

ECOLOGY OF PUBLISHING IN CANADA, THE MIGHTY D.I.Y. KRILL:  
WHAT ROLE DO CHAPBOOKS PLAY IN CANADIAN PUBLISHING AND CANADIAN  
CULTURE?

A Thesis Submitted to the Committee on Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Science

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## Abstract

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T.J. Thompson

The purpose of this thesis is to acknowledge the contributions chapbooks have made to the world of Canadian publishing and to Canadian culture. It is important to place chapbooks in Canada's publishing history as there has not been a lot of writing on chapbooks or even on Canadian publishing. What sources there are usually focus on larger, traditional presses, often based in Ontario (Lorimer); if chapbooks are mentioned at all, they are usually mentioned only in passing (MacSkimming). On rare occasions when texts focus on micropresses or small presses, they are usually out of print and not easy to access (Anstee).

Due to this short list of accessible resources on chapbooks, this project was created to help record and capture the impact chapbooks have on Canadian publishing and culture using interviews.

Keywords: chapbook, Canadian publishing, Canadian culture, small press, micropress, interviews, community.

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A final note, for those who wish to be part of this, who want to create, who want to talk to people about chapbooks and zines, go do it. This is a welcoming group of people, make the zines, make the chapbooks, share the little art objects you make and start up that press. Spending time in these spaces can easily rejuvenate the imagination. Don't let fear/whatever keep you from a kind community of creatives who are just as excited about books, writing and art as you.

## Table of Contents

|                                                                          |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Abstract.....                                                            | ii  |
| Acknowledgements.....                                                    | iii |
| Intro.....                                                               | 1   |
| History.....                                                             | 2   |
| Struggles of Publishing.....                                             | 3   |
| Key Terms.....                                                           | 5   |
| Interview Themes:                                                        |     |
| Chapbooks Place in the Publishing Ecosystem.....                         | 13  |
| Chapbook's History of its Community.....                                 | 15  |
| A Community Under Pressure.....                                          | 17  |
| Stepping Stone Theory.....                                               | 19  |
| The Professionalization of Chapbooks.....                                | 21  |
| Not just Steppings Stones.....                                           | 21  |
| Freedom of Form.....                                                     | 24  |
| Press Philosophies.....                                                  | 26  |
| First Words in Print.....                                                | 27  |
| Why Go Mainstream at all?.....                                           | 29  |
| Link of Canadian Identity and Books.....                                 | 30  |
| Are Chapbooks Important to Canadians.....                                | 31  |
| Hopeful that Those that Need It Find It.....                             | 32  |
| What Can Strengthen the Chapbook in Canada? (Funding, it's Funding)..... | 33  |
| Easier Projects to Fund: Events.....                                     | 35  |
| Easier Projects to Fund: Travel.....                                     | 36  |
| Making a Happier Ecosystem.....                                          | 37  |
| Interview Process.....                                                   | 38  |
| Question Sheets Used for Interviews.....                                 | 45  |
| Chapbook Gallery.....                                                    | 57  |



|                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Work Cited.....       | 69  |
| Interviews:           |     |
| Leslie Ahenda.....    | 71  |
| Sonja Ahlers.....     | 84  |
| Noelle Allen.....     | 110 |
| Cameron Anstee.....   | 120 |
| Gary Barwin.....      | 140 |
| derek beaulieu.....   | 159 |
| Jessica Bebenek.....  | 179 |
| Erin Bedford.....     | 214 |
| Gregory Betts.....    | 225 |
| Alice Burdick.....    | 237 |
| Michael Casteels..... | 260 |
| JW Curry.....         | 276 |
| Joseph Donato.....    | 302 |
| James Dunnigan.....   | 346 |
| Cary Fagan.....       | 368 |
| Kyle Flemmer.....     | 388 |
| Jemery Luke Hill..... | 405 |
| Jim Johnstone.....    | 433 |
| Jamie Kitts.....      | 457 |
| Willow Little.....    | 495 |
| Jeffery Macklin.....  | 571 |
| Andrea Martineau..... | 529 |
| Victoria Mbabazi..... | 548 |
| Amanda Merpaw.....    | 557 |
| Justin Million.....   | 584 |
| Rob McLennan.....     | 623 |

|                                 |      |
|---------------------------------|------|
| Khashayar (Kess) Mohammadi..... | 643  |
| Rami Obeid.....                 | 681  |
| Joe Ollmann.....                | 696  |
| Ashely Opheim.....              | 719  |
| Klara du Plessis.....           | 754  |
| Jacob Quinlan.....              | 775  |
| Emma Rhodes.....                | 791  |
| Stuart Ross.....                | 809  |
| Elisha Rubacha.....             | 854  |
| Karen Schindler.....            | 879  |
| Kate Siklosi.....               | 883  |
| Andrew Steeves.....             | 899  |
| Mallory Tater.....              | 939  |
| Paul Vermeersch.....            | 964  |
| Tali Voron.....                 | 988  |
| Bruce Whiteman.....             | 1002 |
| Kirby.....                      | 1028 |

List of Figures

|               |      |
|---------------|------|
| Figure 1..... | xi   |
| Figure 2..... | xxii |

Ecology of Publishing in Canada, the Mighty D.I.Y. Krill:

What role do chapbooks play in Canadian publishing and Canadian culture?

By: T.J. Thompson

The purpose of this thesis is to acknowledge the contributions chapbooks have made to the world of Canadian publishing and to Canadian culture. It is important to place chapbooks in Canada's publishing history as there has not been a lot of writing on chapbooks or even on Canadian publishing. What sources there are usually focus on larger, traditional presses, often based in Ontario (Lorimer); if chapbooks are mentioned at all, they are usually mentioned only in passing (MacSkimming). On rare occasions when texts focus on micropresses or small presses, they are usually out of print and not easy to access (Anstee).

It can be hard to find popular texts on the subject as much of it has disappeared. Many times, it takes someone who knows the writer to get a copy. Even knowing the author of the article might not lead to the article as the author might not have it anymore due to minimal archival work for literary magazines, zines, chapbooks and other print objects. Due to the nature of the medium, it is not surprising how hard it is to find webpage links that work, papers being properly archived, or material being handed out and then forgotten about.

Due to this short list of accessible resources on chapbooks, this project was created to help record and capture the impact chapbooks have on Canadian publishing and culture using interviews.

This introduction identifies some core themes presented in the interviews. It discusses the central metaphor alluded to in the title, that Canadian publishing functions as a kind of ecosystem, and presents findings on the following topics: one, chapbooks' place in the publishing ecosystem; two, chapbooks' history of community; three, a community under

pressure; four, the stepping stone theory; five, the professionalization of chapbooks; six, the ways that chapbooks are not just a stepping stone; seven, the freedom of form; eight, press philosophies; nine, first words in print; ten, why go mainstream at all; eleven, the link between Canadian identity and books; twelve, whether chapbooks are important to Canadians; thirteen, the search for an audience; fourteen, what can strengthen the chapbook in Canada; fifteen, other ways to fund events; sixteen, funding travel; and seventeen, how to make a happier ecosystem.

### Canadian Publishing History

One of the most important events in Canadian publishing was the Massey Commission chaired by Vincent Massey. The commission started in 1949 and reported its finding in 1951, its goal was to promote national interest in institutions and give Canadian's a sense of identity on a national level. It helped to revitalize and grow the publishing industry on a national level – and by extension it helped chapbooks to flourish as interests in books in general grew. It was a nation-wide effort to help build a Canadian identity with one focus being books. “Writing and publishing became a vital acts of self-definition” (MacSkimming 2). Many of the books being sold in Canada before this were from the States. Canada was not an ideal place for publishers for many years:

Canadians are so accustomed to buying American books that are cheaper to produce, thanks to economies of scale (the bigger the printing, the lower the cost per copy), that Canadian publishers face a daunting dilemma: even while publishing for a relatively small population, they, must underprice their books to be competitive. (MacSkimming 4)

That funding helped larger presses but with an audience and government encouragement, chapbooks, zines and other small handmade print objects also grew: “infusion of federal money has, indeed, recognized the national importance of the little presses” (McCutcheon 89). Some of these presses are still around today, including House of Anansi Press, Coach House, Talonbooks and more. This funding for the small publishers helped the experimental works and non-commercial find a place of publishing in Canada “to publish books out of your basement as they did, to crank out whatever you believed in, whatever the country and the world needed to read and know” (MacSkimming 21).

### The Struggle of Publishing in Canada

Publishing has always been a difficult industry no matter where you are in the world. It’s a personal challenge to those who participate in publishing. Andrew Steeves says, “if you don't like that challenge you're not gonna do well in this, in this line of work. So, or you're going to be tedious to listen to cause-cause there's lots of tediousness to do in publishing.” (Steeves 919) This is especially true in Canada as many of the core factors that make publishing viable have taken time to build in Canada, from publishing to distribution to sustainable audiences.

### Funding Publishing in Canada

Securing funding is easier said than done. Funding is distributed by the government and governments change; program budgets get adjusted; programs can start and also die just as easily. Many small presses rely on government funding to be able to keep publishing each season. So, if budget cuts happen to funding programs, publishers might have to fight to keep

that funding. Or new publishers might have to fight more to get on the list to be apart of funding. Ashely Opheim talked in her interview about how hard this can be for new publishers: “It's just like there's not too much of the literary funding is going to those sort of stable publishers that have been supported for-for decades through core grants, right? And then there's so few emerging publishers that are given access to-to funds.” (Opheim 744) These small budget cuts means more competition. This means there are less resources means it can be hard financially for small and micropresses to get funding which can lead to publisher’s slower growth. Interviewees talked about these crises with Noelle Allen talking about in a direct but also joking matter of fact way: “And so, it's always in crisis, like, we were, I was joking about this online the other day is that you know it's not like we're not in a time of significant change. It's just a change never really stops. There's always something going on.” (Allen 114)

If funding isn’t acquired, high sales would make up for that lack of funding. High sales are hard to garner though in a country as small as Canada. Moreover, the publishing world is cutthroat in sales; if a book doesn’t sell in the first six weeks it can be considered dead: “If the book does not generate sales quickly, it is dead, pulled from the shelve in perhaps six weeks... Every book is in a tournament fighting for sales and attentions against every other new and backlist book.” (Greco et al. 3) High sales are hard to achieve hence why they aren’t an easy solution for many publishers. The Association of Canadian Publishers say, “More than 10,000 books are published each year in Canada.” (ACP). Only a few out of those 10,000 books see success when they are first launched or gain a second wind later. This is why government funding is given to presses. That funding can help keep presses a float. That funding allows them to create more experimental works with some financial cushion if the book doesn’t do as well. This allows for creative, innovative works to be made in Canada.

This is not true for all books; some gain a new life on social media or gain a second wind with public interest. For example, the following happened:

“Since its re-release in 2022, and especially since the election, countless TikTok reviewers have recommended *I Who Have Never Known Men* as a “book that will change your life.” It has more than 138,000 ratings on Goodreads — with an average of four stars, while many literary novels are lucky to eke out three — it sold 100,000 copies in the U.S. last year.”  
(Gould)

### Key Terms

This field of chapbooks in Canada continues to evolve so to start I will layout some key terms. These terms have different meanings to different people in the community, but it’s important to stabilize the definitions in this introduction.

### Definition of Handmade

Typically, chapbooks are handmade objects; but even the term “handmade” is called into question by some members of the community. Some micropublishers now have their books printed and bound professionally; some sit at home with a stapler or use needle and thread while making their books. Handmade is an aesthetic, the way the object is crafted, from small touches like recycled paper scraps to the imperfections of hand stamping each letter in a poem. Yet handmade also designates the way the book is edited or sold, from hand-to-hand.



### Definition of D.I.Y.

The term D.I.Y., which is a short form for “do it yourself,” also plays a part in the handmade aesthetic. The do-it-yourself philosophy is a core part of chapbooks which are published by small groups of people or just one individual. D.I.Y. is a reflection of publishers who have to do it all themselves, or at least the majority of it.

### Chapbook to Zine Gradient

Chapbooks are infamous for being hard to define with Andrew Steeves talking about the diversity of them in his interview:

I would say to some extent that kind of object was just always out there in the world. It wasn't always a literary sort, but-but the notion of anything from a student you know, high school magazine to a church bulletin to-to an advertising flyer. These are sort of like near relatives to the chapbook, and so the world is just always full of particularly in the sort of pre-digital age of my childhood things. (Steeves 899)

Even in the interviews the interviewees had loose definitions with Alice Buridck saying:

But people now are very, sometimes very clear about defining these things, and they're like, this is a zine, and this is a chapbook, and a chapbook is usually a little prettier looking, and it's got this and this and this I'm like, it's just a, it's just a chapbook is a chapbook. (Burdick 248)

It's best to contextualize the term of chapbook on a gradient, from chapbook to zine. Both are handmade print objects, usually with small print runs and get often mistaken for each

other. Typically, a zine is a small handmade radical form of magazine which can have many issues or just one issue; that specific type is usually called one offs. The zine is also associated more with visual art, this is most likely due to its collage roots with the paper, scissors, glue D.I.Y. scene which is where it was first discovered by many artists of all kinds. A chapbook is usually a small handmade book that is usually a chapter in length. The chapbook is usually more literary, with poet and prose making up the bulk of its content. Chapbooks and zines exist on the same spectrum as they have a lot of similarities due to their arts roots, yet they have branched off and have their differences. For example, many publishers and authors say in the interviews that their chapbooks have been called zines or the other way around. For example, Sonja Ahlers says, “And then I just started self-publishing them, and at the time I called them chapbooks I didn't call them zines, cause that didn't feel quite right, but that's just what everyone ended up ended up calling them.” (Ahlers 84) Even someone who is very prolific in chapbooks like Stuart Ross, “Absolutely, I've had so many people call my chapbooks, zines.” (Ross 819) A good definition of a chapbook should be broad as many of the creators of chapbooks purposefully are always trying to break the definitions people are trying to make, so boxing in the term would miss much of what makes the chapbook a unique form. In the Open Letter issue on the subject they talk about this range; “The small press in Canada covers a wide-range of interests and abilities; it doesn't totalize in an easy definition.” (Christie and beaulieu 10). This broad approach to definition also allows for off the wall experimental work to be included. That type of writing thrives in this area and is an important branch in this scene that should be in any good definition of the chapbook. With the gradient in mind and the struggle of defining a purposefully difficult-to-define term, the colour wheel analogy should help give a visual to the complex nature and interplay chapbooks and zines have with each other.

## The Colour Wheel Analogy

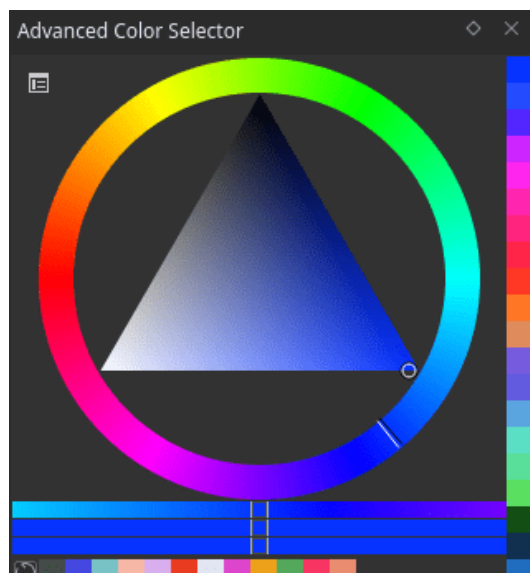


Figure 1. Kirta Advanced Colour Wheel.

With this complexity of the terms in mind hopefully the gradient of chapbooks to zines and the colour wheel analogy will help in understanding the complex chapbook. Due to the fact that a one-off zine could be called by some a chapbook or the other way around, a visual aid may help in understanding the complex nature of these handmade print objects. A good visual for understanding the range of chapbook to zine and how they play off each other would be the

colour gradients on a colour wheel. Think about how all the colours blend and flow into each other according to colour theory. Each slight shift to the right or left makes a new colour with different saturation, hues and tones. So, within this visual, think of chapbooks as the cold tones, more literary side of the colour wheel, and the zines as the warm tones, the more visual arts side of the handmade print object. They are different but in the same wheel and they each have some that are clearly cold colours like your royal blue. There are other colours that ride a line of “is this more a cold colour or warm colour?”. Chapbooks can rub shoulders a lot with zines and the other way around. For example, a warm tone violet is technically a cold colour, technically a chapbook but it does ride that line as the violet has some more red mixed into it then a standard purple, so some might see those warm tones and think “oh this is a zine”. Maybe because this chapbook in this violet example has more visual art to it many may attribute it to zines. Some people may see the hues and tone differently; that is, some may see the cold tones more, another might see the warm hues more. Each reader/viewer of colour has a different slight interpretation

of that colour's shifts. This visual is easier to digest as an allegory for the definition of chapbooks and zines as they don't have a clear visual, or structural rubric that can be followed. Yet a colour wheel can show all those different combinations in a visual way with two clear sides, the chapbook side and the zine side, the cold and warm colours. Two different distinct sides that can flow and blend together, shows how they are on the same scale and are connected. The colour wheel also shows the individuality of each zine or chapbook, as the colour wheel has countless colours with many colours maybe having the same base but not exactly the same colour due to a shift in hue for example. Each chapbook is their own unique print object; many might be of poetry, but no two-poetry chapbooks are the same. Hopefully this visual helps illustrate the flow of these print objects and how they are not easily boxed into a definition.

### Chapbook Definition

A chapbook is a small print object that is a chapter in length. Usually, it has some handmade element either in process or aesthetic. Unlike zines, chapbooks are literary with a focus on poetry and prose for example.

### Small Press vs Micropress

Another term that requires definition is "small press." For many years small press as a term was used to describe small traditional presses like Gordon Hill Press and chapbook presses like above/ground press. It means different things to different members in the community so it's important to explain that complexity here as it will make understanding each level easier when

reading this paper. For example, this definition in *Some Silence Notes on Small Press* by Cameron Anstee that came out in 2024:

In fact through my first two decades doing this, in each overlapping role right up to today, I have never been entirely at ease with the term *small press*. It has always felt elusive because it can mean so many different things to so many different people, entirely dependent on the contexts of the conversation and its participants. (Anstee)

There has been a shift in terms fairly recently which should be noted. The term “micropress” which is meant to give the chapbook publisher their own term when talking about the different levels of publishing, is a fairly new term in many ways; for years, “small press” could be used to define presses like Wolsak and Wynn or Apt.9. Recently that has changed with an effort to have a specific term for the chapbook publishers. The first to define this term with some success was Jim Johnstone with his book, *Write, Print, Fold and Staple: On Poetry and Micropress in Canada*. His definition is:

A publisher-often a single individual- that creates and distributes chapbooks or ephemeral articles on a small scale, usually in prints runs under a hundred copies. Methods of reproduction include letterpress, mimeography, photocopying, laser printing and even handwriting. (11)

The use of the term micropress is starting to gain popularity, but some parts of the community do still use small press in reference to chapbook publishers while others use micropress.

### Small Press Term in the Interviews

“Small press” is an umbrella term for presses for many in the community and in the interviews the term small press was used in the questions. This was done at the time as the community is still coming around on the term micropress as it only recently has started to circulate more, most likely aided by Jim Johnstone’s book on the matter.

### Micropress Definition

Micropress is the level of publishing that is D.I.Y. in some way and produces chapbooks, zines, broadsides, pamphlets, and postcards in small runs. Examples are Gap Riot, above/ground press or No Press.

### Small Press Definition

Small presses are publishing houses that use traditional publishing methods but on a small scale. Not as many books are printed as larger presses; and they don’t have as many staff. Examples of small presses are Gordon Hill Press, Palimpsest Press or Wolsak and Wynn.

### Mid-Level Press Definition

Mid-level presses use traditional publishing methods but unlike the small presses they have bigger teams, print more books each year, do more distribution, and usually do more runs on books. Examples of this level are ECW Press, Goose Lane and Harbor Publishing.

### Large Press Definition

Large presses use traditional publishing methods but they have global reach. These publishers have larger teams of people, a lot more money to print many different types of books, have the facilities to print thousand of books, and can do many print runs. An example for this level of publishing is the largest publishing house in North America, Penguin Random House.

### Press Evolution into a Different Level of Publishing

Another thing of note is that some micropresses grow into small presses or some micropresses do some traditional publishing. One example would be Kirby from KNFB when the press made, *She*, “Well, we did publish, *She*, but *She* is a whole-length book.” (Kirby 1039) Some small presses start because of micropress work funding the larger project, such as how Wolsak and Wynn started with Noelle Allen saying: “So, they decided to start a publishing company. They funded it with the sales of their own actual chapbooks and small publications and the first book they published was an anthology about jealousy.” (Allen 110) And some small presses grow into mid level presses due to good sales, grants, funding of some kind that allow for more production and staff. Some micropresses stay micropresses for principal reasons, always making chapbooks, Jim Johnstone spoke to this saying:

You get to make your own choices. There aren't any rules. I mean, it's just really, it's what I, it's what I prefer. It's what it's what I love. It's again what I grew up doing unconsciously. And so, it's not something that I would, I would ever, I would ever leave, or-or fold, you know. That's I think that's the-the-the hill that I'll die on is the-the Micropress Hill, so I don't, I don't plan on not publishing my work in-in that way. And-

and you know I'll continue you; I'll continue to do both my work and other people's work at-at the Micropress level. (Johnstone 443)

Some presses grow by the nature of what the people who run them want out of the experience, or they see a need in their community for different types of publishing, with Willow Little saying “to do it kind of in this way that feels like it's fulfilling a community need or adding to a community as really nice for me.” (Little 496-497)

### Interview Themes

The interviewees come from different backgrounds, publish a variety of literatures, aim for different audiences, but there are some core themes they brought forward during our conversations. They all made it clear why chapbooks are important to Canadian publishing and Canadian culture.

### Chapbooks Place in the Publishing Ecosystem

To understand chapbooks and to understand their place within Canadian publishing a helpful metaphor to use is an ecological pyramid. Another good term for the pyramid would be an ecosystem. In this ecosystem there are larger carnivores at the top of the pyramid; your large presses which are fewer in number, then your omnivores which are flexible, and the core middle which is your mid-level and small presses. Then your herbivores who are usually large in numbers but are at the bottom making up the larger base of the pyramid which in this case are the lovely micropresses. This is a simplistic view of ecology and an ecosystem and publishing, but it



gives that visual pyramid. The interviewees used the terms ecosystems and other like it quite a bit when talking: “We exist. We’re an important part of the ecosystem and there and there’s room for everybody.” (Martineau 547) One of the reasons why the term “ecosystem” is a good one for this industry and why it was most likely referenced is because it is in constant change and evolving with a lot of variety and new projects popping up, blooming and dying. Paul Vermeersch spoke to this with his own addition to the ecosystem idea:

There are so many possibilities with what a chapbook can be what it can contain, how it can be made and-and the fact that it is a-a non-commercial object, for the most part ten bucks, five bucks, twenty bucks. A really beautifully made letterpress object on fine paper hundred dollars or whatever. Because it can be anything it invites it; it invites make them so the creative potential of the chapbook is unlimited and as something that exists at that fundamental level the writing and publishing ecosystem. It needs to be that... It needs to be, it's like, it's like, it's like cultural stem cells. They can become anything. (Vermeersch 978)

Ecosystems also rely on the other tiers to keep everything balanced. When a foundational group is not doing well, the rabbits in this case our micropresses, this can lead to a direct effect or ripple effect to the other groups. Chapbooks might be the herbivores but when weak or struggling it affects the other groups and when thriving the other sectors gain a great deal. Kyle Flemmer for example explains:

I don't wanna say, like, “hierarchy” is not the right word, “tier” isn't the right word. It's-it's an “ecosystem”. There's-there's, you know this, the smaller entities, the-the little creatures on the down, in the dirt. And then there's the-the big old eagles soaring over

everything. And they all, they just, they serve different functions to the, to the whole ecosystem. So, I think it's—I think it's healthy. (Flemmer 396-397)

Ecosystems rely on each tier of that pyramid to have balance even if some might not see the importance, “They don't realize that, you know, they're interested in the caribou, but they're not interested in the lichen, and if you don't have the lichen, you don't have the caribou.” (Steeves 925) This metaphor of an ecosystem gave the interviewees a way to explain the complex nature of this scene and expand on their ideas in the interviews. It was interesting that so many used it as a way to explain the landscape of Canadian publishing and the vastness of this industry.

#### Chapbook's History of its Community

One theme which the interviewees spoke to was the history of people who inspired them and helped them. One of the greatest figures and still remembered people from the scene is bpNichol, a poet who worked in publishing but did a lot of work in chapbooks to the point that we now have a chapbook award named after him which is done by Meet the Presses and the Official bpNichol Archives. bpNichol is a great example of a person getting into the scene and sharing his knowledge, really showcasing that community of sharing. Many interviewees had kind things to say about bpNichol: “And I remember when I went to his place, I had a really bad fever, and I was barely coherent, and he was so lovely to me and at the same time he showed me poetry, poems that he'd done.” (Ross 817)

J.W. Curry spoke about how as a young man he was able to connect with bpNichol:

“And so, I looked him up in the phone book ‘cause I wanted to see more of whatever it was he was doing, and lo and behold! He answered the phone. And I, you know, with my “Hi, Mr.

Nichol” and he told me to go to Village Bookstore and check out what they had there. And so, I went down to the Village Bookstore, and I was just—Marty let me into the back room, and I was blown away by the stuff I found. And I came out with, oh, a bag full of stuff, just a bag full of stuff for like a nickel, twenty-five cents a piece, and I'd never seen anything like it before. It totally changed my approach to everything.” (Curry 276)

Nelson Ball is also a great poet and chapbook maker with his own contest in remembering his great contributions to the community with Cameron Anstee saying: “Nelson Ball, who's like one of the all-time most important Canadian small press figures going back to the sixties.” (Ansett 53) Not only was Nelson Ball known for his work as a poet and for his micropress work but also as a teacher and generous person within the community still spoken about very fondly: “I soon came across the work of Nelson Ball who, again later, became a very, very close friend.” (Ross 824) That older generation passed on the knowledge and shared the form with students in high school, to undergraduate. Micheal Casteels even speaking to this in his interview saying:

I met Stuart Ross, who—he runs Proper Tales press chapbook, press. He also, like, he's an editor and writer for-for bigger presses. He was a writer in residence at Queens, and I showed him some of my, like, zine poetry books, and then from there he was showing me the chapbooks that he makes and then that sort of got me more into taking, like, the zine and turning it more into, like, a craft object and-and he'd sort of introduced me to, like, the-the chapbook scene. (Casteels 260)

This generation also shared with people they met on the street, at the book fairs, in the chapbook markets and in the book shops and then later meeting through online spaces. Rami Obeid talked about his experience entering the space this way:

So then, when I made a Twitter account, and I got into the, quote, unquote, writing community on Twitter, that's when I started realizing that chapbook, like, I didn't even know what a chapbook was until I was like—like, you know, at that time, like, in 2018 or 2019. And there were like small magazines all over twitter like pretty literally littered all over twitter. (Obeid 681)

The community always finds new tools and new ways to share with others. Always growing with changing, challenging times. Whether that be in the community or people starting by themselves and then finding the community.

### A Community Under Pressure

Why do micropresses close up shop? The interviewees had a couple responses to this. With many presses being passion projects, burn out can happen quickly. People have other jobs that pay the bills so doing a heavy workload can very easily lead to burn out and exhaustion. Many in the interviews talked about this in detail with Amanda Merpaw talking about that exhaustion:

And I think that that leads to burnout. I know so many folks in this industry who are just exhausted, like they're working so hard all year, every year to put out these beautiful things, and like they also are predominantly writers themselves. They want to be making their own work, in addition to putting out other people's work. It's, it's really, it seems exhausting, right? It seems to be exhausting. It's all the, everyone I know who runs a micro press as an exhausted person. (Merpaw 581)

Time management is also a challenge as it is linked to not burning out and just finding the time with other daily responsibilities. Joseph Donato talked about that challenge for him and his projects:

But the biggest challenge is just that, its constantly changing, like what I'm able to do. And when I'm able to do things and knowing that there are at-at certain points people depending on me like once I've accepted someone's work like I don't really wanna make them wait a year for something to come out. (Donato 324)

Time is money and most have other jobs to meet living expenses, making it hard to divide up that time which Khashayar Kess Mohammadi talked about:

And I'm like, “Okay.” Then it's like three hours zoom, I'm like, sorry I don't have time, and I don't have money, and anything I put that much effort into has to remedy one of these two situations, and that's the reality of my life situation right now. I can't get into—I can't invest that much, weekly. That's something that I do for—like three hour zoom meetings—that's something I do for work. (Mohammadi 669)

Other people talked about how they have changed their lives to be able to keep creating as they try to balance funds and time. Ahsley Opheim talked about the choices she has made:

There isn't a whole lot of money. So, I've had to. Yeah. So, I've had to sort of accept a life of precarity which I've happily done, because I love what I do, and the work is very valuable. (Opheim 744)

Jessica Bebenek also talked about why it ends for people and how life can change ending a press's run even if you did time manage well and had funds all in order:

Oh, it's just a lot of work. It's-it's as we said. It's a labor of love, right?... And so, if you have one or two people doing this and then their life circumstances change, they might not be able to do it anymore. (Bebenek 206)

These types of challenges are linked to not being paid for these projects and burn out. Something many interviewees talked about across the board.

These are the first answers the interviewees gave when asked why they thought micropresses close up shop.

### Why Micropresses Close Up Shop?

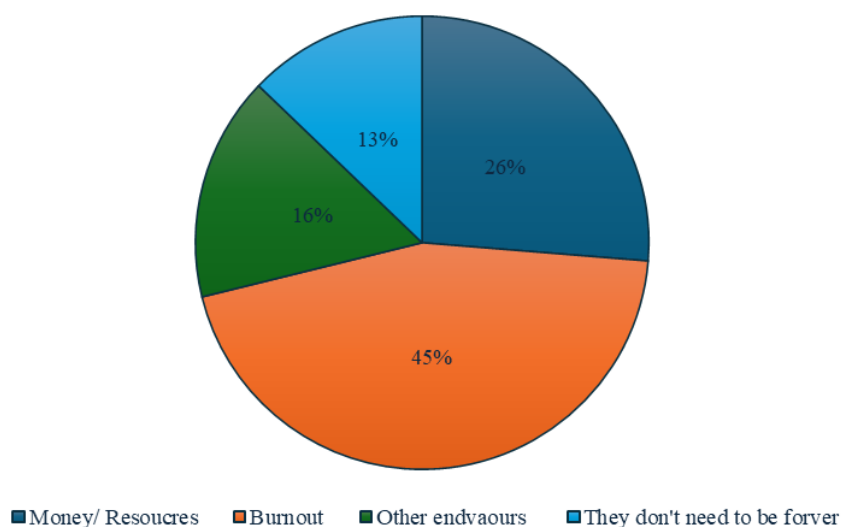


Figure 2

### Stepping Stone Theory

These experimental fertile grounds allow for new makers, creatives to practice, gain footing and learn how publishing works even at the smaller scale. Many of the interviewees stated that the D.I.Y. training teaches important skills and experience which can be hard to find. With Ashley Opheim directly stating how she sees her press as a stepping stone: “so I guess I’ll

say that I've always considered Metatron to be the sort of stepping stone between chapbook and trade book.” (Opheim 747) This scene teaches the next acquisitions editor, the next big poet or the next publicist with Gary Barwin even talking about how it can lead to other opportunities, “sometimes is a path to more mainstream publishing and often careers also go that way.”

(Barwin 156) Due to their knowledge and their understanding on how to make something out of nothing (which chapbooks and the D.I.Y. heavily do) a person working at a small press with limited resources will be able to stretch that small budget, due to that D.I.Y. experience. An author who has read at their chapbook launch has experience reading, talking with a crowd which is a key trait that writers, poets or any author has to learn. These skills help with the success of books. Not overspending helps keep other budgets for example on track and an author with some experience reading is more likely to sell more books at a launch. A room can read the author and get an understanding of the text and the writer which leads to sales. That experience is valuable.

People like Jim Johnstone see that value and help authors by working with Palimpsest Press to help first time authors publish full length traditional books:

Anstruther press has an imprint on Palimpsest Press, where we publish full length books, it's called, Anstruther books. So sometimes this can be confusing. Anstruther press and Anstruther books. So, this imprint allows us to take some of the authors that we've worked with most often people that we worked with as-as first-time authors and publish full books for them. (Johnstone 443)

Many interviewees talked about how chapbooks can be a great first step for a poet or author that is just starting out. Giving them space to grow and learn.

### The Professionalization of the Chapbook

The chapbook has the ability to be a great stepping stone so there was concern from some interviewees on how some people are trying to professionalize the chapbook by using it as a fancy calling card trying to print something with expensive paper for example with the hope that their book will be seen as more “valuable”. Stuart Ross shared that worry by saying:

I noticed it's really interesting that the young-younger chapbook makers—the people who started doing chapbooks in the last ten years, tend to, like, they-they do, accounting, they-they, they-they see exactly, except for you—How much money. They try to turn a profit. And they it's-it's really fascinating to me. That's mostly what I've seen. There's not as many people doing it in this anarchist kind of a way. (Ross 814)

### Not just Stepping Stones

In the interviews people did talk quite a bit about the stepping stone theory with Elisha Rubacha stating:

But they also launch people into trade books. And we've seen that happen a number of times. We have several poets in particular, who have moved on to trade books, some of the multiple trade books. (Rubacha 869)

Yet some were reluctant to even say that the chapbook is a stepping stone, as chapbooks are not all about training like Elisha Rubacha who also had this to say:

Well, I think, what I, well, maybe this isn't to me, but what I've seen be a really important for others is, and I know some people like hate hearing this, but chapbooks are a stepping



stone. They're great in themselves, like I don't mean to diminish them as that I think they're important and like need to exist in and of themselves. (Rubacha 869)

Gary Barwin who also talked about the chapbooks ability to be a stepping stone also stated:

But it's not only it's not that. It's also a particular aesthetic and cultural choice that people are making to continue to publish in this way. (Barwin 156)

It's not all about preparing the author, editor or publisher for "real publishing" or the more traditional methods of publishing. Jim Johnstone also spoke to that hesitancy of just calling the chapbook a stepping stone:

I do hesitate to like, point out that, like the chapbook stage is a place where you can learn and-and sort of get better. I mean chapbooks are ephemeral so you can leave them behind if it's not some, not a direction that you want it to take. You know that they can be a place to experiment. You know I-I hesitate to mention that because I really do think that chapbooks are an art of their own and a place to publish that's, that's, that's not that. But it can be that, too. Right? So, you can have people that learn on a chapbook level before they go and publish trade books, but I do think the chapbooks on their own are important and can be, can be important and just as important as-as trade books. (Johnstone 457)

It cannot be denied that many great authors in Canada started their publishing career by publishing chapbooks. Margaret Atwood's *Double Persephone* published with Hawkshead Press is a good example. There are people who do move on from chapbooks and do not return to the form but due to the freedom that the form gives artists it creates a space where people can come back to it and play. Gary Barwin spoke about that return for himself after a big career event:

One of my novels was shortlisted for the Giller prize. So, I went to the big glitzy—it was at the Ritz Carlton, you know, very glitzy ceremony. And it was broadcast on live TV, you know, national TV and all of that. Very fancy. And then the next week I went to the Toronto small press fair, the-the Indie literary market, with, like my work, right and other people's work, and I was really happy to be part of that which both it felt much more like my-my own scene, and there I knew people, and it was, it just felt, much more intimate and much more about the work. (Barwin 146)

There is a reason why chapbooks are so attractive to authors and why they come back to it or never really leave; it gives them freedom to experiment. Joe Ollmann talked about the really cool things he had encountered with one stand out being:

Kelly who did this zine. It was in a paper bag that he'd silk screened the cover on the bag, and there was all these, little zines inside, and the whole thing was about exploitation films from the seventies about Jonestown, the Jonestown massacre... There's a whole all of these exploitation films about that and he'd studied and wrote abouts length and had photos from—and it came with a packet of Kool-Aid in the, in the bag. Now that, that sticks in my mind forever, because it's utterly amazing and brilliant. (Ollmann 700)

Kyle Flemmer also talked about a project he made that was playful and experimental:

And so, I took this project. I love it, but it's—in a way it's kind of disrespectful, to the people who—who he sampled their bios from. So, in a way, I sort of wanted to—to enact this violation on his work as well. So, I printed it out on little red cards, and I stacked it up like a bunch of Deli meats, and I tied it together with butchers' twine, and I bound it in like a Styrofoam tray with Saran wrap and a sticker just like you would see meat at the

butcher. And it's got a sticker on the back that's like, you know—if you want to read this, open it up and read it. But good luck ever getting it back together, you know: it's-it's a consumable item, and it's a one-way sort of operation. And when I presented it to Sasha, you could see that he was like-like it was, it was so good he couldn't help but accept it as-as what it was. So that's, for me, that was the most successful version of the taking it and change-transforming it into something that you know serves both Sasha and the press and me, as the designer. And then, hopefully, the reader who encounters this object thinks “What the hell is this?” and has, like a lot of fun, a real memorable experience interacting with it. (Flemmer 392)

Authors also seem to be attracted to the community that chapbooks sustain. With Gregory Betts talking a lot about the people:

So, I try to hang out and-and make my community with people who are fundamentally kind and check their egos at the door. And I think that's-that's the best part of the small press is it's not so much, who's-who's the big genius in the room? But it's let's have a good conversation, and let's do it together, and let's build up something that's really unique and strange and fun. (Betts 233)

### Freedom of Form

Interviewees stated in many ways and at many times that chapbooks have little monetary incentive or gain for the people who do make them, with Stuart Ross saying: “But I-my estimate is I've lost about ten thousand dollars publishing books and chapbooks over the years. But it's—it wasn't ever, ever about making money.” (Ross 810) They are made by people who care deeply

about the form, with Leslie Aheanda saying: “And you know, people I think, as long as there are people who love art for art's sake, and who love poetry because it has something important to say, there's always going to be people who find ways to create it, despite the obstacles that we're facing.” (Ahenda 81) This allows for interesting playful work that doesn't need a reader or audience to sell to. Jessica Bebenek spoke to this idea with the work she does; “I think you always come up with something really interesting. Like in my, if you've seen my knitted mind, knitted poetry, right? That's like misusing the practice of knitting.” (Bebenek 182)

Chapbook authors tend to experiment with little worry for reactions as people can play free of judgment. Victora Mbabazi spoke to this directly, “I think experimentation is the biggest part of a chapbook. I think that you should be able to just, like, I think they should be as weird as possible, as, like, unique as you want them to be. I think it's, like, the—because you have so much freedom.” (Mbabazi 553)

derek beaulieu recalls one particular example, which indicates the sense of experimentation common with chapbooks:

One of them was called shipped flat great Brian, Brian Panhuyzen, and on the back, it says, February 1996, thirty, out of thirty-three. There were thirty-three copies, and then the address, and then it has Damian's fingerprint on it. There you go. And inside you like peel up the backs and it's called shipped flat right? And inside it unfolds like this... That—that excited me. It was like, this isn't a book. This is a what is this, what do I do with this thing? And then inside, I'm not going to read the whole thing. But the first few sentences are “Elo fres Sounin, Noonan art mix maul signum Tormelia meena, Lord Epsilon, Hornham, Zuzeria. So Zorilla tonam zoo Zorilla, blast” and I'm like what the hell is this? This is a sound poem made entirely out of the names of items sold at Ikea. (beaulieu 160)

## Press Philosophies

All presses have their own process and aesthetics, and each publisher has their own philosophies. Not always aligning and not always traditional. Kirby from Knife Fork Book says, “For me it's about the beauty of the book in hand. I like making pretty things.” (Kirby 1028) Or Bruce Whiteman’s feelings on how he prints, “You know it's-it's a little expensive when you use Coach House, but-but some things are, you know, just have to be done. So, the money secondary. So, the decisions are very off the cuff as I said earlier, yeah.” (Whiteman 1008)

Micheal Casteels or derek beaulieu have their own goals with the chapbook:

Now that, Puddles of Sky it's like, basically just me that does it. I think my goal is to sort of publish some like poetics that don't get a lot of representation. So, like concrete poetry, minimalist poetry, surrealist poetry. It's all kind of like my favorite kind of poetry as well. But it's also poetry that doesn't lend itself very well to being published by larger presses. Even other chapbook presses. There's a few now that do it. But I think when I moved more towards doing chapbooks there were very few chapbook presses that would focus heavily on concrete poetry or-or minimalist poetry. So that's sort of my goal now, I think, is to is to publish that type of work. (Casteels 261)

derek beaulieu has a no pressure model of publishing:

So, there's no, there's no contracts. There's no proofing. There's, when-when I was running House press up until 2004. Increasingly it felt like a business or responsibility. You know, some people wanted contracts or proofing, or you know, wanting to know about sales. And it started to feel like, if something didn't sell enough copies. It wasn't doing well. I was getting trapped in that thinking. So, I shut the whole thing down and

was like, nope, this isn't fun anymore. And about six months later I couldn't resist, and I started up another new press. But I wanted there to be no responsibilities and no ISBN numbers and no worries about sales and no sending books to bookstores, and no problems...So, I name the press, no press and that's where the title came from was to step back from all of that stuff, and just remind me that it's fun. (beaulieu 167)

The chapbook is flexible to the artists needs. Philosophies may differ but that is the beauty of the chapbook, Alice Burdick talked about that flexibility in her interview:

But people now are very, sometimes very clear about defining these things, and they're like, this is a zine, and this is a chapbook, and a chapbook is usually a little prettier looking, and it's got this and this and this I'm like, it's just a, it's just, a chapbook is a chapbook. (Burdick 248)

### First Words in Print

Many of the poets interviewed talk about the first time a poet sees their work in print which for many is a major milestone which can help many continue to create and share with their community. Emma Rhodes shared a story on her experience after her first chapbook was published:

That really kind of brought me into the poetry community in Canada, I think. I finally like, had a physical thing to give to people if they wanted to like, know about my writing just like out in the world. I was in a Flying Books once, and then somebody came up to me. I can't remember why I was there. I think I think it was a work event. And this person came up to me and said, you have a chapbook, don't you? And I said, yes; and then he

said, do you have one with you? And I was like, actually, yes; like for a while I was carrying like months after it's published. I was carrying them in my bag like, just in case, and especially working and publishing. I was like, I'm always meeting people... And I just like he bought it right then, and then he told me that he followed me on Instagram, and I didn't even I didn't know. (Rhodes 799)

Another interviewee Rami Obeid also talked about the gateway of having his words be in print for the first time and what it gave him:

For me chapbooks are important and maybe I have a biased answer. But, like, I said earlier in the interview, that chapbooks—they gave me the confidence to write more and to keep writing ‘cause, I mean, if I hadn't had my stuff published through Whispering Wick, I don't know kind of where my writing would be, or if I would still be even writing in the first place. But being published through Whispering Wick, having that small book of poems published, and seeing the reaction to it from people that I know and don't know—it gave me the confidence to kinda—the can I be, like, okay, I do have some skill, apparently. And the goal in the end, for me, is to write a novel and kind of see it published in Indigo, or wherever. So, for me, I would say, the most important thing that it gave me is confidence. But it also—chapbooks, because—like, I said, because they're so personable. I also gained more friends from them. (Obeid 690-691)

Sonja Ahlers spoke about the chapbooks ability to connect in her into as well:

There is something extremely connective when a writer is able to hold one's work in their hands or for someone to hold a chapbook that has been made with great care; “So yeah,

but I think they are very special. I-I mean, when I find them and yeah, they're just it's a labor of love, truly, you can feel it. Yeah.” (Ahlers 93)

These small books are for some the first time they will see their work in print or see a new form they are experimenting with in print, which for many can be a hard dream to help come true but with the help of micropresses or the creatives own two hands a book can be brought into the world to read, sell and share at readings. Kate Siklosi talked in her interview about that creation period with a poet or author:

And-and so we, you know, make careful sure to kind of bring people along in every step of the way and really make sure that folks are involved, that they're heard, and that their ideas you know, we wanna make something beautiful, and we want you to be a part of that, because it's your work, and we're kind of we see ourselves. You know, Dani says sometimes that we just see ourselves as midwives of chapbook babies. And so, we just really see ourselves as facilitators. And really just you know, bringing the work that you're imagining, and that you want to see into the world. (Siklosi 886)

Poets, authors and presses all together help people stay connected, help people keep creating and keep the weird alive and healthy.

### Why Go Mainstream at all?

Many of these people who write and publish chapbooks do not wish to venture further than the micropress, small press or mid level presses. Many interviewees expressed the joy, the creative freedom, some enjoy the craziness of a non-commercial world, some just enjoy that their art can be traded with another in a form of sharing. Interviewees spoke about this with great joy,



with Emma Rhodes stating: “I bought his book, and it's a beautiful kind of community builder to be able to have a thing of collected poems to share with people rather than just like sending them to like disparate magazines you've been published in.” (Rhodes 799)

Some didn't want to leave a form of publishing they found so fulfilling with Cameron Anstee saying:

I-I think a lot of the most exciting and interesting writing in Canada, whether you know poetry or fiction or nonfiction, I think a lot of the most interesting writing is happening in the small press and-and in the chapbook form. There's things that would be wildly, like, unreadable or impossible to publish in a trade book.” (Anstee 133)

### Link of Canadian Identity and Books

Why is the chapbook important to Canada? Many of the interviewees saw the connection of publishing in general to Canadian culture. Even if they would pause before answering or even deflecting, they eventually would build up well thought out answers, with Andrea Martineau saying:

I think, in the big scheme of things just again, because of population, size, and history compared to the, you know, like the US for example: we are quite a bit smaller, but it's not to say that what we are producing is any lesser than so I think, like smaller print runs, I guess, kind of reflects our smaller population. And just like, I guess, our or multiculturalism to, I guess unique experiences are reflected in that. (Martineau 541)

Rami Obeid talked about how he hopes for Canada to be seen more by Canadians and the world:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. While it—whenever someone, like, thinks of, like—I mean, America is, like, the epicenter of, like, literally everything: publishing movies, music. So, and people, like, forget that you know, Canada and Europe has great talent too, in writing, so specifically for Canadian writing it's so easy to, kind of—to kind of get your work out there, because it, kinda—I would say the same thing about like, maybe South America as well as Europe. Like, it's-it's—it offers glimpses into Canadian writing or writings, like other pieces of writing from around the world. So, it's kind of, like, a sample of that sort of work and talent. So basically, in a nutshell, Canadian chapbooks—it just offers the fact that, no, it's not just America that's, like, kind of the world leading in writing talent. But going back to how chapbooks offer such a, like, a small sample size, and being able to finish a chapbook in a day. It'll show people around the world that, no, Canada has some talent, too. It's not just America, for me, and I-I-I personally would like to see Canada kind of equaling America, or even more so, than America, in terms of, kind of, being well known in terms of publishing and writing. (Obeid 692)

### Are Chapbooks Important to Canadians?

So, with books being important to Canada it would make sense that the krill, the chapbook though smaller, is still important to the whale, the traditional book, but also to the ocean, the country of Canada. Yet are the krill important to the whale watchers? Are they important to Canadians in this analogy and out in the world? No. That was the most common answer when this question came up. The average Canadian does not even know the term chapbook, let alone what the term could mean. The people who study the whales know that the krill is important; the whales know that the krill is important but the whale watchers, the

audience, the readers of Canada usually do not. The interviewees still talked at length about the importance of chapbooks and why people should care with Amada Merpaw saying:

I think we would lose out on a lot if we lost our, our chapbook presses like if we suddenly in a dystopia where, like a worst dystopia, then we're in now, obviously, with all these other terrible things, also lost every single chapbook press we had, I think we would lose a lot in terms of ideas and conversation, and I think that, that would be really devastating like I can't imagine a landscape, especially for poetry in this country without...Chapbooks. (Merpaw 573)

Andrea Martineau talked about specifically why this smaller scale might even be more enticing to Canadian with our spread-out smaller populations:

I think, in the big scheme of things just again, because of population, size, and history compared to the, you know, like the US for example: we are quite a bit smaller, but it's not to say that what we are producing is any lesser than, so I think, like smaller print runs, I guess, kind of reflects our smaller population. And just like, I guess, our or multiculturalism to, I guess unique experiences are reflected in that. (Martineau 541)

### Hopeful that Those that Need It Find It

There are many different perspectives on whether chapbooks should be more mainstream. One common perspective in the interviews was that people in the community wish for those who would want to be a part of or enjoy the content can find it. With Sonja Ahlers stating: "What does the public need to know? Yeah, people had a broader, I wish people had more information and knowledge that this existed, and that this was possible." (Ahlers 104) Due to the chapbook's

form, it will not be for everyone yet there are people out there who would enjoy it, but they do not know of it. There are creatives out there who want to publish and think there are many barriers, when there doesn't have to be with Sonay Ahlers continue to say: "And I wish that, yeah, the public knew that this was an art form, like an accessible, yeah, rather than everyone having to explain it." (Ahlers 104) One can see that from the rise of self publishing on Amazon people want to share their work and want to be able to do it themselves. The numbers aren't super clear or easy to come by but one source claims, "Amazon releases over 1.4 million self-published books through its Kindle Direct Publishing every year." (Curcic). There is clearly a desire to share and the chapbook, the D.I.Y. is a great way to do that.

#### What Can Strengthen the Chapbook in Canada? (Funding, it's Funding)

With all these things in mind, what kind of future might chapbooks have? Should there be more funding? More grants? More coverage? With what has been understood from the interviewees what can help the chapbook in Canada? The interviewees had many ideas on what could be done to help the community and the chapbook at large, but most said that at the end of the day what was needed was funding. Ashely Opheim talked specifically about how funding would help presses in the long run:

But to be completely honest with you, I think one of the reasons that, like so many presses don't make it past like the five-year mark, or don't continue isn't because of like lack of passion or lack of people that want to do that. I think it's truly the way that our grant systems are organized. And I have done like a lot of personal research behind the scenes in Canada Council funding, core grants versus project grants and I think that if

they found a way to support-put more money into project grants that we would see a lot more of a healthy literary culture in this country. (Opheim 744)

Justin Million also spoke on how Canada itself is weakened when not supporting our books:

Our cultural exports then our country is literally weakened by a lack of funding and support for publishing in any and all forms. So, it-it has a literal impact on the fabric of your culture on society, on well-being and mental health but also how you're seen by the rest of the world. (Million 616)

Being able to afford materials is a bigger hurdle for micropresses now then it has been in the past, from ink, paper, to the time to do it. Alice Burdick directly talked about that balance: “Well, I mean, you know, I think the ones that most people, it's you know, it's the thing of finding the time to write, and also live. And pay for things, you know, and so that's always been an issue for everybody over time.” (Burdick 244)

Due to high costs of living, many people cannot do the work for free anymore and that time might be needed to pay their next student debt fees or next month's rent or unexpected accident repairs. Life keeps moving and things happen outside of people's control, but those challenges do not go away. So, being paid even a small amount can allow those who wanted to make chapbooks the ability to create with less financial worry or strain. This is an area of funding that helps presses stay open as not much money would need to be given out but enough to help with financial stress for time and materials. It can be hard for these types of presses to gain funding with Ashely Opheim saying; “But I think the problem is that there's not enough resources to help people keep projects alive. It's just temporary, inconsistent funding and it's impossible to grow something sustainable on that kind of funding.” (Opheim 744) Presses

struggle to get funding and support due to the pool of money staying the same, but costs of living only seems to grow. Sonja Ahler also stated on the matter: “I wish there was more outreach and some more support like there should be grants funding for chapbook presses and to support, you're supporting the underdog.” (Ahlers 104)

### Easier Projects to Fund: Events

Another area of funding which the interviewees brought up that is easier to fund are events or trips. It is a one-time grant that would allow micropresses to gather their community without nickel and diming their own community. Grants for events allow for the community to come together and to share in a space that allows for creativity and community. Due to financial stress many presses wish to do this but can't and a grant would help. Many presses do try to reach out and get funding for a book launch for example but see little success in gaining the funds in this area. Willow Little spoke directly to this in her interview:

There's acknowledgement or-or what's the right word and be feeling-feeling certain pressures because of that and that that ties in with things like funding as well where you know, we applied for a sort of event grant, last year and didn't even get an email back, I think, saying that we weren't chosen. So, it and-and then saw all the-the people we know in the Montreal scene who were accepted having their projects publicized. And we are wondering, well, what didn't we have? Are we-are we not considered an important part of the scene because we're affiliated with an open mic, or because we're a chapbook press and not a traditional full-length sort of press. (Little 503)

These events and fairs help the creatives in these spaces take important career steps but also allow a community to engage with itself in person.

### Easier Projects to Fund: Travel

Another one-time grant would be trip grants so people from Vancouver could come to the Ottawa small press fair. Flying in country is quite expensive and driving across Canada can take days even with back-to-back driving. The diversity of the community from all over Canada helps create a rich collection of works being put out. Yet very few have the ability to see what another side of Canada has to offer. The sheer amount of physical space can make it hard to know what is happening in another community even in a neighbouring province or even in the northern part of the same province. Travel grants would allow for the cross pollination of creativity and strengthen the community which was an idea that Sonja Ahlers talked about in her interview: “Possibly more travel grants or people, if they can or are aware of that, they can apply for travel grants to do these things. Yeah, there just needs to be more inclusion and accessibility, I think, to share knowledge.” (Ahlers 107)

This would let this community grow more nation-wide and strengthen those smaller isolated communities with Sonja who lives out in British Columbia saying:

Just what we talked about at the beginning of this was just like how vast Canada is and how each region, territory, province is so separate, and BC. And I'm on an island I like I would have to travel constantly, and any like, nothing would happen unless I went to Toronto or Montreal. (Ahlers 108)

### Making a Happier Ecosystem

Due to the ecosystem of chapbooks and so many people being involved on multiple levels of publishing, this would be good for all of Canadian publishing. When chapbooks thrive so does all of publishing. Networking, problem solving, and creative sharing allows for wider range of books, better art and a thriving culture in Canada. Which would help with the ongoing dream of a unique Canada which the government and citizens have been dreaming of for years, since the Massey Commission came together to answer that hope. Every part of the Canadian publishing ecosystem is important that punk, D.I.Y. krill though small is an important part of that happy ecosystem.



### Interview Process: Introduction

To start the process of the interviews, I first had to figure out who to interview. I used a lot of different methods to figure out who could/would be contacted. Markets are a core part of the community and many people who do not have an online presence go to them. So, I picked up many business cards on visits to markets with personal emails, or business emails which I couldn't normally find online. Searching the web did help with some of the search for interviewees. Gap Riot's small press map also aided greatly in gathering presses from all over Canada as many recurring names from Ontario or Quebec kept coming up, but the small press map led the search going into other provinces. Talking with people in the community also led to more names of people, presses and email addresses of interested parties. This helped with people who didn't have a currently large presence in the community but used to do work in the community or people who had been around in the early blooming of the community.

### More Than One Category

With the goal of variety in authors, poets, small presses, and traditional presses this led to a wide range of answers as many people fit into many categories. This made it so the interviews had people with a lot of experience being able to share more. This community is known for that breadth so being able to showcase that is crucial in this paper. Due to participants being able to check off which box they fit into on their consent form this informed what questions would be asked to them. This allowed for that variety to be showcased. This is why some interviewees are in more than one category at times.

### The Necessary Ethics Process

The whole process – from finding interviewees to the questions to the storing of data – was vetted/approved by Trent’s Research Ethics Board. This meant filling out documents on ROMEO about the project’s purpose, goal, and the way in which the interviews would be conducted. Once the questions were done, the rough draft of emails and the consent form were made up so next steps could start. This was proving that both parties (student and supervisor) involved in the paper completed a course on ethics and understood their responsibilities. After completing the course, certificates were presented, and the Research Ethics Board of Trent went over the proposal and all other important documents. Once reviewed and small changes were made the interviews were green lit for a certain period of time in the Spring/Summer of 2024.

### Starting the Interview Process

After compiling a list of names, presses, email addresses and Trent’s Research Ethics Board approval the interview process started. I sent out emails with information and a separate document of a chart was made. This chart had names, emails, positions/titles and then blank spaces for if the party responded, what they said, if they had signed the consent form and when the interview would take place. This was done for each person/press that was reached out to in order to keep track of the people who had been reached out to and where in the process the emails were. When someone responded, the consent form would be signed and then a date would be made for the interview with a Zoom link being shared. All signed consent forms were placed in a folder with each participant having their own folder. Each Zoom link was made in the Trent student Zoom account with each one accounting for time differences and having the session start

recording when entered and with many hours more given for the meeting time. This was done in case people were longer than a rough estimate of forty-five minutes to an hour. Some spoke for longer as they had the time to spend.

### Right Before the Interview Occurred

Before an interview occurred, I printed out the questions for that interviewee, set up the necessary equipment which was my laptop, my headphones and my microphone. I put a sign on the door stating that interviews were in process. This was to ensure that the program and microphone didn't pick up background noises and so no one walked into the room where the interviews were taking place.

### The Interview

When the interviewee entered the call, I went over some basics. Such as how much time the interviewee had that day so I could keep the interview on track and not take up too much time if the interviewee had other matters to attend to. I also would explain how any question could be skipped or interpreted the way the interviewee wished and if they felt uncomfortable answering something they could say what they felt comfortable sharing even if that was nothing at all. I would also explain the opening part of the interview where I would state the date, time and what kind of interview would be happening and explain why that needed to be stated at the start. At this time as well, I would also state what was needed at the start of the interview of the interviewee such as name, press/presses, part of Canada they are from and etc. Once those basics were conveyed and understood and answered any other questions the interviewee had before

starting, I would start the interview. One interviewee didn't have time for a Zoom interview so they filled out the questions and send back their written answers which was one way the interviewees could participate in this interview series but most picked Zoom meetings for their preferred method of interview if they had the time. During an interview, not all questions were asked in order as to accommodate for the flow of the conversation. Conversations can evolve and change so accommodations were made to fit the flow of the conversation. The interviewing method or technique I used was to have a conversational tone. My hope was for the atmosphere to be relaxed and create a space where the interviewees felt comfortable sharing. This conversational part added a back and forth of sharing making the interview still informational but also allowed for a good interview experience. Creating a good environment is as important as the questions themselves. Not every question was also asked the exact way it was written but I did make an effort to keep to what was written on the sheet. Sometimes to help clarify I would rephrase or add examples to help the interviewee understand the language of the questions. This did not happen often but did occur.

#### After the Interview

After each interview I sent an email thanking the person for their time and told that once the project was done, they would be informed. Then in the chart document that kept track of where in the process the interview was, the final box would be checked off after sending the thank you email. The whole process of emailing and doing the interviews took about two and half months. After the interview period was over, I closed the research period with the Trent Research Ethics Board to ensure that all forty-three interviews had been conducted in that time span.

## Transcript Trials

Once the interviews themselves were done each interview transcript needed to be reviewed and compared against the audio to ensure that the transcripts were accurate. Each transcript was then formatted, this was so there weren't any odd spacing, grammar, misspellings and no missing information. Removing the spaces that weren't in the audio made it easier to read them and the program had artificially put them in. The next error was the common words the program misspelled. The most common one was when an interviewee said chapbook or zine and the program would put the words chat book or the word scene instead. It could also struggle with spelling names of people or names of presses such as House of Anansi Press would always be made into house of a Nancy. Then after those small visible changes the audio would be played to make sure that the transcript reflected what had actually been said. For example, "my boyfriend" was actually "my poet friend". Or some singular words would be changed such as poem to bomb or poem to home. At points the program hadn't heard the interviewee, and this meant having to replay that section over and over again to manually type in the sentence which had not been put in by the Zoom transcript program. Sometimes audio quality would dip or just the way a person would talk made it hard for the program to pick up on what the interviewee was trying to say. This led to many months of transcript work being done as documents could be four hundred pages, with the spacing fixed they would be forty pages. Some audio issues could be understood with turning up the audio on the program but sometimes this was not possible. The transcript program also struggled with spelling of people's names which led to many online searches of people names to make sure the spellings of names were correct to the person that the interviewee was speaking about. This proved to be difficult for some as many individuals do have an online presence, but many do not. Yet on the odd occasion the program did spell names correctly.

## Technical Issues

Many technical issues occurred in this part of the process. From audio distorting to being unable to hear what the audio was at times. This could have been due to internet connection during the original Zoom interview, mics not fully picking up the audio ,or many other reasons. In these cases, the term technical issues occurred were used to explain the cut off or a break in conversation. The term was also used if someone had to use the restroom or, attend to something such as someone knocking on the door; and the term cat technical issues occurred was used when a cat decided to join the call unexpectedly. Many things can occur when doing an interview and these terms were used to explain those gaps in the transcript. The reason for just those two terms being used was to have a certain amount of consistency. It also didn't change the transcripts as in many cases it was easy to understand what had been said and where the conversation had picked up. At times it was only a few seconds or a couple minutes. To show the time difference with these issues if a technical issue was brief such as a couple seconds or less then a minute the formatting didn't change, and the term was put in and the sentence continued. If the time was considerably longer a new line was created for the term and the transcript would continue with the next line of audio under the term. The use of em-dashes also helped show if someone was cut off mid word or sentence. This was also used if I accidentally cut off the interviewee and the other way around as well. Despite all the technical issues that occurred the information in the interviews stayed and little from what is understood from the recordings was lost. Some was which is just the nature of the programs, internet connections and other external factors such as weather interfering with internet connections. The interviews still procured a lot of important information and gave great insight into the project.

### Editing the Transcripts

Due to the way humans talk when talking naturally, the transcripts reflect the natural sentence structure people have when speaking or when someone is thinking on the spot. To try and keep these transcripts in the voice of the participant little was done to edit out repeat words, or quick changes in sentences. Punctuation was used to try and keep the writing understandable but still true to how a participant spoke. This was important as each interviewee had their own way of talking and keeping that personal, down to earth, D.I.Y. grit was important to me. As that nature was shown in the transcripts and to sanitize it would be a disservice to the interviewees and the project.

### Editing Transcripts Second Pass

Once a transcript had been formatted and edited, they were edited. Then changes were made to clarify information, make small house style edits for consistent formatting and quotes were pulled for the paper, with a master document of quotations and information making it easier for sourcing while writing.

### To Note About the Question Sheets

For reference the list of questions here are not blended here but many of these interviews took a mix of author questions and small press. That was a common combination. One example of the combination of questions will be at the end of the questions to showcase how they were

blended. The introduction was the part that the interviewer had to so as to place the transcript and the second part was what was required of the interviewee at the start of the interview.

### Question Sheets Used for Interviews

Me: Hello. Have to say things for recordings: my name, date, time, reminder that the call is being recorded and that they can dropout with the deadline a week after the interview. Interview for blank.

Them: Name, press, part of Canada they are from, pronouns, title at press and other titles they wish to share.

### Author specific questions:

How did you discover zines, chapbooks and this kind of publishing?

Why did you publish a chapbook/s?

Would you work with a small chapbook press again?

What did this kind of publishing teach you?

What does this kind of publishing offer you that traditional publishing or other kinds don't?

What are some challenges you've faced in publishing?

Are chapbooks important to you?

- Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why, or why not?



- Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself?

What's something you wish people knew about Canadian publishing?

Why do you think most small presses/micro presses close up shop?

What's something important about DIY press history, or your history that you wish people knew?

Any additional comments you would like to make?

Small press questions:

How did you discover zines, chapbooks and this kind of publishing?

Why did the press start?

What is the press' editorial philosophy?

- What is the press' goal?

What kind of work do you publish?

- Why did you choose to publish this kind of content?

What is your process (i.e. from submission to production)?

How does your press make decisions?

Where does the press sell their books?

- How are they sold?

What are some challenges the press has faced?

Why are chapbooks important to you?

- Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why, or why not?
- Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself?

What does this kind of publishing offer that other types of publishing can't? And vice versa.

What's something you wish people knew about Canadian publishing?

What has this kind of publishing taught you?

Why do you think most small presses/micro presses close up shop?

- Why did it end for you?
- How and why are you still keeping the press going?

What's something important about DIY press history, or your history that you wish people knew?

Any additional comments you would like to make?

#### Traditional Publishing Houses questions:

How did the press start?

How did you discover zines, chapbooks and this kind of publishing?

What's the house's editorial philosophy?

- What's the goal for the press?

What kind of work does the house publish?

- Why does the press publish that kind of content?

What is the process (from submission to production)?

How does the press make decision?

Where do you sell your books? How do you sell them?

What are some challenges the press have had?

Why are chapbooks important to you?

- Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why, or why not?
- Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself?

What does this kind of publishing offer that other types of publishing can't? And vice versa.

What's something you wish people knew about Canadian publishing?

Why do you think most small presses/micro presses close up shop?

What has small publishing taught you?

What's something important about DIY press history, or your history that you wish people knew?

Any additional comments you would like to make?

This is now an example of the most common combination of questions that were done throughout the interview process. The A next to some of the questions are marking that those are the author questions which have been mixed in to help the interviewer when doing an interview.

Small press mixed with Author questions:

Why did the press start?

How did you discover zines, chapbooks and this kind of publishing?

What is the press' editorial philosophy?

- What is the press' goal?

What kind of work do you publish?

- Why did you choose to publish this kind of content?

What is your process (i.e. from submission to production)?

How does your press make decisions?

Where does the press sell their books?

- How are they sold?

A. Why did you publish a chapbook/s?

A. Would you work with a small chapbook press again? (that isn't your press)

What are some challenges the press has faced?

A. What are some challenges you've faced as an author?

What did this kind of publishing teach you?

Why are chapbooks important to you?

- Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why, or why not?
- Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself?

What does this kind of publishing offer that other types of publishing can't? And vice versa.

What's something you wish people knew about Canadian publishing?

Why do you think most small presses/micro presses close up shop?

- Why did it end for you?  
and or
- How and why are you still keeping the press going?

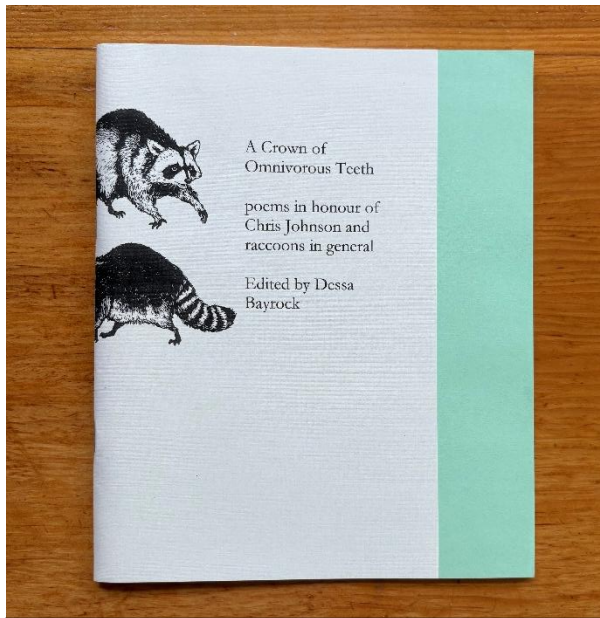
What's something important about DIY press history, or your history that you wish people knew?

Any additional comments you would like to make?

### The Design of the Questions

The questions were design to start with background questions helping gain an understanding of why people start and participate in these types of projects and endeavors. The question about how people discover this type of small publishing also gives insight into how people become apart of this community which isn't known to most of the public. The larger Canada and publishing questions are to gather an understanding of this kind of smaller publishing place in Canada and in the community. With the last questions giving space for personal or D.I.Y. history that one might wish to share but didn't have the opportunity to through out the interview. Same with the additional comments question. No interview is full proof but giving the interviewee space to share near the end can lead to unexpected additions which can give good insights not foreseen in the original drafts of the project.

Chapbook Gallery: Due to the nature of chapbooks being very hands on and hand crafted some examples of some of the presses mentioned here and of those interviewed will be seen here. For such an experimental form, this paper would be lacking if there weren't some visual representations. There will also be some small press books and some traditionally published books (and zines) by micropresses in here as well to showcase some of their work as to show the difference between the two mediums while also showing the range of each category.



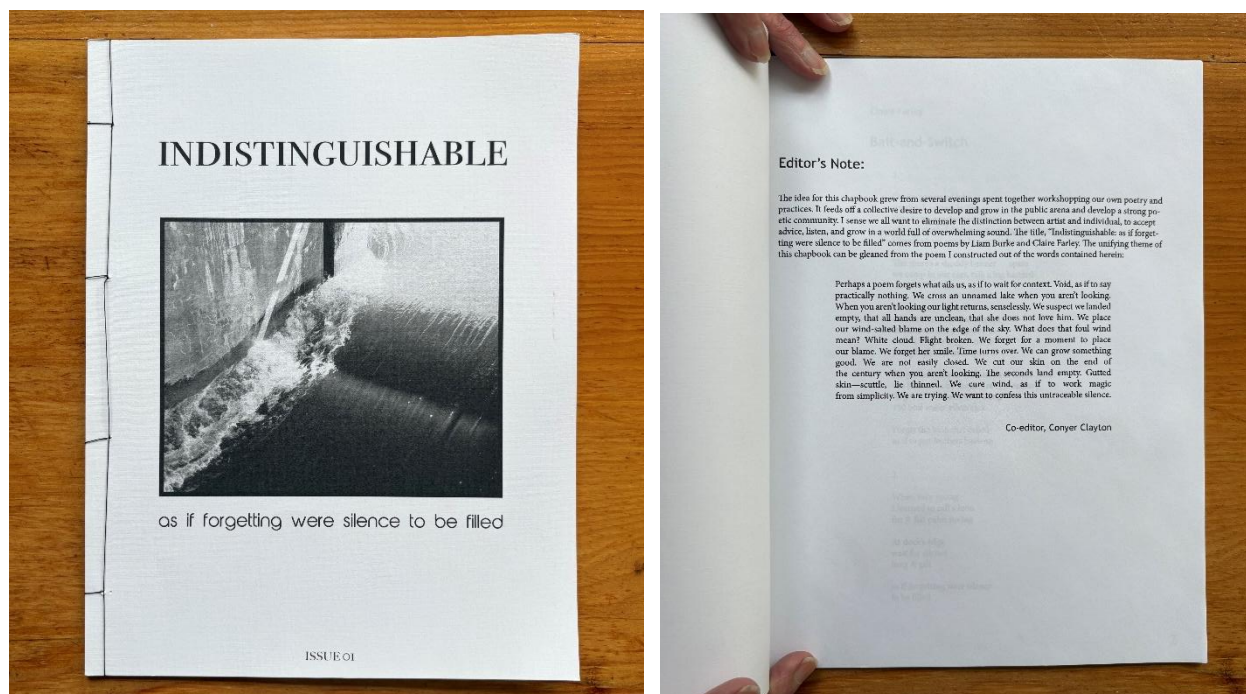
Dessa Bayrock, *A crown of Omnivorous Teeth*, above/ground press, 2024



Jack Benedict, *BANDAID*, Whispering Wick, 2020

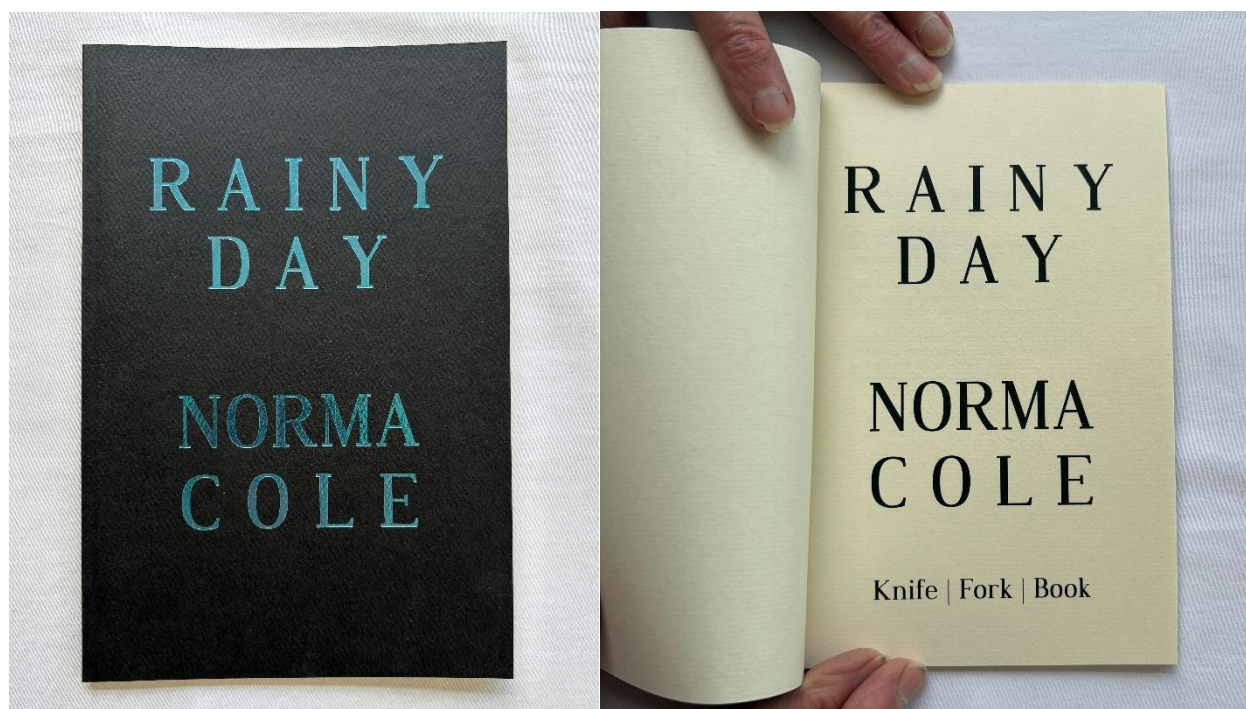


Michael Casteels, *illiterate. 8*, Puddle of Sky Press, 2018



Conyer Clayton, *INDISTINGUISHABLE*, &Co. Collective, 2017





Norma Cole, *RAINY DAY*, Knife Fork Book, 2024

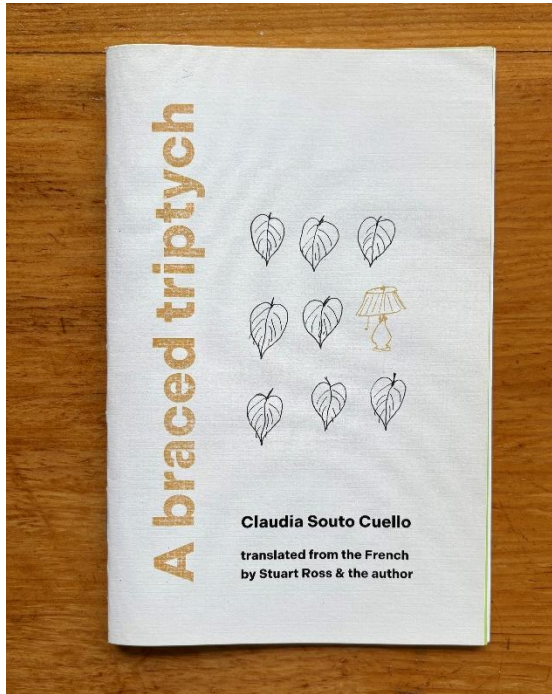


Sophie Crocker, *BRAT*, Gordon Hill Press, 2022





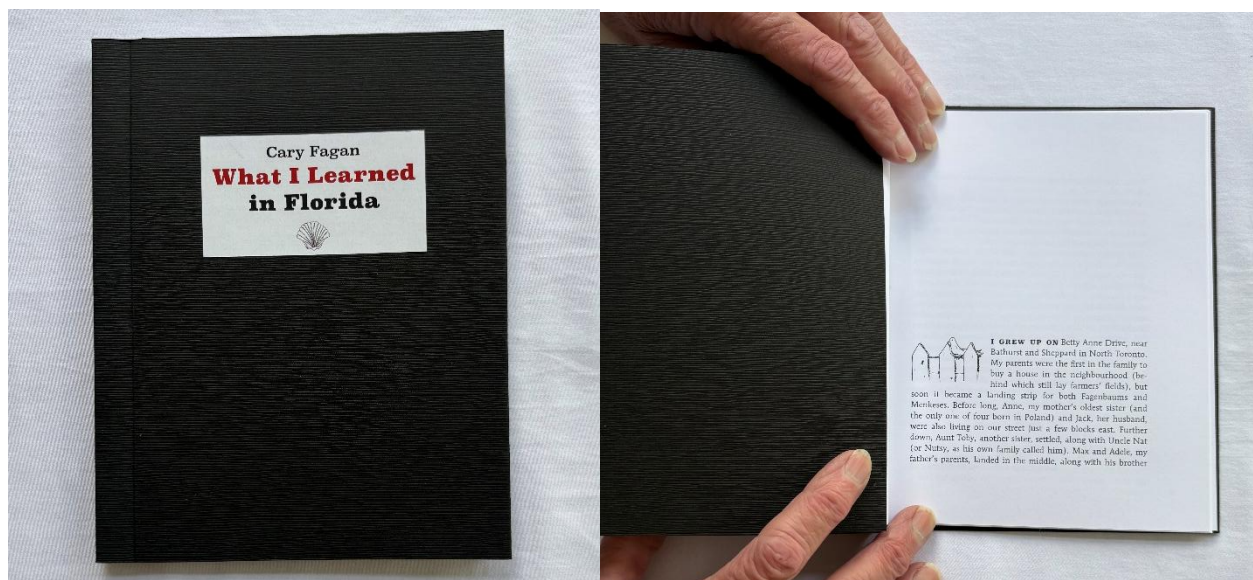
Lana Crossman, *PICS OR IT DIDN'T HAPPEN*, Pinhole Poetry, 2024



Claudia Souto Cuello, *A braced triptych*, Proper Tales Press, 2025

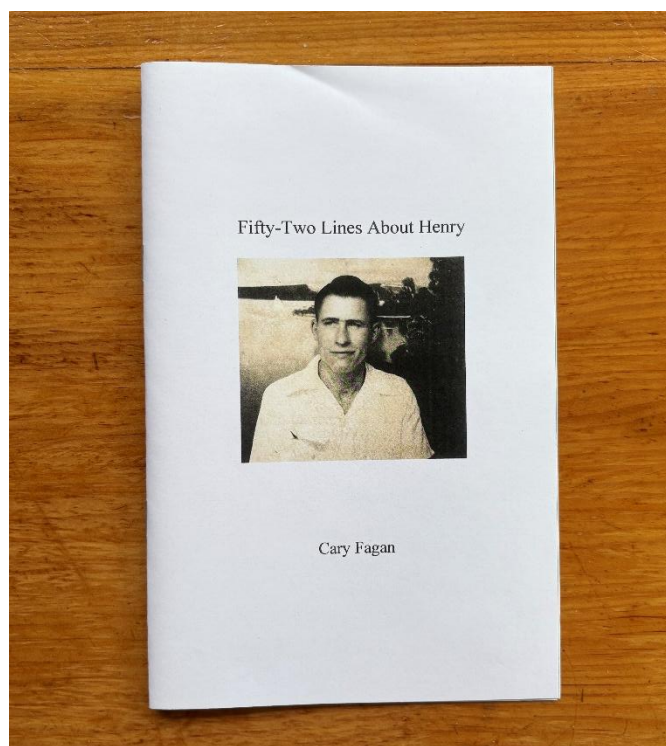


Joseph Donato, *RADIO 06*, BLOCK PARTY, 2024

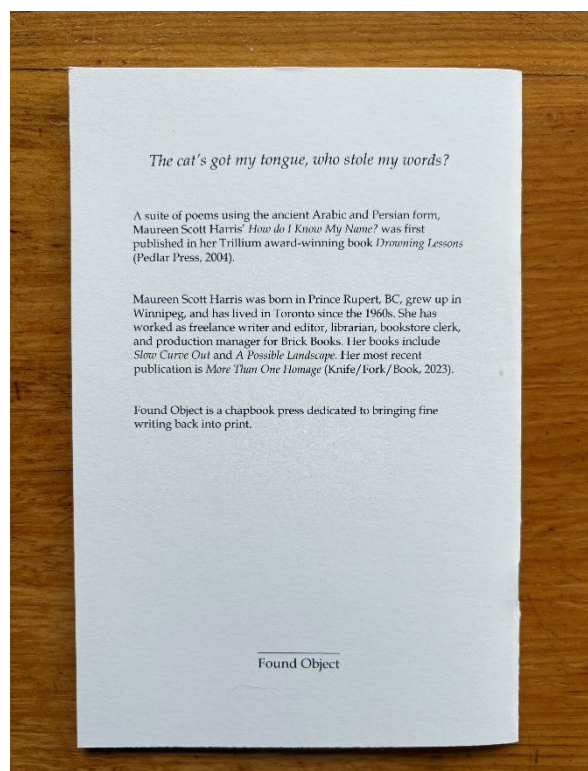
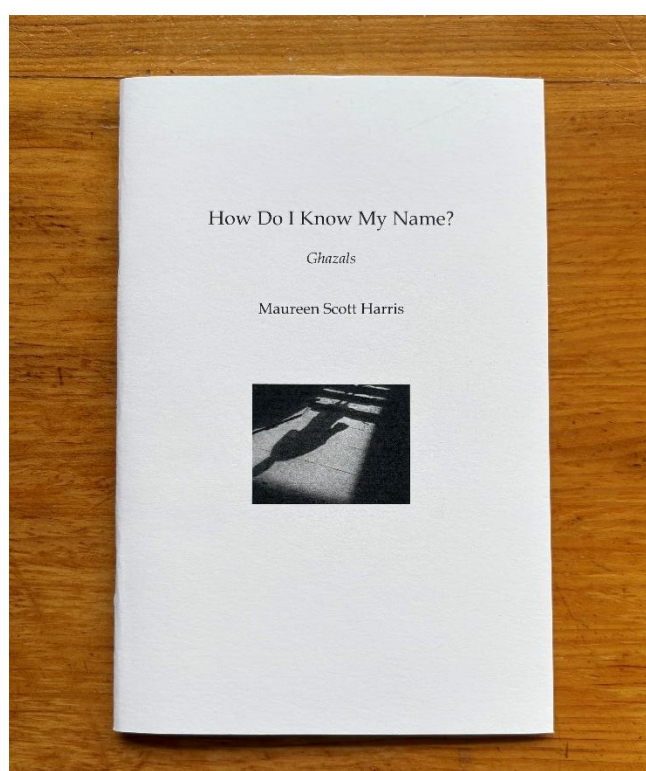


Cary Fagan, *What I Learned in Florida*, Espresso, 2016





Cary Fagan, *Fifty-Two Lines About Henry*, Espresso, 2024



Maureen Scott Harris, *How Do I Know My Name?*, Found Object, 2024

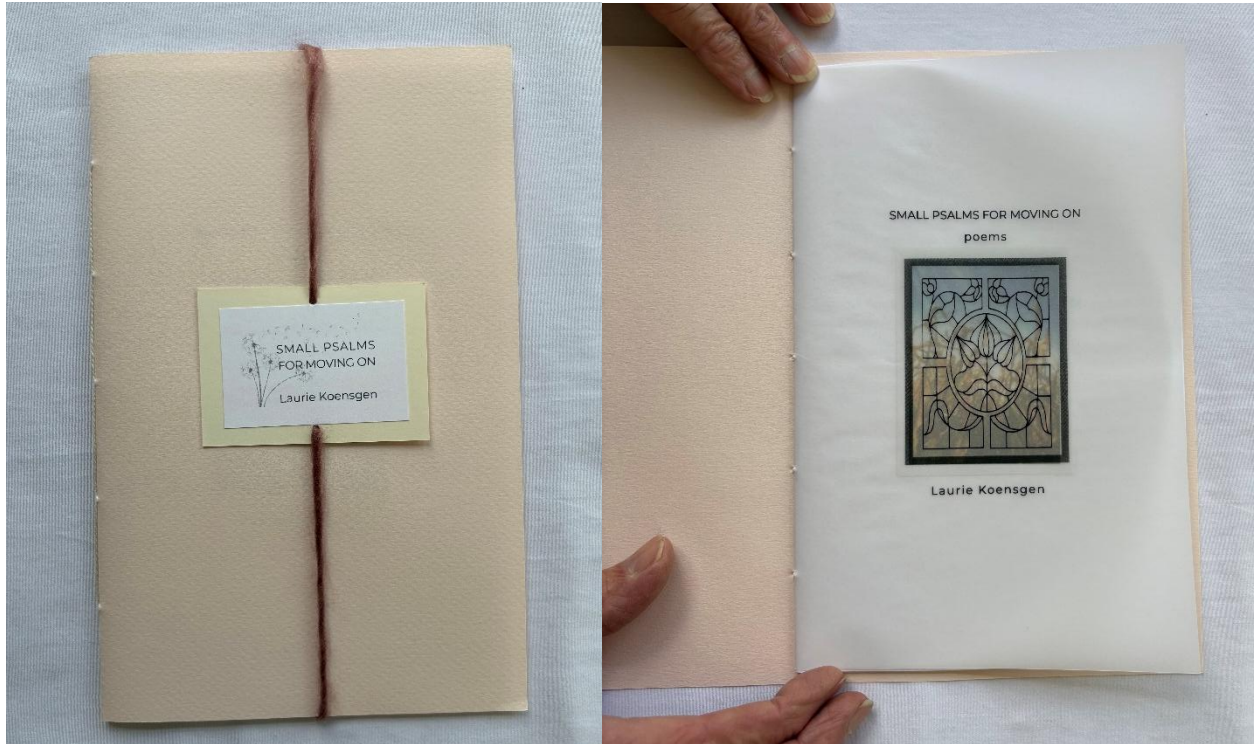


Chris Johnson, *Gravenhurst a failed record of a roadtrip to haibun*, above/ground press, 2019



Chris Johnson, *some of the raccoon poems*, above/ground press, 2022



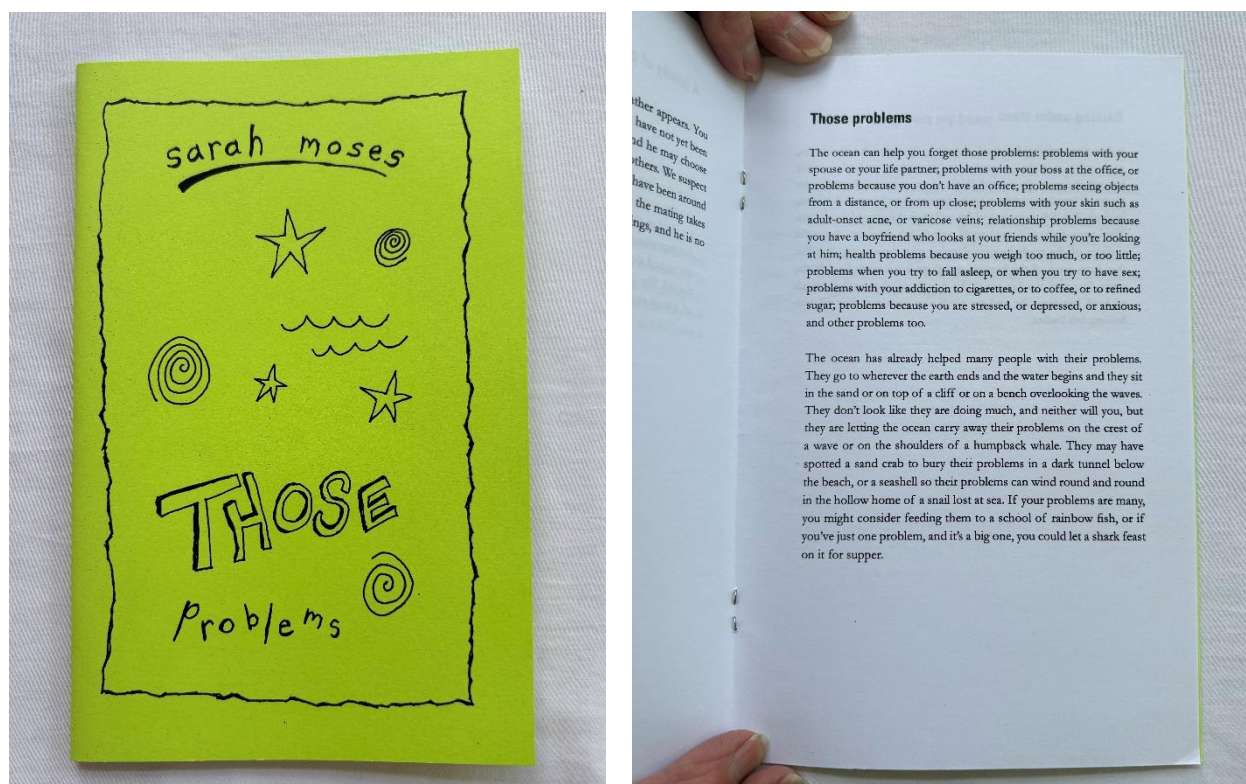


Laurie Koensgen, *SMALL PSALMS FOR MOVING ON*, Pinhole Poetry, 2023



Stevie Manning, *Joan Would Say*, Knife Fork Book, 2023



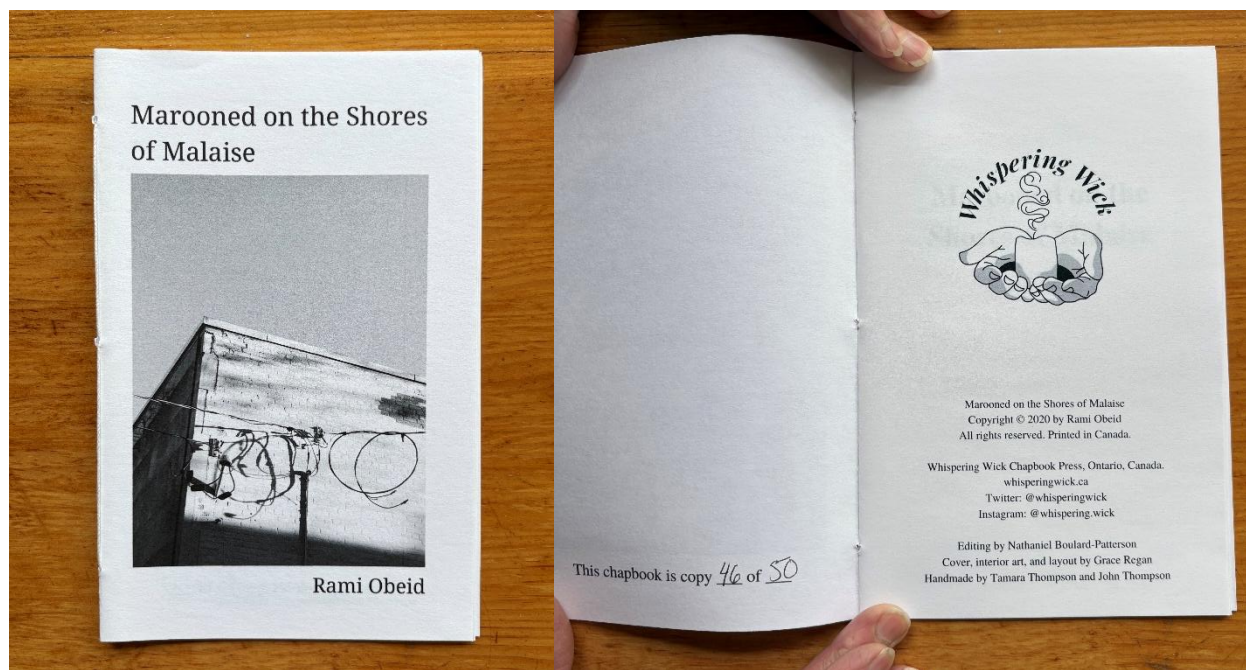


Sarah Moses, *THOSE problems*, Proper Tales Press, 2016



Linh S. Nguyen, *Visiting Gales*, The Soap Box Press, 2021

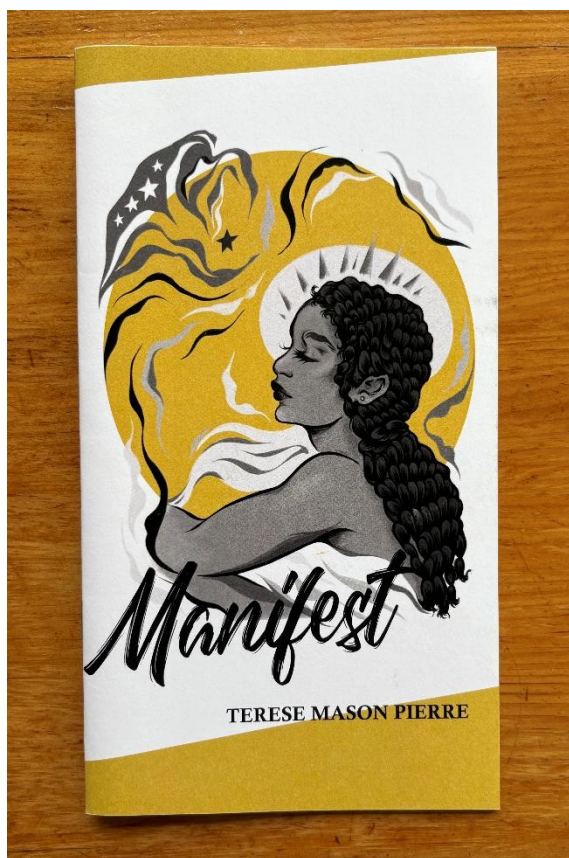




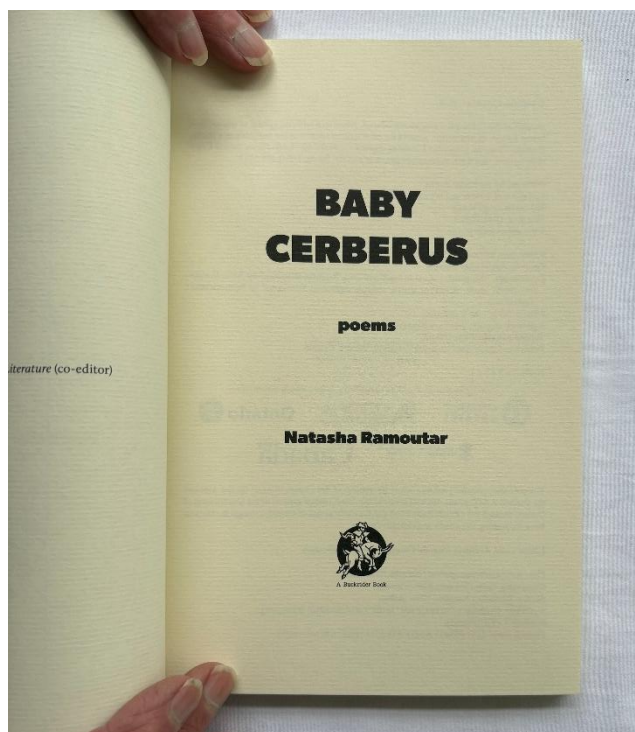
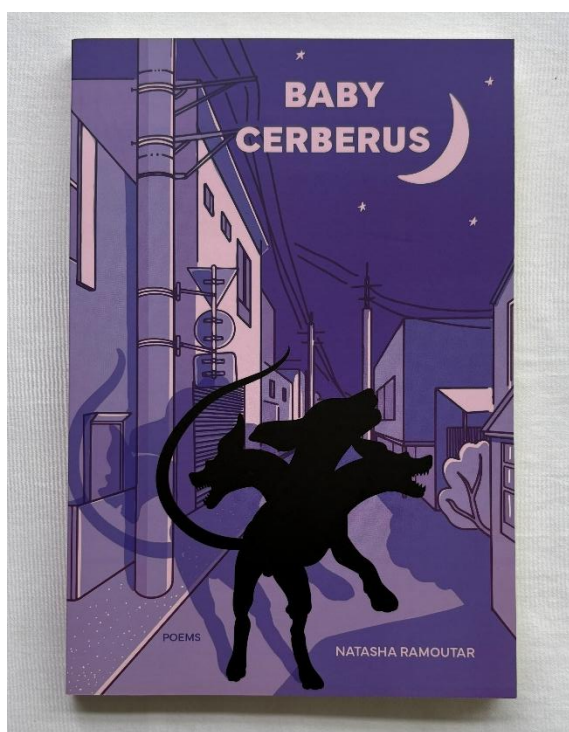
Rami Obeid, *Marooned on the Shores of Malaise*, Whispering Wick, 2020



Michael Orr, *The Alibi*, Simulacrum press, 2024



Terese Mason Pierre, *Manifest*, Gap Riot, 2020



Natasha Ramoutar, *BABY CERBERUS*, Buckrider Books, 2024



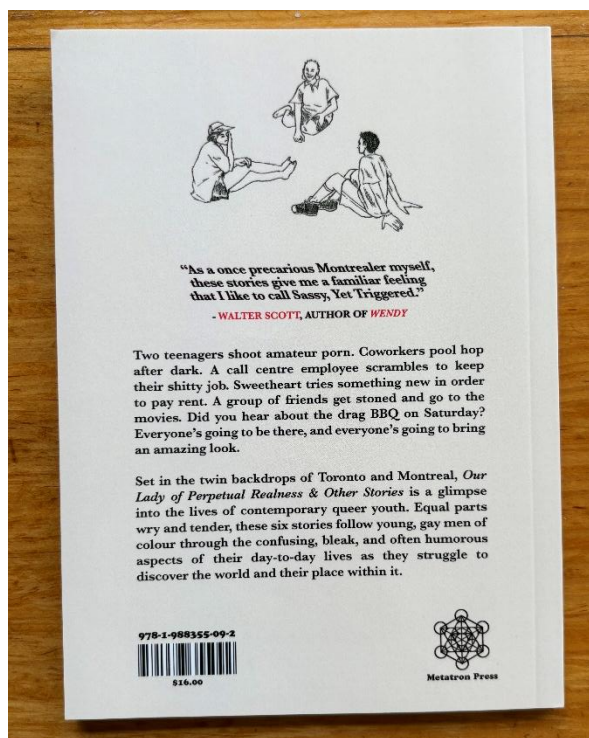
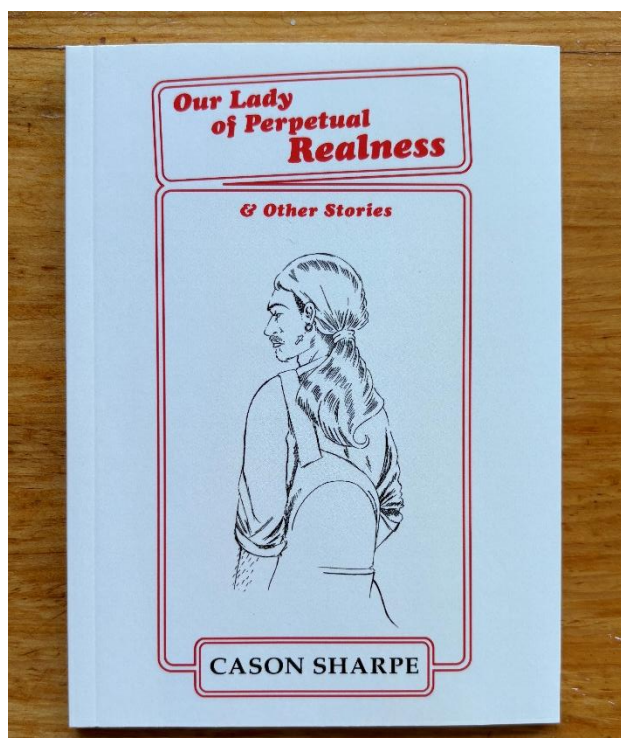


Stuart Ross, *SUN COWS OF THE PETRICHOR*, Proper Tales Press, 2022

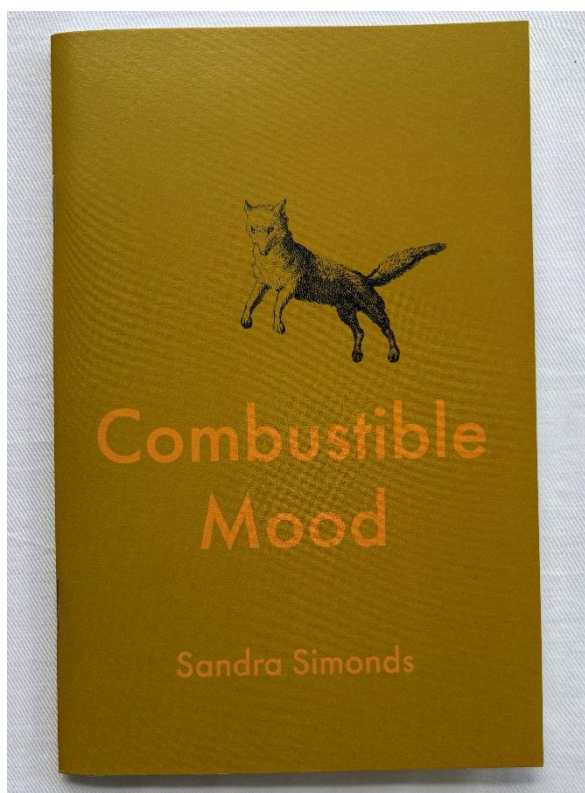


Brandy Ryan, *in the third person reluctant*, Gap Riot, 2024

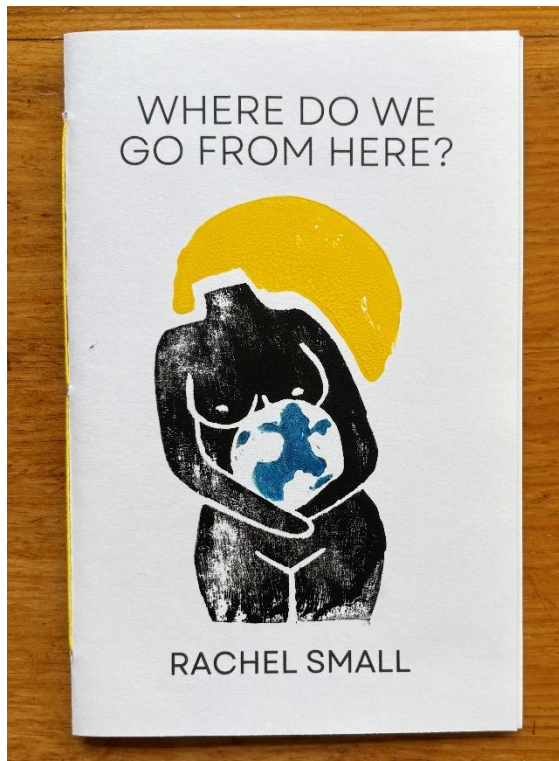




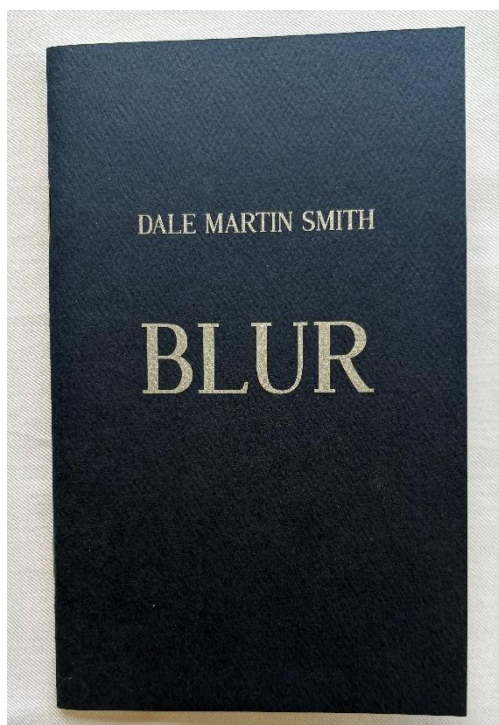
Cason Sharpe, *Our Lady of Perpetual Realness & Other Stories*, Metatron Press, 2017



Sandra Simonds, *Combustible Mood*, Anstruther Press, 2024

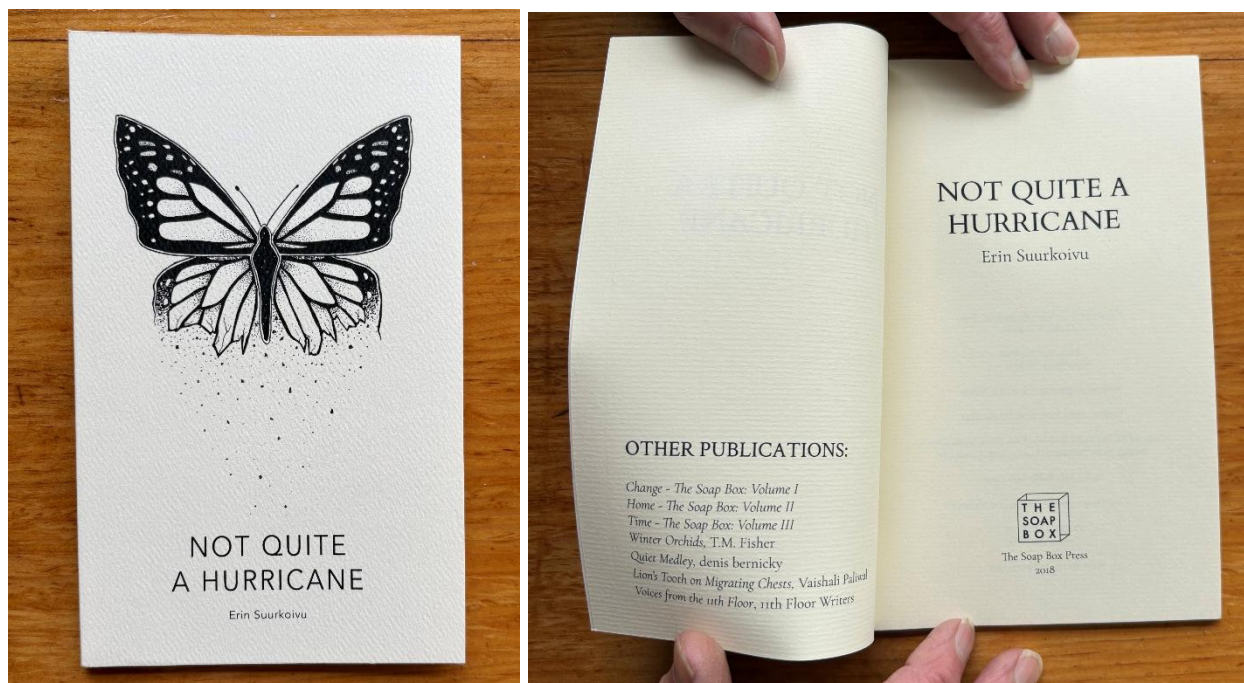


Rachel Small, *WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE*, Whispering Wick, 2021

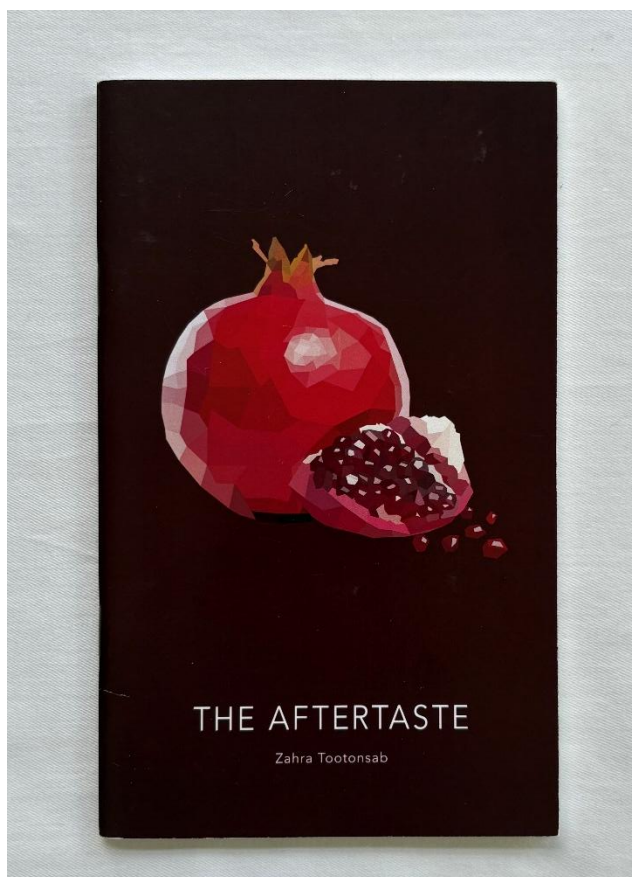


Dale Martin Smith, *BLUR*, Knife Fork Book, 2022



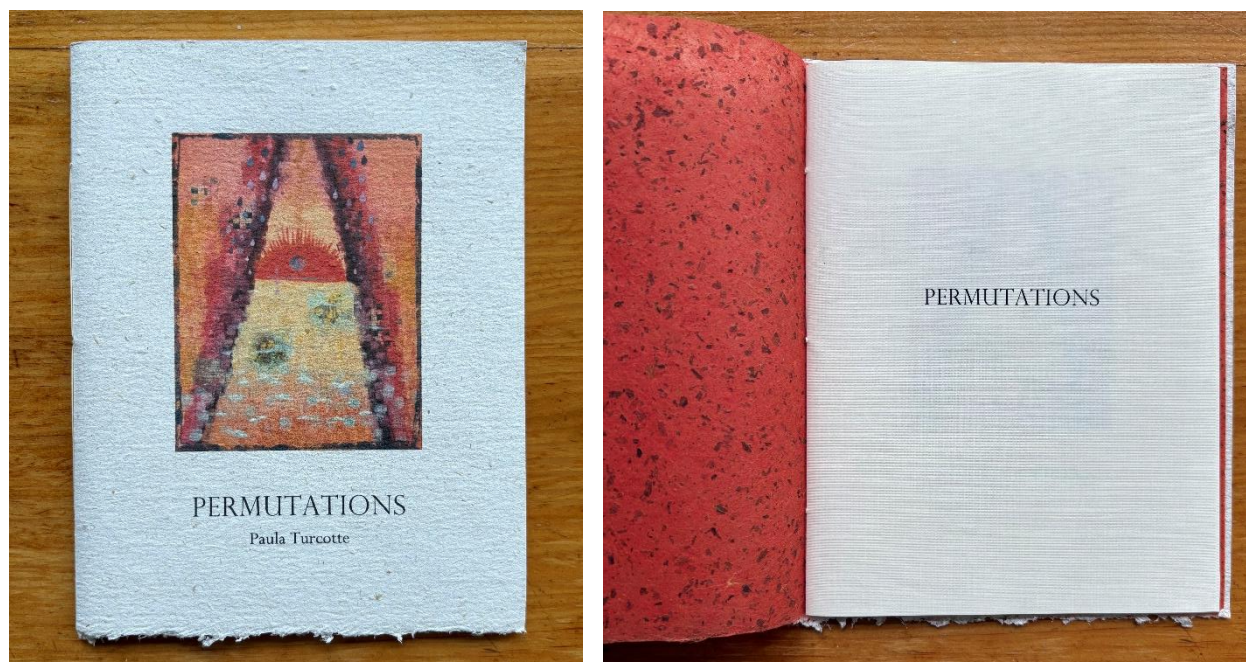


Erin Sururkoivu, *NOT QUITE A HURRICANE*, The Soap Box Press, 2018

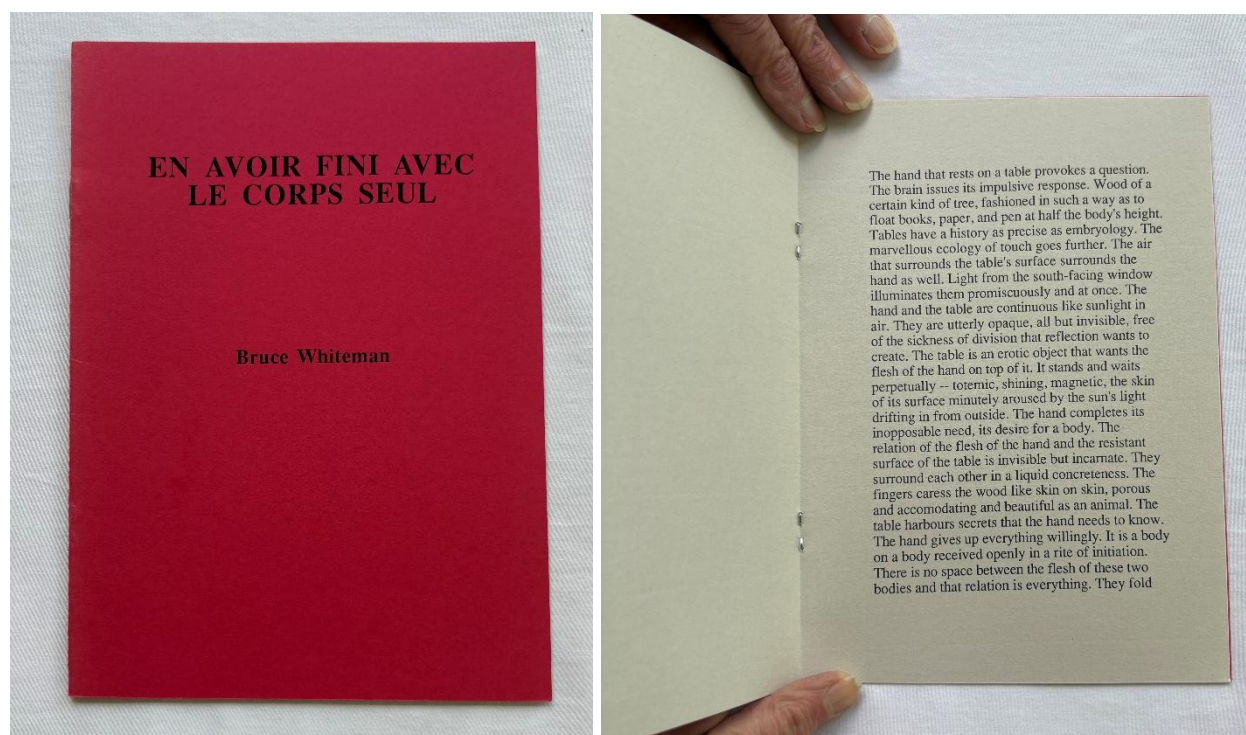


Zahra Tootonsab, *The Aftertaste*, The Soap Box, 2019



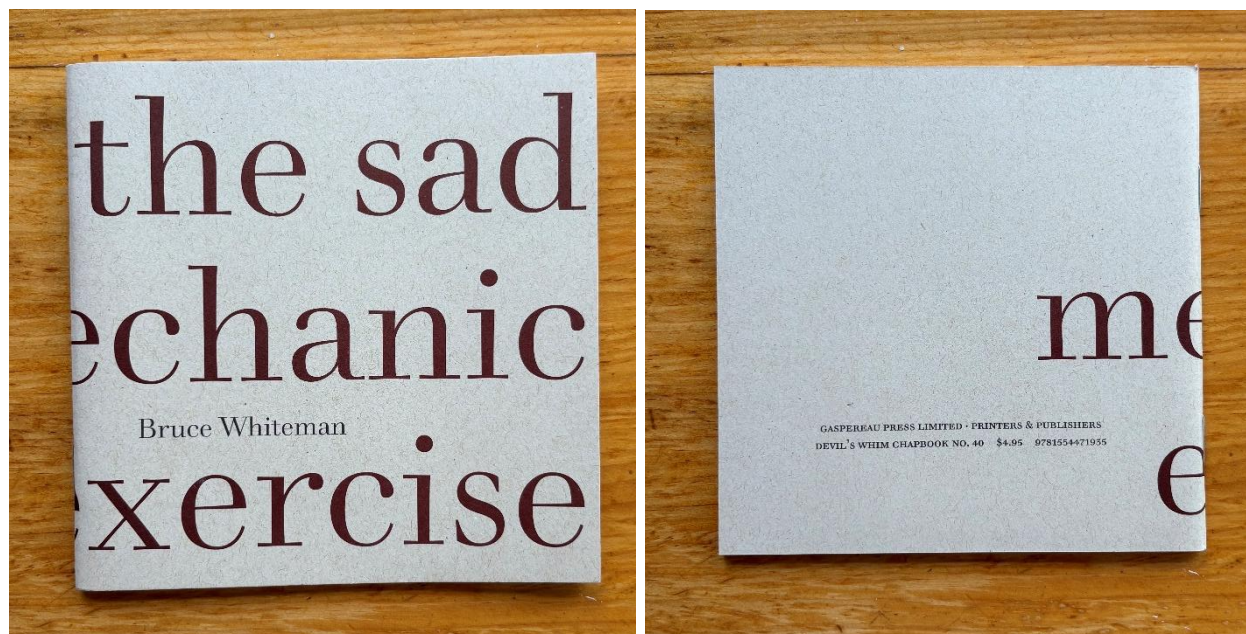


Paula Turcotte, *PERMUTATIONS*, baseline press, 2024

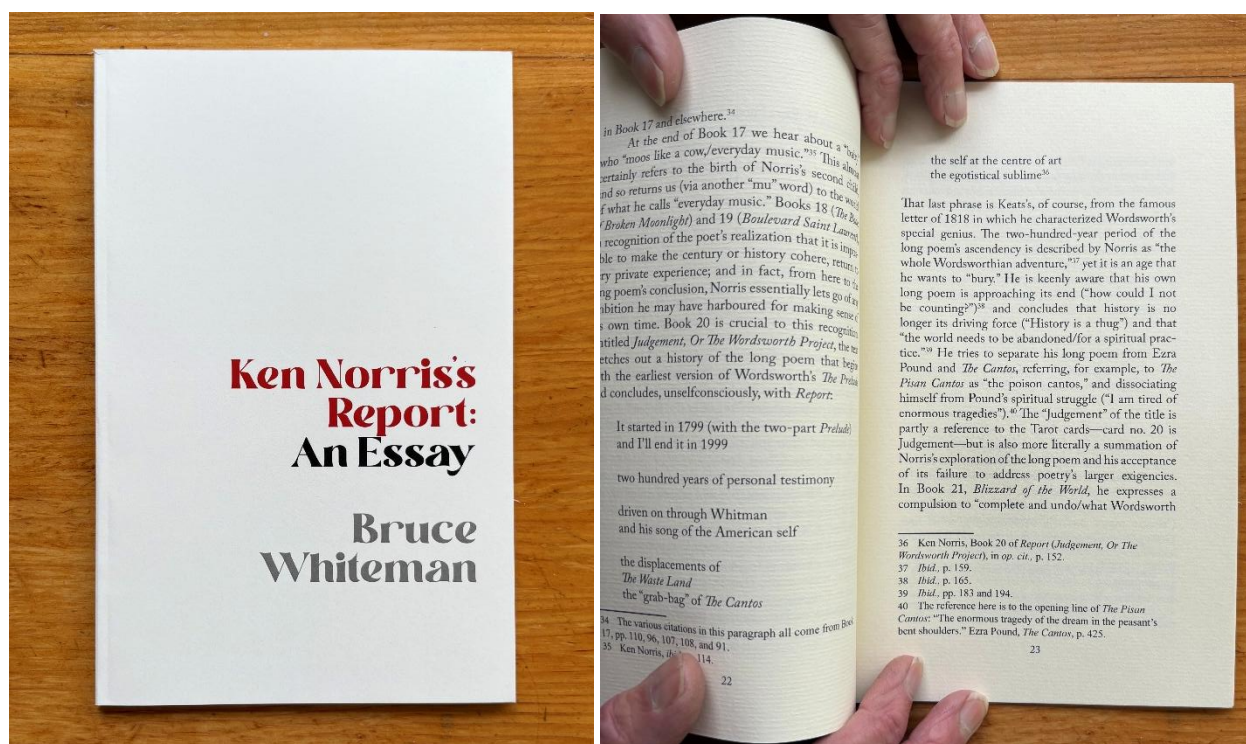


Bruce Whiteman, *EN AVOIR FINI AVEC LE CORPS SEUL*, La presse de poètes et des pentres d'outre-mer, 1987

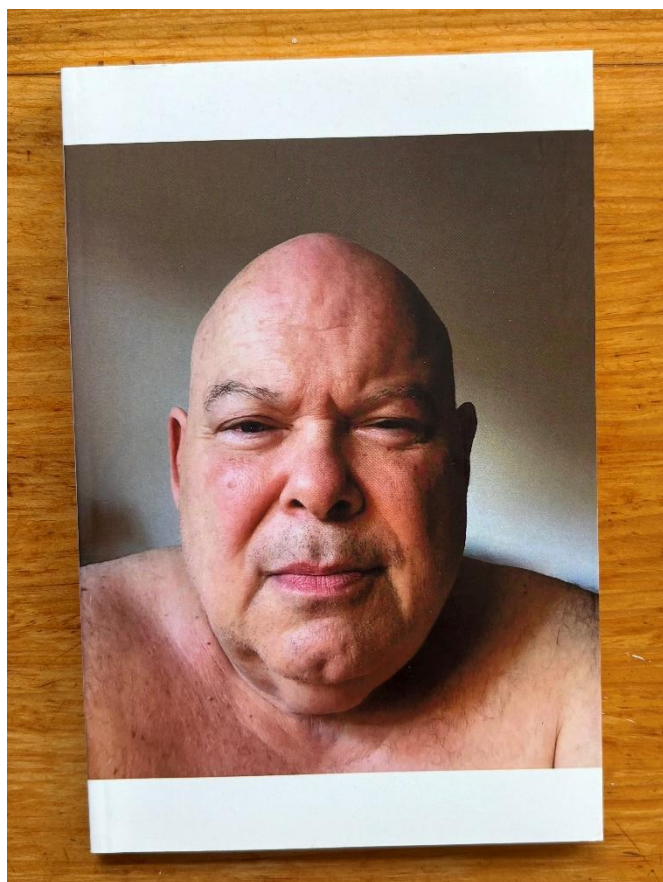




Bruce Whiteman, *the sad mechanic exercise*, Gaspereau Press, 2024



Bruce Whiteman, *Ken Norris's Report: An Essay*, Poets and Painters Press, 2024



Kirby, *She*, Knife Fork Book, 2024

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These interviews hold many great insights which couldn't be included in the intro so that the intro wasn't just a repeat of the interviews themselves. Many amazing quotes, themes and ideas have been left for people to discover in the interviews. Enjoy.

Leslie Ahenda

Tamara Thompson: Hello, my name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is July 19<sup>th</sup>. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview time. This interview is for author and traditional press.

Leslie Ahenda: Hi! My name is Leslie Joy Ahenda. My pronouns are she/her; I work at House of Anansi press. I consider myself an editor in that capacity. I also write, and I paint, and I dabble in other art forms like embroidery. But I don't really give myself a title to do with any of those. I just like to make art.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic and a general part of Canada you're from?

Leslie Ahenda: Yes, I'm from Calgary and I live in Toronto.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Thank you so much. So just to get the ball rolling, how did you discover, like, zines and chapbooks and this type of, like, smaller publishing, like, how did you discover, like, the smaller side of, like, this bigger beast that is publishing?

Leslie Ahenda: I came into it, I think, just through community really, starting, sort of, in high school and then undergrad. I just knew of people putting things together, and we would start, kind of, collaborating on projects and writing poems here and there. And it wasn't until a little bit later, near the end of my undergrad and into grad school, that I started actually, like, making my own chapbooks and selling them. And up until that point I was really just doing it for the sake of art-making with my community.

Tamara Thompson: Excellent. So a couple of these questions are gonna be about press. You could talk more about your experience with them if you'd like, but any history you have is appreciated, but not necessary. But so, the first question is: why did the press start? If you don't know why the press started, how did you get started with it?

Leslie Ahenda: With House of Anansi Press?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Leslie Ahenda: Anansi started in 1967 by these two men. And it's, you know, it's-it's known as a prestigious publisher here in Canada. So, I was kind of, I mean, I was aware of it and interested in it while I was doing my undergrad and getting more into the, like, literary scene of Canada. But I never really considered it as, like, my destination that I was looking for. What happened was: I moved out here, to Toronto, for grad school, did an MFA in creative writing. And at that time, I knew I had to be looking for a job and a position opened up at Anansi, and I thought, you know, like, might as well try. And I'd had some experience editing on, like, my undergraduate literary journal, and then a couple of other magazines along the way. And so that's kind of how I just fell into book editing. Yeah, it was a really simple sort of process.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So again, so, these—some of these next questions have to deal with the press. But does the press have, maybe, an editorial philosophy, maybe a goal? And again, these things change all the time, but is there, maybe, like, a current one that you can speak to, of, like, what press is trying to do? Again, it could also just be as simple as, you know, make Canadian books? But just asking the question.

Leslie Ahenda: Yeah, no, definitely. Our motto is that Anansi makes very good books, whatever that means to any given time. We're sort of in a state of flux, right now, I would say, because we had a new publisher start in the last handful of months. So, she's really, I think, figuring out what direction she particularly wants to take it in. At this point, what I'm responsible for is our translation imprint, where we translate books from French into English. So, I'm sort of starting to develop my own philosophy for that imprint, which is where I want to find, like, more plot driven stories because a lot of the French literature that we've done in the past has been like character-focused, like slow paced literature, which is gorgeous in its own right, but I feel like we've done so much of that—that—now I'm looking for, like, French books, particularly by or about minorities, that have, like, pose new questions about the world that I hadn't really considered before. And that hook me with a really, like—like, plot driven story.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's adding a little bit of variety.

Leslie Ahenda: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I totally get that. So, you're talking a little bit about my next question, which is, like, the kinds of things that House of Anansi publishes or focus on. So, I'm just interested in the kinds of like, genres, like, because, again, I'm talking to a lot of places that might only do fiction or might only do poetry and stuff. So just to get a general idea.

Leslie Ahenda: Right. So, we have several different imprints, and—and we do across the board. We do fiction, nonfiction, poetry. We've done some drama in the past, although that's kind of rare for us. So, it's kind of tough to publish a—a book of—that's a script—unless there's also a production going on. And we have an imprint called Ambrosia. That's, like, sort of, a self-help slash lifestyle imprint. We've got Spider Line which focuses on genre fiction, and in the past, sort of, mainly been like mystery, thriller stuff. But it's starting to expand into more across the board genre like speculative. We've got a new mystery series. Actually, a new book that's really exciting that we did recently was an indigenous horror book that I loved so much. And we're looking for more of that. And then we have, I mean, our Anansi imprint that does the literary fiction like hard-hitting nonfiction. And then our gorgeous poetry in print that I could talk about forever, because I love it so much, and it's all so beautiful and wonderful.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Thank you for giving such a—a broad spectrum. What was the name of the indigenous book that you're talking about? What was that title again?

Leslie Ahenda: It's called an *Ordinary Violence* by Adriana Chartrand.

Tamara Thompson: I thought so, because that is what I'm taking up to read at my cottage with me.

Leslie Ahenda: It's so good I worked on it. It's incredible. I love it so much.

Tamara Thompson: I'm so excited to read it, because this is the kind of stuff where, like, I love horror and stuff like this, and stuff that, kind of, like, pushes the ideas of, kind of, those, like, darker themes. So, anyway, I'll get us back on track. But I'm so excited to like to dig my teeth into it.

Leslie Ahenda: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: For, like, for two weeks, finally read for enjoyment. So, I understand, if you don't like, know, the whole process of how a book is actually made, but if you could give me a little bit of an idea on, like, what your part of, like, that process of, like, making the actual book is, like, I'd be interested to hear about that.

Leslie Ahenda: Yeah, I'm involved in—in several different avenues, but definitely not the whole thing. So, we start, I mean, it starts on submission. We get submissions through our—through our portal that anybody can submit through, which opens twice a year, and we also receive agented submissions year-round. That, all, like, any one particular editor, would read the manuscript, and then, if they find that it's publication worthy, or even just worth talking about, we have an editorial meeting that occurs every couple of weeks, where we bring our projects forward, and we discuss and—and sort of make a decision by committee of what we think is right for the press, for whatever particular imprint. There's a lot of considerations that go into whether or not a manuscript is picked up, like, far beyond, just "Is it good?" but then, once we, finally, you know, we do the deal. I'm not involved in the actual deal, contract, money stuff, like other people do that. And then I get to come back in to do the edit on a book, or any of the other editors. We go back and forth with the author for a handful of months with the goal of then turning it around to a clean, finished manuscript to go to copy edit and that's where it's off my plate again. For a little bit, it goes through a copy edit. It goes through a proofread and then it goes to design where they typeset it. They do any images that need to go in, work their absolute magic, design the cover, design the back, make it all look beautiful and then, once that's all done, it goes to print where it will then once it's printed, sit in a warehouse for a little while, and then get shipped off to bookstores, and marketing and publicity get involved. Whole other departments I don't really know a lot of what they do, but they are awesome.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's when you're dealing with something as big as, like, *House of Anansi*, you just need the people to help push things through. So, I totally get that. But it warms my heart to hear how much editing is done, because I've been hearing some places have been getting rid of substantive, and I'm like, "No, that's one of the best parts."

That's what I love. That's what I'd love to edit, and that's what I love to hear, as an author, is to hear that feedback, because, sorry that just makes me so happy.

Leslie Ahenda: I'm so glad. No, I think it's so crucial.

Tamara Thompson: Because, like, yeah, like, no book is, like, fully ready to print, because, like, you always have, like, people who need to have eyes on it. That's one of the things I always tell my students. I'm like "Doesn't matter if you think your piece is perfect soon as you submit it. They're gonna want to make changes. And that's not because the pieces are good. That's because you might not have as much of your idea on the page as you think. And that is okay."

Leslie Ahenda: Absolutely but there are also cases where you can reject an edit if you don't agree. You know it's—is options.

Tamara Thompson: That is the other thing, too, is this: I always say an editor's task is to try and get your ideas more onto the page and that it's not to take over the work. Don't be scared of an editor. They are there to help you—

Leslie Ahenda: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: But, like, also, like, the whole idea is an editor—supposed to point out a problem, and then you work the problem together. You can ask the questions. I asked probably way too many questions, because I just want to know, because I'm so curious. But, like, I'm, like, that's, like, not a bad thing, because then you learn and everything like that. And I'm like, don't be afraid to ask your editors questions. Don't just, like, be afraid of them. They're there to help, and my students are always like "Whoa."

Leslie Ahenda: Oh, I remember being that student. But no, we want to help you. We want your work to shine. And just because we can identify a spot that needs some more work, doesn't mean that we have the answer to what it needs. So just because we point something out, we're like, maybe this, like, you could take it and run a whole different direction. And we're like, "Oh, you're so right." That's way better than what I suggested. You know that does happen.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, the idea is to address the problem and give suggestion on how you could fix it. And all my students are like, wait, you mean, I don't have to, like, to take every single edit. And it's like, no, you're not supposed to do that, usually, anyway.

Leslie Ahenda: No. It's just a starting ground for discussion.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And they're also—I'm like, don't worry about a lot of red pen, either, because that shows that the person really cares about what you're doing, right? And I also always say, "Make sure you think about where you're submitting, because you want your manuscript to have a home, not just a place where it's published."

Leslie Ahenda: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: People do care about it. Right? I'm like, and you know, I'm just saying Canadian publishers and smaller publishers care a lot more than Amazon. And a lot of those, like, vanity presses and stuff like that. Just saying you should be paid for your work. Not have to pay. Yeah, no, I know, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Look, that's what I have to tell my students, because they—if they cause, they don't know, right? They don't know. And that's not their fault, you know. This is a big, big world.

(Technical issues occurred).

Leslie Ahenda: -write down my thoughts of little stories and poems, and whatever. I started taking it seriously in my first year of undergrad, when I was an English major and hated being an English major. But I took a creative writing class, and it, like, changed my world. And I was like, "Oh, like, people actually do this and take it seriously and like work hard at it and really put their heart to it." I could do that, too. So, then I transferred to (technical issue occurred), to do a writing degree for my undergrad and just fell in love with poetry. And that was yeah, toward the end of—that was when I went to the Banff Center, and then I made my first chapbook and that really did something for me—to get to see my words, like, on something a beautiful piece of art that... I had a friend of mine, Natalie Lauchlan, who's a Calgarian artist, do the cover artwork, and it was published by a press called Moon Jelly House, which was in Edmonton. I don't know that they're still operational, because it was, it was run by Nisha Patel when she was the poet Laureate of Edmonton.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Leslie Ahenda: So, we did that, and it was such an incredible experience. And then I finished my undergrad and thought, "What am I gonna do now" You know, classic. So, I thought, you know, maybe I'll just apply to grad school and see what happens. And then, in the meantime, like, I got accepted to grad school, and then Covid hit. And then I was, like, now what I've kind of been thinking maybe I'll go to grad school, maybe I'll travel. Maybe I'll, whatever-whatever. So, then I figured, you know, if I'm sitting in my room not able to go anywhere, I might as well do grad school on Zoom. So, I did that for a year and then moved up here for the second year. That was 2022 by that point—2021 end of—I don't remember, somewhere in there, like, the first couple of years. But when we—

Tamara Thompson: A lot happened.

Leslie Ahenda: Right.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Leslie Ahenda: Yeah, so I finished that program, which was incredible. I did it at the University of Guelph. I had some incredible teachers. (technical issues occurred) Amazing experience. And then I did my second chapbook that I put up with the Blasted Tree, which is a press in Calgary. Oh, yeah, you know it. They're—I love Kyle. They do great stuff.

Tamara Thompson: I'm talking to him next week.

Leslie Ahenda: Fantastic! Tell him I said hi.

Tamara Thompson: I will.

Leslie Ahenda: I had a great time with that chapbook. I got super sick before the launch. I got Covid, and I couldn't go to the launch, so that was disappointing.

Tamara Thompson: Oh!

Leslie Ahenda: It was—it was great. I still have a few copies of that one left. And in the meantime, like, I'm working on a poetry, like, a full-length manuscript. I'm also working on a novel, but I am a very slow writer, because I only write by hand.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm!

Leslie Ahenda: Takes me a lot of time to develop my ideas, and I've never been the kind of writer that, like, will get up at four am and write for three hours before they start their day. I'm, like, so impressed by those people, but that will never be me. So, my writing practice nowadays is, like, I trust, follow the emotions, and I let them guide me into, like, when it's time to put something down, when it's time to, like, to ruminate, when it's time to go for a walk, and just like listen to music and think. And it's been—it's been a really solid process for me.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I feel like everybody has to gain their own process on their own flow, and there's like no right way. Like, listen to what other people are saying, because it might be helpful. But, like, I'm the same way. I am baffled by how people can wake up at like 3 am in the morning—and like, well, I got an hour, and it's just, like, I know I can, like, accidentally stay out till one writing. I could do the opposite a little easier, but like, it's 1 AM of those things where, like, for me, if, like I sometimes—I just need, like, a little bubble of space in a week to write, whether that'd be a short poem, something. I just need it, because if I don't, I tell everybody "Go away. I need to do something like artsy, or I will lose my mind."

Leslie Ahenda: Oh, I feel ya.

Tamara Thompson: You know. So right like. I just, like, everybody needs to leave. I need to paint this cat. I need to write about gay cowboys, something, something, you know? So yeah, okay. Sorry.

Leslie Ahenda: Nope, I feel you.

Tamara Thompson: So, it is a decision to, like, make your work, like, take your work and put it in the form of, like, a chapbook. So why did you choose for some of your work to be in the form of the beautiful chapbook?

Leslie Ahenda: That's a good question. I personally find a chapbook to be the ultimate form of poetry delivery. I get the appeal of doing a full-



length book, and I'm trying to, you know, but I think a chapbook is precise and for me, my-my first one I was ruminating so much on the same theme and going back to the same images and the same, like, trajectories, and I found that I was working through something like-like existential questions, that I could only pour into these images. And it was a lot of ocean imagery that ended up taking on a sort of narrative of its own that I didn't really expect. But once I arranged them, I started seeing that even though they were separate poems, I was really telling one tale and so it made a lot of sense for me to gather up these, I think it was seventeen poems, and put them together and say, this is a unit and let that just stand as what it is. And after that, I sort of started following that-that narrativized poetry more seriously and more, like, on purpose. Where my second chapbook was—how many poems I don't remember, but a handful of poems that had to do with living during Covid. I was—it wasn't about Covid, but it was about the process that I sort of went through being, feeling so stuck in so many different ways, physically, in a relationship, in my, the state of my psyche.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Leslie Ahenda: Unpacking all of that, the move that I did to this town, where I know absolutely nobody, or I didn't at the time. And all the, like, emotional processing that went along with that, it was all one story. And I put it in eleven sections. But, like, it was all the one poem, and I knew that that was, like, enough to be something. It didn't have to be an entire full book in order to be something worthwhile, and, in fact, like putting it into a book with a bunch of other stuff might even muddy what I was trying to do with that sequence. So, it was important to me to put it out as a chapbook.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I love the, like, the artistic intent that you're talking about and how it's very specific. And like, again, not every chapbook has to be, like, the concept album, as, like, Emma, Jamie have both given up those ideas. And I'm just, like, yeah, not everything has to be the concept album. But chapbooks are just, like, so good for it, because they could be so small and so specific. So yes, I think, oooo yes, excellent reasons. Would you ever, like, again? Super busy life and publishing never stops, like there's so much to do always. Especially if you're doing your own artistic, like, endeavors, and stuff. But would you ever do, like, a small chapbook again and work with another press? Would that be something that you'd be, like, yeah, maybe, not like this year, but like, if, you know, would that be something that you'd be interested in?

Leslie Ahenda: Absolutely I have nothing to put into a chapbook right now, but I know that I will again, and I'm sure that when the time is right it'll come. I think that so much of my poetry comes from necessity. I write something in verse because I have no other way to say it, no other way to express it. And I need to like, figure out what I think. I start from a question, and I usually don't answer it, but it's my way of thinking through things. So, I'm sure there will be a time, again, where I'm thinking through something, and it lends itself to what I believe a chapbook does well, so yeah, absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fantastic. So, this next question you can take in whatever way you're comfortable sharing with. But what are some challenges that you faced as an author?

Leslie Ahenda: Hmmm! Where do I start? Okay, let me think about this. I think, then, my big challenge now is... there are two, I'd say, time management and mental capacity.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, yeah.

Leslie Ahenda: And those are both related to the fact that I have a full-time job as an editor. And I love the work that I do, and I love the authors I work with. And it is challenging to spend so much time in other people's worlds, and then come back to my own, because previous—

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Leslie Ahenda: When I was in a very generative space I wouldn't read. I'm a big reader in other cases, but when I'm generating, I don't want to be influenced by what other people are doing, because I start to get very like, oh, I'm supposed to do this and this and this, and this is how it's supposed to be done, and whatever. And I get lost from the path of: what am I saying, and how do I want to say it? So that is a challenge to come back to my own world, that I'm building and trust it, when I have all these other incredible authors on my editorial roster that I'm, like—you're doing this in such an amazing way, like, I should just copy you. And there's, I mean, there's always room to be in conversation with other authors. But for me it comes into, like, insecurity about my own abilities, and that's where, like... you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Leslie Ahenda: So, there's that, and then there's just the time to be able to do it when I—I go to work every day, and then I come home, and I have a partner, and I have a dog, and I have responsibilities, and I love everything in my life and I have to find ways to develop a consistent writing practice, as well. So, I've tried things like carving out three hours on a Sunday, for instance, and then every week. That's my space to have room to write, but every week is different, and every day has different needs. And—and so now I'm—I'm following the, following the waves, following the emotions and hoping that that'll level itself back out. But I'm still working on developing that practice in a sustainable way.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's definitely not an easy balance, especially when your job is so much creative mental labor as well. Yeah, so what do you think this type of, like, smaller publishing of, like, the chapbooks in the homemade? What do you think that has taught you in your time doing it?

Leslie Ahenda: Hmm! What has that taught me? That's a great question. I think that making those chapbooks was my first real look into how collaborative the process is. Because I can go off into-into the woods and write my poems and until we get other people involved, it's a word

document that nobody else can see. And I was just so incredibly grateful to Nisha for—at Moon Jelly House, for the first chapbook that I made that—she pulled together this whole team. I had an editor. I had a designer, and I got to choose the artist that I worked with, and Natalie had such incredible interpretations of the work that she ended up bringing forward through her art, like themes in the book that I didn't even necessarily think were the most overt.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Leslie Ahenda: And the editorial feedback that I got just strengthened the work so much. So, then, for it to turn into this physical thing that I could hold in my hands and know how many people had to put their hearts into it in order for it to become what it was—was really transformative for me.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah—but, I think yeah. So, you were kind of answering a little bit of my next question on why chapbooks are important to you, but I'm still going to ask it a little bit more directly.

Leslie Ahenda: I mean, yeah, it's about community. I love to go to a reading, and somebody wows me with what they read, and then they say I have a chapbook to sell for ten dollars, and I can pick up this chapbook. And I get to read all these poems, you know, especially everything's so expensive these days, and—and we're all trying to live. And I don't always have the budget to be buying, like, every poetry collection that comes out by every author that I like. But a chapbook is such a gorgeous little delivery of poetry that's such a useful way to just share with people. And I've even done just like chapbook exchanges with my friends. I'm like, I'll give you yours—I'll give you mine if you give me yours. And I've gotten to experience so many different people's work that way. And the way that they think and the way they see the world which, you know, allows me to explore my own emotions and my own views so much deeper that I might not have gotten to experience if all that I had access to was full collections that might be maybe too expensive for me at any given time, or maybe just—there's so much in there that yes, I can go through this collection and love it. But I might not spend the same amount of time on each poem that I would otherwise, if it's just in a little chapbook.

Tamara Thompson: So, I'm, we can take this next question kind of wherever you feel comfortable. And whatever, but do you think chat books are important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not?

Leslie Ahenda: Absolutely. I think they are crucial. I—I assume you do, too. Given that this is your research.

Tamara Thompson: Just a little (laughs).

Leslie Ahenda: I do think they're crucial. I think that poetry is about so much more than what traditional publishing can offer, and I won't—I won't slander traditional publishing. I do see its merits, and I think it's great that people can put out a book of poetry and get nominated for awards and—and whatnot, you know? That's great. But I'm gonna keep talking about community. And I'm gonna keep talking about even more... because,

like, for instance, at Anansi, we can put out three books of poetry a year. That's-that's what we have the resources and the capacity to do. And so, we look at hundreds and hundreds of manuscripts, and of those we can pick three and so they have to be the best of the best, whatever that means. And congratulations to the people who get to be on that list. But it's not the be all end all of what makes poetry good. And I think that the more poetry there is in the world, which is so much easier to do with chapbooks, the more we get to talk to each other and learn from each other, and read each other, and share in this experience together. Especially given that writing poetry can be such an isolated experience, that coming together with all of our chapbooks and sharing in what we know and what we love. You can't do that so much with a full book as you can with a bunch of different people's chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I agree. So, I'm-I'm interested: do you think this kind of publishing itself reflects Canada in some way?

Leslie Ahenda: Like chapbook publishing or?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, do you think it reflects Canada?

Leslie Ahenda: Hmm, well, that's a ti-that's a tricky question. Cause, what is Canada?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Leslie Ahenda: Let's start there. I mean, it can often reflect the Canada that people see and experience. Certainly, I think that the way that we think of our place, where we stand and how we relate to the space that we're in, you can't really divorce that from poetry, because, no matter what you're putting down on the page, it's coming from you, in you, and where you are and how you got here a lot. So yeah, and-and chapbooks, I mean, just because you can do so many, and you can, you can make it so much what you have to say. Yeah, it can. It reflects your culture. It reflects your beliefs. And you get an incredibly wide array of perspectives. So, I'm sure if you asked, like, a hundred different poets, like, what they think Canada is, and they all wrote a chapbook about it, we'd have a hundred wildly different takes on what this space is.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm!

Leslie Ahenda: I think there's a lot of room in chapbooks, especially, to be a little more subversive, as well, because of, I mean, it comes into also like the flow of money where it's coming from, where it's going, who it's helping, who it's hurting. And the flow of money, I think, is just easier to track with chapbooks than it is with, like, large publishing. That's all, like, hidden away.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, kind of talking a little bit like jumping off with some of the ideas you were putting at the end there, but why do you think most small presses and micro presses have to close up shop? Because it is an unfortunate, but true fact.

Leslie Ahenda: Yeah, it's unfortunate. I think that it's a loss. I wish that there was endless money in the world for them, and I-I regret that so much of the economy of art making comes from philanthropy. Because people who have a lot of money to throw around have their own agendas for why they might choose to do so and what they feel confident giving it to. I do. I worry about that. I-I worry about the free expression of ideas and what is considered appropriate, what is considered literature, what is considered Canadian. Yeah, I think that's a real concern that we're facing. But at the same time, I know that, like, as other—as certain presses fall, there—there is also room for others to start. There's a new press, Assembly Press, that's run by Leigh Nash who used to be the publisher of Anansi. I don't know that they've put out any books yet. But I know that they're hard at work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think they just released something about, like, something was happening that I saw on Instagram recently about it. So.

Leslie Ahenda: Oh, see, yeah, they're doing things. And you know, people I think, as long as there are people who love art for art's sake, and who love poetry because it has something important to say, there's always going to be people who find ways to create it, despite the obstacles that we're facing.

Tamara Thompson: So, we're in the home stretch of my last couple of questions here. But these questions are more, just to give space these last three. But what's something that you wish, maybe, the public knew about Canadian publishing, like, that they might not know that you really wish they would?

Leslie Ahenda: That's a great question. What do I wish that general people knew. Honestly, you don't need an agent. That's what I wish everybody knew.

Tamara Thompson: I know, right?

Leslie Ahenda: Don't get an agent. Like, you can if you want to, and, like, there are reasons for people to have agents. But, in my opinion, if you're starting out, you're a new author. Don't bother. You're gonna give up fifteen percent of the income that you make from that book, or whatever you negotiate with your agent. You're going to have another person involved in the editorial relationship that you have with your press and I-I just don't think it's necessary. Like, get your money, find a press with an editor who you trust and believe in. That editorial relationship is really important, and it's up to you as an author, as well, like, who you want to work with. But I think that, like, going to agents on submission, especially as a debut author, can be a bit of a distraction.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Leslie Ahenda: And it's just another, like, goal post that we've put on people where like—where like the sense is, in order to be taken seriously, you have to have X, you have to have Y. You have to have an agent. You have to have these credits. As long as you have something to say and a beautiful way to say it, people, someone's going to take notice, and it

takes time, and it's hard, and it hurts but you just don't have to give up a bunch of your money, in order to do it. You know, I just want authors to get paid.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I-I totally agree. Something I tell my students. We sit down and I'm like, "All right, royalties talk. Don't take three." And they're, like, "Why are you telling us this?" And it's like, "Oh, well, yeah, I know, right?"

Leslie Ahenda: Don't take that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I know. And they're just like, "Why are you telling us this?" And I'm like, "Oh, yeah, the competition of people getting paid for their work." Oh, yeah so bad. So, this next question is, again, just making space. But what's something important about-?

(Technical issue occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's something that you would want people to know about D.I.Y. press history or something cool you've seen? Because again, I didn't know about Moon Jelly House, but Jelly House, right? Like, so many of these things are very ephemeral from the presses to the things people actual make. So, is there something interesting or cool that you've seen that you might, like, that you want to share?

Leslie Ahenda: Hmm! I like that question. I mean, I would just want to highlight the Blasted Tree. I'm Calgary. I love Calgary. I feel like Calgary—it gets a reputation that you know we can talk about whether it's deserved. But in Calgary there is such an abundant community of artists and bookmakers, and people who just love to come together and think and feel and create. And I just think Kyle, at the Blasted Tree, does such an incredible job of curating really fascinating experimental work that there isn't necessarily always room for in traditional publishing. Something that comes to mind is—is a poet named Katie O'Brien. They did a chapbook that was all made up of, like, musical notation and I was, like, "Oh, this is something that I wouldn't have thought of in terms of poetry until Katie made it." Kyle turned it into a book and mailed it to me, and I got to sit there and spend time with it and see the poetry in it. So, that.

Tamara Thompson: Cool. Okay. Last question, what's something that you wish-

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's something about your history that you wish people knew about you?

Leslie Ahenda: Oh, what do I? What people need to know about me? I'm just a regular person. I don't know. I don't think that I'm—I don't think that, in order to be a poet, or in order to be an editor, or in order to participate in these-these industries of art making, that you have to have some sort of something that is—is something like headline grabbing and cool, and whatever. Like, we're all regular people is, like, I think the biggest thing that I have learned over the last handful of years. When I,

you know, I used to idolize all these different people, and there are reasons to look up to people, certainly, but we're all just regular people. And, like, I have something to say because of-of my experience living in the world, and my experience having feelings and observing them and so does everybody else. So, I don't think that in order to be a poet you have to have something that makes you a poet. So, I don't think my history is that wildly different from anyone else's who might sit down and think. It's time to write a poem. That's what I want people to know.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording.

Leslie Ahenda: Do I?-write poems. Even if you think you hate poems, write a poem, do it authentically. I think everyone should write a poem from the heart at least once in their life, and if nobody ever reads it, you've already succeeded in creating something that is authentic and true to yourself, and beautiful.

Tamara Thompson: What a great note to end on.



Sonja Ahlers

Tamara Thompson: Hello. My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is July 10<sup>th</sup>; the time is 6:04 pm. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after the date of this interview. This interview is for author.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, okay. So yeah. My name's Sonja Ahlers. I live in Victoria. Oh, sorry; my pronouns are she/her. I'm in Victoria, BC, which is Lakwongan territory. Yeah, I've worked with Insomniac press, Drawn and Quarterly, Conundrum press and some; I've done some anthologies with some different presses from like the nineties. I can get you that information, I don't have it on-top of my head, because I wasn't sure about that question. So yeah, anything else I'm missing?

Tamara Thompson: Just any titles you have for yourself things that you would use to describe yourself.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, yeah, the title. Yeah. I just say, artist and writer.

(technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: So, just to get the ball rolling here, how did you discover like zines and chapbooks? And, like, this kind of smaller D.I.Y publishing? Was there a specific moment, or could you even just talk about that introduction for you a bit?

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, I just started making zines in the early nineties, probably starting around 1991, 1992. And I was influenced by early Drawn and Quarterly comics at the time; they were autobiographical comics. And yeah, I wanted to make my own work. But I didn't wanna work in the confines of a square. I didn't want panels. So, I just started doing this more-more of a kind of a fluid, it wasn't actually a decision. It just, it's just what happened. And so, it was more poetry collage drawings like a fusion and found text, found imagery. Yeah. And then I just started self-publishing them, and at the time I called them chapbooks I didn't call them zines, cause that didn't feel quite right, but that's just what everyone ended up calling them. So, I-Broken Pencil kind of sort of working with them a bit like as a resource cause sending them for in for reviews, and I started a network, a pen pal network of distribution. So yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Cool. Was there a moment, though, like in particular, where you realized that this was something that you could do? Or did you just like start doing it? Like it was just like I'm making a thing; let's make it.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, no, it's funny. I don't even know. It just, my friend was working at the Parliament Buildings in Victoria, and she had access to a photocopier, and she has the brain that can put together a zine or a chapbook. So, she helped me. She facilitated. So, we had a free resource. And yeah, it just happened. It was, it was like magic. I-I don't... usually, I'm not very intentional things just kind of unfold. That's just yeah. It just happened.

Tamara Thompson: That's, that's so cool and so fun. Because I-I love the organicness of it. And also, just the types of things that you we're like even creating. It's very interesting. And I-I hope you'll talk more about some of the things and specifics, like specific things that you actually created, because I love the idea of blending the genres and stuff like that. And I also understand people calling things a zine or a chapbook, and people really wanting to define them. But it being more of a gradient, as I've been doing my research, I've kind of been just like, well, I need to define a lot of terms, like "Canadian." Don't know what that is still, I made one up the best I could for the sake of talking to people and for the Ethics Committee. But even "chapbook" itself. I had to use Jim Johnstone's definition because it was in text from his book *Write, Print, Fold and Staple*, I believe, is the way that one goes, the title. I always get the terms mixed up, but even he debates his own definition, and how hard it is to even come up with a definition. So, you talking about how people they were chapbooks when you started, and how you thought about them and how people started calling them zines. That is definitely something I've seen. It's not necessarily what it is or a definition. It's more just what people call it, and I feel like it with the arts and stuff like that. People lean more on the term zine, when I feel like sometimes, they could also be defined by the term "chapbook."

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, I know it's so vague and gray, and everybody needs to have it compartmentalized it seems so. Yeah, I-I really struggled with that I didn't like being-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: Boxed in.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm, yeah. The way you were talking about how you are kind of floating, even defying the box of the comic; that's so fun. I teach comics and like graphic fiction. And I keep, I always try and expand my students understanding. And one of their favorite things to always analyze was when things went out the box, or if they were just a full page. And they're like, what does that mean? And here and there, and like they loved that kind of stuff. And so, I'd be like, hey, look at this person who's doing that. You might like that like, get into the experimental stuff, and some of them would get really into it, because it's really cool.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What people are making.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And that's another thing that has occurred to me only recently is, like, I was, it was experimental, like, I was seeing what I could do with the form of the book, the chapbook, like working within the confines of that architecture, and also what I could do with a photocopier and with collage. It's like, how? Yeah, it was very experimental.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I run a small chapbook press, and I, bless Grace, my layout and designer. Bless her heart; she makes everything look so beautiful. And I look at it and I go; I just print the paper.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: 'Cause I have, like, she, like, I know how to use the printer, but she makes it smooth. So, all I have to do is basically press a button, and I'm like blessed be you are a thing from heaven, because she also does a lot of our proof reading, because I have dyslexia. So, I have a hard time seeing those mistakes, and my editors been staring at it for like a long time. So, he doesn't see anything. And so, she's just like this. And I'm just like. How did you even notice that I didn't notice that. So yeah, I understand the need to get someone to help with layouts, because I also don't understand them.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Yeah. We all need each other for different jobs, for sure. Absolutely. It's a group community effort.

Tamara Thompson: So, I'm a little curious of, like, because this was something that just kind of happened very organically for you and, like, because it is a decision to publish a chapbook, especially for most people to, like, to do their poetry in a smaller form or something like that and I'm interested how you would answer this question. Because I-I've, you are kind of breaking some of my questions in the best ways possible. So, interpret that question of like, why would did you decide to make this tiny little book? Like, why, the tiny book, as the form for what you're trying to create?

Sonja Ahlers: Why the book, I think. Well, I think it's because I started out doing a lot of correspondence like I just started writing a lot of letters in the early nineties and that was just to one person, and I think I don't know. I think I just maybe in my mind I got, I got, I wanted to expand on that, that intimacy, and I could create a multiple. So, I'd and I would only make maybe twenty copies. And then I would mail those out as a letter per say, or whatever you wanna call it. I mean, it was just another form of connecting and communicating with one person or twenty.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: So yeah, there's a distribution.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And my next question is like, would you ever work on like the similar project again? And I know that you're very busy. You have a lot going on, and many like really interesting projects that you're doing. So, I'm curious if you'd ever like dabble in this kind of publishing again, like the smaller handmade stuff with someone else, or more by yourself?

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, I have started making zines again. I'm now, I'm just, like, I'll just call it a zine, I-I don't care anymore. It's just now I feel like it's more open. There's such a spectrum. It-it feels more inclusive now. It's like, oh, well, everyone's making their own zine like their own expression, and I've just embraced it. There's actually quite a

big show up right now at the Vancouver Art Gallery. I don't know if you know about it, copyright copy machine manifestos. It's like a big zine show the first kind. So, I made a zine, especially for that. And then I've been doing those fold out zines like those eleven, like eleven by seventeen. For, yeah, I love making those run doing little workshops. And yeah, no and then I still do it. I mail out people. I'm still really good friends with my friend Susan, who still works for the government, and we still use a photocopy there. But don't tell anyone.

Tamara Thompson: No one needs to know. Also, they can pay for like the twenty copies. I'm sorry; it was one of those things where my parents also used to work for the government, and I'm like, I'm sorry the MNR can pay for my paper I'm using while I'm stuck here with my mom in the office because I have to be.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like, I'm sorry.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, it's exactly-well and funnily enough. You should ask that question today. Because just last night I got an email from another artist who runs a small publishing; she does artist multiples and she asked me if I wanted to do a book with her, and she only makes twenty-six copies so, but she does amazing, like, really unbelievable multiple artist books. So yeah, I just found that I was like, yay. So-so, that's very small. And I'm like, yeah, I like this; this is great.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I have moments where I tell people to go away and leave me alone, because I either need to write, paint, or make a book.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh!

Tamara Thompson: Everybody. Leave me alone. I'm losing my marbles. I'm overwhelmed. I'm gonna paint a picture of a cat-

Sonja Ahlers: Nice.

Tamara Thompson: Scratching into a carpet or something, you know and like. It doesn't matter to me if it's any good. I just need to do something, where I tell everybody to go away. I need to write about my gay cowboy monster, hunter, man.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I need. I need that.

Sonja Ahlers: I hear you; I need to do the same thing. I appreciate your sense of boundaries (laughs).

Tamara Thompson: Well, it's-it's just one of those things where I feel like my creative outlet really grounds me.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh yeah.

Tamara Thompson: If am feeling overwhelmed. I'm like everybody needs to go away, and I need to colour this cover of this one zine that I'm not gonna make any more. But I'm just gonna make the one.

Sonja Ahlers: That sounds good. I love that.

Tamara Thompson: So, what do you think this type of publishing has taught you over the time that you've been doing it because you've been doing it for quite a long time? So, what's something that you think it's maybe taught you over the years?

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, sorry! Could you say the first part of that again?

Tamara Thompson: Oh, yeah, of course. What has this type of smaller publishing taught you over time?

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, small, like the smaller print taught me over time. Yeah, it's funny. No, it's like I feel like I've come full circle like starting out, you know, making twenty copies, and-and then it expanded. I think my first book, I think maybe, well, wow, one thousand five hundred copies maybe two thousand, and then then four thousand, and now five hundred. And now twenty-six or less. You know what I mean. Like, ten. Yeah, I'm like, it doesn't bother me. I think it's I'm like, this is amazing. I don't care anymore. It's just because I feel like the book will, just it gets has a life of its own. It gets passed through hands, and it doesn't matter how many copies there are, because it's gonna find its audience somehow. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's gonna find its home.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. That's something I've had to get through my first-year creative writing students' head. It's like, don't write for the audience or the reader. Write something you enjoy writing and they're like, but what do you mean? I'm like, and they're like, but it needs to be good, or else people won't read it. And it's like, yeah, but it'll never be good if you're not enjoying writing it, or if there's not something enjoyable happening here like they get really caught up in like. Well, it needs to sell this many books and whatever and all that, and I'm like, bring it down a little, because some of them also think they're going to make money in publishing. And I'm like, you gotta look somewhere else, buddy.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, I know, I-I, yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It's a painful, but it is also a truth that needs to be told sooner rather than later.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, now more than ever! Yup! Now more than ever.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, talking about just painful truths and things that you have to face when you're dealing with publishing. What are some challenges that you've faced in publishing, and you can take that in whatever way you feel comfortable.

Sonja Ahlers: Hmm challenges. Well, work not aging well. I have a book from 2004 that I still have copies of. It's out of print, but I think I have maybe fifty copies in a stash, and I've had to remove some pages that are not aging well; in-inappropriate. I had to like, take a sharpie and actually like cross things out, you know. So, I have to be really mindful of these things. Yeah, like the sensitivity. And else that's a good question. Other challenges in publishing. Yeah, I that's the one that comes to mind the most. I might, yeah, something else may come. Yeah, I mean, there's a lot of miscommunications that happens as well over time, like with-with small publishing. And-and because there is, there isn't a ton of it, well, unless you get grants. But yeah, I wasn't getting grants back in the nineties, so I didn't have a ton of support, and I didn't know what I was doing. So I was just like flailing on my own. Yeah, so things are different now.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: I've just had to learn over decades it seems. Well, not for everybody. But that was my, that was my path, I guess you can call it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And the tools that you had back in the nineties are very different from like what is going on today.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That's something I find really interesting when I talk even to my students that are less-

Sonja Ahlers: Oh yeah.

Tamara Thompson: They're eighteen, and I'm twenty-five, twenty-six, and they're just like, well, wouldn't you just like look something up? And I was like, no, when I was a child, I went to the library and I picked out a book, and that's how I learned things.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Or a teacher told them to me.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: The idea of an Internet research project was a new-fangled thing when I was in, like you know like middle school, like late like elementary school like grade six. And even then, it was mostly like middle school, like grade seven and eight. And they're like, Well, what do you mean? You didn't get on the computer and do things, and I was like, no.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Because the computers were special, and they taught you typing. And they taught you how to Google safely and put the fear of God into you about the Internet. And that's what we were taught about that.

Sonja Ahlers: Right.

Tamara Thompson: So, I feel like a lot of people don't realize that access to tools and resources have changed so much, even just in like the past twenty years. Even in ten, really. And just also like how communication is hard. A lot of them are like, well, I wouldn't do that stupid mistake. And I'm like good luck then I'm well, I'll wait here until that miscommunication happens with the world. And it's gonna happen. And that's okay. That's the other thing, too, that I'm trying to get through my student's heads because they're always worried also about being cancelled on Twitter, for like one random tweet and stuff, and I'm like it is okay-

Sonja Ahlers: Oh wow.

Tamara Thompson: To make a mistake. That is okay. You have to deal, you have to figure out for yourself your boundaries with social media, but you also have to understand that you are not the worst person in the world, because you said oh, I don't know that you didn't, like, *Coco* or something, right? You know, the Pixar film, you know, like you need to establish those types of boundaries and like worth. And I feel like a lot of them don't understand that relationship, and also how that will affect their writing career and writing life as well.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: It's tough to navigate, and it's not easy, and I don't know. It's a very hard concept to get across to them sometimes.

Sonja Ahlers: Interesting, wow.

Tamara Thompson: Because they feel very at fault if anything had happened to them, or they blame the person if that they saw this happen for. And I'm like, I understand. But you also have to give a certain amount of grace. It's like you're giving grace to this person, and I'm like it was one tweet.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Dial it down a bit here.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, yeah, I know; the Internet does not forget.

Tamara Thompson: And it does not forgive.

Sonja Ahlers: No.

Tamara Thompson: If you're looking for on mass forgiveness, you're never gonna get it, because someone will just purposely do it just for the sake of doing it, right?

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah. Absolutely. Yep.



Tamara Thompson: Anyway, I guess my point is-is that I'm even trying to teach my students to have more grace with themselves, and it is not an easy lesson to teach, or even to internalize for myself. It's a very hard thing to do.

Sonja Ahlers: Ohh.

Tamara Thompson: Well, it is, you know, kick in the hypercritical, stressed-out world we live in.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, tell me about it! I know, I know.

Tamara Thompson: That's one of those things where I'll have students be very critical of a of a text or something, or of a recent popular thing. And I'm like, well, yeah, it was made by a human.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But it should be better. And I'm like, yeah, but that was the first person's ever writing a comic, and they had to do it every week for two years. Yeah, there's going to be pacing problems and character issues and whatever. And you can criticize it one hundred percent. But like, don't criticize the person that's very personal and weird.

Sonja Ahlers: Yes.

Tamara Thompson: It specifically bothers me with graphic or comic artists that get a lot of that flack, because I know what those schedules are like, and those are hard schedules to keep to. I do not know how anyone survives off of half of that stuff, and I'm just like, can we maybe have a bit of grace.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

(Technical issues occurred).

Sonja Ahlers: Just from art making. Yeah, I just as a child needing to make art. So, I just yeah, that's it really, just, I've always made art. And then kind of, yeah, I really fell in love with the photocopier in my twenties. Yeah. And I-I wasn't ever planned, it's just like again, very organic. Yeah, I'm self taught as well. So yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I, don't get me wrong; I think school can definitely, you can learn a lot of things. I did my undergraduate in creative writing. So, I did go to school for writing and stuff like that, but I find it always interesting when people are like, oh, this person must have gone to art school or something, and it's like, no, this is just a self-taught artist ya know from Montreal or something, and it's like they can still produce a lot of work, a lot of really good work. See, you like this work.

Sonja Ahlers: Absolutely. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That's really interesting. That's... 'cause you do so much in the art space that that's really like self taught like, that's.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It's definitely not like unheard of or anything. But it's always nice to hear if that makes sense.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, yeah, well, it's also tied into my survival, like, it's like, I have to do this. Yeah, I think school I would have kind of wrecked me just cause who I am, and.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Sonja Ahlers: I mean, I think about going back. It's like, oh, not back. But oh, I could do an MFA. Like, I have enough like couple of decades of experience in the field, but I don't know. I don't know. We'll, see. Still possible.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's-it's one of those things. Yeah, I was even going back and forth on this very project. But then the world got set on fire, and I said, Well, it's not like the job. Market's any good right now. Let's do something fun.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, that's great. That's really good. Smart.

Tamara Thompson: I happened to find out that I liked teaching along the way. So, you know, that was kind of fun, too.

Sonja Ahlers: That's amazing.

Tamara Thompson: Because I have such specialized degrees. I was able to teach a lot of things like graphic fiction and creative writing.

Sonja Ahlers: Nice.

Tamara Thompson: They could not put me in Old English. I could not be TA for that. I didn't take it. I don't know anything about it. You want to know how to write a play. You want to know how to write poetry. You want an analysis of a film. I got you. I did all of my undergrad on that, can't help with old English, rhetoric. Sure, I can do rhetoric, but.

Sonja Ahlers: Wow, amazing.

Tamara Thompson: I had a very specialized degree. That was one of the few things I was worried about. I was like, don't-don't let me teach something that's super out of my depth. So, sorry I'm blabbering on here, and I want to get back to some of these-these things here but really enjoy the conversation.

Sonja Ahlers: Awesome.

Tamara Thompson: So, why are chapbooks important to you? So, just a general question there.

Sonja Ahlers: yeah, I don't know. They're just, yeah. I find them there, I mean, I wish they were more accessible.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: Do you have to get it from the source, it seems, and I do feel I right now, I do feel out of touch with that community. I don't have, yeah, I don't, I-I-I have a lot of individual relationships, but not a community. And everything is very isolated and separate, and I feel like that type of medium attracts those types of people or, you know, maybe introverts and work in isolation, but need to distribute. So, I wish I was a bit more connected. I wish I knew more of what was going on right now, so I-I'm always kind of on my own, and out in the left field, just.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, I. So yeah, but I think they are very special. I-I mean, when I find them and yeah, they're just it's a labor of love, truly, you can feel it. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I-I love the human aspect of it, of the tact-and the tactile-ness of things.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: Even a book made by like a big print shop or a big like-like print house, and like publishing house like if it's got that rough paper, I'm like, oh, different texture. This is nice.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah. Absolutely. Yup.

Tamara Thompson: You know, even something small like that, like a small choice or thought in the creation of something, and chapbooks all it is-is small choices and thoughts and creative intents, right?

Sonja Ahlers: Absolutely. Yeah, you really can feel that it definitely, it holds that which I love.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that little bit of magic.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: So, are like, are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If you think so, why or why not?

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, yeah, that's a great question. I would love to hear your answer for that cause. You run a-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: You're on a little. It's like what do you call it? A chapbook, publishing house, or what do you call it?

Tamara Thompson: So, it's called Whispering Wick Chapbook Press. So, we call ourselves just a chapbook press, but we've heard the term small press. I've heard the term micro press. The problem is there's no consistency.

Sonja Ahlers: Okay.

Tamara Thompson: So yeah, I-I call us the chapbook press.

Sonja Ahlers: Okay. Cool.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, I should, I'd love to check out what you're doing if-if the web, website I'm sure right.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, yeah, we do. Our oh, our theme is because we kind of publish all types of poetry and short fiction. I kind of had to make a like ethos of kind of how we were gonna look. And so, our whole thing is like 1940, 1920 like old Hollywood film and-and not just also film from like, you know, Hollywood, but films from like, you know, Asia and other places and stuff like that. So, we have a lot of that, like old-old movie vibe which I love because I grew up on like *My Man Godfrey*, *Life with Father*, you know *Casablanca*, and other like screwball comedies like *Topper Returns* and love *Topper*, things like the *Crimson Ghost*, *Copperhead*, like old RKO and stuff. So, like my parents had me like watching all these really old things, because my parents my moms in her sixties, and my dad just turned seventy. So, like my parents are older, so they like, let me grow up with it. And I loved the like photography, art styles, and just like films from that era, from the campiness to a lot of the other stuff. So, I was the one who was spearheading the project. And I was like, this is what we're gonna look like. And we're gonna call it *Whispering Wick*. Because *Whispering Cities* is a really cool film; *Noir* and *Wick*, because it's you know another W word.

Sonja Ahlers: Nice. Okay, that's cool. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: So, but to answer your question just now. That really helped me. But no, I feel like chapbooks kind of bridge the gap between like-

Tamara Thompson: Hmmm.

Sonja Ahlers: Like with like with, yeah, I just, there's that kind of that important nether world or that kind of grey area where, well, I mean, cause it usually leads to something bigger. Not that it needs to, but it usually does. So, it it's sort of yeah, I'm not, I'm saying, bridge the gap. But I'm like the gap between what really I mean a zine and a publishing house. Then there's a chapbook but there's something really special about chapbooks, and that's why I called my zines, chapbooks, because that felt more, not oh, this is so special like my zine but the chapbook. It just yeah. Again, it felt more inclusive. Yeah, yeah even though, yeah, I don't know. They are kind of exclusive, though, because

they're so, they're so limited. But there, that makes them really special and cause they're usually given by the artist or writer to another individual. So, it's a direct exchange. Usually often given or traded. So, there's that. And I really like that aspect of it.

Tamara Thompson: Well, even you were talking about it bridging the gap, but like you started doing some of the stuff, and you've returned to it, and that's been a theme that I've also seen is, people have like bridge the gap and gone and done other things. But a lot of people still return which I think is interesting.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, that is really no. I had no idea this was gonna happen. It's just, it's again very, very organic. And I don't know. Yeah, I feel it feels really, and it's neat. It's interesting. Yeah, it feels good. I'm like. This is really like a return to form.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it felt right to do.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, and I don't have any pro-it's like, oh, well, I didn't like put out some giant publication that was, you know. It's like, who cares, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: At end of the day, who cares?

Tamara Thompson: At the end of the day, it's more important that you're happy with your output and what you're putting out. Then other people are accepting of that like output.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, yeah, everything that I've ever done, even if it's one copy like on like a one off. I do quite a few on one off book that I don't even show people. I'm just like I keep it hidden in a little shell like this Barristers bookcase. I'm just like, oh, no, nobody needs to see this like I made it for myself in this form, you know, out of necessity, and.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Sonja Ahlers: And I had to do this, and I don't need to share it. I-I don't, it doesn't really matter.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, or the material was very limited. I did a one-off thing with doodles from my like notebook that I didn't want lost, and I want it all in one place. So, I cut out those doodles and pasted them somewhere. I only had one doodle, you know, like I guess I could scan it, but like it wouldn't have the same feeling.

Sonja Ahlers: Yes, exactly. Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: Me, making and gluing.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like this little book.

Sonja Ahlers: You can't replicate that-that gets so flattened. It, just it, it, the mechanical, using the scanner like it's like at the process of it-it changes the original completely. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, I-I one hundred percent agree. 'Cause I've had people be like, this is like a really cool idea; w Why don't you scan it and like, make more copies?

Sonja Ahlers: Nope.

Tamara Thompson: But then it wouldn't be the same. You wouldn't be able to feel the tape I put there like, if maybe like, if that's what I wanted like, it wasn't the point to feel the tape and see the different things, and it'd be more one off and like the idea is to scan and share and like, be like, oh, there was tape there, but you can't feel it now, like if there's a like a point to it, sure. But the point was to feel tape, and to have this one off of all my little doodles, so I don't lose them, you know.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I-I show them to people because people are interested. I also make like one off thing when I do, like seeing workshops. You know, I had one that was called *Rats*, and it was just a whole bunch of different pictures of rats where I ripped the edges, so it looked like a rat had chewed. It, someone was like, why aren't you gonna-are you gonna scan that? I'm like, no 'cause you'll lose all my beautiful marker like-like colors and stuff. It would be black and white.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, my goodness! Hilarious. Wow. Cool.

Tamara Thompson: It was just something I did, because I wanted to practice with my friends before I went out and did the workshops myself, you know just to kind of get a feel, because I've never fully done one with like people I didn't know before. So, I was like, I'm gonna do one practice one before I go out, and I made that, and everybody loved it.

Sonja Ahlers: Nice.

Tamara Thompson: Cool, I just drew rats.

Sonja Ahlers: Pretty genius.

Tamara Thompson: So. This next question is very much open to interpretation, so like, take it like wherever you desire, wherever you want. But does this kind of small publishing reflect Canada itself in some way?

Sonja Ahlers: Hmm, small pub-yeah, I think it does. Yeah yeah, it seems like, yeah, Canada does feel kind of Indie in its own way. And I mean, it's such a vast country. And there's so much land and space between provinces and territories. And it does feel like, yeah, it does feel representative of Canada itself, the chapbook, and how they are

distributed, and each region has its own sense of identity. And I mean, there are threads. But yeah, I do feel that it does reflect this country. And also just with our arts funding situation; like, we have the Canada Council. Other countries don't have that. So, we have that luxury.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: And I feel it does support smaller endeavors, like I mean, I don't know if you get grants to do your press.

Tamara Thompson: No.

Sonja Ahlers: No, not yet I'm surprised actually, that surprises me. Cause you, yeah, like, is it like, because it's not a publisher? Is that like what, I don't understand that.

Tamara Thompson: It's more just because everybody who works on the press, we're not part time, we're all extra time. So, when and if everybody has like a little bit of extra time. We're currently on a bit of a hiatus because I'm doing this. And this is taking a lot of my time. And other people are living in Toronto and having to pay Toronto rent. So, they're playing a lot of like high-high dollars. So, they also have to work a lot. So, it's one of those situations where we're doing stuff. But it's not necessarily publication. And the other thing, too, is when we were making books, our focus was to get off the ground and do stuff because we only started in 2020. I so the press actually came to be, because we all had to do an internship for our program but 2020 had it just happened, and it was the fall of 2020. So, there were no opportunities. Our program was brand new. We were the first people to go through, so we had no connections or contacts. So, it's not like we could like rely on other like contacts who had helped the program for years, or something like that. We had nothing. So, I was panicking like crazy, because I was like, I really need something or I can't graduate. And I came up with a pipe dream of wouldn't it be great? I could just do a chapbook press, and then I could bring all my friends, and then.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: We don't need internships; we'd have it, and I said it aloud, and my dad said you should do that, and then my prof said you should do that. And then the co-op lady said, please do that.

Sonja Ahlers: Wow, amazing. That's so cool.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, we didn't have a lot of time. We only had one semester to really get everything off the ground. So, we technically haven't had time since to do any work into like just writing grants. You know what I mean because it does take time and research and stuff, and our priorities were elsewhere, which is setting up the press trying to figure out paper trying to edit things, is trying to make things. And so, it's not something that like we're opposed to. It's just we haven't had the time to do it yet, you know what I mean.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Because I would like to pay the people on my team. They do a lot of really good work, like I was saying about like Grace my head of production is my partner, David. I would love to pay him because he does a lot of research, not just for our production and making sure that everything's priced correctly but also just a lot of research. It's like, what kind of security measures do we need to stop to like, make sure that things are okay online. And he does all that research for us, you know.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And, like our reviewer Faizal, he does reviews for us, and like we can't pay him. I would love to pay him, and I love the reviews he does because they're very honest. And he reviews chapbooks and other lit mags and stuff, and like certain issues. And it's like, that's important. I believe that's important, but we don't have the time to do it, because he's also trying to work his job at the bank and do another certificate, degree, you know, and also do writing things with his own personal stuff.

Sonja Ahlers: Right.

Tamara Thompson: Same with my editor, Nate. He lives in Scarborough now, and he works at a barn; loves it. But it's very labor intensive, and he's there almost like six days a week.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, wow, yeah, that's-that's wow. That's a lot.

Tamara Thompson: He works at a barn in downtown Toronto, too.

Sonja Ahlers: Okay?

Tamara Thompson: So, it's not exactly the easiest environment to raise the horse.

Sonja Ahlers: Wow, okay. Wow.

Tamara Thompson: When he first told me that I was like downtown like near Union, this place is. And he's like, yeah; and I'm like. where do the horses go? There's no outside.

Sonja Ahlers: That's unbelievable, unbelievable.

Tamara Thompson: Only it's a historic building. So, it's been there for quite a while. But.

Sonja Ahlers: Wow? That's amazing. Wow.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. But it's-it's one of those things where, like, everybody's just kind of because of how expensive things are and how getting a job that will actually pay you a livable wage is.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.



Tamara Thompson: A lot of the team is just kind of in a place where we don't even have time to do the grants, even though we would want to do the grants, but we also don't have time to do anything for the press in general, because we're also busy. So, there's no point getting the grant. If we can't do what we're supposed to do with it.

Sonja Ahlers: Right? Okay, yeah. A little catch twenty-two there. But yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: It'll get figured out.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: It doesn't have to happen all right of way, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly. And that's why I say we're on hiatus because I still love doing it. We're still gonna do a market like this fall with the Ampersand Review and like, do stuff like that. It's not that we don't want to do it. It's just that like I'm the big pusher cause it's my, it's like it was my brainchild, and stuff. So, I'm the one who pushes it. And like if I'm not pushing, which I can't right now, because I don't want to have to pay winter fees. Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: This is all I'm doing.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, its good. You're smart.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I. So, it's something that I hope to return to.

Sonja Ahlers: Right, yeah, absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: You will.

Tamara Thompson: I will. It's, I can't help it.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, I hear you. I hear you.

Tamara Thompson: So, we're getting into kind of the last set of our questions. So, I do have to ask the more, like, sad question. But why do you think most like small presses and like micro presses, have to close up shop? Because it's true. We were talking about how I'm currently on hiatus, because I'm busy. But like, what do you think that is for? Like so many other people in this space, or even maybe yourself, why you stopped for a period of time?

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, yeah, I've definitely stopped yeah, I don't, how do I? Well, I mean, the first the publisher put out my first two books is no longer like that's done, and I don't even know what I'm gonna do with that

material. If it ever gets reprinted or yeah, it just is what it is. It is what it was. It was like, oh, yeah, there were just these two thousand copies made, and it's out of print, and that's-that's the end of the story for that. And I mean it's really sad. I don't know what happened, 'cause I lost touch with the publisher, so I don't know what happened, he just decided.

Tamara Thompson: Is this?

Sonja Ahlers: Insomniac.

Tamara Thompson: Insomniac. Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, so yeah, and I haven't, I mean, he put out my last book that was 2004. That that was the last we did two books together, and that was 2004. So that was a long time ago. And then I just was able to, I mean, that led to another book, and with Drawn and Quarterly, which is like a miracle. Yeah, I couldn't believe.

Tamara Thompson: Beautiful books.

Sonja Ahlers: I couldn't believe it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, just beautiful books.

Sonja Ahlers: I couldn't believe it. I know it was like a dream come true.

Tamara Thompson: I'm so excited I'm going to be in Montreal this fall, and that is one of, I'm going to go to the store, and I'm like, I don't care what you guys think. We're going to all your stuff. We're going to this one bookstore.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Gorgeous work. But yeah, why do they fold is that the question.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, like, why do so many people who make chapbooks and like even just small presses in Canada like, why do you think so many of them have to close up shop at the end of the day.

Sonja Ahlers: Well, I mean, too, now that we're talking, 'cause I mean I was, I made zines all through the nineties, and then I had books that were published up till 2004, and then by about 2005, or 2006, like I was done. I was burnt out completely, and also, I just felt like nobody was making chapbooks in my sphere or zines at-at that time at all. And they-they actually weren't. So, I kind of packed it in. I did make a zine, I think, in 2006, and I-I just, I didn't even distribute it. I think I made.

Tamara Thompson: Hmmm.

Sonja Ahlers: Thirty copies and just put them in a drawer. I still have some of them to this day, and I would just over the years it'd be like, oh, maybe that person might like this. I would pull it out of the drawer and mail it to them. And it was that was it like I-I honestly packed it in completely. I moved to the Yukon and that was it. And then and then things

picked up again. You just have to kind of live through trends I think you just have to be patient. You just have to be patient and like things come back and I have a lot of patience you know which is.

Tamara Thompson: I think you have to, if you're an artist of any kind.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, you just have to ride it out. It's like, okay, well, no one's paying attention to this right now. And that's okay, like, don't take it personally. It's just the way things are. So, it does shock me and blow my mind that zines are so huge right now. It's such a, it's phenomenal. It's like a tsunami of zine work going on. That's amazing. Yeah, it's really cool.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think one of the things that I find really interesting, especially now is when I go to conventions of any sort where, like there might be an artist ally. I'll see a ton of zines of that artist's work there. It's because, like it's a little fanzine off of a video game or a collage of their like work, basically like a little chapbook like art book, or something like, I see a lot of that happening as well, so I think like that kind of stuff, a lot of people are more supporting of those types of artists, and I think people are getting more exposed to maybe it in that way, even if they don't know what it is.

Sonja Ahlers: Hmm, yes, yes.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, I will say when I like, pick up a zine by an artist I-I see, I see them look over. When I say this is a zine, and they're like, yes, cause I actually know what this is.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: So, I don't, I don't know if the people who usually pick them up actually know what they are, but people are buying them, and even if they don't fully understand what it is, and that there's a lot of other stuff going at play, it's still interesting to see how in like a very specific space of like artists, that that work is being created and distributed to people.

Sonja Ahlers: Right? Yeah, yeah, that's why the fairs are so important. Yeah. And I mean, I'm kind of, and I'm an introvert. And I always find I find it's really hard to sell my wares directly to a person at a table. I'm not so good at that, which is why I would end up mailing things out, because it was just, it was easier on my psyche and just my, I don't know. It was just easier cause I you know my fear of rejection, and whatever. But yeah, I find I, I'm a bit too sensitive to do the fairs. I do attend them, but I know I-I need to get over this sort of social anxiety that I've always had about it. But I I'm much better about it now than I was before.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Sonja Ahlers: So, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Well. It's a lot of mental energy.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Things where like, when I do fares and stuff, I-there's the similarity between doing the interviews, but also teaching in front of a large group of people, and then the fairs. So, there's like the interviews which are still important to me, and I want to do well, right. And there's a lot of mental energy going on there, because I've tried to key in and listen to what you're doing and be responsive and have a good interview with you. But like, when I'm at a market, I feel like it's so much mental energy because it's not just one person with you. It's just you and me. I get a feel for your vibe. We can go off of each other a bit more.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But at a market I'm just like I don't know anything about these people, and because I'm the head person who was like the founder and manager and everything, and I do a lot of stuff. I make a lot of the books to with my partner you know, like everybody wants to talk to me, and I'm like, yes, hello! Hi! Hmm!

Sonja Ahlers: It's a lot of work.

Tamara Thompson: I find I clench my jaw a lot, so I always have a headache.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: 'Cause I'm so stressed.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, it's hard work.

Tamara Thompson: Fear of selling the book and the rejection for me, it's just the stress. And I'm like, I need to make sure, like, as you want to do a good job, and you want people to appreciate what you're doing. So, there's just like you feel the pressure.

Sonja Ahlers: Absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: So, my point is-is, I really understand what you're talking about.

Sonja Ahlers: Aww, thank you. I know, I think a lot of people experience this. But yeah, I know they are still very vital and important to have these fairs. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I love going to them.

Sonja Ahlers: They're pretty full.

Tamara Thompson: I like being at them and talking to other people who are doing press things and stuff like that. And then when a random person comes up, and it's just like, what's this? And I'm like let's see if

you'll be interested in my creative book of poetry. Well, that sounds dumb, bye, and I'm like cool.

Sonja Ahlers: Who does that? That's ridiculous!

Tamara Thompson: People who, like, don't understand and are just like, well, why would I spend ten dollars on this like little book when I could go to Chapters and buy one, or like when I can go to my Walmart?

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, hard! That is so rude. so rude! They have no idea. They have no idea.

Tamara Thompson: No, and-and that's one of those things where I don't worry about it. And I'm just like that person has no idea how rude t hey came off to everybody within, like a good three-meter radius, and they have no idea.

Sonja Ahlers: I'm-

Tamara Thompson: I know everyone around me is on my side in that interaction.

Sonja Ahlers: I'm stunned. Wow, wow! I wow!

Tamara Thompson: Most of the time people are good, but sometimes you'll get like the random person off the street or like somebody's mom who, like they? They wanna, like the child wants to be like an artist or knows something about it. And the mom's like, I don't understand. It's like that's fair. But could we try.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, can you just little more open minded and kind? Yeah. And some sensitivity training.

Tamara Thompson: Well, like, to them, I guess the very particular encounter, and I was just like I don't know what to do.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Just gonna keep being quiet, I guess.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, I know that's all you can do. It's just like, oh, deflect, deflect, deflect.

Tamara Thompson: It wasn't like that big of a deal, but when I looked back on it, I was like, Damn! That was a rough interaction.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. They need bodyguards at those things. Maybe that's the next step.

Tamara Thompson: But I will say that's like the one percent out of all of my experience.

Sonja Ahlers: True.

Tamara Thompson: Everybody who is also like, if someone is coming up to me it's more that they're, they already know what I'm doing, and they like what I'm doing or they're curious in a positive way. So, I always try and go in with someone who obviously doesn't know what I'm doing with the fact that they're probably here more out of curiosity than they are here out of malice.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, yeah, sure, absolutely. Yeah. And you can't take it personally. You can't take it personally.

Tamara Thompson: You can't.

Sonja Ahlers: You just can't.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: (Laugh).

Tamara Thompson: Public school taught me that well, you know, you get kicked down on the ground, and you just gotta get back up again. I'm gonna be pushed again, but I can at least get back up.

Sonja Ahlers: Absolutely, absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: So, what's something that you wish, maybe the public knew about Canadian publishing?

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, isn't that interesting? Great segue! I feel like we just-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: Were talking about that question.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: What does the public need to know? Yeah, people had a broader, I wish people had more information and knowledge that this existed, and that this was possible. I wish there was more outreach and some more support like there should be grants funding for chapbook presses and to support, you're supporting the underdog. And I wish that, yeah, the public knew that this was an art form, like an accessible, yeah, rather than everyone having to explain it. So maybe it does need to be more in in the school system.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's definitely something that when I tell my students because they're interested in what I do because I'm in thesis. And I explained that I'm doing a like thesis on chapbooks. And they're like, oh, that's cool. What is that? I'm like, okay. And I explain it.

Sonja Ahlers: There ya go.

Tamara Thompson: Once they understand the idea, they start like they're interested in it. And they're the types of students cause I'm talking to

creative writing students and people who are into comics. And if it's not the bird, course, it's something they really care about, or even might want to do so for them they're really interested in what I'm doing, and they try it. And they make stuff. And they show me. And I'm like, if they had known about it, or had been given an avenue to explore this earlier like they'd, I don't necessarily need chapbooks to be known by the world, but for the people who I know, who would like to be a part of it. I think they should have the accessibility to be a part of it.

Sonja Ahlers: Exactly. Yeah. And the thing, too, about chapbooks and zines it's like, it's D.I.Y. culture, like people need to know that it's possible for them to make their own like that's part of why I should have said earlier. But now that we're circling back is that, that's why I started making them I-I wanted people to see like, if I can do this, you can do this if you want to like. This is an option. You have that power.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It's something that I really would like to do is to do a small press course and get like students to look into small presses like chapbooks to make their own, like little mini version, you know, for an assignment, and then have them make chapbooks or zines for themselves, because that's how I learned about them. And my professor was like, you need to make ten chapbooks. And then we had a little fair at the end, and we exchanged them with our classmates, and I want to do something like that course. But that course was self publishing. So, we also had to talk about vanity presses, and like, you know, Amazon and stuff. I don't want to do that. And so, when I hear people talking about how they want to have that outreach for people to do those types of things. I'm like, I want to do that so badly. And it's one of those things where, like you know, if you get an email from me in the future, being like, hey, I'm trying to convince this board on this university or college, would you maybe say, this is a good idea.

Sonja Ahlers: Right, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Because it is so hard for them to understand the importance of something like this, not just creatively, but even in their understanding of publishing, right. I think it is such a good accessible way to publish that so many people.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That they can do, like, to your point earlier about like I can do this. You can do this, and we can figure out a way, and just be able to like to have that resources for those students like teach them like, because how I learned to sew a spine was in class. Paul Vermeersch taught me how to like, fold it, how to use a long arm stapler, how to sew with spine, right? And if you're not taught those things. You can look it up on the Internet, but you also have to know what to look for.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You know.

Sonja Ahlers: Absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: So. Yeah, sorry, I just, I'm really passionate about this. And I really think that this type of education should be accessible. And like, I've even thought about doing this in like public schools, because kids make little books and stuff like that all the time I did as a kid and a lot of people I've talked to who I was like, when did you first realize you were making chapbooks and like, well, I was technically making them when I was five. I had no idea I was making them.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I think it is such an accessible thing to do that it doesn't matter what age you are, you know.

Sonja Ahlers: Yes, and I think that's I know a book can be anything, the content can be anything which is amazing.

Tamara Thompson: Just some so-so cool and fun.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, we're getting into the last two questions here, and they're mostly just to give space for some stuff. So, this question second last question here is, what's something important about D.I.Y. press history that you wish people knew about? This is kind of my question to give space for some of the history, but also like, say, you saw something, and it was a very limited print run, and nobody knows about it, because there was only twelve made out of it. This is kind of the space to kind of record this really cool idea or something, because again, the way I find out about a lot of cool things like the way I even found about you was through like Joe at like Drawn and Quarterly. Really, he was like, you know you should really talk to her. And I was like, well, that sounds amazing. I would love to, you know, especially with the type of art and stuff that you create. But I found you through someone else telling me, right. And I feel like this community is very much about that. So that's kind of what this question is-is to give space for some of that knowledge and sharing.

Sonja Ahlers: Okay and sorry. Can you repeat the question again?

Tamara Thompson: Absolutely. What's something important about D.I.Y. press history that you wish people knew? And again, it can be bigger history or smaller stuff.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah. Oh, that's such a hard question to answer. I-I like what you said about sharing information. Yeah, I mean, because I was really, I mean, a lot of my early work was kind of aligned with Riot Grrrl.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.



Sonja Ahlers: Which I didn't fully, I wasn't, I was a bit isolated from Riot Grrrl, living on an island like growing up on Vancouver Island, and that was all happening Northwest and Washington DC, so I mean to this like nowadays, like people go, oh, yes, part of the Riot Grrrl movement. But I, it would, I was making, they were personal zines, what I was making like a per zine or the chapbook again. So how do I answer this. What do I wish was shared? I don't know. I just wish that, there was more, I know. I think. I wish there was more of a distribution network like, I mean, in the nineties there was a magazine called Fact Sheet 5, that where it listed everything like chapbook, zines, like you could go through and find addresses. And that's actually how I found a lot of my contacts through Fact Sheet 5. And then there's broken pencil, which we all know about which is great. And it's amazing. It's still in publication, that's because of, I'm sure grants funding keeping that alive, which is a miracle. Yeah, I just wish there was more accessibility.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: Is this answering the question?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, no, I.

Sonja Ahlers: Fair. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Especially.

Sonja Ahlers: Knowledge, sharing like passing it down.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Unless that press, like a lot of that press's knowledge, if it just closes up, that doesn't get shared with the community unless they actively try and share it, right? Or it might be shared with only one other person, right?

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And that the other person knew for the best.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah. And then I think about we probably need like more sort of retreats, or like, I mean, TCAF is great. All of the zine fairs and-and comics, festivals, arts and comics festivals are very important. I think that people need to. I think there needs to be more accessibility and attending those festivals like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Sonja Ahlers: Possibly more travel grants or people, if they can or are aware of that, they can apply for travel grants to do these things. Yeah, there just needs to be more inclusion and accessibility, I think, to-to share knowledge. And-and yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, cause we're a big country, and I'm talking to you.

Sonja Ahlers: Yes vast.

Tamara Thompson: You're all the way in BC, but like there's the stuff you're doing there is really interesting, and I want to share it and have it be a part of my thesis, because my thesis is Canada, not just Ontario, right? Toronto and Ottawa are very close, and big hubs for chapbooks and zines, and a lot of that kind of stuff, and same with Montreal. But like, if you're not close to them, it's hard to get to them, and I'm not even super close. I have to like, I have to like, it's a big effort to go out. I can do it.

Sonja Ahlers: Yup.

Tamara Thompson: Like I have to like plan somewhere to stay, because it's a lot to go there and back in, like, you know, a day.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, absolutely no. That's so interesting. Just what we talked about at the beginning of this was just like how fast Canada is and how each region, territory, province is so separate, and BC. And I'm on an island I like I would have to travel constantly, and any like, nothing would happen unless I went to Toronto or Montreal.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Sonja Ahlers: Had to be in those hubs. So yeah, there's not a lot of back and forth really, like you just have to go and plant yourself. But then, again, there's the postal system, which is amazing. So, I was very dependent on the postal system.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, and like, the Internet is definitely a good tool. But like and then the Internet.

Sonja Ahlers: Oh, yeah, the Internet, I forgot about that-

(Both laugh).

Sonja Ahlers: See that, does it, that just feels impossible now, it's like, how do you find anything? There's not a lot of directories or consolidate information. There probably needs to be more online accessibility.

Tamara Thompson: Well, the if you read my thesis, you'll see at the back every person I talk to, and-

Sonja Ahlers: I can't wait. That's great.

Tamara Thompson: People who weren't able to talk to me because they were too busy will be like, I have like a whole list with everybody who I talked to and emailed. And it's just like these are people doing interesting things and I'm trying to get as much information about a lot of these places and people as I can who have done these cool things. But

it's like, even if they didn't even respond back to me. I think it's important to have some type of archive, because my thesis will be archived. So, these interviews will be archived in the thesis because my thesis just automatically gets archived. So, for me, there's a lot of.

Sonja Ahlers: That's great.

Tamara Thompson: There is a lot of solace in that, because my list and my interviews will be archived so like I don't expect people to like go like searching through the Canadian like MA thesis archive and stuff, but it will be there.

Sonja Ahlers: Right.

Tamara Thompson: I'll talk a little bit later about some of the other things I hope to do. But I'll do that.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah, archives are essential absolutely. And I wish that archives more accessible than they are.

Tamara Thompson: Same here.

Sonja Ahlers: I know. More accessibility. And yeah, that's the bottom line for all of this. Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, very last question, what's something important about your history that people—that you wish people knew about.

Sonja Ahlers: Hmm yeah, I just feel like, yeah, we've touched on it all throughout this interview. It's just, yeah wanting other people to find their own expression. That's kind of what that was what inspired me to I mean, I'd say it happened organically, but I know deep down I was like, I said, if I can do this, anyone can do this. I still firmly believe that to this day just feel like everyone has their own expression, and if everyone was making some kind of art, there would be less problems in the world you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, there wouldn't be as much stifling-

(Technical issues occurred).

Sonja Ahlers: I don't think so. I think that's, yeah. I think we've covered everything.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic.

Sonja Ahlers: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Then I'll stop the recording then.

Sonja Ahlers: Awesome. Thank you.

Noelle Allen

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson. The date is the 27<sup>th</sup> of May. Time is 11:05 am, and a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after the interview. This interview is for a traditional press.

Noelle Allen: Hi! I am Noelle Allen. I am the publisher of Wolsak and Wynn, which is a small press, a traditional literary press based in Hamilton, Ontario. Pronouns are she/her, and really the only title for me is that I am the publisher, so.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely. Thank you so much. So, I'm gonna just start off here with, how did the press start originally?

Noelle Allen: So, the press is over forty years old. It started in 1982 with two poets, Maria Jacobs and Heather Cadsby and they felt that at the time there weren't enough opportunities for poets to be published. So, they decided to start a publishing company. They funded it with the sales of their own actual chapbooks and small publications and the first book they published was an anthology about jealousy where they collected poems from various people, which they thought was a really fascinating book, and sold very poorly. After that, they did just single author collections. And they did those for several years until Heather sort of retired. They both started this later in life. And then I came in about... oh, about twenty years ago I worked for Maria, and eventually I bought the press from her and then we moved it from Toronto to Hamilton, and we grew it from just poetry to publishing pretty much everything.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely. That's wonderful to hear that. It also started with the funding from chapbooks. Actually, get the thing off the, get the press off the ground. How did you discover like publishing, but also kind of like the smaller side of like chapbooks and things?

Noelle Allen: I started, I-I kind of fell into publishing the way a lot of people do. I thought I wanted to be a writer. And it's terrible work; never, I don't recommend it to anybody. So, after writing a little bit, I realize I didn't really like the sitting at home alone writing part of things. But I loved books. So, I decided the next part was that I would just make books, because you know that I could do the-the fun part, and then I wander through looking for publishing jobs and I ended up working for Maria.

(Technical issues occurred).

Noelle Allen: Okay. So, I wandered around and published it. And I ended up working for Maria as her publisher's assistant. And that's when I really started to get to know poetry. I didn't really know anything about it. But she ran a poetry press. And so, from there I quickly realized that there's lots of different kinds of poetry, and the press itself was very firmly rooted in the poetry community in-in-in a in Canada, like Maria, had been in the League of Canadian Poet, she'd run poetry. Toronto, she really was really well, came connected in the community. So that's how we discovered how I learned about it. And the longer I've worked in poetry, the more and

more I'm publishing, the more I've gotten to know all of the smaller publications, too.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely. So, what would you say is the house's editorial philosophy? Or maybe the press's goal?

Noelle Allen: So, I say that our-our-our goal is to challenge what people think of-of literature. So, we will, when we do poetry, it can be, they could be breaking form. They could be experimenting. They could be very political texts. They could be between genres. So, *Ether* by Catherine Graham was a poetic essay, and that one was up for the Trillium award. And the fiction, it's gonna be more experimental. It's gonna again blur genres. But all almost always asks big questions, and nonfiction is the same.

Tamara Thompson: I love that, just as a small comment in return to what you've just said. That's lovely. Everything I've ever purchased or read has always been the one thing. So, I-I've gravitated towards it unknowingly.

Noelle Allen: Yes.

Tamara Thompson: It's wonderful. So, you said you've kind of published everything-

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Okay, basically, we've already been talking about kind of what the press publishes. But could you give maybe some key points to some of like if you had to like, say, oh, well, we specifically, really like this, like poetry or creative nonfiction. Or, you know, could you list maybe some key points that the press really likes to publish.

Noelle Allen: Okay. So, we actually, because I like to divide things up a little bit and keep myself organized, we have a-a variety of imprints, and each imprint is, publishes one particular kind of thing. So, in the Buckrider books imprint, we publish our poetry, and we publish our-our fiction. And that's a very literary imprint. It's going to be very challenging works people are gonna play with genre. They're gonna play with voice. They're gonna you know, the poetry will be all over the page. This is, we're going to be really avant garde there, not quite-quite like that all the way Avant Garde, but pretty avant garde. The Wolsak and Wynn is where we pull most of our literary nonfiction. So those are going to be essay collections, they're going to be memoirs. They're going to be sort of, sometimes more political books, sometimes more environmental books, but always with really good writing and or and very important in my mind stories to tell. Jane Street North is our local imprint, and we do a couple of books in that every year, one for season, and that is books about Hamilton by Hamiltonians. That can be any genre, but it has to have a Hamilton writer, and preferably a focus on the city or the city has to be part of the book in some way, and we've just relaunched, or in the process of relaunching Popular press, which was, gonna be my fiction in print until Paul joined us, and then Buckrider took that on. And Poplar is speculative fiction. It is more speculative than literary, because there

just isn't a lot of it in Canada. And it's not actually done very well here, like most people who write in that genre have to go to the States. And we have a couple of-of editors who just love speculative fiction, have really good eye for it, and they're gonna bring out a couple of books of-of that every-every year. So, one spring, one fall.

Tamara Thompson: Wonderful. I love to hear the growth of speculative fiction because it's a genre that I also personally write but also to read. So that's-that's lovely to hear that you've expanded with that in print as well. Thank you very much for answering that that's wonderful. So, I'm gonna ask another like pretty big question about how the books get made like from submission to editing, to production, to launch, what is that process like for you as a press?

Noelle Allen: Well, it takes about two years. So, we have an open reading submission. So, you don't need an agent. We're very clear about this. Nobody needs an agent to work with us. We have an open reading period from, or submission period from January to the end of March. Every year we collect everything in, and then we kind of go through them read through them. Ask. We ask people to send in partial-partial manuscripts, and then we will often ask for full manuscripts if it looks promising. So, that starts there we whittle it down to just the-the-the fifteen or sixteen books that we could do and then it's you know, contracts. I myself do all the contracts. I do all the business parts of the work. So that's all with me. And then either, if it's nonfiction, I will edit it, or if it's a Buckrider Books, Paul will edit it, or part of his editorial board will edit it. We start with a substantive edit, probably within about six months of acquisitions six months after that about a about a year out or sooo. Because we things could often slip because we've got in lots of work and very few people. We'll start like the marketing side of it. So, we will send out surveys to our authors, asking for all their data, summaries like where did they want to tour. What are their availabilities? What's their most up to date bio, things like that. We will start creating, the-the cover. The-the catalog will go out about six months before. Head by then we should have substantive back. We would look at advanced reading copies then and we would go into the copy edit after we got the copy edit, it's designed, and its layout and design proofing and then press. So, it's-it's a long period usually takes about two years from it, it, we-we plan two years from acceptance to publication as you know, we go through all those different steps. Does that kind of answer that.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, wonderfully. Thank you. How does the press make decisions? It sounds like the imprints are usually pretty much making decisions, but, like, could you tell me a bit more about that.

Noelle Allen: So, for-for Buckrider, Paul has an editorial board that he works with, and they all sort of, we don't tend to do a lot of acceptance by consensus. Some people do, where everybody has to agree on a book. What we really want is somebody to love a book that somebody has to be really excited about the book. Like, think it's a great book, and then we gotta we can talk it over. But generally, everybody kind of acquires in Buck Rider like, if somebody loves the title everybody's got space like Paul make sure everybody has space to acquire at least one title per season that they love and then he will, you know, fill in any blank spots and

fill in around that with the books he loves as well. Just to kind of get a good mix and we're looking for a mix because we have a lot of return authors. But we always want to bring in new authors, and we want new voices like you can't always have just people you previously published. You've gotta always be aware of, ensuring that you're bringing in new people and-and honoring your commitment to your-your established authors as well. So, there's a lot of delicate balancing there. And I did the exact same thing on the nonfiction side. But it's just me for that one, and for the Hamilton books as well. So-so I mean between the two of us we acquire about the same number of books. And then the Poplar one they-they have a little bit more consensus oriented but they're just starting to get off the, off the ground there, and there's three editors for that one, and they talk a lot together to kind of find the book that they think is-is the best, because there's only like one space per season. So, it's a little bit tougher for them, and they're still building that list. So, they kind of work together a little bit more but in the end if, it's generally like somebody at least one person has to love the book before it's gonna go forward. Does that help.

Tamara Thompson: Excellent. It makes a lot of sense as well. Where do you sell your books and like how do you sell them?

Noelle Allen: Oh, that's the one-million-dollar question.

Tamara Thompson: (laughs).

Noelle Allen: So, we'd like to sell more books. We are, we have distribution. So, we are distribution to the University of Toronto Press which is one of the biggest Canadian distributors. So, they distribute us; they distribute Biblioasis; they distribute Dundurn. There's a lot of like the presses are based there. There's other distributors you can work with as well in Canada, but not too many. But you need that if you want to work with, you need that kind of distribution, if you want to work with Amazon, not as a vendor, but to have Amazon sell your work so Amazon needs them. Indigo needs them. The bookstores prefer it because they could order from a group of us at a time, get consolidated shipping. Somebody else handles all of the payments. It's great. So, we send them their books. They handle distribution. And then they give us a payment three months after the sale is made less any books that are returned in that time, and returns as a whole, another kettle of fish but we also sell directly from our website. We sell at books fairs, we will sell from our office if people walk in, though that's not as big a thing. Launches, events, things like that. So, you know, we-we do it through a variety of ways, because it's very, very hard to reach the audience. You know, to reach, to reach book buyers without having lots of different approaches. We can't just do it through the bookstores anymore. The books-independent bookstores like our books, and they sell them the best of anything. But there's a lot of places that simply don't have an independent bookstore. So, for them, you have to do online. And there's a lot of people where you go into a bookstore. There's just an overwhelming number of books, and that's where having a book fair table is great, because then they see the books together. And they actually they can connect with them longer than they can in the bookstore, because you have about six months to a year, unless you've won an award.

And then the bookstore returns your books and is ready for the next batch of books that have been released.

Tamara Thompson: Right. Yeah, you find that at book fairs that you sell like a bit more because of that connection. Or do you find that you get more people asking about their newest manuscript.

Noelle Allen: We actually s-sell a lot more books than we get submissions at book fairs. There's always a few like, there's always a few to come up. They want to talk, they want to figure things out. And I mean, that's actually a really good way to do it, in my opinion, because then you can look at the books. Not that everybody does, but I mean, you can look at the books and say, okay, I like what they're publishing. I think my book would fit here. Which I always recommend to new authors to do like. Look at the publishers list and if you like their list. There's a good chance that that editor will like your book. There's gonna be like the similarity and style of taste there, that's gonna work for you. But a lot of people, just they're-they're fascinated by the mix, and they don't see a lot of independently published books even in the best bookstores, because there's just so many multinational books coming out that we get buried in the flood. So, book-book fairs are a really good way to highlight them, and they could see them, and we spend a lot on our covers and our design to make our books look quite, I think, like really attractive, sometimes beautiful, other times just really eye catching. It really depends on what you want the book to do. But people are really drawn to those covers, and then they'll pick them up and see them when they're on the table, and I sell, I and, I could sell older titles that way where it's harder to get those into the bookstore.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I can agree about your covers. I am always attracted, because if you're, I bought one last time, I was at Meet the Presses just because I was so intrigued by it, and I picked it up, and I was intrigued by what it said about it, and the first couple of pages. So, the-the for me, anyway, that's definitely to get to-to my heart and also to my wallet. Anyway, what are some challenges that the press has had to face over its time publishing books.

Noelle Allen: Well, I mean, we have a poem that Maria, what came in one of the publics, one of the collections by Ken Norris, who was a Montreal based poet, has been around for years. And he did the collection with Maria just as I was starting on the at the press, and she'd loved it so much that she had it made it to a broad sheet in Brain Ditch because she thought it was, it was very on point it was to the Canadian publishing industry in crisis. And so, it's always in crisis, like, we were, I was joking about this online the other day is that you know it's not like we're not in a time of significant change. It's just a change never really stops. There's always something going on. So, it was Indigo, taking out the, all of the independent bookstores. It was General Distribution going under right after the press had been talked into joining them for distribution. And so, what that happened in the early late like early 2000's and a lot of presses really struggle with that. You're seeing something very similar happening right now with SPD in the States, where a lot of small presses were caught up with a-a like a distributor going under, and they gotta get their books back. They gotta figure out where to



go it, it really like switching distributors, or losing your distributor that way is really-really hard on a company. We had to find figure out how to make eBooks. Then, you know, once we gotten used to Indigo. We have Amazon. You know? Now we've got AI, so there's always something that we're all sort of like trying to figure out how to work with the Internet changed a lot of things, of course. Because with the Internet, came the decline in reviews from traditional media, because we had the advent of social media. So, like they, there's always something happening that you have to just kinda, that will impact you. And you just have to figure out how to work around it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, you have to figure out how to pivot.

Noelle Allen: Yeah, yeah, you're just and you're not even pivoting because we're doing the same thing. It's just we're making the books, and we're trying to get them to the readers and the path. It's like we're like the mice in the maze, and they keep changing the maze. But we're still getting through it. We just, you know, it's like you-you just need more dead ends. And you go, oh, I can't do it this way anymore. So, you turn around and you go back through it the other way. So, you lose a little more time in the maze and energy. But you, you know, and sometimes, and-and our and our sales are our sales are higher now than they were, of course, when we did just poetry. But I think for most presses as a whole they're lower, because like just in number, wise, just because there's so many books being published, especially with self publishing. And because it's just, it's never been easier to publish a book, and it's never been harder to sell. It is what we-we say right now. So yeah, it's-it's those are all the different kind of challenges we've sort of faced.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Your analogy of the maze is a very good one. I've never heard of it explained that way, but I feel like it's very, it very true to the facts of what you're dealing with.

Noelle Allen: Well, I-I-I think about it because everybody says pivot. But when I think of pivot, I think you're-you're gonna you're, gonna do something different. But we're not. We're just we just gotta find a new route, right?

Tamara Thompson: Right. Yeah, it-it makes a lot of sense to me. And I think it's a very good analogy. So, we're gonna get more into some of the chapbook kind of questions if you feel uncomfortable answering them, no problem.

Noelle Allen: I'll give you my best shot, and if I don't know, I'll say so. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Sounds good. So why are chapbooks important to you?

Noelle Allen: So, chapbooks to me a step on the publication process to a full like. I don't know, some people never leave it but for us. It's a real, definitely we see it as a step in a poet sort of journey.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Noelle Allen: They start with a single poem. People collect those poems. They make a small chapbook. Often, they're beautifully created, but they're very specific, like they're-they're, you know just a suite of poems. After they've done a chapbook, couple of-of suites of poems, and they've done their chapbooks. Then they're often come to us with a full collection. Sometimes it has like a chapbook within it. Sometimes it's something completely different, but it's it feels like. And it seems to me for most poets they're the way they progress through publishing to become to-to until they hit their first you know, full length collection, and they've got all the poems ready, and sometimes there's just pieces of your work that are better suited to a chapbook, and then they go back, and that is just a chapbook. And then there's folks like Gary Barwin or Stuart, who just likes to do everything all the time, and they need lots of ways to-to publish and chapbooks fit some things. Full length collections do others you know, or maybe they do something with like a saxophone, you know. So.

Tamara Thompson: Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not?

Noelle Allen: I think they're important again, because they allow people to publish quickly, to publish smaller pieces, to take them out and share them with people directly chapbook is a very direct kind of publishing. So you were, gonna you know, you may be working with the chapbook press. but you're-you're often handselling those. Either the press is or you are. So, you're really, your chapbook as a way to really connect very directly with readers, whereas when you do traditional publishing, you may never see the majority of your readers. You may only hear from a handful of them. It can feel kind of like it's just disappeared into the ether. You've got some copies, you know, a few people who've read them, but you don't know where everything else went, where with the chapbooks often it feels like a more like more direct connection with the readers out there, and I also think it just is a good way for people to just get works out into the public fairly quickly and reasonably low cost.

(Technical issues occurred).

Noelle Allen: Okay, this is, it's gonna be a little bit oh, well, whatever. So, what I was saying is that I think that the chapbooks are very important, because it's a way for poets to connect very directly with their readers. To publish things like quickly and fairly inexpensively, and to actually like hand sell and meet readers in a way that you can't often do with traditional publishing, where your readers are very dispersed, and you may never meet them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I agree. I feel like that hands-on element is very important. And also, just to learn about that community that you can build or be a part of.

Noellen Allen: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada in itself? In some way, maybe the people or our public? Maybe our writers?

Noelle Allen: No, I don't know that it reflects the country. But I think it re-reflects smaller areas. So, we have a very vibrant zine and-and zines are sort of different from chapbooks, but-but I mean, we have a-a pretty good us like a so we've-we've definitely got chapbook people down here, and we've got a lot of zine people down here, and I find that different parts of the country have different styles of chapbook, and zine makers. So I think and then this is true. And publishing like what you're publishing on the West Coast, is very different from what I'm publishing here in Ontario is very different from what they're publishing in in Nova Scotia. So, each we're very regional in Canada. So, I think each one of these areas displays those you know the writers. What's important to the writers, what's important in the areas differently. And the voices are always different. And I think each place where that the more immediately you can write and produce the more strongly, you're going to reflect what's really happening in your area.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I agree. What does this kind of publishing offer that other types of publishing can't offer, and also vice versa, kind of like, what do chapbooks offer that traditional publishing houses can't? But also looking traditional publishing houses offer that maybe a chapbook can. We've kind of been talking a bit about it. But I figured I'd ask the question a bit more directly.

Noelle Allen: Well, I would say the chapbook is immediacy, right? It's much quicker.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Noelle Allen: To-to write, publish, get it out. And that direct connection, what the traditional publishing is frankly longevity, because your books are in the public record that they're in-in a way that chapbooks often aren't. They're going to be in bookstores across Canada, or they can be in bookstores. They can be bought by libraries. They will rest on shelves for very long times. So, there's that staying power of a full book that I mean, that chapbooks and-and zines are really not supposed to have the chapbooks due to a little bit, because they're kind of in between. But there's a lot more like a lot more of that stability in a, in a full book, I think.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What's something that you wish people, or the public knew about Canadian publishing.

Noelle Allen: How much of it there is. Most people can't tell. They have no idea if a book is published by a Canadian author. And they certainly don't know if it's published by a Canadian publisher. So, they end up buying whatever's marketed the most from the you know, Penguin Random House. So, you know, people-people don't know that the stories about their, about their cities you know, their towns written by the people who live in them who really understand them are mostly coming up with independent publishers. And when they find them, they're usually delighted. But they just don't even know they're there. So, it's like-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Noelle Allen: You want, you want people to find them. You want people that's often why we started doing so many book fairs is because, like people just don't know we're there, and when they find us, they're thrilled. But they-they don't know. They don't even know what to look for. So yeah, that's-that's kind of one I think I knew, wish they people knew was how many there were, how many different kinds of books we publish, and the fact that they probably really enjoy them if they picked one up.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, why do you think so many, this is the sad question, why do you think so many small presses and like micro presses close up shop?

Noelle Allen: Money and workload. It's really those are the two things that kill people it's very expensive to publish a book, I would say conservatively it takes me about twelve thousand dollars to publish a poetry collection. That's a lot of money, and our grants are flatlined. They've been very, very similar for almost thirty years. And so, with that, and with people not actually knowing where the books are and the difficulty in selling the books, it's very hard to sell enough books to-to cover that cost in this market. And if the grants aren't there to help you kind of bridge the gap people basically burn out and some. And so, they run out of money, or they run out of energy. They can't hire the people. And so, they end up, saying, I can't like, they can't do it. And they-they-they close shop.

Tamara Thompson: Right? Yeah, yeah. Sad, unfortunate truth if there's also no one pushing. (Technical issues occurred) Doing it all yourself. It's-it's very hard to keep up that energy, especially if you're spending so much money on the press itself. You also need to still be able to survive.

Noelle Allen: Yeah. And I-I've seen a lot of people struggle with that over the years. I've seen a few, I've seen processes fold under it quite quickly. I've seen others kind of struggle through. But it's-it's-it's a very, it's a very tough go of it. So.

Tamara Thompson: What's something that you wish people knew about your history specifically?

Noelle Allen: The press?

Tamara Thompson: Sure.

Noelle Allen: I don't really. You know, people don't really need to know much about our history. It's nice when I realize we've been here for forty years. But you know, and we've-we've published some really, really good books. I think, basically, I just want people to know we exist and maybe look for what's coming out, right? Maybe get excited about the new books. Be interested in what's coming out and know that we've been doing it for a long time, so they can trust us. They can trust they will be good. but there's nothing really specific in the history that I'm like. Oh, yeah, they should know we did that big thing. You know, there's you know, we have no bp Nichol in our background. We've-we've been consistently putting out good books, you know, winning awards occasionally. Doing different fun things, launching new authors like there's just lots of things we've done

to really kind of contribute to and build the community. But I what, I would rather is that they were really keen on what the next season was.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, just have people be interested in what you're doing. And trust you to continue to purchase and that you have good quality, and they know that you're there.

Noelle Allen: Yep.

Tamara Thompson: Makes a lot of sense. Are there any additional comments, anything else that you'd like to add to this conversation?

Noelle Allen: No, I think like, you've got a good mix there. So hopefully you get enough information to-to write the thesis.

Tamara Thompson: Of course, I-I really appreciate you spending the time and answering all of my questions. I will pause the recording now.

Cameron Anstee

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson and today's date is May 20<sup>th</sup>, the time is 4:45 pm. This call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out of a deadline of a week after the interview. The set of questions for this interview is small press and author.

Cameron Anstee: My name is Cameron Anstee. My pronouns are he, him. I am the editor and publisher of Apt.9 Press, which is a chapbook press based in Ottawa, which is where I am based. I don't know if this is outside of scope, but I myself am also a published poet with chapbooks and-and all that sort of thing. I think that's what's relevant to this.

Tamara Thompson: Cool. Thank you.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: No, it's totally okay. Why did the press start?

Cameron Anstee: Oh, sure. Okay. So, Apt.9 press started in 2009. I was at the tail end of my studies my undergrad and my master studies at Carleton University here in Ottawa. When I was an undergrad, I worked with a magazine on campus called in/words - i, n, slash, words - and it was sort of a quarterly literary magazine, but it was also a chapbook publisher. It was also like a monthly reading series and open mic. There was like a set of writing workshops. It was just sort of this big like jumble of activities. So, for two, three years I learned the basics of, like, making chapbooks, how to throw magazine together, how to get people in a room and read poetry. And I knew it was something that you sort of, like, aged out of 'cause it was for students, right? But I knew I still wanted to be involved in making chapbooks, because that was something that I-I enjoyed a great deal. And so, in the last sort of like the back half of my master's degree I-I carved out time, which is hard to do, as I'm sure you know to.

Tamara Thompson: Oh yes.

Cameron Anstee: So yeah, I carved out bits of time to begin planning the press. And it was something I launched in August 2009, which was like the same month that I submitted my master's research project, and it's been going for fifteen years since.

(Technical issues occurred)

Tamara Thompson: Nice. Thank you. You kind of already talked a bit about this question already. But how did you discover zines and chapbooks in this type of publishing you said you discovered it at your university?

Cameron Anstee: Yeah. So, when I was in undergrad, which is going back a ways, it was like 2005 to 2008. It was a moment, like, before social media; like, I remember, this is a tangent, but I remember Facebook like being launched in my university. You could suddenly, like, subscribe so there was no Twitter there. Presses, like chapbook presses, didn't have websites. I had no idea there was a magazine on my campus until I found

copies of it in the tunnels at Carleton. There are tunnels connecting all the buildings. And what the magazine would do, and the chapbooks they would have them printed, and they were all given away for free, and they just left them in stacks like on newspaper racks. And so, I found one of these an issue of the magazine on a break in one of my classes, and I was just astounded to find this thing that was full of students, like people my own age, people who cared enough about poetry to, like, try to publish it and share it, and-and to-to find ways to do that. So, I began reading the magazine and going to the open mics just to listen. And at some point, this was in my second year, at the end of the second year I approach the professor who oversaw it, called Tracy-so like, is there a way to be involved in this? And I became involved in my third year as an editor. But in/words, it just opened up all kinds of doors. Ottawa had and continues to have a very sort of like tight knit, really, like productive chapbook community. We have a lot, we have, not a lot of trade presses, but we have a lot of chapbook presses and-and it didn't take long to discover that with our little student magazine there is a-a twice annual Book Fair in Ottawa, the Ottawa Small Press Book fair, which is run by Rob McLennan. At the time, there was the no end of reading series that all got a bit decimated by the pandemic, but you could go to, you know, three or four readings a week in Ottawa at the time when I was an undergrad and as soon as you began to tap into those networks in Ottawa it opened up the networks beyond Ottawa because people would come to the Ottawa small Press Book Fair from Toronto or Montreal or Peterborough and you would just start to build up a network of people in a very like organic in person, kind of way. And it was just remarkable to me, even beyond like in/words, beyond my immediate peers and fellow students and young writers at the Book Fair you were seeing people again that were like your age, or a little bit older. They were making these beautiful, remarkable objects with like crappy resources, like no one had any money, had any training. We were all just kind of trying to figure it out with what we had at our disposal, and-and the things that I was finding just amazed me. It was a real spur to try to figure out how to do it myself, once my time with the magazines was over.

Tamara Thompson: That's brilliant. I love, I love to hear stuff like that. It, oh I love hearing how people discover this scene. It's one of the main reasons why I put it here. Near the top, because it's just such an interesting thing to how everyone falls into it.

Cameron Anstee: It is and like it in Ottawa. There are people like Rob McLennan who's been doing it since like 1993. We have a man named John Curry, JW Curry who's been added even longer, like going back to seventies. Making chapbooks and little rubber stamp things, and like amazing incredible objects in this world of the small press. And once you get to know these people and they introduce you other people. But also, I think the student context was very important because I was studying literature, and it very quickly became the focus. Like, it was a focus of my master's work. It was a focus of my doctorate afterwards. I immerse myself in it, both like, sort of actively and like personally, like I was putting my own money and labor and time into making chapbooks and books, and I was also spending, like my professional life as like a scholar researcher, and student just immersing myself in as much as I could in Canada's history of this stuff. And so, it-it was really lovely to

encounter it as a tradition right as like a set of works that has, like a history, a material history, but also something very active and vibrant and alive today. And so, I've always loved the-the balance between those things and-and how many, my heroes, anyway, of-of people going back to the 50s and 60s who, guess let's just say, we're still around back in, you know, 2008, 2009 and-and more recently. But you could still connect with those sort of early-early heroes umm, yeah, it's-it's great.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Any sources you can give. It would be brilliant. Of course. So, what is the press's editorial philosophy or maybe the presses' goal.

Cameron Anstee: Yeah, okay. So, when I started the press, it was because I really like making chapbooks. And I was so inspired by seeing other people do it, and I thought I'd like to learn how to do this and get better at it and I want to bring help, to bring books into the world that I just think should exist. So, the editorial policy, in so much as there is one, is just the books interest me and it could be, I'm publishing, you know, like a first chapbook by a young writer, or I'm publishing a book by hero of mine. Like I've done, for example, a few by Nelson Ball, who's like one of the all-time most important Canadian small press figures going back to the sixties. So, I've always had that sort of balance. I also wanted it to, in the early days especially, I wanted it to reflect that it was here in Ottawa. So, for example, the first three books that came out of the press, the first one was by Justin Million who is a student, like a peer of mine as an undergrad and it was I, I thought he was great, and I still think that, and that he needed more attention. So, I did his book. The second book was by Sandra Ridley who has since gone on to get Griffin shortlisted. She just published her, I wanna say her fifth book with Book\*hug last year, and it won the Pat Lowther. She's incredible. But at the time in 2009 she hadn't published trade book yet. And everyone in Ottawa, we all knew her, but, like Sandra is the best, people are gonna love Sandra, and they like, you know, they finally get these books, which is true. So, I wanted that part of Ottawa, and the third book was by a man named Monty Reed. who's been publishing since the seventies. He's an absolute favorite poet of mine, and I felt like he was sort of like under appreciate. So, it was, it was like students who we're beginning to try to figure out how to write. It was Sandra who was like about to establish her career. And then it was Monty, like long into my mind, very like storied important writing career. So, I wanted that balance. I wanted to reflect all those different things that I saw around me in Ottawa. I would say over time, it's become a little bit less Ottawa eccentric in terms of the people I publish. So, Ottawa writers still make a big part of it. It's just sort of followed my own interests as I've...

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Cameron Anstee: Developed as like a reader as a writer myself, and-and I go after different people. I'll say the press does not take unsolicited submissions and I think that's, like I never have an open reading period. It's something I thought I would do, and what I found is that I've had to



narrow it down to really operate within the resources that I have available to me. And part of that means money, but it also means time. I make the books by hand. I do all the printing at home. I, you know, slice cover stock. I thread needles; that like I do it all just manually myself. And so that limits how many I can make in a year. I can make three books, four books in a good year, maybe five, sometimes one, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Cameron Anstee: And so, I've net-I've always found that I'll-I'll have commitments to people about a year out, you know, like I've got my next four or five projects committed to, and I-I don't want to make commitments beyond that kind of horizon 'cause I-I think chapbooks, you shouldn't have to wait two years for your chapbook to come out, you know? Like this isn't like a trade ecosystem. It's-it's a like a handmade chapbook one. So, the policy is kind of developed along those lines. It's-it's chased favorite writers of mine. I wanted to, within my limited resources, like, give them a leg up. And it's also operated within those sort of like resource constraints.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Cameron Anstee: But yeah, it's just. It's books that I think should exist. It's very often books that I wish I could have written, but I wish I could have like figured out how to write myself, and I'm pretty jealous that someone else did. But I can help, you know, make it a book and it's work that just holds my interest in in different ways.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I understand that mentality. So, kind of jumping off of, kind of like you publish what you find interesting, like.

Cameron Anstee: MMmmm.

Tamara Thompson: The next question is a little broad but like, what kind of works do you publish? So, are you more heavy in poetry, do you do fiction, or is that kind of a dabble if anything.

Cameron Anstee: Yeah, these days it's almost entirely poetry. There was a little bit of fiction in the early days of the press, and I also had a dream that it would publish nonfiction. I wanted to publish essays, you know, about small press or about poetry, or like bibliographic kind of projects and those have been harder to come by; whereas poetry is very easy to come by. You know, there's yeah, Canada and Ottawa like, with so many great, great manuscripts sitting there. It's also something that I feel better equipped, maybe creatively like to work with, to work with it on the page, to work with it in capacity as an editor when that's appropriate it. It has come to dominate more of the list, but you never know where that stuff is gonna go. I feel like the press has gone through sort of a series of different phases. And I-I would love to do more nonfiction in the future. I think fiction is maybe a little bit beyond the resources of the press. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. very, very understandable. I-I have my own press, and it is surprising how you sometimes just kind of find, you-you might have the intention of doing more, but poetry always finds a way just to sneak in and become the majority.

Cameron Anstee: Yeah, is it?

Tamara Thompson: It's just kind of like. Oh.

Cameron Anstee: And I would say that I think that the chapbook is very often the perfect mode of publication for poetry. I think fiction is really well served in magazine trade books, and I think poetry can be served very, very well in a trade book. But I think the chapbook is kind of like a natural habitat for a lot of-of poetry. It doesn't need to be hundred pages, or hundred and twenty pages, you know it can be eight pages, or twelve or twenty, you know it-it can be outside of the bounds of all these official ways that poetry is published and received, you know, like for a trade book in Canada. To get funding, you have to follow the UNESCO definitions. It has to be forty-eight pages. You have to print so many copies da-da-da. But with chapbooks it can be way less than that can be just as valid of publications. I think. I don't think all poetry is served well by being in a hundred-page collection.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree. I know my mother definitely agrees. It's the only way she truly enjoys poetry. She finds she'll just buy a ton of chapbooks that are poetry.

Cameron Anstee: That's great!

Tamara Thompson: Agree with both of you on that point. It's just a very nice accessible way to experience poetry. Also, many different types of po-like of poets.

Cameron Anstee: Absolutely, it's accessible. It's more affordable. I also think chapbooks do this really wonderful welcoming opening kind of gesture, where they show very plainly the ways in which they are made as objects. I think if-if you showed most people, you know, like a trade book like a perfect bound book or a hardcover book, it would be very hard for most people to make the leap to how, how it's made, like to imagine what equipment they would need, and what skill set, and what the actual steps of production would be. But when you show them, you know, four or five sheets of letter-sized paper that are folded in half and stapled or stitched or whatever other configuration the press can come up with, it becomes this thing that's very achievable in it's a lovely kind of radical way. I find it a very welcoming form, and it and you see it with sort of the renewal every few years of like new people starting their own presses. You come to these book fairs, and there's a stall works. But there's also, like a new crop periodically and it's because it is so. You can do it with nothing, right? You can have very limited time and money, and you can find ways to-to produce these books that feel handmade and personal, and really like suited to the-the material.

Tamara Thompson: Well, talking about the materials and stuff: what is the process from like submission to production, to actually getting the book

out there? You talked a little bit about the submission process, but I kind of want to get a fuller picture of what that is like for, for your press.

Cameron Anstee: Sure. Yeah. So, the-the entire operation happens in the office that I'm sitting in right now. I solicit, like we said, I solicit books from people. That can happen by email. It can happen in a book fair or to reading I do get queries like unsolicited queries, and I always read them. And I have taken books from an unsolicited query before; that has happened. But you know, sort of the official policy is that the submission needs to be solicited but once a book is, once, I think, I want to do a book. The-the writer and I have a conversation is usually by email, but it's very informal. The press doesn't have any official funding. The press doesn't have contracts or lawyers, or anything like that. We just talk about it. I explain the usual, you know, parameters, that the press operates within in terms of print run in terms of how many copies go to the author in terms of like the design process? And if we agree, like, if we're on the same page, then we move forward with the project. I'll typically make about eighty copies of each book these days, which is more than it used to be. The author gets twenty five percent of the run. So, they get twenty is their author copies. They can buy more from me at fifty percent off. I sell the books ten dollars, and any sales get recycled like back into the press. They pay for like the-the toner and the paper, and-and the thread and the needles, and like book fair table costs and coffee. Like, it just pays for itself in that way. I do all the design on my computer. It's-it's done with InDesign. I'm not great in InDesign, but I know enough to get you know the poem on the page. I do all the printing on a-a pretty crappy laser printer that I bought in 2009 for a hundred bucks. It's like an old HP black and white laser printer, and it has continued to just like chug along thousands and thousands of pages. It has cranked out for me. And I'm very grateful for that. Yeah, it's very lo-fi. There's-there's nothing.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Cameron Anstee: I briefly had a letter press, but I didn't have a time to learn how to use it. So, the press sort of reverted to laser printing and my, whatever design skills I happen to have and it-it carries long in that way because I found that it's sustainable, for I like the labor that's involved in it. I like the-the aesthetic that the press has landed on. I like the scope of it in terms of copies and distribution, and the and the relationships that I have writers throughout it all. And so that maintains it for me, feeling like a positive thing that I want to continue to do, and that I can continue to do in a way that's healthy for the present for me. And so that's, I feel very grateful to have found that balance it was a difficult balance to maintain at the end of the doctorate, as I'm sure you're finding it at the end of your masters. It can be really hard to find times to do those things. And I think, currently, I've got good balance. But yeah, so that, I mean, that's it-it's a very sort of closed ecosystem in that way. It's like me in this room doing it. I have a very kind and patient partner. Who, she's very, what's that like patient, but it's a-it's a kind of activity that takes up a lot of like physical space, right? Like.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, yeah.

Cameron Anstee: Books in the house, and it's an activity that takes up some like mental creative space time. And so, I think that you have to be mindful, too, of the way that it impacts people around you your life. And so, it's something that she has a, she's been very supportive of. She's helped me with design. Lots of times she sat at-at book tables with me at book fairs for countless hours over the last fifteen years. It's one of those things that to keep going you need to have people that support the work outside of your own, you know head. I've rambled a bit, but hopefully some of that-

Tamara Thompson: No, that's -

Cameron Anstee: I hope I answered your question.

Tamara Thompson: That makes, that makes a lot of sense to me. A lot of what it is for many people, myself included, is very small scale. I take over my parents' dining room table. We add in the extra planks and make it really big. I get my laser printer out, and it tells me it's too hot for the thirtieth time.

Cameron Anstee: Yeah, sounds familiar.

Tamara Thompson: I stuff everything under my grandmother's buffet; and when people come in, my parents say, oh, that's where the press is, and everyone looks at them. Funny, because it's just a bunch of boxes under their buffet. Yeah.

Cameron Anstee: Yeah, it's very familiar.

Tamara Thompson: How does the press make decisions? From the sounds of it, it's really just you pushing, this thing alone.

Cameron Anstee: It is. When I was an undergrad working with in/words, there would be like five or six or seven editors at a time which was great because we had to compromise. We had to work together. We had to, you know, balance what everyone wanted to do but at the same time you had to compromise, you had to balance everything, and so I was quite happy when I sort of struck out on my own. After my time with the magazine ended to have control in that way over the editorial decisions, over the general sort of aesthetic, over the amount of time I put into it. But it it's I also think that the role of the writer is like central and the relationship between the press and-and the different writers shapes the press as much as whatever decisions I make. It's people who have to, you know, like they have to trust the press with their work, which is a very valuable thing. And I try to never take for granted that people send me manuscripts, and that they want to, you know, like, wait for my slow process. Before a book shows up in the mail eventually. It's something that's, you know, no press can do anything without and as much as I'm the one who pushes it forward kind of materially. It's-it's push forward by people buying the books. It's pushed forward by people wanting to publish books with the press. It's pushed forward by people like you who are like interested in just these general questions. Right? Cause that's what the

small press is. It's this giant, amorphous kind of network of chapbooks and reading series, and-and readers and booksellers and-and trade books. Right? That's ecosystem two and-and academic research all of that kind of bundles this whole thing forward. And so, as I'm sure you understand, having your foot in like the research side of it and the production side of it. I feel very conscious of the way that all of those things have to-to coincide and-and share the space for it to be sustainable.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Where does the press sell their books? And like, how are they sold?

Cameron Anstee: So, there is a website. The press has a website, and there's a store linked through the website that is run through Esty. I did not have an online store in 2009 when I started. I remember having a discussion with Leigh Nash and Andrew Faulkner, who at the time ran a press, a press called the Emergency Response Unit in Toronto.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Cameron Anstee: They were a couple of years ahead of me getting going. And I said, oh, do you guys, like I saw you have an online store? Like, is it worth it? And their response was like, honestly, not really, like we sell a couple a year online. So, I set one up and had the same experience. I sold, you know, one or two online each year for the first few years, and but then it picked up in the way that all our online shopping did. So, the, this store online is a pretty big part of the sales now. I sell at book fairs predominantly the Ottawa Small Press Book fair, which happens twice a year. I do go to Toronto from time to time for the Meet The Presses in the literary market. It's a commitment, and it's like a resource commitment to come from Ottawa for that 'cause you throw in the costs of like travel and hotels, so I don't go there every year. But I love it when I when I get to. When the press was younger, I used to run events too, like we would often do a launch for each sort of couple of books, and so I would sell at readings. And today authors will often just bring their own books, or I'll show up with a stack than when they're doing a reading in Ottawa or somewhere nearby. So, readings, book fairs, websites and then the like great small press gift economy. A lot of books go back and forth in the mail or in person, just as-as gifts.

Tamara Thompson: so, I'm gonna change gears a little bit. Because you also were interested in talking a bit about your author perspective. Why did you decide to publish some like chapbooks for yourself?

Cameron Anstee: Hmm. So, I published a way too many; I don't know, like a handful of chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs.)

Cameron Anstee: When-when I was a student, because at in/words, we had, they gave us an office to this day, I don't know why they gave us an office, but they did and with the office came the office key which opened the photocopy room in the English department. So, we would go at like ten o'clock at night, when the building was empty and use all the stencils in this old risograph copier they had, and just like print off books. And so,

we had access to like free quote, unquote paper and printing and it was very, like, freeing to be able to, like, imagine ways to make books, and because we were all young, we were writing a ton. We always had material, you know. So, I published a lot of chapbooks just like they were under the name in/words, but it was me doing the work for the most part. After the first one or two-I need, should credit Peter Gibbon, Justin Million, and Nick Clain and David Emer-there's a lot of people, David Emery, Mark Zucklas (technical issue occurred) who are the team. But what am I saying? I had the resources, and I had the poems, and it was really fun to figure out how to do this, but at the same time it didn't take me very long to figure out like I need to slow down and publish less because the work is not aging well, you know? Like, it was very like early, enthusiastic student work that like mercifully, it was before social media and meaningful Internet. So, there's no record of it anywhere. Thereafter, I found chapbooks to be a really like liberating way to publish. I didn't have enough for a trade book yet. It'll take me a long time to get to a trade book, but I often felt I had ten pages or twelve pages that would make like a compelling object as a chapbook. And so, it was. It was always exciting to see it in print to experience the work differently in print and chapbook presses were so open to like young writers, students as they still are. And so, it was a great way to experience publishing. After God, twelve-ish years later I published my first trade book in 2018, and very often people-I'll go off on one of my like pet peeves here. Chapbooks really often get spoken of as like the minor leagues and trade books are the majors you're supposed to, like, grow out of chapbooks or graduate from them, or something, right? Like a stepping stone. And then you move on. And I think that's such, it does such a disservice, that attitude to Canada's history of publishing and chapbooks to the things that chapbooks have to offer. I think of them as very distinct chapbooks and trade books they, of course, inform one another, and they exist in like the lovely symbiosis. But I think that people are missing out if they're not looking at the chapbook world. If they're only focused on trade books, or if they publish a chapbook or two, and then once they get a trade book. They sort of turn their back on that world and decide they're done with chapbooks. I think it's a really like essential, vital part of the ecosystem and I feel proud to this day, when I publish chapbooks, I don't prioritize a chapbook or a trade book. I don't like privilege one of the other. It's just what's the right thing for the project. I think that's what I try to bring the decision.

Tamara Thompson: So, you would definitely create another chapbook again? Not necessarily, currently, but at some point. And would you work with a press outside of your own?

Cameron Anstee: Oh, absolutely. I have a chapbook coming imminently from Gaspereau.

Tamara Thompson: Oh! Wonderful.

Cameron Anstee: Yeah, it should be in the mail, like in the next few weeks. I'm-I'm very excited to get my hands on it. I publish chapbooks or little objects. Maybe they should be called leaflets, or something with Puddles of Sky Press.

Tamara Thompson: OH!

Cameron Anstee: I don't know if Michael Castile is on your radar.

Tamara Thompson: He was the one who I was emailing literally before we got on call.

Cameron Anstee: Fantastic. So, my! He's my favorite maker of chapbooks in Canada. Michael's the best. He's the nicest guy I love the work he does and so I've been lucky enough to publish a few with him over the years. I've published Baseline Press and above/ground press. Yeah, I love chapbooks. I'll always publish chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: Excellent. Yeah. So, switch it back. Kind of to the press a bit. What are some challenges that the press has faced?

Cameron Anstee: I think it very often for me is a question of like finding the time and-and the resources to put into the press, because it's something that, again, as I'm sure you know, could-could take up most of your time if you let it. But we all have lives outside of chapbooks, and you have to work, and you have to study, and, you know. Try to have a personal life and do all these other things, and so at different times, the press has gone into periods of like not-not any sort of official hiatus but just sort of like a quiet period. So, the transition at the start of my doctorate was, it slowed right down at the end it virtually stop like I made one or two things over a couple of years. It's sort of found a-a second wind or a third wind or fourth wind starting with the pandemic. Actually, that might be true for other presses. I'm not sure but I-I had time all of a sudden.

Tamara Thompson: That's one of the reasons why Whispering Wick exists at all. I was, there were no internship jobs, and I desperately needed one for my program. Because, you know, the pandemic had just, you know, hit that past spring, and I needed one in the fall.

Cameron Anstee: Of course.

Tamara Thompson: Crazy pipe dream of a chapbook press that I could run, that I could do with my friends, and it would solve all our problems. I said it aloud at some point, and someone said, "Hey, that's a good idea!"

Cameron Anstee: Yes, oh my god, yes.

Tamara Thompson: That's how it came to be. Because we had the time to get the roots in the ground.

Cameron Anstee: Who that's great it like. And-and there was sort of like a moment to reflect on it. And there was like a creative impulse. Maybe that was like building up pressure in that moment for a lot of people. So, it, finding time to plan for the press, finding time to do the physical labor, because, like I said, I do the work at home. So, it's not something where I design and send it off to a print shop like I run every copy off. I fold, every sheet of paper I have to thread the needles I have to number them. I have to, you know all of that work. And so, finding a balance to

do that is probably the biggest struggle. And then there are way, less interesting struggles like the paper that I like to use has been discontinued so I've-I've like stockpiled this paper, and I can see the supply dwindling I'll have to find new paper, probably in about a year. Similarly, like finding thread that, I like finding things to protect the books, all the sort of tedious online stuff like running the way.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Cameron Anstee: There's-there's all that sort of like day to day stuff that is way less compelling than like oh, designing the book and working with poet, and like talking to people about the book. That's the really exciting stuff. And then some of the struggles are just a very like you have to do it, all moving stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Practical things of why won't the printer do as I say? And why won't it fix itself?

Cameron Anstee: Oh yes. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Why won't it do what the Internet said?

Cameron Anstee: Yeah. Navigating the printer can really be something. In in the early days, I had this laser printer, and I had like a twenty-dollar photo printer. And I could get some color out of the photo printer. It-it died, and I replaced it. And then the replacement died. And I thought, okay, this black and white from here on out is fine.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Cameron Anstee: And I think the saving grace with the specific printer I have is that it's a manual duplex. So, it's a very simple machine. It's not manipulating the paper inside. It's not turning it over and printing the second side. So, it means I have to feed everything through twice. But it runs very quickly, and it doesn't have a lot of moving parts. And so, I bought it because I couldn't afford an automatic duplex at the time and I'm it's been one of those like stroke the blocks. I feel like it's really saved me a lot of frustration over the last fifteen years.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I'll-I'll tell you they haven't gotten better at the printer thing every time I get a new one, I feel like it's just gotten worse.

Cameron Anstee: Yes, yeah. And I, I recently had to update the operating system on my laptop. And I was so scared that, like the printer would be, it wouldn't speak to the laptop anymore. You know that I was gonna have to like, retire the printer, but it's-it's hanging in there.

Tamara Thompson: That's good. So, what are some challenges that you face as an author then? Because we've talked a bit about the press side of things. But what are some challenges that you faced as an author? Not even just in just in Canadian publishing, but I guess in general.



Cameron Anstee: Oh, that's a question. It took me a long time to-to get a trade book published, but I think that was just my own, it was just my own work needed to develop. It wasn't like people were slamming doors in my face or anything. It was that I'm quite slow. My rate of production is very slow, and-and sometimes with that the rate of like development is also very slow. And so, I think it's taking a long time to get, sort of up to speed and I would say the big thing really is it's not dissimilar to the press. It's as I think anyone will tell you like right, it really takes a lot of time. And it takes a lot of time, just I'm like sitting there and doing the writing. But also, how much of all of our writing practices is like a reading practice and thinking practice. I mean, I think it's just been trying to figure out that same balance, and it's as much as the press kind of oscillates like this sort of work life balance my personal life, the-the writing and the press share the same part of that spectrum. I-I think of them as like inextricable, like the writing, and-and my own writing and Apt. 9 Press are-are part of the same small press practice that I am engaged in and so, when the press is more active, my writing is lower. When my writing is like taking up more of my time, the press is less active, and so it's a sort of constant oscillation between prioritizing my personal work versus like the press, versus is this lovely thing because you get out of your own head. You're like focused on someone else's work. You're supporting the community in a different way. And so, I think it's just figuring out how to balance very limited, like fixed resources like we all have, between those competing activities as much as they're part of the same practice. There's still activities that require like an hour here, two hours there, and you have to pick and choose what you do. But I would say that in the face of all that, I found chapbook presses to be just like the most welcoming lovely people and persons at book fairs, by email. I hope this is your experience as you're reaching out to people to have these discussions. But I did the same thing through my MA during my grad studies. A lot of just contacting people cold about, can I talk to you about your press or this thing that you did? Or I'd love to hear more about your writing, and I was almost universally met with, just like positive responses. And that's something that I certainly talk up to just the small press like you're not gonna spend your life making chapbooks and publishing poetry for no money. If you're jerk you know, like, gonna be people, you get enough people in a room. There's gonna be some people that that aren't that nice. But I-I would say, by and large, if you're committing like a meaningful part of your life to this sort of practice. Then you're probably like a positive like kind, welcoming person. And you're gonna be very supportive of like the next generations coming along. I think that's one of the most important parts of the small press.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I agree. I was worried when I first started if anyone would talk to me before I even entered my program. I talked to Paul Vermeersch. And I'm like, do you think anyone will talk to me? He's like, I don't think you'll have a problem. I'm like, okay I'll do this then.

Cameron Anstee: They will talk and talk, and you'll be sick of it.

(Both laugh.)

Tamara Thompson: But it, it's been a very positive experience.

Cameron Anstee: Good.

Tamara Thompson: Moving on to kind of maybe like, what did this kind of publishing teach you as maybe an editor and author, or even as a publisher? Just kind of what, has it taught you.

Cameron Anstee: Okay, I'll try to be- (technical issues occurred) about this, but it's as an as an, a poet, as a writer, chapbooks taught me a lot about my own work. As soon as you see something in print, you know there it is you have to live with what you put in print. So, I think it, it taught me very early on like slow down, and not rush things into print, because you'll have to live with them. As a, a lot of the things I would say I learned as a writer and editor in form my life as-as a writer. And so, if you're publishing, or if you're soliciting work, you're exposed to all kinds of people, you're exposed to all kinds of different work, you see different ways that writers approach their own editing and see different, like stylistic you know, poetic moves from-from different people. You-you see how people carry themselves in the small press community, and you decide who you want your models to be like, who-who are the people you're going to model your own practice on. You learn a lot about making books which I'm sure you understand. The more chapbooks you look at, the more like weird small press leap, and broadsides and-and objects you encounter, though the more you become aware of the range of possibility out there. It doesn't just have to be couple sheets folded and stapled, you know it could take all manner of forms and sort of the richness of that, the like infinite possibility for these books to look different ways, or to-to adapt to-to the works that are inside of them. Consistently amazed by walk here in a small press Book Fair is just one of my favorite things to do, even though it can be hazardous to-to one's bank account.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Cameron Anstee: And I would say, I've learned the like, how essential that community is to, to like one's individual artistic practice, but to-to the literary history that you're studying, that I've studied the only reason that there are small press book fairs and chapbook publishers and-and reading series are because people sit down do the work. You know, they decide it's where they want to put their energy, their like limited energy. And there's like a-a long-intertwined history of-of all these presses and people and writers and booksellers and audience member readers, and whoever else that collectively are the small press And so I think it's taught me an awareness of that history. and I try to-to bring that to all of my engagements with what I try to be very mindful of that. We're just like we're like a little, we're a step in the whole thing. We're just keep trying to keep the ball in the air. So there-there is that community, for whoever comes along next that they find some sort of like living, breathing, small press community, and-and the whole thing keeps going forward that way.

Tamara Thompson: I'm gonna ask you a little bit more of a direct question. But we've been kind of talking a bit about it in certain sections, but

basically just a little more direct about why our chapbooks important to you?

Cameron Anstee: Hmmm, I love the chapbook as like as a unit of work. I think we talked about that a bit already, as you said, that it's not a trade book. I think it's very personal, I think, I love how a jabber press reflects it's-it's editors, and it's publishers like they're all so unique. Walk around and book theirs and-and Rob McLennan above/ground press table looks very different than Mr. Ross's Proper Tales press. And that looks so different than you know Gap Riot press from Dani Spinosa and Kate Siklosi and my table. It's different. And Marilyn Erwin here in Ottawa is shrieking violet press hers looks different like there's-there's-there's so many chapbook publishers in Canada, and they're all like unique and interesting. And I'm just so compelled by like that work that that people do. I love it as a unit of poetry. I think that just make a very blanket statements I think a lot of books poetry are too long, and I'm certain that mine are among those. I think probably ten pages fifteen pages twenty pages is like a really good unit for poetry. And I think chapbooks are the place that you can encounter that. And I'm really happy that they're there as an outlet. I also love that they're limited. You know that maybe there's fifty or twenty or one hundred, or whatever I like that there are these objects that are not accessible forever to every person under the sun, you know, like, it's okay for some things to be finite and to be local and-and like, restricted to certain communities, or to circulate only in the gift economic kind of way. You know, I think that that can be a really beautiful thing to-to narrow a maybe narrow has negative connotations. But just to have, like a focused like a concrete community, you know, like you like, if you make eighty copies of the chapbook, there's a good chance that you're gonna know the hands that book goes into, in the again, sweeping generalizations, but like the Internet, isn't like it bottomless, infinite place. And we have this idea like, for twenty years I've been hearing people say, everything's on the Internet you know, but like I have things on my shelves in this room that are not on the Internet. You know, there's five, there's five of them in the world. They're not on the Internet or there's fifty and-and you know, like, I know where it's documented, that every coffee is in a certain person's hand like, I think that's really nice to have these things that are outside of maybe the dominant way that we experience the world today and chapbooks are one of those and they're so personal. They show you who made them how they made them. They offer that up, I think, as a kind of gift.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. We're getting into some of my favorite questions that I've been enjoying asking people so far, and I find it so interesting to hear why people enjoy the chapbook. But why do you think chapbooks are important to-or are Canadian chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? And if so why are? Why not? And you've been touching on this a bit. But again, just to have a more direct way of answering it.

Cameron Anstee: Sure, I-I think a lot of the most exciting and interesting writing in Canada, whether you know poetry or fiction or nonfiction, I think a lot of the most interesting writing is happening in the small press and-and in the chapbook form. There's things that would be wildly, like, unreadable or impossible to publish in a trade book. There's things

that maybe you-it's not possible to find a big enough audience to justify a trade. Maybe there's something that it should only be ten copies. And that's great, that's like beautiful and lovely. I think that an really important role of chapbooks is that like you asked me the question earlier, what have you learned? Right? They're they are a testing ground. They're a place to learn how to be a writer in the Small Press, how to be a publisher, how to be an editor. The-the sort of barriers to entry are really low cause you can make them on the cheap. You can figure out how to do it. You can steal paper like-like we did English department at-at poor Carl University in my early days doing this. It's something that you can, it's a form that will welcome you in, and then you can turn it into anything that you want to be. You can make it fit your community. You can make it set a kind of writing that you want to see. You can make it fit a kind of physical production that you find compelling. It's incredibly malleable in a way that trade books just aren't, because, like we've discussed, there's trade books are sort of beholden to all these things like funding and reports and-and rules about metadata and length and print runs. And all this stuff like there's a structure. And it's an important structure. And I-I think Canada has a really excellent small press trade ecosystem as well. But it's bound in all these official sort of ways that chat books never, ever are. and I think the free-so, the freedom of that is totally essential to developing interesting experimental, radical kind of I'm writing to developing editors and publishers who believe in those as sort of ideals of-of publishing and writing in this country. Yep! Again, a ram-rambling answer.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Cameron Anstee: But you know. But I guess that's yeah. That's-that's what I feel.

Tamara Thompson: Do not feel bad for rambling at all. It's-it's where your mind allows you to go to different places. And data is data at the end of the day, and what you've been talking about has been very interesting, so don't fret.

Cameron Anstee: Alright.

Tamara Thompson: Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way.

Cameron Anstee: Oh, wow! I wouldn't know how to, I wouldn't know how to answer that, I mean yes, of course, in in all kinds of ways but...

Tamara Thompson: Hmmm.

Cameron Anstee: I don't know how off the top of my head articulate those it-it reflects Canada's literary history and the small press history. I think there's a very proud history of chapbooks in Canada. I think people more articulate than me could point to the ways that these communities have changed in the last twenty years to reflect a lot of the conversations happening in society. It's a lot less you know, straight and white and male than it used to be, which is the best thing like that it is changing sorry.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Cameron Anstee: You know I think it's an incredibly like diverse and-and exciting community, and in a way that lots of places and communities in Canada are. Wow... I don't-I don't know how to. Yeah, I'm not... that's what I'll have to reflect on in a more formal way. I'm not sure off the top of my head.

Tamara Thompson: That's totally fine. It's a very large question, and the idea of a lot of these questions is to let you interpret them to the level that you feel comfortable answering them, and that one is definitely a biggie. But it's-it's very interesting. And one of the reasons why I put it on there, because I keep getting a lot of very, varied answers which has been amazing, and also some consistencies throughout it.

Cameron Anstee: Hmmm.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you. Cause it's like there are many different ways that you can take it like, does it reflect Canadians? You know, does it reflect just the reader, the writer, just the publisher, or just like the public, right? And I-I find it interesting how people answer it. Some people have answered it in the wider sense of the world like, how does it reflect on like the world stage and stuff like that in comparison to like other countries.

Cameron Anstee: Hmmm.

Tamara Thompson: It's-it's a fun one. I've-I've enjoyed the responses I've gotten so far.

Cameron Anstee: That's great. Yeah, it must be interesting to-to see them all. I look forward to reading all the transcripts when, when this is done.

Tamara Thompson: Well, thank you. What does this type of publishing offer other types of publishing can't? And again, we've talked a bit about it, but you know, kind of what does it offer that you know trade publishing, or even like smaller scale publishing can't, and maybe vice versa.

Cameron Anstee: Yeah, I-I think there's a freedom and-and a malleability that comes with it that is difficult to achieve in a trade world. I think that you can do things quickly in a really personal hands-on way. I think like I-I when the previous questions, like the-the barriers to entry are quite low, so it's very welcoming. You don't have to be rich. You don't have to find a benefactor or beg the Canada Council for money to make chapbooks, you know. I think, well, I mean cost of living is through the roof these days, so it's-it's probably a bit harder than it was, but it can be done pretty cheap which is really nice for a kind of artistic practice, for a publishing practice that is engaged with like a community. You don't have to, you don't need formal training to do it, you know, you don't need a lot of fancy machines or resources. And I think that is really vital to having, like a vibrant, you need to have something like that that people can do in their own personal way. But that is also doable

you know, like, yeah, we talked about earlier on, I can hold a chapbook. And most of the time, I think people could see and imagine, like, okay, so these would be the steps to do it. I think it really shows very plainly how it is made and that can be very liberating. If there's someone who's interested in and pursuing that.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Cameron Anstee: Yeah, that's probably what I would say.

Tamara Thompson: Excellent. What's something you wish people knew about Canadian publishing something that you wish that maybe the average Canadian would know, or even maybe the average, like, foreigner?

Cameron Anstee: Wow... well, I mean I'll-I'll return, I'll maybe step away from chapbooks for a second, and I'll go back to some of my academic life which my research was focused on independent booksellers in Canada. So, I always take the opportunity when I'm given that to-to plug the value of local bookstores and independent bookstores of not Amazon, of not Indigo you know, not chapters.

Tamara Thompson: Definitely not those ones.

Cameron Anstee: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

Cameron Anstee: If you're lucky enough to live in a city or a town that has one or more small bookstore. Go there; buy your books there. I think if you're a reader, you're probably someone who can be like patient, for example, like-like you're willing to sit down for ten hours to read a book, or whatever you can get it from Amazon in two hours, or whatever they offer. Now, your local bookstore, it might take them three or four days to get the book in. But you're putting your money in your community and you're supporting someone who's like objective is to sell books in the community like what a beautiful thing, bookstores are essential to communities in so many ways. And they are the like the great supporters of the small press in Canada in terms of like official distribution. You know, chapters orders, a Zillion copies, and then they return all but two of those, and it wreaks absolute havoc on the publishing landscape, whereas your local bookstores are not doing that. They're hand selling these books. They're supporting the presses they've been supporting for decades. So, I would say that Canada has like a-a robust ecosystem of independent booksellers. But it's always fragile, insofar as people don't go there and buy the books it will continue to be there. So, if you want to live in a place with independent bookstores, support the ones you have. There's no small press without them. In Canada's like literary culture, but also just like its culture, would be in a much worse place without like unheralded labor of all these booksellers over decades and decades.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, I-I agree, I always encourage my students to go to our local second-hand bookstores because we have many here in Peterborough, but also-

Cameron Anstee: Yup.

Tamara Thompson: To Take Cover Books in East City, because it is one, a amazing bookstore run by lovely people. But they do readings. And yeah, they support the local queer community and local indigenous authors, and local-Jim Johnston actually did a reading there not too long ago. Like it is a lovely environment to go into. And they have quite a nice variety. And I tell my students, if they're interested in becoming, because many want to become writers, I say, integrate yourself in that community. It does not have to be the lonely writer by themselves. That is not an experience that most successful writers have, or should they feel they have to have. There's a ...

Cameron Anstee: Yeah

Tamara Thompson: ... community of people here who want to engage with you, so go engage.

Cameron Anstee: Yes. Breathe.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Cameron Anstee: Totally and like the small press, is that community cause like internationally, you know, renowned authors who sell millions of copies and they travel the world, you're gonna have a hard time sending them an email, you know but Jim Johnstone, you can send Jim a note; hey, Jim, I liked your book, and you'll have a really lovely conversation, and you'll be like welcomed into that community. It's like the-the chapbook in the small press world is welcoming in all those ways, and it's like human scale.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Cameron Anstee: It's not, it's not larger than life. It's like, it's very much of the-the scale that we all live and operate.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, no I-I do have to ask the-the question that was probably creeping up at some point, maybe, in your mind. But it's the sad one of why do you think that most small presses and micro presses close up shop?

Cameron Anstee: I'm sure there's like a thousand different reasons for a thousand presses. I think it's very often resources. I think it's just you know, like we had trouble with finding the money or the time to-to put out the next book, or to do the work as often as we wanted, or you know, I had competing priorities. I had my own writing. You know, family obligations or work, life circumstances change. It's-it's not like a simple thing to keep going for ten years or twenty years or thirty years. It's something that's gonna adapt and change if-if you continue to do it. And we have a lot of examples in Canada people continue to do it. But yeah, like, sometimes people run out of steam. Sometimes life conspires against them when they can't keep it going. Sometimes health issues, a it's, it's always sad when a press decides to-to stop. But you know you appreciate the work that they did while they were going, and you try to document it

and remember it if you have the time to do that, and then you read the books.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. How and why are you still keeping this going?

Cameron Anstee: You know, it's it just still engages me like, I'm just still interested. I get excited when I open manuscripts. I really enjoy doing the design, the layout, and the production. I find it very relaxing work to do. And then I love to sit at the table at a book fair with all the books in front of me, and think like, oh, I made all these and-and these people trusted the press, and-and then I get to just talk them up to people walking by. It's the best I love doing it. And I have, I have a nice balance right now. I have, you know, the time and resources to give to it, which is, is even better to have something that you like, and that you can, that you have the capacity to do. It's great.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What's something important about D.I.Y. press history that you wish people knew, like specifically?

Cameron Anstee: Well, I would say in, oh, this this is gonna stick in my head this question. I'll-I'll I'm gonna give an answer, and then for the next few days I'm like oh, I should have said that! But I will say that.

Tamara Thompson: You can send me an email, and I will one hundred percent take it.

Cameron Anstee: Alright. So, there was a time in Canada when this division between chapbooks and trade books was not like an active kind of categorical thing for writers in the small press. So, I want to say 1970 bpNichol wins the-the Governor General's award, and it's not for a book. It's for four or five different publications from small presses. And there's in that bundle something we would call chapbook today from Nelson Ball. We flower pressed like a box thing. There's-there's all kinds of like weird objects, and he wins the Governor General's award for this like body of work in the previous year. And I always think that's such a lovely moment, because it's saying like, I'll zero in on the chapbook. But it's just a book. It's a publication. And today we call it a chapbook, and it denotes this thing that's like shorter. And it's not officially all that stuff. But in 1970 that wasn't like a question that you know Nelson Ball, or Daphne Marlon or bp Nichol or Phyllis Webb was like particularly concerned about. These things were just books.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Cameron Anstee: And I think maybe the, like, the division is artificial in kind of like a spiritual way. But it's-it's very material in other ways like we've talked about like funding and length and all that stuff. There's a very like material ways that that's an active division. But in the small press it's really just, these are all books and publications, and-and the artificiality of the division. I think, bleeds into this idea that, like you do your-your junior chapbooks, and then you move on to your like big adult book. And-and I think that does a real disservice to-to the like, yeah, the quality and range of-of writing and publishing that's happening in Canada, I think that that look at the small stuff because



it's really rewarding and unique and interesting. And it's probably happening in your town or your city, and-and the people doing it are-are probably awesome and would love to talk about. Track it down if you can.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What's something that you wish people knew about your history? And that could be the history of the press, as an author you can answer both, but it's kind of open for you.

Cameron Anstee: Oh... Ummm... I have no idea. I don't know how to answer that question. I really am at a loss like I feel very like welcomed and supported, and the community like in Ottawa and further field in Canada. I get lots of opportunities, I guess, to talk about myself. So, you know, like a written record of what I think about what I do. Yeah, like, I don't know. I'll-I'll just double down and say that, like I really care about this with work that I'm doing. And I-I'm incredibly grateful that people continue to trust me with their manuscripts and their books. Getting to do that is really it means as much to me as-as publishing my own writing like it's really, it makes me incredibly happy here, and proud.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Are there any additional comments that you'd like to make something? Maybe we didn't touch that like the people just really need to know.

Cameron Anstee: I don't know. Like I, we've been talking, I've been like pulling books off the shelf so that I can send you a list of things. I feel like we've covered a lot of ground. What do I wish people knew? I don't know... I-I think that, I like, I guess, like I'm repeating myself, but you can carve out any corner that you think should exist in the world chapbooks, small press it in like a broader sort of way. It's really the doors are wide open. There's no gatekeeper. There's no one is, gonna tell you, you can't do it that way, or it's not allowed in that, you know particular world or whatever. If you have an idea for how to make a book, or the kind of the books you want to see, and-and you can't find it being done just like, go and start it. You know, if your student, you know egg and steel and bore, or whatever you could find in your department. There's probably funding on campus that you could get it, your hands on like the you know student Association, or your department, or whatever. Go and ask for five hundred bucks, because you can do a lot with it. But yeah, like, it's, it's wide open. And if it if you find it compelling, and you have an idea, just see where it goes. Cause if you don't do it, no one else is gonna do it and the whole thing keeps going and-and stays up in the air because people enter into it. So, it's however small you might think the contribution that you could make is it's totally essential. Like it's two thousand small gestures that make up small press, you know, in Canada any given day. It's not one or two big names. It's-it's every single person who's doing any of the work, whether it's writing, editing, publishing, grab your reading series, running bookstore. Sitting in the audience at a reading just like putting your body in the space and listening. It's it couldn't be more important all that work. So go and do it.

Tamara Thompson: Wonderful. I'm gonna just stop the recording, if that's the end of your additional comment.

Cameron Anstee: Yes, perfect.

Gary Barwin

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson. The date is Wednesday, the 29<sup>th</sup> of May; it is 3:06 pm. And a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant could drop out by the deadline of a week after the interview. This interview is for small press, author, and traditional press.

Gary Barwin: Hi, yup! My name is Gary Barwin. I have been involved in small press from my own small press Serif of Nottingham, and I'm one of the organizers on the committee for Meet the Presses and I've been involved in the Toronto Small Press Fair when it was called that for forty years. I'm based in Hamilton, Ontario and my pronouns are he/him and I have as my-my titles in terms of my-my, my things that I've done. I'm a- I'm a writer, I'm poet, publisher, editor, organizer, and I'm a musician and multim-and multimedia artist.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely, thank you. So, I guess we'll just get into it. Why did the small press start?

Gary Barwin: (Laughs) Well, I mean, I-I think I-I can speak to maybe like why it started in in in Canada. And I think, actually, that makes sense it relates to how also how it happened historically, I mean, I think it was a way of publishing and distributing work outside of the power structures and the limitations both of-of money and of the kinds of restrictions of, well, restrictions of the market or restrictions of the dominant society as to what kind of discourse is-is permissible. It also allows publication to happen right away quickly, so that I think I mean, I'm thinking, even like of the-the broadside ballads of the earlier chapbook makers where they could, someone's getting hanged, they could respond right away. Similarly, somebody writes a poem, and they want it to be, to either to respond to something or just they want it out-out there, and they can bypass the-the normal time restrictions and the, and also that it can be the, I guess, the means of production and distribution can be put in the hands of the people who are creating it so direct. The poets can create, direct, or the whatever writer can create it directly or-or just any, I mean, it's-it's accessible. It doesn't cost very much. It's accessible to anybody who wants to, who has access to any kinds of any kind of publishing which even mean, may mean well, nontraditional publishing, like even handwritten, or-or letter-or rubber stamp, or any anything. And also, I think that it allows something more similar to artist books; so idiosyncratic publication methods that aren't available or aren't accessible because of for a variety of reasons, money included so that particular kinds of work and lengths of work design of work can-can happen. So, I think those are, those are some of the reasons. Sort of its combination of kind of political, social, cultural. Amongst other things.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely. How did the press that you work on and work with-how did those start? Because you have your own small one that you do?

Gary Barwin: Yeah. Yeah, because I've been involved in my own, but also a whole network of mostly Toronto based ones which and I got for me. It was very simple that it was, it was access to community. I was actually in, taking a creative writing course at York University. And there was this

thing called Meet the Presses, where people were publishing chapbooks in a kind of in a small little mini book fair sort of setting, and it was kind of a community. And so, I published something as part of the class, and then went to exhibit my wares at this place, but it became an entree into a community both of publishers and of and of writers. So, in that sense it was, and I-I mean as a writer, too. So, I have a publication that is under my control, and I can be publishing work that is of interest to me. And I can, and by publishing other people, or by being part of that whole micro economy, micro culture I then could find my-my scene, I guess. So, that's- that's where that that's I started from there and then it also, then I connected with people who are doing that in other plate other places through selling or sharing books or through little magazines, or through kind of mail art, like connections that way.

Tamara Thompson: Nice. So, you were speaking a little bit on how you kind of discovered this type of publishing. But could you get into maybe like a couple of more specifics of like the aha moment where you're like, "oh, this is what a zine or a chapbook is?"

Gary Barwin: Ummm, yeah, because I think that I had the experience, I was in grade six. I made a little chapbook for the school white elephant fair and because everybody was like selling muffins or-or macrame, or some such, so I mean, and-and so in that sense, I had again as a little kid I had the sense of I could write a story; I could illustrate it. I could make it into something, and then I could, I could distribute it. So, I got a sense of that. But what I, what I didn't get, so I got a sense of like, yeah, you can make some writing and make it into a thing that is a has like exchange like you could give it to somebody as a formal thing rather than, oh, yeah, I written the story. Okay well, where do I access it? So, the small press that, like the Meet the Presses, the difference, I think, was that there was a kind of a community. So, that I, it was actually a, it was part I was entering a discourse or a dialogue that I could, that there was a group. So, once I brought my little book down to the, my chapbook down to the-the fair is like, "oh, there's people who are interested in what I'm doing." That I-I'm they're doing similar things in terms of publishing, and even aesthetically. And it you're-you, I had entered into that little, that little scene, and-and I had, I had a position by virtue of being a writer and a publisher, and a, and as a reader, too, I think. So, that I guess that was the aha moment like oh, I see how-how writing can connect and can be it has sort of social currency, social, literary, what whatever, however, you wanna construe that as currency in the sense of being part of the discourse. Part of this-this discussion. So yeah. And so that was, I don't know. I was nineteen or something.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Gary Barwin: So, yeah, so, yeah. And so that was the beginning tip for me of being involved in that whole, in that whole world.

Tamara Thompson: I'm gonna ask you a little bit about your press that, like you run and make things with, that is your press. What is the editorial philosophy or maybe the press's goal?

Gary Barwin: Yeah. So, in the, I mean in the beginning, I did a lot of both, mostly just public-self-publishing, publishing my own works in, very, in smallish editions, like fifty or one hundred, and but also, they were small books that they had maybe the idea was to design a book that a chapbook that that was the right kind of shape design for that one particular piece, so I was interested in-in-in that. I'm interested in how, so part of it was to have my work be part of this discourse that was sort of part of, but also to think about how-how, what is the place of publication? So sometimes I did things; like, there was a JW. Curry had a through his Curved Hands Press had a had a one cent editions, so I did things like making little books, but you get a penny along with it. They cost a cent but then you get the penny back if you, if you bought the book or I sold them by weight one time, or sort of play with the idea of value, and you know how much; what is the value? As a commodity versus the value of the writing or as a value of, you know the-the work put into it, or any of that sort of part of that was playing with that. Being aware of it. Sort of social position, I think, and then la-the last, I don't know, like the last ten years I've-I have, I'd be more quite sporadic in terms of publishing, but I have included a lot more. I-I included other people, as I guess, I have many more publishing opportunities myself and my work, is it-and also, I would say, there's a significant difference now, because of the online. So, part being part of the discourse being part of distribution being part of discussions, I'm able to sort of migrate some of the function that I, of that online, plus if I want. But if I want beautiful books, other people make more, have been making beautiful books with my work. So, I'm able to do that. So, part of what I've thought about changing it is that I met people who haven't had, that haven't had the chance to be published. So, I published a lot of people just beginning writing or people just beginning publishing, I should say, and-and also having them be part of that kind of discussion that my press has been able to be part of. So, that's been a little bit different, as well as still publishing some my own-own things. I do feel that some of what my work has been in the press has changed, both because it's a presence of a lot of other small presses now who are doing that work. And plus, as I said the-a whole online world, both of social media and a blogs and of websites. And that's-also I'm thinking of that as a kind of small press publishing as well and even in terms of how it subverts mainstream like post, you know, posting visual poems on Facebook is, in a way, is subverting what Facebook really wants you to do with Facebook, which I, you know, or-or any of them. So, which I really, I'm interested in.

(Technical error occurred. Meet the Presses was brought up and is what Gary is discussing in the next lines.)

Gary Barwin: -two primary things that we do. We run a-a yearly book fair the Toronto in-in the literary market. So, we run, run-we run that in Toronto, even though many of our people are not people, of people, in many of the presses, and many of the organizers are not in Toronto. We've-we've run it in Toronto area. Most we have hitherto done it by invitation. So, we invite presses. We look at what presses are interesting, and we invite them. The other thing that we do is we administer the bp Nichol Chapbook Award. And so that's sort of being part of our-our responsibility, and they're kind of obviously related to both about promotion of small press and-and chapbooks, and I would also say, kind of under the spirit of

Toronto and bp. And the sort of small press world that-that I came out of, and that many of our, you know, many of the, I think many people have inherited from that world that was based in like Toronto and Vancouver, I guess, with bp and bill bisset and those-those people.

Tamara Thompson: Well, what kind of work does your small press publish like does it lean more poetry or?

Gary Barwin: I have done, I guess, mostly poetry but-but also, but also visual, like, which includes visual-visual work. It includes like hybrid work and in-in-in, sometimes I was interested in also publishing things that were that included, both because that's something also that, especially in the past having poetry and fiction and together was not something that was, that was not done for a variety of publishing reasons. And so, I was interested in-in-in that. And a lot of it was very small deliberately, because to have one little one little poem, or one little, short story and a tiny little book is a different way of conveying is a different way of publishing.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Gary Barwin: It's interesting. Also, I should say that when I look back 'cause it's been a while that some of the-the means I've used are-are a really quaint like dot matrix printers that were like, then they were the kind of the the-the most advanced thing I could get for my own desktop, as you know, as-as an independent writer. I did do have some things typeset. But mostly I was using on my own computer or a photocopier, or, you know, using these kinds of the means available to and trying to be playful with-with that.

Tamara Thompson: So, from like submission to editing, to production, to getting the book into people's hands: what's that whole process like? It's a biggie of a question.

Gary Barwin: So, unlike many small presses, because mine is deliberately just, sort of small and casual that it most, it's been primarily by invitation for people to publish. So, I ask people for a manuscript. Or sometimes we have a discussion of somebody I know when we I end up publishing them. And then so, then usually I-I-I would, I look at the work, decide what's going to go in it within consultation with the writer, and we do editing and then I make some kind of design for the, for the book, for the, and for the layout, and for and images and then, yeah, and then produce it again, using kind of deliberately low tech means like a copy shop rather than fine paper or anything like that for the most part. And-and also for the most part, my distribution is being face to face. People have mail; I mail stuff to people by request, but mostly at book fairs. I have these books that I then, that I sell directly to people. I mean, and again it's possible now to just make a website with PayPal and be, do up the whole online, which it was less possible in the past. So, it wasn't something I-I did like advertising, or anything.

Tamara Thompson: So, it sounds like for the most part the press is just all you. So how do you usually make decisions for the press?

Gary Barwin: Again, I mean, I guess two reasons. One is, I have started publishing people I feel that haven't got enough attention or don't have the, it's harder access for them for some reason, you know. They're just not, they're not putting themselves out there as much when I see their work, and I'm able to publi-I'm able to publish it. That's been something sort of it's-it's kind of just give them a, you know, like a leg up to start just to kind of in in encouragement that way. That's one of the decisions. One of the reasons things I do sometimes with mine. It's something that seems particularly relevant or because I-I often wait till close to the time it's gonna be sold so I can make something that I'm currently excited about and want to share first whatever reason hit it's relevant, or it just feels something work that's interesting or exciting to me at that moment. And-and so in that way, it's also a possibility for to do something that's experimental in the sense of trying something rather than it, you know, only doing the stuff that's safe. I'm able to put stuff out that I think, okay, I'm not entirely sure about some of this stuff. I mean, I-I think it's working, but I mean I don't, I'm not waiting for it to sort of season and see what you know what it looks like two years later I'm able to just, you know, things that I think are sort of feel hot at the moment.

(Technical difficulties occurred).

Tamara Thompson: So, I think I was able to get the full length of the end of that. So where does your press usually like sell their books? You were saying that it's mostly in person at fairs. But you said a little online. Could you expand on that?

Gary Barwin: Yeah, I mean, I have, I mean again through presence, through social media. So, you know, posting about the book on social media. Like all the usual, like Twitter and Facebook and Instagram and Twitter and so I've had, and I've had people like direct email inquiries from people. Mostly, however, like the Meet the Presses, there's-I've been at some other fairs that I've been involved in there, some in Hamilton, that there's a Zine- Zinposium in Hamilton, and Sharp Words Book Fair, which has happened recently, is also a Hamilton-based one. And also at readings, too, I've done. I-when I do readings, I-I often have those books, and I either sell them or-or give them away or give them away with my other books that people, other-other books that people have bought like bigger books. And also, yeah, I should say there's and there's some also some stores, too. I've had them at as well, I should say.

Tamara Thompson: Like-like local stores.

Gary Barwin: Yeah, like, I mean, over in-in the past. I've had them at yeah, some of some local stores and at Art Metropolitan Toronto, which has stock, small press things and, yeah, some local store, local bookstores here. And even there was, there's now a bookstore, but it used to just be an art shop that I used to have them displayed at. So that's another place that they've been and occasionally, just like a street fair. Hamilton has a bunch of street fairs, and I put, a put up a table and sold-sold books mostly to people's confusion. But, you know, it's sort of part of the kind of part of the goal for people to-to see it. I think it's interesting. I would say that now that there's sort of self publishing as a kind of, I

don't know, the-the, what was vanity publishing? What is self publishing through like Lulu and those kinds of things where people are publishing often genre books that maybe would have had a place in in commercial publishing? But they're choosing for a variety of reasons, lack of access to publish it themselves, which-which I think is different than doing experimental small press books. It-there's a different, it's a different D.I.Y. aesthetic and different kind of, they're-they're lot more, they're-they're much more because they're experimental sometimes that they don't have they wouldn't have a place as-as likely. So, they think there's a distinction.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, yes, I-I agree. So, I'm gonna move on to more of your stuff, as like you as an author and stuff like that. Why did you publish chapbooks yourself personally, like your own work?

Gary Barwin: But in the, in the beginning it was as just as a way of-of getting it out there, but also as a way of being part of a the small press community, and as, and as way of kind of being able to explore both publishing, but also the actual work itself, because I could try things out in in my little community, and I was kind of being part of the, as I said, part of the scene, like part of the discourse in the scene I guess. So, it felt like I was in conversation with, because I even if I had published something in a in a magazine or a journal often it, I wouldn't have. I wouldn't know what people thought. I wouldn't be, feel like it was a conversation, because it would go out into the world, and I wouldn't know what how it felt. You know how people felt about it, whereas if I published in my own smaller community, I had some, I had, I had feedback and had conversations. And yeah, and so that was, that was a motivation. And latterly, I still continue to publish my own work, but also in the small press other sorry I publish my own press, but I also publish a lot with other small presses across the world both because I can be part of a particular kinds of conversations, and also particular interest groups like visual poetry or-or that kind of thing. So, I'm able to speak to the people who are interested in that in-in that community like there's a small press I publish with out of Sweden, Tim Classit press which does-they go to all these book fairs in Europe, and I don't have access to that. And so, I'm part of that kind of the people who are interested in that kind of, in that kind of work for example. So, I continue. And so, I do that even as a as another thing that I do, in addition to other kinds of publishing like I have published novels with Random House. So that's but those are novels that Random House will publish. They're not publishing my visual poetry or my, you know, experimental stuff. So, I'm able to find a-find a publisher and find a community and find an audience in the right place. So, I'm matching the work. They're matching the work with the publishing situation.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, would you work with small chapbook presses again? Like, it sounds like you're already doing that.

Gary Barwin: No, I continue to. Yeah, no, I do. I still do.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Gary Barwin: I still do.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Gary Barwin: Like I remember oh, actually, you know what I'm going to send you a link to a-I'm going to write this down. I wrote a little-little essay about small about my involvement in small press, so I'll send you that, too.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you.

Gary Barwin: But with, we're in I-I recount this anecdote, which is, I just remember but liking this that I did. My, one of my novels was shortlisted for the Giller prize. So, I went to the big glitzy-it was at the Ritz Carlton, you know, very glitzy ceremony. And it was broadcast on live TV, you know, national TV and all of that. Very fancy. And then the next week I went to the Toronto small press fair, the-the Indie literary market, with, like my work, right and other people's work, and I was really happy to be part of that which both it felt much more like my-my own scene, and there I knew people, and it was, it just felt, much more intimate and much more about the work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Gary Barwin: And I'll lately I've been doing editions of my prints, too, as part of the small press thing. So, and I'm do a lot of visual work. So, I've been publishing like prints of-of visuals as part of, as part of my publishing endeavors, because small press publishing doesn't only have to be chapbooks. It can also be anything, so it can be prints.

Tamara Thompson: Mmm.

Gary Barwin: So, I've been doing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Gary Barwin: So, I've been doing, I've been doing that. So yeah. So I mean, I continue to, because I feel like it's able to address the audience in a particular way, is able to be artist-run artist driven, and it and I think it's important to for me to have not only, not only am I ideologically committed to work that's outside the marketplace and outside of commodity in that way it, but also that it allows work that wouldn't have a place. It's not commodifiable in that same way.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Makes a lot of sense to me. What are some challenges that the press has faced over the years?

Gary Barwin: Ummm, ...I'm trying to think. Well, I mean challenges in the sense of, I guess, in terms of distribution, because one of the things that the great thing is that it's all me and I could do whatever I want. The-thy complication, or the or the-the downside is, it's all me, and it requires me to do stuff. So, if I wanted to go to more book fairs, if I wanted to distribute more fulsomely, and you know, get it out there and-and have a really good website or have a website at all, it all requires me to do it. And so, part of it is also just juggling my other things that



I do. So as much as I really am committed to small press, I'm doing so many other things. It's hard to other artistic things. It's hard to keep up with what might, what I might like to do, particularly when other people are doing. Really excellent, you know, beautiful jobs of designing and publishing and-and distributing. So, in truth, the last few years I've done more with as an organizer than I have with as a publisher, because I'm facilitating people kind of doing the work that I was doing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's all about time and resources, is it?

Gary Barwin: And-and you know, and somewhat in truth, that I'm able to, I'm able to access lots of small presses and lot and other publishing opportunities. So, I in a way, part of what I'm do, what I'm I guess my work has, my interest has been facilitating up new people to do that. People who don't have access to those things. So younger people, people, people at different places in their career pleat people, you know, like again, marginal voices, and all of that which I think is really important and was always something that was important to me. But now, in a way that I have more opportunities as a writer. So, I'm not you know it's not, it's not quite as it's not quite as urgent. If I want to get something out there, I can pretty much get it out there you know. So, even like, no matter what it is, whereas maybe other people don't. So, I've tried, I've-I've work to kind of facilitate that for other people more sort of in the last little while, just because I've-I've been able to.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely.

Gary Barwin: And I would say, yeah. And also, I mean, and also part of it is that again, like I said with social media, some of that kind of getting the work out there and experimenting with it. Like putting out-try trial balloons, test balloons, test balloons I'm able to do that. On, you know, in social media, and in a way, access more people than IWI was given my publishing. So, in many cases that's being though it's much more ephemeral than even the ephemeral leaflets. It's that's been something that I've been able to that, I've been able to do, plus all I also am making, I still make continue to make prints and things so that they're the like Coach House to say the fetish object formally known as book. So, like, I have, like, you know, physical on a physical object. And there's the beauty of the paper and the design. All of that, you know. I'm still able to do-do that.

(Technical difficulties occurred.)

(Both laugh.)

Tamara Thompson: -okay. What are some challenges that you faced as an author in Canadian publishing?

Gary Barwin: You know what I would say that it, it doesn't feel like this would be the case now, but in the beginning, for the first many years Canadian publishing was very, very traditional and they, I think that was part of the impetus for me to publish. Was that it really did not publish anything that wasn't quite mainstream like so a lot of, so anything like anything visual, anything sort of not realist in a way, in in many cases,

so things that were I guess just more-more experimental in many different ways. Canadian publishing, at least when, we're talking sort of the for the 80s and 90s was just not interested, and there weren't places for that. And so that was definitely a challenge to be able to be published and to be able to find, I guess, a community of that. So, getting reviewed, getting-getting, you know, readings. And so, part of the small press thing was getting that opportunity to participate in those readings to have people read my work through distribution through small press magazines and-and chapbooks. It feels like that like now I feel it's less so. That's been so much broader as to what is available. But back in the 80s and 90s it was, it felt it was all very, very it was quite narrow. And so that was, that I definitely felt that was a challenge. Because now you know, now I'm looking back, I've got a book coming out in the fall of new and selected short fiction, and some of that short fiction was stuff that was in small press. But now it just seems it seems really tame. It doesn't, you know, and it's like it's now coming out with a with a not a micro press, but a small press, but it, you know it-it seems it really doesn't seem so unusual, but it did seem so, at least in Canada. I don't think it was really that unusual for the world that, but it was in Canada. It felt it did, didn't really have a place, and people just looked at it as this oddball strange work, I think, and I would say that, and plus like the work of my peers as well. So, though I don't see it as particularly experiment-I mean it's particularly advanced or experimental, but it felt like that in Canada.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what did this kind of publishing teach you? What is this smaller kind of publishing taught you as like an author?

Gary Barwin: Well, I mean, I think I mean, so I mean a kind of first of all hands-on experience with-with-with design with-with kind of layout. You know all of that stuff in sort of a sense of how books work. I think, which I think I can scale up to any kind of book just having a sense of how work is transformed from basically my brain or my computer or my notebook to-to publishing that do you think a sense of how that and how that works. It'd be like a composer writing music and knowing how would sound on a violin, you know, rather than just so, that, you know they have the experience of hearing it played on the violin, either mute writing music for violin that then you hear played on the violin. So, for me, writing-writing text that then I see published in different ways, and I kind of get a sense of how I don't even how the page works. How about how page turning works, how a book works. You know all of the kind of affordances of the medium, I guess. So that's really taught me that. And I think also something about you know, there's all the kind of adjacent things to, of being there with my book, seeing how people respond to it, doing a million readings of my book and kind of understanding like interacting with audience and as performance and as the connection between the book and a performance and maybe which include, might include music, or it might include someone's kind of physical manifestation like, I don't know some kind of using the book as a kind of a prop or as part of a sudden performance piece almost. Like all of those things, I think, have-been informed by having access, like on a on a ground level to-to small press publishing cause I think it'd be different if I just wrote, wrote my novel manuscript, and sent it away, and it got published by, you know, like goes into the shiny building of Random House, and it just comes

a book. And I, you know it just would, that wouldn't feel the same, that wouldn't be the same thing. It feels like really grassroots.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, why are chapbooks important to you?

Gary Barwin: So, I think, I think all of the things that we've said about being outside of, outside of commodification. Being a more direct connection to a community, to write to a writer and a public to writers, and their publishers. To people outside the outside the-the mainstream. So, it's exciting to see like if I, you know, I go downtown and see like somebody-somebody's got made up a new little chapbook press, and it's got some new stuff and sort of seeing who they are and what they're doing and where it comes from. That's to me that's really exciting. And it and it again it's, it is outside whatever is the mainstream, and it's controlled by that community and that person. So that to me is-is very important. And also, I think, historically, like looking back at past decades, it's some to see that stuff, because it's-it's there's a record of, there's a there's this kind of archive of stuff, that of activity, which express-not only the work, but also the whole, the whole scene. I mean to look back at, at how all that worked, and how-how some of the writing that is pretty produced now where it came from, and it came from this, you know, from-from chapbooks and zines and alternate publishing. And some of that stuff get it gets forgotten. So, I think it's important to be able to remember and look back and understand the place that chapbooks historically had. I mean, even in the last, you know, I said the last few decades. And then also, you know, for that matter, understanding all the many ways that publishing can happen. So, before the Internet and before web pages and before social media. And there's different kinds of publishing, whether it was like handwritten books, or, you know, rubber stamp or you know that I said the dot matrix of my old Atari, or like photocopy, typewriter, or whatever like just understanding the connection between the production and the work. But also, how writers use the available technologies, the-the available-available publishing means, and some of the-the publishing means is the same as the writing means this, there's-there's it's not. You take one thing, and then you but move it over. It's actually part of the whole process of making the work. So, it's designed for a certain look. It's designed to be part of the integrally connected to the publishing of it. It's shape design type, you know, type setting all of that. So, I think that to me, that's-that's something that's important about-about the medium, I think.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Gary Barwin: Like, I mean to use another musical analogy, you know like, if like, if you if you I don't know if you wanted to understand something about punk music, you know part of, it is like what kind of access to what clubs they had and what kind of guitars they had, and what kinda, you know, all of that is part of the whole. That's you know, you need to know that to understand how the music is not. Some kid goes down to the local music store and buys, you know, buys the damn factory distressed guitar to look, and does-does the thing which I mean, the music may be great, but it comes from somewhere, and it's integrally related to its, them to the material, the material context and the social context. So that's important. Those things are all important to me.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why are they not?

(Both laugh).

Gary Barwin: Well, in a way, they're important by the fact that they're not important, right? Like so, all the people who don't think they're important. That's why they're important, right?

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Gary Barwin: Like cause it's outside of what you know, it's outside of what is, what is considered important. Which so, that's always interesting, right? Like the, it's outside of the taste makers and power brokers, as it were, literary wise so you know, I mean, I found it interesting when my first novel was published, which is Random House. People, I-I got reviews saying like, where has this writer appeared overnight? And it was like my twenty third book. So, in terms of small press, let alone hundreds of chapbooks. So, you know, it was interesting, like, like, completely invisible to the mainstream. Even, you know, even I had three books published by Coach House, which is not an insignificant small press, but that was still it was invisible. Back then, back you know when my first novel was published. So that which was 2016. So that's why it's important. Is this, this whole world of interesting stuff happening that doesn't make it to that-that doesn't make it to-to the mainstream, in that case, newspapers. But even but even now there's less of that. And but even just whatever kind of online taste makers or noticers, if think that-that-that's one of the thing. That's why it continues to be, it continues it is, actually is important. Because of all of these. And all of this network happen, all of this whole world happening underneath the outside of the mainstream. So, I do think it is important. And it's not only is, it's, a it's a vital place for people to-to begin and try things. But I think it's a vital place for people to continue to do those things that would otherwise not have a place. Just it-it, there's it wouldn't, there wouldn't just be-there's not a just, not a viable model for people to continue to do this kind of work within most Canadian publishing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way?

Gary Barwin: Oh, that's interesting. Well, well, couple of things. One, to what I-speaking back to what I said, there was the kind of official record of what Canadian culture looked like. And then there was the actual record of the whole multiplicity of what actually being Canadian was, met much of which, for most of Canadian history, was entirely, not entirely ignored. There's a there was a very narrow definition of what being a Canadian was, and what that looked like, and in fact it-it never was that, and even in terms of Canadian publishing there was a lot more happening. I know you spoke to or are you going to speak to Greg Betts?

(Technical issues occurred).

Gary Barwin: So, he like, I know he so for me, like I know, he's done lots of work about Canadian publishing all this weird Canadian publishing that happened in the twenties that, like people don't know about. It's like, yeah, that's actually what it looked like. It didn't just look like the McClelland and Stewart. What was it the Canadian, whatever that canonic, you know, the canon of Canadian literature looked a lot more it looked-it wasn't just Margaret Laurence and Mordecai Richler and all those people. It was actually all this other stuff that was happening, that-that was happening in the small press. And so that's indicative of kind of what Canadian, Canadian culture and CanLit in general, it's much how it portrayed itself and how it wanted to be portrayed by vested interests, and it they ignored they-they missed all this stuff. So that's why I think it actually, really it does reflect Canada in that way, and also, I would say, I didn't think I'd ever quote a Conservative politician in terms of talking about small press, but Joe Clarke had that, had that phrase Canada as a community of communities. And I think that's true with small press-is all these little communities little-little, both geographic and aesthetic, of people creating this work in-in their own, in their own place or own niche, and I think that it has always been a How can, that is something that's been an aspect of how Canada is. And so small press has, and chapbook publishing has allowed, has allowed, that has enabled that all these little scenes in different cities have had their own publishing world, and connected and-and networked in various ways, but that, to me, seems really, it seems really Canadian. It's not really central, the way it's been portrayed the way that we've thought about it. But meanwhile we've kept up this active, active way of being Canadian, active way of expressing our culture outside of the main outside of the mainstream. So that feels really Canadian to me. Actually, the American writer, Charles Bernstein, writes about official verse culture. He's talking about America his talking about the US. But so, I feel like, Oh, there's official verse, culture or official CanLit. And so, all of this is outside of that which has always been happening.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, we've kind of talked a little bit about this, but I want to ask the question still directly, how are chapbooks important to the publishing landscape in Canada?

Gary Barwin: I think that, yeah, like we have said a lot about in in terms of like how it is it-it is a, it is a place. It is a community of people who are producing all this work that's outside of the mainstream publishing. I also think it gives, it gives a place for writers to try out community, try out their work and on, and to build it themselves and build their own communities. So, whether or not they choose to then also publish in in less chapbook, and not just in chapbook form. But it's still people continue, even after having books to publish in chapbooks, because they-they allow all the things that we've talked about, the allow stuff that's outside of saleability or outside of funding, or outside of, you know, design restraints, or out of time, that you can, you can, you know, do as many chapbooks whenever you want. You know, and even with small, even when you're not doing yourself even with small presses, there's all sorts, you just access different people. So, I think it continues to be an important place for-for writers to be able to like writers and writing community to inherently be themselves, which I think is important, which is an important thing for Canadian publishing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, excellent. Very well said. What's something that you wish the public knew about Canadian publishing?

Gary Barwin: I think this continues to be this idea, that well, two things, understanding that significant or important work without that being pretentious, is being produced in many different places, and that just the way they might look at some, you know, like a, some artwork. They think, okay, that painter made this beautiful painting, and it's just as important as whatever other painter people kind of need the imp-immature of a big press or big sales, or and not understanding that things are market driven, and things are, you know, there's a whole commercial thing to it, and so they can and so, when Canada reads, says, this is the most important and most exciting book. It is, maybe for that-but the way Taylor Swift is the most important exciting in in the sense of it's, you know, there's different kinds of popularity and different places that literature functions in. And I think people assume that I mean the main, you know, people the leadership in general don't understand that there are many places where very, very interesting, exciting work happens, and it just happens. It's sort of niche or specialty, or-or you know that it's outside of-of, outside of that whole system and that that may be some-there may be work that they would be really interested in if they didn't mistake you know, may like it just didn't mistake what's going on like you might go to the Gap to buy something, but you might buy something from-from Etsy some particular, you know, somebody made this really cool shirt that you really love, that's a one off that's very niche. So, it's the same thing with writing, but it's-it's just not. It's-you can't compete in numbers or in in attention to the Gap. But you might get this particular thing. That is actually the thing that you, you know, really speaks to you because I know a lot about fashion, clearly.

(Both laugh.)

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Gary Barwin: But you know what I mean. I mean, it's just I think it's the sort of same thing I think people don't understand. Yeah, culture about cult-how culture actually works.

(Technical difficulties occurred.)

Gary Barwin: Oh, I just said, I don't think people and like I don't think people understand how culture actually works in terms of sales and commodity and attention and main, and the main, the mainstream, and all of that, I think, in terms of what actual culture is-is-is a different thing than-than culture is commodity.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree.

Gary Barwin: And that has its place, you know, like Taylor Swift, or whoever. How that definitely has its place I-I-I understand that. But that's-but that's a different, that's a different thing. Even though there can be some overlap-overlap. There are still some people who are creating a certain kind of culture that also, that also are able to access the

mainstream. But that's not necessarily, not necessarily the case. It's not necessarily an indicator of how interesting the work is.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I do have to ask a more sad question of why do you think most small presses and micro presses have to close up shop?

Gary Barwin: Well, they don't close up shop. They just reincarnate as another one or somebody else's.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

Gary Barwin: Yeah, I mean, I do think that. Well, I do think for a couple of reasons. It's one of the things that we said before, is that it often ends up on, it requires money from the, from the creators and tons of work. So why that and there, the freedom to do whatever you want and to do it all yourself is tremendous. It's also a lot of pressure, and it's hard to sustain. It's hard to sustain production. It's hard to sustain distribution. It's hard, all of that, and the money and money, for that matter, too. And you know there's a lot of even other commitments so often people who are, I mean, if for me, I would publish a lot more if I were less busy doing other things. Other art, you know, I have to prioritize. And so, I, I'm writing and publishing and performing a lot. So, I just have less, just less time to be honest to do it. But I also think that, I think it's be interesting to see that the-the presses stop. But then, so what happens to those people and what happens to that work? I think it would be interesting to follow, like I was joking that about reincarnation. But I mean, I don't know that that means that the person stops, that the people involved stop doing, stop creating. I think it might just go somewhere else or be manifested in a different way, perhaps. Oh, and also there's new people coming in to doing it, and so that-that so that it sometimes people make way for other, or the fact that they're not doing it anymore. Other people are-other people are starting doing it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, how and why are you still doing the small press stuff? Like, how are you keeping going?

Gary Barwin: I think somewhat a kind of stubbornness, because, I mean, I think you know, like 'cause I-'cause I started a lot of long time ago, and I-I guess I'm, but I'm really committed to the ideas, you know, and that the understanding of-of how it functions in society and the opportunities it gives for-for writers and for readers in a different way. And I guess conceptually, I think it's a really powerful and really beautiful concept, so I guess I feel I still feel committed to it. And I loved like I was saying I loved going to the fancy Giller thing. Which, of course, it was better for my career in terms of like opportunities, and whatever, on the other hand, I loved then going to my small press world, and being able to talk to people and doing it that really felt more like home to me and the, where my aesthetic comes from, and the kind of the thing that art should be about. It's not all glitz, and glamour and kind of all those other things, and the banks involved and everything. It's grassroots, D.I.Y., kind of stuff that, for me, I'm really committed to that, or that it really, that really inspires me. Cause ultimately, like everything I do, I feel is like D.I.Y., cause I sit down and write my stuff myself, right like that's part of what and it feels like thy, it's a completely natural

extension. Then to like, I'm making marks on things. And so, to make marks that other people can read like feels like part of the same thing, and or to make something and share it, to read it, to post it, to email it to you know it. So, it-it really feels one in the same thing to me. As opposed- and I-I understand that for some of my work it goes through a kind of processing in order to get out there. So, like I'm you know, I have an agent. I write a novel. I send it to my agent. It goes through that thing. Then they sell it to a publisher. We do, you know what that goes through? That's a whole other thing. And while I'm, I do want to avail myself of that for a number of static reasons, like I'm able to get the book out to many people. I'm able to, you know all of that. It's-it's a good carrier for that kind of work. I'm also aware that it's also comes with certain kind of limitations, and only certain work that can only happen to certain of my work. And it has to, I have to be aware of certain kind of restrictions of that. So, whereas the small press stuff, it's an opportunity for me to explore other kinds of other kinds of things and to keep that and so, it feels like I quote unquote keeping it real. You know, I mean, it does feel like it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. One hundred percent.

Gary Barwin: Also, it's like, super cool that you know, you're looking into this. You're studying this. You're taking it seriously; like, yeah, exactly right, like the fact that-that I've stuck with it long enough that it's like, look, now, people are kind of getting it again right, and are beginning. And it's beginning, you know. I just donated like all of I had. I had a whole whack of chapbooks that I donated a couple of years ago to McMaster. And-and then once I get it together, I've got a whole pile more to do. And so, the idea that it's considered important. A-a you know the university, the-the-the library, the a-academics, can understand how this is culturally important, even if it's not important, numerically or economically.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Gary Barwin: So, I you know, I once went to thy rare, was it called the small press, the Rare Book Room or whatever it's called. The Archives and Rare Book Room at University of Buffalo. And they brought, I went to visit, and they brought out all these little chapbooks and leaflets that I done since I was eighteen. They had like sixty of them. It was unbelievable, carefully preserved in special archival envelopes and everything, and it was so moving that somebody in the world felt that this was like my little part. But it wasn't just about me. It was about that me, and people like me, who are, you know doing this work were-were valued and that kind of part of culture was valued and preserved against the-the larger, the larger world that wouldn't consider it important.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah-yeah, something, it's always exciting talking to people in the community. And this has been something that is really just where my heart is just, how much people care and the amount of life that can be breathed into literature, publishing, writing anything like that just from pure passion. And it just, it's it just makes me smile and makes me so excited because it is so exciting.



Gary Barwin: Oh, absolutely. I-I taught a course at OCAD this past winter term, an experimental writing class. And so, I had them make various kinds of publications, or they were, some of them, they were invited to. So, some students did, and so to see, you know, these undergrads, making their like sometimes their first chapbook, and trying to figure out what was possible and what it meant, and how they could distribute it and go to, and you know, and-and have sell them like the art students were selling their work, you know, and-and they were all, or their jewelry, or their prints, or whatever, and they were selling their-selling their, you know, their books, and so they were able to be put it out there, in other words, and that just that kind of it's easy to get impassioned about it. I did a thing, I used to work with street involved youth, and we'd make chapbooks. I'd make-we'd make chapbooks or publications, various kinds of ephemera or sometimes I would make it for them. They would write it, and we'd put it together. But I remember then going again to one of one of these sessions a few years after the first one I did. And then this guy, very definitely street involved, kinda came in. He had nothing, basically, but his backpack, and he pulled out. You know, this backpack from way in amongst all this stuff. He had this like completely beaten up, we had made a poetry postcards of his own work, and it's like he didn't have carry much with him in his world, but he carried that, and he was so proud of it. And it's like, okay, that's exactly what I'm talking about, you know. I mean, it felt the same way to him as it did to-to me you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I teach as well. And I've taught comics and creative writing.

Gary Barwin: Hmm.

Tamara Thompson: And so, to see a lot of those students want to be writers in some capacity, and I'm like, see what Canada has to offer. If you want to be a comic artist, don't go to marvel. See what Canada has. We have some amazing things, and we have some amazing people who would actually probably publish you. You can do your own things. And because I'm a master student, I get students asking me, well, what are you doing? And I say, well, I'm doing a thesis on chapbooks, and I'm like, cool! What's that?

Gary Barwin: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And I get to tell them what it is, and they're like, oh, this is really cool. I'm like, if you ever get a chance engage with this community, because this is the community that's going to keep you excited and keep you going. Do not be the suffering author by yourself.

Gary Barwin: And I also see that the connection now there's so many like graphic novels and-and comics, basically, that has is-is very strong. And so, there's a huge overlap between that and chapbooks.

(Technical issues occurred.)

Tamara Thompson: What's something important about D.I.Y. press history that you wish people knew about?

Gary Barwin: I think that it's not it, it's not just because people are not able to get published. It's because it's actually a thing in itself. It sometimes is a path to more mainstream publishing and may often careers also go that way. But it's not only it's not that. It's also a particular aesthetic and cultural choice that people are making to continue to publish in this way. And people do continue to like so-so like many of the people that you've spoken to like, say, Derek or Greg, or me, have continue to publish and-and have their work published, and publish other people in D.I.Y. or in-in chapbooks, because of aesthetic commitment to that. Not just because-because, despite having books published by more mainstream places. So yeah. So, I think that yeah so, I think that I think that people know it's not just it's not vanity press. And it's not just because oh, well, you're not able to. It's because it's this thing in itself. I think that's, I think that's important. I think people don't understand that. And that what publishing can look like can look like lots of different things.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's something about your history that you wish people knew about?

Gary Barwin: I-I mean, I guess, in in terms of the more, the more mainstream stuff that that that I'm most, you know, in terms of I am mostly known in-in many circles for my more mainstream novels and things. And just the fact that this is, this has been a part of, and it still continues to be is that that it's important, and that writers are able to both create a whole range of different kinds of work with different aesthetics, but also exist in these different ecosystem. Literate ecosystems, and that's important and nourishing part of what is what it is to be a writer, and what I find as to be a writer.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, are there any additional comments? Anything else you would like to add?

Gary Barwin: Yeah, I guess I would just say that, also, I think and this as part of that, there's this idea that good writing or interesting writing has to sort of it feels like it has to come from somewhere else, or it has to come from, you know, out of out of us cultural commercial center. But that, like people, like interesting work comes out, is coming out of all sorts of places that are not the centers that are, that are in the margins. I mean, it's lots of terrible work, too, but that's sort of interesting is that it's this whole, you know-you look and decide what's interesting to you. And it's not that there isn't any center of culture. The culture is everywhere, I think, and that's part of what the aesthetic of chapbooks are.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Gary Barwin: I-I sound missionary-like, don't I?

(Both laugh).

Gary Barwin: But I guess right.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, well so many people don't know about this amazing thing, and it's hard to capture the public's attention when they don't know that you even exist, or what you even are right, so.

Gary Barwin: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Sometimes you have to. I've had to come up with my like own little mission statements about like, what's a chapbook? What's my thesis. What's this? What's that? What's this part of writing? What's this part of publishing? And you kind of, because you have to say it so much to so many people, because they just don't know. You kind of have this like thing in your head. And you're just like, here's the mission statement. If you're not gonna take anything. Please take this.

Gary Barwin: Yeah. And I think that you know people, it's like, okay, so it's not you like, the numbers of sales are tiny. And it's not some individual chapbooks are incredibly important just in themselves, but mostly it's the-the, it's this whole movement, right? I mean just the way like some indie records are super important by themselves, but really, it's the whole move more, the whole movement, or the whole scene. That's important. And that's you know, I mean, obviously into some individual things are, you know, eternal masterpieces. But-but or whatever but-but you know some things are particularly, but generally it's just the whole. That whole movement is, is it the whole-the whole way of doing things is significant. And I think people they don't get that they need, it's it-it they need to have like the best selling. This or that is somehow is the one that's important, like, you know, the way they publish, like the-the highest grossing movies as somehow is, if that's the most important movie. I mean, it's important in a certain way, obviously. But it's also not, but so similarly with books, it's like, well, okay, it's not on the best seller list, but it doesn't mean that it and the whole world is part of isn't-isn't significant in just in a different way.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I like it when someone who's from say like a different part of literature, who's like, maybe it's creative nonfiction says, is that this isn't the best book on the list, but this is like one of my favorite things, and they're just very passionate about it. And then I read it, and I usually will enjoy it, right? And I like hearing what other people are passionate about. That's not necessarily the best of everything of all time. But maybe it's like a personal favorite of someone, and they could talk about it forever. And I find it so interesting. And I'm really happy that there's starting to become a little bit of a culture of people sharing that. They're going to take the time to review it or talk about it. They're really going to take the time to explain why and why they care about this thing. And it it's been one of like the small-small blessings when it comes to like the reviewing and-and analytical kind of culture, especially online for me, anyway, of someone who genuinely, very much cares about thing, this thing. And it's not just because it's the most popular thing. It's because they genuinely, really care about this.

Gary Barwin: No, oh, absolutely. And you know, I also kind of think that people can access like learn about these things because of, it's information is available online. And-and these things can be shared

online. And people can it's just like people share comics and rare comic books and talk about all the intricacies. You know, online through, you know reddit groups or Facebook groups, you know. And so similarly, these, this kind of work can be and the discussion and the discourse around it can be is accessible online.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Gary Barwin: You know, at least as, at least as a way in. But I think there's become. It's-it's cause it's also a way of creating kind of community. And then people, you know, people are passionate about-about that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, any other comments? Before I stop the recording or?

Gary Barwin: Nope, I think that's it.

derek beaulieu

Tamara Thompson: Hello. My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is May 31<sup>st</sup> the time is 1:21 pm, and just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out within the deadline of a week after this interview. This interview is for small press author and traditional press.

derek beaulieu: Hi! My name is derek beaulieu. I'm the publisher of no press, which was originally in Calgary, and is now in Banff, where I live. Before that I was the publisher of House Press 97 to 2004, and I live in Banff. I'm the Director of Literary Arts at the Banff Center, author, publisher, poet person, Poet Laureate of Banff and looking forward to chatting. My pronouns are he/him and good.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely. Thank you. So, I'm just gonna start off with, like, just kind of a soft ball question of like, why did your small press start?

derek beaulieu: Sure. I started, I started House Press in 1997, and I, I had been introduced to small press publishing through email conversations with folks online and slowly started hearing about things that were happening. I wasn't seeing a lot of small press work in Calgary, but also wasn't particularly engaged with what was happening here. So, this was all new to me, and it mostly came about by hearing about things that were happening in Toronto. So, I was hearing about Coach House books which had had recently kind of like folded in, then got reborn. Damian Lopez's Fingerprinting Incorporated, which was a huge influence on me, but also things like Darren Wershler's Torque, (technical issues occurred) that Natalee Caple and-and Brian Panhuyzen was, we're running Kitsch in Ink press by Stephen Cain. And what I was seeing is that there was a sense of community. There were people who I've written something, and I'm excited about it, and I want to share. It seemed modest; it seemed community based it seemed conversational. It seemed like a great way to make friends and-and also as somebody who like to think with his hands. I had an artistic practice. I like, you know, things like playing with Lego and-and also, I have a collector's mentality you know. I collected comic books, hockey cards, and all that kind of thing. So, all of those things together made the small press something that was really attractive. They were small things made by hand in a community where people were keeping track of what was going on, and-and being aware of what was going on and-and additions were being made in conversation with each other, that I wrote a poem, and I thought it was really cool. I can print it in a way that feels right for me and hand it out just like, give it to someone and found that, that wasn't something weird that was something that was treated with respect. It was like, oh, I have this thing, and you took care of it like you took it, and you put it aside as opposed to using it as a coaster and that all felt really validating, and it felt like a community that I wanted to be involved with. So, a colleague, and I wrote a-a-a short suite of poems in response to the passing of William S. Burroughs in 1997 and put it as a little chapbook that I had hand sewn. So, I learned how to sew in 97, and like twenty-six copies and that started to open the door for me, and I started to create more and more things and once I had done a few things of my own. I started to reach out to friends that, like, here's something

I've made. I'd be happy to do that for you, and it became a way of creating conversation and creating community and supporting each other and a, an act of generosity and kindness. And I just started to click. And here we are like what twenty-six years later, and I'm still doing it.

Tamara Thompson: So, we've already kind of talked a bit about it, about how you discovered, like chapbooks and zines and this kind of publishing. But could you like, maybe like, pinpoint, the - huh, okay, yeah, this, I like this, like, maybe that moment.

derek beaulieu: Yeah, I sure can. There were a few, a few presses, a few things that are like held in my hand, and was like, oh, wait and those were, I have them right here. (Takes out small print object). Those were additions that came out of damian lopes, damian lopes's press Fingerprinting Inkoperated that he ran in Toronto in the mid to late 90s. And there were two things that stick out in my mind. One of them was called shipped flat great Brian, Brian Panhuyzen, and on the back, it says, February 1996, thirty, out of thirty-three. There were thirty-three copies, and then the address, and then it has Damian's fingerprint on it. There you go. And inside you like peel up the backs and it's called shipped flat right? And inside it unfolds like this.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, that's awesome.

derek beaulieu: First of all, this is a book?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: That-that excited me. It was like, this isn't a book. This is a what is this, what do I do with this thing? And then inside, I'm not going to read the whole thing. But the first few sentences are "Elo fres Sounin, Noonan art mix maul signum Tormelia meena, Lord Epsilon, Hornham, Zuzeria. So Zorilla tonam zoo Zorilla, blast" and I'm like what the hell is this? This is a sound poem made entirely out of the names of items sold at Ikea.

Tamara Thompson: Oh! (Laughs).

derek beaulieu: So, it says, at the bottom. This lexicon, the lexicon of this piece is entirely of product names from the 1995 Ikea catalog. It's shipped flat just like things from Ikea. So, it was like, oh, no! Suddenly form and content, this was something that you could make on your own. This is like a piece of paper and a piece of cardboard folded in some blue. There's nothing here that anybody doesn't have access to. It's-it's witty and playful. It responds to Ikea, which was like my living room, and-and it challenged what a book was. Suddenly this was a book and that blew my mind. So, there's this thing, and then this other one that he did called two slides of A (pulls out a square small print object), also by Daiman Lopez. And on the back of it-it says, while two slides of A may be viewed in many ways, the piece was intended with the intention of viewing both slides simultaneously. Black case in front of white. June, 93, 36 exposures. Figure printing Incorporated Box 6, 57. Station, P. Toronto, Canada. M. 5, a. 2, y. 4. That's what it reads in the back and inside. Just kind of open this thing up like that. And inside our two slides.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, slides.

derek beaulieu: Yeah, and he says, black slide, and for so there's the white slide and the black slide, and you put them on top of each other. And you get this, this image.

Tamara Thompson: Oh!

derek beaulieu: And I was like once again I was coming from comic books. I drew a lot. I was reading the work of bpNichol. And suddenly like this, not only is this a book but these are poems?

Tamara Thompson: Cool.

derek beaulieu: And it was this kind of work coupled with reading bpNichol work as an undergrad that suddenly what I thought poetry was changed. What I thought, like poetry was stuff that looked like poetry, you know it was rhymed, and it had a, you know, a-a-a flush left margin and a ragged right margin, and it did all those things. But suddenly poetry was something that include drawings and comic books and sound poetry, and Ikea and all of that started to blow my mind. All of that started to be very, very welcoming. And that's the thing; it was welcoming. It was, it was supportive. These were people who were trying things on, asking what worked putting it out in the world. And we're being met with what I felt was a similar response. Like it, was, the response was rarely no the response was, yes and here's a reply. Yes, and how about this? And I loved that, and that's-that's where it started for me was presses like Fingerprinting. And-and from there I met people like McLennan, and Steve Cain. And this kind of thing, who are all doing similar things always very different aesthetic. You pick up a book by aboveground press, and you're like that. Looks like they all look like it came from that press. They all look the same but unlike something that you know, and like this, which is, you know, thirty-three copies. Aquinas doing books in editions of two to seven hundred, and it's like how all in his living room. And it'd be like, you know, you're there for a reading. He sees you in the afternoon, he asks for some work. He prints it then, and hands it out at the reading that it was immediate, and it was responsive, and it was like, it made poetry, and it made publishing an occasion like a thing that is important, of celebrating and noting as something that happens now. And suddenly poetry was something that happened now. And I love that.

Tamara Thompson: That's so fun. That's one of the things I teach creative writing and comics. Actually. So.

derek beaulieu: Okay.

Tamara Thompson: I-so, our interest very much aligns, but, like one of my favorite things, is, like all of them, want to do, like fiction, either literary or like their own sci-fi stories. And I'm like, yeah, that's really cool. But what about poetry? And I show them, and I'm like, it doesn't matter. There are no rules. Have fun, throw things down, make it better, experiment. And the kids who really take it to heart, I'm like, oh, this is so good; like you could, like, take this somewhere and, like,

it's just so interesting to see them see that? Oh, this is different and same with comics. I'm like, it doesn't have to be this like the comics course I just taught. Like, we read *Ducks*, we read *Grass*. We read *Maus*, and so some like pretty heavy stuff, but their minds were like changing and, like, what is a comic? How can you explore the stories? And I would get them to draw comics in seminar and be like, let's think about how these things work together and just like how much they would get excited about it. And it just made me get excited about it. And it's like this is fun stuff. This is exciting.

derek beaulieu: This is a playground. This is-this is a sandbox. This is, you know, this is like dumping a big box of Lego on a table, you know it's a box of atoms, and just like bake whatever weird shit you want and nobody who's playing with the Lego with you is going to say no, that spaceship has to look like this. And given that sense of freedom, that sense of enabled play you get to respond in whatever way you wish and that to me is so freeing. And for students to have it just be like you are free and welcome to play here and that play doesn't have to look like anybody else.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, exactly.

derek beaulieu: It doesn't have to do anything, and it can escape from all the various things that you think a book has to be, or a novel has to be. Even if you're writing a science fiction novel then; if you could hold it in your hands what use your imagination. What would be the best way of holding this? And if you're like well, I wish it was, I wish it was etched on plates of steel that looked like they came from the side of a spaceship. Then great! What are you f-ing waiting for? Find yourself some pieces of metal, and scratch this in the side of a spaceship or, you know scoped it out of gears and wires. Or you know, I wish that I wish that 3Cpo would recite it and might then find a way of doing that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: Make it; make it a playground and see where you know. Robert Creeley's old thing of-of form is never more than an extension of content where those things start linking up because they do, and they do overtly in poetry but they can in any art form and I think that the small press and the- and the-the chapbook press, presses in Canada have taken that the ones that are truly aware of their of the opportunities have really taken that to heart. And that's the thing that excites me. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I'm gonna just add one little thing, one of my favorite things that we did at my- 'cause I run a press with stuff like it's the experimental fiction book up there called *Band-aid*, and we literally took *Band-aids*, and we painted them, and we did coats on coats of paint. And then I took a like a paint marker and wrote *Bandaaid*, and that's how we did the title. It wasn't printed on. We glued it on, and we did a whole bunch of different colors. And my, it's literally about a daycare experimental fiction. So, it's not gonna all make sense. But it's literally about a daycare provider who gets stabbed and has a whole bunch of toddlers around them and they're all like, what do we do? We'll put a band aid on it, and it's like, I appreciate the concern. But that's not helping so like it. It was just fun to take something that was so core to



the story and make it feel physical like you can touch it. It's like a real band aid on the cover that we just gone with heavy blue, so that it didn't fall off. But let's play.

derek beaulieu: Yeah, hey? Like, you know, if the book is literally a box of band aid and every band aid has us like part of the story written on it. That's like John Riddell's book smokes where the book is literally. (Pulls out a cigarette box).

Tamara Thompson: Oh, that's cool! (Laughs).

derek beaulieu: Literally rolled, on these little pieces of paper. (Shows up the small cigarette).

Tamara Thompson: Brilliant.

derek beaulieu: That you read in order. So, there's-there's one.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: And the idea is that you, you know read it, roll it and smoke it and it comes in. Pack to twenty-five, and it comes in the smaller packs, too. Same idea and it's like if you need, if you, if you're writing a story about somebody with a knife and a daycare. Then yeah, it's gotta be a box of band aids, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: Cool, love it.

Tamara Thompson: I love that kind of stuff. So, to change gears a bit: what is your small press, like, editorial philosophy, or like goal?

derek beaulieu: Sure so, no press which I've been writing since 2005, the editorial philosophy basically is, I publish, I publish stuff I like. I rarely take submissions because people don't tend to submit so it's usually solicitation, but not exclusively so; and I publish work that I like, and that tends to be concrete and visual work, experimental fiction or risk-taking, risk taking score, risk taking you know editorials or nonfiction or fiction, and then I publish those in usually small editions of between realistically, now between thirty and sixty copies and then the author receives half of the print run as payment. So, they can do anything they want with their let's say, twenty five out of fifty copies, those twenty-five copies if you want to sell them great. You keep the money you want to give them away. Fine! I don't care like. Do whatever you want with that that's yours. And then the remaining twenty-five I can do the same thing with, and I mostly give all the copies away. I end up, maybe selling two or three on any edition, and it doesn't matter who the author is. The average sales is two or three copies. If it's Charles Bernstein or Michael Ondaatje, or Rob McLennan or-or Kate Siklosi, usually about two or three copies, and the rest I give away. I keep a couple for myself and that's it. So, the philosophy is work that challenges me, that I find interesting, or that I want to support or endorse, that I think that people should read in additions of about fifty copies, usually hand sewn.

Tamara Thompson: Roughly, I love-I love hand sewn spins that's all Whispering Wick does. Yeah, there's just something so nice about them.

derek beaulieu: Yeah, and, or their leaflets, or one-fold things, you know, like.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

derek beaulieu: Here's-here's *Composition No. 0* by Nick Monford. (Holds up another chapbook). Here's the front and the back, says as he asked, inspired by a discussion with Maria Eugenia Marquez, in a workshop at Unam, March 5th, 2024, and at the bottom, it says, published an edition of sixty copies deep, deep in a national park by no press. And then there's my address and the book, it's basically, you know that that that's it. And you know, so sixty copies. This I send thirty to Nick and the other thirty I have, and I hand out, or, you know, mail to people or whatever.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: I do that. And then I edit a small journal called the Minute Review, or The Minute Review depending, and that's between sixteen and twenty-eight pages of experimental visual work and short reviews of similar type of work. It's really, a sample issue would be like; the most recent issue is right here. (Holds up the most recent issue). And so that looks like this. This is a legal piece of paper, folded in half. So, it's eight and a half by seven inches. That's a legal sheet. And this issue is twenty-four pages, and as one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve contributors. Print covered by Kate Siklosi, visual work inside there's a page of like visual work by Frank Singleton, and a poem by Lillian Nećakov. So, there you go and that's what the Minute Review looks like. So, yeah, that's the mandate.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely! So, you've already been kind of talking about what kind of work and content the press actually like publishes. But could you go a bit more into detail. You kind of talking about some of the weird stuff but.

derek beaulieu: Yeah. So, no press historically. And House press before that. I focus on concrete and visual poetry. Work that is challenging in terms of its form but also mostly poetry on occasion prose, but mostly poetry. That's also, might challenge me in terms of compositional structure. So, I recently did a chapbook by Kyle Flemmer that he's written entirely using Wikipedia. Basically, doing (technical issue occurred here) seven through Wikipedia or short fiction, or you know short poems that I find of challenge, of interest. Because of this, because the sales are usually minimal. I don't look to think, I don't think of what would sell. What does a readership want? What could I place in bookstores? What could I make a profit-profit out of, none of those things interest me. The money's not there, anyway, so I would rather publish work that, I think, is fun, or playful, or creative, or interesting or challenging and that I'd want other people to read. So, that I think that like, oh you know, Tamara needs to read such and such, or people need to see this great. So, I print them. Put it in the mail. It's-it's a way of distributing the news

and-and that's and that's a way that McLennan and I quite agree, while we have different aesthetics in terms of what our publishing looks like. The publishing mandate of having work that is responsive and immediate, I think we share. He has a greater breadth; like he can hit a community in a larger way, usually by printing stuff in editions of, you know fifty, all the copies will be gone within a day or two. So what do I publish work? The challenges me work that I think pushes the conversation forward, or work by emerging writers. Who does-who do that? Who, I think, need you know? Like let's get some exposure. Let's have this person you know, let's put this person next to that person. Let's see what happens. So in you know, in this case, what happens if we put Kate Siklosi next to Frank Singleton, next to (technical issues occurred) a next to join Johanna Drucker and Ron Silliman and see what happens, or if we have a piece by Ron Silliman that's written on a typewriter right after a piece that's or right before a piece that's by Sasha Archer from Burlington also written on a typewriter. So yeah and allowing different conversations to kind of like bump up against each other that if you get an envelope, they'll be like oh, there's something from Tom Jenks, from the Uk. As well as something from Sasha or from Kate. And how did they start creating a dialogue.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, there are-I definitely have some people who I look at, and I'm like, it is a crime if the world they would be foolish not to recognize the talent in this person from like my undergrad. And I specifically my one friend, Sarah Ibrahim. She's already started to get out there, and I'm like, oh, man come on, people! Look this way. Look at what this amazing poet and experimental fiction comic! Like Yemeni, Ethiopian, like lovely lady is doing like, look at this stuff.

derek beaulieu: It creates a, it creates an ecology; it creates a change.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah!

derek beaulieu: For, for you know new kinds to grow, and I also believe that it-it, it's not, it's not a stepping stone. It's not like you use this to abandon I-you know this leads to working with this press, which means I don't have to do small press work anymore. It's not, it's not something to be moved away from, and, in fact, even larger Canadian, more established Canadian authors. You know, your George Bowering's or your Daphne Marlatt, or whatever they're still doing small press work because they see it as community responsive and being in place. And I think that that's that sense of ecology and that sense of like, even if you are you know whether you're an emerging writer and or an established one. If you want to try something on. You think it needs to be in a smaller form, or it's a risk and you're not quite sure what it's going to do but would kind of like it out there to get a response, to have a conversation. Or, you see, somebody whose work you think is exceptional. And you just think like more people need to read it, great.

Tamara Thomspson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: That's-that's the power of the small press. We have the time we have the resources, and we have the enthusiasm and that's all you need.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I kind of want to get into a little bit of your process 'cause you've talked a little bit about it, but from submission to production, to getting it into people's hands. What is that like in a more broken-down way?

derek beaulieu: Sure. Everything that I get in terms of submissions or-or solicitations are-are done over email or over social media people usually would, I would accept it through a, you know a doc file, a word file, or a PDF. Or a series of jpegs depending. And I do all the-the layout, the design in Microsoft publisher, which is a PC, only it's not made for Mac, PC only program that's mostly made for designing business, or greeting cards or banners for your grandmother's birthday, or something like that. But has a lovely little booklet function, so you can actually do, it knows how to create books in, in four-page editions. So, I've been using that since, since 97; that's where they started using. And while it is a goofy little program, that's what I use for pretty much everything, is Microsoft Publisher. So, I will lay it off-lay it out in Publisher. Then either look around the house or, you know, scratch paper at the local, you know, photocopy shop. Find something that fits or is immediate, depending on, you know the scope and then print them. Print them in my living room. Print them in the, you know and then I do have a paper cutter. I'll trim them right there, so fold them, trim them. This all happens at the kitchen table and then punch some holes with an awl or a thumbtack usually saddle stitch just using, you know, needle and thread. Yeah, and it's not fancy needles. It's not fancy thread. It's needles I got at the dollar store. Thread that I got in the same place. My mother-in-law recently downsized, and she was a quilter, so she gave me like a box full of, and I mean I got box full of-of thread so I just reach into the box and grab a grab a spool and just use that until it runs out and then once-once I have all the editions or all the copies printed, folded, trimmed, bound. I put half of them in the envelope and mail them to the author and the other half. I have a drawer here with a bunch of envelopes in it from people who yeah, I correspond with. One will go in each envelope, and then, if I have any left. I'll usually put them up on-on online put them on my website or advertise over social media saying, like, hey, so the new issue of the Minute Review is out and it's four dollars, including postage. If you want a copy, send me an email and put that into the world. And usually between zero and three or four people will write. Go, I'd like one of those. Now they'll usually transfer me something over, PayPal, or just send something else in an envelope and send it back and we trade, and that's it. That's the whole show.

Tamara Thompson: Nice.

derek beaulieu: ISBN's don't do anything, so I don't use those. There's only one library that collects everything sight unseen, and that's SUNY Buffalo. So, there's an envelope here that I just shove it in. And once a year I just, you know, put together an invoice and send it to them and-and Simon Fraser University does collect my papers, so they get a copy of everything. But other than that, that's it. It's very, very simple. There isn't, I don't need a bank account or anything like that. It's all done through PayPal or even before that, you know checks just make them out to me when we were using checks. So, there's no, there's no contracts.

There's no proofing. There's, when-when I was running House press up until 2004. Increasingly it felt like a business or responsibility. You know, some people wanted contracts or proofing, or you know, wanting to know about sales. And it started to feel like, if something didn't sell enough copies. It wasn't doing well. I was getting trapped in that thinking. So, I shut the whole thing down and was like, nope, this isn't fun anymore. And about six months later I couldn't resist, and I started up another new press. But I wanted there to be no responsibilities and no ISBN numbers and no worries about sales and no sending books to bookstores, and no problems.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: So, I name the press, no press and that's where the title came from was to step back from all of that stuff, and just remind me that it's fun.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah.

derek beaulieu: So that's kind of the process. That's it's all you know, or I'll see stuff online. So, somebody posts a, you know, an image on-on Facebook or on Twitter, or something, or an Instagram that I like, and I'll just write them and say, this is really cool. Can I publish that and almost always the answer is, yeah, of course.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Kate showed me the other day what you did with her phone piece that like folds out and.

derek beaulieu: Oh, good.

Tamara Thompson: With like a swirling thing. And I was like, oh, that's beautiful. She's like, isn't it just great? And I'm like, yeah, it's wonderful.

derek beaulieu: Yeah. So, she had posted that image on Instagram, I think. And it's in in, it's in. It's in in response to Judith Copithorne, who's a poet that we both really like. I thought it was beautiful, so I just asked if I could publish it, and she said, yes, and you know I could just do a piece of paper but I kind of wanted it to like bloom. I wanted it to come out of the book.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: So how can I do that? And so that's the little form that I came up with. And so.

Tamara Thompson: It was lovely.

derek beaulieu: I didn't have fifty pieces of the same-colored paper, so there's like blue and green, and I don't know there's like four or five different colors, but I had fifty of all of them together, so printed as much as I had, sent her all the copies. A-a variety of each sent them off. And that's it. So that's how, I mean working with Kate on that is very, very typical. That's how-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: And we do a thing. Yeah, saw a thing. Thought it was great. Asked if I could print it, printed it probably within a week, and mailed it off.

Tamara Thompson: Nice.

derek beaulieu: Easy.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, we do letters of agreement. But that's more just because we're dealing with first-time authors. That's what we like to do at Whispering Wick. So, we're like, here's what a contract might look like, you know. And here's what we're doing and like, here's what this might look like. Here's what the editorial process is kinda like. But I also understand the desire to have nothing and just do it, just create because it's the fun part.

derek beaulieu: Yeah and I can see why you would do all those things to kind of like orientate somebody into that but, not saying you're wrong, but I-my perspective is more to not do any of that because even at the highest level of publishing we don't need any of that material. And if we want to see change in terms of how we interact, I would rather remove those tools or that, or that expectation of standard conversation then reify it by issuing contracts and letters and all this stuff and make it people talking to each other.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: So that it is easy. It is welcoming and-and demonstrate that, like, actually, you don't need any of that stuff. All you need is a piece of paper. Yeah, and you can go from there. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I've-I've really enjoyed how people have like talked about their process, and why they choose to do certain things because everyone's got their own little way. And it's one of the reasons why I asked the specifics of it, because it's so interesting to see how people like talk about how their process works. I don't know; I just find it really interesting.

derek beaulieu: Yeah. Totally.

Tamara Thompson: To get on to a bit of kind of your work and stuff like that. I'm assuming that you've published chapbooks of your own work as well, not necessarily at your press, but you might have, but at other presses, as well.

derek beaulieu: Yes, in both cases.

Tamara Thompson: So why did you do that? Why did you publish a chapbook or chapbooks?

derek beaulieu: Why did I publish my own work?

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

derek beaulieu: For exactly the same reason why I would publish somebody else. I created a thing, and either there was a reason like I'm doing a reading this weekend and need and want to share a piece or I've got something that I'm particularly proud of or I've got something that I'm confused by and want to share it and get response. I don't think there's, I don't have any problem with publishing my own work, and I think that most-most presses I interact (technical error occurred) for instance, the publishers don't have a problem with that, either. There's nothing wrong with small press self-publishing. And if nothing else, if I'm proud enough to create something like if I've made something and I'm happy with it but I'm, I can at least demonstrate that I'm happy enough to actually publish it myself you know, like, I don't see any rough problem with that, and but also-so having a small press means that I can publish my own work. But it also, from a certain point of view, would suggest that I don't need to work with anybody else, but I want to. I, so I, yes, I publish my own chapbooks, but I also work with a lot of other presses. Because I want to see how they could handle things and be surprised by the process as well. Here's a manuscript. How would you make it and-and release it into a conversation of trust? So, whether it be Jim Johnstone's press, or Rob McLennan press, or whomever working with that press and basically saying, here's a manuscript once they accept it. I'm like, do anything you want.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: How you-the form that it takes that you've decided to put it into is-is now yours. You like-it's a conversation. You print it in ways that you think are responsive or smart, or aligned with you and allow me to be surprised. I would rather it be like I said; I'd rather it be a conversation. So, releasing that responsibility and that expectation, and allowing myself to be surprised by what might happen because they're going to, they're probably going to make decisions I wouldn't make, in a good way. And even if it's respond, even if it's decisions that I would make that, you know give me pause. It's still alerting, and it's still, it's still provided a conversation. It's still provided you know a chance to interact with somebody I didn't expect. So, I don't think there's anything wrong with publishing your own work, and I'm happy to do it. And I do it often, I do publish my own work, and I have no problem with that. Sometimes for speed and efficiency, sometimes because I have an idea it's like, no, I want it to look like this. I've been staring at the stack of purple paper, and I know what I want here. So, I'm just gonna do it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, would you-sorry, you can keep going.

derek beaulieu: No, no, please.

Tamara Thompson: Would you work with other small presses again, like I know, everybody has busy lives and stuff, but?

derek beaulieu: Absolutely. And I still do. Constantly. Just this year Anstruther put out my *happy face* manuscript. This thing, where'd it go? Yeah this, this I got in the mail yesterday.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: And this. (Holds up cool print object and shows interior).

Tamara Thompson: Brilliant.

derek beaulieu: This was published in Copenhagen and, like I said, I got copies yesterday. I-I continuously worked with other presses because I'm not done with the conversation and the aesthetics of presses are constantly changing, and the presses that pop up are changing. So, every one of those is a conversation I want to have. So yeah, no, I absolutely continue to do it, and happy to do it. And don't see that, don't, I don't currently see that changing in terms of how I want to solve these problems.

Tamara Thompson: So, for the press itself. What are some challenges you face? And you've talked a little bit of what happened last press before no press came before, but, like, what are some other challenges that you faced? Or maybe you can expand on that more if you'd like.

derek beaulieu: I think that-I think one of the challenges that-that people have that I have had, that I had to like wrap my head around was sales. Was the money side, and I've spent a lot of time trying to extricate myself from capitalist thinking around small press and from publishing as a whole; that once you start thinking that a book needs to make back the money you put into it, or make you a profit, or pay your rent, or buy your pizza, or whatever it might be, that leads, in my opinion, to making decisions that are based solely on profit. What-I only publish books that will sell. That will make me X, and that doesn't interest me. I-I had to spend some time thinking about that, and like, why are you doing it? Why, like ends-once I could escape from that thinking, I felt much, much freer to publish what I want because I want to and because I think other people will care. And if it means that, you know printed fifty copies and nobody cared. Nobody read them fine. I thought it was cool. I enjoyed the process. I spent an evening sewing and looking at a thing that I thought was cool, great, fine, and if nobody else does. That's okay, too. But I bet the author is happy. And so, it was just a conversation between-between the two of us. I think that-that's I think that's-that's a philosophical thing for presses to wrap their head around. Other issues are-are just kind of like straight up form. Where are you sourcing your material from? I-what kind of, what kind of decisions you want to make? Is it stapled, or is it sown? Is it white paper? Is it green? Are you getting it from this kind of shop or that kind of shop? Are you only printing on material that you can find. John Curry has done a whole series of books that are printed solely on the paper wrappers around the tin cans of food that he eats. So, he only uses the paper he could find. He doesn't buy paper to keep his cost down. So that's interesting. How do you want to respond to the tech that the text that you're receiving. So do you want to create something that is you know, openly having to be in a particular form? Is that important to you? Or is, you know just a folded piece of paper okay, too and-and that and those decisions don't have to be absolute that's okay. I only do it this way allowing yourself to be responsive and open to change, I think is a good



thing. It's to me. This is an active community service. If I can make a few bucks to pay for the postage, great but for the most part, I don't and it's and it's not a-a fiscal position that I've taken only because I have a permanent job. Like, I said I started publishing in '97 you know, as an unemployed graduate student or undergraduate student, and have continued, since it's not something that needs to be based around money it's-it's about making space and having conversation and-and being generous. And you know hoping that it inspires. So, I think that to me those were the big issues. The big issues are money and aesthetics. Why do you do what you do? And how do you? What form do you want it to take?

You could get into like the culture there is there a review culture or people reading it? What kind of effect does it have? But the reality is-is that there is no review culture. There's very, very, very, very, very little. It's all word of mouth and it's it can be playful. It can be fun and there are all sorts a very valid reasons not to do this. It doesn't pay it nobody reads it, anyway. The cultural reach is small. Oh, sure, fine whatever but I think there are way, more reasons to do it if nothing else. Some-like you were saying somewhere along the way you and I have never met. But somewhere along the way a culture of small press publishing leaked its way into your world and inspired you to do the same and then inspired you to do the same, to promote it and other people and in your community and your friends, and to like, take a moment to step back and go well, what are other people doing and why? Which led directly to your MA thesis. Great!

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I love all of what it is and what it does. And so many people will look at me and be like, well, what about this or that, and especially the sales thing. I very much understand how like, why people do it. But at the end of the day like even with people's writing, they're like, oh, well, is this marketable? Have you ever felt the pressure to be marketable as a writer? And I'm like no cause I wouldn't be doing it if I was worried about that. And just I had to really hammer into my creative writing students. If you're not having fun your piece will never be good. Don't try to be good, because it will never be good. Have fun, and it can be like goooooood, you know.

derek beaulieu: It doesn't have to be. It doesn't have to be perfect. It doesn't have to be any of those things. It just you know, just put it in the world.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: Your kid doesn't have to be perfect and getting all A's. Just help them exist in the world and be welcome.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: And, you know, be-be their crazy, weird self, because we want to see more of those.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly. And I just I think that's one of the things I'm enjoying when it comes to talking to people like you in the small press community. Why? I love being in it. Why? I love doing it, and I have almost no time. Because I'm crazy busy doing interviews all the time, but

that it's just to create something like, oh, I'm gonna break on like a random Wednesday and stay up till three am doing something that I definitely don't have time to do but I'll just need to do it.

derek beaulieu: Yeah, it's supposed to be fun.

Tamara Thompson: It's so fun and freeing. And again, that community conversational aspect, I think you really hit the nail on the head with that like that is. I think it's just so exciting.

derek beaulieu: Yep. And I keep finding little tools and things that you know as I wander through craft shops, or whatever that like open up the possibility. So, I got like one of these. (Hold up corner trimmer).

Tamara Thompson: Oh, yeah.

derek beaulieu: Yeah, and it's a little corner trimmer. So, it creates round corners. And I've never seen one of these things before. And now I can do that?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: And that is like, oh now I start looking around like, okay now, I want, I want round corners on everything. Stomp, stomp, stomp, stomp. I have this new tool. Let's share it. And it's supposed to be fun.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: So, like I, I printed a chapbook by Helen (technical issues occurred) these little round corners on it and gave it to her, and she was like. How did you get the round corners? And I was like, have you ever seen one of these. She was like no, and she ran out and got one of those, and like it's supposed to be playful and fun and providing opportunities for each other and sharing-sharing the tools and the thinking. So, yeah, that's-that's why that's why I like the small press, the small press. And that's why I'll continue.

Tamara Thompson: What are some challenges you faced as a Canadian-like author, to kind of jump back to that?

derek beaulieu: Very similar kind of issues. I think that the as a Canadian author having published with a number of presses in Canada and internationally is once again wrapping your head around oh, what we consider success in Canadian publishing that too often, I think that authors in any genre equate money with success.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: And bestseller list, price culture, all those kind of things that without that they don't know if they've been a success or not. And there's no money to be had. There's simply none. No money now, literally; there is some. But the mathematics just don't add up that your average book. Let's say it's twenty dollars. Just for ease of math a twenty dollars book. The author gets ten percent. They get two bucks which

is not even a cup of coffee. I mean, it's a cup of Tim Horton's coffee so, it's coffee.

Tamara Thompson: Depending. Yeah.

derek beaulieu: But, like, if you so, if you like, if your book came out in addition to five hundred copies and sold all of them in a year, which is highly unlikely, it usually takes between three and five years sold every single copy you made a thousand dollars. That might do one month's rent, but that's it. Like, there is no fame and fortune. There's no money to be had. And that's okay. Once we stop defining our success based on all those other things, then we can start seeing it as where do we understand success is coming from. And I think that, that to me that's the, that's the space that excites me. That's the thing that, because then, if it's not about it, then it's about, if it's not about money, then it's about community and conversation, and letting your freak flag fly and giving voice to a community that isn't-isn't being heard. All those things that I think that we value. (Technical issues occurred) and-and so I think one of the challenges is-is that understanding what writing can do, that we're here to open up opportunities and to see the world differently, not to make money because there isn't money to be had. Yes, there's always exceptions that rule. But the exceptions are very, very few. You know the number of writers in Canada that can live solely off their writing especially in poetry? You know there's a handful? Like five.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: And-and that's, and that's a country of thirty-five million people. The conversation is more interesting when we create work that we wish we could read; that we wish could, we could see that presents a point of view that excites us and-and supports other people doing the same. So, I think that one of the biggest challenges for Canadian writers and one of the biggest challenges I had to face was wrapping my head around the idea that there is no fame and fortune none, none famed, none fortune. But there's conversation, and there's community, and there's friendships, and there's opportunities. And there's strange things that happen and that to me is way, way more cool than money.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, well, I think also, a lot of people equate money to success and success to happiness.

derek beaulieu: Yeah.

Tamara Thomspson: Which is not as straightforward line as people think, because once they get the success, they're like, happiness will come. And it's like, oh, once I have money, success and happiness will be like together, and it's like not necessarily. And I feel like that's why so many people do the small pressing, because there is so much fulfillment and joy like I have been smiling this whole time, but I smile with whenever someone's talking, because you're talking about something I enjoy, and I love hearing about it, and I just I-I sometimes see myself in the little box, and I'm like, oh, no wonder my cheeks hurt. But I'm just so excited and hearing what everybody has to say about this wonderful thing that I care about, and to hear other people like that's joy. Am I

making any money off of this? No, I'm paying lots of money to do this. But I love the fact that I'm able to do this that my institution was like, yeah, sure you could do MA on chapbooks, cool. It's like, can I do interviews? And they're like, yeah, sure.

derek beaulieu: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It's a bit of a pain in the arse to get through all of the stages and everything. But you can do it, and I'm like cool.

derek beaulieu: And that-that to me is because, like right writing is supposed to be fun. And it's supposed to, we became writers because we were readers because we found books in the bookstore that blew our minds or made us cry, or we could identify with, or we read, and we were like I wish I was and then there are you know there are-there are people who read the book and wish they were in the book or wish they could meet the writer. And then there's the few weirdos that when they read a book, wish they could be the writer.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: You know, I want to do that, too. I want to write a book like this, not just. I want to read another one. I want to make one like this and every, every area, every workplace, has somebody like that that, you know. They see a motorcycle and there's folks that think I want to ride it. I want to ride one of those or I want to look at one of those or I don't watch. I wanna watch people ride them and race them cool. And then there's other people who look at them go...how do you make that? How do you make one of those? I want to take it apart and I want to tinker with all the pieces, and I want to put it back together again. I think that'd be cool. And those are the kind of poets I love.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: Who, when they see a poem, they want to take it apart. They want to play with all the all the atoms and then they want to put it back together again. How did you do that? How did you come up with this line in that line? How did those two things work together. How did this gear fall into that gear? Why did, you know? How did you make this thing? What tools did you use and see it as inspiring somebody else is like, oh, you use that tool. What would happen if you use this tool and loud to educate yourself allowed to be like, oh okay. So, if I do this and then do that now, I've learned something, too. And then the whole process gets weirder.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: And that's that to me is the thing to learn about writing is that's funner then money? Yeah-yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, we've been kind of talking about the question I'm about to ask already but I wanna again ask it more directly. What did this kind of publishing teach you like if you had to stand in front of a group

of people and be like, what's the major thing that you want those people to know.

derek beaulieu: That, that-that writing in particular poetry is...is weirder than you think and is more welcoming than you think that like dream big and weird so that other people can't yeah. And you know create the work that only you can not, just from the point of view, like writing from your point of view, writing from your voice but also write the books that because, like we're taught to, you know, write the book, write what you know and I-I want writers to write what they don't know or what they wish they knew you know. Write the book that you dream about, write the book that you wish you could read, write the book-book that you wish someone else would write. Well, then, that's gonna have to be you and-and that small press publishing is actually the perfect venue for that, because the risk you control all of the decisions and all of the risk you get to define and that means the entire process from you know, typeface to format, to plot, okay by everything. It's an entire world that you get to play in and given an entire world to play in would you choose just to play in this one tiny little corner? Or like you can play the whole thing. You can do any weird thing you want and know that there's some other writer out there that's been waiting for you.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: Finally, finally, somebody used that corner cutter thing. So finally, somebody found it used to do such and such exactly. And-and to me, that's what writing can be is this is a way to discover who you are, how you fit in the community. What kind of languages, what kind of languages. What kind of stories, what kind of poems are being told, in what form? And you get to actively play the part of that conversation. And... I don't know that all feels really cool.

Tamara Thompson: Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not?

derek beaulieu: Absolutely, because they're cool. Absolutely these, the, this is the, this is the, this is the hot, this is the, you know chap-chapbooks are basically where poet's hotbox their car, or where they, they, you know, live in the laboratory with their with their weird lab coat and their chemicals. This is, this is the space to take all the risk. This is the space to find out what's working and not. This is the space to encourage other voices and the larger Canadian presses. And they don't have to be that large just like larger than this are aware. They're watching. They're reading this work they want to see risk happening. It's the perfect spot for small conversations for, or things that need to just be this big to occur. It's the perfect space for immediacy. It's also the perfect space for things like non-publishable forms, like the Damian Lopez thing I showed you on two slides. No press is going to publish that. It's too expensive or weird and they don't know how to market it. So it is, it is a place that allows you all the opportunities to play and to refine and to discuss and to build community and all of those things benefit a larger literary ecosystem. And you can do it without any sort of without having to risk anything. Like-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: Nobody is dependent on you to do this. All you get to do is just like, it's free play. It's very, very important. And I think that a lot of, a lot of, a lot of poets realize that. Which is why folks don't graduate away from the small press. They continue to do both because this gives you an opportunity that this does not, and vice versa.

Tamara Thompson: Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way? And this is a pretty big, open question. So, you can take this whichever way you'd like.

derek beaulieu: I don't know if it's uniquely Canadian. But I do know that we have an awful lot of very strong models in Canadian literary history that have created an ecosystem once again of a small press of small presses and how they, how they build community. So, you do see that. I mean, I still see that in American presses I see that in the UK. I don't think it's uniquely Canadian, because I think it just happens where poets live.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

derek beaulieu: Wherever poets live they're gonna do this weird thing. But the Canadian presses we have had have created a long history and a healthy ecosystem and an understanding that this isn't, this isn't unusual. This is healthy and normal and-and part of what's needed.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: So yeah, so I don't think it's uniquely Canadian. I think it's uniquely poetic. We just have a particularly strong scene.

Tamara Thompson: Nice. So, we kind of touched a little bit on this with like the answer that you asked like, answered a little bit. But what's something you wish people knew about Canadian publishing like the public at large.

derek beaulieu: I kind of just wish they knew about it. I don't really care what they what they knew of it just know it just like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: You know read Canadian authors and read Canadian presses and realize that the-the stories, the poetry, the journalism, the-the fiction and nonfiction, the playwriting, the art that's coming out of this country is just as exciting, weird, fascinating healthy whatever-whatever adjective you want as anything that's coming out of another community. We are all too often fed the US as the primary culture but... and that creates a sense that Canadian culture is small, or boring or uninteresting, or whatever but I think it's the reverse. I think that anything that you're looking for you can find here, and we should look for it more.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: Not because, you know, it's some sort of nationalistic act, but because there's really cool writers that you'd really like if you gave chance, if you, if you had even heard of them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: Like, just like go into your local bookshop, even if it's Chapters, and say, like, I'm looking for a great new horror novel. And they'll give you a hundred. Go into any local bookstore and say, I'm looking for a great new horror novel by a Canadian and pick that one. See what happens, cause I won't bet it's going to be a point of view you never saw before. It's still going to be really cool.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I do have to ask the little more sad question of why do you think most small presses and micro presses close up shop?

derek beaulieu: Ummm...because they're, because they're run by people. And-and you know, people have lives. And I think it's that people get busy. You know, in some cases they might get bored, or they might get frustrated. But I think that in most parts it's just that they have lives. They'll you know they get a job, or they have kids, or they do this or that, or whatever. And it just-just trickles out or things have a lifespan. You do it for a while, and then it's just like, actually, I feel like I've said what I wanna say. And now I want to see how other people pick up the mantle. I don't think it's, I don't think there's a, I don't think there's a particular reason other than things have a life.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. How and why are you still keeping the press going?

derek beaulieu: 'Cause it, 'cause it's still fun. That's it. I-I, why? Because I still enjoy it. How I think that's probably the same reason-

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

derek beaulieu: Because I still enjoy doing the things, I still enjoy reading work. I still enjoy sharing it. I still enjoy having conversations like this, or being, you know, surprised. And you know the-the type of work I've done is kind of ebbed and flowed, the style of publishing. But I'm still enjoying, and I'm still learning stuff. So, it's still rewarding.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: And once it stops being that I'll stop. But sometimes you know, there are fallow periods where it just feels like you know I'm not seeing anything that really blows my mind, or whatever. And you have two options. You can kind of like you could well, three I guess. You could stop. That's it. I'm done forever. You could just kind of slow down and just be responsive just when you find something do it. Or there's like or you push through, and you just keep doing it, because you know that there will be a good day on the other side, you know. Kind of like a yoga practice like when you don't want to go. That's when you got to go to Yoga. Not that I go but because you want it to be there when it's on a good day. So, you have, you have to be there for it on a bad day.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah. What's something important about D.I.Y. press history that you wish people knew about?

derek beaulieu: I feel like we've kind of discussed that, but that it's-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: That it's healthy and weird, and that that people don't publish for small presses because they can't publish with someone else. They publish in this form because they want to because it's an aesthetic and artistic choice that they've made and so meet that aesthetic and creative choice in the same way that you would risk meet any other aesthetic, creative choices. This is not a lack. This is a, another form.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

derek beaulieu: This is not. We do this because no one else will. We do this because we want to. And it's healthy. And it's amazing. And it's fun. And there are lots of people doing it.

Tamara Thompson: What's something you wish people knew about your history?

derek beaulieu: Umm... I-I share everything I've published everything I publish I put on my website for free. And I do that because I think that poetry is funner or weirder when it is given away. I don't give it away because it can't sell or that it won't sell. I don't give it away because I'm rich or that I don't need the money. I gave it away because I believe in writing and I believe in the small press, and I believe in making that we're here to create conversation. So, I give it away to be surprised and to be supportive. But folks, yeah. (Technical issues occurred). I just said that, you know, like I, I give work away because I believe that I believe in the conversation. I don't do it because I'm rich. I don't do it because I'm employed in a certain way. I don't do it because, you know I don't need the money or any of those things. I do, I do it because I believe that writing is-is healthier when you're generous with each other and-and that's it. That's it. It doesn't, it's not like, it's not like I've, I'm a bestseller, so therefore I can give I can afford no none of these books sell amazingly well even the books from other presses. None of them are paying my rent. None of them have secured me some sort of amazing position, or, you know, full bank account. I gave the work away because I believed that that supports writing and writing beyond just my own writing. So, yeah that's something I wish people knew.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Do you have any additional comments that you would like to make?

derek beaulieu: Not at this point, but what I would like to do is, as I offered earlier, is that if you have more questions, if things come up, if you want to follow up know that we can chat, we can chat more anytime.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you.



Jessica Bebenek

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is June 24. The time is 1:33 pm. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview, if they so desire. This interview is for small press and author.

Jessica Bebenek: This is Jessica Bebenek, and I run a business or press currently called Jessica Bebenek Studio.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. What part of Canada are you from and your pronouns and any titles?

Jessica Bebenek: I'm currently living in Montreal, Quebec, and my pronouns are she/her and my titles are I'm a poet. I'm a bookmaker. I run the risograph, or I'm the risograph coordinator at the Center for Expanded Poetics at Concordia University. As well as teaching independent bookmaking workshops. I'm an educator. So, I teach English literature also at Dawson College. And I'm a, currently a freelance publisher, primarily printing on the risograph.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So how did you first discover, like, zines and chapbooks in this kind of publishing, where it was kind of a aha! This is a thing and not just, you know, the, like, pamphlet of, like, religious texts that you would, you know, technically is, but not really?

Jessica Bebenek: So, I was first introduced to chapbooks in my undergrad at York University, and creative writing through my poetry, Professor David Goldstein; and he introduced us to chapbooks. He brought a bunch in, and he also brought in Andrew Faulkner and Leigh Nash, who at the time were running the press Emergency Response Unit.

Tamara Thompson: Emergency Response Unit, yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: We-we both said the same thing. So, I think that's right. And they've just started their own press now, which is exciting. I'm sure you know.

Tamara Thompson: Umm, yeah, I'm trying to get in contact with them, but they're-they're a busy bee.

Jessica Bebenek: So, they came in and talked to us; and then our whole class, for our final portfolio, we could either just submit a normal-normal portfolio or we could submit it as a chapbook. So, I think pretty much everyone got excited and made a chapbook and exchange them, and-and through that I really, I got really excited about it. And I created a press called Grow and Grow, and published some of my classmates, and that went on for a couple of years, until I then moved to Montreal and started the master's degree at Concordia and started working on the risograph instead.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So, you talked a little bit about why you started doing this type of publishing with your first press. But can you

go a bit more into detail about like how that press started? Just a little bit more.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah. So, I got really excited. Not only like I guess, my interest in creating that press was both in book design, like, I got really excited about creating books which were innovative in their form, had beautiful papers. Very like beautiful handmade book art objects, which is very much still, my interest in bookmaking because I feel like there's kind of two streams in-in the small press world which is like a quantity over quality, not to be rude. But like putting out, like just putting out the work and spreading it as far as possible, which usually means like putting out more cheaply made books, whereas I make fewer books, but they're very beautiful, and they're in a more limited edition. But then I would say a-a con of that is that they can't reach as many people so, both of those have a pro and con and then my other interest is in publishing innovative work. So, all of those first books that I published by my classmates, chapbooks that I published by my classmates, were conceptual to some degree and so my interest as a, as an editor, as a book designer and a bookmaker is to create books that uplift whatever the text is doing, and to present it as well as it can be presented, which is sort of like if you're doing, if you're publishing lyric poetry or something it's like making the book pretty right most of the time, whereas with more conceptual works, I'm always really trying to like lean into what the, into what the author is doing, and really trying to create an, a book design that is as strange or interesting as the text itself.

Tamara Thompson: Cool. So, would you say that kind of like goes in with, like your philosophy of trying to just create things that are like unique, but also, like the subject matter themselves?

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, exactly. Like, I feel like one of the reasons that really attracts me to chapbooks, one of the things that really attracts me to chapbooks is that they... you can do more interesting and experimental things as opposed to larger press publishing of poetry, which is still very small. But people are looking to, at that level, at the small press versus micro press, I'd say people are just looking to create a book which can fit onto the shelf at Indigo, right? So, you're going to be limited by what it's possible to actually do at that level. So, when I'm making something that's only in an addition of fifty, I can make a hand glued accordion book, you know, or I can make a Japanese stab stitch book, or I can make a book that I made for Jack Pine Press had hand pressed leaves sewn into the binding. You know, you can't do that when you're making hundreds and hundreds of books.

Tamara Thompson: So exciting. I love the accordion style books. I really wanna make one that's graphic fiction. (Technical issues occurred) I was like, oh, this would be so cool if you could follow it, and it just like opened, and your eyes could just flow like a scroll almost, but not quite.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, I'm interested in the-the scroll as in the physical paper scroll as well as the Internet scroll.

Tamara Thompson: Yes!

Jessica Bebenek: The endless stream, that's cooking, cooking for a while.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's one of the reasons why I also love Webtoon is because I'm in such a world where I love comics and how things work with like a page flip, and how that works. But I love the scrolling method because it, there's so many different techniques to both like to the book like turn, and then to the scrolling of a comic. And just how that timing and pacing works. And it's so interesting to me and I love how so many like artists are utilizing the technical one, whether that be adding music as you're scrolling, or just like how they set a scene.

Jessica Bebenek: Is this digital?

Tamara Thompson: Yes! And because this is digital and like, so on the screen, it's that scrolling. And like you have this much space (shows a large gap between hands). So instead of a page being like this (shows a typical page size), you have this (shows a large gap between hands), but it goes on for as long as you want it really. And I love the way that like, I'm not as interested in a lot of like digital stuff. But that is something that really interests me because of the amount of techniques that can be used, utilized, and how they, and how these artists are really pushing these boundaries of what a comic online can be. For the most part it was, I've read the page click the button next page. This is just like a beautiful way of experiencing it. I love seeing how people are using tools, old and new, and just like really coming up with really interesting ideas. And then also, just even like a regular scroll like the physical scroll, is so interesting, too. Sorry bit of a tangent.

Jessica Bebenek: No, I'm agreeing; it's great.

Tamara Thompson: So, you were talking? I-I just want to get into a little bit more about like kind the kinds of things that would be actually in the books. Was it, like more poetry? Was it maybe, like, experimental fiction? Could you like maybe just give me a couple of examples there?

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah. So, with Grow and Grow, I published, I think, I only published four or five books because it was only, I only had it, for, I think, a year and a half before I moved on, but I started off with a book which was entirely footnotes. So, the poet started off with a one-sentence quote by Walter Benjamin. And then each word was a footnote, and I believe each footnote was further quotes from the arcades (laughs).

Tamara Thompson: This is the fun stuff that I love.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah (laughs).

Tamara Thompson: Like, it's so interesting, just so.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, and then the-the other one that I did by a classmate was, I can't remember what text she started with, but each, each poem was a haiku, and she had taken long text, and she had you-I don't think this exists anymore, but Microsoft Word used to have a function called "auto summarize," where it would, you would select the text, and it would, I guess, compress it down like use some sort of AI to compress it

down into something still intelligible. And so, she did that over and over and over, until she had a multi-page text. It might have been like chapters of a novel or something I can't remember now compressing down into a haiku length.

Tamara Thompson: That's kind of brilliant.

Jessica Bebenek: Yup.

Tamara Thompson: I-I love it when we take things that are, like, taking away the kind of human aspect of it and then, like, absolutely breaking them until they're this unique human thing because an AI is not going to kid keep doing that unless you ask it to do it. It's going to be like, why are you doing this? We did it already you know, and I love how-oh, that's so interesting!

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, one of my favorite, I would say across all of my artistic practices, one of my favorite things to do is to misuse a tool.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

(Both laugh)

Jessica Bebenek: I think you always come up with something really interesting. Like in my, if you've seen my knitted mind, knitted poetry, right? That's like misusing the practice of knitting.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, was-was that with- who was that you did? Did you do that with someone else?

Jessica Bebenek: That was.

Tamara Thompson: Or have I seen that somewhere else?

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, that was published, I mean, it was, it was like a really collaborative between the Center for Expanded Poetics and Broken demand press out of Berlin. So, there was like a Berlin edition and a Montreal edition basically.

Tamara Thompson: Right? So, I saw that somewhere where I was literally at a like a chapbook market thing. And someone was like, yeah, you just knit the poems. And that's why it comes with like needles and stuff. I'm like, that's brilliant. That's actually one of the main examples that I use when people are like, well, what is the chapbook I'm like, well, it's this, and I'm like, oh, so it's only that. And I'm like, well, no, here's another example.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah. And people are like, well, how is this gonna fit on the bookshelf? I'm like, good question.

Tamara Thompson: It usually sits on the table and is given to by the person who made the book usually, or the person who did all that, which I think is also a really unique experience. When it comes to markets and

stuff, you're actually seeing the people who made things that you're so interested in, and that you're holding in your hand.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah. And one of my, I I've really this might be stepping on the toes of some other questions, I'm not sure, but I've really stepped back from having the thing, putting the things that I create into bookstores consignment most of the time. Mainly because, like, I prefer tabling, and I prefer like hand selling. I have my things up on Etsy, but they rarely sell on Etsy. I-I mostly do my-my selling person-to-person and having things on consignment it was this is just me, but it was like a lot of admin and I'm not someone who particularly wants to run a business. I'm more interested in making and teaching. So, I'm trying to step back from that, and lean more into especially teaching. I have a real passion for teaching.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I have a lot of people who were in my program that they weren't interested in it. And I'm like, why are you not interested in teaching? These guys give me so much hope for the future and for the current. They get so excited about this thing that they've never experienced before; they've realized poetry is actually not rules and can be fun. That is such an amazing moment to witness and to be a part of. Or they really liked this book or they really hated this book, and they're being really expressive about it, like, I don't know because I get asked a lot, how do I stay so optimistic? And you know the dire times we live in. And I'm like, it's-it's them they bring out so much optimism in me. You know?

Jessica Bebenek: I hear a lot of teachers say that. If they're teaching something creative, if they're teaching something that sucks, then they're like the world is terrible, and these kids are idiots.

Tamara Thompson: I mean, like, it's one of those things where, like I, I understand. But like, for no matter what I'm teaching, even if I don't like, super like a book that a teacher has, like, chosen I'm like, let's talk about it. I don't care if you like the book, full honesty, which is how I do it every time anyway; I'm like, I really like this book. You didn't have to. If you don't like it, let's talk about it, you know.

Jessica Bebenek: One of my favorite classes that I've taught is a class on politics and poetry, because I start off, it has three phases. You start off, starting off with mid century political poetry, and then comparing that in the second portion to current political poetry, so kind of trying to like twin certain movements and see, okay, what has changed. And the third section I, we look at language poetry and conceptual poetry, and what, it's my favorite part, because most of the students have not really studied poetry before. And then by the, by the third section, they're saying things like, well, this isn't poetry. I'm, like, "amazing." Like, "you care. And you're getting angry." I love this.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think, I think the other thing, too, especially when it comes to poetry, is once some of them realize that there's not as many rules, or it's not as strict like-like, have fun. And I think one of my favorite things specifically so, there's I have a lot of women in my classes, right? And I don't have a lot of male students. And when we read

*Diving into the Wreck* by Adrian Rich, it's a very like feminist female set of poems. It's from like the seventies. It's not everyone's favorite. But when I see my male students, they don't feel like they can talk about it. And I'm like, no, there's some universal experiences here, right? Men deal with some of these issues, too. Right? If you work in the service industry like, there can be some like, some unwanted touching. And then, like they open up. And they're like, yeah, there are like a lot of things that I'm like yes, your voice is also important. This isn't just about female voices and stuff like that. It's about everybody who is dealt with the bullshit, and to see them open up and connect with this like feminist poetry from the seventies, and actually connect and enjoy something that, like, you know, they're not supposed to enjoy. And this is like, oh, we can't do this, or they don't want to talk over their female classmates, but they're not. They're a part of it, and for them to kind of feel a part of it. It's the best, it's so good because the other female students, or even like the queer students are just like, no, together. And I'm like-

Jessica Bebenek: That's pretty sweet.

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: We have succeeded here today. It's-it's that book, specifically, I keep telling Rob Winger who I work under; I'm like, don't get rid of that book. So many kids love that book, and it's such a moment for them to, like, realize and connect with each other, no matter like gender. I'm, like, that is so important.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, I actually taught that one in-in my politics and poetry class, because I taught that in feminism in mid-century feminism. And then there is a can't remember her name, but a trans woman who wrote like a direct sort of critique of Adrienne Rich, and that poem can't remember the title of it. And it's so great to see like these conversations going on and have conversations with the students about like, okay, how can we appreciate a text, but also criticize it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: Not like straight up throw something away, or cancel, or whatever.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And that's something about specifically Adrienne, it builds a bit of community. But it also doesn't mean that we can't critique some of these things, but it also doesn't mean that we can't still appreciate some of these things. Things are complex, and I like the fact that it brings out that complex thinking in the students.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Because it's not just black or white, right? It's, there's a lot going on here, and there's a lot of conversation, and Rob frames it as like something from the past, but still kind of relevant, but also has a lot of things going on in his lectures. So then, when I get to them at seminar, they're already starting to think about it. And then it becomes this complex thing for them. Yeah, sorry.

Jessica Bebenek: No, no when, yeah, when I did my poetry translation or knitting translation of *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot, which was my master's thesis., it's-it's like a criticism of that poem. But it's like a loving criticism, right? Like, I wouldn't have spent that much time with that poem and that author if I didn't love it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Oh, man that sounds like a really cool thesis. Personally, I-I-I had to stare too much at T.S. Eliot's work for a editing assignment because there was an editing book that was around like *The Waste Land* and stuff like the whole text and stuff, and I-I had to stare so much at it.

Jessica Bebenek: Was it the-the facsimile edition.

Tamara Thompson: It might have been I can't remember. It was like second year I lived in a basement. There were no windows. (Technical issue occurred)I don't remember, but yeah, I there are a couple of texts that I probably would care for a little more. But T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and *The Great Gatsby*, I-I can't. I'm more willing to show some love for T.S.. Eliot, but I've had to read *The Great Gatsby* like five times.

Jessica Bebenek: Really?

Tamara Thompson: I refuse to read that book again.

Jessica Bebenek: Somehow, I got through only reading it once.

Tamara Thompson: Had to do it once in high school, and then, like the rest, was an undergrad. I was like, why, why, this isn't even that good. I don't care about the west egg, egg whatever. That-that was a brutal couple of a lot of semesters there where I had to do that. Anyway, sorry. Let's-let's move on. I want to know a little bit more about your process on how you actually make some of these things. I know it's probably different for each of them, because of just what each of them kind of need. But could you like maybe give me an example like from idea/conception to actually getting it into people's hands, kind of like what that process is like? Because I'm very interested in that.

Jessica Bebenek: Alright. Like, talking about that press that I ran, or right now?

Tamara Thompson: You can do both, or either, or I'm just interested in how you actually make the things.

Jessica Bebenek: Okay.

Tamara Thompson: Make such beautiful, interesting things.

Jessica Bebenek: Thank you. Yeah, so it is. I'll talk about kind of right now, because it's very similar to how I ran the press. So, the way that I work right now is that I take on a lot of commissions. Basically, like freelance book publishing I would call it. So, people who want a book published. Usually, they have funding from somewhere. Or I have someone

who has a following online. And so often people are sort of pre purchasing, and so she's able to, or they're able to sell them directly things like that. I had someone fund it through Jack Pine Press but hired me to make it; so, all kinds of avenues. But people will come to me, and they'll say, you know, hey, I like your style. Let's work on something together so very often I'm taking what I make from concept to finished book. So, I do every step along the way, which is how I like to work so often I'm not doing editing. People will bring a complete text to me, although I can do editing and have in the past so often I pick it up at the book design process, so I'll talk with the person. What did they have in mind? I'll read the book and try to come up with some kind of an innovative design. That really highlights what the book is doing, as I've said, so like a great example is the Jack Pine, one that had the press leaves within it which I, you know, went out and gathered leaves and pressed them, and then bound them into the book, and then I do the book layout through InDesign, and there is some extra formatting, because I print on the risograph. So, the risograph is, it's like the, it's like screen printing process. But it's within a machine that looks like a-a photocopier. And you have individual ink drums. So, you print one color at a time.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, okay.

Jessica Bebenek: So most often, most often for a book, we're not messing around with more than two colors. It can get a little much I did do one book that was a four color on some pages. So that's a lot of work. A lot of risographs only have one ink drum. Luckily, we have two at a time, so we can print two colors at a time but otherwise the ink comes out wet. You have to let it sit for at least twenty-four hours and then run it through again. Every time you run it through again you can run into smudging, and, so it's a very physical process. That's why I love the risograph so much. You know I've talked about texture and physicality, and I don't do any stapling of books. Everything I make is hand sewn and that's just me.

Tamara Thompson: So, I also so because I love it. I love how the-the embroidery things I love, how they feel, and the color.

Jessica Bebenek: It's all about tactility for me.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: So even though, even though it is a digital process, you send a digital file, although you can use the flatbed as well most of the time you're sending a digital file. It's still a very tactile process, and you don't really know what it's going to look like until it comes out. Even I have been working on, I've been working with this machine for like eight years now, and my favorite experience is being surprised when it comes out. And actually, so Cameron Anstee who I know you interviewed, he has a book coming out next year, and he wrote a chapter on my knitted poetry, and also my risograph publishing, printing, and he has this excellent quote; and I'm misquoting it a little bit; it, but I think it's just the chef kiss description of the risograph, and why the risograph is so wonderful, and he says something like it combines the, the promise of the perfection of the digital with the necessary fallibility of the



analog. I'm like, yes, that's it. That's exactly what is so perfect about it.

Tamara Thompson: That's so great. Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: So, I print on the risograph and, most of the time, that is why people come to me. They want something printed on the risograph, and I'm one of few people who use the risograph print books, because it's really not meant to do that. But again, it just takes some extra work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: And so, I take everything through the printing process, which is a very-takes multiple days. It's not like printing something on a, on an offset or digital process and then I'm, if, it's a more typical book then I'm, you know, collating all the pages, because with the risograph. You don't print page one, two, three, four, five in a row. You print all of page one, all of page two, all of page three. So, then I co, hand collate everything. Which is another reason why I can't do too big, the runs can't be too big. It can take me a day to collate all the pages and then I do the binding so often it'll be some kind of a specialty binding process as well. And so, then I do the-the binding, the trimming. Sometimes I'll do rounded corners. Any kind of little specialty things you can do when you're doing something in a really, a small run and in terms of papers that I like to use, I like to I go to this place called Techno Lith, which is two brothers. Whose dad owned this this paper. Just I don't think they make it. I think it's like paper distribution warehouse. So most often they're selling whole reams of paper to companies, but they also have a warehouse full of discontinued paper from, dating back to like the sixties until I'll go in there with them. And I'm like, here's what I'm looking for, and we just walk through the stacks and try to find it.

Tamara Thompson: That's fantastic.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, that's my most. And during the pandemic I ended up ordering a lot of stuff online, which I really don't like to do, because first of all, I'm completely self-taught in bookmaking and so I don't know or have a super strong understanding of the more technical aspects of, not technical aspects, but paper sizing and weights, and I just prefer to experience something in person than have to guess at what it'll come to me being I do have a good, I have an understanding, but I prefer to encounter it in person.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I get that. That's where my production manager, my partner, comes in. I'm like, I want this and this, and he'll go okay, order this, and I'm like cool. I didn't have to do any of the work, 'cause I just wanna hold it.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah. So, my favorite way to buy paper is absolutely by buying it in person. And also, I get really inspired by encountering limited amounts of a material. So, it can be a little bit of a backwards process where I if I find something great, I'll grab it, and I have my shelves here that are just full of paper, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I get that, too. Like, if I see a really nice embroidery thread, and I don't think I'm gonna see it anywhere else. I'm gonna be like, okay, how many? How many should I get? Yeah five. Well, maybe?

Jessica Bebenek: And you see that with people who work in textiles as well like, you go to the garment district, and if you encounter a bolt of fabric. You're not ever going to find that bolt of fabric again.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, my mom does historic sewing and hand sewing.

Jessica Bebenek: Oh, love it!

Tamara Thompson: So, a lot of, and she does knitting and stuff like that, too. I actually did a couple of art projects, and I needed a tiny bathmat and tiny towel, and she made me tiny knit things for this bathroom I made. Like I sculpted out a bathtub, and like a lady and stuff. And she knitted me these tiny, tiny things.

Jessica Beneke: I love that.

Tamara Thompson: But yeah, I-I know, because we'll go to the yarn store. My mom will be like, well, I'm never gonna see that again in that color. And like they're not gonna make it that weight or color/weight again, or whatever. So, you need to get all of it in one go, because you're probably never gonna see it again. So, our house-

Jessica Bebenek: And if you start a project.

Tamara Thompson: Full.

Jessica Bebenek: And run out of it. You gotta make sure you have enough to do your project.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly. And so like, I understand the gathering mentality, it was formed in me when I was young, because my mom did it all the time.

Jessica Bebenek: I was born in the darkness.

Tamara Thompson: No, literally like my-my mother like is such a hands-on tactical person like she's a biologist and an ecologist, and she does a lot of things with soils and clays and escarpments. And then she has all these interests, and, like everything else like she plays guitar and does all of these amazing things.

Jessica Bebenek: Show how it does intuitively go together. I get it, I am also into like a lot of my, I'm also like, I make herbal medicines and things which is like not a part yet of my, of my practice. But it is part of my life.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, my mom does the same thing, too. Like, she'll look up something and be like, okay, this is the Chinese medicine, for if you have a cold, so do this and this, it'll help with the inflammation side of

an inflammation chronic pain thing. So, she's like, well, where to do this, and this is medicine. So only once a day, and like she will be very particular, and she'll go find the herbs. She'll go find the thing like I talked to my mom, I was like, hey, my skin's really bad, and I hear Korean skin care is really good headfirst into Korean's case. She knows everything of us. She's the lady who will have eighty sources for the two-page paper. Yeah, yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: The ADHD is hard.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, and that's why it's strong in me, and my dad's the same way.

Jessica Bebenek: So, yeah, I have, I love also when-when someone comes to me with a with their text and then I'm like, oh, okay, I have this paper like we could, let's use this as a starting point or something.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: Because I don't like. I'd like to start with the material. Rather than like I-I like a limitation. I find limitations to be generative, which is also what attracts me to conceptual poetry.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I, one of the things I do eventually want to do, and I don't know what project it will be, but we have so many misprints, because when we first started, plus our printer is a laser printer, so it'll smudge things every once in a while. So, when you were talking about the smudging. I was like, yeah, I understand that I have-I have like a huge box of paper that I wanna pulp and make it to paper that we can use to print more things off because we have so much of it.

Jessica Bebenek: Absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: I'm not getting rid of it. I paid good ink and money for that. I'm gonna bloody well, use this thing again, and that's such an interesting project that my designer and my designer, layout and proofreader, Grace does. She's again, she does all those things, and so well and like we always bounce ideas off of each other. And that's one of the things that we're really keen to do at some point, because, like, here's this thing where we fucked up for a better term, like no better term like we messed up the paper, and there were so many instances where that happens, because it's going to happen, especially with your first starting.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, right?

Tamara Thompson: Exactly. But there's something that I'm so attached to the fact that those were so messed up, and I spent that time and effort. I don't want to get rid of that paper. And my parents like you keep the paper. And I'm like, because I'm gonna use it again. And it's gonna be this really cool material with a lot of weird sentimental value. And it's gonna be great.

Jessica Bebenek: I will say with the risograph, people love the misprints on the risograph and also because—because you're literally pressing ink through a screen. You have to print five to ten of anything first before it's fully saturated. So those first five to ten, I'm just printing them on scrap paper. So, I'm gonna add two or three layers of shittily printed whatever, text, images. And so those end up looking really cool and like they're just in my scrap file. But people will come in and be like, can I take these? Yes, please, because I hate recycling things.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And it's like, if I can find a way to make it into a cool thing, I'm going to find a way to make it into a cool thing, you know.

Jessica Bebenek: Done things where I'm like, well, one thing I wanna do is grab those and like, bind them into books, right? So, on one side it's blank on either side. It's a bunch of random scraps, and like, I think people would like those as notebooks.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that'd be, I think that would be so fun.

Jessica Bebenek: It's just like you need infinite hours in the day, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I know it's all about time. That's what I say when it comes to like Whispering Wick; like, we're not part time where extra time whenever someone has extra time to do something. That's when something gets done—

(Technical issues occurred but the conversation moved to writing).

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, I have always been, well, I think all kids are creative, right? But I would say I got into writing when I was a teenager and then I started off like, I was writing poetry from the beginning, and I've also written short stories and published some short stories. I was writing plays in high school, which were actually put on and I also did like directing and doing like costumes and props. So, I've always been like very interdisciplinary and so writing is one aspect of the things that I do. I would say but it is the thing I've gone to school for. So, it tends to get the first bill. So, I started off yeah, mainly writing poetry, plays and then I went to York, and I started off in the professional writing program and then switched to the creative writing program. And then did my master's degree in creative writing as well. But both my undergrad thesis and my master's thesis were kind of weirdo experimental projects. So, I was always interested in interdisciplinary and strange things.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that was one of the things I liked about my program is we didn't just write fiction or short stories. We wrote plays. We wrote video game things; we wrote sci-fi things.

Jessica Bebenek: Oh, that's really cool!

Tamara Thompson: I know how to write a video game now I had to learn how to figure out how to program something, and that was one of the most like interesting fun experiences and thinking about how text is so direct. But

a player will always try and break the game. So, you always have to think about how-how will this person want to break it? I had a friend play test my game, and she would always be like, why can't I look in the garbage can? And I'm like, why do you want to look in the garbage can? And she's like oh, well, it's here. Why can't I look in it? And I was like, well, you know, it was such a different experience. And my program introduced me to poetry, and I realized how much I actually liked it, and it wasn't actually scary, and it was something that I enjoyed. It introduced me to blending genres like poetry and fiction, or creative nonfiction and fiction, and like what a weird combination that is, in a beautiful way, you know, and it was something that introduced me to all of these things. And now, when somebody asked me, what do I write? I'm like, I kind of do everything because everything is interesting.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah. Choosing what to actually stick with is the tough part. You can get excited about lots of stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I have so many products that have been finished. But I am also not one that needs to get a project done in like, you know, a week. So, for me, it's just kind of like I let some of my projects grow, and they'll get done when they when it's time, right? Not necessarily because I don't have the time. But it's like, no, I need to think on this a bit more. Yeah, you know.

Jessica Bebenek: For me I'm, I have been, and still am, very interdisciplinary. But right now, I am trying to I guess, professionalize a little bit more, not because I want to be more professional, but because I want to make sure, I have a like, a viable career can keep doing this and can keep making money. So, for example, I just finished a full-length collection which is coming out in next spring and, you know, working on writing the grants for the next collection. And because one of the limitations of working in things like chapbooks is that you don't get invited to literary festivals. You're not getting asked to judge contests right like, even within the world of Canadian literature small press or micro press isn't really recognized. And I'm lucky that I'm doing this at a time where actually I am like, you said, your program is brand new, right? And right now, I'm working on, maybe pitching some classes to universities on like chapbook publishing. And right so universities are getting interested in the interdisciplinary buzzword. Right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: Big in academics right now. So, I'm very lucky that that's happening at a time, as opposed to me, just being someone who people don't know what box to put in.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, if you want any like to be like, hey, this worked at Sheridan. And I've talked to students there, and it works like my self publishing course, but also my acquisitions and imprints course was very good, because we literally were tasked with acquiring work, and then making an imprint so kind of making a little press and having to put a catalog together. So, there was more tactile things, and that course was a favorite among the students. So, if you want to be like, hey, this worked well over here, let me do it over here. Yeah, I'm sure the people like

Leslie is a lovely person, Paul, of course, is a lovely person, and so is like Owen Percy and stuff like that. So, if you wanted to be like, hey can I use you as an example. I'm sure they would be because-

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, I mean, I think-

Tamara Thompson: More of this needs to happen, and I think the fact that you want to do it, it's so exciting for me to hear that more of this type of teaching is gonna like potentially happen. And that's why I say, like, hey, it worked really well in this program, which is about this stuff, and a lot of the students enjoy it, especially even as people going through it for the first time with all of its bumps. Right?.

Jessica Bebenek: You gotta make a-I mean up a bump isn't a failure like you literally have to make mistakes in order to learn.

Tamara Thompson: But yeah, I don't know if that's actually helpful in any way. But okay because those were the two courses that had very tactile, small publishing kind of vibes and they were also super fun cause there was a lot of creative freedom, and the stuff that people created like our catalogs had to look like our imprint, and like some people, did some really cool stuff. So why did you publish your work as a chapbook? Like, why did that decision come around again intertwined, but still?

Jessica Bebenek: Trying to think back to my first chapbook, now... yeah so, my first chapbooks were, were more like, how do I phrase this? There, they were like collections of lyric poetry. Which I think of as like a genre of chapbooks which is like, here's a preview for what my full-length collection is going to be. I feel like that's kind of how a lot of more traditional poets view chapbooks. And then what I've moved more into and what I really love about chapbooks these days is the chapbook as the final product. Right? like this is chapbooks are my favorite way to consume poetry and conceptual poetry, and whatever. I think the length is a lot better. I think even this is my personal opinion, but I think a collection of poetry that is seventy, eighty to a hundred pages. That's way too long.

Tamara Thompson: It's a lot.

Jessica Bebenek: I, when I talk to a lot of poets, they're like, yeah, this could have been twenty pages shorter, like every collection.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jessica Bebenek: I think a collection of like thirty to forty pages of poetry is how poetry should sort of be consumed. I like a, even in lyric poetry. I like a more cohesive concept to what is being written about which you can do a lot better in a chapbook length. You often also see, like a poetry collection that has two or three sections. I think that's what's going on there, too. Right? One of those could be a chapbook but what I really love is like a zine length or a chapbook length, which can be like one long poem or one project of some sort. I'm really gravitating towards those these days. And also, I'm someone, I do something that I don't see a lot of people do, which is, do multiple editions of one chapbook. So, when you know the fifty copies sell out, I reprint it.

Whereas a lot of people do, we'll just say like when it's done, it's done. But the, and I think that is a symptom of the first example that I gave which is this is a preview to the full collection. So now they're like, okay, just wait the full collection is gonna come in eventually, whereas I think of it as like, no, this is the thing. And so, I want to keep that in circulation.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: If it was popular enough to sell out, it's gonna keep being popular to people. There are certain things that when I do this hand selling. You know, people are like this is incredible. They get so excited about it, and it'd be so sad to me if it's just like, well, sorry it's sold out. It's gone now, and now you'll never know about it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, we sold out of my partner's book, because while we were like testing out the press, we did people who worked on the presses work before we brought in outside people. Because I was like, we need to figure this out first. And so, we did, David, our head of production and my partner's book, and he did a small, tiny little like sci-fi short story, and it's sold out.

Jessica Bebenek: Like short stories as chapbook, which people rarely do.

Tamara Thompson: I love them. I know that it's a, I know it's a world of poetry lovers, but I love the short stories and David's short story for sci-fi. For a lot of people who didn't know about it, who like we knew and who wanted to support us, they bought that book a lot. And then people who even just discovered us from the scene bought that book a lot and same with.

Jessica Bebenek: Go figure; people love fiction more than poetry.

Tamara Thompson: Well, no, even Grace Regan. She had an experimental kind of in-the-woods little anthology of short stories; like, there were four short stories in this place.

Jessica Bebenek: Oh, and I saw that on your website. I was sad that it was sold out. It looked cool.

Tamara Thompson: I think like it's, I really want to do a reprint of it, because that book was so fun and interesting. And I liked what we did originally, but I want to remake it because it was the biggest book we ever made, and we realized that we needed to have more of a cap on our page length.

Jessica Bebenek: How long is it?

Tamara Thompson: It was, it was thick for us, but it's to the point where I was like, let's make little chapbooks and put it together and do a cool outside binding and stuff like that and do, and I was like, I wanna reprint this book because I want to redo the format because this was one of the first books we ever did. We didn't really know what we're doing.

Jessica Bebenek: Fair.

Tamara Thompson: And like Rebecca's book, which was really good as well. But she did all hand watercolors. So, each one was different. She did like gold leaf from like-like it, was like gold leaf from the dollar store. But it looked really cool. And so they were, these beautiful pages that she handed all herself like she did all those covers herself and like we can't really redo those. But they were still a beautiful thing. But with Grace's book I'm like, I feel like we could do something. This is cool. But let's like make it cooler. And so like, that's our next project. We're gonna work on as a press when we get time, because it's such a, it was such an interesting project that I wanna give it more of its dues, you know, and I want more people to interact with her work, cause she's a very good writer. She's one of those writers where she, when she writes about a hot day, you start sweating in December. You know what I mean? She's very good at what she does.

Jessica Bebenek: You also touched on something that you can really only do in chapbooks and not larger small press, which is individual or hand crafted covers and things like that, like one of, I think my third...? Second or third chapbook I did hand stamped, like, coffee rings where I literally took a mug, dipped it in like a plate of coffee or tea, and, like hand stamped with the mug, each of like fifty or seventy-five, or whatever I did.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I, we did a book called Band-aid, and Grace drew a doll covered in Band-aids, but the title was a Band-aid, which I had bought from Shoppers, and I painted the shit out of. So, it was this stuff little thing, and I asked Faizal, who does our reviews, and also one of our authors, I said, how do I stick this to the book without needing a glue gun? Because it's just going to fall off? And he said, liquid cement. So, I liquid cemented it, and I wrote the word in a paint pen, Band-aid, and that was the title. So, there was this blank spaz on top, which I just slapped those Band-aids on, and I did them in different colors and stuff, too. And it was just fun. It's like, literally me holding the Band-Aid down with my nail, so I didn't mess up the paint just going back and forth multiple coats. So, you didn't see the tan color underneath.

Jessica Bebenek: See, that's the kind of fun stuff you can do right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I also like that Grace did like hand carved rubber stamps and one of the stamps actually broke. But it was still, like, we can't do those covers ever again as the full piece. But there's something so beautiful even about like the small gap like there was something really pretty about that. And I was like, damn, this is really pretty.

Jessica Bebenek: I mean, that's what people love about the riser, too. The imperfection.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm, exactly. And like I had a lot of people complimenting it. And they're like, oh, is this a different stamp? And I'm like, no, the stamp just got old. We did like fifty covers for Rachel's book, and then we wanted to do some like notebook like things. It just fell apart cause it's just this rubber stamp like we didn't have it on



wood or anything, because we didn't have any wood. It was just us like my mom and myself because she did the yellow suns. So, the black and blue didn't get into the yellow sun but like it just broke over time, because, you know, that's what happens. But it made it so weirdly like, really beautiful, you know? Sorry I'm going on a lot of tangents, but I'm really enjoying our conversation. Would you work with like a small press again? For like chapbooks for your own work? Obviously, you do stuff for yourself, but like?

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, probably I'll do it like in six months or something.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, exactly.

Jessica Bebenek: I have a chapbook come out or zine come out like every year or two consistently throughout my career. So, I think I just publ-I just had a zine come out like a few days ago. That was, I think my eighth was my eighth chapbook/zine. I absolutely love it.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic.

Jessica Bebenek: That one was self-published. I've worked with three different presses now, and it's always been a great process. It's always been different, and it's always been a great process.

Tamara Thompson: Fanatsic.

Jessica Bebenek: No doubt, no, no hesitation in my mind that I would work with another chapbook press.

Tamara Thompson: Great. What are some challenges that you faced as like an author over the years? And again, you can interpret that, however you desire.

Jessica Bebenek: (Laughs) money.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, I would say, the biggest challenge is being able to create a sustainable practice.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: Which is because of-of money. I've actually been pretty successful in getting funding, and I feel super grateful for that. But it is still inconsistent, and I think if you're gonna go down the road, I'm going down, which is to really like, go all in on being a creative person as opposed to like getting a day job and then also doing it. You have to just be okay with fear and living in uncertainty and for some people it's worth the trade off, and for some people it's not, and like no judgment either way. But for me, I would rather deal with the, with like the inconsistency and be able to do what I need to do. Also, like, I'm a chronically ill person and couldn't work a nine to five if I wanted to. So, it kind of forces me into this kind of work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I understand that a lot where, where it's like, well, my body would, I'd love to. But my body has other plans.

Jessica Bebenek: So even something like teaching is a job that I can actually do, because I only have to teach the class. And then the other work I can do at my, to some degree, at my leisure. There's obviously frequent deadlines.

Tamara Thompson: But there's more planning flexibility which I also like about it. I get to choose the time when I'm gonna sit down and, like, prepare for that lecture. I can plan my schedule out in a way so that, like, I could be sitting down at home with my heating pad and my comfy chair. Right? I understand that.

Jessica Bebenek: I can give myself a buffer day. Like, I as a chronically ill person, if I can help it, I never leave something to the last minute, because I might be sick then.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, or like, you might just have like an off day, and you need to plan your days accordingly, right? So, like I, I understand that I always try and be ahead of the curb with my like marking, because I want one done. I don't want it looming over my head, but like two, I want to break it down where I have enough time that if I don't get as many papers done one day because life happens, it's okay.

Jessica Bebenek: Exactly... so, I really appreciate like there's pros and cons to-to oh, for example, I know a couple who are both writers, and one of them a has sort of gone all in and is doing I'm sure he puts together many different ways that he-he makes his money, you know, as you do. And then the other person has a nine to five, and she, she's the one who told me about this situation, and she was like, I just can't, I can't deal with the instability, and he can.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: Right? Like, just in terms of your nervous system, whatever it is. But then, of the person who goes all in has a lot more workout in the world, right? No, no judgment either way. Everyone's different. But yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah

Jessica Bebenek: It is worth it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, whatever gives that person-

Jessica Bebenek: And is okay with some vulnerability.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, whatever gives that person more peace of mind, because at the end of the day there's no point in creating full time. If you can't create cause you're so stressed out. Right? So, it's one of those things where, like, there's no judgment either way, because at the end of the day, whatever works best for that person is going to be the

thing that works best for them and will allow them to still be able to live a peaceful life and to still create.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: Just the people still have to do the creating part. I know a lot of people who have left that part behind, and I'm like come on, man, you do some amazing things. It's so frustrating. You're so good at this, and you stopped. It's an insult almost.

Jessica Bebenek: I got the advice early on, which is one of the best pieces of advice I've ever gotten which is the people who are successful at this career, at writing, at being creative, are just the people who keep doing it. They're not the most quote unquote, talented people, whatever that might mean? That's a loaded phrase, right? It's just the people who keep doing it for forty or fifty years, or whatever those are, the people who actually have their career because they just keep going. So that's what I try to keep in mind.

Tamara Thompson: It's literally one of the things I tell the students because they're like, how can you be successful in this? I'm like, don't give up because as soon as you give up, that's you're-you're lost. This is not anything of who is the best, or who is better, or like a lot of it is luck, and you get more times to be lucky the more you give yourself an opportunity.

Jessica Bebenek: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: So, it's like, it's very hard to take those rejection letters but you have to take them. You have to take the L. You got to take the, you didn't win the contest. You got to take the, you didn't get into the literary magazine this month you know, and that's okay. You have to learn to be okay, like you have to learn to live with disappointment. The famous phrase from Princess Bride, right? And that's okay, right? And know that it's not about you, and that it's literally just a system, right?

Jessica Bebenek: That's another thing that I learned from workshops: is like literally the professors told us that, but also getting critiqued over and over and over and over. It makes you less precious and getting rejected by magazines. Oh, like you're a good, you're you've got a good record if you get like one out of ten, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I said-

Jessica Bebenek: And I truly don't take it personally at all. I'm like, look, I mean some things I want more than others, so it can't hurt. But if I just send out my stuff to like twenty magazines if I get nineteen rejections, they just don't faze me, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And it's one of those things where, like, I recently sent something to House of Anansi. Because I'm just like, I just need to start. Let's just start. I know this thing is open so just go.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And let's just like throw it at the wall. And my friend, who's an editor, he's like, oh, well, you know, and I'm like no, you and I both know we were in the same program that if I get a response I've done something good. If I get a positive on that response, I have won the lottery. Like I said, you and I both know that this is not gonna like. And he was like no, yeah, you're right. And I'm like, I know I am in this instance, and it's not an ego thing, or whatever I haven't, added Ego, since I was like four. So, like that was pushed outta me as soon as I got into public school, you know, like, it's one of those things where it's like it doesn't matter, and that's okay. But like the people who stick around and doing this are just persistent. And that's because you just really care about this thing. And it doesn't matter about the rejection. It matters that you've created this thing, and you're continuing to try.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, actually speaking of Anansi, and they do open submissions. I actually had someone who was in the creative writing program at Concordia as well. Just after me. And she had a manuscript pulled out of the Anansi open submissions. Like, what, like that-that happens? And she's like, I would guess, around fifty or so like she had had a whole career, I think, in theater. And then, like, this is her first book and, like, just to know, like you can start late quote unquote, you can, like, it doesn't have to be this whole *wunderkind* thing that you see happen with some poets.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think the other thing, too, is so many people are worried about it being publishable, or quote unquote good. And I had to. I keep telling people, but specifically my partner and I'm like, if you're not having fun, it will never be good like if you're not having fun, your reader is going to know, so don't try and write for this invisible person who you think is there. They're not there. You have to make it so that they will come to you, right? Build it, and they will come, you know and like it's one of those situations where it's like, if you're having fun it will be good, whatever good is and like, it doesn't necessarily mean it's the thing that wins the award. But maybe it really connects with someone.

Jessica Bebenek: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: Maybe it really helps them during a bad time. Maybe they figure something out about themselves, and they're like holy shit. Maybe I'm attracted to this like gay woman who's tall in this book, you know? Like if you're making something and you enjoy it, people will recognize that and enjoy it with you. Yeah, it's something I also keep telling my students I'm like, don't try and write for this imaginary person, or what you think people want. Write something that you're enjoying writing, and it can be still sad and upsetting. But you're creating it because you want to create it. There's something here that you're enjoying.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, whether it's happiness, it can be curiosity, or whatever.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, cause like the other thing, too. There's a lot of sad stories out there. There's a lot of like biographical stories. There's a lot of like, and they're amazing, right? They find their places and like

it might be really fucking sad and about trauma, and like their dad and all these relationships. But it's found people and connected with them because you cared, right? And a lot of people are like, well, no one's gonna care about like my poetry about my dad, and like my racist grandpa, and it's like you'd be surprised. People like connecting with other people.

Jessica Bebenek: Other people have dads and racist grandpas or, if they, if they don't, they would read it and be like, Wow! I didn't know that this was an experience in the world.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly. Not everyone has to relate to everything you're writing about. That doesn't mean that they still can enjoy it. Yeah. What are some challenges that, like you've had when it comes to like the press side of things. So obviously the press kind of like stopped after a period of time. But then also, like your own studio thing, what are some challenges that those things have like experienced over time?

Jessica Bebenek: I guess one of the challenges I have, which is also like handcuffs of my own making, is that I work totally alone.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jessica Bebenek: And that is a lot of pressure.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: So, I do, while I have total creative freedom more or less. And what I work on I don't have a safety net, and I've had, especially in doing this freelance kind of work where I'm working with people I might not really know, and they hire me. I've had to really learn how to be clear about my...my expectations from them as a client. Cause yeah, some people are not great at deadlines. Some people are not, have not been great to work with and then put it on me. And so, I've had to learn how to be a good employee. Employee is not the right word but someone who pe-people hire right? Say, here's what deadlines I need from you, right? Here are my boundaries, I guess.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: So yeah, in working, it's, I assume, the same kind of thing where you with your press didn't want to take on outside people before you worked out the kinks. Right? Cause then people are, gonna have these expectations of what you need to do for them. So that's been, that's been something to work out and like collaborating with people is always a challenge. But it's also really generative.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it, it's really rewarding. It's just that, like, communicating is hard.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: With people in the world, and you just have to learn how to communicate, because every person is different.

Jessica Bebenek: So, I would say that, yeah, that's one of the most difficult things is a, it's collaborating.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, like having-the other thing, too, is, I think, a lot of outside people. If this is their first chapbook or their first thing, they have very unrealistic expectations. Like when I say I'm a chapbook press, people think, oh, you're a publisher, so you must make a lot of money, and it's like, what do you mean? Any money I make goes right back into the books. I don't take any of it. In fact, I spend money on this, and don't get it back ever again.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, I mean, I'm sure what you hear from everyone is it's a labor of love, right?

Tamara Thompson: Oh, yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: People do it because they want to be doing it at this level. And like one nice thing about being a freelancer is that I actually, like, get paid for my hours and my labor. So that's really wonderful. I do, because I'm often taking on like individuals work. We're almost... my peers a lot of the time.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jessica Bebenek: I offer a sliding scale based on whether they're self funding versus whether they have institutional funding for the project. Which, again, is that instability. But it's important to me to make my work accessible to people, especially if they're self funding.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, cause the, it's expensive out here where your eggs at fifteen dollars at Loblaws, and you're like, oh.

Jessica Bebenek: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: What has this kind of smaller publishing taught you?

Jessica Bebenek: A lot of self-sufficiency. Maybe that's not exactly the right word. Resourcefulness is the right word. As I said before, I'm completely self taught in everything except writing. So, it's a lot of creativity, a lot of resourcefulness, a lot of googling. But that's what I like. I like-I like learning.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: And so, I've just, what I've what I've like, what it's taught me is how to learn. Maybe that's a weird, weird thing to say right, but it's like.

Tamara Thompson: No, it's-it's not, it's, it's one of the reasons why I love this so much. It's because it allows for that to happen. And there's so many like, and that people are willing to share how they were able to do this one thing, if you ask them, you know, I'll send it.

(Technical issues occurred.)

Jessica Bebenek: So, yeah, I've literally just learned, like, everything. Everything that I do like that is much of what I how I make my income is just totally self-taught, which I almost feel like I can't admit to people. Especially if they've done a degree in graphic design or something. But yeah, I just learn, I learn through like passion, and despite not say, have formal training, not having formal training in something like book layout. I learned by just looking at a lot of books, and being like this is what is good, and this is what is bad, in my opinion, and copying, with flair.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I think that's one of the most exciting things about the space. If you want to know something and learn something, you can discover it, especially now with online. But if you ask somebody like, hey, how are you able to do that? Like they're gonna tell you.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, it's a, it's truly a community, whereas I've actually found through...through other like more traditional writing, book publishing it feels more impersonal, feel more like social climbing happening.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: Whereas in these kind of bookmaking and small and micro press communities, it truly feels like community.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: So, that's why I really love these spaces, and probably what keeps come me coming back. If I hadn't found the community to-to buy the books or trade the books probably wouldn't keep making them or I would just do like, I also have a practice where I make notebooks.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: You know, something like that I would do. But this is like, hey, people actually wanna like, buy these books or trade these books and like read what I have to say or look at the beautiful book design that I've made and pulled it and touch it. You know it's very rewarding and say, like, wow, this is so creative. How did you do this?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. It is exciting. I love, how experimental it is, and just how playful it is like so much of the playfulness. You can't find a traditional publishing, because well, that won't fit on a shelf. Well, that's like you know, grandma who we're trying to appease like, is it gonna buy like a cigarette box that has different stories inside of it, like, no, you know. But like, that's so fun and interesting.

Jessica Bebenek: I love that or like when I did the, my book knit to together, which has the twine and needles attached to it, I was inspired, and also with a lot of the aspects of that book design, I was inspired by knitting magazines from like the fifties and sixties which were often printed on a risograph or something similar, wouldn't have been a

risograph. But the similar printing method, like a newspaper type printing method and would come with the supplies to make one of the projects.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: So, people will be like, how did you come up with these things? This is so completely innovative. And I'm always like, no, it's not like. Here was my inspiration.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: Which I think is really important to like, cite your sources and-and-and it's also part of my project in these knitting, these knit multiple knitting projects that I've done part of what I'm working with or against is this idea of like individual genius? And what I'm trying to play into with something like a knitting pattern is like, here, let's collectively make this thing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I think the other thing, too, is-is like, I also have a lot of students who worry that they're not original. I'm like nothing's original. What's original is how you're going to explain the idea. How are you going to translate that idea? And have you done it in a good way. Well, if it's not super original, it doesn't matter, because it's an enjoyable thing to read. You have succeeded. You do not always need to be original.

Jessica Bebenek: But that people can get held up sometimes.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: It's problematic if you're aiming for originality all the time.

Tamara Thompson: 'Cause the other thing, too, is, even if you feel like you're super original, people will try and poke holes into it because people just like doing that. They get too much time on their hands. I don't know why they don't spend it elsewhere, but whatever you know, that's a lot of energy to be spending to try and nit pick this one thing that Pixar did. And it's actually not original, you know? Like, okay, cool; moving on why are chapbooks important to you?

Jessica Bebenek: Because they're so fun ummm yeah, because you can be playful and experimental. It's all-all the stuff we've been talking about, right? Because they're-they're a site of play and creativity and freedom alongside traditional publishing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not?

Jessica Bebenek: I would say, yes, they are, but they're not often acknowledged.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.



Jessica Bebenek: And I would say, largely like not even known by most readers. That is one of thy sort of cons of it right? Yeah, that it's not in Indigo or whatever. And it's not being written about in, I mean, book reviews rarely happen now, anyway, but it's not being talked about on book talk, or whatever is how people find about books now, how, however, people find out about books now

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: So, its hiddenness is both a pro and a con.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: It's what makes it so lovely. But it would also be nice if more people could know about it. But it's sort of like it's, it, it is its own limitation.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I wish, like, it's one of those things where we're probably gonna touch on this again later with some of my questions. But like it's one of those things where I wish the people who would be interested in it, and who would like this sort of thing could find it.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Because I think there's a lot of people who would be interested in this sort of thing that just don't know about it. Like a lot of my students. When I explain it to them. They get really excited-

Jessica Bebenek: Oh yay.

Tamara Thompson: Because they like to create things, but they just had no idea right like you can't enjoy and explore and be a part of something, if you don't even know it exists, as a concept.

Jessica Bebenek: Exactly. And that's why I really want it to be shared more in like creative writing workshops and stuff. Because I feel like that is the site where everyone in the class, everyone in the room is going to care.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah or be excited about it. You're telling me I can make my own book, and this is cool?

(Both laugh).

Jessica Bebenek: Community of other people doing it, and they want to trade with me? Incredible.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: So, where we left off was another Canadian question. But does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way? And you can take that question wherever you desire.

Jessica Bebenek: ...it's like, what is Canada?

Tamara Thompson: No, literally.

Jessica Bebenek: I mean, it reflects Canada in that Canadians are making these things. I have a complex relationship, to the concept of nation.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: The way that we have to engage with the concept of nation as Canadian artists applying for funding is very complicated. Ummm, so I would say this might be a bullshit answer, but like, yeah, I think it, it does reflect it because it's just people who live in Canada are making this art and creating community so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I agree. It's, I had to define what a Canadian was for my like Ethics Committee. And I was like, 'cause I have to narrow down my field. I can't do chapbooks in the world. I also know more people in Canada, so I might get some people in Canada to talk to. So, I was like, I have to have it narrow anyway. But then the Ethics Committee was like, what is Canadian, and I went, oh... damn... You got me!

Jessica Bebenek: Idea of Canadian identity. And I would say a lot of Canadian writers that I know, and of my similar age are not particularly interested in their Canadianness.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: So, I think it has a lot to do with the Internet, especially breaking down a lot of national divides that.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jessica Bebenek: Things like the publishing industry. Things like economies in general have not caught up to how international the Internet is. So, unfortunately, things like publishing industries are pretty limited by things like nation. But like am I more similar based on geography? Am I more similar to someone who lives in BC. Or someone who lives in New York. Right? I'm a lot more physically close to the person in New York, even though they're quote unquote in a different country. So, you'll see a lot of Montreal, New York commuting in terms of the arts. Even Toronto, New York. I don't know, "what is Canada?" is my answer to that question.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. 'Cause the other thing, too, is, Canada doesn't have even a set identity, because we're so goddamn big. Like, we're cut; like the amount of times people also think Canada is so small. It's like, oh, do you know my guy in the Manitoba? And I'm like, no, I don't actually, I'm from Ontario. That's more than like five States away for you.

Jessica Bebenek: Maybe if he makes chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: Maybe because that's a small world. But like yeah, even geographically, we're so different from each other. So, I love how people

interact with my Canadian questions 'cause I have to have them for my scope. Right?

Jessica Bebenek: Sorry if I broke your questions.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, no, I love it. It's great, because break my questions like Andrew from Gaspereau really broke my questions. And I was like, yeah, break them, 'cause they're gonna have people who find their ways around the questions and have their own opinions about them. But I love it. When people interact with them in a way that they weren't quote unquote, made to be interacted with. That's what this community is about. There's no set right way.

Jessica Bebenek: As I said I love misusing a tool.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly. So don't apologize for breaking it. You're supposed to. You're supposed to do whatever you want. What does this kind of publishing offer that other types of publishing can't, and maybe vice versa? We've talked a little bit about it, but?

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, we've talked about it, but it's worth reiterating.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Jessica Bebenek: Because I think about this all the time as someone who's now moving into publishing in what I would call like trade, trade paperback, kinda full-length collections. So, there's a lot more creativity and freedom in small press publishing. But, as I said, it's limited in its scope of who it can reach. And so, your kind of like publishing for your community of other small press publishers, and maybe other poets when you are in this world, and then you're able to reach out a little farther when like, in publishing through larger small presses or traditional publishing avenues. So, like, my publishers are able to send my books out for review, are able to set up interviews for me, are able to help me get funding and do a tour, are able to promote my book in ways that I just don't have the resources to do, or any small press that's run by one or two people is gonna have the resources to do so. That said, large Canadian poetry publishing is still a lot of hand to hand selling. Books sell a lot better directly from person to person than they do through like Indigo, or whatever word of mouth is huge. So, it's still, I still call like it's, I still call it. And I think everyone still calls it small. It's still small press like I think, the only non small press publisher of poetry in Canada is Penguin Random House, who just has a poetry imprint. Maybe Anansi is kind of riding the line.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. House Anansi and Coach House are kind of like mid level is kind of how I've heard people describe them. They're not massive, like the conglomerates and everything like that. But they're still bigger than the smaller Wolsak and Wynn kind of stuff. Yeah. So, I've- I've heard the term mid level.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You know tossed around. What's something you wish like people, or the public knew about Canadian publishing?

Jessica Bebenek: Like broadly Canadian publishing or small.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, take this wherever you desire.

Jessica Bebenek: I mean in terms of small press I wish they knew we existed.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: Right. Like, I was just at the Ottawa small press fair and now it's held in an arena, like a hockey arena. Has this like community space. And it's great because there are people who are like going to the hockey game who stumble into the book fair. And that's really cool, like just trying to get people who fully wouldn't otherwise know about it. And like, if they're curious, if they're curious enough to stumble in they usually really have a good time. From what I can tell, they're like what's going on here, tell me more. And like, that's kind of like more fun than like selling to your friends. Obviously, that's really fun, too. But like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's.

Jessica Bebenek: Introducing the whole concept to someone is very cool.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah, I agree. Why do you think so many likes micro presses and stuff close up shop or end?

Jessica Bebenek: Oh, it's just a lot of work. It's-it's as we said. It's a labor of love, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yup.

Jessica Bebenek: And so, if you have one or two people doing this and then their life circumstances change, they might not be able to do it anymore, or you might be seeing them doing it for ten years or twenty years, but not sticking to a typical biannual or what twice-twice annual publishing schedule, like larger presses do because they don't have employees. They don't have, you know, resources. They very rarely have funding. So, it's just that it is a, it's a labor of love. And a lot of people have other jobs.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: One thing, that is a pro that I've noticed in my process as a bookmaker, is that because I am able to do every step, including printing. I make money in selling books. But most publishers, most small press and micropress micro press publishers are breaking even a because of printing costs, and because they might be paying a designer or something. Right? So, in my case, in doing every step of the way, I'm not making a lot of money, and it depends how you want to like break up like, oh, how much am I getting paid hourly? I don't know. But, like I am, I actually

make money and have from the beginning if you're just comparing it to cost of materials and stuff like that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, how have you kept this going? Because I know that your first press that you started in Toronto kind of had its time. But like, how are you still keeping kind of the studio? One that you were explained like, how do you keep that going? And why?

(Both laugh)

Jessica Bebenek: I think I'm able to keep my practice going because it's shifting. Right. So, if I started off making, making these chapbooks, and I also like just I-I-I have always also made notebooks. And I have also, like we haven't really talked about that here. But I have always made artful one of a kind notebook. So, you can also scan my website. And you know it's not part of my publishing practice, but it's very much a part of my art practice.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: In this kind of like what I would call like book arts and so those sell for some, you know, from, say, forty to eighty dollars, based on the size and complexity of the books. Which is not accessible to everyone, but it is part of the quality. So having that flexibility in the practice, having different avenues in which I'm doing it. So, making notebooks often from the scraps of the publishing practice, which it-so, they're very much tied into each other. Just starting off with that micro press. Then moving into I started working at the CEP like that press ended, grow and grow ended because I moved to Montreal. It was doing a master's degree. And I was like, okay, that's just I'm not gonna be. That's not gonna happen while I'm doing this. But I started working at this place called the Center for Extended Poetics, which had a risograph that was brand new and new, and no one knew how to use. And so that became my thing. I taught myself to use the risograph. And so that became a new, right? I talked about my, what's exciting to me is just learning new things. So that became like this exciting new aspect of my practice and my publishing practice and so making prints with people making books through that we also have a book series called Documents on Expanded Poetics through the CEP, the Center for Expanded Poetics which is much more collaborative. So, in that I only, I only print the books.

Tamara Thompson: Okay.

Jessica Bebenek: There's editors, there's layout, and then I print, and then someone else assembles and sells. So that's another aspect of something I do. And then, with the with the freelance publishing could broadly call it that came out of sort of organically, and it was especially popular during the pandemic of me taking pictures and sharing what I was doing online and people taking interest and asking me to publish their books. And so, it's happened quite organically. And now that that's slowing down a little bit, I'm moving into teaching more because we haven't really talked about this. But I find running a business to be a little bit wrought in terms of making items and putting them out into the world. I think what I feel more passionately about is-is teaching.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: Not even more, not more passionate, but also passionate, about teaching.

Tamara Thompson: Just different.

Jessica Bebenek: Yes, because I love bookmaking. It's absolutely nothing against book making. I love it. But I am feeling the urge to start a press soon. Spoilers! And I have an idea I won't talk too much about it, because who knows? But I have a pretty concrete idea of what that would be, and it would be unlike anything I've done before. So, keep an eye on that.

Tamara Thompson: Absolutely.

Jessica Bebenek: So, it's-it's what keeps me going, I think, was the question.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: Is having a new practice, right? Like-

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Jessica Bebenek: Doing new and exciting things because it's not a business, because it is a business, but because I'm not doing it to make money.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: That's not the primary intention then; what that looks like is me just always doing something new and interesting to me which then luckily ends up being new and interesting to the people who want to look at or buy my books. So that's nice that that overlaps.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, we only have two more questions left, and they're very much just to give you space to talk about whatever you desire. But what's something important about D.I.Y., past history that you might want people to know about?

Jessica Bebenek: The history?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: What's important about? Sorry? Can you say the question again.

Tamara Thompson: What's something important about D.I.Y., like, press history or D.I.Y. history that you would hope that someone would know about, or you want to share.

Jessica Bebenek: It's very queer.

Tamara Thompson: Yes!

Jessica Bebenek: Which shouldn't be surprising when you take a look around at the weirdos that are still doing it. I think of a lot of what has gotten covered, and a lot of what you see is a lot of men doing stuff. Which is just how history goes. And I will say the older men that I know in this community never had a single problem with any one of them. Lovely, lovely people a lot of a lot of I can't say the same about the writing writers I know lot of shitty men in writing, but in small press and micro press. Every old man that I have met has been wonderful and lovely.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: Even if they're crotchety, they're still lovely. They're not shitty in the way that you would not want them to be.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, they're, that's one of the things I found about the community at large is just how excited and happy people are to share and talk about this thing and just how positive they are. I have yet to technically like, really have like a bad experience with anybody.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, I've had lots of bad experiences with writers not so in this community, which is really lovely. But there are a lot of women and queers who have been there the whole time. And if you know Amanda Earle, you might have talked to her.

Tamara Thompson: I don't know.

Jessica Bebenek: I haven't talked to her, Amanda Earl, does Angel House press, and also *Bywords* magazine.

Tamara Thompson: Oh yes! She didn't have time to talk to me, because she's been so busy with stuff I did reach out to her, but I'm anybody who didn't have the time to talk to me. I'm still going to have like a list of the people who have talked to me what they do. And then the people who couldn't even have time like Amanda, gave me other names, just their work they do and stuff like that, and like I'm going to include their work in the back, because even if someone didn't have the time to talk to me, there's still important people doing important things in the community, and I know their name, and that's a place where their name can be, you know.

Jessica Bebenek: That's a good idea. Because Amanda, I mean, I feel like especially well, you probably know she just published the *Judith* anthology.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, so like, that's incredible reclamation kind of work. And really highlighting women in visual poetry and all the different forms that takes too right like that has, especially in the people she's highlighted, has taken in the form of crafting and textile arts a lot of the time which is this gendered labor that has been really devalued, and maybe is why it's not being held up alongside male contemporaries, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: And then also that it is very queer. Right? So, if you take a look at the documentary, *Queercore*. Do you know this?

Tamara Thompson: Maybe. I'm-I'm not the best with names sometimes.

Jessica Bebenek: It's called *Queercore: How to Punk a Revolution*.

Tamara Thompson: That sounds so familiar.

Jessica Bebenek: So, it's-it's about, it's a documentary, and it's mainly based out of Toronto, although it spans to like Seattle and stuff. And it's about how in the nineties a bunch of Zinester in Toronto who were who were queers were feeling really excluded from punk communities. And so, they made a fanzine, a fake fanzine or they made a fan team which covered fake shows that they were going to and made up fake queer punk bands and so, and then that was spread. You know, there were networks of like people mailing their zines to each other across the continent. And people who didn't know that it was fake, were buying it and reading it, and then it ended up spawning and like giving permission for actual punk bands, queer punk bands to exist, because they thought that they also existed elsewhere.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: It's super cool.

Tamara Thompson: It was like a gateway.

Jessica Bebenek: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: I literally saw this on my YouTube recommended the other day like, that's why.

Jessica Bebenek: Absolutely watch it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I definitely will, because it sounds like a good resource just to even understand that scene D.I.Y. ask of things, because that's what it sounds like it's doing. And especially the queer concept like that was one of the things that was really important to me is because D.I.Y. is for anybody who has hands, like can make something with their hands like. If they can make something, it can be a zine. It can be a chapbook.

Jessica Bebenek: It can be anything.

Tamara Thompson: But so interesting, right? Like, if you can think it, it can be it because, like.

Jessica Bebenek: You don't have to ask permission.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly!



Jessica Bebenek: And I think and maybe you should have even said that earlier answer to some of your questions. But like, I think that is one of the best things also about micropress publishing and self publishing is that you don't have to ask permission. You can have an idea, and then you make it and then boom! It exists in the world. There's no waiting multiple years for it to come out and going through editors and copy editors and all cover designs and all of this stuff. Right? It just, you don't have to ask permission. You can absolutely just do whatever you want and that's.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jessica Bebenek: So that's what makes it so subversive. Right? So like this book just came out through. I think the Brooklyn Museum slash fight on called copy machine manifesto all about small press and zine history. And I opened it up and like my eyes just lit up because I'm like, oh, my God, it's like, it's all gay like they didn't. It's all like it's all gay, and it's all punk right, and I'm like, oh, my god, they're not shying away from the actual history, right? Like the history of these kinds of publishing, this kind of publishing is freaks and weirdos and nerds, and right, like people publishing their *Star Trek* fanzines and like punks making collage scenes. And because there are no rules you can do extremely subversive stuff. And so, I think, the-the world of chapbooks and stuff that we've mainly been talking about is a lot nicer, but I know- (technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: I love the roughness that a chapbook can be and like it's a sliding scale. And there's that overlappingness. But I love the roughness of a chapbook. I feel like some people want to elevate the chat book and like make it this like art thing, and that's awesome. That's great.

Jessica Bebenek: I do both.

Tamara Thompson: Absolutely. Let's do that. But also let's-let's have that like rough scrappiness. Let's just take this like weird talking printer paper. That's like just what anyone can find, and let's get the long arm stapler out and staple it. Not everything has to necessarily be this really cool, like expensive high art project thing it can be, and that's super cool. But let's not just make it that because there are so many other interesting things happening in between and, in the folds, and I know a lot of people like to say that the zine is the rougher thing, and that the chapbook is the more refined thing, but I like to think that they can kind of-

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Go in-between.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah, like the-the one that I just published in there somewhere. I'm still haven't unpacked yet. Yeah, it is like quite artful collages. But then I leaned into this like punk aesthetic of cutting out and pasting on the words right like. I always want my zines to, even if they are more artful and poetic, I still want them to exist in this, in

between place and like, I said, because I do these like more elevated book art things. They're not accessible in terms of price to people. And so, the reason I started making, my first zine was called What Is Punk, and I made it so that I could give it away or sell it for a couple of bucks or trade it right? Because I was sick of having my work locked up by money.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, because sometimes it needs to be. But other times and I again, I think that's what's so great about it is, the freedom to have that diversity, and to have, like that sliding scale back and forth. Definitions are fine until they start restricting the thing.

Jessica Bebenek: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: So, I have my final question here, what is something that you wish people knew about your history? For most people this is the toughest question.

Jessica Bebenek: (Exhales)...I kinda actually feel like my most recent zine answers this question. That's because I gave myself a similar prompt in order to write it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: So, I-I made this zine because I was teaching one of my workshops, and the prompt that I give people to make their zine is what is something you wish that people knew about you, and that's where we start from in order for them to-to make their zine. And then I asked myself that question, because I always try to do whatever I'm teaching as well. And-and I realized it was, I wish people knew more about my chronic illness and how limiting it is. In terms of energy levels, in terms of mental health. And how you know, if you're seeing me, you're seeing me at my absolute best, and most of the time I'm not.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jessica Bebenek: So, yeah. The fact, because a lot of the comments I get from people are super nice. And they're like, wow you're so creative, while you're so prolific. Wow! You know you do this and that, and you're everywhere, which I guess is true, but also like it's really hard for me. And a lot of days I have to focus on just doing things like eating and drinking water and stuff like that but because I've sort of chosen slash have to do all this stuff as a job as opposed to the nine to five. As we talked about. It makes me lean in and really, really do it and the way I get-get away with that is what I was gonna say is that I live really simply. I don't buy a lot of stuff that people might buy. I don't go on vacation. I don't do, I don't have a lot of expenses. Everything I buy is second-hand, and that's for ethical reasons, too. But I'm big on garbage. I'm big on trash picking. I'm big on free and trading communities, you know. So, these are ethical things, but they also like, allow me to live this life. That is, that a lot, that is in line with my values.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording?

Jessica Bebenek: You're doing a great job. I want it, I want it on the record.

(Both laugh)

Tamara Thompson: Thank you. Thank you so much. I'm doing my best out here.

Jessica Bebenek: I'm really. I really love this project. So, I'm glad that you're doing it.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you. I also love it so, so much, cause it's so exciting. And I guess I talk to people like you who are excited and care about this thing. And I didn't really get a chance to interact with the community as much. So now, I'm really interacting with it. And I love that.

Jessica Bebenek: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It's so exciting.

Erin Bedford

Tamara Thompson: Hello. My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is July 3<sup>rd</sup>. The time is 1:25 pm. And just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview, if they so desire. This interview is for small press.

Erin Bedford: My name is Erin Bedford, and my pronouns are she/her the press that I run is called Pinhole Poetry, and it is a digital journal, but the-the one that you'll be interested in is a chapbook press. So, Pinhole Poetry chapbook press, and I'm located in Pickering, Ontario.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Do you have any other titles you care to-to give yourself?

Erin Bedford: Well, I'm also a writer and a poet, but that's about it.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough. So how did you discover zines and chapbooks in this kind of smaller publishing? When was the moment when you were like, Oh.

Erin Bedford: Definitely. I began reading them myself when I started writing poetry, because that's where a lot of the new poetry in Canada comes from. These kind of smaller publications by people that you know maybe they're not so well known. But they're still writing fabulous poems. So, yeah, that's when I kind of became familiar with chapbooks, when I, when I got into poetry myself, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: They're enough. Why did you start the press? Because there's a lot of energy that goes into making these and keeping them going. I run one called Whispering Wick chapbook Press. I have some of our books behind me, and it's a lot of work to do this stuff. So why did you start?

Erin Bedford: It is a lot of work. But I started it, I started first with the digital journal, and then I went down to AWP, which is a conference for writers and professors. And you know I listened in on quite a few talks that people were giving about chapbooks and zines and different ways of getting poetry out into the world. And I just felt like that hmmm might be something I would like to try. I'd like to try making something that represents the work that I'm publishing for the journal. So, I started with, what-what I called a volume one selected, and so I approached poets from the digital journal to be part of this first chapbook that I made, and I really enjoyed the process of making it, picking out the papers and sewing and making an object that I could then share with these poets that I've been kind enough and generous enough to allow me to use their-their work in that in that way. And from there because I enjoyed that so much. I decided to run a small kind of a chapbook search. So, I put out a call for manuscripts in August of last year, and I had, you know, a good-good response to that and from that I chose nine chapbooks to publish this year. So yeah, I'm still in the very beginning stages. But I would say I began it as an offshoot to the digital journal. And just for my like, just for my love of the-the poems that I was publishing, and the and to make more space for the poets. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fantastic. So, you're talking about like making more space for the poets. And then that kind of leads into my next question of, is there a goal, maybe an editorial philosophy that the press has?

Erin Bedford: I've always, when I started it, because I am a writer and poet myself, I really shaped the journal, and the way the journal runs based on my own experiences, and what I hoped as a writer, the kind of response that I would have from a press if I was rejected if I was accepted, either of those I kind of tried to use those parameters to shape how I was gonna interact with the people that I worked with, and so definitely, one of the underlying things that I've always been concerned about is building a community while I'm doing this as well. So, like a lot of support for the contributors. I make sure that we follow each other on social media, and if they have news to share, I have a newsletter, I share it. So yeah, it you know that's-that's why, yeah-yeah, that's it's about. It's definitely about the community for me. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fantastic. I love that you have a newsletter like system setup. That's-that's great. I love that. So, you obviously do poetry. But why did you use poetry as, like, the type of stuff, like the type ... why poetry, I guess? It was-that's what we will go with.

Erin Bedford: Why poetry for me was just because it was like I've been. I started as a long form fiction writer; so, novels. And that is very different thing from chapbooks. And then.

Tamara Thompson: I was about to say good for you. That is not an easy first step.

Erin Bedford: (Laughs)

Tamara Thompson: That's not an easy first step. I started with short stories.

Erin Bedford: I'd always, I've always had a fascination with short stories, and those could play into chapbooks very well, but I feel like I have no...no speciality in in forming a story in that umm kind of, that narrative arc. I just I'm lost. So, I've kind of stayed out of the short story stuff. But poetry was something that I came to, I... seven years ago, I guess, and I worked with some different mentors and I yeah. So, when I came, when it came time to doing the journal definitely, I was feeling like I wanted to have more space for-for poetry, because I know a lot of the journals that are out there, they're, you know, they're fit-their short fiction and their poetry and their and sometimes their craft essays. So, the amount of space for poetry keeps getting like shortened down. And I just wanted to have all poetry and see and the lens less photography. But yeah, mainly-mainly the poetry. Yeah. And it's because that's what I had an interest in at that time. That's what I'm writing right now. So, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fair enough. So, you make some lovely like print objects. And so, I'm very curious about what that process is like, because

you talked a little bit about the submission process, and how you kind of get manuscripts for chapbooks and stuff like that. But I kinda wanna know a little bit more on like how you make them.

Erin Bedford: Oh sure!

Tamara Thompson: You make very pretty things.

Erin Bedford: So, I always, when I'm about to start working on a manuscript, I always discuss with the-the poet their ideas. So, at first it's-it's just generative. It's like, send me pins or send me photos of other chapbooks that you like or books, book covers that you like, or things that you think are associated with your manuscript, and once I have that, then I can, I can kind of feel out what they would like their own chapbook to look like, and what will represent the material inside in the best way, and also kind of have a-a similar aesthetic to the other chapbooks that I, that I do.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Erin Bedford: So, once I have that, then I will ask them about colours for covers and stuff like that, and-and then from there I choose the-the interior pages, and the if there's a fly leaf, if there's gonna be a fly leaf, or if there's gonna be a decorative elements like for one of them. The Apocryphal Girl which I published in-in May. She had these she had a, the way that her manuscript was there were places where it seemed like it would be great to have a little bit of artwork so like I don't know if you can see this, (holds up book) but this is a so it's kind of banged up because it's an extra now, but like just folded it in half, and then from there you would turn the page, and you would see the poem that that particular image referenced. And I love this kind of stuff like I love the art part of it as much as I love the poetry inside of it. So, and-and-and so, yeah, I have like a little whole puncher thing for making the punches and doing the sewing, so it's all hand cut, hand folded hand sewn, and I try to use, get the best materials that I can afford to without losing money. So yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, you-you have to get pretty crafty to not lose the money part.

Erin Bedford: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, it sounds like it's very much a one woman show here. But, like, how does, how do you make decisions for the press?

Erin Bedford: I just tried to think about the poet themselves that I'm working with at that time. It is a, it is a one woman show, and there have been requests for me to do things that I just at this point don't have the time for, and-and that's kind of it's always difficult, because I'm so excited about the press, and I want to be able to do these things. But if I did them, then-then the-the poetry work itself would suffer. And I really don't want that to happen. So yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's-it's about figuring out your resources. And time is a big resource.

Erin Bedford: Exactly. Yeah, for sure.

Tamara Thompson: So where and how do you sell your books? Are you online? Are you more in markets?

Erin Bedford: So, I do have an online shop. And I, I have some subscriptions that I've done through there. Both quarterly and year long subscriptions. I do, I would say Hmm I would say probably the business is split fifty-fifty between what-what comes in through the website and what I sell at book fairs or launches. So usually the launches that's where I will sell the majority of the copies of a book, because there's people there that know the author, and they're connected to the work in some way, and they wanna be there to support them. That's usually the, like, usually, the way that they go yeah, it's about half and half like in person and online.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What are some challenges that the past has faced?

Erin Bedford: Challenge...

Tamara Thompson: You can take that any way you desire.

Erin Bedford: Well, the-the one of the only challenges other than just trying to figure out how to use my time. One of the recent and only challenges I've had was one of the summer poets backed out of.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Erin Bedford: His chapbook published. And it was one of those things where I understood his reasoning because he had been offered like a contract to have it, to have a full collection published and when we had additionally talked about it I 'cause I had accepted his chapbook first. But I'm not like a contracts person. So, it was like a handshake deal.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Erin Bedford: So, when he told me about this, I understood, like I understood where he was coming from. I was disappointed in it because I'd made plans around the chapbook, and I'd sold subscriptions having this extra summer chapbook. So, I have to go back and then figure out what to do about those people that will not be getting three books now. They're only getting two books, so do I refund? Do I send them another book, that kind of thing. So.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Erin Bedford: Yeah, and then it, yeah. It just made me. At 1st I was like, well, why don't you send me something else that's not going to be in this full collection, and I'll take a look at it. But I thought about it for a few days, and I kind of thought well, I feel like I'm extending myself for the poet. And it's not coming back in the same way. So, I, you know, send

him a very timed letter, but basically said, I don't think I can actually do that. I don't think it's fair in terms of, you know the kind of work that I put in. And yeah, so that, that's been a challenge. But it's okay.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's what happens. Sometimes people get accepted to things that they're just like, well, I can't do this small thing with you anymore.

Erin Bedford: I know, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And you're like cool.

Erin Bedford: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And-and so it is one of those things where things just kind of happen. Things fall apart. People sometimes we're like, maybe I got too personal here. Maybe I don't want that out in the world, too. So, I-I've had to do with some of that myself, like where people submitted things that they've said maybe not, and like no ill will or anything, it's just more like, damn get all these things planned. I was getting excited.

Erin Bedford: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: So why are chapbooks important to you?

Erin Bedford: I think that there, there are a couple of reasons for me. First, they're important to me, because they, the turnaround between acceptance and publication is very short, usually. Which means that you're getting work that's very current. You're getting poetry that's maybe written three months ago or last week. Who knows. Like, if it's a zine, it's very probable that it even faster. So-so, that I like because it's showing it's-it's reflecting what's happening in poetry at this moment, basically. Like one of the experiences I had recently, I was reading a brand-new full collection from a major publishing house in Canada, and it was talking about, it was talking about the pandemic and that's you know, it's-it's interesting to read those, but they're not like they're not reflecting backwards on the pandemic. That's not that type of poem. It's a poem that's coming from inside of the pandemic still. And it's just different. It's-it's yeah. You-you get a sense that the things that were written about in, in that book are, they're over, you know they're not-they're not happening now. And that's what I like about a chapbook is that you do get that sense that these things are happening now. The other thing that I really love about them, and people different chapbooks, different chapbook publishers handle it differently. But the thing that I love is there is such room for creating small pieces of artwork when you make a chapbook. You can choose what type of thread you use, and you can choose the type of paper, and you can design it in a way that you can't do with a regular kind of traditional collection like there's no, there's no rules for it. You can do whatever you want in a way, as long as it's something that the poet is-is backing you up on. So that's the-the room for creativity and care in a chapbook that's really important to me as well.



Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I, I definitely like, agree with all of those points from the turnaround to be able to get something that's happening currently and actually have some thoughts on it and it's still be relevant. And not five years later. And also, just the-the craft, because I think this one's yours right here. (Pulls out a Pinhole Press chapbook) It's a beautiful little thing this is you know, the small palms on moving on.

Erin Bedford: That's right.

Tamara Thompson: Like so beautiful like I opened it up, and I was like that beautiful stained glass over that picture like so lovely, so stunning. And it's like no one, like no big publishers gonna do that. They're gonna like a lot more money.

Erin Bedford: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That this, like agora, like wool, like thing that goes around the outside like it's definitely those handcrafted things that make it feel nice and personal, but like and just even like the stitching style on the side, really pretty, but also very thoughtful, you know? Sorry I really like this book. I think it's gorgeous.

Erin Bedford: I'm glad, I'm glad. Yeah, that was, that's-that was one of my favorites to make for sure. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Properly put that back on when I'm not trying to also interview at the same time. 'Cause I don't wanna hurt it. Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not? You were kind of talking a little bit about it. But I'm still gonna ask the question.

Erin Bedford: Yeah. So, I think it, they are important to Canadian publishing in a way that I think you get that relevancy in these works, you get a chance to hear diverse voices that are not necessarily going to be picked up by a major traditional publisher. You get a chance to have stranger stuff like, you know, just odd things that kind of fuel the create-the creativity in the, in the Canadian literary tradition. And I think they're important as well, because some of the ways that the-the chapbook press people work and run their, they're presses I think it encourages, at least like the next, like small independent presses. I think it encourages them sometimes to look at what we're doing and how we're working with our writers, and maybe change some of the ways that they do things in terms of the kind of care and support that they give to their writers. So, yeah, like, I know if you publish with a traditional house, sometimes you are on the-the right list and you get the backing of your publisher, and you get you get to go on a tour, and you get to do those kind of things, and you feel, and you do feel cared for, but I've had a lot of feedback from writers who are in that world that that they don't get, that they have to do everything themselves. They have to plan their launch. They have to get word out on social media. They have to do all these things, and they have to do it all themselves, and what I try to do is I try to as much as I can like, I can't pay for a tour. But if you have a launch I will try to show up. I will try to be there with your books. I will try to support you, and I will definitely put the word out

all-over social media, and not just for this book, for other books that you might have or other pieces that you publish in the future. So, yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, you can take this next question and interpret it in whatever way you desire. But does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way?

Erin Bedford: Hmm! I don't know like I'm really bad at nationalism stuff. So.

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: No, this is.

Erin Bedford: I'm not yeah.

Tamara Thompson: This is one of those questions where people usually break it or play with it and just have fun with it. And I love to see it.

Erin Bedford: Ummm.

Tamara Thompson: Take it wherever you desire.

Erin Bedford

: I guess, I guess the, thy idea sometimes with the spirit of Canadian publishing, or whatever is, is that we're the little guy right? Like we're, you know, we're next to the US. And if-if there is a successful book here it's a lot of the times, it's also going to be successful in the US with, I guess. With chapbooks we're like, we're the littlest guy in the little guy universe, you know, like we don't get a lot of attention from any kind of mainstream media or anything like that. It's all we're just kind of doing it for ourselves. And so, yeah, I don't. I don't know how to answer this question really.

Tamara Thompson: No, it's okay. It's one of those questions where it's very up to interpretation. And that's why I ask it. Because I enjoy different people's responses, because, like even myself, when I was writing this like to be approved so, I could talk to people. I had to define what Canadian was, and I went oh.

Erin Bedford: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Well, I don't wanna limit people because I wanna talk to everybody and anybody who's willing to talk to me. But I need a definition, because I also needed to have a scope for my project. I couldn't do like the world of chapbooks. That's a PhD. And even then, I-I think even Canada itself has enough information for a PhD. So, it's one of those things where it's like I had to be careful that I didn't get too big. But then I'm also sitting here being like but what the hell is Canada?

Erin Bedford: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What's a Canadian? I don't know.

Erin Bedford: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like, I was asked throughout my whole undergrad what Canadian literature was, and we never figured it out.

Erin Bedford: Oh, I know. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like truly. Which is, I think, one of the best parts about it, because it's not really anything.

Erin Bedford: It's shifting all the time, too right? Yeah, which is good, I think. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I agree. So yeah, don't worry.

Erin Bedford: (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: I just to ask the question and to hear what people have to say, because it's not exactly an easy question to answer.

Erin Bedford: Right.

Tamara Thompson: So, what has this kind of small publishing taught you?

Erin Bedford: Oh, okay. Ummm... I think it's taught me a lot about where to put my energy, yeah. And it's like, it's always 100% put the energy back into the poets that are making the poetry always like there will be nothing as rewarding as-as somebody feeling like they had a really good experience publishing with you whether it was it's been the journal or it's been a chapbook. So definitely that for sure, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I-I think that's a-a great lesson. So, I do have to ask the little more sad question of Why do you think most like small presses and micro presses have to close up shop, because this is something that is very ephemeral, and people don't do it forever, because it's a lot of work, right? So why do you? Why do you?

Erin Bedford: Why do I feel like that happens.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Erin Bedford: I feel like that happens because people get worn-out, you know, like, because especially a lot of these places are one person shows, and it's a lot to take on and. And sometimes I think if you're looking at it, if you get into it because you think it's a business, or if you get into it because you think that it's going to lead to something else, it won't. And it's not or it's not, and it won't, because it's not a business. It's not going to be something that makes you really any money. You have to love it, and if you don't love it, I won't say don't start it, but like it, there will be definitely a time of reckoning, probably not very long after you start it that you realize it's not really, it's not really for you. Yeah. So.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, there'll be a make-or-break moment of. Do we care about this enough.

Erin Bedford: Exactly. For sure. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, I know that your chapbook side of things has just kind of getting its feet and getting going. But how am? Why do you still keep doing this stuff right.

Erin Bedford: Oh, yeah, just love like love. I love, I love the process of making the chapbooks I love interacting with the poets. I love to see the books, meet the readers, and get that kind of feedback on social media or in person if I see them at a launch or at a at a book fair. Yeah, it's just it's so rewarding to me to see to see that happen. And it's happened uummm, it's happened with every single chapbook I've publish like I've heard back from even though even the launch that I didn't get to attend because it was in Louisiana. I-I got a beautiful letter from the poet who talked about the people that came up to her and talked about what the chapbook meant to them in different ways, and it was so beautiful. And that's the kind of thing, like that's why I do it. There are people out there that are that appreciate the poetry, and they appreciate the work that's put into it. And yeah, to know that those poems are out there in the world being enjoyed because of something fairly simple that I can do you know, that's awesome.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so what's something maybe you wish people, or the public knew about like Canadian publishing? And again, you can take that in whatever direction you desire.

Erin Bedford: Hmm! I don't know, can you... I guess, I guess the thing if I was talking about the general public, I think there's a huge misconception with people and traditional publishers about, you know, if you write a book and you send it in, you know, it will eventually be picked up by somebody. Like there's a, or get this famous author to take a look at your novel, and then they can recommend you. Like, that's not how it works. And I think that the general public maybe there's-there's a little bit of a disconnect about how difficult it is to get into the traditional market, and I guess, in terms of Canadian publishing and what it means, I guess to the public, or what I'd like them to know is that there are all sorts of different ways of being published. Like, self publishing, chapbook publishing small press publishing, Indie publishing, traditional publishing. There's it's-it's so diverse. And each one is doing something different. And yeah, I guess I don't know if I had to say something that would be it. Just that there is, you know, there are many different ways into it. And there are many different levels of care that you're gonna get from each different place. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fair-fair enough. So, we're in our last two questions. And this is more just to give you space to kind of talk about some stuff. What's something important about D.I.Y. press history that you wish people would know about? And this can be a general thing, an overall thing. Or you just saw this one really cool chapbook and you just think people need to know about it. The idea of this question is just to give

space for that history for that knowledge, because I don't learn about a lot of this stuff unless someone tells me about it, because so much of it is there and then gone, so much of it is so cool.

Erin Bedford: I don't-I don't know that I know a lot about the history of D.I.Y. publishing in Canada, or really anywhere. But I-I can tell you a little personal historical story that I remember walking around Queen Street in Toronto when I was in my lower twenties. So, like twenty-five years ago, and I remember there was a bookstore, and they had this rack of zines and chapbooks there that you could buy, and I went over to it, and I kind of spun it around. And there was this little, tiny little like this, and it was, it was stapled together. It was just a few, you know, a few lines on each page. And I just thought you know; this is kind of amazing. They're selling this bookstore, and you know anyone could do that if they wanted to, and that I-I think that kind of has always stayed with me, that there is always that possibility that if you want to do it you-you can do it. You can just get some paper and a printer. You can go to the library. You can photocopy some stuff like that's, it could be your own work. It can be somebody else's work. If you have a friend that really wants to do that like it's just there's, it just opens up a lot of other possibilities for the work that you have, that you would like to see out in the world. And I think that's really cool. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I 100% agree. There's something so just exciting about the fact that, like, hey, this is just this little staple, folded thing.

Erin Bedford: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And anyone can make it. And that's just like there's, it's so exciting because of the amount of possibility.

Erin Bedford: Yeah, for sure.

Tamara Thompson: So, we're down to the last question. And it's the hardest question that everyone struggles with. It's what's something that you wish people knew about your history, or something that you do?

Erin Bedford: With the-the, with the press?

Tamara Thompson: It can be anything.

Erin Bedford: Oh my.

Tamara Thompson: Anything you do. Yeah, exactly. Hardest question.

Erin Bedford: People don't like talking about themselves, right? So that's why.

Tamara Thompson: Especially in this community. They're just like, I'll talk about this person who's great. And that person.

Erin Bedford: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, you want to know about me. Why?

Erin Bedford: Yeah. Hmm! Something about... well, I think I think what it is-is that what's in my history feeds into the way that the press runs. So, I had a lot of experience when I was first starting out writing poetry, and I had this idea like, you have to have a, you have to have a full manuscript. You have to have a complete collection. And you know, to do that as a poet who's just beginning. It's overwhelming. And I guarantee you at least 50% of the poems in there are not going to be very good because you're just, you don't have that kind of material yet. You-you haven't practiced enough so-so kind of going through that and realizing that myself as a poet led me into chapbooks, because I thought well, I-I would like to be a space for not necessarily always poets who are starting out, but for sure I would like to make space for poets who-who don't necessarily have a million poems that are top notch material. Yet they're still working on their craft. They're still finding their voice so that that has been part of my history that will feed into pinholes history, when we're old enough to have a history.

Tamara Thompson: You're making it.

Erin Bedford: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I feel I felt the same way about Whispering Wick when I was first starting out, and then I looked back. And I'm like, oh, that's almost five years old what happened? What do you mean it's almost five?

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: Are there any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording.

Erin Bedford: No, I think-I think I said what I needed to say. I'm good.

Tamara Thompson: Sounds great. Okay.

Gregory Betts

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is June 14<sup>th</sup> and the time is 11:04 am. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview. This interview is for small press and author.

Gregory Betts: My name is Gregory Betts. I am a poet and an academic. I have published many chapbooks and small press items, particularly starting with House press, no press and above/ground press, so the three that I primarily worked with. But I have worked with many, many other ones as well. I have written about the small press and the experimental world of Canadian literature, and particularly in my two books. One of them is called *Avant-Garde Canadian Literature: The Early Manifestations*, and the other one is called *Finding Nothing: the-the Vanguards, 1959 to 1975*.

Tamara Thompson: And pronouns? And what part of Canada you're from?

Gregory Betts: My pronouns are he/him, and I am from St. Catherine's, Ontario.

Tamara Thompson: Beautiful. Okay, so how did you discover zines and chapbooks and this kind of smaller publishing? When was the moment where you realized, oh, this is a thing, and I enjoy it?

Gregory Betts: It was brought to me as opposed to me, going to it. I was taking a class with the sound poets and-and normal lyric poets, I suppose, Stephen Scobie at the University of Victoria and he made mention of a call for submissions for a strange publication in response to the poet bp Nichol who I had a vague awareness of at the time. This was when I was an undergraduate and I decided to try, and I wrote a poem, and it was published by derek beaulieu from Housepress in a small anthology in response to bpNichol's *Translating, Translating Apollinaire* and that was my introduction. And as soon as I was connected with derek, he pushed a world view on me. That expanded how I understood what publication meant and what it did. Scobie gave me some key clues but derek was the one who sort of opened up that world and told me to go find Ross Priddle in-in Victoria, who was a poet there, who was starting a magazine called *Moss Press*, just call it *Moss*, that was involved in doing readings and doing the promulgation of small press culture. And I fell into that orbit in Victoria, and the rest fell you know, followed very naturally from there.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely. So, do you run a small press yourself, or do you just work with a lot of people in that community?

Gregory Betts: I publish rather extensively with small press and various ones like I said that in Canada and abroad. I have what I call a para press. It's called Semantics, Semantics Press, and we publish things without permissions, and they're usually for occasions. I will do a reading, and I will have documents to accompany it. I'll go on a road trip, and we'll pass a notebook around, and I'll just surreptitiously but publish that at the end. Things of that sort.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So, did that start because you were on the road and wanted to just do things yourself and hit to hand out as events? Is that kind of how that started for you?

Gregory Betts: It did. These are-these are su-supplements to things, to events that I've organized, I organized a very large conference in Dublin a few years ago, brought about hundred forty Canadian avant-grade poets and scholars over and, for that one, I wanted, for when people arrived, I wanted there to be an instant anthology. So, the day of the conference, I, I said, send me a poem. And then the next day we had the anthology printed and to hand out.

Tamara Thompson: That's fantastic. So is the press, like, philosophy, just trying to get things out and just make things accessible like or is it just to just have fun with making things?

Gregory Betts: Fun with making things for sure. As-as an occasional ephemeral para press, the point is to put something into somebody's hand for a particular mode. So, that there's a kind of connection and community bond that's created when you gift somebody in that way and these are not meant to be like, you know, sent to libraries. They're not meant to be collected. They're meant to disappear. But in that moment, they-they play an important crucial role.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic; love hearing about that. Like, there's the longer-term stuff. But that turning on a dime kind of publishing is so interesting. And like you said it's ephemeral. It's just, oh, it's fantastic. I love to hear that kind of stuff so from like you said that you did this poetry anthology. Can you give me a couple of ideas of some of the other stuff that you've done?

Gregory Betts: So, I did a talk in for conference called Rereading the Postmodern up in Ottawa and I made a little chapbook object of all the sort of the history of Canadian visual poetry. And there was about twenty examples. And there were just these; so that instead of a handout I actually made a chapbook and-and circulated that so that it worked like as a standalone object, that one more so than other ones. But it also was a supplement to the talk, so that as I was going through, you know, there were PowerPoint images and all that. But here's something that actually does the physical work of the subject that I was talking about.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's, I'm gonna probably say it a lot, brilliant (laughs). So, you said that you do it like really quickly, and that you got people to send you poems, and the next day you had the anthology in people's hands. How does that work as a process to just gather everything? Like, I kind of want to know a little bit more about, like, how like how you do it so quickly.

Gregory Betts: Well, there was a there's an ethos there which is has a history. Some people don't like it. I-I'm drawn to it, but it goes back to bill bissett blew ointment press and bp Nichol once criticized it as being not-not a magazine, but like more-more like a newsletter because he didn't reject anybody. So, anybody who sends him a poem, there's a self selection that like who wants their work to appear in the weirdo context of a zine



like Blew Ointment. So, anybody who makes that selection arrives and is put in, and in a similar way with some of the anthologies that I've done, and I did one for my birthday during Covid. I woke up in the morning and said, I want to do something today. So, I put a post on social media and a couple of other places and said, send me work today. And by the end of the day we'll have an anthology, we'll release it, and I called it *blue, blue candle*, and it was just this sort of sad candle of a Covid birthday by myself; but at sixty, sixty different people sent me work, all you know spun out on the moment. How does it work? You just accept you-you slot in, and then you take it right to the printers. And there's-

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic.

Gregory Betts: It feels, it feels rushed, and it is rushed. But that rush is part of the pleasure. bill bissett has a book called *Rush*, actually, which is one of my favorite collections. And it's he-he uses the sticker the stamp rather from the-the post office, rush-rush.

Tamara Thompson: Wonderful. So, it-it really is just you being like waking up I wanna make this thing and calling out to other people and being like, do you wanna be a part of it? There's no formal decision making. It's just like, hey, let's make this thing and work together, and it'll be done by the end of the day kind of situation.

Gregory Betts: But that's ha! That's happened on a number of occasions. I've done a number of those-those kinds of things. Let's just do something right now. Other-other projects have had, you know I did a I did a walking tour as part-part of the Scream literary festival; did a walking tour of Kensington Market, in Toronto. And I, just I made a little anthology of works that I was going to talk about, so that everybody again could have just like a keepsake. This, that's what I mean by ephemeral like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Gregory Betts: They become like programs or guides to the event that we're exploring together. And then you know, I-I've seen people just drop them at the end and sort of walk away the-the way you would the program at a play, or something like that. A little part of me dies inside. But-but these are meant for that. They're meant for ephemeral moments.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I even get upset when people drop their lovely Stratford play booklets because those things are wonderful. I love keeping them, it's memory of what I saw and what I did that day.

Gregory Betts: But those. But that's-that's a similar kind of publishing event that I'm working with here like there. They're-they're guides to what's happening to give you deeper insight into the, into the moment.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Gregory Betts: And some people let them stay in the moment and walk away from them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I'm going to talk a little bit now, if you, if you don't mind switching gears a little and talking a bit more about your experience as an author in this kind of space. So why did you publish, like, a chapbook and then continue to publish them? Why did you make that decision for yourself.

Gregory Betts: Was it a conscious decision at the beginning? I would say it probably wasn't because it was more connection and a community that I was I suddenly found myself in that fit, a lot of my aesthetic values as a writer. I love the decision Derek Beaulieu runs a house-ran house press, I should say and each and he sold the items he sold them for, like three or four bucks, or something like this and burned out very quickly on that one, and he actually got very frustrated with it because it wasn't selling and he canceled that press and created no press which doesn't sell, it just gives it away. And as soon as he took the money out of it, he was much happier and I was actually happier too, because I didn't feel obliged to hawk. I just wanted to give a way to work. So, this is, this is, this is strange, and this is bothers a lot of writers that-that there is an outside to the economy. But I actually really relish that outsidersness place where you don't have the economic pressures of any kind of other form of literature. You don't have to hawk your goods; you can make absolutely unbridled work, wild and ridiculous works. We have, we have this saying you know, dance like no one's watching. I've, I counter that way, saying write like no one's reading.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I agree. It's something I-I teach creative writing to my students. And one of the things that they're always saying is, well, what were the publishers like? And I'm like, no, no, no, no, don't write for the critics, for a publisher, because if you're not having fun, it will never be good.

Gregory Betts: That's right.

Tamara Thompson: If you're not enjoying it, no one's going to enjoy reading it. Why, write to have fun, and you'll find your audience that way, and it doesn't matter if it's good or whatever that's up to other people to decide you have to decide that for yourself first, and they're like, Whoa, that's crazy; and I'm just, like, well, it will never be good if you're not enjoying it. Because why write, to begin with, like you shouldn't be writing for fame and fortune cause that's just not gonna happen.

Gregory Betts: That's it.

Tamara Thompson: Do it because you enjoy it.

Gregory Betts: So that's-that's always been my approach. It's been an exploratory space. I-I-I let my thoughts run rampant, and I end up in strange places, and that's where the writing begins.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Gregory Betts: And so, it's always just seemed natural that that's a good home for this kind of writing. You know, I have, I've dabbled in

mainstream. Not me, super mainstream presses, but mainstream presses. And that's fine. I-I mean, I enjoy that space too; but it does something different to the writing can feel the tensions in the pull. So, I keep coming back to this, because in I'm part of the community too, right? I feel I feel that is an important part of it and I know the writers, and I know the people who are reading this. And so, I say I'm not talking this stuff, but all my work is circulating in a community where I know almost them all two o one , and I do want to share my best thoughts with them. So, it's like I do work hard on the on the stuff to get it polished, knowing that there's an audience. But I'm I don't feel any economic pressure in there.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's-it's, it's very liberating in so many ways when you don't have the economic pressure on top of it, because it's not there to pay the bills. It's there to be a way of expressing and sharing.

Gregory Betts: And it's sort of see it as things to say in an elaborate conversation. And so, a-a chapbook. So, for instance, derek beaulieu did a beautiful piece called *Prose of the Trans-Canada* which was a big poster of visual poetry. I don't know if you've ever seen this work, but it's sort of scrambled explosions, letters, and numbers and as a tribute to his twenty fifth year of publishing, I think this is twenty fifth year publishing. I actually decoded all the letters of *Prose of the Trans-Canada* transcribed it and got it all that put it all in alphabetical order, and then used all those letters and numbers and created a poem about going across Canada on the on the Trans-Canada. And that's, it's a kind of mania. So, there's there you see the conversation. I'm directly-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Gregory Betts: Responding to him. But it's also the kind of text that only make sense in the context of that conversation.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, from the sounds of it, you really enjoy working on the smaller side of things. Would you continue to like keep working on this side to print? As I know, everybody gets busy and stuff. But would you still like to publish work as chapbooks and stuff like that in the future?

Gregory Betts: I just published one a week ago, so.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic.

Gregory Betts: But that's also pretty close about as close to the present as you're gonna get right.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, fantastic.

Gregory Betts: This is an ongoing part of how I think about writing and how I live as a writer. So, this is-

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Gregory Betts: Inevitably going to be part of my ongoing process.

Tamara Thompson: Right. What are some challenges you've faced as an author, just kind of in general?

Gregory Betts: Well, I've just published a book with a small press in the UK. And I just did a little literary tour of Ireland and England, and that was all lovely. The press is Pentrack press, and they've just gone, they're just in the midst of going through a crisis where my book has sold enough copies to make it financially viable; there's economic pressures have crept into this one. It's a beautiful hardcover, full color book. Totally weird, ridiculous concept but if you get into the logic of it, you can see that there's-there's something there,. I believe there's something there. But they just closed their Twitter account and they're shutting down the, they decided to shut down the press in about a year's time and this is something that I bumped into a few times where presses that I published my books in because of the-the nature of these small press entities. They are dependent on the goodwill and generosity of individuals, and they burn out so, he's burning out. So, he's shutting it down my book. I had a book come out in 2009 of *The Others Raised in Me*. But I'm very proud of love that book. It's gotten good attention, and somebody wrote a PhD dissertation on it. It's-it's got some, it's got some attention. And that press just stopped publishing. And they decided they pulled all their books from Chapters and pulled other books from Amazon. And so, it's just unavailable. So, there's-so there's this interesting moment where I-I can feel my literary corpus melting away.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Gregory Betts: It starts to disappear. I've had two presses now completely disappear that have published books of mine and those books do disappear with those presses.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, publishing is not for the weak of heart. It's for the people who really care about it.

Gregory Betts: I agree with that. Yeah, it is. And it does depend on sort of charismatic individuals. Right?

Tamara Thompson: I agree with that, too. So, what has this kind of publishing taught? You over time especially having to interact with it.

Gregory Betts: Well, I've learned so much about language, about art, about some of the expanding limits I'm always challenged. I'm always bumping into new ideas that just take me into strange places. I was just reading umm oh, my! Gosh! I'm gonna forget the name. I forgot to forget the name. But this very strange small press book that was put into my hand when I was over in Leeds in the UK. And it's a collection, he's gone to book auctions and collected all of the different descriptions of abused books; like know the way, you know the way they say in book descriptions, tattered torn corners, and he's rubbed the margins, and he's just collected all the language of abused books, and it's, it's such an interesting vocabulary and language, and-and it's and I'm now all filled with this idea of damaged, and how books maintain a kind of trace of as individual objects. You have to think of them, as you know, sets and

additions. But the individual book has its own story and history. And this project really kind of brought that out. And it's-it's got me thinking about the individual object as opposed to the addition in new ways as an example. So, I'm learning all the time and bumping into the limits of my own thoughts and being challenged. And that's it's my favorite thing about the small press world is the thoughts are kind of unbridled. Now, that's such a weird book, right? A book of like the vocabulary of abused books. That's not, McClelland and Stewart isn't gonna publish that, right? It doesn't belong there. And yet it's collected this language that is remarkable and significant, and has something to give us a nice reflection on about the practice that we're involved in. So, I love, I love bumping into new ideas, and I, and that's a daily event for me.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, why are chapbooks important to you? We've been kind of talking about it. But I'm going to be direct with the question there.

Gregory Betts: Well, chapbooks are smaller, right? So, chapbooks don't need to be the forty-five-to-one-hundred-page book. So, you can get a quicker, a quicker sentence. I think of them as sentences versus paragraphs, or even short stories. These are sentence-sentence, length ideas. You've got one idea. You explore it. You map it out and you and you share it, and the conversation carries on. They're-they're cheap, they're portable. They're easy to access. There's-there's issues with them. It's-it's hard to store them. Have all these, you can't see them there. But I've got all these little boxes filled with chapbooks and overflowing, and it's hard to hard to keep them and-and organize them in a library. But so, it doesn't do well on that. But they do really well on that direct conversational level; when it arrives, you engage with it. You hear that sentence, you get the, you get the point of what they're doing with this new thought, and you have access to it, and then you in you ingest it and carry on.

Tamara Thompson: Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why are why not?

Gregory Betts: So, in a similar way, because you're operating on a smaller level; it allows you a greater deal of freedom to think new thoughts and that freedom is absolutely essential for developing bigger thoughts, right? You-you can only get to the-the totally new novel, the totally new book of poetry through a series of steps and chapbooks represents an enormously powerful space for developing those bigger projects, those bigger ideas. So, you can, you can develop it a new way, a new approach, something new, something that's never, ever been done before in the history of language. That stuff happens all the time. I love those moments. You can circulate it and see and get people's responses, and maybe-maybe it has been done before, well, now, you need to know that. And these are conversation starters. You get the feedback, you but you keep working, you build it up into the bigger project, absolutely important. Under, underrated, undervalued by some of the bigger industry people but I can't imagine Canadian literature having any of the vitality that it does without this-this form.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way? And you can interpret that however, you desire.

Gregory Betts: It all depends on which Canada you want reflected. I-I don't know that it captures all the diversity and weirdnesses of a country like Canada. It's certainly does capture-capture a lot of weirdness but there's a lot of communities that don't have access or-or make use of this powerful technology called the chapbook and the micro press. I remember having a conversation with Lillian Allan ; gosh, this is back in 2006 or something like this where she wanted the two of us to start a micropress to serve the dub community because the new, especially new Black-Canadian writers didn't have immediate, or she felt that there was a gap in representing that community with these kinds of tools. I personally got a job, and life got very, very busy, so we never got to follow up on it. But I think her point was fair that there's a lot of places, that are not a lot of voices that aren't using this yet. So, I would say, it's representation of Canada is decidedly incomplete. But that doesn't, that's not a fault of the-the mode, but just of the-the pedagogy that surrounds it, and we don't-we don't, you need more missionaries for the chapbook to spread the gospel of its powers.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, I agree with that because once you explain it to people, they get very excited, especially people who want to express themselves in a way that they can actually do it themselves. I explain it to my students because they're like, oh, well, you're a thesis student, right? What's your thesis? I'm like, oh, it's chapbooks and like, oh, cool. What the hell is that? And I'm like, well, okay, let me explain. They get excited because it's something that they could do themselves once they realize that. And I'm like, no, you don't have to say in it you-you can do it yourself. No one cares, there's no rules, have fun. And they're like, wait, really, because so many of them have these ideas of academia and, like the critics and the economy of it all, they get really wrapped up in it, and so to see something that's completely devoid of it, if they decide too completely devoid themselves of it like whoa! This is amazing, and I'm like, I know, have fun, go forth.

Gregory Betts: And there is a kind of radical tradition that, that plays to right. I mean the origin of these things are the pamphlets that-that people would-would circulate after the invention of the printing press. But they would do so surreptitiously to call out politicians, government to expose corruption, to advance radical ideas and do so anonymously, and the pamphlet in the chapbook were a way to circulate ideas quickly. There was a risk involved, because if you were the printer, you could get caught. But the-the objects themselves circulated often without attribution. It allowed you to spread an idea much faster than by direct conversation and much more impactfully. So, it has this radical background that speaks to a kind of wild freedom that you're talking about here. When they when they, when you tell them that they can do anything they want. They can, even, you know, try to tear down the government, you know. As far as-as you know, as far as that goes, they can go fully political. You can go fully literary. But there is a bigger and wider history to this medium than just the literary uses that we're talking now.

Tamara Thompson: I think also a lot of them like the fact that it's a physical object because they can share their grievances online. But it's not the same as sharing a physical object, making something and showing,

hey, I care more than the thirty seconds it took to do a tweet. I took the time I put in the effort. And now they have something that they can share with someone else. I think that's something that my students have shown interest in, and because it's not quick and immediate. Umm... okay, perfect.

Gregory Betts: Change the world; you can change the world with it right?

Tamara Thompson: Yes, I agree. Why do you think I do have to ask this more upsetting question of why do you think small presses and micro presses have to close up shop? Because a lot of them do.

Gregory Betts: Well, the economic realities do kick in. It is a significant amount of labor, and we still live in a in a society that requires remuneration for our labor. And this is a place that is outside of the responsible economy. So, it is a drain, and it is effort. There's also something weird that happens with publishing where I've-I've just bumped into this a number of times with-with publishers who had to endure just awful behavior from people who get a sense of entitlement that and that they deserve the-the labor that is not being remunerated, and that there's and there is a sense of entitlement. This-this happened to the press Beir Bua in Ireland that published *A Book of Wine* that I wrote with Gary Barwin and she just started getting attacked for when she had to decline, and she decided to decline books, which is entirely the right of an editor but-but received an enormous and significant harassment for that. And there's something gendered about that in in that particular case, and I think that's a recurring theme as well. There's a weird thing that happens where you have people who do feel a sense of, ummm and it's-it's almost like self righteous entitlement that. That the, that this labor already belongs to them, and they've earned it and deserve it by the virtue of they are and done, and again so that that's a drag right like that. Just that just slows down the ability of people to produce. So, I try to hang out and-and make my community with people who are fundamentally kind and check their egos at the door. And I think that's-that's the best part of the small press is it's not so much, who's-who's the big genius in the room? But it's let's have a good conversation, and let's do it together, and let's build up something that's really unique and strange and fun. But-but that other stuff starts, does, does creep in, and some presses get overwhelmed.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Well, when you're dealing with a world of people, you're going to get a lot of different types of people, and not all of them are pleasant.

Gregory Betts: Yeah, they don't know how to play along.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, they-they didn't learn the crucial lesson of being nice in the sandbox.

Gregory Betts: That's ex-it's exactly right.

Tamara Thompson: So, why are you still keeping your small little press going? How do you keep that going for yourself? Because again it is it is, it can be draining.

Gregory Betts: Well, I have no pressures, because I-I call mine a para press, because it-it has no presence, except for in the moment when the object appears, and if I feel like it, I do it, and if I don't feel like it doesn't get done, there's no, there's no bureaucracy that I have to do. I don't ask permissions when I'm printing poems. I, just because these things are essentially and fundamentally ephemeral, it probably crosses some-some lines with some people. I've never had any-any pushback for any of the objects I've ever made but it's just pure, pure delay. Similarly, you know, we were talking about no press a second ago. Because they've taken themselves out of the economy, it's pure pleasure. So, Derek, I just so, I just had a chapbook that derek published through no press he-he prints. I think it's like one hundred to fifty copies of these things. And then he just mails out you know, seventy copies to the people he thinks should have it. And isn't that a lovely moment when you open your mailbox? And all of a sudden there's-there's a little there's a little thought there. That's not only thoughtfulness on the part of the press, which is-which is an amazing and inspiring thing to be a part of. If you're, if you're a gift giver. I'm a gift giver. I like, you know, I like giving things. This is-this is definitely part of the fun of small and micro press is being part of a community of exchange and sharing that moment of saying, oh, you've got to read this. And just handing it over, and then it's theirs. I'm watching their eyes light up. I actually did a talk in I did a reading sorry in Quebec, at Bishops University and I talked about some of the small press objects, because I was reading from them and there were some questions about what does that mean? And I said, and I talked about the gift economy and how special it is to be able to just give somebody something, and how it creates an immediate connection. Well, after the after the reading, one of the students in the that was there came up and bought two copies of one of my objects and I watched her, and she went over and gave one of the other copies to somebody there, so trying to trying to enact some of the ethos that that we were just talking about.

Tamara Thompson: I think there's also something very special about sending something through the mail, like receiving letters and stuff like that, like I can do emails and stuff like that all day. But if I'm having a bad time, my partner will send me just his thoughts on a regular piece of paper through the mail.

Gregory Betts: Oh lovely.

Tamara Thompson: And it lights up my whole day, you know, and it's something very simple and small, and not he just had to pay the fifty cents for the stamp, bam and it's gone. And it's there's just something magical about doing things through the mail, and it's one of the reasons why I like, because I have my own press, and I send things through the mail, and I love writing by hand on it. I got a stamp for our address. I kept messing up on the paper. So, we do that, and now I have an official stamp, and I get everything sealed and looking nice, and I send it through the mail, and there's something really nice about that ritual and practice of sending something through the mail and receiving through the mail.

Gregory Betts: And knowing that that's gonna arrive somewhere, and the ritual that goes on the other side of opening it and receiving it.



Tamara Thompson: Yes, and enjoying it.

Gregory Betts: Enjoying it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's something you wish people knew about Canadian publishing kind of in general, like, what's something you wish the public knew?

Gregory Betts: I have made it my career as a scholar to tell people that there is a very strong and vibrant avant-garde tradition in Canadian literature. This is what all my books document and demonstrate. And I've and I've had to go and spend a lot of time in the archives, finding old lost, buried, weird books. Some that were censored that you know, that were blocked by the police. Bringing-and bringing those back. The reason it's important for me to know that-that there is this tradition is as a writer I want to know what's-what's already been done, of course, but I also want to have the confidence of this trajectory that I can gain that energy and propel my own works forward. It does push me to further new places, knowing that that tradition is there makes it easier to write strange and experimental works, knowing that there is a hundred years of such activity in this country. So, when I was starting out as a writer, people talked about this moment, and they talked a little bit about the 60s but that was the boundary. And so that's that was where my first book was like, okay, let's go back; start in the 1910's; and, boy, I found all kinds of amazing, weird, wonderful stuff that creates in in a weird way created an avant-garde tradition in this country. And now there's a lot of stuff to go back to and revisit and rethink. I mean some of the some of the automatic poems that WWE Ross was working on in the '20s, he was doing these strange automatic experiments that he actually started to think would reveal because it's he's getting a subconscious mind control text. He started to believe that he was predicting the future, and he actually took it to the Canadian government and said, you know, there's a war coming we need to stop and prepare for this. So, there's a lot of weird things out there that are that are well worth exploring. I want, I want that to be more prominent, because the more prominent that becomes, the easier it is for people to gain permission to do their own weird and eccentric projects. And that's just a more interesting literary ecosystem.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's something you wish maybe the public knew about, like D.I.Y. history, like, more specifically? Is there anything where you're, like oh, this one chapbook I wish people knew more about, or maybe have something more in general?

Gregory Betts: Well, one of the things that I love showing people is I have, just looking over at my bookshelves here. I have about seven or eight boxes of literature, which is a form of publishing that always sort of you, can I-you know I bring these to class and the students, their jaws drop, and they say, how can you publish poetry in a box? And it's some something about that maybe we all have a little kitten inside of us that wants to curl up inside these boxes. But there's something lovely about creating disordered objects, because when it goes in the box. It falls out of order. And that's-that's a special mode that I think is definitely overlooked and not generally well known.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's something that you wish people knew about your own history, the things that you've done?

Gregory Betts: Depends on who we're talking about.

(Both laugh).

Gregory Betts: Yeah, I don't-I don't know. It's an interesting question. All that I wish people know is that I've always just kind of tried to make it easier for other people to do stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Gregory Betts: And so, when-when I'm writing, I'm always thinking through community and thinking through other voices. My most of my work is in one form or another, interactive or responsive to other texts. And I've always tried to foreground those connections and those relations. A lot of you know, we talk about the anxiety of influence right that bloom text. I've always tried to make the make influence productive and think through it. So, I-I will respond to text like I-I mentioned that Derek Beaulieu piece a little bit ago where he wrote the pro trans Canada. Well, I turned it into actual prose by reordering and rearranging all the words and letters in this visual thing. That kind of dialogue is absolutely a part of what-of what they do, everything that.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Gregory Betts: Everything I that I do.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Are there any additional comments or anything else you'd like to say before I stop the recording?

Gregory Betts: I would be very interested in knowing more about your press.

(Both laugh)

Tamara Thompson: I can stop the recording, and I can tell you more about what I do then.

Gregory Betts: That's great. Yeah.

Alice Burdick

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is Friday, June 21<sup>st</sup> the time is 1:06 p.m., and just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after the date of this interview. This interview is for small press and author.

Alice Burdick: Alice Burdick is my name, and I live in Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia, or originally from Toronto Ontario, and I go by she/her. I have been a chapbook author as well as co-publisher as well as the published, and I've also helped coordinate small press book fairs. I'm also a poet. Publish in the more traditional press area as well as in micro press and small press. A cookbook author and also an editor at a proofreader and mentor to, to some. And I like to collaborate with other artists.

Tamara Thompson: Excellent. Can you name some of the presses that you've like collaborated with just quickly.

Alice Burdick: Proper Tales Press has been one there was Clint Burnham had a small press that he just called CB. John Barlow Oversion, Daniel F. Bradley. There have been, I think I've also done sort of festschrift as well, sort of celebration, publications for various authors. Katie Chan, back in the nineties had a few things, I think Curved H. And Z. did something. It's, it's actually, I would have to go to by my library and see cause you've been a lot over, over the years. I've also just collaborated with like, by one offs with people to like doing aboard sheet here and there, that kind of thing.

Tamara Thompson: Excellent. That's, that's good enough for me. So, let's just get into it. How did you discover zines and chapbooks? When was the moment when you kind of recognized so that this was a type of publishing right like you could do? It wasn't just a pamphlet that you saw here or a chapbook, but you didn't know it was a chapbook at the time. When was the moment where you're like, oh, okay.

Alice Burdick: I think, I remember attending the Small Press Book fair in Toronto, in the late eighties, and as a teenager and also seeing Stuart Ross and his precursor. Oh! Crad Kilodney out on the street, I think I, I saw Lily Netschakov out there, too, with their wares standing on Young street selling their chapbooks. And I thought, okay, so this is sort of the wild card way of doing it. But that would have been the, the mid late eighties, I would say probably but 1986 or so is what I first started to go to the fair, and I also really saw as a form actually, I saw it as a form a little bit before that, because my mother was a visual artist, and she, I remember going, she brought me to Wayzgoose in somewhere in Southern Ontario. Oh, Grimsby, I think it was Grimsby.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, Grimsby!

Alice Burdick: Oh, Grimsby!

Tamara Thompson: Really is the middle of nowhere.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, but it was like outside of I, I can't remember if it was a library, or like a or a sort of a revised train station or something, but they had all these small artists like very mo-more on the artsy end presses there, and she was a, she did print making, too. So, I did see that probably around 1985 or so, something like that. But I was also in an extracurricular writing class called the Dream Class. That was once a week after school, and that's where I really was exposed to all kinds of different forms, including, you know micro press publishing, Zines, from some of which that, that some of the ones that were shown were from the like mid late sixties onwards. So it was, it was quite an eye opener.

Tamara Thompson: Nice. So, you said, just to like to clarify that you've worked on presses yourself. So you've like done some of the chapbook, publishing yourself with other people, right?

Alice Burdick: Yes, so the eternal network was the one that I was actively involved in, and that would have been early nineties, and that was with Victor Coleman. So that would have been probably 91 to 94, I think, was when we were producing other people's work, but also mine so, and, and his and and some of it was done using, you know, our computers and, and the, the Kinkos, or whatever down the street to print things off, and then saddle stitching, and then some were done at Coach House on their machines, you know, on the machines there, much more on the just, the whole scale of, of production.

Tamara Thompson: Could you talk a little bit about, why that press start like, how did that you're like, yes, we're gonna make this a reality where we're going to do-

(Technical difficulty occurred.)

Alice Burdick: You were asking how it came to be essentially.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Alice Burdick: So, so Victor was he, he was a lot older than I was there, there are things that could be discussed about that, too, but that's sort of outside purview, but not unrelated to most arts, related things. Anyway, he, he had operated the eternal network himself with other people. It was one of those sort of I think it was based on the Oulipo idea. So there was like a lot different people would be involved in the project at different times. So the eternal network being, that's it. I mean, if you if you sort of look at those 2 words, that's essentially what it was, is so it would go in and out of production at different times, probably from the seventies, maybe early eighties onward, and he hadn't done anything for a little while with them, and then, when we sort of got together, we were like, well, this is this is how you know, if you want to get stuff out there and share your work to whomever might be interested, and also be a part of that community, this is how you do it. You instantly have, there are people around who are curious, and we'll read each other's work, and this is how to do it without having to wait, you know, to go through the whole process of sending it out, being considered legitimate, or, or whatever, at various times and, and so and it's immediate you seize the

means of production, you just do it. So it was just part of how we were living and thinking, and it made sense to do things that way.

Tamara Thompson: Nice. Would you say there was maybe a goal was starting it up, I know, just to get an idea like cause I know some people are like, Oh, this is our philosophy, if we're gonna do this, this is our main idea, or is it just to create.

Alice Burdick: They're wasn't really sort of a manifesto, but there, there was a sort of a structure around it. The idea was, you have the, the work in place, you think of the, the design, and you, which is simple. It was, we had a very simple sort of setup in terms of how the books mainly looked. It was like a fold over, you know your typical page size double sided, folded in the middle. But to, to publish things that would otherwise maybe not be published.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Alice Burdick: You know? Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So kind of things that wouldn't be normally like published. Was it, kind of mostly on like the poetry side? I'm just trying to get an idea of the kind of things that you created.

Alice Burdick: It was strictly poetry, I would say, yeah, I mean be-both being poets and primarily interacting with other poets That was what we were doing was, was it, was it was going to be mainly poetry. So yeah, definitely, poetry. Sometimes there were artists about, I was, my very first book, I had my drawing on the cover and then I hand watercolored each of the covers, cause it was it was a alphabet, so a to z.

Tamara Thompson: Mmm.

Alice Burdick: You know, and then with a couple of, and that was also our typical mode, too. So it was just a fairly, is a keep it fairly simple. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So I, I just wanna get a little bit more of an understanding of kind of what that process was like, cause you get a thing, and you'd be like, Okay, we want to make this into something. So how did you go from, we want to make this into a chapbook to actually getting it into the world like actually be, it being a physical thing.

Alice Burdick: I, let's see if I can remember. Cause it, well, this, now realizing how long ago it was that this specific project was happening, but it was I think it was so it was a really exciting time for me in terms of my writing, because I was realizing that this is really what I was and what I enjoyed doing, and umm the fact of a community encouraged the making of the thing. So you knew, okay, well, there's gonna be like a couple of small press book fairs. You know, there's gonna be, so well, the goal will be to make something to share there, you know. So that was one of the, thy motivating forces, for sure was knowing that there was a place, there was a venue. Yeah, I wish these things could be shared so that, that gave that sort of deadline in a way. So there was usually one

or two a year, therefore, and usually the impetus was, you know, you would be doing it right before, like the, the weeks before the, the month before, but I was producing a lot of work, so I think there were maybe a few more of my, of my books than any anybody else's. I was just a productive time for me. And you know half of it was in Toronto, and the other half was in BC. And so, the inspiration was changing. The references were changing. You know, life is constantly changing and providing different information. But yeah, that was sort of-and so it was just like, well, use the tools at hand at the time. Copy shops were everywhere, so you would, you would have to sort of figure out your budget, which was low and, and, and you know you're doing, doing the stuff, so it's not, it's not super fussy. We didn't have like, we didn't have a very, it was just like, get it, get it out there! Get it printed! Get it out there.

Tamara Thompson: So, would you say the place where you were actually able to like get the books out there would be like markets. And was it kind of just like that hand exchange.

Alice Burdick: Yes, so it very much, you know. Yes, definitely sold books, but I think so much of it was the economy of you know it was a trade economy, so you would be, you would share your work, you'd get other people's work in exchange. Sometimes people just be given stuff away, people dropping stuff off at each other's tables, hanging out together. Also, you know, there was, it was also social. So you'd be having drinks and hanging out places and talking about everything and sharing work that way. Readings also, were places where you could give away or, or sell things to but yeah, no, it was very much a I don't, it wasn't a profitable situation, but you'd never really lost money either, if you know what I mean. I guess there's different about when gaining and losing money. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So I run a small chapbook press, and any money we gain from making the books. It goes right back into making more books.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, right? Yeah, exactly. That's it, exactly. Or to for beer, you know, at the time was like, Okay, we're gonna have, you know. Cause, you know, I don't think well, I don't really know where everybody was coming from economically, but I do know for us we were, and most of the people that we knew is fairly close to the bone. It wasn't really. So that wasn't really even it wasn't really a priority. It's become something that I've thought about more over time is like the cost of late, and, and I'm quite, you know, for, for certain things now I'm like I need to be paid, you know what I mean. But, but for other things I'm like, this is a, a community related thing.

Tamara Thompson: An adventure, kind of happening.

Alice Burdick: Exactly. Yeah, yeah. yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. The way I describe my press is, that we're not even part time. We're all extra time when anyone has extra time we work on something.

Alice Burdick: Right. What's the name of your press?

Tamara Thompson: Whispering Wick chapbook press. We started up in 2020.

Alice Burdick: I think I've heard of it, you know. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: The pandemic had just hit, and I was still in my program, and it was brand new, the Sheridan College Creative Writing and Publishing program, and we had to do an internship in the fall, or else we wouldn't be able to graduate. But there were no jobs because the world was on fire.

Alice Burdick: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I came up with of press and stuff and my dad said, Why don't you tell that to your professor, Paul Vermeersch? So I talked to him about the idea of doing a chapbook press as an internship. And then he said, talk to the internship people, and they loved the idea because it was a self-starting kind of business.

(Technical issues occurred.)

Tamara Thompson: But I don't know how much you were able to hear. But basically world was on fire needed something to do, and the internship people said, yes, take people, do this.

Alice Burdick: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And so I started it, and we all love it. We're still doing it. It's on a bit of a hiatus because of my master's.

Alice Burdick: Right, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But I, I haven't lost the love for it. So, we're still going to markets and stuff. We just aren't creating anything like brand, brand new. I just don't have the time.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, that's I, I guess that's it. Where you're talking about like the extra time thing.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Alice Burdick: If you can, it happens. And yeah, that's great.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you. So, I, I'm interested to go into a little bit of like the author kind of poetry, kind of side of things. So, you were talking about how you did that after school kind of writing workshop-

(Technical difficulties occurred.)

Alice Burdick: Yeah, I mean, so I, I knew I enjoyed the, the arts in general, my mother was a visual artist. There was a lot of art around when I grew up, and my father was like a secret poet in the sense that he, you know, he to amuse himself, he would, he would write poetry, or, or translate from ancient languages. So, it was sort of it wasn't an, an entirely alien idea, but I think the way things have been taught in school, you know, despite some of my, you know, like favorite teachers,

best efforts was, it was a little it was, it was very dry, and my sense of poetry was vague, and not inviting, we'll say. So, this extracurricular class was where I first, you know, found out about language, poetry, sound poetry, umm, the New York school of poetry. There was so much that was so enjoyable, and, and I connected to it, and, and realized that, how much I enjoyed doing it, how I was able to do it. You know, initially, not, yeah, it took, it took a little bit of time, but it was, it became a really essential part of how I created and how I thought about the world, and how I wanted to communicate. And, and then, when, after high school and entering, I did, I tried to go to university, not successfully. It just was, I think, due to things in my personal life with my family and yeah situation. I just wanted to not be in school, and so I dropped out after maybe a month and a half or 2 at York. And just, you know, had jobs and, and wrote and, and yeah, so that's sort of how it happened, though, was definitely this, this class that just opened my eyes to all the different things that poetry could be like the just, the range, and that, like music, or like form, other forms of writing or anything. It was a huge, there's so many things that could be considered poetry, and it didn't have to be stayed and dry, or really, really romantic, or really personal, or really impersonal, or you know all of those things. It, it could just be, it could be a lot of more interesting things to me.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's something that I try and get into the heads of my 1st year creative writing students. As I said, poetry is a lot more fun than you think it is.

Alice Burdick: Yeah!

Tamara Thompson: Embrace it, and you'll be amazed. So, many of them are like, well, is this poetry?

Alice Burdick: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, like, don't get hung up on, and that, that's, that's definitely something I try to, to encourage people when I'm teaching them, too. Is just, it's not a forbidding thing, and also so much of how we're taught to think about poetry, you know, again, you do need information, you do need an, an understanding of structure and basics, I think to begin with, but beyond that, like to get really hung up on what any specific thing means. You know what the intention of the author was, is it about the author-like all that stuff is like, you know, really you'll, you'll enjoy it a lot more if you don't worry. It's like le like listening to your favorite song. If you're gonna be, you know, parsing everything to death, it's not gonna be too much fun.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, and I feel like it's the same way people sometimes treat art. They're like, but I don't get it. And I'm like, but are you enjoying looking at?

Alice Burdick: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What emotions are you feeling?

Alice Burdick: Yeah.

(Technical issues occurred.)



Tamara Thompson: So why did you first publish your work as chapbooks?

Alice Burdick: Umm, I was encouraged to do so. Really, you know, and I, I essentially thought, Well, why not? I mean, you know what can happen with it. I didn't have a high expectations of anything, you know. I just thought this was a way to share it, and it was, I mean, I was very nervous about it for sure. But it wasn't, you know it, yeah, definitely a really interesting community, because they could be extremely snarky, but also very welcoming, and, and, and I also, I didn't think it was terrible like I, I, I really had the sense that my writing wasn't, it wasn't like, you know, genius or anything. But I, I thought it was worth that it was worth something worth sharing, and that it would be interesting also to know what people thought. It was almost like a way of getting feedback. Umm you know, the-the most immediate way of getting feedback at the time. I wasn't really, I wasn't really sending to magazines and, and really very rarely did or do. It's, it's more like developing relationships with people and seeing if things fit for both of you in a way. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Alice Burdick: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Would you make a chapbook with a press, again? I know that you're a very busy bee, but would that be something that you would be interested, like doing this process again.

Alice Burdick: Oh, yeah, I'm, I'm open to it. I have been over the years like it's, it's definitely, it definitely did drop off a bit once I was sort of published in the more traditional form, which is kind of interesting. But I know that's not the case for everybody, and maybe also because, you know, I think just different communities or relationships develop every you know, every year, if not every decade. And I'm really, you know, I'm on the older end at this point. So, I definitely, I'm totally open to it. Umm I, you know, and it does happen every, every now and then there was a chapbook that I did in collaboration with Gary Barwin a few years ago, with Above/Ground very the very, the very prolific above ground press and my own chapbooks there and also, and but the one that I did with Gary was picked up by a, a small French press like in in France, and they translated it with a Canadian translator, and, and then it was, you know, redistributed in this different form in a different language in a different country, you know. That's very cool to me, I, I love it. And, and right now I think most of my collaborations are with, you know, with musicians, and not necessarily other writers, but I'm always open to other, you know, either writing together or and or also publishing together, or, yeah, I'm definitely open to that. I feel like it's a lifelong thing, I don't, you know, I don't see it just stopping unless it's related to just things, and organically, naturally, stopping. I don't think there's lack of prestige or a gain in prestige, either way, it's not about that for me. I'm not at a level, anyway, where I could be like I'm too, you know, I'm too high and mighty for this.

Tamara Thompson: What are some challenges that you faced as an author over the years? And you may interpret this, however, you desire.

Alice Burdick: Okay, yeah. Well, I mean, you know, I think the ones that most people it's, you know, it's the thing of finding the time to write, and also live. And pay for things, you know, and so that's always been an issue for everybody over time. But I have to say, you know I wasn't, I-my parents were not, they didn't have a lot of money, they were, they, we weren't poverty stricken. But we, we you know, we moved around a lot and there was, there were work issues. It was pretty close to the bone, and you know, university to me would have been a huge expense. Like as it is to everybody. But I was not prepared to, I-I would have rather get my education from other poets directly and from the process of publishing, than to be in the classes, even though there were some very good teachers there, and I'm sure I would have enjoyed them, the classes. I just it wasn't for me then. I had to make them, I had to, you know, you know, pay for rent, and all of this. So that like, that's a long standing, existential thing, you know, it's, it's a lot of people, this is a common thing. When I had kids later on, it was, it was also umm, and this is where I think a lot about labor. Hey, yeah, I mean, not just specifically giving birth labor, but the, you know, the division of labor, the unspoken around, who does what, when, and, and what, how exhausting it is just to be alive and also losing your identity a little bit as a as a creator in that time coming, you know, having, you know, both my mother and a boyfriend of mine died within 5 years of each other, so there was grief. Grief was a, a factor in my life as a writer in that I wrote about it, but I also spent a long periods of time, not writing anything but and then also, after that, realizing A, I love to write yes, no matter what. But B, also I am, this is who I am. So sometimes writing is about not writing and about living and assessing and surviving, just surviving. So there, I mean, I guess basically, life in general has been the, the factor and exhaustion and hope and sadness. And you know all of those things and love but love also of the joy and the immediate satisfaction of, of writing something, whether or not anybody ever sees it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Alice Burdick: That's the other thing, I think when you're doing, really, when, when you've started out or have done really small press stuff it's like you realize, well, this is what you like, and, and it's not about you know, award culture, necessarily. It's not about recognition, you know. I-it's, it's okay, like it's, it's something you do, because you love to do it, because what-what are, what are the other rewards to it? You know the rewards are non-monetary, non umm, non-prestige related things, but they're deeply satisfying.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I, I actually tell my students because they're like, "Oh, well, I need to make something that's publishable, or that people will like". And all of this junk, and I'm like, if you're not having fun, it will never be good.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, and like, why, what's going to happen then? Like, that's the other part is like, I don't really, I don't want to discourage people, because there is a lot of hope, and that's actually can be a motivating thing for people. And I know some people who've actually done really well with that sort of way of thinking. But I just find it like

you're gonna it's mainly gonna be disappointing. So, if that's your, your thing, it's gonna be disappointing in in many ways, anyway, so you might as well just enjoy what you enjoy about it.

Tamara Thompson: Well, I also told them, I said, you know what is good, anyway. This quote unquote good thing, right? And I said, you know, if you're having fun with it, then you're gonna find people are going to have fun with it, because it's pretty obvious if you don't like the thing that you're making.

Alice Burdick: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And even if you do make something that let's say becomes successful of like the one-point one percent chance. And you, you're doing it. You're gonna have to pretend like you really like this thing for a pretty long time. Let's just say people are gonna catch on pretty quick that you don't like it.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, and you're gonna be tired of it, cause you've moved on like, that's the thing. The other thing about publishing in the traditional mode is that the typical model, it's not like this for everybody. But the typical model is that by the time, if you get, if you if you're lucky enough, or whatever to get something published in the in by, you know, a slightly larger press. It's gonna be at least a year or two from the last time you gave them the manuscript, which is gonna include work that you did years ago. So, by the time it gets out there, it's old, I mean, and that's one of the things about, about the micro press. It's so exciting is that it's you-it's right there like it can take a few months, or whatever, and it can take longer now I know, and it places. But you're doing it yourself, you, you know it could be a little bit fresher, at least for that time.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I find that there's so much relief when I tell the students that if you're having fun there is more likely that it will be, quote unquote, good in their eyes, or whatever. But have fun first, if you're going to write right because it's fun, even if it's not necessarily super like enjoyable, because you're talking about something really depressing. But are you enjoying that process, right? If you're not, then what are you doing?

Alice Burdick: What-what is the, what's the point? Like life really is actually to short for that, you know, there is no point cause you're just fooling yourself really.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly, and I think it relieves them like it's like a weights taken off of them with those expectations. And it's like, just enjoy.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, exactly. Just, you know, have fun. And also, you can change your mind, too, about what you like and don't like. And you know what I mean. Like, it's a it's, a it's a work in development and, and you're not necessarily gonna love this stuff that you did. And you know I do, I've talked to other writers who are very like Oh, God! You know I

have this this book that I did, and it's so embarrassing, you know, my old work is so embarrassing. And I'm like, I think of it as like, yeah, sometimes I guess if I was really gonna be hard on myself. But I feel like life is hard enough on you, you know. I the way I feel about is like I love that younger version of myself, and I would encourage her, you know. I wouldn't, I wouldn't be like oh, that's really shitty, I can't believe you did that. You know what I mean like, it's, it's just one of those things where it's like have, have a little bit of sympathy.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, cause I know what that little person of me was doing. There was a lot going on. The fact that we were able to make that, hey? That's pretty good, you know.

Alice Burdick: Exactly. That's it exactly, exactly like, just be tender to yourself. Be just as you would to, to, you know a student, or you know somebody you're mentoring, or whatever.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Alice Burdick: Mmm.

Tamara Thompson: What has this kind of like smaller publishing taught you?

Alice Burdick: I do think that it gave me, you know, lifelong well, I mean, so far, friendships and relationships with people. And to me so much of small press is community, and community is a complicated thing, sometimes right? It's not always going to be great, but it's, it's, it is a, it is a place where you kind of get each other, and that is really important. It's I like-I don't like always being around people who think the same way that I do, or act the same way, or do the same things, or whatever. But it's nice to have people in your life artistically, who you don't have to explain everything to. Who are like they get it. And even if they, even if you like, you don't quote unquote, get each other's work. It's not, who cares like, that's not really what it's about. It's about thy, the companionable system of support in just recognizing that you all exist and are, are creating things.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's-I love hearing the, people's like, answers to a lot of these questions. The further we go down, because I love hearing the insights and the perspectives and the experiences of people. It's just so fun. I'm getting-

Alice Burdick: Yeah!

Tamara Thompson: To talk about a thing, I really like to talk about. So, this is fun.

Alice Burdick: Oh, I love it! Well, that's why, when I saw your email, even though I've been a little distracted, or whatever I was like, oh, yeah, I'll talk to you because you, you're, A, you're all obviously invested in it because you're I mean, you're doing your thesis. But you're also doing, you know, you're, you're working. You have your own chapbook and enterprise and are you a writer, too?

Tamara Thompson: I am. If I do not write, I go a little loopy.

Alcie Burdick: Oh, I get that.

Tamara Thompson: It's kind of like if my sister doesn't listen to music, she's like. No, no, everybody go away. I need to listen to music by myself, for like an hour. I'm that way, I'm like everybody go away, I need to go write about gay cowboys, everybody leave.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, it's like that term friable where stones start to sort of flake at the edges. Start to feel you need to, it keeps you sort of cohesive in a way that maybe not other people would really get. But it's it brings the parts of you back together a little bit when you could write.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-

Alice Burdick: When you're la-like, if you're laughing or crying, or whatever sometimes, at the same time, it's, it's good.

Tamara Thompson: I have, my moments will just be like, I need to create something sometimes that's a poem, sometimes that's getting to a story that's already existed. But sometimes I'll just be like, I'm painting abstract cats, and everyone needs to leave me alone.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, that's-

Tamara Thompson: I need to do something.

Alice Burdick: That's right. Do something. Yeah, do something with your hands, like or, or voice, or whatever. But yeah, I like to draw, I do a lot of drawing, and I go in and out of periods of time where I do a lot of it. And it's very satisfying. And it's similar in that, it's like I'm making a thing, and I don't care if you like it or not, but I'm gonna do it, and I might show it to you, and you also don't have to respond, it's gonna be there.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I, I, I for a period of time I did absurdist Garfield art, because I was like, you know what this is fun. And I'm enjoying it, and there's a group of people on the Internet who really like this. So I'm gonna share it, because this feels right, you know, and I still draw cartoony, dogs and rats, and kind of in that style, and when I was, I would I had to go to the lectures as a gta, but, like I already knew all the content that was happening. So, I would just passively listen, and I would draw comics in the comics class that I would be teaching. All my students would be like, are you paying attention? And I'm like, Yeah, I am but I also like this is a second-year course and we're analyzing a page that, you know. Like, like, I'm glad you guys are like having a group discussion, but I'm not allowed to participate. So, I'm gonna draw.

Alice Burdick: It's your response. Yeah, is the is the drawing. Yeah, there's, that's, that's a participation. That's you know.

Tamara Thompson: I can't actually participate. I have to sit quietly and listen. So I'm gonna do something while I sit quietly and listen. Doesn't take a lot of brain cells to draw a Garfield looking cat, you know.

Alice Burdick: Oh, and it actually, like, I, yeah, it helps focus in other ways.

Tamara Thompson: Mmmhmm, that's what I say. But yeah, I'm, I'm an artsy person, I actually started in more of the creative writing side of things, in my program, and I stayed there, but I loved the small press side. So, when I was asked what I was going to do after school, I said, I don't know. And Owen went, Tamara, you love chapbooks, I'm like, well, yeah, duh, I'm gonna keep doing that, Owen of course. And he was like Tamara, why don't you do a master's on it? And I was like. Oh, Owen...

Alice Burdick: Yeah, it's a really.

Tamara Thompson: It's a great Idea.

Alice Burdick: It's a rich history in in Canada, you know, like there's so many, I'm sure you've talked to a lot of people that I, I know I mean, thy odds are high, and it's just really also interesting to me. I have I, one other thing that I have done a few times, too, is been sort of the judge. It sounds very formal, but I mean and there is, there is a formality to it. But of the, thy Bp. chapbook award.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Alice Burdick: I think three times now, once, quite a few years ago, and then two consecutive, say, you know terms. And it's always really fascinating because you, I just I mean, they're just so many right now. I think umm, they've really grown, and they're, they're the one thing that it's sort of, it's not like a capital C concern for me, but it's something that I notice, and I don't really relate to. It is the, the sort of formalization of, of chapbooks to the point where they become very precious, like it's a scale, it's a scale of production which is really wonderful. But it seems like there's this sort of thing that's happening where they're becoming more, difficult to, for people to get into like there's like the, the, you know, you have to pass a board and then, you know, it's a little less about people making their things. And it's become like there were, would there used to be a little less differentiation between things that we now call zines.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Alice Burdick: And books and stuff like that. To me, they're all chapbooks. But people now are very, sometimes very clear about defining these things, and they're like, this is a zine, and this is a chapbook, and a chapbook is usually a little prettier looking, and it's got this and this and this I'm like, it's just a, it's just, a chapbook is a chapbook.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Alice Burdick: It doesn't have to be those things. I like those things. I'm not against them, and I and I think it, it, you know it's not a it's just I don't, I don't want things to become... really elitist, I guess, or you know, or.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, you don't want it to be set in stone. You want to have that gradient.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, I don't want it to become difficult for people to be published in by chapbook presses. You know, I mean, like I don't, wanna I, I want the, I want it to be something that people enjoy doing. And I guess the, the way for that to happen is, people are often seating that means a production thing. So it's like somebody else is publishing them. Therefore they're gonna the, the way the presses are gonna operate is more like, you know, the, the traditional, slightly larger small press, you know. So book, book thug, or book hug used to exclusively chapbooks like that's, I'm sure it's a really interesting transition that they've gone through. And now they are, I think, exclusively, I think you could correct me on this, but they is, you know, traditional publishing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think they fully moved off of chapbooks. But again, I'm not 100 sure, either. They, I think they still have a section on their website that talks about that history, but I don't know if they necessarily pursue a lot of it. I have tried to reach out to them. And I can't remember if I got a response back. I have so many emails that I have to keep up with.

Alice Burdick: Oh, yes!

Tamara Thompson: To keep them in in track all the time. I have my excel spreadsheets and stuff, but sometimes I'm like, wait. Did they get back to me?

Alice Burdick: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And so I like, I, really, you know, I, I get it. And I can see that seem like a really like a natural thing, but it's, it's interesting to me sometimes, like some of the trends that I see where these sort of it's almost, it's a kind of conservative approach that a lot of places seem to be having now.

Tamara Thompson: Mmmm.

Alice Burdick: It's fine, you know. It's just like people, if people, the way people could get around that, and, and that's the thing is, it will always be subverted. It'll always be subverted by people doing it themselves.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm. Why are chapbooks important to you?

Alice Burdick: Ummm, I get to see new work. That's sort of less mediated by popular trends in writing and form. I get to find out about different writers. I get to see writers do things different, you know. I get to see writers experiment a bit more sometimes, too, like sometimes you'll see chapbooks by people that are very different from work that they've had published elsewhere, or in other chapbooks, so they'll, they'll, they'll

be a bit more experiment, there's more experimental qualities to chapbooks and I like, I like the scale like I, like a little I like a little, a little slice of writing, you know I like, and I like, I like the things where people are doing mixed media stuff, too. Yeah, I just find it's a more experimental exciting form.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree.

Alice Burdick: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Umm, are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not?

Alice Burdick: I don't know, (both laugh) I'm, I feel like in the, in historically they, there has been like, it's like a stages thing. And again, that's something that can be a little bit of an eye roll sometimes, but like also when you think of like Coach house. Aaaaa, they have gone through so many changes over the years I love, I love that press, I mean I love, I love what they do now. But there, there was a period like they did very experimental things earlier on, and people, they often would have people who were fresh out of the world of their own smaller presses and then and then move into, into that form. And you know, like Sou Thammavongsa was a great, like her, her writing, and her, she-I, I met at the small press book fair years ago in Toronto, and it was really interesting to see how her work was picked up initially. So it was a, her very tiny poems were her own, when, I can't remember the name of the press that she was involved in because it was her and a friend or two, and then that was picked up by Beth Follett from Pedlar Press, and her first sort of perfect bound book was through Pedlar, and then after that, she I think, I think she's published by somebody like I don't know, I don't think it was, I don't think it was House of Anansi, but it could be, it could even be Penguin now. She's like a novel short story writer. Umm, so, you can sort of see sometimes how it sort of feeds into, like they wouldn't, know they wouldn't, the, the larger publishing houses might not even know of many people unless they'd gone through the small, micro press, chapbook situation before. But I really, I don't know now how, how it works exactly cause I, I feel like there are a lot of people who, who are published in traditional publishing, who don't, who haven't been, you know, involved or engaged in chapbooks. I-it, it does it, I, I it's hard for me to say exactly. Also, I, I feel somewhat removed from traditional publishing myself, so I might not be a good you know person to say I did, by the way, I at another point in my life, too, at for five years, I co-owned a small bookstore in Lunenburg.

Tamara Thompson: Ooooh.

Alice Burdick: I, you know, curated and or-organized events, and had apparently one of the better poetry sections in Canada at the time. So I was interesting for me, being on that other side. You know how things were being sold, you know, by publishers, by distributors, by reps, by trade fairs, and how things were being received by people coming into the store, for example. So, you know, I think at that time I was seeing. Oh, I was really trying to get poetry, and that probably still had more of that connection.



Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Before we move on to the next question, I just want to briefly touch on how Souvankham Thammavongsa is one of the four people that all of my first years, we read *How to Pronounce Knife* in Rob Winger's class, and they love it.

Alice Burdick: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Love it, and I'm like, well, she also does poetry.

(Both laugh.)

Alice Burdick: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: If you liked her writing, why don't you try her poetry so that you're not scared terrified when you have to do the poetry unit. See, here's an author you like, maybe she's a poet you'll like.

Alice Burdick: She, and, and also, like, you know, I think there, it sounds really simplistic, but I think there's something to like sharing work that is quite spare, you know, for poetry with students, because, like Nelson Ball, Souvankham's work like there's, there, it is really actually accessible, you know. That's not my favorite word in the world, but I don't think, I think it still has value in the sense that when you're teaching something, there needs to be sometimes a way in initially, and, and also their work is just great, anyway, whatever stage you're at as a reader or a writer, so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I really like teaching her work in the creative writing class, and I also really like teaching *Nishga* by Jordan Abel, because my students are like, Whoa, this is a book. And I'm like, yeah, you can blend genres, and they're like, what? And that's when I introduced the idea of creative nonfiction, fiction to them. And they're like, what's that? And I'm like, you've known it, probably most of your life and didn't even realize.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, well, that's, that's it. Yeah, it doesn't matter. Contained always in a particular, you know, genre.

Tamara Thompson: And like, I love teaching with both of those. Just novels because they're just the anthology and the short story one of the students will actually read it, and the other one, Jordan, usually comes to Trent to speak. So, I say, I don't care if you don't read any of the other books you read this book, I am willing to put the fear of God into you. He is a lovely individual; you are to read this goddamn book.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, yeah, do, do I-and also like, I think it's fair. I love, I love a close reader, and I love close reading. But I also think sometimes you can jump in and out of, of a book depending on what's going on in the book, right? Like, you know, *Hopscotch* wouldn't be what it is

without that ability, and it's a great novel. You know what I mean like. There's so many approaches you can have as a reader also, and that's fine.

Tamara Thompson: I always tell my students to go in knowing what, especially like Jordan Abel's Nishga's books about, and I'm like, recognize these themes, pace yourself right. Don't be reading this in the Tim Hortons, because you might cry.

Alice Burdick: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You know, but read, read the book, cause he's a lovely person, and you're going to have questions, and you're going to regret not asking them, if you do not read the book.

Alice Burdick: You don't know what you're missing.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly, and a lot of them say thank you to me afterwards, because they're like, I didn't have time to read a lot of the ones on the list. But I'm glad I read this one, especially at your persistence.

Alice Burdick: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Because it was so helpful when I could talk to Jordan. And I'm like, exactly, that's why you read the book.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, yeah, no, that's it's, it's really, that's a really that's a treat for them to be able to meet the author for sure.

Tamara Thompson: Especially when a lot of them think that the authors are supposed to be like the tortured poet tucked away in his like secret cabin, isolated and mentally ill, and it's like mental illness doesn't make a good poem.

Alice Burdick: No, it usually stops you from writing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Alice Burdick: It's not a, it's not a helpful thing, usually, I mean it, you know it's not, not that, not a co-cofactor, but, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But it can surprisingly be more of a roadblock. So interact with your community, because, hey, we have a pretty nice community.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, so I'm gonna move on, and this is a, you can take this question wherever you like or interpreted however, you want. But does this kind of publishing, like this kind of smaller publishing, reflect Canada itself in some way?

Alice Burdick: Yeah. I mean, I think, I think because the people contributing are Canadian, usually just in the most explicit sense, I

think it does. And I think you know the themes that are in there, the absurdities sometimes that are mentioned or just, you know, thy, thy, the type of production, this sort of the, the, the modest scale is, is there something-I but I don't think I mean, I how can I say. Canadian chapbooks are Canadian and American chapbooks are American, like, it's just, it's, it's just a form of, of publishing. So, I, I think that umm, yeah, I don't know, you know, I mean, I think just, just in the strictest sense, it's a Canadian thing. I don't think in any more, in a more subtle, I don't think there's a more subtle thing going on there actually, like I, I don't think you know, I, I mean, aside from the themes that might be in an individual books, the type of humor maybe that's an individual books or the, the themes or the descriptors they owe you instead of you know, yeah no.

Tamara Thompson: Chapbooks aren't necessarily like specific or special to Canada, but we have our own way of interpreting them is kind of is that kind of what I'm.

Alice Burdick: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What you're trying to get out there.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, I mean, there's specific communities in Canada that are very, you know, Canadian communities, and I do, it was-it's been interesting on occasions when I've, that when I've had occasion to speak to authors, maybe from the States, for example, and they'll talk about how exciting, you know, like the, the Toronto scene was in the in the 90's for them as Americans seeing like the, the level of production and creativity and, and community. So I don't, so there's things that are very specific historically, to, to Canadian small press scenes, but I don't know if it's cause they're Canadian, and maybe like that, very like the Canadian project being in, in a really explicit sense, since the-since the sixties, maybe multicultural, that might, might extend to that type of production, but it also, you know, it's not exclusive to Canada, I guess.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah, thank you.

Alice Burdick: You're welcome.

Tamara Thompson: It's a, it's a very, the whole purpose of the question is to see where people go with it. So, I always it's, it's one of my favorite ones to ask, because it can-

Alice Burdick: Oh yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Interrupted in so many interesting ways.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, yeah, I guess so. I'd be, there must be people who think this is like, these are just, it's just very, very specifically Canadian and I, I can't see it personally.

Tamara Thompson: I've had, people say, well, it's just if there's a weird poet, there'll be a chapbook. So, you know, that can happen anywhere, or people are like, well, if we're thinking about chapbooks on the plane of like, you know where their places is in the world and stuff in the place

of Canada. And it's just there's so many interesting ways people take that question.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, yeah, like, yeah, exactly. There are so many different possible interpretations. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What does this type of publishing, like the smaller type offer that traditional publishing can't? And vice versa. We've talked a little bit about that. But I'm still gonna ask the question and kind of see if you have anything more else to say on it.

(Technical issue occurred.)

Alice Burdick: Okay, yeah, yeah. So, with, with the, this type of like, the chapbooks,

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Alice Burdick: I would say it's that, that, that ability to immediately produce something and share it on a scale that's outside of the marketplace. So, it, it exists outside of the traditional, you know, way of making and distributing and sharing and selling work so you can get it out there faster. You usually can umm, have a bit more, you, you have, you can do what you want in terms of the aesthetics of it. You could do what you want with the content of it. You can sell it, you know. You can sell it by whatever way you want to sell it or trade or have different sort of models also for how you distribute it. But it's, it's your job to do that. And the, you know the benefit, I-I'm not down on traditional publishing in the sense that it is a place where that work is done by a funded body, and you know, funding, I know, could be an issue for a everybody at every level of the publishing schema. So, it's like, you know, writers, publishers, small, medium large, all of that. And then you, a, a traditional publisher, will be able to, well, theoretically, we'll be able to represent your work and, and get it to a wider audience, a larger audience, and through the means of, of distribution, to book stores to other portals for selling work and into festivals and, and the funding the again, that also goes down to the funding thing. If you are published in a traditional mode, I, I, I know there are variations on this with funding, but you are more likely to be funded as a writer if your work can go through that mean means, you know, you're considered more a, a, a more authentically professional, I guess, is the is the is, you know what it comes down to, yeah. So, it's like how things are distributed. How you know, and then how you fit into an economic system that will reward you for that. Whereas when you're doing chapbooks, it's not really, it's not, it's, it's not existing within that concept. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What's something you wish, maybe, like the public knew about Canadian publishing.

Alice Burdick: Yeah, I, I do-it's so interesting over time to see how people think about publishing and authors, when, like people who are also writers, or who have not been published yet, and whose hope is to be published by a larger press, or whatever how they think of, of the world of writing and publishing is usually a sort of romantic thing. The way I

think of it is like, if you're a writer or you're, you're just, you're, it's a creative thing, you can't do it without your, your arch, without your hope and without like love, and all of those sorts of things. But it's also a job like it's work, like it's, it's work. And most of the work is stuff that you're not going to be seeing. So you're not going to see all the editing that goes into something, all of the anxiety and the revisiting of things. You-you're not going to see all of the things that happen before it gets out onto, you know, into somebody's hands in whatever form that takes. So, it's just another job. But it's a job, it's not recognized as a job by, by other Canadians. It's really like the, the arts fall, especially writing and things where you can't see all the work that goes into, is such a mystery to people, and I just wish it were-I don't want, I don't want to be, you know I don't need, I don't need a parade but I would like to be able to, like everybody would, to be able to, you know, pay my rent and not worry that my kids aren't gonna have a place to live. You know what I mean, like, it's, it's the-the value associated with it, the thing that people, people who value the arts often also think well, or who people who think they value the arts think that there's some sort of status associated with it, that is like, yeah, you can be regarded as you know, somebody who has been doing it for a while has a certain amount of authority or expertise even in something. But it's not then matched by what you make and what you don't have to worry about on a daily basis. So, you know it, it would be, it would be nice for it just to be considered a real job.

Tamara Thompson: Yeaaaah.

Alice Burdick: But that's not gonna happen. So in the meantime, you know I do other things for money, and my, my friends do, too, and I've never I never was really drawn to academia, which is the one acceptable job for writers. And it's not and I, and it's deeply stressful, also I know, and I know that the pay isn't great.

Tamara Thompson: Yeaaaah.

Alice Burdick: If there are jobs like with everything. So, I know, you know I've been free from that in the sense that, you know, I'll I can try to go out and get a job, and I work at like, for example, my, my job right now and I find it satisfying is I work at a at a gift shop in town. That's my main income right now, and that's fine. But then I'm not writing as much, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Right. Yeah, it's, it can be hard to get people to understand, because if they're like, well, I can write a sentence. What are you doing that's so special? And it's like, well, you know, it's a little different than that, but okay.

Alice Burdick: And are you writing that sentence? Like that's the thing, it's like people look at art and say, I, you know my kid could do that. It's like, is your kid doing that? No, you know, maybe your kid can do that. Will you encourage your kid to do that? No, you know, like your kid might have to do that without letting you know that you're-that that kid is doing that because you're not going to approve of it, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Alice Burdick: Everybody's struggling like this is a thing you know, I- this is part of it is like, I don't think of art as having an, you know, and I don't think art in itself is an elite activity. It's just an activity, you know, it's an activity. It's a job, it's, it's, it's a job, and it's fun. And I think people don't trust fun like you said and, therefore, you know, even though they also say you gotta love your job. They don't want us to love this job because they don't get what's, what's lovable about it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. You're supposed to enjoy your work. But why doesn't your work make more money and give you status? Because that's how you get happiness right? That's how that works, you know, money and status that makes happiness. And then once people get that, they're like, well, let's, let's try children, because that's supposed to make me happy. And let's just say there's a lot of mistakes already happening. Let's not put this onto another person.

Alice Burdick: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And it's unfortunate that it happens to so many people, because that's what they're told, and they believe it when and what makes you happy is what you enjoy doing.

Alice Burdick: Yeah. Then, sometimes the things that make you happy let you down, too. So it's like, you know what I mean like, it's, it's you could be happy for a little while with it. I also, you know, I know people, too, who were writers, who were authors and who been like fuck it. I'm that was, I'm not doing that anymore, for, for whatever reasons they have it. Sometimes it's like it was a short-term thing, or you know it was what they wanted to do at a certain time, or sometimes they're just you know, they're over it. They're, they're and they, you know, I think if you're if you're struggling to make your, your ends meet, and you can find a job that does that, that sometimes is what you need to do right. It's not like it's not a choice people want to have to make, but they, they will make it because, you know it-it doesn't make them less authentic, it just makes means you had to, to live.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree.

Alice Burdick: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, I'm gonna, I, I have a couple more questions here. So why do you think most small presses and micro presses have to close up shop?

Alice Burdick: Ummm, I think it's exhaustion, like, you know, I think one it's exhaustion. Two, sometimes things just have a built-in end date.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Alice Burdick: I, I think, I think that that can't be discounted just sometimes things are part, part of the thing with doing things that can

happen more quickly is that they can also end more quickly, and people can change their minds and move on to other things, and, and, and that's also part of the, just how, how that kind of system works a little bit is, is, you know, you do it, and then you stop doing it. And it doesn't mean that something else isn't gonna come in and take its place in one way or another. Yeah, you know, it can be really sad when, when certain places close down where you're like Oh, damn! Or you know, sometimes it's life circumstances, you know, people will break up so that I know there's presses which have been formed from, you know, people being together. That was sort of like the eternal network was part of that for me. I was with Victor at the time, and so it was part of our whole thing, and, and so but it continues, I think he, he's kept it going with various other people at different times, too. So I kind of like that idea. I like the idea of something that just can be taken up at any time. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What's something important about D.I.Y. press history. That you're like, hmm, I wish I could share this with more people.

Alice Burdick: Well, one of the things that I loved about the early 90's and that scene was, was the community aspect of it. The fact that people could share their ideas, not only in the things that they were doing, but just by getting together and talking and hanging out.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Alice Burdick: And it must, still, I don't know if it, I don't, like I don't know, I don't know if it still happens in the same way, and I think it was really related to the fact that there was, you know, there was a fair, and there was like, there were events that would happen, and readings that would happen, that people would all show up to and be different spokes in the wheel of the community. And umm ,so it's just like conversations like, I just think in person conversations about art, about living as an artist, about writing, about making things is really important, like it's there's the doing the thing. There's the thing that you make, then there's the, the community, and, and you know people behaved well, people behaved poorly. There was the whole range of stuff, there were all freaking out, and people having their own issues and being mean, but usually there was some sort of conversation and a way of getting through it. So there was a bit, it was a, it was a fairly tolerant scene also in that people could fuck up, but then they could be forgiven. So I think, and I think that comes from conversation and from people who are a little different, talking to each other and, and sharing ideas, because the common project was, was making art and sharing it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What's something you wish people knew about your history.

Alice Burdick: Mhmmm.

Tamara Thompson: The hardest question. You must talk about yourself.

(Both laugh.)

Alice Burdick: Umm, I think, I think when I tell people how long I've been writing and creating stuff, some people include the chapbook stuff, the early 90's stuff and other people count it from the time my first, you know perfect bound book came out in 2002, and that's a long, you know, that's a long period of time to me. That's over a decade.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Alice Burdick: Of development, and I would not have had any, I wouldn't have any of the books that I've had out through traditional publishing if it weren't for the chapbook. See for, for having produced and lived in and organized those events. To me, I yeah, I wouldn't be who I am as a writer without having done that stuff. And I, I don't know, I'm not sure what else, I mean, like, I always feel like I'm okay with people not knowing everything about me, just because, because well, A. I don't. But also there's so much to talk about that, you know the that it's okay, if people have a certain way of thinking about me or my writing. You know, I know a lot of people don't quote unquote, get my writing and, and, and that's, that's okay to me.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Alice Burdick: It is actually okay. It's, it's to me because I, I think I'm at a point in my life where it's really not my problem.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Alice Burdick: You know what I mean? Like, yeah, you take it or leave it, like I'm not, you know, I'm not doing this for accolades or for anything. It's nice to, to, to laugh with people sometimes about stuff. Or you know, whatever it's, it's, it's okay to, to not know, to have a whole back story. If you're reading my writing, you don't need an explanation exactly.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I find so many people are like, well, how does this relate to your life? And I'm like, you mean my weird sci-fi story that-

Alice Burdick: Yeah!

Tamara Thompson: What? What?! No, I, I wrote it, but that's not me.

Alice Burdick: I know well that, and it is, it is you, but with the part of you that it is, is your mind. It's like, like, that's not, no, yeah, it doesn't... it represents the, the, you know, your thought process. And basically I think the way I write is how I see the world, which is, it's a strange, strange old world, you know, I mean.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Alice Burdick: Things are very odd, and, and I, I you know I, but I like a I, I like a lot of what is strange about the world, and you know I do-I do. There's a lot that I dislike also, obviously, but like to respect and love, people as, as people in the world is to accept that, you know things are very odd in general.



Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Alice Burdick: You know.

Tamara Thompson: I don't need anyone to get my writing. I'm enjoying doing it, and the people who like my writing don't need to quote unquote, always need get my writing, either. I don't know, especially when it comes to like the experimental stuff I'm like, I don't know. Think about it. That's the whole point, I want you to think.

Alice Burdick: Yeah!

Tamara Thompson: I don't want you to just consume, think about the, think about what does this soup metaphor mean? And who's the bone broth. Think about that, is it the government?

Alice Burdick: (Alice laughs) Well, yeah, you know, and I like all kinds of different types of writing like, that's the other part of it is like, I, I will like a really straightforward narrative lyric poem, if it's, if it's something that I think is good in my estimation, as you know what I mean, or I'm enjoying, and, and I will like a very explicit, straightforward nonfiction piece, and I'll, I'll like the weird, I'll, I mainly like the weird shit, honestly, but it's but I, I I'm not discounting any of it, because it's all coming from, you know, a person.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's one of those things where it's like the weird shit is interesting. But that doesn't mean that I'm not going to be interested in the new Netflix Special, whatever the hell it is, all right. This has got some interesting things, let's go for a ride.

Alice Burdick: That's right. Yeah, exactly, exactly it, it, you know, life is while wildly various. So you might as well take it all in.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly. Yeah. Well ummm, do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording.

Alice Burdick: No, I'm just so curious just to eventually read what everybody, what you're, you know what you what you say about it all, too, because it is an interesting conversation. And there's just so many different people and approaches involved.

Michael Casteels

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson and today is and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview has taken place. This interview is for small press and author. Your turn.

Michael Casteels: Oh, yeah, I'm Michael Casteels. I run Puddles of Sky Press in Kingston, Ontario. My pronouns are he/him and I don't have any other titles.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah-

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Okay. So just to start off this conversation: how did you discover zines and chapbooks? And this kind of publishing? When was the "Aha," kind of moment for you?

Michael Casteels: Yeah, I think probably when I was be, like, nineteen, twenty so, like-like fifteen years ago some friends of, friends of myself we were doing more, like, political kind of zines. They introduce me to zine making and then we did a little journal of like politically inspired Zine making. And then when that sort of petered out, then another friend of mine, he started doing poetry zine chapbook things, and then that, sort of, turned me on to doing it for my poetry. That was, sort of like, my-my introduction into, like, the making of zines. And then when I moved to Kingston a while ago, I met Stuart Ross, who-he runs Proper Tales press chapbook, press. He also, like, he's an editor and writer for-for bigger presses. He was a writer in residence at Queens, and I showed him some of my, like, zine poetry books, and then from there he was showing me the chapbooks that he makes and then that sort of got me more into taking, like, the zine and turning it more into, like, a craft object and-and he'd sort of introduced me to, like, the-the chapbook scene. I guess I didn't really know that there was one.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, nice. So, you kind of talked a little bit (technical issues occurred). But could you go a little bit more into detail-?

Michael Casteels: About-about which part? Just, we'll, just like...

Tamara Thompson: Like, why did, it's a lot of work to start a press. So, you know.

Michael Casteels: So, I think when-when I first started it with my friend in Peterborough. We-it-it was a bit of work, but it was mostly, just like, getting our own work out there with zines. It's-it's not as much work, like, sort of like, the grunt work of, like, putting them all together basically, 'cause it was all, kind of like, hand-done. So, at that point we were doing, like, scissors, glue, printing our poems off computer and then, like, cutting them out, gluing them on to paper, and then just like going to staples and photocopying them. So, we could, like-you could get an idea for a zine and, like, within a day or two you could get it printed and given out to friends. So that was sort of like an interesting thing

about it, just, like, how immediate it could be at that point. And while we were doing the zine making, I think we are kind of, like, we were kind of doing it together, but separate. And we've wanted to, like, pool resources, like, one, like, he had, you know, the long-arm stapler. I had, like, stacks of paper things like that. So, we-we sort of combine forces. And then that's when we came up with doing it as the press. So that's where Puddles of Sky Press was founded, just, kind of like, bringing-bringing tools together, maybe helping each other, like, fund a project if we didn't have money for printing and then to do little chapbooks that would-would include, like, friends. So, we did a couple little zine ones, where we just, like, gathered work from our friends and-and printed it all together.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Would you say that the press has an editorial philosophy, or maybe a goal, like? Because I know some people do. But and the goal can even be, is just as simple as, we wanted to make something. But I wanna, I wanna ask.

Michael Casteels: Yeah. So, I think originally, the goal when we first started was just to, like, get our work out to friends, just to have, like, an object that we could sell at readings. Just a way to like to get our poetry out into the world, away from ourselves. Now that—Puddles of Sky—it's like, basically just me that does it. I think my goal is to, sort of, publish some, like, poetics that don't get a lot of representation. So, like, concrete poetry, minimalist poetry, surrealist poetry. It's all kind of, like, my favorite kind of poetry as well. But it's also poetry that doesn't lend itself very well to being published by larger presses. Even other chapbook presses. There's a few now that do it. But I think when I moved more towards doing chapbooks, there were very few chapbooks presses that would focus heavily on concrete poetry or-or minimalist poetry. So that's, sort of, my goal now, I think, is to —is to publish that type of work.

Tamara Thompson: It's really interesting. Yeah, thank you. So, like, you're talking—so, the press is, like, kind of works in genres that it usually does. It's sounding more like it, just kind of does mostly poetry. Am I correct in that?

Michael Casteels: Yeah, mostly poetry. I do, I do also publish, think I published one book of short stories, one chapbook that is just a short story, a couple of things, sort of, like, fall out of the realm of poetry. I do postcards as well. Yeah. And then I do lots of, like, little, like, ephemeral things. And they—they're all poetry, as well. But just, like, little one—one poem publication. Sometimes they're just, like, a strip of paper that's folded over once, and a poem is—is rubber stamped on it, and then, like those ones I can just ,sort of like, give out. But I would say, yeah, primarily it is—is poetry.

Tamara Thompson: Cool. Now, my next question: I'm very interested to hear how you actually make some of your chapbooks. What's, kind of, your process from getting the work to actually creating it? Because I've seen some of the things on your website that you've created and you've got some really cool stuff.

Michael Casteels: Yeah, thank, you.

Tamara Thompson: I'm interested in that process for you.

Michael Casteels: Okay, yeah. So that, I guess, because I do various types of publications, some like—the process is quite different, Depending on what I'm doing. So, for example, I've just completed two chapbooks that I wanted to prepare for the Ottawa Small Press book fair, which was just this past weekend. So, I normally, sort of like, set my print schedule for those. And so there, the two publications are quite different. So, the one is more of a traditional chapbook, I think, that you might see where a friend of mine gave me some poems. I used, like, Adobe InDesign, and so did all the layout and formatting there and then basically printed—printed it all on my laser printer at home, or the body of it at least. And then I do all, like, the—the production here, so I print it, fold it, cut the paper. It's a bit smaller than normal size chapbook. So, I cut all the paper, fold, staple it here. In this case, a rare case, I got the cover printed out of house just because I wanted a nicer quality that I knew I couldn't get at home. So, I got the cover printed out of house, but I still had to do all the cutting folding and stapling for the cover. So that's sort of like the more traditional one that one's—it's called *Blizzard of None* by Jason Heroux. And the other, sort of, style that I'm working and almost more focused on these days are the rubber-stamped chapbooks. Yeah. So, these ones—are ones—I was very inspired by the work of JW Curry, John Curry. He's originally from Toronto. He's in Ottawa now and he's been working the chapbooks, I think, since, like the sixties. And he does a lot of these rubber stamp publications. I have a big collection of his and they're really interesting, because after you do chapbooks for a while, at least in my case. Because I do so much work at home and because I like working in different formats, I end up with a lot of, like, off-cut paper that—it's just oddly sized, and paper that you can't fit through a printer. So, the rubber stamps are like sort of a workaround that you can—you can use them on any size paper. So basically, you have these little plastic platens and a set of rubber font. So, you, I think it's a lot like letter press printing where you basically take each letter, you type set it onto the platen, and then the poem is all set, and then you can just rubber, stamp it as many times as you want. So, the most recent publication I did with that is a journal of minimalist short form poetry. It's called *Stumped* and the—that sort of comes together. I have sort of an open call for submissions, so submissions are sort of trickling in all the time. Sometimes I will also solicit work, if I have an idea of somebody's work that I know that I—I think would be a good fit. Sometimes those poems will sit with me for a long time, like, there was one poem in this issue of *Stumped* that I've held onto for like a year and a half; other one I solicited and got them like a few weeks before printing started. So, I, kind of, wait until the poem, sort of, line up for a journal like that. And then once I have an idea that—that it all sort of adheres together, it's a bit cohesive. Then I can start doing the production. With that project, specifically, because again, it's all rubber stamped—You can't—can't play with the font size the way that you can when you're using something digital. So, for example, like, when I'm doing Adobe InDesign. If a poem is really long, then you can just kind of, like, maybe shrink the font size a little bit to fit it specifically onto a page. With the rubber stamp poems, you need to find the paper or the

card stock, or whatever that can house the poems specifically. So in this case, there were poems that are larger than I normally do, so I had to find the right paper size. Luckily, I have some, like, lots of boxes of paper and card now, and when I find the right materials, then I can kind of set to work on figuring out how many copies I can do, depending on what the quantity of the stock I have is and, like, what the format's going to be. And then I sit down, and I actually start doing the-the production. So, type- setting with the rubber stamps, and then just sitting and-and stamping for hours. Other considerations are what the binding's going to be. So, in some cases, a lot of cases, I'll do like sown bindings. Again, sometimes that will also depend on format. A sometimes, depending on the format, staples don't work if there's too many pages, or in this case, with this new issue of *Stumped*, one of the poems that was submitted was basically six poems that were meant to all appear on one page rather than spread over six pages. So, in this case I had to-to cut a page specifically, and when you open the book, and you get to that page, it folds out into a larger page.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic.

Michael Casteels: Yeah. So again, I think with-with the rubber stamps, specifically, it's and-and I think what I-one of my goals, actually, I guess, maybe this ,kind of, goes back to that other question, is to fuse the poem and the form in which it is published. Actually, I'd say, that's probably one of my biggest goals yeah, to give the poem like the perfect housing. I think that's sort of like the main-the main rundown of my actual production.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I love hearing how people create. I-I run a press as well called Whispering Wick, and one of my favorite things is when my designer, Grace, also my proofreader and layout person-

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Oh, sorry. Basically, I just love when she comes to me. And she's like, 'So I wanna do this.' And I'm like "So cool. Let's do it."

Michael Casteels: Yeah, it's so much fun.

Tamara Thompson: I, that tactical aspect. The-I have a lot of favorite questions in here, but this is one of my favorites is just to hear how people actually create these things.

Michael Casteels: I would, I would be super interested in that actually, that-yeah, that's super interesting.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. How does your press make decisions? Because you talked about how you had a partner before here in Peterborough. But now- is it just you, or how-how does that work?

Michael Casteels: It is just me, so yeah, decision making is pretty easy. Not really sure what goes into it. I guess it has to be a poem or a collection that I feel very, very strongly about. If I'm going to work on it. I know I had-I had done one project a couple of years ago that I

think—it was—it was okay. It wasn't like a project that really-really spoke to me. But I went ahead and did it anyways and part-way through the production of it, I just got so exhausted because I didn't love it. And it's a lot of—a lot of hours, a lot of work to put into it, if you don't absolutely love the work. So, after that project, I realize that, unless I really love it, then it's not for me. That's the big decision, I think. Other little decisions—finances, maybe—is a little part of that. Umhm now that I'm doing primarily rubber stamping, finances have-become less of an issue because I have the majority of the materials on-at hand. Now I-I bought a couple of sets of rubber stamps, and an ink. So basically, all that's there. Once I sit down to do it, it's basically free to print again, because it's all done on the off-cuts. So yeah, like, this issue of *Stump* that I did, I don't think it cost me very much. I bought a stack of paper at a thrift store. The cardstock was donated to me by a friend, and I had all the stamps at hand. So it was, yeah very, very minimal finances. Some of, like, the-the Jason Heroux. I had to print the covers out of house. So, some of those decisions end up being financial, like, I had to do all the-the trimming and cutting myself because doing that at Staples the-the print's not expensive. But to get me just cut down to size is very expensive. So yeah, that sort of ties into some decision making. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you. Yeah, that makes—that makes a lot of sense. And I totally agree with needing to be passionate about that project. Because it is so much work.

Michael Casteels: Yes, yeah. And-and it's just me. Like, if it was a group of us, and somebody really loved it, and I wasn't too into it, but we're working together, that's different. But if it's just me, then yeah, it's a lot of time to just be sitting in the basement working on something you don't love. So yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's—you can feed off of someone else's energy. But when it's just you and you are the one who's doing the pushing, and you're the only person who's got gas in the tank, it can be really hard.

Michael Casteels: Exactly. Yeah, for sure.

Tamara Thompson: So just a little—another question here: like, where do you sell your books? Do you have a consignment agreement with a store, or do you do markets online?

Michael Casteels: Yeah, I would say, I, I sell primarily the bulk of my materials at some book fairs. I go to the Ottawa Small Press book fair. Twice a year they have a spring session which just happened, and a fall one which happens in November. There used to be, and I think maybe that's still ongoing, but they happen less frequently—there's a Meet the Presses in Toronto; they do the Indie literary market and the bpNichol chapbook award. So, I go to Toronto to sell. There's a market through the International Festival of Authors in Toronto, which happens early September. I've been invited to the last number of years. There was one at Art Space in Peterborough that I've been to, so those—that's kind of where I, like, I can go. And I can sell, like, a big chunk of chapbooks. I also sell online. Those orders happen, like—sometimes I'll get, like, a bunch of orders, and then I'll go for, like, a month or two and not have any and

then get a couple more. Those ones are interesting because—because it's online, you can sell anywhere. And I've—I've sent chapbooks all around the world now. So, it's pretty interesting when some of those ones come in. And at readings, I will sell chapbooks. There's an independent bookstore in Kingston that will sell some of my chapbooks. And yeah, that is sort of consignment. Yeah, I think that's—that's mostly it, a lot of trades, too. I think that's an interesting thing with chapbooks. Is that yeah, there is definitely more of like a trade economy. So, with some other presses, we just sort of have like a standing agreement that, like, whatever they produce they'll give to me, and whatever I produce I'll give to them, even though, like, some of us, like—there's a Rob McClellan in Ottawa, and he runs above/ground press. He publishes, like, I don't even know how many it feels, like, a hundred chapbooks a year, and he'll send me everything, and I might only publish ten, and I'll just send him. And it's yeah—It's—it's an interesting trade economy. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I agree. I—I also trade with—with with Rob. I give him some of the stuff we do too.

Michael Casteels: Oh, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Michael Casteels: Yeah, that's funny.

(Technical issues occurred).

Michael Casteels: —like I just came to writing pretty naturally. I just—when I was a kid I was playing outside and I got caught in the rain, and I don't know why, but that just really spark something in me. I went inside, and I felt, like, I just needed to write a poem. I don't think I—I hadn't read any poetry, I mean, aside from what we had read in school a little bit. But even that point, I don't think we were really reading any poetry. But I just, yeah, I don't know, I just went inside, and I wrote some poems, and then from there, poetry writing was sort of tied in with my journal writing. I've been doing journal writing for a long, long time, and I think, some of my poetry was basically just, like, yeah, journal writing in verse. And yeah. And then it just sort of evolved from there, where I just continue to write all the time and must have been—yeah, when I got out of high school, and then my friend Andrew Nurse in Peterborough—and then he and I were starting to share work and editing work at that point, still, I—I wasn't mean—I was seriously writing. I don't think I was serious about, like, getting things published, or yeah, really, like, honing the craft. I think I was just writing. And then it was when I moved to Kingston and met Stuart Ross, the writer-in-residence at Queens, and he really helped me learn about the craft of writing poetry. And then, from there, that's when it became more of, like, a serious endeavor.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, he's a—he—he's a fun guy. I—I enjoy every conversation I have with him.

Michael Casteels: He's great. Yeah, I love Stewart.

Tamara Thompson: So, sorry. Correct me if I'm wrong, but you have published like your own work, as chapbooks, right?

Michael Casteels: Yes, yeah, I do a lot of-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Michael Casteels: Self publishing.

Tamara Thompson: That's what I thought. Okay, so why did you choose that format for your work?

Michael Casteels: Again, I think that chapbooks can create, like, a very perfect home for a collection of poetry. I think sometimes some longer collections, especially if they're, like, themed about something, they can often be too long. And it's, like, they have to be, because they need to fit within a certain format. Chapbook. If you feel, like, you want to write some poems about seagulls, and you only have five poems, that can be a chapbook. You don't need to do a forty-five-page book all about seagulls and again it kind of goes back to my-one of my other comments. But just the immediacy of it-you can have the idea, like, I think I've had, yeah. I did one a couple of years ago now, when I was on a camping trip up in Frontenac, north of Kingston, and I didn't plan on it, but as I was hiking, I started writing some poems, and then, like a week later, I published a chapbook of those poems. And there's also just like the tradition of chapbook publishing in Canada, and I think, like specifically, it feels like in Ontario, I think, like Toronto is a-was a hub back in, like, the sixties, seventies. And I, like, sort of, like working in that tradition, yeah. And I, I-and I think, too, yeah, this kind of, giving them that-that perfect house. I think, being able to-to play with formats for me is really important. I like-I like changing the size and shape of books. I like the tangibility of a-of a chapbook. I like playing with, like, cardstock and paper textures and all that sort of thing. For me, that's-that's really fun. Also, I feel, like, there are times where, as a writer, my drive to write poetry or edit poetry, kind of, dries up and doing it as a chapbook allows me to still work within the realm of poetry and to be really creative. But not to have writing poetry at the forefront. It's more of, like, the sort of, turning the poem into a physical object.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I love chapbooks and chapbooks of poetry or short stories. There's just something really nice about just the length of them, and it feels so complete. And some of the-my favorite poetry is from like chapbooks or short little things, right? Don't get me wrong, I do have my favorite collections as well.

Michael Casteels: Oh, for sure. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But it's just so. There's so much experimenting that can happen with poetry. It's one of the things I tell my students because I teach as a TA, right?

Michela Casteels: Oh okay.



Tamara Thompson: And they're, like, "Where is the interesting things happening in poetry?" Especially if they're interested in poetry. And I'm like, "Don't look at the collections part of Chapters. Go and find the chapbooks, because that's where the Canadian poets are writing. That's where--"

Michael Casteels: That's really interesting.

Tamara Thompson: Interesting things are happening, and it's because, like, a lot of them were either scared or hesitant with poetry originally, and kind of found their own groove, or were introduced to it. And it not being scary or strict, like, what their primary schools had told them.

Michael Casteels: Right. Oh, for sure.

Tamara Thompson: So, they want to see that experimentalism and those are the kinds of people they want to read. So, I'm, like, if these are the types of people you want to read, like, I can recommend you some full collections.

Michael Casteels: Hmm.

Tamara Thompson: But go out into this community, and I think you'll have a lot of fun there. And a lot of the time, the students, like, oh, man, this is so cool! People make their own stuff. And I'm like "Welcome."

(Both laugh).

Michael Casteels: Yeah, it is—it is very exciting, I think, I—when I—again it was through Stuart that I sort of discovered the—the community of—of presses and chapbook makers. And that was just, like, mind blowing and eye opening for me to go, and it—and it's such a welcoming community, too, that you can—you can be making your—your first chapbooks and people are so supportive. They're very interested. They're willing to help you. It's a really great community.

Tamara Thompson: It really is. And I think it really harbors a lot of creativity and just expression. And I feel, like, for a lot of people especially stuck in academia and, stuff like that, it's so freeing. Or they're being told, it's one way or another, because English teachers said that the only right answer to Hamlet is "this." You know?

Michael Casteels: Right. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Then they're discovering this whole new thing. And even in my classes, they're, like, "Well, isn't that the answer?" And I said, "Well, there is no answer really."

Michael Casteels: (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: I—I know what I think about it, and I don't want you to write what you think. I want you to write—I already know what I know. Tell me what you think about this thing. That'll be ten times more interesting to me.

Michael Casteels: For sure.

Tamara Thompson: I look at them, and I'm like "You're a first-year. I can tell when you're trying to impress me. Don't impress me."

Michael Casteels: Hmmm.

Tamara Thompson: "Write something that you actually care about." And they're, like, oh, is that important? And I'm like, "Yes, Please!"

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: Oh, my God. I adore teaching. I love seeing their excitement when they discover something new. And they're like, "Wow! This is so cool." And I'm like "Right."

Michael Casteels: That would be really, yeah, very satisfying.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs). So, the next question is: would you work with a small chapbook, press again, and make chapbooks again? And from your eagerness, I would assume yes, but I would like to hear it from you.

Michael Casteels: For sure. Yes, yeah, certainly. So I do a lot of self publishing, and I will continue to do that, probably for the rest of my life. But I do like getting published with other presses. It's interesting to-to-to see what other people do with it. I've had some really great experiences. So, some of my best ones with Apt.9 press in Ottawa. Cameron Anstee, I had sent him a set of my typewriter poems basically just on, like, loose sheets of paper. I sent it to him in the mail. And then when he published it, again, it was just, like, all loose sheets of paper tucked inside an envelope that he had made like it, was so beautiful. It was something that I couldn't have done myself. He makes, like, some of the most gorgeous chapbooks in, like, Canada. And I have just, like, yeah, like-ah, last week was published a short story collection from Stuart Ross's Proper Tales Press that, yeah-that press I-I have loved his press for years. And it was, sort of, like, one of my-my goals as a writer, was to get a chapbook landed with him. So that was really special, and I think yeah, I think I've got a couple of others-a few more presses in mind that I would really like to get some chapbooks published, but I think that's, like, a good goal at least for me, because again, like, I do, I love long collections. But-and there are some, like, you know, larger publishing houses that I would like to get published with. But a lot of my goals are-are chapbook presses.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's one of those things where I love the experimental-like, don't get me wrong, I would like to be published in a traditional sense. But I also want to on that smaller scale, because it's so fun to see what people can do with your work.

Michael Casteels: Yes, definitely. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, what are some challenges you faced as an author? and you can take this in any direction that, that you would like.

Michael Casteels: Hmm yeah, I'm not... challenges. That's a good question, because I don't really feel like I come up with too-too many great challenges as a writer, I think ,maybe because I-I'm so eager to-to do the chapbooks and-and publish my own work. Think, like, challenges could be just something, like, getting work placed in journals. But I don't have that real drive, I think, when I first started getting into-to writing more seriously, I was doing a lot of submitting to journals, but I just became less and less interested in it. And I mean, that's just like a challenge for all writers, to get their work placed. For me, specifically, I guess, because I do like writing poems outside of the traditional sense. Like, I really like concrete poetry. I like minimalist poetry and surrealist poetry. Those I feel, like, hard maybe a little bit harder to place, like, if you can't send concrete poetry to most literary journals and expect it to be-to be even considered. Yeah, maybe that-that is a challenge. But generally, I, yeah, I feel like, it's, yeah- I don't feel, like, I have a lot of challenges, really, with writing.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough and I'll move on to this other one. What are some challenges that the press has faced?

Michael Casteels: Yeah, maybe just like being able to-to sell chapbooks. I've got like stacks and stacks of subtitles and because there's-there's not as many fairs as there used to be, like, the Meet the Presses one I haven't been to for a number of years, partly like Covid kinda-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Michael Casteels: Got in the way of that fair. And then I think they're having a very hard time finding a location in Toronto. So, spots like that, is normally where I do sell the majority of my work. And without those fairs, it is hard. So yeah, I think maybe just getting-getting rid of some of my back stock is a challenge. And I have done a couple of chapbooks that are-I mean, yeah, they're not even chapbooks. They-they'd be full book. So, I have some that are-are printed with spines, and that I've printed like out of house. Like, costs for those ones, that is a challenge. You need to, sort of, like, yeah, save up for a couple years, like, with the press to-to pay for that. I, kind of, basically Puddles of Sky sort of funds itself. So, whenever I'm-I'm selling chapbooks, it all kind of just goes back to the Puddles of Sky Press fund. I try not to use my own money. So, for some of those bigger projects, it could take a couple of years to-to work towards that.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Michael Casteels: Grants, I would like to be able to apply for a grant. But, one: just grant writing for me is a big challenge. I-I don't like doing it, and I feel like there are, there are restrictions if you don't have the press set up as, like, I'm paying, I'm not even sure but, like, maybe, as like, its own business, you need to have its own, like, separate bank account. I know there were some grants through, even like the-the city of Kingston grants that you would need to have had the arts, yeah, either to have, like, your arts organization, or in this case the press have its own bank account. And to sort of, show its financial history for a year or two years, or three years. That type of thing I-I can't really

do on my own. Again, because I'm doing it all by myself, and I need to make sure that it's just fun. And I think when I start thinking of those kinds of things, I don't really want to do it as a business. I just want to make books and sell them. So that—that I think, is maybe the biggest challenge: is trying to get any, like, external funding to, like, take projects to a larger level, yeah. So, I've just gotta find ways to just do it on my own.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I get the method of all the money from the books make more books. That's how Whispering Wick works too. I know that when I say a chapbook press and stuff like that. They just hear the word press, and they're like, "Oh, you're a publisher. You must make a lot of money." And I'm like, "No."

Michael Casteels: No, no, no.

Tamara Thompson: Most publishing you make no money actually.

Michael Casteels: Exactly. Yes.

Tamara Thompson: And any money I do, goes into making books. And people are, like, "Well, why would you do it that way? Don't you want to get paid?" And it's like. "Yeah. But I also want to make the book and—"

Michael Casteels: Yup.

Tamara Thompson: "The book needs paper. The book needs the ink for the laser printer."

Michael Casteels: Yes, yep. Yeah. Sometimes what I'll do, like, because it's—it's like, basically, self funding—Sometimes I will just, like, some of the money does come back to me, like, if I do, like, I sell one of my books online through PayPal. So, and sometimes that, like, if I'm buying something online and there's an option for PayPal, then I'll just use that. And then it's sort of like the press paying me for some of my work. I don't really, like, I never really figure out what I'm making. Or it just kind of seems, like, every once in a while, say, if I'm buying a used book online and I can do it through PayPal, then it's just, like, the press is paying me by buying me that book.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Michael Casteels: Yeah. So sometimes I'll do it that way. Or, like, at a book fair. Sometimes you just, if you see somebody else at a table, you want to buy their book; you just grab it out of the money box. And yeah, it doesn't really matter. But...

Tamara Thompson: The same five dollars being passed around.

Michael Casteels: Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Michael Casteels: Hmm yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, what has this kind of small publishing taught you?

Michael Casteels: I think it's taught me that-that poetry is a community. Like, we do spend a lot of time as writers, very insular, and spend a lot of time solitary and on our own. But when you are doing chapbooks, you are, sort of, forced to connect with the community. And for me, it's really great, like, the community of people. Submitting your work and getting to meet people through that, I think, maybe, for a lot of people with their chapbooks, you end up, you know, publishing your friends, you end up publishing people from your own community. And I think that's really important. It's yeah—it's a great way to connect with other people. Again, I think because the economics are so minor in the-the grand scheme, that yeah, like, I can just hand out chapbooks. I can, when I—when I fulfill orders for people, like, I'm fulfilling some right now. I always just toss in some extras because I usually have some on hand or, if I meet people who I just think would be interested, and I yeah, I don't expect them to buy. Then I'll just give them a little package of things that I do. There's a bit of a gift economy, I think, inherent with chapbook making and it—it has taught me a lot about the editing process, a lot about formatting my own work for publication, for yeah, submitting. Like, when I did my—when I had my-my full-length collection done, that was, sort of, like, tied into my chapbooks. It was my-my first publication. My first full length was in 2016, through Invisible publishing, and-

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Michael Casteels: The editor at that time was Leigh Nash, and she had discovered my work through a chapbook that I sold her at a small press fair. And-then she approached me for publication. I didn't have to, like, submit all my work for it, so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Michael Casteels: Yeah. So, I think chapbooks can-can provide opportunities. I think, partly through that-that gift economy or yeah, just-just through being able to disseminate your work a little bit easier.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm. Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not?

Michael Casteels: I think they-they are, they're kind of like essential, I think, because-because you can just publish what you want, and you don't have—I mean, and yeah, there are editors, but you can self publish. In that case, you can just publish whatever you want, and you don't have to-to worry about the editor sort of cutting work or thinking that something doesn't fit. You can do it all yourself. And I think a big part of it is because as a, like, for me, selling chapbooks my-my bottom line isn't like how many chapbooks is this gonna sell? Am I going to be able to recoup my costs? That part doesn't factor into it very much. Maybe, like, a five percent that kind of comes into it. But, like, if I really love the work, even if I know I'm going to sit with those chapbooks for years, I'll still publish it. And I think that that is one of the most important things, is to-to step away from, like, the business aspect or the economy of it, and

just being able to-to put the work out there. I think that's super important.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Michael Casteels: I think, too, it's-it's a, like, a great way for, like, emerging authors to get their work out there. I think, yeah, like, a lot of people that I know had their first experience with publication in chapbook form. And yeah, I think for people who are, like, underrepresented writers, they had-they can have an opportunity to-to get published again, just either through self publishing or through publishing with a chapbook press that-that will take their work and, like, underrepresented poetries. So, like, yeah, some of the ones that, like concrete poetry or minimalist poetry that don't often find a home in journals or are a lot harder to-to find homes in the larger presses that those-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Michael Casteels: types of work can find a good home.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I-I agree with a lot of what you're saying here.

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: Does this type of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way, and you can take that wherever you-you desire?

Michael Casteels: Yeah, I think it does. I think because-because Canada is so diverse and it's such a, like, a large country, there are chapbooks being published all across the country. I would say, for me, thinking about Canada, I would, sort of, think that acceptance is a good, you know-a good value that Canadians would have generally. I think that, sort of, ties in with chapbooks as well, but I think with yeah diversity of voices, diversity of formats. And yeah, just being able to-to feel liberal or free in what you're writing and being able to publish and not being too constrained based on, you know, formats of publication or editorial oversight then, yeah, it can allow for, like, a lot of freedom that way.

Tamara Thompson: Now I have to ask the little bit of sad question here: why do you think most small presses and micro presses have to close up shop?

Michael Casteels: I think a lot of times it-it's really exciting when you're doing your first few projects. But when you realize that it's, you might not sell all the books that you're making. There might not be the appetite that you thought there was going to be. That can-can put a damper on it for sure. I think a lot of people close up shop because they-I mean, other-other things just happen. I mean, life can get in the way, very easily, and chapbooks might not be top priority for a lot of people. I mean, for myself, even I-I know I've had to, like, to cut back on the number of projects I can take on at this point, just because you've got the family and work and other things going on. I know, for some people, too, because it's-it is tied in with your writing life that, yeah, it can

take away from-from time that you could spend writing. So, I do know, specifically, some people who have said, like, if it comes down to making chapbooks or spending time writing, they're going to spend time writing or making their own work, yeah? Like, those are, like, the-the big things for some people. It's-it-it is a group project. And if a few people of those, like, few people from the group start to lose interest, then it might not be something a lot of people are willing to just do as a solo project, yeah?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. How and why are you still keeping this, this press thing going?

Michael Casteels: I just really like making books. I think it's-it's really fun for me. It's-it would be like asking a painter why they just continue to paint.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Michael Casteels: For me it's like tied in with my identity. Now, I feel like I'm a writer, I'm a bookmaker, I'm a musician. Like, I do all those things, and its sort of-it's an aspect of who I am now. I feel like without it there would be, like, a little hole in my life, because I-I really like it so much and I feel like at this point, I...people-people know the sort of stuff that I do. Maybe not, you know, a lot of people, but, like, the people in the community, know what I do. And they-they get excited by the kind of stuff that I'm publishing. And again, because I like, I like working in the tradition that, I think it's important to-to continue being- being that-that portal for people to, like, to enter the scene. And I like... what was I gonna say? I think that it's-it's an important way to give back to the community. And I think that it's one of my ways of continuing to give back to people, is by-by publishing, and I think that's a good way to do it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, one hundred percent. What's something that you wish maybe the public or people knew about Canadian publishing?

Michael Casteels: That-that maybe like what you had also said earlier is that some of the most interesting, exciting work is coming out in chapbooks. And in these smaller collections, that yeah, that chapbooks even exist. I think a lot of people don't know that. I've been to, like, some of the book fairs, like, there's the, that international festival of authors that I've been to a number of years. And people come by, and they just have an idea of a book as something they see at Chapters and they don't know that, you know, a book, or a chapbook could be this little tiny publication. Or it could be, you know, cards stuck inside an envelope. Or it could be, yeah, like, a box filled with loose sheets of paper that are all printed. I think, yeah-I think people, if they had that idea that-that books can be more than something with a spine, then, they might be a lot more interested in books in general.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, this-this next question goes a little bit into that territory. So, we're-we're rounding our set out here. We got two more questions left. But what's something important about D.I.Y., like press

history and making that you wish that people knew about? Obviously, we wish more people knew about it.

Micheal Casteels: Yes, yes.

Tamara Thompson: Is there, maybe, like, something in particular, like, a project that really sticks out in your mind that, like, you're, like, "Oh, damn, people should know that this thing existed because it was cool"?

Michael Casteels: I think more people, even people in the—in the community and in the scene—I think more people should know about John Curry and Curved Hands. That's his—his press. Because I think he's done some of the most interesting things in Canadian publishing since, yeah, the sixties. He's done, I think, like, one of the longest standing journals in Canada and I feel, like, a lot of people don't know him or they don't give him enough credit partly because some of his public-like, the majority of his publications are all so ephemeral. He's done a series called "One Cent", that is now done four hundred and seven different publications, and he sold all of them for one cent. He continues to do that. He just published one for this past book fair, and I bought it from him for a penny. And yeah, some of those things are so interesting and a lot of—a lot of authors that maybe were around in the sixties, seventies, eighties that are no longer around, and people that maybe never had a full trade publication, maybe we're only ever published in—in the micro presses, small presses—he gave a lot of opportunities to those people. And yeah, that's—that's something I—I really wish that a lot of people knew about. Because, I think, yeah, he deserves a lot more credit than he gets.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, one hundred percent. Now, I have to ask the very difficult question, which has been very difficult for everybody.

Michael Casteels: Okay.

Tamara Thompson: What is something about your history that you wish people knew about?

Michael Casteels: Oh yeah, that is, that is hard. My history... maybe just, like, yeah, the variety of different kind of publications I've had that, yeah, I mean, I've had my one trade publication. But, I think, yeah, I wish more people knew just the variety of books that I have made and done that, yeah, like, I have done little loose-leaf publications; I've done yeah, chapbooks that are just envelopes with cards stuck in them; I've done yeah, a wide variety of things. And I feel, like, maybe a lot of people don't know that.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough. Well, do you have any additional comments you would like to make before I stop the recording.

Michael Casteels: Hmm I don't think so. I think I've, if—the yeah, I think I've said pretty much all I had intended to say yeah. if I think of something else, can I email it to you or?

Tamara Thompson: Of course.



Michael Casteels: Yeah, okay, yeah, no then I think, then I think I'm-I'm good.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, I'll stop the recording then.

Michael Casteels: Okay.

John Curry

Tamara Thompson: Hello, my name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is July 29<sup>th</sup> the time is 1:07 pm. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview time. This interview is for small press and author.

John Curry: I am ready for your question.

Tamara Thompson: Could you say your name, the name of the press, the part of Canada.

John Curry: Okay. John Curry. The name of the press—there are very, very, very many of them, *Curvd H&z* is one. I'm in Ottawa now but *Curvd H&z* started in Vancouver and continued in Toronto and then continued here, although there hasn't been a lot of activity in quite a while, because I've been thinking in other domains. Everything on paper.

(Technical issue occurred.)

Tamara Thompson: Okay, and then your pronouns and any titles you'd wish to give yourself.

John Curry: None of the above.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So just to get this ball rolling, how did you discover like zines and chapbooks in this kind of smaller publishing. Was there a time in your life, maybe a moment that you remember.

John Curry: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I was twelve when I went to our local library in Etobicoke, in Toronto, in the suburbs and found bpNichol's *Martyrology: Book 2*, which I took out and took home and was just astonished by. And I found that—I found out he lived in Toronto from the Bio in the rear. And so, I looked him up in the phone book 'cause I wanted to see more of whatever it was he was doing, and lo and behold! He answered the phone. And I, you know, with my "Hi, Mr. Nichol" and he told me to go to Village Bookstore and check out what they had there. And so, I went down to the Village Bookstore, and I was just—Marty let me into the back room, and I was blown away by the stuff I found. And I came out with, oh, a bag full of stuff, just a bag full of stuff for like a nickel, twenty-five cents a piece, and I'd never seen anything like it before. It totally changed my approach to everything.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. What a, what a great way to start with! Like, bpNichol, like, that's fantastic.

John Curry: It was pretty good. I couldn't—

Tamara Thompson: It's definitely cool.

John Curry: Couldn't have found a better-better window on the world, I think.

Tamara Thompson: So why did some of your presses, like, first start. Like, why did they get rolling? Because it's a lot of work to get this shit going. I have my own press, and so I know: it's a lot of garbage you gotta do to get this stuff going. But how did you like... why did you start?

John Curry: Well, but it doesn't have to because-

Tamara Thompson: True.

John Curry: Okay, well, it's--there's--there are two--two real reasons. One is that when I was fifteen, I started sending my poetry around to publishers, and I got a very nice rejection letter from Pulp press, from D.M. Fraser at Pulp press, and you know, this might make a nice little book for you and your little friends. But you know, this, when you're actually publishing things, you know, in large editions, there's a little bit more responsibility involved. And I was like, "Yeah, really never thought of that." So, I rewrote everything. And I sent it off to Bill Bisset, and he published it, when I was sixteen. And when I got the book back, I was very enthusiastic, but within two years, say, I was pretty appalled. And I was like, "Did he? Did he know I was a kid, or did he think I was an adult?" Like this stuff really should not have been published. Like, it's great for juvenilia, for sure. But it's not--it's not something I would care to spread around, let's say. And so, I thought, okay maybe I need to go that other route of doing it myself and see what happens. And around that time--at that time, actually, I was vagrant for several years, like four years. And I met this guy who was trying to run a con and he had gotten this rubber stamp kit that he wanted to print up little fake things with, right? It turned out that the rubber stamps were not exactly the quality of print. He wanted to run his con and I expressed extreme interest in the fact that he had a rubber stamp alphabet that can be configured into phrases, and you know, etc. Right: lines, I'd be very interested in that. So, I conned him out of his rubber stamp set and then got busy with it, and so there--there was no--there was no difficulty, so to speak, in starting anything up. It was just: Whoa! I can now print things, and so I did, and then I had another friend in Vancouver who--who worked at a place that had a mimeo--had their own mimeograph machine and she offered to run stuff off for me if it was too big to do with the rubber stamps because rubber stamp space--it--you're not going to get a lot of text in, you know, a couple of lines. So, I designed some things for her to do and she ran that stuff off. And I did, I did, she ran the longer stuff off. And I did the shorter stuff. And it worked okay, it worked okay. And then I started inviting on other people, because most of the people that I knew are artists or writers in some way and so...

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

John Curry: I did other people's work, too. And then when I--when we stopped--my girlfriend and I at the time--when we stopped in Toronto to have kids and stuff, then I was in a stable environment. And I started going to readings--going to readings before, too, like I met there--I met bp in '78 or something like that in Vancouver, maybe even '79. I'm not sure, because we came back to Toronto in May '79, so it could have been early '79, at the latest. But when I came to Toronto, at that time there was, I guess, in a per capita ratio, there was--there was probably more going on in

Toronto of an extra linear nature than anywhere else in the world, ever. Like Paris in the twenties. Yeah, whatever it was, you know, a handful of people, Toronto. There's like you could make a list of like thirty people at least, who are doing weird stuff just in the realm of literature, let alone anywhere else, right? So, I was going to readings by all the people that I had been reading since I was twelve and thirteen when, at these Ganglia Press publications and so I would see a name, and I would go, yes, I'm going to that, and I would go to the reading and if I heard things I liked I would ask after, "Hi, you know my name's John Curry, I'm starting to publish little things, and I really liked that poem. Would you mind if I did something with it?" "Sure. Go ahead." "Okay, great." So, I started printing things off, and it just snowballed like, very easily. And then stuff started coming through the mail from other people. Yeah. Plus, I was sending my own stuff out, too, I mean that way. So, a lot of exchange 'sort of stuff' happened. And it was like there was,—there was an—it was effortless. It was really.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I love how you were able to build that bit of community by just going out and talking to people. I am a TA, and like one of my biggest pet peeves is when my students go to—don't go to readings, and they're terrified of them. I'm like, please, for the love of God, interact with other people. You'll learn so much and you'll be creatively inspired. Like, go and talk to these people. They're not scary.

John Curry: Yeah, I think, yeah. I—I would—I would tend to agree with that if it were the same. But-but now I would not want to go to most of the readings that are going on anymore, because people aren't taking chances, and they aren't doing the kind of things they were doing at the time.

Tamara Thompson: That's true. In Peterborough, where I am and where my students are, 'cause I work at Trent, right? There's a lot of—there's, like, a very small little, like, literary scene. Like Take Cover. They really cultivate a lot of people through them, and, like, a lot of really great people in the small press scene, and I'm, like, go to the small bookstore and buy the goddamn books and speak to these nice people. One, the bookstore people are really nice, and like the people who run it and own it, and they bring on nice people. Talk to them, like, Justin Million: like he does a whole bunch of readings in Peterborough. He does cool, weird shit. Go out, because all of them are scared of poetry and all this other stuff. And I'm just, like, just interact. For the love of God, we have some cool shit happening here. Like, it's not like, you're just, like, throwing a-a nickel in a bucket. And you're, like: well, I hope I land somewhere good. It's like: No, we got a really good spot going on, and we actually have interesting, nice people. It's one of those things where I'm, like, here, go see this person. Say that I sent you to it, and say that you're a student here at Trent. Do this. This guy's name is Andrew. Be nice.

John Curry: Be nice.

Tamara Thompson: Yup, be nice, read the things, buy some literature, buy some books. And the people who actually go and do it. They're like Tamara, that was the best thing I've ever done. I'm like: interact with your community. Oh, my God, guess what, you had fun. Wow! What a concept.

John Curry: Carlyle Baker is in—do you know Carlyle Baker, in Peterborough?

Tamara Thompson: That name sounds familiar. I—I know Justin, and I know the guys who run Take Cover Books, Bruce Whitman and like they are the guys who—who—who keep me in touch with people in that area. Elisha is another good one and then people come to Peterborough. Kirby's coming. Think, Stuart said he was coming this September. So, we have a nice little community that Take Cover specifically is trying to cultivate, especially when it comes to chapbook stuff. They've had Jim Johnstone and stuff. And I'm like, go talk to these people; you wanna write in Canada.

John Curry: Yeah, that's all. That's all very straightforward stuff, for sure. That's way outside of my realm, like I'm not there.

Tamara Thompson: They're students, and, like, they've just learned that a poem could—doesn't have to follow rhyming scheme.

(Both laugh)

Tamara Thompson: I'm trying to get them to understand that we can blend genres. And they're, like, "Prose poetry. What's that?" And I'm, like, "Just wait till you like figure out what experimental fiction is." We're gonna go on a roller coaster, you know.

John Curry: Right.

Tamara Thompson: Like they're just like the concept of poetry in itself, with it not being children's or rhyming, or a song. It is new ground for them.

John Curry: Hmm, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And they're first year, first semester. So, most of them are just trying to figure out how to cook a pancake and do their own laundry.

John Curry: Yeah, right.

Tamara Thompson: They're great kids, but they need... They're just anxious.

John Curry: I would, I would encourage you. Find Carlyle Baker. He's an interesting guy, and he does really interesting work, for sure.

Tamara Thompson: Cool, cool, cool, so Carlyle.

John Curry: Yeah, and he's local. So, or local to you guys.

Tamara Thompson: Okay writing that down.

John Curry: That is the only concrete visual poet in Peterborough, that I know.

Tamara Thompson: I mean, for such a small community that it is, it does surprise me how much stuff we got going on all the time. I turn around and I'm, like, there's four plays happening. What do you mean?

John Curry: Yeah, I think it used to be even more active. Actually used to be there—Michael Dennis used to be there. I think not that I have any great you know, for Michael Dennis, but stuff centered around him there for quite a while. I don't know who all. Just remember it being a kind of a hotbed for a little while there.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's starting to pick up again. But Covid fucked everything up, and then things start petering out, and then we really shut down. We're starting to get up there again.

John Curry: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I'm so, I know that not every press has, like a philosophy, or a goal, or whatever or the goal can be as simple. Let's just make stuff. But would you say that you maybe had a goal when you were making these things?

John Curry: Well, the goal was always, "Gee! This is a really neat thing. There should be more than one of it. If I—if I reproduce a bunch of them, I can hand them out, and other people can see them." But it wasn't quite that simple, really, because...

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

John Curry: I always wanted to be involved in other areas than standard methods of delivery of poetry and fiction and all that kind of stuff. 'Cause my interests had always been the visual stuff: concrete poetry and sound poetry, visual poetry, sculptural works, etc, etc. So, that was what I chased more than anything because there were not—there are not as many available outlets for people doing that kind of stuff. And, especially, there weren't available outlets that would do things the way the writers themselves envision having them appear. And that's a perennial problem. In my opinion, that's been a problem all the way along for people doing visual stuff is. It gets—we get shoehorned into whatever format the person who's doing it thinks, yeah. Those formats are not necessarily helpful to the work that's being shoehorned in. And I've had a lot of things that I've published along the way but were not delivered to me in the ways that they finally appear again. Maybe, like, even some cases, the writers themselves, they had an idea that they were after, but they didn't quite know how to get to that next stage. That was something I was able to do is—so well. Why don't you just have, like, it's two books? And this one does one thing, and this one does the other. Why don't you have them meet on a common, on a common cover? And we'll have, like, a, you know, two books in one, but that open two different ways and they end on the same last page. This is a novel by Michael Dean, *Book Fetish*, and they both end with the same phrase on each side of the page, but they take different routes to get there. But he had never thought of it, being, like, dosa of dos, right?

Tamara Thompson: Hmm, yeah.

John Curry: No, no, no, no, it's not two books. It's-it's one book in two parts, but do more with, so that I was able to make stuff like that happen.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

John Curry: Which-which is fun. Lot of other things, too, that are like physically tedious to produce say but, yeah, that's my job.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

John Curry: What do you have, like? That's what I used to ask people a lot was, "What do you have that you sure wish would get published, but nobody's, you know, seeing as-being the possible thing to do? And the-I got to do a lot of neat stuff that way, because it-it opens people up to that possibility. They make these things that are sculptural in some way or something, but then they don't know what to do with them when they're done, so they go back in the drawer, never sees the light of day. But if there's somebody going, "Hey, you know, I like to do this kind of stuff. Why don't-why don't we run-rummage around at your place and see what we can find?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: That-that-that was some of the most fun for me. I got to see such strange (laughs) and hidden away, right? Because just, "I don't know what to do with this. I thought it was neat when I did it. But you know now what?" So yeah, it was, it's a good way to proceed. I think.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I love hearing that you do some, some really cool, weird abstracts. And from what like you've shown me even, and like what you shared with me. Just cool fun, little projects from here. There. So, it's yeah. I that's the type of, like, in the world of academia, they're like "You must define what this is." And I'm like "I don't know." Because there's like the chapbook, and I always think of it as, like, a sliding ladder, like, from chapbook and zine. There's just like a little thing going up and down because it's, like, well, this is a chapbook, but also, this is technically a chapbook. There's the traditional folded paper, and then there's a little shell that has a little poem that you scroll out of it. That was something Stuart Ross told me the other day, and I thought that was brilliant. Or a little poem got pulled out of it. That's great, right?

John Curry: The Joe O'Sullivan Walnut.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, like, let's oh, so good. Yeah, right? And like, those are technically in the same, like, area tha-that I'm studying and like to be able to describe that these are two things are technically the same. Like in some way, like, within this definition that I'm defining because I don't want to. Yes, there's the classic chapbook, and that's beautiful and great, and whatever, but the cool shit is the weird stuff, and the things where people play and experiment. And that's where I find some of the most interesting things about this community come forward.

It's one of the reasons I'm so glad we were able to, like, to reschedule and talk again. Because I know you do some of that. So, it's like, yeah.

John Curry: Well, the walnut is just different binding, right?

Tamara Thompson: Exactly, but so many people would be so thrown off of by it right? And be, like, well, is that a book? Because, like, the paper's not the right way, and it's, like, "Yes, it is."

John Curry: Well, you know, the funny thing about that walnut piece that Stuart mentioned is that most of the people who got that because it had a little string on it with the title on a flag, right? I don't know if you saw in—in the stuff that I sent you links to—but it's in there that one.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: And a lot of people that got it, didn't understand that you opened it up, because the flag seems like the poem. But it was just the title and if you opened it, that's where the poem was right. So, a lot—lot of people never got, never did read the poem. And they thought, Oh, wow! This thing's so great! But they didn't even finish reading it. So how do you know? (Laugh).

Tamara Thompson: Oh, that's great!

John Curry: Becomes my test of the reader.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: You know. Do I wanna send you anything again after? Oh, I didn't even finish reading it, you know. What it never occurred to you or, anyway.

Tamara Thompson: So, would you say that you publish more like poetry, or just weird stuff that you find new like this, "let's make this"?

John Curry: Probably more poetry, because that's what I mainly was getting through the mail—like the unsolicited—getting through the mail. And it's mainly poetry, and I'd have to sort of broad. But if there are poems there that I like, sure, why not print them?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: Yeah, there's—there's a lot of barriers, but there's a lot of other stuff around that. And now it's almost, well—no—I'd say, now, it's almost basically other weird stuff. But we'll certainly take a—a twist for the tweaked.

Tamara Thompson: So, I'm a little interested on how you actually, like, make some of the objects that you make. If you could just give me even just a little peek into that process of, like, I know how you, like, get the work, but how you talked a little bit about that editing. But if you could go a little bit more into the editing and then the creating process,



I'd be really interested to know how you make some of the things that you do.

John Curry: Okay. Well, editing. I never did any editing, personal.

Tamara Thompson: The-the-the helping hand of hey, "What about this?"

John Curry: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I-but I wanna make that clear, right? The only time I did any other thing was like: are you sure you want to spell this wrong, alright? Or, you know, like, to draw square, and the corners or the corner lines overlap, and maybe be like, well, you know I can fix this. Would you like me to fix that?

Tamara Thompson: Right.

John Curry: There were those kinds of things and editing way different than editing with nonlinear material, then linear, linear stuff. Basically, the size of the pieces determined the formats that I would publish to them based on, you know, the fact that we're stuck with eight and a half by eleven right now, by fourteen, or eleven by seventeen. There's, like, standard paper sizes, right? It doesn't take long to realize that all you need to do is slice off an inch off the edge, and you've got a different size, right? Print on that inch, too and then pull that and have something else, as well. That's just a little leaflet or something, right? Or a little booklet. That was one thing from bp that I learned, too. He would gang print books. So, you have a standard five and a half by eight and a half book, but, in fact, the top three inches was like the book of haiku, the bottom five and a half by five and a half was a square book something else entirely and he was chopping them and print them, gang them together, and then chopping in half. And you got two books instead of one, I was always hyper, conscious of extra space. They're, like, okay, because I have always been very, very poor, and so, you don't have the money to, you know, do a lot of trimming without wanting to have something on those trims, that they could then be used somehow after. So yeah, more-more often than not, the formats of things were determined by- if it was a longer poem, I would have to be photocopying. If it was something short, I could rather stamp it. But rubber type is a lot bigger than typewriter type, and so things would get modified according to what- what I had available to work with. It was always a matter of matching up exigencies, as many things as you can. Just okay, this will work. If and if you look at the stuff in the sets that I have in, like in the order of appearance in the sets that I have up here, in there you can see that originally there was not much attention given to much of anything other than, "I can print! Oh, boy!" And I would just do that, right? But over time, it's like, okay, well, I've done that a thousand times now. How to change it up. Make things a little bit different. We don't want to (technical issue occurred) in some way, even if only adding, like a dingbat, whatever, in between a name and title, or something like that. There's always something you can do. I don't know, add something, just add something.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah.

John Curry: Over time it got more and more absurd.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I really relate to the fact of those cut piece, and like keeping the paper and the scraps. It's like, "No, I'm going to use this." I've—every time our damn printer loves to like make mistakes and get wobbly, and people are like, "Well, you're gonna throw that out." I'm like "No, I'm not." "What do you mean?" "That's money." "What do you mean?"

John Curry: there are other sides to this paper.

Tamara Thompson: Well, it's not even just that. It's more just, like, I can shred this paper. I have the capabilities; I have scissors. I can make this into new paper. I can make this into something, instead of throwing this away. What do you mean? So, I have a big stack of like misprints and everything, especially when we first started. There was a whole bunch of issues, and I was, I have a temperamental printer. It's a laser printer, and I hate it, and I'm going to get rid of it someday. But the famous last words, right? And so, I've got all these stacks of just misprints, and my father was like so, "You can get rid of those." And I'm like, "What do you mean? Am I going to get rid of those? No, they're staying in that box, and then I'm going to shred them and make them into new paper. Do something with them. They'll become a book cover or something. I'll lace them together; I'll figure it out." So, I'm also curious about like, like, where you sell your books. How are they sold? Because, for me, the only way I can keep doing this is that I sell them so that I could buy more paper. But I know that's not everybody's way that they do it. But how do you get these books into people's hands so that they can read them.

John Curry: Aaahh... (laughs). That has changed over time, too. Initially, I ran—I would just take things and trade them with people, straight up. Right? I would go to readings. I would hand little care packages to people that I was interested in soliciting work from. And here's, here's the kind of things I do. Please help me expand my boundaries, you know. Give me something that takes me out of this into-into where you are. They had subscriptions for a long time, but then I stopped doing so much stuff on paper, and the things that I was doing were not subscribe-able anymore. That sort of put-put-put an end to that. And somewhere in there mid '80s yeah, let's say, in the '80s, when I really got going, I started Room 302 Books, like, a bookstore cause I was buying. I had had a few books fall apart on me that I just read to death, and so I discovered, where I could afford it, I was buying in pairs. And while I was buying in pairs, I was learning how to handle books a little more carefully and so I ended up not having books fall apart on me in the end, and having all these perfectly fine duplicate copies of what had become in the meantime, rare books. So, I kinda, inadvertently found myself with the bookstore. And then, between what I already had and what I continued to bring in anyway, because it's like, oh, I seem to have a bookstore, well, I'll keep doing that. So, between all that stuff and what I was producing myself, there were a lot of opportunities to keep putting out lists of different material, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: So, it was—it has been, since I started printing on things other than paper—it's been pretty much the bookstore and going to small

press fairs. And that's it. Yeah, I get the occasional query through the mail, or something like that, but very, very rare.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, of.

John Curry: Occasional email queries.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: And then, you know, and, like, my stuff is on Flickr. So, I get the occasional person going, "Hey? Is this for sale?" They just—they don't look at the site as a whole. They just look at whatever the theme at the time.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: But yeah, I do get the occasional hit that way, which is great but very, very, very few.

Tamara Thompson: So before, I'm going to move on to some of the, like, the author questions, and then a bit more into the bigger questions—But before we, like, move on, what are some challenges that the press has faced like in your years of doing this? What are some challenges and answer this in whatever way you'd like, and whatever you feel comfortable sharing.

John Curry: Well, but I've never found any of it particularly challenging other—other than getting people to pay attention in the first place. And—

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: part, and part of that is well, I'm not very good at inflicting myself on people. I'm a little bit better when it's somebody else's stuff I can go. "Oh, check this guy out." But if it's something I've produced, then that—that has my ability to be able to be one hundred percent enthusiastic about trying to slam, you know, slam this in front of somebody's face and make them read it so—that—that has been a challenge, to adopt any kind of, you know, hucksterism. I just, I just can't do it. Not in me. Like when I, like, even when I sit at tables up-up there. So, I just find it very, very difficult, because I—I watch how people don't pay attention to the things they're looking at. And I can't, I can't bear it. I just can't stand it. It just makes me have to get up and leave. I'll come back, after you studiously ignored the whole table. I'll come back and either, you know they're interested, they come back, or they just roll on to, you know, a table that has something shinier that attracts them better. And I—I don't really care. I—I just like doing this stuff, and I do it, and I make it available for those who want it. And if you don't want it, and I can understand that, you know, close to a hundred percent of people really don't want this kind of stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

John Curry: That's fine. It's there for the few who do. And they're—they're not all gonna be in Ottawa. It's gonna be, like, Belgium or the US, couple in the States. Maybe somebody-somebody in France, maybe in

England. And it takes forever to find all these people, for them to find you. However, the stuff's here. I don't hide it. I do advertise it, but I don't advertise it aggressively.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: And so, I think that comes around to it, too. I don't think people exercise the curiosity aggressively. They'll find out that something exists, but they won't chase after it. It's-it's easier now to chase after stuff than it ever has been because of Internet stuff, right, like that. At one time you would have had-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: Write the letter (technical issue occurred) blah, blah, blah, which happened fast. It was fast at the time. It seemed fast, certainly faster than you know trying to get to Vancouver let's say. So, it was doable. But it's even more doable now, and people don't do it because they just don't have, I don't think they have the attention span. And I also think, well, I guess that's part of the attention span to when they are confronted with stuff that is so very different. They just, you can see their eyes glaze over when they pick stuff up, when they bother, to open that. You can see them go oop! Down it goes. On the way they go (laugh).

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's interesting cause, like, sometimes, like the amount of people who have come up to me and be like. "But I don't get what this artist was trying to do in this painting," or "I don't get what the poet was trying to do." And I was like "Guys, some of it is just like enjoying what you're seeing like just because you don't get, it doesn't mean that you can't experience what this artist was trying to do. With time and effort, you might get it if you keep putting in the work. But you're not going to get it right away. People who get poetry don't get a poem right off the bat. You have to ruminate on some of the stuff, and sometimes that's what the poet or artist wants you to do, like, it's almost like, "Oh, I didn't get it within thirty seconds, well, I must not be the right audience for this." And it's like "Whoa, maybe like, take a second here, Bud, maybe think about it a little, like."

John Curry: Yeah. But if that's their-if that's the way they're gonna think about it, then they're not the right audience for it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, sad but true.

John Curry: Yeah, (laughs) just how much time do you wanna fucking waste, you know, flogging the dead thing there? Come on, get up. It ain't gonna get up. Just leave it. I mean, there are exceptions, obviously, and that's what we hope for, is to encounter the exception. But they're few between. This slog in between is really heartbreaking.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: Don't, don't believe in that. Don't even require that. Because if you require that, you're not going to do anything ever again. I'd-

that's not, like—the concept of an audience is just almost beside the point.

Tamara Thompson: That's what I keep trying to tell my students, especially my creative writing students. I'm like, "Don't write for the audience. Don't write for the publisher. Don't write to what's popular. Because, one, the popular things going to go out of style before you even finish the gosh, darn thing, right? Create because it's fun, or you're enjoying it, or you like doing it right. Don't create so that'll be 'quote unquote,' good, or whatever." And a lot of them are like, "But shouldn't I have an audience in mind?" And I'm like, "No, you'll find your audience. They'll find you. It'll take some time." But everything does, you know like, my audience isn't going to be, necessarily, your audience, or whatever it is. But I don't write for an audience.

John Curry: No.

Tamara Thompson: I write for myself, and Sarah Ibrahim, the one friend. Whenever I show her something she's like, "This is fucking awesome," and I'm, like, Sarah gets it. Sarah gets it every time. But, like even then, I don't really write for her. I write for myself. And then I just share it with her, because she gets it.

John Curry: Yeah, I—I gave up on trying to get anyone who gets it.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough. So, you've talked a little bit about how you started writing, and when you first tried to get published and like why you started your press and stuff. But why did you choose—and you talked a little bit about this already—but why did you choose to publish your work in the form of a chapbook? Because it is a decision to, like, make that choice for yourself and for your work.

John Curry: There were several questions buried in there. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, sorry.

John Curry: Why did I publish my own work? Because then I had control over it and if I made an error, I wasn't able to, go, "You did this." I did that, right. And that was the problem with the first book, was, there was a lot of "Oh, man, did you ever fuck up!" And I would rather be making those errors myself on my own behalf, than being able to blame somebody else. Then there's the, in chapbook form thing. That was exigency in the beginning, because I don't, really, do long format stuff that requires you know, ten pages, maybe five pages, or even two, or-or whatever, but certainly, well, and then there's the whole bound book thing, too. I just—other ways of approaching large bodies of text and bound books is only one of them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: That's a perfect bound. And that was—that was never something I chose.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: Offered to me a number of times.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: When I was like, "No, I don't need to do that." When I was like, "Oh, really; you gonna let me do that? Okay, sure. Let's do this then." And when I was offered the opportunity not only in having such a thing and being able to be a participant in the construction of it, then things work out really, really nicely... but-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: I've always found, he's not there, no. I've almost always found when it's a matter of just handing stuff over and seeing what happens a lot of the time, I'm not so thrilled. So, it's again, it's better to just do the stuff in its own little things and let it exist as itself, rather than it altogether with other stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: That way you get to do the things, get them done. They're out there. They disappear fast now. You know, I don't really see much point in grouping a bunch of those things together and putting them out as some kind of the selection or collection that kind of thing. That's happened and I've not liked it. But I can see a point with some of them of reprinting the actual original things, maybe a different format, but maybe its own format. But they existed really nicely that way. Why fuck it up by cramming them into again, you know, cramming it, shoe-horning it into a format? That is not it, what it deserves to be.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: I think that's me. That's a problem with a lot of the selected and collected that come out in a lot of people who are participants in the so-called literary Avant Garde in Toronto and elsewhere and elsewhere in the world. When their stuff gets reprinted, it gets shoe-horned into these stupid boxes that are, you know, the same every time. And they, in some cases, they'll put photographs in. Oh, and this looks like that. But like why? Just doesn't make any sense to me to do that. Just make the thing again.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah

John Curry: But whatever. There are all kinds of different answers to that, but.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: Yeah, I try to, I try to avoid things that don't do any favors to the work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

John Curry: Work: that is what you're trying to get across.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I one hundred agree and thank you for answering all my questions. When I get excited, I start to layer a little bit more than I should, but that's because I'm excited. So, pardon. So, I have a feeling. I already know the answer to this next question, but I'm still going to ask it anyway, so that the-the record could show. But would you keep making, like, would you publish some work as a chapbook again, or within your own press, or with somebody else that's doing something similar to you? Would you make something like this again?

John Curry: Well, see, here's the thing. I don't make a distinction between chapbooks and anything else. They're all just books. They're self-contained objects, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: Those things in the form of books I call books. Doesn't—doesn't mean they have to have a certain page pound so certainly, if I print on paper, I'm going to be availing myself in the possibility of a book form probably because I tend not to be long winded on paper. I'm very long winded in conversation but not on paper, although my letters tend to go on. But that's, like, it—that's the middle zone. The inter zone, between conversation and writing something—something more succinct on paper...(Technical issues occurred) I mean right now, the only reason I would do anything in print, mainly it's because I do the sound poetry with him, too. But—and I always print programs for the readers—we don't stock in between pieces to explain what's going on. We start and then maybe three quarters of an hour or an hour or later there might be a break. We just go.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: It's handy to have a program. What are they doing now? What's all about? And those, well, you know, it's like a uniform series of five and a half by eight and a half booklets. Very standard, very standard except for the material itself. You know the title lettering—I'll do something strange to this. Have something that's like, what? That's gonna question, make somebody question, every step of the way.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: Seem to—and to offer answers, maybe, to some of the questions, but they'll have to figure out what they are. It's, yeah... But it's a goose. It's a multi-multi purpose series of pieces within the same little unit, right?

Tamara Thompson: So, this next question, again, interpret however you'd like and say whatever you wish to share. But what are some challenges that you faced as your time as an author, as like a creator?

John Curry: (Laughs) Finding people who really were knowledgeably on.

Tamara Thompson: Right, yeah.

John Curry: Good to know that this will be a good idea, rather than just a shoe-horn idea.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: We are finding some. Michael Casteel's is the only person. Well, him and Daniel. But Michael, he's been—he's been amazing. It's not like we have the same mind or something, but we've got some of the same approaches, that's for sure. And he is not afraid to recognize a really weird but good idea. And then and I've come to him with the key ideas he's been surprisingly on side. "Oh, yeah that sounds fun". So okay, let's do it. And then we do it and it's been amazing. He's been great, actually, as like, an example of editorial, whatever; he's the, umm—you looked at all the stuff I sent you? Like, if I start referring to oddball things, are you gonna?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. It was a while since I looked at the Doc, but I should have a general idea, because I did look at them.

John Curry: Okay. So, the welcome to concrete stuff?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: Like ongoing anthology of Canadian Conference stuff. (Technical issues occurred) I came to, I went to Michael because I've—I've long thought that it would be a good idea to have this stuff in print, too, right? Like, it's nice to do that real, but it gets painted over fast, muddy roads, or whatever like (technical issues occurred) and it's all gone. So, I propose to him—because he's doing this postcard series which seems to be mainly collage of like fantastic landscapes and concrete and visual poetry—doing a series of these "Welcome to concrete" pieces within this postcard series, just randomly scattered. One—one photograph of each stencil: pick what site you would like, you know, and make that one. Maybe we are seeing who people have put together. So, with the very first one he did, he proposed three different sites, and I proposed three different sites in our order of preference, and we matched first two and the third one is not enough. So that was a foregone conclusion. When he did the second one, the same thing happened—centered on the same thing, the third one. There was a little bit of argumentation I had; I had one idea he had another idea. His idea turned out to be the better one. So, we went with his, and I've never had such an agreeable relationship with a publisher before in my life. It's just—it's amazing. That's—that's been the difficulty, is finding somebody who is willing to share your subjunctive tenants (laughs) and work to help to make it happen.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: Yeah. And with Michael, too, that applies in way more ways than just in publication. I just found him to be a very—he's—he's he is not a normal person. He's often, often somewhere else for sure, and it's pleasure having, everything, to do shit together—

(Technical issues occurred).



John Curry: Yeah okay, ahh. This is another project that has been going on since early nineties, I guess. Then, I built this weird thing in our backyard in Toronto that was initially intended to be the substrate for a very, very large concrete poem.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

John Curry: To this sort of tower of stack boxes that me and my kids used to play around in. Various friends would come by and help nail shit onto it, and all that and the city made us take it down. And then have you ever seen the bpNichol film documentary by Brian Nash, *bp: Pushing the Boundaries*?

Tamara Thompson: No, I don't think so. What was it called again?

John Curry: *bp: Pushing the boundaries*.

Tamara Thompson: Okay got it.

John Curry: Highly, highly worth watching. Anyway, in that, the guy who directed that, had started working on the film while we had this strange thing in our back yard and when it, he spent some time in it, and he wanted to film it. When it was gonna come down, he wanted to film it coming down and then run the film like pixelated and then run the film backwards. So, it looked like it was going up. Use it as compound footage within the bp film, and that didn't happen because he was off shooting a time lapse of the drive from Toronto to Vancouver, I believe. So, he ended up finding a place where we could rebuild and so, we did. But then that tower didn't get finished and many-many—I came up with all kinds of insane plans to continue with the thing, none of which ever panned out. But eventually, long after moving here, I ended up building another one again on an island in the river—in the Ottawa River. It burned down. Kids with matches' man.

Tamara Thompson: Oh my God.

John Curry: And then I ended up building another one. And now it's been up for almost nine years. And the idea that Being substrate with this concrete poem has actually been thrown out the window. And now that poem is now important to another thing that's actually on this island, too. This big dead tree that I want in size stuff in here. The tower exists in a totally different context now, and one of the aspects of the tower, of the second, is we have a wide and growing archive, the tower of books with the word "Island." And Michael has just been the most tireless guy in trying to find stuff. Like he goes around all the-the free book boxes in Kingston constantly trying to set that. And every time he comes up here, which is quite a bit, he's got like a carton of books for me and so I have to go through and put the little island archive in with rubber stamps and all that. (Technical issue occurred). But yeah, he's become— that's what I mean about his level of involvement. And you know, going, that's a good idea. And like, he jumped on that to the point where it's like, okay, Co-Curator, at this point for sure. So yeah, there—there are very few people

out in the world who are really willing to share your challenges, right? The challenges-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: Or the roots of discovery and challenge that you make for yourself very, so very rarely intersect in such a complete way with somebody else. It's been a real delight to actually find somebody where I could do that kind of stuff, forty years after starting. I've been doing this since I was like a (laugh)- it's been a while.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, what has this kind of, like-what has this taught you in your time doing it? Like in your time, creating stuff? What has that taught you?

John Curry: That's, there's just no end to that question.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: In terms of what?

Tamara Thompson: Whatever you'd like to share. You can share whatever you'd like. I just-it's a question I love hearing people's responses to, because it's so varied to what they say, but the amount of they-to what they, you know.

John Curry: I mean, obviously. Well, maybe not, obviously. But to me, obviously, the-the main thing is that it teaches you how to overcome obstacles to doing what you're trying to do. Like, you can't afford to print it; find some other way to do it. Then there's got to be some way to bring. There are silk screens; you can make potato stamps. There are all kinds of things you can do to make-to be able to print. You can buy where you can cut stencils and pieces of plastic you find at the roadside. I mean, steel spray there, find it laying around construction sites. You know there are always great ways to reuse them. And the challenge always is to figure out what you're trying to do and then figure out ways achieving that and then figuring out where that leads to, in terms of what do you do. Once you figure that out, everything's gonna give you a further series of questions, right? Like you can do-but there's a stencil. There's a lot to figure out about how that works. And yeah, I'm sure I'll be discovering new, new things about how to use them and then prepare them in order to encourage such odd things to happen, right? Like, I don't, I don't know, I don't, I really don't know what I'm doing until I start doing it. And-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: Until stuff starts to lead you along. Yeah, that's I guess how to improvise.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah (laughs), an important skill in this world.

John Curry: And occupying a lot of different areas like not just, but like conceptual skills.

Tamara Thompson: So, my next question is like, why are chapbooks important to you? But I think I'll phrase it more as, why are these little print objects like these little things that you create, why are they important to you? We've covered some of that ground, but I'm still going to ask it directly.

John Curry: Yeah, yeah, because, well, because it represents a potential end stage of a process. Right? When the thing is done, there it is, and now you can judge whether or not it was a good idea. And the more of them you do the more you learn how to recognize what is an idea worth pursuing and then more stuff you can cram into each of those things and the more questions they will ultimately answer for you when you get them done, because you're not just operating at a one trick pony level, operating very quickly. So yeah, it's-it's always an end stage, that is, than a beginning stage for something else, because you do get to see what you, what you did, and then you get to judge, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: Those judgments will then propel you on or apply to other things you're working on, several things. They don't have any one thing. I can never work on just one.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

John Curry: A thousand things going on.

Tamara Thompson: I really liked the way that you said that-like a lot. I my-my ears rang because, like every single time that, like someone says something I'm, like, oh, that's a great way of saying that, and how you were, like, there's an end. And I'm like, yes, they're so satisfying to be, like, I made this thing which I can now hold, which is now in front of me, and like I love that.

John Curry: Yeah, you can look at it and go. Oh, wow! That worked out okay, didn't it?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: Mainly, okay. But I notice now that, you know, and those are-those are the important moments for me-like, I like the satisfaction of looking at something when "Yes, this worked," but they also like to learn something extremely good. Oh, yeah see where I fucked up there. You have that knowledge to work with in future other things.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Right? So, we're getting into some of the more conceptual Canadian things. So, do you think chapbooks are important to Canadian publishing? If so? Why or why not?

John Curry: (Laughs) yeah, they are, of course because they do, they present entire ideas in their inherent form rather, again be avoiding the

shoe-horn thing. Oh, this is gonna sound so good. Some people's work, you don't want to read fucking one hundred pages of it in a row.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: It's not served well by these over amping formats. Better to encounter the work in the formats it is—is a devised work. And the more you get away from standard lineation in poetry, the more true that statement feels.

Tamara Thompson: I have my favorite collections, no doubt, but there's just—especially when it comes to poetry for me—like there's just something about like this little form of this poetry that's just like perfect. I'm like, I don't want—I-I got the right amount of it. I didn't need anymore, because sometimes I feel like, in collections, there's like fat and I feel like everything with a chapbook, whenever I read it, I'm like, "This is just pure," exactly what I want from this experience. And, like, again, I have my favorite collections, no dis on people who do collections and stuff like that. But I just, I love the chapbook for how concentrated it is, and I don't feel like there's like an unnecessary thing there, you know, majority of the time when I pick up something.

John Curry: Okay. But the word concentrated that you used there like that's—that's a good one, right? Because it does allow the thing it's on with your enough of concentration. Okay. Next?

Tamara Thompson: Do you think this type of publish—no your good (both laugh). Do you think this type of publishing, so, like, the small, like, chapbook, like, handmade things—do you think it kind of reflects Canada itself in some way? And take that wherever you desire.

John Curry: No. Simply no, it doesn't.

Tamara Thompson: End of a statement?

John Curry: Pretty much, I mean, how could it possibly reflect Canada? What does that, what does that mean?

Tamara Thompson: I don't know. It's one of the questions that I let people take wherever they go. Sometimes people take it internationally. Some people take it in the way of like citizens. Some people take it in the way of artists. And like people have a lot of different reactions to that question. I like it because I love people being like, nope, move on. And I'm like, cool, or some people are like, well, what even is Canada? And I'm like, okay, let's get into it, right? So, it's a one of those questions where I like asking it, just to see what people have to say about it, because for some people it's like, nope, go on. And I'm like, cool and other people, they're just like, Yeah, sure, maybe I don't know.

John Curry: Well—

Tamara Thompson: And some people are like I don't even know how to answer that question. What the fuck.

John Curry: Chapbooks are especially literary. Chapbooks, they're irrelevant to most Canadians. The only chapbooks they're interested in are the, you know, manuals on how to operate things and catalogues and stuff like that, right?

Tamara Thompson: Or their religious literature that they get at the weekends like Evangelical or Mormon Church.

John Curry: So, yeah, I-I think it's pretty irrelevant to-it's-most people.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough. What do you think, so we've already covered a bit of ground because you answered a bit of that question earlier. But what do you think that this type of, like, publishing offers that traditional publishing can't offer, and maybe vice versa?

John Curry: Yeah, I have answered that question pretty much, but it also offers up, it offers opportunity to do things in nontraditional ways. And you know, we're a many-there are many realms that can get into. Just-just as an example, though, and one of the things I found amusing in one-one of the series I do well-it's actually a sub series of another series. But it's, like, with a magazine and the one cent series. I print it on recycled envelopes and stuff like that. Yeah, junk paper in general. And one of the fun things about printing with rubber stamps on-in a small format like that, is that, if I have sixteen pages issued, sixteen different pieces I can print now, every copy I'm doing, three hundred copies. However many copies I can, I can print every copy from a different order. Just find that's so fun that even when I'm done, is like, I have a methodology that sort of makes sure that they're gonna be in a different order. Through the entire press run at the end, I'll make a little graph. Find out if it's true, if they are-if they're all different. I've never had to deal with the problem of "Oh, these two copies are the same." Would I destroy the one, or would I keep it as an example of a true variant because when they're all different, then they're all the same, right? Except these five are exactly the same. Then you've got two separate. This gets into weird bibliographical stuff, and like, because I'm a book dealer, I have to deal with that stuff and an archivist and all that. Then I have-and that stuff's way more fun like that's-that's way more fun to deal with as an archivist.

Tamara Thompson: So, the next question: Because these things are so ephemeral, from the objects that are being made to the people making them, under like certain names and stuff, so why do you think some small presses, or like micro presses, like, have to close up shop? Or people, like, stop doing it and stop making things?

John Curry: Because they don't believe in it really. It was there, a little fad for a while, you know. They got-they found out about it in university, and I thought, oh, I can do that until they do, and then they stop. It's annoying. You have to deal with egos of other people. You have to deal with your own ego. You have to deal with having to make the things or having to pay for things, or having to basically exert yourself on behalf of this stuff and on behalf of the whole rigmarole that you believe

is there. And people allow that, and their belief in the necessity of doing that. So, they stop doing it, and that's fine.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: That just hasn't happened for me.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, you just keep—so, you just keep going. But, like how, how do you keep going? To some people, they get burnt out, and I've heard many things from many people on these answers. But how do you keep this stuff going?

John Curry: I have ideas. I just keep having ideas. I can't stop.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

John Curry: I don't have a choice in that. I do a thing, and it makes me think several other things, and I, you know, play with those. And then something happens, and then something else happens. I keep having ideas, and they keep seeming like good ideas. And so, I keep working with them. Ultimately a lot of, like, I've said a lot of stuff over the last, well, many, many years now. Over ten years has not been of a paper nature, but I would see some of this stuff documented somehow on paper. So, I'm trying to, trying to generate some of that now. That'll be few and far between, I think.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough.

John Curry: I think Michael pulled out a few things there. There are a few people I can approach about a few things, and then ultimately the rest of the yeah (technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: I mean Michael's also so eager like, when I was talking to him, he was so eager about it, and when he—I said: What do you wish, like, people knew about? And he's like, "Oh, you gotta talk to John," and like all this stuff. "You gotta talk to Curry." And he was like, so into what you were doing, but he was so into it in general. So, I understand, Like, when you talk about him, he was just this, like positive person, you know.

John Curry: Yeah. And that kind of enthusiasm is really rare out there. So, you have—you have to have ideas that you wanna come up and find out about. And have that enthusiasm to be willing to pull it outright, and then he's one of the few that does have that and I don't think, I don't think he's gonna be, you know, one of the flakes will fall by the wayside. He's gonna keep at it, man. He's gonna keep the new stuff. He's too amused by it all to do otherwise. Wow! This, huh!

Tamara Thompson: I think one of my favorite things to learn, too, is even people who, like, stopped doing it for a little bit, came back to it. They didn't really stop doing it. They just stopped sharing everything.

John Curry: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: They just stopped making like fifty copies. They're like, "You know, man, I only made ten, and I gave them to like three people." You know? So they didn't technically stop. They just weren't doing as many.

John Curry: Yeah, that-that does happen. But a lot of people, like, if you look at the whole history of all the publishers that've ever been in Canada, you'll see that most of them, they come right—they last a couple of weeks, so to speak, and then they disappear. And a lot of them, the only time they ever publish, is before the, before a book fair, somewhere, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, one of the things that I found with *Whispering Wick* is a lot of people are like, "Oh, you're on hiatus. You're on hiatus." And I'm like, "Yeah, but I'm still doing shit." Like I went through a fever dream the other, like, last week, because I was, like, I'm talking to all these really creative, amazing people. I'm going to make something. So, I called up my partner and I said, "You know that horror story you made?" And he's like, "Yeah." And I'm like, "I'm taking it. Give it to me." And he said, "What?" And I'm like, "I'm making a book today." And he said, "Okay." And so he did a couple changes, sent it to me, and I was like printing, like, crazy. Made stuff up and got my long arm stapler out. And I was, like, and people are, like, "Oh, you're not doing things." And I'm like, "Well, I mean, like not that you've seen, like, I'm making stuff still." Because I go a little crazy if I don't, that's what I find. If I don't do something creative, I'm like everybody leave me alone. I need to do something because I just go a little stir crazy. It's, like, I haven't left the house for a while. I don't know if you find that. But I find it's very true for myself where I'm just like, "Everybody, fuck off for a bit. I gotta do something. Nobody talk to me. I gotta make something."

John Curry: In a different way, in a different way, yeah. I definitely have, like—most of my activities these days are large scale sculptural, weird things on the island.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: There are times when the visitors that appear over there are a little too relentless, and it takes away from things that occupy great amounts of time. Like way, way, more time. This is like, this is the largest scale thing I've ever done. And it's my whole playground. So, what can you do with that, you know? And I'm learning how to chisel rock and stuff. But that's pretty neat (laughs).

Tamara Thompson: So, we're rounding in the last couple of questions here, as I said. But and these next questions are just like making space for cool shit. I don't learn about stuff unless people tell me, right? And that's how I've learned about so many things. But this is the—the softball like starter question here. But what's something you wish maybe the public knew about, like, Canadian publishing which is basically, What do you wish people knew about, like, these types of Canadian artists?

John Curry: What about the people I particularly am interested in?

Tamara Thompson: Yes, sure. It's just again about sharing stuff, cool things, you know. The next question is, literally, like: What's something about D.I.Y. press history or cool shit you've seen in your time that you want to share? This one is more Canadian centric, but...

John Curry: So what? The first question is what again?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, sorry. I'm, I'm getting excited because these are some of my favorite questions to ask. What's something you wish people, or the public knew about, like, Canadian publishing, or like the people who make these like print art objects?

John Curry: Yeah, that's a hard one. Cause really, people don't care. And do I want them to care? Well, yeah. But they're not gonna care. You-I can't really project any care in return, right?

Tamara Thompson: Right.

John Curry: You can't go. Oh, I wish oh, I wish people knew about it because they don't want to know about it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: Why would I wish it on them. You know, as far as people who are already involved in some way, shape, or form, with something that you would think would encourage their willingness to pay attention to things in that realm. There's where we go back to: I would wish they had the openness to actually pay attention to stuff around them and notice that there are other things going on than they expect. And are only comforted by-if they find-because people are not comforted by finding things that contradict their expectation, generally speaking.

Tamara Thompson: I find it exciting.

John Curry: Yeah. Okay. Well, you know.

Tamara Thompson: I'm a weird duck.

John Curry: Right. Like there-there are those of us out there. But the work on this, like, this comes from having dealt with it with being on the fairs and stuff and watching the way people deal with them. People who, you know, like-for instance, people who are involved in this stuff, who make a point of making their living off a supposed knowledge of real outsider stuff, have the opportunity to exercise their curiosity a little bit more. They don't generally take it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: And I find that really, really disturbing. (Technical issues occurred) wish fulfillment stuff. Idealistic stances of, oh, "If only" that's not a subjunctive that I can operate in.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's something important about D.I.Y., press history or something cool you've seen in your time that you would like to



share mostly with me, cause I wanna know? I say people in general, in the question, but mostly me, because I just like learning about this stuff. This is my special interest I'm sinking a degree into it so that I can learn more about it and have an excuse of officiality behind me to be like, "Hey, talk to me about this cool stuff."

John Curry: Yeah, right, (both laugh) which, of course, we could just go, "No."

Tamara Thompson: Yeah (laughs).

John Curry: Well god, I don't know how familiar you, how familiar you are with the, like, more nonlinear means of writing that are out there in Canadian history, but it's very, very, very rich and complements the rest of the world's investigations in those zones far more than the rest of the world has been willing to-to show an admittance of, let's say. I'm always astonished to see how Canada is represented in these, right, concrete poetry anthologies, and stuff like that. It's always such low-end material, not the good that has come out of this country and stuff that has been added, (technical issues occurred). But, objectively speaking, because this is an area I've studied really seriously since I was thirteen basically, putting that stuff in a real context-and it'd be really nice to have that acknowledged, and it's not, (Technical issues occurred)-the position of Canadian stuff is not acknowledged at all, right, for the quality that it's favorable. And you see that in like rare book dealers catalogues, and stuff like that, too. You know, the stuff is always downplayed, and it's just, it's kind of weird that there's nobody here fighting for that position. Not that, like, it's on a position of some sort of thing, but-but it is.

Tamara Thompson: I get what you're trying to say, yeah.

John Curry: Acknowledge that there's some, really, really, amazing stuff has come out of here, but it's so invisible that nobody knows. But, like, I have a lot of rare stuff and I know it's there because I have it here and it's astonishing. So, who I would like to see more attention paid to those real outside things when that stuff started (technical issues occurred). Fact is that, though, if anybody knows, you know, and stuff's not published, it's not, not fixated on, in any way. Part of that is, you know, examples of something that which is really too bad. And they are very good. So that's, it's always been my fixation. What's that? How can do this? You know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: That's this anthology that we're working on now at the medium concrete stuff, I think answers that question.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: What has been available, that has gone beyond expectation bigger than we were-you've still got a hundred twenty pages that are going to be real, I think, are going to be real surprises. Think they even know what's going on. Does that answer it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I love. It's, it's a good answer, because I—there's so many things that Canadians make that people just like poopoo on. It's like, No, there's some really cool shit here. And like I personally like being challenged. I like learning about new things. I like people showing me new things and stuff like that. So, like, just—I wish some people as well would also, like, look at some of the stuff that, like, is happening here and being, like, yeah, that's cool and unique. And you should look at it. You should read it, right? But that's also again, because I just love encountering different things that challenge me, right? You know, I also know people who don't learn anything out of high school and never will learn another thing in their life again. But you know that's not what I want to do.

John Curry: Part of the problem—part of the problem is convincing people to actually pay for the privilege of providing them with knowledge. Right? And yeah. And more than merely economic terms. That's for sure. And yeah, getting people over that hump is very difficult.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

John Curry: It's there. It's available and no one buys it. Very, very, rarely they do, and I find it a shame because it's not just my stuff. It's a whole country's worth, and more pretty challenging and satisfying material. Come on people, let's go.

Tamara Thompson: Just even to get like my students to recognize that some of the things they're reading are like written by Canadians. And they're like whoa Souvankham Thammavongsa wrote this book, and she's Canadian. That was a pretty good book for a Canadian, and I'm like guys, what?

John Curry: Oh, a Canadian? Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That's the thing I hate the most, is this—is when I hear, in passing, people talking about, like, for Canadian. Like, it's my biggest pet peeve, when of course, I'm—I'm the book writer, so everybody gives me like Indigo gift cards, which is fine. I use them, whatever, and I go, and I hear people being, like, Oh, did you hear this one's Canadian?" And it's like when they discover an actor or singer who is Canadian, it's like, "Oh, we have something good." And it's just like, yeah, we've always had something. What? What? Huh?

John Curry: Yeeaaahhh!

Tamara Thompson: It, it's like they found a golden egg, and they're just like, oh, there's only one of these in the world, and it's like, Oh?

John Curry: Yeah, well, students are well.

Tamara Thompson: No, it's not even my students that do some of that stuff, because I find when I give them positivity and show eagerness, they give me that, like, ten-fold. It's, like, the random mom in, like, the children's book section being, like, "Did you know this book was written

by a Canadian?" And I'm like, "Yeah. I did, Margaret, actually. I probably even know that that's A House of Anansi book that you're holding right there. Did you know, that was Canadian?"

John Curry: Annick press, or something.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, God anyway, last question here for you. What's something that you'd wish to share about your history, stuff you've done?

John Curry: No, I'll pass on that. Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough. Do you have any additional comments you'd like to make—for-before I stop the recording?

John Curry: No, I don't think so.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic.

Joseph Donato

Tamara Thompson: Hello. My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is July 18<sup>th</sup> the time is 1:16 pm. And just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant could drop out a week after this interview time. This interview is for small press and author.

Joseph Donato: Hey! I'm Joseph Donato. He/him, I'm living in the GTA in Pickering. I am the editor in chief of a magazine called Block Party, but we publish annual magazine issues might get into some chapbook publishing again, who knows. And then I'm also the overlord of Horror Pop Mag, which is a horror-based arts and literary magazine that I also do annually. I'm excited to be here.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, thank you for like spending the time with me. So just to get the ball rolling, how did you discover scenes and like chapbooks in this kind of like D.I.Y. publishing was there like a moment where you're like, "oh, this is the thing! ". Was there like a moment for you like that?

Joseph Donato: Yes! So, I did my undergrad at University of Toronto, at the Scarborough campus, and had-did a poetry class with poet Ryan Fitzpatrick, who is wonderful. Hey, Ryan! And he, like the whole point of the class, was to kind of work on your own essentially a chapbook, although I don't know if I knew the name for that at the time. Yet he he's kind of the one that taught me about it. So, in that class I wrote basically my chapbook Toothache that I had come out with above/ground press last year. That's where I had started. That's where the ideas all started. That's where I got to workshop a lot of the content. And I love a chapbook, love a chapbook. I teach a lot of creative writing at the Pickering Public Library, where I work. And I am the biggest like do this, do this, do this person. I just think they're great. I think they're one, much quicker to write than a novel, obviously. So, you can get it out much faster, which means it can be a lot more relevant. Cause you don't have to wait like eighteen months for your book to come out at and adds a publication credit to your-your resume. It gets you involved in the scene. It gets you like; it gets people interested in your writing. Are you, are you gonna break the bank or become a household name. No, but it's more like doing it for the love and doing it for the culture. And I am such a big fan.

Tamara Thompson: Excellent, excellent. So how did like Block Party like start? Because, like, it's a lot of work to do a lot of this stuff right. So, like kind of-

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It is! So, like why did it get going?

Joseph Donato: So, it was me and my very good friend Isla McLaughlin. We were co-founders, it was during Covid, I wanna say 2021. That whole time period is kind of a blur, but I know we were kind of at a very early stage in our own writing careers, where we were kind of just starting to send our work out to other magazines and other journals and I think we were

just both very attracted by this, like the-the idea of being able to publish other people's work and kind of provide that opportunity for other people and do it our way. We both really like control also. So, it kind of made sense that we would do all of this. And we also like to take on a lot of work. Which is why, I think in that first year we published three magazine issues. And I wanna say, we had like two launches like digital launches and then, very soon after we did five chapbooks, and another two issues like we kinda we did a lot all at once, which did burn us out very quickly.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think that's the other thing, too, with like the pandemic is you had so much time and nowhere to go. So, it's just literally like, "well, what else am I gonna do".

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: For me it was like almost a hyper fixation where it's like, well, I have nothing else to do, and I've made this my internship. This is my life now.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And like, it's not even just making the books. It's like everything else that comes around it. Of like making the like magazine or the book, and it's just like right I have to like do marketing things.

Joseph Donato: Oh, my God! If I never make another Instagram post in my life, I will be so happy. But it's like marketing, it's also like I'm a designer now. I do all the formatting as well both the magazine and the chapbooks now.

Tamara Thompson: oh, god bless you!

Joseph Donato: It's it, like I and Isla, we had to learn a lot of skills very quickly. But I'm, I think we're very appreciative of the opportunity to do so, especially when we didn't have to do like-like school was still online. My job kind of ghosted me, so I didn't know what was happening with that. So, like we had the time to do it. And then, as soon as you kind of get back into regular life, you realize, oh, wow! This is a lot of work that now I have to do on top of everything. On the flip side or on the bright side, loved it. It is so much fun, so much fun.

Tamara Thompson: I think the pandemic was like that perfect sweet spot where, like I had so much time, so you could get your roots in the ground, so that you could do all that like formatting.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And, like my god praise Grace Regan, who does all of our formatting, who does all of our layout, who does like so much proof reading, because I can't read half of it, because I'm so dyslexic. It's like glaze, nothing, can't see anything. So, like she's the proofreader. She's like the designer, the layout person. And I'm just like she got to learn all of these like things because we just had so much time because of

the pandemic, and because we were literally doing nothing else because it was an internship. And I'm like, thank god! Because, like, I'd wanted to start something for so long. But it gave us like the perfect time to just-

Joseph Donato: -Yeah-

Tamara Thompson: Do everything cause it is so much work just getting things set up. And I think a lot of people don't realize, like how much work it is just to be like, "wow, yes, I'm going to create this thing". And you're just like cool, wow here's like the laundry list of shit you gotta do.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, I-I always try to like, emphasize all the stuff that you need to be able to do or like, be able to find someone who knows how to do it. When people are asking about like how to start like a magazine or anything, anything, because you just don't really realize it like I didn't really think that Instagram, for example, would be such a big part of running magazines. But, like I, if you're not on Instagram, or some kind of social media like, how are people gonna know about it. Like it's very hard to engage with people if you're not doing that, and then, if you don't really like, pay much attention to the design of it. No one really wants to look at it. It doesn't really catch anyone's eye. So, you realize very quickly how important every single aspect of the process is, and that you can't really, like lack anywhere. Kind of have to be like full force in everything, one hundred percent of the time which can totally get exhausting.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think the other thing, too, that I didn't realize was how important Facebook was like-

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: For, like the people who have been doing this for a long time, they mostly use Facebook, and then how much their community also flocks to like you if you're on Facebook, like, we have way, more people on Facebook than we have on Instagram.

Joseph Donato: Really.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, right.

Joseph Donato: Oh, I'm not even on Facebook.

Tamara Thompson: I also had no idea, but you need to get on there, boy, because, like, let me just say like it. It surprised me to the degree of people we were getting on Facebook. And I was just like that is crazy like, it's the older people who are on Facebook. And then the younger people on Instagram.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But because the people who have been doing this for a long time have really established themselves on Facebook. I was just like this makes sense. But I'm also like.

Joseph Donato: Wow.

Tamara Thompson: Right?

Joseph Donato: Okay, never would have guessed that. Okay, let me tap into Facebook.

Tamara Thompson: I had no idea until I recently looked at the numbers like, we haven't posted anything on there for forever, because we've all been so busy, and I'm just like I haven't been doing anything. And this thing has been growing.

Joseph Donato: Wow!

Tamara Thompson: Right?

Joseph Donato: Oh, my, gosh! Let me tap into Facebook, me acting like, I didn't hear about this like multi-billion-dollar company. Oh, my gosh! I need to try this out.

Tamara Thompson: You know that new fangled thing that they're talking about? It's like everywhere.

Joseph Donato: Yeah. Like, who? Okay? Okay, Mr. Mark.

Tamara Thompson: I am interested, though. Does the like, does the magazine have, like a like editorial philosophy? Maybe a goal? I know not everybody does. But I'm interested if you do.

Joseph Donato: Yes, I have different ones for-for both. So, for Block Party the whole idea that Isla and I had was like community like, we really want to establish like a little Block Party like a fun time. Where you can come up with your neighbors, celebrate have a good time. So, the whole kind of point of Block Party to be able to spotlight good art and good writing cause I just like let's have fun with it. That's another big part of Block Party is like the fun aspect again I've like, I've seen a lot of journals and magazines, and I know a lot of them take themselves very seriously, which I think is also like really good, like, I think we should have some places that are serious, but that is not my place that is not what I'm I bring to the table. I want to have fun, party, laugh, so I always try to make sure that no matter what we're publishing, even if it's like a serious piece that the attitude towards it, still very celebratory, very like-like this is something that people are meant to enjoy. So, I want, I want I want people to enjoy it, and I'm enjoying myself and that's also very important. And then, oh-

Tamara Thompson: -I think that is a great philosophy-

Joseph Donato: -Thank you. Thank you. And I, I do feel like we've really been able to achieve that. I think like, thank you to everybody who supports because I love that like they get right into the-the crazy fun of it all, like they come to Blockoctber fest the event that we had last year. They're always ready to celebrate, always at the launches, always

looking to read the new issues. I think people are just, especially during the time period when we started. I think people were really just craving a good time and lack of seriousness. So, I'm very happy we were able to provide that and continue to do so. And then for Horror Pop Mag that's my-so, I-I only publish four in that one, and my goal with that is to I get, it's to legitimize horror and I guess to really highlight it, just to show that it does have a lot of value cause I know, especially in like academic spaces, which I've been a part of forever. Horror, any of the genres, the genre writing is not the most respected, people will tell you outright, or sometimes it's just a kind of subtle, subtlety. Which I think is crazy cause, especially with horror I just, you guys what a tool! Everybody's scared of something. It's something that everybody can relate to, and it's such a wonderful way to tell a story and to tell, like to share experiences that I think it gets overlooked and kind of, kind of the same way comics or comedy are like, it's just kind of like a, it's like Kitschy.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: So.

Tamara Thompson: One hundred percent agree, like the only time I've ever seen horror be taken seriously was in my cinema of Horror class where we talked about how horror like actually speaks a lot to the like. I don't know, like the zeitgeist of like, what people are thinking.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like what are you scared of? Because we went back-

Joseph Donato: -Totally-

Tamara Thompson: -1920's, and it's like, it was completely different than what it is now, right from like Frankenstein's Bride, to like the Babadook to like Halloween, and like how horror has changed over time to reflect our society, and what people are scared of, and what they think. And I think horror is such an underrated genre as well, and I think so many people are sleeping on it. In the way that they sleep on something like romance, and they're like, "well, I don't actually like romance", and I'm like there is a romantic plot, in almost every goddamn book there is.

Joseph Donato: Thank you. Thank you. Yes.

Tamara Thompson: Boy, you don't like romance?

Joseph Donato: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: What was most of Harry Potter other than that.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It was high school teen romance, with like some little fantasy on the side.



Joseph Donato: Yup, yeah, totally, totally agree. And I, yeah, it's just so much more important than people realize. And I love what you said about how it's like reflecting the zeitgeist. Like zombies in the eighties. A lot of a lot of those zombie films had, it was like a metaphor for Aids, the Aids crisis, or a lot of the last like twenty years, we've seen a lot of technology related horror films. And I'm sure it's gonna continue. And I'm sure we're gonna get a lot of disease centered horror again. It's really important.

Tamara Thompson: Well, I think the other thing, too, is-is that I think we're gonna get a lot more liminal horror. That kind of taps into the nostalgia that.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That everybody really wants, but also into that uncertainty of the familiar. And I think that's going to be really interesting because it intersects with the technology, and it intersects with like-

Joseph Donato: -Totally-

Tamara Thompson: -I think that's going to be really interesting. I've already seen a couple of things happening. And I'm like, yes, more of this. This is cool, but like also like speaking to the fact that you were talking about early with like Block Party is that I feel like so many people think something is not good or literary, or whatever if it's positive, like the amount of times I don't know if you've ever experienced this, but I would write this little happy thing or this really cute comedy thing, and people would be like oh, is this like a kid's story-

(Technical issues occurred).

Joseph Donato: Like not everything has to be so serious.

Tamara Thompson: I love that, that's like a core part of like what you want to do, because-

Joseph Donato: -Yeah-

Tamara Thompson: It's one of those things where, like, we need the variety, because, like, let's have fun.

Joseph Donato: I agree.

Tamara Thompson: Fun is good and like important, right?

Joseph Donato: Yeah, I get a lot of emails like to-to the Block Party account. And I know, I know most people like don't know that it's just me like now that-that's running both of them. But the-they'll email like, so pol-not politely. But so, it's just so structured. And I'm like, it's just me like, I'm just a person. It's okay.

Tamara Thompson: But, like so many of them, don't know about publishing so.

Joseph Donato: I know.

Tamara Thompson: They are just so scared and like, I'll go into a classroom, and, you know, like the void minutes before, like the seminar technically starts. But everyone is there.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I'll be like, all right. Kids don't take three percent royalties. You're getting scammed (technical difficulties occurred) Oh, what? Because it would be such a harm for me, for my like, for other authors to get paid reasonable royalties.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Or like, oh, yeah, it's such competition. We have another good Canadian writer. I'm so scared like no, this is all positive, like there's no negative.

Joseph Donato: Yes, there is room for everyone.

Tamara Thompson: But they're always just like "whoa!". And I'm like, ask me anything. I'll tell you. I don't care.

Joseph Donato: Right.

Tamara Thompson: Get in there!

Joseph Donato: I know I don't get the like-like snobbery gatekeeping like sophistication, and I don't really experience much of that cause I just am not in those crowds, obviously. But whenever I hear about it, I'm like that, we are writing stories. Can everyone calm down like, let's chill. We are not doctors. Well, maybe some people are, but most of us are not doctors.

Tamara Thompson: You're a doctor in English. Calm down.

Joseph Donato: That's what I'm saying, like, I'm studying creative writing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Like let's chill.

Tamara Thompson: And like don't get me wrong like you should be like praised for your academic work, cause it's so much work to get a PhD. Oh, my god.

Joseph Donato: Oh, my God! Absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: But like I'm also sitting there and I'm just like I get why, some people are hesitant to share, because the other thing, too, is, you don't want to disappoint the person. I sometimes think the reason why people don't share in Canadian publishing is they don't want to be mean to the person because they're like, I really like you. And you're a really nice person. But I don't want to publish your thing. You know?

Joseph Donato: Oh, yes.

Tamara Thompson: I feel like sometimes there's definitely people who are snobbery. But I also feel like sometimes people are just like very nervous and they also don't want to accept the first book and then not accept the second book, because getting the second book, it's like, well, you accepted the first. Why not the second one? And it's just like well, I can't, you know.

Joseph Donato: Oh my gosh yes.

Tamara Thompson: Or maybe it's not as good. And so, I feel like sometimes it's that like too niceness. And it's just like you're really great person. But like, I can't publish this, because, like literally, the press doesn't even do like, you know, romance. It's the horror mag, and it's like this is really nice. And I like you. But I can't publish this, you know.

Joseph Donato: I know. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like you don't wanna crush this young writer's dreams, but you also can't always say yes to everything.

Joseph Donato: That's the thing I do feel a lot of responsibility for, like making or breaking someone's dream, obviously on a very small scale. But it's so hard like the first time I had to send out rejection letters. I was like, oh, I'm gonna burn in hell like this is awful. It was terrible. But if I've learned anything from being on this end of publishing, and I tell my students, or any literally anybody who was involved in the scene. It is like so not a personal decision like it almost also never has to do with like quality of work for me cause I don't think I've ever really received anything where I'm like wow this is like this person should not be writing. Never.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Never honestly, and I've received like thousands of-of pieces of work it always comes down to like. Oh, have I published this person before. Maybe I wanna give someone else a chance. Have I public-like, have I published someone very similar to this before? And I wanna give someone else a chance? Do I have similar work already in this issue? Is this to the theme? Is it like long enough, short? Not like it-kind of comes down to things like that, and the actual talent of the person is so separated from it. And I-it's so hard to get people to understand that because writing is so personal that it feels like a rejection of my writing is a rejection of me as a writer, and ultimately as a person. But

I promise it's not, at least in my case. I can't, can't speak for everyone.

Tamara Thompson: Well like, I know, for, like so many people who do acquisitions, the hardest part is giving someone who you like who you believed in a rejection, right? Because the rest of the board didn't believe in it, or like, if you get like a no from like-like a prize, or like a contest, is like, well, that specific judge maybe had specific taste, right? It literally could have been if it was a different judge, you would have like gotten second or first.

Joseph Donato: Oh, for sure.

Tamara Thompson: And like there's so much subjectiveness like I have so many students be like, "well, why is it a seventy like two and not a seventy-five". And I'm like, well, let's talk about it, you know, because I'm like the marks are so bullshit because we're like we don't have two plus two equals four. We don't have those answers.

Joseph Donato: Always saying, I like, this isn't math. I-I am biased. And I can-I can't help it, even if I can recognize it like I can do my best, but it's art.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And I think that's like the hardest thing is this, like, when I give students edits, I'm like, take what you need like if you want to come back to this, I also understand your limitations for the assignment but like, ask me questions, but everything I give to you is an edit, which means it's a suggestion that you don't have to take, right? I'm trying to point out a problem. And here's the way I would think that you could get like, get better to help make it so that this piece could be more legible, so that I understood what was happening more, or to, maybe not have you telling the story to me as much as you could show it.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And like, I have so many students come up to me, and they're just like I really appreciated that you weren't telling me what to do. I'm like well, as an editor, you're never supposed to tell the author what to do. You're supposed to help them. The fear of editors is strong in writers, and I'm like they're not there to take over the story. They're there to help make sure that your story gets more out of your brain and onto the page.

Joseph Donato: Yeah. And like, you said, like the craft stuff that just like show versus tell, like some, some stuff is kind of like this is how to make it the most legible, and the most like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Quickest way to say something. Sometimes it's just as it that's a little more black and white I feel, but then it comes to like personal taste, which, like you said depends on who's reading it?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, literally. And it's so like frustrating. Because I'm like you're eighteen. This is your first year, like, first course, like, first semester, you're doing a good job. Like, even if you started writing in high school, you're eighteen, and if you're already writing to like a decently like, I'm pretty impressed that your first year like, keep going. Don't be discouraged like you know what I mean. It's one of those things where it's like you're not gonna be like this is probably a bad example, but, like HP. Lovecraft, like nine years old, writing this beautiful poem, you know what I mean.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It's like most people aren't like that, because guess what, I didn't come out of the womb knowing calculus, how am I gonna come out of the womb knowing a poem, you know.

Joseph Donato: Neither did I.

Tamara Thompson: Algebra, I can get there, calculus not so much.

Joseph Donato: That's impressive. I, yeah, I totally agree. Like writing is one of those things that you get better the more you do it.

Tamara Thompson: Yup.

Joseph Donato: The more you are trying to improve like the more you're looking for different resources, getting feedback, trying new things. It just is kind of a matter of doing. I kinda think of it as like, like exercising like working out like, the more you do it the better you get at it and yeah, I, as someone who was very recently like starting my undergrad. I totally understand to have to come from like your entire life, basically doing things for a grade. And now, all of a sudden, you're still doing it. But there's also kind of the undertone of like but I still feel like this is right like I still feel like the way I did it I like it more and you kind of have to know the-the difference between I guess, I-I wanna say, like writing for school and then writing outside of school. It's a very different.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Very different game.

Tamara Thompson: The other thing, too, is, you have to know when in the writing advice is BS, and when it's actually helpful. That is so hard because you don't wanna like not take the advice cause maybe they're seeing something that you're not seeing, but like I think for me, like the biggest thing like where I was like oh, no, you just really don't understand. And I was with that like comedy story, but like the bachelor and whatever I was like, oh, you fundamentally do not understand how to edit a happier piece.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You want... I had people saying, oh, he's a war veteran, and he's got PTSD flashbacks. I'm like he's just an anxious like bachelor like what's happening?

Joseph Donato: What a jump! What? What are?

Tamara Thompson: And so like people like you need to lean into that more. And I'm like, that's why. Where are we? You know.

Joseph Donato: That's, that is a crazy thing. To just be like this is what you're doing. So.

Tamara Thompson: Well, I said he had helicopter ears, because, you know, he was a helicopter like pilot, and so they're like, oh, Vietnam, and I'm like whoa!

Joseph Donato: Oh my gosh! They wanted something terrible to happen, so bad.

Tamara Thompson: I know, and it was literally just about a little girl being lost in Ikea, and this man not knowing how to handle it because he wants to help, because he's a responsible adult. And so many people were like, well, I wouldn't do that. And I'm like, well, aren't we glad that the child had him like instead of you.

Joseph Donato: Damn, that is, that is something to admit.

Tamara Thompson: I know.

Joseph Donato: Aren't workshop so crazy.

Tamara Thompson: They're bonkers. That was like a whole class workshop, though. So, it wasn't just like four people. It was everybody.

Joseph Donato: Love that.

Tamara Thompson: I was just like, I will never do this again, because I got so many conflicting things. And I was just like, this is too much information. I didn't even have time to process I was just writing like mad everything everyone was saying. And I'm just like I don't even know what's happening.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, class workshops, where you have to jump with like twenty people that you, either one don't know or two would probably never voluntarily be in a group with is, it just the results are so fun. I love workshops, love it, love them so much.

Tamara Thompson: I love workshops too.

Joseph Donato: I think they're so chaotic. And yeah, you do need to be good at pointing out like, hey this person does not read horror. So, take

what they say about writing horror with a grain of salt. And same for me, like when I read like-like a like romance and I, obviously the everything in me is like this doesn't make sense to me like, why would this happen? But like, that's just like what, that's the genre like of course, I don't know what happens. I don't really read it like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: I don't go out of my way to read romance, so I also like to say, heads up I do not read romance, so take everything that I say with a grain of salt. And that's okay. It's okay to not know everything.

Tamara Thompson: I know that's the other thing that like boggles my mind is when I tell my students I'm like, oh, I don't know. And they're like, what do you mean? And I'm like well, I'm twenty-five, and I don't know everything. Welcome! Welcome to the world of adults.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: They're a lot of people pretend like they do know everything, but they're just lying, they just pretend. And like the other thing, too, is, someone with a different perspective can give you a lot of really cool and good feedback.

Joseph Donato: Totally.

Tamara Thompson: But, like sometimes I'll be like writing, and it's like I had like a story of like two gay ladies, and then, like someone was like that, came out of nowhere. And I was like, I'm sorry. Did you not like read the first sentence on how this woman described this other woman. She called her basically a piece of art. I'm sorry.

Joseph Donato: Oh, love that, though. It jump scared them.

Tamara Thompson: Well, why did they kiss? And I was like, because they were in love the whole time. And they're like really, I didn't pick up on that. And I looked at like everybody else at the table, like we knew they were gay. And I'm like, thank you.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I'm not going to like plaster, like queer and lesbian on their foreheads, like no.

Joseph Donato: I know, I know. Yeah, there's definitely, it's also important to know your audience and know that, like, it is impossible to write a book that everybody will love and connect to. Because, again, this is not math. Like people have different experiences and opinions.

Tamara Thompson: Agreed. So okay, so we've been talking about all these fantastic and wonderful things. But I do have more questions.

Joseph Donato: (Laughs) yes, yes.

Tamara Thompson: So, what kind of like work do you publish? I know that you do like a bit of poetry, but like, what's some other things that you like to throw in.

Joseph Donato: Good question. Okay, for Block Party we have themes. So, the like, for example, the current theme is radio where I'm asking people to-to submit something that's inspired by a song, cause that's so fun, right? I'll take anything, truthfully. I'll take any like poetry, fiction. You've got a script. Send it. I we also do art like I'll, I will publish art. So, send that cause I think that's just another great way to tell stories. Yeah, I will take anything if you've got something I haven't even thought of before. Like, send it if I can put it in a book somehow, with the-the technology of today. I will try my best and then, for-for Horror Pop Mag kind of the same thing where I'll take anything. We don't have themes there. I keep saying we it's just me. Horror Pop Mag doesn't have any themes, just horror. I just kinda wanna get horror from all angles for that one. Again, in any-any medium you can think of.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Joseph Donato: Cause, I like them all. I like reading them all, even if I don't write everything, or do all the like work in the same mediums as all the artists. I think they're so cool to see, and I just I don't want to read the same things. Give me some variety.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Joseph Donato: Spice it up.

Tamara Thompson: Like I get to-so, like I learned something. And I'm like, that's cool. Let's learn about that now.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, like.

Tamara Thompson: I still love the other thing I learned about last time, or like a week ago. But I can like a new thing you know, so I totally get that. I literally did like a little horror zine because I was losing my mind. And I was like, everybody, leave me alone. I'm gonna make this tiny little chapbook, and it was like a fridge like the cover was a fridge, and I hand wrote on like the note on the fridge-

Joseph Donato: -So sick-

Tamara Thompson: -And it was like a little horror thing, and it was like this, dingy like old fridge and everything, and I couldn't figure out how to print it. So, I was like, I'm just gonna print it on regular paper and slap it on cardstock with glue. And I was like yeesss.

Joseph Donato: Classic, that is so classic.

Tamara Thompson: And I did like our like stamp that we usually use when we're sending out books instead of doing our logo. I just did that on the back, and it's like a little messy, and everything like you can still read it.



Joseph Donato: Beautiful, the D.I.Y. nature of chapbooks cannot be lost. I'm so worried that we're moving into an age where people are expecting, like bound books, like professionally bound chapbooks which is, they are beautiful. Don't get me wrong, but we cannot expect that you guys. Like the-the publishers publishing chapbooks can not usually afford to do that. That is a production, and chapbooks are meant to be like this very accessible thing that anybody can produce. And I just, I'm so worried we're gonna lose that magic.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's something really important when I'm like going through my definition. And I'm even talking to like zine people, because the only difference between a chapbook and a zine. Most of the time is the word people use.

Joseph Donato: Oh, my god, okay, I've been thinking that I've been thinking about that.

Tamara Thompson: Right, because, like I literally talked to Sonja, who's in BC like did some really cool like artsy, like chapbooks, things. And people kept calling them zines on her, and she's like, no, they're chapbooks like I've decided that their chapbooks. And then it got to the point where she's like, I'm just tired. Everyone keeps calling them zines fine. But I'm like, no, they're chapbooks, and like you should fight for that right.

Joseph Donato: Why not?

Tamara Thompson: Because, like, just because they're not like the perfect bound, beautiful like Knife Fork Book, which, like beautiful books, right and like, don't get me wrong. Those are beautiful books, but like or like pinhole-pinhole books are gorgeous. Erin does such a good job but like let's have the scrappiness too, and just like don't get me wrong. I think zines are definitely like very fun and like more punk and artsy. But I don't see why that can't be a sliding scale from like chapbooks to like absolute zines, paper, scissors, glue, kind of thing, and having that like as a sliding scale, and not two separate things I think they can like be that sliding scale.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, totally.

Tamara Thompson: It's something I've been thinking about a lot, because it's like, who do I interview, right? It's like, well, you're doing technically lit mag, but you've also done like chapbook things right. And then I've also talked to like again, Sonja. She did mostly like things people would consider zines, but she considers them chapbooks or like Joe Ollmann, really good, like comic artist, and because he's a comic artist, his things were considered zines but also chapbooks just depending on who you ask. Right?

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Literally, there's going to be a whole section in my thesis about like me, defining these terms and saying at the end, these

terms are not universally used in the community. People will use different terms.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, I've-I've been thinking about that because whenever I am teaching chapbooks, no one ever knows of what I'm talking about, but people seem to know what zines are, which actually is odd to me. I'm like, okay, I didn't realize that was like the popular term right now.

Tamara Thompson: Because it's got links to the music industry and a lot of people who are into-

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That band culture.

Joseph Donato: Okay.

Tamara Thompson: Like they know what a zine is.

Joseph Donato: Right.

Tamara Thompson: Because it got so, like popular in the punk movements. So, in the artsy community, the zine is more prevalent, like I've seen things that are chapbooks and people have been like, here's my like Fanzine on this, but because it's like a fan work-

Joseph Donato: Hmmmm.

Tamara Thompson: It's considered a zine and not a chapbook, because it's not original work. But it's basically using, it's like a fan fiction like comic, basically. And I'm like, well, I'd still consider this like a chapbook, because there's a lot of original work here, right. Using characters from like a video game that no one knows about except you know me, and that one person.

Joseph Donato: Interesting. Love that, it kind of is giving to me like it's, I sometimes I feel like people are trying to devalue work by labeling something as a zine, because it's the again related to like even like you said, like music, like even just magazines, kind of again with what people will do with genre work, or like comedy. And like chapbook, seems more literary, a little more professional, or whatever I just like who cares?

Tamara Thompson: We are making cool bookish things.

Joseph Donato: Right!

Tamara Thompson: Let make cool, bookish things. Let's make the super limited, absolutely beautiful bound things. And let's make the scrappy things with the little human mistakes which I love, because the thing is, is in our world of like AI, and becoming like so blurred with like humans and machine.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

(Technical issues occurred)

Tamara Thompson: I-I basically just like show me a spelling mistake. And I'm like, hmm, yes, a human made this good-good. Let me let me purchase.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Ya know?

Joseph Donato: Yeah. Also, it's a lot of pressure to put on like a publishing, like publisher doing chat books to be like, okay, why is this not like perfect.

Tamara Thompson: It's made by a human.

Joseph Donato: Also like by two or three people like who don't have the funds or the time like I-

Tamara Thompson: I know right.

Joseph Donato: I don't know where we move past it like a lot of publishing being like-like, I don't know why it has to be a job like a full time like this is my life. Like it's either nothing or that I'm like, what about like the-the Passion Project people? What about the part-time job people, or the like the just dipping my toes in trying something. I it, sometimes I feel like if you are ready to be able to spend the kind of money or-or the time that it takes to produce, like the really high-end stuff. Even at like the chapbook level, it almost feels like you're not even considered at all which is such a bummer.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah and like, I feel like the creative expression is so important to chapbooks specifically, like it doesn't have to be perfect and sometimes maybe that's a part of the point.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I love the artistry of specific decisions, or just like seeing someone figure something out. I think that's so fun, too. Right?

Joseph Donato: Yeah, yeah, they give you the opportunity to be a lot more creative with, like, the really, everything like the whole process, especially the production of-of the book, versus, like novel publishing, where especially for doing it, the traditional route you probably have very limited, say in what happens. Versus chapbooks, where like for mine, the one that I had come out with above ground press, I wanted my X-ray in there of my teeth, and-and Rob was like, okay, yeah cool. Totally.

Tamara Thompson: Why not?

Joseph Donato: Well, yeah damn, okay.

Tamara Thompson: So, I am really curious on how you actually like make your things. So, we talked a little bit about submission. But like, I'm

curious about like submission, to like editorial, to like making the book. The details on that process because it's so different for everybody.

Joseph Donato: Okay so, I'll walk you through the process. So, everything that, like all the formatting I use InDesign, I've always used InDesign. I don't actually really know how to do anything else but InDesign at this point, just because I'm I've always used adobe in school. Then I print I print out; I work at a library. I print out a library because it is as far as I've seen the cheapest option. Again, I'm not printing anything fancy like. It's just kind of on regular printer paper and then card stock for the cover. So, I don't really need anything more than that and as far as I know it's not taxed per page like staples. Just saying so it's a lot cheaper for me to print there and then I-I do the stapling for mine. I've thought about doing thread ones, but I don't think I have that that patience in me to do it. So yeah, staple it, like again, cards dot covers to add a little bit of stability, especially if I wanna then put it in libraries and-and stuff like that. But ultimately, that's-that's it. It's a very, now it's a, it's a very simple process, because I figured out all the steps. And now it's kind of automated. And I love folding books. I could put like something on the TV and just.

Tamara Thompson: So right. so many people are just like, how do you fold it so well? And I'm like, I've-I've done hundreds of these at this point like give it to me.

Joseph Donato: Hundreds.

Tamara Thompson: I keep my nails long so that I can like line things up.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like I know how to do it. Give me that.

Joseph Donato: Professional.

Tamara Thompson: Give those pages I can do it.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, it and I've also learned like when I when I started, when-when, Isla and I were doing like our, the first round of chapbooks together. We were folding individual pages, and we had I, what do we have? We had like thirty... one hundred and fifty? We had a one hundred and fifty books that we had to fold in like a week and we did each individual page and then kind of like in the last, like five or ten that we did. I think something we were... like girl, does it matter like what are like? Who would, who's really gonna notice it does not have any effect like we can. We can bunch some pages. So now my process is much quicker.

Tamara Thompson: I, oof I-I cannot fathom like I take all of our interior page's fold, boom done.

Joseph Donato: Yeah. And you know what, no one can ever really tell the difference like it again it's like, it's a chapbook like it's not supposed to look perfect because, like you said a person made this. Probably in between jobs and for free.

Tamara Thompson: I got my big, old, fat, purple ruler that's like this wide, and I just like Boom! Boom, done.

Joseph Donato: I like these, my little bones.

Tamara Thompson: See, a lot of people are like, oh, you need to get a bone. I'm like, girl that's expensive, like, every time I look online. They're so expensive. And I actually had someone be like, well, you're not a real like chapbook person if you don't have a bone, and I'm like, I'm sorry I take offense to that. My ruler is fantastic. It's very 2000's like.

Joseph Donato: What the hell. Who is making these rules.

Tamara Thompson: I don't know.

Joseph Donato: What do you mean you need to have a bone like the page gets folded.

Tamara Thompson: And like I totally get it. Bones are great. I love them, but nothing quite hits like that thick, chunky, like clear-

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like purple plastic ruler that I have.

Joseph Donato: I used to use this marker. And like it was fine. It's again, I think people like are so scared to admit sometimes that what they're doing is not as serious and important as they have it in their head like something can mean, be very meaningful and not be serious.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I don't understand why they want to compete with like traditional publishing. You're your own thing, and that's good.

Joseph Donato: That's the best part. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And like you can take it very seriously. And everybody's process is different, like kudos to them. But like, it's one of those things where I feel like a lot of people get down on themselves because it's not as serious or something. And I'm like, no, it's serious. And like how many serious authors have gone to traditional publishing, and then come back because you do the weird, cool shit that actually inspires our community.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like.

Joseph Donato: You get to have a hand in the production of your work from start to finish you. It's just so much more like-like I, you know what's happening the whole time, more or less. You get to be so much more involved. I love it. I am such a chapbook fan.

(Technical issues occurred)

Tamara Thompson: Right. And like the other thing, too, is this like, when I'm working on an author's book, I'll send them like a snapshot of me working on the book, and they can see what's happening right like.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: The point of Whispering Wick is to demystify the publishing thing. So, it's like, here's a contract. It's a letter of agreement. This is what you might see like, sign it like to get an idea. This is our marketing package, which is just the fun shit we want to do.

(Technical issues occurred)

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, but like I give them like a marketing package, because it's like.

Joseph Donato: That's so cool.

Tamara Thompson: Right. And like, I mean, it's marketing stuff that's actually fun, and that I wanna do. I'm not doing marketing if it's not fun.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, right?

(Technical issues occurred)

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I am curious on how like you make decisions with the press, because I know you had your partner before. But now it's just you so like decisions for how things get done.

Joseph Donato: Oh, my gosh, great question! It was so nice to have like a partner to be able to bounce ideas off of and just a different perspective. So, I don't feel like I'm crazy like and like, I'm doing everything in a weird way. So, this is going to be the first issue that I do on my own for Block Party at least. And with Horror Pop Mag that was also all me, which was so weird. I, yeah, I had a lot of thought about like what went into both-both issues of the of-of, or I'll talk about Horror Pop Mag, because it happened. So, I always try to look for variety in terms of the like writers. And also, in terms of content, like, even if I receive because I only published ten pieces for that. Even if I received ten amazing poems. I wanna try to find some fiction or some photography, or if I can like a script or video like-you know what I mean, like I want, I don't want to just stick with one thing I kind of want to make it. I, I'm-I'm always worried that if I just kind of start sticking with one thing, that's all I'll be known for, and it'll deter people from submitting their-their other stuff. So, yeah, variety is definitely something very important to me. And especially recently, I've been focusing a lot on proximity. I really wanna focus on people in the community. I'm actually a part of like-like, locally. Definitely for Block Party. The decision came when we had, like-like the-the issue, right before this one. So, our last issue, we had six hundred submissions, something around that for the magazine which that is way too many, love

you guys. Thank you. But that's way too many, especially when I would say, like seventy of them did not adhere to the theme or like-like, I can tell, like, you know, when people just kind of mass submit stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: You can really tell when that happens. And it's like this is awesome. But I can't really do anything with this right now. So, in it, in with respect to that and then also I just find it a lot more gratifying to be able to publish people not necessarily that I know of, but like that kind of live in the area cause, then I can actually see them at a launch. We can actually kind of communicate, and-and there's like relatability there. It's just been a lot more satisfying for me. It is like I am bumped out that I'm-I'm kind of missing out on like the international aspect of what Block Party was like being able to hear from all over the world. Cause I love that, I love to see where like, where people were writing from and where they were sending stuff in, and it was so cool to me, and I love to like-like when Isla, when I would do those issues like we would try to again, like see, like-like, have variety, and where people were submitting from. But it's just very challenging to do when we are such a small organization, and when all of our events are obviously local. And we're not expecting people to fly out for like a magazine launch or something like that. That'd be absurd. So yeah. So now for both Horror Pop Mag and for Block Party local, I think, for Block Party. Yeah, I'm looking for Ontario artists and writers. And then for Horror, Pop Mag definitely focusing probably again, mostly on Toronto, but not saying that I won't publish people elsewhere. I think in the first issue of Horror Pop Mag I published a guy from New Jersey. Yeah, cause he's awesome Scott Laudati.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough, makes sense to me. Thank you. Where does the press sell their books and like, how are they sold? Do you do them mostly online, is it like markets?

Joseph Donato: Oh, my God! Let me tell you about this. Yeah, I saw, I thought stamps were one dollar, period, I thought that was like their flat rate. I didn't know that it depended on size, so I was baffled and shocked when we started selling our books, and we had to start mailing them. I didn't know how much shipping was! No wonder that service is a, it's like a dying service. It sucks. It's so expensive. Who is doing this? Oh, my gosh! Nightmare, nightmarish! So that's how we originally sold our round of chapbooks for Block Party. Don't recommend that, especially if you're just starting out. And you're one of the smaller guys like-like I am. I think events like, when we did Blockoctberfest to be able to sell all the books at that event, or like unload as many as possible without having to do all shipping with everybody in one place, and even the authors were all there. That was top notch for me like that was best case scenario. And definitely what I'm gonna look to do in the future, like I'm gonna focus my efforts on-on selling at-at my own events. Again, we're like the authors are being spotlighted. Cause I think that's when people are most interested in it honestly.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree.

Joseph Donato: And definitely, if I continue to do any kind of shipping which I think, I it's kind of unavoidable honestly. So, even if I do choose to do that. I'm definitely gonna take some inspiration from other publishers where they have like two-week period or something where you can order. And then all the books go out or like until supplies last, like, I'll probably do one of those, because it is just so, not my thing. It is so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Like we, the amount of time.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, yeah, just like Whispering Wick does a lot of our stuff like, basically, only through mail. If it's not at a market. And like we literally got the biggest envelope that would still consider us like letter mail.

Joseph Donato: Yes!

Tamara Thompson: And then I still, and then I stick on like two stamps, and the ladies at my local post office are like, this is a package. I'm like... so I don't talk to them, and I just put on two stamps, and then I just throw it in.

Joseph Donato: Yes, yeah, I didn't. Okay. I got stopped the other time because they were like, what's in here. And I was like, oh, some books, and apparently that's like different than a letter and it cost more.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Or so I'm like, well, well, why did you ask me like? Let me like-

Tamara Thompson: -literally, just say, oh, it's just some paperwork.

Joseph Donato: Which it is.

Tamara Thompson: It just folded pages.

Joseph Donato: And they think like big book.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, like hardcover. And I'm like, no.

Joseph Donato: Look at this envelope. Does it look like a hardcover book to you?

Tamara Thompson: This is a chapbook, but they don't know what that is. So, I just say, yeah, it's just some paperwork.

Joseph Donato: Yeah. Oh, what a nightmare! What a nightmare!

Tamara Thompson: Oh, yeah, it's just a letter, and it didn't fit in like a regular letter, and I didn't want to fold it a whole bunch.



Joseph Donato: Where'd you drop into the mailbox, don't ask me question?

Tamara Thompson: I get my dad to go in and buy the stamps, and I sit outside, and then I drop in.

Joseph Donato: (Laughs) that is so solid.

Tamara Thompson: Unless its international like, if it's in Canada or the US like, I do that. But if it's international, I have to go in because it's like special. And I want to make sure-

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: that it gets to the person. But I also like, tell people like we do international shipping. But we're gonna have to like bill you for that international shipping.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like I am happy to do it but like it will cost a specific amount like will contact-

Joseph Donato: Yes.

Tamara Thompson: You again and ask you if you're still okay with it.

Joseph Donato: Yes.

Tamara Thompson: Cause like we want to make it available, but it's also like we can't foot that cost.

Joseph Donato: No cause it's so much more expensive than people might think cause between like the actual stamps, and then, like the envelopes, and even just the-the time of going there constantly. Oh, my God! Like on genuinely if someone orders something and it's in my city, I will bike there.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joesph Donato: But you're right like it, it's like an unavoidable evil. Because what am I gonna do say only people in my city can buy this, or you have to come to my one event. No, that's absurd. They're like-like the authors friends, and family who might not live here want to-to do that like they want to read their work, and I don't wanna like cut them off from it. So, it is just like I just need to figure out, I guess, like a system that works for me.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, and if it's too heavy they will clock you for it.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, it's like I might put like a big book in one, and then, like a little one or two or three little ones in one, but, like you

have to like, make sure it's not too heavy, because then they're like, that's a package, and I'm like it's not.

Joseph Donato: I know, I will stuff envelopes, too.

Tamara Thompson: I know and like for me, I'm like it is literally cheaper to put on to make these two separate envelopes and use more stamps.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: For this one order.

Joseph Donato: Also, Canada Post call out, they keep losing my stuff. Yeah, cause someone will--will message me. And they're like I, it's been like a month. I never got my book, and I'm like, oh, my gosh! That's terrible!

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I know, right? Like oh, anyway, so kind of going on with, like what we're actually talking about. Now, my next question is.

Joseph Donato: Yes, sorry.

Tamara Thompson: Some challenges that, like the press, has faced. And you're totally fine.

Joseph Donato: Challenges. I will say, with Block Party as awesome as it is to have like two people running it, there are obviously like that comes with its own issues, because you're two different people running the one thing a lot of compromises needed. But now that I'm doing both on my own, I guess some challenges I'm currently facing is like my own time management. Especially because I'm actively in school, and I have a job that I'm more or less working about full time. I kinda need to chill out a little bit, and I think I'm--I'm like starting to find myself like a schedule for that like if I do Block Party for one half of the year, and Pop Mag the other half of the year. I could probably manage it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: But the biggest challenge is just that, its constantly changing, like what I'm able to do. And when I'm able to do things and knowing that there are at-at certain points people depending on me like once I've accepted someone's work like I don't really wanna make them wait a year for something to come out. So, it's just.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, biggest challenge has been trying to sort that kind of time out while working with other people.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's, it's so like, I say, like, Whispering Wick isn't part time we're extra time. So, like, even though we're on quote unquote hiatus. We're still like doing a lot of stuff behind the scenes, because it's literally like, oh, Grace had extra time. I had extra time, you know what I mean, because, like, that's literally just how it works it. Right?

Joseph Donato: Truly, truly like half of the work that I do for both the magazines is like I don't know, like between eleven and twelve in the evening and like I'm just kind of oh, you know what I have I have a second. Let me work on this. It's not something-

Tamara Thompson: Literally.

Joseph Donato: I can afford to like, sit down, be okay. Today's my Block Party day I wish but I'm not-not quite there.

Tamara Thompson: I know right? And it's like, and especially if you have like a deadline coming up. And you're just like I have a deadline, because most of the time you don't. But sometimes you're like, no, I like have a deadline like this market is happening.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: This person like needs a like, needs this thing out and printed so that they can apply for this grant, you know.

Joseph Donato: Yes.

Tamara Thompson: Just like oh, I have so much to do. But I also like need to do all of this other shit, you know, like goddamn.

Joseph Donato: Also, so funny when, like for me, when I set my own deadline, I'm like, hey, it's gonna come out July 15<sup>th</sup> and then I'm like oh my god why did I say that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I know. Never say it allowed. Say to yourself, and like, give yourself like at least another month of wiggle room, because, like.

Joseph Donato: Yes!

Tamara Thompson: Shit will just happen.

Joseph Donato: That is really good advice. I wish I knew that earlier cause here, and being like, okay this is the exact day it's gonna come out this day. You're gonna get your feedback from, and I'm always scrambling last minute like trust and believe. If you receive something I just finished doing it.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

(Technical issues occurred)

Joseph Donato: My gosh! Well, I've like ever since I was a kid I wanted to be a writer I used to like, but when I was like in grade school, I would read a lot like a lot. I didn't really have friends hehe, so I did a lot of reading, and I just I, it was always kind of like, yeah, I'll be a writer one day like, what else am I gonna do like, of course I will. And I write a lot of, you know the little, short stories here and there, and always try to start a book never finish a book. Not that much has changed in that respect. And then, during high school, or, I would say, like kind of end of elementary like three years of high school, it kind of stopped reading stopped writing. I guess I started to think more like, okay, but like, what's my job gonna be like, what's my life gonna be? I have to start thinking realistically, here, people and then it was grade twelve I was in a math class. It was before school started. It was like two days before school started, I had a math class that I was going to be in, and something clicked. I was like, oh, no, like I actually am really bad at math like why am I? No, who do I think I am? Why am I doing this? And the only other class that I could take at that time was a writer's craft class and I one hundred percent credit that class- (Technical issues occurred). Anyways high school that was so long ago. But I one hundred percent credit that class is like reigniting my passion for it, and also kind of showing me that it was possible as a career cause he was like he, he was like a songwriter professionally, but aside from being a teacher. So, I'm like, oh, my God! Like people can actually make money from this that is so cool. And then I-I weirdly. It took me another year to fully get on board with that cause I-I went to UTSC originally for psychology like that was my whole first year and then I switch my major. Then I did when I do mental health studies. And I did anthropology. And then I finally settled on creative writing. So, it took me a while to get there. But then, when I did I it, yeah, I you really can tell when you're like, oh, no, this is like right. This is the right thing to do. I should not have been in psychology.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I remember like looking for courses and then landing at Sheridan and being like, yeah, I would not have been happy in a regular English course cause I saw my friends doing it, and I'm like, no like some of that's fine, but I.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: To take old English like I would have been pulling my hair out.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, it is so different. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I wanted to do game writing. And I'm just like this.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Is so much fun. I'm doing such cool things right and like.

Joseph Donato: Hell yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I loved my program that I was in, and I'm so lucky that, like the year I took my year off to like figure shit out.

Joseph Donato: Hmm.

Tamara Thompson: The program was literally just starting. So, like we were brand-brand new first group of people to go through. So, like we were really the guinea pigs. But like I got similar teachers like I got like Paul Vermeersch and Glen Clifton and Leslie Wu, and like Owen Percy, like multiple times.

Joseph Donato: Wow.

Tamara Thompson: Which didn't happen much like for the younger students, but because the courses had never been taught before.

Joseph Donato: Right.

Tamara Thompson: People who had like started the program had to teach them first, for the most part, is like my understanding of it, anyway. So, like I got to learn a lot from these people, and like I'm like, I would have been probably so unhappy, especially in like a group of like three hundred people. I was in a class of like twenty something, and at the end.

Joseph Donato: Yup.

Tamara Thompson: I think at the end, we were like twenty-eight people.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like, we started out at 75.

Joseph Donato: Right.

Tamara Thompson: In between. Then from a strike to a pandemic like a lot happened, you know, to OSAP getting cut.

Joseph Donato: Oh, my gosh! That is so funny! I was kind of in a similar boat, where, like my first year, was also the first year of-of the program being like a-a major program like a major degree. So, it was like in its infancy still, and people were figuring things out. It was also in like during the height of-of the pandemic. So, we were also all from home.

Tamara Thompson: Yup.

Joseph Donato: It's just so odd like, definitely the experience that the kids are having now in that program is vastly different than mine. And I'm like so happy for them. I'm so happy for them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, me, too. I think they don't necessarily get like the same experience, because they have a lot more teachers teaching the program now. Because, you know, when we were in first year, we didn't need to have someone teaching year fours because year fours didn't exist.

Joseph Donato: Didn't exist. Yeah, I don't like that.

Tamara Thompson: So, it lay it was literally one of those things where, like, I got to like, get a lot more time with very specific teachers. And I'm like really grateful for that.

Joseph Donato: Hmm yeah same.

(Technical issues occurred)

Tamara Thompson: So, like you've obviously like done chapbook with your own work. So why did you decide to like publish your work as a chapbook because it is like a decision to choose like chapbook as the form. So, I'm curious about like how that decision came about.

Joseph Donato: Well, I mentioned earlier like it started as a chapbook, because it was for a class where, like that was the project it was to make a chapbook. But I definitely thought a lot about, oh, like, do I wanna turn this into a full length like is that something that I actually want, and ultimately, like my decision had to do with I just don't have the material to make a full length like collection in this particular theme. And with this-kind of imagery, like, I just feel like it would be. It's too specific that it would get really repetitive. And then just stop not be as effective as a full-length novel. Which is another reason why I'm so pro chapbook. Because I'm like if you have this like weird niche interest that you wanna explore. But you know you don't have it in you to do like seventy, a one hundred pages of it or-or even more. If you're doing fiction then the chapbook is like the perfect opportunity to try things out and to get to look at something from a whole bunch of different angles without feeling like you have to meet some kind of a-a word limit, you know, or a page count.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like, I know you're super busy, and it's not like you don't have like a thousand other things happening all the time. But like, would you ever think about like making a chapbook again with some of your work? Would that be something you'd be interested in doing.

Joseph Donato: Oh, absolutely like right now I'm working on I have like a like a fiction novel that I've been working on for many years that I'm trying to prioritize like, get out of my head. It's pissing me off like I need it to be done. So that's like my number one right now and then I have an idea for like a, like a poetry collection like a full length, one that I think could be fun. But because I-I love interests I have so many interests like I-I just like, and most of it is not to the point where, like I could write about it forever like they are very short I guess windows into my-my mind. So, I would love to do more chapbooks, love it, and I'd love to be like cause the chapbook I published, I did it with above/ground press, with Rob McLennan, who is so fantastic, and like the King of publishing a chapbook, chapbook publishing but he's in Ottawa, so I didn't actually get to be part of any like events or anything locally

that was done there. Cause I'm like here in Pickering in the GTA. So, I think I would like to look more local next time, just to see like what-what different opportunities that brings. I guess I just yeah, like, I wanna work with different people, try different things, see other processes, cause obviously like I know his. And then I know mine. That's just two people and especially to be in this kind of business like as a publisher. I think it'd be so valuable for me to get to-to do it with other publishers like other people and just see what's up over there.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, no, I-I totally get that. So, I have to also ask this other question, and you can take it wherever you feel comfortable sharing. What are some challenges that you faced as an author.

Joseph Donato: Ooo... I will say the number one challenge for me is time management because I love to start things. But I'm not so great at keeping them up. Because now I just have like a million things started that I kinda need to figure out. Let's prioritize. Let's-let's figure out what's important here and since the whole time I've been writing I've also been in school and working.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Joseph Donato: Sometimes like multiple jobs at the same time. It's never, it's never really been allowed to be like the number one priority ever.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: And I think, like this summer is kind of the first time where it's at least the second priority cause I'm not in any summer classes, and even though I'm working again pretty much full time hours, like I kind of feel like now is my chance to really get to work on-on my writing without school, where I'll still be writing. But it's again writing for school is so different than writing on your own. So, I'm already mentally preparing for that in September. That's definitely the biggest challenge, though. And then other challenges I guess, I definitely have fallen victim to thinking that what I write is not important because I write horror, or because I write even like comedy, or like queer stuff. I just I-I can't shake the sense that people don't care, and that I'm not writing anything of meaning. So, I've really spent a lot of time trying to get myself out of that mindset, especially because I really do believe that writing horror and comedy, and then like writing queer stories and queer poetry like very important, so I don't know why in my head when I do it. It's not important you know what I mean, so.

Tamara Thompson: No like, I totally understand that mindset of, like everybody else, is doing similar things around you, and you think it's awesome. But when it comes to your own work, you really struggle to be positive about it.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, which is crazy. I mean, I have, like again, been in the academic world for my entire writing career. So that's definitely influenced it, because again most of those topics are not the most celebrated in that space, depending on who you're working with or who you're surrounded by. You don't get to choose that all the time. But as

I'm as I'm heading into my masters, I'm really trying to appreciate what I'm, what I write, even if I don't maybe love the story I'm writing. I'm like, oh, this story sucks. But still, like the thought behind, it is important. And I should just try something else.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think-

Joseph Donato: But it's a process.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it one hundred is. And like, I think, like going back to what I said like earlier, this is like, what is quote unquote good anyway? What's good is when you're having fun. Good art is things that are made by people who care about what they're doing right.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And like, I keep trying to tell my students that it's like, well, first off, it will never be good if you're not having a good time, and you're going to be rejected a lot. And that's okay. Because the person who actually gets published isn't the quote unquote good author who only submitted three times. The author that gets published is the author who keeps trying and who perseveres, and who tries to listen to what people are saying.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Still believes enough in their work to put it out there, right? And that's really hard, and that is not an easy task. And I tell my students this, but I'm like there are so many other factors into why, a publisher will say no other than your work was bad.

Joseph Donato: Yes.

Tamara Thompson: Right, and it's so hard to not be difficult on yourself in those moments, because it feels so personal. And I think the other thing, too like, especially like my partner does this to me all the goddamn time he's like, well, you're like, you're my partner. Of course you're gonna like what I did, and I'm like when I had my ex's bring things to me. I told them if it was garbage.

Joseph Donato: Right.

Tamara Thompson: I'm not gonna let you go out there and like embarrass yourself if I like it, I'm gonna let you know. If I don't like it, I don't like it.

Joseph Donato: I'm not letting you embarrass me.

Tamara Thompson: Well, it's not even-just it's literally like, why would I lie like. That's so much effort.

Joseph Donato: Like, what does that bring you?

Tamara Thompson: Nothing.



Joseph Donato: Yup.

Tamara Thompson: Why would and like, don't get me wrong, like sometimes, like you want the specifics and like I'll give the specifics like, I sometimes don't believe my partner when he says he likes something I'm like, well, give me the specifics. What do you actually like about that? But that's like the editor in me that's just like you can't just say that you like this thing.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: He's not into poetry. So, whenever I show him a poem. And I'm like, why is like, I don't know. Cause poetry's scary, but I know I like this, and I'm like.

Joseph Donato: Real, Real.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you but.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, like, okay, awesome.

Tamara Thompson: And my poetry is very much different from what's like. I don't like doing the stanza thing or line breaks the way that like classic poetry. So, a lot of people are just like this is like pros. And I'm like, no.

Joseph Donato: I love when people are like wait so how is this a poem, that is so funny. I love what people say that. It cracks me up.

Tamara Thompson: Well, like, one of the things I don't understand is this like, people will be like, yeah, but this is like a long sentence. And I'm like, yeah, that's the point. And they're like, but that's not a line break you just ended the line there. And I'm like, no, that was a decision, Barry.

Joseph Donato: Many rules, just so many rules. I don't really know who invented them and who's like enforcing them. But who cares like you can do it your way, like, it's okay. It's okay.

Tamara Thompson: I know, and that's like one of the things I try and instill in my students so much when it comes to poetry. I'm like, fuck the pentameter.

Joseph Donato: Yes. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Is like, let's have some fun like I don't care about your muse or anything. Let's get weird with it.

(Technical issues occurred)

Tamara Thompson: -like, what has this kind of like smaller publishing like taught you, because, like, I feel like doing this and like being a part of this teaches a lot of people different things.

Joseph Donato: Oh, wow! One thing definitely, the value of trying new things and like learning different skills, even if you end up hating them. Like, like, like I said, like, I hate the whole shipping process. But like I'm so grateful that I was able to like learn the ins and outs of that and what that actually involves. I just feel like it makes me more well-rounded person in this field, and just as a person in general to learn different things. And it's also really taught me how important this might just sound so like cheese. But like how important community is because I-I like when I do my classes at the library I can tell like, oh, this person, this is probably like the-the thing that they're doing outside of the house this week like this is, this is their community. Because, as writers like, it's an often a very solitary thing like you don't usually do it in big groups of people like, even if you workshop, it's not usually a regular basis thing. So, to be able to I guess, bring people together with the magazines especially, but even with like the chapbook publishing, and the events like to be able to give writers a reason to come out and celebrate and talk about the things they enjoy with people who share those same interests. Is so like that is like the best thing that I could spend my time doing and to be able to be a part of these spaces as well, and to like, go to other publisher events, and to just check what they've published, and see all the people that they're spotlighting and just get a like a once again I feel like it just makes me a much more well rounded a writer, a publisher, a person to be able to know so many different people and so many different experiences.

Tamara Thompson: I think, like definitely writing can be a very solitary thing. But one of the things I always try and instill in my students is that if you make it extremely solitary, you will be missing out on so many good things.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: There are so many interesting fun things like, and don't get me wrong there's a lot of introverts in this community. So, you have to go out and find them, but when you talk to them, they love talking to you like.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like every person I have talked to has been like such a sweetheart in this community, and it's just like I've just been greeted with so much positivity. And it's like, don't be scared of these people. You're dealing with other introverts who like the similar things that you like, go out and talk to these people, and you'll learn so much about yourself, about your writing about this community and like, hey, maybe you'll have fun.

Joseph Donato: Yes, yes, like, whenever I run like, I run an open mic at the library, and people are always like, oh, like I'm-I'm nervous to read. And I'm like, why, it's just us like it's a bunch of losers like no offense like we're all just a bunch of losers. Let's be real, in the best way possible. And I think that's so what-what makes this community so special is that it's made up mostly of people who have a really hard time

fitting in elsewhere, but we all fit in so well here. It's just so hard for us to like to recognize that and actually use that to our advantage.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, this-so, my next question actually plays into some of the things that like we've been talking about. But like, why are chapbooks important to you. You've kind of answered it, but I still want to like ask it a little more directly.

Joseph Donato: Exactly. Chapbooks are important to me for several reasons. One, the just their accessibility as a publisher and as a writer like they're just so much simpler and cheaper and faster to produce. It just gets more writing out there in the world and into people's hands. If that's something that you're really looking to do. Also, the fact that you can focus on such a specific thing and not feel the pressure to beat it to death in like a full collection or a novel just like I-I just kind of call them like snapshots into like a person they're into like their writing. I think they're a great, a great way to get involved in the community because of launches and readings, even just to like to go to an open mic and have something to read from like a book. It just, it-it, it's like a little, almost like a like a little ticket to get into these spaces. Not that it's official or anything, but it just, it's like it helps. If you're looking for like an in. And you feel we are just kind of showing up places. It makes it a lot easier to show up with the book that the whole event is centered around. You know what I mean.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: You can meet people who not only can start to get a really good taste of your writing, but a good taste of you without them having to sit down for like days and read an entire novel. I think they're like again. I always tell people like you're not gonna be come rich. You're not gonna become a household name from a chapbook, cause it's just so niche. But because it's so niche like that's where all of its magic comes from, and that's you should look at those kinds of positives first. And what a great way to step into the publishing world again, because it's so quick and like compared to a novel for example. You can, you can kind of get them out, maybe more regularly, or maybe before you release like a novel, almost as like a precursor to the world of publishing and what that actually entails.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, like, so much of Whispering Wick is like, is just preparing people for publishing and getting a taste of what that is like.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Demystifying things. And it's just like, let's have some fun. But like, let's get into this, you know.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, let's talk about it.

Tamara Thompson: I feel like there's so much mystery with like traditional publishing. And it's like there doesn't need to be, you know, and like again, so much of publishing is like, really fun. :Lets have some fun.

Joseph Donato: Let's not lose that like, let's-let's highlight it. If anything.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Totally, agree.

Tamara Thompson: So, getting into, like some of the bigger questions here. But our chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why are why not.

Joseph Donato: Definitely. Yes, and I'm gonna say, mostly because of the accessibility factor. The way that as long as I have like access to my local library, and like ten dollars, I can print a couple of copies of a chapbook and be able to distribute them and have what I want to say, or what I feel like, is necessary to say. I can have that heard and read. Like traditional publishing, as amazing as it is like, you can't obviously publish everybody that's impossible. So, this gives people, especially if they want to self-publish, especially with self-publishing it gives you the ability to do it for cheap locally, quickly and like what's to hate about that. So even if you live it like, I'm very lucky that I get to live like right next to Toronto, which is like such a major publishing landscape. But even if, like someone lives, let's say, out in the prairies like you can still make your own chapbook, or you can get into publishing chapbooks. I mean, obviously it takes a little bit of time and definitely a little bit of money but it's much easier to get into them again like traditional publishing.

Tamara Thompson: One hundred percent. So, do you think this kind of like publishing reflects Canada itself in some way?

Joseph Donato: Yeah, definitely. I mean, I've read a lot of chapbooks that are very Canadian specific. And I think because there's like chapbooks are so niche again, and like usually the only people writing chapbooks are people who also write them, or who are at least very closely connected to the community. It's, it's easier to write something very like local, very relevant. And have everybody who reads it be right on board with you. Like I've read like, I mean this isn't maybe on the Federal scale. But like I've read a lot of chapbooks that are very city, based like a lot that are Scarborough centered.

Tamara Thompson: Right, yeah.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, this couldn't exist somewhere else. Like, it's fantastic that this kind of gives us the opportunity to-to-to look instead worldwide, but to be able to look such a small place that affects people so greatly. But then there have also been several topics that are very like Canadian center that wouldn't make sense outside of the country like it would be really hard for someone who has no relation to Canada to understand, especially a lot of indigenous writers from here.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: It's like wonderful that we have these spaces that are so local that we can share this work with people who truly will appreciate it because again, when you have some like more niche topics, especially when it comes to place, it's harder to get it published somewhere that is looking to-to send it internationally because they're not gonna see that, I guess the value in that everywhere.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, sorry. I don't know if that would. That was like a long, winded answer.

Tamara Thompson: No, it's okay. It's like that answer, like, sorry. That question is like a favorite of mine, because you can take it in so many different directions.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And I think like, it's like, I have a couple of questions in here that I really like asking people, because I just like the amount of interpretation and perspective I get from it because I totally agree there's such specific lenses that certain things like, if you like I've seen like a chapbook about like Zellers, you know, and that's fantastic.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And like an American, wouldn't understand that you know they wouldn't understand the core nostalgia of what a Zeller's means from like the bargain. Then, like DVDs, to the diner, with like a really good like grilled cheese, you know, right.

Joseph Donato: It just gives you so much more opportunity to play with things that are relevant to a very small population. Even if the small population is like a country, like compared to the world. It is very small, like, it is like only certain people will get this if you know, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's the other thing, too, is just because we're big, doesn't mean we have a lot of people, you know.

Joseph Donato: Big and have like, even though we have thirty million people, a very, very few of them are actually reading chapbooks. Let's also remember that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And like the other thing, too, is we're so spread out like.

Joseph Donato: Yup.

Tamara Thompson: Our experiences in Ontario are completely different from the experiences of people in Quebec, or like Nunavut or BC. Or on East coast, like, we each have our own little cultures of places. And that's why, when people like one of the things I think is so funny is when people try and like, talk about our politics, and I'm like you don't understand

how far apart we all are from each other, and how different a lot of our like thinking is depending on where we're from, because we are so far apart. And people are like, oh, yeah, you really, you're really close to Manitoba. And I'm like, oh, you mean, like, the thing that's basically like five states away for you, is like-

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: The next province over for me. Right? It's so much easier for me to go to Detroit than it is for me to go to like Fort Severin.

Joseph Donato: Or even like Quebec.

Tamara Thompson: You know.

Joseph Donato: Like Quebec like we were saying, it's like five hours away, something like it's, it's like, even though we're so like, obviously, we have a lot of things that all Canadians can relate to. But like you said, like, it's so specific, even just town to town. And chapbooks give you the opportunity to-to look at stuff better on that kind of scale.

Tamara Thompson: So, I'm gonna ask this next question because we were talking a little bit about it before. But it's gonna be like more specific. But does, what does this type of like smaller publishing offer that, like traditional publishing can't, and like vice versa.

Joseph Donato: Person that comes to mind is control for the-the writers like they can actually have a say in the production of their book, and like the actual end product or isn't traditional publishing or mostly left in the dark until the very end. And then they're like this, is it, I hope you like it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Like we did Block Party we actually asked people like, what kind of do you want to see on the cover again understanding that we can only do so much, which I guess is like-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: A draw back of-of small-scale publishing. But then all these people were kind of like, oh, I think like it'd be really cool to have this on the cover, like this kind of design idea.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Joseph Donato: Which we were able to incorporate. As long as you know, it was like possible.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Which just makes it, I think it's so exciting to get to be part of that process, because when you're a writer, I think for most of us, if we see the end product the entire time we're working on it. So, to

actually get to continue contributing to that end product even when it's more or less out of your hands, like it's like you're now working with other people. It's so exciting and gratifying when-when it finally is launched, the world. And you can say yeah, like I got to do, I got to decide like the font, how sick.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, or just even like be shown like the cover of the book that, like the designer had done. Or maybe it's your artwork that's the cover.

Joseph Donato: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: Or like you were shown like, hey, we're folding your pages today, do you? Wanna like come over and like full pages with us, you know.

Joseph Donato: Oh, my God!

Tamara Thompson: Or.

Joseph Donato: Like, so fun you can.

Tamara Thompson: Be on call when I'm like printing them out and just like out, while I like fold things because it's pandemic, and I'm not even allowed to leave my own goddamn house. But, like, let's do this like quote unquote together, you know.

Joseph Donato: So nice. And then also like, if there are any events, you can come to them and like you're not working with a spokesperson for the company. You're working, probably with the person who actually like printed and assembled your work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, exactly right. And I think that's one of the things as why I like going to like reading events and stuff like that for, like smaller books, whether that be small press and stuff, you're actually meeting the people who either bound the books, who helped in like the making of the book and not just like the author. Your kind of meeting like the whole team that like participated, and getting this art thing made.

Joseph Donato: Yeah. And then what wonderful like conversations that come from that. Just so, it's just such-such a tight, knit community. I love it.

Tamara Thompson: I, one hundred percent agree. So, we're getting to the last couple of questions here. So, I have to ask the for most people fairly sad? Question, but why do you think most small presses and micro presses like close up shop and like, how are you still keeping this thing going like, why do you still do it? You know.

Joseph Donato: Definitely money, it like renting the-the more you produce. Obviously, the more you need to pay, and event spaces cost money, food for events cost money. Paper costs money, shipping cost like. Unfortunately, money does rule the world, and.

Tamara Thompson: Yup.

Joseph Donato: You get to a size that you just can't support anymore. You either need to change the size or stop before you go too far. I think the only reason that I've been able to survive is one, because I work at a library, and I have those resources like at my fingertips all the time. It's been a lot easier for me to get things done. And also, because when I realize that I something is not sustainable anymore. I'm usually very good at like reworking things completely, even if it might disappoint some people. But I-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Put-put myself first when it comes to like oh, maybe I shouldn't do five issues a year and also do chapbooks, and then also do events while I'm working while I'm in school like that. That is a crazy person thinking so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Yeaah.

Tamara Thompson: Especially like if you're going into your master's. Like I turned around and I was like, five full novels a week. Yes, I have time to do things, and I'm not dying. Like oh, boy.

Joseph Donato: Let me read six hundred submissions now, awesome. Yeah, no like that is absurd.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, no. Literally.

Joseph Donato: And like on top of that, I'm supposed to like talk to people and like, leave my home like, are you kidding me? That is absurd. So just.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Like you really have to be ready to change at the drop of a hat, and I'm lucky because neither Block Party or Horror pop Mag, are so big and giant that I have like people depending on me, or like really used to a schedule, I think, from like day one even with Block Party Isla and I were both very transparent like we are just two like twenty-year-olds, or whatever we were at the time like. Don't expect too much. You know what I mean. Like we're doing what we can. So, let's all just be on board with that. And I think.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, let's realistic expectations here.

Joseph Donato: Yes, and people have been very, very supportive of that, like the grace that people have given us, especially when we're like hi, we really underestimate it how much work this is gonna be. We might need an extra two weeks on this. We've never really had an issue with people like. That's crazy you said you said one thing now, why are you changing your mind so.



Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: That's another big reason why we still exist. The support of people like I would not be able to do events if people didn't come like when we did the Blocktoberfest last year eighty people came like, over eighty people came which I was not expecting at all. But it's because of that, that I'm probably gonna be able to do it again this year. So cannot thank everybody enough like everyone to even if you're not reading the issues cause you just don't care about literature. And you just like are supporting maybe your friend, who is published in the magazine, or you're my friend, and you're supporting me like it is so much more meaningful than you might think. Truly.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, last couple of questions here. This is more just like giving, like, some space for stuff. But like, what's something that you wish. Maybe the public knew about like Canadian publishing.

Joseph Donato: Oh, okay. I would say as a whole that there's like less money in it.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, yeah.

Joseph Donato: And you can't necessarily expect the things that you see American authors doing, or American writers or publishers.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: It just, I like, hey, we should all know this by now but if you even like, compare Canadian TV to American TV, like, it's clear that they have significantly more funding towards that.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Joseph Donato: Some, you know. It's just something you gotta keep in mind like and it trickles down to like the chapbook level, too.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: It's just, it's harder to do things sometimes. And just the fact that there's less people here which means that there are less writers and artists. It's also strangely like a smaller community, even though it's still probably millions of people. But like you said scattered throughout the country.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: With all, with very different politics and very different experiences, that it's, it's a little bit harder, I think to form community, especially if you're not like me, where I live, right basically, at the heart of it like right next to Toronto. Even I live next to Toronto, and it's still like such a pain in the ass to have to drive downtown like it still takes me an hour and a half which is absurd. That's

crazy, that is crazy like I can't even imagine living like even just Northern Ontario, and.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, my God! Like I-I try and explain to people like how big the Hudson Bay lowlands are in like Ontario, and, like some people are like, well, it's not that big, and I'm like, well, you can put two Texas's in the Hudson Bay lowlands. So, considering Texas is considered to be big and everything that's pretty fucking small.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like, and we're not even the biggest province you know what I mean like. We're nowhere near as big as Quebec, or like Nunavut, or even someplace like-like even like Manitoba. And stuff like that I'm just like aaa.

Joseph Donato: It's absurd. It's absurd, and it we're not like America, where we have, like several different publishing centers. You know what I mean like, there's a couple of country or countries, a couple of states that are like for publishing and writing is really big, whereas in Canada, like it's like, there might be obviously lots of different places all over the country, but not to that scale. Even TO.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, like.

Joseph Donato: So, it not to the scale of New York, or LA, or something.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And I think the other thing, too, is-is like, just as a general rule. I tell my students, if you want to make money don't go into publishing because publishing is so up and down, it is so hard to make money, and like, if you want to be rich and famous, pick a different career path like.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You know what I mean and like people are like but I see people getting so much money like JK Rowling. I'm like, girl. She's got like movie rights, merchandising. How much do you think she actually makes off of the books? Her money comes from the merchandise, and like the fucking like universal land. That's where that money comes from, like her money is not from the fact that you bought Harry Potter when you were twelve. You know.

Joseph Donato: Which is so disheartening. But it's also like that's.

Tamara Thompson: The truth.

Joseph Donato: Just-just the deal like that's just unfortunately, how it is.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, like so many people who are successful authors are successful because they're basically made a franchise that other money-making mediums.

Joseph Donato: Oh, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like go off on, right.

Joseph Donato: Yeah. Well, even singers like they're not making their money from streams. They're making it from like concerts and merch. At the end of the day people just don't respect art enough like it is not valued enough to be like a feasible full-time job for just anybody like it's so much more difficult to really break into. But as a long, I think as long as you're able to support yourself some other way, and you just really enjoy the process. Then it's perfect.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly like. I don't expect my writing to like buy me a house or something. I expect my writing to get into people's hands. That's what big goal I'm dreaming big here. I want-

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: People to read.

Joseph Donato: Hell, yeah. Hell, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You know. So, it's like-

Joseph Donato: Have realistic goals.

Tamara Thompson: It is. And like even sometimes, I'm just like, hmm, my fantasy, you know, in a hundred years maybe.

Joseph Donato: Yeah, of course.

Tamara Thompson: But like I think the other thing, too, is-is like, I don't write so that people will read. I write because I like writing, and I hope people will read. You know, I don't write for an audience.

Joseph Donato: That's a good way of saying it.

Tamara Thompson: I write for myself, and people who are attracted to that kind of material will find me, you know.

Joseph Donato: That's perfect.

Tamara Thompson: So.

Joseph Donato: Perfect.

Tamara Thompson: This next question is more about just like making space for like cool shit, you've seen. It's what's something important about D.I.Y. press history. Chapbooks or zines that you wish. Maybe the public knew about or that people knew about. So, this can actually be history, or it can be like, you saw this really limited chat book, and it was really cool, and you want people to know about it right?

Joseph Donato: Oh!

Tamara Thompson: So, like this is just like making space for like the cool shit, because, like, I don't learn about half of the cool things that happen in community because, like, they've just like they're so ephemeral. So, like, I love this question because people just tell me the coolest things.

Joseph Donato: Gosh! Oh, you've put me on the spot!

Tamara Thompson: I know.

Joseph Donato: Okay, I will say, I really love when people take the opportunity of a chapbook to just get like crazy with it and to do something so weird and just something I just couldn't really exist again in like a long form thing. Cause it-it because of I don't know form, or because of content. One of my favorite chapbooks ever is it's just called Chapbook. It's by one of my friends, Victoria-.

Tamara Thompson: This is the one about no name!

Joseph Donato: Yeah, it's like, it's like a-

Tamara Thompson: Yes!

Joesph Donata: That is so funny like. Hello, I think that idea is so smart. But like, could you do it as a full collection, I guess, but it's kind of perfect as what it is, as like a chapbook like a little-little like oh, my gosh! Like! Imagine this! Look at this! That's so fun! And now it exists, and it is so. I love it. I read it all the time.

Tamara Thompson: I, so I interviewed her like a while ago, and I was just like that is so fun. I love that-I love her like humor, and like she's got a book coming out soon, and I'm so excited for her it sounds so good. But yeah, like I love that kind of in like you could technically make it longer. But would that hinder the work? Especially for something that is so tight. You know what I mean? That's just like so perfect the way it is.

Joseph Donato: And I will also say, like who is it? I think it's Blasted Tree. I think they're. Who's that? Kyle Flemmer?

Tamara Thompson: Yes, I'm talking to him later this week.

Joseph Donato: Like just the most fun packaging like the covers like this is I have a book here called *Rat Queen* by Tyler Hayden, and it's like the cover looks like rat fur, and there's a tail. But-

Tamara Thompson: That's amazing.

Joseph Donato: It is so sick like yes, I do judge the book by the cover, and yes, I bought this book with every I just looked up the cover. And I was like, yes, like, hello! Like, how fun again! Like what? The it's just. It's a thing that I just you don't see happening in traditional publishing, and like, like novel publishing, or even full and poetry

collections. But because it's so tiny and so easy to make and cheap to make. You're able to-to explore those like weird little things.

Tamara Thompson: That's so fun. You're gonna have to send me a picture of that.

Joseph Donato: Alright. Well, thank you.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you.

Joseph Donato: So sick.

Tamara Thompson: Good sense fantastic, but I have like a per-like personal softness, for, like rodents and rats and stuff like.

Joseph Donato: Right.

Tamara Thompson: Okay.

Joseph Donato: I'm right there.

Tamara Thompson: Very last question. What's something important about your history that you wish people knew about.

Joseph Donato: Oh! Oh my gosh.

Tamara Thompson: The most difficult question of them all. You must talk about yourself.

Joseph Donato: Oh, god I guess when it comes to horror, I guess one of my big draws to work specifically to like monster horror definitely has to do with-with queerness. I mean, it gets set all the time that they people love monsters and love villains. I think it's just because it's like, for me, at least, like this is this thing that doesn't exist in like regular society, like it's widely hated, like, nasty, gross, like, people don't want it around. And I'm like, oh, my, gosh, vibe, like, okay, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: No right.

Joseph Donato: Yes, it just makes so much sense to me. I've always been able to see myself in, in monsters, and it's just like horrors is where I felt the most comfortable I guess always. And I think that's really important to know when considering horror like its place in the wider literary world like it is so important for a lot of people, and to dog on it, and to devalue it. It's to me it's like devaluing the people that are so into it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Very rarely do you find a horror event. It's like, Oh, yeah, okay, yeah. I can say horror people, they're usually like really hell into it. And it's just it just goes to show how impactful this genre is. And then again, especially for me, like, I don't know, like to be able

to, to know that everybody is scared of something is just such a unifying thing to think.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: Because maybe not everybody, like if we're thinking romance and not everybody cares about-about that kind of like-like romantic love. Maybe not everybody cares about sci-fi futures, but I feel like horror is one of those very few things that like yes, everyone's scared of something. Like, even if you don't like to read horror like you can kind of relate the themes in some way, and you even had mentioned, like everybody borrows from horror because of the campiness and just the drama. It's exciting. It's fun. And it's just a way to present these themes that we're so scared to talk about in a very fun and dramatic way that almost kind of distracts us from the truth. But allow space to talk about it. I mean, like when I look at like Barbarian that just came out or get-like all of the Jordan Peel movies where they're like, really like making this really significant effort to legitimize horror in such a like on a grand scale. And to do all these things like to-to tackle these-these complex themes and issues in a-a fun and exciting way. Like it's hard for me to understand that people don't see the value in that. So that's.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: I guess to answer, the question is like just how important port is to the people who really like it, just to consider that when, when thinking about its space, the space that it takes up.

Tamara Thompson: As a reader, I think the moment where I felt the most seen with, like my like body dysmorphia was when Frankenstein looks in the water for the first time, and how that's described, and how many painters and artists have like drawn that scene. And I'm like.

Joseph Donato: Oh, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, my god, right and like that's a really old piece of like sci-fi fit-like fiction horror, right like it's like the first, like monster creating kind of thing.

Joseph Donato: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And so, for me, I like having that like out of body, like realization of what you look like and who you think you are in your brain and like having it being so well described for something that old and for having so many artists interpret that moment. It's just like it hits like a truck every time, and I'm like, Oh, my god!

Joseph Donato: Yes, like horror does this thing where they turn the character that's supposed to be like the freak, and like the scary thing, and they kind of give it complexity, like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: A lot of the times we're even like, oh, that actually kind of makes sense I don't know like maybe we should chill. Like again with Barbarian or like, that's an example of a film where, like the scary monster you actually are supposed to like kind of feel bad for at the end, like you're supposed to humanize with-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joseph Donato: This terrifying creature almost. And I think that's so special and so important and just shouldn't be overlooked, especially in academic spaces and like literary spaces like that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I one hundred percent agree. So do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording.

Joseph Donato: No, just that this was so fun and wonderful. And I thank you so much for like doing this. That's such like important research.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you, and I'm so glad that you agreed. I've had a really good time talking.

Joseph Donato: Same. Thank you so much.

James Dunnigan

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is June 27<sup>th</sup>, the time is 1:07 pm. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant could drop out a week after this interview. This interview is for small press and author.

James Dunnigan: I am James Dunnigan. My pronouns are he him. I am an editor at Cactus Press, which is based in Montreal. I am currently based in Toronto, and I'm a PHD candidate in English at the University of Toronto, as well as a poet, a writer of short stories, and so on, and so forth.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So just to get the ball rolling: how did you discover zines and chapbooks in this type of smaller publishing? Because there's little things that people make, you know, to hand out. There's Mormon Scripture that they give you on the side of the road, which is technically a pamphlet or a chapbook. But when was the moment that you, kind of, realized that this was an actual thing and not just, you know?

James Dunnigan: So, when I was doing my MA at McGill, that's when I started, and along with a couple of other friends trying seriously to get published, you know? And-and one of the, like, the first obvious means to do that available to us were, you know, student magazines and journals, and so on. And you know, obviously, the first couple of years we wouldn't get into any of the big ones like *CV2*, or *Event*, or whatever. At most we would get maybe a print public (Technical issues occurred). I mean speaking especially for myself, I tended to write some fairly long form stuff, which is difficult to publish in a journal. You start digging, and eventually you find out this format called the chapbook, and there are presses that do, specialize, you know, in creating these sorts of books. And then you find out, also, like, oh, okay, so, like, these things are like handmade. And they're a print publication. But you can do, like, a twenty-five-page thing, you know, which is not something you can do in a journal. And oh, these-these books actually kind of look nice, too. They're like-they're art objects, too. And then you learn also that a lot of the poets that you respect from fifty or whatever odd years ago published in this way, and that's sort of, like, that became-that became, at least for me, the mode of predilection, you know? Because I think I've published more in chapbooks than I've published in journals at this point, you know? And that's-that sort of sums up broadly my exposure, first exposure to chapbook culture, I should say.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So, can you give me a little bit of background, if you-if you know why Cactus, like, started, like, when was the-the press is a lot of work. So do you know when that, kind of, started?

James Dunnigan: That would be-so, the details of how it started in 2006, which is when it started long before my time, that would be more of a question for Devin. But I can tell you how I got into it, which is when. Because it went on hiatus for a couple of years and I can't remember between which year and which year, but in 2018, 2019, Devon and Luc-Antoine Chiasson, so-who are two poets in Montreal; One of them, Luc-



Antoine Chiasson, one is an Acadian poet, he writes in French—they decided to found a reading series called The Accent Reading Series in Montreal. It still meets in the same place as it's met for the past five years, minus pandemic times we'll be doing that online. In those cases, and around that reading series, which grew fairly fast and was, very, you know, very diverse from the (technical issues occurred)—but, like, from the beginning, obviously more people, like, we had a poem read in German two weeks ago. This sort of reading series accrued a number of people from different horizons in Montreal. Whether we're talking about, you know, MFAs, or just students in English, or, you know, people who, like, are bike mechanics and also write poetry, they would come and congregate around this, and eventually there was a critical mass where Dev has said, you know, I think I'm going to restart Cactus press, and I, the first chapbook he published from that, you know, part, like, the resurrected Cactus press—you know, post hiatus—was my chapbook, *Wine and Fire*. And after I published with him, about a couple, like, about a year or something later—I can't remember exactly when I came on, but it must have been post pandemic—I-I joined the editorial team. And that's—that's sort of, we've been publishing chapbooks, you know, at the rate of, like, maybe nine a year, I think ever since. And that's sort of, and—and it's grown around that—that specifically. The reading series really is—is the—the was the basis, the material basis, you know, the—the platform by which we broadcast this whole thing, right? And so that's—that's—that's really what I can speak to, from my point of view, so far.

Tamara Thompson: So fantastic.

(Technical issues occurred)

James Dunnigan: All to say I mean to—to just add a little asterisk next to my comments: when you're talking about how the zine—how the press started, pardon me—that—that you should definitely refer to Dev first, because Dev has been there longer than I have, and I can only speak to how it started in terms of when I entered on the scene. Right? So that's—that's—that's—just that to get that very, you know, clear and out there 'cause I might not know everything, and I might make mistakes, especially with dates, and so on. So that's—that's something to watch out for.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, one hundred percent. And again, a lot of the stuff isn't written down. So, the idea is more just to get a bit of the history down, and it doesn't have to be perfect, especially since you're an editor there, and you joined later. But even knowing when you joined and getting some of that knowledge is still, it's still important to me.

James Dunnigan: Sure, absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: But yeah, so can you talk a little bit about what kind of content the press has been publishing, like, since you've gotten on? Is it mostly poetry? Is there any, like, fiction? Can you talk a little bit about that? And like, why, you guys, maybe lean to maybe more of those kinds of stories and poets?

James Dunnigan: So, our press has published, I think, almost exclusively poetry, but it's been poetry of very different kinds over the years. We

don't really have a set house style, or any preference and you know, off the bat like, oh, well, we're, we'll we don't do this, or we don't do that. We just never got—we've never got, you know, like we've, we've never got any prose submissions at all, you know. And all of them basically were in English. So that's another thing we would, on occasion we would get. You know we—we did publish one book; Willow published a full-length book with us. That was our first attempt at that. That was in 2022, I'd like to say, but I'm not exactly sure. And but, broadly speaking, yeah—there's no—there's—we publish,—we'd like to publish a variety of things, and we'd like to publish people from Montreal. Actually, I don't think we've—I think there's only a couple of rare occasions where he published this or that person from Vancouver or Toronto but has ties to the community here. So that would be, like, a that—that we—we do occasionally. But mostly, it's Montreal, Quebec poets and—and and whatever is going on is what we're gonna publish, you know? And obviously we won't publish stuff that we don't think is good but we're also not going to like fiddle with manuscripts to the point of changing them. You know we—we like—we like to have it, oh, I've got a very strange listy poem about, like, basically about a pair of sneakers, you know, like that someone saw on a stranger, which is *Honeymoon Sneakers* which came out not too long ago. Or, oh, we wanna have, like, this oh, we've got a sequence of thirteen sonnets, you know. We'll publish those things in the, under the same, you know? You know, publishing house are through the same, through our outlet, because we don't think that they're mutually exclusive. You know we don't, we don't, we don't deal in, you know exclusivity, is what it.

Tamara Thompson: You know, yeah that's fantastic. I love hearing, and I love that you have a focus like that, like, the press has a focus on, like, Montreal, and what's going on in Montreal. Because I—Oh hmm!

James Dunnigan: It's fun!

Tamara Thompson: Sorry. It's just so exciting, and I love that.

James Dunnigan: Grassroots, you know. It's very cool.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's very cool, and also just the types of poetry. I run my own small press called Whispering Wick and I love the kind of stuff that we do in the experimentation. Like, we did one, like, recently, like, *Where Do We Go From Here* by Rachel Small, and, like, our designer did a great job, like, designing the book and everything we did, a hand carved, like, rubber stamp. So, fun! But just, like, the poems themselves, like, this, like, lady, like, Rachel, lovely person, is just from Smith Falls literally, just, like, works in, like, the local museum. But she made these really thoughtful fun poems about health and chronic illness, and like the pandemic, but not the pandemic. You know how sometimes people were writing a lot of poetry about the pandemic, and I was just sitting there, and I was, like... right, cool. Like, she really captured the imagination of me, especially while we were going through it.

(Technical issues occurred)

James Dunnigan: Yeah, well, that's cool. You know, you didn't find a job. You invented one. That's good.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: That's fun.

Tamara Thompson: A lot of the students that have come after us, have not necessarily made chapbook of presses, but they've made their own ventures. Which has been really interesting and fun to see but, like, it was one of those things where, like, I was literally, I could not leave my home. And now I'm finally able to talk to people like you, and, like, so many other people in this community and it's so exciting. I was a little nervous going into this being, like, oh, you know, and now I'm just, I've been let out of the cage, and I'm finally able to talk to everybody about this cool thing that I love so much that I literally didn't know where to look and who to talk to when I first started doing my own stuff. So, sorry I just needed to gush a little bit, because it's so, like—

James Dunnigan: No please.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

James Dunnigan: I'm in the same boat as you, absolutely. Yeah, yeah, for sure.

Tamara Thompson: Okay. So, I wanna ask a little bit about how you guys actually create the books. And I know that you might not necessarily be, like, one hundred percent, like, aware of everything that happens. But, like, what part of, like, the process do you help out with, 'cause you are the editor and stuff, right?

James Dunnigan: Yeah, I'll be reading manuscripts when they come in. I'll be editing them once we proceed with, you know, an offer for publication and we can go through it like a number of runs, too, you know. Like, as we figure out the layout, I'm not involved in any of the laying out. That's all Devin and the artwork all Devin. But Willow and I and Devin, all three of us, will sit like in the preliminary stages with this manuscript and sort of vote on it, like, decide whether or not we want to go forward with it, or, you know, like, oh, maybe this thing is too long. Well, maybe we propose, you know, like this, maybe we propose to break this down into a smaller selection and see what the author thinks. We can't publish seventy-five pages into the chapbook. But this is what initially—this is what happened, right? I mean, like, with Willow's book. When it came in, it was already a full-length collection, and we were, like, we were thinking of doing a full length, but we're like, "I don't know if we can do that right now. Maybe we start off with a chapbook and then that creates momentum and anticipation for the bigger thing at the end?" We did that, you know, but like this—this sort of decision making I'm—I'm—I'm a part of. And now, Willow, as well, you know, and then we'll—I'll be obviously proofing manuscripts as well. I'll be suggesting rewrites or edits or stuff like that to—to discern that manuscript in.

(Technical issues occurred)

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, you were talking—You were talking about the last book, and then you moved on to something else, and then it went out.

James Dunnigan: But anyway—the-so—I'm—I'm there to assist in editing, as well. I'll propose edits. We'll try to gather them up into one, you know document, you know, and so that after that, when we set the, you know to the point where we're proposing these things to the author, they don't, you know, like come out from three different sources, you know we try to tie them up, you know, summarize them. Yeah, see what happens. That's—that's about how I'm involved. Otherwise, you know when I'm in Montreal, I-I-I'll help you know, to the extent that I can with festivals, or whatever. Like, we did a festival on the Lachine canal when I was there two weeks ago and that was—I was one of the readers at the open mic. I have, you know—we were, like, basically, Willow and Dev and Jean Gui—another poet who's taking care of the Francophone side of that—they did most of the work, but as much as I can, I'll be involved in—in—in—in every stage of the process. But I guess I'm more in an editorial role now, than I'm in anything else in any other capacity, you know?

Tamara Thompson: So, you were talking a little bit about how the press makes decisions. And it seems a bit more like democratic. So, you guys vote on stuff. Is it—is that correct?

James Dunnigan: So far, yeah. I mean, now that Willow is there, like, Devin and I, the two of us, we could just basically do a consensus-based thing. But now that we have three different people with different preferences, with different, who see the press going this or that way, well, this year we're pretty much in agreement, and I think we know each other well enough that, okay, I know Willow won't like that one or this one, and so on and so forth. But most of the time when we—when we—when we agree, we, like—when we take something, we agree on taking it. That's like—that's—that's—it's democratic, but also consensual, you know, like a process. So, it's—it's hard really to tell exactly the name the process exactly, because it's different for each book and there will be different debates on the contents, or the style, or the presentation of each book, you know? Like it'll be very different from person to person, but we end up settling on something eventually, for sure.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So, you were talking a little bit about the festival and stuff like that? Do you usually—like, do most of the books get sold at, like, readings and festivals? Or do you do any stuff online?

James Dunnigan: There is an online—there are ways buy books online, or our website allows you to buy one through PayPal. And I think Devin just packages it up at home and sends it out.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, we do the same thing.

James Dunnigan: That's the standard, you know, the standard small press, like, "Hey, here you go! You bought one, I'll send it to you." So, on so forth. Thirteen bucks is usually the price. I think these days they go for thirteen bucks, the chapbooks and—but yeah, they do get sold mostly at launches and those launches also happen to coincide with the bi-monthly reading series often. So that—that'll create that, you know enough buzz,

you know, that people will show up to the reading series, but also, they might buy a couple books, too, you know, and then otherwise it's festivals and stuff like that, for sure, yeah. But mostly coming from—mostly at readings, and sometimes the author will have a couple of copies themselves, and they can buy the copies, more copies at cost and can sell them at their own events. It's—it's nothing very different from—from—from chapbook presses at large, you know? Really, it's—there's not—we're so—we're at—we're like, and we're this this close to—to selling them in back alleys, you know? Like it's—

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: Not even like there's no real message to it. It's just whenever we can, we just pop them out, you know, in the that's how it does. That's how it works, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Nice.

(Technical issues occurred)

James Dunnigan: —was fairly easy, because, you know, I've been writing for about as long as I can remember, and in different ways. Most of my life is writing, whether it's academic or not. You know, when I was a little kid, before I really knew how to write, well, I put the comic books together. Yeah, take like eight sheets of paper, pull them down the center. Staple that. Everyone's making chapbooks, essentially, you know, but, like, really rudimentary ones out of eight and a half by eleven sheets paper, you know? And—and I accumulated quite a—quite an archive, you know, with the—with all those—those little things, and but that's always been my life, really, you know. And—and—and, you know, instead of plagiarizing sci-fi, you know, I decided to, you know, like, oh, people write short stories, and they publish short story. They publish poems, too. Yeah, it was, it started off mostly prose, and I haven't abandoned that either. But poetry came out very, very, you know, sort of around the end of high school, beginning of university. That—that was sort of the awakening to that part of things. And you know we get to start to read quite a few things that change the way you want to write, you know? And when you—you get—you start reading older things, or at university, for example. My process is almost inseparable from my academic life in the sense that I knew I was gonna study, like, for—for—for—for academic purposes in English. I was going to study modernism. I knew that, you know, from the beginning. But I did—I took a detour because I took a course with a Prof called Maggie Kilgore on Virgil and Ovid and that sent me into a spiral where I was, like, well, I have to learn Latin for to read these and that whole thing like go back two thousand years and then retrace your steps back to modernism. That's kind of, like, that inevitably influenced the way I wrote, too. You know I was, like, something in history and trying to figure out how literature got to where it was in the early 20th century by going back to deeper roots even. But I would not have done that of my own volition. Someone had to point me, like, "Look, this stuff is cool." You know? And—and then I eventually was, like, I never would have thought but, my God, it is. Yeah, that's sort of how I worked.

Tamara Thompson: Everybody has their own journey with a lot of this stuff, right? And I'm a TA, and I love teaching, and it's something I definitely want to pursue further. But I love, you know, that moment that you were talking about where someone opened that door for you.

James Dunnigan: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Were able to explore it. I love doing that for my first-year creative writing students, because I'll be, like, poetry is not scary. Look at this, and they're just, like, Whoa, my cousin actually was very worried. He's trying to get into a creative writing program at Concordia or in the—I can't remember, and he was very nervous. He's like, "Well, I'm not really a poet, and we have to, like, to have a variety of things, and I need to do poetry." And I'm like, "Okay, stand here." And he's like, "Okay." And I'm like, "As a poet, I knight thee a poet. Now you're a poet. Anything you write that is poetry, is poetry." And he's, like, it's that simple. I'm, like, yeah, man, like, it's not, like, don't take it too seriously. And, like, he got, like, a little skip after, because you know, just having someone release some of that pressure off of you, because poetry is supposed to be fun and enjoyable.

James Dunnigan: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And I just love doing that for my students, because it's so exciting. Because they're excited because they're, like, "Oh, cool things." Same with graphic fiction. I teach graphic fiction and getting them to think about things that they didn't—in ways that they hadn't originally thought about it. And they're, like, wait a minute. This panel here relates to this, and this is foreshadowing this and this. And I'm like, yeah, what else? And they're, like, and this and this and this, and this relates to this. And I'm like, yeah!

James Dunnigan: Absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: I just connected with that moment because it was given to me as an undergrad when, like, I first discovered chapbooks. When I realized I could, maybe, do poetry and stuff like that. And so, I love hearing about people's, like, moments for that, because it was important to me. I love hearing other people and seeing and being a part of that process for other people.

James Dunnigan: Yeah. And sometimes, you know, there's something to be said about—you know, there's—it's—you're made by the people that you meet, really. You know? Like, there's—

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

James Dunnigan: —They're not a self-made genius, or whatever. You're always being pointed a direction that you would never expect to go by someone else, even if you—if it's by-by pure contrarianism, you know? Like there's something like that. I'm not saying that applies to me because it doesn't. But you know—you're—you're oriented by other people towards, you know, an approach or—or a method and—and an ethos all lifelong, really. And this doesn't really stop, but especially in those years, like, at the

crossroads of undergrad and grad. That becomes very, very important. If you're going to school. Other people who don't go to school have other ways of figuring that out, too, I'm sure. But, you know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, they have. We have other people and other people that they'll meet through their life that can maybe do that for them as well. It's, just, I feel, like, school just gives so many opportunities to meet people like that.

James Dunnigan: You could have a million more and millions of ways to say like, oh, that you had to, you know, finding permission to do this or that, or like, oh, you don't need that, and it's like, oh. I'm always remembering one of my friends. We were talking about—we were like in this course on-on the Romantics. I think it was my first class at McGill, and we were reading Coleridge's Kubla Khan. My friend Dominique, he's looked at me—he's, like, find a single figure of speech in here. Find a single metaphor. There's not one. There's not one of that order of-of figuration. It's all just narration. That's still a poem, you know. And that was like—that was, okay, so, you don't need all this stuff to make a poem.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

James Dunnigan: Like, it's really surprising what you can do with language not necessarily unadorned. But you don't need to have it sound a certain way or push a certain number of buttons for it to be poetic, you know? Gotta fuck around with it a little more, you know, like.

Tamara Thompson: Oh literally, and especially because poetry has evolved so much. When I try and get students to think about poetry, a lot of them think it's very strict. That there's rules and rhyme schemes. And I'm, like, that's of the old. And if you want to do that, you can, but just know that some people might think you're fucking with them a little bit. Because people don't do that much anymore unless they're very, very good at it. People will think you're being sarcastic and stuff. And they're like, "Really?" And I'm like, "Yeah."

James Dunnigan: Yeah, there's that. And there's also, like—that's a rhyming—is it fairly—it's a rhyming poetry was—you know, people two thousand years ago in Rome and Greece didn't rhyme their poems either, you know? So like it's—it's a fashion or a manner that became—that occupied a lot of space in the world of poetry in the West for a long time. But it has no—it's in no way inherent to it, you know, like that's—

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: That's an artifice, a manner that—that became popular, you know, at some point. I can't really—I don't think you could pinpoint moments where it becomes it—it waxes and wanes, you know, but like there's nothing original, or, you know, fundamental to rhyming and poetry. It's just, people like sounds that sound the same, you know, and that's like—

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: It appeals to that. But then you don't need that to write poetry, don't you?

Tamara Thompson: I feel like a lot of them feel that way, because in elementary school they dealt with a lot of rhyming poetry, and their teachers didn't understand it, so they were very strict with the rhyming aspect.

James Dunnigan: Oh, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Because a lot of children's poetry does rhyme which does make sense. You say words in a funny way, and they sound good together. A cool—you know it's—it's fun to do and to say. But I feel like so many teachers focus on it. And so, then when they get into high school, they still use those parameters, and then when they get out, I—I hate how many fourth-grade teachers have ruined poetry for so many people.

James Dunnigan: (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: To be ruined, because it was ruined for me in grade four. And I was like, "Why did we need to do this? This is so cool, and you got mad at me because they didn't rhyme my French poem well. When you gave me the word squirrel, like, I had a hard time."

James Dunnigan: Yeah. I see, I see.

Tamara Thompson: Like I was ten. Give me a break.

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: But yeah, so I'm going to move on a little bit as to why you chose to, like—you've already talked a little bit about it, but I want to ask the question a little more directly of why you chose the form of chapbook to publish your work, because it's—it's a deliberate choice.

James Dunnigan: It is a deliberate choice, and the answer is—has to do with—sometimes, you know, like the stuff that I write happens in units of, like, ten pages, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: And it's hard to pull the units apart. I mean, like I can—I'll write a short, you know, poem that you'll publish in the Fiddlehead, probably, you know. Like I got two recently into the Fiddlehead that are more along that—those lines, you know. But that's—that's an exception, because normally, what I'll do is, I'll have sequences of—of poems, you know, and—Like my first chapbook, which was, which won the Frog Hollow press chapbook Award in—in 2019, I want to say 2018 or 2019 I'm not exactly sure. Well, that was a sequence. It was called the Stained-glass Sequence, and there were five of those, and they were written in succession and building on each other, you know? So, you don't publish that kind of stuff in journals so much. You don't, you can definitely do that in a chapbook form, though, and that's—that's sort of been the way I've composed, and the way I've published as a result of just the nature



of the medium, you know, like, or the of composition. The medium followed-followed suit very conveniently. Like the-the-the form matched what the-the poetry demanded, you know? In some ways, you know?

Tamara Thompspon: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: Well, that's basically how it went.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I that's one of the things I love about chapbooks. I think it was both Jamie Kit and Emma Rhodes both said, not everything has to be a concept album, but it's fun when it is.

James Dunnigan: its very fun.

Tamara Thompson: You know, and like chapbooks have the ability to be so focused that they can really be that, like, concept album. And I loved that idea that they both brought up.

James Dunnigan: Yeah, no, for sure. And I mean, if you look at it very carefully, I mean, I think we can. I don't know how you would trace this fashion in CanLit. But Ca-long poetry is a big thing in Canada, you know, like? And concept album stuff, too, you know. Like, if we're talking about Billy the Kid, you know, or if we're talking about most of Ann Carson's books, or we're talking about like Clara du Plessis sort of things. Or if we're talking about even Hannah Green, who won the-the Governor General's award. Those are all concept albums and people are looking for those, you know, like so. And you can't do that in a-you can-you can publish bits and pieces of those things in journals. And I'm sure many of these authors, you know-especially, I know, definitely Ann Carson published in a couple of journals before she came up with these, like-where she came up with, like, *Plain Water*. Obviously, or whatever. But these are, like, these the-the chapbook is-is probably, like, the logical step toward that kind of fashion, and for that reason gets a lot of support. I suppose I mean, more-there's a lot of chapbooks in Canada, and there's a lot of poetry that works well with chapbooks, too, you know? It's-it's-it's everywhere. It's kind of in the air of the time, I think. You know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I-I love the type of stuff that Canadian writers and poets are able to create. I don't know, I-I always get excited by like even something like a short story collection. I love that Canada loves to write short stories, because I love short stories.

(Both laugh)

James Dunnigan: No that's true. But yeah, that-that makes a lot of sense. That's good. It's another good example, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, would you publish with, like-would you publish a chapbook again, even if it wasn't with Cactus? Would you work with someone else? Would you make another one of these fun little books?

James Dunnigan: I am actively trying to-I'm-I mean, depends, it depends, you know? Like, like, I don't know. I don't know who I'm going to send it

too next. But there's a couple stuff I could put together into a chapbook. And you know, why not continue doing that, you know? Like, it's another.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: I'd like to have, like, you know, all the writers I respect from, I mean the-the period that I study in university modernism. They've been to book making a lot, you know, and-

Tamara Thompson: Right.

James Dunnigan: Do small presses and a lot of the literature of the period. The literature I like the most comes out of that medium. So, I want to be part of that, you know. Like, that's-that's-I want to do that kind of literature, that for sure. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I love how fun it can be and how experimental it could be, because so much of like, yeah. I can get a trade book published of my fiction, and that's cool, or whatever, but, like, my poetry being, like, made into, like, this cool art object thing that's, like, limited, but also so interesting and handmade, like. That's just fun, you know.

James Dunnigan: That is very fun.

Tamara Thompson: What are some challenges that you've faced as-as an author? And you can take that however, you desire.

James Dunnigan: Hmm... none of them, were you know, limiting really, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

James Dunnigan: But it's just it-sometimes it's just hard to get published, you know, and that's-that's sometimes people are just not interested in what you're doing. And-and-and sometimes you don't seem, I mean, I'm you know, it's-it's a very, very small world, the world of publishing, but it doesn't mean that because it is small that it necessarily will be easier to integrate. You have to do a lot of stuff, you know, and in terms of, you know, like, networking, and so on. you know, if you really want to get noticed. And that I find a little insufferable. But you know the-the-the-I have met some great people around, and, you know, at open mics and stuff like that. And so, I keep doing that. That's no problem, you know. And with Cactus, I mean, all of this is based in reading series. Right? You know, like, like, that's-that's still fun. But yeah, I guess challenges-I could say that I don't really know yet what has been a challenge or not, actually. I really don't because, you know, I've, I have published stuff, you know. I just, I don't-I would like to have a trade edition at some point. I'd like to do that, because I want to do everything, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: So, I don't know what it yet is. The challenge, or what constitutes a challenge at this stage, or what has constituted a

challenge. I don't know. But finding where to place things is often an issue. But I think that's not unique to me, you know. Like you'll have—and not being someone—someone who hasn't done an MFA—I don't know everything there is to know about, you know, the—I wasn't formally trained as a poet, you know, or I wasn't—nothing like that. I have formal trainings elsewhere that influences the stuff that I do. But, you know, it's not, has nothing to do with publication, or, you know, like that stuff. It's pretty—like, I'm figuring out as I go, basically. You know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: By working as an editor. I don't know if I can really point to you to one challenge or another, but because it's D.I.Y., D.I.Y. means you do have to do it yourself. I wouldn't say it's a challenge, because I mean or it's not, like, unfortunately, I had to do it myself. No, I actually am choosing that path, you know. So, like, that's it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: Like, many people, you know—and that's you know the—the—it's all right, because there's a million different ways of being a poet, too. Right? It's just that yeah, that you have to—to commit, you know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I keep trying to tell my students because they're like, oh, I'm going to get published to make a lot of money. And I'm like so, first off: it's just money and publishing don't go to. Just so you know. But, like, a lot of them, are, like, well, how do I get published? And I'm like, it's literally just perseverance. We read *On Writing* by Stephen King, and they're like, "Is this really like how most people do it?" And I'm, like, "Most people who get published are not the people who are great and fantastic in the next voice of a generation, or whatever. Most people in general aren't those people. And most people who are those people usually die before they're even recognized." Right? So, for the most part, I'm just trying to get it into their heads that the people who get published and make this into something that they can still enjoy years later and are still doing, is because they just didn't fucking give up.

James Dunnigan: Well, see, that's okay. Maybe this—now that—now that we're talking about this, I think this: I can name a challenge. But it's not something that happened to me once and that I had to overcome. It's—it's that, it really is about just the perseverance factor, the challenge of being any kind of writer. And it's a challenge that I'm starting to, only now, sort of, make peace with is that you have to play the long game because it really doesn't matter if you get published now or in five years, it really does not matter you know? If you publish right now, that just means you publish right now. Doesn't mean people will be reading that in five years. Doesn't mean anything. It really means nothing, you know? Like, so—it—it—knowing, that is, makes it easier also to you know. The only way to make that easier is to say, like, it doesn't matter, and it will happen in time. But in the meantime, you have to keep going and that will never stop. That will always be an issue. But that's also the only way, really, because everything else you just don't control.

Tamara Thompson: You have to learn to live with disappointment when you get those rejections. And I tell my students it's not easy. It's hard. That's why a lot of people—

James Dunnigan: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: —they give up. But that's why the people who persevere are still here.

James Dunnigan: Yeah. And you know, you get a rejection. You know, you got a spreadsheet full of rejections, you know, like an excel. I keep an excel spreadsheet, you know, for where I send stuff, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yup, yeah.

James Dunnigan: Yeah, I can see, like, a two percent increase over the last two years, you know. And that's like, okay, well, this is good. Or maybe I'm finding the right places to—to that will take my stuff, you know? Now. And that's kind of, that whole thing is—is really annoying. But it's, like, really the only way to do it, you know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: No one is going to pay attention inherently to your stuff. You have to put it out there, you know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I tell my students that the more you get your stuff out there, like, send your stuff to the literary journals, make the chapbooks, like, the more people know your name, and the more you understand publishing, the more people might be willing to publish you or because they trusted you. And one of my students said, "It's like, Oh, it's like the jealous popular girl." And I was like, "What-what do you mean?" It's like, "Well because you want the boy and because you got accepted by the boy. Now, everybody wants that boy." And I'm just like, "I guess you're right?"

James Dunnigan: Well in in some ways yes, it is comparable. But what is true of publishing, which is absolutely not true of dating—

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan:—Is that the persistence always wins.

Tamara Thompson: Yep.

James Dunnigan: You know? It's not the case in dating, and, in fact, persistent can be criminals, whereas in publishing it's not the case at all. We're not playing a seduction game here. We're playing a really long, hard—a very unsexy game of passing shit around you know, and that's like it has. If—if you look at it as dating then, of course, you're like, you're like obliterated with rejection, you know? Like, obviously, if I had as many rejections in dating as I've had in publishing, I'd be dead, you know?

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: It's not the exact same, for sure.

James Dunnigan: It's not the same thing, you know, like, you can't.

Tamara Thompson: No, it's not, but, like, she had such a light bulb moment where she's, like, I get it now. It's like...?

James Dunnigan: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like she didn't. It was just, like a-like an allegory for what she was trying to say. And she's, like, I get it. And I was just, like, okay. If you understand better, that's great.

James Dunnigan: That's good. Okay, yeah. If you can put a finger to it. That's good. Yeah, not too much of one, though.

Tamara Thompson: No, like-

James Dunnigan: Don't make it all about that.

Tamara Thompson: Its not a true parallel.

James Dunnigan: Exactly.

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: So, is this kind of publishing taught you, like, the smaller side of publishing?

James Dunnigan: The smaller side of publishing. Oh, you know how intimate the process all is, you know? Like, when you're building a book, when you're working with other people, you know, like you, you learn how to-don't do a lot of things, you know. Like you learn how-how-you know, even if you're-even if you're working with a big publishing house with this or that, you know, like, you'll learn very quickly. That's, like, oh, no, it's just two humans, or more than just, maybe, more than two, sometimes. But this, like, you're dealing with people a lot, you know? It is not a profession for people who are happy, and ivory towers, you know? like-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: That's not what it is. And you know that's-that's-that's in fact, it's only ten percent what it is, because that's-you and your ivory towers, when you're writing with it. After that, getting it out. There is a whole other thing, you know, and so, like, you have to-you have to-you have to realize that this is a collective endeavor, you know. And that's what you learn when you do these-these smaller scale publication gigs, you know? Like that's-that in fact, the only thing that makes it real is the intimacy between the editor and the author, and the and the-the material of the book. Like, that's the only thing that makes it real, you know? It makes it happen. So that's something that you learn very quickly and over and over again as you do these things.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's something I learned while working on this thesis which I—I've—my father says that both him and myself are introverts who can act like extroverts. So, when we need to act like an extrovert, we can—we can go out and shake people's hands and stuff like that. But I realized very quickly a lot of my friends from my—because I did creative writing and publishing at Sheridan, I realized a lot of my cohort and a lot of my friends from there did not know how to do that. Because I'd be, like, "Oh, hi! My name is this," like. You know, we're at word on the street, and I'm—I'm doing my thing. You know that kind of stuff, and I'd be like, oh, this is my-my friend. They do this and that, and they'd go...hi, and I'm like bro.

James Dunnigan: (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: I didn't realize you were struggling that much, you know, because it is hard to talk to people. And it is such an important part. It's also—I find it really fun. It's scary, don't get me wrong it. It's terrifying. Like sending out these emails, you know, and just let them go into the void. And I don't know how people are gonna respond. But so far, I will say, I feel like, especially the smaller side of publishing, is very forgiving and open and welcoming.

Jame Dunnigan: Well, they have to be, or you would go out of business, you know.

Tamara Thompson: I feel like it's—yeah, yeah, yeah, well, literally. But, like, I feel like this side of publishing is a very warm community. So, I feel like it's—it's been very kind to me. Anyway, I have met not one, like, I've not had one bad interaction. You know what I mean? And I'm talking to a lot of people.

James Dunnigan: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And like it, which is also very surprising, because I was hoping maybe to get, like, at most, fifteen interviews done. My signed consent form folder is over thirty now, and I'm just, like—

James Dunnigan: That's good.

Tamara Thompson: It's a great problem to have, but it's just one of those things to see such a positive outreach, and the willingness to talk to me. Because, again, all I'm doing is saying, "Thank you so much for taking the time." And people are giving me their time, because it's—this is time that you're spending to share with me, right?

James Dunnigan: I am too. But I'll tell you what I think personally about the whole thing, because I like the project, you know, like, one of the things that's really important. That I think most of these thirty people in the folder, you know, realize, is that we need people like you, too, you know? Like we need—we need people who write projects about this stuff that's going on. Because, as you can you know, as—as you can prove from material evidence, it's happening, you know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: And people want to do stuff about it, you know? And like that. You see—I mean—so we need—we need projects like this. We need, especially in Canada, where—where I mean this is, it's, as far as you know, our even—even our highbrow publishing, or, like, you know, high, you know, like, I wouldn't say high, but maybe, like our most exclusive publishing houses are based around these very small connections, you know, like, these are. This is a small country.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: We're like, this is a tiny country, you know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: You know, in terms of its—its population, you know, and—and it's easy to forget that, you know?

Tamara Thompson: So, I know we've been talking about the amazingness of chapbooks and everything. So. But I'm still gonna ask this question of, why are chapbooks important to you?

James Dunnigan: Well, chapbooks are important because they allow you to do more than your regular trade edition can do. I mean, not more, but more of a variety, you know? And it allows you to put together, in one volume, that you can carry around, that you can give to someone or sell to someone that you meet. You know, it's very portable. It's very practical and it's not. It's in some ways you can think, like, it's cool. It's got a romantic value, because you have something in print. A lot of people get published online. But there's still something to be said about being published in print and having your name on the cover and being able to sign it and give it to someone else. It's like, it's—it's—that has a practical utility. You know, it's not just a romantic thing. That's—that's—this is a really good, a really, really, like, rewarding medium and in which you can be more individual, you know you can choose the cover which you don't always choose if you get a trade edition. You choose the title. You have more say, in that process than you would with a corporate publisher. And so, in that sense, it's really—it really gives you a much more valuable, grassroots experience as a writer and it's also evidence of the living a culture of that in Canada you know. And that's why it's so important; not just for me, but I think for many people, you know? Did I answer that to efficiently.

Tamara Thompson: No, you answered it really nicely. Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not?

James Dunnigan: They are, because that's where the most interesting things are going on, I think. I'm obviously—I say this because I'm part of it.

(Both laugh)

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: But I would like for that to mean that. But I think historically, you could look at that, I mean, especially, you know, not even just in Canada, but all-all kinds of places, you know? Like the-the there's a lot of writers. And I was talking about the modernists earlier. But you know, like City Lights Books, you know, with Lawrence Ferlinghetti was, like,-that was a small press, too. Their books are about chapbook size. If there was an Allen Ginsberg in Canada, you know? And I don't-I don't-I don't want to go, like, making equivalences between poets of his time, you know? Like, the Allen Ginsberg of Canada would publish in a chapbook, you know? If-if that that's-that-that would make sense, you know, and-and that's, that's why that's cool, and that's why it is important, actually, because a lot of the literature that lasts is D.I.Y., surprisingly enough, you know? And you might think that the-the reduced mediums, or the, like, the-the smaller capital, or the-the-a smaller distribution, you know might-might hamper it from making any impact. But once again, we're playing a longer game than that, you know? I don't think it's easy to forget so many big names started off like that and, in fact, so many big names only did that, you know-you know-and people who had a harder time than most of us. And I mean I don't know what you think of James Joyce, but he got his whole first edition bought out from a small publisher and burnt. And Ulysses started off, his friend Sylvia Beach printed it for him, you know, in her own shop. That's-and Ulysses is, like, it's like wall-to-wall research on this book, you know. But that's an example. That's a valid comparison, you know. It's-it's not to be neglected.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think the most recent name that I also tell my students, because when they talk to me, they're like, "Oh, cool chapbooks. What the hell is that?" And I'm like, "Oh, okay, like, but one of the people that they read is Souvankham Thammavongsa, with *How to Pronounce Knife*. And I'm, like-she started in chapbooks and in poetry. That's the other way I get them to get into chapbooks a little, but also into poetry. And I'm, like, if you liked this book because a lot of them really like it, and I'm, like, maybe try her poetry. Get them into the poetry, right? And a lot of them are, like, "Wait, really?" And I'm, like, "Yes."

James Dunnigan: Nice. That's great.

Tamara Thompson: So, this question you can take wherever you like. I love seeing how people interpret this question. So please just take it wherever you desire. Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way?

James Dunnigan: I think there's-that if-if we're talking about, the way I understand, Canada is not as one thing. Hence, if that's also the same you could say for the chapbook world, you know, is that it is also multiform-is also, you know, varied. It's probably, I think I have, I-I wonder about equating D.I.Y. stuff with a state though, you know, like, I think-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: especially a colonial state. But nonetheless, you know. Nonetheless, you know, like-



Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: —and literature talks about that, too, you know? Like—

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: —a tons of chapbooks—there's tons of poetry coming out these days, at least. Talk about these things—I don't think it's—I think there's a lot of discourse around representation which will say that a literature is a mirror, or I think it's more like a—or like a—a window through which you watch the world. I'm not sure exactly. But, like, it's like more,—it's more like if, though—if-if represent—if-if a chapbook or a book is a window onto reality, it's important that there's glass in that window, you know? It's not something you just look through. It's something you can look at to, or look through, you know, and—and—and color therefore, whatever you're—you're seeing beyond, you know? And so, it's not—it's not a simple equation.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: But it definitely offers you a sense of the living culture, under the apparatus of the whole—the whole bureaucratic and state apparatus that you have in—in the country. You—you have evidence of something that's much more roiling and vibrant and—and varied and freer in many ways, too, in that the image of, like, the—of a chapbook, you know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah, I think that's a good way of putting it, especially with, like, the window idea. Yeah, thank you. I love—I love hearing how people interpret that, because as soon as I say, “reflect Canada itself,” people, “Wow! What is Canada?” And I love that.

James Dunnigan: Right.

Tamara Thompson: I love that so much.

James Dunnigan: Well, the verb is important to reflect, you know? That's like, well, yeah, what way? What? Through what means?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: And we can take it another way, too, where I think that definitely chapbooks are reflecting on Canada. You know that for sure more than they just reflect intransitively. You know, they're actively doing something rather than, you know, accidentally, you know? There are other things that they do accidentally, which is the whole sort of, like, oh, actually, here you have evidence of—of a complex society, you know, which is not immediately apparent when you look at just the flag or the symbols of state, you know? Like, you know, this is what lies under the crown in some ways.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: And that's-that's the-this is the real Canada, you know, like, this is the real, the real variety, real people, the real people's art. You know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's the thing that you wish, maybe, like, the average person, maybe the public people in general knew about Canadian publishing? What's something that you would like them to know?

James Dunnigan: That they could do it themselves if they can do it, too. You know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fair enough.

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: So, I do have to ask, the slightly more sadder question of why do you think so many small presses and micro presses close up shop?

James Dunnigan: That's an interesting-and-and then I can, like, the-I don't even need to go back into examples from modernism or other periods of literature. I think I can just say this, anecdotally speaking. You know, like, the part of the D.I.Y. culture is that it happens almost accidentally somehow, you know? Like, people get together and they do stuff. And then someone moves away, or someone, you know, changes careers, or someone gets a deal with another thing. They stop working on the D.I.Y., or they decide to, you know, change their writing career in another direction. They start to publish novels-is it's really-it's it-these things happen, they sort of constellate together and they constellate into existence. But then they can also, just as easily sort of vanish, you know, according to circumstance, and according to the, you know, the natural lives of people involved in these things and on who's-on whose conjunction these things are necessarily dependent. And as evanescence a way is that, you know, like, so that's kind of-that's a lot of what-that's a lot of why these things stop after a couple-after a couple of volumes. It's the same thing for, you know, like student journals, and so on, so forth.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: These things begin, and they end. You know, they've not, like, it's not never, not always a change of guard like there is in-in a publication like CV2, where there's always a new editor coming in. It's like the D.I.Y. stuff is more vulnerable to that in some ways. But I don't think that's a negative thing necessarily. Also, we could always state the obvious with, like, the pandemic, and so on. But, like, I think-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: I think there's more, you know it's been-There have been worst disasters, you know, that have ended stuff, too, you know? Like this-things like this happen, and I don't know that we, you know, climate change has threatened a lot of other things down the production line, if you will or in people's lives everywhere, and it's being felt in the literature. I don't know that a publishing house has ended for-be-for

reasons of climate change, because first of all, it would end the world rather than a publishing house. You know, these accidents are part of the deal. I think they—it's—that's just how it works. And, you know, obviously, that's barring, barring any other reason. You know, I think that, broadly speaking, these things begin and end of their own accord, really and dependent on the collectivity that bring it together.

Tamara Thompson: How and why do you still keep doing this?

James Dunnigan: Cause it's fun among other things.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

James Dunnigan: And—and second, it's like, I think that—I think that this is culture. You know, culture is—is something that people do all the time. I think, like man, was this—this Welsh Marxist I think his name is Raven Williams, who has this essay called *Culture is Ordinary*, and he's talking about the bus stop. This is the ordinary stuff that people—doing stuff all every day is culture, too, you know, and—and that's culture is not up there. It's everywhere here, you know, and that's a way of participating in that, in some ways. Right? So.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: Make that a habit.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, we're in the home stretch. I have two questions left. What's something that you wish, maybe people knew about D.I.Y. press history? This is more just to give space, so that if you— 'cause, I feel like so much of this stuff is ephemeral, right? It's there, and then it's gone. And so, I want to, like, if you've seen something cool and you're like, oh, people should know about this cool thing. Because there was only like five of them made, but they were still really neat. Right like, is there anything like that?

James Dunnigan: Well, I can't give you immediate examples, but I can come back to stuff that I've spoken over a little earlier. It's, like, there's a lot of important literature that comes out of that historically, you know? And—and in Canadian history, especially, too, you know? Like that's—that's something people should know: that it's not like, you're not going to pick up a Penguin Random House edition and go like haha! That's how they started. No, no, no! Some of them started like—like us, you know? Like for sure, you know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I—

James Dunnigan: Should be more widely known. You know, it's like—

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, one hundred percent.

James Dunnigan: Shame, or anything like that, to be publishing with your friends, or whatever, like a small circle of friends putting together this thing from scratch, you know? That's not a shameful thing. That's a very important thing, very valuable thing to do and is taking control of the

means of production, in some ways, too. I think it's Louis Dudek who had this really-really strong belief that that was what poets should do, is that they should make their own publishing house and publish that way, you know? From-from the grassroots up, you know? So, like, that's another figure really, really important. And that—that speaks to the—that's stuff we could easily forget, you know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: Under the veneer of officiality, literatur-literature, and literary awards, culture and stuff like that—that occults a little bit the truth of the matter.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's fantastic? Yeah. Now, I have to ask the very difficult question. Everybody has a hard time with the last one. What's something about your history that you wish people knew about?

James Dunnigan: Huh! People knew about my history. I think they can read it in what I write.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: I think that's in-in the basis I'd be, like, read my stuff, you know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: That's I want you to know, but that's—that's as much as I can say, really, because I can't really say, like, oh, this or that I would like people to know about. I would like people to misunderstand me less. I don't know, exactly. That would be vague. I have too vague an idea of what exactly I would want people to understand about this... it depends on the day, too, because sometimes I'm, like, I wish some people had read a little more *Virgil*, but that's not a fair wish to have.

(Both laugh).

James Dunnigan: That's not fair to anybody, but it just so happens, I wish somebody cared—people cared about the same things that I did. But that's not necessarily, you know—it doesn't work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: I guess the answer would be, like, oh yeah, just-just whatever I would want them to understand, I'd write down and try to publish.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

James Dunnigan: That way—that—that would be my answer. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fantastic. Are there any additional comments or anything you'd like to say before I stop the recording?

James Dunnigan: No, I think—I think that's about all I had to say, you know? But thank you. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you, and this is a great conversation.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you. I've had a great time talking with you as well.

Cary Fagan

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July. Just the time is 11:09 AM. And just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview time. This interview is for small press and author.

Cary Fagan: Hi! I'm Cary Fagan. I live in Toronto and was born here. I am a writer; I am publishing my-I think, my sixth story collection, my ninth novel, as well as a very active writer of books for children. So, but I have this sort of alternative career in chapbook publishing which I have had since the beginning of my career, which started out of frustration as a writer, and has ended up being just something that I love to do. I have been involved in a couple of other presses, but currently I'm involved with a chapbook publisher called Espresso. And we publish chapbooks of poetry, nonfiction, fiction, memoirs, which falls into the nonfiction category, and I think we have done maybe eighteen or so some years we do more, some less. I work with two partners, which-which makes our press a little bit unusual, I think they're usually one person operations. But Bernard Kelly and Rebecca Comey, who happens to be my life partner. We're, we are partners, and we make editorial decisions together, and then we have other responsibilities in terms of actually producing the chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: Cool and your pronouns please.

Cary Fagan: Yes, he/him.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So, you already started getting the ball rolling, but I do want to ask this question before we get into the nitty, gritty stuff of the press. How did you first discover zines and chapbooks, and, like the smaller world of like D.I.Y publishing? Was there a moment or more of like a time period in your life where you're like, "oh, cool"?

Cary Fagan: That's a good question. There weren't zines that, I-I didn't know of zines back then, so I was in my very early twenties. I would look in the bookstores for mostly for literary press titles. So, I would, I discovered this Canadian indie publishers like Oberon and Coach House and House of Anansi back then, and sometimes I would see a chapbook, or there were literary journals that look kind of like chapbooks. They were more in chap-they were very modest and, in fact, that's the first thing I did start with a little modest journal which-which was in chapbook sort of form, single stapled, you know signature. And, but what I the time I mostly remember was actually, I must have known chapbooks before that. I went to Montreal with my friend Bruce Whiteman when I was in my early twenties. Bruce was my first writer friend, and I was in my first year of undergrad, and we went to the Word bookstore, which is still there in Montreal, and I discovered chapbooks published by a press, published by Robyn Sarah and Fred Louder, and the press's name is escaping me at the moment [Villeneuve Publications], and I bought one or two chapbooks of-of theirs they were, it was a wonderful press. I can get that name to you; but anyway, that's the first I remember discovering of chapbooks, so you might see them. And there was also a store in Toronto called The Other Books that sometimes had chapbooks, so they weren't, as you know without the Internet. Things were much harder to find back then. But they were

around if you looked. And oh, yeah. And Bruce actually had published a chapbook with a friend and gave me that that may be the first one I ever owned.

Tamara Thompson: Cool. So, it's a lot of work to do anything in the small world of like press making and bookmaking. Why did the press start originally? Because again, you have to get these things off the ground, and it's a lot of effort right.

Cary Fagan: Right, I guess Espresso is a little bit different cause Espresso started through my meeting with Bernard Kelly. So, Bernard was, he ran a magazine called paperplates, and he wanted to pub-do some book publishing, and I had, I guess, published one or two books at that point, and so mutual friends set us up on a friend date, and we met and immediately decided that we would publish some books together, and we started a press. An actual little press called paperplates books and published for over a period of quite a few years, four books and-and that was we, a couple of them did pretty well and got attention, I mean, in small press terms, and couple of them were not, kind of overlooked, but it was a lot of work. It was expensive to print them, you know, as it was, and then we had boxes of books we had to store. We needed an actual distributor to take them to the bookstores, and we had to send a lot of review copies, and we weren't very good at all that stuff. And eventually the press petered out, and so we would have meetings but we weren't publishing anything for a few years, and I... umm so we hadn't published anything for a while, and I at that point I had done some chap-I had-had a small, a chapbook house called Shaw Street Books, with a partner which had done, I think, four over a period of years, and I had done some one-off chapbooks of my own before I, because I wasn't getting any books published, and I was frustrated. So, I was doing some short stories in chapbooks form, which, in fact, led directly to my first book contract. So that was helpful and so I just suggested to Bernard that why don't we do a chapbook of one of your one of your stories. I wanted to publish something at Bernard's, and so that was, it was a short story about a dog called Hanky, and we published it as our first chapbook and then we got the idea of asking-asking someone else, Martha Bailey, who is a-a novelist and she gave us some poems to do and, but there was probably a fair bit of time between them. We were very slow to get anything done, and then somebody sent us a manuscript we liked, and we did it. And so, it grew very slowly; and then Rebecca, I asked her if she would want to become part of the trio, and once she did, she helped really kind of energize us to be more active, and we started publishing more chapbooks and approaching writers we liked to-to submit to us, so I would say we, you know we started more ambitiously as a book press and we shrunk down to being a chapbook a press. Which turned out to suit us all much better, and what I discovered was that it takes all the same skills and same steps to publish a chapbook as it does a regular book; you have to, you know, solicit or read unsolicited manuscripts, and accept the manuscript, possibly edit, design, publicize the thing and-and sell them. But, you know, in kind of in miniature, and because we did limited editions of first, I think one hundred and fifty. Now we can do one hundred copies. There weren't all of these books to have to sell. It was much more manageable, and our books, probably half of them would sell out, and the others would sell enough to

cover their expenses. So, it really was much more practical as well as fun to do them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I'm a little interested in, like, and again, not every press has maybe a goal or an editorial philosophy. Or it can be just as simple as let's make something. But do you guys have, like maybe a goal, an editorial philosophy?

Cary Fagan: Uhh... we are interested in experimental work. And that gets pushed more by Rebecca than either of us. And so, we have done work by Sandra Alland, Natalie Helberg, which definitely is challenging both in terms of subject matter and in terms of stylistically. And so, we do have an interest in that but we also, I mean, I- it's boring to say but we're also just interested in great writing. So, you know, and that's what we look for. We-we are one of the things most chapbook houses primarily publish poetry, and we're really interested in stretching that form. So, we have published memoirs by myself and by the poet Jane Monroe, for example. We're going to be doing essays, and we have-we have moved more vigorously into the short story publishing. And so, for example, our last published chapbook was by Elizabeth Hay. And Elizabeth Hay is just a great writer, and I was really thrilled she gave us a story which I think worked really well in the chapbook form. I think stories are wonderful in chapbook form and-and there should be more of them. We are certainly interested in publishing people who are lesser known. But that's probably balanced just by the fact that as someone who's been part of the writing community for many years, I know many other writers, and some of them are-it's easy for me to ask some of them if they're interested in publishing with us or some of them come to me because of that. So, we also have published people like Ronna Bloom, for example, who are, you know, well-known poets, or-or Liz-Liz Hay won the Giller prize. So-so we're really trying to make a mix of-of known and-and lesser known or unknown people.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so you are kind of answering a bit of my next question of like, why do you, like, choose the kinds of like genres and work that you choose? And it seems like it's just kind of the stuff that like interests you, and that you get excited about, which I very much understand. That's kind of how Whispering Wick works as well. We wanna give people voices and, like, show them kind of a way through publishing so that it's not as foreign to like the new authors and stuff. We take on a lot of new authors, but also just work that excites us because you wanna be working on something that you really care about.

Cary Fagan: Yeah, for sure. And a lot of it's just on the level of language. People who really can bring language alive or do really interesting things with language. And its relationship to, to humans, and-and so that's you know, I think we might be interested in certain kinds of manuscripts. But when a really- when obviously well-written manuscript, that's like, you know, you open up a manuscript, and it's, like, you can tell it's like a beating heart. You know it's just alive. It's very hard not to want to publish that; you know whether or not it falls into some category or not. We-we tend to want to. So, I think, yeah; so we probably as a result are areasonably eclectic press, I guess.



Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I'm interested in a bit of what your process is like. From like getting the manuscript, to editing to the actual production of things, because, like actually making the books because you make some lovely things. So, I'm interested on how that that works for you guys 'cause everybody has their own process.

Cary Fagan: Yeah. So, first, we have editorial meetings, either in person or on Zoom. We all live in Toronto, but sometimes it's just more convenient to do it on Zoom and we'll discuss manuscripts whether they've come unsolicited or solicited. We actually, like- our last three books were chapbooks, were short stories, because I really wanted to kind of launch this short story line, and they were all solicited by me. But I would say it's probably half and half in terms of solicited, unsolicited. Then we get together and have an editorial meeting, and we have to all agree on-on publishing and manuscript. We don't all have to equally like it, but we have to all agree to publish it so that can, you know that's a little bit harder than being a one-person operation where you can simply be the sole person deciding and that can be frustrating. But at the same time, I think it, it makes for a better publish, better press. So, we accept the manuscript. We don't do a lot of substantive editing generally; we have a poetry manuscript coming out where we did suggest the person cut like the last two pages out of it. Or but, we don't otherwise, really, I guess we don't see ourselves as having that role we tend to just pretty much, except what the author is interested in in presenting. We do a copy edit, though Bernard's a good copy editor, so Bernard does that Rebecca, and I are more responsible for soliciting manuscripts, and-and probably a little bit more on the edit more on the editorial side and burn it a little bit more on the practical side of things. So, we accept the manuscript and come up with a timeline, which hopefully we will keep to and again Bernard is the designer, but he kind of, to run things past us, and I think for him one of the pleasures you know he likes designing, so it's definitely one of his pleasures, and our designs are, except we, except for a few are fairly traditional looking because they are poetry up until recently all our books were hand sewn, and we use this Japanese linen paper for the covers with-with glued on labels. But so, kind of Bernard has had to express himself within the confines of that tradition. But every once in a while, we do something in what we call the one poem series, which is really a-a single poem as a chapbook, and we don't hand bind those. And Bernard just designs those covers, and he's and if you'll see he's he does some very different things. So, we all, we all proofread, and we send the proofs to the to the writer as well. And if it's the hand bound, and we're still hand binding poetry that's so, that's Rebecca and my job to do so Rebecca does a lot of the, so we've since we've changed the style a little bit, but we-we, so we sew them and fold them and label, put the labels on, etc. And that's-that's our job to do which we, it's time consuming, but we enjoy doing it, and we, I have modified the style a little bit to make it, to make that a little bit easier than it used to be, but they still come out as really lovely books. However, because we, we've it's so time consuming it really limits, you know, like the very most we could do is two chapbooks a year, and that's why we decided to do some chapbooks where we have the whole thing printed and bound. And so that's like this one here. So, it sort of mimics are earlier formats. Here's one of the handbound ones. [Holds up Espresso chapbook.] But it's I think it's really nice, though I-I-I have actually no problem with it.

Bernard does, he makes some of the covers pretty vibrant generally, and were I think it. I also think it makes them. I always worry about chapbooks being too precious seeming and I think, kind of straddle the line fairly nicely with the, our hand bounds but the other ones are even less, you know, have less of that quality which I also like. So-so we, now we publish both ways, both as handbound and as-as printed and bound by the by I don't even know that Bernard takes it to the printer, so I'm not even sure we get print it. That's the nice thing about a three group you don't have to do everything. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I understand the folding and stapling, and like using the awl to make the holes and stuff; like, it takes a long time to be able to-to do all that stuff even with like a long arm stapler. It's still to match everything up, make sure you're putting things in right.

Cary Fagan: No, yeah. Yeah. If you don't line it up, the staple doesn't go perfectly into the yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I'm interested in where you sell your books and how you sell them, because some people do them online, some of them people do them more at markets.

Cary Fagan: Yeah, well, we've always relied, first of all, on a book launch. So, we do- we've done both live and Zoom launches. They're kind of hard. We're all kind of introverts, actually, the three of us. So, to do a launch you know, kind of puts us out there. But, on the other hand, it really is lovely to create an event that brings people together, and we've had some really nice launches pre-before Covid. They were all in person, and we had a very nice local cafe that we could do them to, but we've lost that cafe, unfortunately. So, we have struggled with venues, and we have done at Knife Fork Book, which is you know, but now they don't have, they don't. He doesn't have a space anymore, Kirby. They don't have a space, excuse me and-and we have the last one we did was we rented a-a library space which we one of us liked very much. Now we have our eye on a different on a bookstore that seems like they're amenable. So, and we and we've done Zoom and definitely have sold, you know, a reasonable number of copies at the launches. And of course, we have a website, and we send out both through Facebook and through emails. We sent invitations out to the launches, but also make sure to put a link to the website where the books can be ordered. So, you know, we have a PayPal button and-and-and so those orders definitely do come in, I'll be honest with you I find that the poets who do the most readings and have the most friends sell the most books, I mean, that's so it's more than that than how well known the person is and-and then, you know, more sales slowly come in, and we do find there's a balance. Some sell better than others, but we tend to break even. We have done the Small Press Book Fair in Toronto, and we're gonna do that again this fall which is great, and also a lot of fun to do, seeing all the other publishers is really nice. And sometimes, yeah, the-the authors do their own readings, and they'll buy books to for the readings or get books for the readings, and those are very useful. So, it's a little of this, and that we have done a little bit of advertising. So, when Liz book came out for example, we put an ad in *Canadian Notes and Queries*, CNQ magazine which is *Canadian Notes and Queries* and because it just seems to me that I don't know, and I don't know, really, if it

brought in sales. But it just seems to me that readers of that journal would be interested in our press and might come look at the website as a result. So, we kept very- we've been very modest about it. I used to, the other thing I used to do is send out more review copies, but it's extraordinarily unlike, difficult to get reviews these days of chapbooks. So, I'll send a very few out, still like maybe two. But I we used to get, our first chapbooks use to get, you know, reviews and newspapers and-and-journals, and now even the journals I don't find really do them so as a result, that's I actually this is an aside, I guess, but I have a chapbook review blog it's called Word Dot Music Dot Blog in it, and I and I started it, I started it for my own pleasure, because it gave me it meant I had to read more closely some chapbooks and actually articulate what I thought about them. So that's...and but I also did it because I just wanted to bring attention to these ones, some wonderful chapbooks that people were not hearing about, and just to give the community a sense that there's, there... this response out there to the work they're doing. So, I mean, I mean, I'm not the only one. And now the Miramichi reader is reviewing chapbooks. They just reviewed a chapbook that I did with above ground. So, I was pretty surprised and happy about that. So yeah. So that, that is that used to be a better way to get some attention through reviewing, Broken pencil sometimes they...

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Cary Fagan: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, in your time, like working on the press, what are some challenges that the press has faced, and take that wherever you desire?

Cary Fagan: Right. Well, we sometimes have trouble finding manuscripts we like well enough. I would say, of the unsolicited manuscripts that come in, and we are not like publishers. We're not deluged by them, and we have certainly accepted a number of them. But the last couple of years, we haven't really liked most of what has come over the transom, unfortunately; and then we have, and then it can, you know- I asked people who I admire to-to submit to us, and some of them do. Which is great, and but some of them don't, or some of them want-want to, and they just don't have something available. Or and I realize like for a short story writer like a well-known short story writer. And there's a couple who are hoping to send us something they could quite possibly send, like publish, in the, I mean, one of them publishes in the *New Yorker*, so.

Tamara Thompson: Hmmm, right.

Cary Fagan: *New Yorker* or *Espresso*, I mean, you know, it's a hard. It's not that hard choice to make, so some of it is that. But I would say, but one, one challenge is just really getting material that we really like and that, I would say, that's the primary one and-and one of the challenge, one of the challenges is having a trio of people with where, say, one person really likes something and the other two are not as keen on it. You know that that's a difficult situation, because I believe we should publish work that somebody, at least somebody, feels passionate about. But is it good enough if only one of us does? That's something that we balance

sometimes, especially if that person hasn't had a one of their favorites chosen recently. I'll tend to want to give them the benefit-that manuscript the more the benefit of the doubt or just be willing to publish it because one of our other editors cares more about it. But that's a balance that can be a little tricky to maintain.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Cary Fagan: I-I would say, that's the main problem, because the-the publishing, the actual process of them, well, it goes relatively smoothly. There's not a huge risk to publishing a hundred of anything. And we have not, ummm so I-I guess, I guess the actual publishing is not, is, hasn't been such a challenge. It's work, but it's not a challenge, really.

Tamara Thompson: So-

(Technical difficulties occurred).

Cary Fagan: -chapbooks in maybe a little bit. So, I-I was one of those who started young. I think I was ten or twelve when I decided, want to be a writer. Not exactly sure why, but except that I wrote some things that my teachers really liked, you know, and read to the class so positive reinforcement. And I just always loved, I always loved drawing and painting and making things, and cutting things, making things out of boxes and paper, and my mother was is a, is still, she's ninety seven, and she was always very creative a person, I think, in her way. And so I think it came from there, and I became pretty seriously serious as a writer in high school; I mean, writing short, dedicated to writing short stories and then in early university; and I was and around that time I started you know, seeing the literary journals, and I was eighteen when I started sending work to literary journals, and I was twenty when my first story was published in, I think it was in *Descant*; and I started a literary journal before that, though. I started a journal called *Harvest* because I wasn't getting published. So, I started this journal, which I typed everything on an IBM selectric from my father's office. I, you know, took it to a print shop, folded and stapled it. I even sold it door-to-door in the suburbs where I lived. Just to sell some copies, and I probably put some copies in some of the bookstores, and I am, and I think I put some posters up around U of T for submissions, and I think that's how Bruce Whiteman came to discover the magazine. And I became a freelancer to help, you know. I was working as an editor, magazine editor, editorial assistant and I was freelancing a lot and doing a lot of books reviewing and frustrated though that I became-I wrote two novels and a book of short stories that did not get published. I was really frustrated. So, I published a couple chapbooks. One of this is my first one that I published called *Two Stories* [holds up chapbook], and gave it away, and I also had a friend who distributed small press things to the bookstores. So, we did that I sent it to people, Timothy Findley read it and said something nice about it on television which I was able to use as a quote. So, chapbooks were kind of important to me early in my career then I-before, and umm then anyway, I'm not sure. It's hard being a writer, I mean. There-there certainly were a lot of challenges. I spent ten years of really working hard and not and having manuscripts turned down, and not even really getting published in the magazines I wanted. I would get published in some of the small

journals, but not the sort of gloss, the better journals. And it takes a lot of persistence. And I, and you know, I think I was lucky in that, you know, I came from a home where my parents were very supportive, because you have to find the confidence to continue somewhere and then I always knew I came from a middle-class, upper-middle-class home, and I knew my parents wouldn't let me starve. So, you know, I had that advantage which I have always appreciated and never taken for granted. But I worked in magazine stuff. Anyway, I finally did publish my first book of stories in 1990, and things got at least easier after that. But for many years it was still difficult. It might take me five or six or eight submissions to find a publisher for my book. It didn't necessarily, some were real, some had great reviews, some didn't have such good reviews. Some got more; we're got a lot of reviews, some are ignored, none of them sold particularly well, so it's it wasn't really until, what, 2012, I think, that my writing career started to really improve and become stable in terms of who my publishers were. I've still had a lot of different publishers. I also have a parallel career in children's writing, and that has always been more stable and more successful. So, I've-my very first kids' book was published in like '94, with Tundra books, and I still, which is now part of Penguin Random House and I have two books coming out with Tundra. I've published many books with them. They've been the steadiest part of my career, and I've published children's books with others and lots of translations. So, for me, actually, you know, my bread and butter has been writing for kids, which I love to do equally to writing for adults. But it's also been the part of the career-career that I can rely more on.

Tamara Thompson: One of the main things that I try and teach my students because I'm a TA for creative writing is, as they said, it's not necessarily the good author that gets published. It's the one who is more persistent, who keeps going up to the plate right, and a lot of them are like, well, wouldn't the good author be published because they're good? And it's like, well, no, there's a lot of decisions that go into what they publish even that season, right? And I'm like it's the people that are willing to stick around and prove and keep trying that get published, right?

Cary Fagan: Right.

Tamara Thompson: And I think a lot of them are shocked by that.

Cary Fagan: Yeah, I think for most people, it does take a lot of persistence and also, to be honest with you, those three, my early manuscripts weren't great. Like, I can see now why they weren't published. I mean, it was hard for me then. I mean, they had promise. But I'm not, I was not a prodigy; so it wasn't really until my thirties that I that I-I could see, once I started writing stories that were in my first collection. I could tell that there was a leap of quality in them and sophistication in them that I hadn't-I hadn't had in my previous work, but it took me that long and a lot of writing to get there. And so, some of it is that and persistence, for sure, because as you say editors are not blank slate, so they don't just come say, is this good or not? It is, does it-what is, you know, does it fit our mandate as a publisher? Have we published already a book that's in some vague way similar? Are we looking to do more or less, more, fewer books of this kind. There's stuff that you

just cannot know as an author. Sometimes agents know it, but even they don't know it all. So, it does take persistence, and you have to develop a hard shell when you get rejected, 'cause it's not fun. It's you know, it's still not fun to be rejected. But you-you have to, I used to. I made a rule for myself, which was within twenty-four hours, for forty-eight hours of a manuscript being rejected, I had to send it out again, and I just-that was rule. I kept lists. I was careful to make sure I knew when everything went out and-and-and also because they're so slow publishers, I mean, they're inundated. And they're so, that's they're so, even when you're a known writer, they're painfully slow to read new manuscripts sometimes. So, the-the patience is difficult and yeah. But they do need new books, and they do want new books, and they do need and want new voices, so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I know that you're a busy bee, and you're trying to get things published in other avenues. So, this is more just like-like, you know, if you had the time and the work, would you publish like this like a chapbook again, whether with Espresso or with someone else. Would that be something that you'd be interested in doing?

Cary Fagan: Oh, yeah, absolutely. You know, I've often thought that because I'm sixty-seven now; and I thought, well, maybe one day the publishers, I'm lucky, you know I have like five books coming out. But at some point, the publishers are going to, maybe I've had enough of me, you know, or maybe I just won't have the strength to like, write novels anymore or write long-form things. And the children's publishing world really changes a lot. So, the picture books they want now or not, even the ones they wanted when my career started, so there might be a time when the publishers start closing the doors on me. I'm aware of that happening, that hasn't happened, but it could happen, and I think I would still publish, and may probably just still publish chapbooks. I'm not going to stop writing, and I'm not going to stop being part of the literary world, and I think I'll be fine, to be honest. The other thing is I still I completely love. I mean, I published a chapbook in '24 with above/ground, and it was the first time I really-I hadn't been, I hadn't submitted to a chapbook house really, before I don't think. And it's been really fun to have that come out. And I, and I've actually had quite a bit of response to far more response to it than I would have imagined. And that's been really great; and I did a chapbook with our own press. And I have a nonfiction manuscript which actually the other editors want to publish. I feel a bit sheepish about doing another one with our own house. Like, I don't think it's wrong to, but maybe I-I just the only, but it's, a it's-it's, a it's like an essay, and it has a lot of photographs, historic photographs in it. And it's not, it's not the sort of thing that will fit. Like, I've looked there to see if there's another chapbook house that it would fit. There is one and I have talked to them, but they just don't have the money right now to be doing any chapbooks. So, they're a lovely house called Woodbridge Farm Books. I don't, do you know them?

Tamara Thompson: I've heard of the name. I believe someone's spoken about them before.

Cary Fagan: Yeah. So, they I just, I just reviewed, I reviewed a couple of their books. So, they get, they get writers to write about other passions

of theirs, besides writing. My-my manuscript, like is so perfectly fits into that category that I just feel it really ought to be one of those books, but they've been very, very kind to response to me, but they just say they just don't right now have the money so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Cary Fagan: I know our press would do a really nice job in terms of visually; like, Bernard would design it well, and that photographs would look great, and everything.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Cary Fagan: Probably it'll happen, but I'm not pushing it, you know. I'm not pushing it, but I would do other things. I would definitely; if I have a-a story, or I've started, I seem to have started, to write, write poems again after like thirty years of not writing poetry. So I would be delighted. And there are some presses that I adore. I wouldn't even send to them like Baseline. Maybe you've talked to them. They do beautiful books, but I-I wouldn't send to Baseline. I think they-they have, they find just the, just the right authors they need. They don't need a guy like me who's published all these books. So, but there are other publishers; Apt.9, that's another favorite of mine.

Tamara Thompson: Cameron does beautiful stuff.

Cary Fagan: And who wouldn't want to publish with these guys, you know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah:

Cary Fagan: I mean, so yeah, I think, I think I totally think chapbooks are gonna be or continue to be part of my life, both as a publisher, as and as an author. I'm actually starting new publishing house which I'll-new little chapbook house. So, I it started as a little private press.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm!

Cary Fagan: Where I published, I don't know Bruce may have mentioned, but I-I publish these chapbooks. I could, because I did so much, so-so much freelancing years ago. Like, I did profiles and interviews with really interesting writers like the poet Phyllis Webb and Don Coles, and I thought that it would just be nice to, you know bring them out, and my friends, who are poets would be interested in reading them. So, I have just, you know, they have ISBNs, but I sort of consider them more private cause I-I didn't have a website. I didn't-all I did was put it out to my friends on Facebook, and I gave them away for free. I sent them to anybody who wanted them and-and it's been really fun. It's called Found. The press is called Found Object. And I've been thinking anyway I-I've been thinking for a long time that what we really need, is a publisher in this country who will publish books are out of print because there are so many great books that go out of print. For example, I was really shocked my, Scott Harrison, my, with a friend of mine, you know, well-known poet. I think all her books are out of print. I mean, that's what I had heard, or most-most are all of her books, including her book that won the Trillium Award,

and-and so and there's a lot. And selfishly so my early, my own earlier books are out of print. I wouldn't want them all to go back and print, but there are one or two that I really. So, I'm not ready, I'm not about to start an actual publishing house, but it occurred to me, why can't I do it in chapbook form? And so Found Object is going to be a house that reprints out-of-print work, and I asked Marine if I could have a section from her. Her book of poetry of ghazals, which is a form that I, you know Canadians, have found very interesting to write in since John Thompson and-and-and she was thrilled to see them back in print. So, I am working, I hope probably it'll be out in the fall. I'm working on the first.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Cary Fagan: I have a number of other authors that I'm interested in in approaching. So, and I just I you know I-I love being involved. I love knowing what the other chapbook houses, I have a pile of chapbooks over there that I've bought from probably ten different chapbook houses, and I some of them I'll review on my on *Word Music* and-and others I won't. But I'm, you know I'm-I'm that's, you know, rather than go out and buy a book published by some big publisher, I'll go and publish and to support that. I mean, every time Apt.9 puts something out, or I mean, I-I just can't resist having it. I just have to have it. So, it's-it's absolutely gonna continue. And also, I'm really lucky because Rebecca Comay, my wife, who's a-a writer and a, she's a professor of philosophy at U of T. And I'm an essayist and she likes the form, too. And so, you know, this little chapbook house Found Objects is my own. But you know I'm taking cover designs over to her for her opinion. And what do you and-and she and I work on it. We are, you know, really enjoy working together on Espresso so, it's you know, it's just part of the fabric of-of my life really.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Okay. What has this type of like smaller publishing taught you in your time doing it?

Cary Fagan: What has it taught me? It's taught me to be a better reader, I think especially of poetry, because I do like poetry. Even though I'm now writing some more, I still don't consider myself a poet. And the chapbook form, I think, is really very good for poetry, because you can slow down when you have a book of fifty or one hundred poems; it's a little more daunting. But when you have a chapbook of poetry you can really take your time and reread them. And that's true, for all-all the stuff that gets really gets published in chapbook form. So, I think it's taught me to be a better reader for one thing. It's taught me to realize that you know, to question what it means to be successful, either as an author or in publishing I've always thought that readers are one, one at a time, no matter how many books you sell, and that's especially true of chapbooks. And I-I think the one of the things about chapbook form is, it puts it, the-it puts the emphasis really back on the writ- on the writing itself, and-and the experience of the reader and the writer. And it really brings you back to the essentials of what of what good writing is about, and what creative writing is for, and how it can be part of, you know, essential part of one's life, both reading and writing. So, I think chapbooks have really, have really done that for me. They've almost, they've-they've come



as I'm like a magnifying glass. I've put a focus on the things that are most valuable.

Tamara Thompson: So, you're kind of probably answering a bit of my next question. But I'm still gonna ask it directly on, like, why chapbooks are important to you?

Cary Fagan: Umm...there! Well, there for what I just said, but also, I have to admit I have a just a love of them as-as objects. I love chapbooks. I keep a few on display in my little study upstairs, and I change them. I have boxes on one shelf, probably two shells filled with chapbooks that I have bought since you know, since they're at least since the early, probably since the 80s on. And-and then and so what they mean to me is pleasure. What they mean to me is the marriage, forgive the cliché marriage of text and image and text and paper in a really interesting way. I mean, I think some of these people are really wonderful designers, even though they're not train designers. And-and I really love to see what, how these, what they-what they do with their chap-with the form of the chapbook. So, I would say it means to me is you know, I-I guess I've always believed that the greatest pleasures in life are small pleasures and chapbooks are small things. So, I would, I would say that. And I think they bring, they bring the writing community a little closer you know as well. I think, authors of the chat books and the publishers. I do have a sense of community that really does matter.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Cary Fagan: And matters to me.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so kind of jumping off of that community aspect here. Do you think chapbooks are important to Canadian publishing like itself? If so, why or why not?

Cary Fagan: Yeah, I-I think they are. It's not absolutely easy to prove, but I think they are, in in the way that literary magazines are. That they are a place where new writers can publish and find readers for the first time and they're also a place where established writers can try out something new. I remember a above/ground book written by a First Nations author, as you can tell, names are escaping me who it was.

Tamara Thompson: It's okay.

Cary Fagan: Trying something really-really different and interesting by kind of deconstructing a colonial narrative and later that became part of a, of a novel that that he recently published with a large publisher, McClelland and Stewart. And notice I remember all the publishers names; but anyway, and so I think I think there's-that I think sometimes it's just the right receptacle for something. For example, the-the Espresso book that I published was-is a series of very small personal essays about growing up and becoming a writer. And I-I didn't have I, you know, I thought I might write more of them, and I never did. So, I just never had enough to be a book. And so, but I had the perfect amount to be to be a chapbook. And so, it just was the right form to-to publish that-that-that thing, so I do think they are important, because I think those these

writers do go, some of it is, these writers go on to find a lot long, larger audience, but I also think they're at, they're also in in itself chapbook publishing is a valuable part of the publishing world. It's the small-smallest part. But as I say to the readers who read them to the writers who publish in them they-they are, its valuable work, and I don't think it has to be even though I'm talking about how it feeds in. I don't think it needs that to justify its value. I think it's on its own terms. It's valuable; it is literature; it is the publishing of literature. It's part of absolutely a part of the literary culture.

Tamara Thompson: I, I love the variety that chapbooks give. When it comes to like these beautiful art objects and then also just seeing people playing with the form of the book or just playing with the subject matters that they're putting into these chapbooks. And I love that experimental kind of stuff that people can do, especially with chapbooks, and I don't know. I it's-it's some of the stuff that excites me the most.

Cary Fagan: Yeah, I agree. I-I absolutely agree, I mean, I-I guess I get a fair number of above/ground chapbooks, and I'm amazed by the manuscripts Rob gets, and he's obviously his-his, or the kind of the scruffy is looking have the better-known chapbook houses they're in it, they use inexpensive paper and expensively produced. But some of the some of the there's some incredibly interesting challenging work. He and I guess Rob is just very, very well connected at this point with writers.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Cary Fagan: Not just Canadian writers as well. And-and he's he really has? some of that work really pushes the envelope in really challenging ways. And I, I find that having a chapbook of that work makes it easier to try to really immerse into something that sometimes we try, we come, we tend to resist because of the difficulty. You know, times things need to be difficult. And-and so I admire the houses that do that, publish that stuff.

Tamara Thompson: So, do you think this kind of publishing reflects Canada itself in some way? You can take that wherever you like. I just want to pose the question.

Cary Fagan: Yeah, I actually, I don't really know, except in the sense that we have this very big spread-out country. One of the things I've realized is we have chapbook houses in other parts of the country that we don't see like here in Toronto, where I live. For example, there's a fairly newish one called Broke Press. That's out in BC. That's a run by a fairly young person. And they're doing some really, she's done some interesting stuff. She did a little play, for example; a book of hers that I haven't opened yet, and-but I don't think her press is so known out here, because, just because she's in Vancouver or-or the Alfred Gustav Press, which is, which is a subscription press. I only, I found, only found out about that press a couple of years ago, and I really like that house. But so, I do think they tend, there is a kind of localism about it. There are scenes separated by geography, otherwise, I would say at the same time, they you know, some people are like Apt.9, just published that book by Dag Summers or something like that, a book of poetry. Really

wonderful, lovely book of poetry. And he's Norwegian, you know. Some of them are publishing work from a broad. We're going to be publishing essays, an essay by a writer lives in Berlin, and so I do think there's also an internationalism to it and chapbooks. I mean, chapbooks are big in other countries, too, not just in in Canada. So, I don't think they, I think they're in their in their contents I'm sure they're reflective. But anyway, I've run out.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, no, I think you were able to speak well to the question. It's very much a question that a lot of people interpret very differently. So, I love hearing people's responses. So yeah, thank you. So, we're getting near like the last couple, like, I think I only have like five-ish questions left here. But what's something that you think that the smaller type of publishing can offer that big publishing can offer, and kind of vice versa? We were talking a bit about it, and earlier, but I'm still gonna ask it a little bit more directly again.

Cary Fagan: Right, I guess it depends, I think, for a new writer it offers possibilities that are less likely with a larger publisher, especially now publishers I know we're inundated with manuscripts. I just had lunch with an editor yesterday and it's very, very hard to get published right now, to get a book published. I don't know if it's a creative writing programs or everybody started writing during Covid, but everybody.

Tamara Thompson: It's a lot of Covid stuff, I can tell you that there's a lot of Covid stuff. People just had time.

Cary Fagan: Yes, so, and there, and people, so the presses are really inundated. So, it provides, definitely provides them with a valuable opportunity. And I think that, you know, if you're a poet and you with a chapbook you can. Then you can take it to, you know, reading series, and you can also use it, you know I think somebody taught me actually, Susan, the poet Susan Glickman once said that her publisher told her you shouldn't be afraid to give your books away, and I think that's you know you can take a chapbook and use it almost like a calling card, you know. Let people read your work, publish it in chapbook form, maybe start your own press. If you don't have a chapbook to do it and send it out there. Send it out there to other writers. Make some poet friends. It just you know try to get your people to read your work. I think that's-that's part of partly what it can provide. It can just also provide just the right format for certain things for certain essays, certain-certain you know, certain suites of homes. And-and also some poem-some writers who aren't, who are very slow to finish work and don't have enough for a book. And they're, you know, not everybody's producing you know, a poem every day inundating the world with their work. Some people are, are, you know, taking a long time over there to produce their work. Everybody is legitimate, so I think-I-think-I think for writers, particularly. It's a valuable form, I think you know, obviously, most readers don't know about chapbooks, and I think that's too bad, I think, but the more adventurous ones hopefully will discover them, whether online or maybe through a friend who-who produces them. Or stumbling into a small press book fair more people discovered them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's something I-I have students come up to me because I'm they're, you know Ta, and they might be interested in grad school. And so, they asked me, you're a thesis student. What are you doing? And I'm like, I'm doing chapbooks, and they're like, cool. What's that? And I go, oh okay. Let me explain, and I see them get so excited. And I think that's something that this, like there, I feel like there are so many people who would love to be a part of this community and do like some and be a part of so much that's happening. But they just don't know it even exists. And so, to me, one of the things that I, personally, as like someone who can kind of be in some of these like eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds lives and be like, hey, have you heard of this thing? And they're like whoa! So, like for me, I love sharing what I do, and sharing this world with them, because I find so many of them are genuinely interested. Now I do teach creative writing and graphic fiction. So, I explain to them what a zine is, I explain to them what a chapbook is, and they love it, or even just I've run Zine workshops for the Trent library, and I've had people be like, well, I just carved a pumpkin at like Lady Eaton. What are you guys doing? And I'm like we're making books and there like cool. Can I put my pumpkin here and make books with you? And I'm like, sure let me explain how we do it. And they're like, this is fun. And I'm like, right? So, I feel like, if you just give people these avenues to explore, they get really excited about it, and I love it. Sorry I love it.

Cary Fagan: No, no, no, I-I love your enthusiasm, and I agree. I have two of my daughters have produced zines. One produced a number of zines of- of really good. She's now publishing, actually publishing a book, but she and I really liked her zines, and my stepdaughter has published a chapbook in the US. And so, we, it's and I agree with you. It's-it's a really exciting thing to do. I think, I mean, when I wanted to be a writer. All I wanted was, like, if I could have one of these little indie Canadian publishers publish me, I'll be in heaven. I never ever thought of publishing with Harper Collins, or Random House, or anything. It was not my ambition, nor to be a big seller, or-or I just never had that ambition, and I think too many people think that that's what being a writer is, you know, being a writer is, means like you know selling millions of copies, and-and they don't understand that's really a small. It might be the largest part of book sales, but it's a small part of-of the actual publishing writing world and umm...

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I have students that are like, I'm gonna write something and be rich and famous. And I'm like, okay, let's step, take a couple of steps back there, but money not in publishing. You gotta go somewhere else. You know that J.K. Rowling money you're seeing. That's movie rights and Universal land, and, like some of it, was from the books, for sure. But let's just say a lot of it is not from the book side of things.

Cary Fagan: I mean.

Tamara Thompson: And they go oh, and I'm like, yeah.

Cary Fagan: I-I mean, I- there are people. Obviously, people do become and do what they need to do to become that.

Tamara Thompson: True.

Cary Fagan: You need to have the ambition to be that. And that's-that's actually fine. I-I-I don't have any and you know what I-I-I just read tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, which is sold two million copies. And is it a very good book. I mean, you know some of them are actually good books. So, I don't have, you know I also don't have a prejudiced particularly against it. But I don't know, it's just yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I just don't want my students to shoot themselves in the foot before they've even got started. I'm like, let's have some realistic expectations here, because, like I, 100% want that for you, if that's what you want. If you want to get a book deal in Europe and tour around with your friend, who's also got a book deal in Europe. I love that that's your dream. But and I think you should still strive for it. But I also think I don't want you to not get it in the first couple submissions and then get disappointed like it's you should be proud of yourself for even submitting, because that's really hard. And even if you get a rejection like that's okay, I try and build up that, I try and give them that perseverance which is needed. And I try and give them that stable or backbone. Because I'm like, it's okay if you didn't get picked up the first time that happens to a lot of people like you're not being excluded or like, it's, it's a common thing that happens to people. And that's okay, right, and so keep going. Keep pushing, keep thriving, keep striving. And it's very hard to get the students to understand that you're going to be rejected a lot. And that's okay and very normal. So, they're like, well, that's really hard. And I'm like, yeah, it is. And that's okay. But that doesn't mean that you're not any less of a good writer, or any less of a good artist. Right?

Cary Fagan: I think the question yeah is, how do you create a life? How do you create a good life? How-how do you bring writing into your life and-and-and how do you do that realistically? And-and well, young people are not always realistic, but that's part what I what I'm still, you know, the lot of them tend to know zines where they know chapbooks, and it's how there's this kind of I mean, there is a sometimes it's really obvious what the difference is. But sometimes it's not. And obviously, I mean zines often have a you know, they have a sensibility to them. That's-that's obviously different, and a kind of style to them which is in a certain way more in, identifiable and also, they don't tend to be straight, but they can be, they can be just a collection of poetry or story, or whatever, for sure. There's really, it's really funny how they somehow seem like two separate things, and you'll go to a zine fair or something, and you won't really see the chapbook publishers, or you can go to the small press book fair, and you don't see the zine publishers. It's-it seems to have grown up independently. I don't. It's interesting. I don't really have...

Tamara Thompson: That is that is something that I've had such a hard time defining, because so many people are like, well, how are you going to define a chapbook against a zine. And I'm like, well, sometimes with the amount of people I've been talking to, sometimes it's literally just this person decided to call this a zine, and someone decided to call this a chapbook. Like, I've talked to some visual artists who are like, no, this is a chapbook, but people kept calling it a zine because it was art. Like,

they did art in the book instead of maybe traditional writing, or as traditional writing, like it was a mixture of blended genres and mediums. Right? So, people kept calling it a zine. But the artist was like, no, this is a chapbook. I made it as a chapbook. Please call it a chapbook, right? And so, it's very interesting that sometimes it's literally just what the person decides it, or the community decides it. And I find specifically with zines and chapbooks it's very hard to define them, so they're kind of on like a sliding scale for me. It's like sometimes there's very much an idea of what a chapbook is, and then what a zine is. But then there's all the other stuff that people create in the middle, which hard to define. But I guess that's just what a definition is. The closer you get to defining it. The further way you get to actually defining it correctly.

Cary Fagan: Right. I guess one thing about zines is they're virtually always self-published. They're not really seeing houses that publish other people so much. I don't think.

Tamara Thompson: Sometimes they can be more of a community project. But I- I love, I think, specifically, zines have more of like a fan culture. So, I think that's why a lot of younger people know them, because there's a big fandom culture, especially like with my age group, a little older and like that's very, very strong. So, I think they know zines because of that fan culture that zines kinda has with it, and especially also with like the art communities, because I will go to a convention for like, for example, Fan Expo, I will not see a chapbook anywhere. I will see a lot of zines, because these artists will make these tiny books. And it's literally just like a little bit of like, I bought my partner one that was based off of a video game that no one knows about. And the, and I picked it up. And I was like, oh, this is like a fan fiction like someone wrote and did the art and everything, and they called it a zine. But if-if they hadn't called it a zine, I would have called it a chapbook, right?

Cary Fagan: Right.

Tamara Thomspen: And whenever you pick up those objects the artist goes you know what this is, and I'm like I do know what this is. And this is a fun thing you got here. And they're like, thank you, because most people don't know what they are when they first pick them up.

Cary Fagan: Maybe-maybe it's partly depends on what tradition the person comes out of like. If they know about zines, they're making zines. If they know about chapbooks. They're making chapbooks and.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Cary Fagan: They kind of are. It's like two different species of zebra, or something.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Cary Fagan: Anyway, give me the last questions. So, cause I'm gonna have to go.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah, yeah, cause we're getting so why do you think most like small presses and micro presses have to close up shop? Because it is a sad, unfortunate truth that places do end up having to close. And have you kept it open, or why?

Cary Fagan: Well, it you know it, it takes a lot of it does take a lot of energy, and I think that it's very much a personal thing chapbook houses are run by individuals out of their homes, and personal circumstances change, and people run out of time to do things or their interest moves elsewhere. Or I don't, or possibly they get discouraged, although you know, I think from I think it's probably more the reasons are probably more personal, while-while it changes, you know, it's because it's different from I mean as an author I've at least had three of my publishing houses go bankrupt at some point, and that is obviously has to do with the you know, the financial conditions of being a publisher in Canada. But you know, I think, for chapbooks although that it's possible that, that's one of the reasons it's more has to do with personal and you know, energy and desire. And maybe some people, for example, start doing chapbooks, and then maybe they start getting published elsewhere. And they don't-they don't personally need it anymore. That's something that might happen and of course, because they're really usually one person operations, too. You know some, it's hard to keep going if that person has personal financial troubles or health problems, or-or whatever it is. I think that's really mostly I imagine, mostly the cause I guess I'm trying to think of I can't think of like I know of ones in the past that existed that don't anymore. But I don't really know of any that, the last few years that I really like that have stopped publishing. I guess I know some publishing houses, but not some chapbook houses, so I don't have any really, examples to draw on.

Tamara Thompson: No, I think what you stated is kind of some of the universal facts. So, I have two questions left, and they're more about giving space for cool things that you've seen and for giving space for you. But what's something important about D.I.Y. press history, or like books or chapbooks, and something that you've seen, that you wish people knew about whether that be something important that someone did, or just a cool ephemeral text that you saw that, like only five were made, and no one knows about it? But it was really interesting. It's just a way to give space to some of the history, because again, these things are so ephemeral.

Cary Fagan: Yeah, there are some that I have seen in the past, and that I have really admired and written about on my blog, including one or two pretty more political. With more political subject matter that I thought, we're doing some really interesting work about mental health, for example. There's-there's so I think there's some valuable work that you know could be better-better known for-for that reason. And then there's just others that, for example I just reviewed of the Blue Sky by shoot. I'm gonna look cause that's driving me crazy by the yeah, yeah. Sorry. By Cameron Anstee, who you know, and it's just a such a you know what... it's just a lovely book, that and, in fact, in my review, I sort of said, this is more an appreciation than a review. It's like today will be a better day if you sit with that little chapbook and read those lovely responses to being alive. You know? So, I think you know sometimes there are manifestos and

chapbooks that are really interesting. Anstruther their press, I think, has Manifesto series. I've just ordered one, but I haven't got it yet. So, I do think there's-there's some, I got a-a little chapbook magazine like a really tiny scrappy one, which and the subject of-of the issue was ceasefire now.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Cary Fagan: I think in the way in which people, even in their very small ways, have a need to express how they're feeling about some, you know what's happening in the world and wanting to-to share it. I think those things are very valuable, and I think they could be certainly seen by seen-seen by more people. But maybe I-on the other hand, I think maybe the work of chapbooks is to do the work under the surface. You know, I mean, it's not, they're not, they're often not intended to have a large distribution. Maybe-maybe they work in more mysterious ways then-then-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah,

Cary Fagan: We even know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Okay, final question here, what's something important about your history that you wish people would know about?

Cary Fagan: What's important about my history? Well, I guess just in, really just in, because it, I don't know how to answer that question in a non eccentric way but that my first published books, after ten years of frustration, directly came out of publishing a chapbook. It was a short story that was published. And this is how the world has changed. This chapbook was reviewed in the Globe and Mail and Quill and Quire and people really noticed it. It's something that I guess would not likely happen now, probably, and the publisher, a publisher, saw the review of that chapbook and asked me for a book of stories, and that became my first collection, so I would-don't I feel like if it weren't for chapbooks I-I would have first of all, maybe given up because I would have had no outlet and second of all, directly led to my finding a publisher. So, I am both proud that I started by self publishing, and that chapbooks played this important a role in my life at the beginning of-of my career.

Tamara Thompson: I think that's a great, a great way to end. But do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording?

Cary Fagan: Yes, I don't. God, I feel like I've been very boring, actually, and haven't really had anything-

Tamara Thompson: Oh no you have!

Cary Fagan: -new to say. But anyway, I'm glad you're doing this. I'd love, I'd be delighted to see it when it's over, because I am like I-I-I could learn from it well, and one of the things I-I mean, we kick around ideas, and one of the ones I had was interviews with other chapbook publishers



and producing chapbooks of them, which I think you should do. That seems like you should be doing so, I'll throw that at you.

Tamara Thompson: Okay.

Cary Fagan: Yeah, anyway, I wish you the best of luck. And I, I'm gonna take a look at your press.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you so much. I'm going to stop the recording now.

Kyle Flemmer

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is July 24<sup>th</sup> the time is 2:04 pm. And just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview time. This interview is for small press and traditional press.

Kyle Flemmer: My name is Kyle Flemmer, and I'm calling in on behalf of the Blasted Tree Publishing Company. My pronouns are he/him and we are based in Calgary. We've been here for about eight years. Our first couple of years of operation were in Montreal. I am the founder and publisher of the Blasted Tree. I kind of do all of it. So, any of the—you call me an editor or designer, any of that kind of stuff, I do it. On the side I write poetry, and I work for the Athabasca University Press as their production and promotions coordinator.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Thank you so much for that lovely introduction. So just to get the ball rolling and just to kind of start off this conversation: How did you discover, like, zines and chapbooks and this type of, like, smaller publishing? Was there like a specific moment? When about in your life did you find them? Just kind of giving some background.

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah. I was about halfway through my undergraduate at Concordia University, was taking creative writing and starting to look for outlets to publish my work. And I just sort of fell backwards into the—the-Montreal has a great zine community, zine makers, and you know, a lot of them are visual artists and that kind of thing. And there was a very small group of them producing literary work. And so, I got quite interested in this. The print shop, right across the street from the school, has a little display rack of samples of stuff that they were printing on behalf of other students, and I saw some zines and some chap books in there, and it—something clicked. I'm like, oh, I can do this with my own work and with my friends' work and then I never have to ask another person for permission to publish my work ever again, right? So yeah, seeing it sort of out in the world in this accessible form was a bit of a light bulb moment for me. And that's—that got the ball rolling.

Tamara Thompson: I love how you use the word permission, because, yeah, it is like, you don't have to ask anyone for permission to—to do it. You can just create. You don't need to prove or get permission to do stuff. That's a great way of stating it (technical issue occurred). But it's a lot of work to start stuff like this. So how did the press, like, get off the ground?

Kyle Flemmer: Well, I was on summer break, and I set up a website, and I started with four or five chapbooks. I've reached out to other people, all of whom were in my creative writing class, and said, "Hey, I really liked that story that you read us, or these poems that you that, you've been working on, are, you know, really interesting to me. Would you let me publish them for you?" And essentially everybody said, yes, 'cause I—I think that's a pretty sweet offer. So, I was working part time, I think—I was working at a restaurant or bartending. So, you know my evenings were busy, but my days were wide open, and so I used that free time to—to set

up the press. You're right, there's a lot of, there's a lot of moving parts to publishing, especially we do some digital, some print. So, trying to cover all those bases is a lot of work, and I think, having that free time right at the outset to do the trial and error, helped to get things going.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I understand that staying up till like closing till, like, two or three am, going home and crashing. But then, having, like your full days, basically is, like, well, I can't do anything until seven pm. I used to do banquet serving with weddings. So, yeah.

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah. The website itself took, you know, a month or two to set up, of pretty consistent efforts. But I was—I was always really worried about setting something up that I wouldn't—that would be really easy to update. So now, when I add something to it, it just takes a few minutes. Start a new web page, put the content on it, sort of fill in the blanks and post it: good to go.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So, like, correct me if I'm wrong: you guys started doing a little bit more traditional books, as well, right, like that? More traditional, like, 'cause I don't know how your process is, but it seems like on your website, you have a place for like books, and then chapbooks and like your broad sites. Am I correct in that?

Kyle Flemmer: Yes, the books are pretty recent. We released two books in 2020, one of which is my book, the *Barcode Poetry*, and the other is by Ben Robinson. It's called *Without Form*. That one's like a six-hundred-page hardcover, dust jacketed, beautiful book. So, sort of different ends of the spectrum. Mine's like a-a cheap and cheerful paperback kind of thing.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Kyle Flemmer: It was always sort of my intention to move toward printing books, but they're quite expensive and so it took a long time to get to the point where, not only I did I have the savings to put towards some books, but also the audience who would then buy them, and-and they—

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kyle Flemmer: ...and I could cover my costs that way—the way the website is organized as, like, print ephemera, like broadsides and leaflets and that kind of stuff, and then chapbooks and books, that's also relatively new. It used to be more of like a poetry, fiction, nonfiction, digital art kind of thing but I decided to shift towards foregrounding the—the format, whether it's a book or a chapbook, that kind of thing. Because it—it fits better with—the way that I actually think about the projects. I think about a chapbook taking a-a month or two; I think about a full book taking like six months to a year; I think about a leaflet being something that I can do in an afternoon. So.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kyle Flemmer: They fit conveniently into those groups in my mind.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it was a very easy way to like to navigate, the website and find the certain things. Yeah. I liked the design, anyway. But, so, I know not every press has necessarily, like, an editorial philosophy or a goal, or it could be just as simple as let's make stuff, but do you guys have something that would maybe constitute as, like, an editorial philosophy, or like a press goal for what you're trying to do?

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah, I will admit at the beginning, I-I fell into the same sort of descriptive trap I think a lot of publishers fall into, particularly magazine publishers when they say we want your-your bravest, your most exciting work, right? But that's...

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kyle Flemmer: ...it's so vague and then I move toward being more specific about wanting visual poetry stuff, that was formally experimental. And that could be a very broad category. But I-I wanted it to—I wanted the author to sort of justify that to me in a way. How does it qualify as formally experimental, and I found that I wasn't getting exactly what I sort of wanted. So now I ask pretty specifically for visual poetry, and other formally experimental stuff. But I want what the author is really excited about. I want the thing that makes them feel like they are experimenting or pushing boundaries. Everyone's boundaries are in different places, right? Like what seems radical to me might not be the same as what seems radical to, like, a first year creative writing student. So, I want the Blasted Tree to be a-a place where the, regardless of where your boundaries are, you can—you can feel comfortable sort of at least submitting. But yeah, I will, I-my interests have narrowed in, quite a bit more towards the visual poetry end of things, particularly because it's so fun to put in a print format. There's a real alchemy between the-the materials, the design, and the content. And then the way that you talk about that content, to like market the-the project, or whatever, I feel, like, that's—there's just something really exciting about that in particular. So.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, you-you kind of answered a bit of my next question about, like, why you publish, like, specifically the works that you publish. So, it's just for the record and stuff like that. It's mostly poetry, like. Is there any experimental fiction, creative nonfiction like? Do you, like, dip your toes into that kind of stuff, if you find someone who's excited about it?

Kyle Flemmer: Yes, yeah. And I'm open to all sorts of stuff. I just tend to have my, sort of, go-to tastes, I suppose. It's not, —it's not a hard and fast rule, but in the—in the past, we've published all sorts of stuff. Spoken word video poems that are like embedded from YouTube. Or we published a short story that's like a hyper compressed version of the Old Man and the Sea, that was essentially—did like a statistical analysis of Hemingway's writing and then used the computer to reproduce that but, like, at ten percent of the length or something. And it's—it's, you know, really funny. And it really captures Hemingway's, like, voice and that process is just so cool to me that how-how could I turn that away, right?

(Technical issue occurred.)

Tamara Thompson: But yeah. So I-I really love that. You're into the experimental and not just like the poetry, but also, just when it comes to like fiction and stuff like that. I love that kind of stuff, too. We do some fiction and stuff like that, like, we did a sci-fi one which was more traditional. But it was very like short and cool. But we also did an experimental fiction piece that was basically about a daycare provider, (technical issues occurred). So, they're gender neutral. You don't know their pronouns, or anything like that, and they get stabbed on their front door, like, impaled and they have to hide it from the toddlers that are around them. And it kind of feels like an allegory, for something's going messy in your life, and the people around you don't understand. It's like having a bunch of toddlers being, like, look, we got Band-aids for you, and you're like, "That's really nice, but that's not gonna help."

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You know. And so, it was really interesting that came out during the pandemic, and that one was fun to—fun to create. And then we did like a little poem thing by Faizal, and he did just something about all the short poems, about all the planets, and then also the gods that usually are attributed to those planets.

Kyle Flemmer: Right.

Tamara Thompson: Just fun stuff, you know, and just like weird shit. I appreciate it, when other people appreciate the weird stuff.

Kyle Flemmer: It's—it's hard to quantify the weird stuff, as well. One of my artist friends loves the expression "Undeniable is undeniable." And it—he—it's re-referring to just that special something that—that you know makes a weird piece jump out at you. You know it. It's not something you could have asked for. It's something that you know—it's—it's part of its magic, is the surprise of—of engaging with it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I am curious on how your like—what your process is for actually creating these lovely books that you'd make from submission, to editorial, to actually physically making them? Because you make some really nice stuff.

Kyle Flemmer: Thank you.

Tamara Thompson: It's true.

Kyle Flemmer: Thanks. The submissions are pretty much open all the time, so stuff just rolls in, and I—I read it when I have occasion to and think about how it fits in with what I've published recently, and what I'm looking to publish, coming up. I generally don't do a whole lot of, like, content editing unless like, sometimes I'll have an author, or like a poet, present a collection, and they'll say, "Oh, you know that these are—here's the thirty poems I've done recently. I need some help shaping them into something." I can sort of help them with that a little bit. But if somebody presents, like, a, "This is a finished project," you know, I'll

be like, "Okay, well, let's put a comma here, and there's a spelling error here," but other than that, I kind of just leave it as it is. The flip side of that is, I tend to take a lot of ownership over the design and the materials. I really enjoy the process of-of designing stuff. And while I—on one hand, I really respect an author's vision for their work; on the other hand, I feel like part of my role is to add value to their content like, why isn't it just a text document on their computer? It's there's—there's something that I bring to the table. And—and I have increasingly felt comfortable, claiming that part of the process to myself. I think the best example is this—this chapbook—chapbook we did for Sasha Archer called *Rooted Retreat* and the content is—he took a bunch of author bios, and he redacted all the—the proper nouns out of it. So, everyone's names, all the magazine names and whatever—so it says, you know, redacted, published, redacted, and redacted, and in 2003 I published, "redacted" and "redacted," right? It's quite funny, and it makes it—makes the—the sort of rhetorical flourishes that people put in their author seem very, like, almost childish, self-indulgent in a way. And he—he brings it, you know, the—the meat aspect of it, the depersonalize meat of people's like, the, their bios, I guess. And so, I took this project. I love it, but it's—in a way it's kind of disrespectful, to the people who—who he sampled their bios from. So, in a way, I sort of wanted to—to enact this violation on his work as well. So, I printed it out on little red cards, and I stacked it up like a bunch of Deli meats, and I tied it together with butchers' twine, and I bound it in like a Styrofoam tray with Saran wrap and a sticker just like you would see meat at the butcher. And it's got a sticker on the back that's like, you know—if you want to read this, open it up and read it. But good luck ever getting it back together, you know: it's—it's a consumable item, and it's a one-way sort of operation. And when I presented it to Sasha, you could see that he was like—like it was, it was so good he couldn't help but accept it as—as what it was. So that's, for me, that was the most successful version of the taking it and change—transforming it into something that you know serves both Sasha and the press and me, as the designer. And then, hopefully, the reader who encounters this object thinks "What the hell is this?" and has, like a lot of fun, a real memorable experience interacting with it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's so fun. I love that—that like you down to the sticker at the back, to the twine, like, that's brilliant.

Kyle Flemmer: Well, thank you.

Tamara Thompson: So, is it just kind of you running the show, like, how does the press make decisions? You were talking a little bit about how you work with a lot of authors. But are you, like, the main pillar who's, like, kind of keeping this whole thing going.

Kyle Flemmer: Yes, yeah. In recent years I've sort of put together and edited—I call them my editorial collective, and if I have any, well, mostly run like big picture stuff by them, like, oh, I'm considering doing a couple of books this season, and—and like for a while I had a subscription service where you could sign up for a year and you would get everything I published for a year. And when I decided to move to a different model, I contacted these eight people, and you know, said, "This is the position I'm in. What do you think?" And so, they would give me

their, you know, casual feedback to-to help guide the press. I don't really turn to them for editorial feedback, even though I call them my Editorial Collective. But other than other than them, my unofficial circle of-of advisors, it's just me. It's, yeah...

Tamara Thompson: They're the—they're the editors of the press, on how to help the press. Not necessarily on the works—I get that. Yeah. So, I am also curious because you were talking about a subscription service. Do you go to markets with these? Do you sell them mostly online? Because I know you have a store. Where do you sell these things to actually get them into people's hands and interacting with them?

Kyle Flemmer: Well, we sell them primarily online. And then yeah, everything we publish is-is freely accessible online. So, the-the store is pretty exclusively for the print items. The model we use is compensating authors with-with contributor copies. So usually, twenty percent of the print runs goes to the author or, you know, ten-ten copies of a fifty-copy run, and I encourage them to-to sell them or to-to trade them, give them away whatever they want with-with-with them. So that puts a chunk of them out in the world. We do artist fairs and zine fairs. There's a couple here in Calgary that are run once or twice a year that I like to attend and then readings and events.

(Technical issues occurred).

Kyle Flemmer: No, it's all good. But yeah, the last, the last avenue being events and readings. Sometimes, you know, we'll launch a new chapbook. If it's a local author, we'll set up a little reading or-or tag along with some other event. And then occasionally we'll do like a press event. For instance, we have our ten-year anniversary coming up in September, so we'll have an event at a local coffee shop with some music, and some readings, and some books there.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Yeah, I feel, like with Whispering Wick I'm turning around and it's gonna be like, five years old. And I'm, like, huh, "How'd that happen? Oh, damn!"

Kyle Flemmer: It goes fast.

Tamara Thompson: I should maybe do something.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: So, since you've been doing this for like ten years now, what are some challenges that the press has faced in its, like, since its creation? And you can share whatever you feel comfortable with.

Kyle Flemmer: Oh, that's a good question. Some of the challenges have been, well, my reason for doing it has changed. And so, you know, there's the, that-that's kind of the existential crisis of the press is, you know. Why? Why bother? Is—and then my answer to that has changed, and when-when that answer changes, you sort of have to, you know, wrestle with a new set of-of reasons. At the beginning I just I wanted to-to get my own work out there. I found it very challenging to be accepted into literary magazines

and I was, you know, frustrated. And so, I'm like, you know what, "Let's just, let's make a little bit more space. I'll put some of my stuff in there, and I'll make some space for other people, and that'll be good enough." After I graduated it became my lifeline to the literary community, because, you know, I had all these friends in school, but once I moved from Montreal back to Calgary, I felt kind of adrift. And I didn't, you know, have anyone to talk to about poems, anymore. So, my reason for doing it was finding new people to connect with, and of continually exposing myself to new writing through submissions and-and through connecting with the-the community, 'cause I'd, like, I'd have to go-I was going to readings like once a week for a while there just to meet people and invite them to submit. And then later on, I-my purpose for doing it became like a career, I wanna build all these editorial skills and design skills and whatever. Maybe I can turn the Blasted Tree into my full-time job. Or maybe I can develop enough skills doing this to land a job elsewhere, which is what-is sort of ultimately happened. And then, when that happened, it sort of shifts again to being like, "This is just like a hobby that I love doing." It has-it fits in a really nice place in the world and in my life. And I-I just feel fulfilled doing it. And so, I continue to do it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, you answered a bit of my next question-is- why are chapbooks important to you? I'm still gonna ask the question directly, but.

Kyle Flemmer: Sure. Sure. Well, chapbooks specifically are important to me, because they are the-they are the place you get to-to try out your new stuff. In the sense that well-first of all, I should say, I think sort of in series, when I'm writing or making art, or anything like that. I think in, like, batches of ten or twelve or twenty and a chapbook is just a perfect length to-it-explore an idea through a series. A book feels like such a big commitment. It's such a ton of work, and you have to... it's just a different sort of-it's the difference between a sprint and-and a marathon and so the-the chapbook fulfills this function of, you know, of the sprint, the-the literary sprint. There's so much less at stake than with a book, you know. When you print a book, you-you do three hundred copies or something. You have a lot of money on the line. You gotta spend a lot of time marketing it. With the chapbook, it's like it costs, I don't know, the twelve bucks to print it at the-at the local library on the-on the photocopier, and a few staples, and away you go. There's-there's essentially nothing at stake. You can almost use them like business cards. You can hand them out, willy nilly. You can throw them from the rooftops if you want, it's-it's very free. And it-it showed me that you don't have to play some sort of like literary game to fit into the expected publication channels. You can, you can invent any game you want and play it, however you want, via the chapbook, I should say.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so like, kind of talking about like the publishing machine and industry, do you think chapbooks are important to Canadian publishing itself? If so, why or why not? I'm-I'm interested to hear what you-what you think.



Kyle Flemmer: Oh, that's a—that's a good question. I know at this point I've—I've—I know a lot of Canadian authors, and I don't know very many who didn't publish chapbooks or have chapbooks of their work published at some stage in the game. I'm talking about like Giller prize winners, who, when they were young, were having their poems put out by like Blue Ointment, or-or some-some cool experimental chapbook press. The path to becoming, like, a Margaret Atwood type person is almost impossible without a strong grassroots community. I, like, in fact, I can only think of a handful of people. Most of them have gone through the, like the, Academy. They've, you know, built up their credit as a professor, and so, when their novel comes out, they have some serious attention that way. Otherwise, if you're not in the Academy, you got to be developing a readership somehow. And it—it seems to me that without chapbooks we wouldn't have this—this really powerful grassroots community. And I should say a community that, like Canada, is very strongly represented by the small press community around the world. Like, there's a publisher in Sweden, Tim Glacette. About half the books that they publish are by Canadian authors. Penteract Press in the UK, lots of Canadian authors. Paper View, Paper View books in Portugal, tons of Canadian authors. And the reason is because the Canadian small press micropress community is like, is on fire. It—it really is, even if it doesn't like to translate to—to dollars in our bank accounts. It's—it's the most fertile literary space that we have.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I'm—I'm interested in what you think of this next question. But do you think this kind of, like, smaller publishing reflects Canada itself in some way? And again, take that wherever you desire.

Kyle Flemmer: Well, Canada is so big, it's so regional. It's hard to have like a national—it's hard to have like a national culture. And this seems so obvious. Like in in the States, where, like you have your—your LA culture and your New York culture and it—they're both so big that it makes sense for them to be separate. But, like, Calgary doesn't feel big enough to be its own thing, right? Toronto has its own sort of thing, and even Vancouver doesn't really feel like so big as to reach across the whole country. So, we have this really sort of regional-regional divisions. I feel like I'm—I lost track of the question a little bit there.

Tamara Thompson: No, it's totally okay. Like, do you think this type of smaller publishing reflects Canada—

Kyle Flemmer: Oh!

Tamara Thompson: itself in some way?

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah. Okay, so what I'm working towards here is the attempts towards national culture and national identity, like through the Canada Council for the arts. Canada Council grant was initially meant to foster national identity. And this, curiously and pretty fantastically backfired, in that Canada is actually quite a cultural mosaic. And when you start funding artists from a variety of different backgrounds, what is produced is very disparate, different perspectives and—and works which is fantastic. So, I think small press in Canada is reflective of that—actually, that we are so multifaceted. And there are so many different

perspectives that can be shared and once you get up to, like, the big industry of, you know, Penguin Random House Book publishing, it's a little bit more, you know—they're—it's a little bit more mainstream or homogeneous, or they're looking for their guaranteed bestseller rather than experimenting, or-or, sorry, gambling on a bit more of a radical experimental work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I find it very interesting that Canada is so big. Even just our provinces are huge. And people think we're so small, and it's like we have a smaller population. But like geographically, we're massive, like the Hudson Bay lowlands, which is only a part of Ontario. You can put two Texas in there. Texas is supposed to be the big State, and you could put two of them in not even the whole province of Ontario, which is not the biggest province, you know.

Kyle Flemmer: Totally, and writing can be so reflective of place, and if-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kyle Flemmer: -you know, if we have so many different places and environments and ecologies, it doesn't make sense, for, like-a-a book about an Ontario Forest is necessarily different than a book about, you know, the rocky forests of the Rocky Mountain. They're just, they're different. So. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, we were, you were-you were touching a little bit on more of like the bigger, like traditional publishing houses, because, like, there's the smaller, more traditional publishing houses like the mid-sized ones. And then, like, the gigantic ones of Penguin Random House, slowly taking over the world. But what do you think that this type of smaller publishing, like chapbooks, or even just even small press books, offer, that maybe, that bigger, more traditional side of publishing can't offer? Or maybe, and even vice versa, right?

Kyle Flemmer: Yes. Yeah. Well so, I think a lot about publishers like Coach House books and Book\*hug that started as like chapbook presses, or sort of more, much, much smaller than they are presently, and they've sort of grown to fill that middle tier and they still have one foot in the community of writers and-and-and makers that they serve. And then also, they're-they're large enough to-to-to capitalize on economies of scale so they can get-they can get nice. Like, Coach House books always print on nice paper because they can buy a ton of it at once and get it for cheap. You know, I can't print on that nice paper unless I'm like willing to really splash out for it. But then the larger publishers they-they look at Coach House's bestsellers, and it's not unusual for someone to have like a breakthrough book with Coach House and then, now (technical issues occurred) is publishing them-or-or, you know, whomever because those larger companies, they want to know the audience is there. They wanna-they want to know that they're going to see returns on their book, so I think that there is this nice-nice, I don't wanna say, like, "hierarchy" is not the right word, "tier" isn't the right word. It's-it's an "ecosystem". There's-there's, you know this, the smaller entities, the-the little creatures on the down, in the dirt. And then there's the-the big old eagles soaring over everything. And they all, they just, they serve

different functions to the, to the whole ecosystem. So, I think it's—I think it's healthy.

Tamara Thompson: I—I one hundred percent agree. When people ask me for my project, why I'm talking to other people other than small publishers, and like people who make chapbooks, and I'm like, well, you need an author and a poet to make a chapbook, and a lot of chapbooks help smaller presses and more traditional presses. And Canada is, again, I use the term "ecosystem". My mom's an ecologist. So, when talking to her about it, it's what we came up with, and it's, I think, it's a very good word, because it's something that I've heard, not just like you, but other people describe publishing as, because it's not necessarily a hierarchical system. It's a system that works and each part kind of needs each other in order for everything to kind of function.

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah. And there's, you know, there's a whole bunch of people who aren't interested in publishing a big, like a big book, or even a book at all. Like, I've had—I've had the privilege of publishing several spoken word artists who never had considered committing their words to print in any format. They just, "I'm a stage performer." I'd be like, "Okay. Well, next time you're on the stage, here's a leaflet that you can give out to people who are excited about your work and can have your email address on the back. And now you've got a—a whole bunch of new opportunities coming your way." Like some of the people I worked with at the bookstore here in Calgary, you know, they are hobby poets, but you know, when the opportunity to put a little chapbook together for their friends and family comes along. And so how do you say no to that? And that might be the long and short of it, so far as their literary career, or ambitions go. But that's—that's great. I pride myself on being part of that, like the grassroots community, rather than the—the people who are leaning really heavily into the professionalization of the industry.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I—one of the things I, so I teach creative writing and graphic fiction. So, I'm dealing with a lot of young artists, a lot of young poets and stuff. And sometimes I'll have kids come up to me and be like, "I want to be a rich and famous author." And I'm like, "Okay, you might be able to get the fame, the rich part let's—let's talk about that, because there's not a lot of money in publishing, if there's any at all."

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: "What do you mean? I know J. K. Rowling makes a lot of money, and I'm like, you know, universal land." You know those movies that make billions of dollars every year. Yeah, that has something to do with it I think.

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah, like, even Neil Gaiman's putting out a new book every year. Cause why do you think that is? He needs the money.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, like, you know, and it's, like, it's one of those things where I'm, like, publishing. There is not a lot of money. There can be other opportunities that can, I guess, lead to more money if you've proven yourself, but, like, to the industries at large. But it's, like, at the end of the day there's not a lot of money here. But you gotta have to

be doing this because you love it. And I think a lot of them are like, "Oh, okay." And I'm like, "Yeah, it's-it's a lesson that we all must learn that it's not just that even there's gonna be a lot of money. There's just the lesson of, "Good Lord, I hope I make some money." And so, yeah, it's-it always surprises my students but most of them just knuckle down and still do stuff, too, which, you know-it's-it's always nice to see, you know?

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah, I like to think of it like skiing, you know: not everybody who skis is gonna be a-an Olympic athlete or professional skier. But a lot of those people and a lot of people will just spend a bunch of money on equipment and lift passes and travel to and from the mountains and all that sort of stuff. But it's fun, and they enjoy it. And they connect with like-minded people. Some of those people become ski instructors, or lift operators, or whatever, and they do make their-they do make their living that way.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kyle Flemmer: It's more so about our collective love for the activity than it is about, "Oh, I'm gonna, you know, I'm gonna win gold at the next Olympics."

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I use the example of hockey. I'm from the North, so everybody wants to get out of the North, wants to become an HNL hockey player. That's how you get-that's how you leave like Cochrane or Moosonee and stuff, or even Timmins, like, become big like Shania Twain, because she's from Timmins, right? So, like, you have people, like, I use the analogy of a hockey player. There's a lot of people-it's like you can still enjoy hockey, and, like, you still sink in a lot of money. But that doesn't mean every kid who plays hockey wants to be an NHL player or can be an NHL player. But you can still play the sport, even if you don't think you're gonna become the next like Carry Price, or, like Sid the Kid. You know what I mean?

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: There's still that collective community of people who like that thing and enjoy that thing with you, and that-it's enjoyable together. Right?

Kyle Flemmer: Totally. Yeah. I totally agree with that.

Tamara Thompson: The sports analogy seems to really work well with the students. So, I understand the ski one, that's a good one. I might use that one, too, because not everybody's as into hockey. But there's quite a few who like skiing.

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah-

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Sorry. Little bit of a derailment there. So, I'm going to just move on to the next question here. But which is the unfortunate, but,

like, sad truth and fact of, like, small publishing, and like micropress and stuff like that. But why do you think most, like, smaller presses have to close up shop because it's-it's true. A lot of places do, can only go for so long. So why do you think that is. And how have you still kept the press going? Because again, you're coming up to ten years, right? So.

Kyle Flemmer: I think some people-it's resources, you know. They have-I've got X amount of dollars set aside, and when they run out of it, then it's, like, okay, well, that was fun. We're gonna close the mag-that was, we did four issues with this magazine, and that's all they'll-there'd be. Some of it is, like I was saying earlier, the reason for doing it changes, or maybe their reason for doing it goes away. Or perhaps you know, other aspects of life.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kyle Flemmer: And so, you have less free time. I mean, there's all sorts of reasons. They're way more reasons to stop than there are to keep going, if you, if you, like, dig down too deep thinking about it. I think for me, as I was saying, that keeping going is a matter of being able to-to-to react to the changing reasons for doing it. I've also sort of taken the approach that, like, I'm just gonna, like, all-all the-all the money I put into it is like a sunk cost, or it's a gift to the press in a sense that I never really expect to make any money off of it. And I really only price stuff to break even. Just to sort of keep things afloat without, you know, putting myself in danger of missing rent next month, or something like that, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kyle Flemmer: So yeah. I think-I think it's-it-oh, burnout is another one. I should say-mention, I think there is a lot of work that goes into producing this kind of stuff. And after a few years it can-you can just be burned out. And it's totally normal to feel that way and need to take a step back.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I think, like, again: life just happens. And if you're the only person doing it, like, in your situation, you're like the main reason why the press is still being made and pushing and stuff. But if, like, something happens to, like, the one person doing everything, like, they get sick, a family issue happens. Like, life still keeps happening around you, even if you're still doing something or want to continue something.

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah, for sure. Like-and recently, I've had a full-time job. So, it puts me in a better position to pay for the press, but it-I have less time to work on it. So, it's, like, a give and take, and I don't know if there's any perfect-perfect situation, in order to keep-keep the thing alive.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, especially with how expensive the world has become, not just with groceries, but like paper and ink. OOOOOo, I looked at how much my ink for my LaserJet was going to be, recently, and went "Oooooooh, no."

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah, it's getting out of control, isn't it?

Tamara Thompson: Oh yeah. So, we're getting into the last couple of questions here. I only have three left. And these are more just making space questions. Because again, a lot of stuff that I learn about the community is mostly just through other people, just telling me stuff. Because again, there's so many cool things that Canadians do. But we're also spread apart. And let's just say, Google doesn't exactly have the best way to search for things.

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Trust me, I've exhausted all of my options, and most of the time I find the coolest shit just by asking people.

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah, totally.

Tamara Thompson: So, this question is: what's something you wish people knew about Canadian publishing, like, what's something you wish the average person on the street, or that the public knew about Canadian publishing?

Kyle Flemmer: Oh, that it is made up of people just like them. As we mentioned earlier, the, like, not needing to wait for permission from somebody else to publish something. Everybody who's presently involved in publishing one day was just like, you know, "I'm going to claim that authority to myself". And from the inside, it doesn't feel like you know you're taking your, like, I-I-I wouldn't position myself as an authority figure. I would position myself as like a facilitator. I-I derive a lot of pleasure from making space for other people, in helping to promote their work, in adding my own little touch to it. I wish more people realized that you're-you're literally just the print button away from being a publisher. You're a twenty-dollar table fee at the local arts market from being a-a bookseller. You're, you know you're one-one event away from being an event coordinator, you're-you're-there's-there's the only thing between you and-and a path in-in this community is-is you know, your willingness to claim those things to yourself. When you're in university and creative writing programs, they very rarely say this is on you to keep-to keep the thing alive for all of us. Everybody wants to be a writer. Nobody wants to be an editor. But we need editors. Nothing gets published without an editor. Very few things get published without an editor. I had a really good creative writing, professor. They were speaking specifically about grants and stuff like that. And they said, "You know, the Canada Council, grant seems so out of reach and-and impossible to get, and it might be the first couple of times you apply for it. But you have to apply, because if nobody applied, they would take it away from us, and it's better that we have it. And then that money is circulated somehow, even if it's difficult. Then-then it goes away." And I think that's true for literary magazines, for small press publishers, even

for the big publishers. They will go away if-if you don't take charge of, sort of, your own destiny in the space.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I keep trying to tell my students two things. But I'll say this one first, is that a good author, quote unquote, doesn't get published. It's the persistent one, the one that just didn't give up, you know. Because even, say, the good author put in their manuscript twice. Well, there's a lot of decisions that go into why you accept and reject a manuscript, other than it being good, and that writer might be better than writer A writer or B is better, right? The art is more good. But writer A gets published because they kept trying. They kept learning, and they kept growing and kept going for it, right? Perseverance wins at the end of the day, and my students are always surprised by that. And I also tell them, quote unquote, "good", like what is good? No one knows. We can sit here all day and debate it for hours and hours, because it's so subjective in something like writing that in itself is so subjective. Right? Like there are the popular things, of course, and we can talk about why something is popular and stuff like that, or why something has literary merit, and you can debate all day about it. But it's, like, there is no point in writing something if you're not having fun. If you're not having fun, the thing you're writing will never be good because it will be evidence to the person reading that you don't care, or you don't like it. And I know a lot of students who have come up to me and being, like, "I feel like I have to write for this reader or for this publisher." And I'm like, "Don't do that because writing is supposed to be fun first and foremost. But, like, as soon as you start doing that, you start losing yourself, and you start losing the audience that you could have had. Don't get hung up on those ideas." And they're all, just, like, "What do you mean?" And I'm just, like, "Just go out there and keep trying. Keep doing it." And I love that you brought up the fact that, like, it doesn't matter if you're going to be rejected. Push those boundaries and be, like, "No, we're here. We want to use this money. We are being creative." And like, even if you don't get it, you tried and you did it, and you told them that you were a person who wanted to have your stories be heard. I think that's a—that's fantastic because so many people just don't do it, and it's like "No, goddamn it. Go and do it."

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah, they-they sort of wait for this, the nod of approval from somebody that they respect and-and-and they'll buy their time waiting to be called up to the Majors. But that's not going to happen. You got to work your way up there, and you're right. Some people have those innate talents, but nobody is born knowing how to read or write. They're skills that everybody has to learn and there—it's like, it's a muscle. You can develop it. Just practice-practice. They say, you know, it's not—it's—it's not how good you are, it's who you know. And part of it, I-I think, it's sort of somewhere in the middle. If you, if you're connected with a lot of people, the things that you're good at will become visible to them. There—there's, you know, like I'm only equipped to notice people—a certain set of talents. So, I can only cater to those things that I appreciate and see, right? But a different editor, a different publisher might see a totally different set of talents and appreciate yours. So, you gotta keep putting yourself out there.

Tamara Thompson: I think, I think the other thing, too, is you can't wait around for permission. You just have to get out there and keep and keep doing things, because if you wait, if—the time will never come. And you'll be very disappointed if you've waited thirty years, and no one's recognized you. Well, guess what? There's a lot of other people who are actually going out there and trying to be recognized and still not being recognized. But they're trying and, like, I know, a lot of my students are just, like, well the person who gets published is the person who has the natural raw talent, and I'm, like, half the time, No, it's just the people who are willing to push themselves out there. Because sometimes people with the natural talent are waiting. There's people waiting and it's like, stop waiting.

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Go!

Kyle Flemmer: Yeah, I agree with that, as well.

Tamara Thompson: So, this next question is again just making space and learning and stuff. But what's something important about D.I.Y. press history or something creative that you've seen, because chapbooks and zines and pamphlets and broadsides are all very ephemeral. What are some cool things that you wish people knew about? Because I—I, asking this question, I've learned so many cool things that the community has created or has done in the past. So.

Kyle Flemmer: I guess, to answer that, I'll just say, perhaps the things that I wish I was aware of earlier, 'cause, like, when I started, I didn't really know anything about chapbook history at all. Like I said, I just saw, like, a sample on the rack at the—at the printer, and was like, oh, I can make that. I know how to make that. I can do that. Especially in Canada we—there's actually quite a long micropress, small press history. And it ties into our national culture in—in these really surprising subtle ways that I didn't really realize until much later. Like, for instance, I think, we have the—the bpNichol Chapbook Award. And it's—it's offered by the Meet the Presses, or it's administrated by the Meet the Presses collective. And it's you know, it's named after Bp. Nichol, who was an experimental poet, small press publisher. He published everybody around him at the time, you know, like he built this community. And then those people have gone on to publish everyone else around them, and then, and the presses that are alive today sort of owe something to—owe their existence—or owe the enthusiasm that led to their existence. Sort of back to these—to the these really energetic figures of the—the 60s and 70s. I wish I, sort of, knew that there were archives of this material I could—I could look at and be inspired by. I—I felt, like, I was setting off into uncharted territory. And that's sort of exciting, but it's also frightening, and I think can be forbidden. I wish I knew that there were like-minded people out there already, and that, you know you—you just sort of apply your curiosity, and—and it's—it's there for you. It's—it's quite accessible. On the flip side of that, I think small press has very poor institutional memory. These small ephemeral publications sort of persist in traces and in the oral history of our community, curiously enough. So,



yeah, it's—it is sort of hard to—to get on the path, but once you're there, you see how that path leads sort of everywhere.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So last question here: what's something important that you wish people, maybe, knew about your history, and you can take that wherever you desire?

Kyle Flemmer: Goodness. I mean I—I'll—I'll give a similar answer in the sense that the—once—it's hard to find the path, but once you're on it, it can sort of lead everywhere. The—the thing that, sort of, surprises me about my own history, and I think is—would be useful to other people is, you know, the older I get and the more creative initiatives I undertake, the more I realize that your experiences are never really wasted. Even, you know, your failures: the things that you tried, and you decided you didn't like—the stuff that you really did like when you were ten years old and then walked away from when you were a teenager, because it didn't feel cool anymore, you know. Now, they, everything sort of comes back around. For instance, like, I got into creative writing because I wanted to be, you know, one of those, an intellectual writer type. But I worked it—on my school newspaper, doing the page layouts. And suddenly I realized, oh, there's this whole other side to the book world that involves design, type setting, being able to use or—or to coordinate with printers and understanding printer specifications and all that sort of stuff. As I'm doing more experimental poetry publication, I realize, oh, all my skills with computer programming, with image software, with video software, all the stuff that I was interested in my early teens has now become super useful for a digital poetry publication. Even things like, you know, playing on a soccer team and developing teamwork. This is my role. I'm gonna take responsibility for this section of stuff and I'm going to set you up as strongly as possible, and I'm going to cheerlead for our team wherever possible. You know, that's the position you're putting yourself in as a publisher also. You—you are, you become, you're sort of like the self nominated team captain, and you're there to—to truly, for everybody else. And that, you know, that experience like these things all, sort of, dovetail together, and to rather—rather than be afraid of trying too many different things, I would say that my own history sort of proves the case that the more things you try the better positioned you'll be to, you know, do—to do what you want and go where you want later in life.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I end the recording?

Kyle Flemmer: Oh. I can't really think of anything specifically. Besides, I, sort of, gestured to the past of—of small press publishing, and how, you know, there's this long heritage, this underground heritage of—of small press publishing in Canada. But there's also this thriving, living beast of a community. And there's some really fabulous resources out there, such as the—the Canadian small press map that Gap Riot Press has put together. As I mentioned, the Meet-Meet the Presses organization has tons of resources, particularly for publishers in Ontario. They host a market. Suffice to say, well, I guess the—the closing comment is that I think that we are in a watershed, sort of, moment for the industry were the largest of the large, these monopoly corporations are struggling because their business model is—is threatened. It's dying. It's threatened

by AI, rising paper prices, loss of interest in-in mass market books for people to buy as Beach reads. This is, rather than feeling, threatening for the little guy—I think that this is a profound opportunity for us to sort of take the reins again and make space for ourselves to reintroduce the-the community publisher to-to the world. And I re-inspire this belief in the value of literature, of poetry and of-and of small press publication.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I think that's a great note to end on. Thank you.

Jeremy Luke Hill

Tamara Thompson: My name is Tamara Thompson; the date today is the 16<sup>th</sup> of May. Our time is 1:07 pm, and a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that if the participant wishes is to drop out that they have a deadline of a week after this interview time to contact me for eligibility for dropping out if they so desire. This interview is for a small press.

Jeremy Luke Hill: I'm Jeremy Luke Hill. I'm the publisher at Gordon Hill Press, located in Guelph. We do mostly poetry. A little bit of nonfiction if it's on the lyric side; a little bit of fiction, if it's on the weird side and we emphasize authors with a visible disability. We have just ourselves launched a little chapbook imprint called the Sheffield chapbooks. In my other life, I also run a nonprofit called Focus Writers Committee that supports a writing community in the wealth area. So that's me.

Tamara Thompson: Nice, and your pronouns?

Jeremy Luke Hill: Oh, yeah, yeah, I go by he/him.

Tamara Thompson: Cool, thank you. So, let's start off with the first one. Why did the press start?

Jeremy Luke Hill: It had-so, my business partner is Shane Nielsen. He does the acquisitions and editing mostly. I get an opinion on things, like if in the fiction area, but otherwise he does most of that work. And it had been our intention to buy Porcupine's Quill in Erin. When we heard that it was perhaps available to be purchased, Shane actually showed up on my doorstep with a couple of cups of coffee and announced, hey, we're buying Porcupine's Quill! I was like, we are, are we? And so, we got fairly far down that road before we realized that that was probably not going to happen at that time. Enough preparation done that, we thought, well, let's just do our own thing and start something new without really realizing all that's involved in that. If I had known, maybe I would have been more terrified. And so, we've now been in business for, I don't know, five years or something like that. And yeah, so we're still quite small. We only do about six books a year kind of thing. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And what-because you also said you're doing a small little chapbook branch now, what kind of spurred that on after, you know?

Jeremy Luke Hill: Ummm.

Tamara Thompson: After taking on Gordon.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Right. So, Shane was the chapbook editor at a-a-a chapbook presses out from BC. The imprint that he was editing was called Dis/ability and given our emphasis on disability issues and visible disability issues, it was a really nice springboard for us. 'Cause he was editing both, he would get people who would come with the chapbook, you'd say, hey, that's really good if we flesh that out, that could be a full-length book on our full-length imprint, you know, full-length press, or we would get the vice versa. We get a submission to Gordon Hill like okay,

young person, brand new book, see potential there. But there's really only a chapbook here. So, what would you feel about that? And then we could build on that and later. And so, it was a way to kind of find new voices and new talents and connect with people who we might not otherwise; but also it was a way so when that went away, we felt the lack of it. And we have, we always get requests like, hey, do you folks do chapbooks, and we're always like no. And then we thought, well, maybe we should, just in order to kind of foster that kind of, that kind of interaction again, so that we do have a-a place to send to people if the book is, you know, needs some-some paring down, but we want to keep in touch with that author and sort of bring them along. It's a good way to develop young writers.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I agree that's kind of what my press does, too, is-is we're really out there trying to have, like, a really good, like, first experience kind of thing. And so, I-I-I couldn't agree more.

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: How did you discover zines and chapbooks and like this kind of publishing? How did . . . was there a moment?

Jeremy Luke Hill: With chapbooks . . . so, trying to think the first time when I started running into that kind of stuff. Well, I had a few things in university that I, so university for me was like '96-2002, something like that. And there were some people doing ziney kinds of things. They were, they weren't what I would call chapbooks because they weren't terribly literary. They were more just like, they were comics, and they were, whatever it was, fun stuff circling around the university. And that's so sure how I started running into that. And then when I started going to small press fares and whatnot, you'd find that kind of thing, and there are some sort of oldies but goodies in-in Canada who've been doing this for a long time, and so you would show up to them. You see the same people year over year. Like, you know, the Rob McLennan's of the world. And these people were-and so, I started looking at it that way. And then when I started the nonprofit the-the, we were doing initially full-length books for locals to locals, but we quickly found that th-there really isn't minimum print runs for that kind of thing make it unwieldy if you don't have distribution more widely, and you're not getting some sort of funding for it. It just doesn't make sense. But if you've-we, if we started focusing on smaller chapbooky kinds of things, especially stuff that has the visual element to it, that was much more practicable. So, we started doing some of that sort of locally here and-trying to think the first one we did. But and then it's also been like an expression of my own. So, like, I'm a good enough editor to know that I'm a mediocre writer. And so, most of the things that I play with as a writer, tend to be kind of one-off projects that don't have a real, have a space in, like, formal publishing. So, like, for example, when Trump won the election the first time, I wrote like poems in the voices using the actual words of his people. And then I've Photoshopped their faces onto Renaissance paintings because, you know, because you can. You make this little thing, and it's therapy. You get something out of the world. And so that kind of thing has always been interesting to me too, and-and broadsheets for the same reason. Like, hey, I have this idea for something. It isn't gonna fit in a, it doesn't have any purpose as a as a full-length book. But here's a-

and so I really started to like the creative possibilities of that, and you can, they can be as like, oh, rough and ready as I photocopy this zine like, and slap some staples into it, or all the way to, you know I-I handmade this paper out of seeds from my backyard and I you know what I mean, and you can do that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Everything in between. And I love that, too. Because yeah, because of what that turns into in terms of creativity. And then there's a local guy here named David Knight, who, for I don't think he's still doing this for a while he's running a thing called Fenny Lalanine, which I can't spell for you if I tried, some of some sort of chemical process, or I don't know. Or maybe a chemical compound. But he was doing this thing where he was basically putting up files for chapbooks on the Internet. So, he would do that work of it. And then it was up to each person. The files are free. You create your own art object out of it. So, you, yours, your little chapbook will be different from everybody else's, because you made it with your own, you know, your, to your own specifications. And so, you're really leaving the-the creativity up to people to work with. And so those kinds of things are possible in a way that, you know, but-but a book forecloses on.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, nice. I'm gonna get back kind of to your press. Like, does your press have like an editorial philosophy? Which it already sounds like it does but, like, kind of like a goal?

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah, so we don't exclusively publish people with this with visible disability. But my business partner identifies that way. He's, like, neuroatypical, bipolar; all the things. And that's a really important part of, the drive for him was to have representation, specifically for people with a visible disability. That's what he's done through his chapbook press before that he's started. The Able, the Able Hamilton Poetry Festival; like, this is a real big passion of his and so that was always going to be a part of it. And that's a major part of our editorial drive, not just people who are working through those issues in one way or another. But the people who are literarily dealing with that kind of stuff. So that is a one of the major things. My-my sort of drive for the press has always been to have something local to Guelph. Because Guelph has never had a literary press based here. And so that was a big thing for me to kind of make connections between Guelph and the larger literary community. So, we have that element, too. And then, obviously, like, if you're trying to hit grants, you have to do all the things, you have to demonstrate that you're Canada-wide. But also, because you're Ontario, that you're emphasizing Ontario authors. And you know, and that you're-you're hitting all of the other sort of, sort of like representational kinds of points, and especially when those granting agencies at certain times will have more emphasis of one area or another. So, try to do that kind of thing as well as do things that you like. So, our own preference is with poetry. That's Shane, and we do a wide variety of things. So, he tends to like things that play with form in one way or another with, but with the fiction that I'm more involved in, we're really looking for something that's different. We don't, I've seen the great Canadian novel. I've read it like a thousand times, not terribly

interested in publishing another one. But like if you want to tell me short stories with graphs, I'm in. If you wanna, you know what you mean. Like the that kind of-

Tamara Thompson: -Yeah, yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: I want to see you do something new and interesting and that doesn't necessarily mean, like, always bizarre and experimental. But I want to see something that I haven't seen before. And so that's a real emphasis for us, too. We don't want to just like pump out books that are gonna end up on your, you know, your book club. We really want to do things that are taking up authors who, books that might not have a spot elsewhere and-and showcase that kind of writing. And you can do that when you only do six books a year.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: And because, like, if you're going to lose money, you might as well know you guys will do it in terms that you like whereas it's harder if you're a big press and you have to. You don't have, you know you have to do it a certain way in order to make money like there, I can tell you, like straight up, that there isn't a huge market for short stories told with graphs. That's not a thing that's out there, but the people who like it like it a lot, you know. So, trying to foreground things that wouldn't and so, because of that chapbooks kind of do fit well with what we do, we aren't trying to hit a mass market. We aren't trying to; we're trying to give space for people doing things a little bit different. So, chapbooks kind of fit with that. And so that's why I-I really feel like going back into that is a is that a good idea for us.

(Technical issues occurred).

Jeremy Luke Hill: Right? Well, well, sounds-sounds like fun.

Tamara Thompson: I'm enjoying it so far.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Good.

Tamara Thompson: Lots of work, but that's anything with publishing. It's fun, but also a lot of work.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Anything with academics. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Jeremy Luke Hill: There's a reason why I didn't take a PhD.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, I a, as my friend Eli says, I would totally do a PhD if they paid for it.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah. Yeah. Even then I-I sort of hit the end of the MA, and I was like, I think I'm done. And then I read nothing but like trash fantasy for six months but just the worst. And then, at the end of that, I was like, okay, I think I'm ready to real read, you know, real books

again, or whatever that means. And yeah, because it was, it was a while I-I my brain almost-almost exploded by the end.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, I had to read the American novel in the fifties, and to-to be fair that was one of my favorite courses. But chapbooks, especially these puppies [hold up chapbooks], these were the ones I worked on with my team. These kept me sane, because I was like, creativity yes!

Jeremy Luke Hill: (Laughs). Creative expression!

Tamara Thompson: Yes! I get to print and fold something. My mother actually helped me make that one there with the print. Grace did the, she carved a stamp out of rubber and so my mom helped me make them. And so even though that was very tedious and black ink got everywhere, very oily thick it got everywhere. It was just like haha! I was like a mad person with the ink on my face, because I was like something to do that's different.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah, yeah, no, there's something really therapeutic about it. We had so.

Tamara Thompson: One hundred percent.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Publication studio here in Guelph gets people. Are you familiar with publication studio?

Tamara Thompson: No, I'm not.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Okay, so this is a holder tangent. That's gonna maybe break your brain cause it's like I-if, anyway, Publication studio is a movement started in Seattle by Guy from Seattle, as all these things do, all the, all the left-wing weird things start in Seattle. It's like counter cultural publication. Each little studio publishes its own books whatever it feels like. And when you want one, they might have a few on the wall, but when you want one you come in and they like print it, and they bind it with, you know, manila file folders and stamp cover or whatever; it's very sort of like underground fun.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jeremy Luke Hill: And their distribution is such that those files go on the web and to all the other publication studios. So, you can go into like, say, Apollo, be like, hey, I want to buy this one that's made by Guelph publication studio, and they can do that. So, a distribution is entirely like things are always made at sites around. You can go in with your book and be like, hey, I would like this rebound, and then they rebind for you, or they'd be, I will like, I want eight copies of you know this thing that I did, and they like slap it together and print it down, bind it for you. So, the idea is that it's like print culture locally, and there's not a real emphasis on aesthetics so much as like production of you know, material is ready to hand, and it tends to the-the things that are published tend to be those kinds of things, too. There's lots of like you know it's on all, it's all the side of-of like revolution, and

whatever it's very like, aggressively leftist politics, fun, fun, little group they-they.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Need a thesis all to themselves, just saying.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that sounds lovely.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Okay, I wanna ask a little bit about your process at the press, because we've talked a bit about what you publish, kind of your ethos. But what's kind of your process at the press from like submission to production kind of thing to like a launch?

Jeremy Luke Hill: Okay so, we have so-so from sort of beginning to end of- of the cycle; we submit, we receive submissions through the website mostly, but because we're small, we also actively go looking for things, too. So, if I run into somebody and I hear something on a reading or whatever, and I like it, or you know I-I, I'm always asking established writers who probably wouldn't publish with us, like, you know some when I run into them, I'm always like, hey, you know, who do you know who that you think needs a shot? You know what I mean? And so, and sometimes those turn into developmental relationships. So, but most of our stuff comes in through the web portal. Their submissions up guidelines, up there for them that ends up through my inbox, and I triage things. So, anything that looks like even remotely possible, I send on to Shane. Some stuff is like automatically, you clearly didn't read the submission guidelines, and you're sending me a children's book. It's like, I'm sure it's lovely, but we don't do it, you know. And-and it's actually amazes me how much of that there still is. It doesn't seem about-I can see back in the day when you couldn't just go to a website and be like, hey, what do they publish? But nowadays there's really no excuse. But people just send it instead-anyway, the number of cookbooks have been sent, I'm like what do I do with you?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: How?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: You clearly can't read. So how should I trust you to write anyway? So that when that stuff comes in, I send anything really useful off to Shane. He makes those decisions. And then in-in sort of consultation, in terms of like where that needs to come in our schedule, because I keep track for grants and things, so we sort of sit down every once in a while, you'd be like, here's books we like, and we slot that into our-our publishing program, and we kind of go from there. Then he does editorial with them on the fiction I do some of it. And he goes through that process when we have sort of a-a finished manuscript, then it gets sent to me and I typeset it and then send it back to the authors, and they do their due. And then we get a proof-reader, in. They do their do, then back to the author, etc. Until people are happy with the manuscript



in there I also lay out a cover. We tend to do that very much also in consultation with the authors; we like it when the authors are able; some occasionally they are artists themselves, but friends who are artists, or you know, when you know creatives no creatives, and-and try to get stuff that has a certain kind of feel we want it, anyway. So, we get we do that whole process we print through Arkay Design and Print here in Kitchener-Waterloo a r k a y for the recording there. It's in Kitchener-Waterloo, and they are the former back end of Pandora Press which was run by Christian Snyder. But they got rid of their print arm and-and Arkay Design picked it up. And it's, that's an important thing that people don't realize about this. Most print shops don't have purchased equipment. They have leased equipment, and those leases will be broken if they use papers that they're not supposed to use, or whatever else, and so often you can't get sort of your average print shop to print on weird papers. If you want to print on funky things, you can't. They won't; whereas Arkay, because it's they own all their own equipment, they do all of that kind of stuff they do; whatever you want them to. Really, if you were like, please print this on, you know, acetate and bind it to calf skin. And they'd be like, okay; they have a working relationship with layman's print layman's book bindings so they could do all kinds of bindings. And they're really a funky little place, and I highly recommend them. So, they do the printing, and then, we distribute through University of Toronto Press. So, we send stuff up to them in Toronto, and then they take care of that. I don't know how much more specific you wanted me to get than that, but.

Tamara Thompson: No, that's fantastic. I do have a follow up question about how the press makes decisions. It seems like it's the two of you usually make decisions together for the press, whether that be from submission to what are we gonna do for like this fair, or something is that correct?

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah. So, we definitely do things in consultation. He's much, he's, I don't mess too much with the acquisitions and editing side like that's his. Occasionally he will say something like, I like this book but what about this, you know, do should we do this, or th-this is good. But can we actually, technically produce it like that happened really recently? Somebody just hit send us the book, and it's a cool book. But what they want done doesn't fit with our pre specifications like we have things that we wanted our books always look and feel the same in certain respects, and we couldn't accommodate it, and they also wanted color interiors, which we don't do but like various things like that. So, you have to; he does interact with me about those things, but mostly that's his section. And then my section is mostly turning the manuscripts into pretty books, and then I tend to do most of the like forward-facing stuff, because he prefers not to be in the limelight, really. And so, I end up at the fairs and the whatnot. He'll come along and like participate. But I'm the one who runs that and then we-we write grants. Well, we've done it several different ways. I think it works best when he writes again, we write the different sides of it. I put all the technical bids in, and then he writes the-the grantees which he's, he is fluent in grantees, and I am I'm not plus I tend to like I need like, I said. I need a proof figure for my life anyway.

Tamara Thompson: That is very understandable.

Jeremy Luke Hill: So yeah, that's basically divided. Oh, and then we have a proofreader. And we have a social media person who does all that kind of stuff. And then we have a publicity person who is my mom. So, she.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: She does all that stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it-it's interesting how it can so easily become a family business. During Covid was when we started, and my partner couldn't come down to help me bind the books. He was head of production, and he sourced everything for us. But I looked at my dad I'm like do you want to use the al in hammer and help me punch holes into the spine of these books. And he said sure, so now he's looking at me, and he actually he has his name and some of those books for helping me make them. Because I asked our designer, Grace, hey do you think you could do that.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Cool. Well, anyhow, go do some during Covid.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: You talked a little bit about like how the press sells the books and stuff like that. So, they're all shipped up to Toronto, and that's mostly handled for you, because I do find it interesting how presses are able to actually get their books out to the public. So, is that like just the main way other than fairs?

Jeremy Luke Hill: So UTP doesn't handle chapbooks for us.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Only full-length books chapbooks we mostly sell through our website that's where that goes. I will sometimes sell them at fares, too. There are, but most of our sales come face to face at fairs and shows yeah, and the books that sell well are, generally speaking, people who are able to go out and do that kind of work themselves. So, authors who are, you know, buying fifty copies and then going out and selling them and making some money, and then buying some more at their author. Discount making money they tend to be the ones that do well, and chapbooks are like that, particularly they're they don't tend to sell well, at most book places people... so, there are two very different things here. One is a literary fare. You go to the literary fairs. They're the same people selling at them all, and there's the same people who show up to them all. They probably own your books because they order them online, or they don't want them, but they know all about them, and they'll come into you and talk to you about that book, and how what it was like at the last year's fair and blah blah blah! And they never buy anything like there's a very few it's more, they're more like cultural exchanges than they are sales events like you'll sell some books, but it isn't the places where I sell books mostly are things like multicultural festivals, university student centers that kind of stuff because you're the only press there. The people there are not saturated. And so, if you can sort of pop their bubble and be like, hey, take off your headphones for three seconds and come,

they're-they're much more interested to come over and actually buy things. Neither of those places are terribly good I found in my experience for selling the chapbooks another ephemera but the places that are really good for that are like zine fairs. So, for a long time had a, it was called the-the Kazoo Print Fest. It was a part of the print festival here is now it's gone now, now it's sort of been replaced by something called the Paper Rock Scissor Show, which is run by publication studio as part of the arts everywhere festival each year. This year it was up in the Museum, and we had probably like eighty vendors, mostly from Toronto-ish, but London way, too, and then some people as far as Ottawa. And so those fares tend to, we don't sell as many full-length books. They're not as interested in that. But you'll sell like anything that's sort of little and cool like that Trump book I was telling you about like on the front of it is Trump's face photoshopped onto the body of King Henry the Eighth. It-I just sell that. I don't even all the things in my life that I put work into writing. Never! You don't sell anything. That thing sounds like hot case. I have to remake them like every six months. I have to make more. Because people just love that book, right? And so that kind of stuff just flies out. So, it-it really does depend on the kind of thing that you're going to. And-and because of that there, and because that there's no real distribution for chapbooks like you almost need an emphasis on just selling chapbooks and going to those kinds of fairs. And being in that that market. The other place that I go to that does a that you, some does a little bit of each is. Guelph has a lot of like night markets and there's-there's the ward markets and that kind of thing, and those I sell both kind of equally. You get a wide range, and I try to go to places where we're the only publisher. Because it's just a different, you're not selling to literary people who probably already have your book if they want it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, or people who want to impress you and be like, hey, will you publish me? Hey?

Jeremy Luke Hill: Exactly. Oh, yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: There's a lot of that I find.

Jeremy Luke Hill: I was keeping track, I was keeping track the one year, which can't do trying to find my wiper thing because my screen's getting messed up. I kept track of one year at-at the small press fair at down at Ted Harbor front, and it's part of the...

Tamara Thompson: Word on the Street?

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah, no, no, no, it's-it's part of the Toronto International Festival of Authors, or whatever that thing is.

Tamara Thompson: Oh yes, yes.

Jeremy Luke Hill: The, in-

Tamara Thompson: Yes, I know.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Gap Riot its the Gap Riot Small Press Fair. Okay? So, one year I kept track, and a full third of people who came by our tables we're trying to pitch us books like a full third.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: At this point, you know, you may as well just call like an acquisition, spare and be done with it, because.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah, anyway.

Tamara Thompson: It's-it's-it's a little brutal.

Jeremy Luke Hill: But it is, what it is.

Tamara Thompson: I was trying to sell a book, and they're trying to sell me their idea. You have to put them down gently, especially when your submissions aren't open, you like oh, we're not taking anything right now.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah, I'm always like, I hand them one of our bookmarks with the website out of like, the submission guidelines are on the website. But like that, and just gotta shut that down right away, because otherwise you'll spend ten minutes listening to their synopsis of the whole book.

Tamara Thompson: Yep. And sometimes it is very interesting. But that's like 10%, unfortunately.

Jeremy Luke Hill: And honestly, even if it is interesting, you're holding up the table for people who might want to buy something. So...

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Now the-the fest, the fair, the literary festival that we get really good traffic at is Word on the Street in Toronto like last year. It's-it's only was just be there at the table, and I couldn't like deal with all the customers fast enough.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: There was so many people pressed in there.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I remember that my partner said I couldn't talk to the guy who was there, but I picked up his card. You might be interested, cause I was going around trying to see if people would actually be interested before I started a lot of my research.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Right.

Tamara Thompson: A lot of my research. Because, you know, I needed to know if people would want to do this thing.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And he was like, oh, this guy was so busy, but I got it, I got you his card for you, and I was like okay.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Well, there you go. Yeah. Just hand the things out. Go, go, go.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, go-go. But it's-it's nice to see, it was one of those things where there was a lot of busy people so I didn't want to take up a lot of people's time, but it was very nice to see how open they were to my idea, but also to see how many people they were interacting with what was on their table as well.

Jeremy Luke Hill: And I don't know why people will show like it's all in the same city. Why do we get like five thousand people out to that event. But we get nobody at this-the Gap Riot print expo like, what's the difference? Really? Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Just word of mouth. I think there's more publicity for word on the street. There's more talk about it. From what I understand when word on the street is happening. I see a lot of people talking about it, but not when it comes to the smaller things. It's-it's quieter.

Jeremy Luke Hill: But we're talking about the Toronto International Festival of Authors.

Tamara Thompson: I know.

Jeremy Luke Hill: It's not little.

Tamara Thompson: Which is wild.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Right like I don't know. Anyway, I-I if I could figure these things out, I'd be richer than I am.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs) so, moving right along. What are some challenges that the press has faced in your time, on working on it?

Jeremy Luke Hill: So, the main challenge, all obviously, is always funding. And we're not in a great funding time and it's extremely difficult to get through to the core funding level. Even if you have, even if you are sort of meeting some of the target demographics that the granting agencies are looking for. So, in our case like we meet there we fit there's emphasis on disability. And so, we have gotten funding for various things, including project grants. But you have to have, be consistently granted in those ways for a few years before you're eligible for core grants. And so yeah, it's-it's tough. That part of it is. You're always sort of scraping through. And it's hard to sign people, you want to be a few years ahead. So, you know what you've got coming down the pipe, especially with the full-length books. But you're never sure whether you're gonna have funding. And so then you know what happens if you don't have funding for their book. So that is definitely the hardest part of it. And there's no easy solution to that because I don't see there being new

money coming into that area anytime soon. Thy Federal Book Fund just got a little bump up it, but it hadn't been previously, had an increase in funding, and like I don't even know how long like decades. But we have a, in Ontario we have, you know, a conservative government that isn't terribly interested in funding the arts, and we will, you know, barring something I don't even know. We'll very soon have a federal government that is extremely uninterested in funding the arts like it isn't even on their platform. So-so, I don't in long, long term, I don't know how this works for new people coming in and if you're working, which is why I think that in the long run chapbook presses, perhaps are where that sort of literary market ends up going for the experimental, weird side because you can do a run fifty bucks of your own pocket and kind of sell a bunch of copies around and basically break even without losing you know your shirt over it. And so like, that's what the nonprofit has gone to. We if we, that's all we do now, because it's just much more financially feasible. So yeah, I don't know what that-so that would be one of the major issues that we face. The second one is something that most small businesses face, which is, you're trying to get some sort of profile up there. So, you have to kind of get into the market somehow. So, people know you. Because there are people who just go to, you know you have, they know who was. They're going to-so, from everything, from submissions to purchasing on the other end. They-they know Coach House, and they know Anansi and they know, you know, ECW. And so Biblioasis was the most recent one to really break into that and become kind of a mid level well, I don't know if he would say mid level, but I'm gonna say it for him. A mid-level press but that takes a lot of takes a lot of work there, and we've been fortunate in that we've had some award-winning authors who have kind of gotten us some national attention that way. And even just recently we just had, we just won the Edmonton book prize, and we had another shortlisted for the for the Raymond Souster, and we-we've been getting good prize attention.

Tamara Thompson: Congratulations.

Jeremy Luke Hill: But the downside of with how things are lately is that because there's very little media traditional media coverage of books anymore, getting kind of buzz that way is really hard. So, the CBC does list of the poetry books you should read the spring, and there's like forty books on there, right? And it's like they're not narrowing it down. They're not reviewing them. They're just like publishing-the making a list of blurbs and photos. But that's like the, that's what coverage has now become. And there are some places that are trying to do a little bit more focused like All Lit Up does some pretty good work, and there is There's first kind of promotional programs that are being run by some of the book agencies, some of the book not agencies, but groups like the Oppo and all these places they have programs and some of them seem to be a little bit more effective than others. But the long and short of it is that it's tough to kind of get your name out there if you're only this big and what has really exacerbated that is the Covid thing. Because we-we did sell way more books through Covid, like as an industry because people were like, what the hell do I do with my time? And so, they bought books, but the books they bought were all the same books, small presses didn't see a huge boost. We saw some, but not a huge boost. I was talking to people they're like, yeah, you know, we sold a few books more than normal, and we don't,

we didn't see the kind of boost that that the big companies saw who are selling. You know the fifty shades of greys and whatnot.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, the Colleen Hoovers. Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Exactly. Exactly. So, when you, those kinds of books are, did sell a whole lot more.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jeremy Luke Hill: But when your littler places who really focus on selling face to face a lot of those face to face, things went away, and that was tough getting, you know, publicity and whatnot. But also, we haven't really seen a return to pre-Covid numbers for launches and whatnot and I don't-I don't think it's Covid hesitancy anymore, or like very rarely, I think it's really just a cultural habit where people just don't go out to things as much as they used to. And I, and that's tough, too. Because if what you're relying on is those kinds of interactions that might-then it's you need those to be successful. And-and initially, during Covid, the Zoom launches were successful with a lot of people, are those. But now people are sick of that like, they're-they're so done with zoom launches. And so, we do them for accessibility reasons. But like you get you know, ten people, twelve people online. And-and people don't buy books at zoom launches. If they go to a real launch, they kind of feel like it's part of entry to the book.

Tamara Thompson: An experience.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah, where you don't get that in the zoom launch. And-and there isn't the same kind of feedback, even if people are feed-giving feedback in the comments, and whatever it isn't the same thing as someone coming up to afterwards and going hey? That was a really good reading, a, rejoined X and A, and having a conversation about it over, you know a beer or something.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: So, you missed that part of it, too, and that's also a lot of where the word spreads. Hey, I saw this really great reading had a really good time X author sat down, chat with me and did whatever. So yeah, I guess I think those are the two major things renting well, funding and getting exposure.

Tamara Thompson: I'm gonna shift gears a little here and ask why, like chapbooks are important to you? A little more specific.

Jeremy Luke Hill: They're important to me it from a personal perspective for the reason I was kind of touching on earlier, because they allow me to express myself through my writing in a way that is useful and accessible. And so just, I gave the example of the chap, the, that Trump chapbook, but like I was bored, and I of all of the same Canadian music acts on the radio because Canadian content laws. And so, I made a little CD size chapbook called CanCon, which, as like all of Kansas, most overplayed bands, I took their lyrics, and I shuffled them randomly, and they took

fourth at random, and because there's only two songs in the world like, I love you I don't love you anymore. They kind of make sense, and you kind of read them you're like, oh, that one's from Celine Dion, and that one's from Nickelback, or whatever. And so, you kinda like, anyway. So that kind of thing, it lets me play, and I like that. But I've also used them in a very personal way where we've made like chapbook collage things just for family to send them around the first iteration of the adoption poems that I did while we were still in the adoption process, and I wasn't willing to send those out places because I didn't want CAAAs to crap on me. That was released last little chat book just for family. And so, there's that. But then there's also, like my more serious poetry has also been published by chapbook presses of various kinds, so the Allora Poetry Center, which is just down the road. They publish this beautiful, beautiful book for me of- of the like, the found philosophy poetry and then 845 press in London, Aaron Schneider at 845 Press. He'd probably interview, just saying. I, he- he did the *Ordinary Journal Machinery* book for me, which is responding to Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*. And that's the kind of thing, too, where it has. It's a very limited kind of thing. It doesn't have the legs for a full-length book, and so getting it out there. So, on the personal level, it allowed me to express myself in lots of different ways and I appreciate that, especially for somebody who is not a major writer, where if you're a major writer, but McClelland and Stewart works for you. If you're anybody else, they kind of don't. And so how do you keep a writing culture when there are a couple of monolithic publishers, and then a few small presses, and then a bunch of online nonsense. At some point you need ways for communities and people to express themselves. And so, chapbooks are important that way for me personally. As a business like I said earlier it's a way, the boards is a for a way for us to keep in contact with people who are expressing themselves that we wouldn't normally see, because McClelland Stewart doesn't pick them up and so, if there is like a, you know. Oh, look! Here's the new superstar, and she just got a three-book deal with-with Penguin, or whatever like great like, we can't compete with them anyway. So how do you find things are interesting? If the people aren't publishing off their chapbook publishing, and you can find the cool stuff, and then that's an introduction to them. And-and so that's why it's important, I think, to small presses is to have that link because for a lot of people that's the entry way. And I, and I, honestly, I tell young poets when they're starting out. It's like they're like, how do you get there? It's like, well, you start by submitting to magazines, and you just submit, submit, submit. You get a few works published and then, as you're doing that, you're building stuff towards a chapbook get that thing paired down till-till it's shiny, and then send that out to chapbook presses. Do that a couple of times. You have three chapbooks in your belt. Now you can go to a-a small press and say, Listen, I've got these 3 chat books together. They were successful. Blah! Blah! Blah! Here's a whole book that combines the three of them, and some other stuff, or whatever and it's like it's a way in for a lot of young authors, too so.

Tamara Thompson: Hm.

Jeremy Luke Hill: And then also in terms of interaction between poets, and this is a little bit more esoteric, so I don't know if this fits into what you're doing. But do you do poetry weekend out of New Brunswick.



Tamara Thompson: Have I heard of it?

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think so, in passing.

Jeremy Luke Hill: So, it's less the poetry festival that is like a poetry convention. You have all of these poets come from all over, mostly in Maritimes, but from everywhere, like Shane, my business partner took a bunch of us out last year from-from Ontario. Which was a very long, cramped trip I was stuck in the very far back of an SUV. It was-it was an experience. But there are three sessions of like ten or twelve poets every day. So, you're talking like sixty plus poets talking at each other for two days. Everybody goes out for lunch with each other afterwards, and, you know, does the CanLit bickering, and well that sucked there. They were great there, kind of thing, but they give each other feedback too, and there's a kind of like an interconnection, and I feel like the opportunity to try stuff out on each other like in that space. People read from flight books, too, but there's a whole lot of like I wrote this thing here, check this out like I wrote this, check this out, and people kind of trying things out on each other. That's part and parcel of the of that chapbook process, I think, where it's like because it's-it's not as like, not as serious. You could try new things, and you could have people respond to it in that way, like I liked what you did in that thing understanding that by the time it gets, if it gets to a full length of the book, it will have chance to change, and it lets people bypass to a certain extent the-the inability for us to review each other's full-length books anymore. Review culture is basically dead. You can't say negative things about each other. Really, you can't say, hey, good book, in this respect. But you know, like I didn't like XY and Z. Because then you're crapping on a fellow writer who's just trying to get along, and you know you-you don't want to spoil their whatever you don't want, spoil your own chances to get picked up by that same publisher, and you don't wanna get their publicist mad at you, cause it's so incestuous. It's really hard to be honest about each other's work and say, yeah, I really like this bit didn't like this. But I think this should have changed. Why'd you do that and be-be honest to make each other better. But you can do that at the chapbook level, because there's no stakes, right? So, if somebody comes up to me and says, oh, I-I liked your book, but I you know I-I thought you were like slavishly addicted to form, which is true. I would, I could be like, oh, that's true, you know, and-and respond to that. We could have a chat about it because there aren't thousands of dollars at stake. And careers at stake. And so, I like the way that it fits into the-the conversation of poetry better these days.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I can. I can definitely understand that. Do you think chapbooks are important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not?

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yes. So, for all those reasons, I think they're important to Canadian publishing; but I would say, far more important to small press publishing than to you know, trade publishing. Usually, the trade publishers are like three levels down the road. And so, by the time you get around to them, they're taking their pick of people who have

already been successful elsewhere, or you know, sometimes they cherry, pick some-some hot young commodity who's, you know, done something great But they're-they're not usually, they're not as dependent on that literary culture that I'm talking about, to have relevance. So yeah, like, in terms of like dollars I don't know, I don't know what proportion or-or are there, but certainly just small press publishing, and really is, and-and whatever that adds to the-the trouble is that-that like I said, it's a small and-and an incestuous little group and there are a lot of people, not a lot of people outside of that group are-are reading what's there. People tend to read the books I don't know how true this is anymore. The Stat-these stats came to me before Covid but people are saying that we sell more if you include eBooks, that the industry sells as many books as it ever has and sell each year, and it sells way more titles each year, year over, year over year, because before you had giant publishers, then a bunch of middle class publishers, and then some small presses, and then some little micro presses, and then whatever. And now it's like giant presses couple of literary presses, and then like self publishing, right? And so, you have so many titles, but only a very small percentage of them are selling any of the books, because people either buy if they're going to buy two books in a year it'll be a best seller off of whatever list they've seen, and the book that their buddy published. You know, through Amazon, or whatever right like, those are the books that we read. And so, you're really dependent on-on those kinds of things. And the middle-class literary publisher that literary culture increasingly doesn't exist. So, with, I would say, it's extremely important for chapbooks within that little closed circuit. But it's not important to all those people self publishing their books out there. And it's not as important to the two big publishers making money at the top. It's really ...yeah, it's a part of that kind of literary culture that is increasingly divorced from those other expressions, and I don't know how to make it, I don't think it's, I publish poetry because of that, because it's talking back to a way of-of thinking that says that every problem can be solved in and you know, in a tweet like the epithet that probably tells you to go die a hole.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Poetry is short, usually. Well, not always. But you know what I mean, these little, and they tell you to stop essentially like, read it more than once. Try to relate to this, think about it, feel about it, talk about it, poetry hopefully when it's dealt with, appropriately demands our sustained attention in a way that, like a Facebook post, does not. And it requires more than just a thumbs up liked it. It requires a-a kind of a-approach to it that that is missing in our culture, in our society. And so, I feel like, it's really important. But people don't know. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, a sad unfortunate truth.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Do you think this kind of publishing reflects Canada itself in some way?

Jeremy Luke Hill: That's a good question. I don't think I know enough about other countries to answer that effectively. What I have noticed about various national publishing approaches is that there is more of that literary culture that we were just talking about in some places. And more emphasis by their governments on translations, particularly things like that. And perhaps because of those things a greater willingness to publish weird things. I sort of joke with people that Bologna probably never gets published in English first, right? Like, it probably doesn't happen even though like, that's incredible stuff, right? And so, I-I feel like that, the-the-the major sort of stylistic innovations aren't coming from Western English-speaking countries generally, you know, like, if you're looking at trends and how in literary trends and and-and innovations. It's not generally around here, and certainly not on the big presses. There are some exceptions, like, I think, especially early McCarthy, before he gets all big and-and too big for his britches, is really interesting and-and experimental stuff where he's trying to like unite a sort of a Hemmingway, in a Faulkner approach to writing in the same like an American Southern approach that like unites those things which I think is a fascinating project. But, generally speaking, I don't know if there's a whole lot... yeah and that and that, and to me that's concerning. And-and there's a whole lot of factors that go into that one we don't have reading public to sustain it. So, everything is basically government grant driven but two for the writer side is very MFA driven, and I'm not picking on MFAs, because I think that they do provide. They do a really good service in weeding up people who can't write at all. But I think along the way they often rub off the-the edges and they so they try to with the kind of make people sound the same if they don't, if they're not confident enough in their own voice going in, they come out sounding the same. And so again, when I'm talking to young writers, I often tell them they'll say, should I do an MFA I'm like, well, there's no problem with doing an MFA. You'll meet a bunch of people, they'll be helpful. You'll learn a bunch of things. It'll make you write in a way that's good for you, like it's not a bad thing, but have an idea of what you want out of it, and your own voice going in cause if you aren't you know confident enough in yourself to talk back into something your own way, anyway, it can also it be this homogenizing thing. And you see people come out of MFA. Being like. Well, I wrote a book, I didn't want to write because my instructor kind of wanted something, you know what I mean, and you feel like trapped into something, and I've heard that story a lot. And I think that all not-not in every case. But I think that sometimes that does kind of weed out some of the weirdness. And then, when you have all those people like asking each other to edit each other's books, and then you get this kind of like homogenous hole. And the same thing happens in our award culture. So, like, it's hard to get weird books hit awards, right? Because you have this committee that sits down, and everybody knows everybody. And they're like, I really like this book. And this person's like, well I hated that book. I really like this book, and all the books that people really like don't really get chosen. It's like the one that they didn't agree on you know. It's like, well, that one suck. Yeah, that one didn't suck. Okay? Yeah. So that one was the award because it didn't suck. And again, like, I'm not picking on award winning books. Most of the books out there deserve an award there lots of-any more books don't get awards that deserve them. But the way that we tend to produce what is good writing is often like a matter of kind of consensus or whatever. So-so I think that

in maybe to answer your question that I think the actual chapbook part of it is maybe a little bit countercultural to what Canada normally does it-there, there's less asking for you know permission. There's less apology for having done something after the fact. There's less, it's a little rougher and more and more Populist, maybe, than we tend to be.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: That yeah, that was a long ramble thing.

Tamara Thompson: It's-it's an abstract question to just kind of see how people respond, because the idea of talking and asking these questions to a variety of different people is just to get data and see what's in front of me. Right? What are people saying? What are people saying maybe here, what does this individual say? And again, we're talking about some very specific things, and then also some bigger ideas. And there's gonna be no consistence what is actually good or bad, or like what's actually reflective of this. And there'll be academics who can debate that for years. I just want to be able to hear from the people who are actually in it. What they think. And again to me, data is data, because I can go and look at it and say, okay, what did these people say? And what can I understand about maybe what was said here over here? And why does this fit there? Right? So don't feel bad for any rambling. I'm asking the question because I genuinely want to hear what you have to say about, and if that's a longer answer I'm totally okay with that, because everything that you stated was very interesting. And I also think-think true about like kind of what chapbooks can be. So, thank you. You're good, is my point.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Good.

(Conversation shifted to a personal matter and Jemery gave me some people to reach out who you see in the interviews. Thank you, Jermey.)

Tamara Thompson: Okay, back onto what we were talking about. (Technical issue occurred) but I'll-I'll-I'll restate it again, in case you have any other thoughts on this. But what does this kind of publishing offer that other types of publishing can't, or vice versa.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Right. Yeah. So, we-we I think we have covered a bunch of that. But it is that I think an opportunity where the-the stakes aren't quite as high financially or even career wise to try new things have people see what you're doing and engage with you in-in a way that's more kind of like, yeah, accessible and-and-and community building, too. And-and so the-the drawback of that, of course, is that you don't have distribution. If you-you can't, you do you can't, you know it doesn't show up places in the same way. So, like, if your book is published by McClelland & Stewart people will know that it exists, whereas the little chapbooks that you publish no one will see that unless you put it in their lab, or it gets there through some random happenstance. And so obviously there, that's the place of the of the larger, more traditional publishing industry is to create the canon essentially, and then the role of small press and chapbook press is often to disrupt that as in, in various ways, obviously also reinforcing it because you're sending people on the-the get

off as theoretical, both as we want. But I think that that's the kind of the opposition.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah. What's something that you wish people or like public knew about Canadian public pushing?

Jeremy Luke Hill: I wish people did understand the finances of it. Outside of The Bookshelf right down here in Guelph, I don't know if you have ever been there-there, someone had scribbled on the wall, Books should be free. And I'm like, yeah, I kind of agree that with that on one sense it would be great if there were some ways to fund books to be free to people. That would be amazing, however, for books to be free, if you look at who isn't making money along the way like the-the bookshelf that you just scribbled the wall on is skating by-by selling cards and booze and board games, and whatever else, just so that it can underwrite the selling of books. You know what I mean like you, you have to sell other stuff just to be able to not make money selling books. And that's how bookstores that are successful have to operate. And then you have the distributor who's sending you that book who, in like in the case of UTP at one point, was like mandated by the Government, that they must distribute for small certain small presses, because there was no other option, and they have to make money somehow. They've got like they're not making money off me; I can tell you they're not making much off of me. Then you have the publisher behind that, who has to print the books and do all the promotion. Do all that kind of stuff, and then you've got an author at the other end who probably spend several years of their life writing it. And if they're with a small press in in Canada. It's gonna make like two hundred fifty or five hundred bucks advance on royalties that might not ever get paid out right? So, we're talking about a whole, a whole industry that operates at subsistence level, and that doesn't exist without government funding, and that is inadequately funded by government. If that's how we want to do it, which I don't think is the greatest model. But you have to, if you don't do it that way, we need to be doing other things to foster a kind of public that will do something besides swipe, swipe, swipe with their phones. So, like, I really wish the public understood that whole economic bit, and also understood what the shift away from, not just books, but going to see film and-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Go into an art museum and go like that. That shift from a kind of cultural interaction into a-an interaction it's entirely through their screen and is mostly what I would call idling in the sense that you're doing something, but not nothing. You're not getting anywhere right. You're not really resting. You're not really getting anywhere the engines on. But you're not moving. You just like swipe, swipe, swipe like-like, like I watch my kids and they like things like automatically it comes to the feed they just like it. There's no, there's no processing level of do I like that? It's like-like, like-like-like-like. And it just like reinforce the algorithm automatically. Just go, go, go. And I, I-I wish people understood that part of it, too, that the kind of culture that we're engaging in isn't just, it isn't, it isn't like some non-culture. It-it doesn't have it is, it's not a no consequence choice that when we choose to interact in a in-in a way that is you know, doing politics at

the level of the Tweet. This is a choice that has real repercussions when we stop being thoughtful and inquisitive and evidence-based, and all the other things that democracy fails like when they were, the they were theorizing democracy back in the day. The response to it from-from people was, you can't do this because people are too stupid to vote. And the response was, well, if we have good education and a good Fifth estate, and people are in educated and informed, they'll make good decisions and then run us in a position where we are like deliberately self misinformed and pulling apart an education system and pulling apart a-a cultural industry. And there's just nothing left to inform us, and democracy fails in those situations. And so, I think I wish people so I wish the people knew what goes into making books, and I wish they knew the role that culture plays in in having a-a society that is-is healthy and compassionate and informed and educated, and you know, smart enough to elect people.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah, that that makes a lot of sense. I've-I've talked to other people about like what they wish people knew about Canadian publishing, and a lot of people so far have just said, I wish I wish they knew about it.

Jeremy Luke Hill: (Laughs) yeah, I wish they knew it existed.

Tamara Thompson: That the media would talk about it. I wish the school systems would teach it.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like it's not political or weird. If Americans will teach about an American author, or if a French school in France will teach French poets. Why is it political for Canadian literature, film anything that is from Canada to be weird about like not teaching the kindergartners, you know, like, why is that strange.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But it's, yeah-

Jeremy Luke Hill: In kindergarten.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Jeremy Luke Hill: In kindergarten you're getting Robert Munsch. After that you're probably not going to see a Canadian on the curriculum until University.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And I know there was a big push in my school for Canadian film. We had a pretty big film department and drama department. And so, they would do like a little film festival of Canadian film. And that was a really big push because of one teacher Mr. Robertson.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And I do the same with my students where I'm trying to teach them like, I teach them graphic fiction right? And I'm like, do we

see this? This is money. This is a lot of money. Do we understand that this is a lot of money for this coloured book.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Book, and I see students be like, well, I wanna get published by Marvel. I'm like, why would you want to be published by Marvel when we have Drawn in Quarterly, like some making some of the best graphic fiction and comics that are so interesting and fun and playful, and things that you've also heard titles of before from like, why are you not interested in this Canadian place.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Right?

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: They just don't know about it.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah, yeah. I ran into Seth once, and before I knew what he looked like. I was in the pub downtown and this guy walks in with his partner, both looking like they stepped out of the 1930s or something. I was like, who are these weirdos; you know, good times. They sit down near my table. He went up to the bathroom, and she struck up a conversation with me, because I was reading a book. And she's like, oh, my partner is an author, too. He does graphic novels and I'm like, oh is your partner, Seth? She's like woah. Alright. Good to know.

Tamara Thompson: That is the other thing Canadian publishing is a very small world.

Jemery Luke Hill: It is.

Tamara Thompson: It's one of those things where I talk about someone or I've read something, and someone's like, oh, you need to do this. Oh, have you talked to this person is like, yeah, okay, this is all, it's all coming together at some point. You're gonna keep hearing some of the same names just because people have worn so many different hats and have been at different publishing places. And done a lot of interesting things.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah, you run into them over and over again. You just do. And that's actually the first kind of-

Tamara Thompson: Which is kind of nice because a lot of them are nice people.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah, no-and that, and this is one thing I would say because of, in small press because of, because nobody's making money at it essentially, we have found nothing but the like kindest assistance from all sorts of people. Other publishers have helped us along the way, particularly a, Noelle Allen at-at Wolsak & Wynn, (technical issue occurred) publication our distribution at UTP before we were big enough to do it ourselves. Jack David and-and David Karen from ECW we're both very,

very helpful yeah; Dan Wells Biblioasis was giving some help at the very beginning, too, and we really found the whole community just very supportive and encouraging so yeah, I-I have nothing, I have nothing but good things to say about the publishing community as a whole.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So unfortunately, I have to ask an unfortunate question of why do you think a lot of small presses or micro presses close up shop?

Jeremy Luke Hill: It is hard working hand to mouth.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: And I mean this in sort of the broadest sense, but also in like a-a current sort of like, in its current sort of social use there is a tremendous amount of privilege involved in being able to run a press. It implies that you have certain amount of like education and connection, and the financial wherewithal to suck it up when you don't get funding, and whatever like, I have an extremely tolerant partner who when we were dating back in the day, was like, I really wanna have a career. And I was like that's awesome because I don't. And she was like great. And so essentially, as long as I don't lose money, I don't have to feed myself, right. And that's a big thing. And my business partner is a medical doctor, right? He doesn't have to rely on this to feed himself. And so that is a tremendous like not many people are in that position. And so, there is like a real, at this point in Canadian publishing small press publishing you, you are enabled to-to in order to be able to do it, you have to be in a privileged position in terms of like financial wherewithal, and that's just, th-there are probably exceptions to that, especially when you get to like the publishing chapbooks on the side kind of thing. But it's just the truth. There's no other way to run a publishing house and make money at it, and you don't give money from the government to begin it. And so, it's got to come from somewhere. It's gonna come from your pocket. And so that is a real consideration, especially when you're trying to create an industry that is like diverse. So, we are seeing a lot more women become publishing in in publishing houses over the last little while, but we still don't have a lot of like racial diversity in terms of publishers and a massive barrier to that is just like historical economics. And-and there and I, there is no real way around that be-and until there's like government intervention about it, or something like I there's no, there's no natural way through this is what I'm saying, at least none that is, gonna take, you know, have an immediate effect. And because of that like as I think if you are thinking about those questions, then you're probably also thinking about the questions of how do I-whatever position I happen to be in select books that are giving voice to a diversity of people. But the fact is, you can only do so much of that like consciously, there's-there's going to be a subconscious part of you that and also, frankly, there's a whole lot of like taste. So, like I said, I like weird crap. And it isn't to say that that doesn't exist from diverse forces voices because it does like tend to tick X split tooth is an excellent example of the kind of book that I love, even though the poetry is kind of questionable. But it's a, it's a great book in in my opinion. But in terms of just your submissions, I can tell you that the kinds of people writing experimental novels are people who have time and



degrees to do so generally. And so, we get so that also becomes a question. If you, how does my taste reinforce certain ways of publishing norms, you know. So anyway, that like which all which is say is like, it's difficult, and it-it is a privilege to be doing what we do, and not everybody has that. And so, it they are going to go under. And it's unfortunate, but it's like that's a fact, and I don't know how to fix the industry, because you have to do two, one of two things you have to assume that the government is funding it is-is a good model, and that the more that we fund it the more people eventually read it, which I don't know if it's true. But if you do that, then you have to start funding at a much higher level and being much more selective about the kinds of things you're doing with it, or you assume that we need to be driving from the public side, which is that what the government money and policy needs to be going into driving people off phones and into art culture, and I like I don't know how you do that. But though I think it's either production side or it's consumption side, but we have to do something, because the way that it is now it's not really tenable for most people to run a press.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, how do you keep the press going? We've talked a little bit about grants and bursaries, but there's a lot of also just personal effort like it's a lot of energy as speaking as someone who knows what it's like, especially being the head of my press and the founder and the manager, and whatever like, if I'm not running the press and not going anywhere right? So, like, how do you keep it going?

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah. And that's an element of it, too, because most small presses are at some level, involve a lot of volunteer hours. Even if people are kind of paying themselves. They're not paying themselves nearly minimum wage, or whatever. Like at this point we don't pay each other or anything. I sometimes pay myself as a sort of off the side of the of the- the press, as a, as a freelancer for doing like I'll be like, here you go. Here's-here's a thousand dollars for you for doing all that layout work, or whatever.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jeremy Luke Hill: But nobody really gets paid so there's a lot a lot of volunteer hours that go into it. And when you don't, so you most people who are involved are not just a publisher. They're also doing, you know, they're doing promotion. They're going to shows they're working on grants. They're doing the books they're doing, updating the website. They're doing all the things. And they can seem really, really overwhelming. I think you need a certain sort of person to do that, and you will run into these people quite often. Rob McClellan is a great example where they just go to everything, and they do everything, and they're not happy unless they're working. You know what I mean?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: They are dedicated to the culture of the thing. So, you get people for whom the promotion of literary culture is almost a religion. They-they interact with literary culture in the same way that people used to, you know, interact with volunteering a church where they would show up on a Sunday morning, but also come by to clean and or fix

something, or whatever, and they just make themselves available. And there-there are a lot of people who do that day in and day out in CanLit at the small press level, and they don't get nearly enough credit. But they I mean; they just show up and they do it. And I, and this is why, when we get in these conversations, I always want to like drop the names of the people like I, Noelle Allen, like she does the work, you know these are it's Stewart Ross, and like I, I can't remember off the top of my head. But all these people they just show up and they edit, and they publish, and they write, and they everything. They did everything all the time. Gary Barwin, these guys, they just do it. And so, there's a part of what keeps you going is seeing other people doing it and being a part of what's going on and being a part of that community and returning to them what they've passed on to you that kind of interactive, familial kind of thing, and I think that's a major part of it. Certainly, what keeps me going if we, if the industry as a whole required this much of me, but I was showing up but chose. And people are being assholes, and you know, whatever I think it'd be a whole lot less interested in continuing but to be part of that. And-and-and the second thing is to really believe that it matters in some way. I have, I always tell my kids I don't wanna care what you do. I-I it's more important how you do it. So, if you wanna be like one, one kid wants to be an underwater welder. Well, great be an underwater welder! But be, you know the guy on the shift who looks after people and make sure that everybody, you know be a good person, doing good things wherever you are whatever you're interested in. I'm interested in books, and so to me it's like, well. What are the good things that you can do through it? Make those make that your-your focus take because you can be an asshole through books just like you've been asshole anywhere else. But let's not like, let's-let's actually try to be kind and human. And so, I'm attracted to the that. The space because of that, but it also gives me something to like put passion and belief into where some things, you know don't.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What's something that you wish people knew about, like D.I.Y. history, or something like something that you wish that maybe the public knew about like the small zine? Maybe something that's happened in the past, or maybe something current?

Jeremy Luke Hill: In terms of like public, like things that they should have known about publishing like the books that have been published.

Tamara Thompson: That's important. And you're like people need to know about this.

Jeremy Luke Hill: There are a lot of those things, and they-they tend to come up with conversation like, even just in our conversation, you know. Hey, have you heard publication studio? Oh, that's a cool thing, right? Like that kind of sharing. And this is part of book culture that mode of expression. Hey, have you read this book? Oh, you should read this book, right? That kind of interaction is as a it's not just book culture, but a lot of those cultures that circulate around kind of shared physical objects. You see, I have a friend who's a big fish fan, you know the band fish. So, they don't they don't do albums. You have to like people, record their concerts, and so the.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, okay. Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Recordings become collectables.

Tamara Thompson: Oh yes, my partner is really into this. Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: So-so, it's the same kind of thing, right? You get these groups that or like, I played magic cards I was a kid. My kids are into magic cards, and now it's so. People show up, and they like, you know what I mean this like this exchange of things check out this. Have you seen what this guy did, and that kind of conversation around these shared objects. I use those examples because it doesn't always have to be like high art or something.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Kind of interaction is really, is key to those kinds of cultures. And in and in books, I think that that yeah. So-so, which is to say that when you're asking, what do I wish the people know. These are the kinds of things that are almost always for me like, come up in relation. What cause it's not something to what does everybody need to know. But when I'm talking with you, what do you need to know, and then vice versa. What do I need to know from you like, that's the reciprocal thing of what goes on there? So that yeah. Because and then then you have, and I have the sort of rule for myself where, if I get a book recommended to be three times, I should probably read it by people that I you know, respect rather than.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: The advertisements telling me. But like, if somebody tell three people that I know who are into books, they're like you should read this book, even as a book I wouldn't pick up normally I'll probably do it, you know, so like one of the ones that Erica McKeen's Tear-Tear-Tear T, E, A, R don't know how you're supposed to pronounce it. Aaron Snyder at 845 Press recommended that book to me because he helped edit it.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jeremy Luke Hill: I was like, okay, Aaron, you know, that's great. And then I-so, I got a copy, and I didn't bother to read it at the time, and then I was at another small press fair, and somebody came up to me, and I was talking about experimental books, and he's like this one isn't really very like very experimental, but you should read Erica McKeen's Tear. And then, like later that same day, as I'm packing up that book is on a table, and somebody's like, oh, I love this book. You should totally and so then I read this book, and I liked it, even though I'm not really into body horror.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: It's good.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: That that's the so that kind of thing I feel like is a question that comes up in-in relationship. What do you need to know? What do I need to know? And that becomes a shared point of conversation and direction.

Tamara Thompson: Well, to kind of turn the question a little bit more personally, what-what do you wish that people knew about you or your work, and what you do.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Ummm, the scale of it. So, people have this idea when you say, oh, a publisher, they're like, you have the print shop somewhere, and you do whatever meanwhile, like this is like until we're-this is my, the backroom of my house, right like where my MacBook is like. This is the press. And do you kind of just make it happen as you go? And so, I don't think people necessarily realize exactly what that is, and there are some benefits of that people like, oh, you're a publisher like, yeah, you know. I spend a lot of time at my house.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

Jeremy Luke Hill: So, like, so there's that part of it too good and bad, but also the scale of it in terms of-of work that people understood that when you're in small press publishing there's just like I could be doing something 24/7 and it has worked out very well for me too, in terms of its flexibility, like I could be at home-

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Being basically, a primary parent, because very little has to happen at a specific time, you know. So, I can kind of move it in my day here and there, and-and I so I enjoyed that part of it, and I enjoyed that. There's something new that I'm doing pretty much every day like I don't have the same job over and over again. There are lots of benefits to it as well, but I wish that people understood the scope of it, because they sort of have this idea that like, oh, you have this nice, you have this big office, and you sit around all day, and-and you know, edit people's books, and you know it's lovely.

Tamara Thompson: Yep. They don't understand what goes into it. But most people don't understand that you're editing your own promotional video with a very old piece of video editing software. And the microphone is terrible. And you're trying to fix the audio. And you're just looking at your screen being like, why am I doing this, right! It's because it'll make it good for like Instagram or something. But I can't get the video quality right.

Jeremy Luke Hill: As Tim Minster of PQL says, you have to keep explaining to people what a book is.

Tamara Thompson: Yup.

Jeremy Luke Hill: You know, they just because we've really lost that. And well, that's one thing I love about publication studio and about chapbooks

actually is when you get people doing it and they start to realize the physicality of it. And what goes into creating the thing that is a-a I often take I have the chapbook equipment with me to show some things, especially if I know they're going to be kind of slow and then I-

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jeremy Luke Hill: It's in, they're-they're ostensibly for the kids. But inevitably the adults will come over also. And I'm like, hey, do you wanna help make a little book, and they'll come over, and I like have cover stock. And I got like various color sheets, and that we-we make a book. We you know, use the folder, and we use the stapler. We use the trimmer. We do the whole thing, and we get to this little, you know, blank booklet that they could walk away with. And because, A I'm trying to get the kids especially, but the adults, too, who are long for the ride away from this idea that like a book is a magical thing that somehow appears nowhere, that has a process, and it can be made, and it is made, and you can do it but also that it requires work. Somebody has to make the damn thing. It doesn't just appear out of nowhere cause, especially the digital age. We have this idea that things just like happen right? Like I click and then on my phone, and I have a picture. And I do this, and it records, and I type, and that exists, I don't. And so, the idea that it takes physical labor to make things is like a little bit foreign to people.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I, I do a couple, the local Bata library. I've done a couple like zines things.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And usually, you get people who have no idea what it is. And they just heard there was a free thing with snacks.

Jeremy Luke Hill: All of the snacks. (laughs).

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, and then you get people who are really into it. They don't want to hear your spiel about what a zine is. I know what it is, and I'm like, okay, but like not, everyone does.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And to see the excitement, because it's the library, they have a lot of out of use, nice magazines like art magazines. So, they got a lot of really cool stuff. And you just seeing the excitement of people being like, I'm making a thing. And I'm like you are making a thing. Isn't this fun?

Jeremy Luke Hill: You can do this.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, and they get really excited. And there's a lot of hands on tactile-ness. We got markers, stamp, stickers.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Glue sticks, everything, right? And I help them with the long arm stapler, and they're, woah it's book now!

Jeremy Luke Hill: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And to see the fear in their face when they're folding it, because they want it perfect.

Jeremy Luke Hill: Right.

Tamara Thompson: And to realize how much thought goes into just even folding the pages they're like, I didn't think this would be that difficult. I'm like, no, but because you want it to look good you gotta put a lot of thought into this don't ya they're like yeah, wow, and I'm like yeah.

Jeremy Luke Hill: And the kids always love it, too. When I told when we're doing the trimming, I say, here, you take up the head and the foot and the nose, and they love it when they get to cut off the nose. This is slip it's perfect. It's good.

Tamara Thompson: Are there any additional comments that you'd like to make for the record?

Jeremy Luke Hill: I don't think so. Just that, like I-I think that this is a good thing that you're doing.

Jim Johnstone

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date is June 10<sup>th</sup> the time is 10:04 am. A reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out within a week after this interview, as that is the deadline. This interview is for small press and author.

Jim Johnstone: I'm Jim Johnstone. My pronouns are he / him. I'm being broadcast from Toronto, Ontario, where I live, and I work at Anstruther Press. I founded the press with my wife in-in 2014, and I'm the-the editor-in-chief.

Tamara Thompson: Excellent. So just to get the ball rolling, why did the press start?

Jim Johnstone: Oh, that's a good question. I-I actually have worked in small press, in-in various capacities over the years my first initiative was a, was a small magazine called *Misunderstandings* magazine, that I founded in 2004, with Ian Williams and Vicki (small technical difficulties occurred). Ian and I were at U of T at the time as-as graduate students, and Vicki was at OCAD, and she was a designer who-who helped design the magazine, and that ran for about eight years. And while I was, while I was doing that, I met someone named Devin Gallant in Toronto, who was starting a-a small chapbook press called Cactus Press, Cactus Press still exists Devin works at Montreal, and they're actually publishing quite a few chapbooks now. They, they've-they've been on and off for years, and I-I started editing some, some chapbooks at Cactus press, and I really enjoyed it. I stopped working there in 2012, and I wanted to start my own a chapbook initiative. I felt like working at the magazine, you know what I what I really wanted from that experience was to work with authors, more substantially. You know, the magazine was really taking a poem or two and and-and publishing those alongside other poems. And I-I wanted to start working on-on collections of poems, and I really liked the work I'd done at, at Cactus Press, where I was, I was editing chapbooks, so that was the impetus to-to start Anstruther press. I wanted something that was mine, and-and branded in the way that I wanted to brand it after you know, sort of working for someone else at-at Cactus Press. And so, I-I started it with my wife Erica. We just gotten married, and we were, we were looking for something to do together. So, we consider the press a little bit of a family project where I'll bring in manuscripts and-and edit and-and do that through our editorial board and she does the-the layout and design for the chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely.

Jim Johnstone: That's a little, I-I mean, yeah, a little bit of a story, for you know how the how the press started.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's always interesting to see how people got the thing started, because it's a lot of lot of work an effort to get stuff off the ground, but it's so rewarding, and especially when you said that you wanted to choose your own aesthetic and stuff.

Jim Johnstone: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That was a really fun part of doing Whispering Wick is just figuring out how things were gonna look and how things were gonna play out, and how we wanted to do things.

Jim Johnstone: For sure.

Tamara Thompson: How did you discover zines and chapbooks and this kind of smaller publishing? Was there a moment where you're like, "this is a chapbook, cool?"

Jim Johnstone: Right. Well, it was definitely through, you know. I-I think I came-came to it maybe, maybe not backwards. But I came to it through poetry and through my interest in poetry. And-and you know that I I-I started reading and writing poetry maybe around ten years old, and you know gradually, you know, I went on a journey of discovery where, you know, I discovered that people still wrote poetry, and there were living authors. Everyone I was reading when I first started was-was dead right, and-and was sort of a historical figure, because at least in the time when I-I was looking at it I-I think that's the way it was, was taught. I, I do think more living authors are taught today. So, through that journey of discovery, and then finally going to readings an in-in-in Toronto and meeting poets and people who wrote poetry. I discovered the-the small yeah, the the-the small book, the-the chapbook, the pamphlet things that people were distributing at readings and-and reading from that's where, that's where I started to see those things, because I hadn't seen them in a like in a big bookstore, let's say, you know, as-as a as a teenager or-or an early twenties, something, you know, just-just going to Chapters or Indigo like you. You wouldn't find something like that there. And-and I was really interested in books. I had started to sort of collect books in my early-early twenties, and-and some of those books were chapbooks, even though I didn't know what-what that was, initially. I you know I-I would just see books of different length and not think about it very much. That's how that's how I discovered them.

Tamara Thompson: Wonderful. So, I'm gonna get a little bit back to the press. But does your press have like an editorial philosophy, or maybe a press goal?

Jim Johnstone: Right. So, I think the first thing I should mention is that we have an editorial board, which is, which-which is a particular kind of setup. That allows us-it, it allows us to do a few things. So, we have, I think we have six editorial board members. Now they're-they're available like you can look them up on our website. But off the top of my head Klara du Plessis, Blair Trewartha, Katie Fewster-Yan, Daniel Tisdale, Amanda Merpaw, and David Ly are our editorial board members, and they're spread across the country. You know David's in-in Vancouver. Katie is in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia; so those are our furthest points, you know. Klara's in Montreal. A few of us are in you know, Blair's in London, Ontario. It gives us access to different communities. You know, because our mandate is, and-and the thing that we're most proud of is we-we like to publish and work with debut authors. We want to give first time authors a, an editorial experience. You know the, a book, making experience the experience of being branded and bringing work into the world. I think that you know it's you, you can learn a lot from doing that at a chapbook level



you learn about what you what you want, and you don't want and it, you know, during-during that kind of a process. So that's our, that's our primary mandate is working with 1st time authors or authors without full, full-length books. But we also believe in-in publishing established authors, because it brings a little bit of shine to emer-you know the emerging authors of the authors who haven't published before you know, pairing them together. This maybe, someone comes to a launch, and you know, for that established author they know, and they see an author that they don't know. And-and they're-they're there to be discovered. So that's the goal. And the editorial board helps with that. Because, you know, David, for example, is in Vancouver. So, he sees, at readings, you know, younger writers that I-I wouldn't see or-or have purview to-to see, and everybody on the editorial board keeps me honest and expands my definition of poetry and the, and the kind of poetry that we wanna publish. So, it's really helpful to have multiple voices at that press to you know, to-to fight, to, to sort of broaden the horizon of the press and make sure that there's-there's not too much individual bias.

Tamara Thompson: Wonderful. So, I wanna ask a little bit about what kind of work you publish. So do you guys lean more poetry, fiction? And why do you publish that kind of content?

Jim Johnstone: We publish poetry exclusively. The only kind of prose that we publish is writing on poetry. So, we have a-a little manifesto series. And the manifestos are, you know write, writing about arguments about poetry. That that that we welcome, but otherwise we exclusively publish chapbooks and broadsides. So, broadside, meaning like single-single poems. Published on an on a sheet, you know that are, they're nicely designed meant for; you know wall, wall hanging, or yeah, and-and such. So, we publish only, only poetry. It's sort of we're really where-where my interest lies, and we publish a lot of different kinds of poetry. We-we range all the way from, you know, just like standard, standard lyric to narrative poems, to concrete poetry and visual poetry which we're very interested in. You know, ex-like expanding more in in that direction. But I really you know, as a poet, you know I have, I have a particular practice, but I like to publish outside of you know the-the way that I write. I'm interested in reading all kinds of poetry.

Tamara Thompson: Wonderful. So, I wanna ask a little bit about your process. So, kind of what is it like from submission to production to getting a book into people's hands? What's that process like?

Jim Johnstone: Okay, I mean the-the thing that I like the most about chapbooks is the idea that that process doesn't have to be standardized. You know, when you work, because I also work for larger publishers; but there's still small presses. But you know presses that have to sell there, you know; I think the distinction to me between a micropress and a press that publishes trade books is distribution, right? If-if distribution is-is handled by, you know, a, an outside distributor, and your books are distributed, you know, in bookstores to me that you know signals that you are, you know, a-a small press, not a micropress. So, as-as a micropress, you know, when-when books are accepted, we have we-we have a process where an editor will be selected to work with the-the author that's been selected it's-we always have an editorial process where we at least sort

of dis-discuss the-the poems before they-they, they are-are published, so we'll give authors a timeline we work without contracts. We work just with-with a handshake. Some authors have asked about contracts in the past. I like working without contracts, simply because I-I like the process to be more informal than what you would get at-at-at a traditional press. I'll-I'll-I'll give authors a timeline, and then we'll-we'll work towards that timeline. It's normally pretty quick. That we'll-we'll get to an editorial process, and then, you know, the process takes the time that it takes. If you know I'm working with an author, you know, instead of, instead of another one of the editors. So, I'll-I'll speak for myself here, and-and the edits are done in two weeks. Now, that means that we can head to lay out and design and-and get the book produced and published fairly quickly. If the edits take six months and-and both of these scenarios have happened in the past, then you know your books gonna come out six months later, but the goal is really to make the best book possible, and the book that the author wants. So, the time it takes is-is simply the time it takes at-at Anstruther. Sometimes there'll be a delay before we can get to-to, edits like if I have too many projects that are that are coming out at the same time, you know, I'll tell an author, maybe they've submitted in the spring. I'll-I'll say you know we can start working on the book in the fall, because there is, there's-there's a bit of a backlog, and-and that does happen. But once we start, once we start the process when edits are over, it'll go directly to-to layout and design. So, Erica will typeset the book, and we'll work alongside the author to come up with a cover that both the press and the author likes. So, we-we brainstorm. Sometimes authors give us mood boards to work from, and-and we'll design a cover. Sometimes they give us a specific image that they want, and we-we design around that. Sometimes they want a guest artist to come on board and to-to draw their cover, or you know, have-have something to do, you know, with-with the design, and we-we welcome that as well. We're very open to, you know, making-making a book that the author wants. The only thing we don't have is much of a budget for-for cover art. So, you know, that's, you know, it helps to have Erica in house who's able to do design that, you know, is-is part, part of the-the foundation of the press. It means that we don't have to pay for lay out and design, which is really convenient for-for a chapbook press. Because she's doing it, doing it volunteer. And I mean, the-the two of us are-are investing our own money in-in the press. So, yeah, that's-that's you know how-how I see the process. You know, there's, there's the selection process for the manuscript. There's the editorial process, you know, preparing the manuscript for publication. There's the type setting and cover process so essentially branding the project, and then we throw it up online. And we have we have launches periodically. And you know, we'll sort of gather the authors that have, that, that have published in-in the in the last little while to-to come and-and launch their books. If they're, if they're in the area, if they're not in the area. We-we often work with them to you know, put together a launch in-in their, in their area, and sometimes the-the other editors can help with that, you know. Again, if something's in Vancouver, David can help. If something's in Montreal, Klara can help, and you know we-we try, we definitely try to set up, you know, a reading or two for-for people so they can have a public. You know, a public launch, of-of their material.

Tamara Thompson: So, for the actual, like selling of like the chapbooks and stuff does it usually happen mostly at launches or?

Jim Johnstone: Right. So, it-it-it happens in a number of different ways. You know, when I started and when I was when I was running *Misunderstandings* magazine in 2004., it was almost exclusively, at events, at launches. Now, we do most of our sales online, actually. It, the-the books sell really well on the Internet and people- I-I think there's a there's a new generation of-of-of readers who, like to acquire material that way. We, you know, we still sell at launches; it, it really, it really depends on the on the type of launch, you know, with the if you get a big crowd or not. We also sell it at small press book fairs that I know you're a part of as well. So, we'll do a few of those every year. It, lately we've been doing the the-the TIFA Small Press Fair. That's run by Kate Siklosi of Gap riot, and-and we always do meet the presses which has been kind of on and off in the in the last few years, and we've recently contacted by the Ampersand festival that are running, going to be running a book fair as part of their festival again. I'm not, I don't think it didn't sound like that was associated with Meet the presses. There's also there was also one out of Hamilton, I did a few years ago that Noelle Allen organized. So, we're always on-on the lookout for small press fairs. We've done the Ottawa small press fair as well. These are always oh, and there's one sometimes that runs at the Fisher Rare Book Library. So, these are all good-good venues for distributing the chapbooks, and I think we find a totally different readership when we do fares and when we do launches, it's-it's normally kind of a family-family and friends buy-buy books, you know, in the pandemic, we did online launches because we couldn't launch physically. But we've gone back to doing-doing some physical events which-which I really like. So, there's, I think, I think of it as sort of a three-tiered process for getting you know, for-for selling books, you know, we sell them. So, we sell them online. We sell them at fairs, and we sell them at launches. Kind of yeah, three tiers. So, it's the focused events the website. And then general events which are the fairs.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely. So, you were talking a little bit about how the press makes decisions with your board and stuff. But do you want to maybe talk a little bit more about that, because it's-it's pretty interesting?

Jim Johnstone: Yeah, well, we-we have you know, we-we take material in two different ways. Material will come in through-through general submission calls or-or processes where people will email us manuscripts to consider for submission or for-for publication. And we also solicit manuscripts. So, like, I was saying, the editorial board will often see, you know, or meet writers that they might want to work with and ask to see a manuscript, man-manuscripts come in that way. There's actually a third way, and that's that over time authors that I've worked with in the past have brought projects forward. Authors like (small technical difficulties occurred) Benjamin C. Dugdale, Sarah Burgoyne. These people have, have brought poets that they've worked with often in mentorship capacities forward and-and asked if we'd publish them. And I liked. I really like finding manuscripts that way, and I always ask the poet who's brought it forward, brought the project forward to work in an editorial capacity with-with the author. And so that's worked out really well. In terms of

how submissions come in through-through an email inbox. You know, I will consult with members of the editorial board about manuscripts that come in that are that are unsolicited, and we'll-we'll talk about them and see whether-whether we want-want to do them. If anyone feels strongly about a project and wants to you know, want-wants to work with someone. I always say, yes, that's-that's always, you know, a-a good sign for me. I mean, we're really, we're really doing this for authors. I don't particularly care about sales. It's not the part that I'm good at, I-I just want to give authors a-a launching pad where they can, they can share their work. There needs to be some sort of there, or there always has to be some sort of gatekeeping process, because we couldn't possibly publish all of the submissions that come in. But we've really expanded our book list in recent years. I think we do about twenty chapbooks a year now. Up from about maybe fifteen during the pandemic. And-and when we started, we were doing, maybe four or five a year. So, this is all due to interest in the press and-and people that come forward and-and want to be published, and we-we have a sliding scale in terms of, in-in terms of the material that we take on if it fits our mandate, if it's a first time author will often publish work that you know, in poetry that needs a little bit more work, a little bit more editorial assistance. We, we hold, you know, established authors to a, to a higher standard. It has to be something that one of the board members really-really likes and-and-and wants to do so, you know, that's, that's kind of the way we look at material that comes in and we don't have, you know, because I because I run things very informally. We don't have a specific number of books that we take on, you know. Most-most presses are, you know, sort of limited by that, right like certainly, in-in, a in, you know, I work at trade publishers. There'll be slots right? It'll be like we can publish three books, and you know the, the spring of 2024, and you find authors to fill those spots. We don't do that at-at Anstruther press we sort of just take on what we what we wanna take on. Sometimes it's felt like a little bit too much, but I like the informality of-of the process. And again, you know, even-even pacing and communicating with authors, you know, if I, if I can't, you know, if I've taken on too much, and I-I can't get to things. I just sort of communicate with people, and we-we work out a reasonable time, to, you know, to-to work on a book and-and release it.

Tamara Thompson: Nice.

(Technical issues occurred).

Jim Johnstone: I-I don't know. I-I will say that I was writing, I-I started writing short fiction. I started writing, choose your own adventure stories before I was writing anything, and I-I had a long school, school bus ride. I lived on the outskirts of Stouffville, Ontario, and I-I would travel to Uxbridge. It was maybe a forty-five min bus ride as a kid, so I would, I would sit there, and I would write these stories and-and kind of, and of, and fold and staple them, and they were like little zines, actually. So, I I've been making. That was maybe when I was 8 years old. My parents still have some of these things with spelling mistakes. I was French immersion kids. So

Tamara Thompson: I understand that.

Jim Johnstone: Horribly spelled. But so, I-I started, I started that way. And-and it's funny that I came back to or like, I've sort of always in in high school, I worked on, we started like a little, a little zine as students and, and, and published it again. It was just sort of a folded and stapled piece of paper. So, I've always, you know, worked that way and been interested in, in, in small press distribution, even when I didn't know what it was, because I certainly couldn't have categorized that or placed it, you know, when I was eight or when I was eighteen, making, making a zine. I-I didn't, you know I came from us-I was, I lived in a small town. I didn't have context for-for any of that. I fell in love with-with poetry just by, you know, having an anthology. I was an old poetry anthology that my parents had when they were in school, and I would, I-I would read it almost like to understand history because it-it broke, it broke poetry up into eras. So, you know, to the first I'd ever heard of-of the Victorians or the Renaissance era, or the Romantics, you know, came through this anthology, and I was just sort of fascinated. I, the-the amount of information that I gleaned from that was it wasn't just poetry right like it was reading these long bios and explanations of-of what these eras were and meant. And so that's how I how I first came to it. I was a bad poet for a very, very long time, I-I think, primarily because I was reading very old poetry and trying to imitate what that sounded like. So, you know it wasn't it couldn't, it couldn't possibly be modern, or you know interesting. One of the things I do remember, though, is that I would, I would put together concrete poems at-at that point like that was something I'd never seen, and that it just sort of came naturally to me. And-and one of the things you know, when you start to learn about poetry in a more formal sense, or-or get some, some kind of training, and all of mine was self taught. But you-you sort of learned to edit your natural instincts out in some ways, and-and you know I became much more sort of traditional as-as I evolved as a writer because I you know, at-at when I when I started taking it seriously and wanted to publish. I wanted to fit in rather than stand out. And so, I've tried in recent years to sort of come back to those roots a little bit more things that I was, you know, the way my mind worked and things I was interested in.

Tamara Thompson: So, you've talked kind of published your own work in the little handmade capacity. But why did you, like get your work in a chapbook like, why did you make that decision for yourself?

Jim Johnstone: I can tell you how, yeah, I can tell you how that happened. I mean, I wasn't, you know, when I was folding and stapling things, I wasn't distributing them particularly. I'd show my friends right. Give it to a friend. But it wasn't meant to be you know, a publication that someone could buy or-or you know, and you know a lot of a lot of chapbooks, I should say a lot of chapbooks, aren't, you know, for sale. A lot of that is-is distributed among community for free or in and-and or in kind of a trade context, right like to-to trade back and forth kind of context. My first chapbook was published by Danny Couture. I had never thought about publishing, you know, I was publishing my work in in little magazines. That started at the University of Toronto the first, my first year at the university.

(Technical issued occurred).

Jim Johnstone: So, when I first started at U of T, I-I was a science student, and I was a science student all through my-my education. I was, I was taking a human biology as an undergrad, and I went on to do my masters in reproductive physiology but that first year in, when I wrote my first exam, it was a chemistry exam. I was traveling home on the TTC. And one of the one of, the sort of the traditions that U of T is you would compare exams with-with classmates and a person that I met doing that was Ian Williams, who is now known as a, as a Griffin nominee as a poet and a Giller prize winning novelist. Ian was also a science student, although he transferred out of the science program after-after the first year and became an English major and went through and did his PhD in English. But Ian for me was really a link to the-the creative world, you know. At when we were comparing our exam, you know, exam answers that first you know in in October, that first time, you know, I said to him, you know yes, like, you know, we're up assigned to what I really love is poetry, and I like pulled the poem that I'd written out of my pocket, and he did the same thing. And so, we-we really bonded in that way, and he showed me all the campus literary magazines that existed. I don't know, like without him, whether I would have found that. But at U of T there's active *Victoriana*. There was the *UC Review*. I don't know if that's still in existence. The *Hart House Review* is probably the-the big, the big one as a campus magazine and-and *Echolocation*, which is their magazine that's-that's sold in stores and over the years, you know we-we would, we would hang out and we would publish our poems and those student magazines. And that's-that's how I started publishing and I, and eventually I started submitting to-to larger magazines. The *Malahat Review*, *Descant*, and-and publishing there. And I started going to readings consistently in in Toronto, and I did some open mic readings at the Art Bar, and that's where I met Danny Couture, who was someone I think, that I admired before I met I-I sought her out to buy her chapbook which had been published by Proper Tales press, which was run by David Clink and Mina Wallen for a very, I think that press only lived for a few years, but they published some very interesting authors over there over their time. Alex Boyd was also, did a first chapbook with them, and-and Danny Couture's first chapbook, called *Midnight Grocery*, was published with them and Danny saw me on the open mic, and-and we became friends. And-and she said like, why don't I, I wanna start a chapbook press? Do you wanna be my first publication? And so, we put together a book. Dani did an interesting like woodblock, a lino block print for the cover, and had, like a hundred fifty covers drying all around her apartment. Her wife was not very, not very happy at the time that you know there was all it just, I love that that kind of anecdote speaks to the process of what it's like to make, you know, make a small book, right? It like, if you're if you're going to ink-ink covers like they're gonna take up space in in this space where you live, and-and you know you have to dry them, and you have to, you're physically making these things rather than sending them out to a printer. So, I yeah, I mean, all everything about that book was-was chapbook was very kind of handmade. One like it didn't have an ISBN. So, it was not registered with the Library Archives of Canada in any way. I photocopied the inside, the interior on the Department of Physiology Photocopiers, where we had an account for my lab which I probably wasn't supposed to do. You know, just-just to make it affordable, so that we could print a hundred fifty copies of-of this book, which, ended up being called *Siamese Poems*, which is now long extinct. I think I have a few copies hanging around, but I I'm I don't think the one

hundred and fifty copies were ever distributed. I think handfuls of that were probably trashed, because we weren't able to get rid of them all. It was a wonderful first experience, and it was really driven by Danny coming to me and asking. If she hadn't done that, I that book, wouldn't exist. And I I'm not sure you know what would have happened with my literary career. I hadn't started editing chapbooks for Cactus Press yet. That started the next year in 2007, and-and the-the whole experience of publishing with Danny, and it-it turned out that I was the only chapbook Danny ever published with her chapbook press which was called Surly Additions. So, it really was a one off in-in many senses. But it, it's what got me interested in doing the same for other people. I saw how easy it was to sort of, and-and you know I don't know, maybe easy is not the right word but maybe-maybe accessible and democratic a process it is to-to just be able to fold and staple and design something yourself. And it was, it was a huge deal for me. It was a way for me to feel like I belonged to part of a community. It spurred me to keep going. Danny's faith in me as a writer made such a huge difference in-in my life. You know there's- there's-there's been people that have come and-and done things for me as a writer that pushed me to continue writing. And this was this was maybe the-the biggest I needed, friends. I needed community. I needed people that believed in me to-to keep me going. I-I look back at that early work, and it wasn't very good, but it was as a science student, it was, it was sort of all-all I knew, and I needed sort of enter that community to learn how to get better and you know the people around me really helped me with that, and everything I do at Anstruther is a way to try to pay that forward and do that for other authors, because I saw what a difference it made in my life. And you know, to sort of take that process and sort of streamline it, and kind of professionalize it a little bit at Anstruther, while still keeping it loose and informal, is, you know, has always-always been my goal. And so that origin story is really-really important to me and really connects to everything I do.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic, just, I love hearing the stories behind things I, so exciting and so much of this is just, you know, just told to people, and you hear the stories and stuff. So, I'm just so grateful that you, you're doing this on the record so that I can look back and remember it and share it with other people, because it's such an interesting story, especially as someone who tries to encourage other authors and hearing about that moment of oh, someone cares about my work is encouraging me. I see it all the time when I talk to my students and how they're like, oh, you think this is good. And I'm like, Yeah, you're in first year. And this is amazing. For a first year, like you're dealing with the world, first semester all by yourself, and you're able to make this, I could never make this at your age like this is amazing! And just seeing their reaction. So, it, it just makes me so excited.

Jim Johnstone: In the literary community, you know, having been part of it for twenty years now is that young, you know, young authors are able to write, you know, extraordinarily, like there, you know, the people I'm meeting that are publishing great poems are getting younger and I don't know why, that is I-I would sort of hypothesize that maybe it has something to do with the Internet and access. And-and you know, being able to see everything that's going on. You know, people are growing up very

quickly. Their minds are evolving quickly. And yeah, but it's it, really, it really heartens me to see that.

(Technical issues occurred)

Tamara Thompson: Okay, so I know that you're obviously a very busy fellow. But would you work with a small press again? Would you ever make another chapbook for yourself?

Jim Johnstone: Oh, well, I've published chapbooks in-in you know, since-since that chapbook that came out in in 2006 with Danny. I've published with several different chapbook presses over time. I worked with Frog Hollow Press to publish a chapbook called Epoch in 2013. I worked with Thy Hellbox press, which is now extinct. That was run by Hugh Barclay and Hugh, was actually letter pressed, his-his chapbooks, and he made really extraordinary book objects that I-I really fell in love with, and I-I feel very grateful to have worked with-with Hugh to publish a chapbook called Microaggressions in 2016. Hugh died several years back, which is why, that that press doesn't exist anymore. He was very old at the time, but I-I had the experience of going to Kingston Ontario to Hugh's house, and to see his print shop in his garage, and to see his, to see all of his equipment, and also to help him type set poems, which was quite an experience. Because when you're type setting a poem, and you, you have to pick out the-the lead type letter by letter you start to question. You know, what did I really need that word in my poem? You know, like you, you start to think more minimalistically. It's quite you know, I, I'm-I'm really grateful to have had that experience, because letter pressing a book is a totally different way of-of making a book and it-it, you know it's-it's a really old school way of-of working. And I-I love the-the finished product which-which included some handmade art by Hugh that, that he printed it in-in-in my book that sort of over, they kind of overlaid the poems, and I still have quite a few of those-those books I give them to-to friends and people that you know are interested in my work because they're really beautiful, and they're-they're a beautiful art object. I also had a-a pamphlet come out from Knife Fork Book in 2021, Knife Fork Book run by Kirby, who would be a, you know, a great small press person to talk to. I don't know if you-you know, if you're interested.

Tamara Thompson: I am trying. Both her and Stuart.

Jim Johnstone: Important people to talk to, for sure; Stuart as well. Yeah, so I-I publish, so, I so you'll see that like intermittently between trade collections, I've published seven full length books of poetry. I-I still return to chapbooks, and I think that chapbooks, you know, for me, are in in a lot of ways the ideal unit of poetry I love picking up a chapbook is something I can read in one sitting. Poetry is dense, but you know, like a small chapbook is something that, that is so wonderful. It's a wonderful way to print poetry in a, in a lot of ways like the-the-the book I did with Kirby was just a single poem that was six pages long. And you know it was, it's it was a wonderful container for-for that poem. So, there's-there's things that I like to-to publish on, on micropresses. I-I think that I-I-I actually like, I've never been the kind of person that was like interested, I-I know a lot of people in the literary community, I've seen over time, like some people start in micropress, and then they-



they publish a full life book, and they never come back. You know I'm-I'm the kind of person I actually think micro presses where I would prefer to be. If I ever had to make a choice you know I would choose, I would choose micropress, and I would choose, Anstruther press, because Anstruther press this is probably where I should tell you, Anstruther press has an imprint on Palimpsest Press, where we publish full length books, it's called, Anstruther books. So sometimes this can be confusing. Anstruther press and Anstruther books. So, this imprint allows us to take some of the authors that we've worked with most often people that we worked with as-as first-time authors and publish full books for them. If it was asked to choose between the two, I would always choose the micropress. I-I think that, that's the level at which and-and I like, I like to operate at, and that I find the most exciting. And-and again, like it's kind of a punk rock enterprise to-to like fold and staple your own books. You get to make your own choices. There aren't any rules. I mean, it's just really, it's what I, it's what I prefer. It's what it's what I love. It's again what I grew up doing unconsciously. And so, it's not something that I would, I would ever, I would ever leave, or-or fold, you know. That's I think that's the-the hill that I'll die on is the-the Micropress Hill, so I don't, I don't plan on not publishing my work in-in that way. And-and you know I'll continue you; I'll continue to do both my work and other people's work at-at the Micropress level.

Tamara Thompson: So, exciting. I love doing the interviews. It's been my favorite part of my journey with my thesis so far, because it's so fun to hear people who care so much about a thing that I care so much about and hearing their experiences. It's so rejuvenating.

Jim Johnstone: Well, and you're gonna gather a lot of data and information, right? And-and you know, being able to, being able to standardize that a little bit and like create a thesis on something that there's not a lot of information about. And because I wrote my that little book that that you have a Write, Fold, Print and Staple from Gaspereau press. Which is about, yeah, which is about micropress and-and covers some micropresses in Canada, you know, when I wrote that book there wasn't a lot of information out there. I tried, you know. I-I had, you know, twenty years of experience within the community, and a lot of knowledge that I relied on to-to write the book. But when I tried to do research there wasn't, there wasn't a whole lot out there. So, you're gonna, your thesis is really gonna be a bigger version of that of that book, right? It's-it's going to be, you're gonna be able to expand it. And something people will be able to rely on. Maybe even something you could publish as-as a trade book eventually. I-I really love the-the idea that you're doing this and-and that you're, you know, putting all of this information together, because, you know, a scene that goes undocumented. Really, you know, like it, can, it can disappear.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And I think this is something that is so special and unique. I don't know why no one else has talked about it before, because it's so fascinating to me, and I love it so much. So, I've, I've just been so excited by how eager everyone has been to talk about it. And also like, when I talk about my thesis, a lot of people are like, oh, you're in the thesis stream. And I'm like, yeah. And they're like, what is your thesis about? And I'm like, oh, chapbooks and their like, oh, cool!

What's that? And I have to explain. And then they're like, oh, that's really interesting, and I'm like you don't even know the half of it. I just gave you a little short summary that I have in my brain, for when someone asked me what my thesis is about, because you get asked it all the time.

Jim Johnstone: Yeah, I had the same as a scientist. I had to have sort of the-the layman's version, you know. So, like I-I could, I could make it understandable to someone who wasn't in-in the field. And so, I'd have a little, a little, a little, you know blurb, that I would, I would give them about it. I mean, you know, in terms of information that's been gathered about these kinds of things. There's there is a lot of information about what happened in the sixties, in the seventies. That's still a very sort of it's a canonized part of CanLit, and still, something that people are writing about to this day. I-I think that-that comes from, you know, first of all, that was a real nation building time. You know, the-the sixties were time when the Canada Council was created to start to support the arts, but also like when our national anthem was-was put in place when our flag was put in place. Like all those things, came in the 1960. And so, people still look back, and there's a lot of information about like bpNichol, and-and-and his activity, and bill bisset and Blew Ointment Press and-and Gangla Press and, and Weed Flower Press, and all those old presses that existed then they were really wonderful and very-very collectible. And I-I love that material. But I think that sometimes we forget to sort of document what's happening right now, like in present day, and there's a very, very vibrant community, and if we don't document it again like it, it will disappear. So, I'm glad you're doing the work.

Tamara Thompson: I am glad too, because when I was looking and like the Canadian archives for anything that related to chapbooks like even some small press things, there was one paper from 1990's about chapbooks, but more about religious chapbooks, and the idea of purity at the time in the nineties. So, it was more how that idea and the religion was being spread than about the books itself and that was the one paper I could find.

Jim Johnstone: To give you a tip. There is an issue of Open Letter. It's a magazine that's now extinct. But Open Letter from 2004. It was an issue edited by derek beaulieu and Jason Christie, and it's, it's a, it's a micropress issue, so it'll give you-you know. It's-it's two hundred pages or one hundred and fifty pages. It's, it's like, it's, it's a robust issue. And it's you know it, there's a lot of information in there, and a lot of people who you know, who you might even interview today. You know. I think Stewart's in there, Rob McLennan, Jay MillAr. A lot of sorts of the key figures in the in the early 2000's are covered in that, in-in that issue. And I think it's-it's really worth looking at even just to see how substantially the communities changed cause that-that means that's twenty years ago, right? 2004, how substantially the communities changed in that time in terms of production method. Because remember, like the Internet, wasn't that old in 2004 and like digital, you know, styles of printing have really changed what you can do. And the Internet has changed even what publication means, because some presses exist only online now. So, you know, I-I think that in terms of like a you know for your research, I think that could be helpful in in a number of different ways. It's I tracked one down when I was writing Write, Fold, Print and Staple. I just

found one and-and ordered it. And I think you could, I think there's on there if-if you yeah, or.

Tamara Thompson: Any suggestions at all are very much welcomed.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: -back to our questions here. What are some challenges that you've faced as an author?

Jim Johnstone: Yeah, okay, I mean, the challenges come in, in numerous forms. But I-I think I won't talk too much about like writing-writing challenges. Writing-writing is always-always a challenge. I mean, I think that as a poet, distribution is always, is-is always a challenge. You know finding readers. I-I tour quite extensively. And you know that's been one of the unexpected joys of-of being an author is that I've made a lot of friends in a lot of different places in Canada and also seen Canada, you know, before I, before I started writing and sort of touring behind my writing. I traveled, but I didn't travel within Canada very much, so you know, writing has taken me, and I-I-I credit writing for taking me all over the country. And-and you know I, I've also met a lot of interesting and you know, good, good friends that way, and it's nice, you know, when I tour now I get to see people that I you know that that I know, and I get to visit people, and it becomes kind of a-a two-pronged thing, you know. I get to visit places that I like. But certainly, you know, attracting audiences for poetry. It's difficult selling-selling books, you know, really trying to get your work seen and-and out into the world is-is difficult publishing is-is harder today than it was when I broke in. Simply due to the-the, an increased amount of competition, because there are so many very good writers, in-in Canada, writing poetry, and the readership hasn't really expanded. You know, as-as a poet your readership is often just other poets, and that can be, that can be difficult. I, I attribute that to the fact that poetry is kind of unlike any other kind of writing, in that it demands participation from readers. So, what I'm, what I mean by that is that you know a plot in in A, in a book of fiction or a book of short stories it often guides you. It-it tells you where to go. It tells you what to think about. You know what's happening in the book, but a poem it-it welcomes, it welcomes readers in in a way where it's a little bit more open, a little bit more amorphous. It allows you to imprint your life over top of the poem, and to interpret it in-in the way that you the way that you like, and I think readers are not used to that. I-I hear from a lot of people that say they don't understand poetry, or they don't know how to read poetry, and the real secret to poetry is simply that you know you can read it any way you like, and what a poem means to you is what it means to you doesn't have a secret hidden meaning. You certainly, I have intent when I write a poem as an author, but I love to hear what other people think that, that means to them, because when you publish something as opposed to when you just write something for yourself, you're giving that away. You're giving that to an audience, and it's no longer yours. You don't have control over how it's interpreted. So that's another challenge with poetry is-is how, you-you have to be willing to sort of give something to-to people and-and seed control, right? So, you're gonna be, you're gonna be criticized. Your work is going to be written about. It's not always going to be interpreted in the way that you want it to be

interpreted. So, you have to come to terms with that. That has to be part of the experience that you that you want for me. It's one of the most exciting possibilities about writing poetry is that you could, you could put something into the world that'll have meaning to someone else that's different than the meaning it has for you personally, as the person who wrote it. So those are, I think those are the-the things I think about the most. You know how to find readership and-and you know what-what that readership actually thinks about the material, and how they can participate in the interpretation of the material and-and make it their own.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I have a similar way of when people are like, well, I don't get the art, and I'm like, well, you don't have to get it. Just experience it the way you enjoy it. There are some people who like analyzing it and understanding the color theory. And then there are some people who just like looking at it. Maybe there's some people who, like the historical representations of it, interpret it and interact with it in a way that you enjoy. There is not a right way to enjoy the art, and it's kind of the idea that I give my students when I'm talking about poetry for a lot of them, it's a big hurdle. And like, think about it as a picture. You don't have to understand everything going on, but that doesn't mean that you still can't enjoy it.

Jim Johnstone: Yeah, yeah, no, a-a hundred percent. I mean, it's, I think some people are, you know, this might be-be wrong. But like waiting for permission. They don't feel like they-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jim Johnstone: To, you know, to-to read poetry. And I'm I, you know, again, I think it's, it's something that that people aren't used to being asked to do is to participate in, like an arts meaning cause, you know, again, like, when you watch movies or television like it, it often takes you to a place that's you know where it's telling you what, what to think or feel. I-I prefer, even in-in movies, I prefer endings that are interpretable. I prefer open ended you know; stories that don't have you know a lot of plot. So, I-I've always veered towards something that I can participate in and think about rather than something that is closed, ended, and, and, and you know, sort of gives you a-a firm ending.

Tamara Thompson: I, I agree. Which is why my mother says, I'm a frustrating author to read because, she says, well, what does this mean? And I'm like, I don't know. You tell me, what do you think it means?

Jim Johnstone: Yeah!

Tamara Thompson: And she's like, well, don't you have an answer? And I'm like, I don't know, past me might have. I don't remember. Now tell me what you think. That's more interesting to me.

Jim Johnstone: I always ask people that, you know, and of course that's a favor to me. If they tell me, if they can tell me what they think, and I think it's part of the role of an editor; you know, when I when I edit poems I talk to authors about intention, and-and again, like my

interpretation, because I can serve as the reader for them. And you know I think part of you know good editing is trying to get the poem closer to an author's intention. I often explain it like this, if you are writing a poem in a coffee shop and you're-you're writing about your time in the coffee shop, you know, as you're writing it, you can smell the coffee. You can hear the baristas, you know, tapping you know, tapping the coffee out and, and, and making, you know, like making a latte hear the machines. And if you if you write your poem, and you don't explicitly mention those things, the reader won't be hearing them and smelling them and seeing them; so, I think sometimes authors can read their own work back, and they can fill in those gaps. And-and-

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Jim Johnstone: Right! So-so you know, as an editor, I have to sort of, you know I can ask them about their experience, and then read the poem and say, well, I don't, I don't smell the coffee, because it's not in the poem. And they say, oh, okay, like, that's why it's not working in in this way. And-and so like, that's-that's sort of what I'm looking for as an editor is to just try to get it closer to an you know, to an author's intention.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I try and explain that to my students that an editor should not be trying to rewrite your story or tell you what to do. A good editor will just try and help you get what you meant on the page, on the page.

Jim Johnstone: Absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: And they're like, whoa, wait, really. And I'm like, yeah.

Jim Johnstone: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: They're there to help you.

Jim Johnstone: Editor shouldn't be scary; like, my, you know, my editorial philosophy is, is, like, first and foremost, that I want you to publish the book that you-you want to publish. I don't want to interfere with the material in a way where it doesn't feel like it's yours. But I'm really just here to help, and I have twenty years of experience, you know, having read many, many, many manuscripts, and there's things I can tell you about poetry and poems and your poems that you might not know. But I'm just here as a, you know, as-as person that can give you that information. You don't have to use it. I always tell people like when I when I give them edits like, if you don't, you know I-I love it when people push back and wanna talk about edits, I absolutely respect, you know, the default for me is always, if I select a manuscript, and I give you edits, and you say I don't wanna make any of them the default, as always. I'm, I'm happy to publish the manuscript as-as you wrote it. I'm only here again to hopefully work with you, to make it better in a way where you feel it's better.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's... whenever I write my students comments, I'm like, this is the problem that I'm seeing. Here's my suggestion. But

again, it's a suggestion. You don't have to take anything, I said, or if you don't see that as a problem, we can talk it out if you want to make improvements to it right? And I, my students always like, why did you say suggestion? And I'm like, because edits are a suggestion. I've given you a way to fix it. But if you do not like the way that I said you could fix it, fix it in the way that you'd fix it. That's the whole point. I've shown you the problem that I'm seeing. Let's talk about it. Or maybe I'm seeing a part of a bigger problem which you know about, which we can fix together right.

Jim Johnstone: I often, I often find it's better when authors fix things in their own ways, you know? Like, I can suggest a fix. But they, you know, invariably, when people make their own, make their own fix and, and-and write, you know, do that in their own voice and own way, it's better than what I can offer. So, I think, as you say, pointing out the fixes or sort of pointing out the area, that there might be a problem is-is important. And you know, ho-hopefully you interact to make that fix as-as natural as possible in-in a way that suits the work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree. So, what has this kind of publishing taught you? Like, just in general; it's a very open question.

Jim Johnstone: Yeah, it is a very open question. I mean, it's taught me a lot about working with people. You know, I've-I've published hundreds of chapbooks for people over-over the years. And you know all of those experiences were different. It, you know, it's-it's taught me that different people need different things they need, you know, when you, when you're when you're serving in a, in a mentorship capacity or like a capacity where you're guiding people or shepherding something through to publication. Different people need different forms of-of editing. You know, support, encouragement. And you know you have to; you have to sort of meet people on-on their terms. I-I'm, I'm very interested in that, not having such a set and-and stock way of working that I'm asking people to conform to me that I, you know, sort of come to them and meet them on-on their terms. And you know, that's-that's been part of a-a learning experience for me. I-I think that you know there was, there is a few things that I maybe didn't expect. You know, when I when I decided to start publishing chapbooks and-and one of those what was sort of that it's about forming relationships with people, you know, when you have, when you're forming an editor, you know, when you're editing a manuscript. You're forming an editorial relationship. You're forming, you're forming friendships in in in some cases. And you're really working with people in in in an intimate way, because you're talking about to them, about something that means a lot to them. And you're and-and you're-you're responsible for publishing it and-and branding it in a way that they like. So, you know you, there's a lot of responsibility that comes with that, even in a small you know, even on a, on a micropress level. These are things that are very important to people. And you wanna get it right, you know. And you wanna, you wanna make it. You know the way they want it to be, because in ten years I'm not going to be thinking about a book that I published ten years ago, when I when I've published hundreds for people. But that person will still remember, you know, because I know as an author, you know, I still go back and think about where, where there are mistakes in my books. I-I still think about that book that I made with

Danny. And you know, having, having a good experience and leaving people with a good experience, and also, the book that they wanted is-is important in-in that context. The other thing that I didn't expect when I started publishing things for people and-and sort of taking things on as an editor is how much of the job would be rejecting manuscripts. That's a hard, a hard part of-of you know, you-you get into this because you-you wanna help, right? And you-you wanna publish cool books. And you, you wanna work with people. And there's and there's a lot of joy in that. But there's also a lot of having to say no, I mean much, much, much, much more no, than yes, right. So, I get to send a few, a few messages to people I'm gonna work with saying, yes, I'll work with you, and-and you know there's a lot of excitement around that. But you know, I'm still figuring out, you know, the best way to-to say no to people, and I often have to say no to things that are really, really wonderful. That just don't fit for whatever reason. And-and sometimes that reason is simply, I have too many things to publish, and I-I can't publish this book. That's just as good as any of the ones I have is very difficult to communicate that in a way, that's meaningful, because, you know, rejections start to, you know, flatten over time for authors, and it starts to feel like the same, you know the same, you know, I know as an author right like you, you and you get a lot of rejections. They're just I-I, I've had a lot of rejections where people said nice things, or-or even said, you know, like this is something we would publish. But we just don't have room, but it's still a rejection, right? And it still feels the same. It's like that, you know, that work is not getting into the world. You need to keep pushing. You need to keep knocking on doors. So that's-that's a hard part for me, a part that I didn't really think of, and something that you know that I've, I've learned over the years, and I think I'm still learning around, around rejection and, and how to encourage people that I can't personally take on or-or publish in, you know, in a lot of ways. You know, I've-I've tried to help people that that I had to reject for various reasons find home for their work. But I-I can't help everyone. I-I just don't have the time or the, or the purview for that. So.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's-that's hard. What are some challenges that the press has faced over the years?

Jim Johnstone: Money. It's always it's-it's always money, you know. Folding and stapling things is ostensibly cheap, and it's, it is, you know it, but it-it depends on what level you. You want it, you wanna do it, so, we you know, we-we publish a lot of chat books, and there is an investment that goes a financial investment that goes into every one of them, even if they even if that investment isn't huge. But in our case, you know, every one of our book's costs, you know, several hundreds of dollars to print in, in sort of the-the amount that that we print so I don't have any grant funding. I'm not interested in-in government funding for the press. I like being able to do whatever I want to do. You know, part, of part of the-the freedom, and you know to me, like the-the ethos of running a micropress is that you make what you want to make, and you're not beholden to something like a, like a governing body. So, I've steered clear of that group. But that means I have to invest my own money, and it often means that-that doesn't come back. You know, I have; I have large Tupperware containers that my wife bought to store chapbooks and, you know, some chapbooks that we print sell ten copies, and some have sold two hundred copies. So, it's

a very, it can be a very different you know, financial situation for each book, and you and you never really know what you're gonna get. So, that's- that's always a challenge. And I I'm a person that doesn't have a lot of money because I do not, I don't run Anstruther press for a living, but I- I-I my living, is working as an author and working at several trade publishers. And-and you know, this is this is all sort of part, of part of what I do. So, I live on a very limited budget. So funding is always a problem.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Why are chapbooks important to you?

Jim Johnstone: They are a way of communicating with-with the world. There, they offer an alternative to the gatekeepers that, that exist in in media. Right? There, there are often, you know, established opinions, and-and people won't publish outside of established opinions or established forms or styles of work and I think that if you really want to break ground you know often, often people are afraid of that when-when you, when you start, and I mean, I've seen that with pub. You know, poets that I've published I mean one of those poets would probably be Mark D. Severio and Mark, when I first met Mark, he was writing these, you know, beautiful formal poems that were extremely kinetic mark was very open about having mental illness and getting long slots of time in hospital and he couldn't get his work published. And over time, you know, I worked with Mark to try to, you know. Get him a trade book deal, and-and many years later. But I think it's about fifteen years now since I met Mark fifteen years later, you know, he's, he's sort of part of the literary establishment, and he's known, and people-people admire his work and his and, his work fits in better, but it really didn't fit in when he was starting, and a chapbook was the only place where you could really like publish the kind of material. It was edgy the kind of material that he was writing. So, I think that you know micropress is-is, you know, one of the bastions of-of free speech. The way this started was with people publishing broadsides on, on, you know, on the printing press, so they could communicate in-in ways that they wanted to communicate, and those were often very anti-establishment ways of-of communication. You know the reason I came to zines and chapbooks first when I wanted to take my poetry seriously is that I looked around and I thought, well, I don't think the Fiddleheads gonna publish me, and I know the New Yorkers not gonna publish me or the Paris Review. So, I have to find a way of distributing my work that's not through those institutions. And-and I think that that remains important for writers who, you know, want-want to try something new. Try something different. And-and you know, some sometimes, for-for certain people there's, that's their only entry into-into the literary community. The only way that they can share their-their work. People with different opinions, that, you know, come from different backgrounds. I think that it's-it's super important that-that exists, and it's part of that, that's the reason I love it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Well said. Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing. If so, why are why not.

Jim Johnstone: One hundred percent, yes. I mean chapbooks inform what's published on-on major presses. Right? People who publish in chapbook form often go on to publish trade books. They become part of the Canadian



establishment, and some of our greatest poets start started that way. I-I would point to Karen Solie. Karen Solie now is, you know, simultaneously published in Canada, the UK, the US, you know, she publishes with Anansi here, she publishes with Salt in-in the UK. She publishes with FSG in the US the large one, maybe one of the largest publishers in the world, and she started by publishing chapbooks with Junction books in the late nineties, and Karen is also someone who comes back and-and continues to publish chapbooks with-with Junction books, and so she, you know she exists in both worlds, and I have a lot of respect for that. But I mean there's absolutely a direct connection to-to, you know, but between the two and I-I think they both, I think they both need each other, right? They're-they're both important, they're both important stages, but without, the without, the without the chapbook stage, you know I-I do, I do hesitate to like, point out that, like the chapbook stage is a place where you can learn and-and sort of get better. I mean chapbooks are ephemeral so you can leave them behind if it's not some, not a direction that you want it to take. You know that they can be a place to experiment. You know I-I hesitate to mention that because I really do think that chapbooks are an art of their own and a place to publish that's, that's, that's not that. But it can be that, too. Right? So, you can have people that learn on a chapbook level before they go and publish trade books, but I do think the chapbooks on their own are important and can be, can be important and just as important as-as trade books. And that people who publish trade books do come back and publish chapbooks for a reason. Someone like Karen comes back and publishes a-a chapbook, and it's not so that she can learn or-or test out her poetry. It's because it's the form that she respects, and-and a, and a, and a method of distribution for her, for her work that matters so I hope that answers the question.

Tamara Thompson: You answered it wonderfully. I-I love that chapbooks don't, aren't necessarily one thing, and there's so many things, and that's what's interesting.

Jim Johnstone: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way?

Jim Johnstone: Of course. It's a, it's a cross section of the Canadian imagination. There's, you know, poetry and I suppose they shouldn't just say poetry, because chapbooks can be anything, right? But you know, publishing and-and writing is a way of, a way of thinking. It's a way of distributing thought, it's a way of distributing culture. So I, so I absolutely think that it. You know it. It reflects what's going on in Canada. And I mean, yeah, again, like, chapbooks can be multiple things. So, you can, you can run a little newspaper. That's-that's micropress right? And-and-and-and spread the word in-in a number of different ways.

Tamara Thompson: What's something that the smaller-we've talked a little bit about this, but I'm gonna ask it again just directly. What's something that the smaller micropress can do that the trade publisher can't, and, like vice versa?

Jim Johnstone: Right. Well, I think, I think micropress can capture the zeitgeist better than trade publishing, because you're not on a timeline. You know a trade book has to, has-has necessary delays. You-you need to create metadata. You need to talk to distributors. You need to network with bookstores. They're often, trade books are often taken three, two, three years out from when they'll be published. There's very, very difficult to capture a moment. A chapbook can be, and I've-I've done this before it can be published in a week. You know? It can be published in a day if you want. I-I've published them that quickly a week or two. And I-I think that they you know the speed at which that information can be, can be relayed with a chapbook. Now, it's not the speed of the Internet which is sort of, which is sort of instant. But we are talking about Arc here. And I, you know, I think that that little bit of delay is okay. So, I-I think that you know th-that's something a-a chapbook can do that a trade book can't do. It can come out and sort of reflect a particular culture of moment. There, you know, there's again there's, there's, there's more freedom so like you can, you can publish what you want. If you're, if you're a person that can fold something and staple something you don't have to deal with-with anybody except yourself. You know. You can invent your press name. You don't even have to put a press name on the piece of paper that you're folding and stapling and-and distributing. That's small. That's micropress, that is, you know, self publishing falls under the umbrella, and I think it's incredibly important you know, to be able to-to, you know, as a, as a form of self expression. You know trade books have-have their advantages. They certainly have distribution channels. You know, I've talked to young authors before that have approached me and asked me about the difference between self publishing and-and publishing with an established press, and they're talking about publishing a full-length book and I-I remember I had had an author come to me, and I explained the difference, and they came back to me and they said, well, I'm having a hard time marketing my work. And I said, well that was, you know, on-on the on the list of things that trade presses could-could help you with. Right? They-they opted to go the self publishing route, which can be quicker, which can be, you know, more, they have more control. It's-it's more do it yourself. But a trade publisher has established connections and networks, right? One of those that might be underestimated is even like this have a network of libraries they sell to right. So, they can get the books and libraries where people will-will take, you know. See them and take them out. They have, you know, kind of an extended reach. They have stores they deal with. They have people that will buy books simply because the book is published by that press. Chapbooks have that, too; you know Anstruther has a following, a smaller following than like, let's say, a press like House of Anansi would have, but we do have a little bit of a following, but I think the, you know that the difference is, it is simply in numbers, you know they'll they could, they probably have a budget where they can print in larger numbers. So, the reaches, the reaches, I would say significantly different most of the time. There's exceptions to-to all rules.

Tamara Thompson: Why do you think most small presses and micropresses, close up shop?

Jim Johnstone: I think that's one of, one of the built in, you know, things that's wonderful about-about a micropress. They can, they can stop

and start, and they, you know, I've seen them stop and then start up again, some of them years, years and years later, sometimes like a decade later. You know they can, they can start and stop at the will of their proprietors. I think, the reason you see a lot of micropresses pop up and- and leave is there, you know again, like finances. They can be hard to find time, you know time, people, you know, someone might start-start something, and then, you know, have a family and not have time to run in it. You know they're often started by young people. Maybe you accomplish the kind of change that you're looking to accomplish, and I think that micro presses are a way to change and shift and shift and steer the culture. If you're not finding the books that you are looking for, that you want to see published, you can publish them yourself. But maybe you know, after running your micropress for a little while, you see more of those books being published, and you-you sort of accomplished your goal of-of changing or shifting the culture in that way. So, there's so many reasons. But I think that, these kind of stop start nature of micro presses are part of what a micro-like the this should be part of the definition of a micropress. They're part of what a micropress actually is. That you know, there micropress is informal that you know that as a proprietor, a person who's making small books that you know there's there should be an-kind of a tacit acknowledgement that that's-that's difficult, and that you know you can, you can have periods of time when you're not able to do it, for, for whatever reason. It's, you know, because normally you don't have a team, right? Behind-behind a micropress all the time. A lot of the time, it's a single kind of a single person doing it. Also, like, you know, a lot of these things aren't-aren't funded, or Grant Stream, so you don't have to be consistent with your publishing schedule, whereas if a press missed publishing and certain slots that a government you know Government Grant had paid for, they would be accountable for that, and have to return money to the government. I-I so, I-I think that there's just the flexibility of working in micropress means you can brand in different ways. You can close one that you're working at and start another one or like me, you could be working at one with someone and decide, you want to start your own to-to work in different ways. And you know I'm super, I'm super happy that, like Cactus press continues like alongside Anstruther press to publish lots of you know, and they're and they're publishing quite a quite a few books, and they're really-really you know, centered I think they only publish Montreal authors, and they're centered in Montreal. So, they're really city based so you know, it's just, I think it's really cool that things come in out. And you know, just like things go in and out of style. I think because chapbooks are so linked to the zeitgeist and to what's happening, you know, like, currently that they can, they can fade quicker than you know. Then a, a trade publisher that's-that's looking for kind of a slower kind of kind of mandate, right.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, how and why are you still able to keep the press going?

Jim Johnstone: Hmm, yeah, I mean it, it's something that that crosses my mind. It's our ten-year anniversary this year. So, I've been doing it for ten years, which shocks me. I keep, I continue because I continue to enjoy doing it. I love working alongside my wife. We have a lot of fun signing the books, we, I have fun publishing. I love working with the authors. I

love the joy that it brings to the authors. And so that's why I continue. And I and I plan on continuing. Thy, I guess the how is that I'm-I'm sort of able to continue doing it because I found, you know, I found a sort of a way to run it financially, and that and-and nothing has-has changed, certainly, you know, you're always kind of on the precipice of being priced out as a person who, you know runs, runs a press, and has to invest money into it, but as of now we've been able to keep it going, and we've been able to keep it going consistently. We haven't taken any breaks. We've been, you know, sort of an established presence, and that's how I, how I keep it going another way I've-I've kept it going is that I've-I've closed submissions for long periods of time. This doesn't mean submissions aren't still coming in, because people still ask, and I'll still read when-when I'm asked, but sort of trying to control the intake of unsolicited material has been important because overtake-that can become very overwhelming, and it can become you know, just too much work. And-and for me also, you know, just to, you know, heartbreaking work where you're having to send out rejection. So, I try to, you know I-I try to control my-my slush pile as-as-as well as I can. And that-that's, that's helped me keep going, too.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's something you wish people, or like the public knew about Canadian publishing?

Jim Johnstone: That's a really hard question. Because I don't, like, I really can't speak for what the publishing-the public knows about-about Canadian publishing. I think they're-they're, you know... there's a lot of great Canadian authors out there. I wish there was a more direct pipeline to-to get that to people. But then I don't really believe in giving people things that they don't want. You know, if people don't want poetry, or don't you know, aren't interested. Then that's-that's okay, too. So, I-I would just, I would just say, I don't, I'm not, I'm not really sure I don't, yeah, I 'don't, I don't really have anything that I would, I would, you know, say directly to people I think that if you love something you'll find, you'll-you'll find you'll find it right like I found this community because I-I-I love it. And it was inevitable that I would find it because I kept digging, you know, as-as a person who was really interested in poetry, I kept digging into in different places, you know, when I was an undergrad I would go to the library, and I would look at all the books that have been published by Canadians, and I discovered Coach house press and you know all the all these wonderful like leg, like legacy presses. And-and you know, then-then it's like, okay, what is Coach house press. Oh, it! It still exists! Oh, there's an actual Coach house that I can go to. I can visit this place, and so I did, you know, and it's like you get there, and there's like a bp Nichol poem like inscribed in the sidewalk and you know, and, and then it's, then I was like, there's-there's readings happening. So, I went to everyone I could. And then, you know, you see, people with these chapbooks, and it's like, oh, what is this? And-and there's oh, there's a fair where these things are sold. So, you go to the fair. You'll discover things if you want to discover them. And you know I and those things are there for people that want them and wanted, want to discover them. And I find you know new people every day. You know, this community is one hundred percent different than it was ten years ago than it was twenty years ago. There's new people that come all the time and are finding these things and-and finding, you know, finding their-

their niche and what they're interested in. So, I'm-I'm not, I'm not concerned, you know, like when we have small press fairs, there's tons of people that are coming to the tables. You know, it's small, it's small press. It's micro press for a reason. It-it is, it is niche in-in and of its-its nature, right? And I think I think that's you know, if-if that changed, if too many people came to it, then it-it would have to change along with it right? Part of what keeps it democratic. And what keeps it interesting is the fact that its appeal is limited.

Tamara Thompson: What's something important about D.I.Y. press history that you'd like to share, cause I try and give space for people to share these things, because I think it's important, because again, a lot of it is word of mouth. So, do you have anything that you'd like to share?

(Technical issue occurred).

Jim Johnstone: D.I.Y., D.I.Y., okay. Yeah, that's a good. It's a good question. I mean, D.I.Y. it gives you, it gives you like a creative control where you can do things that you wouldn't normally see done in-in publishing. So, I-I would point to like the special books. You know something-something like that we talked about like-like Hugh's, the Hell Box Press, where these letter pressing books, you know in in you just that as an art object doesn't exist anywhere else. You know, letterpress isn't used by-by trade publishers other than maybe Gaspereau Press, who does letterpress thy jackets of their of-of their books, and-and are really thy, a press that exists on kind of this line between fine press and trade publishing in a, in a fascinating way. It's really a press that doesn't have-have an equal, certainly, in Canada. But I-I don't know even, even you know, in-in the world. It's-it's pretty special. But you know D.I.Y. means that, you know you can make something fancy there's a press called Jack Pine press out of Sask-I think it's out of Saskatoon and they-they act more as a funding body, but they, their goal is to bring together artists and-and poets and they often fund like book-book objects, like people have made, you know, like a box to house you know, to house poems, or that, you know, like objects that are wouldn't traditionally be recognized as books. And so like D.I.Y. means that you're, you're going to get a-a wonderful spectrum of-of-of material, you know, produced in-in just any way that people can think of. And I think that's really exciting.

Tamara Thompson: What's something about your history that you'd like to say?

Jim Johnstone: My own history. Well, I've given you a lot. I've really-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah

Jim Johnstone: Details in, in, in my answers, with like people and-and presses and things, so that you know you have some of that stuff on the record, and-and you know that that people will be able to look into that further. You know my-my own, you know it's-it's amazing, I-I suppose when you look at these things, that how, how you evolve over time, and what you do evolves over time. And I-I just think that for me, like I, I play a role as a person who publishes people in-in this community, but I wouldn't exist without the people who published me and mentored me and helped me.

And-and you know, that's, that, you know that that's, that's really-really special to me. So, I'm just a kind of a cog in-in, you know in in a machine right like that-that-that will keep going, you know. Keep rolling, certainly without me. Yeah, I'm-I'm you know I'm-I'm proud to see the community, you know, a as it exists, and-and as it evolves and-and continues to grow and change and shift in really interesting ways. I-I think that you know, it remains interesting for me twenty years, in which is why I'm still here, and why I still continue to make books and publish my own.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely, are there any additional comments you would like to make before I end the recording?

Jim Johnstone: Nah, I think we have lots of material.

Tamara Thompson: Fabulous.

Jamie Kitts

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, absolutely. Hello, my name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The time is 11:14 am. And just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview. This interview is for small press and author.

Jamie Kitts: Okay. My name is Jamie Kits. My pronouns are she/her. I work for Qwerty Magazine as the managing editor and Homerow chapbook series as an editor. I started the Homerow chapbook series last year as a way to give a platform to emerging graduate level poets who had not had a first collection, either as a full-length published collection with a-a bound press edition, or their first chapbook. Qwerty started something like thirty years ago with actually a-a friend of my dad's Eric Hill. And he started the magazine as a way of giving graduate level writers a platform to showcase their work, where at the time there weren't so many small presses or easily accessible smaller venues for emerging writers to break into, and I wanted to continue that spirit with giving new writers like a great jumping point in their careers. So, I started Homerow chapbook series, and it's been very successful. I would think.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic and just quickly, before we keep talking here. What part of Canada are you from? And-

Jamie Kitts: -Oh yes! -

Tamara Thompson: -Any other titles that you would like to give yourself.

Jamie Kitts: I, I'm from Fredericton, New Brunswick, on the East Coast. Other titles, I have a Master of Arts from the University of New Brunswick, and I'm a PhD candidate in their English department.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So, you already started answering a couple of my questions kind of like, why did the press start and stuff? And then you also started talking a bit about the press's editorial philosophy and goal. Would you mind going into like just a little more details?

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, absolutely. So, the-the presses editorial goal really is, just give-give new writers who are good, like, we're at a point where they-they could have a chapbook out. It's to give, it's-it's to give them an accessible venue. When I started Homerow, I pitched it to the-the oh, what do you call them? Supervisors, the department supervisors from UNB's English department. I gave them the pitch that I wanted this to be for emerging poets who did not yet have a collective work out either-either from UNB specifically, or across Canada. One of my supervisors had suggested keeping it locked to Canadian writers. So that we could qualify more easily for Canada Council funding, which is not something I've looked into yet, but it is something that I-I do have on my mind. The-the, I think the thing that definitely hooked them was the idea that this could be an avenue specifically for University of New Brunswick poets, because Fredericton, New Brunswick, has this reputation as the Poets corner of Canada it was really the center of-Fredericton, was really the center of what you would call the Confederation poets. So, this would be oh, no, I

can't think of them off the top of my head. Bliss Carman was one of them. And so was, so they're not coming to mind, only Bliss Carman is. But we, the Confederation poets and really-really established tone of Canadian arts and letters in their time, and the University of New Brunswick kind of carries their tradition and their spirit in ways, we cultivate a really strong base of emerging writers at this university. And not-in some cases the writers who come through here and finish. The creative writing programs here they don't necessarily need a leg up, but it's there, it's there if they want one. I-I know several writers who've come through the University, who were already either published or were in the process of getting their first collections published. One of my classmates had just won the Scotiabank Giller prize the year that we both started classes. But I also have, my current poetry, my current, excuse me, this is not gonna be easy to transcribe with my stop and start language.

Tamara Thompson: Don't worry about it your good.

Jamie Kitts: My current poetry editor with Courtney she was-was an incredible slam poet. But she didn't have a collection out. I asked her if she'd ever thought about publishing any of her poems, and she said, well, I don't know where they would go. So, I asked her to send me something, and it's-I'm currently working on her chapbook right now. So, I'm right now working on something that fully-fully commits to the-the vision that I had for this project. And what was the-the first question that you asked.

Tamara Thompson: You've-you've basically kind of just answered the whole about like the-

Jamie Kitts: Oh, okay-

Tamara Thompson: Goal and stuff like that.

Jamie Kitts: Right, right.

Tamara Thompson: I am curious about the kind of stuff that you do create like, what kind of genre do you guys lean more into? Poetry or fiction like kind of what are the chapbooks themselves when it comes to like the kinds of content that you publish and like, why did you end up doing that?

Jamie Kitts: So, I stuck with poetry, for now, Qwerty Magazine publishes fiction, nonfiction, poetry, even art pieces. But for the Homerow series I wanted to stick to poetry, because that's where I-I feel the most comfortable, and I don't have other staff working on it. It's a, it's a project that I take on that I-I didn't feel like I could reasonably put on the other editors, especially where all of us are graduate students. And this was really just my silly passion project. So, I-I stuck with poetry just because that's the-the genre that I'm most comfortable-comfortable in as far as the content of our chapbooks. Last year, last year here in New Brunswick we had a bit of, a bit of a moment. Our Premier Blaine Higgs really kicked off the-the wave of transphobia that currently rocks our nation. Of course, it's-it's a, it's a global issue it's-it's affecting so many places in different ways. But Blaine Higgs, that motherfucker is the one who I-I, that's in my thesis that I just finished.



Tamara Thompson: (Laughs) Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: Every time I bring that name, that man's name up, it is capital letters. Tm, that Motherfucker Blade Higgs. I don't feel like being polite to the guy and you can't make me.

Tamara Thompson: Nope don't need to.

(Both laugh).

Jamie Kitts: But he, he, he, he's the one who introduced it here in Canada. And this-this little have not province on the East Coast, that a lot of places outside of Canada don't even know is a real place. And the proof of that I have is a documentary once aired on TV, the University of New Brunswick, which is located in the province, the province of Nova Scotia. If it wasn't going to be Blaine, it was going to be Danielle Smith in Alberta, or if not her, Scott Moe in Saskatchewan. It-it, if it wasn't, if it wasn't us, it would be one of them. But it happened to be us, and because of that the-the province that no one pays attention to, suddenly became a national issue, and all of the-the transphobic policies announced by other-other provinces, or even thy policies that were put forward during the last Conservative party, what do you, I-the only word that comes to mind is congregation. It might have been a general meeting or something like that. But there was a-a meeting of Federal Conservative politicians and their stakeholders, and a lot, and there was a lot of transphobic policies that were put forward. And all of this is really prefigured and framed by that motherfucker, Blaine Higgs, who has not stopped, but a lot of us are still fighting, including myself. So, when that happened, I was about to launch the Homerow Chapbook Series, and I wasn't sure what I would be looking for immediately. But when that happened, I decided, okay, this is a moment where trans people especially are in a rough spot right now, so I thought probably can't get a large enough pool if I say I am putting out a call for trans poets at the beginning of their careers in Canada, who don't have a chapbook or full length collection out. So, I made it a call for generally to LGBTIQIA plus poets from Canada. What I did was I took myself and my workshop group, the Egg Poets we had been thinking about writing a collaborative chapbook for a while, and so I put it to us, do you want to do a chapbook contest? Would you-would you be the guest judges of a chapbook contest with me, and then, and then we'll put a part of our, part of the way that I'll pay everybody is I'll publish a book that has all of our poetry in it. And that'll be the first Homerow chapbook and then we'll judge a contest and publish the winner of that contest as our second chapbook. I ran this by my supervisors, they said absolutely. A lot of the-all, all of us in that chapbook belong to the queer community two of us were nonbinary, I'm trans feminine. And then two other of us were queer, so it the-the first wave of Homerow chapbooks was very queer focused. The winner was Katie Cameron for their chapbook *Might This Be a Greenhouse*. And again, a queer centered chapbook-that's not necessarily going to be every chapbook moving forward. I would be very happy if it was, but it's-it's not a requirement.

Tamara Thompson: Right. I-I love hearing that kind of stuff. Now correct me if I'm wrong. Do you know Emma? Emma-Emma Rhodes?

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, she was also part of, she was part of the chapbook. She is one of the egg poets. I-I went to St. Thomas University with Emma years ago. I-I was actually thinking about this the other day. I was a, I was a teaching assistant in Emma's first year English class and then I think about a year later, I was a peer mentor in her first writing workshop, and then- we are paths converged-or at that or separated at that point, and then reconverged. When we both happen to be taking an undergraduate seminar course I was finishing, I came back to study to do a certificate of honors standing. Emma was just finishing her undergrad, and we both happened to be in the same awful class. And then, and then the pandemic happened. And it was at that point that I started writing my own poetry, and Emma had reached out and said, do you want someone to workshop your poems with? And would you read mine? And we've been friends since and around then is when we started the Egg Poets with our friend Spencer Folkins.

Tamara Thompson: I was talking to her the other day, and she kept bringing up someone. Who I should talk to, called Amie, is.

Jamie Kitts: That is me.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, I was having this whole moment, of did I miss it? I thought I contacted the person that Emma mentioned. And then I connected it.

Jamie Kitts: (Laughs.)

Tamara Thompson: She kept saying Amie would you prefer that, by the way, or?

Jamie Kitts: So, I-I use names, Jamie and Amie when I when I came out as trans in 2020. I-I-I mean, it was the beginning of-of the pandemic. I was afraid that I was going to die tomorrow. So I, but and I didn't want to be buried with my dead name. So, I-I just I figured out a name that suited me. And I, it was, it was funny I was staying up late on the night of my birthday. I had a friend chatting with me online, and I said to them, I-you know, I-I hope I still get to be an author, someday, but I don't wanna publish under my own name. I thought about going by my middle names, but they didn't really work for me. And then out of nowhere. This friend said, what about Jamie? And I was like, oh, yeah, that would, that would be great for an author name, sure. And then I said, actually, I think I would just like to be called Jamie Kitts from now on. Surprise, everybody. And I still use the name, Jamie. I still use Jamie for pretty much everything. It's my legal name, but it's not my dead name. And, I all of my writing credits, all my professional work is under this name but among friends and family I go by, Amie, and it's, it's not, both names are me. I don't really have a strong preference, but I'd say Jamie is a person who exists out of necessity and survival. But Amie is a person who exists out of a sense of hope but-but both are, both are fine in in a professional context I prefer Jamie.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that makes, that makes a lot of sense. I also really like that Jamie also kind of looks a little bit like Amie. That's just the French in me.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, I mean, that's, I could have just, I could have spelled Amie in a way that you know is normal with the y. But I spell Amie, A, M, I, E.

Tamara Thompson: That's still normal. It's the just-

Jamie Kitts: I don't, I don't see a lot of people who spell Amie, A, M, I, E.

Tamara Thompson: That's because, you haven't talked to as many French people. I-I know a lot of Amies.

Jamie Kitts: Really?

Tamara Thompson: Amelie and stuff. Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: Wow! Okay.

Tamara Thompson: They just usually go by Mel because Amelie.

Jamie Kitts: Oh!

Tamara Thompson: There's an L usually in there, and so they usually just go, for you know the English folk, they go by Mel.

Jamie Kitts: Oh okay. Wow.

Tamara Thompson: So, for what's it worth, I think it's a beautiful way to spell it. Personally.

Jamie Kitts: Oh, thank you!

Tamara Thompson: The Y is fine but-

Jamie Kitts: It's boring.

Tamara Thompson: Well to me, it's not just that, the y isn't doing as good a, the way I call in poems, when I'm trying to edit my students, I'll say, this is a placeholder word. That's a placeholder letter. Yeah, it's technically doing the job, but it could be better.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Personal opinion, but.

(Both laugh.)

Tamara Thompson: But yeah, I just wanted to double check because I-I also have a lot of names personally myself. So, I understand having one that you prefer more in a professional setting and having one you prefer more in a personal setting. Also, I can edit this part out if you don't feel comfortable sharing that on the record.

Jamie Kitts: Oh, I don't mind.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, I just wanted to ask, because it's, you know, common courtesy, especially in this day and age.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah of course.

Tamara Thompson: I really, I really appreciate you sharing and being open, but also just like I love the fact that you're sticking it to them, so much.

Jamie Kitts: (Laughs.)

Tamara Thompson: It brings me such great joy.

Jamie Kitts: There is, there is no greater motivator for me than spite. It has, it has pushed me through so many moments, and I could, I could say that all of the work that I do is inspired by better things or kind-er things, but that would be dishonest to who I am as a person.

Tamara Thompson: Well, sometimes it gets you to push, right? It's that little bit of energy that gets you to take that step. I-I get it.

Jamie Kitts: And I-I will say I-I do love my-my friends and my colleagues and my family very dearly, but people do worry that they're dead naming me when they say Jamie and it's-it's hard to, I-I truly don't mean this in any mean way. But can a trans person not just have a nickname.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: Do you know what I mean?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: It's so hard to-to tell people it's fine. You're fine. You're not dead naming me by saying, Jamie, but even my mom, who is, really, I'm very happy to have my family in my life. That is not something that a lot of queer, let alone trans people can say is that their family is still in their life. But my mom will go, like if she says Jamie, she'll start apologizing, like going way harder to. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry I'll get it right", and I'm like you could call me Jamie. It's fine.

Tamara Thompson: I have a, I have a friend who transitioned in college, and I-I love them dearly. And everyone would really beat themselves up, and we had a late-night car conversation of, you know but then it puts all the onus on me, and I have to make them feel better.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And I know that's not what they're trying to do. But, man, this is a lot of work.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, yeah, it is.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I have that with my students, too, because my name on their pa-papers and like assignments and all the official stuff is Tamara, but then I'll come in with a coffee that, says Jack, and they'll be like what's happening and I'm like the Starbucks lady can't spell my name, so I use my other name.

Jamie Kitts: Nice.

Tamara Thompson: My other, other name you know, and that's the other thing, too, like you can have nicknames, and it's fine you know?

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And it's just like, come on. I have like, I literally have thirty names, because my one friend Megan keeps giving me names. The newest one was Jared, because I don't know how to read.

Jamie Kitts: Ha!

(Both laugh).

Jamie Kitts: That rules.

Tamara Thompson: It's because I'm dyslexic. So, you know.

Jamie Kitts: Oh, wow! I, my day job is, I'm-I'm a dyslexia intervention specialist. I teach kids the Barton reading system.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. I love hearing that kind of stuff.

Jamie Kitts: It's, it's work that I really love doing. And I'm, I'm actually going to be leaving that job in September when I start my PHD. Because I-I-I'm going to be able to afford to just go off of my-my funding. I got a- (technical issue occurred) fellowship, so I'm-

Tamara Thompson: Nice.

Jamie Kitts: I think I'm gonna be pretty comfortable especially with all the changes that they announced back in, back in the spring. So, it looks like I can, I can afford to not have to work while I'm doing my PHD. So, I'm-I'm going to take that opportunity because my, doing that during my master's was exhausting. And I never wanna do that again. So, I-I'm going to be leaving that job which I'm very sad about, but you know what, it was a good three and a half years working there. And I met a lot of really amazing-amazing little humans, including some pretty cool young trans people as well.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-one of the things we're gonna have to get back to the interview here. But-

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, yeah, sorry, of course.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, no, don't worry at all. I'm so happy that we're able to connect on this level because it's-it's one of my favorite things is

connecting with the people I'm talking to. Not just about the subject, but in other ways, but like one of my favorite things that, people keep asking me like, how are you staying so optimistic? And I'm like, you see, that little, that little kid over, their like that nineteen-year-old. I'm like, yeah, that's joy.

Jamie Kitts: Nice.

Tamara Thompson: That kid is absolutely depressed out of their mind. But they come into my classroom, and they're just, like they come into the seminar room. And they're like, I'm gonna have fun today. I'm like, yeah, we are.

Jamie Kitts: Ha!

Tamara Thompson: Like, it's one of those things where like, because a lot of them I teach first and second years, they will follow my lead. So, like if I'm positive and open, and I'm like, cause I have a lot of them being like, "well, I've been told that I'm cringe", and I'm like the only thing that's cringe are people who call you cringe.

Jamie Kitts: (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: Everything is game like, if it makes you happy. Who gives a fuck? Is it hurting anybody? No? Then they can go away, like I asked students as an introductory question, like, who is your most listened to person on Spotify? And I'll see all the kids like hide.

Jamie Kitts: Oh!

Tamara Thompson: Like I'm not a nasty person, and because I'm open and honest like mine was Taylor Swift this year, and I was like, well, it was Taylor Swift and then my top song was Ethel Cain. So, you know.

Jamie Kitts: There you go! There you go!

Tamara Thompson: I can be two things at once-

(Technical difficulties occurred.)

Tamara Thompson: Okay. Let's-let's move on here. So, I am curious about your process kind of like from submission to actually like making the books like the chapbooks themselves. Could you talk a little bit about that? Because it's one of my personal favorite things about chapbooks is like the actual creating of them.

Jamie Kitts: The like, the-the this, this might be the least interesting thing for-for us, and my process because-because things are so, because I'm-I'm very busy, or I was last year especially I took a very minimalist approach when it came to actually designing the-the Homerow chapbooks. I basically just took the-the template that we have for issues of Qwerty magazine and copied it wholesale. The interior looks exactly the same as you would see in an issue of Qwerty. Helpful from a branding perspective. But it is something that I would like to keep working on. I want to learn

incrementally every year how to do a chapbook just a little bit better. So, I borrowed a lot from both our own magazine, but also from other chapbooks from around Canada. My good friend Jenna, who is also one of the Egg Poets. Let me see every example of unique chapbook that they have at in their home, and I looked at them. I studied their aesthetics. I looked at what some of the more, like some of the more bespoke additions like there was one. I don't know how I would do this but if I had the capacity to do it I would. There was one little addition that was, the cover was like bound by a string like it had, like it, folded outwards, but it was held together by string that you had to unspool from a little knob on the front that would open up or there were, there was a, there was a zine that I was in. I actually Jenna edited it, and I think both me-wow! This might have been like a proto-Egg poet's thing. Jenna was the editor, me, Emma and our other egg poet, friend Lloyd, were all contributors to that zine. I think the only one who didn't make it in was Spencer Folkins. And it was, it was like a set of postcards that had poems or art pieces on them, and it was wrapped in this brown wrapping paper. That was, it was thick paper. It also had something printed on the cover, and it had little drawings of objects that were based on all the-the poems but then there were also Anstruther Press books which have, they all have a consistent layout in their interior and even though their covers are different, they-they all have that trademark A stamp on the back and Knife Fork Book (technical issues occurred). Their chapbooks all had the same, I would, I would call it block lettering cover. And the same thing goes for I forget what it was called, but they had their own specific imprint of queer writers that use the same formatting for their chapbook covers. So, I-I ended up incur-incorporating a-a little bit of that. The back of our chapbooks has the Qwerty logo in the, this is stupid, but I call it, I'm sorry if this is offside, but I call that little A and the Qwerty logo in the specific placement of it. I call it the tramp stamp, it's-it's-it's just so specific. It's-it's in such a specific placement. It looks so silly it's-it, I mean it looked in my head, it looks silly, but it also looks aesthetically pleasing and perfect, and it's-it's an ideal part of the branding but I in my head, it's just yeah. It's gotta have the tramp stamp. That's how you know it's a Qwerty book, so that's-that's Anstruther inspired the front cover is Knife Fork book inspired where it has the same-I-I needed a very plug and play approach to the covers because I-I-I didn't really have the skills to build a cover from scratch. All of Qwerty magazines covers we source from submissions to our visual art submittable, so I don't really have to try to, I don't have to figure out a cover aside from oh, that one would be good. So, the yeah, the-the-the covers needed to be something that I could easily plug a title and a name into. So, I borrowed the-the-the idea for the-the consistent covers came from Knife Fork Book. But the specific format that I use for the covers I borrowed from the Qwerty issue forty addition which the-the that editorial team did a massive issue like I would, I would, I wouldn't even call it double issue. It has, feels, I think, it takes up the same amount of space as maybe three or four issues of Qwerty. It's-it's a huge addition but it's-it's matte black with gold lettering on the front, and it looks very fancy and almost kind of threatening. I-I look at the at a cover of at a copy of Qwerty forty, and I think that-that looks like it's trying to market itself like really expensive, hard liquor. The key thing is trying to market itself, not actually is expensive hard liquor. So, I thought, okay, that's easy. It's just black with gold lettering. I can definitely do

that. We'd also actually had, but-way before I took over there was an old chapbook that Qwerty had done in collaboration with Echo Location, which is a magazine in Ontario. I forget where it's based out of. But it was called Doubles, and the cover for that was this illustration of twins and the word doubles beneath the picture. And it was done in a similar black cover, with more like a bronze tone for the drawing and the-the lettering. So, I thought, okay, so, there's already a chapbook. I'll try to see about maintaining that style just because someone already set the tone. I can probably keep parts of that going forward with more Qwerty chapbooks. So, I guess those were all the influences that go into the specific aesthetics that I, that I incorporate into how, how the chapbooks look going forward. I would like to try this year; I'm going to be figuring out how to do more interesting covers my current project Rosie Leggott, *Blood and Breastmilk* is-is... it's going to be, it's going to be different, for sure. The-the author has-has a cover that she has in mind and is able to supply it. So, I think, going forward, I'll be more collaborative with my-my authors ideas for cover design, and that'll be what we work on this year. Next year, maybe I'll tweak the interior to feel, to-to move away from the format that we use in Qwerty magazine and-and give the chapbooks a more unique feel to them. But we'll see, all of this, all of this in stages. The idea was, okay, we'll have something that is absolutely acceptable and has precedence in other standards for our first wave, and then we'll just get better from there.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think the thing is this is that you can always grow and expand. Our first books, we tried interesting things, cause I do, Whispering Wick.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Which is a chapbook press here in Ontario and like when we first started, we were just trying to figure it out. But then, as time-time has gone on, we've-we know what our layout is now, right like we know more what we're doing. And so, we're experimenting a bit more, and we're having more fun. And it just takes time. And once you get more stuff under your belt, it's just that more experience, or that collaborative experience like my designer comes to me, and it's like, "I have this really cool idea". And I'm like, "hit me with it", right? So, I think it's a good idea to also get like some more author input as well.

Jame Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I-I think you're headed into a good direction is my point.

Jamie Kitts: Thank you.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, so I'm also interested in how the press makes decisions, because you're technically a part of this other bigger thing. Right?

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.



Tamara Thompson: So, I'm-I'm interested, is it just you making decisions? Because I know that, like you're doing poetry, and you're doing poetry that like interest you and stuff like that. But like, do you get help? Do you have to like report with a board or something? Because you're technically with this like other like, I wanna know a little bit more about like kind of that side of things.

Jamie Kitts: It's very hands off actually. Part of, part of what made getting Homerow off the ground easy was I'm currently the only managing editor for Qwerty. We're supposed to have co-managing editors. There's supposed to be two of us but my last co-managing editor, Shauna Deith. Lovely person. Just no complaints at all about Shauna. She's amazing. I'm really happy to have had time to work with her. When she wrapped up at UNB. Then you don't work on Qwerty anymore. That's just that's kind of how it goes. It's a project for grad students to take on within the department. When she wrapped up that left someone to fill her position. And God help me I tried. No one wanted to take on the co-managing editor position for that coming school year, so I-I was left at the helm so I didn't really need to talk to the editorial board about doing anything. I am in charge and I'm the person who makes those decisions. So as far as doing the Homerow chapbook series all I needed to do was tell the-the academic supervisors what I wanted to do, and if they said no, then I wouldn't go forward with it. But other than that, it was that-that was really the only barrier to getting it done. So, because I'm in charge. I just made a new position for myself as the Homerow chapbook series editor, so that if in the future I-I don't end up staying on it as managing editor. I-there is still that position that can be filled, and I can just take hold of it.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jamie Kitts: This was-this was a little bit of a sneaky way to make sure that I can keep doing this passion project that I want to do, regardless of whether or not I am in charge. I mean to a certain degree there it-it would still, it would absolutely still need to run through the managing editors. You would need to look at the budget that we have to see if it would be possible to do. However, I've also kind of guaranteed that-that won't be an issue, because we've gotten to a point now where the Homerow chapbooks have sold out their-their entire print runs and because the cost of production for these chapbooks is much smaller than producing our Qwerty magazine issues, it's kind of a self-sustaining project. The last bill that we had for our run of Katie Cameron's books was, I think under three hundred dollars, and we sell these at ten bucks a copy. Once you, I think there were about fifteen comp copies that I had to give away. It was one for me and all of the other judges. I wanted to make sure everyone got a copy of the chapbook and then ten that I sent out to Katie herself. After that, that leaves, we do a print run of fifty copies that left thirty-five copies. We made three hundred and fifty dollars. So, this is a project that makes money which is different from our magazine so probably wouldn't be hard to find a budget to keep doing this. Let me think. Sorry. What was the question that you actually asked me again? Oh, right! How do I? How does the, how does the-the who makes the decisions for all of this? At the, at the moment it's-it's me cause I'm the managing editor. I thankfully, I'm very thankful that I have a new co managing editor who's

starting with Qwerty with our next issue. I'm currently working on our 2024 double issue. She's going to be starting with our next issue after that. So, I'm not gonna have to do all of this alone, thank god! But I have already told her, you don't need to work on the Homerow chapbooks if you don't want to. It's entirely just my passion project. If you would like to, I would certainly welcome the help. But don't look at this as an essential part of the job. Just think, of this as my side project that I do through the magazine.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that, so that explains like quite a bit. But it's-it's nice that you have a bit more of that that freedom and also very surprising that it's actually making money. That is a very rare statement.

Jamie Kitts: I know! Oh, I was so surprised I didn't expect this at all to make money, but our first run of chapbooks did not make moneys because the-the print cost for that was about seven hundred and thirty dollars, if I'm remembering it right. But we went through an external printer for that. Usually what we do with Qwerty is, we tell our universities print service, we have a project that we would like printed, and then they will put out bidding for-for regional printers to work on it and the lowest bidder is usually the one who gets the job. And when we told print services, we had a chapbook they did the same thing. When I did the second run of chapbooks I was expecting a similar price tag. And then they realized, oh, you're not looking for perfect binding. You're just looking for staple bound. Well, we can do that. So, they billed us the materials at cost. So, the price of printing fifty copies of a chapbook is under, three is I think, like two hundred of seventy dollars or something like that so it was, it's a really, it's really not an expensive venture for us. So, if you print fifty copies, and you give away ten. Then that still leaves you with forty copies, and that you could make four hundred dollars off of that. That's a profit of one hundred and thirty bucks. That's not a significant like, sure, if you compare this to, I don't know House of Anansi press, or whatever this is not, these are not impressive figures by any stretch, but as far as like projects and magazines that survive by the skin of their teeth and the graces of whatever-whatever external funding and grants you can get. This is this, is a really good sign for a sustainable project that we could keep doing in case the main Qwerty project falls through, and that we can only do because we get grants and funding.

Tamara Thompson: Nice. So, I'm also a little curious of where you sell books. Do you sell them online, markets and that kind of stuff?

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, right now, we sell them strictly through our online, our online storefront. I had thought about bringing them around to local-local distributors. We have distribution deals which are really more like a handshake and a promise with some places here in Fredericton there's a there's an art gallery that has copies of our magazine for sale. There's a consignment store, and it's-it's all the queer's favorite shop. It's a, it's-it's there's some really great things in there. They sell copies of our magazine. There's a, an independent bookseller called Westminster Bookmark here in Fredericton that sells copies of our magazine. So, it it's a there are, there are venues for us to sell these chapbooks, but they have run out of print so fast through our online storefront that I

have no time to bring them to any of our local distributors, and I think if I did, we wouldn't sell them.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jamie Kitts: People know, people who are looking for chapbooks know to like to know where to get these things, and they know how to get them online. But also, it-it happens that a lot of the at least in Katie Cameron's case, I think a lot of her friends and family showed up to buy copies of-of her chapbook. There was a there was a significant contingent of people who all happen to be from where Katie was from. I got a lot of orders from a certain town in Nova Scotia. And so, I kind of figured, oh, okay. So, she's got a wide network of people who want to buy their work. So that makes perfect sense to me. I-I know we had a similar things going on with Egg Poets, although in Egg Poets case I wasn't really sure what I was doing. At first, I gave away five copies each to all of the contributors and I realized after the fact, oh, that only leaves twenty-five copies that can actually be sold now granted we sold all those copies within a month, I think maybe a little bit more. And I don't think any of us have any spare copies left. So, it-it we, we sell these pretty quickly online. And because we do such a small print run, it just doesn't make sense to bring them to local distributors. If I start expanding Qwerty or Homerow chapbooks to a larger print run like if I wanted to reprint Katie Cameron's chapbook, or the Egg Poet's chapbook, or even just expand chapbook production to, let's say one hundred. Then I might consider bringing them to local distributors. But we've been able to, we've been able to sell out all fifty copies of each chapbook we've done so far. I don't-I can't, I obviously can't expect that we will keep doing that. But I think-I think, I think the strength of the-the curation process also comes with, comes with, comes with writers, with maybe a guarantee of success. People who have support systems and people who have like supportive social lives or family lives, people who will want to buy the book just to be like, oh, well, of course, we want to buy your book. This is incredible. Wow! But even aside from that. I-that obviously can't account for every chapbook sale. So, we'll see, for now I-I have it that when we run out of a print run, I put up a digital edition of-of the chapbook, because I don't want these things to go away. This is something that bothers me about Homerow, not Homerow. But this is something that bothers me about other chapbooks. When they're gone, they're gone, and those poems become inaccessible. Unless the poet just happens to get picked up by a larger press and gets a full-length collection. I find that really annoying. So, I have, I-I don't put up a digital edition until the print run is done. But maybe-maybe in the future I'll see about expanding to a larger print run, and if we do. Then I'll, then I'll bring them to local distributors.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I'm interested on how you first discovered zines and chapbooks and like this kind of smaller publishing. When was the moment that it like kind of clicked for you?

Jamie Kitts: I-hmm! It was RM Vaughn's *96 Tears in my Jeans* was, that was the first chapbook I ever read. Are you familiar with RM Vaughan.

Tamara Thompson: Don't think so.

Jamie Kitts: Okay, so RM Vaughn his first name was Richard. He passed away here in Fredericksen back in 2020 it was very sad. He-he left behind a fairly significant community of people who-who loved him, and it was not locked just to Frederick and he, he had friends all over the world, and in different parts of Canada. He, he, he had a very prolific career of poetry, plays, art criticism. He-he was very, a very intelligent man. I had to work on his entry on the poetry website that I-I mentioned earlier. The website was the Atlantic Canadian Poets Archive, and it had at the time a sister project called Poetic Places Fredericksen. I was, I was making a big push for updates to Poetic Places Fredericksen, and because it was, it was an app. It was supposed to be an app that would give you a push notification when you passed by a place in Fredericksen that had a poem associated with it, but no one had actually done the work to-to tie the poem to the push notification. So, the app was there. The poems were there, the places were there, but it wasn't, when you would pass by a spot. It would give you a generic push notification. I forget specifically what it was, but there was something about Richard's, Richard's part on that app that didn't work right. So, I-I had to get in touch with him for permission to look-use a different poem. And all this other stuff. He-he wasn't living in Fredericksen at the time, but he just happened to be visiting here for a book tour, so I-I got a chance to-to talk to him in person, and then exchange emails and had a longer conversation. I went looking through his through as much of his work that I could find, trying to find something that we could use for the app, and I found his old chapbook *96 Tears in my Jeans* and it had two additions, only one of which I could find, the-the regular chapbook version. But there was also a very, very small pressing of a version of that chapbook where the cover was made of recycled denim, and I didn't know you could do that. I-I was blown away by this idea that a book didn't, this was really my introduction to bespoke printing this this idea that you could make a book out of unusual material. I've, I-I knew that you could recycle denim into things like cardboard, but I never thought about using it as material for a book. I found it fascinating, and the chapbook itself was also it was, it was eye opening at the time. This was 2018 I didn't realize I was queer. I had pretty-pretty successfully shoved that part of me into a closet, locked the door, and forgot the key even existed. And I-I didn't know what I was getting into with Richard's poetry, but it is unapologetically homosexual.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Jamie Kitts: Truly an inspiration. I no, he-I'm not, I'm a lesbian, so it's-it's not exactly the same, but the-the way that he wrote about, the way that he wrote about his-his queer how do I put it? If I say queer experience that doesn't really capture specifically what was going on in that chapbook. It's very steamy. It's very, its very erotic poetry, but it's also grounded in very real, a very well, I guess queer experience is actually not a bad way of putting it, because it gets into cruising. It gets into an aspect of hookup culture that we just don't have anymore in, at least in Fredericksen, I would say the queer dating scene is very app centric and kind of boring but the-the way that Richard writes about an old like, it's like a-a form of hookup that just doesn't exist here anymore. And the-the relationships that form from that is really, it's it was a really fascinating, and really, I think I said, eye opening earlier.

But yeah, it's it really was an eye-opening read, because it was my first time actually engaging with queer practices in-in any form. So that was, that was my introduction to chapbooks. I-I, of course, been reading the term chapbook when I was working on that poetry website. It was, It was, it was-it was a website that had poems from Atlantic Canadian poets. But it was also supposed to be a living bibliography. The managing editor of the website at that time, would update the every poets page with any new, any new releases from that poet, but also any new scholarship that had been written about them, if there was any. And I was seeing the word chapbook come up over and over again, and so I looked up. What's a chapbook? And saw that they were these little these, these little books that had maybe twelve pages in them minimum, of new poems. And I thought I didn't get it at the time. I-I thought, this is interesting, but I don't know why this exists, now that I'm more ingrained in poetry, both as a poet myself, but also as-as a publisher, as an editor, I-I completely understand the necessary niche and stepping stone that is the chapbook, but also just the-the art that goes into it. The-the-the some I'd say, maybe, like the poesis of a chapbook. It's-it's mission statement. It's-it's like its specific aesthetic practice. The-the cultivation of a small volume of well selected, well written poetry. A good chapbook, I think, can stick with you just as well as a great full-length collection. And I guess I have I guess I have Richard Vaughn's *96 Tears in my Jeans* to thank for introducing me to-to this concept, in this field.

Tamara Thompson: So, you've had your work published as a chapbook, right? That was the Egg Poets. Right? Is that correct?

Jamie Kitts: So. Yes, I initially didn't want to put my own poetry in that collection. I was just going to be the editor. I thought it was, didn't, I didn't want to come off like this was just an excuse for me to publish my own work. I don't need one. I-I have I poems in lots of places. I just-just a few months ago my one of my poems ended up on Plenitude. I have poems in Malahat Review. Augur magazine lots-lots of different, lots of different venues. I'm not hurting for-for places to get my work out there. But when I, when-when we got the Egg Poets together to see what everyone had, we just didn't quite have enough poems that we could contribute to it. I wanted to try to get a dozen poems in there cause I-I thought haha! Egg poets. It'd be funny to get a carton of eggs. So, I-I wanted to get us up to twelve poems, so I had to put a few of mine in there to get to that point. I was, I'm just not sure how that was gonna fly. My, the supervisor from the department was like, it's fine. You're-you're fine. But I also have my-my own debut solo chapbook coming out later this year. There's a at the same time that I was starting the-the Homerow series at that the time that I had the idea for its-Ian LeTourneau, who's I believe the managing editor of the Fiddlehead, which is the-the other magazine that is run out of UNB he had been thinking of the same thing. The we have the same impetus for starting a chapbook press. Frog Hollow had just closed or at the very least they-they were announcing their closure. So, there was, there was very suddenly this vacuum for good New Brunswick chapbooks because they, I mean Frog Hollow pressed so many different things, but they had the continuing New Brunswick Chapbook series. I don't know why a press on Victoria, British Columbia needed to be the go-to spot for New Brunswick poetry, but no one-I don't think anyone was complaining about the location, the-but, we-we both saw this sudden vacuum in-in-in-need of

filling so completely, independently from each other. We decided we would try to use the resources we had to-to fill that gap. Ian was starting Emergency Flash Mob press. And he was looking for some new poets to publish as well. So, I sent him I-I sent him what I had, and he said, oh, yeah, let's-let's do this. So, I'm-I'm very excited for my-my solo debut *Girldinner* to come out in October.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So why did you choose to have that work to be published as-as a chapbook?

Jamie Kitts: Why did I choose?

Tamara Thompson: The medium of chapbook for your work.

Jamie Kitts: Oh, well I actually, I really wanted to-to... I-I still feel like I'm chasing my contemporaries a bit. I'm, I didn't write poetry as my focus during my-my creative writing undergrad, I thought I didn't understand poetry. I didn't, I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't really think about it that much. I worked for that poetry website, but I did not get hired on because my-my strengths were as a poet. I-I got hired because I'm-I'm an impeccable essayist, or at least I was at the undergraduate level. I think I'm pretty okay at a grad level. I got hired on the strengths of those skills to work on the Atlantic Canadian Poets Archive. But through working on that archive, I think I learned more about-I think I learned quite a bit about the-the different things that you can, that you can bring to a poem. And I met so many incredible poets through working on that project. In 2020 I had written what I thought was a postcard story and I didn't think of it as a poem at all.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Jamie Kitts: Out of-and this is what I submitted to that-that zine that I was telling you about earlier, the one that has the, that all comes on post cards. It was for a festival called Flourish Fest, which I think is actually going on this weekend. Or the-the-the, this year's Flourish Fest this weekend here in Fredericton. And Jenna was the editor, Jenna was at the time just like a professional contact. Not a friend. They were the Poet Laureate here in Fredericton at the time. So, every-at the beginning of every city council meeting they would read a new poem and when I submitted that postcard story to a contest, Jenna asked me out of nowhere. Just send me a Facebook message, "hey? I really liked your poem. Can I read it at City Council?" And I was like, "what poem are you talking about? I don't write poems". So that, knowing that-that was received as a poem, I thought, well, okay maybe if that's what a poem is, what happens if I try doing that on purpose. And then that just kind of kept spiraling. I wrote more and more stuff. I workshopped it with Emma who at the time was working on her manuscript for what would become *Razor Burn* her debut chapbook. So, fast forward, three or four years, for three or four years now we're-we're all working together our-our friend Sara Marie Nason has had their first chapbook before Emma's it was called *Liquid Birth*, and it was also through Anstruther. Jenna just published *Mala Liz* through Anstruther, which I think is maybe a, as close to perfect as you can get as a work of art. I think very highly of everybody that I work with. And I feel, but and everyone's had a longer time to develop the craft and get to

where they are in their careers. Jenna had a full-length collection out like six years ago that won the New Brunswick poetry prize that year, and it was a bit of an upset victory because they beat a translation of Herménégilde Chiasson poetry and if you're not familiar with Herménégilde Chiasson just so foundational Acadian poet.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That's wow.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, and it was. It was an English translation called *To Live and Die in Scoudouc*, and it was translated by Jo-Anne Elder, who is one of the most highly respected French English translation poets and academics alive right now. And just also happens to be a family friend, with her son, Gabe and I were friends in high school, and I just saw that Gabe just got married. I've known that family, I mean, we were friends in high school, but our parents have been friends for much longer than that. It's a, these are, and these are just people that have been around me. I-I learned more about Jo-Anne's career through working on the Atlantic Canadian poets, archive-but sorry, anyway. Jenna-Jenna beat Herménégilde Chiasson and Jo-Anne Elder, and there was someone else who's nominated that year as well, who I can't remember what their name was, but I do remember that it was two, technically three highly established career poets and Jenna's debut collection won that year. And that-that gave their profile a significant boost here in-in Fredericton and I think helped boost their career a lot across the country. So, but, these and it's not that I feel envious of these people. I do not, I'm very, I'm not a very competitive person. I'm an extremely hardworking person, but I'm not particularly petty when it comes, when it comes to competition. I don't think of my poetry as being particularly high brow, either. I'm-I'm not really trying to-to reach for prized culture, or to reach a certain status or anything like that. I'm just happy that my poems get out there. I'm-I'm just happy that someone wants to read them. It's great that I get paid like the fifteen to sixty bucks that you do for individual poems. That's nice. I'm really excited that I have my debut chapbook coming out, and I'm glad that I can do this for other people, too. But as far as my own work I-I don't take myself particularly seriously. I take the craft seriously, but I don't think I take myself that-that seriously. Spite is a powerful motivator, but I don't think, what's the word that I'm reaching for here? Pride, but like a different kind of pride, like-like a negative sense of pride. What's like? Oh, sorry! What's that?

Tamara Thompson: Like ego, or?

Jamie Kitts: Ego. Thank you. Yes. Can't believe I couldn't think of the word ego. That's that vacation brain for you. I don't think of my, I-I don't think I have a particularly big ego as an artist, but I do-I'm not envious or jealous of my cohort. I feel very blessed that I get to work with these people, but I do feel a little bit like I am still somewhat their junior, like I am still chasing their careers in a sense of trying to get on the same level. They would tell me and tell you that-that is certainly not the case. We have I think, we've even talked before that,

like we're all just in complete awe of what we all do with- with our work. We're, I think we are all each other's biggest fan in the Egg Poets, but in, in my, in my h-, in my heart I'm still, I still feel a little bit like I'm-I'm chasing the goals and aspirations of my peers so getting a chapbook out, felt like the, then a necessary step for me. Getting-getting a chapbook felt like the like, the-the next logical goal.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I think that-and I understand the maybe not being like that. You think your peers are like really good at what they do, and they think you're really good at what you do. But you don't worry about it too much.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I, I think a lot of people think that writ-or they assume writing is driven by that want for fame, fortune, you know whatever, when at the end of the day the people who stick this out, are the people who are having fun with their work, and I keep trying to tell my students that, they like, what is good to begin with? But if you're not having fun, it will never be good because people don't want to read something that's like, if you're not having fun, why do you think they'd have fun reading it? Yeah, it doesn't matter if it's like prize worthy or whatever, it's more that you've connected with readers, that should be important at the end of the day.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, few prizes... they're so, they're more the middle ground thing because of the committees and stuff. And it doesn't mean that you're any less better. Like if even if you get like long listed, shortlisted, not listed at all right.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And a lot of their minds. Go, Whoa!

Jamie Kitts: If-if I-

Tamara Thompson: I'm just like yeah man.

Jamie Kitts: If I never win a poetry prize, I will not be upset about that. If I, if I-if I never win a competition that's fine. I'm not in this to compete. I-I can't really, I can't really say that I have wasted my time as a writer when-when it just feels good to write, and that's the thing that keeps drawing me back to poetry. Is trying to write fiction or short stories, or even nonfiction essays, I don't have it in me to be a storyteller, and I don't really enjoy the process of trying to edit long form content. I'm not a very good, I, I'm-I'm a pretty okay editor for other people's work. I'm not a very good editor of my own work. I'm a, I'm the queen of the-the draft and a half. You know what I mean. Like I should, I should not be, I should not be nearly as successful as I am as an academic when I, I've draft one, a lot of my, a lot of my research, and no one can tell. But thy, but part of the joy of writing poetry, is it really, it really works well with that tinkering style. I can, I can write



like I can get what I want to out on the page, or I can even just like go stanza at a time or line at a time, until it feels right, and then go back to it after the fact if I want to keep working on it. And I often do want to keep working on it. Writing poems feels very, very suited to the way that my-my brain likes to work with words on a page.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I get that because personally, sometimes I get an idea in my head and it's not for fiction. It's just for a poem, and I get it out and it's done, and it feels great because it's fully out on the page, if I do fiction story that suckers not gonna be done for a while. That's a slow burn.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But after I finish a poem, even though it's rough, even though, like, I don't think it's even very good the next day it doesn't matter. It's not in my head anymore, and it's on the page. And there's just so much satisfaction with writing poetry for me anyway. I-I love what poetry can do for me, as, like the poet and author, that regular fiction, or even essay writing, or anything, can-can't do for me.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, of course, what challenges have you faced as an author? And you can take this in whatever direction you feel comfortable with.

Jamie Kitts: Oh...challenges I face as an author? You know, nothing really comes to mind.

Tamara Thompson: That's fair.

Jamie Kitts: I'd be curious to know how other people answered this.

Tamara Thompson: That people who would like their work, can find work.

Jamie Kitts: Oh, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And just the regular exhaustion of life, and wanting to do this more full time, but not being able to and I know that a lot of people have also talked about like the burnt-out aspect, and how it's hard to keep that creativeness going because they know they have it. It's just sometimes they get overwhelmed and like finding that balance and still stay creative, I know that those are like-like, kind of broadly what people have talked about and like for me, it's finding that time at two in the morning.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah. Yeah. So, I wouldn't want to be a full-time writer.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: Maybe that's, maybe that's controversial. Because a lot of people, a lot of people who want to pursue this want to do this full time. I think I would lose my mind if I had to be a writer full time. I-I like writing. It is something I am extremely passionate about, but I couldn't see myself doing the Stephen King sit at the desk until you've got one thousand five hundred words out before breakfast kind of thing. I couldn't imagine myself dedicating entire portions of my day just to go write, not as my regular nine to five. I need-I need a-a life that is varied and challenging and diverse in order to-to come write, because I-I like writing from a very evergreen spot, I think. I, I'm my-my friend (technical issue occurred) calls himself an occasional poet. And I really love that. I don't know that I would necessarily call myself an occasional poet, because I'm, I love reading and thinking about and writing poetry, but I also can't say that this is the, that over the course of my day. I'm like bouncing my leg up and down, waiting for the-the kid I'm working with to stop talking so that I can finish up and-and go write a poem. I-I like the fact that I, I live a-a varied life where writing is not the center and focus of it. It, I don't like being, I'm not much of an introvert to be honest with you and I, I get the sense that a lot of writers come from an introverted headspace. And I-I just, I don't feel that way even a little bit. I like my alone time, but there's a reason why I call it alone time. I can write poems, and I have written poems in the waiting room before I'm getting a tattoo or the-the germ of a poem will come to me on a bus or sometimes I'll even write one while I'm on the bus on my commute to work or school like I-I-I don't come to poetry or writing in general and think god I could do this forever. I mean I-I could, I mean, I hope to keep writing poetry until I croak. But like, I don't want that to be my whole day. I got other stuff I wanna do. I got people I wanna talk to. I got friends I wanna see. I got students that I wanna work with. I'm excited to start my PhD. Because I'm excited to lead a classroom. I'm, I love the dynamic that we have there I would love to be, I was just talking with one of my former mentors about wanting to start an excellence in writing Academy or have it as maybe a satellite to St. Thomas University, which is currently looking to update its, it's creative writing program. I, the, what brings me joy as a writer is getting other people to write.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: So, my, I don't really perceive myself as having challenges as an author, I mean, I guess if you wanna think about it, in that, like my challenge is not wanting to write enough, but I don't really perceive that as a challenge, I think that's just how I am as-as an artist. I'm not constantly on the grind trying to make myself better for whatever time I can eke out during the day. I write when I feel like it and when I feel like it, I usually do a pretty good job. I'm pretty satisfied and happy with the pace that I have.

Tamara Thompson: I-I think that's a great answer, right? The whole idea is to get different perspectives. Hence why, I'm talking to so many people.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, yeah.

Jamie Kitts: I mean it'd be great; it'd be great if I got paid more, but.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: And that's, I don't think anyone's complaining. I don't think anyone is out here being like yes, I make enough money as a writer. I certainly, I wish I could pay my contributors at Qwerty more. But I, you know that's-that's just the nature of the industry that we're in. I'm not saying, that's not a problem. But I'll say for me my, my, as far as like, what a, what I could. But as a challenge as an author, it's not really when, I'm not relying on this is my primary source of income or wanting to rely on it as my primary source of income. Hey, you know fifteen bucks, that's fair money. That's a, that's a coffee and a sandwich at a nice cafe.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah so, I'm a little bit interested. How-because the press and this stuff is fairly new. As you were saying earlier, so has the press encountered any challenges, yet?

Jamie Kitts: Yes, now that actually does come to me and my challenges. Qwerty is something that grad students work on when they have the time. It's very different from the Fiddlehead, which is, of course, one of Canada's oldest literary journals, and operates almost independently from UNB, but also does provide, or does have a partnership, it is run through UNB, but it is almost, it is allowed to be independent of it. Qwerty is entirely a volunteer job. It is what you do when you have the time. If you want to do it. I don't mind this, I love working on Qwerty, but it I willing to admit that it is something that is hard to find time for-for, the Homerow series that is even more so in fact, we had a quite a bit of an issue trying to get Katie Cameron's chapbook out the door, and that fell entirely on my shoulders. I got surgery in January, and this was, I had actually just signed off on the proofs for Katie's chapbook right, the day before I left to get that surgery, I had to travel Montreal for it and stay there for a couple weeks and this is the surgery that I will be recovering from for at least a year likely two, and it is not been without challenges and complications. Including the fact that I really was not able to walk or move easily on my own power for a month, maybe even longer. It was not easy for me to get up to campus, and I, the University of New Brunswick is on a big fuck off hill, and I don't have a car, so I rely on the bus to get everywhere, and that is, that was not ideal transportation for me for a couple months. So, there were, there was just this box of chapbooks waiting for me. For almost two months I didn't send, I wasn't able to send out the contributor copies or, I was not able to set up the comp copies for two months after and let alone work on the magazine and even then, like I said, at it, at the outset, I was in recovery from burnout, after finishing your master's yeah, in the middle of all this I was also writing my goddamn thesis. I-I was, I was exhausted, and I still had to work to make money to-to get through all of this. And I-I completely-completely forgotten to put the chapbook up for sale let alone check to see if anyone was buying it. When I finally got up the energy and to start working up Qwerty again. I found emails from Katie being like, "hey, what's-what's up". That I just, I didn't even know we're there. This-this was a, this was a, this-this was a much more difficult time in my life than I was foreseeing when I started this project. It also happens

that both Katie and I were drawn to activism and in the last year, especially, both of us have put efforts into joining different causes that are important to us. So, the editing process for Katie's chapbook was a little bit stop and start it really was when both of us had time, and both of us felt like we wanted to put time that we could have used for working on the chapbook into going to protests or in my case I was taking speaking gigs. I-we, this was a mutual thing that we both wanted to do, but in retrospect, if we hadn't done that, the chapbook would have been out sooner, and it probably wouldn't overlap, it wouldn't have overlapped with-with the surgery. But at the same time in my defense. I didn't know that this was going to be my life for the next two years so yeah, a lot of challenges on a personal level.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: To-to continuing this project, but now that this, now that Katie's chapbook is behind the press, and it is sold out and with the digital copies up. We are moving forward, and everything is going pretty smoothly. I'm having a meeting with Rosie tonight to talk more about her chapbook and what we can do with it to spice it up. Excuse me, what we can do with it to spice it up, and the, I-I have a feeling it's not gonna take nearly as long to-to get out and get into people's hands as Katie's did. I feel bad for how my personal shit ended up becoming Katie's problem. But everyone got their copy eventually, everyone, everyone who wanted a copy got one, everyone, everyone eventually got everything that was coming to them. I-I feel I mean obviously it was my responsibility, and I completely dropped the ball. But in my defense that was not entirely my fault. But that also, that also doesn't matter it should have, I should have figured out how to, how to do this and going forward, I'll have a better idea of things that I can do to make it easier for myself and have maybe a more responsible mindset for my professional obligations. It helps, it helps that I have someone to help me run Qwerty now.

Tamara Thompson: I think the other thing, too, is, you can't be too hard on yourself, because you can always plan for something that can happen. But life also just always happens.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Something can happen where you weren't expecting it. It takes longer because or someone said it would be like this. And it wasn't like this, right? It was more like that, right?

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, I think the other thing, especially when it comes to chapbooks and stuff, because we at Whispering Wick, it took us a while to get our third collection out because we were trying to finish up our degrees. We were trying to get stuff out, people were trying to find jobs. And so, it took over a year for us to basically just release two chapbooks. But it's because I was, I live at home. I print on my parents dining room table. I have to work with their schedules, and I had to work with Grace's schedule, the designer and Nate, my editor, and, like their schedule and stuff like that, you know. So, it was like.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Life just happens. And when you're working on something collaborative and something more, that's extra time you just kinda have to-one of the things I've had to learn especially is I have to give myself grace, because stuff will just happen, and there's nothing I could do about it, and it absolutely sucks.

Jamie Kitts: Yep!

Tamara Thompson: It takes a while to like, not be like oh, but I could have, would have like, I-I should have been prepared for this, and you have to give yourself grace and be like, no, this happened. It's okay, but it sucks, and it's frustrating, and you can do more planning for the future, but life is still gonna happen, you're still not gonna be prepared for it. And that's okay. But it's not your fault, I guess, is my point because I-I definitely get it, I was really hard on myself when stuff didn't go as I had intended and that I had planned for, because, you know like I got sick. I wasn't planning on doing that.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, true. Very true.

Tamara Thompson: Right? And that lasted a lot longer, and that lasted like a whole trial period of trying to like, diagnose, and medicate me, and everything like that was work that I didn't think I was gonna have to do. But my body was like, "oh, well, it's time". So again, everybody is different, and healing takes time. And so, especially when it comes to medical stuff, I think you should give yourself a lot of grace, because again you think it's gonna go one way, because the doctor said, it's going to go that way, and if it doesn't go one hundred percent that way, it can be frustrating. But you know, anyway, I just wanted to-to say that because I've-I've been in those shoes, and it's frustrating.

Jamie Kitts: I appreciate that, thank you.

Tamara Thompson: Of course, because again I'm like, it was my, I was the lead. It was my project, my baby, you know. So, I was like, oh, well, it's my responsibility. And like I have a responsibility to Rachel and Faizal. These are their books they carry so much-and they were just like, "hey, man, it's okay". And I was like, "no, but it's not". Anyway, let's move on here. What has this kind of publishing taught you? Like this type of smaller publishing.

Jamie Kitts: Oh, it's taught me that I can be more hands on with other people's poems. Then I would let myself be with the main Qwerty product because I'm working with like a complete work. And I'm having a much more direct working relationship with the-the poet than I might with, like the one million contributors that we have. In any given Qwerty issue, I can, I can workshop someone's poems and in fact, the entire collection a lot more than I would let myself for-for another poe-for-for smaller individual poems and Qwerty. One of, there were a couple of the poems in Katie's chapbook that work, that I felt like they weren't quite there but were pretty close, like there was something to them that just wasn't really

being fully drawn out, and I remember asking her, you know maybe you should try rewriting this. Maybe you should try working on this a little bit more. I could see that Katie didn't necessarily know how to move past a certain point with one of her poems. There was, she, there was one poem where she just added a new stanza and that was like, that was just how she thought she could resolve, what-what I was trying to ask of her. But it didn't quite work. So, I thought, okay maybe I'll work on this. What happens if I start tinkering with this. So, I went in there, I really looked at what we were working with, and I looked-I diagnosed the problems that I thought this poem had and then I looked for solutions to it. It ended up being a drastic re-edit of the piece. So, I took that I sent it to Katie, and I said this is not what you need to do. But this is more what I'm talking about when I say that, when I, when I point out these issues with the original piece. You are welcome to look at this and take it for what you'd like. You don't need to write it this way, but you can use it as an idea of what you might-how you might consider editing this poem more. And then they looked at the poem, and they-they said, "oh, my god, can we just go with this?". So, I-I, I'm very hesitant to do things like that because I don't want to, I don't want to take over someone's work. I-I wanna make sure that the people that I'm publishing I don't want them to feel like they need to do it my way or it's not coming out. But I've also accepted the fact that I'm like this, too. If I don't, sometimes you need fresh eyes on a, on a piece in order to really, really find the-the direction it needs to go in. And that's the role of a producer in for example, like album production like sometimes I remember watching this biopic of the band, Def Leppard when I was in high school and I don't remember what it was exactly, but there was a moment where the band we're working on a song, and it wasn't coming together. And then the scene shows someone who's not part of the band pushing a lever forward, and that, I think, causes a-a sound effect like a reverb, like a reverb sound effect over the vocals, or something like that, and that ends up being how they get through creating one of their breakout singles. I haven't seen this biopic since I was sixteen, so I'm probably misremembering all of that. But that scene showed up in my mind shortly after this exchange with Katie. So, it's-it's given me a lot more confidence to-to take a more active role in my, in my authors chapbook production. Not everybody needs that. And I-I don't know that, I don't, I don't know that I'll even go that drastic in the future. But it's-it's given me the confidence to suggest. "Hey, have you considered this alternatively".

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

(Technical difficulties occurred).

Tamara Thompson: I think, something that chapbooks really gives like a place for that kind of growth. And I think it's really important it also, it's just kind of fun getting to know without as many expectations as like a quote, unquote, real paying, editing kind of job, or something like that might be. It's an area where you can play more and learn and discover. And not have people you know, be like "you ruined us this quarter", you know.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: So, why are chapbooks important to you again talked about it in like broad strokes. But I'm going to ask the question like more specifically.

Jamie Kitts: I think they're important to me, because they-they not just because I feel like a chapbook, is a necessary stepping stone in my career, but I think it, it gives you like a sense of confidence.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: There's, there's a, when you get your first poem accepted in a magazine, or something that, that feels great when you have your first like fully, when you have, like your first selection of your own poems selected, that also gives you like tremendous confidence going forward. It feels very rewarding for a publisher or an editor to say, I'll take all of this. I just want to publish your, your thing. I think the, your work is strong enough that it can just be you in this. I think also there's an art form that comes with a small selection, when you are learning to curate a collection of your own work. A chapbook can teach you like how to organize your work around a theme. Not everything needs, not every, just to use a metaphor here. Not every album needs to be a concept album. But I think if you go into the mindset of a chapbook with collecting all of your work and finding the binding themes between everything, or even going into the idea of writing a chapbook according to a theme that can give you the, that's, that's like one small example of what you could bring into writing a full collection or towards writing a long poem. I don't, I, god! I don't know how people do long poems. I'm blown away every time I read one. It's like, good god! How did you do it? How-how did you? How did you go sixty to eighty pages like this? And it's the same poem I'm-it's stunning.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: But so, I think a chapbook has massive educational use. Kind of like building an Ep, I was thinking very much when I was building *Girl Dinner*. I-I had initially thought of it as a zine project, and so I had written the first the that-that postcard story come poem that I was telling you about was the recipe for chocolate chip cookies that my grandmother made for me, cause I was, I'm very allergic to-to milk, and when I was young I was also allergic to eggs, so my grandmother changed her chocolate chip cookie recipe that she made for all of her grandkids, so that I could eat it. And for my birthday, one year my cousin Emily gave me a note card that had the recipe on it, and so I took that note card, and I wrote like little lines around each ingredient. So, I'd-I'd reproduce the recipe for the, for the cookies, and then beneath it in parentheses I'd have a line telling a story. And then the-the follow up to that when I said, "okay, well, what if I try to write a poem on purpose?". I had a recipe for meat loaf that I did the same thing with, but I used each ingredient to be the, to define the first word or the first couple of words in the line of poetry between each ingredient. So those two pieces I-I felt like I was on a roll with writing about food. So, I wrote a lot of poems involving food in one way or another. And so, it, I initially thought, "oh, well, I've got a good, I've got like six of these. Maybe I'll release this as a zine". And then around the time where I had six, I had started writing more things and it just kinda kept that food-even if

it wasn't the central focus of the poems I was writing. It was becoming like of recurring motif. So, I just kept working on it until I had like at some point, I just realized all of the poems or most of the poems that I had written in the last three or four years all had something to do with food, and there was enough of them that I could pitch it as a chapbook. So, going into projects like chapbooks or even zines they-teach you, they teach you how to-to center your work around a theme in a, on a smaller scale, so that you can keep working on it on a larger one. But also, I think like, so professionally, they're helpful, they're great as an editor for giving you something to work on with someone else in a way that will really help bring out the best of a smaller product. As a writer, I think it teaches you how to make the most out of a more limited page space, and it can help you learn how to do it on a larger scale but that is ignoring the-the chapbook on its own merits and focusing more on what comes after it. But I think it is essential to learn how to make a good chapbook. Not just for going forward, but on its own. It has to be a good, complete work. I think bands will release Eps that just feel like unfinished albums that they didn't know how to keep putting new material into. But, or they're just a single, with some extra, like some demo versions of other songs like not-not very worth listening to. But I think a good Ep is like twenty to thirty min of excellent music that feels like it works well with each other, and not just as a promise of something else or something unfinished. It itself needs to be a complete product, just shorter. I think the same of chapbooks, that a good chapbook stands well on its own. Like yes, it will teach you how to do all these other things in the future. But it can't do that without itself feeling like a complete work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. We're getting into some of my favorite questions. Okay, I love how people like answer that question. It's so many different answers and so much passion.

Jamie Kitts: Oh, cool, cool, cool.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, moving along here, why are sorry-I'm mixing my words up. Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not?

Jamie Kitts: Oh, I think they're very important, especially when they're put out by smaller presses. You're not gonna see here in Frederick, we have Goose Lane additions. You're not which has an, a poetry imprint called Icehouse. You're not gonna see a chapbook from Icehouse, let alone Goose Lane. You're not gonna see a chapbook being put out by McClellan and Stewart. You're-you're not gonna see Major Canadian publishing in it's, very Toronto focused sense put out something stable bound, and tiny. And yet this is, this is, this is a niche that has its own like, has its own beautiful form to it. And it's also cheaper, too. It's cheaper to produce. And it's cheaper to buy, too. I'm-I'm not gonna lie. I do love reading poetry, but it's sometimes hard to justify the thirty-dollar price tag on-on a collection that I'm buying. I-I kind of need to know ahead of time that I want this and that I like it. Well, I say that and yet I did just buy the one poetry collection that was nominated for a New Brunswick book award this year without even actually looking into what it's about. It's just it was the one I didn't have I thought I'd pick it up. I knew the



other two nominees. I didn't know this guy, so I thought, oh, maybe I'll read his work. Anyway, it's thirty dollars is a bit of a steep price point, especially when I think very much about what Audrey Lord said of the poem, that the poem is something, is for everyone, and that she didn't say this part but I think academia and price culture have really stolen the-the democratic history of the poem where the poem is supposed to be a form that anybody can enjoy. And yet how many people do you know who say, oh, yeah, I read poetry, I don't. I-this tangent, but I'm-I'm not a big fan of TikTok and Instagram poetry but you can't deny that people read it, like say what you want about Rupi Kaur, people are reading her, like that's not an easy thing to do, it is not easy for a poet right now to-to reach a level of popularity, like Rupi Kaur did like in the last decade and really kick off the wave of like of this sounds, this is such a backhanded term, but like untrained poetry. I honestly admire it, even if I don't like it, because like by my reading tastes are not quite there, like I'm sorry I-I, any-any given day I would rather read something else other than Rupi Kaur or anyone who is self published through just Amazon, or whatever. That's not, that's not a knock against them. It's just I like, I-I am sure that not everybody likes going to see the Avengers and would much rather watch a David Lynch film. But it, anyway back to the original question. The-the chapbook fills a much-needed independent niche. It is, it is allowed to be because of its size, it is allowed to be experimental. Because of its-its size there could be more effort put into the production of the physical object of the book. If that is something you have the-the time and the means to do. There are presses like I think it's called Jackfruit, or something like that in, that do unique like that really challenged the idea of what is a book in a physical sense? You won't get that from-from Goose Lane.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: They are usually around the ballpark of ten bucks. People have ten bucks; ten bucks isn't so bad, ten bucks, that's what do you, what can you get for ten bucks nowadays? You can get a subway sandwich for ten bucks. You don't do anything fancy with it. That's sandwich. Everybody's got a sand-everyone's got sandwich money. If you're buying sandwiches. As-as smaller works they give, they give writers who don't have the same, the same training or the same like momentum in their careers, they give them up, they give platform to people who aren't at full length collection status yet, so you don't have sixty to eighty pages of poetry. No problem. Maybe you've got twenty because you've been writing poems for a couple of years, and you've got some publications under your belt, you got twenty that you can submit, maybe even fifteen pages that you can submit. It is much easier to cultivate a smaller page count than a longer one. It's certainly easier to edit. And did it-it-it's independence, I think, is really important in a, in a marketplace that is so dominated by the-the-the-the prize culture mindset, the-the-the CanLit dumpster fire of more, more, more, more. It's not to say that these are not, that these are audiences that don't cross over, or that, or artists who don't cross out over. Of course, people who write chapbooks end up so will often go on to write full length collections with a traditional publisher, and that's great, and it's fine. But it's, it's better for an industry to have more than thy, than the big dogs like in professional wrestling. The WWE was all everyone talked about for decades. There were

challenger brands like WCW in the nineties, or in on an even more independent level ECW. Which was a much more niche, hardcore kind of experience. And now there's all the lead wrestling AEW, which is the main challenger brand to WWE. And it does something different from them whether or not you like it, that's one thing, but like I'm sorry. Bark root beer, and A and W. And all these other kinds that's fine. But can you say that they're better than Jones? No and yet Jones doesn't have the same shelf space as Barks. It's good that people are making new and different things that don't have the same reach.

Tamara Thompson: I actually find some of the other like, not as major leagues more interesting. The stories are more personal.

Jamie Kitts: Sorry. Say one more time.

Tamara Thompson: I like the stories a bit better for the other leagues.

Jamie Kitts: Oh, okay.

Tamara Thompson: Personally.

Jamie Kitts: There you go! There you go!

Tamara Thompson: I-I find them more entertaining. They're not as rigid, you know. I haven't seen Rory, and like the big WWE that I've actually like-liked for a long time, but the smaller stuff is where I'm more interested.

Jamie Kitts: There you go. If you don't want to watch the Big Leagues, there's a reason why Defy is still going on.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: Yes.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, we're right here so take this next question. In whichever way you desire.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way?

Jamie Kitts: Oh, god, fuck! What even is Canada? At this point she's fucking. Oh... I'm so tired. I think, yes, because I think oh, god! I fucking hate this place man.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: I-I-I, I'm not saying that I wanna go somewhere else. I want this place to get better. And I don't think that's gonna happen with any of the major political parties that we have. I-I-I vote NDP and Green, but I don't have any confidence, really, that either of those parties would actually be able to make anything materially better than the way things

are right now because the problem is so much larger and immaterial. Then what we have cause we are not, I, we are Turtle Island, certainly, but we exist in a global context, and that global context is marred by invisible systems that we ultimately pretend like we have control over, and yet it sometimes feel like they drive us more than we drive them. And I, I-I look at the-the small print, small press publishing world as-as-as like a necessary survival tool in some ways like a small, like a, fucking Jesus-sorry, this is probably way more swearing than your, then, then should probably go into this. But I'm so sorry.

Tamara Thompson: Your totally fine. If I'm told I can't do it. Then I'm told I can't, if I'm not told its staying in, because I think it's a general, I think it's a general sentiment that people are just exhausted.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, like if you want to look at, I-I think you can look at the-the biggest players in Canada as the major political parties that we have and the smaller presses are themselves not smaller political parties, but grassroots communities of people trying to survive the terrible systems that those parties say that they have control over. I think of us as operating by the grace of what meager scraps we are allowed to produce our work under. I fear, for near future, where the grants dry up and there is no longer money for the arts. And what might happen to all these small presses that exists entirely because of grant-and not out of a bottom line. Small presses do what they do not out of profit motive. Now, that being said they, I'm not gonna say that we don't have inclinations to, to selection that aren't reflective of that need to write grants like I said earlier, I'm sticking to Canadian publishers-or Canadian poets, so that should I choose to examine this more closely I would have easier access to a Canada Council grant, which has very specific guidelines for Cancon, and I hate Cancon so much. I think it's so dumb. I hate the CRTC with a passion. Think it's useless and outdated and jingoistic and it is entirely their fault that-a the, that you cannot access news on Facebook anymore. And we can make that claim that like, oh, well, who uses Facebook, anyway. Well, your boomer parents do who are being indoctrinated into alt right bullshit that they don't have any reasonable means of trying to think outside of, because it's being presented to them like a meme or like a rational voice, and there's no counter to that except other meme groups that don't have any of the same reach, and don't know how to appeal to that same base. The best combat we had to that was being able to use your-your your social media feed as a news feed and following CBC or CTV, or whatever. What have you. But we can't even fucking, do that anymore. And that's entirely because of the CRTC trying to play a hard ball with a multinational corporation with tremendous wealth and power. Maybe that's victim blaming. But I don't think that applies in this circumstance. Anyway, the-the circumstances we have right now are of by the skin of your teeth survival. We curate our-our selections and our authors, and who we choose to publish not to meet a bottom line necessarily, but to chase the grants that we've had access to, or potentially even more grant money. We are on welfare.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: I think that is about as much of as an of an indictment of the system that I have, as I can give.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: We don't exist in a similar capacity to any of the big publishers. And so, we are just surviving by what we can get from a government that may not even be willing to grant us that money in the future. And what to-what, that encourages us to do. On one hand, it gives us the freedom to do things that the bigger presses can't, but it also gives us a, a stricter guideline for who we might feel we can reasonably publish. And as such I think this is why there are, it feels like such a tight knit community at times. I don't really engage with it. But Emma Rhodes knows everyone and if, who she doesn't know Jim Johnston knows for sure. And figures like, especially Jim, who would know how to connect us and know how to put everyone in touch with everyone else, people who have bridges and connections with everyone across the country. Those are people who are key to the survival of the small press industry, if you could even call it an industry. We are really just a bunch of pocket communities trying to offer a space for writers who wouldn't get, who-who can't get in the door of a bigger more traditional press, and it sucks. But I think we're-we're doing the best that we can and making great content despite it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I have to ask the more sad question now.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Why do you think most small and micro presses have to close up shop because it's an unfortunate true fact is, these things have a lifespan.

Jamie Kitts: Eventually the money dries up and if it isn't the money that dries up it's the, it's the, it's the capacity of the people who work on it because I don't make any money running Qwerty, I get a stipend of I guess, I get a stipend because it is in the budget to give me one, but it is not per issue. It is per year all the work that I do for Qwerty, and that includes the Homerow series. I get, it depends on, it depends on how many editors that we have working on Qwerty because I want to make sure everyone gets paid. I think I'm gonna get like a hundred bucks. And that's for producing the content of two issues of a magazine and two chapbooks per year. One to two chapbooks per year. That's nothing. The amount of labor that I do, the work hours that I put into this, that ain't shit. If I-if I had to, if I didn't have other sources of income, I couldn't do this. And because I-I have those other sources of income to worry about I can't put, I can't throw my entire self into working on Qwerty and Homerow so if the, if the money doesn't dry up the-the burnout will get you because there's no support system in place for-for the staff who work on these projects. It is, it is entirely out of passion, and out of a sense of like I would almost call the meritocracy. Someone's work is good, and we have the capacity to publish it. We want to publish it. If-if it's the mission of our press. I think that goes for-for everybody. People, places are, places are falling apart because the people behind it are falling apart and that's-that's not, that's not their fault.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. How and why are you still keeping this thing going?

Jamie Kitts: Spite!

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

Jamie Kitts: Sorry keep going.

Tamara Thompson: No, that's a great reason, just like more like, you know, cause it is hard, right? It is hard to do all this stuff. And you're talking about burnout. And so how do you keep yourself like excited about this.

Jamie Kitts: It's fun, I-I stay excited about it because it is genuinely much as I was just being grim out about it all. It's-it's-it's a lot of fun. I-I enjoy working with writers. I love getting to talk to writers. I-I could, I could spend all day talking about artists and their craft. I was just telling someone the other day that one of my favorite things to do before I start talking to-to other writers about you know the-the craft of writing is, you know, I ask them, you know "what did you have for breakfast", or something like that. Like I wanna know how your day is going like I wanna know you as well as like what you put into your writing and I if, I-I wouldn't say that about people that I couldn't approach as a colleague like. I don't wanna, I don't wanna come off like I'm trying to give an okay to pair social relationships with people online that you don't actually know, or anything like that. But if I have the opportunity to interview someone, or even just to-to pick the brain of a contemporary, you know. I wanna know what's going on with them first, because that's what they bring to the table when they get back to writing. Things like those discussions and get it and connecting with artists on a personal level help you, I think, bring out the best in their writing after the fact. Like it's-it's fresh and interesting, for it'll stay fresh and interesting for me as long as writing still holds the seat that it does in my soul, and I don't think that will ever change. Will I be too tired to do this? Oh, I'm sure like, I said, I'm starting my PhD in the fall. I'm not, I'm not expecting to have any energy except for the manic, sleepless kind for maybe a year, as long as I'm doing class work and then probably longer. But that's why we have, that's why I have Qwerty, that's why I have Homerow. That's why I have my own writing practice, and my own art. Gotta have something to keep yourself sane. And sometimes a community of people to talk to about your craft and an opportunity to help someone reach a bigger stage both like in a public sense and a professional sense. That'll really keep you going.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I agree. It's-it's that connection with others that can sometimes be the thing that keeps you excited. And just keeps the energy, you can feed off of other people's energy.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, we're getting into the home run of our questions here. So, I only have three questions left.

Jamie Kitts: Okay.

Tamara Thompson: What's something you wish people knew about Canadian publishing, like the average person, like the public.

Jamie Kitts: That it blows.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

Jamie Kitts: That it sucks and that there's a lot of miserable people who operate within it who will drag you down and make life miserable for you, that it is rampant with predators who take advantage of their station to make you feel special and attended to. That it has as many sharks as it does kind people, that it could be a very solitary experience but also that a lot of us don't take ourselves, that seriously. That the image of the-the poet with a, or the author. The auteur is very rare. I don't like, I talk like this right? Like I, this is, this is, this is just the way that I talk to people. I'm not putting on a character right now. I just am this exaggerated and strange in the way that I talk. This is not the way, the-the incredibly serious person talks. You know what I mean like, I don't, I don't think of myself as a particularly inaccessible ivory tower figure. I think of myself as a goofy idiot who is very smart but doesn't talk like she is, I don't think of myself as a particularly unapproachable person, and I find that, that is often true about most writers that I have ever talked to. There are some people who are very serious, and they are allowed to be, and they're very protective of their time, which they should be, I could probably stand to be a little bit more like them. I choose not to be, to my own detriment, perhaps. And I think, I don't think enough people understand that about-about the people who work in CanLit, which is that ultimately, we are just a bunch of goofy little autistics with a special interest.

Tamara Thompson: Some neurodivergent, queer person.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, yeah, exactly. My-my girlfriend has a, my girlfriend run-runs a Spencer's gifts here in Fredericton, and one of her employees recognized me because I gave a guest lecture to his class. And this, this is like this-this guy is so cool, like he is a Third-generation wiccan. His mom is an actual, polyamorous bisexual witch. He has so much cool stuff going on in his life. And yet he said to my partner "kinda wanna get to know Amie she seems really cool, but I don't wanna bother her". And when my partner told me that I immediately was like well, I gotta knock, I gotta, I gotta get myself off of this pedestal right quick. I'm gonna info dump Adam, about sonic the hedgehog video games for a bit.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah I get that too.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, people-people will get the-the impression of you that you are either important or cool or busy, or like people, people are very quick to put you beneath them. If they think that you do something that it's impossibly hard to get into. And I think that's unfortunate. I wish I could be a human being to some people first, before I am the poet.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's-it, it wigs me out a bit when some people are like, "oh, you run this like publishing thing, this press". And I'm

like, "yeah?". And then they put me up so high I'm just like yo man, you know I'm just a guy.

Jamie Kitts: (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I thought we could talk cowboys, you know what I mean. I thought, we're gonna talk about some gay cowboys, you know.

Jamie Kitts: Yes!

Tamara Thompson: So, can we not still do that? And I don't know, it wigs me out. I've talked to so many people in this smaller side of publishing, and some people are like pretty big names like, have some certain accolades to them. Some of the nicest people who just are like, "yeah, hey, cool". And I'm like these are some cool vibes.

Jamie Kitts: Yes, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Like Gary, just Gary Barwin so sweet.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: An amazing soul and like, but just like meeting people and just be like, oh, these-these people are so nice, and I keep trying to tell that to my students, cause they'll put me up as like a TA and whatever. And then I'm just like naw man grades bullshit.

Jamie Kitts: (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: One of my favorite thing is when I tell them, "oh, I don't know". And they look at me, and they're like, "what do you mean you don't know", and I'm like well, I don't know.

Jamie Kitts: (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: I don't know everything. What do you mean? I-what do you mean? What do you mean like, I don't know everything I can find out, you know, because, like, they think you have an all the knowledge on the text I'm like, man, I'm reading the book for the first time alongside you.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I didn't read this the first year like. So, I like it, when people can change that attitude and mindset, and then come down and talk with me but it's just like I don't know it wigs me out, but every time someone puts me there and I'm just like what do you mean?

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, I think it's, it is, it is much to my benefit that most of, my most of the people I surround myself with now are queer and or transgender. And I'm very blessed to have the community that I do, and I find nothing more, nothing more easily disarms someone from talking to you if they think you were cool, is when you both start talking about gender and the specific ways that you experience gender or the things that you find really interesting about gender and or sexuality. You can have, you

can have really fun discussions with nonbinary people about the way they experience gender, or the way that they think about gender, and that could very easily put you both on the same page.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: It's also happened to me that, like I've, when I've spoken at a protest someone has come up to me and said, thank you for speaking, and I've never been sure how to handle that. So, like the thing that I've said is to thank you for coming. I, like look, I was gonna yell about it anyway, I was gonna yell about it even if no one came but you showed up, which means someone got the message. So now you can go get that message to someone else, that we're here and we're fighting. I don't think they know what to do with that, but I would rather, I would rather put the onus on them for the action that they took rather than the-the starry look in their eyes when they see someone else talking. We do the work behind the scenes, but they do the work out in the street. If that makes sense.

Tamara Thompson: No, that makes a lot of sense to me. It's like when people say, thank you for like publishing me. And I'm like, well, thank you for trusting me with this. Like I wanted to make a chapbook, and you allowed me to look at your work, allowed someone to edit it. And then we were able to like, without your work this thing would not exist. Right?

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And it's like, thank you for trusting us with that work, you know, and a lot of people are like, "oh". And I'm like, well, it's a certain amount of trust.

Jamie Kitts: Absolutely, absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: I was like, I was going to make something, but I didn't know what it was, and then I found your work, and then I was able to make this cool thing, and you trusted me with that. That's awesome, you know.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, these last two questions are more just trying to give space. So, kind of more of just like a sharing kind of thing. What's something important about D.I.Y. press history that you wish people knew about. And this is kind of where a lot of people are like, oh, history! What could that be? And it could be like it could be-

Jamie Kitts: (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: A chapbook that you were like damn, no one knows about this thing, and it was so cool, you know so it could be big, or it could just be something that was like a project that you're like damn! I want people to know about that one.

Jamie Kitts: Wow! This is maybe not like quite to the spirit of what you mean, but I don't think, I don't think we give enough credence to how important social media outreaches for curation and creation. Cause I-I



mean, I don't like, I don't like being on Twitter. I don't go there almost at all anymore. It's a bad place to be. It shows me bad things that I don't like. But at the same time there are people doing really funny and cool things on TikTok and Instagram, and sometimes even tweets like the entire reason why my chapbook is called *Girl Dinners*, because it wasn't like it's a thing, but it also like the meme was happening last year, like everyone was posting weird photos and calling it girl dinner. And I thought that was really funny, and I liked the idea of it as the name of my food-based chapbook. I liked it a lot more than my first title, which was *table manner*. There are people who take concepts and turn them into incredibly digestible ideas all through the power of the horrifying computer in their per-in their purse or their pocket like it is, it is truly a strange thing that we are attached to, and yet it is also the ultimate tool, multi-purpose tool of do-it-yourself creation. If you know the tools, if you know how to use the things that it gives you-you can make something that is gonna completely change someone's like whole perspective on the way that they think about their lives. Or show them an idea that or show them that someone else is feeling the very specific thing that they feel on a day-to-day basis. And I think, I think that even though physical objects pen and paper, all that is ultimately more important to our cultural survival than something so ephemeral as a tweet. I don't think it can be understated. The impact of social media on the artistic mind in this era. I wrote a poem about climate crisis because I saw someone on Blue Sky say, I'm at the global climate crisis and then gave like an ex-like multiple examples of what that meant. And then my head said oh, that's a poem. Can I do that? I'm going to do that. Or the poet Chen Chen tweeted I do not live a gay lifestyle, I live a something, something, something, something gay lifestyle. And it was just one Tweet. And I thought, okay, well, that made me feel something. I'm gonna write a poem about that. I wrote a poem about the Maslow's hierarchy of needs meme that was going around. And that is the poem that's on Planetude. And it's very smutty. And I'm, I always worry that my students are gonna find it. But I'm not gonna be in charge of children very soon. Once I get to the end of August, I'm probably not gonna work with kids again, and that's very sad. But I'm not gonna have to worry about their tutor, finding I'm not gonna have to worry about them finding something that their tutor wrote that they shouldn't be reading.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Okay, last question. And I think this is the hardest question for most people.

Jamie Kitts: Okay.

Tamara Thompson: Can you tell me, is there something important about your history that you wish people knew.

Jamie Kitts: Oh... oh, wow! Is there something important about my history that I wish people knew.... I never thought I would be in the position that I'm in right now or the positions, I guess. I never thought that I would be in charge of a literary magazine. I never thought that I would be a published author. I wanted to be, but I never thought I would ever meet that goal. I-I never thought I would be doing a PhD. I never thought that I would be getting paid to do a PhD. I thought by god, I, when I was in high school never, ever, ever would have said anything to the effect of

yeah, I'm actually a girl, and that makes me gay. I-I had a very serious bout of depression when I was sixteen or seventeen and there was, there was a lot of things going on. My-my parents were getting divorced, and we had to move out of the house that I grew up in and away from the neighborhood, that I grew up in. And I-I never really, I was never very good at handling change. I'm better at it now, but when I was younger it was very difficult. I dropped out of high school, actually and I-I only got an adult diploma which is the-the bare minimum that you need to get your butt kicked out the door so that they don't have nineteen- or twenty-year-olds hanging out with teenagers. Couldn't do anything with that diploma didn't want to do anything with it. I thought I was too stupid to do anything. And I recognize that, that's a very ableist mindset now, but it is where my head was at in my early twenties. I only went and got my BA because I made a promise to my parents that when I turned to twenty-one and qualified as an adult learner I would try some kind of post-secondary education and if I couldn't make up my mind, I would try one year of part time school at Saint Thomas, or UNB the two main, you know the two universities here in Fredericton. I couldn't make up my mind. I almost decided to become a long-haul truck driver cause I really like driving. I find it very relaxing, but I don't like not knowing where I am, and I don't like being away from home. Lot of people grow up with the mindset that they're gonna leave Fredericton, which is fair, there's fuck all here. But this is my, the home, and I love it here, and I never wanted to leave. I want it to stay here. So I didn't, I couldn't make up my mind, so I decided I'll try part time studies at school or at St. Thomas I didn't think I would get very good grades. I thought I would fail and drop out and go back to working what I was, I had worked three years as a dishwasher, and just before I started university that cafe closed, I was very sad about that, and I started working at GameStop and I thought I would drop out of STU and ask for more hours of GameStop. I had an A plus in English at the end of my first term and a B plus in philosophy, and those were better grades than I had seen almost at all towards the end of being in high school and that-that was a real like shock to me. It was, it was I-I wasn't prepared for that at all. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know how to react to it. I do remember crying cause I-I just god. I just, hit me so hard. I'm smart. And-and I hate saying that, like I don't mind telling the story. But I hate saying that because man we talk about internalized homophobia, internalized misogyny, internalized transphobia. These are all things that like I've-I've gotten used to thinking about. I'm still not used to thinking about internalized ableism. No, I don't think anyone is prepared to address that part of their lives. And when I tell that story I realize god wow, I really, that's a horrible thing to say about anyone. But it, my head was at when I was twenty-one or twenty-two. So, I finish out that school year quit that awful job at GameStop. I enroll in full time studies at STU the end of that school year I'm on the Dean's list. And it just, it just kept, there were a couple setbacks. I dropped out for a semester to focus on my mental health. I got overwhelmed with the feeling of pressure cause now I had people calling me a genius and I didn't know how to handle that. That was, it felt wrong to me in a way that I didn't know how to answer, and I still don't necessarily like people thinking too highly of me. But I-I had like a massive crisis at the-the thought that well, now that I'm, now that I'm this good, I have to stay this good. So, I needed some time to work on that and by the time I finished up at STU I had a four point zero, GPA. I had over four point one

in my, in my field English. And when I started my master's I had won a Shirk. I won the, the CGSM scholarship and internal funding from UNB. And now I'm starting my PhD. And I-I have, I wanna another Shirk prize. I won a doctoral fellowship that and-and more internal funding from UNB finishing out my master's with a four GPA. And I run a magazine, and I have a book coming out. I am thirty-one now. I started at St. Thomas ten years ago. I didn't the-the last ten years of my life have been so transformative. You don't think that, like your life is going to take the-the, the direction that it does. You don't, you can't see the peaks and valleys that you have ahead of you. Some people think that their life is just going to be the same thing until they keel over and that can happen. But I-I didn't know any of this was, gonna be my future. I didn't, I didn't expect any of this. So, when people call me a genius or when people think, oh, she's all that and a bag of chips, or whatever like I'd, I'm just, I'm shocked. Guess in my head I'm still existing in that, in that spot of got to prove myself. Gotta gotta grind harder than everybody else. Gotta gotta make sure everyone knows that I still belong here. Somehow, I still live in the mindset of I gotta prove myself, even though, by just about every conceivable metric I've done that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jamie Kitts: So, like, what do I wish people knew about me? Wish people knew that I felt weird when they give me that kind of a high praise because, cause... because I don't see myself that way. I see myself, it's just living my life and that all of this is just as much a surprise to me. Actually, all this is a surprise to me, but it's not a surprise to a lot of the people around me. I tell people I've, when I tell people in my life, "hey, I got this thing". The response I get now was, "oh, of course you did". "Well, we knew you would all along", and I'm like it's, it's not necessarily the answer I was looking for. But thanks.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's weird if you were never good in public school or high school to suddenly start doing okay in university.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And it's, a lot of people in my cohort even looked up to me, cause I did the Whispering Wick thing, and a lot of that stuff. And I'm like yeah, and like, there was a big-and so everybody always wanted to know my GPA, and I always say, well, I don't know. They're like, "well, why, don't you know?". And I'm like, because I learned at a very young age that it doesn't matter.

Jamie Kitts: (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: I'm probably not the ninety-nine. But I'm also probably not as stupid as like the twenty-two fail, you know.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And so, it's, like it to me like it never mattered so when anyone would be interested, because oh, I was doing so well, I must be doing really well in my courses, and even in my Master's degree, a lot

of people were like, "well, what's your GPA". "How are you doing" cause there's a lot of that like, do I belong? Kind of stuff, especially once you get into like sometimes masters and kind of that imposter syndrome, and I felt it even to a degree, but I kind of lost it after a period of time when I looked around and I saw everyone else freaking out. And I was like, "okay, I'm probably fine then". And they would be like, "well, what's your GPA". And I was just like, "I don't know". I-I kept my scholarship. You know I got extra money, cause I did extra well like woo! Like I don't check because I might have gotten like a ninety on this thing, a seventy on that thing. But at the end of the day it doesn't matter. I'm still here. I'm still creating work that I enjoy, and I'm doing something that I'm really passionate about. So, I'm not going to worry too much about the marks, because, especially after teaching, like, I already thought they were so arbitrary. But after teaching I was like, Oh god! Especially in English.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It like I have to slap a number on there, and this is how I do it. That's my opinion.

Jamie Kitts: (Laughs.)

Tamara Thompson: Like. There's no right answer. There isn't two plus two equals four, you know.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And so, when I like, get my students and they're like, well, are you upset that I want to talk about my mark, and I'm like no cause I'm just one opinion. Tell me what you're seeing that I may be missed.

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, that's a great mindset to have. That's-that's brilliant.

Tamara Thompson: But like there, like people are surprised by it. And to me, it's just the way I always have been cause, I wasn't very smart in public school and stuff like that, like, you know, like real bad, like extra teachers and stuff like that. And they like, I dealt with that garbage. But I'm like I'm not gonna be that, you know. If I can be something else for that person, why wouldn't I be? Because I've seen all the bullshit. It's like, why would I want to participate in it?

Jamie Kitts: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Anyway. Okay, do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording.

Jamie Kitts: hmm!

Jamie Kitts: Fuck Blaine Higgs and free Palestine.

Tamara Thompson: There you go, and on that note, excellent!

Willow Little

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and today's date is July 15<sup>th</sup> and the time is 3:05 pm. Just as a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview time. This interview is for small press.

Willow Little: Hi! My name is Willow Little. My pronouns are she/her. I'm representing Cactus Press today. I'm joining this call from Montreal, Quebec and I am a writer poet, ESL teacher for corporate settings. You know, freelancer.

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So, just to kind of get the ball rolling here. How did you discover scenes and chapbooks in this type of, like, very indie, make-it-yourself publishing? Was there maybe a moment that you could talk about or maybe just more generally when you discovered it?

Willow Little: Hmm. That's a great question! I think my-my initial foray into the world of zines and-and-and zine culture was probably when I was maybe ten or eleven. I was really into drawing, and my father got me a booth at Expo Zine, so I was like a little twelve-year-old with, you know, sort of amateur doodles trying to make a buck or two and make some connections, but then I rediscovered it in my early twenties, when I became interested in pursuing poetry. Poetry as a community, just as much as poetry as the art of, you know, creating it. And then I got really interested in-in poet-and, sorry, chapbooks and-and zines.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Just to refresh my memory for the consent form: you just clicked on small press. Did you do small press and author for that section?

Willow Little: I did small press. I, sorry, I didn't, I didn't know I could click both so.

(Technical issues occurred)

Tamara Thompson: -bit more press related? Because again, those are the majority of these questions, what do you know about, like, Cactus Press and how it started? Or maybe like where you started with it? If you don't know, maybe like the full origin?

Willow Little: Cactus Press was founded by Devin Galant and Jim Johnston, I wanna say, like, maybe twelve years ago, and I know that it, it began, and then sort of went quiet, and then Devin resurrected it a few years ago. My connection with Cactus is through the event series Accent. So, I met Devin at an open mic, at an open mic at Argo bookstore, maybe in 2018, tail end of 2018, 2019. I was reading and afterwards I got talking with Devin, and he said, oh, I host an open mic series. You should check it out. So, I started going to that, and I was really struck by what a sort of, what's the word I want to say? like a nexus. But that's not the right word, and I feel like that has a different energy than the word I'm looking for. But it was what-what a kind of meeting point Accent became

for-for poetry in a, in a really tactile and community-oriented way. It was the kind of event where you would go, and there'd be the same people every time. New faces as well, but it really felt like we were all in something together, and that felt really magical. And then I published a chapbook with Cactus a couple of years ago and then a full-length poetry collection, which is, which was and is Cactus's only full-length book although we're planning to put out a second one, probably in late 2024, early 2025. So, I'm not exactly sure if the dates on that. And yeah, and then it eventually Devin asked me if I wanted to join the team.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. I-I love the way that people answer these first couple of questions on like how they kind of got started. Why, this thing got from the press to how they discovered it. I love hearing how people find out about this stuff and how they become a part of these things and reading series in particular, have been like almost like a hub where people can gather and meet and create, not just share. So that's been, that's been interesting to hear.

Willow Little: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Well, with Cactus like we know not every place has, like, necessarily an editorial philosophy or a goal, but does, like Cactus, have, like, something along those lines? Like, why, why do you do it, you know?

Willow Little: I can answer that for personal stance. We don't have an official mandate, and I think Cactus is sort of I-I wouldn't say nebulous. I wouldn't say it's-it's-it's still in a nebulous phase, because I don't know that we have plans to take it to another phase. There's kind of a-a feeling of, there's a kind of casual feeling in-in the interactions I have with the other members of the Cactus team of, you know, maybe we don't want to be this-this press that pushes for progress just for the sake of progress and building something in a kind of more traditional way so, I think that there is kind of this-this ephemeral feeling like the chapbooks themselves, which-which come with that. And I don't know if that's part of-of-of the philosophy, but it's something I notice in how I relate to Cactus, because what I really like about working with Devin, the publisher, and James, who's the other editor at Cactus, is that, like, I-I know what the terms are of my involvement. I know that I'm not the person who's responsible for everything, and we don't have to get from A to B. We can just by which I mean we don't have to like, sorry I bungled that sentence. We-we don't have to be striving to like make a certain quota or something or ...

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Willow Little: ... reach a certain Instagram following. We're just here to support poets who have interesting collections that we want to-to bring into the world. And that's the role that we play. So, I like that. I get to be a part of what's often other people's first, first publishing credit, which is super-super cool and-and-and fun, and-and I also love editing. So, I love that I get to see behind the curtain and be involved in that process, which is something that I do at, you know, professionally as well. But to do it kind of in this way that feels like it's fulfilling

a community need or adding to a community as really nice for me. Sorry if my answers are a little long. Feel free to cut me off if there's anything-

Tamara Thompson: -No, it's okay-

Willow Little: -Not being clear on, by the way.

Tamara Thompson: No, I-I feel like they offer-a lot of people have longer answers, just allows them to get the full extent of what they're trying to get at. So, like, don't-don't worry. You're doing great, I guess, is my point. But yeah, I-I understand that not necessarily strict mandate, and in liking that freedom and not worrying about how many books did we sell? Did we make as many books as we needed? And like those stricter things. Yeah, I get that. So, you were talking about kind of a little bit about the editorial process and for you and your experience with that. But like, I'm curious in the kinds of works that you actually do publish and like, why do you publish like those works?

Willow Little: So, I'm-we have quite a new I, I, I guess having like an editorial process is kind of new for us, because I officially joined the team in January and before that Devin was publishing things that he liked, and there it was, it was, there was only himself to kind of to consider so, I can't speak to anything published before January 2024 or even in the-the months following, when we had things that were kind of on schedule that I-I didn't see before then but we have a spreadsheet where we have all the titles of the chapbooks that have been submitted to us, the chapbook manuscripts and Devin looks at me and James' suggestions when we've, once we read them, and I've started leave, leaving little notes what I liked or what didn't quite work for me. And I-I think we do tend to lean more on they-if something has potential, let's work with it side rather than the if it's you know, not perfect, we don't want it side of things you know, if something really isn't-if something clearly needs a lot of work, then might say, sorry, please submit this again. But we're really looking for-for-for work that-that feels, that feels interesting, and that, I think is challenging in-in different ways and challenging in the right ways. I guess I should say. Personally, I really like things that are kind of decadent and a little ornate, and-and really honest, and feel like have a certain rawness to them, but also a limpid quality on the page. And I tend to look for that, things that are more geared towards sound. But I also really try, when I'm reading through things, to be very respectful and mindful of what the what, the poets trying to do, and just how you know how fast the landscape of different kinds of poetics is. And I'm not going to reject something just because it isn't in that very narrow definition of my personal preference when I'm reading.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so just to clarify here, because my memory is failing me a bit, you guys mostly do poetry is that correct or do you-?

Willow Little: Yes, poetry.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, I was-like, you were talking, and I was like trying to remember. I was like, like, so certain that it's poetry. But I just wanna get it on the record and confirm.

Willow Little: Oh, no problem. Yeah, yeah, it's poetry.

Tamara Thompson: You talked a little bit about the submission process and stuff like that, and kind of like how you pick some of the things that you pick, which is really interesting; and I totally get that like here are my reasons of why I like this take a look. I do the same thing. I run Whispering Wick chapbook press, and that's kind of what we do, because we do open submissions. Everybody kind of looks at it and then gives it like a little note, and maybe like a number, you know, like being, like, yes, someone else needs to read this. This might be worth looking into. So yeah, but I'm interested in how you actually produce some of the chapbooks themselves. Like, do you guys like print them? Do you guys go to a print shop? Like, can you tell me a little bit more about like that side of things of like actually physically making the book?

Willow Little: I-I can't speak too much to the that side of things, because that's Devin's domain. I know that he used to print and cut and, you know, fold everything by hand. And recently he-he moved to a different system. I think he's having them printed and-and folded somewhere, and then he picks them up. But I-I don't know any more than that about that side of the process. I'm more involved with the editing before it gets to that stage. And then I also help out with social media and communications with them, with the poets.

Tamara Thompson: Could you talk a little bit more about like how you sell you books where they're sold? Is it like markets? Is it online? Could you talk a little bit about that.

Willow Little: Yeah. So, we sell them at the launch for-for the chapbook, of course. And then, since Devin also hosts Accent, he brings copies of recent chapbooks to-to Accent every two weeks, which is when Accent is-is held. And then there are certain events that that we go to like, we're-we're expo zine. Last year we were at festivals so like Canal a couple of weeks ago, where we had an event, and we had a table with some chapbooks for sale and so different literary events like that, where-where we see those opportunities, and we're starting to look a little more for them as well. Now that I'm involved in the team, because I think it's important to try and find reading opportunities for our-our poets. And get them, you know, more-more chances to-to share these amazing poems they've written.

Tamara Thompson: It's one of the things I-I teach. And one of the things I'm always telling my students is what do authors do the most of, they do interviews, and they do readings. So like, get out there, do readings, get people interested in your work, because if you read your work and then have it at the table later, people are going to pick it up, you know. And I have gotten a lot of students into the art of reading. Or however, you want to say that and actually going to readings and interacting with the community. And that's kind of like linking to what I was saying earlier, and how much is created at readings, just it's by itself right. And I love that Cactus has that, like, as a big part integrated, and how like books are sold and how it interacts with the community that's, so, fun. Yeah, I love that.



Willow Little: That's really awesome. And what you said just now reminds me of something that I-I used to tell myself all the time. When I first got into poetry, which is like I had this professor at McGill for a course on ancient Greek religion, and-and he-he would say, religion doesn't exist unless it is performed. And I-I just started thinking about all the words you could substitute in that phrase, and one of the ones that that really stuck with me is poetry exists only if it is performed, right? Like, this idea of there being a connection with people that you get but only if you have that, that real human capacity. And I really like what you were saying about the art of reading, because I think that like, why are we doing this? Why are we going to these open mics? Why are we writing books, if not to connect with people and finding ways to do that is really awesome. I'll also add really quickly that we also do sell chapbooks online at the Cactus Press website.

Tamara Thompson: Nice. So yeah, that's-that's really interesting. So, you were talking a little bit before on how the press makes a little bit of it's like decisions. But could you go a little bit more into detail on that? I know you already were touching on it, but I'm still interested, and if you could give me there's like a little bit more detail I would appreciate it.

Willow Little: In terms of the-the team, like how the team works together.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, how do you guys work together?

Willow Little: Dev-Devin always has final say. Dev-Devin is the captain, and James and I are the-the sailors. You could put it that way, and-and then I like that. So, we will make suggestions for things, and then Devin will decide what he thinks makes the most sense, and for-for Cactus and that's-that's both in-in and things like-like events, or-or for you know, changes to-to a manuscript. I'm not so much involved with things like cover art, for example. That's-that's Devin's domain. But Devin said to me recently, like, oh, by the way, the way that we're doing edits maybe doesn't make the most sense. So, you can, you know, frame them this way, that would be more helpful for the poet and then, you know, we make the changes. But I think that, that also goes the other way, and that Devin for so long, was doing this by himself and which is you know, a lot of responsibility for one person, and as I'm sure you know you, you know, from your-your experience with your chapbook with press working with other people is a really nice way of feeling like you're-you're sharing in something both the difficult times and-and the really good ones of like, yes, we did this, and I think me and James really kind of show Devin's and some other perspectives on things. We have a lot of discussions in our meetings about well, do we wanna do more of this kind of kind of work? Or is this the kind of opportunity, what we wanna explore more? Or do we wanna publish more-more books like this? Or what do we, you know, this author suggested that they-they have a cover that they'd like to-to use. Do we want to be taking cover suggestions from poets, or do we want to keep that strictly something that that we-we provide as a way to lend our series a sense of cohesion.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, but I kind of have a similar thing with my team. It's like where I'm the person who's pushing, and I have all the equipment

at my house. So, I'm doing a lot of the physical stuff. But then people will come over and they'll help me make things, or they'll be doing things where they are. And it's like we're all kind of working together to get stuff done. But yeah, it's the captain and the sailor's aspect of just like trying to get things through. But you need to listen to your sailors if you're a captain, because you do not need your ship going down. So yeah, that's a-

Willow Little: -Right-

Tamara Thompson: A good way of, like, putting it.

Willow Little: Thanks.

Tamara Thompson: So go ahead.

Willow Little: Oh, I said, thanks.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, -

(Technical issues occurred).

Willow Little: -putting together a manuscript for a really long time. I think there was a chapbook competition from a different press, I think it was probably Vallum, and I wanted to submit to it, but the deadline passed, and I, my manuscript had just become so long and thorny and-and-messy, and I just thought, oh, there's this is beyond the scope of-of-a chapbook. But I was working on the manuscript, and Devin and James, who wasn't involved with Cactus at the time, but was very much part of our-our community. They kept pushing me to submit. When are we gonna get a chapbook from you? So eventually I sent them the full manuscript, and I said, this isn't chapbook length. It's it was like one hundred and thirty pages or something. But I have this project, let me know what you think. And we agreed from the get-go to do a-a chapbook *Xenia*, which would be an excerpt of the larger manuscript, and then to do the larger project as Cactus's first full-length because Devin had an interest in publishing books as well and seem to like my-my manuscript so which made me feel really good. And I something that I thought was really special about the whole experience, is that you know, when we first had a meeting as-as team to discuss Vice Viscera, which was my full length they suggested that I send it elsewhere. They said, you know we'd love to do this with you, but maybe you know, there are other presses that are more established that could get this book more exposure. And it's such a great manuscript. And they really buttered me up. But-but they-they made me really feel like they-they cared so much about my work, and about the time I'd invested, and really wanting what was best for me and the project and that-that meant something to me.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, well, it's, one of the hardest things is about finding that manuscript a home in a publisher cause some like cause. You can technically put it like you can submit anywhere you might get picked up. But is that a good home for that work?

Willow Little: Hmmm.

Tamara Thompson: That's really hard. So, it sounds like you found a good home for that work, and that is so difficult to do.

Willow Little: Yes, I love that way of putting it.

Tamara Thompson: Good for you.

Willow Little: Thank you.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I guess my point is-is, I understand why you felt it was the right decision for your work. Because again, that's-that's another lesson I keep trying to tell my students. I'm like, don't try and submit somewhere that's not going to take your children's book. They don't take children's books. Don't do it but also like find like-don't just take anyone. Find the place that will actually, like, understand your stories, like that does horror. Or does fantasy. Or does literary fiction, right? Find your manuscript at a home where it will actually, like, do well because you don't want to be halfway through the project and be, like, I really wish I hadn't done this right. You want to enjoy like it. Don't get me wrong; there's a lot of work, and it's exhausting. But, like you kind of want to enjoy the experience of getting your first book out there, and a lot of them are like never thought of it that way, and I'm like fair. But I think it's something that's really important to think about. So, I-I totally understand why you ended up staying there and like becoming their first book. And I think that's just that like, warms my heart is so nice that you were able to find like such a good home for it, especially with people who actually really cared about the work, too. They wanted to see you and the work succeed. So, that's just nice.

Willow Little: Thanks.

Tamara Thompson: So, I'm gonna move back a little bit to the press, and then a little bit of some, like larger questions about chapbooks and stuff. But what are some challenges that the press has faced, that you know of that you've been a part of, or something that you've noticed, and you're like, oh, damn, that's like kind of inconvenient?

Willow Little: I think one of the biggest challenges is moving from a you know a one-man ship to-to go with the metaphor, a ship with a full crew. I think that that's challenging in some ways, because there's just not a whole lot of structure yet, and that, and that lack of structure enables a lot of freedom, as I said before, which I appreciate. But sometimes it can be tricky for things like scheduling meetings, or you know, trying to approach a situation where there's no, there's no procedure. We haven't developed a procedure yet, and it's-it's-it's uncharted territory for all of us. There's also been questions about funding is-is funding something we wanna look into, especially if we're thinking about going in a direction of publishing more full length and-and-and if we were going to go in that direction, would that change what Cactus is? Yeah, so definitely, questions of structure and sustainability and you know, wanting to-to keep something running, maybe beyond Devin's involvement. If-if that ever, if something ever happens, you know. That you know I-I

I'm just imagining worst case scenarios here, but like if Devin got ill and then he wanted-

Tamara Thompson: And.

Willow Little: The press to keep going. What would we do? How would we handle that?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's there's a lot of big questions, especially when it comes to funding. And what will those people who are giving the money to you what will they want? What would that change? And it's something that I've also had to like deal with as well. It's like, if we did get funding for Whispering Wick. How would that change what we do. Because again, it's a lot more freedom, which is great, because then it's not as pressing. It's not as stressful, even though it has its own unique stresses, especially at the end when you're just trying to get the gosh, darn thing done because you're like, I want to get this done, I want to be over it like I want-I want the author to be able to hold this damn book in their hands you know? So, like it's there's like that and stuff. But I think it's very hard, like figuring out like a new way of system, because the other thing, too, is you're dealing with different people. Different people communicate-communication is hard, just like even within oneself, understanding your own emotions and feelings, let alone trying to communicate with other people on a team and figure things out so you can get something together like it's like-, you know it's hard to make something by yourself, and you need help. So, and sometimes it's hard. Make something with someone else. Right? So yeah, I totally understand trying to do the balancing act of growing, especially since-since you're interested in more like full length things as it sounds like the press is interested in like, how is that sustainable? So, yeah, I make total sense to me is like I guess what I'm saying.

Willow Little: Yeah. And maybe speaking as-as well to-to the maybe the funding a little bit, but also just-

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Willow Little: Trying to figure out how we fit within-within CanLit, and I'd be curious to hear if-if you relate to this. So, what your thoughts are on this like being taken seriously.

Tamara Thompson: Yeaahh.

Willow Little: I would say that's a struggle, because being a chapbook press where our launches are often at the open mics. Well, they're usually at the open at the Accent open mic. There is the sense of well, real serious poets don't, and I'm doing scare quotes here for-for the recording. That's-that's evident. But you know, real poets don't go to open mics unless they're invited as a feature, and real poets don't publish ephemeral chapbooks, real poets publish full lengths and then get awards. So, there is this sense of like maybe feeling on a social dimension. And I'm not speaking for James and-and Devin here, just for myself. In my involvement, as in Ca-at Cactus, and as a poet myself, that there's this degree of like maybe not being sure what our place is, and-

and feeling like. There's acknowledgement or-or what's the right word and be feeling-feeling certain pressures because of that and that that ties in with things like funding as well where you know, we applied for a sort of event grant, last year and didn't even get an email back, I think, saying that we weren't chosen. So, it and-and then saw all the-the people we know in the Montreal scene who were accepted having their projects publicized. And we are wondering, well, what didn't we have? Are we-are we not considered an important part of the scene because we're affiliated with an open mic, or because we're a chapbook press and not a traditional full-length sort of press.

Tamara Thompson: I think a lot of people who think that chapbook presses and chapbooks themselves are not serious, or quote unquote real, or whatever are the people who there are very naive in experience, like, if someone tells that to me that just tells me that they haven't really gone out into the world of publishing and experienced a lot of things, because publishing, the reason why I'm talking to like authors, poets, and like small presses, and even some traditional presses is because publishing is an ecosystem. Specifically, in Canada it's really big. There are people crossing over all the time, right? There are people who have made it like, really, really big. And maybe they've won like big awards and stuff. But they still make chapbooks.

Willow Little: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And to me, when someone says it's not quote unquote, real publishing or as, like, much of a merit to me that just shows me their inexperience, because as soon as those very specific people find out that, like, Gary Barwin does, like, chapbooks and stuff like that or like all of these like poets that they look up to and stuff; a and they're like, oh, wait, no, this is a respectable craft, because people I respect in these areas of awards and publishing and have trade links also do this. I will now respect it because I've been shown that respectable people do it and then maybe they learn that there is value in merit for its own sense. But I-I feel like, especially when it comes to like grants and fundings. It's been the chapbooks community specifically is kind of like, no, you're gonna influence me. We are the free press. What do you want, y You know?

Willow Little: Right.

Tamara Thompson: So, I think there's a bit of that. But I also think a lot of the people who do grants and stuff don't understand the importance of chapbooks in our little publishing ecosystem. I think they're starting to, but it's-it's a slow go, because again, like you'll have people come up at like the booth, and a lot of them are genuinely just curious. And they're like, oh, what's this? But like most of the time, they don't take you too seriously. They're like, oh, you're making a little handmade book I could do that, you know, like how sometimes people go to... like my kid could do that. And it's like, yeah. But your kid couldn't think up the process or this or that. Yeah, it's just pain on a board to you, but to the people who actually care and take a look at this, like, you know, abstract art. There's a lot going on here that a child couldn't think up. Not that like a child couldn't do it. But I don't know most four-year-olds who would

think of you know you have to let your eyes go blurry so that you can fully see painting look like a dancing flame. You know what I mean. So, like, that's kind of what chapbooks feel like. Once you get it that you realize it's merit. But a lot of people think, oh, well, anyone could do that. So, it's special that's like is. And if anyone could do it, why are more people doing it?

Willow Little: Yeah. And-and it also, I think it misses the sort of the- the accessibility and the intimacy of a chapbook which are two really wonderful things that are particular to that medium.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree. So, we've been kind of answering this next question. But I'm still gonna ask it directly, because I'd like more details of like, why are chapbooks important to you?

Willow Little: Hmm. Chapbooks, I think I well, because of some of those things we just talked about. Yeah, I think that they're chapbooks are special to me, because there this sort of magical form that's-that's it's like a book, but it's a bit more bare bones than that. And there's something that feels a bit more kind of, I don't want to say direct or honest about chapbooks but there's something raw about chapbooks that I don't think you get with-with other forms of you know, interacting with-with a text and as-as we discussed there, you know chapbooks are artifacts that anyone can make, anyone can make, but they still require specialization. But they also don't have to like you could just make, you could just make like a little chapbook yourself with a couple of pieces of printer paper and fold them, staple it, and write your poems in, and that would be a form of a chapbook. While you have more sort of you know, chapbooks that are more akin to works of art on the other end of the spectrum that that can sewn with like silk and-and-and pressed flowers inside, and all sorts of things. And-and I, I love that-that we have that range within the medium. I think that's really important, and it shows a degree of flexibility that-that means that it's-it's the kind of thing that anyone who wants to make poetry and write poetry, and involve themselves with poetry in some way, can start doing that and learn how to do it if they want and I think-I think the chapbooks are really good initial experiences for publishing. And, like you said also, being created by very established poets. So-so, there's something that's for everyone and-

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Willow Little: And I think this also really magical about-about the fact that most chapbooks are, like, limited run, and then there's no more of them. And then you have this, this book that maybe there were like fifty printed. And you-you have one of them, and-and that's really special.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think that's really true. So, getting into some of like, the broader and bigger questions here, our chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not? I would like to hear some of your insights on that.

Willow Little: Of course, they're so, I mean, I think that like they, they just they-they give us so many more options for ways that we can create and share our art. And-and that's really important especially in Canada, which is so big and so sparsely populated, considering its size where you'll correct me if I'm wrong on this. But I think, like you know, publishing didn't really take off here until like, was it, was it the fifties, I wanna say, with like funding.

Tamara Thompson: It was; it was more the seventies and sixties when the Massey Commission happened. That was more when, like, there had always been publishing in Canada, and we'd always had books, but for the most part a lot of our even texts that were sold here were made in Britain, or, you know, the United States. Our textbooks used to be U.S. history because they were printed in the U.S. So yeah.

Willow Little: Right? Right! Okay, thank you. So, you know, we need some help to begin with. So having, having more options is, it's-it's always good having more ways to-to produce and disseminate art. And I think also there's a sort of there's, there, there's like a financial component that that-that-that needs to need to be addressed as well. Where chapbooks are much more affordable to-to produce.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, yeah.

Willow Little: Something like a trade paperback and talking about things like distribution it's, like, tens of thousand of dollars; and chapbooks are a way that we can, we can feasibly create and support other artists.

Tamara Thompson: So, this kind of like jumping onto like the next question, kind of based off like in general, a lot of what you were saying. But does this type of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way, do you think?

Willow Little: I don't know how it could not.

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough.

Willow Little: Yeah, I mean, we're-we're people in Canada. And these are the things that we're making. And-and I think it's as simple as that really.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I think so too. So, I'm interested to hear on what this type of smaller publishing has taught you in your time creating for it, and then helping create the objects themselves. Like, what is something that, like this type of smaller publishing has taught you?

Willow Little: Hmm. It has taught me so many things. I mean, it's-it's allowed me to see, it's-it's-it's allowed me an appreciation for books that I-I didn't have previously for this-

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Willow Little: Tactility of them and for sort of the just, the-the sense of community and-and connection that I feel with.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Willow Little: With people who have, who have made these for me, people who have made them gifted them to me. The pr-the chapbooks we put out with Cactus, and it's-it's-it's given me a sense of it's I think, that, like for-for me, I really appreciate feeling like I'm doing something important and-and meaningful, and I'm contributing and as a poet myself and a writer I-I am, I also write fiction. I was a recipient for Canada Arts Council grant last year. So last year I-I spent all of that year writing, and-and I'm very you know, writing is, can be such like a solitary often lonely activity. It doesn't have to be, I think it would be a mistake to say that it's always that. But for me it was really important to have people around me also writing and creating books. So, this allows me to feel like I'm involved, and I'm involved in something that's a bit more holistic than my own-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Willow Little: Writing process.

Tamara Thompson: I think those are some great things to-to touch on. Yeah. So, we're getting into our last couple of questions here. And I do have to ask the tiny bit more sad question for most people is, why do you think most small presses and micro presses have to close up shop? It's an unfortunate but true fact.

Willow Little: Hmm. I-I have like limited knowledge on this topic. So please keep that in mind with my-my answer.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, of course.

Willow Little: I can only really speak to what I, what I would imagine in in. You know, we're Cactus to close its doors or things that I've heard about other presses, but I think, you know, when you do have a really small team, have a very small team doing a lot and you know, each person is doing a lot of work. If you don't have a sustainable system in place, with a mind to succession planning in particular, and it can be really hard if someone gets sick or.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Willow Little: Yeah, you know, dies or just doesn't even want to do it anymore. They just don't want to do it anymore. And they-they burn out, which happens when you're doing all that work. As you know, one person or two people. So, I think it's and it-it ties into the-the issue of-of funding for chapbooks as well for chapbook presses, because-

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Willow Little: You know, even if there, if there isn't, if there aren't many funding opportunities sorry, even if there are many funding



opportunities. But the person running the chapbooks press is drawn towards that outlet because it's a little safer maybe, then-then you don't have that sustainability that you might have if you did pursue funding

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Willow Little: But even with that I think that there are issues. And-and-and I think it can be it to be tricky when you, each person is caring so much.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So why are you still doing this thing? I know you still new, and it's all amazing and fun. But like, are you still doing this thing? Cause it is work.

Willow Little: Me. Yeah, because I believe in it, and I find it grounding. And you know, I think that writing has to be about people at the end of the day, and.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Willow Little: Working with Cactus and, you know, seeing the poets faces light up when they get on stage and read from their newly published Cactus press chapbook with the beautiful cover which they're holding in their hands. And-and you just see how-how happy they are and what it means to them to have this it makes it also worth it. And-and-and often, I mean when-when it's someone who's never published anything before. I mean, it's just, it's-it's incredible how seen people-people feel speaking from my own experience, having a chapbook published, but also you know, communicating with people I know who were published by Cactus and who expressed that to me it's a, it's a really special experience to share with someone.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I like you touching on like that sharing aspect. And that connection, aspect of like holding the book and everything. Yeah. Okay, last couple of questions here. But what's something you wish maybe the average person or the public knew about Canadian publishing.

Willow Little: Oh, that's a great question... umm... I don't know how to answer that. There are a lot of things.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, too many things. I'm overwhelmed.

Willow Little: I mean, I think that what's really nice about Canadian publishing is it's-it's it's people, it's-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Willow Little: Not so often these huge conglomerates where you-you can't get in contact with anyone. You have to have an agent, and you have to submit like eighteen different manuscripts, and then you might get like one, one letters coming back saying that they are maybe interested. It's-it's all people. So even-even when, I think what's really cool about-about Canadian publishing is, you have a lot of emerging writers, and you have more established ones. And everyone's kind of in the same environment to

an extent and-and-and I think that's really cool because its kind of, it-it doesn't-this might depend as well where-where you are in Canada I feel like when I went to Toronto there was more of a feeling of-of-of elitism, and also things were a bit kind of different in terms of the relationship with-with bookstores and-and hosting literary events, and-and it being a bit more expensive to live in the GTA but I feel like there is sort of this nice sense of community in-in Montreal, and the sense of there being less elitism and-and maybe I'm speaking from a position of privilege in that. I feel like I've been very lucky in the kinds of interactions I've had. But I do feel like there is this degree of accessibility and Canadian publishing that you don't have in like places in Europe like England.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, so this next question is just giving more space for something cool or interesting that you've seen. But what's something important about D.I.Y. press history that you wish that you could like show people or share with people, whether that be something you've created, something you've seen, or maybe something old that was created? You're like, oh people's like knew this cool thing existed. You know what I mean?

Willow Little: Hmm. Well, I took, I took a course during my undergrad on the manuscript as a, as a medium, and something I thought was really interesting is, I know this isn't really quite tie with small-small press lore, but I don't know much about that. So, this is like the closest thing I can.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Willow Little: Attach into this conversation. But they talked about the concept of-of I think it was auctoritas. I think it was auctoritas. I could be wrong on the spelling or the pronunciation, but basically that like a text wasn't innately imbued with this like sense of authority. And that was that was a-a development later, previously authority was something that was granted by people like witnessing things and was much more about the spoken word and about the sort of age of the people in the community. So, if the oldest person in the community said that they had, they had seen this person commit a crime, then that counted for much more than someone writing it down let's say, and saying you know, which I think is a very interesting contrast to how we think about official documentations nowadays, and I think it's also interesting. And it kind of challenges a lot of the-the-the thoughts we have around storytelling and writing as this official text, this is having this official quality to it, and you know, things like indigenous storytelling traditions which you know, aren't really treated with the same kind of respect that they that they should, in my opinion, but I think that also does tie into chapbooks in the sense that, like a chapbook, is seen as it, it's this this written text, but it's also seen as kind of ephemeral and not quite granted the same degree of authority as-as-as other kinds of texts that are seen as more official.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Willow Little: Sorry. That was a bit long winded.

Tamara Thompson: No, it's okay. I think it was really interesting of an idea to-to bring up, because it relates to the officiality of like trade, and then chapbooks and a kind playing with the ideas that you brought up earlier. So yeah, I think, I think it's a good anecdote. What's something, very last question by the way, what's something that you wish people knew about your history?

Willow Little: Oh, hmm! Like my-my history, my publishing history, or my-my history.

Tamara Thompson: Whatever you desire; take it wherever you want, whatever you want people to know about you, whether that be your writing, your, like your poetry, to your authorship, to the things that you do outside. It's up to you.

Willow Little: Hmm! Sorry, I'm thinking.

Tamara Thompson: The most difficult question.

Willow Little: You must have, how do people react to this question? Do they usually come prepared, or are they like? Hmm.

Tamara Thompson: Most people do exactly what you're doing.

Willow Little: Okay.

Tamara Thompson: The hardest question out of all of them.

Willow Little: (Laughs.)

Tamara Thompson: You must talk about yourself now.

(Both laugh.)

Willow Little: Oh, no! I-I wish people knew how much I cared, I guess I-I care a lot about-about-everything I care a lot about this interview, and I'm stressing now and thinking that my answers were not precise enough, I was not articulate, so I want everyone to know how much I cared about doing well in this interview, because you know, I have to do good.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Well, you're doing good, and you've done good throughout the whole process.

Willow Little: I know, I do think that that the caring is-is always there under the surface, and that umm-

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Willow Little: I think anyone who's involved in-in-in-in creating chapbooks cares a lot. And I-I'm, I think that-that is important.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think, I think that's a good note to end on. But do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I end the recording.

Willow Little: No, but I'm, I apologize for being scatter brained.

Tamara Thompson: Don't apologize. It is totally okay. You were great.

Jeffrey Macklin

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, the date today is June 17<sup>th</sup> the time is 1:06 pm, and just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after the interview. This interview is for small press and author. Go ahead.

Jeffrey Macklin: Great. Hi! My name is Jeffrey Macklin, and I'm a small press publisher. I'm a letter press printer, print person, and my press is called Jackson Creek Press, and it's been around for about twenty-two years now based out of Peterborough, Ontario, Canada and I publish works of my own, both visual and a word based, but also for other people. So, I've got a smattering of ISBNs under the press, probably twenty at this point, and plan to keep printing and making chapbooks long term.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely, and your pronouns please.

Jeffrey Macklin: I'm sorry; he/him.

Tamara Thompson: Excellent, sorry. It's just, it's important for things down the line.

Jeffrey Macklin: It's all good.

Tamara Thompson: So, how did you discover zines and chapbooks and this kind of publishing?

Jeffrey Macklin: Well, I'm a back-my background is I'm a graphic designer and I went to Sheridan College in Oakville for four years from 1986 to 1990, and I was the last cohort at Sheridan that learned before Macintosh's were brought into the classroom; so, we learned all the old school methods, and by doing that we handled a lot of ephemera and I've always been drawn to typography and-and books and magazines and things like that. And very quickly in that program, you know, we would go downtown in groups and stuff, and we would inevitably, well, through our research as well, we learned about zines. 'Cause zines have been around for, you know, over one hundred years now, really, when you think about what a zine is. And then, twenty-two years ago, when I started printing letter press, when I got my first press immediately, you know, through the Internet connected with letter press people. It's a, the Internet is an amazing connecting device, we all know. And right away went to the Grimsby Wayzgoose, which is at the Grimsby Art Gallery on the last Saturday of April. This would have been probably by the time I went to was Wayzgoose. So, it's probably 2004 something like that. And that there, you know I, my-I had a table at this group at Grimsby Wayzgoose, and the only thing I had on my table at that time was postcards and note cards, so that's all I was capable of making at that point. It was so early but at that event, you know, I got to stroll the tables. There's like twenty-four vendors at the time, and there was the Porcupine's Quill, famous Canadian small press publisher, George Walker, the wood engraver. All these wood engravers from Ontario in the area, Wesley Bates, who all pre-, made broadsides, or prints of their blocks, or-or small, and but they also made chapbooks. These beautiful letter press printed chapbooks, and if it often in very unconventional formats, and that was the gateway for me, and ever since

that time I always, although I do have a ADHD and I have a high-I flip around a lot, but I always strive to make one book a year. So ever since then I've tried to make lots of one-off broadsides and stuff but try to really focus on like one small little chapbook a year, too. So, I've tried to do that. But the Grimsby Wayzgoose was my entry point.

Tamara Thompson: Excellent, wonderful. So why did you start your press specifically?

Jeffrey Macklin: Oh, well, again so, it was twenty two years ago, some friends of mine had a printing press in a storage unit and they said, hey, Jeff, do you want this? So, I paid movers to move it to a garage on Bonaccord Street here in Peterborough and at the time it was a Chandler and price ten by fifteen platen press I didn't have anything. I had the printing press, so I again go, got on the Googles, and wouldn't have been Google at the time. It might have been something else, Alta Vista, and found out that the largest supplier of used letter press equipment and type was in Scarborough, Ontario, so I immediately drove to Scarborough, bought one draw of type and-and just started to-to get into it. That's kind of how I got into printing.

Tamara Thompson: Excellent. So, does the press have an editorial philosophy, maybe a goal specifically?

Jeffrey Macklin: Hmm . . . nothing that I tangentially thought about, in those terms. I'm pretty rogue. I work with my friends and print things for my friends. I don't think, I don't think I have either of those things formally, but definitely wanted to portray my queerness more and more all the time. So that's kind of one of its ethos now as to as my own storytelling device. Less so than other people's stories that it's been in the past. So, about eight or nine years ago, I tried to, I'm trying to switch everything over to me more about me and my life than anything else.

Tamara Thompson: Right. So, you talked a little bit about the kinds of stuff you publish. But is it so- you talked a little bit about your arts. I know you do, like, cards and stuff. I've seen your paintings in like Dreams of Bean but, like, specifically with the press, do you do like more poetry? Is it more fiction? Can you tell me a bit more about that?

Jeffrey Macklin: Yeah, sure can. Excuse me. For the bulk of the time that I've been making chapbooks they have been linocut cut based with some typography. Hence letter wood type but they're evolving a little bit more to be more work based over the last ten years again, part of my kind of evolution. I still carve linocuts but they're more a complement to the words than the other way around, how it used to be.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm!

Jeffrey Macklin: Does that answer your question?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So why did you choose to do that, shift? Was it just the natural evolution? Or was there maybe a moment?

Jeffrey Macklin: I've always been a journaler, and I've always written, and I've always drawn in my journals. But I felt the need to again start talking about myself, and I felt it was more, easier to tell my story, leading with the words and following with the images than the other way around, though I do have a couple of books that have linocut of different parts of my body that are just stand alone, without any setup, any text. Now I'm trying to lead with the words; I write on a typewriter as well for the last few years. So, I write on typewriter, and then I pull things from those typewriter bits and use them in my letter press as well.

Tamara Thompson: Do you work with anyone outside of the press? Or is this very much like become more of a personal project?

Jeffrey Macklin: Well, I like, I said, I'm, I collaborate sometimes with people I collaborated with, a fellow named Carlisle Baker three or four years ago for an Arts Week project, and we printed out in the street. I collaborate with the local poet Justin Million. We have events that we run together.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, yes.

Jeffrey Macklin: Printed the words of local poet, Bruce Whiteman a couple of times in two books. So, I collaborated by in that the most recent one with Bruce Whiteman was, I asked Bruce to write me some poems about the flora of Jackson Park and then I printed, handset his poems, but they're facing pages, a linocut of that plant. So, it's my cuts and his words. So, I look for opportunities to do those kinds of things.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So, I'm gonna ask you a little bit about your process from when you've gotten an idea for a book to actually creating that to getting it into people's hands. How does that work for you?

Jeffrey Macklin: Well, I, you know, starting right at the beginning, I was having coffee with Bruce, and I asked him if he would, we both talked about our love for Jackson Park anyway. He came up with the words very quickly, but it took me about eighteen months to get the cuts done and do the printing. It's a lot of work. It's probably four hundred hours to make thirty-six copies of a book but the process is that he gives me the words. I look at them on my phone. I stand at the composing, at the cabinet of type, and I handset each poem into a composing stick, and I print each spread on the press by hand and then I, once the spreads are all printed, I fold them and collate them, and I hand stitch them with a cover into a chapbook. So, it's really every step of the printing process is done right in, within the building.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So, it seems like this is very much a one-man passion project where, like you make decisions. But for the press, because I just want to learn just a little bit more directly, and I know we're probably covering some general ground with, like, we've kind of already covered. But for you is it kind of like you just get an idea and you're like, oh, well, let's just go with this. Let's make this thing a reality. Is that kind of how like you make decisions?

Jeffrey Macklin: Absolutely. So, I have, I have a I have Google doc on my phone, and I stop on my bicycle. I'll stop in the grocery store. I'll stop anywhere. But when I get an idea, I say it into my Google doc. And then when I'm looking for something next to do, I fish through that Google doc and I pull something out of it. And that's what I work on. So, it is all called from my own things I think of when I'm out in the world, and then I fish through that, and that's where I get my ideas from.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic.

Jeffrey Macklin: That's how I move forward. Yeah. So, I'll make a note talk to Bruce about flora of Jackson Park. And that's how that project gets going.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely. Where does your press like, sell the things that you actually create? Like, how do you get it into people's hands? Do you do markets? Do you have things in shops? Like, how does that one like, how does that aspect work for you?

Jeffrey Macklin: That's a that's a tough one. That's a tougher one, I mean. I've always-I'm a pretty go, I'm a bit of a go-getter. Pretty quickly, once I started printing, I started an Etsy store. And an Etsy store for probably about eight years and sold a ton of things sold probably five hundred broadsides all around the world and I mailed them out. You know it's-it's a lot of work. Etsy's a lot of work. When it went public, I got off Etsy. I didn't want to be on Etsy anymore when it went public. But I also, have always pursued local avenues as well. So, I've long been involved in a local art market called Focus Fair.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Jeffrey Macklin: I'm the main organizer now, after organizing with people for years and years, so I always sell at Christmas time. I have a market that I sell to, and I have a very loyal following-a loyal group of people in town that support me, that I love very much. But I also run on Focus Fair the other times a year, but I'm always at the Grimsby Wayzgoose. I do a show in Kingston called Fat Goose, but I, and I also have retail. So, I have, like a store in Port Hope, Port Perry, two of them in Peterborough, and I'm pursuing more where they have my stuff on inventory there, and people can buy. A lot of different little threads to try and add up to a business. I mean, when I started the business within five years, it was probably five percent of my income. But now it's about thirty of my income. So, it's growing. And that's where I want to really focus all my time less so, sitting at the computer more so, you know, pursuing the-the print and artwork.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, lovely. So, I'm gonna get into a bit more of like the author-type questions for a sec here. Why did you choose to publish your work in the form of chapbooks?

Jeffrey Macklin: I constantly publish in broadsides, like I said. I try to publish one or two little chapbooks a year or two, but I think that it's the lowest, most easy entry point for me because I come from a printing graphic design background. And I just, I know how it all works, and how I



can lay the page out, and how I can bind the signatures together. And it's just. It seems like the most natural response to, what I had to say, and how I would get it out in the world. That being said I'm a bit voracious at the social medias as well.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Jeffrey Macklin: I'm publishing things there constantly. But the easiest way to get a physical thing out in the world is just to make it yourself.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, have you, so, it seems like a lot of your work you publish under your own press. But have you thought about working with, like, other people outside in the community?

Jeffrey Macklin: I have. I do a bit of design for, in book design. So, I'm doing a little chapbook of for Bruce, of a works, of an essay by Ken Norris, and it'll be published at Coach House. Jobs here and there that are affiliated and in the zone. But it's more from the graphic design standpoint.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jeffrey Macklin: So, I'll lay the papers out, but it's going to be actually printed at Coach House. Yeah, I think I yeah, I think, I don't know if I think I answered your question.

Tamara Thompson: You did. I-I just wanted to know, like, if you thought about like working with other people because this is such a community-based exercise, right? It's interesting, because again, it's not necessarily something you have to do. But I find it interesting how people interact with the community in their own way.

Jeffrey Macklin: Now, I, I do collaborate. You know, I collaborated with Peter Brocs on some, of a creek walk guides a couple of years ago. But it was more from a how-do-we-make-this-happen kind of standpoint? So, I guided them through the process of laying it out. They printed it on a risograph and then I help them get a bound and stuff like that or is really from that standpoint people reach out to me for guidance in some in many instances, when they're trying to do this kind of process. I definitely am open all the time, and I do collaborate with people, but I think the collaboration comes more from, well, other than like asking Bruce if we could do a book together, most of it comes the other way, where I'm more like in my own world, making my own things. And then things come up and people come to me, and they say, hey! Can you help us with this.

Tamara Thompson: Makes sense to me. What are some challenges that you've faced as an author? And this can be interpreted however, you desire.

Jeffrey Macklin: Yeah. Well, considering myself an author is-is-is a weird thing to even think about. I just published in April my first little book of my own for lack of a better term words, poems that I wrote on the typewriter, full like what I consider works along that ilk. I think they fall somewhere between what poetry is and just conversational dialogue.

I'm not even sure. They don't follow any structure or form. But so that's the only really that's I mean, I am the author of all these visual books and these books with some words in them, but nothing that screams author until this little book that I just put out. I feel like I'm the author of that book.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I-I also feel like-just to kind of talk about how you were talking about the more conversational openness of the poetry to me, stuff that doesn't follow forms or rhythm, I find so much more interesting because forms and rhythm have been done so much, and when they're done well, it's done exceptionally well.

Jeffery Macklin: Sure.

Tamara Thompson: But I find a lot of the more open, experimental things more exciting to me. It's something I try and tell my students 'cause they're so scared that they have to write a sonnet or something when I'm trying to introduce them to poetry. And I'm like, forget the rules you learned in primary school. They're not going to help you here, and they're not going to help you create anything that you actually enjoy. Poetry is something to be enjoyed and expressed. Just let go and have fun. It's one of the reasons why when people come up to me and ask me what they should read when it comes to any creative writing thing I say Daniel Tisdale, I believe, is his name, and he has an excellent book on writing poetry because he talks all about it. He has exercises in there, and I'm like this will help you open up your brain to what poetry can be doesn't have to be so strict.

Jeffrey Macklin: With it.

Tamara Thompson: I'm one of those who likes to have experimental, like break the boundary, screw the rules, like show me something interesting.

Jeffrey Macklin: I think, I think I had an idea what poetry was. I mean, I collect and read books, you know. I've got, you know, read Leonard Cohen. And I've read-I, because, basically-so, I picked up chapbooks all the time and I read them some of them. I've read hundreds of times, just because the little story, the poem, is just so beautiful.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: In the beginning of the pandemic, one of the things I did was I started reading a lot more and reading books-books like bigger books which I haven't done. You know the Internet, ADHD. But I read a ton of the B's through the pandemic. The first three years I read Bukowsky and-and Burroughs and Kerouac *On the Road*, and like a whole bunch of stuff and that made me more intrigued with words as well. But a lot of their words were unconventional. There were run on sentences; they were, they didn't follow those conventions, and it was much more attractive to me. And then I feel like that was one of the things that made me feel, like, I could allow myself to make these weird little word books.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I always try, especially with my first-year students to explain, but I want them to do the weird and new thing, even

if it doesn't go successfully, try it out. Because if that's what they want to do, that's their voice. That's their authorial-

Jeffrey Macklin: That's right.

Tamara Thompson: Desire. And I'm like, try it because it's something I keep repeating over and over again do not try and write something good like quote unquote good, because it will never be good.

Jeffrey Macklin: Yes.

Tamara Thompson: Because if you're not having fun, no one's gonna want to read it. If you're having fun, it will be good.

Jeffrey Macklin: Yes, I mean, that's-that's a universalism that I take to heart, I mean, in telling my own story, too. I'm trying to be as authentic as I can, and not, not try to edit what I'm trying to put out there, and just let it be with my whole heart.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, 'cause there will always be opinions and critics, and whatever.

Jeffrey Macklin: The old-

Tamara Thompson: But you know.

Jeffrey Macklin: You be you, and you'll attract the right people. You know.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly.

Jeffrey Macklin: That's the way it goes.

Tamara Thompson: You're never going to. You can't worry. If you're publishable, you can't worry. If your literariness is good enough for this award or that thing.

Jeffrey Macklin: Yes, now I've given, I've given my little poetry book to a few people who are writers in town, but I can't barely get them to say anything about it, because I think they just don't like it. But-and that's fine. That's totally fine, because it doesn't follow the conventions. You know it has a lot of-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: Queerness in it to, and that doesn't appeal to everybody. But a, the people are, you know, if you can't get. They used to have salons where people spoke their mind and said how they actually felt about things. But people are so kind, you know, they don't want to say what they think.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: Anyway, it's fine. I-I have gotten some little bit of positive feedback, but it's not gonna stop me from publishing version two in a year or so.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly. Because at the end of the day, if you're making something that you enjoy creating, especially on so many different levels, then why stop?

Jeffrey Macklin: Well, that's-that's one of my ethos, too, is just. I make mostly what I want to make. And if people like it, great; and if they don't like it, great.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's all right.

Jeffrey Macklin: If not, you know people find it interesting. I never, I used to make like eighteen or twelve or eighteen of each chapbook and sometimes some of them, I've maybe only sold one copy in twenty years, but other ones would sell out after two shows, and I wish I had made more, but I often don't revisit the same work twice. So, it's a bit of a, so I have up my numbers a little bit. I try to do like thirty books now each time, and then still have sold through a couple of them. But I'm they-they exist in my inventory for a little longer.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: But yeah, make what you believe in, and the right people will find it.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly. What has this kind of publishing taught you?

Jeffrey Macklin: Taught me? Oh, man, it's just, it's taught me that the, anything goes. A book isn't just what you find in Chapters, you know. I've got books that are telescoping; there's the physicality is-is inventive, but also the way the words are used is inventive. A book can be almost anything and always trying to break out of what it can, what a conventional book is-is always part of my thinking as well.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think that's so freeing, especially when it comes to the chapbook form. I was talking to derek from no press, and he showed me a chapbook which was a cigarette box with cigarettes inside that were numbered, that you unrolled, which told you the story.

Jeffrey Macklin: Exactly!

Tamara Thompson: That's brilliant, right?

Jeffrey Macklin: Yes! If you stroll like Dream Zine in Toronto at that event, or you go to a small press gathering, you're gonna find unconventional books about unconventional subjects. It's just a book could be anything that's right.

Tamara Thompson: I remember going to a market, and a lady, and it might actually have been Gap Riot, I can't remember it's been so long. It was before the pandemic. So, who remembers that?

Jeffrey Macklin: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: But she had a book of poetry, and then she had needles and wool, so that you could knit the poems.

Jeffrey Macklin: Oh, yes, yep.

Tamara Thompson: Like fantastic.

Jeffrey Macklin: Yeah, outside of the-

Tamara Thompson: That is so great.

Jeffrey Macklin: It's outside-of- the-box thinkers.

Tamara Thompson: And to have that tactile version and implementing the print and the word with something that's physical, that creates another thing out of a, so fun.

Jeffrey Macklin: Yeah, no, it's great.

Tamara Thompson: What are some challenges that the press has faced over the years?

Jeffrey Macklin: Paper supply. There's so much less interesting paper. I print mostly on machine made paper. So, I'm not too precious about it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: But with the pandemic I mean, everything is vanilla. Now it's like white and boring.

Tamara Thompson: Yeeaaaah.

Jeffrey Macklin: So, I mean, I do buy from the Japanese paper store, and I will buy from the place in Montreal. But it's not the bulk of it. I would say the paper is one of the challenges, is, is other challenges are . . . I can't think of anything right now. I went to in the fall-I was at the Ottawa small press fair run by Rob McLennan. You know, Rob? You must.

Tamara Thompson: I talked to him, oh, about like two weeks ago.

Jeffrey Macklin: He's amazing, you know. I've long followed him on the socials. Like, iconic putting on shows, building community. Really is an inspiration. But I, and I hadn't done the small press fair in seven or eight years, but I went back in the fall, and the-the reception was so sweet, and people bought my books and talked. I talked, and I bought books, and, you know, inevitably spent almost as much as you make buying other people's books and that community in Ottawa just blows me away.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, the community in Ottawa is so, like, dedicated, and there's so much going on in Ottawa. That's fantastic.

Jeffrey Macklin: Yeah, like Cameron there, and Justin Million here. He went to Ottawa U and did poetry, and it's just it has a great little scene with that one bar, the bar I'm trying to think of the name of the, Manx. A few events there, great little poetry Bar Well.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: That'll be an adventure. Let's move on to the next question here. Sorry I lost my train of thought for a second. Why are chapbooks important to you?

Jeffrey Macklin: Oh, because I can make them easily and get things disseminated and out of, out of the world with very little issues. So just accessibility.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: It's a forum for expressing myself, and it's so easy to get it out there.

Tamara Thompson: Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why are why not?

Jeffrey Macklin: I-I think that chapbooks are very important to Canadian publish. I mean, you look at the book that won the, I don't know what, the Nelson Ball Prize in 2023, which is the Small Press Poetry Prize. It was just one by, like, a photocopied little book

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: By this guy named James-I forget his name. But-but if it's just a super little book, but that's something that's as-as a proletariat as put together of that little book with against like umm Gaspereau press that it, that it's, it can win because aesthetic isn't everything, and getting the words out is more important than holding the words in, but it almost, there's no, it's like a level playing field, even though they are disparately different things.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I think one of my favorite things about publishing is seeing the growth in small presses, and I like the roughness. When I first started with my press, we didn't know what we were doing. So, we did before; we brought outside people in. We were like, okay, we need to like, figure out our process for a sudden. So, we just did books of the of the team for people who wanted to do them. And I look at those books and they're rough. We didn't, we didn't know how to do the holes right. Folding it was difficult.

Jeffrey Macklin: No, totally!

Tamara Thompson: I-I look at the books we make now, and I'm very proud of what we were making now, but I love the roughness of those first books, because you can see the growth on how much we cared and how much we wanted it to look good, like some of our first books didn't even have indented paragraphs because we were just so, it was like the fall of 2020. So,

everything was still happening. It was such a stressful period of time. But we made this little scrappy thing that was amazing. And yeah, we're gonna redo one of the books because I think it deserves to have like a more beautiful edition of it, but that's because we've chosen to do that. But I still love the first edition of that text.

Jeffrey Macklin: That's the thing. It's barriers to access; I mean, how ease, how easy is it! Take one, you could take one, eight and a half by eleven sheet of paper fold it into eight pages, and you have a zine. I mean, it's the it's and you don't have to be a graphic designer. You don't have to be a printer. You don't have to be an illustrator, you can, you can just handwrite whatever you and you can make twenty-five copies of it on a photocopier. Fold them, and you're done.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: You know, and my books were, you know, shitty at the beginning, too, but I grew into it, you know.

Tamara Thompson: I think there's a lot of charm when it comes to that. And seeing that scrappiness.

Jeffrey Macklin: Yes!

Tamara Thompson: So just even seeing that homemade-ness; we do hand carved rubber stamps.

Jeffrey Macklin: Exactly!

Tamara Thompson: And I like that.

Jeffrey Macklin: Yep. I totally agree with that. I don't look for any of my things, books or broadsides to have that, a, carbon copy feel. I want there to be nuance among the run so that they are unique pieces, and I'm hand folding them, and I'm hand-stitching them with different threads. And I'm doing, trying to imbue each one of them with its own little touch.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, like one of the stamps actually, after doing a Rachel Small's book, where do we go from here? It was a lady's figure holding the earth with the sun behind her. But the earth had to be a separate piece, so her arms were really weak, and so the stamp actually broke. But we wanted to do little notebook things. We still use the stamp, but you can see that it's not one full piece, and each one of them were different, and we did different color changes. We did one where we like, where I painted on the stamp the different black and blue, and then I would go in with like a little streak of gold for one of because it was like a night sky kind of theme. And I love that kind of stuff where you could tell that each of these were handmade, like my mom and I sat down put the ink on the thing, and we both work together with my hands being the dark black and blue, and her being the yellow, so that the yellow didn't get too messed up.

Jeffrey Macklin: Yeah, totally. I-I was in very blessed to say I was in Paris back in May and I went to a concert, and in the, in the venue of the

concert there was like an ante room where they were doing weird art stuff. And on this night, there was a girl from Paris University who I spoke to was projecting some videos from the YouTube, and then she was also performing. do, it was a bit of a performance art thing. She had chapbooks, and I bought both of her chapbooks. I didn't buy anything in Paris except five books, but I bought two of her chapbooks, and it's like you're talking about. It's first of all, it's designed interestingly it's probably just photocopied. It's perfect bound. But then, all through it, she's hand tipped in images with stickers. Hand wrote messages and notes and like just hand, the hand uniqueness of each one circled words is-is-is unfathomable, but I don't know how many she made, but it must have taken days.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I did a very small print run of ten books for a story of mine, and I hand sewed different symbols onto different pages.

Jeffrey Macklin: Exactly!

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jeffrey Macklin: These are, these are like, everyone is unique by far.

Tamara Thompson: That's so interesting. And I think that's what makes it so exciting is the amount of possibility. And like, if you can think of a way to do it, you can do it.

Jeffrey Macklin: Yes, exactly, yeah. And also, you know, when I first got my press, I didn't know dick all about what I was doing. I didn't know how to set type and locking into a press. But I, you know, found a woman in Kingston who spent the day showing me. But also, YouTube shows me anything I want to learn. You know how to bind a book, whatever I can just learn on my own if I want to, though I do take workshops. But the Internet is an equalizer as well. It's just, all the information is there. You just have to look for it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I'm gonna ask our next question here, which is very broad. So, take this in whatever way you'd like. Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way?

Jeffrey Macklin: I like to think it did more than it does. Big corporate world and did shareholder dividends or king capitalism sucks. I feel like there's this little voice of small press like a fist shaking that's never going to go away, but so I don't think it's-it's always going to be super niche. But I love that community. I really align with it. And I, my values are those values so. But it is always going to be niche. I don't know if the widespread people will ever know that it exists. I mean, you go to like Dream Zine in Toronto, and yes, eight hundred people will go through the door on a Saturday, but that's pretty small.

Tamara Thompson: So, in comparison to how many people actually live in Toronto itself, not even the GTA.

Jeffrey Macklin: Exactly. Yeah. So, I mean, it's niche. And that's okay. I don't think it's ever going to be a big, famous thing. Everything has its



ebbs and flows. But I think, I think there is a revival. I mean, I read about just as a revival books are—are a revival, you know, small press or independent bookstores have grown forty percent since 1990 or 2019 in the US, forty percent growth. That's significant. Like, I don't think the printed page is going anywhere soon. I don't like, I only know one person that's ever had an Amazon, whatever it is. You know people want to hold books in their hand, so we'll always make books.

Tamara Thompson: I think the thing that is really driving people now is there such a world of artifice, artificiality with AI and everything. And because we're getting so advanced in those areas. I think people really want to hold something physical that they can see was made by a human. And I feel like even those little mistakes that regular publishers make which some people would be like, huh! They forgot the apostrophe after the and. I think people will come to love those little things a lot more, and not see them as a lower thing, because it'll be seen as a human touched this.

Jeffrey Macklin: Absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: I think that things that are created by people will become even more sought out by the average consumer and the average person on the street because they'll feel that loss of it, and they'll want it.

Jeffrey Macklin: Yeah, I—I mean, the AI is just becoming such a game changer. I mean, it's—it's radically, you know, we talk about how fast things change in the world but in the—the that window of change is—is closing all the time. It seems like the—the iterations of how things work are changing in a faster process all the time. And I don't know where AI gonna be, where that's gonna leave us in two or three years. I mean, it feels like in the last eighteen months it's like blown stuff out of the water.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: So, but.

Tamara Thompson: I agree.

Jeffrey Macklin: Like you're absolutely right that people want keep things from people they know, but also things they know that somebody cared and put their hand to.

Tamara Thompson: I have a lot of students who are worried about AI specifically like comic artists students. I also teach comics and graphic fiction and a lot of them are like, will publishers want to take me on? And I'm like one hundred percent. They hate this thing for starters. But the other thing, too, is, is people crave that handmade-ness. So even if your art isn't worthy of being in a gallery, or if your sense of like body in proportion isn't one hundred percent. If it feels like a human mistake, people will enjoy that part more. Like, I show a lot of my students Drawn & Quarterly text, because I'm like, this is work that is published. And look at this art. It is so expressive and unique.

Jeffrey Macklin: Yes.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jeffrey Macklin: Drawn and Quarterly store in Montreal is amazing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, just fantastic stuff. So, what do you think this kind of publishing offers that other types of publishing can't, and like maybe vice versa?

Jeffrey Macklin: Well, I think again it's, you know, you can make a one-off book, or you can make ten of very easily where, if you wanted. I don't know how it works. I have a sense of how it works. You write your story, and you shop it around, right? You shop it around and maybe nothing comes of it. Maybe it takes five years for something to come to it, but small publishing is just right there and ready to go. So, I think that answers your question. It's kind of cover what we talked about earlier.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah, a lot of this is sometimes a little bit repeating.

Jeffrey Macklin: That's okay.

Tamara Thompson: But I find that people give sometimes more in-depth answers, even if I re-ask the question, I am listening and hearing what you're saying, but I find it so interesting to hear more. Why do you think most small presses and micro presses have to close up shop?

Jeffrey Macklin: I think it's mostly because the-the person who owns it has died or is ill. I mean, that's what that's happened a bunch of times in the last couple of years. Presses have folded just because the people who ran them can't do it anymore. I mean, I feel like even Gaspereau, I just heard that Gaspereau has been sold.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: Steve's is staying on for another year, and then it's gonna change hands. I have no idea what that means. But that's the first time I've heard. Like a Porcupine's Quill, the fellows in the hospital. So, the whole thing is dead. The whole business is gone. When people die or they can't produce anymore then the-the work stops. Gaspereau, I'm interested to hear how what happens out of that and what he does next, for sure. But I can't imagine he's taking a break from the whole thing. But who knows? Have you ever been to the Gaspereau Wayzgoose?

Tamara Thompson: No, I haven't.

Jeffrey Macklin: Oh, man, you should go to that one. It's always a banger.

Tamara Thompson: I'm actually talking to Andrew on Thursday, I believe.

Jeffrey Macklin: Oh, cool! Wow! You're really covering everything.

Tamara Thompson: I'm, I am very limited in my time, I have till the end of July, and I'm asking anybody who will listen.

Jeffrey Macklin: Sounds good. Andrew will talk your ear off, that's for sure.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. How and why do you still keep your press going?

Jeffrey Macklin: Because I still have things to say. I can't imagine not, I love it. I love standing at the press. It's way nicer than sitting at this computer.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: So those three reasons alone. I got things to say.

Tamara Thompson: Something great. I think that's an excellent reason. And if you still have things that you wanna create.

Jeffrey Macklin: Yes.

Tamara Thompson: Why-why stop?

Jeffrey Macklin: Yeah, exactly. I-I told my children. You know they'll someday throw everything I own it out-out in the garbage. It'll go in an auction or something. But I filled sketchbooks, and I just create all the time. And I've just got things to say, and I'm constantly making. And the press is a huge part of that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. My dad does watercolor stuff, and he's like, well, what are you gonna do with all my watercolor sketch books? And I'm like I'm gonna keep them. They are time lapse of how much he's progressed over time, and it's something he loves so much. And I love going out doing it with him like we go out together sometimes and do pan aire cause that's the way he likes to do it, because he was a biologist. So, and I'm like, I'm not going to get rid of those things. Those are memories, but also it's really cool to see the evolution of his art, so-

Jeffrey Macklin: Yeah, totally. And I don't think-

Tamara Thompson: So, those things aren't going anywhere.

Jeffrey Macklin: They won't throw out the artwork but they're definitely not gonna have a need for a printing press. I can't imagine them taking it over. So that's the other thing about your previous question is, I don't see a lot of like family passing along kind of action out there.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah. So, like, what do you do with the family farm or the family grocery store?

Jeffrey Macklin: The family printing press usually just goes up, goes up on marketplace for sale, or it gets melted down, I guess.

Tamara Thompson: Hopefully not melt-it down.

Jeffrey Macklin: Hopefully not.

Tamara Thompson: Your press is beautiful.

Jeffrey Macklin: But it has happened a million times. There's so many, few presses in North America than they used to be.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's something you wish people knew about Canadian publishing like something that the public you'd hope they would know?

Jeffrey Macklin: I think just the, I think that a book making doesn't get the credit that painting does or those other high, more high-profile art-art things. When people think, oh, I'm going to get a book of wood engravings by Wesley Bates. I mean, it is a mind-blowing book of wood engravings by Wesley Bates, and it's a modern-day thing but I don't think it gets the same cat-or has the same cachet as an oil painting, or a maybe a dance performance, or the same visibility.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's definitely true for the visibility part.

Jeffrey Macklin: Like the-the forum, the public forums for showing these kinds of things there's, not like here in Peterborough, we're lucky to have two art galleries, a public gallery and an artist run center. But even if you look at what they do. The books are like a super niche, even in what they do. They don't hardly ever talk about them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: The odd time the publication, but it's a very small part of a public galleries persona.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Jeffrey Macklin: So, there's no like other than maybe like, Drawn an Quarterly would be like, that's the that's the Church of Zines, or Book church of graphic novels.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: You know what is the church of small press Wayzgoose at Grimsby, probably but it only exists one day a year or this Ottawa small press fair. That's the church of small press as well.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, or the Meet the Presses or Ampersand's putting on one this year, too.

Jeffrey Macklin: Exactly. But I, it's not around, like-you can't go to Toronto and go to the small press store, museum slash whatever anytime you want. You gotta pick your days. It's just different. It just is different in that echelon of artistic pieces, I guess, or substances, or whatever.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What's something important about D.I.Y. history that you wish people knew?

Jeffrey Macklin: D.I.Y. history . . . not pertaining to books?

Tamara Thompson: It can be. Again, totally interpretive to you.

Jeffrey Macklin: I don't know. I think that innately people have always wanted to make things, and I think, luckily for us, books are a relatively easy thing to make. If I wanted to make a wooden bench I would struggle immensely if I wanted to carve my own gravestone, I wouldn't have a clue. I wouldn't, it would take me decades to figure it out. But these-these things are available, and I use them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: That's what people they people do innately want to. Everybody's got a hobby. Everybody's making something but it's usually like kind of a low barrier to entry stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Right. What's something that you wish people knew about your own history? And again, this is, open to whatever you wish to-to-to share.

Jeffrey Macklin: I-I find, I-I think it's always been kind of a struggle to get people to understand where I'm coming from.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jeffrey Macklin: I'm not a fine press person. I'm not George Walker, who's printing pristine copies of his wood engravings in a pristine book that sells for five thousand. So, I'm not that and I'm not making all, I do make up zines, but I kind of use the same mechanics of what George Walker would use and what Gaspereau would use. But I'm, I-I would draw more inspiration from someone like Amos Kennedy, who is a printer in Detroit I, so I call myself, I use words as visual triggers and a, but I print them in a in a very proletariat way. I'm not fussed about details. That much, I registration is not-not as important to me. It's more about putting ink on paper.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: Like we touched on that earlier. But it's definitely I feel like I'm a printer of the proletariat. Not that high and mighty, snobby small press thing which it can be. It's totally is you look at green boathouse press, you look at barbarian, these are, these are the epitome of small press. Right? Books that are worth five and ten thousand dollars every one. But it's still using the same mechanics that I use in my kitchen.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jeffrey Macklin: Just a different take.

Tamara Thompson: Any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording?

Jeffrey Macklin: I don't think so. I think we covered it. But I may think of things, and I can email you.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fantastic. I'd love that.

Jeffrey Macklin: That's probably the best route to go.

Andrea Martineau

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is June 9<sup>th</sup> the time is 7:41 p.m. and just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview. This interview is for small press and author.

Andrea Martineau: My name is Andrea Martineau. I'm the executive director at Jack Pine Press, as well as a poet and fiction writer. I live in Regina, Saskatchewan on Treaty 4 Territory and Jackpine Press operates primarily on Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, on Treaty 6 Territory.

Tamara Thompson: And your pronouns, please.

Andrea Martineau: My pronouns are she and her.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So just to get the ball rolling, how did you discover like small press and zines and chapbooks? Was there a moment where you're like, oh, wait! This is cool, you know, was there a moment like that for you?

Andrea Martineau: Yeah. I was actually introduced to chapbooks, well, I guess more so, Jack Pine in particular, when I was interning at the Saskatchewan Book Awards. The executive director at the time was Courtney Bates Hardy. She had her, a collection of her poetry published through Jack pine. I believe it's called *Sea Foam* and that kind of got me interested in it. And it's just kind of popped up in all of the different creative circles that I've been in, you know, like, if you go to a poetry slam oftentimes poets will have their own chapbooks for sale and it just seemed like a really lovely, convenient format for poetry.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I one hundred percent agree with that. I-I love reading poetry specifically in chapbooks. I don't know what it is. It's just great. Well, I have ideas, but there's just a magicalness to it. So how long has Jackpine been around? If you can just give me like a general idea there, for about like years.

Andrea Martineau: I think we're around the 30-year mark approximately.

Tamara Thompson: The third or thirty?

Andrea Martineau: Thirty, three zero.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, I just wanted to, like, make sure 'cause I was like three years? I thought it was longer than that. Thank you for the clarification. So, it sounds like you came on later. So, some of my questions are about the press and stuff like that. But if you don't know some of that history, that's okay. If you even just say some of your history with the press? That? would be appreciated.

Andrea Martineau: Sure!

Tamara Thompson: So do you know why the press started. How that came to?

Andrea Martineau: Yeah, it was started by Tim Lilburn, Sheri Benning, Jennifer Still, Heather Benning, Rosalie Benning, and Helen Marzolf and just kind of run as an editorial collective. That like I-I can only presume because I haven't spoken to them myself about it, but I can only presume that based on their extensive work, that it came about because of a passion for poetry primarily, and also for handmade books. And they just kind of ran with it. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Cool. So, what is the press's like editorial philosophy, or maybe goal? It's the like, maybe, like a bit of a mission statement kind of idea.

Andrea Martineau: For sure. We are looking to, I guess, give you an existential crisis about what is a book? So, are looking for projects that really push the boundaries of, you know, what is this actually a book? While at the same time championing just like excellent writing. That's just so well done, so crisp, so intuitive. And yeah, combining those two into something that is a unique and limited-edition experience.

(Technical issues occurred.)

Andrea Martineau: Yeah, I think that summed up, I guess, what the goal is.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I think it's really cool, like, I've seen some of the stuff that you've done on your website and, like, what like you guys are doing have done, and it's really interesting. So, I'm really glad I was actually able to talk to someone who is a part of that because I think a lot of the stuff that you guys do is really interesting and really creative. So yeah, I, I can understand why that goal is-personally, I love your goal. I love having the creativity and pushing things outside of the bounds, and really playing with the idea of what a book is, I think that's super fun. So, you were talking a little bit about the types of like genres and stuff that you publish. You were saying mostly poetry. But could you like talk a little bit more about that. And like, why, you guys like specifically publish that kind of stuff because you talked a little bit about it, but I just want to get a little more detail.

Andrea Martineau: I can't speak necessarily for the press historically, but in my own personal experience the chapbook is a format that just goes so perfectly hand in hand with poetry. I think it was Jim Johnstone has a book and I'm blanking on the name. It's like *Small Presses in Canada* or something like that. And in it-

Tamara Thompson: *Fold, Staple*, like *Print*, right? *Print, Fold, Staple* something. Yeah, I own it. It's good. I know the exact book you're talking about. It was one of the few I actually used as an academic kind of source when I had to explain my project.

Andrea Martineau: Yeah, it's, and like, I completely agree with his philosophy that, like that chapbook format is just like the perfect little envelope for a poetic idea. And that's not to say that, you know, it can't lend itself to other genres like we have, we have had folks who have gone more of maybe, like a memoir route or a hybrid route, or even a short fiction route. Poetry seems to be the most popular one. I think, just



because it's so popular within poetry circles, whether it's spoken word or written. It's just kind of goes hand in hand, whereas it might not be the norm for other genres per say.

Tamara Thompson: I feel like for the most part, it's other poetry or more experimental types of fiction. Oh, Hello, (cat technical difficulties). Sorry I got distracted. But yeah, I understand the idea that poetry is like this perfect encapsulation. It feels just like as a reader, I feel like I can sit with the work and go back to it more frequently, and don't get me wrong. I have my collections that I love, but sometimes I'll read a collection and be like I feel like this could have been tighter.

Andrea Martineau: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And I feel like chapbooks really can be like they're so poignant and like again, I've I think I've quoted this thing to ad nauseam at this point but it was Jamie Kitz and Emma Rhodes both said that not every album has to be a concept album, but a lot of chapbooks sometimes have a bigger concept. And that's just fun.

Andrea Martineau: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I love the comparisons with music. Yeah, so I don't know how much you know about, like, all of the process of, like, how you actually like get a book from submissions to like production and into people's hands? But whatever you do know, I would love to know.

Andrea Martineau: For sure, ours is very, pull yourself up by your bootstraps type of production, I guess. So, our authors or creators, or whatever artistic title they decide to go by, they come to us with their concept, and they have to ideally send us a prototype so that we can see exactly how they plan to build this book. So, I guess our press's function is a unique version a lot of others in that the author is the one who is making the work themselves. And we're kind of helping with that process; whereas other presses they are the ones doing the actual bookmaking or the actual printing, stapling, folding all that jazz. So, it really depends on what type of book it is. So, we help along the way in terms of offering, you know, like artistic, an artistic sounding board, to bounce ideas off of, or to make recommendations for vendors and suppliers and materials wherever we can. We provide editing, primarily copy editing. Less or so substantive editing for the project. And then we also provide funding, of course to the creator to create these limited-edition chapbooks, and then we carry on with the marketing and the promotion and the launch of them eventually, and then kind of take over in terms of selling that chapbook from then on. So, it's-it's really different, depending on what project the author has in mind for some of them. It's they're working you know, with a visual artist who does prints who might be helping with it, or with a illustrator or graphic designer. For some of them they are a multi faceted multimedia, artistic creator, and so they're doing a lot of the art themselves. In addition to the actual book making. Yeah, we're-we're pretty open ended, which can be intimidating. But I think, allows for a lot of creativity. And I guess challenging of norms.

Tamara Thompson: So how do you decide what people, you're gonna like work with because you're not technically making books? But you are aiding and helping with a lot of the process of it. So how do you like make those decisions?

Andrea Martineau: For sure our board is, we're kind of still a working collective of sorts, though they officially function as a board, and they act as the editorial board as well. So, we take all of our submissions, and we flag, which ones, you know, check the boxes in terms of excellent writing, a feasible yet innovative project plan. Is this feasible within the budget that we're allowed to support them with? And then also, in terms of what we've previously published. So, we wanna make sure that we're publishing something different each and every year. So, if there is something quite similar to like something we've recently published, we might go a different route. Essentially, it comes down to our board. We are the ones who make the decisions, and they come from a variety of creative professional backgrounds. We have folks who we have actually two previous executive directors who are still on the board, which is great for that longevity of knowledge. But we have folks who have done like their MFAs in creative writing. We have folks who are visual artists. We have folks who have worked in arts, and then people who work at, you know, like paper stores. We have a bookstore owner on our board, so it's a good variety of bookish people, I'd say.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, a mix.

Andrea Martineau: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fair enough. So, you talked a little bit about like, where you sell the books. But do you sell them online, markets like, where and how do you actually sell these things?

Andrea Martineau: Yeah, we sell them online at [jackpinepress.com](http://jackpinepress.com). We also are very fortunate that one of our board members, Amy Beth, she owns Perryton books in Saskatoon. So, we do have an in-person, brick-and-mortar store, where people can go and like feel the books and touch the books and admire the books and buy the books, which I think is something that's nice. Because, that-they are something that you need to feel and kind of look at to really, truly appreciate and it'd be hard kind of hard to get that online at times. But we do sell online. And we've shipped them like all across North America. I think we might have even sent some to Europe at some point. But yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I'm always surprised by how many like I've run a chapbook press called Whispering Wick chapbook press. And I'm always surprised how many people from the States and from South America buy chapbooks, had a couple in like Europe, but a lot from like South America, Mexico, United States, and I'm just like I'm not selling as many in Canada as I am to like complete other parts of the world.

Andrea Martineau: Yeah, it's yeah. It surprised me, too. I was actually recently looking into where we had sent books for a final report for one of our funders. And yeah, it is interesting. You can kind of tell, like when there's when we launch a book by a poet because there's a bunch of

sales from their little pocket of the world. But I think, for it has to do with just Canada is we're huge, but we have such a small population in comparison to the State. So, I think that definitely plays into it a little bit.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree. So, you like, definitely do the stuff with like Jack Pine and stuff. But you also do your own creative work right? So, I'm gonna just like switch gears- (technical issues occurred).

Andrea Martineau: -started with reading. I loved reading. I devoured books. My mom got me started on reading super young, and made sure I was at like every library program imaginable. And then that just kind of morphed into wanting to write. Once I hit elementary school grade one grade two, instead of learning how to write and working on stories in class. And it's just kind of kept up since then. So, it's just been kind of I don't know just a part of my-my upbringing, my heritage. Just we love books, and we like reading them. We're like creating them. We do what we can.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, no, I get that. So, have you yourself published any chapbooks, or like? Had any of your work like were published because I was like- (technical issues occurred).

Andrea Martineau: For sure. I haven't published any chapbook, or book length things yet. But I do have a few projects on the go. I have a chapbook length poetry thing, possibly a longer poetry manuscript. And then I'm also working on a psychological thriller. In terms of publishing history. I've had a handful of poems kind of published in the past, decade, I guess. Now. Just kind of here and there. Hodgepodge I haven't published any fiction yet, so I'm a bit green there. But yeah, so I have, I'm trying to think of the most recent thing I think the last poem I had published was Lakota Mar de la Belle Mayor in, oh, I'm blanking. I'll have to send it to you. But yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I really appreciate that. Because again, I try and do as much research before I like I even reach out to somebody. But I would really appreciate like seeing your work, because I like seeing what everybody, like, oh, I've talked to you. I've gotten to know you. I'd like to see your work, you know.

Andrea Martineau: For sure.

Tamara Thompson: And I don't know. I find the people who do this kind of work have some very interesting writing. Maybe that's just personal bias. But-but so you said that you're working on something chapbook length. Why did you choose to make something chapbook length. That is a decision.

Andrea Martineau: I hate writing long things which sounds like a really bad excuse, but I hate writing long things in university, I was always the person submitting like essays that were like several pages too short. I just think my poetry isn't very long winded. I am late sometimes, but my poetry is quite short. So, it just seemed appropriate for the length of the story that I wanted to tell in the I guess depth of the creative project, and I just couldn't imagine spreading it out like right now. It's

a suite of maybe like twenty poems with up to maybe five to ten more on the go, but I can't imagine, you know, providing like fifty more to make it that like full length manuscript level just would exhaust the idea. I think a little too much. So, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I totally get that. And I-I say, it's the editor in me. It's something I even worried. When I got into a thesis program, I'm like hundred pages? That's a lot of pages, and the thing is, is that like, don't get me wrong, I think there are definitely some very good like master's theses out there and PhDs, but I read some of them, I'm like, oh, my God, please get to the point. Like the editor in me is like you didn't need any of this. You said this over here. So, when I was like a hundred pages? I'm very direct, because that's just how I write. Can I do that? And I think I can do it because I've written larger, longer fiction pieces now. So, I have more confidence and the ability to do it. But it's also like I get very much being like, no, I don't need this extra fluff. This is what I wanted to say, I don't need these extra words, and I appreciate that.

Andea Martineau: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I appreciate that in a person because whenever I'm reading, especially students, whenever I'm reading an essay or something I'm like, why? Like, I would have liked it more if you made it shorter. You know this is getting painful now, you've given me nothing except I read the book. Let's make it different, please.

Andrea Martineau: I think, too like for me. I prefer shorter things in in part, because, like as a parent, my reading time is shortened so much now.

Tamara Thompson: Mmm.

Andrea Martineau: So, it's like, if you're getting my reading time like you, it has to be a gem. So, it's kinda just like the most like direct hit of poetry you can get, I guess.

Tamara Thompson: No, I totally get that doing, my masters, I'm so busy and I'm reading things all the time. And I have an app on my phone that gives me web comics. And they're like really short things. And so, it's like I can still be reading but it takes me less than five minutes to read it, and I was like, well time for next week, and it ended on a cliffhanger. I'm so excited for next time but gotta get back to the grind, you know. So, I totally get that bite size things, a lot of people, it drives them crazy because they want to know everything right away, and I'm like, nope, I got my fill. I'm good now. I have things I have to do, next week at this time I will have the time again, but only five min.

Andrea Martineau: Exactly, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: I think the other thing, too, is that, like, personally, I started out in short stories, and I love the art of short stories. I love the art of short stories. I think it's also very Canadian to have that very short thing to like short stories, and there's so much analysis in high schools and stuff. So, I'm like, there's nothing wrong with a good

short story. Sometimes they're better than the full-length books they make you read.

Andrea Martineau: For sure.

Tamara Thompson: Looking at you, *Great Gatsby*.

Andrea Martineau: (Laughs.)

Tamara Thompson: Read it five times. I'm allowed to be upset.

Andrea Martineau: Oh for sure. That's-that's a lot.

Tamara Thompson: It was too much. So, anyway it sounds like you're interested because the next question is, would you work with a small chapbook press again? But like, would you like-it sounds like you're interested in working it with small presses because you're trying to create this manuscript. Would you see this as something for yourself, going forward that you would like to do more often? Not just like with this one manuscript, but maybe other kinds of stuff.

Andrea Martineau: Oh, for sure. Yeah, like, I think it's just a format that just appeals to me as a reader and as a writer, and even from like the like, the publisher arts admin side of things, too. I really like the work that we do. And you know, if that led to work with another press ever in the future. You know it, I-I only see it as a good thing, really. So yeah, I probably wouldn't hesitate to do a project with a small press from either end of the process.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree, there's so there's such interesting things. And when you work with different people, you get such an interesting, collaborative, artistic, just unique thing that can be created into the world. So, this next question- (technical issues occurred). But this next question is, what are some challenges you faced as an author, and you can take that in any direction that you would like to share.

Andrea Martineau: Challenges I faced as an author. I guess there are. There are big things, and there are small everyday things in terms of small, everyday things I would say, finding the time and money to write. I think that's everybody's battle, whether you're working multiple jobs or you're in school, or you have children, or you're a caretaker for somebody else in your family, that does take up a lot of time. So, finding the time to just write the thing can be a challenge. For myself it's been, I guess not a challenge recently, but in the past, you know, finding people to share your writing with and to workshop with can be kind of daunting. When I was in university that was a bit tougher. But now I have some really solid workshop groups. I guess in terms of, umm I guess, learning to better your craft. I think that's usually where money comes into things, you know not everybody has time to do, the timer money to do their master's or to participate in, you know, writing residencies or retreats. So, you know, public funding is a really great and wonderful thing that I've been grateful to take advantage of there. In terms of bigger challenges, I would say that the way people read has really changed. So,

the writing that they're consuming and where they're consuming it, and how they're consuming it, and how frequently they're consuming. It is very different and will only continue to be different. Post-covid, though we're kind of still in Covid, but post height of Covid and with technology, and with the way generation like Alpha and Beta are being brought up. Yeah, I guess so, I guess finding leadership. Aligns with what you're creating and finding that audience is a big challenge. And I guess to one challenge that somewhat directly impacts me. But I would say impacts, maybe others more so is that mentorship can be hard to find, because a lot of folks, especially if you're somebody who is a woman or BIPOC or 2SLGBTQIA+, they're often spread very thin across many creative projects and endeavors, and to be a mentor or find a mentor and be mentored, can, it can be difficult at times. So yeah, that's and spots in I guess, offered mentorship programs, you know, are limited to. So, I guess those would be a handful of challenges that I can think of at the moment.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, cause the other thing, I think, to speaking to the mentorship thing. If you are-you do find a mentor, but they maybe don't understand the queerness in your story and your queer audience, because that's not their experience, or the BIPOC or indigenous experience. It could be kind of a weird mentorship project because they might not fully understand what you're doing, and that can be very frustrating. Or if you're doing something that maybe they don't fully understand, like I've had people be like, well, this is what your story is about, and I go no, what do you-what do you mean? No. And they're like, well, this is your core audience, right? And I'm like, no-

Andrea Martineau: (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: Why do you want young children reading this? What is wrong with you? What, you know? And I find it always very interesting when people will say those types of things to me, because I completely understand where they're coming from with that thought. But it also shows me they completely do not understand what I'm trying to do, so I have to take a lot of what they're giving me with a lot of salt. You know what I mean. So, I think, speaking to that point of you're saying that there's a lot like very few people who are even doing mentorship, and even very few people who would understand some of these other projects. If you fall into this other category, or like these different categories which you know, there might not be a lot of mentorship options for it's not easy. And I think also with like the changing aspect of like readership, and how people consume content and stuff. I teach because I do ta-ing and stuff. And I teach creative writing first year and because my program that I did in undergrad was creative writing and publishing, they always ask me about publishing and stuff like is their writing good and all of this stuff, you know. And I say, well, your writing will never be good, if you're not having fun. Like, if you're not enjoying making this thing, it will never be good, because what is "good" anyway. And it blows their minds when I say that. They're like, well, don't I have to have like a readership or something? And it's like, no, you'll find your readership. But if you don't like what you're doing people aren't gonna like reading it. Or they're gonna figure out real fast that you don't care about the thing that they really care about. And it's not gonna end well. So like, why

make something that you think people will like when you could make something you know you like.

Andrea Martineau: Oh, absolutely and, like, by the time you write the thing that aligns with the trend, the trend will have already come and gone, and like be put to its final resting place. So, you may as well just write what you want, and really. get to know your like genuine readership or genuine like writing community that way I say.

Tamara Thompson: A lot of them are like, oh, but like, I like, there was that whole *Twilight* trend, that happened and everything change and I'm like, no, no, there were books that already existed that then got popular because of it. And then people tried to jump on the trend. And did you hear about any of them? Did you read any of them? No, you didn't.

Andrea Martineau: Yeah.

Tamara Thomspen: No, you didn't. There are very few people who can successfully hop on a trend and actually make it into something. It doesn't happen, don't do. And they're like, oh, but I thought that might be a strategy, and I'm like don't do it.

Andrea Martineau: Nope.

Tamara Thompson: So, to continue our conversation, a little bit more on some, like, challenges like in that relationship or related to that question, I guess, is, what are some challenges that the press has faced over the years that you know about, or that like something that you're like, oh, yeah, that was like an issue for a little bit.

Andrea Martineau: Yeah, I would say something that we have faced recently, and that I think a lot of nonprofits and arts organizations are facing is that people don't have a whole lot of spare time. So, if you're an organization that runs primarily on volunteer hours, finding people who not only have the time to commit without burning themselves out and are qualified to volunteer, can be quite difficult. Another issue that I know a lot of organizations here in Saskatchewan have faced is that oftentimes with these small organizations there is like one person for the organization who's been the executive director or the President for years and years and years and years, and they've really like pushed that organization forward with their whole being. And then, when they retire or move, or seek a new opportunity. So much of that knowledge is gone. So, what's the word, for continuity and leadership. And knowledge sharing, I think, is something that can be quite difficult to manage, especially if somebody has to depart quite suddenly. I'm lucky in that, like both, two of the previous executive directors are still on the board, so I can just text them up and be like, hey, Amy, hey, Delaney, what the heck do I do with this? But a lot of other presses or organizations don't necessarily have that. I think funding is like a perennial want slash need. Things are getting more expensive. I'm sure you've heard everyone talk about how expensive paper is, and.

Tamara Thompson: Umhm.

Andrea Martineau: How, I guess everything is more expensive now within inflation. So that really impacts if you have status quo funding year over year, you're able to do less and less with that money. I guess, for context we used to give our authors slash creators up to \$1,500 to produce their 75 limited edition chapbooks. But we had to jump that up by about a thousand dollars to. So now that we give up to \$2,500 just because paper and materials was getting so expensive that folks weren't able to put together, I guess anything beyond more than just like a stapled, simple, printed thing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrea Martineau: Just because the materials to do something more innovative weren't necessarily available for that price. So yeah, that would, that would be a big one. I'm trying to think if there's anything else. Oh, I guess one that is a challenge for us specifically, is that the art of bookmaking isn't a super commonly known thing. So, finding folks who you know, can put together a book project or even, you know, for us, in terms of who on our board or our staff can do some educational work and outreach work on bookmaking. There don't seem to be many people so getting, I guess, the word out there that this is like such a fun craft to work and to become an expert in is something that's on our to do list for sure. That's something we want to do more of in the next couple of years.

Tamara Thompson: I am- (Technical difficulties occurred.)

Andrea Martineau: Yeah, you need, you need, I think you need all, and like an a proper like book publishing ecosystem like, you do need like-

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Andrea Martineau: Massive trade hits that are like mass produced. But you also do need, like the finely tuned little weird things to, you know, push new ideas forward and to push new voices forward. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I 100% agree. But it, it warms my heart that like when I say that I want to do this course, I hear that other people are trying to do something similar to try and get people interested. So, I love that you guys are like trying to teach and share that knowledge, because I think it is so important. And I feel like, if people actually knew about it and knew how fun it was, they would do it more or participate. or just enjoy the community. And what other artists are making. You know what I mean. So it just makes me so happy hearing that people are doing that kind of stuff like, whether it be like a Prof who does like workshops with like the local library or something I have just-I love hearing about it, and I've done my own Zine workshops, and I've seen how like eager people can get, because I just did it in the Trent library, and I had people walk in being like, hey, I did a pumpkin carving thing, I'm coming here now, and I'm like, well, let me tell you what we're doing, and they just think it's so great, and they've never heard of it before. They just walked in, and they're just having a good time.

Andrea Martineau: Yeah. And I think it's like a, it's something that anybody can do like, even if you're not a writer, or an author. Maybe



you're an artist. And you wanna create a book of your art. Or maybe you just wanna put together like a really cute little family heirloom of sorts that has some of your family history in it. So, I think, yeah, there's space for bookmaking. I any of it really, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, or you're just stressed out. And here's an activity with, you know, paper scissors, glue, you know, a pen, markers fun things, you know, just like a nice like thing to do. That isn't your job, your schoolwork. You know all the other things that actually works your brain, maybe in a different way. I think a lot of people don't understand how important making things can be for their mental health. I-I think it especially, has worked really well and like the student situation, because I think the students who are like yes, calm with the glue stick. And I it was just like seeing them zone in and just to enjoy. And I was like you needed that apparently.

Andrea Martineau: Right? Yeah, it's you get that sense of flow when you're doing something with your hands that you can't get from scrolling your phone or like watching a television show or something. It's like you have to have that. Hand distraction.

Tamara Thompson: It's a very different way of spending your time. It's like, it's a very different experience. And I think a lot of people are like, well, it's more work. And it's like, yeah. But like, if you have all of the resources there, it can be just like a fun thing to do, like everybody for a period of time, was doing Bob Ross paint-along nights for a period of time before the pandemic. I knew they were really popular at my college people love that stuff. It's just a craft. It's fun.

Andrea Martineau: It doesn't need to be a masterpiece. Just do it and have fun with it. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly. So, just moving right along there. What has this kind of publishing like taught you? Because, like the smaller type of publishing, what do you think it's taught you.

Andrea Martineau: Oh, a lot of things. I guess just it's, taught me to think about my own work in a different way, like when I see some of the projects that, like Jack Pine, has previously published, I guess it just kind of like opened this whole other category of like, oh, maybe I could do something like entirely like off the wall with my own writing. That's a good question. What else have I learned? I think just people's passion for telling stories. I think you like, I've met a lot of people who care a lot about the art that they are creating, or that they are like stewarding. And I guess just kind of seeing that like genuine desire to create a wonderful, beautiful thing even if they're not getting paid for it or not being paid much for it. And like the time they put into making it a very finely tuned, detailed, beautiful thing. It, I guess it pushes me to do a bit better, too, in the work that I do and then again to just kind of tie back to the arts ecosystem thing. It's just reiterated to me like, for example, in my day job, I work for an arts funder and get to work with our many wonderful publishers here in the province, and just kind of seeing where you know, the micro presses fit in with the small presses, with the bigger presses and the different academic presses and the different

language presses, and it's like, it all fits together. It's like a very wonderful puzzle piece. So, getting to explore that little puzzle piece has been just very rewarding, and helped give me a different outlook of, like the other pieces of the puzzle, too.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I agree. Yeah, so kind of like going off, of what you just said, what does this type of smaller publishing offer that maybe, like traditional publishing can't offer, and maybe vice versa?

Andrea Martineau: I think that it offers creators more control. And I do think that it's important for authors to learn how to relinquish control over their works, especially if they do want to publish and succeed. But I do also think that for those who are craving a more curated experience of producing their own work like this is the perfect spot for them. It's like, if you want, if you have all these grand ideas about like the cover design, and like the paper, weight, and all this like perfect. This is like the spot for you. And I think, too, it's something that is beneficial for creators at any stage in their career, because then I think it gives them a better appreciation of the work that you know other publishers might be doing more so for them if they do publish with the bigger publisher, and are the ones making those decisions just to kind of understand, like the typeset and the proofreading, and, like all everything, every step that goes into it. I think it kind of gives them a like. I connect the dots one, two, three, step by step. Look of what others may be doing with their work in the future. And then I would say, too, I guess from the other side of the lens, something that a bigger press might be able to offer more of is, while you might be relinquishing some of that creative control, they might be able to push you farther in terms of reach. So, you are limited to seventy-five copies with us, for example, limited edition. So, there's no such thing as a reprint, at least, at least they don't come along very often. We stick to that limited edition seventy-five. So even if it is wildly popular. It can't go much beyond that. And it-it can be really great for some-some exposure. But for sure, I think, like a larger press, who has the capacity to reprint things, and renew them. You do get a much bigger reach there, too. So, I think there's yeah, there's pros and cons to both. And I think that if you're a smart writer you'd probably take advantage of every single scale of publishing that you can.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so do you think that this like smaller type of publishing in like chapbooks and stuff like that? Do you think that they're important to Canadian publishing, and like, you know, if so, like, yes, why? And if no, why?

Andrea Martineau: Oh, I think for sure they're important to Canadian publishing. I think in part because I guess one incredible thing about the Canadian literary scene is that there's-there's so few people living here, but there are so many different lenses and lived experiences, and I think that this very finely tuned, like personal creation of a book that you can make with like, a chapbook, or, you know, with Jackpine. That is, gonna give you like thy closest, I guess the closest immersion in another person's lens and creative experience possible. So, I think, yeah, I think it is important in terms of, I guess, conveying different, different art

and different lived experiences. And in fostering writing careers. I don't know, there's I have another thought, but it's in the brain fog. So, yeah, I guess I probably can't pinpoint exactly why. But definitely important.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree. And I think the perspective and like seeing very specifically kind of what that like artist, author, poet, was wanting you to see, to feel even, maybe even to smell right? I think it's really interesting. So yeah, I think it's important, because, like, yeah, you don't really get that very specific type of experience and traditional publishing.

Andrea Martineau: Yeah, and there's something-something thrilling about. Oh, this is like a chapbook. There's only seventy-five of them, you know, in the world, and I got it because I went to some event, and I met this really cool person like I, it's tied so much to memory, too, in reading these small little creations that or you know you bought it from your friend that you e- transferred on Facebook for it like it's very grassroots. Very, it's, it's unique and fun, I guess, to swap chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, very personal, very human, like that human like tactile, like, not made by AI or robot. And you know, it's not. Yeah. So, you can take this next question in whatever way you desire. Interpret it, however, you'd like. Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way. Like this type of smaller publishing?

Andrea Martineau: I think so. Canada, I think, in the big scheme of things just again, because of population, size, and history compared to the, you know, like the US for example: we are quite a bit smaller, but it's not to say that what we are producing is any lesser than so I think, like smaller print runs, I guess, kind of reflects our smaller population. And just like, I guess, our or multiculturalism to, I guess unique experiences are reflected in that. Sorry. Can you say the question again? I kind of wandered off the path.

Tamara Thompson: It's totally okay. Does this type of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way.

Andrea Martineau: Yeah, I think those would be the two, the two main things. And I think to at least my experience of being like a prairie poet is that I think, I guess the- the land in which you are lucky enough to live on really, place influences Canadian writing quite a bit, and I think that this is can come out quite clearly in smaller publishing like this. And so you're kind of getting these teeny, tiny little glimpses into different geographical locations. So, I guess because a chapbook can really be anything in Canada can really be anything. It's you've got lots of options.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I really like that question because I like the different ways, people interpret it because, like people will sometimes be like, well, what is even Canadian in Canada. And I'm like, oh, trust me! I had to define what a Canadian was for my like to be able to talk to people because they were like, what's a Canadian in your perspective and like for this study? And I was like. Ohhhh. What is it, you know, like cause? I

wanted to be able to talk to Canadians who maybe moved away, but did a lot of work here in Canada, or still do work here in Canada, but don't necessarily live in Canada right now, you know. I wanted people who like, live in Canada, but not be originally from Canada to be included. You know, and I was just like I've done my best. I think I came up with a good definition. Joel, my supervisor, oh uuhh, what are you thinking? He said, I think this is the best we're gonna get, because it's like, because in my four years of my whole undergrad degree we tried to figure out what Canadian publishing was we and like Canadian literature, and we never figured it out in four years because our Profs kept asking us and like they didn't have the answers. We don't know, like we have an idea and like general terms. But then you kind of look over there and be like, but what about that specific book? And it's like that doesn't follow what you said over here. And it's like, Damn it! But that's also very Canadian.

Andrea Martineau: Right? I think that's kind of like our motto, too, is like, okay, you know what exactly is a book? And it's like, well, what exactly, is a Canadian like? It's there's so many different ways you can look at it both good and bad, and everywhere in between. So.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree. So, I'm gonna ask a little like, more like on the personal side. Why are chapbooks important to you?

Andrea Martineau: Oh, they're just so special. (Both laugh). I don't know like there's- there's it's so nice to be able to like. I-I equate like a chapbook to an afternoon. So, it's like you can-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrea Martineau: Fit that whole chapbook in an afternoon, and you get that full emotional experience. And it's just a lovely to hold them, and you can like highlight them, and like tear them to shreds and like fold over the-the ears of the page ears of them. And yeah, it's just I just think it's a lovely way to spend your time, and to, I guess, form kind of a weird little bond with somebody who you'll you might not ever meet through their writing. So yeah, they're-they're just fun. They're just lovely. And I think they convey everything from, you know, lighthearted, lighthearted messages to tough truths that people need to hear, and you know what better vehicle for written art than a chapbook.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm! I agree. I-I liked you talking about like the specialness, and like the magic of almost like a chapbook, and like do some about them. So, I do have to ask a little bit more of like the unfortunate side question. A lot of people interpreted that way. But why do you think most small presses and micro presses have to close up shop? Because it is. It is a fact. A lot of them have a hard time staying around, you know.

Andrea Martineau: Yeah, I guess there's-there's so many reasons why. I think that part of it is, you open it during a part of your life, and your time changes, whether your family life changes, or your academic or creative life changes. If you don't have somebody to pass the baton off to then sometimes closing up is the only thing that happens. Burnout is a very real thing among artists, creatives, entrepreneur's, arts

administrators. That's a big facet. I know, for some folks. They sometimes have to set down projects like publishing. So they can focus on their own creative careers, which is totally valid. funding, too. It can be, it can be tough to scrape together funding in a world where inflation is a thing, and it can be tough to make ends meet. Yeah, it's-it's unfortunate. And but I guess the thing I try to like, tell myself, is that you know, when one thing closes, or if a small press closes, odds are, that person is probably still making the art scene a better place in a different way.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrea Martineau: While you might kind of like mourn the death of that little process like, okay, well, they're-they're innovating in different ways now. And that's okay. Gotta let them do that, too. So.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think that's a really good way of putting it. You can still mourn on the facts that this creative thing is gone. But for the most part those creative people are not.

Andrea Martineau: For sure. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, but sorry-I-I just really liked the way that you stated that that's really nice. Like, how is Jackpine been able to keep this going, cause this, this is a press that's been around for quite a while, and like, even if you can't speak to, maybe how it's been able to stay full. Why are you still here doing this thing? You know.

Andrea Martineau: Yeah, I'm quite new to it. I've only been with the press for I wanna say, four or five months now. But I honestly. Just think! It's-it's the people behind it who push it forward. Like, for example, Amy has been with the press for a long time. She was the executive director. She's currently a treasurer on the board, and she, just like-like books, are everything she does like. She owns a bookstore. She did her thesis in something in visual arts. She'd have to explain it. But anyway, she did a visual arts project that involved books, and I think that, like she, people like that are what keep it going is that they believe in the goal of the organization, and they enjoy what they do, and they're good at what they do, and they just.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrea Martineau: Keep pushing it forward. Same with Delane, like they are wildly busy. They like work/founded a lit mag. They just finished up grad school, and they're working another arts sort of job. But they're still volunteering their time and still pushing these projects forward. And trying to make things better. So. Yeah, I think it's just that. At least what I can tell from, like my brief understanding of the history of the press and my knowledge of the people who are still here with the press is that. Sometimes you just luck out, and you are able to pass the baton to the right people. I think to having some understanding, too, like from our funders, like I know there were, there was a time where you know, we did lose a handful of board members. All at once. Just kind of bad timing, and we were maybe a little rockier, but they-they did, you know, try to help us cross that gap together. And so, I think having supports when you do

kind of hit a valley rather than a peak is important, too. Cause if they had pulled their funding, has said, no, like your board is too unstable. We're not going to give you a second chance. Then maybe the press would have folded, but because they said, hey, we want things to kind of, we want to help you right the ship you know, for able to carry on so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, nice. So, we're getting into the last couple of questions here. And these are more just to like, give space for like knowledge or things that you want to share, and stuff like that. But what's something that you maybe wish the public or people knew about Canadian publishing? And again, take that wherever you desire.

Andrea Martineau: Oh, that is a tough one. I would, I guess, Canadian publishing in general, I would say, look beyond the best sellers list. You know, walk into your independent bookstore. There are so many amazing like storytellers that are literally on your front step. But then also take advantage of how everything is so global. Now, like, you know, with online events and all that, also take advantage of cool things that might come your way from other locations. So, I guess what I wish people knew about it is that it's maybe not, the-the limited window that you see in your high school English class, and the best-selling list in the newspaper, it's so much more, and there's like a spot for everybody in it. No matter what you like to read, no matter what you like to write, no matter who you are or what you identify as there's-there's a spot for you somewhere. You just gotta do some digging, so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I-I understand that. And I think that's very true as well is-is that it feels like sometimes more Americans read Canadians than Canadians read Canadians, and it's like, no, we have good literature. We have good poets; we have good people. We have people doing fun, romance things, you know, and like you don't have to like you look overseas and see the world, but also look around you, and you might be surprised.

Andrea Martineau: Right. Yeah, there's-there's a lot right here like even like I, I would see Saskatchewan as an example, because we've got like what maybe a million people. But we have so many writers and so many genres, so many varieties, and like mediums of storytelling, that it's like there's so much right here, and that is replicated in different ways elsewhere, too. So, there's always more to explore.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's something I tell my students as well. I, they always hear about like Margaret Atwood and stuff like that. But one of my personal favorite ones that I'm like, well, if you want to read something that's Toronto a literature and actually feels like the place that it says it's about. Read *Scarborough*. You read that book. That's Scarborough. It's great. It's sad and I didn't super loves some of the endings, but it's multiple characters. It's got a very fun and well rounded, and it feels like Scarborough. And that's amazing, you know, because some of them come up to me, and they're just like, well, like, I kind of want to read stuff about Toronto, but like everything, doesn't feel like Toronto. And I'm like, yeah, cause you're reading the Torontonians. Read Scarborough.

Andrea Martineau: I hear ya, yeah. And I think, yeah, I don't know. It can give you an interpretation of like, where of your place of your location

that agrees with you like I think so many people kind of get, they think of like prairie writing or prairie poets as a certain thing, and I'm like, but it's not like that at all, like there's so much different here. So yeah, I totally hear what you're the Toronto thing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What's something important about D.I.Y press history that you wish people knew. And this could be straight up historical fact or could be just this cool chapbook you saw, because there was only five of them. Not many people know about them, so you can take it in like whatever way you want you to take it big, small. It's just more to give space. This is one of the questions I'd like to ask to give space just for that history, for that knowledge, because so much of it is ephemeral. And it's one of my favorite questions, because I get to hear about really cool things.

Andrea Martineau: Oh, I, I'm kind of like a baby in terms of D.I.Y. books up. I'm very green and new and my background is definitely more so arts admin, than bookmaking. So, I'm kind of learning as I go alongside- alongside our intern, Michelle, I'm kind of. We're learning as we go and putting together, we can share with others. But I would just say that an interesting thing I found in my reading is just how it's like, it's like a thing in every culture, like every culture, has their own twist on books, and if you can explore you know where this method of book binding came from. Where this style came from. It can lead you on some really excellent rabbit holes, and also like a better, like appreciation of folks who might be a lot different than you. So yeah, I would guess I would just say, you know, do some digging and find the, the cultural history of it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I think that's very true. Because it is like the- the desire to create things as a, human things and books have been around for so long. Every place has its own interpretation of it. I think that's a really cool thing to bring up, I guess, because it is true everywhere has its own like little way of doing things. And that's one of the things I actually love about my partner. He's the head of our productions. And one of my favorite things he does is he just researches, because he's a really good researcher. He'll research this medieval book binding method or this or that; we might never use it. But we know it. And it's another thing that we could potentially do. And that's just so exciting because we learn something, but we could also potentially create with that knowledge as well.

Andrea Martineau: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I like your answer to put it in bare bones. Alright! Now we're on to the last question here. What's something that you wish people knew about your history?

Andrea Martineau: My history, or about Jackpine's, history, or?

Tamara Thompson: Your history. It's the hardest question.

Andrea Martineau: Oh, I don't. I don't know. I don't know. Like in terms of writing and publishing. That's a tough one. In terms of my history. I-I guess I don't know. I think people when they read my writing are usually

pretty, I guess surprise when they match the writing to the person. Because I am, I've been told I don't agree with it. I've been told I'm a sunshiny, outgoing person, which I'm I think, I'm can't be, further from, I'm a bit of an introvert, but it doesn't necessarily match up with, like the-the horror or the creepy, or the you know, sad stuff that I write about. And I guess what I would want people to know in terms of that is that you're writing this, your writing can be like a reflection of you, but it can also be something entirely different. It can be like the antithesis of what you are and that's okay. And it's that's your world to play with regardless. So, yeah, I don't know. That's, that's a wishy, washy answer. But I don't know if I can think.

Tamara Thompson: No, I think it's I think it's a really good answer, because I think a lot of people attach a lot of meaning to what writers write to the writer personally like. If they put in a bad guy, we'll say it very generally. Well, was this based off an ex? Is this your mom? No, what do you mean? This man in purple tights? Is not my mother, sorry? I just wrote a character.

Andrea Martineau: Right, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Doesn't all have to like. Not everything's a Taylor Swift lyric guys like we can have separation here. Like all good for the people who do-do things about their personal life. That's cool, but that's not everybody.

Andrea Martineau: Exactly. Yeah, like it's I don't know. Sometimes I, I should be knowing or like. It's not necessarily that serious, you know. Rejection isn't from like a lit mag. It's, it's not that serious. It's nothing personal. Just kinda keep on rolling. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I tell my students that the writers who actually get published are not always the good ones. They're the persistent ones, because they're the ones who try and get better. They're the ones who keep trying. They're the ones who keep submitting because a good writer who never submits. Well, they're not going to be published like there's no point in being good and wanting to be published, but never trying.

Andrea Martineau: Exactly. I-I-I have that argument with friends all the time. They're like, oh, but my- my works not ready to submit. I'm like just fucking. Do it just like I know Yolo is not a thing anymore. But I'm just like YOLO, like, you gotta just send it out.

Tamara Thompson: Just go for it.

Andrea Martineau: Who cares like you sent it out? That's better than not sending it out so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I know I, the term I get so like I use with my students, I'm like, just go all in, like there's no point. Jump in the pool like. Why, why, why not? And they're always just like.

Andrea Martineau: Yeah.



Tamara Thompson: What do you mean? And I'm just like guys. It's not that critical like, come on, man.

Andrea Martineau: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, okay, do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I start recording.

Andrea Martineau: I-I guess the only comment I have to make is that, yeah, people should, people should read small presses. We exist. We're an important part of the ecosystem and there and there's room for everybody, so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's-that's the point I'm also trying to prove in the thesis. So, thank you.

Victoria Mbabazi

Tamara Thompson: Hello. My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is June 28<sup>th</sup>, and the time is 1:23 pm. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview. This interview is for author.

Victoria Mbabazi: Victoria, Mbabazi and my pronouns are they/them. And I- currently I'm in New York, but I am from Windsor, Ontario. Well, born in Windsor, Ontario, grew up in Guelph, and I went to school in Scarborough, so Toronto, GTA.

Tamara Thompson: What presses have you worked with?

Victoria Mbabazi: I worked with Anstruther and a Knife Fork Book and Palimpsest Press.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. And do you have any titles for yourself that you'd wish to share?

Victoria Mbabazi: Title, like the books, titles, or my titles? Sorry.

Tamara Thompson: Your titles.

Victoria Mbabazi: My titles. No, Victoria's fine.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, so just to get this thing started: how did you discover zines and chapbooks in this type of smaller publishing?

Victoria Mbabazi: When I started at University of Toronto, like, my-in undergrad, when I started the creative writing program, like, in my first classes, we had a lot of, like, alumni who had chapbooks coming out and I didn't know what they were beforehand, but it sounded, like, you know, like, an EP and that's kind of how I heard of them, just, like, with many books. And then some of, like, the upper-class men are, like, people who were, like, alumni starting zines and stuff like that. So, I-I'd heard about it just from being, like, in workshop.

Tamara Thompson: Cool. I was much the same. I found about it in undergrad, in a self-publishing course where my professor, Paul Vermeersch said: "Okay, we have to talk about the Amazon stuff. But let's also talk about the cool stuff, you know all the D.I.Y.-"

(Technical issues occurred).

Victoria Mbabazi: I started writing when I was, like-when I was really young. My, I'm-my-me, and my siblings were in a band, and I wrote a- songs, like, in the band. And I started to write poems, like, when I was around thirteen and-and stories I-I always, like, I was always writing somewhat, like, ever since I can like remember. When I started writing, like, professionally, I think that was also an undergrad, like, when I started, like, submitting poems and-and, like, sometimes flash-that was, like, maybe when I was, like, nineteen.

Tamara Thompson: Nice. Cool. I love how you started doing stuff with the band. That's really cool. So why did you choose to publish some of your works as chapbooks? Because it is a decision to, like, make them into chapbooks instead of submitting them elsewhere. So why did you make that choice for yourself?

Victoria Mbabazi: Well, so, for my first chapbook it's called—it's called Chapbook. I was doing my thesis in undergrad with Tisdale, and the thesis at first was vignettes, which are—and they were, like, these little blocks about, like, places or people. And I was getting it, like, you know, sometimes, like, cause I—it's, like, hard to look at all the time. Like, just, like, these blocks, having to write them. They were getting, kind of—I was a little tired, like, by the end of it. So as a joke, I had written No Name brand poems for—for my prof, and he thought it was really funny. And he wanted me—and then he worked, he was an editor at his friend's press Jim-Jim Johnstone. So that's and then he—he asked me to write like six more of them and submit it. And then that became my first chapbook. And then the other one. It's, I think I'm very, like, conceit based. So even with Flip, which is, like, it just flips. Both of them are just, like—the titles are just what they are. But it was music poems, and then, like, poems, and some of those have been submitted in other places. Like, I've had some of those published elsewhere, but those were like to make it into a chapbook. Kirby had asked me who's the publisher of that Knife Fork book after I had done the launch for a Chapbook. They—she really liked the—those poems and she thought it was funny. So, she asked me for this one, and that's how that one what happened.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. I love—I love hearing about, like, the stories and origins of things, and like what you actually created. I knew we were gonna get into it later, but that's so fun, like, No Name poems.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah, let's.

Tamara Thompson: That's the kind of stuff I get. My—I try and get my students—because I'm a TA—I try and get them into that kind of stuff. I'm like poetry is not just sonnets. Look at this.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And we're like 'Whoa!' And I'm like, "Right."

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah, that's exciting, like, that—like, being able to make them excited about, like, things that are a little silly. 'Cause I feel, like, yeah, sometimes it can get kind of boring talking about poems.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Victoria Mbabazi: For students.

Tamara Thompson: Well, I think the other thing, too, is—is that they have such a strict idea, because elementary school and high schools given them such a strict idea of what poems can be. And you expose them to this whole new world into, like, whoa, wait, that's considered a poem? I'm like, yeah, it is. It— isn't that cool? And they're just like, "yeah." It's

literally the reason why I kept-I have so many people around me, because, you know, being in my twenties it's hard to be an optimist and I say it's their excitement about this thing I care about. And their joy that gives me so much optimism because I'm looking at these people who are discovering these things, because let's just say in my friend group it's hard to beat off negativity. And they're like, "How do you do it?" And I'm like them, that little eighteen-year-old, that kid. She's, yeah- they're excited. And they wrote a poem about, like, the different years that they had stacked in their, like, dorm room, and how they felt about it, and how it felt, like, the great wall of, like, insurmountable expectations. And I'm, like, cool, you know?

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Sorry again. I told you I couldn't help myself.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah. No. Yeah. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, I-I have to ask, like, would you work with small presses again? Would you keep doing this thing of making this thing we call a chapbook?

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah, chapbooks are really fun. I think if I were to do another chapbook, I think it'd be more fun to do it collaboratively, collaboratively, like, with someone else, like, a double chapbook. I-we did do-I did do one. Oh, also, I guess, like Collusion books had like a collaborative chapbook. It was like virtual with Nora T. She's like-like a photographer and, like, she directs movies and stuff, like, she, like, films and I, like, and that, that's really fun. I don't know if I would do it again with myself unless I have, like, a very, like, niche little idea. I think that chapbooks are great, for, like, concepts. I know some people just do, like, poems in a book, but I like when a chapbook, it's like-like-like it has, like, a story, like, something. It's doing specific-like, a little small story it's doing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's something that could only be delivered in the chapbook form kind of deal.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I love that kind of stuff, too.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah. No, I think it's really fun. And, also, I think it's fun, like, as you were saying, like, for, like, students too. Like when they're thinking about poems. When they get, like, those little ideas, because then they can think of anything.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah-yeah. We one hundred percent agree. So, what has this type of smaller publishing taught you?

Victoria Mbabazi: I think you have more-in a lot of ways you have more freedom to think about, like, what, like, if you-you're working, like, you're working more collaboratively. It's more community oriented for collective, which is nice. It's, like, a-it's, like, your first time,

like, learning how to, like, own your work and, like, your voice, which is nice. I think, also, it can be, I think, somewhat frustrating if you don't like, you don't always like the results, because, like, you know, they don't-(technical issues occurred). Everyone doesn't have that much money to, like, make what you want or how you imagined it. But it's, like, your first time you're, like, writing a book. So, it's, like, a really good first step into that, too.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I-I one hundred percent agree. Do you think? Sorry I messed up my words there. What does this kind of publishing offer that traditional publishing can't quite offer, and maybe vice versa?

Victoria Mbabazi: I think the freedom part. Like, if I'm thinking about, like, my-and also, it's, like, you're creating something and it's mostly for your friends. So, it's not as intimidating that, like, as, like, big publishing. And, like, you know, like, other writers who are like you, you get to meet other writers like-like the first time you're, like, actually, like, talking to writers who are, like, in a place of, like, starting their careers with you. Also, you get, like, those-like, when the press has, like, a launch for, like, multiple writers, that's really nice because you get to meet other writers in that-that you're working with. I think that, yeah, it's, like, just like, you're less worried to be more experimental. You're just less worried about how it's going to look. And if people are going to like it, this is, like-this little-it's, like, most, like, fifty copies of this little book that's just for people who in your city, like, really is about in the city you're in. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, you can take this question wherever you like and answer it however, you want. But what are some challenges that you've faced in publishing as like an author-challenges that you faced as an author/poet, you know?

Victoria Mbabazi: I think, I think, because like publishing is very white and-and like my poetry I think, is very sapphic, I think. And I work, I feel, like, I've worked with a lot of, like, queer men. Or, like, or, like, men in general, or white men in general. And I think, like, sometimes, you don't always know what I'm talking about (laughs), and, like, I have to explain, like, this is, you have to understand this. If you don't understand this, I know that there's, like, the person I'm talking to knows what I mean and, like, usually it works out. That's all, like, I think that-that's like one of the challenges being like-like, just, like, having my point of view is seen as, like, unique. So, they think it's not coherent, but it is, because I know who I'm talking to.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I get that sometimes, too, where people are, like, "But why does everything have to be gay?" I'm like, "Well, you know,

maybe this is just what I'm having fun with. And why does everything also have to be straight? Like, come on, man."

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah, it's, like, it's just good.

Tamara Thompson: Like, leave me alone.

Victoria Mbabazi: Well, just, like, that's my life, like that. Everything is, I don't know what it's like otherwise, so.

Tamara Thompson: Well, like, I'm sitting here, and I'm, like, what's wrong with my gay cowboy, like?

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: He's, like, he's discovering himself, and he's learning that he's not maybe just a "he" and maybe a "they/them." And maybe that's fine. Also, they fight monsters, like, and they're discovering themselves like it's fine.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah, I think, yeah—I think during the pandemic—and it wasn't even really an issue it's just like something I had to explain—we're just, like-like, a lot of, like, queer-like, a lot of sapphics were discovering they were non-binary and, like, their relationship to, like, lesbianism, or, like, you know, like, just being sapphics in general. And there and I had written a line about that, and they were, like, "Is this like-like empirical? And I was, kind of like, it's just, like, we were inside and all online, like, I, "It's not. It's like, and you're old. So, you don't know what I'm talking about but, like, yeah, but I promise you this makes sense."

Tamara Thompson: This will connect with who would connect with this work like you. You don't have to worry about it; like, they'll get it.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah, like, yeah, if you don't get it, don't worry about it. It's not about you.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's what I also have issues with. Like experiments, like—I write some experimental fiction, too. And people are, like: "What does the corn-starch goop mean?" And I'm like, "I'm just referring to myself in that way. And it makes sense." You know, the people who also have body dysphoria and feel like they have to fit into all these molds. They'll get it. They'll get it.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah, they'll get it. It's just, like, I have to start it, so you won't get it. But I know who I'm talking to.

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I feel that hardcore. Okay, are chapbooks important to you?

Victoria Mbabazi: Are chapbooks important to me?

Tamara Thompson: Sorry, that's supposed to say: why are chapbooks important to you?

Victoria Mbabazi: I think experimentation is the biggest part of a chapbook. I think that you should be able to just, like, I think they should be as weird as possible, as, like, unique as you want them to be. I think it's, like, the—because you have so much freedom to, like, make something, because, like, no one's worried about eyes on you, that you should really try to be like who you want like, to—to cement your voice in that way. It doesn't need to be great. So why don't you just do what you want? I think that's why chapbooks are so important, because people worry about their first book. And, like, they're, like, you know, but, like, I think that that's the most important thing, just doing what you want. That's why they're important, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not?

Victoria Mbabazi: I do think they are. I do think, because, I think, that's how, like, most writers in Canada start. And they—they also—also how they meet. I think. And for this, poets specifically, like, they meet, a lot of other poets. And, like, they go up in—in their work, like, you know, like further into publishing because of chapbooks. I think for me, like, when I started publishing, I like, the, like Anstruther was my first publication and then that's how I met Kirby and Kirby published my second. It was a double chapbook, and then, because of that double chapbook on, my first book is coming out like in, in fall. So.

Tamara Thompson: Congratulations.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's awesome. I mean, it's awesome that you're doing stuff in the chapbook world. And, like, from what you're telling me even about your chapbooks. So cool. Like, so, congratulations on getting, like, another book.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So umm, this next question is one that you could take anywhere you like, interpret it, break it, have fun with it. Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way?

Victoria Mbabazi: Maybe, I think more—I think it's really city based. I think it reflects more, like, the little regions in Canada. Depending on where the press is and who they're publishing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, cool. I love how people answer that question, because I love all the different kinds of responses it can get, because it can be interpreted in so many different ways. But yeah, I think it's very true that it reflects a lot of the city things, because a lot of chapbook presses also—like, if they're based in Montreal, they're going to publish Montreal people.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's something that you wish maybe the public or the average person knew about Canadian publishing?

Victoria Mbabazi: I don't, I don't know. Is that okay? (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: No, that's totally okay.

Victoria Mbabazi: I never thought about that ever.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, no, that's okay.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That's totally okay. It's Canadian publishing itself as a weird—is a weird concept, like trying to do, like, in my undergrad, they kept trying to be, like, what is Canadian publishing? And we still didn't figure out even after four years. And I—I don't think.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah, yeah, I—I can't really think of what I would want people to know. I think that's—yeah. I just—that it exists. (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: A very common answer. I wish people knew that it was here. Very fair. Do you want to speak more to that or are you good to move on.

Victoria Mbabazi: I think that's good. Like, yeah, (laughs) that's it.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough. Okay? So, I do have to ask the little more sad question: why do you think small presses and micro presses have to close up shop? Because it is true, a lot of places have to—have to stop doing this—this thing.

Victoria Mbabazi: I've got enough money. I guess, like, there's just, like, no money. And it's also—it's sad—I think it's sad, because, like, I think, like, a lot of it is, like, little projects with friends. So, it's, like, something, like, you know—it's, like, passion projects. That's—which is what's really cool about chapbooks. It's, like, totally passionate about making, like, little cool things. So, like, that's why a lot of presses have to close off shop, because there's not enough money, or they—they don't get grants. And then what's cool about Canada, I guess, so—in more places than, like—like, well, more so than in the US—that they have a lot of grants for, like, Arts Councils, and, like, at the Arts Council for things like this. But still not enough to keep—it's always enough to keep things going.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's so—we're coming into the home stretch here. And these are very, like, just interpreted kind of questions. So, you can take them wherever you want these last two, something important about maybe D.I.Y. press history that you wish people knew about. It could be larger history. And it can also be, like, this specific book that you saw that you wish more people knew existed because there was only, like, five



of them. But they were really neat, right? Some examples, so take where you please.

Victoria Mbabazi: What? What, like books I wish people saw?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, like, kind of like D.I.Y. stuff. So basically, this is just an area for people to share about, kind of, the chapbook history and the things that the community makes, because so much of it is there and then gone, right? So, I kinda like giving space for people to share.

Victoria Mbabazi: I think, I think one that closed down was Frog Hollow Press, I don't-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah, they made, they really made, really cool books. They published my friend Ryan, who has a couple of cool chapbooks. The one I think they-they just had one that was like ghosts. And then, like, it was about grief. And then this one. And then the one with Frog Hollow Press was also about grief as well, they mean. And, like, their chapbook press is full of, like-I can't think of any specific books right now, even, like-but like, I do think ...oh, and Anstruther has manifestos as well. They publish chapbooks and manifestos. So yeah, I think, like, that-that would be my answer. I can only think press and like people-wise. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: No, that's still really great answers, because I didn't know about, like-I knew about Anstruther manifestos because I talked to Jim. But I didn't know about some of the stuff that, like, Frog Hollow did, because it's hard to find stuff, like, unless I was there, or I've talked to people who knew about it. I don't know about that.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That's a great answer, yeah.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That's my point, mainly. So, this is the last question. And it's the hardest question for most people. What's something about your history that maybe people should know about?

Victoria Mbabazi: My history.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Victoria Mbabazi: That's so, that's so vast. I'm not sure-I guess whatever they ask me. (Laughs). And if I feel like sharing, yeah. I don't know. Yeah, I-but I-there's a lot to know, a lot going on right. I do really-I think, well, yeah, history-wise, I can't think of anything specific unless somebody asked me it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's fair. I just, like, giving space. If people made this really cool thing and they want to share about it, or one aspect

of themselves, because again a lot of this is lost and unless asked or given space for. So.

Victoria Mbabazi: I don't know if a Chapbook is still findable. I know it's on Anstruther, but it's—I think that both of the chapbooks are sold out. So that would be cool to know. But everything for me is very, like—like right now. I'm, like, really excited about what I'm, like, my book, like— (technical issues occurred) but its astrology based. So that's cool. That would be a cool thing, for people to know.

Tamara Thompson: Can you say who is publishing it? I understand if you can't but.

Victoria Mbabazi: Palimpsest Press.

Tamara Thompson: Okay.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah. So that's also Jim with Palimpsest Press. Yes.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, I just wanted to ask. Because all of the things that you've been talking about when it comes to your writing and stuff I—I'm interested in. So, it's kind of important, if I'm interested in it, to know where to find more of it.

Victoria Mbabazi: Yeah, for sure.

Tamara Thompson: Do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I end the recording.

Victoria Mbabazi: No, no, I think yeah, that was great.

Tamara Thompson: Okay. Thank you.

Amanda Merpaw

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson. The date today is June 5<sup>th</sup>, the time is 2:57 p.m. and just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out with in a week of this interview, as that is the deadline. This interview is for author.

Amanda Merpaw: Amanda Merpaw. My pronouns are she and her. I'm originally from Ottawa, Ontario, but I'm currently based in Toronto, Ontario. I am a writer across genres, although, mostly a poet, also playwrighting nonfiction and some fiction. And I'm an educator as well, I'm a trained teacher, but I don't currently work as a teacher, but I have.

Tamara Thompson: Nice. Thank you very much. So just to kind of start us off: how did you discover zines and chapbooks and this kind of publishing? When was the "aha moment" when you realized, "Oh, wait! This isn't just like this is, this thing," you know?

Amanda Merpaw: This is its own thing. That's a great question. I was actually thinking of this before the call, because I was like, this is going to come up, and I should think about when I was first introduced to the idea. You know I was first introduced to literary journals, I think, before I was introduced to the idea of chapbooks and zines. I was a reader at the Rusty Toque very early in my career. Like I hadn't published anything myself, but I was a First Reader there, and writing a lot and doing a lot of research online about, like, what are the ways that people move towards long form publication in poetry and seeing a lot about chapbooks and chapbook culture. So, I started doing some research into chapbooks and ordering chapbooks and seeing reviews of them in some journals. They're, they're not as popular as collection reviews, but some journals do review chapbooks. And zines as well, I think, came into my life more through queer community, and like, like queer arts, markets, and fairs, and like that sort of thing, and having my students do them, when I was a teacher, like bringing that into the cla- into the classroom, like I interacted with them sort of outside of the realm of poetry, like it felt like maybe more around my politics, and not so not that I didn't see them as aligned, but when I was younger in my work I think that they seemed like separate things like the chapbook felt more like institutional. And now that I'm actually, like, have published one, and then, further in my career, I realize that chapbooks are also very scrappy, independent; they maybe have, like higher production budgets by a smidge.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Where they're going for a different aesthetic, but they're just as scrappy most of the time as, as zines. So that's how I first came to interact with or like, come to know them was through a lot of independent research or through community, and then reading and, and going to readings, and like seeing people sell their chapbooks and that sort like seeing people, self design chapbooks, and sort of seeing the connection with, like the zine culture that I had been familiar with. So that was probably my first introduction to those worlds.

Tamara Thompson: Nice-

(Technical difficulties occurred.)

Amanda Merpaw: -kind of person who was writing when I was really young. I was a very, like, a highly sensitive, introverted child. And I spent a lot of time by myself reading and eventually writing. I started writing these like superhero, superhero stories about like myself, thinly veiled. I was the hero of this, like, series, sort of influenced by, like, I was really into sci-fi and comic book culture and that sort of thing so, like, writing in that way, and then is it-and then short, like very dramatic short stories, that I would, like, send to my friends to make them cry; I don't know. Like whatever-whatever felt like affirming at that time. And then, when I got into high school, my parents bought me a, like, a contemporary poetry anthology, and it had everyone, from, like, slam poets to, like, William Carlos Williams to, like, all this wide variety, and that's when I started writing poetry. It was after I had read that, and then we started reading poetry in some of my high school English classes, and then I started to take it, like, maybe more seriously, where I was writing really often and sharing with more people and, like, sharing online and, like, forums and stuff, like, for bands that I was part of their discussion groups. This would have been, like, in the 2000's. And that's how I started writing, but I didn't start publishing until much, much later, like a lot of my writing was very much just like informal sharing with people or yeah, just doing it for myself as opposed to, I don't know if I if I had a concept of myself as someone who could like publish things out in the world, but I was certainly always, always writing.

Tamara Thompson: The side of the D.I.Y of the sharing, and, like, the fan kind of stuff like that. Yeah, I, I understand that I, I'm my friends did their whole thesis on fan fiction.

Amanda Merpaw: Oh, nice!

Tamara Thompson: Specifically, Teen Wolf-

Amanda Merpaw: Oooo!

Tamara Thompson: There were graphs and everything. It was great.

Amanda Merpaw: I love, I love that very much.

Tamara Thompson: I thought it was great, it was kind of like how, like, it's like folk for this, but like a modern version of like taking tales and spinning them, and how they like evolve. It was very interesting. But it's a different type of the D.I.Y, but more online and more sharing, not necessarily putting into print. So, I'm also interested in that kind of stuff, too.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So why did you first decide to, like, publish, like, a chapbook for yourself? Why, when, when did that decision come around and how?

Amanda Merpaw: Umm, so I had started publishing my poetry and journals in, I want to say 2017, but I had been sending it out for a few years before that. And I'm 36 now, sorry just to give a sense of the timing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: This would have been, like, later, perhaps, that I don't think I'm old, but later, perhaps then many people are-

Tamara Thompson: You're not.

Amanda Merpaw: I know, lots of people are first publishing their work in, like, their twenties, I was, you know, like, maybe on a later, later timeline than that. But I had been publishing individual poems, and I had been thinking about, you know it would be great to publish a chapbook. It seems like it would be a good first step towards practicing some of the skills of developing a longer collection and seeing what it's like to assemble poems and write towards a theme, perhaps like those kinds of things. So it was on my mind, and then in I think it was 2020, I was part of the Arc poet in residence program, so Jim Johnson was the poet in residence at the time, and I was one of the mentees that was chosen to, like, do the mentorship with him. And the mentorship was, you send three poems, then they send you feedback on the poems. And typically, the way Arc works, I'm an edit-on the I'm a contributing editor there now. So, it's interesting to see the other side of it; but usually you're, you're recommended as a mentee, when Arc has rejected the poems you've submitted, but they think that your writing is strong enough, that they'd like to help you hone it by connecting you with the mentor.

Tamara Thompson: Umm.

Amanda Merpaw: So, it's like you've been rejected from publication, but you're close. Yeah, you're close enough, and they connect you with the mentor, and it's optional. You don't, obviously you don't have to take that opportunity. But for me, I was, like, Yeah, I want one on one, and I had done it once before, when Adele Berkeley was the mentor in residence as well, and that was a few years prior. So, getting a lot of rejections at Arc, like the nicest possible ones. And Jim and I went back and forth for about a month. I'm, like, maybe this is the end of 2019, but I think it was 2020, about my poems and then at some point I mentioned to him, you know, I'm, I'm putting a chapbook together, and like I'm curious about your thoughts about it. And he was running-he runs, Anstruther press.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: The chapbook press, and he very enthusiastically was like, "Send the manuscript my way, I'll have a look. You know, we'll let you know if we're interested in publishing it." So, I finished putting the manuscripts together for it over the course of, I don't know maybe the next few weeks or so, and then sent it to him, and he accepted it for publication, which was so exciting. I remember it was my birthday, the day that I got the email. And I was like, yes, like, finally, some good news. It's like early pandemic times, right, like-

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Amanda Merpaw: Not a lot of, of great stuff happening. I was so excited it felt very monumental to me that someone wanted to trust, you know, not just one poem, but maybe fifteen to twenty pages of my work, in their publishing calendar. So, we put the chapbook out in 2021. So, if you want to say like mid to end 2021, we did the chapbook. It was great. Yeah, it was very exciting.

Tamara Thompson: Would you work with like a small chapbook press again? Whether that'd be like Anstruther with, like, Jim Johnstone or, like, other people? Would you like dip toes into that again?

Amanda Merpaw: Oh, my gosh, yeah, I yes, I loved that experience. It was wonderful. It was so nice to have, I've now just put out my first full length collection, it came out like 3 weeks ago. Also worked with Jim as my editor on that, but it was at Palimpsest where he edits for them, but it was through like a trade book publisher. And having done that, I feel like the chapbook is so, Jim would say the chapbook is the perfect unit of poetry like that's his, he has a whole book about chapbooks, which is incredible. But this idea that, like it's so digestible.

Tamara Thompson: Right over there, [points to shelf behind them.]

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: At the back there.

Amanda Merpaw: Yes, it's, it's fantastic, but it is, it's like people can sit with it, have their coffee, their tea, a little snack, and you know you have it thirty min to an hour, depending on how long it is. And you know, they get this like tight collection that you've put together, usually on a unified idea or theme, and it was such a good experience for me, learning how to order the poems, to cut poems, to edit things, to like, revisit themes, or revisit language. I loved that, and I loved the independent nature of it. I mean, I'm a big, a big proponent of indie press regardless, but I think chapbooks are so beautiful. I love them. We have so many beautiful chapbook presses here that make like art objects.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: You're right like, if you look at like Baseline press right? Or there's some presses that are just, they're the first ones that come to mind, I just obsessed with everything they do. But I would definitely put out a chapbook again. Like I don't, I know some folks as soon as they move to a full collection, I think they feel very much drawn to the trade book and always writing as a trade book, but I, I don't feel that I, I definitely feel connected to testing out ideas in smaller form, or maybe some ideas for a larger form, like, maybe the chapbook is its own unit, and it doesn't become-it doesn't grow into a larger collection. And it's nice to work with the folks at the chapbook presses, and not to feel the same pressure of marketing and publicity and selling copies. Obviously, you want to sell copies of your chapbook. But it's more like,

you know, word of mouth. And like you show up at a festival where I'm reading, and I sell it to you, you know, from my hands to your hands. It costs you ten dollars or something right, like, I think there's something about that culture that I still, I'm still very, very drawn to, and I still have every intention of, of publishing more writing, more chapbooks hopefully, people will publish them, but like it's still on my radar, I don't feel like I've left that that world for sure.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think so, I run my own chapbook press as well like, that's what those books are behind me. [Point to shelf.]

Amanda Merpaw: Oh lovely.

Tamara Thompson: My team and I have made, and I think oh, thank you. That one is a hand carved rubber stamp that my beautiful, amazing proofreader and layout designer did, where she literally carved stamp like-

Amanda Merpaw: That's incredible.

Tamara Thompson: Rubber, and it's just fantastic, and the other one beside it has, like a band aid which I painted with multiple coats of paint, and then just stuck on there.

Amanda Merpaw: That's so awesome. See you don't get that in trade books that's very reflective of like chapbook and zines culture.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, and like the other one is like watercolor where the author just literally put like gold leaf she'd gotten from Dollarama, like gold leaf, and then just put it on, and like every cover, was different and just-

Amanda Merpaw: Oh that's great.

Tamara Thompson: Right, but I think the other thing, too, is, is when it comes to marketing, a lot of people are like, "Oh, what are you gonna do?" And I'm like, I'm gonna do the fun stuff. I'm gonna make a little picture collages; we're gonna do little Spotify author artists, playlist things 'cause it's fun. I'm not doing it to sell a book. I'm doing it to like, maybe have engagement and stuff. But like more just cause it's kind of fun doing this. And also to see an author be like, I'm gonna do a reading video. And I'm like, yeah, and I'm gonna edit it for you, and it's gonna be fun and we're gonna enjoy it. It's not pressure.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah, it doesn't feel as commercial like. There's something about it that I mean zine culture, especially, that's like anti capitalist, right? Let alone just like, not capitalist. But I think there's something about that, that's so, it's so exciting, and people get excited about doing much like more intellectually risky things or things that feel like, you know, that the direction you're taking artistically might not feel really commercial might not feel that it would quote unquote, sell well, but that's not the that's not the point.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, not the point. That's fun; like they, one with the *Band aid* is experimental fiction, where literally a person we don't know

the person's gender is like impaled with something. And there's a bunch of toddlers we're like not totally figuring it out. But then, when they do figure it out, they're like hopefully these aids will work, and it's like a lot of metaphor for things, you know, and it's like that would never be on like a regular shelf. It's too short, it's too weird, but it's so perfect for this medium.

Amanda Merpaw: Exactly. I love that. I still buy chapbooks all the time, and I still think of projects in chapbook form like, it's certainly not something I want to. I don't want to abandon it like I, I would love to keep making in that in that form, for sure.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, there's so much freedom and creativity I was talking with Derek Beaulieu in Banff. He literally showed me a chapbook that was a cigarette box, where you open it, and there's little cigarettes inside, and you unroll it, and they're all numbered, and that's the story. That's how you read the story, but this is fantastic.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah, it's fantastic.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so fun. Yeah, you couldn't mass produce that. But it's so brilliant.

Amanda Merpaw: But that's what makes it brilliant is that it's that special experience that you're having. Yeah, I that's incredible, Derek's also amazing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I was so happy to get to talk to him. We were literally just pulling things off the shelves being like, look at this look at this thing.

Amanda Merpaw: Sure. I'm sure, I'm sure he has lots of interesting stuff.

Tamara Thompson: So cool. So, I'm gonna get on to, like, the next question here, because I would talk about form with you all day. What did this kind of publishing, like teach you?

Amanda Merpaw: Hmm. That's a good question. Ummm, like me going through the experience of, of publishing. It taught me a lot. I I think that, I mean it, it taught me about thinking about my poems in relationship to each other; like, I think that was the first thing was when I was sending things out to journals, I was thinking so much about the poems as these individual pieces, and I think being able to create the chapbook I had to think about the relational aspect of how are the poems speaking to each other like, what is the connection between the poems? How will a reader experience these? And because it's so tight you're really thinking about, I gotta cut what's not working, like you really want it to be the strongest pieces in that you're not like, there's no filler in a chapbook, or you're hoping that there's not right because you're like, wow, I'm only putting out these fifteen pages of poems. So, I really learned about that putting forward your strongest material and, and having the material being in conversation. Working with an editor, it was really the first time I'd worked with an editor on, aside from like the mentorship experiences, but me-like editing towards publication and having conversations with Jim



about my work and about the relationship between the work, was really impactful for me. I learned a lot about how to work with an editor and how to, you know, engage in that process. I really like feedback. So I feel like that, like, the dialogue back and forth about the work felt really easy to me. But Jim and I also have, like, a very positive working relationship. I know lots of folks don't love their, the editorial relationship for all kinds of reasons. But-and Jim was really great about because it's a chapbook like not like, don't take it seriously, like it's a joke, but like, don't take yourself too seriously, like you're, it's there, it's one thing you're putting out into the world. There will be lots of others right, and because it's this form that is not supposed to be, you know, a trade book, it's not supposed to be commercialized like you can, try things, maybe, that you're scared of trying right like, or don't be so anxious about the reception of this like. Put out the work you want to put out. Don't worry about who's gonna read it or who's gonna buy it. Like, I think some of those questions, learning that they're not as important as I'm writing. Obviously, they're important for, like the publisher, right like. But the art for art's sake, I think, is really at the heart of what, what chapbook making is, and making a beautiful thing and working with a cover designer, all of that like, those are my first experiences doing all of those things. And it was really wonderful to have all of those, all those experiences. They certainly prepared me for putting together a long selection, although it's like a totally different, you're like, wow! This is 80 pages. This is quite a lot more, and then sometimes you are thinking about, you know, is there something missing? Do we need it to be longer? Or how will this be received by a larger audience, although it's still poetry in Canada, so the audience isn't as large as perhaps fiction, for example, I wish it was, but-

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Amanda Merpaw: There was something really nice that about that chapbook forum where you learn about focusing on the value of the work for its own sake, and Jim very strongly believes in that, and was very encouraging about that, like, make something that you're proud of, regardless if we sell ten or a hundred copies.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: And it also taught me about like, self promotion, which makes me want to vomit when I say that word out loud. You do have to self promo with a chapbook, like it's you. And you know, if you're lucky, the press is also pushing, pushing what you're doing. But you know you're out at festivals, you're out at readings, you're like posting on your social media pages, encouraging people to buy it. It's very much you representing your own work, and I think I had to learn a lot about, I feel very embarrassed by those kinds of things, so I had to learn to feel more comfortable in being like proud of something that I made, or selling copies to people, or asking people to pay for work that I had done right, like becoming more comfortable with that relationship is something that I had to learn through that process. And I'm glad I wasn't learning that for the 1st time with a full-length collection, because the stakes feel a bit higher.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And it's not an easy transition either.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: To go from "I don't know if I want to share anything" to "oh, I have to go out and do all this." It's a big transition. So, I understand the-

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: The slight unease.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah, and you're like, you know, "can I sell?" I don't know how many copies the chapbook we sold. I think we did end up selling like a hundred copies or something. It did pretty well, which is really lovely. But when your publisher for a trade book is like, well, we printed we print five hundred. You're, like, I don't know, do five hundred people want to read my book like, I certainly hope so. But in a chapbook if you're printing, let's say the first printing is fifteen copies, right? It's so, it feels so much more manageable, and it doesn't feel like it's a bit, selling things right.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: And I think, on the flip side of that process, after I published my topic within Anstruther, I joined their editorial board, and I edited some chapbooks for them. And you realize how much-it means so much to everybody when they're putting something out like a chapbook, right? And especially if it's their first publication. But always, like, people are, are so they're trusting you with their work, right? They're so excited about their work. It, even if it's just like a brief fifteen pages, there is something so meaningful about that connection relationship. Yeah, it's really, it's wonderful to me that these independent chapbook spaces still exist. I know there's no money in it, and I know funding is not always consistent. But it feels like an important form to have as part of our landscape and our conversations. So I think that all of that was part of part of the learning process of both helping other people make their chapbooks and, and making my own.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What does this kind of publishing offer that maybe traditionally, like traditional publishers can't? Or you know what I mean there, like, what's something that this kind of publishing offers that trade publishing can offer, and I guess vice versa?

Amanda Merpaw: Hmm! I mean, I think, sort of what we were saying before, like, I certainly see chapbooks being much more experimental or having this space. Not all chapbook publishers want to go in that direction, but I have chapbooks that I've seen that are just these, like totally wacky experiments in long poem, or in erasure, or in like formal choices, or in language, or these ideas about, like all the poems in this chapbook, are,

you know, epistolary letters to like this dead poet that I love whatever. And you're like, maybe these projects wouldn't sustain themselves for eighty pages, and there needs to be a form where they can, right, where someone can try out some of these ideas, and I think chapbook presses tend to take bigger chances on work like that, and it allows readers and writers right to sort of stretch what we think is possible, and then-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Maybe the trade book world will make more space for one right can dream, experimental work if they see it being shared and celebrated right in a smaller form, and I'm not saying it has to go from chapbook to trade book, but I do think I always like when there's more space for things that are experimental, or things that seem to push the, the landscape of the status quo, what we're already doing. So, I really love that chapbooks do that. I love the art like the artistic nature of the chapbook they seem, there's obviously beautiful trade books and trade books have money to pay for designers and art in ways that chapbooks don't. But there's something about the aesthetics of chapbooks that I think are really gorgeous, and some of them are hand sewn right, or they're like you're saying, painted or drawn, or each individual copy is made right, fresh, new, new cover, like those sorts of things, I think that they're so deeply labors of love, like people are doing it because they really care about it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: It's not about getting your chapbook into a store.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Some people-that's so rare, right? Like, maybe your neighborhood shop that loves you is willing to sell some of your chapbooks. But I think the fact that it is the labor of love and the, the love and the collaboration between people is really just about wanting to put out interesting or exciting or good work, and, and like, I think, about some of the chapbooks that Gap Riot press has put out over the last few years. I love their stuff so much and like Knife Fork book has such a specific, and Kirby has a great, they're wonderful, they have such a keen sense of like beautiful, they make really beautiful things. Even like end papers in chapbooks can be so fun right? And you can do fun things that maybe a trade publisher would be like I don't know, like, is it gonna look ugly when we print it, cause we're printing a lot of them, so, you know, you can't take the chance. And I think that that's it almost feels like a little like a secret like you're sharing a note in class, you know, like to someone you're like. Here, look at this thing. I think all of those, and, like, you know- (technical issue occurred.) Exactly I think, for writers also, who want to try something different like, say, I wanted to try a totally different kind of poetic writing that I'm doing in my, you know, maybe quote unquote, regular work that doesn't feel so much like my voice, so that feels formally really distinct, or I want to try writing, you know, weird sci-fi, because that's what I grew up reading, and I'm like, well, there's no other venue for this. I don't feel like I can publish this anywhere else or I don't know how else to do this, maybe I

can put it out as this like brief thought, experiment, art, experiment of the chapbook, and I think that's great. I think it's great to be able to do that and not devote two hundred and fifty pages to a thing, to figure out whether it's working for you or not.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Like it really feels in service of writers and readers, I think.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah, more that, not that, you know I think trade books come with their own world of like, it's so wonderful, I'm so glad to have a trade book. I love having a full-length collection out, and that you can go to your local bookstore and buy it or order it, like, that's so meaningful to me as a milestone in my own writing career, and I know that the considerations felt, the stakes did feel so much higher, putting it out and thinking about who might read it. And what is the cover? What does it look like? Is it—does it feel consistently me, like my voice throughout like, it does go on a lot of experimental tangents. Even if I do have poems on my hard drive that feel, you know, like—

Tamara Thompson: Like art.

Amanda Merpaw: Exactly. Yeah. Those would be better suited for a little chapbook like of their own, I think.

Tamara Thompson: Well, I can tell you that your cover is beautiful, so you don't have to worry about that.

Amanda Merpaw: Thank you! I love the cover. I'm so glad, this artist I have like a whole folder of her art, and I sent it to Jim, and he's like these are perfect, I was like, I know, like they're so the spirit of the book. And we reached out to her, and one of them, the one that I was hoping was available. And the publisher at Palimpsest paid for the rights. Obviously, you have to license the artwork because you're selling the book; she paid for the rights to license the artwork. And we actually just sent a copy to the artist, and she just got it. And she emailed me like a few days ago and was, like, "it's so nice." Which is a relief when you use someone's art book that they're excited about it, right? But you know what chapbook press doesn't have a couple of hundred dollars to pay to use other people's art on your cover, you're really—thankfully, my chapbook we actually did use an artist art, but they were willing to let us use it for free, because they understood that chapbooks were not like a money-making enterprise. So, there's like a really cool collage that we used on my chapbook that I was really grateful the artist let us use. But that's what it is, right? People are all just like, Yeah, I guess if you're using my work for free people will get to see it, and it feels—is it, there's a different spirit to what's happening, I think.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, definitely, I—we do all of our own pictures and stuff like my designer Grace literally went out to downtown Port Credit, and, like, took the photos for one of the poetry books. And it's just

like, and I was like, you could probably sell some of these and basically, she wanted have it in the book, just put it in the book. It's, it's good there.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah, it's the service of the book. That's nice.

Tamara Thompson: What are some challenges that you've faced in publishing in general, and that can be like on like, the whole scale, from like the small to the other, to the personal. Just a general question which you may take where you please.

Amanda Merpaw: Okay. Oh, my gosh, those challenges like there are so many. Oh, my gosh! I mean, I think that I had a very complicated relationship with my own writing and publishing sort of early on, when I started publishing, because of the nature of a personal relationship I was in at the time that was rather complicated in its, like the person that I was with their relationship to my writing and publishing was really complicated, and I don't know that I had ever thought about that like, I think I was so keen to be published and so keen to put work out there that I hadn't considered that there might be people in my life who, for whatever reason we're not like, had maybe a more toxic relationship to that. So, I have a lot of challenges in my own self perception of being, worthy of publishing like that my work was worth putting out into the world, or that the stories that I was telling were worth telling. And I think, in addition to the relational element, part of why, that is, is because I, a lot of my work is about relationships which for me, I'm like those are fundamental in the world, like the way-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Right? The way that we relate to each other in the world is all we have. Like, everything in the world is about how we are in relation to each other, right, from like the very intimate space of like 2 people on a date to our politics like, it's all about how we perceive people and how we relate to people. But I think, as a queer woman who also has like neuro divergence, and like chronic illness, and all these other things like anxiety, right? Like, I think I felt a lot of like self imposed judgment about the value of publishing my work, and then, I think, receiving rejections and then sometimes seeing what was published, and I understand everyone gets rejected like I have a very positive relationship to rejection in my writing life. But I think that part of me felt like, and sometimes I still feel like the work that's published, or that's praised, or that receives prizes is not always the work of like the intimate space, or like the work that that's like, I hate this idea of like quote unquote women's writing, right? Or like writing, that's like queer relationship writing right that there's something about that that feels maybe not as valuable unless you say the word queer like ten times in the poem, and then maybe someone will want to publish you because they're like tokenizing you.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Also, you don't want, you know, like-there's something about writing from that space that I feel has been challenging, and I feel

it can be challenging to sometimes see what's prioritized, and what's praised. Or see the derision that is sometimes brought upon poet, to write primarily about the relational, or perhaps in ways that feel really conversational, or even like quote unquote confessional, which obviously is like a loaded poetry term. But you know, like I love Sharon Olds, Sharon Olds is amazing, and she's gone on of course, to win lots of prizes. She's very celebrated and like early in her career, and even now there are people who are like naysayers of her work, because she writes about the space of the personal. And I think that I feel that a lot in what I see being published and what I feel about my own relationship to publishing, so I was very grateful that I felt like Jim understood what I was doing. And that he wanted to, you know, make a whole book, right? About kinds of like relational elements that I wanted to write about, and I just think beyond that sort of becoming comfortable with like telling my stories and finding ways to tell the stories that I wanted to tell, want to tell without compromising to maybe what feels popular or what feels praiseworthy like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: You know, like I don't want to, like throw in things that feel disingenuous to what the piece is, just because I think it might hook someone into publishing it more.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: And I think that I, I have a challenge with that like, I don't always want to be dropping all of my identities into a piece in order for someone to feel like, well, they've named all these things, right? So-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: But they're like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: And I, I feel like that can be really can be really frustrating, I feel very challenged by that. And about thinking about like what's good for the writing versus what's good when you're submitting something to an editor is sometimes, right, the project of like an editor choosing works to publish is a different, project than me writing something. But if I start thinking about what is an editor going to think while I'm writing that can really impact, I think the quality and the authenticity of the work. So, there's really a challenge that I have like taken on to try not to let the publishing process, infiltrate the writing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: I'll, like, let the writing happen, and if I feel strongly about something, even if it gets rejected, that's okay. And like, there are pieces in the book that were rejected by journals that I'm like. these are great, they look great, I'm happy with them, and maybe they were just meant to be in this book in, you know, in conversation with the other

ones. And then sometimes, of course, something's rejected a lot, and you're like, maybe I should sit and look at what's happening with this. Maybe I do need to make some edits like sometimes, if you're getting rejected quite often for something, it might mean that there's like a lack of clarity or a lack of momentum, or something like that. But aaa-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: I think all of those things. And then, I think, putting something out, that's so personal, it's very intimate, like the collection is very intimate. The collection is like about my divorce. The collection is about like coming out and dating as a queer person, and, like all of these things where I felt like, it's clear that there that there are really personal stories from my life that are, I think, very like opaque in the book. You don't know who the poems are about, but I'm sure some of the people that the poems are about know the poems are about them, and I think I worried a bit before I did, I don't think I worried, I know I worried my therapist, and I talked at length about publishing these poems in this book, and like. what are my parents going to think like, the book talks about like sex, and the book talks about dating and like, are my grandparents gonna read this book like, are the people involved going to read the book, and that nothing is like damning, there's nothing in it. I, I do have, like a sense of ethics around, like personally around what I'm willing to put in a piece and not but.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Amanda Merpaw: I do think that's a challenge, when you're putting something out. There is like something that feels like it's so, yours all of a sudden you're handing over to all these readers, and it becomes theirs.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: And there's almost, like, I don't know. I had a fear or even maybe like a grief like these, like this private manuscript that I've been working on for years, like we signed on to do this book, it's 2024, and we signed on to do this book in 2021, and I had already been working on it for years before that. So, it's like having this like long time imaginary friend, that all of a sudden you like push out into the world.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: And let other people hangout with. And I think that's a challenge, too, like releasing your work can be as hard as like keeping it to yourself depending on what it is. So, I, I thought, I have found that to be, it's getting easier now that it's out there. And I'm just like you're reading it. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That's happening.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah, it's happening. Don't ask intrusive questions.

Tamara Thomspen: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: But I think that, it's been a challenge through the process of like embracing and accepting that this thing is going to come out into the world, and then...

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: As a person with like the kinds of anxieties, that I have like even the process of like seeing the book for the first time, and hoping there wouldn't be a typo in it. But I mean to like a very extreme degree of anxiety right, around, like some of the things that I personally get very like hung up on and stuck on in my own relationship to, to the world.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Wanting things to be perfect and knowing probably nothing you make is ever going to be perfect, right? Like you'll always find something you want to change after the fact.

Tamara Thompson: I think that's so beautiful. And that's one of the things I love about artists. And it's one of the reasons why I don't like it when people meddle and continue things when an artist just died. I'm like you can't make the same mistakes that that artists can, let alone do the good things, so that to me, even if you might see it as a mistake, I see it as so human and just so genuine. There's so much behind that, and sorry, I feel very strongly about this, because so many works have been picked up and redone after authors and people have passed, and I'm like, no, don't do that. Don't touch that. Stop that.

Amanda Merpaw: Don't do that.

Tamara Thompson: And the people are just like, oh, no, but this is what they wanted, and I'm like, yes, big book publisher, of course I believe you. No!

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah never.

Tamara Thompson: And it's like, I don't know, it's one of those things where I'm like, you can maybe mimic what they were doing, but you can never make their short fallings. You can never mimic their growth. That was that person's thing. And it's okay that it ended, even if it didn't end the way the person wanted to. It's okay.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Sorry, I just don't like how entitled people are to thing.

Amanda Merpaw: Don't, it's okay. It's so affirming. I think that's so important, and like when I see mistakes in books, or what I might perceive to be a mistake like, I'm not harshly judging the author on the other side of it. It's like, oh, you're human, just like me. Your copy editor is human, just like me, like, you know, we're, wow, I really wish I could



change this line in my own book. I know that every other author is thinking mad about their book, too like, of course, as soon as you publish you're like I finally figured out how to fix this one thing in this one poem, but I love them. I do, I do think it's part of what makes like, it's part of what makes the work feel more alive, and I think that I had to come to embrace and accept that as someone who is like very much like a, a perfectionist in a way that is like painful to myself, right like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Make something and you share it. You have to accept that there might be a mistake. Something might be, or you might want to change something later, and like the thing, is still alive, even after you've made it and I think all of those things are like they're all learning experiences right, but they certainly have been challenging like a lot of those things.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Challenging, even just putting a book together right, putting together a collection and assembling the collection and choosing what to keep. And you know, like even figuring out my own relationship to edits right like, if Jim offers edits, and I'm like, oh, I'm not sure about that. I mean, we have-the conversations are always so constructive and positive, but I think that artists also have to learn in that relationship, like, where are the places where I'm in like full agreement about the suggestion. And where are the places where like, maybe, I'm not. Maybe, am I resisting because actually, there's something about the original that I want to hold on to, or am I resisting, so I'm not ready to make the change yet, like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: There's so much about that, that's hard. I'm really lucky to work with an editor who wants to have conversations about those things like and talk through what's good for the work. And sometimes we land on a brand-new third idea, and sometimes we go with the original, and sometimes it changes like, I think that all of those things have been, you know, challenges in their own ways.

Tamara Thompson: I, I'm gonna say one more thing about this, and then I think we should move on.

Amanda Merpaw: Okay.

Tamara Thompson: So, I teach creative writing to undergrads. And I teach that kind of stuff, and I have friends who are authors, I'm an author, I have friends who are poets, that's why I do a lot of this work.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But like, you're-if you're worried about if your work will be good, or publishable or marketable, it will never be good cause if

you're not having fun, it can't be good. But if you're having fun, it has definitely the potential to be good.

Amanda Merpaw: Yes.

Tamara Thompson: Whatever that means, right? And I said that to my students, and they're like, what do you mean? And I'm like, well, if you don't like writing about, like right now the biggest thing is space pirates, you know, like, let's just say it's space pirates, and everybody wants space pirates. But you're like, you know, those vampires who are in love that I really liked when I was a kid, I wanna write about those right. Write about those because you're gonna have fun doing it, and people will connect with that. But if you write an empty story about space pirates, it's not gonna go anywhere. You'll be upset, you'll be like, and so many people are worried about good and publishable. It's like, no, there's no point in writing something, if you're not having fun, because then it can never fully be good, and if it is good or polishable, or whatever you're gonna be miserable the whole time. So just don't do it, you know, even if you do technically succeed.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah!

Tamara Thompson: You're just going to be miserable. Don't do it.

Amanda Merpaw: It's true, it's true. I think, having fun with it is, and like having joy, and the experience of writing is so important, and playing and being playful and like, I think a reader can tell if you're trying. If, instead of like having fun with it, you're like really trying to be smart and clever, or like, you know, you're like really not having fun, and you didn't like the topic, or you're bored, if you're bored by your own writing, I don't know how you're gonna expect any outside reader to enjoy what it is that you've put together. And I do think that, I do think that's important for sure. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I've had so many people feel like, do you think that's marketable? I'm like, I don't know. They're just two gay ladies in a Victorian mansion. I liked writing it.

Amanda Merpaw: I was gonna say I would read that. Highly marketable, in my opinion.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you, see, but because I wrote about something I cared about. Other people who care about that thing will recognize that. Hey, I actually care about what I'm writing, and we'll enjoy it with me. The whole point is to enjoy with.

Amanda Merpaw: Yes, yeah. And people can tell, I think if you're excited about something like, if what you've written comes from a place of interest and excitement. Then you get all the other people who are also like, Oh, yeah, I want to read about that like, that sounds amazing, for sure. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So I'm gonna move on a little bit back to chapbooks. Are chapbooks important to you? We've kinda talked a bit about it. But let's be a little more direct.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah, they are important to me. I think they've been important in my own work, like releasing a chapbook was really a significant milestone for me and my work. It's what led to releasing the full length right like working with Jim on the chapbook led to us having a conversation about doing a full-length book that use the chapbook as a as a jumping off point. So, doing the chapbook for me was really instrumental in doing the full length, not that that's what its purpose is, but like it allowed me to, you know, expand that work. But I also, I love reading chapbooks, it's important for me, as part of my reading, experience, and feeling connected to other writers, and like being introduced to, to writers that I haven't experienced before. Like it's so easy, I think, in that world to, you know, pick up something that you're like, I'm not sure if I'm gonna like it, or it doesn't sound one hundred percent like what I'd usually buy, but it's five dollars. And it's this like beautifully made thing, and it's a small press, right? I feel like I'm willing to take more risks as a reader, maybe to, to engage in chapbooks and appreciate the love and care that it took to put it together. Even if I don't love the writing like there's something about it, I think that I feel yeah, as a reader regardless.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: They're very, they're very important to how I conceive of like literary community, like as a thing we do in relation and collaboration, but also like in reading and in writing.

Tamara Thompson: Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not? And again, we've talked a little bit about this, but again, a little more direct.

Amanda Merpaw: Oh, that's a good question; that's a good question. I mean, I think they should be, I, I think they are to a lot of people like, I do think there, there is a large community of people, especially poets, who really prioritize and value the work of the chapbook. I do think there's a large space evaluating them and like an economy of them, and re-like some spaces, still review them. Not many, but some I think they are really, really important to Canadian publishing, and I think we would lose out on a lot if we lost our, our chapbook presses like if we suddenly in a dystopia where, like a worst dystopia, then we're in now, obviously, with all these other terrible things, also lost every single chapbook press we had, I think we would lose a lot in terms of ideas and conversation, and I think that, that would be really devastating like I can't imagine a landscape, especially for poetry in this country without...

Tamara Thompson: Hmmm.

Amanda Merpaw: Chapbooks, I don't know how people who are just starting out wanting to put their work out there. Whether they're D.I.Y.-ing it or working with, you know, a publisher like a chapbook publisher. I don't know how people would get their work out there like trade publishing can

be so inaccessible, and I feel like, what I hope we're doing is making like it more accessible to tell our stories and share our work. And, but I don't think that Canadian publishing as like an industry values the chapbook or thinks the chapbook is important, like, I don't, I think that the big, you know the Big three, or, you know, like major publishers, I don't think that they see the chapbook as, as a valuable like commodity quote unquote, because I think that their job is to commodify books, right? And I don't think chapbooks are supposed to be seen in that way like that's not what they're for, so I don't think they're like, quote unquote, useful to a larger publishing apparatus, because they're not like money making. But-

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Amanda Merpaw: Most of us who are writing, I mean, if you're writing a chapbook, you're not in it for the money. If you're writing poetry, you're probably also not in it for the money. I wish they were valued more like I wish they were, you know that that, they hadn't a wider audience, right? Even that poetry had a wider audience, I wish, but like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: I think that so, I know so many people in my life that I'm like, if you read chapbooks and zines, you would love them like you're missing out.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah!

Amanda Merpaw: A world of great stuff!

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: And they just don't even know that they exist.

Tamara Thompson: I know!

Amanda Merpaw: It's like the shadow world, and we're all like secretly sharing them with each other like I said earlier, like, we're passing notes. But like the people on the surface are like, they're like missing out on this whole excreting experience. But I don't know like I wouldn't want the big houses to take over publishing chapbooks. I think that would ruin what chapbooks are supposed to be as, as I imagine them, you know, like, I don't imagine chapbooks being published by big houses. I don't think that they would maintain-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Their spirit.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: So, you know, but I think there's a sense of like the literary establishment could like value. We could not, or find a bit more

find ways to celebrate, I know there's like an award right every year meet the presses does it.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Amanda Merpaw: And you know we do our best.

Tamara Thompson: bpNichol.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah, exactly. But you know, and some like, there's content-chapbook contests, you know, Vallums runs one. A number of different spaces run the chapbook contests, or like the League, I'm sure the League of Canadian Poets, but like there could be more. There could still be more within our communities of elevating, elevating the chapbook a little bit, I think.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way, and you can take that in any direction you'd like.

Amanda Merpaw: Oh, my gosh! I'm like, wait! Tell me more about what this question means.

Tamara Thompson: Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way? So, whether that be Canadians, the public, maybe just the art scene. Maybe Canada on like national level.

Amanda Merpaw: That's a good question. I mean, I think that, from what I can tell on a national level, we are not, like as someone who writes predominantly in poetry like, we are not a country that really values poetry in general, let alone Canadian poets like, and I think you can see that I mean the Griffin, aren't the readings tonight for the shortlist.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, yeah, I think so.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah, I mean, that's like a classic example of like, I don't know. How is the Griffin a prize based in Canada that now really just honors writers from elsewhere.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Like the poetry community has so many feelings about this. There's a lot of Facebook threads we could dive into.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: I do think it reflects like a larger lack of care and investment in poetry in this country. For sure I know that, you know we could talk about how many outlets still review poetry like major outlets like the Globe and the Star, and these, you know, in other major cities as well. I'm in Toronto so obviously, those are the newspapers that I am

thinking of. But there's lots of outlets that used to have poetry review columns that now don't anymore. And you'll be hard pressed to find, like, you know, top twenty reads of the year like, are there any poetry books on those lists right like. Probably not or one or two when it's by poets everyone knows about, because they're also novelists, right? Like Michael Ondaatje.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Amanda Merpaw: Margaret Atwood, but I think it, there's certainly a national problem with elevating our poets, recognizing our poets, celebrating our poets like, even the way that we teach about, as someone who used to be an English teacher. Even the way that we teach about poetry in school is so wild to me like it seems like this terrible difficult thing, I don't know why anyone, how anyone could leave the public school system and think poetry is awesome, I want to do that, I want to read that.

Tamara Thompson: All my students are terrified. They're like, we have a poetry unit. And I'm like, yeah, and they're like, what about all these rules? And I'm like what rules? And they start like listing different like rhyme schemes to me, and I'm like, if you do that, I'm gonna think that you're trying to be Dr. Seuss and not being serious.

Amanda Merpaw: Right.

Tamara Thompson: They're like but isn't that what a poem is? And I'm like, no, here's a poem that's just sound, it's like a just list of Ikea things.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah, like.

Tamara Thompson: Here's a poem that talks about the basement back rooms of McDonald's. Here's one that's a list poem. Here's one that deals with like-and I just like, show them all these things, and they're like this can be fun. I said, Yes.

Amanda Merpaw: That's like one of the fun, like it's more fun, I don't know for me, I'm like it's one of the funniest forms, because you can do stuff that doesn't have narrative logic. It can just be sound based, or it can be like a list, right? You can think of all these creative ways to engage, and like I just find it is. I do think, the lack of investment or care in or like, you know, I know that there's the sense of like, what's exciting about chapbooks is that they're small and they're like scrappy. But sometimes it's nice not to be so scrappy, right like sometimes it is nice to like consistently. Get good funding every year that you know you're not going to lose or like consistently have an audience. So, you can keep making the stuff, and that those things don't alter what you feel you can publish the risk you feel you can take right? I think that definitely reflects a larger issue that we have, and like, even just in general, with valuing Canadian books overall like, I don't know what it's like to put out a debut novel in this country, as on an Indie press. But I'm sure that's also hard, I think it's a little bit easier than putting out poetry, but we love American writers.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, and the Brits and the Brits.

Amanda Merpaw: And the Brits!

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, them too.

Amanda Merpaw: They make, like, great covers. I do love British cover design. I have to say, but we are obsessed with everyone who's not ourselves like we, I don't think we are valuing our own creators enough and like, we love to hold up the people who already are celebrated like the folks I mentioned before, and-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: We have so many young talented writers who want to share their work, and it's, like, well, what are the spaces, right? Like in Toronto we had the crisis of Artscape recently, right? And, like all of these art centers, were they going to close? Were they going to stay open like the Artscape, Gibraltar Point, on the island where I've written a lot of the book that now exists. Like are these spaces going to be able to keep existing or not, and thankfully the city stepped in and agreed to create, like a new, not for profit that would like house some of these spaces, but-

Tamara Thompson: Mmmhmm.

Amanda Merpaw: It's very tenuous. I feel our country's relationship to art, and I mean the fact that we don't have universal basic income for artists, I think is, I don't know in my sense of politics, and like where I think we should be. That's the world that I want to live in. So, you know I'm not surprised that we're not living in a country where people are like buying chapbooks, you know, for their friends, as circulating around literary markets, trying to fill their bags with them. But I'm disappointed by it, like I feel like it's-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah. So, we've kind of been talking a bit about like around it. But what's something that you wish, like, the public knew about Canadian publishing, so we've been talking a bit about it, but like...?

Amanda Merpaw: That's a great question. I mean, every-I would just wish there was more clarity about all of it, like I think that talking to people outside of the publishing world, folks who do want to be writers who aren't, who aren't yet writers or who sorry, I'll take that back. They're writers, but they're not professionalized. They haven't published, for example, for money, but they're certainly writers. I talked to lots of folks who were like, I have no idea. How do people publish? Where do I send it? You have to do so much independent work? You're like, what is submittable? Do I need an account? Is that where everyone accepts work like, why do I have to pay for, for contest entries like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Like these are questions, since they-like it's so inaccessible to figure out how to become a professional writer. It's so hard, and you have to just find people who are already in the industry, who are being nice and volunteering their time to talk to you, or you have to look online and try to like, dig out all the, the hints for yourself that had to move forward. So I feel like we're, we're, we have this like general public that want to be involved in the arts that have no idea. It's a mystery to them. And I feel like we keep replicating that. And I feel like it's our responsibility like, well, I don't want my generation of artists to replicate that like, I want it to be clear to people what the how to access. I want to remove barriers.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: Accessing the system by letting people know what it is. And then you have people beyond the system, like, I think of my parents, who are like, they read a lot. They're very voracious readers, but they had no idea what the difference between an indie press and a big house was, right? They don't know. What is the process, do you-how does someone get published? Do you have to like, are people just calling you after they see one poem in a journal? Do you send your manuscript in like what is self publishing and comparison? Can people self publish whatever they want? Do they do that through Amazon. Where do people self publish like I think that-how do you get your book in a store, like my parents were asking, well, how do you get your book in stores like these are great, these are great questions. Or how do you get your book in a library, right, like I feel like we have no, not that there's no, of course it's like, well, the Canada Council runs a little workshop about this thing, and if you can make it at that one hour, you might have a bit of information about this, and if you can go to this other workshop by this person at this time, you know, you might have a little bit about how to craft a Cv. Or how to keep track of your submissions like, but I don't feel like it's clear to the general public or to people who want to be writers. I haven't done an MFA, I think that the business of being a writer is sometimes, but not always, addressed in an MFA. I'm sure it could be more thorough.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: I just think it seems very shrouded in mystery, and I don't know why, even like, how much are the advances like, what are people making.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: I follow Xoxo publishing on Instagram. I don't know if you follow them. Is that what they're called? They're like a gossip girl type.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, okay.

Amanda Merpaw: Where they basically publish, publish on their own?; so, on their account, like posts from within the industry, like insider, like folks will DM them. And they're like, I work here, and this is what's going on here right now. I work here, and this is what's going on here. And they're like, I mean, it's not item, not everyone should be doing



that. Obviously, like, it's not the way we're all going to spread more information about what the publishing world is like, but I think it's telling that an account like that has to exist for transparency around what it's like to work at a publisher, or what it's like to try to sign a book at a publisher, or for a while they were publishing a lot of posts about like secret AI negotiations that were happening at the at the big houses, clauses that we're looking at contracts right? And it's like these should be public conversations like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And it's, it's really difficult. I did my undergrad degree in creative writing and publishing at Sheridan. And, and a lot of that was breaking down those barriers. And so when I have students be like, well, how do I publish? And I'm like, well, don't go in it for money. There is none. Even if you go into bigger stuff like you're not gonna make a lot of money. You need to know this upfront because some students will be like, no, I'm gonna become a famous writer, and I'm gonna make a lot of money like G.R.R Martin and I'm like, okay.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah, okay.

Tamara Thompson: Or I'm gonna be a Marvel comic artist and stuff like that right? And like I give them the information that I know. And it's like, don't take a 3% royalties that should be illegal. Don't do that.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And I just give them that information, and their minds are blown. But to me I got educated in it, right, but like a lot of them are like, why are you sharing this with me? And I'm like what you think I'm afraid of more competition. More Canadian writers! Such a bad thing.

Amanda Merpaw: But some people do. Some people keep it close to their chest. They're like, I have information and I'm not gonna tell anyone.

Tamara Thompson: I know!

Amanda Merpaw: It's like who does this help. We're not, we're not in competition with each other, but the landscape certainly makes it feel like we are, I think, sometime.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, it sometimes tries to divide up that community base which I think is a shame, because I think writing shouldn't be a solitary act where you go and suffer by yourself. I don't think it should include the suffering either, uumm but, like it should be a space where you can share. So, the whole point of writing a book is to share. So why does everything else have to be in solitude?

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah, it's a great, it's a great question, like, I feel that having a mentor of some kind in your life is like the only way, like having someone like you who's telling your students, you know. When I got my first contract I'm like, I don't know, what should it say, what is it supposed to say? What is-what are the royalties supposed to be? What is the, you know, the payment that you get upon publication like. It's all

kept so secret, and I think that that only benefits people in charge of things, right? It doesn't benefit the rest of us. But you know.

Tamara Thompson: It benefits a select few.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah, it benefits a very select few, and I think that that's not great for artists, and I don't want to see other artists as my competition. Like, I feel like there should be enough space that we help uplift each other as opposed to trying to keep information from each other. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I'm the other thing, too, is this, I'm a creative person. So what you steal my idea, I got tons of other ones, I'm going to be mad at you for stealing my idea. But, like, damn you guys, steal my idea, can't you think of anything else like by yourself? Okay.

Amanda Merpaw: I have taken so many in the absence of having an MFA, I do a lot of workshops. And I do a lot of them online, because, like, I prefer it, and just based on my health status and whatever like, I prefer not to be in person right now. Umm, but never, ever, I have shared so much work in these workshops, and never have I seen someone, to my knowledge, steal my idea, get around to publishing something before I published it. Like people are so obsessed with their own ideas, usually in these spaces they don't need yours like I've never had that, I think that experience would probably be rare, and I imagine that someone who's already in the class for the wrong reasons, or who's having a conversation with you for the wrong reasons, but, like I have never had-I think I worried about that at first too, and then I realized that everyone is so in their own lane.

Tamara Thompson: I think the other thing, too, is just like once you find a good group of workshop people who understand your ideas and what you need and how you communicate with each other. I just go back to that person, and if I want a different opinion, I'll go to the other person I met at this workshop who I really like. You know what I mean.

Amanda Merpaw: Totally, yeah, that's exactly it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Okay, I'm gonna ask the next question, which is a little bit of a sad one. But why do you think so many small micro presses have to close up shop?

Amanda Merpaw: Oh, that is sad! I mean, I think, for all kinds of reasons. I think financial, of course, like the lack of funding, I know that some folks don't have consistent funding from funding bodies. Funding bodies are so different across cities, provinces, territories like, it's sort of wild that you know, like in Toronto, we have so many funding. We have the Toronto Arts Council, the entire Arts Council, the Canada Council right. And then there are places where they don't necessarily have the same kind of funding because they're like in a rural area, and they don't have like a city at a quote unquote city Arts Council or if they do, the funding is quite small, right? So, I think a lack of funding is number one. A lot of people are doing this on a volunteer basis, right? Like, the money is being put into making printing the thing, shipping the things whatever.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: And I think that that leads to burnout. I know so many folks in this industry who are just exhausted, like they're working so hard all year, every year to put out these beautiful things, and like they also are predominantly writers themselves. They want to be making their own work, in addition to putting out other people's work. It's, it's really, it seems exhausting, right? It seems to be exhausting. It's all the everyone I know who runs a micro press as an exhausted person like.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, very tired.

Amanda Merpaw: Tired, so much to do, so much to think about. You have to balance doing your own work, and probably neither of those things pays right. Writing doesn't pay you. Putting out chapbooks doesn't pay you. So you have a third thing you're also doing, which is the thing that pays your bills.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanada Merpaw: And having to balance all of that, I don't know how, right. So I think those are, like the two main factors, is really like a lack of capacity, which also comes from a lack of funding. Because if people had money and it, it could be their job, they wouldn't have to do this other thing to pay them right to keep doing this. And I wonder about like a lack of you know, like I don't know, I don't know if there are micro presses that feel a lack of engagement with their work. I hope I hope not, I hope that's not it. And then, you know, sometimes people retire out of the industry, and like they don't feel like no one in, who's left in the industry wants to take up the mantle of that space, or, you know, like I'm thinking of this is the opposite. But Gaspereau one of my favorite presses, just announced that Andrew and Gary are leaving Gaspereau, and they're passing it on to, is it hard-boiled press? Which is some odd like for us, is it, Keegan? Kieran? I'm saying this to you right now. And I'm like I should know this, I'm gonna look this up while I'm talking to you. And that's a huge, a huge deal, because if we actually just lost Gaspereau, that would be right?

Tamara Thompson: Heart wrenching.

Amanda Merpaw: It would be. It would be awful. And they're a huge force in the Maritimes, right for Atlantic voices like we can't, we can't lose them. But we're not going to, they've just found an alternate way to make things possible.

Tamara Thompson: Hmmm.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah, it's Keegan. Yeah. And to have a transition, it was called Hard Scrabble Press. And he's going to be taking over basically Gaspereau, they-I mean Hard Scrabble does beautiful stuff. But a lot of people don't have that. Like if they can't find someone they trust right to take over the apparatus of what they're doing, and they close, and there's no continuity, and I think that's an issue, too. I think that's part of why, I really believe that people who are writers, I don't want to

use the word should. My therapist is telling me to stop using the word should, because it's like a value judgment.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Amanda Merpaw: I think that writers ideally would get involved in processes of helping other people get their work out there too, right? Like being a reader being an editor having a-like working at a, at a press, putting out other people's chapbooks like, I think there's something a bit strange about the expectation that other people will help you put out your work. But you are going to be part of any of thy communities that make the putting out of the work happen. Cause like a lot of those people are also writers, right? Like, I think that, that's the first piece of advice I have for a lot of new writers is like start reading in a journal, or like, if you can become a contributing editor somewhere, volunteer at a small press like.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Amanda Merpaw: Becoming part of that community like, if we don't have those places, you have nowhere to put out your writing so like I think that's important, too. Like I think there's a sense of I'll use the word entitlement, I guess, to expect, to expect outlets to put out your work and never contribute to actually making those outlets like stay alive.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, so what's something that you wish, like, something important about, like your history? Or maybe D.I.Y, like history, you can answer these to separate things. But what's something that you wish the public knew.

Amanda Merpaw: Oh? That's a good question. I mean, I feel like the, the history of D.I.Y. and of Zines is so, there's such a strong, I know so many people who are like strong in activist communities and like political activist communities who are making zines right these awesome zines. And then I know so many poets who would align with those politics who are making chapbooks, and I feel like I'm like, let's get these people in a room together like, where is the meeting of these things? I feel like those communities could do more of work like bridging the gap with each other, certainly, and helping folks out in the general world understand that these things exist and that they're wonderful, I think, is like important, and I mean even just having a sense of like bringing Zines into education. For example, like teaching teenagers how to make their own Zines super successful. Teenagers love that kind of stuff. They love a collage. They love politics like they love art. So, I think, having a sense of them more embedded in how we teach about what it means to make things and communicate, and that they're like really valuable forms of communication and art making. I don't know about me, I'm like, what do I wish? But I don't know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that one's usually a hard one for people. But I think it's important.

Amanda Merpaw: Yeah, that's a great, that's a great question. I don't know. I don't know. That's I would, I would like people to read my book.

Tamara Thompson: You want the people who would like to read your book, to be able to read the book.

Amanda Merpaw: I would love that, I would love for them to be able to access the book. I think that, that like maybe something that I feel as a tangent from that is like, do people know that books exist that are not on the shelf at the bookstore like.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you.

Amanda Merpaw: And actually, order books into the bookstore that aren't there yet, and that going to an independent bookstore, you're probably more likely to find something awesome that's been curated. My local bookstore is the best. I'm obsessed with them. The Queen books here in Toronto, in the East End is like, they have such a beautiful curation. and they'll order anything in for you if they don't have it. But I don't know if folks realize that that they could do that that, like all the books you could possibly read, you don't know about them just because you browse the shelves at the local big box bookstore.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, they'll go into Indigo with all their blankets and mattresses.

Amanda Merpaw: Exactly. Is it even a bookstore anymore.

Tamara Thompson: Questions we don't have the answers to. Are there any additional comments you would like to make.

Amanda Merpaw: You know, don't think so? No, not off the top of my head.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, then I will stop the recording.

Justin Million

Tamara Thompson: Hello, my name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is July 17<sup>th</sup> and the time is 1:13 PM. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview time. This interview is for small press and author.

Justin Million: Justin Million. He/him, I was a member I was an editor with In/Words magazine and Bird Buried press. And what am I missing, anyway? Bird Buried press In/Words magazine and my title, I guess, would be poet.

Tamara Thompson: Cool. And part of Canada you're from.

Justin Million: Oh, Peterborough, Ontario but worked for quite a bit in Ottawa.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough. So, how did you first discover, like, zines and chapbooks? Just kind of like to get this ball rolling. Was there like a specific moment, you remember, or were you just like, yeah, generally like, around this time in my life? I just want to get a bit of backstory.

Justin Million: Yeah, chapbooks and zines, I guess I knew about zines through popular culture. But chapbooks 'cause zines come up in like counterculture narratives. Like, you know, I'm-I'm in, I was born in the eighties. So, you know, early nineties, late eighties were big zine times. But I didn't really run into too many zines or chapbook. I didn't run into any chapbooks; I didn't know what a chapbook was until I got to university and linked up with In/Words which wasn't a press at the time. It was just In/words Magazine, and I became an editor of that magazine in my second year, I believe, university. And-and then I realized that chapbooks-I realized I had seen chapbooks before, but just didn't know what they were so essentially. I think most people outside of the know would call it a pamphlet, you know, or something like that. So, we started making chapbooks of, you know, individual authors work at In/Words. So, I obviously got to know it the chapbook form very well. Starting around, yeah, my second or third year, and then had my first chapbook of my own work I think in third year university. I may be wrong on that, and I could check, but I won't. Yeah. So yeah, again, I knew what these things were, but wasn't really introduced personally to the forums until inwards at Carlton.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough. So why did the press start? This is more just to get a little bit of history, and you can talk a little bit about In/Words, if you know. But you can also talk about Bird Buried, if you'd like to you. I'm just trying to get a bit of the how'd this thing? Gosh, damn happen?

Justin Million: So, In/Words, Cameron may have told you better than I will but In/Words started as a project, I believe. It was 2001 with Collett Tracey, who's a Prof at Carleton. She had a particular love for Canadian modernist poetry that she instilled certainly in my class and cohort, but obviously before me, and folks like Cameron arrived. And so, they made a-I

believe it was just like a collaborative class project to start. Probably as many of these things kind of do, a passion project. So, it was a passion project led by her and probably financed by the English department and her students and then, I believe, but I don't know who the players were. There would have been some students at that time that wanted to keep this student magazine going. And then Cameron and I and our group, which I would argue, was kind of the most fruitful time while I-it's pretty hard to argue for any other time being more fruitful than our time there. But we came in, I believe, in 2004 or 2005, so three, four years after it had started, and you know, when we came, it was it-I guess maybe the students had already moved on who had started it. So, it was already kind of in limbo when we when we got there. But yeah, I remember my roommate, Nick Culhane, who was an editor at In/Words. He was an editor the year before me, which seems very strange now in hindsight, because he's now in the navy, and I'm still a poet. But he and David Emery and Pete Gibbon were editors the year before Cameron and I and others came on, and so I think they were just kind of getting their feet wet. So, when we came in, David dropped out, and then, or while he's still kind of hung around, but we took it kind of to another place. There were more of us, and we were able to do a lot more and procure funding and whatnot. But Bird Buried, started Elisha and I wanted to do something locally. I had just started the year before; I just started the Show and Tell Poetry Series, Poetry Reading Series here in Peterborough, Ontario and we wanted to do something together that we could work on together. But being that Elisha knew far more and still does obviously know far more about layout, design, anything that basically involves actually getting a book put together, she was gonna be the-the, you know, the brains of the operation and the-the head editor, lead editor, or whatever you want to call it. And I was still do function as poetry editor. But yeah, basically just started from a want to, I think Elisha missed putting her zines together that she used to the Linen Thread zine just oh, you can't quite see it's up there. And I think she probably just wanted more opportunities to put together unique kind of book packages, unique chapbooks and I had more connections with writers just through my history at Carleton. And so, it was, it was a, it was a good working relationship in that I would bring in writers for the most part other than when we had open submissions, which was a bit of a crazy time yeah, oh, it's-it was wild.

Tamara Thompson: It's just nuts.

Justin Million: We were, we were doing well, and I guess I don't know if I should talk about that now, but we were doing like at a time when we had open submissions. We had also insisted on doing feedback to every submission. So, and some of them like it was wild to look back on like some people I was responding with like two-to-three-thousand-word responses, you know and putting in hours and hours every day on responding, but we, or at least I, had a lot of experience in bad rejections, like bad rejections from journals and publishers being just like "it's not for us" or "it's a no at this time." Well, like where am I supposed to go with that? I just put all of my heart and soul, or whatever yada yada, as they say, into this thing and then, now all you're gonna give me back is, no. That doesn't do anything. It doesn't help me. It doesn't make me a better writer. It doesn't make me a better editor. It also doesn't make me want to continue to participate publishing, and

publishers, I think, are just like-it's a disease in publishing and it's in particular in poetry, publishing like nobody really tries to help anyone else out to demystify the process or kind of help you along. So, we decided, like, we want to do that. That's-it's going to be hard work. But it's important work to give these writers, especially young writers, feedback and let them know like this is why we said no. In-in detail, or this is why, if they if we said yes, of course you know, that would be the end of the discussion. But anyhow, yeah, that's a longer answer of how I got started with both of those places.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, you were talking a little bit when it comes to like how your rejection process was going and kind of getting into like your editorial philosophy, and a bit of like maybe, like the press's goal. But could you just like expand a bit more on that? Because I'm interested in it.

Justin Million: On just on whic-sorry.

Tamara Thompson: Well, just like an editorial philosophy, maybe a goal that the press had, or I guess, still has, sorry.

Justin Million: Yeah. Well, no Bird-yeah. Bird Buried, as I said, like the initial impetus was if we're going to do well, I remember saying to Elisha like, if we're going to do this cause I already had experience it In/Words, and I had experience running a read like, you know, I had a lot of professional experience at a young age in this regard, in poetry and presentation of poetry. But I remember saying, like, if we're gonna do this, I don't want it to just be like any other press where we have this kind of loose manifesto. That's basically just like we see the landscape of poetry, and we think it's ridiculous, and we wanna assert ourselves as the only ones that are producing any quality work or whatever like they're all just so vague and meaningless like. So, we started with basically our manifesto, if you want to call it that, was essentially like we're we are providing feedback. Usually, detailed feedback on rejected work. So, at the very least, if you submit your work to us like you'll hear back and you'll get feedback, which you won't get from ninety nine percent of other publishers. We also were doing things like which we don't do anymore admittedly, just because we're not, we don't do open submission. So, there's it's kind of pointless. But we did something really interesting, I think; it's really interesting in that we would offer a very small like token payment like we would for a while, I was publishing single poems on our website, which are still up there because I wanted to provide this kind of workaround for the granting system. So, at the time, for a recommender grant you had with the OAC, for instance, Ontario's Arts Council. So, you had to have three what would you call them? Like writing projects, three paid, what's the word? Writing, three paid pieces of writing through different publishers. So, I made it known in the request for submissions that, like, you will get a check for like a dollar, or like ten cents, or whatever it was, a cent, or whatever, because then you can say like, I was paid for this poem. So, it gives you a writing credit. That's what I was looking for. It gives you a writing credit. So, you're only two writing credits away from getting, you know, being able to apply for grants. Because grants, if you want to be a professional writer, are extremely important. So again, like, nowhere else really does this. If



you're going to get paid, you're getting paid like fifty or seventy-five bucks or one hundred bucks, which is great but like we couldn't afford to pay that. So why not just pay a token amount, as this kind of some might argue greasy, I would just argue well, why is the process so laborious and-and filled with obstacles like, let's make this as easy as possible. So again, Bird Buried was trying to demystify the publishing process. So again, providing feedback let's do what we can to give young writers, especially enough credits so that they can apply for grants even like to the point where, if somebody wanted to apply for a grant and made that known. I would just tell them like, I'm gonna publish your poem on the website for a week, even if I don't like it.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Justin Million: Then I can say it's published. I can send you the check for fifty cents, or whatever it was, and you'll get your writing credit. Because why do I care like, why do I want to be a gatekeeper for somebody's success in, you know, small press micro press writing. The stakes are too low to keep anyone's gate, yeah. So, I mean, we were also working very closely with the university. I think that's a thing that most publishers that are associated with universities don't even really do, in my experience, which is weird. So, we were, you know, I also was running the reading series at the time, so we were linking up with profs who would send young poets our way to either get them published or to put them in the reading series. Like, it was all this kind of organic thing, and it was working very well until the work started to be a bit too much. But so yeah, again, publishing philosophy is just to do some of the very simple and cheap or just plain free things that you can do as a publisher to help either your writing community or other writers in the province. We also wanted to showcase writers in Ontario and specifically outside of Toronto which is an underrepresented community even though that's like all of Ontario, almost. But Toronto just gets so much, so much optics and funding that we thought it was important to pursue writers outside of Toronto. Yeah. So basically, just doing the things that I just never really understood why they existed in publishing. And like, let's just, if we're, if we can, we control the means of production here, why don't we do whatever we want in terms of philosophy? And if it doesn't work out, then it doesn't work out. We're very still going. It's very different now than it was, but.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Justin Million: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I run my own chapbook press as well. And we started in like 2020. And like one of my big things is that like I was doing an undergraduate with like a lot of my other people who worked at the press with me like on the project with me in creative writing and publishing, and it is so scary for authors to go into publishing cause, you know, like so many people, know almost nothing about it. So, we really wanted to guide that process like we gave them a letter of agreement so like a-a "contract", you know, read over your "contract".

Justin Million: Oh, wow! That's great.

Tamara Thompson: We are here to help you.

Justin Million: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And then we gave them like a marketing package. And being like these are the things that we want to do because it's fun. I'm not gonna do marketing if I'm not gonna enjoy it.

Justin Million: That's fantastic. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Right? So, it's like we're going to like, show you how everything goes together. We're going to show you like, I send proofs to the author of like, what, like hey, this is like the first printed proof. It looks wonky. And you know, this is what we're thinking for the cover. And we're trying to like, test out different colors and stuff. And I show them that process to try and demystify the process a bit, because it's not ooooo...like smoke and mirrors, and then a book, you know.

Justin Million: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like, no, there's a lot of hard work happening here, and, like, so many authors want to know and understand. So, it's just like and same with like poets and stuff. It's like, why wouldn't I show them, you know?

Justin Million: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, like, I totally get that, like, break down the publishing doors and be just like we don't need to do this.

Justin Million: It's very strange. Like I picture poetry as being, I mean, in a lot of ways, being unlike any other kind of written art form in a lot of ways, but more so in publishing. Like I've said it many times; it's almost like even not for, even for people who don't have a press or publishing house or whatever. Like, even just for the poets who are just writing and trying to publish. It's-it's as if, like they get to a they, they go through their career, and they learn all these things, and then they hoard them and, like, if you want to know what those things are they won't tell you they'll be like, well, no, just go find out on your own like I worked hard. It's like a boomer thing like I don't know, like I worked super hard to get all this subjective information, so it might not even help somebody else to tell them. But, like, they hoard this information, and I never understood why. Like, I was still, I was writing chapbooks like you know it-halfway through my career, like I'd say I've been writing at a hot, high level, whatever that means for like twenty years-ish, starting around In/Words time at the beginning inwards, and I'm forty-one in a couple of days. So that's, yeah, about twenty years. And even, you know, halfway or more so, through that even now, like, I'm still learning things now, because nobody bothered to tell me at any point. Nobody, I-I still like, I still don't even know what it would be like to have a literary agent. I will never go down that road, because I'm just not that way. And I, and I choose to deal with small press as a philosophy, as a rule, but it's yeah. It's very strange everybody wants to

keep the cards so close to the vest in poetry, and I don't know why, and I think publishers do also because there's so little money in it that I think if they-they think if there's too much crosstalk between publishing houses and presses, and everybody knew how much was paying everybody else like it would make some presses look really bad, and other presses look so good that why would I work with this press so like there's this weird cone of silence. That I don't really under, I still don't understand but like to the point where, when I talk in plain terms as I am now, and I can be much plainer at times, or more frustrated. I-I get kind of reactions from people like well, why do you take this so serious like, they're-they're like taken aback by my like frustration level with how this is all going and-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: It's like looking at something that very obviously isn't working and just being and then them looking at me and be like, what's wrong like. Don't you like, this is fine, like? No, it it's not. And it's obviously not working, because some of the best poets I know are unable to procure funding. Are-they get the runaround or they don't want to deal with, like, oh, I have to wait a year and a half or two years for my book to come out. Oh, I got a fifty dollars advance just so a publishing house can like continue to kind of assert itself as a traditional publisher that pays. Therefore, they can then get their own grants that they can use. Like it's-it's a mess, and I kind of, like-it's a mess. Like, I'm sure Cameron probably spoke to this. Like, it's kind of nice that it's a mess, in a way, because it means a lot of people can come kind of in and out of it. There's not a lot of gatekeeping that way. But this-and I've talked about this for at least fifteen years like this, like tenure-track in small press is insane like. So, you're supposed to, you probably started in university like I- it's probably something fairly similar to my route, although my ending isn't as good as what it's supposed to be. But you know you go from publishing in journals probably, or like when you're younger you're writing, you know maybe you publish for a school thing or whatever. And then you-you start publishing in journals, probably through your university, or at another university press or any kind of you know Arc or whatever. And then you get a chapbook because you can then leverage your journal work into a chapbook and then you leverage your chapbook into a trade book. And if you don't do it that way you're a fucking idiot and nobody wants to deal with you because you're a simpleton loser that must not have anything very good to say in your work, because if you did, you'd have a trade book or five or ten. And I hate that, because, like some of the best stuff I've ever read is in a chapbook and was never, was never published in a trade book. And like we can get into the difference between a chapbook and a trade book, but like that tenure track, I've always thought is absurd, especially in poetry, especially when you're talking about small press. Like, I know people that spend so much of their fucking brain and time networking, schmoozing you know. Pardon my French, but blowing people, not literally, figuratively--just to get like a publishing opportunity with a small press in Ontario. Like, yeah that's absurd to me. If you're trying to get in with like Harper Collins, or something like, maybe-I would never do that. But like you know what have at it, because there's still not gonna be any money in it. But you, you know, Mom and Dad might be more proud than they would be of, oh, I've got a book coming out

with Talonbooks. Nothing against Talonbooks by just using them as an example of a smaller publisher.

Tamara Thompson: When Mom and Dad don't know what Talonbooks is. They don't know what Wolsak and Wyn is. They don't know what Anvil Press is, you know?

Justin Million: That's right, and they don't want to know, or they'd be like, oh, that's cute, you know. Like, are they like a little university thing or something like you could tell them," Oh, no, they've had this many Governor Generals award nominees" or, like, whatever. They don't care, like even if it's Harper Collins. It's like, "Oh, yeah, I've heard of that." You'd have to be like, "Oh, my poem was on Hockey Night in Canada before, during the montage, or whatever, and then go [gasp]."

Tamara Thompson: Or Canada Reads. That's the other big one there.

Justin Million: Right.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, CBC's Canada Reads.

Justin Million: Oh honey.

Tamara Thompson: That's so cool!

Justin Million: Yeah, honey, why don't you get your book on there like I'm sure it's tantamount to actors being like, oh, the Jeopardy job has just come up. Why don't you apply for that, honey, when you're like twenty-five, and you haven't done anything, but your parents know you're an actor, or whatever so like, oh, why don't you do that?

Tamara Thompson: Like I do stage plays, actually.

Justin Million: Yeah, right? So maybe host of new host of Jeopardy is not our wheel of fortune or whatever is not in my wheelhouse. Pardon the pun. But yeah, I've just, I've had so many problems with how publishing kind of works that I think has pushed me to the outside and to the fringes of that. Like do I want a trade book? If-if House of Anansi calls me this afternoon is like, "Hey, just by word of mouth alone we've heard you're great. We want to publish a book." Would I do it? Sure, I would. Am I going to, you know, really work on a, you know, amazing cover letter? Get letters of reference, you know? Come, hat in hand, to House of Anansi and be crushed when they don't publish my book? Like, no, because I also don't want to wait two years to see my work in print. That's another issue.

Tamara Thompson: It's one of the things that I talk to my students a lot, because before you start a seminar there's the void minutes of like ten minutes before you have to start, and everyone looks at their phone and doesn't want to talk to you. So, I'm like, all right, kids, I'm going to tell you why self-publishing with Amazon sucks, and you're not going to do it. Listen here. The other thing I do is, listen here you're not going to get three percent royalties; like, you're not doing that. You're gonna ask for seven for your first book or ten, because you know what? How you're supposed to be paid? Like, you're probably not gonna get fifteen,

because that's like Margaret Atwood numbers. But not three percent. And they're just like, why are you telling us this like this feels like secret insider information. I'm like, what you-you want me to be upset, that you're gonna be paid more? No, why would I care like? Or it's just like, why aren't you scared of the competition like? Oh, no. Another good Canadian writer. I'm so, like, hard done by.

Justin Million: So that's-that's like speaking of publishing philosophy, this whole disease of self-publishing going on right now. This epidemic of self publishing is really sad. Like, I know one really great, who, I won't mention, because you may know this person, but a really great young writer in Peterborough who is now working on a book of poems that they're going to publish soon. And it's going to be self-published. This will be their second self-published book. Meanwhile, like people I know have told me and I haven't read his first book because it's fiction. I tend not to really read fiction, but I have it; I just haven't gotten to it. But people, a lot of people have told me who don't have to tell me this, that it's a good book, so he's doing himself such a gigantic disservice. One, he's getting the workout right away, which okay, there's value in that. I understand that part. But to not have this is big for me to not have your work assessed for merit.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Justin Million: By an individual editorial review process. Be that one tyrant who runs the press all on their own and there's no editorial body. That's still better than just sending it to a scantron machine at the Amazon Fulfillment center, or whatever, that spits your book out and then you can go around telling everybody, like how, like, what-what do you want me to say when you've just given me this-this Amazon product that's supposed to be your work like? I'm not even gonna tell you it's good, even if it is because I don't want you to pursue this anymore in the future. I want you to have the courage to submit your work to be assessed for merit by people who know what the fuck they're talking about by people who've been doing this for decades likely and who have seen the best poets in the country come across their desk, and you want to be in that conversation like, and if you don't, then it's time to start a zine honey. Like, it's time to-it's time to just get a diary, you know, and write for yourself, and there's nothing wrong with that. But, like, if I don't understand wanting anyone to read it when it's done like so, you get it self-published, and then you give it to somebody, and you're okay with them reading it, then. But you're not okay with a stranger who you'll never meet reading it. Who's a mentor or not a mentor, an elder of yours in your field? You don't want that one person or two or three people to read it and assess it from error, and get back to you, regardless of what the answer is like? I want my work in Margaret Atwood's hands. I want my work in Michael Ondaatje's hands. I want them to reckon with my work like they've had to reckon with people before, because I want to be in that stream of Ray (technical issue occurred). And you know I want to be in the same conversation as these people that I grew up reading and learning from.

Tamara Thompson: I think the-the major thing that I'm seeing, especially with, like my students, and like their writing and stuff, it is, it's the

fear of the editor almost. And I'm like, guys, the editor is not to take over your work. It's not the point. That's a bad editor. The point of the editor is to help your vision that you're trying to put on the page; be actually put on the page the way you want it to be. The whole point of an editor is to help, and I've had students be like, well, when I get-of course I dispel this myth immediately. The rich and famous author. It's not going to happen. Find another job if you want to be rich, but they're just like, yeah, when I become this famous author, I won't have to listen to any editors like Margaret Atwood or Stephen King, and I'm like, when was the last time you read a good book? They're like, oh.

Justin Million: Hey!

Tamara Thompson: A long time. And I'm like there is a reason, like even these amazing authors who don't get told by their editors because they're too big, or whatever you know, and it's just like your work is made worse by not having that communication. The whole point you are making a book is to have a conversation with other people. So why do you want to avoid the people who could actually help you make that conversation better?

Justin Million: That's right.

Tamara Thompson: Like, what is happening, you know?

Justin Million: I think, I think really what it could like you don't want your young artistic dreams crushed. And there's two things there. The one big secret is that you need, at some point, you need your creative dreams crushed in order to expand them. So, like you know, think of a smash burger, you know. Smash burger's like something like this, and you smash it down, and it's bigger than it was before, and apparently better, according to Instagram, which is why you can get smash burgers everywhere. But like you need, you need to get crushed at some point ideally, multiple, multiple times like, well, talk about Stephen King. Shit like more rejections than anything, you know. If not for Tabitha, you know, *Carrie* would have remained in the wastebasket where he left it, and we never would have heard of the guy. So actually, that's a perfect example. It took somebody to read it, who, he didn't want to read it to save it and to make it something else. It just happened to be his wife. But yeah, like you, I think it's just yeah fear of young kind of artistic rejection, because if you don't have your work assessed for merit by some editorial review process, you can maintain the illusion in your mind that you're a phenom. You're a genius. The world needs to see your work. It's just a matter of time, and how you're going to do it. And the other thing is-is that if you're curating a magazine or journal, let's say you're an editor of a journal or you're while you're or you're a poetry editor at a small press like you have certain wants, needs, desires. So, like you want to publish a certain kind of work-chances are a work that does a certain thing that hits you in a certain way so, and-and as somebody who's submitting their work to that person, you don't know what type of work they want or like, or you can do research. Find out who the poetry editor is at a certain press. Read their work, you know. Maybe work some angle like that if you really want to, but it's a crapshoot. Like, if you're applying to a literary contest, it's a fucking crapshoot; it's whatever the judge likes not what they deem to be best what they like. And so,

they're going to be looking for work that they already like not looking for the best work.

Tamara Thompson: Work that they can stand behind when someone says, are you sure?

Justin Million: Absolutely, so like your poem may be amazing objectively to most people and even to those editors or gatekeepers or contest judges. But it may not win, like, the best work doesn't always get chosen. The best people don't always get chosen to deliver certain work, or whatever it's a crapshoot; if you know it's a crapshoot going in. Every rejection letter should then be a stepping stone. You know it; it shouldn't be a crushing blow. It shouldn't be.

Tamara Thompson: It shouldn't be the end.

Justin Million: Right. Like, okay, got another rejection letter. Now I know this about this publishing house, for now also never say no to anyone. Like, you know that door is closed, for now it may open again later. Keep all your rejection letters. I think there's value in that too, even if they don't tell you a lot there's value in kind of, having these things to refer to, I don't know. Like a-a rejection letter should be a badge of honor again, because you've submitted your work to be assessed by experts.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think.

Justin Million: Opposed to, again, the scantron machine that is Amazon publishing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think, especially when it comes to rejection a lot of people think they can only handle it a couple of times. And the thing that I keep telling my students is that good authors aren't the ones that are published, the ones that didn't fucking give up. It's the one who perseveres. It's the person who went, okay, I've learned from this to the next thing, and they're just like, so it like I could. I'm like you could be the best writer in the world but if you only submit twice, you're probably not going to get picked up.

Justin Million: Right.

Tamara Thompson: Because it doesn't matter. You like how many times have we heard all this book or this song or this TV series or film might never have happened and is so influential and impactful. But this person just didn't give up on the project and kept trying. And that's how that thing came into existence, you know; and it's like, it's not because it was better than you know the other things on TV or whatever it just that person just didn't give up, you know.

Justin Million: And I think there's so much content out there, whether video or you know, written or whatever that I think people just assume everything gets made now.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Justin Million: Like, I know it seems like that when you've got like, you know one of these, like, *Love Is Blind* and shit like this. Like, yeah, it seems like everything is just being made but, like, and then there's so much being rebooted. But, like, there's still a ton of stuff from high end people like, you know. I-I was listening to a podcast the other day where Steve Martin was talking about how he and Martin Short had a project in, like, in the mid-to-late 2000s that got turned down. Like that Steve Martin. Like it if-if you're a comedy person of a certain age before I was born, like it doesn't get bigger. So, like, you know people do have their work rejected. Even if they're the best in their field, or like you were saying, maybe sometimes you get a bit too much control, and then the books start to suffer and the work starts to suffer because you just think, well, anything I put out is great. Yeah, not everything gets made, it's hard to make things. And then not only do you have to make the thing. Chances are if it's small press you've got to be out there doing readings. You've got a, you know, you don't have to shmooze necessarily. But you, you're-you're publisher, insists on a certain amount of participation from you.

Tamara Thompson: Yup.

Justin Million: And you can stipulate that beforehand, like, I won't be involved in any kind of readings or launches or marketing. And then they'll say, like, okay, well the book sales will you know? Look-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: Like you didn't do any of that. So just be aware of that. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, I'm gonna, I still have some questions about the press. So, I'm gonna bring it back a little, f that's okay with you.

Justin Million: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Because I am, because Elisha talked a little bit about this, but because the editing process and stuff like that is more, like, in your wheelhouse and the kinds of things that you do publish, which is like poetry for the most part, she said, that you guys do a couple of other little things, but majority poetry, if I'm remembering correctly.

Justin Million: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I'm interested in like, why you like, like, why, poetry other than, like,-it's probably going to boil down to, like, interest and just joy. But, like, I still want to ask the question of, like, why those types of works?

Justin Million: Yeah, I guess it's just because it's I feel poetry is the only-like I mean, I'm, I'm a, I'm a, or was an academic; like, I have a master's degree in English literature. Like, I can talk that academic talk if I need to. I can write that academic writing if I need to. But it-poetry is the thing I know most about. It's the thing that I know more



about than anything else that I know anything about and so I guess that would be the kind of easy answer. There are more kind of interesting personal answers, maybe that, like, I like discovering poets. I like discovering poets that are doing, especially the ones that are doing something different or the best possible reaction you can get, and people always, or a lot of people always, find this to be kind of funny. Or maybe not funny is that I-I think it's a great sign when I get jealous of somebody else's work. Like, if I get jealous of a line, if somebody can write me a line that I'm like, oh, my God; like I feel like a gut punch; where I'm, like, "Man, I could die happy that day with that line, or I could end the day." I shouldn't say die happy. I could end this day happy if I had written that line. That's quite a thing, because I've read a lot of things. I've read thousands of different things. So, if you can give me something that whether it's syntactically novel or, I don't know, you've just said something a certain way that now I can't look at that object or think about that subject the same way ever again, because of the way you unfolded it that's a special thing, and I need to know or want to know those people. And I want because I want to, it's not like I all of a sudden want to, you know, bring them into my friend group or something. It's just part of it is, yeah, selfish. And knowing that, you know, I saw something in that work, and I get to read it first before other people do, and-and kind of watch it grow, which we've got to see with a few writers of Bird Buried press and to see them go on to bigger things. But I want them to know that I see the thing in their work, because going back to what we were saying a bit earlier about, you know, kind of your younger demystification whatnot. Like it's such a fan-it's unlike any other feeling when a poet well, sees you and-and because we're all kind of writing for an invisible audience. So, when somebody from that invisible audience sees you and reaches out to you and says you know, in my response, let's say to their submission like this line like knocked me on my ass. Congratulations! You know this-this is crazy good! I bet that feels really, really good like I still remember a review I had from Amanda Earle who's, I know pretty well from Ottawa. I don't know if you talked to her.

Tamara Thompson: No, not yet.

Justin Million: A small press person. She's been going for quite a while in Ottawa. Amanda Earl, Earl as in EARL as the title she wrote a review, a one-line review of a poem of mine in an anthology. So, she was picking poems that you like from this anthology. I think- (technical difficulties occurred) by Rob McLennan (technical issues occurred) like Justin's, Justin's work is so banal, but that banality makes it possible to achieve, like, sometimes a perfect line. And that's what I've been going for this whole-like yes, banality is not an insult to me. Like banality is what I want. That's kind of what I'm looking for. And then, so that I can, you know, lift something out of that within the poem like I can talk to you about. You know I don't know something, layman, and-and you know everyday commonplace. And then to, you know rocket ship something out of that or hit you with something in that to me that's a lot I don't know. There, that's my style. So, she hit it exactly and I was just like, I don't know, and I've, I've recalled it now that, that's probably a ten- or twelve-year-old review, and I still remember it because she saw me. And I've had it happen since. But yeah, when a po-another poet sees you, it's like it

seems like almost like a chance meeting that never should have happened. Because again, you're casting these poems out to eight billion other people. Anybody could read it. But if you can get one of those people that's like this poem was made for me, you know how people say that about TV or movies like *Twin Peaks*, was made for me. It is David Lynch saw me. I wasn't even well, I was like seven years old, but he's like I'm making this for Justin Million. He's going to love this when he's older. It's going to be his favorite thing, and it is like, it seems like it was made for me. When people, yeah, read that poem of yours, and they think like this is for me. This is written to me and then somebody tells you that. Forget it; that's it! Like I'd rather have that than the money if-if somebody were like you could have the-the ten thousand a-a month every day or whatever for the rest of your life. That lotto thing, or you can get an email from a poet you respect every day telling you how much they like your work. I'll take the emails; I'll make money somewhere else. I'll take thy, and it's not about being adored and you know everybody blowing you over it, but like it's about, man like I'm, I'm, I'm doing something here that other people are seeing and valuing that has nothing to do with money. Like, fuck that's as good as it gets. I can't think of anything better.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, to have someone understand the thing that you're trying to communicate.

Justin Million: And in that special way that you slaved over in which to communicate it. That, just that's perfect way for them that is not going to be perfect, or even likable to somebody else.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I wrote a poem about.

Justin Million: Oh!

(Technical difficulties occurred)

Tamara Thompson: What is your process from like submission to production? Elisha talked a little bit about the production side of things. Could you talk a little bit about your editorial process a bit?

Justin Million: Yeah, it's-it's certainly again, I think, just because by virtue of me wanting to do, be a little different. And for the mag, or for the-the press to be a bit different than other presses. I don't really have a hard and fast editorial process. I mean some books you know, some poets that I've been paired with to work with as a poetry editor of *Bird Buried* have required a lot of work. And by work I don't mean; you know a red pen to their manuscript and just destroying it. That has happened maybe a couple times, but it always happens with, in collaboration with the poet. But I usually like to tell people now and maybe for the last few years, like I will be tearing apart pieces of your book. Likely if that's gonna be a problem, you know, maybe this isn't going to work because I do want freedom as an editor to, yeah, if I feel like I'm the big changes or big sweeping changes that I'm making, if I feel they're improving the work, then I'm going to, I'm going to put that forward now again. I would never move forward with finished manuscript to give to Elisha as gospel, to then be printed. I would never do that without making sure that the

writer is, the poet is entirely satisfied with the product that's coming out as satisfied as a poet can be because I- you know, you do have to kind of cut it off at some point, because, and Cameron could attest to this because Cameron's published me many times, that I'm not necessarily the best when it comes to meeting a deadline you know. I always I keep reading, and then I'll send and-and editing my own work. And then, you know, even if it's past the submission date with Cameron, let's say, you know I'll-I'll send him the finished manuscript, and then that night I'll send him another one. Then in the morning, I'll be like, oh, no, no, it's this one; you know at some point you do kind of got to cut it off and say, you know, can we, are we satisfied with this to move forward? But I've also worked with writers where I've said before, you know to them that this book kind of defies editing for various reasons, so I'll still go through it and talk to them about it and whatnot. But in a lot of ways it defies editing, you know, stuff like we did a book with Katherine High. She was a local poet here who's now moved on somewhere in cow country outside of Peterborough, but she had a book. That was basically using Craigslist, old Craigslist posts and content. And just kind of, you know, found doing kind of found poetry work within those Craigslist posts, so none of the language she ever used was her own. So, in a lot of ways, the book kind of defied editing, because it was necessary for it to feel kind of ripped from something else, and so by smoothing it out or making it sound more like her one was actually kind of losing the voice of the book. If that makes sense.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it does.

Justin Million: So, you know, I even told her that, like, I'm not going to be doing a lot of editing because if I, you know, scratch something out and I say, "what about this?" Then the whole conceit is blown, because now I'm inserting my own language, or you know, asking her to insert some of her own language in a, in a into a machine into which it would not fit, like trying to put a part for a vacuum in your car, you know, or something like that. It just it wouldn't work. It wouldn't make sense so. And I think that's how I-I don't, I think I'm a really good poetry, editor. Once I get in, I can tell you what's right and what's wrong and what works and what doesn't, I'm not strong in traditional editing. I - don't know what a dangling participle is you know I-I don't know what a yeah, I you know my grammar is more of the school like I know what a thing should sound like as opposed to it's more intuitive, I guess, than even though I have a master's degree. For some reason we never had to really get any of that drilled into us, for good or ill.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Justin Million: So yeah, it's different. It's different for each poet. And I think it should be that way. I think that makes sense. And as long as I'm working with them and not coming down on them with some type of this is the way I work. And this will be the rigorous process, and if you don't abide by it, then you know you're out like, let's just make it easy again. The stakes are so, the stakes are low in terms of the reception. The stakes are very high, though, in terms of getting the work the way you want it. So, you know, so again, like the stakes overall are low as in the industry stakes. There aren't any, this isn't gonna make any money, but

you know people will read it, and you want to be well represented. You want the work to still be the work that it felt like when you submitted it. So, it is a bit of a fine line and there are certainly a lot of as you would know and as anybody any good writer reader, would know there are very bad editors. And there are really good editors. It just depends on, yeah, unfortunately, it depends on who you get.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, sad but true. But sometimes you can find a true home for your manuscript. I always find it really nice when people genuinely care about your work. And they say, well, you could probably publish this anywhere else. And it's like, yeah, but you care about this work. This is this manuscript's home, don't really need to give it to somebody else who might, well, for a bit of lack of a term, fuck it up, you know? Yeah.

Justin Million: Absolutely and that should be worth more, like, I of course I like, and now I'm only operating in that in that way, like I, if I have a chapbook to publish, I'm either gonna bring it to Bird Buried press my own press or I'm gonna bring it to Cameron, or maybe you know somebody else who I have a relationship with, like Jim Johnstone, maybe at Anstruther, or you know there are, there's it's not a long list. And if none of them want to publish it then I would just publish it myself. If it's something trade book length which I'll be, I'll be getting into that mode soon, because I've been working on a been working on a manuscript now, the same manuscript, now for about seventy-two years, is something like that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: Finally, finally almost ready to-to be, you know, shopped around. But you know, like, yeah, I-I at that point, I'll-I'll be looking, probably to presses that I'll start with presses that I do know bit about, or if maybe I know the poetry editor. But I again, I won't be precious about it. I don't know if Elisha told you anything about. You know her trials and tribulations trying to get her book published, or one of her books. And it's a great book, so it's a shame that it wasn't just gobbled up immediately. But at the same time, you know now I've you know I've recommended that she open up her-her scope of submissions a little bit, because she really wanted this book to be published with presses that she admired and-and really liked. But that meant, but that meant that she had to only apply to or only send the work to two or three places.

(Technical issues occurred).

Justin Million: And I would argue like by, by virtue of publishing something in Canada, especially with a publisher that can reach now that has national reach. That's, that's way more interesting. You probably actually reach more people than you would by publishing with, like a state publisher in America, where, you know, if you publish with a small publisher in Maine who, just by virtue of it, being in America, is actually bigger than most, if not all, Canadian publishing houses but doesn't have a national reach. Then you're actually reaching more people in Canada, across Canada than you are in that small market in the States. So, just by virtue of being published in America, doesn't mean you're any

better off. I think it's just because a lot of people we hear from in America who are doing interviews and whatever and have a book coming out because they're all over the media. And they're really out there you know, with a marketing machine. You hear a lot more about, you know the New York Times bestseller list and, and shit like that, like nobody really talks about the Globe and Mail list. You know it's not that big of a deal. The New York Times bestseller list is, is the thing so. You know? Like, yeah, I think it's just.

Tamara Thompson: Which I don't get I usually don't like half the things they put on there.

Justin Million: No, well, sure, and that's it's, it's the great evener, you know. It's just, it's, it's lowest common denominator work but that's why it appeals to so many, because the appeal is so broad. The, but you know, we, we, we have a unique opportunity in Canada. Your book can go a lot further here I think, in a lot of ways. Anyhow, but I'm a, I'm a believer in hyper regionalism more and more now I think that given, you know AI, even though that's not full blown, not even close to full blown yet like it's, it to me it's looking more and more like there should be at least more impetus on local being able to prove that you actually wrote it yourself, for instance, we're gonna have to reckon with that soon. But that's why I'm, I'm you know, I'm becoming more I would argue of a performance artist. Because I like the idea of, of doing live poetry work that you know. Then it's not like I'm doing it to prove that it's a human being doing it. But that's a nice added benefit and just getting, you know, to see the art being made right in front of you in a time when we won't know what was made by a person and what wasn't, I just think it's, it's, it's gotta come back to regionalist, regionalist kind of mentality in terms of funding and output. I mean, I may be wrong about that, but we'll see. It just makes sense to me.

(Technical issues occurred).

Justin Million: Yep, one like, let's just, let's just opt out and start acting more locally. I mean.

Tamara Thompson: Yup.

Justin Million: It-it, you know local, doing more locally can also affect the region and the nation. You know. So, it's not that by starting locally. You're, you're opting out necessarily. But I don't know I'm opting out. Excuse me, I'm opting out more and more these days, and it's improving my mental health. Like done with the social media, etc, anyway. Sorry.

Tamara Thompson: No, you're totally fine. I-I get it. It's so frustrating. I think that's one of the things I love about chapbooks so much is that I know a human made this because there are like five spelling mistakes. The, like, paper isn't folded completely perfectly, because, you know, card stocks hard to fold, or you know what I mean, or it could be this beautiful art object that was made immaculately. Then someone handwrote, you know five out of fifty, you know.

Justin Million: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I love that, ya know? And my most recent book creation thing, I was like, I really don't want this to be perfect. I want, this is a horror story. The scrappiness will add to it, but also things don't have to be perfect. They don't have to look immaculate, and there was something so rejuvenating about making that book just being like, yeah, it's scrappy. I couldn't figure out how to lay out the page correctly, so I slapped the, couldn't figure out how to print this picture on cardstock, so I put it on regular paper, and I glued it, you know.

Justin Million: Yeah, absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: I forced with glue, you know.

Justin Million: I did that for two, I did two show and tell poetry zines during the pandemic because, you know, like it wasn't really running the series like I did a few online things. I think.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Justin Million: And did a couple of things here and there. But yeah, and with the, and the zines were man, I forgot how much work it is to actually do, put a zine together. Especially when you're cutting out things and pasting them in and finding the right images and blah, blah, blah like it's, it's hours and hours, but at least, when it came time to the poetry, I didn't have to worry about layout. I just cut it out of the page. I printed it on, you know, eight and a half by eleven, or whatever and then just cut out the poetry and glued it onto the page and then the poetry layout parts done so and that can also be very rewarding because of the immediacy of the reward. (Technical issues occurred) I guess I don't know what else to say about that.

Tamara Thompson: That's alright.

(Technical issues occurred).

Justin Million: -I don't, I don't really even know. Like I've, I've spent maybe not enough time like trying to trace like the-the first moment, you know, a lot of people have like, you know, actors like oh, I went and saw this, and I knew I wanted to do that, I never really had that moment. I would argue, because when you're young, like very young like, which is, when I started writing like I think I probably wrote my first poem when I was like first purposeful poem. For, it was for a girl, and I think I was probably twelve, and it was more kind of sing-songy as I, you know, think, probably tends to happen more so than not. Usually, the gateway drug seems to be music like you get into music and then music lyrics become interesting to you, and then you start writing your own lyrics, probably, and then you find out about poetry, and then you want to be a bit more abstract, or whatever, and you start writing poetry. For me it was. It was kind of that way, but I think that's mostly just because we don't have a lot of exposure to poetry when we're younger.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: And unless your parents are reading, you-like my parents like, neither of them graduated high school. They're both you know, shift workers, factory workers, or they were, anyway. And I think unless you have like Shel Silverstein read to you when you're a kid or something like that. You don't even really know what poetry is, or you think it's your roses are red blah, blah blah or you think it's like Shakespeare, and it's this unwieldy thing that you'll never understand. So, again I came to it, a bit well, literally, romantically, like trying to impress a girl. And then I remember I got, you know, feedback from a couple of my friends who I always, I always credit my friend Nick Hodgson who I don't really see so much anymore. But he was a good friend of mine in elementary school and high school, and I'll always credit him cause he was like, I was like a chubby, funny kid. And I kind of played that, you know, like funny role in our group of friends. And our group of friends were kind of like the jockey kids, which is weird, because I certainly was not that, and I'm not that now. But you know, Nick, would go on to high school and be like a super popular kid and, but I remember him giving me feedback on that poem. Being, like, man this is like super cool, like, you gotta give this to her because I was waffling about whether or not I should and that vindication from him, I think, was like, I was on a-I was on a kind of a knife edge, and didn't know at the time between, like, am I gonna keep doing this or not? And you know, even after Nick Hodgson kind of, you know, justifying me writing this poem, and you know, giving me that approval, that I didn't know I wanted or needed. I think it kind of kept me going. And then, when I got into high school it started to make a lot more sense. You start reading; I started reading poetry in earnest, started listening to more kind of complicated music. And then you start to see some kind of representations in pop culture. Like, I was the kid sitting at his locker you know, writing poems, and had my little notebook, which I thought everything I was writing was brilliant, and that nobody had ever written anything like that before. Had a giant ego I think also because I was the only poet that I knew. Nobody else in my friend group or in high school that I knew of was writing poetry. So, I thought I was some unique beast, and turns out obviously that I was not, but yeah, then I-I managed to have great, in my mind it's all becoming a poet is all about the little things that keep you going so like Nick Hodgson. And then I had a series of really great teachers in high school who are all feeding me different things. Like Frank Drum, who was my writer's craft prof. Which he would not be allowed to do now, of course, but he would keep me after class, and we would sit there and talk and listen to like Tom Waits and talk about William Burroughs and, which was amazing. And then I had Joe Webster, who was teaching me about, you know Robert Frost and Whitman, and-and stuff like that. And then I had Terry Collins who was teaching about the Canadians like Al Purdy and such, so I had a very well-rounded high school literary education. But I was so keen. I think it was easy to kind of, for the teachers to see that and to want to help me along with that. So, you know, it seems like a-a solo journey. Being a poet in a lot of ways and a lot of ways it is your dark nights of the soul. All that stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: But I do really think whether you know, whether it happens, you know, consciously or not whether you can recognize it at the time. It's really, they're usually I think, you know, a collaborative process between you and other people. That kind of keep you going, and a collaborative process, of course, that nobody knows is kind of happening or working on you. But it is, you need those people to keep you going, because poetry is a hard thing to say that you're doing. You know it's like probably tantamount to being in Los Angeles and saying you're an actor you know. Everybody just kind of rolls their eyes and doesn't take you very seriously. Which is why I've always made it a point to call myself a poet.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: Also, because I think I've had a few people over the course of my life say, like it really affected me when you called yourself a poet, because I never wanted to call myself that, or didn't think I could.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: And in that way, I'm maybe keeping that writer going in a way that people had kept me going before. So yeah, I do think it's, it's, you know again, as much as it seems like a solo journey. It's really not.

Tamara Thompson: That's something I try and instill in my students all the time. You can be the writer who sits and writes in solitude. But if you only ever do that, you will not become the good writer you want to become, you become the better writer when you go out there and interact with your community.

Justin Million: Absolutely. Also, like I had the added benefit of you know, like with Cameron and others at-at In/Words, like you know, like we were so passionate that we would like you know, we would have class and then we would all go to the campus bar to actually talk about class like not to go talk about girls or well, and we had girls with us. But, like you know, you're not going talking about sex and drugs, and whatever like and what you're gonna do that weekend we actually went to talk about work. And like we, I really do think that we were such a kind of special group of writers at that time. And you know, looking back on the list like, it's a pretty good list for you know, especially for Ontario poets because we were all pushing each other some of us, to greater degree than others like I was definitely, as I said before, I was the one that would read something good and be like, aw fuck you know, like shit, that's really good, like. Cameron wrote something really good. So, I gotta write something really good and.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Justin Million: I don't know if everybody thought that way. I doubt Cameron did. But to different degrees, we were all doing that and meeting up on weekends and talking about poetry and talking about books. And so, it was a big part of our lives, and we made it a big part of our lives because we were all were invested in it. And yeah, pushing, pushing each



other is huge and it doesn't have to be antagonistic. Sometimes I prefer when it is because I think that can light a different fire. But.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: Yeah. It's all about pushing each other.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so correct me if I'm wrong, but you actually have some of your work published as like chapbooks, right?

Justin Million: Oh, yeah, I've got quite a few. I probably got, jeez, I don't have a, I don't have a comprehensive number, but it's probably something like twenty-five, maybe something like that.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, so it's a choice to publish something as a chapbook. Right? So why did you make that choice for those works?

Justin Million: At different points in your life as a writer you make different choices. I think about that like the-the reason why I published you know my third chapbook let's say where I did, and how I did is very different than how I would publish a book now or a couple of years ago, for instance, but.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Justin Million: And why but like in the beginning, you just want your work out there and that grew into, you know, like, well, hang on, we control the means of production here. I can print whatever I want whenever I want like. Well, shit, why would I wait like, I remember there were at least a couple of chapbooks, where I wrote the content over a night or two and published it, and it was being disseminated within like three days. All on my own like, while, like no other hands had touched it or were part of it and I didn't assess it. You know I didn't send it to anybody to assess for merit. I just published it, whereas I've even though I was in In/Words the chapbooks that were published through inwards you know, wouldn't just be you know, thrown into the printer and-and printed right away. Somebody else would have edited that, or looked at it at least first, and then with Bird Buried to jump forward. With Bird Buried it tends to just get published, because I mean I'm the poetry editor. But Elisha will always look at it before, and chances are I'll always send it to somebody else beforehand. But if I was going to send it to you know an outside publisher like Cameron, which I've published with many times. You know he will do the editing work, and he'll question me on things, and he'll push me which is, you know, the experience you should be looking for I think I, because publishing is such a vast or chapbook publishing is such a vast thing, industry. If you wanna even, though it's not an industry, I would say it's the more you get into it the more different kinds of chapbook publishing there are, like I as much as I rail against self-publishing. I think it's-it's one thing to self-publish if you've been in the game for like twenty years and you know how to make it. And you, you know, blah, blah, blah, you know everything, almost everything about chapbooks inside. Now it's different to self publish then than it is to publish your first book. You don't even know how you know you would go to put a chapbook together. You've never, maybe even read another chapbook like that's different. When

you have an education, I guess it'd be tantamount to like a director editing their own film. You probably don't start there. Or maybe you do start that way just because of money and whatever. But you get to the point where you're like no, no, I want my vision expressed the way I want it. But yeah, I do, it's different. Sometimes I do want my work assessed for merit by somebody else most of the time I do. Unless it's gonna get published with Bird Buried. And then I'm just doing myself. And I find I think of those two different modes of publishing as being different.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Justin Million: Even though they're both chapbooks and they're both chapbook publishers, one is just kind of a shoot; like, I throw it down the shoot. It gets printed right away because I'm controlling the means of production whereas, of course, I know I'm not and I have to be hands off, kind of, as the person who submitted the work elsewhere. But chapbooks are extremely important and different than other type of publishing in a lot of ways, and the biggest one, which everybody would probably say is just the immediacy which I already touched on you. Can-you can publish a chapbook in a day, in an afternoon depending if you already have the material, you can, you know, publish it right away. So, you don't have to wait to six months to two years for a trade book which is just crazy in my mind and yeah, you have a bit more freedom in terms of what you're publishing. You're also involved in a kind of you know, gift economy of sorts which is interesting, like a lot of people trade chapbooks which can be great but can also be a bit of a pain-in-the-ass, like you know, somebody like Cameron, who publishes beautiful hand ripped pages. And-and you know this card stock that he chose, and all this stuff. And then somebody comes along with a zine, and they want to do a one for one like well sorry, you know. I know that's your labor of love, but this labor of love is like the Sistine Chapel fucking chapbook. So, no I'm not gonna trade you this. Cameron probably would, because he's the nicest guy in the world. But you know it's, it's very-two very different things. They're just like, anything there's, there's a whole vast world to be discovered, so don't another reason not to just send your work to self publishers.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I'm interested in this next question, and you can, like, take it wherever you like. But what are some challenges that you faced as an author, like, throughout your time of, like, writing and trying to get published?

Justin Million: I think, didn't, I was just talking to somebody about this recently, which I do think is probably the number one problem for poets in particular, but I would argue any writer and you usually don't get over it until a bit later in your career, or maybe ever but is really, actually, if you're being honest with yourself, like, writing not just for or not, not writing for somebody else like, you know, I don't mean that, as you should only write for yourself and keep it for yourself but, you know, you should be a fan of your own work.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Justin Million: And you should be writing about, and you should be writing work that you can really stand behind and are proud of, not work that you

think your mom and dad would be proud of or your grandma or your favorite poet or whatever I think not many would admit that they do that because it's not a sexy thing to admit to because all you know, poets want to be mysterious, and you know, geniuses, and-and so to admit any type of philosophical or intellectual performative weakness is not sexy to do as a poet I know, but it's important. So that's, that's been at least my number one battle with publishing has been do I really like this or am I just writing this because I think this would win an award, or this would impress my family, you know I really do think that comes into it more than writers let on.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Justin Million: But I say, I do also think a big hurdle which we've touched on a bit here already is that ten-that kind of tenure track? Like, there's a, there's a grant that just came across my desk yesterday, called the DC Read Poetry Grant, I believe it's called through the Writers Trust of Canada; and it's, so it's such a great prize. But there's so-the prize is five thousand for eight different people. So, wow, that's huge amount of money every year and it's for poets of modest means. So, you have to be able to prove I guess, through a tax return or whatever, that you made under thirty thousand dollars last year in order to qualify which I think that's fantastic. The problem I have with it is you have to have had two quote or two books by quote traditional publishers. And, and so what they say, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What the hell, what?!

Justin Million: Yeah, I know. So-so I like they; they do go on to explain a bit about what it means, and basically what they mean by that in order to simplify what they mean by that is you have to have gotten like an advance and or royalties for the book. So, I sent an email to the administrator, who's you know the contact for this. And I probably should have waited an hour or two because I was a bit hot about it. But I wasn't mean, or, you know, terse or anything in the email. But you know, I just said like I-I whenever I see something like traditional publisher. I always have to clarify, because you know, Tamara, somebody like me I've been in, I've been working at this now, for, as I said about twenty years. I've got more chapbooks than anybody you're going to talk to. You know. Like, I've, I've been, I've run a two-reading series over fifteen years. I've, you know, published I don't know how many poems in little journals and zines, and whatever. I've mentored, I've taught classes, I was a TA. I've, you know, done basically everything other than you know, being a kind of tenure-track professor in it or, you know, some large kind of funding or large HarperCollins-esque publisher-gatekeeper. I've done everything but. And I'm also a working artist. So yes, I make under thirty thousand. But because of this arbitrary two traditionally published books, I am not able to apply.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: And shit like that bothers me a lot because and this is where my bit of ego comes in, but it comes in-in an ideally, a generative way for others. Is that, like, that prize is tailor-made for somebody like

me, who has given more of themselves to their poetry community than anyone else that I know. But I can't do it because I've chosen in most kind of philosophical ways which we've talked about to not publish trade books. But like I have one, I have a trade book with Apt.9, and I've had other, you know, I've been paid for chapbooks. So, like, do I qualify because of that? I've been, I was in an anthology that was a trade book. So does that qualify, like I've published in so many different ways, just not in the one specific way that they're looking for. That frustrates me. So, this-- this is also why I think, Tamara, that people don't, that people don't veer off from the traditional publishing path, because this is the type of bullshit that you can run up against and.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: It's not the fault of the DC Read Grant, of course; like it's great, regardless of whether or not I could participate. It's just I think if they were to take a step back and think about my objection, they might be like, oh, yeah, like because then, you know, let's break it down in Seinfeldian terms, like they are, they have a grant for basically poor working artists. But in order to apply, you have--have to have had two opportunities granted to you through to traditional publishers, which chances are if you're broke and you know publishing one trade book, then you're going to keep up with it enough to publish a second one anyway, I just the second book seems arbitrary to me and the only defense I can see for it is, it proves your you know dedication. It's like, well, fuck, if I have one trade book with a traditional publisher, quote unquote that should already tell you because that's hard enough to do that should already tell you that I'm dedicated and interested you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: So.

Tamara Thompson: I hate how people put down smaller publishing as not as good as trade or isn't as good as big publishing and stuff like. That's, I think one of the things that I dislike a lot is like there's definitely a range when it comes to chat books. You have your super serious stuff. You have your scrappy stuff, and I think both can be like, live in the same world, and we can still treat it with respect like I don't understand why people are like well, it's just a chapbook, and it's like whoa, there, Bud, there's a lot of work and effort and care put into this thing. It's not quote unquote just a chapbook, just because we're not making any money off of it doesn't mean that there's not value here, you know, and I find that very frustrating when people are like well, there's no value, because there's no fame or fortune, and it's like well, fame and fortune don't make people happy anyway. So, like, why would I like, you know, like.

Justin Million: But that--that presupposition about quality is exactly what I hate and--and.

Tamara Thompson: Yup.

Justin Million: Like, and I expressed in my email to this, to this administrator that, like again, I've--because it said, you know it also

said, okay so, if you've got an advance or royalties but also, like, you've worked with, like, that publisher should have, you know, an editorial review process. Well, I've had chapter-, chapbooks published that have gone through an editorial review process, and I've been paid for so like does that not count like I-or I've also experienced you know, kind of or and heard of presses that are the inverse that are just like they're, they would, they're called what would be called a traditional book publisher, in that they perfect bind books and all that kind of stuff. But it's one person. There is no really editorial review process except for that one person, and they pay you in copies instead of money. So, like, the definition doesn't even work. And this is from the writer's trust. So, like, I know, they're trying to cover their ass by saying like, oh, by two traditional publishing houses. We're really saying like-or we're more bound to get professionals. But, like, man! it's-it's such a weird, specific group they're looking for like professional poets who are broke, but who have two trade books like man that's-that's too specific, like, you know. Make it one, one trade book by a traditional publisher and a history like, just say, a history of publishing which could include performance. Like they say, they're not including self-publishing, which I totally understand and they're not doing spoken word, which I also understand because that's those are things that you know are very clear. But as soon as you get into traditional book publishing. I need clarification. So, I still haven't got an email back from her. And I presume she's just gonna be, she's just gonna say, well you know, yes, we mean we do, we had to pick some type of you know, guidelines. And we picked you know, royalties and advances like that's I don't know. It's, it's I don't know.

Tamara Thompson: It feels like those scholarships that they give first-year students where the first-year student has to keep their ninety-five average in their first year in their first semester, and it's, like, oh, so they gave you a lot of money, but they know you're not going to keep it, and they know that you're going to be stressed out and like I, like it was a hard truth that I was taught by Rob Winger, who is my first prof under, and he's like, it is not your fault that this school or this company gave this kid that money with an unattainable average to keep.

Justin Million: Yeah, absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: That is not your fault. They purposely made it so that this kid would lose. And then they won't have to keep paying it.

Justin Million: But it makes them look great, right? Like, it makes them look great like we're giving this money out. All you need to do is, keep it, well that's not the reality.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's not an attainable thing.

Justin Million: Yeah. And if you don't know the mechanics of that reality and how it actually works, you think great I'm not being exploited. But you are. And of course this happens in publishing all the time. I would actually argue that exploitation is more so found in self publishing like I would argue that.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Justin Million: Self publishing is just entirely exploited. It's a, it's and like now there are people which I'm sure you've seen as many as I have that like, especially if you're on social media. How many of these grifters are out there telling you like I can help you self publish your book.

Tamara Thompson: My favourite are the Jesus ones where they're like if you've had a moment with Jesus Christ, and you have a fateful story to tell, we'll put it in a book, and I'm just like aaaaaah!.

Justin Million: Oh my god.

Tamara Thompson: It's always like one of those old grandmothers or one of those older gentlemen with a suit in his hair that's definitely not his own, that's very, very stiff on his head, and it's like, we believe in your story of Jesus Christ. And I'm like, you're ripping off a grandmother who's so Christian? What's wrong with you?

Justin Million: (Laughs) yeah, I think it's-I mean, especially that stuff like I can help you self publishes your book. That's some truly evil shit, because I don't care how, you know-what good intentions you're coming into it with. If you think you have good intentions of helping somebody else publish a book, like, that's an evil shit, because that's something that's first of all somebody can do for free very easily. So, I don't know why you would ever have an intermediary in that process. I don't know.

(Technical issues occurred).

Justin Million: Yeah, well, I-I think I yeah, I-I don't need to go on about that. So publishing is evil and awful.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: But I also think chapbook, the chapbook world. Yeah, it suffers most from a kind of turning up one's nose. But I think that's mostly because one people aren't knowledgeable of, or don't really care to be knowledgeable of, the history of chapbooks even in their own backyard or in Ontario. If you want to expand the backyard, which is vast. And people don't really think about it enough. So, you know, like somebody like me or you, or you know, especially Cameron, like, you know, we've thought about this stuff for a long time and in different ways, and we've talked to each other about this in a thousand different ways. And it's, it's a, again I hate, I really hesitate to use the word industry, but it is, it's, it's as vast a thing as that word connotes. So, I like almost like using the word industry because it makes it seem big. And it is big. It's just big. There's something big, filled with small work and by small work.

Tamara Thompson: It's something big that is not industrial.

Justin Million: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It's not getting rid of the human. It's actually one of the ways of publishing that adds the human back into the book, adds the author back in right. So.

Justin Million: Absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: It's one of the reasons why I also hesitate to use industry, because it shows the vastness, but it takes away that human aspect which I think is so integral to the scene. You know?

Justin Million: Absolutely. Well and I think it's those little notes, too, that you brought up earlier, like the this is copy five of fifty. Handwritten in that makes it a, an immediately precious item. Which you can't get from a trade book. The only way you can get it from a trade book, I guess, is if the author were to sign it. And even then, that's not-that just means it's been in the author's hands. It doesn't mean it was necessarily special to the publisher, you know. And then there are little things like with Elisha's books, which I'm sure she told you about like the design element is what you know really sets a Bird Buried book apart from another chapbook press especially in the ones that are like where no cover where no two covers are the same, within the same print run like that stuff I find to be very interesting.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I'm interested in my next question here. So, I want to, I want to ask, because I'm looking at our time and want to pace things a little bit here. But do you think chapbooks are important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not?

Justin Million: Oh, yeah, that's a big question. I would say, like hip shot answer, would be to start, would be-I think it's both. Maybe a lack of-of education about publishing is probably the biggest one in terms of why chapbooks are so much more important are-are so important. They-they offer an alternative to the kind of the machinery of larger press. And you know I've never met an industry, a sport, a thing, that doesn't benefit from multiplicity of ideas presentation, etc. What am I really trying to say?

Tamara Thompson: That doesn't benefit from, like, the variety?

Justin Million: I guess the chapbook is just like more democratic like it's-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: You know, like it, it's-it's first, it's kind of like soccer, you know. People talk about soccer as being like the ultimate sport because of its international appeal, but also because all you need is a ball you know, like for a chapbook like you really don't need a whole lot like, especially if you want to bring zines into that fold. Pardon the pun like.

Tamara Thompson: (Laugh).

Justin Million: You know, all you really need is a printer, and even then, you don't really need one. You can make a, you can make a chapbook with just a typewriter if you have one. You can make it with, fuck, I don't know. You could use a scanner. And-and-and there's, there's so many different ways to do it. But really, if you just want, as bare bones as you can get in the using the furthering, the soccer analogy. You really just need the fold, pa-paper in half and have some type of written content inside that could be handwritten for fuck's sakes. That's what I mean about, you know, more democratic. It's also, it-it's defying kind of the capitalist mentality in publishing. As I said before, there's a kind of a gift economy attached to chapbooks that I think in some ways does it a bit of a disservice in that it makes it seem like these are almost trading cards as opposed to works of art. That can be a problem. But ideally, the person asking, you know, can we trade is aware of the quality of yours compared to theirs, if that's an issue. But yeah, I just the-the democracy of the whole thing, but also yeah, it means of production are available to you. I don't know anybody that has the ability to special bind a book at home. I know a lot of people in publishing. I don't know anybody who has that ability. So, most people I know just send the work to Coach House to be printed, if that's what they want to do. But chapbooks are also it seems, yeah, it seems a bit more, as I said before, a bit more of a precious commodity in that it's probably a smaller print run, but also there's a good chance that actually well, almost a one hundred percent chance that the author themselves had their hands on it, and the publisher had their physical hands on it. This isn't just some sterile thing that went to a press and came in a box and goes right on the bookstore shelf at chapters or whatever, and then gets picked up by, you know whoever and they're the first human being to kind of lay real hands on it. Again, all this is to say that that there's not, it's not-do I think it's better for me personally, in terms of philosophy and whatever than a trade book? But like anything it's just a matter of-of taste. I still read trade book poetry. But it's more special to me as opposed to going to a press like House of, Anansi ordering the book by, you know, a friend pre-pre order. Then, when it arrives in the mail. It's way more special to get an envelope, a thin envelope out of nowhere from a friend who's like, hey, I-I want you to read this, or I thought you should have this and it's something that you know they passion projected into being that's more valuable to me. Also, actually, the last thing I'll say about it is, which I'm surprised is why it hasn't caught on more, and maybe it will here in the coming, you know, years and whatnot is-is the speed at which you can read it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: You know like, unless it's extremely dense, for whatever reason. But if it's a chapbook of poetry, chances are you can read it on the bus you know, on your, on your commute, on your lunch break when you have a spare ten-fifteen minutes. So, there's that added benefit also and I guess there's maybe the added benefit of it kind of being tantamount to like an Ep that a band puts out like.



Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: You might get to experience a poet. You know their first works before they take off quote unquote on the traditional kind of tenure track. If that's what they choose to do you know, it's-it's-it's way more, it's way cooler, you know, I bet, for like an audio file, if an audio file has another audio file over to their place. They would probably want to show them something like this is like a Miles Davis bootleg before he did or ever recorded anything. Then here's kind of blue like the studio version. You know, like one is cooler to the insider than the other. And if I ever go to Cameron's he would have a lot of first edition traditional book publisher stuff to show me, but the real cool stuff that he would want to show me, and that I would take in as being ultra cool would, chances are, be early chapbooks by people we admire.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I'm-I'm curious, like, do you think this kind of publishing, like, this type of smaller publishing of, like, chapbooks and stuff-do you think it reflects Canada itself in some way.

Justin Million: I do, but it does. But the argument I'm going to make for it is-is also kind of covered by well, to a point by traditional book publishing, but just not as much not to the same degree. So, there are countless, well, not literally countless, I should say. But there are many small publishers, chapbook publishers, micro presses, etc all across the country that have then have easier access to artists in their community which, I think, is more where we're gonna be moving in the future. For a lot of reasons. But I-I think that-that means that small press actually has a better shot of reaching more people like if you're in rural Saskatchewan, well, it is anywhere in Saskatchewan I guess if you're outside of a major city from Manitoba to BC. Essentially or no, fuck, how many major cities in Canada really are there? If you're outside of a major city anywhere in Canada chances are there's a small, there's a small press publisher or a chapbook publisher in your town or city or environs like, especially in Ontario. Like, if you're in Ontario in a place that has over thirty thousand people, there is somebody publishing there and it might not be somebody you necessarily want to work with, because then you get into small town personalities and blah, blah, blah, which is something you had to deal with anywhere. But you get people that are just into publishing certain things or historical documents. But there is somebody somewhere in your city publishing something. You can't say that about a traditional book publisher. They're only located in Toronto, London, Ottawa like that's probably it in terms of Ontario because those are big city centers. Maybe you know anywhere outside the GTA, Mississauga, these kinds of places. And if you're elsewhere in the country like, if you're in Manitoba, it's probably just Winnipeg. Yeah, I just think there's-there's a lot more people doing it, and therefore it is more reflective of the country than traditional book publishing would be. And I'm not so much sure, I'm not so sure how in other ways chapbook publishing is more kind of uniquely Canadian let's say, then, traditional book publishing, or holds Canada up to a higher standard than traditional book publishing does. I guess just access and the fact that there's more of it. Also, these days, I'm seeing a lot more, which can only be good is-is more representational small presses. That are only publishing indigenous authors or LGBTQ writers or writers of color, or whatever and only those

writers which I always wonder about that part. That part can be a bit tough, because whenever you're limiting yourself to a certain population of a small country. It-it-it can probably be difficult to find folks after a few years, but that in particular is, is more indicative of Canadian publishing than what the traditional book people are doing. Because we're actually getting at the meat of like, who is, who is in the country? What is our country actually comprised of, and then representing them in, with, you know, gatekeepers that are actually of the same community. So that's more reflective. But yeah, other than that, I'm not really sure I'd have to give it more thought. But yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's, like-it's a great answer. I'm-I'm interested in like, we've been talking about, why are chapbooks important and everything like that. But I want to ask the question like more specifically, if that's okay with you. Of why are chapbooks important to you?

Justin Million: Yeah, it's a long answer. I well, like, all of my answers are. I think it's, it's versatile. You can do a lot more with it. Obviously, experimentation. You can do a lot more with. You're gonna find it very difficult nobody publishes EE Cummings anymore. You know, like or the Like, and maybe with good reason. But you can take way more risks. In-in appearance, content and actually dissemination of chapbooks, too, like you can leave a chapbook. It seems more quaint and effective in some ways to like leave a chapbook on a bus for somebody to find or wedge one in between two books in a library. It would seem weird to do that with a trade book. It would almost seem like you're creating waste or-or like I don't know. It seems more invasive than quaint to do that. That's a small example. But yeah, I love how you can also, through chapbooks and be and trade books by kind of that versatility of being able to publish in both or being the type of person that publishes in both as well as journals and whatnot. That you can have kind of different writing lives like different legacies is interesting to me like-like, oh, well, if you didn't like Justin's, Justin Million, like my trade book is based on like improvisational poetry writing like it's not a traditional trade book. So, for a long time I was kind of disappointed that people might think, or again, that worry about reception that I've been trying to shake now for a long time. I wouldn't want people to think that-that trade book stuff in that book is indicative of my best. You know trade book worthy work, because it's not. It's work that was literally rejected. Work from a live, improvisational poetry show, like that's very specific. But you know, like I have more of that traditional trade book slaved over, perfected in my mind poetry that is in chapbooks. So, like it's kind of the inverse of most folks like the-the content that's in that my trade book with Apt.9 is actually not at all indicative of the work that I would want to put out in a trade book.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Justin Million: That network is reserved for my chapbook work and submissions to magazines, or whatever, which I don't do so much more anymore, either, because I have issues with journals and small magazines also, but yeah, experimentation, versatility, ease, ease, ease of dissemination. Cost because I-

Tamara Thompson: Yuuuup.

Justin Million: As much as I, you know, would love to make money from poetry like anybody would working in poetry, knowing it's not about that frees you up to kind of work within it in a way that's like way more freeing. And you don't have to worry about money, because, you know, it's never going to be a part of it. So, you're-you're freed up then, as opposed to you know. Oh, I've got this fiction book, and it's coming in with Harper Colin. So, like, how rich am I gonna be like? Well, honey, you know you're not.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: But-but you know there's just there's zero expectation of that in chapbooks like it's just, it's not a thing. So, you don't have to worry about it. So, then that takes the whole money capitalist part out and replaces it with something much more holistic, I think and generative and just easy to play and easy to think about.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Justin Million: Also, if you don't, so I'll just say one more thing about that. If-if it also prevents you from having to lengthen a manuscript into inscrutability or lack of quality like, I know so many people that are like, I have this really tight manuscript, but it's only forty five pages, and I can't get a publisher to even look at it, because it's not the sixty or eighty that they demand in their guidelines. That's ridiculous. Like if the fucking thing is done at forty pages, then it's done. And there are so many people that just throw in work, filler work just to fill out that page length, and then the book suffers.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, a sad but unfortunate fact. Which, speaking of which, that statement actually kind of, leads into my next question about why do you think most small presses and micro presses close up shop, and how are you able to keep it going?

Justin Million: We are able to keep it going, because from the beginning in my mind we have been doing it the right way, and we've been doing it the way Cameron, I believe, has also been doing it like from the beginning. The idea was that we would, we would make I think the be, I think the first one was one chapbook, and like two or three pieces of ephemera then the idea was like we would sell through those, and then that would allow us to print the next book, or three books, maybe in terms of cost but also buy maybe a long arm stapler, or a piece of a print-a printer that's better for cardstock or so, like every round of publishing would only make us maybe fifty bucks. We're talking chapbooks here so like you maybe make fifty bucks or seventy-five bucks, or maybe oh, my God! A one hundred bucks on a at a book sale, or one hundred and fifty bucks, and then you leverage that into again purchasing, that lets you make better books or more of what you want to make and experiment with. I think, like many journals that fall by the wayside very quickly. There's this ego attached that, like everybody else in the publishing world is doing it wrong, and me and my friends are gonna do it the right way. That's never

been done before and which is great, you know, like more of that. But like, don't ever think you're, gonna you know, trod on territory that's never been trod upon before. But I think, and I think Elisha talked a bit about or about this to you, because she told me she did. But I think a lot of chapbook presses go about this the wrong way, like, I think Elisha told you, which I agree with, but I would phrase it differently. I think Elisha told you that like if you can't afford it, you shouldn't do it like my feeling on it is similar, but it's more like you know. Do it regardless but when it gets to a point when you can no longer afford it, you have to stop because you can't, it is unfair to put the cost of production on your community. Like that creates a kind of resentment in my mind at least, it does for me like I'll give you an example, and I won't name any names but there was a in Ottawa, there was somebody doing a-an anthology and in order to get this anthology published they, didn't have any money to do it, but they insisted on doing it, so like they went around and got every poet they called in. Like all these favors from all these poets like, can you give me a book? Can you to sell? Can you give me-and they basically did like a GoFundMe, a Kickstarter type thing to fund this project that, like everyone that was asked to participate financially, or in-kind donations didn't have any stake in it or want it. So, like basically, this one person who is you know, has been involved in the community for a long time and has and knows a lot of people, you know, just pulled a bunch of kind of shitty favors I would argue just to get this passion project done on everyone else's back and dime like I do not support that at all. I think if you can't afford again, if you start a small magazine and you're a year in, and you can no longer afford it. It's over. It is not a time to go to a GoFundMe page or anything like that like. It means that unless there's some type of circumstance in your community beyond your control, or whatever like it means that the community is not willing to support it. That's what it means. It's not that, oh, I missed this grant deadline, or like I mean, that may be part of it. But like you should also be doing that if you can. Of course.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Justin Million: But as soon as you're asking your community to fund your artistic endeavor, like, you're a grifter. At that point, you are using your base for wrongdoing in my mind. It's one thing if they give you money, it's 1 thing if they support it and buy your product. That's what you want. And it's not all about product. And blah, blah, blah, that's not what I mean, but just trying to use basic terms here, like if they're not, if they're not buying what you're selling. It's over and for good or ill, but it is over like I-I-I don't know like it's, it's like me taking up, okay, I want to take a painting and or let's use a real example. I want it like something I've always wanted to do. I want to take up directing. I want to direct a film. So, I wanna write a screenplay. Okay, but here's the thing guys, community, I don't have time to do that. So, I want you to pay for me, I've just decided I wanna do this, but I want you all to pay for it. And then, when my movie is ready to make, I want you to all pay for that like what like? No, you-you decided to do this. So why do we have to foot the bill? That's when people are taking advantage of this lovely kind of chapbook community that I've been trying to, you know, round about in a roundabout way to talk about. That's taking advantage of that. And I just think it's so silly. It's such a small community, small but vast in

the in the inside. It's like a Tardis, you know. Looks small on the outside but it's much bigger on the inside don't take advantage of that. And again, it is bad look, like your community will resent you for it. I guarantee it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's.

Justin Million: Don't force your art on somebody else's throat like? Oh, it's weird!

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's one of those things where it's okay if that thing is over.

Justin Million: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It's-it might suck. You might be disappointed. But that doesn't mean you can't participate in the community in other ways.

Justin Million: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Or maybe-

Justin Million: And don't.

Tamara Thompson: Sit back and think about how no one wants to help you or wants to work with you. Maybe that might say something.

Justin Million: Yes.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Justin Million: Yes, like that old saying, like, if you're looking for the asshole in the room and can't find it chances are you're the asshole like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: You know. Not only that, but, you know, assess, like, I always say this too, especially in more so in regard to community reading series; like, I've just finished hosting like my show-and-tell, just finished after nine years. And, like, it was time; it was limping along. It's time to end it. And I'm like, I'm a person that likes to put a, you know, a period on things and-and leave them behind. And assess, assess your artistic community for need and want. Before you dive in; like, don't dive into something ultra specific that's your passion and then be shocked when the community doesn't fall all over themselves to support it like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: If you want to open another coffee shop on Hunter Street, don't, because there's already eight of them like. So, if you open up a coffee shop on Hunter Street, and are shocked by the, by how few people patronize your establishment, you're an idiot because there's too many coffee shops already; so, you know, maybe a small magazine isn't like your community needs. Maybe your community needs a reading series. Maybe it

needs an open mic. Maybe it needs, fuck, I don't know. Maybe it needs an editorial service like or a zine making workshop, or you know, whatever plug in in ways that you're passionate about, of course, and don't be deterred by, you know somebody like me telling you to assess the community for need. That doesn't mean you need to forego your passion to find another one. But, don't be surprised at the end of the day, if you've opened up the eighth coffee shop on the street, and nobody wants to go there.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: Like of course they don't, or they might want to go. But you're not special, and if it goes under, that's why, same with a reading or a chapbook press or journal, I've seen so many come and go it's crazy. Like they'll come out and say, oh, we're going to pay one hundred dollars a piece, and the editors are all getting paid and it's a glossy cover. And I'm just thinking, like, wow, who-who has rich parents because.

Tamara Thompson: Yep.

Justin Million: That is not usually the case. You start small and Bird Buried will never have enough money to print perfect bound books every time and do whatever the fuck we want because that wasn't the point, but also because we're not scaling. You know we're not taking this to fucking Dragons Den.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So have a couple more questions here, and they're more just like, general, take-them-whenever-you-want-to kind of questions. So, I just have three left. And this one here is, what's something that you wish people knew about Canadian publishing, like public that you wish that they knew about?

Justin Million: Hmmm, yeah, that, I mean, I guess the number one big thing will be that, you know, so much of our culture is defined and built on the books that we publish, as a culture. And so, your culture, if that's the case, and if you believe in that, then it is also true that your culture as widely defined as you know, whatever people define culture as I know, it's a slippery term. But whatever that means for you again, if you believe that that's correct, that we are in some way defined by our cultural exports then our country is literally weakened by a lack of funding and support for publishing in any and all forms. So, it-it has a literal impact on the fabric of your culture on society, on well-being and mental health but also how you're seen by the rest of the world. Like there are countries that are known for certain literary forms you know, like that's interesting. What does that say about that place like, what does it say about Japan? What does the Haiku say about Japan?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: Oh, it says a lot actually. It's exactitude, it's tradition, it's seasonal. All of these things are so crucial to Japanese culture, and it's so readily apparent in the work. You know a lot of people say, just by virtue of Alice Monroe being a Canadian, I know where revising her legacy now, which don't have to get into the that.

Tamara Thompson: It's-it's getting rough out there for Alice Monroe right now.

Justin Million: It really is, and I have opinions about that. But it they don't matter but you know, because of her the Nobel and stuff like we are all of a sudden known for being a short story country. Whether that's true or not like I would argue, it's not really because Alice was kind of an innovator. So, and Alice, isn't that old? So, you know, I would argue, we're not really a country of short story writers. We've got some great ones. But I would argue, that's not what we're known for. But again, yeah, it-it-it defines in a way how the country, and the people are seen like how-how bookish your culture is like, especially if you've been on Instagram. You see all these like oh, the Germans have a word for browsing in a bookstore but not buying anything. You know, like, and I don't know what word that is. But like these type of words that are like buildings roman, you know, these type of like weirdo bookish German words like they have all these different terms for bookish things because they're a bookish culture and same with Scandinavian countries that like have holidays that are based on books, book purchasing and giving as gifts like that obviously means that reading and literacy are very important to those nations. So, you know, the book industry isn't just an indicator of an a, a, an economist indicator, something to throw into your GDP or whatever. It's, it's indicative of so much more than just how many literate people do you have in the country, we also are a multicultural country. So, I wouldn't be surprised if in the coming decades that's more of how we're known literally. You know, people like Jordan Abel, and (technical difficulties occurred) ya know these will be people just as Ocean Vuong has kind of opened a new kind of literary landscape in the States that was closed for some time. Those people will be well, Liz Howard, like Indigenous folks, people of color, Andre Alexis, you know, like these are becoming huge household names here and the more of those people that there are in our culture, then the more our culture will be known as being one that celebrates diversity in literature, and not just as window dressing or something we say on a fucking travel brochure, or whatever. It's real I'd like to think the States likes to think they can say that, but I don't, really don't think they are. If you look at the most popular writers in the country are still white people who've been publishing forever. Maybe that's the same here or to actually. But.

Tamara Thompson: I-I think it's bit. I think it's getting exciting. We're still there, but I think we're headed in the right direction especially with something like *How to Pronounce Knife* by Souvankham Thammavongsa that's a text I teach and Souvankham Thammavongsa-

Justin Million: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And the kids love it. It's their favorite read of the whole course. Is this short story by like, by this Canadian Laos woman and she's great, you know, and she's also a poet. So, she also is like the gateway drug for a lot of them for poetry. And it's fantastic, right. So, I-I don't necessarily think we're one hundred percent there, and it's going to take a long, long time. But like I think, having her on the syllabus being read in university is really important, because I think

people are getting an appreciation for her work. And it's not just like, oh, yeah, that book was okay, I have students come up to me and be like I loved this book. This book was funny. This book was heartwarming, and a lot of them are like, I've never read short stories like as an anthology before, like, you know, you read one in school or whatever. But they're like, I really like this format and I'm like, that's awesome. You've discovered something you enjoyed. Go delve more into it, you know.

Justin Million: And I, yeah, absolutely. I would also add to that in terms of answering the same question or furthering that answer rather is unless you're kind of on the inside of things again, which, like you are and I am, and probably everyone you've talked to-to some degree is like there's not a great, this is something I worked on at Carleton briefly with, well, Collett Tracey, for main words among other people, was trying to influence curricula in terms of what books are taught, at what ages. So, a bit different. We were concentrating on age, appropriateness but it was really, more of an attempt to get other books onto curriculums, curricula across the country, at least in Ontario, because I don't think unless you're in the know as I said, if you're not in the know, you really probably give zero thought to how the books that your kids have to read in high school are actually affecting the rest of their lives and are affecting the book culture in your country. So, like the-the traditional book which is still, like, I, I would assume, and I wasn't in high school-it was not too long ago, you know, twenty-five years ago, not too long, but like when I was in high school, I'm sure some of the same books, at least, are still compulsory reading. In early or mid high school, like *Catcher in the Rye* and fucking, you know, William Shakespeare, of course. And what was the-

Tamara Thompson: *To Kill a Mockingbird* is there still.

Justin Million: *To Kill a mockingbird*, you know; like not that those are, or *Great Gatsby*, you know, like not that these aren't-

Tamara Thompson: Oh, fuck! *The Great Gatsby*! God damn.

Justin Million: Or maybe whatever like, whatever your feelings are on them like when those books change to, they don't necessarily have to be by a writer of color, they but just like new books. Like new-ish like if we're talking fiction specific Canadian fiction, specifically like stuff that's been written in the last twenty years as opposed to the last fifty years or seventy years. That also has a profound impact on youth. What they will then go on to read, which is what you were just talking about, which is reminding me of this point. If you read Salinger like, it's fun to read Salinger, because then you get to go on to read things that are more interesting, actually, by Salinger than *Catcher the Rye*. And that should kind of always be the point. But if we've been giving, if the child is reading the same book as the parent and the grandparent. That's a problem; like, it's not that it's a problem, but that implies that the-the, each generation is facing the same problems, same obstacles, issues, etc., which is just, not true. So, equip the youth in particular with work that directly relates to, or maybe even takes place in a world that they can feel and understand that they're actually living in as opposed to picture it 1955, New York's-like, well, what like? It's seventy fucking years ago;



like, it's a totally different world now than it than it was even thirty years ago. Like you, we, you watch nineties sitcoms and read, you know we go over the best sell list from the nineties, and it's-it's not a great look, either. So why the fuck are we not doing our best as administrators and educators who have the power to do this kind of thing, to put different books on curriculums, curriculum, curricula, whatever. That might then expand the readership of people of color, indigenous folks, but also just people that are just writing now and about you know, concerns like why the fuck is somebody who's fourteen years old, reading *Catcher in the Rye*, where they could be reading Douglas Gibson you know, because Douglas Gibson has a lot more to say about where we are right now. Like with AI and technology. And or why not like, even though I don't really love him. But like Douglas Copeland, like, why aren't the kids reading some Douglas Copeland, even though that's more Gen X. But you know, he at least he's getting into issues of social media and the Internet. And-and how the world changed because of the Internet. You know, we're in a technological age and spiraling into something else that we don't even know yet. And we're reading literature from you know, our grandparent's generation. It's very strange and we just keep doing it because these are classics. Like, I, I get it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: You know you can discover those later.

Tamara Thompson: Well, you can also add in a little variety.

Justin Million: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You can still read the classics.

Justin Million: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: The new thing like, you don't have to like you know, you can have both.

Justin Million: Yeah. And the again, those are two kind of like the curriculum thing, and the kind of cultural export thing like when I talk about stuff like this, or almost anything of import I try to talk about you know, not thy like the root cause like, let's talk systemic as opposed to you know well, what's the opposite of systemic. You know, every whatever is happening to you right now, whatever the-the effect is let's talk about the causes of these giant things, because you know, you, you want to look at wealth inequality. Let's not talk about poor people on the street that I don't want to look at, or that type of bullshit argument. Let's talk about a basic fucking income. Let's talk about taxation of the rich. If we're not talking about those two things, then it doesn't matter. And you really don't want to move on any policy you just want to pretend you are. Let's get at some of the root causes of these things, and maybe we can change it. So, I guess, yeah, maybe those two are-are big answers. To the point of you know I don't know unattainability in terms of maybe changing them or one person changing them. But why not shoot for those.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: What's something important about D.I.Y. past history or something cool you've seen people make that you wish other people knew about? This is more a question just to make space for the cool stuff the community does, because I wouldn't know half of the cool shit that happens, or that has happened if someone didn't tell me about it. So.

Justin Million: Yeah, like in Peterborough, like in the community specifically, or that I've just been in?

Tamara Thompson: It doesn't matter where that you've encountered it, that there was maybe only five ever made of, and like only ten people knew about like just something interesting that you want to share, no matter what it is.

Justin Million: Oof there's just so many things, I think. Like most things, I'm gonna answer with a bit, a bit of a long, longer explanation like-

(Both laugh)

Justin Million: I tend to do about everything, if you haven't gleaned that already. But the-the one thing and this isn't a specific thing, but I can name specifics therein. But like, well, I'll start with the specific. Do you remember the whole thing about Wu Tang Clan having one, one copy of one record that that, like, douchebag guy ended up buying.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah.

Justin Million: And it was that, like douchebag asshole, who, like, owned AIDS drugs or something, an Aids Drug Company, and had marked up the pills by like hundred and seventy percent or something per pill. And he's just, like, this villain. I can't remember his name, but he's in prison now. Thankfully. But he bought this Wu Tang Clan. Put this, I'm not even a big Wu Tang clan fan. I don't really know much about them, but they put this one record up for sale, and he bought it just because he has oh, Shkreli! Martin Shkreli is his name, asshole. But he bought this Wu Tang record basically just to piss off like fans. But I love the idea of the one-off singular item. So, like it maybe isn't as much D.I.Y. but the kind of if you didn't, if you missed it, then you missed it if you weren't there you missed it. Or things I guess that more pertains to live events. But the thing about like the, you know, interesting, one-off object like I always had this idea, which I might still do at some point, because, as I said, I like to put a-a kind of a period on things and then leave them behind me. I've got, as most writers do when you're twenty or so years in or ten years, or however many years in. You have a backlog of work that never went anywhere, like partially finished chapbooks, partially finished manuscripts, single one off poems. You got your journal work that never got transcribed into a computer you got, or a word processor. You've got all these kind of poetic tendrils out in the world that never end up making it into a larger piece, or a chapbook, or whatever. So, I had this idea to do a book called Justin Millions' Everything and it would literally be every poem that I could get the rights back to if it's already been published or every single poem that I can find of my own.

Transcribed and put in one giant like absurd looking book. That would be I don't know a thousand pages or more. So, it'd be like this comically, cartoonishly large book. But it would have all my work in it, and I would only make one copy. And so, whoever had that copy would have all my work. I just kind of like that, almost as like an art piece. I like those kind of ideas. I like those kinds of pieces that are these kind of a big swing one off absurd things. Maybe that comes from my love of which kind of ties into this, maybe that comes from my love of like Rube Goldberg machines also.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Justin Million: I'm a big, big proponent of Rube Goldberg. Just like inscrutable machinery like, anyway. Yeah, maybe now I'm just kind of going on. But yeah, maybe that doesn't quite fit with the D.I.Y. aspect. But the big swing one off thing, and it also goes with performances, too. I am a big proponent for live performances that if you didn't see it, if you didn't make it, you know it's over, and you'll never get to see it again like no, please don't videotape. Please don't take pictures of the poems that I give you when I do my keyboard, keyboards nights like. Don't take a picture and post it on Instagram because then it's for everybody like this is for you. I like those one to one like Cameron, wrote a great, he wrote an introductory, introductory essay for my book that he published and one of the great things that he, you know, wrote about my book and about the keyboards events is that it's a one-to-one publishing experience like, I write the poem on stage. And I give it to one person. And so, it's yeah one-to-one publishing like nobody else ever has it. I don't keep records. You assume ownership of that work and do some of them end up getting crumpled up and thrown into recycling. Absolutely. Do some of them get used as coasters at home? Absolutely. You know of the five hundred or so when I did the original series of keyboards when I did five hundred poems like how many of those poems ended up in the garbage or lost because you're also giving them to somebody at a bar when they may be drunk you know, like how many of them are lost, probably a hundred of the five, maybe like does that bother me? Not really you know they-they were out in the world. They were, they were admired by the person for a minute, for an hour, a day, a week, a month, a year, ten-whatever like some of them got thrown out, and some of them got framed and put up on somebody's wall like which I know for a fact which always boggles my mind. But like I've seen them, so that you know that's what I love about it. These big swings John Klemanh, a local visual artist, used to in his more kind of ornery days, used to have paintings up for sale, and then, when they wouldn't sell, sell, he would ransom the community, and he would say, If this doesn't sell in three days, I'm going to burn it, and then, if it didn't sell within three days, he would make a video of him burning the painting. I fucking love that. Like that's different than a GoFundMe that's like a, an art installation almost. It's like challenging our idea of art to make people think more about art. So even if he's burning a piece of art, it's actually affecting people in a way that is maybe more interesting or at yeah, is maybe more interesting than that being on somebody else's wall for fifty years.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Justin Million: So yeah, big one-off kind of swings are always interesting to me. I guess maybe I'll just leave it at that before I keep drumming up examples that may or may not fit.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough. Well, do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording.

Justin Million: No, I better not. Cause it could go on you know.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs) alright.

Justin Million: This, this to me is like I like, and Cameron's probably the same to a certain degree. But Cameron doesn't even like to go on as much as I do like. I could sit and talk about this for all day and night, not even like forego food and drink like I-there's nothing I like more. Then chopping it up about this kind of thing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fair enough. Well, I will stop the recording then.

Rob McLennan

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date is May 28<sup>th</sup>, and the time is 12:31 p.m. A reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant could drop out a week after this deadline for the interview. The interview is for small press and author.

Rob McLennan: And that's me now. Rob McLennan, above Ground press, lives in Ottawa. Born in Ottawa. He/him editor, publisher, writer, critic, organizer, a bunch more. I like writer. It sort of captures all the things. I tend, I tend not to self describe as poet because it feels too small a term for the range of things. So, I like writer.

Tamara Thompson: Yep. Makes sense that works for me, man. So I'm just gonna just jump into the questions. And yeah, so why did the press start?

Rob McLennan: The press started, um so the press started the first official above ground press publications were 1993 in July. Prior to that I'd been wandering the shelves at the University of Ottawa Library. The Morisset Library, and I'd been to seeing all of these little publications by like Bill Bisset blew ointment press. I'd been seeing all these bpNichol publications, and I thought, well, that's super neat. That doesn't look that hard. So, I made something of mine in in around like January 1992, January 1993, probably January 93, and it didn't seem that hard to do. And it just over the next six months it evolved into me just starting a press. There didn't seem to be anything around me like that at all. Although I found out much later that there had been a couple of Ottawa presses that are literally just kind of stopped happening in like 88 or 89, five min before I came to town. I saw all these people around that I thought could have chapbook manuscripts like first chapbooks and I was willing to kind of be out there. I was willing to be loud, and I was willing to say, hey, look at that guy, hey! Look at that person, hey? Look at them! So I just started making chapbooks. And I started the long poem magazine stanza simultaneously, and I decided instead of selling two things, chapbooks and a chapbook sized magazine. I made the magazine free with the logic that it would help promote the chapbooks I was trying to sell.

Tamara Thompson: Makes sense to me. So this kind of, I guess, is playing into a bit of why the press started. But how did you discover zines and chapbooks, and this kind of publishing you alluded a bit to it, and discovering, like bpNichol, and stuff. But could you go a little more into detail on that?

Rob McLennan: It was really just wandering the shelves at the University of Ottawa. I learned through the process that Carleton University put that stuff in their rare book room. Cause it'd be like chapbooks from like the 1960's and 70's, which is very smart on their part. But the Ottawa U shelves allowed me to actually see them as just like random guy wandering in off the street, just kind of as a writer just doing research. Around 90 or 91, I thought, well, if I'm going to be doing this stuff at all, I need to understand the landscape. And so, I made as my arbitrary boundary the early 1960's. So, I was trying to read and understand Canadian poetry from that point forward, and I really just spent like that my twenties just

doing trying to figure that out. And you know learning about prairie poetry, learning about the Kootenay school out in Vancouver, learning about the vacuole poets in the seventies in Montreal. So just trying to get like this, this sort of this overview, to try to get a handle on what had happened to be able to then move forward and part of what I was seeing and discovering were weird little magazines, and like the, the blue ointment stuff I loved because it, it it's all like half it's found paper random scraps of things. It didn't have to be like a pristine object. And then by about maybe 94, 95, 96, I was becoming more aware of contemporary chapbook publishers in other parts of the country, like Joe Blades doing blew ointment or Broken Jaw out in Fredericton or Maggie Hellwig doing low life publishing in Toronto, and her stuff wasn't pristine, either. I liked the roughness of it, where Joe was sending his chapbooks to, to the printer to not only be like photocopied, or whatever else, but actually stabled and cut. So he had these fine edges to it, and I wasn't interested in that it seemed like another task, another cost and I've folded and stapled everything I've made. I'm not paying two cents a staple if I can just do it myself in front of the TV. So, I've had authors over the years complain about my rough edges, but to me. That is the point. It's not meant to be a pristine object. It's supposed to be an object with a certain kind of rough quality to it. Otherwise, if it's kind of too perfect it. It doesn't really feel handmade, I guess. So and so it was through, through the mid nineties, and then my friend James and I invented the small press fair here in Ottawa in the fall of 94, which pulled some other people out of the woodwork, and it prompted other people to start stuff which was kind of fun. In the mid 90's. There were about a dozen publishers in Ottawa of little, small chapbooks or weird little zines like that's, that's a huge amount like yes, three of them were me but still it's a huge amount. And yeah, so James and I invented the first one in fall 94. And then he moved to Toronto. So, I've done all the rest since. So we just it, it just kind of exponentially kind of built out from that between, you know, 91, 92 to like the mid nineties.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So I want to talk a little bit more specifically, kind of about the presses like editorial philosophy or goal. You've talked a bit about like you like the rough edges. But is there maybe something more specific? Or is that like the major key ethos I guess?

Rob McLennan: Well, the key ethos of above ground is distribution. So, books that look good enough. They don't have to look perfect, but my purpose is distribution. I'd rather sell like a hundred books at four book, four bucks than fifty books at eight bucks kind of thing. And yeah, so my production is inexpensive. So then, my, I can afford to give stuff out. By June 94, I was running the Tree Reading Series here in Ottawa, which was twice a month open set featured, reader and I was myself frustrated that I couldn't afford to buy books. So, I like the idea of producing a chapbook by various authors who are reading in the series. So then, if you only had 4 bucks! Oh, I heard this great reading six months ago. Who? Oh, who is the author? Oh, I don't remember. But if you have this little four dollars book. I so I was doing that very deliberately, with the idea that if you only had four bucks you at least could, could walk home with something from that event. I like that very much, and I was doing chapbooks that were like one dollar or two dollars. So, distribution was very important to me and as an ethos, and it's always been like I give

out way too many of these things I produce too many according to my wife, and I give away like mounds of them. And it just it's Robert Croats called literature a conversation, and that to me is part of being within that conversation.

Tamara Thompson: Makes a lot of sense to me. What kind of work do you publish because you've been talking about poetry? But is that the only thing you publish or like. What kind of genres do you publish, the content?

Rob McLennan: My tastes are pretty wide; it leans more into the experimental avant garde. So, the bulk of it is poetry and I'm, I'm more than willing to publish like weird stuff that can't find homes anywhere else. I've even found it interesting that I've done chapbooks by authors that are kind of weird but that weird work doesn't necessarily fall into their trade books. So, there's at least 2 or 3 above ground authors whose work I only really find interesting in the form they gave to me, not necessarily the rest of their published work and I'm not sure what that is about on, you know, for them. Although in 2020 I did start a pros imprint. Canada has always been rather conservative in its publishing and over the years. I've heard from many Canadian writers who were told no by Canadian publishers but if they were doing the exact same work in like the US or UK or somewhere else, that work would be published, and that work would be well known. So, I'm I just got so frustrated with seeing authors just come up against these walls. So, I said, you know, screw it. I'm just going to do a prose series of, of weird stuff. So, I've done about twenty-three, or twenty-four chapbooks in the prose series since 2020, and it just they, projects come one at a time. The poetry chapbooks I'm usually thirty ahead between acceptance and actually producing it. But yeah, the prose chapbooks are still like one at a time, and it'll be like a chapbook length essay, or some short stories, or you know something. It's like some self-contained sort of prose work weird stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: Like we need homes for the weird stuff in Canada, and I guess it, it becomes frustrating, watching the ebbs and flows of publishing move into that and then move away from that. Then it just abandons all of these people who are producing work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, you've kind of answered this question, a little bit about like, why you chose to publish this kind of content. And it sounds like you want these places to have a home.

Rob McLennan: Yeah. And I get excited as a reader to be able to say, Hey, look at this. And it's easier for me to do that if I have produced it, because then I can afford to give out like twenty like, "Hey, look at this, this is really cool". And then hopefully, it prompts even certain people to continue doing that kind of work. During the twenty fifth anniversary of above/ground I started in the colophons to be able to say, this is the eighth book, chapbook above/ground is produced by this author, and I'll list all the other ones. Which is a sort of a neat thread to realize through the press. You know, like certain, like Gil McElroy, I've been publishing chapbooks by him since like 95. So that's neat to be able

to see that as a thread through the press that maybe because I'm producing 60 to 80 titles a year which is ridiculous. It's hard to see those threads unless you're either really attentive and long term, reader or it's pointed out by me.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah. What's your process like from submission to production, to trying to get the books into, into people's hands?

Rob McLennan: Submission, I'm open to submissions, but I, I've never put out a call. I used to get a bag of mail once a week from my mom. All throughout the nineties. And 99% of it is, is stuff that just doesn't appeal to me doesn't interest me, doesn't fit for the press. You know, when you get a bag of handwritten poems by someone, and they say I don't care what you do with it. It's like, well, then, if you don't care, I know also don't care. I got a two-hundred-page medical text once. I know, and if they sent it to me, this two hundred-page thing they sent it to everybody, so I just sent him on a self-addressed stamp, just would have been somewhere in the mid to late nineties I sent a note saying, like, you're wasting your resources and time well before mine, and I included a chapbook as example like this is what I do like. If you're sending it to me like, come on, do your research. So, I get a lot of random submissions that I'm always behind on. I poke at a lot of people for "hey it's time we did another one", or, "gee! It'd be fun to do a thing by you" sometimes it's a matter of me going through like capital review or fence magazine or something and going like Whoa! Who is this? And seeing a poem and going Whoa, finding him online and, and sending him an email like, Hi, you don't know me. But this is amazing. I'd love to do a chapbook by you. So once things are accepted, they just fall into a queue and I keep my list of forthcoming on the sidebar of the Above/ground blog and unless there is an event, I'm aiming a publication for they are pretty much, they pretty much appear in order of acceptance. So once I get closer to like, I'll, I'll design maybe three or four at a time with the idea that if I get money into mail tomorrow I'm ready to go.

Tamara Thompson: Yep.

Rob McLennan: So I'll design some stuff, I'll send the author's Pdfs, I'll wait to hear back. And basically, whoever responds first is the next in the queue for the actual, Oh, good! I got money today, I'm taking it in today. So then I'm not having to wait right.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Rob McLennan: And if I have too much money I'll, I'll do like two or three at a time, and then above/ground has about one hundred and eighty subscribers that get all the papery bits the press makes in a calendar year. So once the, the author gets fifty as payment, I start with a run of three hundred and fifty right now, and a one hundred and eighty go out to subscribers, and then they're about zero sort of friends of the press. People that send me all their pay bits, and they get all of my papery bits like Derek Beaulieu doing like no press in Banff, for you know, like that kind of thing. So even before I sell anything, that's a lot of copies that go out. So, I have about like a hundred, that's that sit in a box when I send out the email announcement and all on all the socials. Hopefully I



get orders, and then I take them to book fairs. To Ottawa hopefully, the meet the presses in the fall in Toronto. And then there's been one or two other random Toronto fairs. I haven't done any other non-Ontario for fairs in a very long time, but I'm open to it.

Tamara Thompson: It's just about getting there with everything.

Rob McLennan: Yeah. Well, traveling with a big, huge box right. There was a fair that two of them actually, that Toronto International Authors festival did. And you know, they, they were gonna put me on a panel talking about publishing. And so they and I figured I was gonna drive because I was bringing a box of chapbooks like two or three boxes to chapbooks for the Book fair. They paid for my hotel they were gonna reimburse me for travel, and it was like a hundred fifty bucks for the doing the panel, which is cool. But there was fifty bucks a night for parking for three nights, and I had to say to the organization like that eats up my entire panel fee, and they said, well, you didn't have to bring your car. It's like you invited me for a book fair. If it wasn't for Book fair I would have taken the train. I had to bring the car because I live like five hours away, and I was coming in for a book fair. So they weren't, they did not look happy about it, but they reimbursed me for my parking.

Tamara Thompson: You would think that they might have made in a negotiation or something, or found a place where you could park.

Rob McLennan: I really think, because they were the first small press fair they'd ever done. It didn't occur to them that I'd that I'd have to travel with boxes. It's like, well, what did you think I was bringing then? I mean, I honestly think it just didn't occur to them, because any other author they brought in isn't bringing mounds of stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Rob McLennan: Like the bookstore will bring in their book, and they'll maybe have a little bag at, at best.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: Hotel. It's all good right.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, huh.

Rob McLennan: Dude. We didn't make you bring a car like you kind of did.

Tamara Thompson: You want me to sell things. I need to have things to sell, and they need to get here somehow. I'm not shipping them.

Rob McLennan: Well, yeah, that. Yeah, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: So how does the press make decisions like, is it all you? Do you consult anybody? Can you give me some details on that.

Rob McLennan: My reading interest is pretty wide like, I said, like I admire someone like Derek Beaulieu doing no press which is very specific in its editorial interest and purposes. But my reading interest is much wider, so why wouldn't the press be? Which also means that there might be a number of subscribers that maybe only like two-thirds of the books that come through the press, or half the books, or, or whatever else which I'm fine with, and that's okay. It's just, if I think the chapbook doesn't work at the chapbook, it's, it's a binary yes or no. I don't really, unless I can see a way to make it fit better. I, I don't usually just go through it with the editorial pen, or anything. Unless there is something glaring after I've accepted it, or unless I know how to make this thing, I want to say no to in a different form. Yeah, so it's really just a yes or no like, oh, yeah, no this works this totally works. Yeah, I'll do this pretty much it, you know it's my enthusiasm fuels the press.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, that's been a lot of people's answers to it is, what do I enjoy? What makes me excited to create things from even just like some of the micro presses to, I've talked to like, you know Gordon Hill, and then, just like you know, what makes you excited.

Rob McLennan: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: If there's no point in working on a book that you don't care about.

Rob McLennan: Unless you're paid really, really, really, well. And even then.

Tamara Thompson: Even then I'd be hesitant.

Rob McLennan: Yeah

Tamara Thompson: So where does the press sell their books, and how are they sold?

Rob McLennan: It's pretty much just through the mail order, the mail order, slash subscribers, and then the book fairs throughout the nineties I was putting stuff in a couple of stores here and there and realizing that they'd be hidden away at the back and I just get damaged copies six months later.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: You know, and it just seemed like a lot of work to make like two dollars. So, I just don't, I just don't bother putting them in store. So, it's just like, like, no one's really interested in putting and having these things in stores. It's just the, the format, like Knife Fork Book was carrying some things for a while. But most of that even wasn't through me. I think some there must have been at least one or two subscribers feeding stuff to Kirby maybe for a credit, or something like that which is cool. It means I could send people to Kirby. Saying, you know Kirby has a mound of above/ground things you should go look. But yeah, I just don't see the point.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, makes sense to me. So, I'm going to get into a couple of the author questions here for a sec. If that's good with you.

Rob McLennan: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, considering how many chapbooks you have created, I'm assuming you've published chapbooks of yourself. Why did you publish chapbooks like of your own work?

Rob McLennan: Cause there's no reason not to like bpNichol published himself through Coach House and I know that it'll be cheaper for me to again to give them out if I'm producing it myself. I did start, as I think, the first five or ten years I was the most published author. And most years over last ten I'm not, so if I have a thing that's ready to go, yeah, over the last over last year or two I've been turning to send stuff out to other chapbook publishers, because like, that's fun, too. But my rate of production has shifted for my own writing, yeah. So, like, why not? I'm excited about my own work as much as I am anyone else's.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: I can mail to people.

Tamara Thompson: So, you would work with like other small presses again, not just within your own above/ground, but with other people too, right?

Rob McLennan: Yeah, totally. I had a chapbook out earlier this year with James Haw's Turret Press in Montreal. I had a chapbook accepted recently by Gap Riot, head of Toronto. I've probably had twenty or thirty chapbooks by other publishers over the years, but again, not so much over the past, maybe ten, fifteen years. I just kind of just and then, like there are other publishers coming up that are doing amazing things. But maybe my work didn't fit, so there's just no point kind of harassing them with any of any of my nonsense. Trying to see what fits, right.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that makes sense to me. so, getting a bit back to the press, what are some challenges that press itself has faced.

Rob McLennan: Beyond storage.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: It would be nice if some of these things are reviewed here and there. I've gone whole years with producing stuff, sending it out and then getting no reviews, or like broken pencil, would do occasional reviews, call them zines, which they're not and then there was one particular reviewer that was like, well, I would have done it differently. Well, it's like this, that's not a review that's about you, and I don't know what that is. No one asked, how you do it. Yeah, reviews would be nice. The sales aren't bad. I have that core of subscribers which really helps. So even if I don't sell a book or two I just, I know that a huge amount, or at least getting out there.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: And I'm always surprised. Stuff that sells and stuff, what doesn't. I've done, I've done Rae Armantrout chapbook. She's won the Pulitzer at least once, if not twice. I've done three chapbooks by her and I'll get orders for like three like what. Be getting more than three orders for this thing. So I don't, unless all the people who are interested are already subscribers, which is not impossible. About forty percent of my subscribers are American.

Tamara Thompson: Oh!

Rob McLennan: Yeah. Been for a long time, too.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I'm surprised by how much Whispering Wick gets a lot from not Canada.

Rob McLennan: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Americans. I've had to send things like we've had to figure out shipping, but I've had to send things to Britain and, like South America, like people, are interested in everywhere, but where I do my work.

Rob McLennan: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Everywhere is interested, but Canada.

Rob McLennan: Yeah. And I find that I find that really curious, that as a reviewer and as a chapbook publisher, I do find that there are elements of Canada that resist. I don't know if it just sort of, maybe interested in a different form of the chapbook. Because chapbooks over the last 10 years in Canada have become, they feel like they've moved into professional.

Tamara Thompson: Umm, yeah.

Rob McLennan: You get that Rahila's Ghost, and you get like the stuff that Kirby does, and they look in comparison, higher end and more professional. And people put them on cvs and stuff where I'm coming from an ethos of kind of nineties D.I.Y. handing shit out.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: So there does seem to be sort of a difference in approach. And I it does make me wonder if there are younger writers that are less interested in that rough approach. Whereas I know for a fact that I can get that title really well distributed.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: Some of the other like. Oh, we've done it! A run of 50 like. The author gets like that many copies I you know, they get out.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, Whispering Wick has smaller print runs just because it's me and my seventy-year-old Dad working together.

Rob McLennan: Nice.

Tamara Thompson: He's got his name in some of the books, "he said TJ, can I, can I get my name in as like production? Because I'm helping?" And I said, tell Grace, Grace Regan, who saves me every time she's my proofreader and my layout person.

Rob McLennan: Cool.

Tamara Thompson: I love. I, I love her to death because she does all the stuff that I can't do.

Rob McLennan: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Also, just good person to talk to, always excited about whatever I give her. She was like, oh, we could do this and this and this, and I'm like, I'm so glad you're excited because I don't know where I would start. So, what are some challenges that you've faced as an author.

Rob McLennan: Finances.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: I made a deliberate choice in my twenties to do this, first and foremost. I didn't see the point in schooling and building a big debt, just so I could do this, anyway.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: So it's always been hit and miss with a grant system and sort of faking it as far as income over the last ten years it's been much more solid cause I have, I have one of these things [points to wedding ring.] And so my random money and my wife's regular money balance each other out mostly nicely. And I'm the home guy with the kids and all of that kind of thing. So that's been like a huge shift from like my thirties and forties, early forties. So, and then just reviewing again, like most books aren't reviewed beyond one or two where there's a small handful of books that seem to get a ton of reviews. It's always seemed curious to me that a lot of the media mechanism pays attention to itself. There are obviously exceptions and outliers but, like we all, we all have to review that new book by such and such. But then, what about all the other books. So as a reviewer I've been reviewing since 93, I, I tried to like, I worked for the crappy weekly and town for about four, four and a half years and was doing like three reviews a week. Trying to focus some of the stuff no one else was doing. A lot of it seemed to be poetry and short stories, and kind of the offside stuff, not necessarily just the big novels or the poetry book by the famous M. And S. Author, or something. But and I'm at the point where I'm doing one hundred and fifty poetry book reviews a year. Which is, and it's insane. But there, it is frustrating to hear that I'm the only review.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: It's really maddening, and it makes me frustrated for the whole mechanism for it. It just feels like the mechanism is failing, if I'm the only review. Should be other venues. The newspapers fell apart.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: In the late nineties into the early 2000's and all of that and the journals. Some have tried, but a lot of them dropped off. Prairie fire moved to all online, and then they erased their archive. So, it's like, Well, okay? So, so those reviews never existed then, and reviews are not just immediate, promotional, but they're archival.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: And so those reviews never existed. Right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that, that hurts.

Rob McLennan: It's so.

Tamara Thompson: Oh!

Rob McLennan: So, I stopped reviewing for them, even though it was fifty bucks a review, because they weren't archiving them. And so I just put them on, on my blog for free.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: If that's more, that was more important to my purposes. You'd like to think if, if it's not going to be there, then what was the point?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: And taking issues to do reviews. I think Arc is one of the very few that's still doing them, and they pay for them like they're out there, but they're really hit and miss. But again, like the big stuff pays attention to the big stuff and the rest of it kind of gets overlooked.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: So that's an ongoing frustration of just media news.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I really like review culture, and I like reading things, and they seeing what other people think at this time when this came out, or now or current, and I quite enjoy those analysis and thinking about things. Cause it's something I do with my own friends and my own partner like we'll just spend hours talking about one thing and what we think and analyzing it. And it's something I do with my friends. So to see that lack of reviews, just for the amount of things that I enjoy its maddening.

Rob McLennan: Or even just being informed that a new thing came out.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: Like I, I love social media in part, because it informs me that things are coming out like, Oh, neat! That person is a new book. I had no idea, okay, I'm going to email publish it right now. Blah, blah, blah, or like, or someone will forward, blah blah blah had the great debut out or coming out. And I'll just find that author try to get an interview happening. Debut, that's great, Okay, that's cool, blah, blah, blah! Send off an email.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. It's how I discover when readings are happening in Toronto. If I can make it, it's how I discover that people are doing things I discover most of my new books, slash new authors or reading events is mostly through Instagram and Instagram stories and posts. Because that's just I spend my ten minutes, and I see what people are doing.

Rob McLennan: Whereas I get books in the mail literally every day, because I've been reviewing for so long.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: But there's occasionally I'll, I'll see something that I've missed or like earlier in the spring. I realized that M&S didn't send me their 2023 spring Poetry list. It went right by me. Jerome and Melissa sent me a review of for periodicities, a spring 2023 eminence poetry book, and it's like, wait they had a book out? He was like, Yeah? Oh, so I had to look up and realize I'd missed an entire list. So I did email a mess like what? And they mailed me a huge box. But it's, it's you know. I'm trying to pay attention, and I know I'm constantly missing stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: So I'm trying not to. But it just, it's just so much stuff. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What has this kind of publishing taught? You?

Rob McLennan: That there, there are more opportunities for strange things than one would think just by looking at the immediate landscape of publishing. Any kind of work that could be thought of, there is a home for it somewhere, just a matter of finding it. And the long game having patience, because otherwise, you know, why are you going to spend 7 to 10 years working in that one book like you have to have patience, and early on, seeing what I considered to be poor quality work being put into book form made me think, well, then, I can get published.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Rob McLennan: This is getting published. I can get published because I am doing more interesting work in my mind, than this.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, that was what gave me the confidence to be like, maybe I could publish my poetry because it's better than what everyone keeps recommending I read.

Rob McLennan: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I had a lot of students recommend to me poetry because I was teaching them poetry. And I said, okay, thank you. You should read this person, you know. Maybe read some Joshua Whitehead, he's doing a conference thing here. Maybe you should read him and go see him cause he's at Trent, you know, partake in the writing community of Canada. Don't be a single writer at home, and maybe you'll start to realize that poetry is lot more interesting than what you're reading currently.

Rob McLennan: Yeah, and they're really expansive. It's always my frustration with the best Canadian Poetry series. Because it seems to be they in my mind they should, most of their volumes should be called best Canadian metaphor, driven narrative, lyric.

Tamara Thompson: Mhm.

Rob McLennan: And if you're gonna call it best Canadian poetry, it, it feels like having a fruit and vegetable festival and all they have are apples. And if you say, but like, what about what about like bananas or oranges, or even like cucumbers and stuff? The answer should not be, but we have sixteen kinds of apples like, yes, I get there, there is range and variety within that that boundary you are conceiving, but that boundary is far smaller than the title suggests. Narrow, even.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: Limited and limiting. And I and, and I've learned over, I've realized over the years that the editors are not interested. They're the occasional editor because there's one overviewing editor, and then each book has a different a specific volume editor, for that year. There's some individual editors that have had a wider interest, and I will throw in some weird stuff every so often, and that that's more interesting, and it's more representative of the kind of work that is actually happening, and not just, you know, here, here's a kind of work that we approve of, that we're pretending is under a wider umbrella.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm! I tell my students, if you want to find anything exciting a poetry or fiction, or anything, because a lot of them are like, well, Canadian literature isn't very exciting. I'm like it is, you just have to know where to look, because most of what is seen as good or publishable to Penguin, Random House isn't necessarily true to what actually is exciting. Go and find these people. They're out there, and it is exciting, and then I open their eyes and like woo. And I'm like, yeah.

Rob McLennan: Yeah. And-and then you will get again like outliers where Sheila Heti is a big name. But she does really weird books, right? Or, or Ann Carson does really weird books. But both of those authors were acknowledged in the U.S. pretty early on in their work. And, and it is frustrating to wonder if that is a factor. That if they weren't like, why



is Marco Kostakos not a big, bigger name like I'm just, I'm baffled by that. She had a novel that was up for the Trillium.

Tamara Thompson: I'm going to move on to our next question of our chapbooks important to Canadian publishing. If so, why or why not?

Rob McLennan: They are totally cause they're sort of quick and easy and can respond to the moment. If I finish writing something today, I can take it to the printer today. and I get it back within two days, you know. And, and there are other publishing forms that can that are even faster. So there's sort of that that responding to the moment. You don't have to wait two or three years between sending it out, acceptance and book publication. So, there's something really nice about that. It's, it's inexpensive, so one would hope that it distributes far easier and far wider than a book can the unofficialness of it allows for it to do versions of the same thing. Yeah, people can afford to come out and trade them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: Like I can, I can go to, if I'm doing a classroom thing I can take a bag of stuff and just hand them out, where I can't do that with books. I just can't afford that. Even if I was the publisher of them, it would still be too much of a cost.

Tamara Thompson: Unless the school was paying for them. Then yeah, here's your free book, child.

Rob McLennan: Yeah, I know, yeah, and which allows that illustration of, if you want to be doing this stuff, you have to be aware of what is happening. Do the research.

Tamara Thompson: Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way?

Rob McLennan: I would presume so; I would hope so. You know it's predominantly, like there aren't that many rural chapbook publishers. So, there's probably whole communities that aren't being acknowledged through this kind of form, but I don't fully know. I would say yes, but I don't know if I could back that up.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough. Do you think it maybe reflects? Maybe the art scene? Maybe the perseverance? Does it maybe say something about Canadians?

Rob McLennan: Well, it's not affected by ebbs and tides of you know what, what is, what, like other realms of publishing are more affected by certain financial constraints, or you know who, who the authors are that one should be paying attention to. I'm sure if Atwood and Ondaatje have new novels coming out, then another author won't have that slot who's got a first book. Which is maybe an unfair position to put Atwood and Ondaatje into. But we're not having to worry about those sorts of tides. Who are the, who are the hot new people, or whatever like we're just paying attention to, it's more community driven, I would think. Yeah. Community.

Driven personality, driven. Someone can put out one thing in a year, and some person can put out eighty. There's really nothing preventing any of that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What does this kind of publishing offer that traditional publishing can't offer, and vice versa. We've been talking a bit about this, but I figured I'd ask the question more directly.

Rob McLennan: That kind of I, I think more the mute, the mutability to be able to, to kind of turn on a dime and respond quickly and immediately. And be able to not be beholden to granting agencies whether for content or timing, or just finances.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: There's no funding for this kind of public publishing in Canada. So, no one cares what I do, and I can kind of just do whatever the hell I want. Yeah, pretty much. So, I think I think it allows for risk, a huge risk. I don't have to worry about a return in the same way. Right, like, if ECW spends three or four grand producing a poetry book and none sell, that's a problem.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: But if I produce a chapbook that I don't, I don't sell any. If I'm, if I stood behind it to produce it, then I can still like just that, goes out to the subscribers. And it's, it's frustrating but it's not, it doesn't impact the next thing I make.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What's something you wish people knew about Canadian publishing like the general public.

Rob McLennan: The variety of it, just, and the and sort of the like, the volume of it, the variety of it, the quality of it that the way books are discussed in media does not necessarily represent the small and micropress. Most people have no idea this is happening, and most people have no idea that this is an option. Oh, wow! I had no idea you could just do this. That's a fun thing to hear from like a twenty, something.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Now, I have to ask a more dower question. But why do you think most small presses or micro presses have to close up shop?

Rob McLennan: There are lots of reasons why that happens. Some people just get busy of things in their lives or their interest in a moves like when, when Leigh Nash and Andrew Faulkner launched into Invisible publishing, running the small press the chapbooks they were making through Emergency Response Unit just stopped the press has put out the random one or two things since, but it the press wasn't active in the same way because they were actually running a press like all day every day. There was a small press explosion in Calgary in the early aughts everyone coming out of like an Ma program through University of Calgary. And basically, every poet there was making chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Rob McLennan: Patrick and Jason, Christie and Derek. But you was all already there doing that kind of being an example. A couple of years ahead of the curve. But like Fred Wah and Aretha Vanherck, as props were sort of to providing the example an option of "Hey, you can make stuff and it was really fun to watch all of these kids making stuff" most of whom stopped after they finished their degree and went off into the world.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: So yeah, everyone is making stuff, and most of them stopped within a year or two of graduating. Which would feel like a drawback of the creative writing program, though some of those kids couldn't figure out a reason, hadn't figured out that it needed their own reason to do it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: As opposed to like a thesis deadline.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: I'm, I'm finishing my novel for my for my ma thesis and then it's like, well, then, what-what gets you to do the next one?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: And that's hard. Like I had the prompt of having a kid at 20. And I thought, well, like, if I'm going to do this at all, I'd better do it. And I read a Margaret Atwood line, if you want full time out of it, you have to put full time into it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: So that that launched me. But yeah, I, I could imagine that would be very difficult to transition, then out of a program. And I see a lot of people that maybe don't have a second book.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: Or it's extremely difficult, and takes a very long time to see them get a second book, because no one's on them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, they, they need the pressure of a deadline and stuff. I've noticed that even within my own cohort of students that I was with, I'm one of the few who's still writing out of all of us. We were whittled down near the end, of course, because of a pandemic, and then a strike and stuff. So there wasn't as many of us as I think, later years. But I found it disheartening to see how many fellow writers weren't writing anymore. And like, I mean, I understood it was a lot of writing in the program, and we were dealing with Covid, and there was a lot of burnout, but I was just a little disappointed because I, I need to write. I'm always writing whether that be a poem or a fiction piece. It's just exciting and fun to me, and if I have the time and the idea, I'm going to do it.

Rob McLennan: Right. And, and, and I don't even know if it's a specific need. But if you're used to having someone behind you saying, "Come on finish a novel". And you try to do a second one. And, and you need to learn a new muscle. It took ten years for me to figure out that novel writing was hard because I was used to that finishing a poem, and that sense of completion. But it took me ten years to realize that, that's what was holding me back to finishing a novel. A novel you don't get a sense of completion in the same way, at the at the end of a day or a writing session, because you're working on a single unit that is large. Not a single unit made up of small single units that'll give that same kind of like. Aha! Good! This poem's done, alright. Set that aside. Work on the next poem and that that was just a minor thing for me to shift into. But I hadn't understood that, that's why I was resisting the novel.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I, I just need to write, or I go a little loopy. I it's like, if someone hasn't listened to their music for a bit, and they go a little cranky. I'm like that with writing. If I'm stressed and overwhelmed and I'm like everybody, leave me alone, and I'm gonna write about cowboys for a bit. No one talk to me.

Rob McLennan: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That's just me, though, and I've learned very bluntly that not many people are like me which is disappointing, because I know so many talented people, and same with my students, but if they don't have the push, they're not going to do it. I'm like, Oh, you're so bloody talented, but you're just not doing it, and if you're not going to do it, you're not going to get better. Like, I've seen beautiful comic artists where I'm like, wow! Your sense of space and just size and everything. You're great at this, but they're like I'm doing other things, oh, well, this isn't an option for me, and I'm like, if I was someone who worked at, drawn and quarterly, and I saw what you were doing, I would be an idiot not to pick up your manuscript.

Rob McLennan: Yeah. Yeah. And people are allowed to make their own choices, and that kind of thing, too. But it's still like, if you want.

Tamara Thompson: It's a little disheartening.

Rob McLennan: Just do it like nothing is stopping. Just go do it, for God's sakes!

Tamara Thompson: I agree. So, how and why are you still keeping the press going?

Rob McLennan: Because it's still fun and I and I enjoy it. And there's always something new that I'm finding that I want to be able to produce and like, Oh, wow! Neat, this person! And there's kind of not a reason to stop. I don't have a reason to stop.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: There is part of me that wants to see how far I can go. I think Bob Cobbing got to fifty years with Writers Forum before he died. So you know, I'm going to do like thirty-one years, this July is above/ground, and, and there's something fun about how far can I take this? And what else can I learn through the process.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: I think me as chapbook publisher, me as editor, me as reviewer makes me more open to being like, I think it makes me a better writer, for sure. And I'm willing to try things, probably at a far wider scope than had I not been doing these things. I'm willing to try stuff willing to fail, willing to just see where it goes.

Tamara Thompson: What's something important about D.I.Y, press history, that you wish, people knew.

Rob McLennan: Anything.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs.)

Rob McLennan: So, many of these presses come and go, and are completely forgotten.

Tamara Thompson: Yeaah.

Rob McLennan: So, there is a period that I was doing all of these, I was I posting them to the blog interviews with editors, publishers of presses, or journals that no longer existed, and so like, for example, Blaine Marchand, in Ottawa was part of a group of 4 people that did a monthly poetry chapbook size calendar. Did it monthly like 1977, 78, right? And it was sort of loosely based on poetry Toronto. And so I interviewed Blaine about like who is around, why did you start? You know what kind of stuff like? And so I posted the interview, and then, you know, and then why did you end? Why did you stop? And it was I cause I've got most of a run of the magazine and the interview posted on my blog and the blog also at the end included a full bibliography of it. Most of the stuff isn't recorded, and like that, this probably showcased, Oh, wow! I didn't know that person was in Ottawa. Oh, neat! I didn't know that Calgary person was interacting with Ottawa people. I didn't realize that person was publishing that early. So that was, I've done maybe a dozen of those interviews from, from so, and it's all from publications that no longer exist. Right. So I did one with like Ken Norris and Andre Farc, who did a monthly (technical issues occurred) publication called Mouse Eggs in like 76, 77, 78, and they did like a couple scattering issues into but maybe 81, 82, and that was a sort of a fun portrait to be able to get of that period of time in Montreal. These young poets trying to just figure shit out. But I've done other interviews with people in the aughts and people in the early nineties. And so just trying to like that, history is not being written down. So that's always a frustration. When I started touring heavily around 96 or 97, I would wander into like the offices of Turnstone press in Winnipeg, or the offices of New Star books in Vancouver. And I'd ask, "Hey, okay, how old is this press? When did it start? What like all of that kind of stuff" because I wanted to know that stuff. The stuff isn't

being recorded. It's not being like, no one knows this stuff. I had a friend who had a book out in the late nineties with Nightwood editions, and she thought that Nightwood was a relatively new press is like, no, it's blew ointment.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Rob McLennan: Because Bill Bissett blew ointment from what? Like 61 to 71 or something, and then sold the press to Howard White and Howard White renamed it, Nightwood. Like that, just stuff like that that people don't know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: No repository for that kind of information you know. Taline, Taline goes back to like the early 1960's when they did a magazine. It's, it's so easy for this stuff to get lost.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: So most people don't even know what's going on now, let alone histories of some of these presses and some of history is really fun and interesting and vibrant, and shows off who is there, and you know all these weird connections. Like New Star, is a history that, and that includes The Georgia Strait. Right cause, Tish Magazine, one of the editors found at- (technical difficulties occurred) writing supplement, and Georgia street writing supplement evolved into New Star books is my understanding. And, and oh, what's his name used to write for, Bob Geldof used to write for the Georgia Strait. That's neat. He used to be like a music guy before, like Boomtown Rats like what? That's super neat. Who wouldn't want to know that. Which is sort of strange to think that, like potentially he was interacting with like Vancouver poets in the late sixties.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Rob McLennan: It just blows my mind.

Tamara Thompson: What's something that you wish people knew about your history?

Rob McLennan: Further facets of it. Not just one or two things, because I know that, for when-pandemic hit, I was already leaning into doing a doing periodicities. Write the online Poetry Poetics Journal. But when the pandemic hit, I've deliberately started as part of that, the virtual reading series. I don't know if you're aware of that.

Tamara Thompson: No.

Rob McLennan: I, I've posted thirty-three sets of five videos per, and like the first one hundred videos were posted in the first two years of pandemic, or something like I was posting like twenty a week, or like something ridiculous, like some big ridiculous number. And, and it was to help maybe people feel less isolated by having these readings online and

then Quill and Quire did a little write up on various literary people or communities across Canada that were responding to the pandemic, and they said, well, Rob, in Ottawa is doing the twelve and twenty question series. Like, well I've been doing this in 2007. I just didn't stop. I specifically did this other thing responding to the pandemic. They didn't write about that at all. I wasn't doing the interview series responding to pandemic. I was still doing it from 2007, and I'm in every three days a new interview comes up. I've done like probably one thousand three hundred or one thousand four hundred, and have not repeated an author yet on purpose, two got slipped in. We don't want to talk about that, but it's just frustrating that I'm seen for only doing one or two things and there is other stuff. I don't know if it's just, I'm doing too many things to keep track of. It's entirely possible. And no one ever asks.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: Oh, what do you do? What did? How did you respond to pandemic? And I would be able to say, well, I started this virtual reading series. I did that specifically as a pandemic response. The twelve and twenties is something I just didn't stop, from 2007. So yeah, I'd like that that kind of thing. I just wish people paid better attention to the range.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: Hmm. Most people don't ask, though.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's one of the main reasons why I specifically wanted to ask, because, even though my project is talking a bit about the here and now, and kind of what is happening. There's a bit of history to it, because to ignore the history would be foolish.

Rob McLennan: Oh, totally, totally thought totally foolish. Yeah, I should send you the link of I've been trying to, I was trying to do a bibliography of Ottawa, literary journals and presses. And that's where I've got the interviews interspersed like links to them, and stuff all the all the stuff that had happened most of which is pre-Internet. So therefore never existed. And both Carlton and Otto you might as well be on the moon. So there's never really been, you know, there's Ottawa has always had two strains of literature, the official and then the weirdos and the weirdoes were never big enough to group for the longest there'd be like one weirdo in the sixties we could talk about. One weird owner seventies because most of the people around them, maybe at didn't have more than one book, maybe never got to a book like that kind of thing. But then, like Carlton University, invented Arc magazine. So, the official people were always big enough to group. And so all the weird stuff kind of outside of that, just kind of it, didn't. It didn't happen. People died. They moved on. Oh, they're doing something else. Now we don't talk about that. Why do you want to know about that? I, I better not see that stuff on, on eBay, like what? I had a guy tell me that when I was trying to find his, his journal from thirty years ago. Like, what, what are you talking, do you not? Have we not met? Like you don't see anything I'm doing. Am I putting stuff on eBay, no.

Tamara Thompson: Do you have any other additional comments, or anything else you'd like to say?

Rob McLennan: Nothing specifically. But I just think that's a general Canadian thing. We, we don't know enough around history. We don't, we don't spend enough time attempting to find it out, let alone document it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rob McLennan: So that just seems generally an important thing. I think I think Grain magazine in the seventies maybe the nineties had some neat little write ups on like Turnstone press and Kato press and sort of, you know, two pages of here's how we started, and that's great. It's something. Like some of that stuff needs to be, dug up and put into a single volume of literary history in Canada, which does exist. That's what the book should be called.



Khashayar (Kess) Mohammadi

Tamara Thompson: Hello. My name is Tamara Thompson. The date today is June 8<sup>th</sup> and the time is to 2:23 pm. This is a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview, which is the deadline. This interview is for small press, author and traditional press.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Hello! Hello! My name is Khashayar Mohammadi, I go by Kess, both professionally and in personal relationships. I have been a part of a great deal of presses most as an author. I have been a part of Gordon Hill Press, Pamenar Press and Palimpsest Press, and as an editor and staff I've been a part of Inspiritus Press and other small projects to lesser extents. I-I'm nonbinary. I'm like, pronouns are they/them. And I think that's all we need for now.

Tamara Thompson: Could you do what part of Canada you're from, and any other titles.

Khashayar Mohammadi: I'm from Toronto and other than—I'm in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and other than being a poet, I do a great deal of translations, both creatively and not, as in, in terms of for example, sometimes for human rights organizations, or the like, so, my other title would be translator.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Thank you so much. Okay. So, just gonna start off with a like kind of smaller question. Why did the small press start? So, one of the small presses that you've worked for you don't have to say all of them, but maybe, like one of the interesting ones.

Khashayar Mohammadi: So-

Tamara Thompson: If you know.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Basically, the first small press and the most important part of my small press life, which is the first small press that I was a part of, which is the beginning of my involvement in Canadian poetry in general, it was called Inspiritus Press. It does not exist anymore. It was a somewhat short-lived press, as a lot of small presses are unfortunately, become after some after a certain extent. So, Inspiritus Press basically started. And I was not one of the first people who started it. So, a lot of this is more my involvement a couple of months after the press started. But basically, of the five, of the four people that started the press three of them took the same class in York-York University under creative writing Professor Bruce W. Powell, who taught I might be mistaken, but I think it was divine poetics, or if it wasn't divine poetic, it might have been but it was basically Blake, Rumi and the like, the vision-oh!—Visionary poetics. So basically, the press started to seek a whole bunch of smaller and quirkier manuscripts that might find it harder to make into, you know, larger books that had anything to do with visionary literature. You know whether it be like divination, bibliomancy. See, all the, everything that has to do with such categories, you know. Maybe not very strictly any of the ones that I mentioned and, like, a lot of small presses.

(technical issues occurred).

Khashayar Mohammadi: -basically, what I wanted to say and oh, now that I've done that part I forgot what I wanted to like interrupt with, but I wanted to say, oh, I-I'll get back to it, and maybe I'll remember so? Aye. So yes, at the visionary of the-the same way that a lot of small presses start, it all starts with a certain need, right? Like it starts with a need to create something that doesn't exist or cannot exist in a lot of the more traditional and demanding strands of literature. Okay, Inspiritus press. I became a part of it a few months into it, and we began, basically, because, you know, my relationship to people like William Blake, people like Rumi, and like a lot of visionary literature across the-and we started to look for smaller authors that could give us something very specific, very, very... I'm gonna use the word pigeonhole, because that's I think that's a good way of saying it. Because a lot of the times the larger presses are you know, putting out hundreds of books, putting tens of thousands of dollars into producing a book. So, they want to not really pigeonhole a single book. They want the book to be focused, but not completely obscure! But I think something that our press was doing, our press was seeking the most obscure. So, I think that's one of the things that Inspiritus was doing. I was, I joined as first, as a first reader, as a photographer, as an event photographer, I think that's what I did as my first thing, and later on, as a whole bunch of other things. You know, I became an editor for one of the first books that came out. And that's that if-if you need any more information, I can provide it, but I hope that was a good.

Tamara Thompson: That's a lovely overview of its history. Thank you so much.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, sorry! Sorry. One important thing. This is what I wanted to say. What and the other major small press that I was a part of was called Knife Fork Book and I want that reflected in the beginning, but that was the one that I was forgetting about.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I love Knife Fork Book so, yeah, that makes sense. Do you know any of the history of, why, maybe some of the traditional presses you've worked with, maybe why, they started?

Khashayar Mohammadi: So, what's interesting is that of the three and traditional presses that I work with two of them have started in the last five years. So, I know very well like, and I was a part of the second-ever printing of one of the, either second or third-ever print. Okay, I'm gonna go-I'm gonna say it more clearly. So basically, I have published. Sorry. I-I'm just gonna clarify when you say presses that I've been a part of. Do you mean presses that I've been an author with or presses that I have had other involvements with?

Tamara Thompson: That is up to you. I just want to know the histories and stuff like that. That's the whole point of the question is just to get an understanding of where you've worked and what you've experienced, right?

Khashayar Mohammadi: So, for example I have been an author with three, I have been of-sorry, I have gotten four full-length books out with three

traditional-with three small presses and the first two is with the same press, Gordon Hill Press. This third one is with Palimpsest press, and my most recent book is with Pamenar Press. So, I'm going to go with everyone. I unfortunately don't know much about Palimpsest press. I don't know about the foundations, and you know, it's an older press. It's been around for much longer, so unfortunately, I don't have as much information on it as I do with the others, because the others I have been involved from pretty much the beginning of the press. But Gordon Hill Press run by Shane Nielsen and Jeremy Luke, oh, my God! Let me...

Tamara Thompson: Isn't it, Jeremy Luke Hill?

Khashayar Mohammadi: Jeremy Luke Hill. Sorry.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, my God, my dear, dear publisher, Jeremy Luke Hill. So, they started the press with the basic idea of publishing a lot of mad poetics and disability poets. So, they're-what they saw lacking in Canadian literature was a dedicated press to mad poetics, disability poetics and a sort of experimental writing that comes from these, you know, not necessarily because experimental is such an umbrella term. It can come from a lot of different-you know-but they were very specifically interested in a sort of experiments that are rooted in you know, neuro-whether it be neuro divergence, whether it be any sort of physical, mental disabilities. And Shane Neilson, the editor has been a, you know, disability poetics activist for quite some time. And I think it was a step up from Shane Neilson's involvement with another small press, which was a chapbook press called Frog Hollow Press. So basically, it was a way of bringing that energy to full length books instead of putting chapbooks out which is, you know, both-both wonderful endeavors. Like I said Palimpsest Press is an older press I have... As long as I've been around, they have been around, and I don't know very much. I don't know a lot about their beginnings. But Pamenar Press is a bit of a different question, because the thing is my, the Pamenar Press, I have a book out with them. But since my book coming out, I have become much more involved with them. Which means that I went from an author to a member, as in you know, I do, I started running the online magazine. I started doing some administrative work for them. And basically, I started being heavily involved with the very inner workings of the press, and through that I learned a lot of things about it. Which is that the interesting thing about Pamenar press-which is also a small press, but it is an international press- is that it, at the same time that it gives it its edge, it also creates a lot of problems that it has-it highlights a lot of problems with funding for presses that we see. And I'm gonna explain a little bit about those, which is that Pamenar Press is very much interested in translingual cross lingual. There are a lot of terminologies here, and I won't, you know get into it, because, you know. Multi-Translingual, multilingual all-all these terms for writing across languages, across cultural boundaries, across nation-national boundaries. So, guys, almost at the-the creator lives between UK and Toronto. So, between London, UK and Toronto, Ontario and the designer-our artistic director of the press, which is, in this press an incredibly important, and incredibly involved aspect of the press like it would, it would not be in some others-lives in Tehran, Iran. So

basically, the whole idea of this press is that-and okay, I'll go, and again, I don't, I have a very scattered mind, so I'm-I'll go a little bit more carefully. So, the press was trying very hard to create these writings across national boundaries, across cultural boundaries. And it is also very dedicated to experimental poetics, but in a very informed way, in a way that a lot of other presses aren't, which is that a lot of presses have a very unilateral way of approaching experimental. So, if they say we publish ex-they say we publish experimental music, this experimental writing, what they mean is that we publish what is experimental to our canon. What is subversive to our canon, what is subversive to our language, what is subversive to our culture. And I think what sets Pamenar apart very distinctly is that it considers every work's experiments in relationship to its own canon. The-the publisher is extremely well traveled, and is very, you know, well acquainted with the literature of the world and very well connected with the literature of the world. So basically, the thing that I really love about is that the experiments are always evaluated in relationship to their own culture and canon. So, what is considered experimental here may not be experimental somewhere else. So that's something that I really like about it. Okay, but I'm gonna also talk a little bit about what is incredibly difficult in this, because throughout this whole process, you start to realize that a lot of funding that takes place in, not just Canada, but anywhere in the world is very ethno-national. Basically, it goes against everything that a transnational and a translingual writing is going to achieve. So, the whole point of a translingual and a transnational writing is to break these boundaries of nations, these boundaries of language and any funding body is funded by a government that is inherently funded by a nation state that is inherently invested in an ethnonationalist project, regardless of its, you know. There are different versions of problem, there are different levels of it being problematic. But, for example, you know a lot of-and you know this is something that we see very clearly in Canada. A lot of writing across languages or a lot of translations-not a lot of all translations from languages that do not pre-exist within Canada, are not funded. They are only interested in Quebec French to English and indigenous languages and indigenous languages. Thank God! But I'm not, I'm not undermining that. There's a lot of great that comes from it. But there's also the fact that there's no funding for any language to come from any other part of the world to this nation. I hope that was a good enough little setup.

Tamara Thompson: That was fantastic. You gave a lot of great detail. You're doing very well, like, even if you feel like you're being very scattered brain the way I can understand the logic that you're going through. So don't feel stressed or anything, because that was very, very helpful. Thank you.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay. Ca-one thing I just realized is because I remembered Knife Fork Book late, I think I should talk about Knife Fork Book as well. Would you like me to talk about it?

Tamara Thompson: Oh yeah!

Khashayar Mohammadi: So, the thing about Knife Fork Book is that, well, I mean small press itself has so much diversity within it, There are small

presses that are so strictly funded. And so, you know, they're basically so structured that you know you don't in-in-in the format of it, you might not even find the difference between a traditional press and an-actually, actually, I just realized something. When I was talking to you because you said small presses and traditional presses and I want you to define for me what you mean by traditional presses, because there are presses that I consider both traditional presses and small presses. And there are, you know, I just want you to define a traditional press for me, so I can perhaps speak about it, and I know this is a little bit too late into the process, but maybe I can.

Tamara Thompson: You're totally fine. So traditional to me is like, there's a team and they're making a classic, just book. This is not handmade. They sent this off to like a print shop kind of deal, and that's to me what traditional publisher kind of is. I had to, I had to come up with a term that I could use with the Ethics Committee that they would understand. So that was the term I went with, and when I mean small press or micropress, I mean, like.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Like stapled, basically.

Tamara Thompson: I mean Proper Tales press, kind of stuff.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay. So okay, so that makes things very difficult, because-because basically everything that I've spoken to until now, everything that I have claimed as a small press was just in terms of the level of funding, and not in the in terms of level of output. For example, like I consider Knife Fork Book, a small press. Or is micro press, not-not a micropress, a small press? It's mostly by one person, but it's perfect bound, you know, and it's printed in Coach House Books. So, a lot of these things again, like, I'll-I'll try my best to go every step of the way that I speak. I will define it by your terms, but-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I would also consider Knife Fork Book, like Knife Fork work, like, I would consider them this kind of small press. Same with Gap Riot, like, (pulls down chapbook by Terese Mason Pierre called Manifest) even though they send it to printers, right?

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, that's, I don't know if you know, but that's my ex's book.

Tamara Thompson: I have been trying to get a hold of her.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, really I-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, but I, it's the sending the email into the void and hoping someone responds.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yeah, yeah. But you know what?

Tamara Thompson: So.

Khashayar Mohammadi: You know what? I will send her a message for you and see if I can get-The thing is, I know she's very busy. She's one of my

closest, like one of my dearests, dearest friends in the world, and one of like my loveliest friends, so I'll try to get hold of her for you, anyway. Sorry I'm not, I won't take that-

Tamara Thompson: I appreciate that because I-I enjoy both of your work. So, it'd be nice to have-have that in my thesis. So, thank you. Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Definitely. Okay. So, I would also like to talk about Knife Fork Book from somewhat the beginning, because another thing about-another thing about such things is that a lot of presses kind of start small, get bigger-some of them start, that's-and sometimes, which is kind of the case, I'll-I'll explain a little bit further-kind of the case with Knife Fork Book. It started small, it got a little bit bigger. It got like a collect-I'll explain that. So basically, Knife Fork Book is a very-is a-not a bit of, but kind of like, maybe like one of the biggest anomalies here because Knife Fork Book started as one person. It was just Kirby. And Knife Fork Book started as a bookshop. It was not a publishing endeavor. So I'll-I'll just explain my whole relationship to like Knife Fork Book basically. I first came across, I was just walking through Kensington Market and I came across-at the time it was called Rick's Cafe and Rick's Cafe in Kensington. It's a sushi shop now, if I'm not mistaken. Kensington is a very specific anomaly and I, said one of the old, it's I-I love the energy of that place, and for some reason the synergy of Rick's cafe renting a corner of the shop to Kirby for two bookcases and a little desk and that, in conjunction with the very spirit of Kensington Market, really helped Knife Fork Book become what it was to become. So basically, I just walk in, I see Kirby, Kirby has that, you know, absolutely contagious energy that you know, most people have seen and the, I get inside, and you know we talk a little bit. You know, I don't think much of it. I wasn't reading as much, but I grab a book. But basically, the second time I come I have read a lot more, and Kirby has, I just see a book all across the top shelf that's called, She's Having a Doris Day, which is the first book that could be published with the KFB label and I read it. I loved it. It really had everything that I was looking for at the time. And the next time I saw Kirby I asked if I could interview her about Knife Fork Book, about small press, about KFB. Unfortunately, the website that it was hosted on has disappeared. And it's way too old for me to find anywhere. I actually wanted to like, dig it up and like, maybe look at what I, what we've talked to- actually couldn't find it. But it was on a website called Lexical.ca. There was a person called Justin Lauzon and their partner Kimberley, I want to say Griffiths-they created a website called Lexical.ca, where you could go and look at every single Canadian entity that was taking any sort of writing submissions. They had all the deadlines, all the, like categories. It was, it was a great-great, you know. It's something that you know you don't understand you, miss, until it's gone. And it was really, truly great to have that as a tool while it lasted. Okay, okay, so I interview Kirby for that. Okay, so basically, okay, this is a, I think this was a little bit of an aside. So basically, I become through that a lot more interested and involved in the whole project of KFB, not so much just, so... Through being involved, I become basically a part of the team. I start coming to a lot of-okay at this point, a few months after that, at this point, Knife Fork Book moves to a larger space because Rick's café sells and Knife Fork Book finds a new home at the Dark Side Studios above the Vegan bakery Bonners, again in

Kensington. It's very close. But the difference is that Rick's Cafe closes. And then Kirby has to leave Dark Side Studios which is a dance studio with a lot of space, a lot of... During the times that they don't have dance classes, Kirby can be a, Kirby can be a business. And during the times when the evening dance classes are not happening, Kirby can host readings. So, this expansion of KFB into a press kind of synergizes with this whole idea of having a, a dedicated space now, which at the time was quite affordable. You know, I'm not gonna mention the exact things because I don't want that mentioned, but it was like quite affordable for anywhere in Toronto. So the synergize, the synergy, the synergy of those few things happening makes the fact that there is now a space and there has been something already put out by Kirby, has been, you know, typeset has been printed, has, you know, shown quite a lot of promise. So now, you know, the next step is like, okay, let's host readings. And a lot of these readings end up you know, basically, it's a whole ecosystem of people coming in buying books, attending the readings, and through that friendship, through that proximity, a lot of great writing makes its ways into Kirby's hands and Kirby begins to have a sustainable pool of writing that can consistently be probed for good work. Okay, there's a whole bunch of new chapbooks that come in. They are very beautifully, as always, they're very beautifully designed. Everything about them is just, you know, gorgeous, and they're kind of a little bit boutique, you know. In terms—as far as, small presses go, they're pretty boutique. But at the same time something starts called What Queer Reading which is a reading series, and it had different hosts throughout the years. But the first host was, the first host of both the series, and everything was Fan Wu and then it becomes an imprint of Knife Fork Books.

So, a few works start making an appearance under the What Queer Reading, which is a queer imprint, like a very dedicated queer writing imprint of Knife Fork Book. And when this happens—when like a guest you know, curator, guest, editor, I think it opens the door for Kirby to realize a lot of this work load that she's been just—just to clarify Kirby's, I don't know if you know this, but Kirby's pronouns, are she. So, Kirby realizes that all this workload that she's been kind of shouldering for this long time can be spread through a lot of dedicated people. So, a bunch of people start joining the KFB Collective now. So I'm a part of it. Fan was part of it. I think, at that, at some point, we were eight. I don't know how vocal I can be about who was on it, because I don't—I don't think there would be any problems, but I prefer not to say who was on it, in case, you know, because it was never mentioned. And I don't know if that was a deliberate decision. So, I'm just gonna try not to get into it. But basically, it becomes a collective, and it becomes at that point, it becomes a bit of a larger press in a lot of ways. You know, it in no way becomes, you know, highly fun—it, a lot of it doesn't change. But at—at the same time a few major things really do change. So okay, hmm and I think that should be good.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, I'm good with that then, too. So how did you first discover zines and chapbooks and this type of smaller D.I.Y., publishing. How did you first discover it? Where you're like—this is a chapbook, or zine.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, okay, okay, that's actually a great question. Because it was through—KFB was the only place I knew that had a dedicated chapbook section. And I think to this day it's the only, yeah, it's the only bookstore I know that sells, that sold, yeah, I am, I'm trying to think of it, but I can't think of another place, at least in Toronto. Like, for example, in Vancouver Paper House has a few chapbooks. And you know, and—and Dundas, the city Dundas. What's the bookstore called? Oh, my God! The bookstore and the famous bookstore in Dundas has like a very, very, very limited collection of chapbooks. But the difference was that Kirby—people came to Knife Fork Book for the chapbooks and that made it a place where all chapbook publishers would come and sell the chapbooks, and where a lot of chapbooks publishers would come and put their—and launch their chapbook. So, it became a little chapbook epicenter. Trying to find that I'll just—give me one second to tell you the name of the Dundas Book store.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that'd be great. Thank you.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Because it's important. The Printed Word, the Printed Word on Dundas is. You know, maybe these two are—I-I honestly. And I'm talking when I say this, I've been to, you know dozens of cities in Canada, and everywhere I go, I go to at least two or three bookstores. Honestly, chapbooks are something that has always been, you know—because of their gorilla marketing—it's either, you know, hand to hand or if it's not hand to hand, it's, you know, post. But there is always, almost never a space where you could purchase them very freely. So, I think, having a place where you could go and look at all the chapbooks that have come out of Canada was absolutely mind blowing. And I think to this day it's mind blowing, because it's the kind of thing that you hear about, you know, happening a lot in like the seventies and eighties in Canada. But it just doesn't exist anymore.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, we have a small one. If you ever come to Peterborough, we have a place in East City called Take Cover, which is a queer/safe bookstore that does readings and also sells chapbooks and things like that.

Khashayar Mohammadi: That's amazing.

Tamara Thompson: It's such a fun place. I figured I would mention it, 'cause you seem interested.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, wait sorry. I-I just have to say one thing very important about my involvement in Knife Fork Book, because I don't know if it ha—it has, it has anything, any bearing on your thesis. But basically, after the Dark Side Studios we moved. So, Kirby found a new spot in Artscape/Young Place at Shaw and Argyle in Toronto. And in case you don't know what Artscape is, it doesn't exist anymore. It filed for bankruptcy last year. But Artscape is a space that gives commercial, gives commercial space to artists as either studios or in any capacity that are low income. Anyway, the point is that Kirby found the spot that had a cafe and I—my background is, like my professional background is in hospitality and food—So, I took over the cafe and I was the cafe manager while in the café. On the... there was half cafe, half bookstore. So, we, me and Kirby, actually



worked together in the physical same environment for a year and a half, before the pandemic.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. That sounds like a great place to be.

(Both laugh).

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yes.

Tamara Thompson: Wonderful. So, I'm gonna move back on to the press a little bit. But what was, like, the small press's editorial philosophy. So, you can talk a little bit about Knife Fork Book. You can maybe talk about the press you talked about at the beginning.

Khashayar Mohammadi: So, Knife Fork Book had a very hands-off approach. I don't think, Kirby, and it's, I think, basically Kirby's editorial inputs, where I will always either, let's like, you know, Kirby liked short and sweet, you know. That's something that you know; it's always been true about Kirby, is that Kirby liked too, first of all, take projects that were already pretty good, and you know, with the amount of great work that came through, it wasn't actually kind of a big deal, like there was so much great work coming through, and there was so much fervor for everyone to get their book out published with Knife Fork Book that it was actually not a hard task! I'm sorry, I'm not trying to undermine Kirby, but it was just like there was so much excitement that people really seem to, you know, get their best out to Kirby, but at the same time Kirby preferred to, you know, not really... but again, like I think the best part is like very hands off like. Just let's, let the work speak for itself. And let the writers figure out what the book needs to be. So yeah, the editorial part, I think, was the-the least, the most minimal editorial feedback was Knife Fork Book. Then, Fork, I think, maybe was kind of diametrically opposed, was Inspiritus. I'm not, I'm not saying Inspiritus was invasive or anything, but I think it was one of the only places where I saw a collective based editing, where the collective would look at a piece and edit together, and at the same time, like not do so much proofreading. But basically, four or five people, like, there was a main editor for everything definitely. But maybe four or five people would be involved in the process of editing like a single thing. So that was a, you know more of a, yeah, that was a lot more involved. Pamenar is also Pamenar, okay, should I talk about minor experiences?

Tamara Thomspon: Yup.

Khashayar Mohammadi: So, oh, actually, one thing I also--there's also the fact that I have, you know, I know I've also, I've talked about...I think one thing is, I talked about the chapbook presses that I've been involved with and the book length projects that I've been an author with. But I haven't spoken about chapbook presses that I have been an author with so with above/ground press, it's this, it's also, like, very minimal. Actually, I think, in general, in general and I--it's-it's a double and it's not necessarily because I think, okay, there is a lack of resources like, compared, and it makes chapbook presses less likely to spend more time editing. But at the same time, it's not because of the lack of resources, but my-but also because of the attitude of the small, of the

small and micro press and chap-chapbook press that, you know, because they don't necessarily need to really, like, they don't need to impress any certain audience. Okay, let's put it this way. So, this is where I'm gonna like, really discuss the difference between, like okay, I'm gonna say it this way: chapbook press and trade book press. And I'm not gonna take the, my-the small press versus traditional press here, but a chapbook press in a way, does not have a dedicated audience. And I, I'm not saying it doesn't have a dedicated audience at all, but because it-it doesn't have a dedicated audience the same way that a trade book press does. Because a trade book press you know, has, you know, first of all, like a season launch where all of them launch together. And there are people who, you know, subscribe. There are people who read, okay: let's read what's coming out of Coach House, let's, you know let's see. Like there's this kind of, sort of branding. There's all these things that go into a trade press that just don't exist from a pure perspective, just simply don't exist in a micropress, because, first of all, like something super simple, when you put out forty of something not only do you not... so, okay. Actually like, let's not consider this a given. Let's just like explore it for a moment. Trade presses publish something between two hundred to five hundred of every book and chapbook presses can print as little as thirty books... and not only, like sum up, not only, do they... some of them are basically created for an author and an author's friend group to read, you know? And not only do they not try very hard to get this book out. They may not even have the resources to print more than the run. You know some of them do. I'm not saying not all of them, but like, for example, like some of the chapbook presses don't try really hard to promote their chapbooks, because they don't even have the financial means to print two hundred to sell, you know? So, if, look, if a chapbook sells two hundred, you know that's inhibitive. So they are, you know... Also, one thing I feel I have to mention here is that, in my-but I don't know if I have mentioned this at any point in our interactions, but one of the first things I did for Knife Fork Book had nothing to do with the collective or anything else. I, actually, one of the first things I did for them before I ran events, before I ran anything else, was that I began curating a chapbook club. Which is because Kirby had access to so many of the biggest and most prominent chapbook presses. I, I'm like, let's "how about we take, you know, advantage of this, and just create a club where we can gather"? It's just like just like any book club. But instead, we read chapbooks. I don't know it, it sounds so simple now, but I swear at the time it was kind of a very new idea. I'm not saying it's insane, and no one has heard of it. But I swear it was you know, quite something at one point okay. So, chapbooks, trade books, okay, chapbooks, trade books, chapbooks, trade books, chapbooks, okay.

Tamara Thompson: Its all right. Do you want to move on, or do you want to keep expanding on editorial philosophies and goals and stuff like that?

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh! Okay, okay, let me just say that very quick. So, what I wanted to say, because they don't have a dedicated-so a lot of the reasons for rigorous editing in traditional book is to make it adhere to a presses ideal style because a lot of traditional presses like to maintain a certain level of quality for their perceived audience. And chapbook presses simply don't have that issue. That's-that's pretty much.

Tamara Thompson: So, from your experience, what kind of work does small presses that you've worked with, what kind of work do they publish so kind of like the content? You've been talking a lot about poetry, and sometimes like experimental poetry. But, like, could you talk a little bit more about that?

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay. Yes. First of all, you know, yes, definitely I would say, I would say a lot of what I'm gonna say has already been said in a lot of places that are like, "oh, it's like experimental," like smaller stuff, harder stuff to like, but I'm going to say something else, which is a lot of young writing and I think that is very exciting. And, like let me actually draw like attention to a press that, so, like a lot of young writing, and Internet kind of writing—which is that, you know, think something you would read on Tumblr—and you can put it in the chapbook but maybe, like a traditional press, will not print it for you in like a hundred page trade book, you know? And it's an important place— and you know, I think one of the first presses that really brought me into that, like whole spreads of youth—I-I-I say it like that, and it makes me kind of cringe. But basically, like, when I was, like, nineteen, twenty, I think what really drove me the most towards writing was Montreal's Metatron. Metatron Press put out the most millennial writing you have ever seen in your life. And, you know, like, I'm a millennial and like, that kind of millennial, like, Internet writing, you know, like sex writing, kink writing, a queer writing, all of that, like it was just hard to get that into you know a press run by, you know, fifty, sixty-year-olds who are editing, you know, poems that they want to adhere very strongly to a lot of things but are very lacking in certain raw emotions. And you know I'm gonna say it, like, sometimes, you know, like a few years on in your writing career, you're just like, oh, I wish I could get back to those raw emotions of, like, the first couple of years. So, it's always-always amazing to see that I'm—I'm—I know, like Metatron is not specifically the only place that does that. For example, Gap Riot has a lot of intense, like punk young, energy, like, Internet Writing, you know, sexual, queer, just (makes a grit noise)—but at the same time, you know not-not at the same time. It's just great to have spaces. You can have it. And another place that had great writing like that was Rahila's Ghost. I was really sad to see them go. Rahila's Ghost was such a great press. Honestly. We're in a—we're going through a chapbook press death kind of there. We don't—pretty much all the chapbook presses, and I think a lot actually—can I talk about this a little bit, or can I?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, one hundred percent.

Khashayar Mohammadi: I think a part of the chapbook press death is the pandemic, because like a lot of the, you know, a lot of the millennials learned the ropes from like the Gen X. And like there was a lot of synergy between generations where you would learn you would cash the ropes; you would get things handed off to you, and then you would start something, or you would start something on your own, based on the guy. But I really think the pandemic really severed the ties between generations. And like we don't know what twenty-year-olds are doing, and the twenty-year-olds don't know or care what we are doing because we were very, very strongly severed for a few years, and now it's hard to get back into each other's—get back into each other's communities. Why, while—like a few—just like

before the pandemic we like, there were series of every age range. And the pandemic was right when, like the younger people would, should have, like, come in and filled out that gap for the younger age range. And then we just disappeared. And that's why a lot of things disappeared because that synergy between the, between older and younger generations just disappeared. And yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, no, I-I agree. I started up my press Whispering Wick during the pandemic because I needed an internship, and it was the fall of 2020, and like I had nothing, you know. So, I made up a chapbook, press to count towards my internship, and I kept doing it right. But like no one else was doing that. I felt like I was able to talk to older generations because, like, people like Rob McLennan like, reached out to me and like, started that. But like I don't know many people my age or younger who are doing chapbooks. And since the pandemic I have also recognized that. And it's weird, considering I started during 2020 in the literal mess of that fall of the pandemic. But yeah, I-I do understand the disconnect that you're talking about, because I also find it hard to find people my age doing something kind of similar to me.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, wait! Do you know? Do you know? Oh, let me find that what? Let me find the—I have to tell you about it before I forget.

Tamara Thompson: Him! Up!

Khashayar Mohammadi: Do you know Block Party.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: -I do. I've met him. He's wonderful. Yes, yes, yes, Block Party.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, my God! I've forgotten their, I feel so bad that I've forgotten their names. Isla McLaughlin, I want to say and-

Tamara Thompson: but he's such a nice person.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Joseph Donato.

Tamara Thompson: Yes. Joseph is so nice.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yeah. Anyway, are you? Is, are these books yours?  
*Where Do We Go From Here, Maroon on the Shore?*

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay, you know what.

Tamara Thompson: Sir, those Whispering Wick is what we do. We haven't been able to do much recently, because I'm in my masters, and everyone's trying to get the real jobs that pay the bills. So, we haven't been doing anything recently. We love doing it. And I hope once my master's has done to get back to it, because I just love this stuff.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay. You know what before. I forgot. Sorry. Just one moment. Bouyaka. Okay. You should receive an email soon.

Tamara Thompson: Okay.

Khashayar Mohammadi: No, I just, I just got your books.

Tamara Thompson: Oh! Thank you so much.

Khashayar Mohammadi: No, I—but like I swear when I see and like, that's one of my—I—when I see a press, I buy all. Like when I see a small press. I buy all the books. I just bought, like, this summer I bought all of, even though I've known, oh, my God! Oh, my God! Why am I forgetting everyone's name? From Kyle Flemmer from Blasted Tree. Even I've known them for years and years. I had not read most of the work that they had put out. So, this summer I bought the entire back catalog, the entire back catalog, like everything that was not sold out, I grabbed, and it was so fun I love, I love just going on a you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I know just really getting to experience everything that a press does.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And what? All the work.

Khashayar Mohammadi: I think I'm a big press reader, like I love reading presses as opposed to, you know, well, just books or authors. I like getting to know, you know, a press, and what it means. Anyway, so.

Tamara Thompson: No, you're—I'm honored that you liked our books enough to purchase some. That's literally.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

Tamara Thompson: My partner helped with the first ones, and then my—and then my father and mother. We I take over our dining room table and I get all this stuff out, and my mother helps me cause a lot of is hand done so.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Amazing! Oh, my God! Do you know zed press.

Tamara Thompson: No, I don't. I will write that down now.

Khashayar Mohammadi: They do a lot of interesting things with, like, handmade stuff, like, so like, I mean, like, of course, they hand, you know, Cabbage?

Tamara Thompson: Nope.

Khashayar Mohammadi: So Canadian Association of Book Binders, and something.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, wait. Maybe.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Anyway. Sorry. Okay, so z press ZED..

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Khashayar Mohammadi: ...they just disbanded, like, this year.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, okay.

Khashayar Mohammadi: I did my first book with them, but, like, for example, they would do, let me send you a few, I would—

Tamara Thompson: Love to see if, like anything you have, because a lot of this is word of mouth. And that's how I've been able to get in contact with so many people— just from hearing from others who I should talk to.

Khashayar Mohammadi: If you just see the amount of stuff they do with, like the, I'll just send you the—the press. They just disbanded, which is very sad.

Tamara Thompson: The sad, unfortunate truth of doing anything small press.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Sorry. Okay. Yay, I got.

Tamara Thompson: Kay.

Khashayar Mohammadi: That's the, yeah, but basically like, I just want to say a few things before, like moving from... So, like, come to Z, that, that's—that page I sent you. So go to the bottom, like the last book, all the great and terrible, do you see that.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay. So, for example, like every book had hand drawn watercolors for every different book. Like, if you come to the one above, like with the couch, every couch was differently painted with different colors like, one by one. If you come to my book that says, *Moe's Skin* by Khashayar Mohammadi the hair, is a stencil. So that they would do, one by one. So, like I think this is the kind of stuff that you kinda would be interested in, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, extremely so. That's what we kind of do at Whispering Wick. Like my designer. Just amazing! Love her! She's my proofreader and my layout person. She hand-carved the stamp for Rachel's book and oh, there.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay, actually.

Tamara Thompson: So beautiful.

Khashayar Mohammadi: This is an important thing, it, which is the absolute. Absolute. And this is something that was a big—that was a first from when I did—when I was a part of Pamenar, as well, is knowing how far a good designer can take you, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, I one hundred percent agree. Grace is fantastic and just like, she went out and took the photos for Rami's book, *Bandaïd*. She worked on all of the handmade things at the end of the book. There's a child's note, and she mimicked a child's writing and everything. So, you know how, like, nothing's quite there, and some letters are longer than others, and she mimicked it. And it's just like she just thought of those things and did those extra touches. And she'd be like, oh, is this a good idea? I'm like this is brilliant. Of course, it's a good idea.

Khashayar Mohammadi: I mean, I'm-I'm sorry to say this, but I'm not sorry to say this. I'm-I'm just saying, like, I hope it's not cringe, but like have heavily, heavily vibing; like, I'm-I'm huge-I'm-I don't know if you-I think you can tell, or I'm like very invested in chapbooks and small presses. And okay, actually wait, wait, let me bring you a book and see if you've heard of it.

Tamara Thompson: Okay.

Khashayar Mohammadi: How much time do you have? I can bring you, because I can bring my entire chapbook collection and tell you about things specifically.

Tamara Thompson: That would be brilliant. Thank you.

Khashayar Mohammadi: One second. (Gets up and grabs books from behind them). Okay, okay, before I talk about the chapbooks I wanted to tell you. You know Jim Johnstone, right? Did you read Jim Johnstone's *Gaspereau* book?

Tamara Thompson: Yes, I have it behind me right there. (point to a bookshelf behind them).

Khashayar Mohammadi: Let me see.

Tamara Thompson: *Write, Print, Fold, Staple*.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yeah. Is, is that how you heard about me?

Tamara Thompson: Oh! Who recommended you?

Khashayar Mohammadi: But did you read that book?

Tamara Thompson: Yes, yes, I did. I was reading it, but I had someone specifically recommend you. Ellen.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Ellen, Chang, Richardson?

Tamara Thompson: Yes, I think it was her who recommended. I talked to you because again I asked everyone: who should I talk to?

(Both laugh).

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Ellen was busy on her book tour.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Ellen-

Tamara Thompson: They said I would love to talk to you, but I can't. So here, talk to these people. And I'm like brilliant. Thank you.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Ellen goes by they/them.

Tamara Thompson: Well, they were on a book tour, and they're brilliant, and they were so kind, so many recommendations, and I believe you were amongst the recommendations. If my memory is serving me well.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Let's go through all the okay, you've heard of the Blasted Tree. Yes?

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Knife Fork Book you've heard. Blasted Tree. Like, for example, like, I don't know how much of Blasted Tree you've seen, but, for example, this is called the *Old Sea* (holds up a blue/green book and shows spine) and it has a little fishhook.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. (Laughs) That's so cool.

Khashayar Mohammadi: I mean, I love the idea, but it really mess-like it has pierced my skin so many times. It is very sharp. Like I understand that is cute, but very sharp.

Tamara Thompson: It-it needs an eraser to stop it from being so sharp.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yeah, okay you know Gap Riot.

Tamara Thompson: Yep.

Khashayar Mohammadi: You know Anstruther.

Tamara Thompson: Yep.

Khashayar Mohammadi: K. Anstruther, of course you've talked to Rob McLennan, right?

Tamara Thompson: Course, he was last week.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yes, and Rob's, you know, Rob's a powerhouse. Okay, let's see who's this from?

Tamara Thompson: He is.

Khashayar Mohammadi: And Rob's quite the character.

Tamara Thompson: He is.



Khashayar Mohammadi: K, okay, this is a smaller,—it's an insane like con schizo text dub. Okay? I don't—I don't want to like kind of show and tell. I want to find things that I have specific things to say about because, you know, this is an interesting book. But you know, I'm just gonna say it's an interesting book. But I also have—I—I'm also like going through it right now. I'm seeing I have a lot of, you know, self published ones, because, so I think it's one of those things where, if you have any idea of, like, design, and you know, aesthetics. You can really like we, and as if you have, you know, any kind of income, can be like, oh, you know what I have a project, I don't want to wait like nine months. I'll just put this out myself. I have enough friends to invite to a bar. So like I have two here, and they're also—they're also, like, very beautiful chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: But like, for example, let me show you Morning poems by my friend Darian. Like it's, like it has all these: [opens up a chapbook and shows a poem with a green illustration that is detailed and looks like a hill]. It is, an in it's, it's an exquisite-exquisite, not just a little bit, but like it's an absolute, it's an absolute, you know beauty. But it's self, you know, published. But it's just because that he is, you know, very involved in the arts and has a lot of different skills that he can transfer into making a... okay we've talked a lot about Canada. But are you interested at all in like US, or no?

Tamara Thompson: Not hugely, but I'd still like to see them. (Laughs).

Khashayar Mohammadi: So Ugly Duckling Press.

Tamara Thompson: Is.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Has, I mean, like these are the Señal. The Señal are specifically Latin X writing and they're always bilingual. So, outside text. (Technical issues occurred. Most of these are Anstruther. This is another.

Tamara Thompson: They make nice books.

Khashayar Mohammadi: This is another of Ugly Duckling. It's Aisha Sasha John. I don't know if you know Aisha Sasha John, but she was up for the Griffins for her book. I have to, I have to, what... God damn it! I've forgotten so many important things today. Oh, this is something I think, if you're at all interested in chapbooks and feminism. I think you really need to know about Belladonna. And Belladonna, I've seen them be very interested in. So, in... I've seen them do a lot of, you know, say, like things online. So, I—I think they would be interested, they would be open to, you know, interactions. So, what they do is... Belladonna is a Feminist collective in New York, and they have a monthly reading series. And I—I think at least half of them are guest edited, and guest call-curated. Basically, what happens is they have between two to three readers each time for the reading series. But the interesting thing is that every person who reads also gets to put out a fifteen-page chaplet of their new works.

Tamara Thompson: Oh!

Khashayar Mohammadi: So, they are, they have—I think mine is two hundred and eighty four.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Khashayar Mohammadi: So, I think they are at like three hundred and forty now, because they put three every month.

Tamara Thompson: Wow!

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, have you heard of Collusion books?

Tamara Thompson: It sounds familiar.

Khashayar Mohammadi: So, Collusion books is run by Andy Verboom from Longcon press. Collusion books is very specific, because it is very specifically printing collaborative chapbooks. Another thing that you haven't heard of because I don't and not-not you haven't heard of but hasn't been around for a while, is Words on Pages. Words on Pages was basically when I first came to the scene. Words on Pages was one of the most, you know, dedicated chapbook presses, you know, and-and especially like, they were like, putting out young, you know new emerging writers, a lot of that. These are Ugly Ducklings, essay and nonfiction chaplets they put out between twelve to sixteen of these, every year. I have a few KFB. Okay, you know KFB. Have you ever read any of Vallum's chapbooks?

Tamara Thompson: No, but I know of them, and I have seen them. I haven't had the time to read them.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay, you know this is Alexei Perry Cox's *Finding Places to Make Places* which later became a part of her book. With her award-winning book with, I forgot the American press, but the book was called *Place in the End*. Very important, have you read any Apt.9 chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, I've talked to Cameron early on, too.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay, okay. Cameron's I-I'm gonna I think I'm gonna have a new one with Cameron soon. Cameron's amazing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, just a lovely individual.

Khashayar Mohammadi: K. I hope this is not boring-oh, for example, like this is, this is a Belladonna chaplet that I have of someone I read with, which is Nilufar Karimi: (holds up yellow chaplet called Notes on Digging). Okay. Oh, let's get to some of the insane ones. K, this is a small press in Athens: (holds up book with interesting cover that appears to have a lot of small words on it and two-colour clear sheets that are blue and red). Between Athens and I forgot where-where's that California city? Oak, Oak, Oakland, Oakland California and it is Riso. I paid sixty-five dollars for this, but you know. Here, it's insane. Wait, let me find some of the insane pieces inside here, like, it's-(holds up inner page

with text that is built like a staircase structure, lines and words building one the page).

Tamara Thompson: Oh, wow!

Khashayar Mohammadi: And another one. It's a little bit harder to see these, but like either; these are like-like onions, not onion screens, but, for example, like there's, like, a I don't know if you can see a uterus superimpose: [They open the book to a red outlined uterus on a clear page which overlays with eyeballs behind it.]

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: And then the uterus goes away.

Tamara Thompson: To reveal, like eyes.

Khashayar Mohammadi: And look at like it's-it's also Riso. It's insane, I think, for the two of these, that the two last ones that I showed you—I think I paid for more than like a hundred dollars.

Tamara Thompson: Wow! They're beautiful!

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay. It's my book with oh...

Tamara Thompson: Gap Riot?

Khashayar Mohammadi: Gap Riot, above/ground, you know. Ugly Duckling I told you about. Just give me one more minute, and I'll—oh—oh—here this is from? Oh, no, this is also Gap Riot. For a moment there I thought I found a new press. This is the only chapbook I have by Gaspereau.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm, yes.

Khashayar Mohammadi: See. Why do I feel I had a lot more? I'm quite sure I'm missing a whole bunch of my books, because I had a lot more diversity in my chapbooks, but I can't find. For example, this is Zed.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, yes.

Khashayar Mohammadi: I just wanna show you like this. (Hold up chapbook with a wine bottle cut out of the white cover page to show the purple paper on the second page.)

Tamara Thompson: Yes, the laser cut paper.

Khashayar Mohammadi: It made me realize something. This is not from that press, but Natalie Hannah from Ottawa had a press called Battle Axe Press, and Natalie is very approachable and very lovely but they are also very like, they have very intense work schedules, so I'm sure they will be able to like work with you if they have the time. But they do—they work in law so, and they work with, you know. Anyway, Baseline Press (holds up chapbook called infinite redress which is white with an illustration in the middle of the cover that shows planets) and here's the last little

handful. I'm just gonna go through them quick. Let's see if there's anything we've missed. Oh, Odorless Press! But Orderless Press was just like three chapbooks, so I don't really, I don't really think you should worry too much about them. Frog Hollow Press—that I think you know. Let's see what was this, with Alfred Gustav Press.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: They used to put out a lot of stuff, but I haven't seen them in, you know, maybe, like, six years. Oh, another one that is active still, you know 845 Press.

Tamara Thompson: 845 Press.

Khashayar Mohammadi: From out of Temz Review.

Tamara Thompson: Brilliant.

Khashayar Mohammadi: And the last one was Cyprus Press. But I think they're also disbanded for a while, they put out one anthology of speculative poetry and they used to publish stuff online, but they just disappeared.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: And I just realized that the poem I've published in here, I've published elsewhere. Holy Shit! That's my first time realizing this because when I was going through things, I realized I have already seen this in another chapbook. Okay, anyway.

Tamara Thompson: I-I do wanna ask you: why do you publish chapbooks with your work?

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay, that's a very—I think, I think, I-I don't wanna like go back to that. But I think not, not go—okay, I'll, it might all make sense. I think Jim had a, Jim Johnson had a really good take on my writing in their micropress book and I think that made me realize that I really like smaller like, even if you, I don't know if you, if you've ever seen any of my books, but my books, so far, except from the last one *Daffod\*ls*, they all seem to be a collection of like two or three, thirty page—like three or four, thirty page projects. And I think in general I write smaller projects, and they all work very well in chapbook form, yeah.

(Technical issue occurred).

Khashayar Mohammadi: So, like okay, one thing you need to know about me: I come from an extremely literary family. But I—you know, all my cousins, sorry not my cousins, all my uncles, are translators.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Khashayar Mohammadi: So, and I grew up around a lot of literature. But specifically, I grew up along around a lot of you know, world literature

because my uncles would bring in is like, here's like, Here's Pablo Neruda that I translated. Here's this that I translate. Here's that that I translated, and in general there was a lot of translations around me, so I read a lot of translations, but I never read much original, like Persian-stuff written in the original Persian. I read world literature, mostly like Latin, American, Japanese. Like my uncle, one of my uncle's was the—he was the first person to translate Haruki Murakami. So, I would just read a lot of Haruki Murakami as like an, you know, sixteen-year-old, and that's a perfect age to read it. It's just such a good age to read that kind of stuff before you start, you know, getting worried about sexual tokenism and stuff. Actually sorry, let's not talk about. But you know, before you're like, oh, why is this, anyway? Why is this depressed girl so, like, sexual? I don't know. Let's not talk about it.

Tamara Thompson: Yup, fair. All the complicated things that literature has.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay, but I never read much stuff in the original Pers-like written in original Persian, or and didn't read much poetry in my twenties. I became friends, you know, okay, I'll just like, be honest, I had a very intense, romantic, real relationship with a poet who read me a lot of poetry, and it made me fall in love with it. And then they asked me to, you know, attend a few readings and the first time I stepped on stage I just caught fire. I'm like I need to do this. I, and that like whole monthly cycle of you know, waiting for the next event, and just writing something just to go read and the open mic for five min and just feeling elated. It was a lot of fun. That's how we got into writing. I-I mean, to be fair, the first time I went because I was reading a lot of prose. I read a short story but then I saw people reading poet-and no one was reading short stories. On the open mic was a poetry open mic. So, I started writing. I-I'm, I'm not gonna lie, the first poetry book I read was Rupi Kaur, and I loved it. And then I picked up a whole bunch of things similar to that, like very accessible poetry. And I got into poetry. And I started like just going forward. I just started reading. And you know I kept going to the open mics and everything just kept growing, you know, like I kept writing for publications. I started publishing. I started putting things in chapbook form and sending them out. A-a lot of things kept working out, you know? Anyway, that's the basic story of it. But yeah, if it wasn't for my friend, yeah it, yeah. And I think the most crucial thing to, it was the *Facilitate* open mic series in Toronto. If it wasn't for my friend Joe, who ran *Facilitate* Joe, is still like someone. When I write a poem, I'm like, what will Joe think? I-I-I really don't think a-a about what a lot of people think. I'm not saying I don't care about what anyone thinks, but like when people don't like my poems, I don't care much. But if Joe doesn't like it, I'm like I have to change this. So, Joe is, Joe is the only person that has remained crucial to my poetry practice in the entire time that I've been a poet. My friend Joe Yanni, Joe also has a book with Apt.9 that I think you should look into.

Tamara Thompson: All right. I have a friend like that as well called Sarah Ibrahim. She's Ethiopian and Yemeni, and she's doing her master's at UBC. And I don't write for anybody, but I do write for Sara. Sara gets it, you know. Sara will get excited by what I'm writing, and I get excited about

what Sarah's writing, and I think Damn! That's a really good idea. I wish I'd come up with that, because that's so cool, and I.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Are they called S. K. Ibrahim?

Tamara Thompson: Maybe.

Khashayar Mohammadi: I'm trying to find poems by them.

Tamara Thompson: They're very new into... They've won an award for it. But I, they might have used S.K. as their author's name for when they get published and stuff. But I-I love Sara's poetry. Sara's like mixing of genres and things like that. Sara is such a, like, she loves blending languages, she loves learning languages like she's actually one of the people. When you were talking about your love for like languages and all these other things I was, like, oh, you sound like Sara, because Sara loves all these amazing, like, experimental things, and playing with language and ideas and different cultural things. I think she does go-

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yeah, I found them.

Tamara Thompson: yeah, I-personally, I think the world would be foolish not to recognize their amazing talents, for readers not to find them and read their work.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, my God! I just! I just thought of something. Have you ever read the Captain Poetry Comics.

Tamara Thompson: No, I haven't. I'm gonna.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Write that down, Captain Poetry Comics this might be, it's another one of those, like, old zine culture things in Toronto. That's why Bp Nichol, I mean, like Bp Nichol is very famous but also like they're famous for a reason. I like them.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, absolutely. I love comics, I teach graphic fiction. I love what it does on a way when it comes to analysis and getting students minds to work differently. I adore teaching it. I just taught it with-as a TA this past of winter, and we read things like *Ducks* and amazing stuff like *Grass*.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, *Ducks*! Was a part of Toronto book awards I-I read that for Toronto book awards.

Tamara Thompson: We read *Kindred*, *The Fade Out*, like all of these books, very heavy subject matter. Most students wouldn't want to read them, and every student was like you need to make the reading less-less heavy. But also, you can't get rid of any of these books because they're too good. You can't get rid of any of them.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Wait. Actually, one thing I just sent you just in case you didn't see. Well, the Captain Poetry Comics are like impossible to find like an original form now. But book\*hug, put together the-

Tamara Thompson: Oh! Brilliant.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Captain Poetry Comics, for, you know...

Tamara Thompson: Oh, absolutely brilliant. Thank you. So. But yeah, I I adore comics. I enjoy graphic fiction. I enjoy what it does and how it gets me to relate to things like this is like an old Hollywood film, or TV. But then something like grass is about history. And is this beautiful like ink style. And this is done by Drawn and Quarterly, which is in Montreal.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, wait! Really!

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Didn't know. Didn't know they would, they published that.

Tamara Thompson: Drawn and Quarterly they also did Ducks by Kate.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, my God, I'm so, there are not a lot of people that I can nerd about. (Technical issues occurred)-that's amazing, I did not know that. I mean, I know they have a whole separate—I've seen that they have a whole separate comics storefront, even.

Tamara Thompson: Just like all the information that would be in most books, they made it in a comic. So, it has, like the ISBN number and everything as just like comic panels. And it's just fantastic, and it's in this old style. I'd love to teach you night course. It is so good. It helps us.

(Technical issues occurred).

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, my God! We're vibing! We're vibing.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, truly (laugh).

Khashayar Mohammadi: I love, I love small presses, and I love, I love everything.

Tamara Thompson: I-I love when I get to see something that's a true expression of art, and that is playing and just wow, and also seeing people interact with it. It's why I love teaching: seeing people interact with things that they wouldn't have interacted before. Like, I teach creative writing and one of my favorite books to see students interact with is Jordan Abels *Nishga* because it is like poetry, but interviews, but also visual things. And this book blows a first year's mind. They cannot believe that something like this is a book, and they're like this is so cool, it's so personal and there's like pictures and overlays with art and stuff. They just lose it when they see this kind of stuff. And they're like, oh, this is so cool you can do that. This is a book, and I'm like this is book.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Well, published book that you should continue to read other works like this. Anyway, we should get back on track. Okay, you've talked a little bit about how you got into writing and the reading series and stuff like that. What are some challenges that you've faced as an author and poet.

Khashayar Mohammadi: I think, and I think this is something that was just not the same a while ago. When I say a while, I mean like fifteen to twenty years ago. Like there's a lot of... hmm, I don't know if I wanna get clearly into this, but I don't like how much... there's a lot of like culture of scarcity you know. You know, there's one spot for like this. There's like you know, ten people who get the grant. There's like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: It's and you know the Grants are shrink-like, they're, the Grants aren't shrinking, but the economy is getting worse, and the Grants aren't getting any bigger.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Not only are they not getting bigger, they keep cut-like I don't know. Canada Council is cutting like four point three million every year until 2027.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: All these things, like, I would say, like more than anything, it's the money, like, and I said, like, when I say the culture of scarcity when I say, oh, like there's just one award. It's not that I want to win the award to like have the prestige. I literally want the money.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Need-and this is some like sometimes, when I like losing a word, it's not that like, oh, I'm not the person who didn't get number one. I'm just like I needed that, eight thousand dollars, you know. And it's just, it's literally I-I would say it's all about the money. For me, the biggest, like, in any way, in every and every single way, the issue is the money.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Do you think that's also true with some of the things that presses face as well as?

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yeah, definitely because a lot of a lot of chapbooks presses, they're just doing them from, like-I've known dozens of chapbooks presses and pretty much every single one I know does it, like, does it from pocket money.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.



Khashayar Mohammadi: They have, they have, they are professional that they make a certain amount of money in their life and they're like this one thousand dollars I'll put out for these four chapbooks. I mean, depends like that, that there's a lot of people that have different, you know, amount of. Some people do print on demand to, like, bring down the cost. A lot of—there's a lot of different things being done but it's all pocket money. So, when you know, things get cut, when, right—cost of living goes up.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: People stop publishing their chapbooks instead of you know, being like, oh, they're not gonna say "I'm going to cut back on my fruit." They're like, "I'm gonna, you know, maybe not publish as"— "I'm gonna stop publishing altogether," or "I'm not gonna publish as much as I used to."

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: So, and that's another thing. Because we're getting a lot more and this is like a lot, a lot of things coming together, right, like the population's going up, the number of writers are going up. There's a lot of climate anxiety, so a lot of younger writers want to, like—I-I've seen this first-hand, a lot of, you know, very young, right? Young writers they wanna publish as quickly as possible. And I see that reflected in a lot of their climate anxiety because they're like, oh, I don't want to wait three and a half years for my book because what's the world in three and a half years? We've seen so much, so many things get so much worse, so, and everything keeps closing down like I've seen, you know, ten chapbook presses go out of business. And I've seen two pop-like you're the literally the second chapbook press I have seen pop up in the last four years and I look for it. I look for chapbook presses, and I have a lot of friends in the small press industry, in the chapbook industry, and it's just, it's hard, man. It's real disheartening.

Tamara Thompson: Disheartening.

Khashayar Mohammadi: And it's all, you know, I'm not gonna lie, it's all money.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, do you think... because a lot of micro presses and small places, they just close up shop. What do you think that's linked to money? Do you think maybe it's linked to time like, what are more, your thoughts for, like maybe a lot of presses just going out?

Khashayar Mohammadi: Well, also, like I mean, I know there's a lot of things about money, but also, it's not just about money. One thing I would say, and this is very catty of me, but, and this is something I don't, I don't know if I think you would like reading this... Have you ever read, Ben? I-I don't like Ben Lerner that much, but Ben Lerner's *Hatred of Poetry* is such a great book to read for anyone in the business of poetry. Ben Lerner says something really interesting in there, which is that because the stakes are so low, the egos are so high, like, because there's no money to ever, like... It's like, oh, there are things where the stakes

are so high and he's like in small presses there's no money. There's no incentive. Like, I don't know. Sorry, I'm not saying money is the only incentive. But, for example, when there's, you know, your monthly paycheck, you're gonna be a lot more considerate of a lot of things. Okay, I-I-I just in general, I refuse to not consider money in-but, for example, when you're in a group chat and, you know, work, you're gonna consider your coworkers because you're like, "I I don't get along with these people, I'm gonna have to stop working. I'm gonna have to find a new job." There's all these things. When you're in a small press, ninety-nine percent of the time you're a volunteer. One percent of the time you're getting fifty bucks or, like, two books, like, what are you gonna get out of this? And people just break apart because there's nothing keeping them apart. Like there's a lot less on the line. And it's very, and I'm not saying—I'm not judging other people. I've done this when I'm, like—okay, I have my day job, I have these, like, responsibilities to my, you know, family and friends, like when it's getting hard in this small press. Why am I staying? And yes, at-at some at-at— and on the one hand, it's very self centered. But, on the other hand, this is some, and this is—I really wanna talk about the difference between the communities' age groups. So, like a lot of the older community members are very used to doing a lot for little to no money. It's because that's how they've done it for decades. But there's also the fact that they have some fundamentals of living figured out. You know? I'm not saying they're set, but, you know, maybe they have a—you know this is not—I'm not trying to go after anyone, but like there are people who are making very little money, but you know they have a house either through, you know, family money. But, you know, or they have, you know, a spouse that makes a little bit of a—okay. I don't know.

(Technical issues occurred).

Khashayar Mohammadi: I'm also gonna go into another direction. Which is that a lot of these collectives need a person of color. You know: queer person, indigenous person. They need that for kind of credibility. They're like, "Okay, we're doing, like a series on racial justice. Here's like two black, one brown, like one Asian, one indigenous person." And then they're like, "oh, you're gonna be volunteers." We're like, "okay, this is, this is not cool," like you're you are, you know. If we're going to put all this mental effort into being the filters for this racial hatred, then this whole community discourse doesn't work anymore.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's one of those things, where, if you have the time and mental capacity to do it for free, and you still want to participate. That's great, but you cannot expect everyone you ask to be in the same place you are.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Especially if you want their assistance. And I understand, especially with that monetary thing where it's, like, you can't always pay everybody, or you can pay them in other ways like with books. That's a very common thing to pay an author with books and stuff like that, right? But not everybody is in a situation where they can accept that, or if that's doable for them. So, I understand the point that

you're trying to make, and the-the perspective you're trying to add there, because I think it is very important, because yes, it is nice that we can all come together as a community and help each other. But we can't always do that all the time. We have other responsibilities that have to be taken care of. And yes, this is something we love. And you can see it as a hobby. But it is a hobby that you have to pay money into, and also a lot of time and not everybody has that capability.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yup. I think that's-that's another thing that when you'd mentioned that I realized, okay, another important thing is that, yes, a-a lot of the older generations they are also a-again, I'm-I'm gonna mention this: They also don't have a lot of money. I'm not saying they're rich. They don't have a lot of money. But through one way or another they have a lot of time and a lot of the younger generations they don't have the money, and they don't have the time. And it sounds very aggressive. But like, for example, like, in the past few months I've been, I've decided, like someone came up to me is, like, "Hey, will you sit on this like collective? We need, you know, voices that are not, you know, Cis White," whatever we need. And I'm like, "Okay." Then it's like three hours zoom, I'm like, sorry I don't have time, and I don't have money, and anything I put that much effort into has to remedy one of these two situations, and that's the reality of my life situation right now. I can't get into-I can't invest that much, weekly. That's something that I do for-like three hour zoom meetings-that's something I do for work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: And you know, that's something I get paid for. So. And I know you can't pay me. But at the same time, I you know there's a lot of egos involved, so I don't wanna be like "you should pay me." But I also...

Tamara Thompson: It's not necessarily because you deserve the money more than somebody else. It's more like, "If I can do this, I need to be paid." So I can do it because I will have to say no to something else that can pay.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It's just weighing your options in your situation, and sometimes you have to say no, even if you would like to. Your just not in that situation.

Khashayar Mohammadi: And I'm gonna, like, make a little example: I'm not gonna mention this-this space. For example, I got a re-I got an email from a Comp-from an organization that I had worked with like about six years ago. And they're like, hey, would you like to be a part of like this year's round of work? And I genuinely-because I had not worked for them for so long, I forgot, I said, "I'm sorry I forgot was this a paid situation, or was this not?" And they very strictly responded, "No, it's an honor."

Tamara Thompson: Oh!

Khashayar Mohammadi: And it's, you know, three months of you know, maybe like ten hours a week. It's an entire part time job. And I don't mind if you respond, "Sorry we can't offer payment." But for you to be so aggressively saying, "No, this is actually, I'm giving, I'm doing you a favor." But that is what I think, that is what I think is the difference, because there—and there are people who are putting so much of their work without any financial or emotional compensation into these works. And I absolutely respect them. They're the pinnacles of this community. But I just don't like that to be expected of everyone.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, you don't want it to be commonplace culture or nature for it to be just, well, this works with this set of people, therefore it must work for everybody, when we're a very diverse group of people. Who have a lot of different living situation. Yeah. What has this kind of publishing taught you?

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, this kind of publishing, as in like a small scale?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: You know what I'm gonna say a little bit here about the difference between US and Canada. Okay. I know we made it specific—we made this; you have specific criteria for small publishing. But, for example, compared to a lot of things, I consider even the biggest stuff Canadian pu-okay, okay. I'm gonna get into it in a different way. So, I think two things make independent publishing in Canada great. And it's weird to call it independent publishing because a lot of it is government funded. So, it brings certain incentives. But I think the ins-like, I think Canada Council gives a lot of range compared to other funding bodies. It gets so much, like, because I've also worked for, like, in a publication, in a grant system, as like the English—was it the British Arts Council? I don't remember the exact wording. I think Canada Arts Council is a very free system to work within. I'm not saying it's perfect. But when you think of any other country and they're publishing, okay? So, I'm gonna get into it. I think because funding bodies, governments, funding bodies take so much financial weight away from presses. Presses are available—Presses are free to make a lot more dangerous decisions that they wouldn't have made otherwise. So, like a press in the US that is not funded. If they're printing five hundred books that won't—that they don't think are specifically geared towards a certain audience, if they don't think the five hundred will sell. they will not publish it, because that's you know, almost, you know, six-seven thousand dollars gone. I mean depends, you know. There's, you know, between two to ten thousand dollars can go into any print run. But and also, okay, there's a double-edged sword here. A Canadian publisher can publish a very—for example, you brought up Jordan Able. Jordan Abel's I don't want to say the name because it's a slur. The book that won the Griffin, the first book, the not, the not their first book, but the book that won the Griffin, with the eye in the beginning when you think that that book won the Griffin, and that book was—was it an Anansi? I think it was an Anansi. It was House of Anansi, that book is, or any of... Anansi is one of the most prominent poetry houses in the country and to think that such an intensely experimental book was one of the highest selling, one of the highest regarded in the country

that is an anomaly when you compare it to you know the US or Uk market—I'm saying US and Uk. Because they are two that I'm familiar with, and that I have worked within because of my involvement with Pamera press in US, and Uk. The top billed books have a ten thousand, twenty thousand, thirty thousand—I forgot the term for it. They publish that many books so, like in the—in the US, if you're putting a book out with—I don't know. I'm trying to think of one of the big presses like poetry presses, I'm talking poetry. It's probably a hundred one thousand dollars investment by the press. So, they're going to really carefully consider what kind of work goes out like that. But in, you know, Canada, even the top billed presses, even Anansi, puts out five hundreds at a time, you know. Even the Poet Laureate's books get printed five hundred at a time. If there's—if it sells out, another five hundred. But it's usually five hundred at the time, max one thousand. It never goes up to ten thousand, you know so it's a much less monetary, financial. But at the same time, let's say it's not Anansi. I mean, an-Anansi has a lot of a financial backing behind it in a way that other presses don't do. But, for example, let's say, like a book by Book\*Hug, you know. Book\*hug puts out a lot of experimental poetics, but they're not too worried about some books. I'm not saying they specifically—but, for example, a small press is not too worried about some books after they've been up for a while, because you know... let's say a book has cost them six thousand dollars. Let's say, maybe, all or some of it has been paid by the government. So, if they believe in a book that is immensely important politically, socially, but they—it is too difficult that maybe it doesn't have that wide general appeal to the general public. They will put it out and if it doesn't sell the loss is not crushing for the press, because the loss is either entirely or partially dot covered by the Canadian Government. And this is especially true with indigenous authors, because indigenous writers have either—most of the time they have either an entirely different funding venue, so that they don't compete with others, which is amazing, or that they have a much more directed funding and much more priority. So that, for example, if a press wants to put out a book by an indigenous author that goes into the entire, like use, like, you know, like, for example, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's book that uses a lot of indigenous languages. A lot of these books, they are able to make it into the white masses—white masses and Canadian—without too much worry of them bankrupting a press, you know. But, for example, if you know of ten thousand, like thirty thousand or something similar goes out into the US market and doesn't sell, that's a hundred to two hundred thousand dollars off, you know, a major press in the US. And it's, gonna you know—when you consider what is being published in the upper echelons in Canada, you realize we have a lot more experimental writing than a lot of other countries do, because we can afford it in the Grant system. But what I was gonna say: it also has the bad part. The bad part is if a press wants to say they are diverse, they can just put a black indigenous person of color on the roster and they don't promote, and I've seen this many times. They just put it on the roster. They put very little editorial feedback into it. They don't promote it, and they don't care if they lose the money, because the money doesn't come from their own pocket. So, that's the double edge sword: at one point, you're—it gives you very—it's an easy avenue for people of color to get, especially indigenous people which need—needed them, black, indigenous people, which needed the most in this country. They get that book out but when is—when the book is out, is it getting the right support? Well, that is up to a lot of factors. And

because the failure of a book means so little in Canada. Sometimes some books are put out to fail.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, just because you're having diverse authors doesn't mean that the house itself is diverse with who they are also hiring from the marketing people, because sometimes they won't know how to market a book like this, so they'll just let it die. So, it's not just about the authors, but it's also about the team. So, they will actually try and push it. So, it's not just all meant to fail. But I have seen it as well.

Khashayar Mohammadi: You're talking about it like that. But there are teams that just entirely don't have a marketing team. There are so small.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yeah, there are small presses that don't have a marketing team, and if an author is good, good, when I say good, I don't mean like, okay. When an author is capable of going out and promoting it themselves, they get good results out of it. And if they are new, like, let's say, like it's a debut author, and there are a lot of debut author like... For example, when I was a debut author, I had already been very well known in the industry. But their debut authors, when the book comes out, they know, like less than ten people in the industry and if the, if the press doesn't give them a tour, they're not able to make themselves a tour. Like I could put on readings for myself and not care about my press. I could, I'm not saying I should. But there are people that start, they don't have the support, and they don't know what to do. Not everyone—not everyone also—not everyone knows about the Grant system. There are people who have been writing for ten years, and they don't know how to write a grant. You know not everyone knows how to, you know write a travel grant. Not everyone knows it's possible to write a grant, travel grant. So, I think that is—I think, one of the most important parts, takeaways, from small publishing in Canada for me you know that there's this double edge sword: on the one side, we, some of our best press is Coach House press, Book\*hug press put out some of the most insanely Avant Garde forward, thinking talent press. I don't know like you, there's so much. There's so much good things in Canadian poetry. But do people read it? And it's—again I'm not putting it on their teams. They're small teams. Some of them have very little to no marketing like I know Anansi does, because Anansi has more money behind it. But, for example, some of these teams do not have a marketing team. There's one person that sends the emails and sends the books and sends—they put something on the, you know Instagram to say, “hi, this is our new book out,” and that's it. They're not sell—they're not sending arcs to magazines. They're not, you know. And the book dies. And it's basically, you know a lack of resources.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, and education on some of these things, because with social media, everyone thinks that you can do marketing. And it's so easy. And it's like, yeah but you have to understand these systems. There are algorithms in place. There are certain places that you can put something, and it'll do well, or it will die. But if you don't know that, you're just trying whatever you can, see what sticks on a wall. And it can take quite a while.

Khashayar Mohammadi: There are times of day. There's frequency like you put like three posts a day. You're killing yourself. You put too little. You're killing yourself. You have to know, you know.

(Technical issue occurred).

Tamara Thompson: So, we've kind of been talking like around this question. But I'm gonna ask it and get a little more direct, or you can expand on it—but why are chapbooks important to you, specifically?

Khashayar Mohammadi: Hmm! That's a hard question. Is it weird to say, I just like... the aesthetics, the feeling there's like so much about. There's—because there's so much about it, and a lot of it is going to sound very, very superficial. But you know, like, yeah, the cover is important, like, sometimes you're like, oh, like, this chapbook has, like, just like punk rockers, like pencil you know, drawing. And I'm like: I love this. I'm like: I love this.

Tamara Thompson: When you get to feel something that has been made by a human. And like, you know, this is amazing, you know, and I get to feel it, feel something that's made by a human like this is wool. This came with like Angora, like wool tied around it like there's something... it's not vain. It is a deep, to feel something created, things like someone else. It's not made by a machine. It is made by another person, and there's something so amazing about it. So, I, like, I completely understand your point is what I'm trying to say.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Let me tell you something else of to write down, and I know one of the people who ran it so maybe I can connect you to. But there's the—and this is a magazine, but I mean, like zines come from magazines. But still it's called Milkweed and that was insane. That was something else. That was like the queerest thing I've ever seen.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

Khashayar Mohammadi: They had the funniest parties, and the-the-the person who ran that, like, actually runs an open mic in Toronto. Now, anyway, I can connect.

Tamara Thompson: Ooo yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: It was run by Sk. Hughes or Kathleen Hughes.

Tamara Thompson: Lean.

Khashayar Mohammadi: I can connect you to.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I would really appreciate that. I really want to get a variety of people, especially like women, and just different people from different communities and recent stuff like that. I-I might be a little biased perspective. I don't know.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Have you spoke? Have you spoken to Karen Schindler yet.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Have you spoken to Danny Spinoza.

Tamara Thompson: Danny. I don't think so. Not Danny.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Danny Spinoza's from Gap Riot.

Tamara Thompson: I've talked to Kate.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, okay, good. They're both.

Tamara Thompson: Kate talked to about Danny. Okay, yeah. Alright. Sounds familiar, but maybe not. But yeah, I've talked to-to them.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yeah, it. Oof what else? And what? Sorry I was mid- I think I was in the middle. Okay? Why, okay, why do they matter to me? I think a lot of it is just the raw writing that goes into it. Again, it's like that raw writing; I mean, not always, but a lot of it is very raw. It's raw. It's very little edited. I-I like that. Like the thing is, I do not-this is something about me. And I think, okay, I'm gonna say this. And I think th-there's a reason zines really appeal to like young, queer all these people, BIPOC. It's that there are a lot less, like, repressed and very, very carefully put together, and very scalpel, perfectly like edit and that appeals to people, because it's not within the canon yet, you know. Some of it is, you know. Some of it is within the canon. Some of the people who put out chapbooks are like, "Okay, let's create something." You know, like, let's put it like (technical issue occurred) Like the editor is gonna tell you "Like this, like doesn't match them." But I, I'm sure there's parts like that. But most of them are not like, I said. Like most even, like, when I was talking about *Inspiritus* is five people editing it. It was still not trying to make it adhere to the canon. The thing about it is that it's gonna be nice and loose and easy to digest, and that immediacy has to stay there for the chapbook. And I think that gets to, and I think a lot of people who are newer to it may not realize why they're liking a chapbook and not liking a trade book. I'm like, oh, this is, you know the editing and production-production of this is like a I mean, not always, but like, somehow, this is like a three month per project, while, like a book is like a year and a half two-year project, you know and just like the time you know, they're like, "Oh," it's sent to you like oh, send it to me in a week. And you know, that's different than like, "here's the first draft." We have three and a half months for editing, you know, and you keep sending it back and forth, and back and forth, and back and forth, and I love that. But something is taken out of the manuscript when it goes through like five edits and it's something that, like a new pair of eyes may not, may not immediately, -oh, oh! Before I forget! Do you know about *Bad Nudes*?

Tamara Thompson: No.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay, write down *Bad Nudes*, ma-magazine, and write down Fawn Parker again. I can connect you to Fawn Parker. Howard Bond is a



great-great and Fawn used to teach an entire course on how to maintain and run your own literary magazine.

Tamara Thompson: Brilliant.

Khashayar Mohammadi: So-so Fawn Parker write that down. I can connect you again when you message me. I can connect. I'm trying to think of all the like, fems, and you know, Queers, I know. So, I can, you know, connect to you to... what else? What else? What else? What else, anyway.

Tamara Thompson: Do you wanna move on to the next question?

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yes, yes.

Tamara Thompson: Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why are why not?

Khashayar Mohammadi: I mean yes, but that I think the Canadian part in that is arbitrary will, of course, bring Canada, and they're important to the publishing, but I guess I'll just say yes, and I don't have much to say about it. I'll just say yes.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: You—sorry you froze.

Khashayar Mohammadi: I said, I don't have much to say about it. I'll just say yes.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough.

(Technical issues occurred)

Tamara Thompson: Yes, exactly. Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way? This is very open question, take it wherever you like.

Khashayar Mohammadi: So, I think the Canada centered questions are always the hard questions to answer, because, like I said, the last one, Canada can be very arbitrary here, but at the same time, because Canada has a lot of funding bodies, the relationships of those two, because they're like, for example, there small, there are like chapbook presses that used to get funding so that can be—

(Technical issues occurred).

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay. So, I want to say, like, there—there are small presses that were funded so, that might be like a thing to... Okay. My entire relationship to writing is very much inspired by transnational, translingual, transcultural studies and it very much goes against like ethno-nationalist. And, you know, nationally defined, border defined approaches to writing which makes me very re—which makes me very resistant to questions like this. But I would just say, what was the question again, can you?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Word it again.

Tamara Thompson: Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way? So, I've had a lot of people who talk- (technical issues occurred). Oh, yeah basically, I've had a lot of people interpret it a lot of different ways. So, the way you're interpreting it is very interesting, because it's such an open question. I've gotten so many different responses. And I think it's really interesting. And I think your perspective is very interesting. So, like I, it's just so cool to hear different people's perspectives on, like, what is Canada? What is Canadian publishing? How do these things relate to each other? And so.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay, so.

Tamara Thompson: "What is even *is* Canada?" is still a thing that a lot of people are like, "Whoa, wait".

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay, I will say one thing. I will say one thing, which is that chap-Okay, Canada has spent a lot of time carving its cultural identity first against the British identity and then against-I mean, I'm talking about Anglo Canadian literature, first against the British identity and then against an American identity like, as you know, a subversion of the canon as a Riff on the canon, as a divergence from, you know, first the divergence from English, Irish, Scottish, and then as a divergence from American. And I think the response to this question is to think about the birth of the chaplet; not the birth, but, like the heyday of the chaplet in Canada in the seventies through-Okay, I will tell you.: Have you read the book? Wait let me find the book. Have you spoken to Eric Schmaltz?

Tamara Thompson: Eric uhhhh... I don't think so.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Okay, I think you really need to read this book *Borderblur Poetics*. So, this, the *Borderblur Poetics* talks a lot about intermedia and Avant Garde-ism in Canada. But a lot of it comes from chapbook subscriptions worldwide, and how it brought a lot of international influence from a lot of other countries into Canadian literature, and at the same time brought a lot of Canadian influence to other countries. You know Japan, Italy, Germany, anyway. So, I think that there is a good answer here that goes into the seventies eighties, you know, late sixties boom of chapbook writing, and the creation like the Avant Garde *Borderblur* writings that pretty much created the Titans of Avant Garde-ism in Canada that we know right now, and we, you know, revere. But I don't think I'm well equipped to talk about that, and I think it really it-it can in a good way relate to my, you know, transnational transcultural points. But I just don't think I know of enough about it, offhand, because, like everything you've asked me so far, I have so much palpable experiences about it that I can talk to you about it for like fifty min on each question. This is somewhere that I just, I'm gonna have to say, I don't know very well.

Tamara Thompson: Well, even what you have spoken about has still been very interesting, especially with your perspective as more of a global approach and not as centered in Canada, because I have to have a narrow enough field for chapbooks. I couldn't—it—this is a Master's not a PhD. As my supervisor keeps telling me (laughs) and like I had to have a small enough press. So, I chose Canada because it's who I can talk-

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so I just had to have a like, I had to pick a scope. And these are people who I could actually get in contact and talk to, and who I know. But I think it's very interesting just how chapbooks are not just in one place. Chapbooks are everywhere, anywhere where someone can find paper basically or something to write on. It doesn't even technically have to be paper. And I just find it interesting how Canada has approached it, but also, in the larger space of the world. How cause? I asked this question, and I forget who said it. But they said, I don't think chapbooks are a Canadian thing, I think chapbooks are a weird poet artist thing that people just want to create. And right, like, so, I think it's very interesting how people kind of relate to the Canadian side of the question, but also the global but also just specific art side of the question. So, I'm going to get into the last final questions. You cool with that.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: So, my next question is still a little bit Canadian based. But what's something you wish the public knew about Canadian publishing; so something that you wish the public knew?

Khashayar Mohammadi: The financial stakes.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Like, how much money presses put in, how much money presses pay to people who work for them, how much money people, the presses pay their authors and how much money I think in general... Okay, this is a—I'm gonna get a little bit political here, but I think the kind of shame—the kind of framing of asking someone's earnings as inappropriate is a very direct way of suppressing how many people are underpaid, and how different people are paid in relationship to their presses. For example, people of different races are paid different wages by the same presses.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: And this is something that so many people find out they're like, oh, you paid, you paid your black author less. You paid your black author more; you paid your... this more. That's, that so, I think, again, like, I'm someone who's very money oriented because money is... the "I" in our society is the strongest political power. So, I—I wish people knew more about the financial gains, losses, the financial stakes of any sort of publishing. I wish people knew that when you have a, you know, poetry book with... a small book, with a, with a small press, how much money

it pays you over the year. How much money comes into your hand, how much money you have to put in it. Do—I wish like, just people knew the difference between self-publishing and publishing, because a lot of the time when I say I have a book to a regular general public, they ask me how much money I paid, because people think that when you publish you have to give them money to put out your book... because people think most publishing happens when you give a publisher money to print your books like a printer.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: People don't know the difference between self publishing and, you know, traditional publishing. Anyway, that's what I think I wish more people knew.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's something I try and get into my creative writing students and like you should be paid for your work. It is not the other way around.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What's something important about D.I.Y. press history that you would like people to know.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, my God! I'm sure there's gonna be so much important stuff here. But I can't think of anything on top of my head. It's like I mean the important—I mean, I—I'm gonna say, like the importance of it to, like, what I can think of on top of my head is, like, the importance of it to queer communities. You know. You know, to just, you know, like, especially, like, what I can think of. It is, like, for example, like Aids zines, like, you know, like body politic, all that stuff, you know? I don't know if you know about the body a-actually, I'm not gonna talk about that because I don't know specifics, and I don't wanna put misinformation, especially considering you're very academic. This is a very academic endeavor. But, for example, like the amount of you know, yeah, like queer writing was so D.I.Y., and most-actually all queer writing—okay, okay, this is a good point. All queer writing was D.I.Y. for the longest time before it became assimilated into capitalism, and people realize they can make money off of it. Still, now, like a lot of people publish queer writing, even though they don't like it because they realize it sells to queries, because queers are now market. But D.I.Y. writing was all queer writing for the longest time. Like, even right now we're getting so much of, like... the-the Aids writings are just coming out, because so much of it was, you know, in hand, written pamphlets that got, you know, passed around like a whole community in Berlin. And they're like, oh, this is one of the most important queer novels of the eighties. And all queers in Berlin would read this to each other, and you know after like raves. I'm like, oh, yeah, like, we're just getting that in a book form.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Khashayar Mohammadi: Because for the longest times queers couldn't get published. I—I mean, it's the same with any minority with trans people, with indigenous people, with black people. I just I don't want this to be,

you know a hierarchy, but like queer writing is what I have more, you know, interactions with you know. Like I-I know, for example, you know, like Brown, Muslim people have, you know, had trouble publishing. But I just wasn't a part of that generation, so I can't speak to that, even though I am brown. I'm you know, you know, culturally, Muslim. I don't consider myself Muslim, but I have heard, you know, like, of my elders that you know... Yeah, in the nineties you couldn't get published as, you know, a brown person. That's just, you know that's not something we could think of. You know there are times when you're, like, Yeah, there are things that's... you know, I don't know if you've ever heard the name "a civil imagination". When something civilizes your imagination, civilize in a derogatory way, when you know you're... you are not even able to imagine something beyond the status quo: you're like, okay, like writing for, like, you know. I know I have elders who are like, yeah, I realize in my fifties that I could be a writer because in my twenties I was, I had writer friends. They were all white. I had, you know, I was writing, but I did not know I could publish. Yeah, I did not know I could publish.

Tamara Thompson: What's something that you wish people knew about your history?

Khashayar Mohammadi: I don't know. I don't know about my history. I don't know.

Tamara Thompson: So, this is always the hardest question, the personal one.

Khashayar Mohammadi: I wish people knew I worked in MMA. I work to mix, I have a lot of things I want people to know. I like people knowing about me. I'm a very, very, very attention-seeking person.

Tamara Thompson: (Laugh).

Khashayar Mohammadi: And every time I say this people laugh and they think it's a joke. No, I'm an attention-seeking person, and I say that with the utmost—you know I say, that in a neutral tone. I am an attention-seeking person. I know that about myself. So, I used to work in film, I used to work in mixed martial arts like as a, you know, crew member. I used to—I don't know there's so much I want to talk about myself, but I don't think that's important to my writing.

Tamara Thompson: Do you have any additional comments?

Khashayar Mohammadi: Oh, wait, wait, wait! Wait! I-I think the most important thing I want people to know about me is that I am—and this is something that never makes it into any of my writings—but I am insanely passionate about video games. And I don't think this exists anywhere like I've never written about a game. I don't write essays about games. I write about so much, but I've never written about gaming, which is weird because video games are maybe, like, one of the biggest parts of my life.

Tamara Thompson: I would recommend that you explore it because I love video games as well and never written anything for it. And it was just so, eye-opening, especially nonlinear storytelling with multiple different

branches and paths, and thinking about how things would work with. You know you not being able to guide their hand and players being able to do whatever they wanted. It's so exciting. I'm hope you explore it.

(Technical issue occurred).

Tamara Thompson: It's just so exciting. And like it's, it makes you think about writing in a completely different way than you would normally approach it, because you don't have any control of a player and there are so many different players, and it is such an exciting way to write.

(Technical issue occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Are there any additional comments you would like to make before I pause the recording.

Khashayar Mohammadi: No, no. Thank you.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you.

Rami Obeid

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is June 27<sup>th</sup> the time is 2:16 pm. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview time. This interview is for Author...

Rami Obeid: Rami Obeid, I am from Toronto, Ontario, Canada. From a Middle Eastern background and I am a writer, currently writing in various forms, but mainly right now I'm working on a novel. I've published a chapbook through Whispering Wick, a Chapbook Press who are also based in Ontario, Canada and I think that's it, right?

Tamara Thompson: And your pronoun.

Rami Obeid: And my pronouns are he/him.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Okay, so just to get like this ball rolling and stuff like that, when did you discover zines and chapbooks? And this type of smaller publishing. Can you like think of a direct moment when you found them? Or was there a point in your life that you could point to where you discovered this kind of smaller publishing?

Rami Obeid: For sure. So, little background; so, I started writing—I started writing, probably—and when I say I started writing, I mean when I started writing things on my own time, rather than you know when you're at an elementary school, and you have to like write a poem about something—the first time I started writing outside of school was probably I was in like maybe grade four, five, or six and ever since then, up until maybe I was like seventeen or sixteen, I'd written small things here and there. But it was when I decided that I actually wanted to do th—there, for a career and for a living, that I got serious when I was around like sixteen, seventeen. And then I had written, you know, I tried writing a couple of, like, serious short stories, poems, etc. But then I realized that I should probably, like, start like a Twitter account, or, like, an Instagram account, just because, like in the future—I-I assumed at the time, which turned out to be correct, that you should probably have some sort of contact for people, to get in contact with you for networking reasons. So then, when I made a Twitter account, and I got into the, quote, unquote, writing community on Twitter, that's when I started realizing that chapbook, like, I didn't even know what a chapbook was until I was like—like, you know, at that time, like, in 2018 or 2019. And there were like small magazines all over twitter like pretty literally littered all over twitter. And so, I started reading them just to, kind of, see of what stuff was being published. And then, you know, I started submitting to them. And that's when I, kind of, like, discovered that small presses were a “thing” 'cause, I mean, I think everyone kinda assumes, when they first start out that it's either like you're writing by yourself, or you're writing on like a hugely large scale, there was—I didn't know there was, like, an in-between. So that's when I, you know, started knowing about all that, when—that's when—when I got hooked up on social media. That's when I kinda realized that there were those kinds of places to get published and to help, like, start my career.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic- (technical issues occurred) why did you decide to publish your work as a chapbook, instead of, like, say, in a lit mag, or in, like, in a more traditional route, like, why chapbooks? Because it is a choice to-to choose the smaller form.

Rami Obeid: For sure, one hundred percent. Well, had-I didn't even have any intention of publishing a chapbook. Until I came across Whisperings Wick's social media I-I had up until that time, I had maybe published poems, like, kinda here and there, like, through smaller other publications, like-but they were online. There weren't, like, a-a place to, you know, publish like, you know, a small volume of work. And at that time, I was writing mainly poems. And so, when I discovered that there was this place, like, this press kind of calling mainly for Canadian writers to submit work to their publication, that's when, you know I'm like, hey, I-maybe I could, you know, get this thing published. Like, I put a bunch of poems together. And kinda, you know, submitted. I did, honestly, I had, I swear, on everything I had no idea that it would get accepted. So then, when it did, I'm like, wow, like, I, I can actually have something to put on like my website that, you know, a place liked me enough to actually publish, like, in physical, in a physical format, you know, my work. So then, that's that's-that's pretty much. I didn't make, like, a conscious choice. I just kinda submitted it just to see, like, okay, maybe they might accept it, but they might not. But then, that's kind of, it was basically by chance that I've discovered a place, you know, 'cause I mean on the-on the social-on social media it's like, it's like ninety-five percent like Americans. I don't like-I think you guys were like-I think, like, Whispering Wick was the first Canadian, fully Canadian place that was accepting submissions only by Canadian authors. So then, that's-that's why.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm. Would you work with a small like chapbook press again, like again, people get busy, and life happens. But, like, do you see that something for yourself in the future, not necessarily just Whispering Wick, but other people?

Rami Obeid: I'll be honest, but probably not. But I will, because I'm trying to, I mean right now, I'm mainly just writing prose, and I'm working on the novel and because of, kind of, the heights of where I want to go. And this is not to the detriment of, you know, smaller presses at all, one hundred percent. Just because of the place where I want to be. I kind of, like, want my work to be kind of-I mean, this sounds totally, like, cocky and ambitious, but, like, I kinda wanna, like, get my work like known, like, throughout the world. So, I wanna, kinda, like, and plus, like, I mean, I know, one hundred percent, we don't do this for money, and I don't, one hundred percent, didn't start do writing for money. But because, for me, I kind of, like, literally, honest to God, see nothing else I want to do, rather than write. I wanna get to a place where I can, kinda, sustain myself and sustain, like, my family, like people around me. That's like a secondary reason. But the first reason is, 'cause, you know, I just kinda wanna become, kind of, well known throughout the world. And like I said, to the heights that where I want to be at. I wouldn't, I mean I-I don't like never say never, if like I, if I, kind of, like, put together a small thing of short stories, or whatever, one hundred, I would submit to a chapbook or to a smaller press. But the



novel that I'm writing, I kinda wanna, you know, I wanna take it to that next level of publishing. So.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rami Obeid: So, yes, and no.

Tamara Thompson: The other thing, too, is-is like the question isn't just, for, like, small presses and, like, chapbooks in Canada, because, like, there are chapbook presses, and, like, England and the States, and in, like, Switzerland, and stuff like that. Like, I've had a lot of people say that they've done things in, like, Europe and in the States, because for some reason, especially chapbook publishers and small presses, like, even ones who do like more traditional stuff, just on the smaller side, but specifically the US and, I think, oh, one of the Danish countries, love Canadian writers. So, it's why I'm-

Rami Obeid: Norway?

Tamara Thompson: Maybe. I can't remember. But like a lot of them really like Canadian writing. And so, it's just not necessarily, like, in Canada, but even, like, in other places around the world, because you were talking about like getting more of a reach, right?

Rami Obeid: One hundred percent. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And-I should-I need-I should say this: that small presses, I respect the absolute hell out of them, and I certainly wouldn't have gotten the confidence I had to start writing a novel if I hadn't been published through a small press. Those places are, I would go as far as saying, like, they're the backbone of, like, the like, the literary industry cause that's how a lot of people would get their start. I'm assuming the-the bigger people I mean.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What do you think this type of publishing has taught you in doing it?

Rami Obeid: You mean like publishing through a, through a-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, the smaller type of publishing. What do you think it has taught you from, like, what has the experience taught you?

Rami Obeid: Oh, man so many things. I-I would say the first thing is, like, quality, like, a hundred percent, quality is the first thing, because, I mean, when I was putting-this is after I had been accepted. Sorry, can I ask you something? Is that okay? Am I referring to like Whispering Wick, as like your thing? Or am I kind of treating it as-as if, like, you're not a part of it, like, you know what I mean?

Tamara Thompson: You can treat it whatever way you want. I don't know if this interview will be accepted because of our close relationship and stuff, but I-still, it's one of those things where I would rather do it and have it, but to not have it. So you can talk about it in whatever way you want, because again...

Rami Obeid: One hundred percent. Okay, but basically, the-the first thing was quality, because when, after Whispering Wick had accepted my poems, me and Nate had kind of, like, talked through, kind of, editing some of the poems. And I remember him telling me, like, you know, like, the-it has to be, like, each one should be able to be like-each poem should be able to be published on its own merit, in a single publication. So that's how good the work has to be. And the second thing is that I didn't know that the way you structure your work, like, specifically to do with poetry. I didn't know that, like, you-you-you couldn't just, like, kind of put them all together. You, kind, of have to see how one of them flows into the next one into the next one. So, I mean structure, form, editing- cause I didn't, I mean, I didn't really give editing, like, I thought I-I don't wanna say I was like too cocky to, like, I don't need to edit up my stuff, like, it's already so good by itself, but like, no, like, writing, one hundred is rewriting. So I'd say the two main things is quality, and the importance of editing, rewriting kind of looking at it-at a, like-as a larger picture, rather than, like, each word by itself. If that makes any sense.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that-that makes a lot of sense. And I think the other thing, too, is-is just, like, talking and interacting with people, you learn more about your work and how things, like what is actually working? 'Cause sometimes you just need that-that like step back and be, like, Oh, shit, wait. That is, you know, right? And I think, especially when it comes to, like, collections of poetry, there is, like, a certain like, rhythm and flow, which is really nice, that the chapbook gives. Because sometimes in, like, longer-like, don't get me wrong, I have my personal favorite collections of poetry where I'm, like, every poem in here is fantastic-But there's sometimes where I'm, like, "This poem didn't need to be here, but they needed it to make it this collection."

Rami Obeid: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And that's what I love about chapbooks is-is like, there's-there's no fat. All the good stuff.

Rami Obeid: One hundred percent. Yeah, yeah, that-that's another thing, too. It's like, it's like, you can't waste a page on like what I would say would be, like, a subpar poem, like, every-because you're only allowed a specific amount of pages, you have to make every single poem there needed, 'cause it's just, like, kind of dragging the reader down. If you don't think it's one hundred percent, should, like, you have to, you have to give a reason to taking up that-that space. So, I'd say, that's mainly the-the main thing is that, you know, quality-quality-quality. That's a hundred percent. What I've learned, the-the main thing.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So, what are some challenges you faced as a writer in your time, like, just doing it, right?

Rami Obeid: I'd say one hundred percent is the, like, self doubt. And I mean, I know that's so generic to say. But I mean, like, it's some like, I-I mean, you know, 'cause, like, when you're writing the hardest part for me-and I feel like a lot of writers would say the same-it's not the actual writing part, but it's, like, staying at your desk to write or actually

sitting down to write, because I mean, first step is to sit down and actually open up and start writing. That's like so unbelievably difficult to start doing because if you've—or if you had already started writing at that point, you kinda, you kind of get a sense, especially when you start out, that your work is a hundred percent, like, it's so garbage that it's like, I don't really want to kind of watch myself write garbage.

Tamara Thompson: Hmmm.

Rami Obeid: And that's when I would say that if you would—if you had start—if you started writing and you got to a point where, hopefully that, you know, you would write through the garbage, at a certain point, when you want to show other people your-your stuff, you need other people to kind of tell you how garbage it is. But at the same time, they give you hope by saying, "No, you have potential." I think you should still keep writing for me. So, for me the self doubt was probably the biggest thing I've ever faced and still continue to face, and I think the best of them still continue to face, is, you know, kind of believing that you have the potential to write something that's good. But it's just, it's just watching yourself write. Awful writing is, like, probably one of the worst things a human being can go through, or any artist, for that fact.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's—it's definitely really hard. Because, don't get me wrong, there's, like, a big community aspect when it comes to writing. But a lot of it is also solitary, where you just have to get the gosh damn thing done. Right? And because there's that self-doubt, already, of, like, "Is this good? Is this something that someone will read?" I have a lot of students who will come up to me—and I've repeated this probably like thousands of times, so like a ton of interviewees and stuff—but, like, I have students come up to me and be, like, I always worry about my reader, about the publisher, and I'm like, don't worry about them. And they're, like, "But I want it to be good." And I'm like, "I understand that. But if you're not having fun and if you're not enjoying in some way what you're writing—because you can talk about really sad things and stuff like that—but if this is not something that you're doing because you love it, it will never be good." It can never be good if you're not enjoying what you're doing, because it'll be evident to the reader that you don't care about what you're doing.

Rami Obeid: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Right? And even if you are able to get published, and whatever, it's going to become really apparent real fast on that book tour, that you don't like this book at all. Like, do yourself the favor and write something you enjoy. You don't have to write literary work. If you want to write the horror. write the horror. You don't have to write the poetry. If you want to write the romance, you don't have to write the terrible sob story about your, like abusive parents. If you just want to write poetry about funny little flea circuses—you know what I mean, right?—like, do the thing that you actually enjoy. Don't try and make it for this makeshift reader, for this makeshift publisher. Make something that you just had fun creating. Now, don't get me wrong. if there's, like, prompts for a magazine, and you're like, oh, this one's for, like, give us your like... Block Party has a submission open right now and they're

literally like, hey, give us your poetry, your fiction, whatever that's inspired by music that's related to music, right? And you're like, oh, I'm really inspired. Let's do something, awesome. That's different, though. That's something where that theme inspired you. It's not you trying to force your brain into the theme.

Rami Obeid: Yeah, no, I-I totally agree. And I-I took it to heart the first time I heard that you should write what you would want to read. And when I had heard that, like, it actually clicked in my mind. Like, you know what to-'cause, I mean, I-I don't know about anyone else, but for me, up until I was, like, when I was writing on my own-I mean, it was stuff that you know-I was just kind of getting down on paper. But I think I don't know if other people had the same thing. But, like, for me, I didn't know that you were allowed to write about kind of, like, like, rougher areas, or like drugs, or like alcohol, or... I didn't know you were allowed to write about that sort of stuff. I thought, in my mind, that like, writing was like kind of Shakespearean writing. It had to have, like, this sort of what, like, the like, like a, the layman's idea of writing 'cause if someone hears, like, oh, you're a writer, they automatically assume, like, I'm writing at a desk with like a quill, and like, you know what I mean? I didn't know that you're allowed to write about those kind of topics, which, I mean, through my own trauma and my experiences that I've had experiences with. And the second thing is what I was gonna say, dude, I had the thought like right here anyways. Yeah, that's-that's-that's probably what I wanna to-wanna say to that? Well, wait. What did you ask me again? Just so I can kind of remember what I had.

Tamara Thompson: Just like some challenges that you've faced in publishing. And we were talking about like the self doubt that people have, right?

Rami Obeid: Yeah, one hundred percent. And also, is that dude? I forgot it again. I literally just remembered it. No, I remember. Okay, so I have a very I mean, I don't know if it would be considered a hot take or controversial, which I don't think it is. But I feel like, if you're a writer, you have to be a fan of reading first 'cause, like, why else would people want to start writing if they don't 'cause, like, the reason I started writing is because, like, I fell in love with, like, things like, I started, like-I like-like when I started, like, reading certain people I, like-I fell in love with their words, and how they made me feel. It's, like, man I could really get into this. So, I feel like you have to be a fan, first of all, to like-to-to be a writer 'cause I don't understand. If someone, I mean, if someone's like journaling, or like whatever one hundred percent, like, and they don't read that that's totally cool. But, like, if they're trying to, like, write fiction or something, I feel like you should have to be a fan of-of reading first. You know what I mean?

Tamara Thompson: No, I it's a very common thing, but I also like to try and tell my students what Rob Wringer tries to tell the students. That's why there's so many books on the writing course. It's like, if you want to become a good writer, you have to know what is already out there. You want to become a good poet. You have to see what other poets have been doing for years. Because let's just say, if you're rhyming, people are going to think you're sarcastic, or you don't know anything about poetry.

Rami Obeid: Yeah. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Right, or you have to be very, very good at it, you know, and it's one of those things where, like, I don't understand myself, either. Like there are, everybody has a different relationship to reading. I read a lot of comics and stuff because I'm very dyslexic, right? But that is a way that I engage with stories and reading—in a way that is more accessible to me. I read a lot of comics online, I read a lot of manga, but I also read a lot of poetry. I read a lot of other stuff because it just, it exhausts me because my eyes have to work, like, double time because of my Irlen syndrome, and then my brain. But, like, it's one of those things where it's just, like, I struggle to read. I still read quite a bit.

Rami Obeid: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And I might not necessarily be the most traditional reader. But I am still reading, and I think a lot of people think that they have to be a traditional reader, and it's like, No. Margaret Atwood started out with the Archie comics. That's okay.

Rami Obeid: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You know, find the places, like, especially if that's the kind of stuff that you want to write. If you want to write comedy, if you want to write serious stuff, or literary stuff, read that literary stuff, right? And, like, I understand some writers not wanting to read while they're writing, because they don't want to be influenced. Totally okay, right? I get it. But you need to be a reader if you're going to write. And anytime I hear that someone doesn't like reading or doesn't read or hasn't read, but they're a writer, I go "How, how!?"

Rami Obeid: I cringe—I—that's just me. I don't know about you, but I—I-I cringe. But that's why I-I was responding to your point when you said you were talking about, like, why are you writing poetry? If you wanna write, if you're, if you're turned on by romance, or if you're turned on by John-like horror or fantasy, or whatever—like the reason you would want to read, you would want to write if you have this, like, yearning inside to write horror? Then I would assume that you probably fell in love with like-like reading like Stephen King books, or if you—if you have a yearning to write fantasy, I would assume maybe you read like Harry Potter, or *Game-Game of Thrones*, or something of that sort, like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, or fell in love with, like, Lord of the Rings and stuff, or even if it was just, like, maybe you love, like, want to write dystopia 'cause you fell in love with *The Hunger Games*, or like *Divergent* and stuff. And that's the other thing, too, that I-I that really irks me is a lot of people don't think that those genres are as worthy as literary stuff. And I'm, like, No, they're just as important, same with YA. A lot of people are, like, oh, well, I didn't know you wrote YA, and it's like first off, fuck is wrong with you? Thinking that a teenager should read this writing—like, what is wrong with you?

Rami Obeid: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You know, and it's considered an insult if someone calls you a YA writer and it's, like, no, there's actually a lot of skill that goes into it. Especially, like, people don't understand, your pacing has to be very quick pace, because the whole idea is to keep the teenager reading and to make the sentence structure fairly simple, so that they can comprehend and enjoy. And it's not too strenuous. That's the whole point of like YA to have fast and engaging plots that have a lot going on. And a lot of people are, like: why is there a cliffhanger on every chapter of a YA novel? And it's, like, because that's what, like, developmentally, that is an integral part of YA. That's why, when people look at something and, like, "Well, I didn't know that your fantasy story was YA," and I'm like, "I'm sorry, but a fourteen-year-old would—one, shouldn't be reading this. But, two, they wouldn't want to read it, because the pacing isn't the same." The way that the writing is—is different, like, if—these are very specific skills.

Rami Obeid: Yes. I would go as far, I mean I—I say, I—I write literary fiction most of the time, and that's what kind of excites me. But I've tried my hand at writing genre, and I will admit, writing—in my view—writing genre is a hundred percent times way more difficult. Or, yeah, writing genre is way more difficult than writing literary fiction, because with literary fiction you kind of have an excuse. You could go on about like the color of like a desk or something. You have room to go off on the color of, like, how the wind makes you feel, or memory, or something. But with, like, genre, like, literally, every single sentence has to have a reason for being there. 'Cause number one, you'll lose the reader. Number two, your—your main goal, even with literary fiction, but mostly with genres, to entertain the person. And I—I kind of relate that to actually, to music, as well, because for me, I mean, I'll be totally honest, when I was, like, fifteen, sixteen, I was one of those, like, edgy kids. Kind of being, like, oh, older music is way better than like modern music.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rami Obeid: Even when I was—like, started get—when I started reading kind of more adult things, I'd be like, yeah, adult like writing about sex and drugs, and all this stuff is, like, that's it, there's, like. All other writing isn't like—that's—it's like garbage, but wouldn't, like, it took me to get older, to realize that, number one, like, not every single song or not every single book has to be about those topics, like, there's merit in pop music, and there's merit in, you know, genre books. So, it's kind of like realizing that, you know, just because it may not be your cup of tea—I mean for me I would never like young adult. Is not my thing. I would ever read, but I respect it so much because—because of the skill that it takes.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Well, like, I mean, there's some stuff like middle grade. I don't love reading, like, a lot of children's fiction. Picture books are fun, though, but that's just because they're fun, their fun thing, you know? But like, middle grade, I go back and return to *Howl's Moving Castle*, and that's a middle grade, book but I love it not because, like—don't get me wrong, *Studio Ghibli* film's fantastic and I love it. But

I love this book because there's so much whimsy. Like, as an adult, I love this goddamn book so much because there's just so much fun in it. Can't get that, and half of the stuff I'm reading, in the adult stuff. You know what I mean? Like, it's depressing as all get out, and like, I get it, it's fine but, like, at the same time, I'm just, like, man give me some of that whimsy. Give me some of that weird magic, you know? You know where, like, the horse is pulling a cart, and there's not a driver, and you wave at the horse and then the horse waves back, you know? Give me some of that.

Rami Obeid: I really like, I don't know if you kind of pay attention to directors, but I really like Wes Anderson movies. So, I kinda really wanna try, like, I don't know, maybe afterwards, you can give me recommendations. But I, kinda, wanna read, like, a Wes Anderson movie. But, like, in, like, as a novel.

Tamara Thompson: Can give you film recommendations.

Rami: Oh, yeah, for sure. After yeah one hundred percent, please.

Tamara Thompson: Can give you many good film recommendations. Especially if you like Wes Anderson, you need to get on the Amalie train. You gotta get on that director.

Rami Obeid: I will.

Tamara Thompson: Beautiful music. Beautiful cinematography. A vision. Multi storytelling. Funny.

Rami Obeid: I love it, whimsical, anything whimsical is fantastic.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, I'm gonna keep pushing us along here.

Rami: Go ahead.

Tamara Thompson: And we can keep talking about movies later. So, what does this type of smaller publishing offer that maybe traditional publishing can't and like maybe, vice versa; like, what do you think that, maybe, the chapbook can do that the traditional book can't do? And what do you think the traditional book can do that the chapbook can't do?

Rami Obeid: Well, I think, number one, the main thing is, maybe I would say probably, financially, and probably reach—because of course, on-on a traditional scale, you're gonna reach probably way more people. But the thing is, if you're—if you're writing at a traditional level, you might have to—God forbid!—sacrifice some of the soul in your work, kinda, to make it more accessible to read. So, I feel, like, that with smaller presses there is no, there's no, there is no sacrificing certain aspects of your work, because, one hundred, like, you don't, you don't really necessarily have to sacrifice your work for anything on a small, like, a smaller level. You could leave everything as it is, because if that's what moves you. So that's, I'd say, number one, there's more soul, and there's more heart in, kind of, smaller presses. And then number two, I think that working with a small press, it's more of a personal experience, in my

experience. It's way more personable. You kind of know the person you're working with, or if you're just self publishing through your own press, maybe, it's way more personable than I would assume traditional publishing to be, 'cause with traditional publishing, I'm assuming that you're kind of, like, I said you have to go for a more commercial aspect. So, you don't—you kind of, I would, like, maybe, like, the agent, or whoever you're working with, would give you notes on how to make you're writing, quote unquote, better. But you don't really, like, you don't really know them and what their tastes. Maybe they're just giving you notes, because it's not—not for the good of the work, but maybe it's like their personal, 'cause you don't know the person. But with a smaller press, I feel like it's, like I said, it's—there's more heart and soul, and it's a much more soul-touching experience. So that's—that's for me. It's the main difference between the two.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree. I think the thing with, like, the smaller the press, the more personal it can be, because, even like places like Anvil, Brick, Wolsak and Wynn—like they're a smaller team. They're technically traditional publishers, but because they're smaller, you get to know them better. If you went to—I mean House of Annasi Press and Coach House are still fairly like they're mid-size. So, you still get a bit of that experience. But as you move up, especially, like, to something like Simon and Shuster's, or like Harlequin, Harper Collins, definitely, like, Penguin Random House, and stuff like that, like, that's when you would probably get a lot more of that divide. So, I definitely understand what you're saying.

Rami Obeid: I—I've read a couple of books published through Coach and House of An—I—I don't know how to say their name. But I know, yeah, I—I can. I don't wanna fuck up the name, but like I've read a-a couple of books published through them and Coach House, and I've read obviously books published through like Harper Collins, Penguin, and Random House, and I don't, like, you, you can kind of tell. There's more of, like, a lively human experience and kind of those smaller mid-range people rather than—not to say that the big people aren't as soulful as well. I mean, the writing is popular for a reason. But I, one hundred percent, like, I said, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, there are different connections that can be made on the smaller level.

Rami Obeid: Yes, I'd say, so. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, why are chapbooks important to you?

Rami Obeid: For me chapbooks are important and maybe I have a biased answer. But, like, I said earlier in the interview, that chapbooks—they gave me the confidence to write more and to keep writing 'cause, I mean, if I hadn't had my stuff published through Whispering Wick, I don't know kind of where my writing would be, or if I would still be even writing in the first place. But being published through Whispering Wick, having that small book of poems published, and seeing the reaction to it from people that I know and don't know—it gave me the confidence to kinda—the can I be, like, okay, I do have some skill, apparently. And the goal in the end,



for me, is to write a novel and kind of see it published in Indigo, or wherever. So, for me, I would say, the most important thing that it gave me is confidence. But it also—chapbooks, because—like, I said, because they're so personable. I also gained more friends from them, like, I said, knowing you and Nate and Grace. So, I mean, I'm—I'm very much, like, I'm—even though I tend to be more introverted, if I'm—if I know the person that I'm talking to, on a deeper level, I could talk for hours and hours. Whereas, if I'm with a stranger, I might not talk at all so and it kind of goes back to that aspect of having more heart and soul to—where—if you're reading works published through, like, a smaller press, you kind of you—you pretty much almost know the person from—you know, from—and their style, from, like, maybe aesthetics, word choice, how they structure a sentence, how they structure a poem, how they structure a paragraph. So, for me, reading other people's work through—reading other people's work—in works—in chapbooks, through smaller presses. It gave me more of, like, a wider, I don't want to say, a wider—it gave me, like, from a wider range of influence to pull from. So for me, it's not just the fact that I got my own writing published, and you know, just for that reason, to see my own work out there, but also those small—these small presses and chapbooks are so important because I mean, you don't have to dedicate—because when you're reading a book like a novel from published, from a, you know, a massive giant like Penguin, you're gonna have to dedicate the next, maybe two or three weeks of your life to reading that novel, depending on how fast you read. But if you have a chapbook, then it's so easy to read, to finish one in one day. That you could read so many in a week, and A, you have more stuff to pull from in your influences. And B, just having—just having that—just having, you know, being able to say, like, I read all of these different types of books, like, 'cause I mean, obviously, you can write different genres and chapbooks. It's not just poems and short stories on a literary level. So, I think it's—they're important 'cause okay? Main reasons: Number one... okay, that's my answer.

Tamara Thompson: Okay.

Rami Obeid: I suck at talking.

Tamara Thompson: No, no, this is fantastic, thank you. Do you think that chapbooks are important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not? Talked a little bit about it, but I was still gonna ask the question directly.

Rami Obeid: Yeah, yeah, yeah. While it—whenever someone, like, thinks of, like—I mean, America is, like, the epicenter of, like, literally everything: publishing movies, music. So, and people, like, forget that you know, Canada and Europe has great talent too, in writing, so specifically for Canadian writing it's so easy to, kind of—to kind of get your work out there, because it, kinda—I would say the same thing about like, maybe South America as well as Europe. Like, it's—it's—it offers glimpses into Canadian writing or writings, like other pieces of writing from around the world. So, it's kind of, like, a sample of that sort of work and talent. So basically, in a nutshell, Canadian chapbooks—it just offers the fact that, no, it's not just America that's, like, kind of the world leading in writing talent. But going back to how chapbooks offer such a, like, a small sample size, and being able to finish a chapbook in

a day. It'll show people around the world that, no, Canada has some talent, too. It's not just America, for me, and I-I-I personally would like to see Canada kind of equaling America, or even more so, than America, in terms of, kind of, being well known in terms of publishing and writing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, you're, kind of, answering my next question on, if you think that this kind of publishing reflects Canada itself in some way.

Rami Obeid: Yeah, yeah, one hundred percent it does. Because I mean the Canadian soul is such a distinct thing, in my opinion. Canadian works, I mean. Our best literary expert would arguably, well, probably, is Margaret Atwood. So, because of her, its, kind of, maybe, put a spotlight on-on Canada. But again, like, I would want to see Canada, kind of, being more well-known and having way more well-known people.

Tamara Thompson: Just more people interacting with the works that Canadians are making.

Rami Obeid: Yes, yes, from around, yeah, one hundred percent. And not just Canadians reading other Canadians. But I want more of the world to see how good Canada is, 'cause we do have great, amazing talent. Like, I'm ,like, I'm reading a poetry book by a-by a guy called Raymond Suster. I don't know if you've heard of him. He's like-like a poet from Toronto, and he was-from what I read-he's, like, Toronto's poet. But yeah, I only just heard of him, which is kind of like sad. I should have probably heard, like, and same thing with, like Margaret Lawrence. I don't know if you know her at all. I, like, I only discovered these people, like, within the last few years, which is unfortunate 'cause, I mean, you know again, America isn't only-there's-like, writers in America aren't the only people writing nowadays.

Tamara Thompson: It sometimes feels like American citizens read more Canadian, like, writers than Canadians do.

Rami Obeid: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Because we don't know they exist, and the Americans do, like. Sometimes I'll get Americans, like, being, like, oh, you need to read this in this Canadian writer and, like: who does what?

Rami Obeid: Yeah, I know I-it's so-it's so bad. I know I'm-I'm-I'm very much guilty of that, too. 'Cause, like, when Americans will tell me-

Tamara Thompson: It's, like, do you know? Right?

Rami Obeid: Yeah, yeah, it would-Americans will tell me, like, did you hear of like XYZ? I'm like, No. I: "How do you? How do you? How do you know these people?" But I don't, like-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Rami Obeid: It's really unfortunate in my opinion.

Tamara Thompson: Why do you think so-I-I do have to ask this next question, which is a little sadder. But why do you think most small presses and micro presses close up shop? Because it is true, places don't always, like, last forever. And that's okay. But, like, why do you think that happens?

Rami Obeid: I mean, I've never run, I've never ran small press. I've never, kind of, been-I was a reader, for, like a smaller magazine, a while ago. But I've never, like, I said, I've never ran a press. But I would assume the reason to be is that, maybe, the people running it, kind of-they're not seeing reward for their work. So, it's kind of discouraging. And I'm not even talking just financially. That's like that's-that's a given. But just having readership and kind of putting stuff out, and not a lot of people are reading it would, I would assume to be the reason, which is very, like, disheartening, and you know not everyone can, like, open up, like, it takes-I would assume it would take so many days and months and weeks, and probably even years, to keep it going and continue you to, like, call for submissions and to continue editing, like graphic designing, etc. It takes so much work and probably, like, there's-but as well as the fact that there are so many, like, magazines, like, small zines out there, and, like, small presses out there, that it's hard to compete, especially people who have been, like, kind of, like, kind of-if they've been running them for, like, a little over ten years, and they're at, like, ten thousand followers or more, it's, kind of, hard to, kind of, open some, like, a place up and kind of get readers. So I would assume it's the main things: not-enough readers, that's probably, that's probably the main reason I would assume. But which is very, you know it's-it's-it's very unfortunate and disheartening.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, 'cause it is hard to get reach, right? Because again, we were literally just talking about how most Canadians don't even know Canadian writers who are technically big, let alone-

Rami Obeid: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: -the smaller ones.

Rami Obeid: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, we're getting into this couple of questions here. But what's something that you wish, maybe, the public knew about Canadian publishing? Like, from-and you can take that in whatever way you want. What's something that you wish that they knew about this lovely sphere?

Rami Obeid: Oh... well, when you say the public, I assume it's, I mean, for me, I would assume it to be around the world. And I'll go back to the point that Canada does, one hundred percent, have talent. We do have great, not even just great writers, but great publishers, 'cause it's a skill in itself to spot great writing. So, I mean, going down from graphic design to editing, to reading, to, etc, etc. I wish that, I wish that the world knew that, you know, Canada has great writing as well, and great work. It's not just America, and you know, I don't mean to say that again,

but I mean for me, it's true. I just really wish that the public took a chance more on Canada, and their talent as well.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, this next question is just more making space for history. And just, like, cool stuff you've seen out in the world. But what's something important or cool about like D.I.Y. or D.I.Y. press history that you wish people knew about? And that's just more of sharing of the cool things that you've seen out in the world.

Rami Obeid: Hmm... just give me a second to think about that.

Tamara Thompson: There's, it's, like, the one of the more difficult questions 'cause whenever I ask, because, like, I've seen so much cool shit at, like, markets and stuff, and I can't remember.

Rami Obeid: I know I, it's-it's, like, 'cause I-I play guitar, and it's like someone asking me: can you play me something? And I just forget everything that I've ever learned. So, the question is like, what?... can you repeat the question?

Tamara Thompson: So, what's something important about D.I.Y, D.I.Y., press history? Just like, so, it can be either a fact, you know, about D.I.Y. press history, or it can literally just be like, hey, I saw this book at this market, and there was only five of them made, and I think more people should know about this cool art object.

Rami Obeid: Well, actually, that's a, that's a thing in itself like-like it being an art object like there's so many things you could do with a chapbook. Like, yeah, like, from, like, the designing and the type of paper you use. So, I'm trying to think of, like, a really good example of, like, of a, dude. Yeah, this is pretty kind of-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, there's a lot. And it's just, like, Wait.

Rami Obeid: Oh, Jesus.... well, actually there, th-there's one example that-that I have seen, which actually was pretty cool-was-there's this Mag, I forgot the name of it. But there is this magazine that would kind of, with every poem or with every short fiction they would release, they would have, like, a piece of music attached to it, kind of, to reflect the mood of that, like, kind of, to listen while you're reading. Like, whether it's, like, a classical piece or jazz or whatnot. So, I mean, there's-I've seen, like, a definitely a lot of those types of examples, kind of. And with, like, with chapbooks, like, there's so much, like-there's so many directions you could go in. So the fact that I can't even, like-there's so many that I can't even think of, like, a good example, like, I can't. That's probably my answer.

Tamara Thompson: No, that's totally fine. And that's really cool, too. Just to have the music come with the magazine and to be able to listen along. That's fantastic, you know. I love that kind of thing. All right. Last question here. What's something important about your history that you wish maybe people knew about?

Rami Obeid: Ohh...

Tamara Thompson: Take that in whatever direction you-you feel comfortable, sharing.

Rami Obeid: I'd say, of kind of, well, I'd-I'd want people to know that, you know, when I write, I'm putting one hundred percent of my soul into it. I want people to know that, like, for me, like, I mean, I don't really, well—we don't have to get into specifics, but like, I've, kind of, gone through a lot from when I was younger up until now. So, I want—I would want people to know that if I say something, I mean it in my work. I mean, and that I want people to know that, like, maybe, like, that, I love writing and reading with, like, it's literally all I want to do all the time. So, but for me, I wanna—I would wanna say that for me, I don't get influence just from actually—yeah, this is a—this is a good, probably a good point, like an answer. I don't just get influence from reading. I get influence from literally anything and everything. Like, it could be from a conversation I have with, like, a stranger, or, like, music or re, or like watching a movie or anything. I think the main thing is that—and that's actually, like, I've been asked a couple of times for advice, and I always say to, like, allow yourself to be influenced by anything. It doesn't have to be just writing, because there's so many cool things out there in all sorts of mediums. So, I guess, for me is that the—for me and my history, it's not just "read," even though reading kind of sparked my love of writing. But you know, I'm influenced by everything, and there's so many things out there that it, kinda, it makes me sad that I'm gonna die without having read every single book, or watched every single movie, or watched or listened to any piece of music. So, I'd say that, like, for me, I've gone through a lot and like my work—I want my work to, kind of, reflect—when I'm on my deathbed, I want my work to reflect the life that I've lived, for better or for worse.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording?

Rami Obeid: Uhh... Thank you for interviewing me.

Tamara Thompson: Of course!

Rami Obeid: This is the first interview I've—I've given.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, I'm gonna stop a recording then.

Joe Ollmann

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is Sunday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, the time is 10 o'clock. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview has taken place. This interview is for small press, author, and traditional press.

Joe Ollmann: I'm Joe Ollmann. I've worked with-I'm published by Toronto Quarterly. I've been published by Conundrum press. I ran a small press called Wag Press, which I published little zines back in the eighties and nineties. I'm from Hamilton, Ontario largely, although I lived in Montreal for about fifteen years. And I'm he/him and think that was it?

Tamara Thompson: Any other titles you care to give yourself.

Joe Ollmann: Oh, I just I consider myself a cartoonist mainly. That's-that's my card. That's my title. Yes.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Great! So just to get the ball rolling, how did you discover zines and chapbooks in this kind of D.I.Y. publishing? When was the moment when you realized that it was actually a thing.

Joe Ollmann: Okay, so I can pinpoint it exactly. I was working, I was a teenage Dad, I was working in a machine shop, and we used to get newspapers. We'd buy newspapers to wrap the rolls of iron, after we'd finished them to (technical issues occurred). And so, I would read the newspapers during my-my time there, and it was an article in the Globe and Mail about the Small Press Book Fair, which was at UFT in those days, and I just read this article, and they had little excerpts, it was Gary Barwin. I remember Gary Barwin clearly in there. And I was like, I'm gonna go to Toronto and see a zine fair, and that was the first I'd ever heard of it. I imagine that is probably around 1985 or so. So, I went to that zine fair, and I was overwhelmed by the you know breadth of things and the things that appealed to me were Gary Barwin again from Hamilton. Well known zine guy, his little books because they were beautiful objects, and they were funny and smart. And so, Gary Barwin, I was like, I want to do something like that. He really struck me. Other little things I found in those days that appealed to me. But that really stuck with me and-and I, by the next year I had I published and-and-and went to the thing and rented a table. And yeah, and then I was just in that scene forever more.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. I love hearing people's first experience in that aha moment. Because it's so exciting how everyone discovers this sort of stuff. So why did you start Wag, like, why did-obviously, the market was probably a big influence on that. But could you go into a little more detail into that.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, that was, it was probably a while after I did like more like traditional paper stapled things first. But eventually I did Wag. I was working at a printing company at some point. I was a graphic designer. I'd gone back to school, so I had access to printing presses and all of their facilities. So, I was able to print these and make these little square bound books, which I glued by hand with a, you know, a paintbrush,

putting glue on them, making-folding a spine with a butter knife, gluing the spine on, and-and then I would take those books, and it was rare to have a spine in those days. Everybody had stapled things. So, my mine really stuck out. They were like two bucks. They had all this art and comics and poetry and everything, and then I did original paintings in the front. I would make these sheets of one-inch paintings and-and so everyone had an original painting. So, people would flip through and try and find the ones they like. So, that-that was kind of the origin of that. And yeah. Eventually, people started, they wanted to like co-other people wanted to collaborate. And so, I publish things by other people. But mostly it was me and pseudonyms.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Would you say that there is maybe a-a goal for Wag? Or maybe an editorial philosophy, or just?

Joe Ollmann: No.

Tamara Thompson: Just kind of do it.

Joe Ollmann: Just kind of do it was whatever I was feeling at the time, which was kind of nice there was, there's low stakes in-in the zines. So, you're able to do whatever your interests are at the time. It's not as-like making a book for publication with a publisher. There's more, I mean, it's dangerous to think about the end market or anything like that. But there's more, you do think more about what it is, you could take more risks. You could do anything you felt like. It's very freeing to make zines because the stakes are low, but philosophy would be, was always kind of a Socialist and just like, just a human you know, about other humans. That's what I love about the-the zine culture is, it's-it's rare that it's-it's very left wing. I mean, it's-it's a rare bird that's a right-wing person making a zine about how they love war or something, you know it's not.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joe Ollmann: Not something, you see.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I love hearing how things started, but also like what the goals were. And sometimes it's just I wanted to create something and bring it into the world. And I love that variety of people having like mission statements and being like "I didn't see this, so I wanted to see it", and some people were just like, "nah I just wanted to make something cool, cause I had the time".

Joe Ollmann: That's it. I just wanted to be part of it, cause it looked like so much fun. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, it was mostly zines, and like art comics. So, would you say that it was mostly kind of that poetry mixed with art, the kind of things that you actually created. Or?

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, cause I was more, I was more mixing it up with-with my art practice then I would, I would, I would write text. I would write poetry like I said, combinations thereof, and just weird collage things.

But there was always comics in there, because it was always, I was always a cartoonist, but I was more doing things in other-other disciplines that-and now I stick to basically I just do comics. I don't do anything else. So, so yeah, it was a various thing, at the time.

Tamara Thompson: So do you still create these little zine things every once in a while, when you might get an itch.

Joe Ollmann: Very rarely. But I-I feel like a sell out because I don't do that but I still have old ones that I sometimes reprint like I'll have the files for them that I can reprint them and staple them together. Just so I have something to give out when I'm at zine fares, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joe Ollman: Yeah, it's nice to be able to-but I haven't created anything new which I should. But yeah, you get busy.

Tamara Thompson: The-the thing about small press and stuff like that is-is that it's so fun and exciting, but it also does take time.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And if people get busy, you start doing other things. And that's, like one of the reasons why I haven't been able to publish anything with my press recently is all of the people who used to help me publish things like my proofreader and layout and design gal, Grace, she's got bills, she's got to meet. So, anything that we do-do is not on part time. I say it's on extra time.

Joe Ollman: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Whenever someone has extra time, we do something. I'm doing my master's and kind of have that deadline of like, you know, I'm already having to pay fall tuition cause I'm behind. It's like I definitely don't wanna pay winter. So, you know.

Joe Ollman: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But like, whenever I have extra time, I'm thinking of other things for the press. They're just not solid, out there things yet. They're not actual like here, I can't give you a physical new thing that we've been doing. You know? Anyway! What was your process like when you were making things with Wag like, what was your like, "hey? I have an idea. Here's how I'm gonna print it. And here's I'm gonna get it into people's hands". I just want to get an understanding of what it was like making it.

Joe Ollmann: Hmm! There was no plan of any kind. It was just like cause I always had, I-I like, I said I got married and had kids when I was super young. So, I was, I was working, you know, from the time I was seventeen. So, it was always in at night, and after my kids were in bed, so it was dependent on amount of time I had, so. But I also stole a lot of time from wherever I was working and use that time with mindless jobs that I was



doing just to, the creative outlet. Like I, it would, I was able to write things while I was at work I would have all these, you know, oil-soaked notes when I was working in the machine shop and little sketches of things. So, it-it was just a matter of finding the time. And whenever I had enough that looked like, okay, that's a, that's a, that's another issue of-of Wag. I would, I would bring it out. But there was no schedule, there was no, it was just of time availability, and whatever that was, whatever it allowed. That's when I would, I would get something out, but nothing like a plan or anything like that. No, no.

Tamara Thompson: It was all just, "oh, hey, I have an hour here". Yeah, I have ten min here. Yeah, that makes sense.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, I mean, I was very fiery, like I really was I-I-I mean, I still feel that like I wanna get work done. I think that's the difference is like, someone said this in an interview with me. But like the difference, in people that talk about making art or the people that actually make art is just perseverance. They just do it, like, like some people just talk a lot. And I've known a lot of people that just talk. And then other people that do, cause they just. They're driven. They do it, they don't, they don't, you know, at the end of their workday. They don't sit down and do veg out there. They're working, you know. They're creating something, cause they're driven to, which is fine, you know, nobody needs to make anything, but if you're driven, you'll-you'll tend to do it more. So yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I teach second- and first-year students. I teach graphic fiction, and creative writing, introductory kind of stuff.

Joe Ollman: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And a lot of them are like, "well, how do you get published?". And I'm like honestly it doesn't matter if it's good or whatever, if you enjoy it, and you think it needs to be out in the world, that is the best way for you to get published, just to never give up. Be that bloody bastard who's just like "oh, another rejection cool, onto the next".

Joe Ollmann: Yeah. Perseverance.

Tamara Thompson: It's gonna get you there more, than maybe someone who's got the higher art or who got lucky or whatever. Like you gotta work really hard. And that's because a lot of them are like, "oh, well, does it, because I have to be like an individual or an artist". And whatever it's like, yeah, sure. But what's gonna actually get you there, is you just never gave up. You can't be easily discouraged in publishing because you're gonna be told no, so-so much, and you can't take it to heart, and that's really hard.

Joe Ollmann: It is, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And it's like you just have to, I actually gave a tip to my students that I got in my program, which was, you get your friends together, who all publish and get all your rejections letters together,

and you put them in a bowl, and then have a draw, whenever you go out to lunch. That person doesn't have to pay for their lunch you know, and so the more times you get rejected, the more times you more likely get the free lunch, right?

Joe Ollman: (Laughs.)

Tamara Thompson: So, it encourages the putting out there of work. And hey, you might actually get a yes, every once in a while, right?

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, and-

Tamara Thompson:-yeah.

Joe Ollmann: You're also, you're also learning, each time you're doing something you could learn from your mistakes. And you get better hopefully. Yeah, so yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I'm gonna just move us along here, this is more kind of like the author side of the questions. Why did you choose to have your work be like in this form. Why did you choose like zines and the chapbook, the small press thing? Why did you choose to have your work that way?

Joe Ollmann: Just because it was accessible. It was easy to do. That's the main thing. Anyone can do it. That's the one thing about the desktop publishing; it really made it universally accessible. Anyone could publish a book at that point. You could typeset it, you could add graphics, you could do it all in one and print it out. It was pretty freeing in that way, which made for a lot of like amateurs, which is the-essence of-of zines like, it's not about professional, it's about-it's not about execution, it's about ideas, and like things can be terribly executed, but they can be utterly brilliant. It's hard to explain but there's so many zines that stick in my mind like that, that'll be there forever, and they're, not like they were high production values or anything. They were just clever ideas that got out quickly, like, you know. That's, that's the-wonder of zines, like anyone can do it. I think of this one, this is in such specific interest to like, there was, I think it might-(technical issues occurred) Kelly who did this zine. It was in a paper bag that he'd silk screened the cover on the bag, and there was all these, little zines inside, and the whole thing was about exploitation films from the seventies about Jonestown, the Jonestown massacre.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah.

Joe Ollmann: There's a whole all of these exploitation films about that and he'd studied and wrote about its length and had photos from-and it came with a packet of Kool-Aid in the, in the bag. Now that, that sticks in my mind forever, because it's utterly amazing and brilliant. And-and you know, that was just his interest, you know, spewed out for the world like that. So, that's these are really accessible and easy to do. That's it's just the obvious entry point. And-and you know, in a zine of your comics, if you're a cartoonist, it's a calling card, you can hand it out and go, "this is my work". And so, yeah, that's basically, why.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I love that idea. And like, you know, no traditional publishers gonna look at that and be like, "oh, yeah, we're gonna like, print this paper bag", and it's like-

Joe Ollmann: -that's the-

Tamara Thompson: -so individual and exciting and thought provoking.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah

Tamara Thompson: That's so fun. I love hearing all of these like small little details that people have interacted with over the years, cause it just makes me start thinking about what I can do and what's possible, it's just so fun.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah. And it's, it's, it's like, you say, like, no publisher is gonna publish that, like, most likely, right? So, it's a way of getting your stuff out into the world without a publisher. You don't need to go that traditional route because it's like, you know, Noelle Allen, from Wolsak and Wynn a little publisher here.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Joe Ollmann: She said, she said this the other day, she said "everyone should write, but not everyone should get published", you know. So, it's like zines are like an in between, if you-you know, and you separate the wheat from the chaff when you read them, because you'll be like, oh, this is utterly brilliant, elevated work that-that you know, not that it should-needs to be in a, in a more polished form. But it could be, you know, but not everything is like that. Some things are just like, it's just this is my interest, and I'm putting it out there. And other people will be interested in it, if it, if they-they share that interest. So yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I love the playfulness of zines and of chapbooks, and like the way people can do things like derek beaulieu from like a Banff, like he showed me a poem that he did-where, like you open it up, and it's from Kate, from Gap Riot, her poem, and it literally blooms open like, because the page falls out. And it's just like that's so fun. And just, you know. Not that I don't like my traditional published books and everything like that. But I love the experimentation because that's where the exciting stuff is happening and the cool, playful ideas of form and stuff. So, I know we've talked about how like you've been busy, so, you haven't had time to do anything recent. But would you ever, like if someone said, "hey, I have this idea, would, do you want to work with me on it?". Would you say, "yeah, sure". And not necessarily next week, or you know. But would you-would you dip your toes in this again?

Joe Ollmann: Oh, yeah, like, I mean, like, right now, I'm like, I'm at, working with these two young cartoonists in Hamilton to get an anthology of, we just, we just all like the idea of comics anthology. So, we're working on publishing a comics anthology. And with Hamilton cartoonists and just figuring out how we're gonna do that, how we're gonna pay for the

printing, how we're gonna pay the people that are in it. You know the logistics of it. So yeah, I'm always interested in-in that. And yeah, like, and I mean, I'm an old geezer now. So, like, like, there was that pulping that, that, that anthology that came out at TCAP all these, you know, Toronto cartoons, and I was like I wish they'd asked me to be in that. But I'm-I'm a geezer now. So, like, you know, they're not thinking of old geezers, they want, they're asking their friends, and that so. But yeah, I would, I'd love to be part of that, like, you know. Yeah, it's nice to just be part of a big anthology kind of thing like that. And so, anyway, we wanted an anthology of Hamilton cartoonists. So, we're just going to make one. That's-that's the idea. If it doesn't exist, just make it. And you can do that with zines, right? So, yeah-

(Technical difficulties occurred)

Joe Ollmann: This just happened, because, you know, you-I was always making work, but had no outlet. No, like, you know, you're just drawing, you're writing, you're painting, you're making sculpture. It's like, when you're a kid. You do all of that. You sing, you dance, you write, you draw, and at some point, people grow out of that. But artists don't. They continue doing those, those things the kids do. So, I just always did it, but had no idea what to do with it. I, when I was a young kid working in factories, I could work in box factories, and on my day off I would take my stupid portfolio of terrible drawings to, you know ad agencies, and-and I would, you know, wear a tie and knock on their door and ask them if they would look at my portfolio. And I, you know, realized quickly that I didn't have the skills for that. I didn't have the proper illustration skills for that at all. And there was, some people were nice, and they gave good advice, but mostly they just pushed you off. So, I guess when I found that zines existed, and you could just, you could have an outlet for all this stuff that you were making. That was very freeing and great. And yeah, I loved it. And I did that for years. And then eventually, it was the zine work that got a publisher to contact me and say, you know, cause graphic novels started to be a hot thing, or you know, in the, in the nineties. And they just they saw my zine work and said, you know, could you do a book of comics? And so that was my first book with Insomniac press.

Tamara Thompson: Insomniac, wow that's fantastic.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What are some challenges that you faced as an author, and you can take that wherever you desire.

Joe Ollmann: Ummm, challenges. I don't know. I don't have a lot like, I-I feel like I've been really lucky I get, I get really well reviewed. Knock on wood. I like, I start, I had a weird career because I did a lot of newspaper comics, for like about ten years, prime years of my working years, I was, I had a, I had a weekly strip in the Hamilton Spectator for five years, and then I had a monthly strip in Exclaim Magazine for another five years and so all that, was working a full time job, like I was an art director by that point like, and so worked at night making those. So that was all I had time to do. So, I stopped doing zines. I, I'd never work

towards like making a, a book, you know. So, a lot of years were spent doing these newspaper comics that are just kind of like in a box. They're—they're too time sensitive. They're all about politics. And you know zeitgeist things that don't make any sense out of context. So, I always feel that's a weird kind of lost time. I wish I'd been making books then and had more books under my belt.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Joe Ollmann: But challenges like, challenges are always just like, like I don't—I don't run out of ideas. I have more ideas than I can do before I die probably like, which is great. I think that's, I feel lucky to have that like I'm always ready to go onto the next project. I usually spend three months between books where I just, I listen to records, and I lie on the couch, and I read books for about three months. That's my work. I just it's kind of like reenergizing. And then I go in and, and, and do— then start the next project when it's, when I feel ready, you know. But other than that, challenges are just like, nothing. I try and be-get better. I try, and I'm yeah, the-the more, the more attention your work gets, you feel obligated to work harder and do better work. I—I would let things go when I was doing zines, or even when I was first being published. Bad drawings, I would just say, "oh, it's good enough, it's good enough". But now I would be like, "no, I gotta redraw this". I'm very harsh upon myself. I really try and improve with every, every book. I just try and get a little better. Hopefully, yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I—I understand that drive to be better with every next project. I'm the same way with my own writing and my own drawings and stuff, and I'll be like "that was a fun, doodle maybe I should, oh, I learned something here about like drawing this character for the thirty fifth time", you know. And I can make this actually, maybe a bit better. "Oh, damn! Now, I'm gonna redraw this whole thing because that's not it, they don't look like the same character anymore. Damn it. Now I have to go back".

Joe Ollmann: That happens all the time. Yeah, I generally redraw the first like twenty/thirty pages of each graphic novel, I, because I don't have a feel for the characters at the beginning, usually about thirty pages in you cement the feel for them and you get them. And then, when you look at the opening pages. You're like damn; it doesn't look like the same people. So, I go back and redraw them. I've done that with the last four books just redrawn thirty pages, and I show people the two side by side. My artist friends, "I'm like this better right?". And they're like, "I can't tell the difference, man". It's like, it's like, it's all in my head. But it's important. You gotta make yourself happy.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joe Ollmann: If possible.

Tamara Thompson: If you're not enjoying the process. And if you're saying "hey, I think I've improved it" even if it's just this much, like that's important. It's so... one of the reasons cause I have students come up to me who are in-cause some of the graphic fiction kids are just there for the

analysis and to read graphic fiction. Because, "hey, it's not, you know the romantics or whatever right or Gothic horror". So, but I also have some kids who come up who actually do want to like do this. And they're interested in drawing and that kind of stuff when they're like, what do you recommend? And I'm like, always do a draft first. Always be prepared to do many, many drafts, and they're like, why? And I'm like, because you'll write, you'll write it out on a piece of paper what you want the page to look like, and you'll draw it, and then you'll be unhappy with it and then you'll try it again, and then you'll make notes, and I'm like, so just be prepared like, don't go in thinking that your first drawing is going to be your final draft, because so many of them are like, "oh, but it's so much work". And I'm like, well, yeah.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, it is.

Tamara Thompson: This thing aint for chumps. Man, you gotta be prepared.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, yeah, it's like-

Tamara Thompson: The ones who can overcome that are the ones that I'm like, "okay, you're gonna be able to maybe do something with this". But the other ones I'm like, "oh", this might fall to the wayside.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah. I think that's it; it's an endurance thing. Cartoons, comics are so much work, it's labor intensive, and it's lonely and takes a long time, and you don't, you're an aren't able to you know, get the adrenaline rush of reaction to it like you're working for years on a book, and you got nothing to show anybody, you know, you show little bits, and you get your little applause on Instagram or whatever. But largely, it's just, you know you, don't know what the reaction is gonna be to the new thing. So yeah, it's lonely and-and hard work and-and lot of redoing things. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And showing the people, you care like, you know your partner, your friends, to being like, see look, this is better. And their going, like...yeah.

Joe Ollmann: Oh, sure.

Tamara Thompson: And it's like damn it.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That's why, when you find a friend who gets it and understands it and they're like, "oh, yeah, it is better" like, thank god.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What is this type of smaller publishing taught you?

Joe Ollmann: Hmmm... I don't know. Hmm! I guess small publishers just the, they're in it because they love it, and I like that. It, it's not, there's, there's no one in publishing, small publishing that's making money. So, they are, they are in it because they love what they're doing,

and they want to, I think there's a like, publishers are unsung heroes because they're elevating people's work, you know. It's not they're they're-they're often creative people, too. And that's kind of suppressed because they're you know, putting out other people's things, and I find that too, about like people that review work. I think that's a, an undervalued, underappreciated thing. Because it's like they're-they're taking a time to bring their thoughts and analysis to your work. I really appreciate that like I, that someone's taken the time to do that, like it really, that's a, that's a, that's a wonderful thing to-to get someone's insight. And-and often they're totally wrong, and it's like, but I love that they will, like they're like, they'll, they'll put this whole structure in. And it's like, it's a Biblical reference. And like this, that. And I'm like, wow, didn't even, that didn't even occur to me like and I, but I love their theories like, it's amazing, right? Like, so, I really appreciate that. I appreciate publishers and, and, and you know, reviewers and all that. I appreciate the passion of people that enter in zines, because there's nothing in it except, it's like they say it's the same five dollars passing around at every zine fair, you know? And so, the people that are in it, they care about it, they love it, they love the community they love, you know they're not in it for money. So, I love that as a Socialist, I love that, that it's-it's just about the love of the thing and spreading their, the work. So yeah, I think that's the main thing that I've learned from it. Yeah, just the-the community of it all, and-and just that people stay in it and do it against their better judgment. Like, you know, I know people that are in running small presses that are like, you know they're in debt from it, you know. They're losing money, but they're still doing it, you know, cause they love it. And they love people's work, and they want to show off. So yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's one of the things that I do with like Whispering Wick like a lot of people are like, well, how much money do you make from that? Because, like people outside who don't know because they hear that I'm publishing so like, "oh, cool, you must make a lot of money", and it's like any money I make goes right back into the press so I can make more books. I get none of that.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, I know that's it, I think there's a I mean I know it because I used to think oh, if you have books published, if you're like, I used to think like Seth and Julie, and Chester and all those people they had, you know they had a comic book every month or whatever times a year and they are publishing graphic novels I was like, "oh they must be making some serious money" like, I really believe that, like I, you know, and I've met them all now, and I know them all now, and I know that that's not the case. Like nobody's making money in comics. There's probably you know, there's probably like four people making money in comics, you know. It's just, it's a hustle. Even at the highest level. They're hustling. You know, they always have you know, freelance stuff going on. So yeah, but yeah, there is that perception, you know, that publishers are making money, or the, you know, the big names and comics are making money, but it's like Dan Clowe said, being the most famous cartoonist is like being the most famous Badminton player.

Tamara Thompson: Yup.

Joe Ollmann: So.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, exactly. It's one of those things where I have some students being like, yeah, I really want to get into this. I-I think I'm really good, and I think it could make a good living. And I'm like, okay, well, good living.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: All right. Let's like pull that back a bit.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like if you're looking to make money. Don't go into publishing.

Joe Ollmann: No.

Tamara Thompson: Straight off the bat. It doesn't matter at any level. Don't go into publishing.

Joe Ollmann: Yep.

(Technical issues occurred)

Joe Ollmann: It's been good, like I was first published by Insomniac press, which was a small literary press that wanted to do graphic novels. So, they I think they publish Sherwin and Sonya. Do you know Sonya's work?

Tamara Thompson: I don't think so.

Joe Ollmann: She is a great like one of the greatest zine makers ever like, I just I think her, the voice of her zines, the juxtaposition of text and, and, and, and image is so brilliant, and, and back in the nineties, I think it inspired so many other people in that zine scene around Toronto and, and, and so she's publishing like she's doing art gallery work now, and-and did a big catalog of her work, and-but she was also being published by Insomniac at the time. There's again it's low stakes, so they just said, can you make us a graphic novel? And they had, gave me seven months, and I worked full time, and at night I would draw till two in the morning. And I did, you know, a hundred- and seventy-page graphic, well, it was short stories in comics form in seven months, but it finished a whole book, and I can, I don't know how you could even do that. I wrote, and through you know, whole book in at-at night in seven months. And then, it's, you know, sent to the, you know, finished design book to them in seven months and that would they basically just copy, edit it. That was it like and-and-and then Drawn & Quarterly published midlife. That was my first book, and Andy published a couple of things in between there, largely it's just copy editing. They-they trust your-your ability, I mean, I've been, I've been making comics for like thirty-six, thirty-seven years. So, you know, I think they trust I know what I'm doing, but they have, I've with conundrum. Andy is a really good editor, so he will work with cartoonists, and it's hard to edit comics because you can't just take out a panel like cause, it ruins the flow. So, you have to, if you're



going to edit it, add something or take something away. You have to fill it with something else. So, there's it's a complicated editing process and he's really good at taking up early manuscript and, and, and making it a better book. He's, he has a, you know lot of experience and, and a good-good eye for that. Drawn and Quarterly again they, I worked with Tracy, and on the-the abdominal Mr. Seabrook book that I did, which was really complicated book, cause it's historical. There's a lot of issues of race and like sex stuff. And so, it, it's a sensitive, a lot of sensitive stuff. So, I got a lot of good advice from Tracy, and that she was a great editor to work with. Yeah. And then, like I-I work with Tom Devlin now a lot of the time, directly, and Tom's a great editor like him. He's smart as hell, and he knows comics. He-he lives and breathes comics like it's this whole thing like and he's also like he's harsh as hell, like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

(Both laugh)

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, he, but he does it because he knows you can do better like he'll-he'll, I remember, in midlife there was this one drawing and-and just on the end papers, on the French flaps, and I reused a drawing from another page and he just said, "would Chris do that, Joe? Or would he redraw it?". And I'm like, "okay, yes".

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joe Ollmann: So, you know he, he's harsh like that, but it's good cause it makes for a better, better book, and he offers really advice on you know, just general structure and everything. So, I let him look at my scripts before I even start drawing, and he offers advice at that point. So, he's very helpful is, is a big, yeah, they've-they've all been big helps. So yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, fantastic! Thank you. Thank you for sharing that kind of stuff. I might have to ask you about Sonya a bit later.

(Technical difficulties occurred)

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, I would think Sonya would be a really good person to talk to, and because she has done art gallery work, there's catalogs which would have references that you could use. That would be more you know, factually like, not to anecdotal, but like dates and things. Yeah, there was another zine back in the I guess in the eighties, or maybe the nineties. That was these two young girls, and they were amazing. It was Pam and Karen, and they did this zine called *Free Toy Inside* and they were so cool they were like the girls in *Ghost World*. They were, these teenage girls, and they were way cooler and smarter than they should have been, and they made these super fun little zines that were really. I looked forward to every one of them they were, they would have inserted little, tiny books stapled inside this little zine just so clever and so inspirational. I love them, and, and I found one of them on Instagram and you know she's grown up and living in New York. She just did a book. She's a publish like, she published this book of the *Language of Flowers*. It just came about like last year, Karen Zulay that's her name. So, I wrote

to her, and I, said, Karen, do you remember old Joe and I, and she's like, oh, yeah, I remember you. And-and so, yeah, she's-she's gone on to like, you know, be professionally published. And you know, she worked in the whole art gallery world. And that so, yeah, but those kids were like so-so clever. And-and I just was amazed by them, cause they were so, working above their age. And they're like, so-so smart the work. I'm just really inspiring. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Positive.

Joe Ollmann: And again, I think the scene was such that even though they were young teenage girls, I don't think they were creeped on. But you'd have to ask them, cause I'm a guy, I-I-I it didn't seem like it. But who knows? I always felt like the scene was kind of safe that way, but that's my experience as a dude, so I don't know.

Tamara Thompson: I just love hearing about all of the interesting things that like that people have to say, and that are sharing with me, because again, I do my research as much as I can. But there's only so far Google will take me, especially with something that is more offline.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You know. So, like, if I'm online half of the time I will be like, "oh, there's this cool press. Let me look them up. Oh, they have a website. Well, it's dead, doesn't exist anymore". Damn.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, that's it yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Right. So, like I so exciting to hear about like these other people and what they're doing because people know about them. I don't know about them. Because again, you know, I'm twenty-five. And I just started doing this stuff right. And there's such a big history and so many cool things that have happened, that I want to at least touch on or reference at some point. Because, again, if I'm one of the few people who is actually talking about it and doing it. I want to reference as many cool things as I can.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, I'm-sorry. Go ahead.

Joe Ollmann: Oh, go ahead. I'm just looking up, Sonya. Others cause I wanna find her a website if she has one. Oh, she may not have a website. But there's lots of references, videos and stuff to her. So, and she's really great. She's funny, and Andy, since he published her book, I was hanging out with her at TCAP, and we've been in the same scene, but we've never met. I just admired her work, and we hung out at the end of the table at this restaurant with all these Conundrum people, and we just sat there laughing our heads up the whole night, just talking about everything, about zines and everything. But like I said, her work was, I think, inspired and influenced a lot of other zinesters, and like just the language of it and the structure of it, so she'd be good to talk.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I'll-I'll see if I can, if you can-

Joe Ollmann: I'm gonna send you a link to her. Instagram.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you, and then I can try reach to her.

Joe Ollmann: Yep, there.

(Technical issues occurred)

Tamara Thompson: Oh, wow! Sorry. I just pulled up her Instagram. So, I didn't lose it. Yeah. Sorry, I'm-I smile a lot during these interviews and say, oh, this is really cool, cause it's just so exciting.

Joe Ollmann: I know.

Tamara Thompson: I-I started doing chapbooks in 2020, because I made it as a way to have an internship for my program at Sheridan, which was creative writing and publishing, and I needed an internship. And so, I was collaborating with other people in the program to start the press. But it was during 2020. So, I wasn't able to go out to markets, I wasn't able to do things. And now I'm able to interact with the community so much more, not just through my thesis, but actually go out to these markets and stuff. So, for me, this is so exciting, because I was so pent up with energy cause I was doing this cool thing, and I wanted to share it, and I literally couldn't leave my house.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, I know, it's-it's hard.

Tamara Thompson: I-I feel like my energy has just been like boiling and boiling for so long. And now it's finally being released.

Joe Ollmann: Nice.

Tamara Thompson: And it's just been so exciting. And I keep using that word but it's because it is, and it's just so fascinating to hear what all these people have to say about this thing that I'm so interested in, and to learn all these things that I had no idea about like, it's just so, just so cool.

Joe Ollmann: Exciting.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah! So yeah, that's why I'm just so bouncy and everything. I'm a person who talks with my hands a lot, and to be able to talk about this and learn about it. It's just again all of that energy is finally being able to be released, especially with comics. I love comics. I love graphic fiction. I love teaching it because one, the kids actually read the books.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, we actually get to talk about some really interesting things. Sometimes they don't always read it, which I understand there's a lot of stress, especially in first and second year. But to actually be

able to talk about this thing that I love so much, and they'll come up after to me like after class would be like, "hey, I really liked this book. Could you recommend some stuff?". And I'm like, of course, here, read this, this person and this person, and if you like this, read this and that, and this, right? And so, like I, I love the fact that, like I've been able to reach out to you, and that you're talking about this specific side of this like small D.I.Y. stuff, because it is specifically like two things I love so much, very much colliding. And it's just so fun and interesting. Because again I, it's such like when I get to teach it, I'm just off the wall bouncy for like fifty min. The amount of times my students have like written to me, cause like, you know, you have your forms, you fill out at the end, and the students are just like "Tamara, made class very exciting and interesting every time I was never bored, and I had a lot of fun". And I was like, "hey, I'm so glad you did, cause I had a lot of fun doing it".

Joe Ollmann: That's it. That enthusiasm is you can't fake it. So, it's-it's great like that, you're so into it. And you can, you know. Pass that on. That's great.

Tamara Thompson: Well, I set the tone for everybody. So then, whenever I give something like that, I get it back ten-fold. It's just fantastic to see people giving that back to me.

Joe Ollmann: That is. Nice.

Tamara Thompson: Sorry.

Joe Ollmann: No that's okay, you're enthusiastic.

Tamara Thompson: I am, because it's-it's something that I get so disheartened when I cut-I see students, and they feel like things are so rigid when it comes to creative writing, or with comics, or any of the stuff. And I'm like, no, have fun. Explore.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: My biggest one is-is that I get so frustrated when so many of my students have had such bad, like negative experiences with poetry.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Specifically. And I'm like, "oh, poetry is fun, experimental". And like, we can learn the rules and stuff like that. And that's fine. But also, I don't wanna see you doing rhyming scheme things. And Dr. Seuss, like stuff. Give me the fun interesting things. Are you messing a word around? Are you creating something interesting? Are you making up sounds?

Joe Ollmann: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And I just love seeing them discover it.

(Technical issue occurred.)

Joe Ollmann: But that's like, so it's-it's enjoyable watching someone else have that same experience. Like oh zines like, you know, what is this? Yeah, it's-it's great. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I, it's there's so much joy that could be found in showing these people things. That's one of the reasons. When I've done my master's. I'm going to see if I can do teaching things because it-it makes a very drab world, very exciting and positive.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, I agree. Yeah, that's great.

Tamara Thompson: I'm gonna move on now.

Joe Ollmann: Yep.

Tamara Thompson: So why are chapbooks important to you? And like the ziney kind of things? Why are they important to you?

Joe Ollmann: I just think, just the, they're, they're, they're that kind of a snapshot of the zeitgeist at the time. It's like whatever's percolating in-in people's minds is got out fast. So, it's immediate like it's, it doesn't take two years or whatever like, you know, traditional publishing. It's just something that can get out quick. So, people can react to things quickly there, there's just like, you say, a lot of passion in them. These are passion projects always, like its just people, things that they love, and they want to get out there. Marginalized communities have a voice in these things they always have like there was always like for a square old dude like when I was young, it was, it was my exposure to like, first time I ever met a trans person was that zine fair you know, just like exposure to queer culture and solidarity with them, like I grew up in very homophobic times like. And-and so, being in that scene, it was like you met people you were exposed to other people. And-and you know that was that's to me is-is great, like you can learn and meet other people outside of your circle. It's great and just-just the fact that these little photocopied, crappy things, I still have them, some of them, and a lot of them, and-and I can still remember them. And I still look at some of them like the first zine I bought from Gary Barwin which inspired me forever. It's this tiny thing called Edwin. I can still remember it, and it was a little illustrated thing, with a text written about how his-his brother was stillborn, and they kept him in a, in a jar of formaldehyde under the basement stairs. And it was this little, beautiful, illustrated book about that. His name was Edwin and that's always stayed in my mind. It was a beautiful like, it's it stayed in my mind as much as like any you know famous novel I've read like. So, there they have lasting power and just the fact that it's-it's pretty democratic. Anybody can do it. It doesn't take, you don't need anyone's approval. You can just do whatever you want. And-and so I think they're really important for that. And I think and you can spread the word like if-if you have a political agenda, you can get your information out in an effective way and I just like to how it's not really a capitalist on a a-a undertaking is, people are just like, oh, we can trade, you know. They still do that. They trade like that's nice, nobody's caring about the

money. They're just they just wanna get zines and sell zines. And you know it's just about spreading love really, you know, like there's.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Joe Ollmann: So low stakes that it's just it's a feel-good thing, like all-around. So that's, that's why that's why they're important to me all of that. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fantastic. Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing. If so, why or why not?

Joe Ollmann: Well, yeah, I mean, you know, like, famously, like people like bpNichol and Crad Kilodney. And is that his name? Kilodney? Yeah. And-and just a lot of people like that. Those-those are still in people's minds. And you know, they went on to other things. But it's you know, like, in the case of Conundrum press. Andy was, started as he was publishing poetry and fiction, and-and then he started moving into comics, because that was his interest, and he also realized that cartoonists were easier to work with than poets or authors, because they required a lot less editing. I-I always joke that it's because cartoonists have been broken by the world already. They have no expectations. They're just like, sure, that's great and-and it was what he was passionate about. So-so what he did he took like, he would go to zine fairs constantly and look around and get like zines of comics and go oh, this is interesting! Would you be interested in publishing a book of this? So, he would collect zines from a you know certain creators and then make a book of them. He did that with a lot of people over the years, and they went on from these first books of collected zines to you know, create original, you know full length works for him and for other people like so chapbooks are important. Like is kind of it's an entry away, and it's a stepping stone. Some people never want that. They don't want to do anything but that, and I think the punk aesthetic of that is like, I don't, this is good enough. I don't need a big work with a big publisher. I'm-I'm happy doing what I'm doing. So, I think, I just think-but it's important as a like in the case of Conundrum. That's really his, his whole philosophy, like he still does that he goes around and finds young cartoonists are doing comics, zines and that's how he finds his authors. That's so, yeah. But I think they're important. For all the reasons I've said before, like just what it's-it's-it's easily accessible, easily distributable, like people still, I don't know people still mail stuff, but back in the day we were mailing stuff, and there was like Slab of Concrete, which was this zine distributor from the UK. And you could send them a dollar, and they would mail you their catalog, and they had zines from all over the world, and you could order them from them, and then mail money to them in an envelope, you know, and-and then they would mail you those zines. They were a distribution service sort of like there's-there's lots of them. There's some in the States. I don't know if the Comet Bus guy used to distribute zines, and you know, John Porcellino of comics he's he still does that. He's still a comics distribution and zine distribution. So, I can't remember what the question was. But I hopefully answered something there.

Tamara Thompson: No, you absolutely did. So, this next question you can take in any way you desire. Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way.

Joe Ollmann: Hmm, yeah, possibly. I mean, I think there was a lot of political zines back in the day that criticize the government. I imagine it's an entirely different, and way more critical seeing now, cause we're just more aware, I think, when I was growing up you were questioning authority, but you were still buying into the mainstream narrative of Canada and its history, and like or this fucky you know, settlers who just came here bought the Indians and won the land and the narrative I grew up with and-and it would be enforced by everything. And we've just had a reckoning and realizing that our whole history is bullshit and-and-and-and our country is built on genocide and blood, and, and there's no denying it. And-and so I think now it'd be interesting, I know some indigenous, you know, zine and comics people like and-and not that their work should have to be about that. But often it is. But they also people bipoc people just wanna make comics about whatever they want. They shouldn't have to do like that-that work. But they do sometimes, you know, like-like, it's inevitable that you, that would be something cause zine have a history of being protest, too. They're often political. They're-they're you know, a lot of feminists, a lot of queer scenes like, we're really inspirational and important, so, but yeah, I think that probably they reflect local scenes and in a larger sense, the whole country. So yeah, I-I haven't been to a zine fair since before the pandemic, so I don't know. I-I don't know what-what people are doing now like I mean, I-that's inspiring. I want to go to the next one, you know, Canzine in Toronto. I-I, I just yeah. I missed the last few cause some of them are virtual, and that yeah. Should go again. It's been a, it's been a long time.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's something that you wish, maybe, like public knew about like Canadian publishing. And you can take that wherever you desire as well.

Joe Ollmann: Oh, I don't know. I think we're lucky that to some extent our publishing industry is propped up by the government, because I think that's really important. I just think they could do more in terms of that, umm I don't know. I have friends in the Netherlands, and they used to talk about this legendary artist welfare which is basically a guaranteed basic income for artists that they used to have. I don't know if they still have it. They probably don't. But at one time there was such a thing. And I was like, that's an amazing thing. If you could just opt out of society. I don't want to be part of capitalism. I just wanted the basic amount that I need to live. So, I can just make art. I would opt for that with-with, without a second thought like I would be. I'll just take the bare minimum. So, I don't have to participate in this hustle. So, I think we're lucky that we do have some granting systems, Canada Council is really amazing, like, I got a lot of grants in my early days, and it was amazing that life changing, and a lot of publishing would not exist. A lot of small publishers wouldn't exist without block grants for publishing and for sending authors on book tours the fact of the public rights lending program where authors can sign up to the Canada Council, and you register your books, and every year, based on how many times your books are taken out of the library system, they send you royalties on that. So, you get a

check from the Canada Council for your books being taken out of a library, that's really thoughtful. That's like someone in-in the past thought of that and thought, this is a this is a helpful thing to ours. They cared about culture enough to do that. And now we have conservative assholes that are just strip mining that taking it all away, and I-you know those things will never get them back and I know there's always cuts to that. But the fact that any funding exists for the arts is amazing to me and wonderful. And I just wish there was more. Oh, yeah, I can't remember what the question was. I-I forget the question after a few seconds. Sorry.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's alright. You answered it in a really nice way. I-I love hearing people's interpretations of the question, which is, oh, damn!

Joe Ollmann: So, what people, what Canadians think about it? I think, I just wish that is valuable like-like that, you know like, I know Conservatives try and sell to people that are, they're a waste of money giving, you know, grants to people who are making dirty comics, you know, and I'm like good, great like, who cares like, you know, it's a drop in the bucket, you know. But they can really try and turn like working people against art that way. They think it's frivolous and stupid, and I wish people knew that it's not frivolous and stupid. It's-it's great, and it's it makes for a, all of that art, and the humanities are so undervalued and so important and like I just wish that the average person like, I like paying taxes like, and I-I wish people would feel like that like, I like education for everyone. I like healthcare for everyone. I like roads. I like art and culture. I like all of these things. I would like people with disabilities to get an actual, livable wage, you know. I think all these things are important, so I guess I wish the people valued that, and knew that-that funding the arts was valuable and-and-and-and good, so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I have three librarians in my family. So, getting, like having the library system as like a third place outside of work and home, and to have it to be so educational, and to be a place where you can interact with not just books, but other types of media now, too, right like it's so important. The amount of like decrease in funding in that, I think, is criminal. Same with my parents they were both biologists, and they work for the MNR. And don't get me wrong, not my favorite spot, but the fact that so much funding is cut for the park systems and stuff like that, but it is such an important thing, and so many people that I know who lived in like, I went to school at Sheridan in Mississauga. So many of them relied on those parks, in the, like on the fringes as an escape, and as a way to interact with nature. My partner who grew up in Mississauga, saw his first groundhog for the first time and I was like, I see winisks all the time here, because they're just they're just here in Peterborough, and I was like, that's crazy. You've never seen one?

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, I know it's really important, right? But that's forward-thinking people like, I was thinking about that. I was in Montreal last week and seeing the mountain there going up on the mountain and seeing this giant green space in the middle of the city. That's forward thinking because capitalism is like, how can we utilize this space and make it make it functional, make it make money? But some forward-thinking people said, let's protect this and have this thing for everybody. That's



amazing, like Central Park in New York City. Like what an amazing thing. Like a capitalist would look at that and go let's build shit on this. But like some smart guys said, no, let's protect it. Yeah, that's important.

Tamara Thompson: And also, how important those spaces have become to those cities, and like how much people love something like Central Park like it's, a like such a core part of so many like stories, experiences like, there's this public narrative about Central Park is this great thing, right? And that's because it's been saved.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah. Yep.

Tamara Thompson: So, okay, we're-we're nearing the end of our questions here. But why do you think a lot of like small presses and micro presses have to close up shop.

Joe Ollmann: Oooo...I think eventually people get worn out like it's-it's exhausting the hustling all the time it's depressing, like, you know, like if you're a small publisher and you're, you, you print a book with all these great hopes and expectations, and it doesn't sell, and you're stuck with the boxes and boxes of books, and eventually, sometimes they get pulped, and that's all sad. It's always comes down to money like it, usually money, but sometimes it's like they want to concentrate on their own work. They are maybe, they're a cartoonist who has just been doing this. They just did it because they wanted to get other people's workout and then they're just like tired of it. I don't know. There are various reasons. I think fatigue is one. Money is probably the biggest. And sometimes people just are like, they just want to do something else. Maybe, you know, I don't know. I think fatigue often, and-and money finances are the big things for sure. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. It's-it's a lot to keep this going. And sometimes the other thing, too, is-is that sometimes you've done it for a period of time and then it's over. And that's okay.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, yeah there are, you know, different phases of people's lives, that's for sure. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's something important about like D.I.Y. press history that you wish maybe someone would know that you. This is a space for you to share some more cool things.

Joe Ollmann: I don't know. Just the fact that it's so accessible like, if you have a niche interest you can write, and you know cut out magazine photos and paste them together, and you got yourself a zine, and you just photocopy it and staple it together. There's all those little pamphlets that you see at zine fairs like how to make a zine, and they literally show you how you can just fold an eight and a half eleven into a zine. So just the that it's so accessible anyone can do it. You have an agenda that you want to get out there. You can do it, or if you just want to make a goofy thing, you can do it. And you know people will read it, that you're sharing your thoughts with other people. And-and I mean, that's a that's it's a neat thing to-to be able to do. And it's it, doesn't, you know, we're not in the fourteen hundreds where we don't have moveable type. And-

and it's all, it's all possible. You can go to any library, and if you don't have a computer and a printer at home, you could do it. So yeah, I think just that. The accessibility of it I-that it doesn't. It doesn't. It's not-not much is required. There are low stakes in it. So, I think that's an important thing about zines.

Tamara Thompson: What's something that you wish people knew about your history?

Joe Ollmann: I don't know. I blather on about myself all the time. I think everybody knows everything about me. I always like to say I was educated in a box factory because I was like, I didn't go to university. So, I like, I, basically, I was in a, I worked in a box factory. That was my first job. And people everyone that knows me mock me about that because I say it so often. But I-I-I kind of educated myself by just reading everything, cause I was passionate about learning, and I want, and I didn't want to be a dunce. So, I-I-I just I read everything, and one book is gateway to another. The mention of another text, and then you read that, and I just spent all of those younger years like trying to educate myself. And so, there's that, I guess, like just that I like, I mean, I'm-I'm a published author I got nominated for the Governor Generals award like I never thought that would happen. I'm a, you know, an uneducated buffoon but I guess what I'm saying is, you ca, you can, you can educate yourself. It's all out there. Knowledge is that we have the Internet. All knowledge in the world is, is, is at our fingertips, right? So, I guess I don't know, what do people need to know about me? That's it. Just like this is my thing. I-I'm a cartoonist, that's all. I-I don't. Sometimes people introduce me as a graphing novelist, and I think that's weird, cause I'm just like, I'm just a cartoonist. It's a, it's a humble art form that I love, and it's-it's my-my long term, genuine love like that's my whole life since I when I found the first comic book that I, you know comics are in everyone's life. Right? We read Archie comics. We read the comics in the newspaper, and I had all that. And Mad magazine was a big influence. But there was one day in the car with my dad waiting.

(Technical issues occurred)

Joe Ollmann: Yes, and then yeah, him waiting in the car with my dad. My moms in a store buying material to make clothes for us, and I said, can I have a buck to go to the store? And I bought co-a comic, and it was a Spiderman comic, and I coming in in the middle of a narrative. Never read superhero comics before and it was like, I was like, what's happening here. I don't understand anything, and I want to. And-and then from that moment on every cent I had was spent on comics. Every moment of my life is obsessed about comics. I feel like lucky to have found a thing that I have consistently been obsessed with and in love with, and it's always in my mind. I'm, I think, of comics. I think of the world of comics. I think of cartoonists that I've known and met, and their work, and how-how much it means to me. And I can think of going to trips to Toronto, to the (technical issue occurred) and buying a stack of books and then driving home to Hamilton, and-and like it's like the-the equivalent of texting and driving, which I would never do. I would be like peeking at the comics on the seat besides, because I was so anxious to read them, and then I'd go home and read this stack of comics, and I would be overwhelmed by how

great they were and that would be devastated, and I'd be like I can never do anything as good as this. But then I'd be inspired after a week or so, and I'd go, I'm gonna and I, it would make me. I fed on it and, and it's I just love that I have it. I realize that every day, like cause I draw comics almost every day, and that's the last thing I do. I look at what's on my table, what I'm drawing, and I and it feels good. So, I found this thing that I-I adore like I love. Never and never fades. I love it more every day and not everybody has their thing. So, I realize how lucky that is. I-I just feel incredibly lucky to found this thing and be part of it, and, and, and, and the good part of it. I'm, I-I know everybody in comics like I'm, and that's I love that like I try and keep up with all the young cartoonists and, and, and the old ones as well, and I just feel lucky to have that in my life like it gives me real meaning. I know it's pointless and stupid, but it's-

Tamara Thompson:-I don't think so-

Joe Ollmann: -it's my life meaning. I love it like, you know. I can't explain it beyond that. It's just.

Tamara Thompson: Well like, why do something if it's not fun.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah, right?

Tamara Thompson: And if you are having fun.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Have fun. Enjoy this thing, and I'm the same way. I'll go to the bookstore. My parents will be like, are you just gonna buy comics again. And then I'm like, not just comics, you know, like, because I'm-I'm from a big family of readers, and I had a really hard time reading as a child. So, for me it was that gateway to stories, because I loved being read to cause, I was read to all the time I loved trying to read, but because I struggled so much comics like my grandfather had just stacks of Garfield comics at our cottage, and I would read those, and I'd go through them every week, and I do that every summer like, for the couple of weeks we were there I would just read tons and tons of Garfield, because it was a way for me to interact with this thing that the rest of my family was doing in a way that I could actually participate and was having fun with. So now, when I go to like, you know, Chapters or the local bookstore here, Take Cover. I go and I'm like, and this one and this one. And now I'm broke. But that's okay.

Joe Ollmann: I know. Well, Garfield was your, your gateway drug, I guess.

Tamara Thompson: He-he really was, and honestly, I'm surprised how much he's come back into my life.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: He always seems to appear in a moment where I'm like. Hmm! Like I-I had a moment where I was like everybody needs to leave me alone. I need to draw surrealist, Garfield art, because I'm going crazy. I

need to do something expressive. It's so weird that like this, you know, half the time I wasn't even laughing at the comics. I was just enjoying the fact that I could enjoy this thing.

Joe Ollmann: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You know. Yeah anyway, are there any additional comments or anything else you'd like to say before I stop the recording.

Joe Ollmann: I can't think of anything else. Yeah, no, no, I can't think of anything.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. I'll end it there then.

Ashely Opheim

Tamara Thompson: My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is July 22<sup>nd</sup>, and the time is to 10 am. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant could drop out a week after this interview time. This interview is for small press and author.

Ashley Opheim: Ashley Opheim, pronouns she/her from Metatron Press. Located in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. I am the founder and managing editor of Metatron Press, and I am also a multidisciplinary writer and poet. I have written two collections of poetry both published by Metatron Press. And one of these collections was pub-translated and published in Spanish, in Argentina. And yeah, I think that's all I'll say for my introduction.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Thank you. So just to get this show on the road, let's start with like an introductory question. So, I get a little bit of your background on zines and chapbooks. But like, how did you discover the smaller side of publishing? Like zines and chapbooks; like, was there a moment or more a general time in your life when you first like actually recognize these lovely little, lovely little print objects?

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, I think for me, it started in high school and in a really small way. I remember I was really instantly fascinated by-by poets and the world of poetry, and I think my first interaction with what we would call like a chapbook would be like our high school's periodical, like our literary periodical, which was just saddle stitch, which is just the-the staples on the side and that was my first foray into it. But I will say that I don't think I really engaged with chapbooks in the way that I now have until I got to university. Pretty much, I grew up in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and decided to study creative writing at Concordia, and moved to Montreal when I was nineteen. And again, like it was the-the student periodicals that you know I found myself engaging with, and I sort of stumbled into a literary slash journalism and arts community that we're printing chapbooks essentially. And I will say that there was a student, a fellow student of mine named Jack Allen, who I think it was like my third year of university. He printed I believe it was like four chapbooks by people like in our class. It was called Trapshot Archives, and I remember being really inspired by it, because the aesthetics of the-the chapbooks were so lovely, and you know he was publishing like really urgent voices. And it was exciting because I think when you're young and an aspiring writer it's really hard to break into the world of like the, you know, like sort of reputable literary arts. I think, I always sort of saw chapbooks as being a really accessible way for artists to express their ideas to a sort of small and niche audience and I think, like another important part of the story is of course there's the printed matter, but I think simultaneously as a writer around that time, I was heavily immersed in like online communities. Mostly around, like the alt-lit movement and I will say, like there was a lot of chapbooks coming out. I was ordering chapbooks from like all over the world from people that I was discovering online. And yeah, like some of them had spines. But you know how like, I don't know, I feel like even sometimes-sometimes something with a spine like still feels like a chapbook, even though I'm sure, like people will argue about this. But yeah, all to say that I think I've always been really curious about format

when it comes to poetry and chapbook is one of the formats that I initially used. But I think it's-it's somehow transformed and I'm not sure if you had a look at our-our website. But we now have a section called digital publications and pretty much the whole idea behind this is its sort of like in my mind, like publishing chapbooks but online, like, they're sort of long like though they're long poems or short collections of poetry, and they kind of embody this ethos of the chapbook. But specifically, they exist online, where there's very, very little costs involved with producing and distributing. So, I will start with that long story short I discovered chapbooks, I guess, originally like through school, and then through like writing community.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's great. And yeah, I-I love your websites setup. It's so, like I can tell, a lot of effort went into it as someone who also does chapbooks and has, like our own website, like, there is so much work that goes into programming and keeping those things like functional and just, I love the aesthetic of your website.

Ashley Opheim: Thank you. Yes.

Tamara Thompson: It's so nice, and I'm like, I look at that and I'm like, that's so much work but it looks so good.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, it was a lot of work. I'm like, I was lucky that I have a programmer friend that gave me a really good deal on updating the website. But yeah, I guess this is like our ten-year anniversary year. So, you know, I think our first-our first chapbooks came out in 2014. So, it actually is a really nice time to be speaking to you, because it's been like a decade now, and I've been doing a lot of reflecting lately.

Tamara Thompson: Nice. So, I am interested in the press and why it started because these things are a lot of work. So how did this ball get rolling for-for your press?

Ashley Opheim: So, the press is like a sort of direct child of an event series that I co-ran with a friend of mine named Kyo-(technical issues occurred) and we started a reading series called, *this is happening whether you like it or not*, in 2012 I believe. Two years before the press was founded, and we spent a couple of years you know, putting on events, I'd say maybe eight a year, six a year and just featuring people in our community, both from within school. But also, we were really interested in featuring people like that weren't in our program and sort of getting out of the-the educational bubble a bit. And then over time, you know, I was, I found myself immersed in a, an amazing community of writers anglophone writers here in Montreal and we were all just having a really hard time getting published. I know people were sending their manuscripts out. There was just not much happening. And I think in my mind I originally just kind of wanted to archive things like, I've always sort of some-I've always seen my role more as like an archivist like this stuff is happening. These people are super talented. I mean, no one's publishing them, I happen to have had developed some skills with InDesign. I ca-actually not InDesign, it was Quirk at the time that I used.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Ashley Opheim: I volunteered at the at the university newspaper and had learned how to lay out my sections, so I kind of knew how to like work with this sort of technology, which made it quite easy for me to put together the first books that I put together. But yeah, to answer your question directly, I think Metatron was a direct response to the lack of opportunity and publishing space that me and my peers experienced and at that time I had just graduated university I felt really lost in my life I didn't know what I wanted to do. Actually, I wanted to work in publishing, but I couldn't afford to become an intern, because I was very broke. And I was actually living on social assistance and really struggling to figure it out, because I mean, I was also an Anglophone in Quebec, and while my French was decent, it really didn't allow for me to be eligible for like literary jobs in the French language world.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Ashely Opheim: So, it was actually through the-the Government department that was issuing me, my social assistance, that they actually had a program called *Je'une Volunteer*, which is sort of a program that exists, and you don't have to be on social assistance to get it. But you have to be I think it's under thirty-five, and you can apply for, like these mini grants to kind of start like your own business, like a little entrepreneurial thing most-it's mostly for artists, though I think mostly artists access it. And so, I applied to this with a couple of friends to start Metatron, and we got it, and it was with the help of that little grant that we were able to publish the first it was, yeah, initially, we did six chapbooks all by local Montreal-based writers. So yeah, I think that's sort of how the beginnings of the, of Metatron started.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, cause you have to have the resources to actually start. Once you get going, you can kind of like, self sustain it. But yeah, you have to, you have to get the materials because paper and ink plus money.

Ashley Opheim: It does, and especially more so these days.

Tamara Thompson: Oh my God yes.

Ashley Opheim: I'm sure that's come up in your talks. But yeah, yeah, I needed some a little bit of startup money just to-to fund the project, and from there pretty much any money that I made selling the books or the chapbooks would just go directly back into the-the Metatron account, and that's sort of how, like the sale of those books would help produce like the next round of books, so like we wouldn't do reprints necessarily, we would just use that to generate like more opportunities for more people.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, you kind of answered a bit of my next question. But I'm, still gonna ask it a little bit more directly like, does the press have an editorial philosophy, maybe a goal? I know not everybody has one more like a big, overarching thing. But it seems like you guys had specific intent.

Ashley Opheim: Well, I mean to be fair like I will say that Metatron started as, I guess, \ I didn't mention this, but I went to university Concordia during a really bad time where there were, which later came out in the media. But there was just like a-a bunch of abusive men in our program. And they sort of, it made it hard for students to sort of access connections in literary world, because there was like this ego and this dance of stroking people's egos and hanging out. Anyways, there was a weird culture at Concordia, and pretty much like, originally, I really saw Metatron is a sort of attempt to create an alternative space like free of- of gatekeepers and free of umm like unsafe situations, like the ones I discovered in university. So, I think originally I really saw Metatron as a feminist press. And then I'd say over-over time, it's evolved as we all have evolved in our thinking to include other marginalized communities that typically haven't been published throughout the history of- of literature, let's say specifically within Canada. I know, there's like some key women that were published in the in the nineteen hundreds. But you know, there really haven't been that many. So, I was really excited to sort of use the platform to bring voices to the forefront, or whatever forefront, bring it to the public that have maybe not been heard from so much in the history of Canadian literature. 'Cause those are the voices I felt most excited to by. And th-these were people that, you know, were surrounding me in my community as well.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I, so I teach right? Just as a TA at the moment, because I'm still getting my master's. But like one of the things that always shocks my students, especially like I teach graphic fiction, but I also teach creative writing is there's a there's something I call the void minutes before you actually start the seminar. When people actually come in and sit down, and it's like a ten min like area of time when no one wants to talk, and everyone looks on their phone. And so, I say, all right, kids, I hate this, I'm going to talk. And I tell them things about publishing. And they're like, are you allowed to tell me this? And I'm like, oh, yeah, wow! More competition. Another great Canadian writer gets paid properly.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And doesn't get ripped off by like vanity presses and Amazon, and like three-dollar like royalties, you know, like, oh, boy, like, you know, like 3% royalties. And I'm like, oh, boy, I'm so hard done by, a person's getting paid properly in my field.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And they're always just like, well, you don't-there's so much gatekeeping and stuff like that. And I'm like, yeah, and it's stupid. And I don't like it, and I have this knowledge. So, if you ask me the- cause, like, it's just random stuff that I think up, that I think is important, but like when they ask me questions, I answer them. And they're like, why do you do that?

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.



Tamara Thompson: That and I'm like, because it's important. Like the more mystique there is, the more people fall for the traps that I hate, that I don't want people to be a part of, because it takes away so much of their like, you shouldn't have to pay to be published. You should be paid to be like to get like, to be published, you know.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like you shouldn't be paying your publisher.

Ashley Opheim: For sure.

Tamara Thompson: And so, like they're always just like, oh, well, that's like amazing. And I'm like, I just think it's just, you know, being a good, just being a good person.

Ashley Opheim: Hmm.

Tamara Thompson: In this world of like secrecy. And like I get, why it happens. But I'd rather my students, you know, not get ripped off.

Ashley Opheim: For sure. Yeah, there's a lot that I feel like, there's a lot that school does not prepare you for, and-

Tamara Thompson: Mmhhmm.

Ashley Opheim: The sense of, you know, the Canadian literary sphere is very small and difficult to permeate. And then there's a lot of people out there who are trying to take advantage of people. Honestly, you do have to be really careful as a writer and then, you know, it's also no one's making a lot of money being a writer. So, it's also and like, same with lots of small presses I don't, I don't believe I mean, lots of them are well funded. Some of I mean some of them if you were established before 2010, you had a really good shot of being supported by their core grants. But if you were established as a press after 2010, you have a 1% chance of getting into their core grant funding.

Tamara Thompson: Yeaaaah.

Ashley Opheim: So, anyway, I know that we don't need to derail into I mean, I could talk about money forever, because honestly.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, I know.

Ashley Opheim: At the very, the very like basis of the press is, of course, like you have to somehow find a way to like, sustain it right and. For me like, I also have been trying to find a way where I can be compensated for the labor that I bring into the press. And you know, this is actually an interesting thing to talk about bringing it back to the chapbooks like Metatron specifically started as a chapbook press, but I will say like, when I was trying to get my first Canada Council grant. Of course. They don't accept chapbooks like books have to be forty-eight pages and more to be eligible, and I believe they need a spine. So what I actually needed to do was to redesign the original chapbooks I put out,

and in some cases they were just around forty eight pages, so like I had to do a little bit of like design magic to make them fit into like you know, to make them fit into a certain thing that would allow it for me to like, you know, get funding to do more books and have more support behind these-these titles. So yeah, I don't, we don't specifically work with explicitly chapbooks anymore. But I will say, like generally, Metatron's books are on the shorter side of things, and I still see them as being like I, pocketbooks, cause they're also small in dimension. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's-it's unfortunate that like, they make certain requirements so that you can get certain funding. And I understand why they do it. Just you know, we're gonna get into it later, but you know.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, I'd love to get into it later.

Tamara Thompson: Okay. So, a I know some of the stuff that you do. But for the sake of the transcripts and audio of like, what kind of work do you publish? 'Cause, I know some people just focus on poetry. They do a couple of other things, but like what kind of works do you publish? And why do you publish those genres or genre?

Ashley Opheim: So, we specialize in publishing poetry mainly. But we're also known for fiction and explicitly hybrid texts mostly by rising authors and I'd say the work we tend to publish is more on the subversive side. I'd say it's a bit more weird. I'd say it is strange and moving and vulnerable writing so yeah, we yeah, so we do books of poetry, fiction, and like novellas and short story collections.

Tamara Thompson: So, yeah so, why did you like, why does the press publish that kind of content? Is just that just the stuff that you enjoy. Is that the stuff that people enjoy editing?

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, I feel like, I had a hard time describing, like what it was that Metatron looked for in writing for a long time, and I still somewhat struggle to but I think it's-it's writing that speaks to like the here and now, and is I like to think of the books as being reflective specifically of the time and place that we find ourselves in right now cause I've always fantasized about someone in like a hundred years somehow stumbling upon like our catalog, and being like, oh, wow! Like this is this is what people were thinking and feeling in, you know 2024 or what within the last ten years of that. So yeah, it's work that I feel is reflective of our time and is saying something important. I've I guess, I'm the managing editor and I have you know, a lot of say, in-in what Metatron publishes, but we've also worked with like a lot of temporary editors and people that have come and gone from the press and help shape the direction of the books that we published within that timeframe. Which I also like I like that Metatron is, has allowed for certain editorial apprenticeship because at the same time, as there's a bunch of emerging writers that need support and platforms to be published. There's also a bunch of emerging editors that need a chance to learn and to you know engage with work and-and kind of distinguish their curatorial eye. So I've been very happy that Metatron has also been able to be a place that that editors can kind of come and experiment a bit and get some experience in the field, because I would have loved to have that kind of opportunity

when I was a you know, an up and coming publish-does it like, well, yeah, publisher, I guess up and coming publisher, or to be, I mean I don't know how to, that aspiring publisher. There it is.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I totally understand, wanting to give voices to others. But even just the opportunities to people who do good work. It's just like, well, you need five years of editing experience, but there's nowhere to get even the first two years of editing experience.

Ashley Opheim: That's it! Totally.

Tamara Thompson: I love that you do that.

Ashley Opheim: Well, and that's like what I like, I mentioned like how I wanted to get into publishing when I graduated, and I reached out to like every publishing press on the eastern-east side of Canada, and I was shocked that, like no one even like responded to like to thank me for my application. You know what I mean like-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, just not even-

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, and not even-

Tamara Thompson: An acknowledgement.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, not even a like, it's like an automatic sort of copy and paste situation. And I like, I should have known better, like I think that there were like red flags early, like sort of like this industry is a bit toxic, but I didn't, I don't know, I kind of just use that as fuel as fire to like, you know to-to create something I think that, like one of my big motivations, was sort of like spite to be completely honest, because I felt so shut out. And I, yeah, and-and so like with that said, like, I do everything I can to like, get back to people, and you know I'm very rarely in a position that I can hire people unfortunately, even though that's my dream. But I at least try to get back to people and thank them for like wanting to be involved with the press cause that's an honor, you know, like that's, I think it is.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think so, too. And like it's, it's one of those things as well that I try and tell my students I'm like, just keep pushing and going out there, especially with the writers. I'm just like there are so many decisions that go into accepting or rejecting a work like it's not just like, oh, well, this isn't good, throws in the trash! No, sometimes someone might like your work. They still have to say no, because they can't publish it that year, because, like they already had something very similar. So, they need to look for something different, right? Or maybe thy board of people, the one person who really liked it couldn't convince the Board of People that year, you know, and it's like there's so many things that go into rejection. And I'm like, it's not just "you is bad", you know. And I think the same thing goes with like a lot of job things it's just like, because there's so few opportunities like it could feel like everyone's against you. But it's also like the there's just not a lot of money in this, you know, like I would love to hire people or have even interns on. But like, I'm just so busy, I it's one of those things where I

just wouldn't be able to dedicate the time to like to have even just like an intern like. It's just one of those things, and I don't have the money.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like you know, and it's just so frustrating that, like you're stuck in that cycle of you know, I can't pay someone to help me work on this, but I also don't even have the time to do that, and-

Ashley Opheim: And I mean, you, one hundred percent understand it. It's yeah, it's really difficult to, yeah, to just keep a project going, let alone, like, grow it. I mean, not everyone necessarily wants to grow a project, you know, and I think that's sort of the beautiful thing about small press and like chapbook culture is sort of, we don't need to like lean into like the idea of mass production like we honor things because they're small and they're special. And they're experimental and there's not a lot of pressure on them, and that lack of pressure makes it, makes it more interesting, like, I think that the market pressure on literature is it like, I mean, a lot of there's a lot of amazing work that gets published as be real, but like I think it does squeeze, especially in the world of poetry. I think it squeezes something out of it. The poetry isn't even that, like, marketable anyways or popular of a genre. So maybe I don't mean that it for poetry, but I think my point is more that I just find the work I find in, the small press world and chapbook cultures just so potent and interesting. You know, and different than what you would find on like the shelf at Indigo.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, at the especially, in the poetry department. I don't know if you've been to Indigo's Poetry Department recently, but it's looking pretty sparse.

Ashley Opheim: Is it bad?

Tamara Thompson: I was in there-

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, it's always been bad.

Tamara Thompson: And I was like, what is this? There's nothing there's literally not like one Canadian poet there that I was like, yeah, by this book there was nothing.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I got this damn gift card, and you got nothing for me, you know.

Ashley Opheim: That's so frustrating.

Tamara Thompson: You're-

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, I know.

Tamara Thompson: You're the one book or writing person. So, everyone gives you an Indigos like gift card. And you're like, thank you I can get book now.

Ashley Opheim: (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: Then you go to the store you're like there's nothing here.

Ashley Opheim: I know; it's tough. Yeah, I like, I've tried really hard for a long time to get our books into Indigo, because not because it's important to me personally, but I knew it was like important to-to the people I was working with some of them. I think that's changed a lot lately, because I mean I shouldn't say too much, because this is on the record but-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And I know I know what you're saying, yeah.

Ashley Opheim: It's maybe not the kind of place I like am ecstatic that our books are in, I'll say that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's been, we can talk more about that later.

Ashley Opheim: Awesome.

(Both laugh.)

Tamara Thompson: So, I'm gonna just keep us moving along here cause I am interested in how you actually like make the books so like what your process is like from like a little bit to submission to actually like making the books. I'm interested in how the process is for you guys.

Ashley Opheim: Okay, so once a book is accepted for publication, we will take it over to usually a Google doc and spend a couple of months editing kind of going back and forth and shaping the book so that we can then move into pre-press, which is me laying out the books on InDesign but I will say simultaneously, while we're doing editing I schedule a meeting with the author, and we talk about book cover ideas, and I have them put together a mood board sort of visual ideas that they kind of have for their book or book covers they like, colors they like and then from there we try to pair them with an artist. If they don't already have an artist in mind that they want to work with and we'll like commission, an artist to create a book cover and go through that process. So yeah, I guess I wish that I actually printed our own books, but I just never did that, so I will prepare like the book files, and then send them off to get printed. But I've always worked with Quebec based printers like when I first started it was like a local print shop downtown and then I worked with a couple of other local Montreal based printers, small. And finally, I ended up I do most of the printing with Gauvin, which is in Gatineau, Quebec now and they're great because we don't do this so much anymore, because the

cost of these things have gone up so much. But I'm not sure if you've seen some of our books, but I love working with foils like-like metallics and kind of things that pop. And so, they were one of the only places I found locally that kind of did that sort of production but yeah. I yeah, so I wish that we printed them. But yeah, that was just never anything I-I did. But as soon as the books are printed, they get back. They come back to Montreal, and then I for a long, long time was just shipping them out like any orders we had I would just ship out myself or drop them off to stores and yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I will say that as someone who does print their own pages, it is one of the most frustrating things in the world. Because you just are basically like for the first, like couple of attempts, you're just wasting paper and ink because-

Ashley Opheim: (Laughs.)

Tamara Thompson: Basically, the printer is throwing a fit every single so like don't get me wrong I love making my own books, but there are definitely setbacks. Where I'm like that's a lot of money that just got eaten up.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, that took me a lot.

Tamara Thompson: Thanks printer.

Ashley Opheim: And yeah, printers, but I have some good friends here named, they run a art book publisher called Asterism books and they've always been super supportive and amazing, and Harley, their founder, was always like hey, Ashley like, come print, come, learn how to use our printers cause they have a ton of printers. And I just it just wasn't something I specifically ever was-was drawn to but maybe in the future I will play with-with printmaking and that stuff. But yeah, that hasn't been my-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, like depending on the project kind of deal.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I get that as someone again who does all of the printing themselves, it does allow me to do like very specific like special things. Like I had my designer she hand-carved like rubber stamps for me to use for the covers, so like I literally had-

Ashley Opheim: Amazing.

Tamara Thompson: Pardon?

Ashley Opheim: What's the name of your press?

Tamara Thompson: Whispering Wick Chapbook Press.

Ashley Opheim: Nice. Okay, I'm gonna look it up after our chat.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, thank you. I-I hope you like it. We have kind of like an old film noir Hollywood kind of vibe to us because we kinda, it was one of those things where I didn't wanna like specifically publish anything in particular. And the name of the press is after a film noir, called whispering cities. So, I was like, why don't we just like do that? For, like our aesthetic? And I 'cause I love, I love like old Hollywood movies and stuff. Let's try it.

Ashley Opheim: For sure.

Tamara Thompson: Especially the actresses who are finally getting some of their dues as they should.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, no, it's so good. And it's so nice to have like, I don't know, it's fun to develop a press, and like, I don't like to call it a brand, but, like you know, like the visual identity of a press like is so personal. But it's still so organic like, you know what I mean like, I'm sure-

Tamara Thompson: I call it our like aesthetic, because I have, like no other term to like to use it-

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Use what we do. So just like it's our aesthetic, I guess.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah. yeah, it's fair to talk about those things, but I don't know. I've also, I've always been really interested in but like aesthetics and how things look, and I think it was really important for me to that our books looked, I don't know like different than what I was seeing on the shelves of like a typical CanLit book, you know, like a sort of photograph and a stock font. But yeah, I just wanted to do something different that was gonna like, pop out. And yeah, sort of work with artists I knew to yeah, to put together the books and yeah, like, when you see all of the Metatron books together, they-they all like look like a family but they're also just like so different, because each one is totally just like its own little world, you know, like the cover was sort of steered by the author and there's a lot of like love and labor that went into to each one, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Ashley Opheim: They wouldn't like hand, even if they weren't hand printed. I still feel like each book just has so much like labor and love, in in each one.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, all of our books are like, so different visually, like, definitely, the hand card stamps look like they were done in the same season because they were. But like a lot of them, are just like so visually different. And I love the amount of play that we get to do with our covers like. That's one of the things I always talked with my like layout and designer, and also technically proofreader, Grace Regan. I always like talk with her about stuff, and she always comes up with like these amazingly cool ideas. But like for us, like we do our quote,

unquote, like marketing and design. It's mostly just when we wanna do something fun, cause I'm not gonna do marketing or design. If it's not fun-

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, like.

Tamara Thompson: Like, especially marketing-like design. Yeah, sure, I'll do the grunt like work and stuff like that. Cause like, it's important.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Grace handles like a lot of that because she loves it and just like so much of like marketing is just like stuff that I want to do, because it's fun, like one of my favorites like marketing things we do is like me making the books. Like I do like a little like making video or I do like we do author playlists. So, like, what was the author listening to at the time where there's specific songs that go with specific poems kind of thing. And like, that's just something we do that's technically like, quote unquote marketing but it's also just kind of fun, you know.

Ashley Opheim: For sure, and I think that's another beautiful thing is like, I think, oftentimes we only ever see the end product of something. But there really is so much interesting stuff that happens within the process of making that thing. And it's so exciting to me that we live in a time with the best of the-the best side of social media is that we kind of get to see this behind the scenes look into the way people are creating things. And you know the way I really think, see publishers is being in the art of creating meaning and of honoring hope and inspiration in the world and yeah, I think, seeing how people do, it is actually really interesting. And I'm excited to hear that you've that you do that and I'll definitely be giving you guys follow I love that kind of stuff. Yeah, we've, I think that you know, being publishers or small press editors on-at the brink of you know, the digital age comes with a lot of interesting opportunity I think that the Internet makes it so that we're yeah, we can kind of do our own thing. And we don't really follow in the steps of-of how publishing happened before us. And you can create your own communities, you can have, like your own access to readers through social media, and that to me is very exciting when people can come together despite geological differences, which is especially relevant in a place like Canada which is so vast and you know, there's so many writers that perhaps don't live in these main cities like Toronto and Montreal or Vancouver, where there are-

Tamara Thompson: Yup.

Ashley Opheim: These communities. So, you know, I think that we should be, and we are very critical of technology and the Internet in so many ways. But at the same time there's been a lot of good things for small press publishing and indie authors kind of wrapped up in in the evolution of technology.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think we can be critical of it will also like understanding some of the positives that it's given us at the same time.



Ashley Opheim: For sure.

Tamara Thompson: 'Cause I totally understand the kind of like gloom with some of-the technological stuff that's happening recently especially, but like, it's also done a lot of like really cool stuff for us as well, especially like again, as you were saying in Canada that it allows us like even us right now, like you're in Montreal, and I'm in like Peterborough. You know, we're able to meet because of the Internet and this technology.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, exactly. And yeah, it's hard to make a name for yourself in CanLit especially. I think it seems to me that so much review, so many review magazines, and the sort of infrastructure we had for engaging with Indie lit has sort of dissolved. And I think it's yeah, so it's we're kind of on our own, I think when we wanna market things, unless you're with a publisher that has resources. But yeah, all to sort of echo what you're saying I think the Internet has a lot of-has had and will probably continue to ha provide a lot of opportunities for writers.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I'm gonna talk a little bit about the press just a tad more. And then I'm gonna ask like some of my-like more author/poet kind of questions.

Ashley Opheim: Okay.

Tamara Thompson: But before that you were talking a little bit about how the press makes decisions. But could you go into like just a little bit more detail. Is it kind of like a board? Or are you like, the central person? And like people kind of like work with you like, how does that-

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Work on like that level?

Ashley Opheim: So, the press has mostly always been run by me, mainly. Which is mainly due to the fact that I've never been able to get substantial enough funding where I'm able to hire someone. With that, said I mentioned earlier on how there will be certain editors that come on for a year or two. That sort of come and help make editorial decisions at the press. But yeah, mostly I've never although I'm in at this ten-year juncture I'm in the process of registering Metatron as a nonprofit but it took me a long time to get there, so.

Tamara Thompson: Wow.

Ashley Opheim: Most of the yeah, I will say, like most of the decisions have been made by me. But I will say that I really try to follow the pulse and the beat of the community, and the people that are in the orbit, and that like, make Metatron like what it is. So, I don't take making decisions like lightly, and you know I will try to do my best, but I think I feel kind of uncomfortable saying that I'm the only one that makes decisions at the press, mostly because I think in theory, I deeply want Metatron to be like a community space. And I've always considered it to be that. Which is why I have decided that the nonprofit direction is the way to go. Because, yeah, then people can help shape it even more, you know,

and hopefully it will open up more funding opportunities for us that we currently don't have access to.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Good for you, for going for that cause that is not easy.

Ashley Opheim: I know, I'm a little scared.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I've looked into it before. And I'm like, I-I-I don't make any profit from what I'm doing. It all goes back right into the press but actually getting like the title, and like being approved and everything. I looked at it and went aaaa...

Ashley Opheim: It's daunting.

Tamara Thompson: Like, not now.

Ashley Opheim: That's why I say, I'm in the process cause I'm currently trying to like, write a mission statement and all that. But I'm not... yeah, it's hard to establish things, you know, in in Canada, and I guess anywhere. But it's no matter what direction you choose especially in the arts it's gonna be difficult to sustain it. And I think that's probably a story that we all kind of share. We all do this work because it's important to us and there, there's something magical about literature in that sense. Because yeah, we're not doing it for the money. So, and that's a rare thing to come across these days in this capitalist world.

Tamara Thompson: So, talking I guess a little bit about the money, because you do have to sell these books and get them into people's hands. That's kind of the idea, not necessarily making like a ton of profit, but more just getting like these lovely little things out there. Where do you sell your books? And how are they sold? Because I know some people do markets. I know some people do online. What do you guys do?

Ashley Opheim: It's evolved over the years. So, when we first started, I was working with local bookstores and selling our books online. And over the years we've done book fairs in Toronto, Montreal, New York and Sappy fest first in Sackville New Brunswick, and how else do we get books out there, launches book events, readings and as of last year Metatron has distribution now so, we have people that are helping us get our books out into more bookstores and more readers. In Canada we're with University of Toronto Press distribution. In the states we are with a new indie that sort of emerged after the dissolving of small press distribution or the abrupt end of small press distribution, I should say, called Asterism, which are, they're very awesome. And then in this UK with Antenna books.

Tamara Thompson: Cool for you for being able to find people who can actually distribute, because that's very hard.

Ashley Opheim: It's super hard. And it's like, not only is it hard in the sense of getting someone to be interested in the project, but also there's a whole world called metadata.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Ashley Opheim: Which I had to teach myself about, because again, I didn't have the money to-to pay someone to do it. So, I taught myself how to do this metadata, which is pretty much like the technical language that books need to exist in systems, online in like libraries and bookstores and distributors. So, in order to get distribution, I had to like, learn metadata, which was like my pandemic project that I did very boring. I don't recommend it.

Tamara Thompson: That is totally fair.

Ashley Opheim: But yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Necessary Evil kind of.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, that's the thing it's like, if you want, I kind of miss when things were at the beginning of the process like easy. And there weren't-there wasn't so much expectation and pressure, not only from like the public, but, like myself, too, like, you know, wanting to like grow things and get better, and but it is, I miss the sort of casualness of the way things felt at the beginning of the press. If you know what I mean, I know that you're.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Ashley Opheim: Long you've have-have had your press for, but those first like two, three years. It's like, you know what I mean. It's so special and precious, and it's really nice to create without pressure.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, we've been-so, we started in 2020. So, we're almost to five years now, which is crazy to me because-

Ashley Opheim: Like so much, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What is time? What happened?

Ashley Opheim: I know, especially in those-those specific years during the pandemic, where time I don't know what happened to time there.

Tamara Thompson: It-it evaded me, and I'm like, oh I turn around and five years later what happened again.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So yeah, it's one of those things. Oh yeah, I, it's no one's putting the pressure on me, but I want to do a good job.

Ashley Opheim: That's why I specifically was self-inflicted pressure. Because yeah, you wanna do a good job. And you know, we all wanna grow and learn and get better at what it is we're doing, and we will. And you-you know what I mean.

(Technical issues occurred.)

Ashley Opheim: I got into writing in high school. I was lucky enough to go to a high school that had a poetry class, and I happen to have a really great teacher who introduced me to a lot of great poets, and I started writing poems in high school. But I was always really fascinated by reading and writing and it would, just wasn't until high school that I realized that you could actually like, spend your life working on a craft such as poetry.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fair, I, I'd always done like storytelling because my reading and writing skills weren't fantastic, so I always did storytelling. And then, when I got better in high school, I had, like a writer's craft prof and I was like, oh, wait! I don't want to do anything else.

Ashley Opheim: (Laughs.)

Tamara Thompson: Maybe I should-maybe I should do this.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You're in like grade twelve, and you're like, I don't know what I'm doing. I don't want to do anything else like I have to go to school. And so, I actually ended up taking a year off to be able to find a program that was like more focused on creative writing. And I actually found Sheridan's Creative Writing and Publishing program which had just started like we were the first people to go through-

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: The program. So, like, I was just like, hmm, maybe I should do something at school that I genuinely, really like doing. Instead of, you know going into business.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, exactly. But yeah, I think I will just say I remember the first time I shared a poem with my class in yeah, in workshop and the teacher asked who wanted to share a piece, and I had just written a poem, and I'd gone up and I read it, and I remember I sat down at my desk after I read it, and I burst into tears because I didn't realize how vulnerable and cathartic it was to share things that you know I think that what poetry gets to is sort of at least with my poetry I talk about-I try to talk about the hard things that are that we often don't say, and so yeah, I think I was really moved by that sort of emotional experience I had of sharing something with myself, with a group of people. And I think that's sort of even though, I cried I was sort of in love at the same time.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Lots of overwhelming feelings were happening all at once, and they weren't necessarily all bad. They were just a lot.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, I was like, what is that? What is that world?

Tamara Thompson: No, I-I totally understand. So, have you published chapbooks of your work? Like of your own work.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, my first collection called; *I am here* was a chapbook.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, so why did you choose to publish your work as a chapbook? Because it is a choice to do it other than like, maybe saving and whatever. So, I'm interested in, why you made that choice for yourself and that specific piece.

Ashley Opheim: I think it was reflective of the amount of work that I had. So, I had like a short I had like a bunch of poems I'd written that I wanted to put out and because there was nowhere, I could publish it I that's why, you know, that's actually like-I guess I will say part of starting Metatron was also for myself, in a way, because I also wanted to publish my work, and I wanted publishing opportunities, and instead of waiting for other people to give me those opportunities, I was like, well, I could just create them myself, I think. Metatron, like my chapbook was one of the original six that would be published originally that were published, and I think it should be actually, I should have said this earlier. I often use the expression we when I talk about Metatron, when I really just mean I, but I think of myself as multiple people when it comes to running the press so that's why I use the term we.

Tamara Thompson: Well, I mean, the other thing, too, is this is that you might be doing a lot of the stuff but that doesn't mean that you aren't interacting with like other people. So, I understand the "we" idea; it's like you might be spearheading it but like there's still other people who are a part of the process. So, like I, I get it.

Ashley Opheim: Okay, okay, good. I just wanted to-to check in.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, no, totally makes sense to me. So, I know that you're like super duper, busy with like so many other things, because everybody always is, because I don't think I know one person in publishing who isn't doing like many things. But would you ever make a chapbook again with your own press, or maybe with someone else? Would that be something that you'd ever be interested in doing?

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, absolutely. I would love to do it, yeah; I would like to work with chapbooks again. But again, I will say that I think, I've sort of transitioned my mind into seeing the credibility of digital publications when it comes to some publishing decisions. And I will say it's ultimately financial. It's a lot to manage projects, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Ashely Opheim: I think you know this. I, after spending a year in publishing I feel like I want to try to transition into something that's a bit easier if it makes sense. I feel like it's been an uphill battle, and I thought my efforts would provide-come would produce different results. I guess I will say, I know that I'm not answering your question directly. I'm 100% like down to publish and do projects and collaborations it's just like, is there funding for that cause I'm not in a place right now where I can take on like personal financial risk to publish things, you know what I mean.

Tamara Thompson: No, I-I totally get it. You have only so much money, and only so much time to be able to do things, and sometimes time is literally money, because you have to work like another job, or something so like, I totally understand that like, I would love to do this project, but I also like, what place am I in, and am I in a place where I can do that? Am I in a place where I'm getting paid like so, I totally understand what you're trying to illustrate.

Ashley Opheim: And I-

Tamara Thompson: It makes a lot of sense.

Ashley Opheim: I appreciate you saying that yeah, cause it's also time that you spend, too, you know, like.

Tamara Thompson: Yup.

Ashley Opheim: And that's and that's okay. And a lot of the work that people do in small presses unpaid. And that's great but I think I would like to see more chapbook presses-like I wanna see more presses in Canada doing like zines and chapbooks, and I know that there is a culture of it, but it would be great if there was like a place that existed where you could like find them all in one place.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Ashley Opheim: Oh, I don't think there's enough publishing opportunities for people. Do you feel like there are?

Tamara Thompson: Well, I think the thing is, this is, people don't know about those opportunities. There are opportunities, but you have to go out and find them, and really look and dig, or like, know somebody who knows of an opportunity, or know somebody who runs this press, who's doing this submit thing so you can do it then and there, right like it is a lot of stumbling upon stuff on like Instagram. And you're just like I didn't even know this like magazine existed. They're really cool.

Ashley Opheim: Go.

Tamara Thompson: You know, like. So, it's really hard to even just find the people who are giving the opportunities, let alone find the opportunities.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, that's it.

Tamara Thompson: What I mean. So, like, it's-it's really difficult. And again, not everybody is in a place where they can have their work published for nothing, right? Maybe they're trying to get a grant, and they need to have like a paid publishing credit, and they need two of them, right?

Ashley Opheim: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: And it's like I have this work which I would love to publish with these people. But if I'm not even getting paid like five dollars. It won't count for this grant thing that I want to try and do. I need-

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: To focus my energy elsewhere. And like, it's great that we have this like more gift, exchange economy and chapbooks and zines, and that we have people, just creating things for the sake of creating things.

Ashley Opheim: Hmm.

Tamara Thompson: But it's also tough times out there, like it is expensive to live in Canada more so than-

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Before, and so like-

Ashley Opheim: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: You have to recognize that not everybody's in the same place as like you are, or other people have to realize that you're not in the same place as maybe they are, right.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Because it's not that you maybe don't want to do that opportunity, or you don't want to be published with that person. It's just not feasible at the moment, right?

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And that's okay.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It's not a slight against anybody. It's just an unfortunate fact.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah. Yeah. That's very well said.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you. I've thought a lot about it.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, no, it's refreshing to hear someone like articulate things that things that, I feel like a lot of people don't talk about this stuff in can let. So, it's refreshing to hear someone else talk about it.

Tamara Thompson: Well, I think it's because it's like Canadian literature, because, like, there's so little Canadian presses and so few Canadians who actually get picked up outside of Canada; like, it's seen as, like, this great opportunity, which sometimes it is. And that's amazing that we have

those opportunities. But there's not enough money sometimes. There's sometimes just not enough resources.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, and also like the cultural value. Like, I will say, I think and different and other countries, it's-it's-it's kind of it's different, I think, like the average person in Canada doesn't care about literature, which is, which is fine, but I will say, like, I thought this was normal until I traveled to Argentina in 2014.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Ashley Opheim: I was invited to as a poet to represent Canada at this international poetry festival. The person had discovered me online that invited me. But I will say like there were so many more chapbook presses. There were so many like, there's so many people the way that I was treated like in public, like people are very friendly in Argentina, and people would ask like what I'm doing there. And when I explained to them that I was a poet they would be like, they would treat me with so much like grace and respect like. I was so used to admitting that I was a poet in Canada, and kind of, you know, someone like being confused, or like rolling their eyes at me or something. And you know what I mean, I think it's just like the culture in Canada. It's like we haven't been through enough as a country, because we're so young that we don't actually understand the cultural value of-of poetry in this country as opposed to places that have been through very difficult times who have seen how poets are the ones that create meaning and keep stories, and the most you know what I mean?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, valuing our artists. We don't do it the way we should.

Ashley Opheim: It, yeah and I, I think about that a lot, because there's a lot of apathy towards artists in Canada and I wonder about that a lot.

Tamara Thompson: Well, I think sometimes Canadians do not like-I think Canadians understand that art is important, but not our own art, and should be fair to like a lot of Canadians our school systems do not teach it, like most of the time, unless you are in like grad school or your undergraduate degree, and your specific undergraduate degree has like something that can like be an offset of Canada like. So, you're doing English, you can do an English like Canadian literature course, right? Like, if you're not, those are the areas where Canadians aren't getting their Canadian arts education.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Very small specific pockets of our society, and it's like I've talked to people before, and it's like, if you go to Poland, and the children are being taught a Polish poet. It is not weird.

Ashley Opheim: Right.

Tamara Thompson: It is expected, it is important, and it is seen as good. But in Canada it's almost just like, well, was that Canadian poet actually important? And it's like oh my God.



Ashley Opheim: Right. That's-that's exactly.

Tamara Thompson: And like, I, I think that Canadian literature is very important to, like, how we view ourselves and all this stuff, and we like to say that a lot which I think to a degree, it is true but like I think, just Canadians don't know enough about their own-

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: To value it. You know they don't know like it's one of those things where, like, I even introduce my students to like-I the course I teach and creative writing, we read Jordan Abel, we read Souvankham Thammavongsa. We do also read like Tony Morrison's *Song of Solomon* but like-

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: We try to pick books that are important that the children should read, because if we don't show it to them here, they won't read it anywhere else right.

Ashley Opheim: For sure.

Tamara Thompson: And I don't know. It's a little disheartening that it has to happen in, like, university, and the prof has to think of it, or it has to literally be a very specific course.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You know.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, like.

Tamara Thompson: Come on. We have so many good things going on here, and almost no one knows about it from like our Indigenous literatures getting going places finally, it's amazing and you know.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, I feel like we lack like a media support infrastructure that like actually is invested in talking about small press. And what's going on, like profiling people that are running small presses. Because otherwise, how are we gonna learn about each other? We can't depend on the algorithm to like, bring content our way always, especially I think it's getting worse and worse, too.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, and we can't rely on the CBC for everything all the time, like.

Ashley Opheim: So much falls through. And like they're still mostly just covering like they're not really covering like the true indies, like I think Indie gets thrown around a lot, and it's kind of confusing. But you know what I mean.

Tamara Thompson: No, I totally get it.

Ashley Opheim: Start talking about us. You know, we need, we need like systems that are yeah, we-we just need better outlets, I guess. So, we can know what's going on in Canada. And so, the so Canadians know of all the cool work that's being done in this country.

Tamara Thompson: And again, it, it shouldn't be weird that Canadian children know something about their artists; like, yeah, they know about the group of seven, you know. But like it's very limited of what they know about our Canadian artists just in general, just visual artists to not even just like literary, you know. And so, I'm just sitting there and I'm just like, I think we need to upgrade some of these systems, and they slowly are like grade eleven is indigenous literature now, which is good. But it's I'm also sitting there and I'm just like, you know maybe we should expand some of the things that the kids are reading.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: 'Cause if you tell it to them young, they're going to see it as important. And Ca-because it is right, and it'll be, you know.

Ashley Opheim: That's I don't know.

Tamara Thompson: I don't have many feelings on this.

Ashley Opheim: I wouldn't have gone down the path that I went down in my life if I wouldn't have met that one teacher who introduced me to so much good literature; you know I really think my life would have been different. So, you know, the work of-of teachers who are putting, you know, really great Canadian books into to-to student's hands is not to be undermined like that is very, very powerful and important work.

Tamara Thompson: On every level, too, not just like, not just in the undergrad or graduate or PhD.

Ashley Opheim: For sure.

Tamara Thompson: At all of those levels it can be formative and important.

Ashley Opheim: For sure.

Tamara Thompson: People are like. The children don't need to know poetry. I'm like the children, especially.

Ashley Opheim: Fore sure.

Tamara Thompson: Who need to read poetry because the way that they've been teaching like third graders. Poetry is barbaric, like everyone's scared of poetry, when I-

Ashley Opheim: That's right.

Tamara Thompson: Teaching the poetry, and I'm like, no poetry is fun.

Ashley Opheim: Where there's no rules right? And like that's exciting for kids to hear like-

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Ashley Opheim: I mean, you can learn the poetry where there's rules, and there's rhyming schemes. But ultimately poetry is a place for freedom and- and imagination. And I think kids need that, I mean kids have access to that but they deserve that kind of joy in their education. Poetry at its best is fun. And-and yeah, like personally gratifying to-to engage with. You, learn how to-to speak out, you learn how to find your voice. You know how you think and feel about the world. These are essential skills that kids like need access to.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, like you're giving basically a child creative freedom. That's not a bad thing.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

(Both laugh.)

Tamara Thompson: Anyway.

Ashley Opheim: Period.

Tamara Thompson: Just like, keep-keep chugging along here. But so, this next question you can say whatever you're comfortable with saying and interpret however you desire. But what are some challenges you faced as an author and like poet, over the years? Like, we kind of touched about it, and our long discussion. But I'm gonna ask the question still, directly.

Ashley Opheim: I think for me, the one of the main struggles that I came across when I was releasing my second collection, which was kind of my first collection ambient technology was that I was not in the headspace of wanting attention like I didn't want to promote myself, and I did not want to take up space online, and the release of my book kind of coincided with more of a introverted period of my life. And so, promoting the book became very difficult, because I, because lots of people that work with small press like there aren't a whole lot of resources. A lot of the pressure does fall on the author to promote. And you know, I think a lot of us struggle with being and feeling seen, and especially when it comes to poetry which can be quite vulnerable in a lot of ways so yeah, I will just add that I guess there was the struggle of not wanting to self-promote when I needed to self-promote.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I hate the mentality that a lot of presses have of like you have to sell the author like everything about them to make the public be interested in it, and it's like, no, you don't have to share everything. And I feel like there's because of like the influencer kind of way of like being popular and like, you know, you don't need a lot of resources necessarily, but you need to give so much of your yourself away and I don't think that publishers should be saying, hh, you need to do all

these things, and it's like I like going to the grocery store and nobody knowing who I am. I like that part of my life.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You know?

Ashley Opheim: Like, I think, going through that, though, really helped me in my relations with, like the authors that I end up working with, because-

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Ashley Opheim: I really try to create like a nice experience for people, and I will ask them, like what their capabilities are, and what their desires are, and try to meet them like on their level of what they want, as opposed to what it is that like, I want you know what I mean. But I think being a writer has sort of given me an interesting angle as an editor, because I kind of get to see things from both sides, I think.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I one hundred percent agree. Because sometimes you're just like, oh, why can't this person do that thing? And then you're like, no, I also probably wouldn't want to do that I understand, okay.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, we have to, we have to be understanding and empathetic with each other, and maybe like a bigger press. There's no space for that. So? Yeah, I don't know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's-it's important to be able to respect people's privacy in an age where it can be so easily lost, and people's lives can be just ruined with like a tweet, even if it's not real. So it's like I'd like, why make someone's life more stressful in an age that is already very stressful. Yeah, like, you know.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Not trying to make it more stress.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: Okay. So, I also have, like a question that kind of relates to challenges but a little bit more in relation to the press. But what are some challenges that the press has faced over the years?

Ashley Opheim: Well, we just already talked about financial like getting-getting grants. Inconsistent funding, losing momentum because of that, other core challenges have been distribution like, how-how the books are getting out into the world, how are like people finding the press? How do you make a name for yourself and yeah. And there's been like interpersonal things, too, because I've worked with so many people. So of course, things have come up not necessarily specifically with me and other people, but in the community. I think poets and writers are very much, much at the heart of-of life and politics and ideas, and thinking, and there's been some really great dialogues and learning lessons for all of us who have been

paying attention and I think learning and growing with the community and trying to be as ethical as possible and do right by the community, has been and continues to be, a challenge. That is a good challenge, like I-I like.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Ashley Opheim: I like trying to do things differently and try to run the press in such a way that my community members would be like, and-and the poets and writers I work with would be, would be proud to be published with. I think we're kind of shifting away from like an era of business as-usual, I think there's higher expectations on an arts organizations and people organizing things to-to have like healthy and good and fair labor practices, and all the good stuff, you know, I think.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, I think it's a yeah, that's kind of a thing that's shaped the last decade of our life. I think we've made a lot of progress in our, I know, I'm thinking, and you know there's been lots of movements that we've all gone through together. And how do we implement those into our art, and into the way we work with one another.

Tamara Thompson: Other. Yeah, I-I totally understand. So, what-so, we've kind of been talking about this, probably like the whole time. And again, I'm still gonna ask a little bit more directly. But what does this kind of publishing like? What has it taught you.

Ashley Opheim: that's such a big question. (Both laugh.) I've, I mean, I've learned so much in this very moment. In my thinking I feel like publishing has taught me that it's-it's publishing is difficult work. And publishing is also incredibly important. I think that publishing is where we can express some of the greatest rights we have, which is freedom of expression. And it gives us access to so many different alternative ways of thinking and being and I think we live in a very politically charged time, where-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Ashley Opheim: Certain people would have certain voices silenced if they could. And lots of those voices are voices that I'm interested in publishing. So, it's almost emotional for me to talk about it, because there is so much resistance towards people being free to express themselves. And so, I think about that, I think about the importance of publishing, but also the-the difficulty of it. And I think what I've learned is I don't know if it's like a vocation that I'll spend my whole life doing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Ashley Opheim: I mean, we'll see like I've I'm kind of curious about other, what's the right word for it? Other industries, I guess.

Tamara Thompson: Other avenues, that, like.

Ashley Opheim: Other avenues. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Ashley Opheim: I feel like I've done what I could. I don't know how much more I have to give.

Tamara Thompson: What's fair. So why do you think a lot of small presses and micro presses like have to close up shop because it is a, unfortunate but true fact that a lot of presses do have to close up shop, and how you kept like fun going cause it's hard?

Ashley Opheim: I know. It has been the hardest thing I've ever done. Like keeping that, keeping Metatron alive. I've had to make a lot of personal sacrifices, to do that in terms of just not-because it takes so much time to run the press right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Ashley Opheim: There isn't a whole lot of money. So, I've had to. Yeah. So, I've had to sort of accept a life of precarity which I've happily done, because I love what I do, and the work is very valuable. But to be completely honest with you, I think one of the reasons that, like so many presses don't make it past like the five-year mark, or don't continue isn't because of like lack of passion or lack of people that want to do that. I think it's truly the way that our grant systems are organized. And I have done like a lot of personal research behind the scenes in Canada Council funding, core grants versus project grants and I think that if they found a way to support-put more money into project grants that we would see a lot more of a healthy literary culture in this country. It's just like there's not too much of the literary funding is going to those sort of stable publishers that have been supported for-for decades through core grants right? And then there's so few emerging publishers that are given access to-to funds. And I will say one more thing, it's not only like it's not only project grants, but like small presses need, they also need additional funds to help them hire people to help them learn how to do metadata, to help them like establish good business practices so that they can, if they want like, grow to the level where they could be getting core grant funding. But I think the problem is that there's not enough resources to help people keep projects alive. It's just temporary, inconsistent funding and it's impossible to grow something sustainable on that kind of funding.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's-it's one of those things where like, sometimes the grants either have really weird specific like requirements that you're like, okay, maybe like-

Ashley Opheim: You gotta jump through the hoops, you know?

Tamara Thompson: Three people could actually apply to this. And but again, only one person would get it, you know, like very specific hoops, or like you didn't write the grant properly, but you didn't know how to write a grant. You know?

Ashley Opheim: So many barriers to access that are so upsetting. And it's yeah, the barriers to access, you have to jump through all these hoops and maybe, perhaps, like smaller, like smaller grants, would also be well welcome, like I mentioned earlier how Metatron was kind of started on, think we got like eight thousand to do like six books, which is like was very exciting and generous at that time, but you know, maybe I just think it's funding. But we're also entering a time where our country is like incredibly in debt, and I don't think it's going to be getting any better for artists in the next decade. Unfortunately.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, we're not exactly in the most stable world climate at the moment.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah. It's hard to know if there's a future.

Tamara Thompson: It definitely can feel that way a lot of the time. Yeah, it, and like, you know, there's a future. But then, also aaaa.

Ashley Opheim: Yes, what kind of future?

Tamara Thompson: Exactly. So again, my question here, we've been like talking a lot about this kind of stuff, but I'm still gonna ask it directly. But why are chapbooks important to you?

Ashley Opheim: Chapbooks are important to me 'cause they are. They represent, are representative of my first relationship to community in literary, in the literary world. They're important to me because they are accessible spaces and they are spaces that honor, experimentation play. And yeah, that's not really a good answer, I feel like all over the place.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, that's a, that's a great answer, like experimentation play where you started. Yeah.

Ashley Opheim: And yeah, I think the ephemeral nature of-of zines and chapbooks is special and unique.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, I love my box of chapbooks and zines I have. There's so many.

Tamara Thompson: I know. So, do you think chapbooks are important to Canadian publishing like, if you think so like, why or why not?

Ashley Opheim: I think, for sure, because I think in a lot of cases lots of emerging writers, first publications will potentially, if not will likely be a chapbook. I think it's pretty common practice for, like a new up and coming writer to-to put out a chapbook whether it's self-published, or with a small press. And I think that chapbook can help create confidence in the writer, and also create access to community and readership which will help further your career. Because, as we know as writers in Canada, community is a really-really important part of-of being a writer and being able to function as a writer in Canada. So, I think

chapbooks, yeah, are such an important space for I'd say, specifically emerging writers, but also not only emerging, but it could also be a space for seasoned authors to do something more experimental and less geared towards the market. So yeah, that's my answer.

Tamara Thompson: So, do you think this type of smaller publishing reflects Canada itself in some way then?

Ashley Opheim: Umm yeah, I think so. I think yeah, I don't know how much I wanna speak to that cause I don't wanna generalize Canadians. But we are a vast diverse bunch and therefore we deserve vast and diverse literature that I think chapbooks help express, because I don't think that we get that much vastness in the sort of popular literature that is propped up by the-the Canadian media. Not to say those books are great, but I will say, like, just, yeah, I think chat books create so much more space for new and different voices to be heard.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's... whenever I ask that question, a lot of people are like, well, first off, what the hell is the Canadian? What the hell is Canada, you know.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It's hard to, like, actually nail down; and like, so I totally understand where you're coming from with it. Because even when I was like trying to like, get this process through, for, like the Ethics Committee, I had to do cause I need to have a certain scope. I couldn't do just like chapbooks in the world 'cause I would be told many times, this is not a PhD. This is a master's; I need to have some sense of like scope.

Ashley Opheim: Right, right.

Tamara Thompson: By but like it's one of those things where, like I had to define what a Canadian was, and I went, oh.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: How do I do that?

Ashley Opheim: I know, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I just did the best I could and asked for help from like my supervisor and stuff. And we're like, yeah, that's-that's what we're going with you know, because it's-it's so hard to be able to even like describe what this place is in a way that actually could like the closer you get to a definition, the further away you get to actually defining the thing you're trying to-to define.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You know. So, it's so hard. It's like that constant push and pull, and especially with something as big of a concept as like Canadian or Canada, so I totally understand.



Ashley Opheim: Yeah, I, like-

Tamara Thompson: The kind of aaa.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, I want to move on just like a little more, because we were talking a bit about like trade publishing and like the smaller scale publishing. And then like the micro kind of stuff that we were talking about. But do you think like what does like, what does this type of smaller scale publishing offer that maybe traditional publishing can't. And maybe, like, what can traditional publishing offer that, like small press publishing can't offer cause like we both have their own things going on right.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah-yeah, so I guess I'll say that I've always considered Metatron to be the sort of stepping stone between chapbook and trade book, because I do kind of try to like play the trade book thing, even though we're still very like micro and community based. So, it's and we don't really have the funding to-to be trade book. So, it's you know, kind of one foot in one foot out. I think that traditional trade back publishing is ideal for writers, because you don't have to do as much work. Which could also be the thing that you don't like, because you have a lot less control over elements when you're working with bigger publishers like, for instance, like the cover of your book, the way it's marketed, the way they describe-like they decide to talk about it, the-the way they decide to frame it the genre they decide to publish it within. These are all things that you sort of let go of when you sign a contract with a larger publisher. And so indie publishing is more of a space for people who are interested in shaping their work, being in community working with others to help shape something that's important to them. So yeah, it totally depends on what you want to do and what your goals are. If your goals are to sell a lot of books and hopefully make a lot of money. Obviously, you're gonna wanna go with a trade book publisher. If your goal is to publish something really, beautifully and carefully, and in relationship with people that are important to you. In a slow process. Then, yeah, maybe a chapbook press or an Indie press might be the route. You wanna take.

Tamara Thompson: I think I-I kind of understand what you're saying, because whispering like does the same thing, because I really hate when like a lot of publishers don't actually like try and walk their authors through the publishing process, because it's a whole new world to them.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Just do this, do that, and go away.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: So when, like we get a new author on, we give them like a letter of agreement, right? Basically, baby's first contract, and we talk them through it. And it's more like, more or less just so that, like they get that experience because contracts are intimidating and scary, and not

everybody has a lawyer friend or the money to hire someone. Look over it or have a friend who's already in publishing that could tell them, yeah, no, that's-that's a bad deal.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, we wanna give a bit of that experience so that if they do get a contract, they kinda know what to look for, and same with like marketing. Most people aren't going to help them market things. So, we give them like a marketing package and be like, this is what we're doing mostly because it's fun.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: this is what we need from you like, I want to give them an experience doing a reading, even if it's just online. And it's a video one like you have to get that experience. Because, like again, we started during the pandemic. So, like, that was the only way we could give that, right.

Ashley Opheim: Hmm.

Tamara Thompson: You know, like you need to have that experience reading your work, because what are the two things that author and poets do? They go do interviews and readings.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, it's like. We are definitely no trade publisher, but we try and give some experience to kind of demystify the process.

Ashley Opheim: And I think it's people like us that also create a lot of value for trade book publishers because you know, we are nourishing and supporting authors that very may well go on to do bigger books in the future. And you know bigger publishers want to see that you've like been published before, like I think it's pretty rare. I mean, I know people that have been published first books with, you know, let's say Penguin, but I'd say that's kind of rare. So, it's I often think that it's the small press people like us that are actually creating and nourishing the culture. And I don't think, I think, that we're doing a lot of the taste making. You know, that-that bigger publishers will eventually capitalize on.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, like it's one of those things where we're the ones who are taking the chances and giving these people like-

Ashley Opheim: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: You know, it's hard to do editing, but let's like go through the process, and we're willing to explain things.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, and taking, we're the ones taking the risks, you know, and-

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Ashley Opheim: That is very valuable. And yeah, I wish there was a little bit more like acknowledgement of that. Because I think yeah, we are small press people are tastemakers in Canada, and I don't think that we get the credit that we deserve.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And like, it's, it's one of those things again, where it's like, I love taking on those like, quote unquote risks, like, you know, like the big publishers aren't gonna take on this?

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Are-are not gonna take on this?

Ashley Opheim: Good.

Tamara Thompson: It's good.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You mean this really cool, experimental, like creative non-fiction thing?

Ashley Opheim: You mean the coolest thing I've read.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, no, like, literally, they're too cowardly to take off.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Because they don't think the public will enjoy it. And then they see the writing skill in that person after it's been like published, and they're like, oh, they might be able to write like a more like approachable subject thing, or whatever, or even not. Maybe there's some magic here, and it's like, yeah, "I has been new" like.

Ashley Opheim: Yes!

Tamara Thompson: You know like, where were you?

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So yeah, I-I definitely understand what you're trying to get at with that one.

Ashely Opheim: (Laughs).

Tamara Thomspson: So, we're ending like, we're getting to the last couple of questions here we only have three more but and they're mostly like just making space for like knowledge and like information and stuff like that. But this next question is, what's something that you wish maybe the public knew about Canadian publishing just something that maybe you're like damn,

I really wish, like the average person would know this about Canadian publishing?

Ashley Opheim: Well, I frequently think about how Canadians actually, to a large degree like fund our literary culture here, like, you know, lots of the things that happen, not to say that all of it, but a lot of it is funded by people. And I think about that a lot, because whenever I get a grant, I'm always so grateful because it's literally just Canadians like making it happen. But I don't think that Canadians ever actually get to like-like, see the fruit of the of that like, I think that there it kind of touches down on what we were talking about earlier, where I feel like there's like this void where like so much good stuff is being created. But there's no cohesive, reliable place that people can go to like discover that stuff. I just think that Canadians are sadly just out of touch with the-the really interesting work that's happening here and yeah, I think I guess I just wish that Canadians knew how much interesting writing was happening in this country, and that there was more engagement and support and love for writers in this country.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, or even if they knew that, like their money was going to like this project or that project like with the actually like knew, and it was talked about and spoken about in a way that they can.

Ashley Opheim: I don't really feel, I feel celebrated by like my community, but like I've never really felt like loved by Canada, and I don't think it's my fault. I think it's just we don't quite have a grasp in this country of like how to hold and cherish and appreciate our artists.

Tamara Thompson: Well, like I'll talk about this a bit later, like before we like in the call, but like one of the things that like I find so surprising is so many of my students come up to me, and they're like, oh, you're a thesis student what are you doing? I'm like chapbooks, and you're like, cool. What's that? And I go, okay.

Ashley Opheim: They don't even know.

Tamara Thompson: We don't even know, and so many of them are so interested in it like they go home, and they make something, and they show me, and they're so proud of themselves. I'm like, that's awesome. And they just like made five or like two or one.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And I'm like they wanna be a part of this community that they didn't even know existed because, like.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, that's it. So many people want to be part of the community. But there's so few spaces that things can actually flow in that way. So, I think a lot of people just end up feeling like under supported, unseen. And that's why I frequently say, I wish we had more support for small press, because I think there's so many amazing people that just deserve to be published. But maybe just haven't found, like the right

people that like, understand what it is that they're trying to do. I believe it exists but yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, not easy, never easy. Okay, so this next question is more just to give space for knowledge, or just the cool stuff in the community. But what's something important that you wish was shared more about D.I.Y. press history? Just about cool things that people have made that were very like ephemeral. Basically, this is just the question that allows you to share some of the cool things that you've seen people making.

Ashley Opheim: Oh, wow! Okay, Oh, there's so much! But...

Tamara Thompson: I know, right?

Ashley Opheim: Ummm, I'll just shout out, there's like a local Montreal based Zine archivist called Archives Montreal, *Archive de Montreal* and I served on their board for a couple of years and got the chance to they have, like an amazing archive library of like Zines, that they have gotten over the years from their expo-they organize *Expozine* in Montreal, and so like through that they have like tons of stuff. And I will just say, being in the presence of that space and all of these boxes of things, and even just opening one or two of them and seeing the diversity of stuff, just it blows your mind because it's just there's so much just explosion of creativity. And it's yeah, I will just specifically say, Archives de Montreal. But other than that, I will say that there was a small press that I loved, that I don't think they're doing anything anymore. But they're called House House Press-

(Technical difficulties occurred.)

Tamara Thompson: That's okay. But yeah, thank you so much for sharing, because, like, the only way I get to find out about so much of this stuff is just by asking people the cool things that they've seen or the cool projects they've worked on, and stuff like that, because unless I'm like cold about someone it's very hard to just like Google this, you know.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Unless you've fallen down like a rabbit hole. It's very hard to find some of this stuff. And like, even in like the academic world. There's basically none. Like I was trying to find any source I could. And I found one from 1992 that was in the Canadian Archives of master's and like PHD's. And it wasn't even really about chapbooks. It was more about religion, and how religion was being like shared at the time, and like purity culture, and like the nineties and stuff. Because, again, still before, like the Internet was common use like, you know what I mean.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like it. It wasn't really even about chapbooks.

Ashley Opheim: yeah, because chapbooks can also. yeah, there's so many like ephemeral objects that can like fall into that as well and is it text

based. And so, I just wanna, I wanna correct the name of the place that I gave you because it's not Archives Montreal. It's actually Arc Montreal. So, ARC MTL, if you find yourself wanting to look further into that project, which is very cool.

Tamara Thompson: Can you spell it again for me.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, it's ARC MTL. And their website is Arc montreal.org like whatever I just said to you dot org.

Tamara Thompson: Okay. Thank you.

Ashley Opheim: They have this cool series that I like called the four-by-four series that they distribute through like old what are those machines called where you used to get, you'd like put a dollar in, and you could get a like a sticker or something come out. What are those?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Ashley Opheim: The vending machine.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, they have, like coin slots.

Ashley Opheim: This little Zine series that they run out of like old vending machines, which is really cool.

Tamara Thompson: That's fantastic.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, my last question here is, what's something important about your history that you wish people knew about, and you can take that wherever you like.

Ashley Opheim: I think, yeah. I think just going back to the idea that if we feel like something is lacking in the world instead of being mad, that it doesn't exist why not just try to build what it is that you think is missing? I think.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Ashley Opheim: One thing about me that's important to know is that's always sort of been what has driven my interest in the project is creating a new culture and a new space for new things to emerge and new ways of doing things. And I only did it because it didn't exist before. So yeah, I think lots of times as artists or as people who are trying to make something of our lives, we go searching for things that already exist, and how we can fit into those things where I think a big important part of my story is you, you also need to insist on-on existing. And you need to create the things that you-you wanna see in the world. And it's not gonna be easy, but-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Ashley Opheim: It is integral that we do this in the world. I believe.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Well, that's a-a really good answer. And that was technically my last question. But do you mind if I ask you one more question.

Ashley Opheim: Sure. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Where did you get the name? Metatron Press? It's really cool, like, where did you like-how did that come to be.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, it is quite a bold name. When Metatron first started there was, there were six of us on the collective, and we, Metatron was like one of the projects, and the other people were kind of working on other projects as well. So that's what we, anyway, it's all to say is, we are originally six people. So, I was trying to think of a name that sort of represented that and I stumbled upon a shape in sacred geometry, which is called Metatron's cube. Which you can look into, but it's a three-dimensional shape that is composed using all of the Platonic solids that exist on earth, and there's five Platonic solids. But so, it came from the shape and sacred geometry but also, I was pleased to discover that Metatron is also a religious figure that exists by name, and ever pretty much every single religious text. And he says, mysterious figure and he in the Torah, for instance, he is considered a scribe to God and he's such a good scribe a-a mortal scribe that he's given archangel status, and he's like the only mortal to be given that. So, I also really liked how Metatron was sort of considered the scribe who, through the art of writing was given like archangel status was, which to me means that he got to like to go to heaven and so, anyways, that's sort of where the Metatron name came from was these two sort of associations.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, well thank you for sharing that cause I was, I was very interested, so I just wanted to know.

Ashley Opheim: Yeah, it sounds sort of like sci-fi. But yeah, also, like, when you're first starting a press, as you know, you just at some point, just need to pick something. You know you can, just you can get like stuck in ideas forever. And at one point I was just like, I think someone told me like, you just need to just settle on a on a name. And so, it was Metatron.

Tamara Thompson: Well, I like it so.

Ashley Opheim: Thank you.

Tamara Thompson: So do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording.

Ashley Opheim: That is all. I think I've said a lot.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, then I'll stop it.

Klara du Plessis

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is July 5<sup>th</sup> the time is 4:07 pm. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview time. This interview is for author.

Klara du Plessis: Hi! So, my name is Klara du Plessis. My pronouns are she/her I have worked with a few Canadian presses. I started by publishing with Anstruther Press, which is chapbook press, and then moved primarily to Palimpsest press, where I have an ongoing relationship. And I have my fourth book coming out there later this year. I also have a bit of a relationship with Gaspereau press. Having done both chapbook and a full-length book with them and, and, and I've also published a chapbook with Knife Fork Book. So, I think, I think those are primarily the presses that are currently—that I've worked with to date. And I'm sure we'll talk more about that and otherwise I live in Quebec, in Montreal. I should mention that I grew up in South Africa and-and so I mean at this point I-I've spent more of my life in Canada than in-in South Africa. But that's also a big part of my identity and-and otherwise I'm also an academic. I finished my doctorate a year ago and-and-and I'm starting a postdoc in September at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan. So that's-that's the kind of professional trajectory I'm on.

Tamara Thompson: Congratulations.

Klara du Plessis: Thank you.

Tamara Thompson: Big congratulations. Lot of work. That's a lot of effort.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah, you—you know, right? You're—you're on that path, too, somewhat.

Tamara Thompson: I-I'm—I'm on the, one of the steps before you do the doctorate. But don't worry. Many people have asked me about it. Don't worry. What's after the masters.

Klara du Plessis: It's-it's addictive. Yeah, you get, you get roped in.

Tamara Thompson: One hundred percent agree. So just to kind of start off this conversation. When was the moment that you, kind of discovered zines and chapbooks in this kind of publishing, because there's smaller publishing like pamphlets and you know the little book that your school will give you about, you know, whatever they're wanting to teach you about right. But when was the moment that you realized this type of small publishing existed? And you went HA!?

Klara du Plessis: Interesting, yeah. Maybe a bit later, I—when I was an undergrad at McGill, I had a little pamphlet called a Writing Pamphlet and it was literally an—a four sized piece of paper that's folded in three, I guess, printed on both sides. And it was basically a publication of student poetry. I don't think I did more than maybe three or four times. But-but at the time I was like, wow! This is such a, like, I-I-I kind of thought that I had this I had, I had found the pamphlet, you know. And



little did I know, of course, like, what a huge tradition there—there is of this—of this kind of more ephemera, more D.I.Y. publishing. I actually can't remember the exact moment that I realized but you know that—that—that zine culture exists. But I do have memories of going to Montreal's Expo zine at some point, right? and—and being like, oh, there's like an entire hall full of people have made these kinds of literary, literary and non-literary objects. At some point, maybe—maybe even as late as after my master's degree, I—I think I started realizing that there was like this real chapbook culture in Canada and started realizing that it was like a very useful jumping off spot for a lot of people. It's kind of like a beautiful unit of poetry, and that—that it really leads towards something larger in a very productive way. And then it helps to build audience in a productive way. So yeah, I—I can't give you the Aha moment. I it's—it's been blurred into a decade of—of memories, I think, but...

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Klara du Plessis: But now I am, you know, very invested, and—and in love with that kind of physical traces, let's say.

Tamara Thompson: I think the other thing, too, is—is that a lot of people kind of make things by themselves, and they don't realize that they're doing that kind of stuff. So, when you're talking about the pamphlet, it's like, yeah, I, like, even as children, like, you'd make your book.

Klara du Plessis: Totally, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I didn't have a stapler, so I would get individual pieces of Scotch tape and Scotch tape the pages together, you know? Like people are always finding ways to make little things.

Klara du Plessis: Absolutely. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So why did you choose to, like, for your work, to be published as chapbooks? You talked a little bit about it as, is like that jumping off point. But like what was the moment where you're like, "Yes, I'm going to make." Well, I guess you know, like why this medium, 'cause it is a choice? Instead of making something or trying to get something traditionally published right.

Klara du Plessis: Sure. So—so, let me put my life in this, in this chronology. I—I graduated from my master's degree in 2012, I believe, and then I decided I was gonna step out of academia temporarily. Or I—at the time I was like, "I'm taking a break," but in—in order to focus on my—on my own writing, right? And so, and that period I—I don't in retrospect, I don't think I had that much of a—articulated plan, but it—it became a long period of time, like I—I think I took six years where I was mostly actually working at a jazz bar in Montreal and focusing my actual attention on—on writing. And it was like a beautiful space like a—a really great project, a great, a great—great community of people. But I didn't love it. I didn't love it. I didn't love working service. And so, I think, in order to make—to make that, to kind of align working in that space with a stage with like who I felt myself to be more, I started, I started a reading series, that happened once a month and was called The Resonance

Reading Series. And I say that because I learned a lot from doing that, I think I came from a more, like, academic place before that in terms, like, in my relationship to literature. And suddenly I was surrounded by writers who were doing it, right? And we're publishing and-and so I—so I learned a lot from all these writers coming in. And there were a lot of them, right? Because there were, like, it was—it was, it's an event once a month, and most months there were four to six people performing. So, at that same time I was working on a manuscript which wasn't even my first manuscript, but I was working on a manuscript that I was feeling you know, excited about and... But at some point, started realizing that maybe still, even this isn't like the *THE* manuscript. I think I had really high, really high standards. And I was, I was kind of like working-working through different, yeah, I think—I think I wrote like three manuscripts or four manuscripts before I actually published my debut collection. Anyway so, this one particular manuscript it had really, in my opinion, it had moments that were strong, but the whole thing wasn't right. And so, at some point, I started learning from this community I was in, that, yeah, that you know well, you can do a chapbook and so I excerpted parts that I felt worked alone into a coherent book that became *Wax Lyrical*. And I have, like one single copy of it left. But it's like this one that came out with Anstruther press. (Holds up a copy of *Wax Lyrical*).

Tamara Thompson: Oh.

Klara du Plessis: And that was, I think, in 2015.

Tamara Thompson: So pretty by the way.

Klara du Plessis: Thank you. Yeah, that was in 2015, I believe. And-and yeah, that's-that's basically it, I guess. Like, so it was, it was a, it was a question of, of that seeming more accessible, too and more realistic and also serving the work better. I think, because the book as a whole didn't have the same impact as the fifteen-page version, you know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Klara du Plessis: And at that same time, and very directly related to the reading series, I met Nyla Matuk, who was at that point a Toronto based poet. She now lives in Montreal. But-but she came to read at my series, and-and she said—and I really owe her a lot for this, you know—but she said, oh, my friend Jim Johnstone has a chapbook press, like maybe you should send it to him, you know. And-and I think I'm speaking, I might be wrong, but I—I think at that point maybe Anstruther had only started. It was, like, fairly early on in the project. And anyway, I—I—I did end up sending my manuscript to Jim Johnstone, and-and he accepted it. And that was a happy moment.

Tamara Thompson: The-the acceptance of the work. Yeah, I—I—I understand that well. Someone actually wants to put in all that effort. Yeah, well, it's emotional.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

(Technical issue occurred)

Klara du Plessis: I, this is gonna sound equally cringy. But I always wrote.

(Both laugh).

Klara du Plessis: Yeah, I-I don't know. I-I as long as I can remember I wrote poetry and like, even when I was very, very little, my parents would write them down for me. And later on, my dad would take them to work and type them up. That was like the time before you had a computer at home, you know. And-and so yeah, so there-there are poems dating back to, I don't know, like, you know, when I was five or something. So, that was always a huge part of, part of my life. And I love literature, and I like write a lot and stuff. I kind of got sidetracked in my teens. I got really into music, into classical music, and which taught me an amazing work ethic, for example. So, I-I don't regret it, but I kind of stopped writing in my teens because I was so focused on this other discipline. And at some point-and everyone kind of expected I would just study music and stuff-and at some point, I remember just being like this is not what I wanna do with my life. I wanna create. I don't wanna reproduce because at-at that, at that time, like the-the classical music scene I was in was very much about like "you play someone else's work," and you have to like perfect someone else's work according to a certain historical style. And all of these things and-and so I decide, I decided to start to do a BA at McGill. And yeah, it's interesting, like, I didn't decide to do a creative writing degree, I decided to do a BA. But-but that's-that's what I did, and-and, as I said before, then, after doing my Masters, and-and at that point I was-I was writing pretty consistently-and-and then, after my master's, I took those six years, and I wrote almost full time and-and that was like an invaluable time to learn how I write basically, and what my voices and that kind of thing. And-and yeah, but I mean, I don't know. I don't really know, like, the word "writing life," like, you know, when you-when you talk, when you write, when you're a poet, it's such a-it's always a marginal thing, because you always have to have a different career also. You know you have poetry, but then you also have something that is financially more viable. Right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's one of those things where I still have some of those little books that I made, where I printed then I went to the Barbie website, and I would make a magazine cover with Barbie.

Klara du Plessis: Amazing.

Tamara Thompson: And I would print it out, and then I would like to write grabbed gunk because I couldn't spell worth anything. I saw some of my spelling tests recently: I'm like, oh, no wonder I was struggling. No, so I-I'm-I did most of my stuff like orally and oral story, like storytelling and stuff like that. And actually, that's still my personal favorite ways to share my work. I don't like other people to read it. I like to read it to them.

Klara du Plessis: Nice. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I probably don't see all my mistakes, which is maybe why I like to do it that way, but I like to read it to people.

Klara du Plessis: It's funny that way, right like you're-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Klara du Plessis: Your-your voice is doing something too.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I like the pacing. I like the voice part of everything. I like reading it to other people. And it's one of the major, I-I teach 'cause I'm doing MA, so I do TA stuff, and a lot of them are like, well, why do we have to stand up and read this small thing that we did? And I'm like "Because what are two things that authors do?" And they're like "What?" And I'm like "They do book tours, which means, interviews."

Klara du Plessis: Right.

Tamara Thompson: Reading their own work.

Klara du Plessis: Oh totally.

Tamara Thompson: If you want to do this, you gotta get better at it, and this is a safe space for you to do it.

Klara du Plessis: Hmm.

Tamara Thompson: The thing is, too, is-is that I, I don't just say that because I believe. I wouldn't do it if I didn't think it was a good place to do it, and if they really don't want to do it, I'm not going to make, force them and make get points off those. That would be bad.

Klara du Plessis: Right.

Tamara Thompson: Like, no, we don't need to do that, man.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But like, because I bring in that positive, enthusiastic energy, they give that back to me. They-they follow my lead, right? And so, when I say "No, like, let's do this, let's share," and then you get into it.

Klara du Plessis: Very nice.

Tamara Thompson: And I'm like, yeah, come on, let's share more.

Klara du Plessis: That's so great.

Tamara Thompson: They get into it right? And it's one of the things that because I started non-traditionally, I have this other perspective. Because I like hearing perspectives and have like, it's so cool that you had, like, your dad typed things up and, like, they were paying attention to, like, this little five-year-old's poetry. That's so cool.

Klara du Plessis: Totally. Yeah, it was very nurturing, for sure.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I-I love hearing stuff like that and knowing some of people's,—not just what they create when they get older and stuff that's published and stuff, but also that journey. I think, is very interesting. So, thank you for sharing.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Okay let's—let's move back on to the subject at hand here. Would you work with a small chapbook press again. Would you ever create another one.

Klara du Plessis: Oh, yeah, for sure. So, I have—I have numerous so, I have. As I said, I had. I started with this one with *Wax Lyrical*. Then I have, I have *Unfurl*, which is with Gaspereau. It's actually essays. (Holds up *Unfurl* chapbook and opens to show title printed in red) It's so beautiful like even inside there's like red, you know. And I have my, I have *Skin and Meat Sky* with Knife Fork Book and this one is as recent as like a few years ago. So yeah, I mean, that's—I feel like chapbooks is something I also continue doing, almost like in between books, if that make sense. Yeah, I think, I think what I also learned when I put *Wax Lyrical* together, excerpted out of the longer manuscript, is that I do really work in terms of a project or a book, or a publication. So, after it came out, Jim Johnstone asked or—or when Jim and I started talking about doing a full-length book together for—for palimpsest press—he asked whether those poems would be in the new book and because that often happens right, you—you publish a track book, and then you include as like a part of a longer manuscript later, and I said, “No, like, I have a new manuscript with a new feel and a new” it was a new, “is a new book” and—and—that's how I, I've been working ever since. So, like so sometimes almost organically, what starts happening for me is that I write a book and then there's like a bit of a moment where I'm still figuring out what comes next. And then, like there are a couple of poems that—that happen that end up cohering in a certain way, and like almost need to be a chapbook. But they won't, they won't be in another book. And—and so, after a moment that starts cohering into a new project... So, I can definitely see there being more chapbooks in the future. I don't have anything planned or spur of the in the, you know, in the set schedule right now. But I can, I can imagine that happening again hopefully. Many times. I love chapbooks. They're great, you know. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I understand that mentality of “No, it's its own thing.”

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like I'm sometimes, that's like way with my own work. If I'm going to get something published, and it's smaller and it's going to be smaller, I'm not gonna take those poems and use them again.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I like, I-I-I understand why people do it. And like I have no problem with other people doing it.

Klara du Plessis: Exactly. It's a specific choice.

Tamara Thompson: I might even do it at some point, but it's more, so far, I haven't felt that you know, it's been very much its own thing. So, I understand the mentality of "No, this is its own thing."

Klara du Plessis: Totally.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fantastic. So, what has this type of smaller publishing taught you?

Klara du Plessis: Taught me. I mean, you mean in terms of chapbooks in particular.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, but like, just the kind of like, small D.I.Y. kind of stuff like: what's something that you've learned from this process.

Klara du Plessis: Well, that, maybe, that intimacy is-is as important as-as a as scale. I think sometimes we're socialized to think like, oh, you need to be selling, you know, hundreds of thousands of copies or something, and you have to have a huge readership and has to make a huge impact, or whatever, but there is such beauty in having, you know, twenty copies of this work or fifty or one hundred. But-but what, however like a small print run right? That is, that is made with care and circulated intimately and honestly. Some of-some of the-some of the best literary experiences I've had have been smaller, you know, readings, readings that are not well attended, or readings that are deliberately capped like during the pandemic. There were events that were like deliberately capped, you know, and they were so meaningful. Because the conversation was more personal. Because it was smaller. So yeah, I think there's a lot of care that goes into small press. And this more of a personal touch which gets lost in big, big publishing. I-I actually don't have experience of big, big publishing, you know. I, like, even working with-with Palimpsest and Gaspereau they're both-they're both still in the-in the small press culture. They're not micro press, but they're small press so I haven't worked with the press like, like Penguin Random House or something, and but I have heard anecdotes where you become a bit more invisible because you're not working as personally with people; you're working with a, within an institution, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think you phrased it very, very beautifully, actually, about that intimate, like smaller side of things. I think the

way you phrased it is very nice. So, thank you. So, you can take this next question in any way you desire. What you've ever you feel comfortable with. But what are some challenges that you've faced in publishing.

Klara du Plessis: Hmm. Before I published my first chapbook, I was getting a lot of rejections. Like, really a lot of rejections. And-and I think, when putting the chapbook together and then putting a full-length book together again it's coming back to something I said before. I started realizing that I work in a larger like, in a-in a-in a-in a-in a chapbook length, or a book length, scale, and so excerpting or taking a single poem and putting it in, you know sending it to a journal or something that's not actually where the strength of my work lies. And so that was an interesting realization, that not only do I sometimes work in longer form poetry, but also taking something out of the context of its book doesn't always work for my writing, for whichever reason. It's, yeah. So-so, something about the format of publishing, I guess, taught me something about how my work is received if that makes sense. What was the question? The challenges of publishing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's something that you've had to just deal with? Because, like again, rejection is, that's hard.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah, no. And-and it's-it's really hard, especially when you're starting out, right? And you're just like, Am I gonna-am I gonna find somewhere at all? And I, I've been, I really have been extremely fortunate to be able to move from Anstruther press to Palimpsest Press, and to really call it a home now. And I have this kind of almost open relationship with them, where-or open invitation, where, where I can write to them and say, hey, I have a new manuscript, and they-they will look at it, you know. Which is a real privilege, so that has taken some of the difficulty of publishing away, right? Because it's-it's allowed me this-this continuity. But I mean, I do sometimes question like, there's the ambition, always like, comes back. And you're like should I be pursuing bigger pu-bigger publishers, or like-like what would happen if I did get a bigger publisher? What are the up, the opportunities that would arise if I had a couple of one thousand readers rather than five hundred readers, or what, you know whatever? So, I mean, those questions persist. I don't think one always has control over that. It's like the circumstances that-that you, that you, you know, work in. There are some-there are some presses that I that I really, really idolize and would like to pursue in my life. You know, one of them is Wave books, which is in the States, and that would-if ever I got something published there, I think it would feel like a real, it would feel like a real pinnacle of some kind of achievement. So, I mean, and I guess one-one is always striving but-but I can't-I can't complain. I've-I've had really kind of accepting environment into which I've been, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's-it's very hard to get those first few rejections. I have my students-because they hear about my program that I did in my undergrad, which is creative writing and publishing. And they say, "How do I get published?"

Klara du Plessis: Right.

Tamara Thompson: The best thing is to persevere like it's persistent.

Klara du Plessis: Totally.

Tamara Thompson: You've published it, like, you can maybe be not as good as the guy next to you. But if you keep submitting and keep trying to get better—

Klara du Plessis:—Yes—

Tamara Thompson: —Will more likely be published than that person who doesn't send out their work.

Klara du Plessis: But also knowing where to submit right?

Tamara Thompson: That's the other thing.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah, like that was like advice that actually, that I got at some point which was, you don't—actually, it's kind of a contradictory piece of advice, but it was like—you don't want to be published somewhere where they're not excited about your work, right? And that was like such an eye-opening thing for me because I was like, yeah, that's true. Like, if they reject me, they don't like my work therefore, why do I want to be there? You know. And so-so also like making sure that you know the journal that you're trying to publish is right like, do you—

Tamara Thompson: —Yup—

Klara du Plessis: —actually, fit into the kind of aesthetics that they are excited about 'cause that, that'll definitely, at least, augment your-your chances a little bit.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And you don't, you want to enjoy the experience. You don't want it to be a slog.

Klara du Plessis: Totally.

Tamara Thompson: There's going to be certain parts, especially on any project where you're like “My God! I just want this to be over,” so tired, right? Like that's gonna happen at some point in whatever project that you're working on, not even just in publishing. But it's, if you're going to hit that point, you want to do it with people who understand your work, care about it and want to, like, especially in chapbooks, like, these are people who really like this thing that you've made. They really care 'cause that's a lot of effort, you know? Chapbooks are not something for money for most people. So, it's like this person really likes your work.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah. People-people put like, put-put their own money into-into making it, too. You know, it's like labor, it's labor, care, but also money.

Tamara Thompson: I-I think it's very good advice that, like, such good looks, such bad, like, yeah, you got rejected. But they didn't also like the work, so it's better to find it a better home elsewhere.



Klara du Plessis: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, we've been kind of talking a bit around some of these next couple of questions, but I'm still gonna ask them more directly. Why are chapbooks important to you?

Klara du Plessis: Hmm yeah, I feel like, maybe I've already stressed some of these points, but-

Tamara Thompson: Stress them again.

Klara du Plessis: It becomes maybe, like, I'll put it slightly differently. But I feel like chapbooks are more community oriented, maybe. Then-then-then I don't know what-what-what's like chapbooks, and like big publishing, or whatever. But.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Trade publishing.

Klara du Plessis: That would, okay, that's-that's a distinction. Yeah. So, chapbooks because, again, because, like the-the print runs are smaller because the production is more interpersonal. You often know the person who's producing it. And you have much more say in-in how it's gonna look you. You can direct the cover, maybe. You, I, you can think about the-you can have an informal conversation about the font, you know? This is like a much more hands-on feeling in the-in the making of the work, but then also in the, in the, in the sharing of it because it's very often not in stores. It's like you're-you're giving it to people hand to hand, or at a, at a reading again. Like, as you're saying, readings are amazing, you know. So, you're-you're there's like a very embodied sense to how the whole thing plays out. And so-so, it feels more-it feels more community driven to me. Whereas all of that can also be true for trade publishing, depending on where you're publishing. But the books are gonna circulate without you. They are gonna go to bookstores, they're gonna, you know, be sold online. They're gonna go into-into libraries. They-they have more of a life beyond what you can control. Whereas chapbooks, I feel are more, it's more immediate. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why are, why not?

Klara du Plessis: I think so. I mean, there's a long tradition of it, as we, as we know, right? Like so much D.I.Y. publishing happening throughout the 20th century, xeroxing of stuff, like.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Klara du Plessis: All of that. But in-in a more contemporary and then so-so, so on-on the one hand, like, there's like this long chapbook history which is like parallel to literary history in Canada. So that's-that's part of the question. But in a more contemporary sense I do see a lot of people publishing chapbooks that then become more widely published authors, right? And so, it is-it is somewhere where you can kind of scout new authors if that makes sense to you. Right? Especially some of the,

like, some-some chapbooks presses, like, unlike Anstruther, like, at least started with this, with a vision of-of-of featuring younger authors. Right? And so, it really is this-this place where Fawn Parker had a, had a chapbook, you know, and then like, published and like, won all kinds of awards, and got long listed for the Giller and all these things, right? She just one of many. But-but-but yeah, it it's the first step in in raising visibility. Right? I feel like I had more of an answer, but.

Tamara Thompson: No, that-what you said, I think is very true, especially when it comes to like kind of fostering that talent before it really can get going.

Klara du Plessis: Hmmm.

Tamara Thompson: Before the world has really recognized it.

Klara du Plessis: But then there's also other, there's like another stream of chapbook publishing, too, right? Which is this kind of like-like-like highly hand produced, a collectible item, and I don't think- that often doesn't go together with-with youthful writing like that's-that's often almost like a symbol of prestige like, oh, you're-you have this extremely renowned writer, and we would love to make this limited edition, you know, hand sewn chapbook with like, I don't know, typographically super cool, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Klara du Plessis: Kind of, kind of collectible item. So there-there are multiple streams. And they're all equally important and-and part of part of the Canadian literary world, for sure.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I was tasked with the Ethics Committee to define chapbook. So, I use Jim Johnstone's definition. But then he also gave me an article where he talks about disputing that definition, and I think because chapbooks and even zines themselves-I feel like they just get given a name by the person who made them, and there's such a gradient.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah, they're, where do you-where do you draw the line between a zine and a chapbook, too, and-and those kinds of things, so?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, because for most people in the arts community, they are creating something that they call a zine. But if they put the label of chapbook on it, no one would dispute it. You know?

Klara du Plessis: Totally, or like, it's even, like, the mode of production, like, someone like Rob McClellan, who produces so many, like, such mass scale of chapbooks. But they're all kind of xeroxed. So, they're-they're faster to produce, too. And like they're closer to zine culture than like the collectible item, culture. So yeah, there's a sliding scale there somewhere.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I think that's what make chapbooks so interesting, too, is they can be this prestigious thing. But it can also be this homemade little scratchy thing.

Klara du Plessis: Totally. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I think-I think that's what's so exciting about-it is because there is such variety.

Klara du Plessis: Absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: I know the academics will love the fact that the definition is so broad.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah, well.

Tamara Thompson: I-I know that they'll passion.

Klara du Plessis: Sorry-sorry go ahead.

Tamara Thompson: No, I know there'll be a question of why this type of definition, and why not a more narrow one? And I'm like, that's real hard.

Klara du Plessis: Gonna cut out a lot of people if you don't have a pretty wide definition. But there is like a page-limit definition. That's pretty official. I can't remember it was like thirty, thirty-two pages or something, but or maybe-

Tamara Thompson: It's definitely less than fifty pages. If you've gotten to more than fifty pages, you're getting into like novelette, novel, novella kind of stuff. And so definitely. The-the only thing we can say for certain is short.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, this next question is very open to interpretation. Take it wherever you want. Does this type of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way?

Klara du Plessis: Hmm...

Tamara Thompson: We're just talking about terms.

(Both laugh)

Klara du Plessis: I mean how do, how does it reflect Canada? I'm gonna skip that one.

(Technical issues occurred)

Klara du Plessis: I mean, I guess I can riff a little bit. I-I really don't know what Canada is, but.

Tamara Thompson: I don't think anyone does.

(Technical issue occurred).

Tamara Thompson: But yeah, it's-it's not an easy question. And I think sorry to just go back to what you were saying to riff you what you were saying there, but, like, the-the-Canada defines itself by what it is not from the State's perspective. And we are technically small, and despite the amount of land we have, we have less people. The States has a lot more people. So, there's a lot more people doing certain things, right? And so, I-I know a little bit about the States, like, small press and like, let me just tell you, they at least have a lot more working websites. I'll go there, and I'll look at-like, when I was doing my research, like, they have things that are keeping these things preserved more than Canada does. But I don't know if that's just because of the sheer amount of people. So, if it's just a distribution of labor, or if there's like money going into it-I don't think there's money going in.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But I think it's just the amount of people they can self sustain some of those like older websites and stuff, or even some of the newer stuff, because, again, a lot of it is very ephemeral, very limited.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Right to speak to what you were speaking about before, about that intimacy. Right? They're-they're there, and then they're gone sometimes, right? And it feels like there's a bit more of that in the States. But you were gonna say something?

Klara du Plessis: Oh, yeah, I mean, it's it is interesting. 'Cause, like, I think, part of-part of where I'm also like hesitating is that-that, so, this is kind of, like, a D.I.Y. spirit to chapbook culture, too, right? Where anyone can do it. It's-it's more democratic like-like you can do it. I can do it. Anyone can. Anyone with like a little bit of initiative can-can decide to print something on a small scale. You don't even have to, like, have skills, like, layout. And that kind of thing. You can just do it on Word, if you really want to, you know, like it is possible. But then I'm, like, I think I'm, like, tripping up over the sense of like the States often has that kind of narrative right of, like, anyone can do it, right? So why-why has that mentality leapt over into Canada so much? I think that's-that's where I'm like I haven't ironed out this question yet.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's-it's a good question to ask about: like that, anybody can do it. But then and it's true, a lot of people who don't feel like their voices are being heard start up presses, whether that be young writers and poets or groups from like marginalized, like, typically, right? But again, so why aren't there maybe more, right? Like, even in my research, I had a lot of older, white men who I was able to talk to, but not necessarily as much, variety, and I had to ask for that right or older women who had been doing this for a while. You know? Who were there back in, like, the nineties, and, like, eighties who were doing that kind of stuff right? But it wasn't necessarily upfront knowledge, and it's like, well, why didn't more people do it? And it's like, well, anybody can do it. But you also still need the paper, the, like-

Klara du Plessis: You need the time, the time, too. Right? And like that, that is also a privilege to have that. You actually have the time to like play around and figure it out and like, make and-and make communities. So that, like, you have to have time to go out and find other authors who you want to print... think it's-it's not, it can't happen in isolation.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's work.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah. Totally.

Tamara Thompson: So, to kind of jump off of what we're saying here. It kind of plays into the next question that I want to ask, which is: why do you think most small presses, and, like micro presses, have to close up shop? Because it is a sad, unfortunate truth of-of-of this type of publishing.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah, yeah, I mean, I think people-people burn out, right? Again, it's going back to the like, oh, ever-everyone can start the idealistic size. Everyone can start it, but also it takes so much out of you to keep doing it. If it's volunteer, even if it's not volunteer. But usually it's volunteer, right? It's-it's you're-you're-you're giving your time and energy and creativity and-and all of that to do something for-for the larger community and-and you can only do it for so long. Like, yeah, people, people again, like Rob, who, who's done it for so many years. It's-it's pretty-It's like really the exception to the rule. Most of the time, it's a shorter period of time. And I-I also I, I'm fine with that, though, like, I think that's, that's also something that's just part-part of that tradition. And-and it means that there's more sharing, too. So, it's like, if-if my press that I don't have, but if my hypothetical press, like, you know, closes down, maybe it's your turn to open up to, to start something, you know? And that's-that's kind of, the economy, maybe, of-of this, like micro press culture that everyone has to give their labor at some point to reap the benefits collectively.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, and sometimes not everything shuts down. They go on like long hiatus is too.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: My press currently is on hiatus because I'm doing this. And let's just say, this is a lot of time. *Whispering Wick*, because we started up in 2020.

Klara du Plessis: Okay. I don't know it.

Tamara Thompson: So, yeah, we were very much in isolation. And that's one of the reasons why I'm loving this project so far, is because I've finally been let out of like my house for the first time. You know what I mean? And actually talk to all these people that I want to share and learn from and understand this thing more. And I-it was one of the reasons why I wanted to do this project so badly, is because I wanted to talk to people because I started the press when I literally couldn't leave my house. I literally couldn't see the people who were even closest to me. So, the

press has definitely not done anything in the past couple of years. But that's because I'm doing the Masters, and I'm trying to...

Klara du Plessis: It'll still be there when you're when you're done. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly, and I still have that want to do more with it. I just have to put it on the back burner, but I know some presses kind of fizzle out, and then, that rejuvenated it again because they just needed that, like, you know, five, or maybe even ten-year, break.

Klara du Plessis: And it doesn't—it doesn't function according to the same regulations of trade publishing, right? So, like, usually they have to have a certain number of books according to certain number of seasons, and annually right, whereas, like you have much more freedom to make your own choices with, with, with something that you're running independently.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But yeah, I've, I-I've had a couple of people be like, so you still doing that? And I'm like, yes, I just don't have the time.

Klara du Plessis: That's totally fair.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, cause it, it's not that the love is gone, or that I still don't care about it—like I do. I just don't have the time to, because again, all of the people who helped me work on the press, they're trying to get jobs and stuff like that. So ever-anytime someone has—we're not even a part time press where extra time is the way I say it, because whenever someone has extra time, we work on something.

Klara du Plessis: Well, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: The other thing, too, is-is like, we're working on stuff behind the scenes. But we can't share anything because it's such small stuff. Yeah, because again, it's that extra time, right? So, what's something that you maybe wish, like the public knew about Canadian publishing just like a general thing that you're like, Damn! I really wish the average person knew more about this aspect.

Klara du Plessis: Well, maybe you know how—how much volunteer labor goes into it. I am, I've been in, I've been in this scene, in this world for a long time now and I'm still shocked that every now and then I hear—you know, and I won't name names now—but you know some—some publisher is working for free. You know, some publisher is making zero salary. While—while they're working a full-time job, you know. So, I think, I think there's, there's the illusion with the Canada Council that—that Canada has this like wonderful support system for the arts, which is definitely true. And I, and I'm very grateful for—for them and for everything they do. But it's not enough. And—and—and so much of the benefits we reap from—from this literary community is—is done just through—through love and—and people really don't know it, you know? And—and that I feel—I feel like if

the general public knew this—my hope is that they would, you know, treat people better or.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Klara du Plessis: Have more patience, or have more empathy or donate more money, or read more books.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Klara du Plessis: Or something, you know. But there's yeah—People-people live under the illusion of, like, Oh, it's like, it's like a thriving publishing industry.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Klara du Plessis: Actually, there are like a couple of presses who are big and-and thriving, and the rest of them are—are really making it work. Despite, despite everything.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. The way I described the Canada Council to my students is like: you need a knee replacement, but, they give you a cane like it's—it's technically helping. You can still walk.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But you still need the knee replacement.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And like it's one of those things where I think a lot of them, too, they also think if they get a book deal that, like, they'll become "Rich and Famous." And I said, okay, I'm sorry.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: "Rich" look somewhere else. Publishing is not gonna be where it is.

Klara du Plessis: No.

Tamara Thompson: Because there's odds against you when it comes to just like getting to that level. Like, it's very hard to get to the level of JK. Rowling, or Stephen King or Margaret Atwood.

Klara du Plessis: Oh my god yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It is very hard, and then on top of that, like even then, even if you technically are making it as an author, you're like one of the five poets in Canada that doesn't have to have another job or do anything else.

Klara du Plessis: Oh, it's.

Tamara Thompson: Right! Oh.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like you've made it. You won't be making a lot of money. Like you're not going to have a yacht or something like that, like you've made it. And you're one of the few poets in Canada, let's say, who could do all these things that doesn't have to work another job. You're not going to be living in New York with like a Mercedes Benz in the basement.

Klara du Plessis: I mean I honestly-

Tamara Thompson: They're like, what?

Klara du Plessis: I'd like to know who those poets are—you that you're citing, who don't have to work, 'cause, like, I don't know any poets who don't have to work something else, you know?

Tamara Thompson: The fictional poets.

Klara du Plessis: Exactly (laughs).

Tamara Thompson: You know the ones in the movies.

Klara du Plessis: Exactly. I think.

Tamara Thompson: But a romance.

Klara du Plessis: There are fiction there. There are novelists who—who can, who can eke out a living but.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Klara du Plessis: In, I mean, you can correct me. But like in—in my experience, like, even people, like, Anne Carson, you know, who is, like, maybe some of the, like, they're working, like, she's working, too, right? Or she did, before, so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it is very, very hard.

Klara du Plessis: Hmm.

Tamara Thompson: To make it in the way where you don't need to do other things. And that's not just, like, even like, many, many famous writers also taught, like, a lot of my students are surprised that someone who wrote *Song of Solomon*, Tony Morrison, also taught. And they were, like, "But she's Tony Morrison." I'm like, "Yeah, I know. Yeah, I know. But she also has to teach, because she also needs to eat cause she writes literary books, and yes, we love them, and yes, they're on backlist, and yes, they're read a lot but they're not going to be the same sellers as like Stephen King." She doesn't write as much as Stephen King, and people will just keep going back and forth and like it might not necessarily be considered highbrow murder, whatever, or maybe as good as his early work, but he's able to make it work for himself, you know.



Klara du Plessis: Totally.

Tamara Thompson: Plus, a-a, you're not even adding all the movie deals and royalties in that way. Right, like, an author usually isn't making the money from the book side.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Royalties. It's usually from like the movie and merchandising things, especially if it becomes into a phenomenon. So, we've got two more questions left. And these are more interpretive. Just kind of giving space questions that I talked about before we started. So, what's something important about D.I.Y. press history that you would like people to know about, that you'd like to share.

Klara du Plessis: Hmm! That's the one that you said everyone got stumped on.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, of what to share. It's not the one that stumps people the most, but it's the one where people think it has to be necessarily history. But history could be you "found this one thing that was really interesting," and there were only five copies, and not many people know about it, you know? It's just about sharing that type of history which—because it's so ephemeral, and it's so here and then gone. And I love hearing just these artsy things that people have done. You know?

Klara du Plessis: For some reason my mind always goes blank when I have to find one thing on—like that's—like it's—it's always the case, you know, like I—I was in a job interview recently, and they asked me, "What is the one text that you like, that you like, teaching?"

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Klara du Plessis: They could probably name any text, right? Because it's like it's like my mind goes into overdrive. I'm like there's so many like "which one?"

Tamara Thompson: Well, tell me a couple; tell me anything. It doesn't have to be maybe the most important, but something interesting.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah. I don't know. I—I, I'll—I'm—I'm gonna just answer this in a totally different way, I guess. But I'll—I'll just say that you know. Like, as someone who also has one leg in—in the South African Literary scene, it kind of emphasizes how important—it emphasizes for me because I can—I can actually see the I experience the difference. Of how important micropress culture is in Canada and how it doesn't exist elsewhere. So, in South Africa, like, people that don't know what a chapbook is, like, there are no chapbook presses and people don't wanna buy them. Like I've—I've gone to—I've gone to fairs before with, you know, with—with beautiful chapbooks, and like, they—all my books would sell out. But my chapbooks wouldn't be touched. And so-so, I mean, this is not fully answering your question, but it—but it is just like—a-like live, like,

being and-and working in-in Canada, I take it for granted that it's this amazing thing that we, that we love, and that's-that's part of, a part of, our part of the-the infrastructure of the-the larger infrastructure of publishing. But it's actually very unique.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. The people meet it with excitement.

Klara du Plessis: Totally. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That's-that's a great way to answer it, like.

Klara du Plessis: I'll-I'll answer it in a different way, too. I did some, I did some research. I did a research residency at Art Text, some years ago. Which it's-it's actually an artist book, it's an artist book archive in Montreal. And it's-it's pretty amazing. They, like, they let you loose in this archive, and you have to do something, basically, you know?

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Klara du Plessis: And I was-I was researching sculptural artist books. And so, this is, this is veering a little bit away from-from the literary, but there are some really cool, just, like, books that are, that-that I don't know. Maybe they can be a chapbook. There was one, for example, that was a loaf of bread, like, you know, some kind of, like, wonder bread or something, that you could page through the slices.

Tamara Thompson: That is so cool. That's fantastic.

Klara du Plessis: And-and I mean they, that bread had been in the archive since the eighties, so the slices were like rock hard, but it still existed. Or there was, like, a beautiful little book that was, like, a paper Mácha box with, like, a little pair of shoes inside and a scroll and you, couldn't it-it-it kinda, it kind of resisted the, like, traditional readability, like. But there were words everywhere, you know? But like there was so much meeting wrapped up in those little shoes, and it was, like, kind of like, a, it had a feeling of violence, or some kind of narrative-narrative that was.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Klara du Plessis: That was, or sad narrative, or something that was happening there. Yeah, those-those are a couple of-of very left field, you know, like-

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Klara du Plessis: -examples of-of non-traditional publishing that-that has stood out to me.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, one hundred percent. That's so cool. I've-I've talked to Derek and Banff, and like Derek Beaulieu.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: He showed me a box of cigarettes that someone had made and then pulled out numbered cigarettes. And that's how you read the book.

Klara du Plessis: Oh, crazy!

Tamara Thompson: Right like that. He, like, that's a chapbook. And he said, "This is a chapbook," and I was like, "So when you were talking about these other things?" That's what it made me think of. And I think that's one of the things that's also really exciting is this community likes to break down the idea of what a book could be. And that's why I think it's, like, you have to include those types of things because they're the interesting fun, experimental things that are so exciting and so much in using their form, you know? And...

Klara du Plessis: Or lame.

Tamara Thompson: like, that's what's so fun about chapbooks. And yes, you can have your prestigious things that are beautifully made and folded, and have the text, like, you know, line by line and paragraphs and stuff. But then you have this little, like, you know, cigarette box, or this loaf of bread and...

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: ...And I think to discredit that as—in this type of D.I.Y. type of publishing of 'cause. You're technically making something with words. And getting people to interact with it. And even if that form isn't necessarily the folded paper that we consider the book, it's still interesting and should be considered. So that's great.

Klara du Plessis: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you so much.

Klara du Plessis: But then also, I'm just like, think, talking about Ann Carson again, like there, of course, there's *Float* right where the-the chapbook format has been, you know appropriated by ma-by like mass trade publishing. I think it's a McClennan and Stewart publication.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Klara du Plessis: You know, and-and-and yet, you know, it's a set of chapbooks, basically.

Tamara Thompson: Basically, yeah.

Klara du Plessis: I love them.

Tamara Thompson: So, I have, we're under the last question here, and this is usually the hardest question for everybody. What's something about your history that you wish people knew, or that you'd like to share.

Klara du Plessis: Hmm, interesting. I mean, people tend to know this, I guess, but-but you know I-I did grow up in South Africa. I-I lived there

between, between five and eighteen years. And it had a phenomenal impact on who I am, you know, like it, I-I don't think you can really remove that cultural immersion. And it's affected—it's affected my writing, you know? Very deeply. I-I often find that my books are written almost with a South African, not with a South African audience in mind. But it's almost like they're—they're written from that place. And it's been really interesting for me. I'm now working on a book that's going to be published in South Africa for the first time. So.

Tamara Thompson: Excellent, congratulations.

Klara du Plessis: Thank you. Yeah, but it's so, it's so, now, suddenly, I'm like moving in the other direction, right? And what's been really interesting is that it's almost, like, a ride from a Canadian place there. So I don't know why, but there's, like, this crisscross happening where I'm almost like importing a part of myself to the opposite audience and—and I don't always like, on the one hand that—that I guess that could be seen as interesting; on the other hand, it's like, maybe it's counterproductive, you know? Maybe I should be publishing the work that comes from a certain place in that place, yeah? I mean, I don't, I don't know. This is like the one thing we need to know about me. But I-I do think it really informs, it really informs my-my work, and like and reading-reading I don't know how much of my work, you know, but like *Hell Light Flesh*, for example, from a South African perspective is a totally different book than reading it from a Canadian perspective. And so, yeah, it's been, it's almost been startling sometimes to-to see books being perceived so much differently. Because of that kind of, yeah, geographic and historical and political and cultural tensions.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah. Do you have any other comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording.

Klara du Plessis: I don't know. I think this is a great project that you're doing. I'm-I'm really excited to see where it goes. I'd like to know more about it now, actually like, maybe if you have time.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, of course. Yeah, of course I'll stop the recording if-if you're good.

Jacob Quinlan

Tamara Thompson: Hello. My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is July 19<sup>th</sup> the time is 1:19 pm. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview. This interview is for small press.

Jacob Quinlan: I am Jacob Quinlan. I am the proprietor of Jacob Quinlan Books, and I've also issued a few ephemeral items under the imprint Spurious Press. I'm based in Peterborough, Ontario, and I am a director of the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of Canada.

Tamara Thompson: And pronouns?

Jacob Quinlan: My pronouns are he/him.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you. So, just to get the ball rolling, this show on the road. How did you first discover zines and chapbooks and this type of smaller thing? Was there a moment for you where you realized this was actually like a small community and a thing that people actually make? But like, I mean, more of this smaller, D.I.Y. small press scene.

Jacob Quinlan: So, my first introduction to small press productions, chapbooks, ephemeral material, etc., was through the Aliquando Press. So, I came to bookselling because I was very interested in William Morris. I was interested in the revival of printing in the late nineteenth century, and I collected Morris and Kelmscott material, and I became aware that people were doing very similar things now in Canada, using traditional printing methods, and I encountered the work of Will Rueter, who has become a very close friend, and he is the proprietor of the Aliquando Press. And so, I-I saw a few things that Will had done, some books illustrated with wood engravings by Wesley Bates and I was drawn to the typographic presentation, as well as the illustrations and the text that he chose, many of which were classical or works of fairly obscure poetry. And so, I started to attend the Grimsby's Wayzgoose which was founded in 1979 by Bill Poole, and I've gone just about every year since that first year, which was about fifteen years ago, and that was what really exposed me to a very thriving scene here in Canada today where printers are producing things according to traditional type of graphic and printing practices, but are distributing them primarily to friends and to a few collectors, but they're doing it for the love of the production and the love of the craft rather than for commercial purposes. That was my first introduction.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I love how everybody keeps talking about Grimsby and this lovely little market. And Grimsby is really just a little speck on a map. Like, it's in the Niagara-on-the-Lake region; like, it's a great, lovely place. I have people who I knew live there, and someone who I know grew up there. But like it's really like out of the way. And to think that a small little press thing happening is still there is so fun to me, I guess.

Jacob Quinlan: Well, its history is sort of funny. So, as I said, it was founded by Bill Poole in 1979; Bill Poole, William Poole was a printer as

well as an art teacher, and he'd been based in Toronto and eventually moved to Grimsby and helped to found the Grimsby Public Art Gallery and he decided, because he was very involved in a small community of printers, to host what's called the Wayzgoose, which is a traditional gathering or festival of printers to mark the feast day of Saint Bartholomew. So, they started that 1979, and they've been running that ever since. And it's sort of interesting, and actually, in a sense, all of the contributors or all of the exhibitors of Wayzgoose produce a chapbook. They produce a small signature, single signature, or single gathering ephemeral piece and that they produce it in a print run of usually two hundred copies or so and that is sent to the organizers of the Grimsby Wayzgoose, and they bind it up and produce an annual anthology which has all of the work of all of the exhibit, exhibitors represented. So, it's a sort of, again-it's a very fun project, not only in exhibiting work, but in building a kind of community, a community of bibli-bibliophiles, type of files, etc. So, it is kind of it's funny, though, that it's in Grimsby. But again that's-that's primarily because of Bill Poole.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, thank you for sharing. So, my next question is, like, how the press started? But I guess for you it's more like, why did you start printing your like catalogs and stuff like that? Because it's-it's a lot of work. (Laughs).

Jacob Quinlan: Yes, it is.

Tamara Thompson: So, why for you?

Jacob Quinlan: So, I-I started in bookselling about fifteen years ago, and I apprenticed with two of Canada's preeminent book dealers, David Mason, who is based in Toronto, and had a shop on Queen Street for nearly forty years, and Stephen Temple who similarly was on Queen Street, and had a shop there for forty years and I worked with them. I was collecting, and I became very interested in finding private press books. I realized that nobody was really focusing in a very serious way on that kind of material in Canada at the time. And so, I decided, I decided to start selling under my name and for me it was very important to produce catalogs for a number of reasons. Nicky Drumbolis, who I might have mentioned, has a distinction between what he calls distributive booksellers and contributive booksellers. So distributive booksellers are booksellers who simply sell material and are concerned with operating viable businesses, but their primary goal is their bottom line. Contributive booksellers still have to be concerned with their bottom line if they want to make a living. But the motivation is to contribute to bibliographic scholarship because booksellers are very significant in many ways to the development of bibliographic scholarship in every area and part of that is because they're very closely involved in collections development, and also because there's all kinds of material for which there aren't bibliographies and so booksellers descriptions which at the best of times are very, very rigorous and very disciplined help bring out subtle and distinguishing features of particular kinds of books. And so, for me, it was very important to-to be contributive in what I was doing, and there was also part of that was producing catalogs which or the entire history of bookselling up until the advent of the Internet, was the primary medium for which booksellers proliferated their-their stock or made people aware

of their stock. And so, there was a very strong tradition, and always has been a very strong tradition of producing catalogs which have bibliographic merit. And that's-that's what I wanted to do. And because there-there haven't been a lot of people specializing in my specific area of Canadian fine printing. A lot of what I'm doing is an effort toward developing a more comprehensive and systematic picture of fine printing in Canada, its history, and the particular bibliographic features of the individual books. So, for me, producing catalogs is sort of part of that project, which is a collaborative project with other library-with librarians, researchers, bibliographers, collectors, and other booksellers. And it just helps us better understand the landscape of books in general, but in my specific case fine printing Canada.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, so you kind of answered my next question of, like, what the goal of the project was? And it seems like it's just to have accessibility to this material and to also keep this material available which might not be seen as important by the everyman, but is still very important to our next- and, like, sorry I'm fumbling a bit. But like, basically, you've already answered my next question of, like, why you do this and, like, the importance?

Jacob Quinlan: And maybe-maybe in a much more you know, in a more pedestrian and slightly ridiculous way, some of the ephemeral pieces that I produce, I've produced a couple of broadsides. And those things I do basically for fun, which is what a lot of private presses are doing. I mean, they're doing so at a very, very high level with exceptional technical proficiency. But in the best cases, I should say, but really a lot of people are-are doing things for fun. Some people do make a living doing this this kind of work. A number of presses in Canada that produce books traditionally that make very comfortable livings, producing the kind of material that they produce. But ultimately, it's motivated by a desire to realize a certain vision and that can be motivated by a number of things, but some of the-I-I did a broadside called *Scorn for Taurus*, which was based on a joke of Flan O'Brien's, the Irish modern novelist, Flan O'Brien. And I produced that basically as a an elaborate in joke for some friends, though I posted on my website, and I had a woman from Ireland contact me and say that it was one of the funniest things she's seen, and whenever I'm there next, she'll buy me a beer, so you never know what emerges from these kinds of things. But you know, so the catalogs I do to try and contribute to ongoing scholarship. Some of the other ephemeral stuff that I do I do for fun, because it makes me laugh, and it may make a handful of other people laugh.

Tamara Thompson: So, I'm interested in how you actually, like, make the catalogs, because everybody has their own process for these print objects and bringing them into reality. So, I'm interested on how you actually do them. Do you make them yourselves? Do you send them off to a place like Coach House and get them printed and layout's done? Like, I'm interested on how you actually make them like the decisions that go into it.

Jacob Quinlan: So, actually, it's funny that you mentioned Coach House, because my last catalog, which was probably, in some way, my most ambitious catalog survey of fine printing in Canada. It was designed by Jason Dewinetz, who is the proprietor of Green Boat House Press. He is

based in Vernon, BC. And Jason actually would be another person that maybe you should talk to at some point, if you have time, because Jason started Greenboat House Press as a publishing initiative to produce works of poetry, primarily Canadian poetry that he valued and that he thought was significant and should be in print, and his early efforts were more-more closely resembled small press chapbooks. What people typically think of as small press chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jacob Quinlan: Eventually Greenboat House Press went on a hiatus, and then Jason revived it and revived it primarily as a let-well exclusively at this point, as an imprint for very, very fine letter press printing, which he does so Jason is an exceptional designer and he but does both digital design as well as more traditional letter press design, and he has done work for the Alcuin society and for a number of other places that relate to printing history and in the history of typography. But he designed my last catalog, which he did digitally and then Coach House printed it. So, it was an interesting intersection of people who-who have been involved in printing in Canada, coming together to produce this catalog, which is a survey of Canadian fine and private press books now prior to this catalog, I'd always just printed it myself and designed it or I-I designed it myself, and then had it printed locally. So, the previous catalogs were probably what they were, in fact, much more amateurish, because I'm a very amateur designer. I have some discernment and judgment, but I'm pretty amateurish. But Jason did the last one, and Coach House printed it.

Tamara Thompson: So how did you decide what actually went into the catalog? Because I'm sure there's no shortage of works that could have been put in, and especially with the scope. How did you make some of those like core decisions?

Jacob Quinlan: Well, in some ways the core decisions are contingent in that, it's the kind of material that I acquire.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jacob Quinlan: And there is a lot of contingencies involved in buying books, but it was also very, very focused. I mean, I I've done a lot of research about the history of fine printing in Canada, and I've now developed a-a fairly significant network of people who are doing fine printing according to traditional printing methods, and who are pretty exceptional in terms of their-their typographic skill, etc. And so, I-it was important to me to include at very least examples which are a kind of represent-a representative and comprehensive survey and picture of both thy historical landscape of fine printing in Canada, but also the contemporary landscape. So, I actually included a few items of very, very early fine printing in Canada, two of the first. One the-the private press of Charles Bradbury, which was an early press which could be characterized as a fine press in Vancouver. So, the sole book which they produced was printed 1931. It's a book by the Vancouver artist, Ross Lord, and it's called, *All Creatures Great and Small*. It's very, very scarce, and there's not a very robust bibliographic picture of it. So, I had a copy of that which I hunted for and was able to locate (technical issues occurred) and



I also included some work by another very early fine printer in Canada, J. Kemp Waldie's Golden Dog Press. So those-that kind of material is very, very hard to source. But I've been doing this for a while, and I have a fairly good network, and I was able to locate copies of those books and sell them to institutional clients or place in institutional collections. And then in terms of more recent work again, it wasn't important to me to include a representative survey and so I did make certain decisions. But those decisions were primarily determined by whether or not something sufficiently resembled a private press to merit inclusion. So, in again, in terms of how I define things a private press requires that the-the work be printed with movable type, though not always. There are a couple of notable exceptions. But that's-that's a significant criterion. And again, typically, the books are hand bound and hand printed.

Tamara Thompson: Hmmm, right.

Jacob Quinlan: So, even if moveable type hasn't been used, then at very least, something which approximates traditional methods of printing would be close enough to justify inclusion. So again, I wanted to have a survey of all of the significant printers, and I-I think that I achieve that.

Tamara Thompson: So, once the catalog is actually printed, do you sell it? Do you give it out to different institutions? Like, who gets their hands on this catalog to be able to enjoy all the fruits of that labor? 'Cause that's a lot of work.

Jacob Quinlan: Yeah, it is a lot of work. And basically, I print them at a loss. All of my sales are-generated by digital distribution. I don't think I've sold many books from a print catalog and that's just by virtue of the fact that we live in a world where print catalogs don't have the same function that they once did. So again, for me, producing them is part of a project in contributing to an ongoing discourse. And it's not primarily a business decision. But I send off the print catalogs to people who have bought books and expressed an interest as well as to institutional clients. And some institutional clients then have accessioned the catalog and include it in their holdings. So, it's primarily private clients who have expressed an interest and who are interested in bibliographic surveys and bibliographic a scholarship and who just or who might just like to browse through it.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jacob Quinlan: Institutional clients, and then I-I bring it as promotional material to fairs and events that I do.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jacob Quinlan: Toronto Antiquarian Book Fair, which is the at this point, the-the only major book fair for rare and antiquarian material in Canada.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's so-you can take this question in whatever direction you feel comfortable, like, answering. But what are some challenges that you faced in your time, in the, in this book world?

Jacob Quinlan: It's-it's an evolving world. It really, things have changed very, very radically. In a number of ways. And in the last twenty years. Part of that was the Internet. I mean, the advent of the Internet changed the entire landscape of rare bookselling. And it also meant that the kinds of catalogs that I produce became, in some ways, anachronistic and outmoded. They were no longer required for distribution and to sell books, and so a lot of people stopped doing them for that very reason. They could simply list books online. They have their client base post things to a website. There's no longer the-the requirement of doing catalogs. Now the challenge with that or one of maybe not the challenge, but the problem that emerges from that is that descriptions and information about books becomes more ephemeral unless they are held in institutional collections and rigorously cataloged. Or there is already a bibliography of that kind of material. So, the internet has-has shifted things in basically every way as it has with everything else. And recently it-it has meant that material that at one point was deemed scarce, is no longer scarce. And because the-the market has been flooded with material, so at one point a book might have been thought to be scarce, because it didn't show up very frequently in a particular area. Now, the global market that book in fact, is-is not scarce or is shown to not be scarce, because there are ten copies listed online from people all over the world. So, it-it's changed things in a lot of ways. I think the-the other thing that has been evolving is the nature of institutional buying. There's always been, especially in Canada, significant, and it and with respect to Canadian literature, a very strong reciprocal relationship between booksellers and institutional collections, particularly places like the Fisher and Library and Archives Canada. But there are a number of other very-very significant institutional collections in this country and with ongoing questions about thy research value in the humanities with financial pressures and budget cuts with Stephen Harper; and I mean, things have, the landscape has shifted. So, it's, I think, that the challenge is to adapt to that shifting landscape. Again, part of the reason why I chose to specialize in the area that I've chosen to specialize is that I love the material. But also, there was no bookseller really doing it. There were there were a few people there were, there were number-there were a number of people who were doing it in certain ways, but it was more piecemeal, and for me, I-I wanted to-to focus and to develop that. And that has meant that I've been able to develop very strong relationships with institutional clients. So, I-I saw a lacuna I identified it, and I positioned myself to respond to that. But increasingly, that's what one has to do. One has to respond to, quickly shifting and changing conditions. So, that I think that, that's-that's the real, that's the real challenge. But there are many. There are many and the-the Internet has also made physical bookstores something of an anachronism, not in all cases, but its bookstores are now in Toronto there are very, very few bookstores compared with the number that there were twenty years ago. The landscape is shifting, and that has broad and wide, ranging implications for the for literary culture in Canada.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I'm going to get into some of my bigger, more chapbook kind of specific questions now, if that's okay with you?

Jacob Quinlan: Sure.

Tamara Thompson: Why are chapbooks important to you?

Jacob Quinlan: Well, chapbooks in and of themselves are not important to me. But I think that chapbooks and this is something that you, you highlighted a little bit in your, in some of the material that you prepared for interviewees, just to contextualize the thesis in chapbooks provide a site for people who have not previously been published to experiment and to produce things. Sometimes those experiments are successful and are great, and other times they aren't. But the point is that an initiative that allows people to do things and to distribute and disseminate work that otherwise they wouldn't have the opportunity to distribute and disseminate. So, in that way I think that it is very important. I mean, booksellers characterize chapbooks as kind of ephemeral, and I think that's funny. I mean, it's a lot of people would lump them in with general ephemera if you were to categorize them. And they—they are ephemera because they are ephemeral. I mean, sometimes they have a lasting impact, and sometimes they prove to be significant, but often they are not. But they—so their effect, their effect is transient, but it provides a site for people to—to take those first initial steps toward experimentation in bookmaking in proliferating their work and in seeing it in print. So, in that respect, I think that they're very important, and there have been notable examples of chapbooks that have been fairly significant. One, the most famous, maybe, is *Double Persephone*, which was Margaret Atwood's first book in 1961, or her first book of poetry, I should say, published in 1961 by John Robert Colombo, under his Hawkshead imprint, and it was produced in a very limited edition and likely that has had no impact on Atwood's reception or career or the establishment of her—her trajectory but perhaps it did. It's—it's hard to say. I mean, that's those kinds of questions, I guess, require a lot of a lot of contextual research. But the point was that it was, it was something that she was able to produce, and it was received. And I think that a lot of people have done, they're similarly in Canada a lot of people's first efforts have been in producing chapbooks. So, in that respect, I think they are important.

Tamara Thompson: So, kind of jumping off of, like, that question, and some of the things that you were saying: do you think chapbooks are important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not do you believe that?

Jacob Quinlan: So, I think chapbooks are not important to Canadian publishing, except insofar, as I think that it's the, it's the exceptions. The exceptions when people become, when people reach a wider audience later in their career or some contingent encounter allows them to pursue some kind of publishing initiative, I think that in those cases maybe the chapbook could be seen as an intermediate stage to reaching a wider audience. But I think again, going back to thinking of chapbooks is ephemeral, partially ephemeral, because they're distributed to a very, very narrow audience. They're typically produced in very, very low print runs at least fewer than two hundred copies, if even that and given that, their impact cannot be very significant unless it's in retrospect, unless it becomes part of a broader literary narrative or part of the—the trajectory of someone's literary career. So maybe they become important in retrospect. And again, they are actively acquired by institutional collections. They become parts of bibliographies, they're exhibited in special collections, libraries, exhibitions, etc. But I think initially,

by their very nature they are ephemeral with a limited audience. So, I think that it's only if they, they're impact becomes part of a broader career trajectory.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jacob Quinlan: Do they have any kind of significance in in a culture, in a broad cultural sense.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, jumping off that again, do you think that this kind of smaller publishing reflects Canada itself in some way? And, like, take that question wherever you'd like.

Jacob Quinlan: I think that that's-that's an interesting question. I-I don't know. I think that in some ways maybe it does. And I, I've thought about this a little bit myself, because I, the sort of the nature of small and-and fine press in Canada as a kind of, in a sense experimental and sui generis initiative or a set of experimental and sui generis initiatives, and maybe I mean because I don't want to get too general or too abstract but, I mean, clearly there are significant cultural inheritances in Canada that are determined were determined by-by our history as a colonial country, etc. But it, Canada is also has always trucked because we're a small country in a relatively young country we've had to cast an image for ourselves or create an image for ourselves in certain sense. And again, I don't want to get too poetic or obtuse about this, but it is. There is a kind of Canadian culture has always been a kind of sui generis initiative, I think, or balance between the traditional and/or tension, maybe between the traditional and the sui generis, the-the attempt to create a cultural identity, a national identity. And in a lot of ways that's what small press initiatives and chapbooks are all about. It's about self creation. About taking an initiative of comparatively small initiative, but an initiative in creating a physical work which then can be distributed which otherwise wouldn't be created, because there's no traditional publishing model that would accept the kinds of works that were produced by these presses through their chapbooks and through their-their other ephemeral material. So, in that sense I see a certain analogy. But I'm hesitant to talk too generally about, I guess.

Tamara Thompson: That's fair. I'm so, I'm-the next question I have here is about the things that small publishing can offer that traditional publishing, you know, like House of Anansi, which is more, I guess, mid like size, instead of like the small, like Wolsak and Wynn kind of thing. But what do you think that small, because you were touching on what small like micro presses, can do? But what do you think that maybe the more traditional avenue can offer that maybe small press can't offer and, like, kind of vice versa? I'd be interested to hear more on that, because you're talking a little bit about it. But I'd like to ask the question.

Jacob Quinlan: Larger, larger, traditional publishing houses have much broader distribution course. They have much, much wider audiences and because they have wider audiences, and because they have larger distribution channels they pick or they-choose to publish things that will appeal to a wider audience rather than a very, very narrow audience. So, I think that, on the one hand, traditional publishing gets one's work

exposed or exposes or to a much broader audience and has a more significant cultural impact. But, on the other hand, the nature of the work is such that it is geared toward appealing to that broader audience. So, it requires that there already is an audience in place for it, or that it's the kind of material that, that would be popularly received. On the other hand, I think small presses again, there are individual efforts. There are individual efforts and their individual, their crew, or their small collaborative creative efforts which try to create a context for something for which they're has not been a context often work by unknown poets or unknown writers that would not have a mass appeal, and so I think that thy small initiatives are there's something extremely exciting about spirit of small presses in that, they are inherently creative because they're inherently trying to set and create a context for novel work. And again, some often that work is, you know not very good, or, according to most standards might, most aesthetic standards or critical standards may not be very good, but it, the spirit of it is, is much more creative, much less constrained, and much more individualistic or narrow in its focus and vision that traditional publishing. So again, there are advantages and disadvantages, and going back to the question of the-the significance of chapbooks and their cultural impact. Once again, I think that part of the reason why chapbooks really often aren't that significant at least when they're first published is because their audiences are so small. Now, maybe that's changing a little bit with the Internet, and it will be very, very interesting to see how that develops, because a book that's produced in a print run of two hundred copies now can still receive a very broad distribution and can be widely disseminated virtually. But whereas a book published in 1961 in a print run of two hundred copies, would not have a very wide distribution, and could not by its very nature it's limited print run, reach a very wide audience. But again, I think that the-the market a-a number of people have talked about this. And-and you might want to talk to Bruce Whitman about this, because I think he has a very informed perspective on this, but the audience for serious, for poetry, I shouldn't say serious poetry. Just poetry in Canada has been historically very, very limited for Canadian poetry. With some noticeable, some-some notable exceptions. But Canadian poetry is typically produced in very limited print runs, and even those editions usually don't fully sell because there is a very limited audience. So, but again, the I think that-that the limitation of that audience does not inherently need to be viewed in negative terms, because if that audience is very passionate in its reception.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jacob Quinlan: It may be more significant than a very wide but mediocre reception. So, there are, there are two sides to that. Does that make sense?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it really does, especially with your point on the Internet. It's something I've noticed as well. I run my own chapbook press, and we're on the Internet; we have a website. And we have the ability to ship, like, internationally, if people are willing to pay the fees. And we've had, we've sent things over to Europe. I've sent a lot of things to South America. I've sent things to Mexico, the States, and stuff like that, you know, and like its interesting how chapbooks used to be

more like if you printed it in Toronto and you were in the circle in Toronto, it probably wouldn't leave Toronto. And now I have a couple of people in Toronto, and then a lot of people in like Brazil. (Laughs).

Jacob Quinlan: Right, yup, that's right and I mean that wasn't even quite my point. My, I think my point was more that the material could be digitized. And then proliferate that way, so that even if your print run was very, very low, you could still reach an audience which was conceivably much larger than two hundred people.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jacob Quinlan: Which would have been sort of the range of-of audience. But I think your point is also very important, Tamara, which is also the case with a lot of my client base. I mean, I, as I say, I sell Canadian fine printing, and I've sold material to, I've sold a fair bit of material to the British Library. I sell things to all kinds of international institutions, and I also have private clients all over the world buying fine printing that's produced here in Canada, including ephemeral material. So, and the same-the same is the case as you say for your-your press. The we are no longer; we're no longer constrained by a particular geographic attachment or a contingency of moving in particular kinds of circles. The-the market is much, much broader now of course, the challenge with the Internet is anybody finding you in the first place.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jacob Quinlan: Right. So again, it-it cuts both ways, but it does create a much broader the possibility of much broader community I should say.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I appreciate you adding onto your other comment and then adding onto my comment. So, because we're talking about kind of how a lot of this stuff can be ephemeral and like limited sometimes it feels like micro presses and small presses are that way themselves. They're kind of there, then gone.

Jacob Quinlan: Yup.

Tamara Thompson: Why do you think so many like small presses and micro presses have to close up shop?

Jacob Quinlan: I think it's difficult to run these kinds of initiatives. I mean, as-as we talked about, it's a lot of work and in the kind of economic climate that we live in it's-it's hard to sustain that kind of work while also making ends meet. Because a lot of these things are there are projects that people do because they feel impelled to do them because they're motivated to do them personally, and there isn't necessarily significant financial return for these kinds of initiatives. So, I think it's partially the nature of the-the projects themselves. I think that this-this kind of work again, is inherently ephemeral in many senses. But I think that it's also that it's very, very hard to sustain a viable model for these kinds of things, and people try things out, and then their-their priorities shift, and then it becomes too much work, etc., etc. So, I think, but going back to the experimental nature, I think that it is

beyond economic pressures and time. I think these kinds of things are inherently ephemeral, because they are experimental. They people try, and sometimes they—they find an audience, sometimes they don't. They produce something it's well received. They may produce something else, and maybe less well received. And I think that people's goals, and the nature of their experiments shift over time. There's also all cut there—there are, especially in I mean, in the in the world of both small presses and fine presses people go through different aesthetic and experimental phases or developments in the same way that people's artistic practices shift over time and change. And so sometimes people decide to take things in a new direction, and they start a new imprint. And only if people are aware is there any evidence, or if there's a call upon, are you aware that all of these disparate imprints actually belong to one person. So that's another thing that that occasionally happens. But I think today it's really, it's just a challenge to be able to do these things in in the kind of economic climate that we live in.

Tamara Thompson: So, how are you still, like, keeping this going? Because again, we were talking about how the catalog is quite a bit of work. Why do you still keep doing it?

Jacob Quinlan: Well, I keep doing it because I'm passionate, but I also make a living from it.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Jacob Quinlan: So, it ultimately it is a business.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jacob Quinlan: I think that that's—that's a critical, that's a critical difference. And there are some, there are presses that I represent and whose material I—I sell and distribute, who do something very similar. You can make a much better living, one can make a much better living doing other things. I'm reasonably comfortable, but I don't think that anybody gets into bookselling or printing or press work in this way because it's a profitable business. It may be a viable business, and one may be able to make a living doing it. But there are more effective ways and efficient ways of making money than doing bookselling or doing fine printing or doing small press initiatives. But there are a number of examples of again, people that I represent who do make a living like myself, doing fine printing work. Barbarian press is one of the finest and best respected private presses in the world fine printing presses in the world. They're—they're based in Mission, BC. And they have been making a living, doing the kind of work that they do for over forty years. And their—their work is produced to an exceptionally high standard, and they have a very robust client base of both private and institutional collectors.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jacob Quinlan: I think that they are motivated, not by a paycheck, but by producing the kinds of books that they want to see in the, so they are motivated by an aesthetic vision similarly, with—with Heavenly Monkey, which is another imprint based in British Columbia. It's operated by

Roland Milroy, who I think, is one of the finest printers working today. And he is able to do this professionally. But again, the nature of these initiatives is primarily that they're motivated by a kind of vocational sense, or someone feels impelled to do them. However, some people are also able to make a living, and that that contributes to their ability to continue to do these kinds of things. And similarly, for myself, if it wasn't viable financially, then I-I couldn't sustain it. So, it's a balancing act.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I understand that. And that's a common sentiment in the community.

Jacob Quinlan: Yup.

Tamara Thompson: It's very much a balancing act. If you want to be able to be a part of this or do anything in book ish things.

Jacob Quinlan: That's right; that's right. Yup, and there are much better ways to make money. But you can, depending upon the nature of what you do. It is possible to make a living pursuing these kinds of pursuits. But again, back to what I was talking about earlier it-it involves being creative, it involves responding to changing conditions and being adaptive, and it involves being in some ways very discerning about the kinds of initiatives that one pursues. But I think that it's also the-the reason why anybody does this kind of work is because they're passionate about it ultimately other wise-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jacob Quinlan: Why would they I do it?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I have students who are like, I'm gonna be a famous and rich author. And I'm like, okay, let's take a step back and realize that book publishing and any publishing is there's no money doesn't matter if you're in Canada. The United States like there's more money in the United States but not JK Rowling kind of one-million-dollar money. That's she got that money by doing movies and merchandise in a universal land.

Jacob Quinlan: Yup, no, you're gonna have a hard go of it, if your goal is to become a rich and famous author.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jacob Quinlan: Maybe chasing a chimera.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, literally. So, we're in our last couple of questions here. And it's more just to give space for sharing and stuff like that. But what's something you wish maybe the public knew about Canadian publishing?

Jacob Quinlan: Well, I think . . . hmm. It's interesting, because I, one of my closest friends whose now dead, Stephen Temple, did interview with Don McLeod who's a rare book librarian at the University of Toronto, which was published in *Canadian Notes and Queries*, and they were talking about



publishing, the publishing trade in Canada, book publishing in Canada, Canadian literature, the market for Canadian Literature, etc. And I mean I-I listen to the CBC a fair bit I've always got background in my kitchen. Sometimes I listen more attentively and other times, but I think that they're-they're really in some ways, I don't know. There's a, there's a lot of talk about the significance of books in Canada and significance of Canadian literature and about the health and vitality of literature in this country but I don't always see that reflected in a book buying public or even in market trends for Canadian literature. So, I don't, I think that in some ways I'm not very optimistic about certain dimensions of-of the market, and I think that there is maybe some hypocrisy in some of our broad scale cultural discussions about literature in Canada. Because we like to think of ourselves as literate and passionate about a literary culture. But I don't always see that being sustained on a broad scale. But on the other hand, there are once again lots of smaller very viable initiatives that I think, make effort toward developing a strong vital literary culture in, in Canada.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jacob Quinlan: In mental and individual ways. And again, I think that there are also very, to temper some of my points there's also, there is a very, very robust culture of institutions in Canada, who are supportive of preserving and cultivating and developing a sense of our-our literary history. But sometimes, when I hear people talk on CBC, I think that they're full of it and think that the market doesn't really reflect what-what they talk about in terms of Canadian literary culture.

Tamara Thompson: Well, I think I think what you're saying is very true, because it's like how it-cause CBC does do like Canada reads and stuff like that. But that's more like it's one of those things where like, and we have our certain prizes and stuff like that. Well we used to have more Canadian centered prizes. We still have some, and you know the prize scene in Canada is interesting and the contests and stuff. But I think, especially when it comes to Canadian literature. A lot of Canadians don't know what's actually Canadian literature like. It's kind of like when you're surprised when you find out the Canadian actor is Canadian, and you're like, oh I love that guy. I love that that gal. She was great in this one, you know, and it's more of a surprise because it's not talked about. And I think one of the biggest issues like in University that was when I first started learning about Canadian poets, about Canadian writers like at all. And it's like, why didn't I learn some of this stuff when I was like, I don't know in elementary school or high school, maybe even, you know, just even-and it's getting better. But I feel like it's like it's not a controversial opinion to have that we should maybe teach our children more of what we have to offer.

Jacob Quinlan: Yup.

Tamara Thompson: And Canadians are like is that Canadian poet actually good? And it's like, they are! Maybe we should teach this stuff and more, not just in university, because, again, not everybody takes the Canadian literature course or the creative writing course that has the Canadian poet or short fiction writer on it, you know.

Jacob Quinlan: Yup, yup, no, I-I agree with that like again. I mean even going back to like clearly these are remarks, in very general ways, using very broad strokes. But I think that I mean there. There have also been a number of people doing things on CBC who, I think are, have been very realistic about the literary Canada, and I've also contributed to developing certain kinds of or developing and cultivating that that culture. I think I mean I-I love Eleanor Wachtel, and I think that program has done a lot for just literature in general.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jacob Quinlan: In not simply Canadian literature, but literature in general.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jacob Quinlan: Reaching a broader audience in Canada. But again, I think that there is you know it-it I think that we are inclined to be, we're inclined to develop a certain narrative of ourselves, but maybe not actually back that narrative up in in important ways with our initiatives. Which again is a very general mark. But going back to the interview that my-my friend Stephen did with Don McLeod, he talked about how the-the market for Canadian literature in terms of rare books, was always institutionally driven.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jacob Quinlan: So, in many ways it was an unhealthy market. And then, when institutional interest started shifting that created a kind of crisis for-for that market. Although Alice Munro is a very controversial figure in the last bit, has become so in the last couple of weeks, he would often like her as an example. And he would say that if Alice Munro had been an American or a British writer, that the market or her books would be three times more than what it is, and that-that reflects a certain kind of value and kind reflects the-the value that Canadians place on their own work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jacob Quinlan: I think that-that's again all of that is very general, but I maybe we should be more realistic and less self congratulatory in terms of our narratives about the kinds of value that we place on literature and books and publishing printing in this country.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Jacob Quinlan: Many noticeable exceptions.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, this next question is more just to give space for some history, maybe some cool print objects you've seen in your time. But what's something important or cool about D.I.Y. press history or ephemeral objects that you have seen that you would like to share? Because again, a lot of the things that I learn about the scene is just by people telling me stuff, whether that be a press, a really cool project that was

done or like this cool zine or this cool moment. I find out about it by just asking people this question. It's a personal favorite of mine just to hear what people have to say.

Jacob Quinlan: I I've got a lot of examples. I and I'm not-

Tamara Thompson: Amazing.

Jacob Quinlan: I'm not really sure that I could choose one, but I think that recently the-the most the thing that I've been happiest to handle, not in terms of contemporary material, because there's again all kinds of contemporary material that is being produced by fine printers in this country that really-really exceptional. I've mentioned a few presses, but again, the Heavenly Monkey is exceptional Barbarian press, Aliquando Press is one of my favorites, Green Boat House, which I already mentioned, Shanty Bay Press, Allen Steen, Gaspereau, Andrew Steves of Gaspereau Press. Both does something that more traditionally resembles a small press, but also very-very fine letter press work which is informed by a rigorous typographic practice. All of the contemporary stuff there's innumerable examples that excite me. But I also, I recently handled a copy of a copy of a book called *Engravings for Macbeth* which was produced by Golden Dog press, which, as I mentioned, was one of the first private presses established in Canada and it was a series of excerpts of acts of from-from *Macbeth* series.

Tamara Thompson: Cool.

Jacob Quinlan: Short excerpts from *Macbeth*, and it was illustrated with wood engravings by Lawrence Hyde who was one of the most exceptional wood engravers to have emerged from Canada. He was actually English, but he immigrated to Canada as a very young man, as a bit as a child actually, with his family.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Jacob Quinlan: So, this is an exceptionally scarce book and the wood engravings, I think capture the harsh stark character of Shakespeare's play. And again, a very, very rare piece that was produced in card covers that are very easily damaged, and it doesn't merge very frequently. I had, I've had an opportunity to sell a couple of copies actually.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm, yeah.

Jacob Quinlan: So, I was happy to happy to handle that.

Tamara Thompson: That's really cool. I love hearing about like, especially the old wood carvings, I went to Fisher, and we saw a printing of *Frankenstein*, and I remember one of the wood carvings of *Frankenstein* when he first looks at himself in the water and it was such a striking image, and so like the things that people do with print, with wood and just it's beautiful, the work was beautiful, and it always amazes me like the amount of creativity and artwork. And it's it just makes you really appreciate these-these objects that were like. I don't know. I just love seeing them and how they capture emotions. So, last question what's something about

your history that you wish people knew about? And you can take this in any direction that you desire.

Jacob Quinlan: I don't wish for anyone to know much about my personal history. No, I'm just, I'm being slightly facetious I-I don't really have an answer to that question. I think I don't in a lot of ways although what I do is deeply personal, and it's motivated by deeply person from a deeply personal place. I don't know how much of my personal history is relevant to that and needs to be known very generally other than that I have formed some very, very deep relationships with people that have emerged, that have emerged out of a mutual and shared love of books and-and so, I-I think that-that that's really what fosters community in, I'll end maybe, for me at least, more significant than community. Very particular relationships in this kind of sphere they-they emerge out of deeply passionate, shared mutual interest and that has in many ways shaped my trajectory in-in the book world. It's because of personal relationships with a number of very close friends, that I have followed certain paths, and also had a site and an opportunity to engage and to talk about some of my passions. So, I think that that's-that's something that for me is important. But I don't think that it is something that needs to be disseminated very broadly, because I don't think anyone really cares, but I guess that's a half answer.

Tamara Thompson: Well, thank you. Do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording?

Jacob Quinlan: Nope, no, I don't. I think that if you at any point have the time I will, I'll give you a copy of my catalog, and-and you might find.

Tamara Thompson: Oh!

Jacob Quinlan: You find it interesting to look at.

Tamara Thompson: Yes please.

Jacob Quinlan: Just to see more of what it is that I do, and also the kind of material that I handle.

Tamara Thompson: I would love that very, very much. Thank you so much for that offer.

Jacob Quinlan: Yeah, you're welcome.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, I will stop the recording there on that positive note.

Emma Rhodes

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is June 25.th. It is a Tuesday, and the time is 7:16 pm. And just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview. This interview is for author.

Emma Rhodes: Hi! My name is Emma Rhodes. My pronouns are she/her, located in Toronto, Toronto. I've been published with Anstruther Press, which is a Toronto-based chapbook press. And I did a group chapbook with the Egg Poets Collective, which is a collective of writers primarily based on the East Coast kind of reviving their chapbook series.

Tamara Thomspson: Fantastic.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Any other titles you wish to give yourself.

Emma Rhodes: I'm a publicist by day, and also at co-editor-in-chief of a review journal called the Miramichi Reader which also publishes chapbook reviews, something I kind of brought back when I joined at the house.

Tamara Thompson: Nice! Fantastic. I love hearing about the reviews, especially for chapbooks. I think review culture is so important. So, I love that your a reader that on. Great. So how did you first discover, like, zines and chat books and, like, this kind of smaller publishing? When was the moment where you kind of made that connection? So, a lot of people say it's always around you because of pamphlets, and you know, like come down to the church and get our small little like teachings, right? Because that's technically a zine or a chapbook, right? But like, when was the moment that you kind of went, oh!?

Emma Rhodes: These exist; I think it was probably in my undergrad. This might... probably isn't like a super like mind blown moment. I think I just, I think I just learned about it as I was learning about poetry and publishing and a number of my mentors had published chapbooks. I published in Flourish Festival Zine, which is a-a festival in Fredericton, New Brunswick, where I did my undergrad and one of my mentors was organizing the zine that year, and has since been published with Anstruther press as well. They're a big advocate for chapbooks, and they started with a full-length collection and not a chapbook, and said that they, like, low-key regretted it because it meant that-that they wouldn't, they were no longer eligible for, like, emerging writer prizes and emerging writer opportunities after they had a full-length collection. But with a chapbook it kind of gets your name out there. With like kind of more traditionally published chapbooks. It kind of helps launch new writers into the publishing world while still letting them be considered like emerging for other opportunities.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's also kind of like baby's first book, because it's, like, you're learning about all the different aspects of it. And it's so exciting. A lot of people, I think, sometimes are like, well, why

would you get excited that your book isn't real book or whatever? And I'm like, no, it's so exciting because it's so different. And it's so fun.

Emma Rhodes: It's totally a real book. It has an ISBN. I don't know totally a real book. And you can have chapbook launches. And I think—

Tamara Thomspen: —Exactly—

Emma Rhodes: —Yeah. They're—they're a big deal. You're allowed to be excited over a chapbook. I was very excited over mine. I had a whole launch my one with Anstruther. I had a whole launch, and I met so many incredible people from the Toronto literary kind of world through that.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Th—Those are the people, by the way who say it's not real book, who don't know anything and also are like, yeah, Amazon's a viable opportunity. And it's like, hmm yeah sure.

(Technical issues occurred).

Emma Rhodes: —been writing since, maybe high school well, since before that, but, like I considered myself a writer in high school, I had a—a really good creative writing teacher who told us that we should, we should consider writing with the same confidence that the like hockey boys consider playing hockey. Like, you're allowed to call yourself a writer just because you write. And I—I became like I just totally fell in love with it. And then I started meeting more writers in university and when I understood what a chapbook was, I don't know if I ever like, decided, like, I'm going to do something. I think I just looked at all the poems I had; after writing for a long time, I started in short stories, and then university kind of turned me onto poetry after I took a poetry class. I just realized I was writing about a lot of the same things and a lot of the things all the poems I was writing; they seem to kind of speak to each other. I was just kind of picking up on a pattern. So, I just played around. I put them together I honored, was it in English with a concentration in creative writing. So, in one of my courses, we put like a book together, as like the kind of thesis, but not really. And then I was thinking, maybe it would be a full-length collection. But I was just very precious about like the order they went in, and what like the whole, like whole collective thing. The whole piece was together, and I thought it had to be a chapbook. It had to kind of have its own like. Each individual poem tells its thing. But then it's also this little kind of precious object that tells its own story as a whole. And I thought that with—with the poems that I had, it was just getting kind of too long winded like more than it actually needed to be when I was trying to make it a full-length collection. And now I'm working on a full-length collection like, slowly. But I have more poems like, I'm kind of taking the themes from the chapbook and like new directions and making it kind of bigger, so that there needs to be more space for it, I think.

Tamara Thomspen: Hmm.

Emma Rhodes: But yeah, I didn't, I never really like, I just kind of kept playing around. And then I felt like the topic made the most sense, for

what razor burn is the name of this chapbook, what it was, and what it needed to be in the moment that I was writing it and publishing it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, you kind of answered my next question there of like, why you decided to choose the chapbook as like your medium for your work. But it seems like it was very intentional, especially with length. Which, like I super appreciate because I love it when poets can be just like no, this; it's done.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It's this big and that's okay. Don't get me wrong. I have my favorite collections and stuff like that. But for me, the way I personally really enjoy my poetry through chapbooks because it-it feels not only just like a quick way to easily enjoy poetry, and just have a lot of fun with poetry, especially like, you know, with the designs and places people can go with it. But just it never feels bloated, right? Everything feels like it needs to be there.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah. And I think full-length collections like should be like that, too. But like very often, they're not cause.

Tamara Thompson: So hard, like.

Emma Rhodes: Oh, yeah. And people will do like different sections of their full length, or sometimes like multiple topics, will inform a full length. I-I mean, like I love, that writers continue to grow, that people continue to grow right now I'm like very like precious about the like the objects of my writing, and I know that, like not, every album needs to be a concept album, but my chapbook and my first full length, I want to be concept albums.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I get that. I get that. I get that desire. I'm currently working on a collection, too. And I'm just like, no okay, these silly, odd poems can be-like cause I have my like odd, weird, like silly poems that like definitely don't fit with the collection I'm writing. And I'm just like, no, that could be a chapbook. It's gonna be completed in the way I like it to be one day.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Because I get that the drive for wanting a collection to have a very specific, like vision for it.

Emma Rhodes: When I read them. I'm like, yes; like this is art. I don't know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: This gets you excited because you're like, oh, there was a clear vision here, and like you were able to connect on that level with that piece of art basically, which that's just exciting.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, would you work with a small press again? Would you make these funny little things we call chapbooks again? With some of your work?

Emma Rhodes: Yeah, I loved it. I loved the process for Razor Burn. It was a kind of incredible. I was-Jim Johnstone, who's also the like creator of Anstruther press he was my editor, and he was a very kind of gentle editor, and also took like my poetry to new levels particularly one poem that I like, I fought to change; and then I looked at it again, and I was like, no, Jim's right. And then the one I made with my friends, like Egg's Poets' kind of collective, I said, kind of we are a collective. That was just like a fun thing to do with my friends, like we're all writers and it's and we're like separated geographically like I'm in Toronto. And most of them are in New Brunswick and it's just hard to like to get together and do things. So, it was nice to like to put our writing together and create a book together.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Emma Rhodes: Which is like, and we were able to do that in six months which, like you, can't do with traditional publishing.

Tamara Thompson: The turnaround is not that tight, usually. So, what has this kind of smaller publishing taught you over the time that you've experienced it and done it?

Emma Rhodes: What has it taught me?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Emma Rhodes: It's taught me that there are, like, creative ways to publish. This one high school teacher was very much, like, self-publishing is wrong and, like, only real publishing is the only way to really publish is to go the traditional avenue and I think that traditional publishers like do great work. I-I work in traditional publishing, but I also think that the process is very slow and in a lot of ways inaccessible. It's in many places dependent on an author is like already formed community or like publishing credits. It's hard to-to get a book signed even a poetry collection, if you don't like already, have significant publishing behind you. And some way to like guarantee sales that way. And chapbooks aren't concerned with that. And like, especially like, if you're just making zines, or if you're making kind of chapbooks yourself, like-like we did with Query, but even like answer, there's like, if traditional publishing and chapbook publishing kind of met like it is kind of like a more kind of formally established chapbook press, but they're smaller. They're easier to print and produce. So, they're a lot more accessible, and that you can get them out quicker. And people aren't like waiting two years. And then, when the book is out, you're still excited about the work. So, you can go and promote it in a way that's excited; I feel like authors are often kind of tired of their own work by the time their book is out. Yeah, I think there's lots of and it's just



nice to know that there are different avenues for different things, and like different avenues are-are constantly kind of coming up like people, people publish an art like. Maybe there's a poem on-on the mural somewhere like that's also another avenue. And I think it's nice to have like in poetry, it's wonderful when the form is also the content. And I think that's true, for-for the way it's published as well.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Emma Rhodes: I think that, I think it speaks to the type of poet you are. I think it speaks to the type of, or the type of poet you are at a moment, and the type of like writing something is-is also kind of how it's published.

Tamara Thompson: I think a lot of people who don't like self publishing don't actually know about the smaller stuff. They only think Amazon.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah, no, exactly. And I think self-publishing has come a long way, like, I think I think that self-publishing was different when I was in high school than it is now. It all depends on your needs. A friend of mine is a high school teacher and-and helped her students write and publish a children's book, and they did it through Freezing press. Just self-publishing, but it's kind of like a more respected like self-publishing. There are a million different ways to do things.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what does this type of publishing offer that other types of publishing, like, can't? You we're talking a little bit about it. But I'm still gonna ask the question 'cause you were hitting on some really interesting things.

Emma Rhodes: I think the speed of production. I think that most chapbooks are hand sold. Which is something that I mean traditionally published. Books are hand sold too, but many authors have to kind of, like, buy their own books. At a discounted rate and most of it is kind of separated from the actual writer like as a publicist, authors will sometimes come to me and be like give me an update on my books because they're so separated from it. They don't know because they're not the ones selling. They'll just go into a bookstore and see their book there, because it's all happening separated from them, whereas chapbooks is kind of closer to them. They'll hand sell it mostly; they'll go to events if they want or sell through social media. They're also smaller and cheaper. So, they're more accessible for readers, too. Lots of chapbooks are primarily or only digital and that's accessible in its own way, too. So, I think-I think, like my short answer would probably be accessibility is what it kind of offers, but it's also a different type of book.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's I-I think a lot of people like depending on where you are on the sliding scale, because there are some people that are kind of like Anstruther, which, like there is more of a professional thing there and then. There are people who are like. I woke up this morning, and I made a chapbook by the end of the day.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Right. And so, there is definitely, like, that sliding scale of what it can be. But I really like that. It's not traditional book with spine. It can be this more artsy thing, or this more maybe traditional folded thing right.

Emma Rhodes: And there's in Toronto, there's Canzine Festival every year that I like to visit. That is like this huge variety of things there, people are doing everything.

Tamara Thompson: I love that stuff, too. What are some challenges that you've faced as an author? And you can take this in whatever direction you desire?.

Emma Rhodes: Challenges I've faced. I don't know if I'm, like, big or, like, famous enough; like, it's mostly been incredible. 'Cause I'm mostly interacting with other writers I'm not like, I'm not like known as an author from by people who are not authors themselves.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Emma Rhodes: Except for, like, my friends and family. I think the challenges would probably be like making money out of it like making it as a job.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Emma Rhodes: Like, being a writer is not my like paid job and it's very hard to do and keep a and keep a full-time job. I just came back from a Residency on Martha's Vineyard, which is the first time I ever applied for anything like that and got in and it was so needed. I was burnt out, and I was, I had lost my like creativity. And then I came back. I-I had, like, my partner works in theater, and he calls it the big sad when you're-when you're in a show and then, after the show's over, you feel really sad, cause you got so close to these people, and then it's just over. That's how I felt after this this Residency cause I it was so beautiful to be able to be on an island with other poets, and then I was like, I have to come back and be in the real world. And look at my computer all day.

Tamara Thompson: Job that pays my bills.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Emma Rhodes: And it's, it can be really kind of demoralizing and easy to kind of lose creativity. I think, I think in many ways for me working and publishing, too, I feel like I'm kind of surrounded by, like, the hard things about publishing. Like a lot of authors don't want to promote or aren't very good at. It is kind of antithetical to like who we are in many ways. Or, like, sometimes, if I kinda I'm struggling to get a certain book, the attention it deserves just because of so many factors like if they don't have a big enough name, or if there's like something else that's like more interesting to media coming out at the same time, like there are so many factors. And then, and then, like I faced the brunt of,

like the author's disappointment or frustration or anger at things out of my personal control. And then I can just, like, I'll get home, and I just don't want to do anything with writing; like, I'm just like, I want to watch reality TV and order Indian food.

Tamara Thompson: No, I totally get it. That burnout, because you still have to go and do your job, and...

Emma Rhodes: Yeah...

Tamara Thompson: If you did it in publishing.

Emma Rhodes: Rejection; like publicity is a lot of rejection, because I'm like putting myself out there for other authors, for other books and getting rejected. And then it's difficult to, because so much of writing is rejection. It's just putting yourself out there and getting rejected before you get accepted, and it kind of lowers my threshold for more rejection.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's-it's a lot to be rejected. I talk a lot to my students because I teach creative writing in the first year. And they read Stephen King's *On Writing*, and he talks about rejection. And they're, like, well, he's Stephen King, and I was like, yeah, and he was rejected, like rejected a ton. I said, the authors that actually get published doesn't mean they're good or better than the other guy. They just stuck it out longer. And they're like, really. And I'm like, yeah this is how this works.

Emma Rhodes: It's all practice.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah!

Emma Rhodes: It's all growing.

Tamara Thompson: Are you willing to take it on the chin, 'cause it's hard getting those rejection letters and getting them so much.

Emma Rhodes: And it's dependent on juries. It's dependent on readers like even that doesn't like it doesn't speak to the quality of your work most of the time, like, maybe if you're getting rejected like thirty times, then, okay, maybe it's the work, or more than thirty. But most of the time it's totally out of your control.

Tamara Thompson: Or it just could be that the thing that you wrote doesn't Vibe with that team, or maybe it does vibe with that team, but they already have commitments to other things.

Emma Rhodes: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: Or they see the potential. But they don't have time to foster that potential right. And half the time they also don't even have time to respond. If I tell my students I'm like, if you've gotten a rejection they've give, they've taken the time to write out something, even if it's copied and pasted. That's a lot of mental energy.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah it is. With this, I was a reader for the *Fiddlehead* magazine for a while. Which just like that helps me kind of put things into perspective at the like-the amount of things that were being submitted. And also, it helped me understand, like how my work stands out it's good to just like see, what other people are publishing to make sure that you're not doing the same as everyone else.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Emma Rhodes: But I was writing rejection letters, and *The Fiddlehead* had had a policy. I don't know if they still they have a smaller team now, but we had to write like one kind of nice thing, like one piece of like constructive feedback for every rejection letter, which is not standard. Most places don't do that.

Tamara Thompson: No, that's why, when I had a friend be like, oh, did you submit to actually House of Anansi? And I was, like, yeah, whatever I put it in. And then he was like, you're gonna get a note back. And I'm like, don't you dare put that in my head. You and I both know if I get a response at all, we're doing great little bit of positivity. I've won the lottery baby.

Emma Rhodes: No, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: I did it. I just did it because I needed to start. And it was open right? And so like, it's one of those things where it's like you kind of have to be at peace with the fact that it doesn't matter if I think it's a good story, it's going into a slush pile with thousands of other things which a lot of them could be masterpieces. But a lot of them are people who think that if they can write English in a sentence, they're a writer. And so, you get a lot of that, too, because that's what open submissions are like. I run a chapbook press, and we deal with first time authors.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Get a lot of stuff and a lot of people who don't follow the rules.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah, gotta follow all the rules. What chapbook press do you run?

Tamara Thompson: I run Whispering Wick chapbook press. We haven't done anything recently, because I'm doing my master's, and everyone else, you know, has jobs at trying to pay bills and live in the economy but...

Emma Rhodes: Yeahhhhh.

Tamara Thompson: We started in 2020. And so, I literally couldn't go out and interact with the community at all with markets and stuff. I did a little bit before the press started. Because I was just interested. And then I started it. And like, I've this has been a fantastic project, because I've it's like I've been let out. And I'm finally able to interact

with this community that I love so much and hearing so many different perspectives. And it's been fantastic.

Emma Rhodes: I love that. I'm gonna look into Whispering Wick; like, I hadn't heard of them.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you. We only started in 2020 and again, we haven't been able to do a whole lot of markets and stuff like that, like our first market was like last fall, and we haven't been able to do a lot of promotion or anything, because I'm the big pusher for it because I'm the head. It was my idea, my baby and I'm busy doing this.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah, that's fair.

Tamara Thompson: So, it's been a bit of a backburner. But the-the way I say it to people when people say, what have you been doing? And it's, like, I have a lot of things in the works that I can't announce because they're not-they're not even close to where they need to be before I can be like, yeah, we're gonna do this. You know what I mean? It's not that we're not doing things. It's just that we can actually do much because we only have like this a bit of time here, this bit of time there.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But yeah, I'm not surprised you haven't heard of us. We're fairly new. So, let's-let's get back here. Why are chapbooks important to you? Again, talked a little bit about it, but still gonna ask it directly.

Emma Rhodes: Ummm I mean, it was important to me like to like start my, like, name as a, as a poet; like it-it was publishing Razor Burn. That really kind of brought me into the poetry community in Canada, I think. I finally like, had a physical thing to give to people if they wanted to like, know about my writing just like out in the world. I was in a Flying books once, and then somebody came up to me. I can't remember why I was there. I think I think it was a work event. And this person came up to me and said, you have a chapbook, don't you? And I said, yes; and then he said, do you have one with you? And I was like, actually, yes; like for a while I was carrying like months after it's published. I was carrying them in my bag like, just in case, and especially working and publishing. I was like, I'm always meeting people.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Emma Rhodes: And I just like he bought it right then, and then he told me that he followed me on Instagram, and I didn't even I didn't know. But then I searched him. And I was like, oh, yeah, it's this guy, and he's also a poet. And then I bought his book, and it's a beautiful kind of community builder to be able to have a thing of collected poems to share with people rather than just like sending them to like disparate magazines you've been published in.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I love the calling card-ness of this type of publishing, because whether that's like a chapbook, a zine, a pamphlet, a

postcard right like these are all like handmade, written like print objects that you can give.

Emma Rhodes: And people love it, and they're more likely to read it, too, if you give it to them in paper. People don't want to read on the computer anymore because they're looking at the computer all day. I mean, depending on what they do. But like the people I'm interacting with in my life, or they work on the computer all day and-and they're, they have a physical thing. So, they're less likely to like forget it like, if you have to tell someone they have to search for something, they're less likely to actually do it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think people are growing more interested in the physical instead of the things that are just online don't get me wrong. I still think there's a huge interest in that kind of stuff, but because of AI and things to see something made by like-like, like that's been stapled that's been glued.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That's been cut, but like at the imperfect, unsteady hand of a human, you know. And I think people really crave that. And I think a lot of people are getting it from things like these little chapbooks.

Emma Rhodes: At the Residency I just came back from there was, it was like a conference. So, it was like-like writing workshops. Every day, and there was one on book binding which is not something I like-like knew I wanted to do with my life. It's like it's not something I'm gonna like, turn my life towards now. But I loved it. I was like, I'm just gonna take whatever they're gonna give me. And I want to learn. I want to learn whatever they have to teach me. And I made my own notebook, and it was awesome. It was awesome to just like-like, do something with my hands for three hours and then to have a book. Now I write all my poems in there. I go outside, and I try and write something every day which I wasn't doing before. And it's kind of helping me like keep up this creativity that I was missing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not?

Emma Rhodes: I don't think they're like necessarily important, like, you don't need a chapbook to get published.

Tamara Thompson: Mmm.

Emma Rhodes: I think they're beneficial in a lot of ways. I found mine very beneficial for like reasons I've already mentioned. But I think what's more important, for like-like to get published in a traditional sense is to just have a publishing background, and that can be in literary magazines, and, in fact, it's probably more beneficial to have literary magazine kind of names behind you when submitting to presses. But like, I do think that chapbooks are important to like the publishing industry because they bring diversity, and I think that they're important in building community. But I don't think they're by any means like a necessary thing for people who are trying to get published, to do.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, we're all said. Does kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way do you think.

Emma Rhodes: I don't know. I don't think so. I think this is like.

Tamara Thompson: This is question you can take anywhere.

Emma Rhodes: Like, I think what I said about it brings diversity to the industry. I think that's good. And I think maybe it actually counteracts Canada because there's a lot, like, one, one good and bad thing about Canada is how much we fund the arts. Like publishing houses, literary magazines and grants like authors use grants. It's all grant funded which is awesome because it allows people to keep publishing for a long time like that doesn't exist in the States. So, a lot of like small presses don't exist after like five or ten years, whereas, like House of Anansi Press, has been here since the 60s, and I interned at Goose Lane edition, which is the oldest in Canada, like; and they're and they're allowed like they're able to continue to exist for so long largely because of grants. But grants also mean that there's like some restriction on like what is allowed to be written. What's kind of allowed to be published. And what gets kind of platformed. And I think that chapbooks that are smaller and operate at lower like operating budgets. And just have lower costs kind of help counteract that a little bit. There's a little bit more freedom to publish whatever. So, I would say, like counteracts Canada that way, which is interesting because Canada, like claims like love to call ourselves multicultural but I think that in many ways we're not. And I think that I think that chapbooks, yeah, I think it's I think it brings diversity. That's-that's like not. That's not like representative of Canada. I think it's just kind of a free thing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, Canada kind of had a bit of an identity crisis in like the 60s. And so, they were like, we need a slogan. We need to be something. Have we decided what we are? So, I kind of have to ask. Now one of the more sadder questions. Depending on who you ask, but sometimes I think it's a little sad. But why do you think most small presses and micro presses close up shop?

Emma Rhodes: Costs (laughs), printing costs. Like time, it's hard like I'm the co-editor in chief of The Miramichi Reader, which is a digital review journal, and it's all volunteer and it is so much work and I took it on because I mean, I'm a like there we're there are two people I with I work with my friend Nicholas Selig and before us it was another person who was running it on his own and I don't know how he did it like, it's like, it's absolutely a two-person job. So, I think it's probably like labor is probably that people want to be spending like they're burnt out. They want to be spending their time doing other things. A lot of people who open small presses do so because they love it and because they're creative people. And then the just like burnt work of keeping something like that running kind of doesn't allow someone to be creative yeah, it's-it's difficult.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's-it's definitely a labor of love. And sometimes you can only do these things for so long, because the world still keeps turning, and you still gotta figure it out, you know.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah. And like grants, keep things funded. But grants are also work to apply for you know, it's yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's a lot. So, we're in the home stretch here. I only have three questions left, and they're pretty open and more an opportunity for you to share. So, what's something that you wish maybe the public knew about Canadian publishing? Like the average every person, maybe, that they might not know.

Emma Rhodes: How hard it is.

(Both laugh).

Emma Rhodes: I feel like, maybe people would be more like compassionate to publishing workers, maybe would pay us more. When I don't know... yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I think that's a great answer.

Emma Rhodes: I think, as a publicist I get kind of 'cause, like media will-will, we'll present publishing as this like super-rich, like corporate world sometimes--which it's not. And so, when authors who have never worked in publishing or have never worked in kind of the back end of like literary magazines or anything like that. Then they they'll come in with like certain expectations that we like can't live up to because it's just like it's just not that like. There's you know, I-I work on like many books at a time, many campaigns at a time. And it's hard to just like have the time to do everything that people want sometimes.

Tamara Thompson: Hm. Yeah, a lot of... I, my students when they come in because I have a publishing creative writing degree. And so, they'll ask me about stuff. And they'll say, yeah, I'm going to be a big writer, and I'm going to make a lot of money. And I'm like, okay, well great. You're a great writer. I don't know your stuff yet, cause you're new. I believe you. You're not going to make a lot of money. I just need you to understand if you want to make money, do not choose publishing, because even some of the biggest publishers that literally have huge monopolies like don't even like they're not even gonna pay you like that great a royalties.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah, just gotta have a big name. Which is it sucks like it really is just like, kind of who you know. And what your background is that will determine. Like kind of less than the quality of the work which is not, that's not something I'd like.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. An unfortunate truth.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What's something important about D.I.Y. press history that you wish people knew? And this could be maybe something you've seen



when you're out and about but just kind of like something that you're like. Oh, man, people need to know about like this. That's cool.

Emma Rhodes: Know that much about D.I.Y. press history actually. I don't know if I have an answer for that one.

Tamara Thompson: That's totally okay. It's to give space for that history, for the things people have seen, because so many of these things are ephemeral, like-

Emma Rhodes: Yeah...yeah, I think I'll skip it.

Tamara Thompson: Totally fair. What's something about your history that you wish people knew about you? The hardest question of them all.

Emma Rhodes: About my history as a writer...

Tamara Thompson: Again, interpret it as you, whatever way you want.

Emma Rhodes: I'm queer. I write a lot about being queer and kind of going back and forth kind of a complicated relationship. It's great as I grew up in like rural Alberta, which was a difficult place.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's brutal.

Emma Rhodes: And I forgot I came up the first time when I came up the second time my friend was like, yeah, we know, and I put that in a number of my poems. I know my current project is queerness, and mothers and my-

Tamara Thompson: Nice.

Emma Rhodes: And abuse in my chapbook, because queerness and abuse and friendship.

Tamara Thompson: Just normal girlhood things, you know.

Emma Rhodes: Yeah things.

Tamara Thompson: Do you have any additional comments you would like to make before I stop the recording?

Emma Rhodes: I don't think so. I'd love to read this once it's completed. I'm really interested.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, of course.

Emma Rhodes: I want to learn more too, cause I've really love chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: I'm so glad; I'm gonna stop the recording there then.

Stuart Ross

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is July 26<sup>th</sup> the time is 9:06 am. And just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview time. This interview is for small press and author.

Stuart Ross: I'm Stuart Ross. My pronouns are he and him. I am talking to you from my home in Coburg, Ontario, one and a half hours east of Toronto on the northern edge of Lake Ontario right across from Rochester, New York, where John Ashbury was born. I have been running Proper Tales Press, my micro press since 1979, and I am the publisher, I'm the editor, I'm the only person at Proper Tales. I design the books, I type set the books for most of the chapbooks that I do. Now I-for the last ten or fifteen years I've drawn-I've hand drawn covers. And yeah, I'm the, I'm the everything at Proper Tales Press.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. But how did you discover zines and chapbooks in this type of smaller publishing, like, the moment or when in your life did you find them?

Stuart Ross: Okay, well, it's interesting. Zines and chapbooks slightly different. I think I was probably about sixteen, seventeen years old when the punk movement started in music, in Britain and a little bit, little bit later in the United States. And that was when I first was aware of the-the existence of zines, because that was a huge part of the do-it-yourself punk movement. There was Sniffing Glue, I think, that came out of the Uk. I never saw an actual copy of that. But there was a lot of press about it, and there were a lot of zines coming out of-starting to come out of US, Britain and then in-in Canada as well, sort of later, into the 1970's, and that was when I first became aware of the concept of zines. Which is very exciting to me. And then maybe slightly after that, I think, I probably the first chapbook I saw. I don't remember specifically, but I think me, I don't remember for sure, but I think, there was a-I used bookstore on Harvard Street, in Toronto near the University of Toronto, called Nth Hand. Nth Hand was run by Paul Stuewe. do you want me to spell people's names as they go?

Tamara Thompson: If you can, cause sometimes, like, I won't be able to know how to spell them or the computer. Let's just say, it doesn't even know what a chapbook is. It thinks everyone's saying "chat book" so it would be appreciated.

Stuart Ross: So, while Paul Stuewe-S-T-U-E-W-E-was a fantastic, a used-book seller in those days. He's still-He's still doing stuff in Toronto, in the book world and in his store Nth Hand he had some really unusual things that I had never seen before. It was a great used bookstore, but in the front-in the window in fact, he had some items from Pulp Press out in Vancouver, and one of the items he had-and he had it the new issue every time was, I believe, a monthly called Three Cent Pulp, which was a single sheet folded over with poetry, fiction. There might have been some reviews in there even, and that was really exciting to me to see this thing-the single sheet that was this exciting publication. So, I'm guessing that in addition to that, that Paul probably had some chapbooks, as well, though I

don't specifically remember seeing chapbooks. The-the first chapbooks I remember seeing, though they may or may not be the first ones I saw, were those sold by Crad Kilodney. You've probably come across his name Crad, C-R-A-D K-I-L-O-D-N-E-Y. Crad was selling his books out on Young Street in downtown Toronto. He had a sign around his neck saying various self-deprecating or self-loathing things, or public loathing things, like, you know, "Terrible Canadian writer: buy my books." And he was selling his first chapbook when I met him published by his own press, micro press called Charnel House. I think the very first chapbook was one called Mental Cases, and he was an entirely-at least in the first twenty years or so-was entirely a writer of short stories. Some very funny, some very, sort of, serious, and some pretty offensive. We became quite good friends. I bought his chapbook, and I was really inspired by this-this chapbook. I asked him where he got it printed, and he told me about this place, CP. Printing, somewhere up north of Toronto, maybe in Thornhill or Richmond Hill or something. And I thought: this is what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna stand out in the street and sell my chapbooks. Now I had already published a couple of times before. My first publication was when I was fifteen or sixteen years old, and it was this book here called the *Thing in Exile*. It was published by a press called Books by Kids. I think it was the third book that they'd done. It contained about a dozen poems, each by me, and two of my childhood friends, Steve Feldman and Mark Laba. I think Steve got connected with them, and then he brought me aboard, and then I brought Mark aboard. Also has a-a several drawings by me. And so this publisher-books by kids-had this concept of publishing books for kids by kids, and they've done a couple of anthologies: *Word Sandwich* and something else. And-and then they did this, which was the closest thing to a non-anthology, I mean, which is three of us. And that was really exciting. It came out in 1975. So yeah, I was sixteen years old when it was published, and I remember they were up in North York in Toronto. Is it two people Anne Millyard, MILLYARD. And Rick? I can't remember Rick's last name, but Anne and Rick- they became Anick, later Anick Press, which is published after they realized that this whole thing of publishing books by kids for kids wasn't really gonna fly, financially. They became Anick Press and became one of Canada's biggest children's book publishers. But when this book got published and maybe this is part of what inspired my whole Do-it-yourself. D.I.Y. aesthetic was that the-they got all the pages printed, and then we went to their place, me and Mark, and-and-and Steven, and then Anne and Rick were there, and they put all the pages, files of pages around a ping pong table and we-we went around and collated the five hundred. We walked around, you know, I guess a hundred and something times each to collate the five hundred copies of this, and then it was sent off to a binder, and who, you know, bound it, and it's a quite a lovely little book. So that was the first time I was published. I ended up going to a lot of-a lot of schools to do readings. Mark and Steve and I-we got called faggots because we were teenagers in 1970s who were writing poetry. So that was, and then yeah, it was-we-we got threatened a couple of times (laughs a little), but mostly we had a good time, and we did readings for other Junior High School classes. Like grade seven to nine in those days was junior high. Few years after that-and I don't remember what inspired this-I don't think I had met Crad yet-but I made my first chapbook, and it was-so I think I have a copy of it, right? Is this what this is? Oh, my gosh, there! I didn't even realize it was here. Wow! That's so weird. I'm-I'm in my incredibly cluttered basement. And it is very disorganized and

a-but this was (holds up orange chapbook with a hand drawn man on the cover). He Counted His Fingers He Counted His Toes. And it's the first Proper Tales Press item published in 1979, so, four years after the *Thing In Exile*. And it's just three sheets of paper, two sheets of white paper inside, and one cover sheet in orange, and it's folded and it's not stapled. It's just unbound. I did fifty copies. I typeset it, quote unquote, on my dad's electric typewriter at his office and I printed it on his photocopy machine, and I was doing a reading at a place called The Axle Tree, A-X-E-L Tree Coffee House, down at Trinity Church, in Toronto. There was a regular reading series there I went to a lot, and I had my first, I guess I-I hate that where we didn't use the phrase feature reading, but I had my first reading there and I wanted something to sell, so I brought these and they were fifty cents each and I sold thirteen of them. So that's six dollars and fifty cents I think I made. And it was enough to buy me an incredible Chinese meal at Kwang Chows, just around the corner, my favorite Chinese restaurant. So, I learned that poetry equals a really good Chinese dinner. And then that was the start. It was--think was the next year that I published, I think sometime, I think it was sometime just after that that I met Crad Kelody out in the street and he'd been printing, he was printing, doing offset printing of a thousand copies of his chapbooks. And I asked him where he got it printed, and he told me this old guy, Leslie Steffler was his name up at CP. Printing north of Toronto. So, I did the same thing. I was working at that time at York University, at the newspaper and so I had access to typesetting which in those days was a huge-huge, it was, like, a size of a phone booth on its side, a typesetting machine. A-a, an M. Vera type, or a Comp/Edit 5,900, I think it was called. And so, I actually typeset my first book, which was called *Bad Glamour*, and I got a thousand copies printed. It was thirty-six pages long, folded, stapled two color cover and might even be one of those around, but it doesn't really matter. And that was--and I went down to Young Street, and I also made stupid signs to put around my neck, like, I think my first big one was "Poet going to hell: buy my books, two dollars." And I did that for the next ten years. I stood out, sometimes full time, sometimes part-time on Young Street. I probably--I had three poetry and fiction chapbooks at first, *Skip and Biff Cling To The Radio* followed *Bad Glamour*, *When Electrical Sockets Walked Like Men*, *Bunny Baby The Child With Magnificent Ears*, and somewhere in there I-I had a short novel called *Father The Cowboys Are Ready To Come Down From The Attic*. And these were all chapbooks, and I sold them on the street for about ten years. I sold about seven thousand, my various chapbooks had a few very famous writers come by. Let's say--let's say Earl Bernie. He didn't buy a book, but from me (technical issues occurred) but one woman who came by, was looking at my-my book, *Father The Cowboys Are Ready To Come Down From The Attic*, my little novel, and I said, "So, do you do any writing?" As I often ask people. And she said, "Yeah." And I said, "Oh, have you published anything?" And she said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, do you write fiction?" She said, "Yes." and I said, "Oh, well, what's your name? Maybe I've heard of you." And it's not really stylish to admit this now, but she looked up at me, and she looked very sympathetically, and said, "Alice Monroe." And then she bought my little chapbook, full of all its--with all its, like, febrile teenage sex scenes in it, and she walked off, and I was horrified. So that was my one meeting with Alice Munro. And yeah. So, that was my--now, when I was out there, I met a lot of amazing people. I met, --and JW Curry came by with his child in a stroller, we met. We were both, I

think, nineteen at the time. We're born the same year. I think you're going to be talking with him later this afternoon. And I also met a young guy who was, I think, sixteen. His name was Jim Shedden, S-H-E-D-D-E-N. He's now the guy in charge of publications at the Art Gallery of Ontario. And at the time, he was this young kid who was making zines. I think one was called *Hangman Dance*, and another was called, *This Tiny Donkey Looks Rather Lost*, or something like that. And we really hit it off and became quite great friends. And that's where I really was introduced to the zines that I could actually hold. Some of them were folded and stapled just like chapbooks. Mostly they were eight and a half by eleven sheets stapled either just in the top left corner or down the side. There was another woman named Dean, young woman named Deanna, I think, a friend of Jim's who did a magazine called *Schrick*, S-C-H-R-I-C-K. And yeah, that was an incredible experience. And that really excited me about the whole D.I.Y. world. And that is the end of my unbelievably long-winded answer.

Tamara Thompson: No, that was fantastic. You ended up answering my next question on why the press started, and it was to have some work to sell out the reading, right? And so, it, thank you. That was fantastic.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, and I'll-I'll just expand a little bit on that, which is my first few books were books by me, and then maybe it was in about 1982 I think, three years after I started the press, I had some friends who were excited about selling books on the street. One person who was my—became my girlfriend for about a decade, Lillian Nećakov, N-E-C-A-K-O-V, who's still a really active writer. We did a chapbook of hers through Proper Tales Press called, *And Crunch* and another friend I met at York University. Michael Boyce, B-O-Y-C-E. Still, a friend of mine, lives in Montreal now. A book called *Hit By A Rock* of his prose poems. I didn't know they were prose poems at the time. There were these weird poems and prose form. I later realized they were prose poems, and I illustrated that one which was sort of odd. I think there's five of my illustrations, and Lillian, and oh, and Mark Laba, my oldest childhood friend, and the one who'd been in *The Thing In Exile*. He was probably the 1st person—I did a separate book by Mark, also sold on the street for quite a while, like a year or two. And we did a book of his, crazy and little concentrated surrealist poems called *Movies In The Insect Temple*. So, the four of us were out there for at least a year, at the same time selling our books up and down Young Street and after that I mostly—I mean I lost a lot of money. Oh, over the years, I've probably lost ten thousand dollars, at least, publishing Proper Tales Press chapbooks. My own book, selling on the street, I made a profit. I did really well with them. I, you know, I sold the books to them. I don't remember what—that's some small amounts. I lost money on those, and then every chapbook pretty much I published since then, I lost money on. I have done a couple of perfect bound-books, and one was a book by Paul Stuewie, the guy who run-ran that Nth Hand Bookstore. It was so important to me. I remember once I was in a store, and I was leaving, and he had told me that he'd written a book about Canadian literature and publishing, and had been rejected by every press. And I said, "Why don't you send me a copy to read?" And he did. It was only about a hundred pages. And I published this book called *Clearing the Ground English Canadian Literature After Survival*, referring to Margaret Atwood's book *Survival*. It was about thematic criticism of Canadian literature mostly and it had this very radical chapter at the end which

said that there should be Canada-Canadian content rules for bookstores, just as there are—were at the time, maybe still are for radio stations and TV stations. And that book got reviewed in the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* and *Quill and Quire*. It was a huge success. I mean, we sold about eight hundred copies of it. It was the only sort of quasi-academic book I'd ever done and the only nonfiction book, and that's just one of maybe three or four perfect bound books that I ever did through Proper Tales Press, end of footnote.

Tamara Thompson: Okay. So, I wanna ask if you have, like, an editorial philosophy, maybe a press goal. For some people, they have a very direct goal. Some people, it's like, let's just make things. But I wanna ask, like: Is there a goal of philosophy that you have behind what you do?

Stuart Ross: Philosophy might be too big a word for it. Basically, my thing was to publish, publish work that I really liked and in a lot of cases, publish work I wish I had written. And the closest thing I could get to writing it was to publish it and help that writer get the thing out into the world. And that's still—I have imprints, I've had imprints with three bigger literary presses, and that has always been my thing is publishing books that I wish I'd written. But with Proper Tales Press I liked quirky work, I liked surrealism. Mark and I had—went—we went to an alternative school where Joe Rosenblatt, the Canadian poet, the late Canadian poet who he adored, taught for I don't know a week or two. He was like a really hardcore surrealist. And I was really interested in surrealism. I'd read a lot of Dave McFadden when I was a teenager. The Canadian poet from, late Canadian poet from Hamilton, who later became—I became very good friends with and edited his final six books. I read Ron Paget, the New York poet, who I've become friends with and published one of his books and I liked French poets, surrealist poets in translation and some German surrealists, and I was just sort of obsessed with surrealism. So, I would say that most of what I published and have published ever since, in Proper Tales Press, has had at least some relation to surrealism. So I wouldn't say I was surrealist press. At one time I think, on the back of my book, so oh, here's copy right here. Yeah. *Bunny Baby*, *The Child With Magnificent Ears*. Yeah, it's a new exploration in *demento primitivo*. So, I—I thought maybe this would catch on and become this incredible new movement in literature, *demento primitivo*. But that was pretty much the first and last place that that phrase ever existed. I think I've used it a few times since, but yeah. So *demento primitivo* is the school of writing that I—I was trying to support and get out into the world. But really it was stuff that I liked that was weird.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: Stuff that I like that was weird is probably the definition of my aesthetic.

Tamara Thompson: So, is that mostly poetry? You were talking a little bit about fiction. I just wanna, like, just for the record, to kind of get an idea.

Stuart Ross: Yeah. My first few books of my own that I published to sell in the street were about three quarters poetry and some fiction, though

I'm looking at *Bunny Baby*, it doesn't have any fiction in it. So, I think the first three books had poetry and fiction and a little bit of fiction, and then mostly—and then after that, because I didn't really know poetry books didn't have fiction in them. I just I didn't know, after that all my poetry books were strictly poetry books and then I published my short novel, *Father, The Cowboys Are Ready To Come Down From The Attic*, and a few years later another short novel, which was actually perfect bound called *Wooden Rooster*. Both of which I had written for Pulp Press's three-day novel rating contest. And they didn't win, though I'll mention that *Father The Cowboys Are Ready To Come Down From The Attic*, they declared it a no win that year but said if anyone had win one it would have been me and they invited me to Vancouver to hang out with them. And they allowed me to use their typesetting equipment to typeset my book while I was out there. And one of the editors there, a fantastic under sung writer named DM. Fraser, F-R-A-S-E-R, he ended up, blurbing my book. Which was an incredible honor. So yeah, end of, end of that. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, I'm—I'm interested in kind of what your process is like today, and how you, like, how do you get work? And then how do you edit it? And then how do you, like, get it into people's hands? Like, I'm interested in that process, if you don't mind sharing.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, I—I publish almost exclusively work by people I know. And I've met, I've and—and more recently, people I've met online. I started publishing friends who are writing; I mean, almost all the friends I hung out with were writers. And gradually I met other people in the literary community or communities, or scenes, or whatever, and I got to know them, they became friends, and so I published some of them, if their stuff was within my sort of warped, weird little aesthetic. So even from the beginning, I edited, I did do editing work. I sort of declared myself an editor. I edited the books that I published, probably mostly small line edits. Finding a better word, getting rid of an excess word and maybe suggesting dropping a poem or two, here and there, if I didn't think they're up to par. So I always had an editing standard. I don't know if you've spoken to Rob McLennan in Ottawa. I suspect you have; Rob does amazing things in many ways. I think he does too much. He doesn't edit at all. I don't believe he even proofreads, I mean, from my experience of publishing with him. One of my chapbooks came out, and I found so many errors in it. I—I asked him, I paid for him to reprint the entire thing. I had been sloppy with it. I thought there'd be editing, but he doesn't edit. But he really gets a lot of work out there, and especially here in Canada, brings us a lot of American writers we don't know much about. So, I edited it and then I typeset the books. I designed the covers, usually with a drawing by me on the cover. Lillian's book had a drawing by Lillian, and Mark's book had a drawing by Mark. And the drawings are things like this (holds up an off-white chapbook with a red box for the title and has a hand drawn bunny in a blanket that has a red outline). Like, on the cover here of *Bunny Baby*. That's a little bunny baby swaddled in a blanket. And my first chapbook has a drawing by me. And then I—at first, I published, you know, in editions of a thousand, because these writers were going to sell on the street. And after the first few years of that—and I realized, wow, that's a—I'm losing a lot of money. I started doing smaller runs of chapbooks. I found of—a place that—a photocopy place down on Charles Street, in Toronto. I lived near there at this point in

the early eighties. Lovely guy named Ahmed probably printed my books for the first ten years there. And I would do one hundred or one hundred and twenty-five copies. I give a quarter of them to the authors and the rest I would sell. I experimented for a year or two with—got this big rack, and when I was selling my books on the street, I would have a big rack with all the chapbooks from the other authors. But really people didn't buy anything except stuff by me, or rarely by anyone else. They wanted to have my book—sign the—the book signed. And so, I tried that. Eventually, in the late 80's or 1987, along with a friend Nicholas Power, we started something called Meet the Presses which was a monthly event at Scadding Court Community Center in Toronto, in which we invited about six—if I remember correctly, was six to twelve literary presses to sell their work. It was like a little book fair. For two hours, there was usually a first reading, or a film sold, or a talk as well, and that was first experience of book fairs. One that ah, Nick and I created, ourselves, a couple of years after that, in 1989, the Toronto Book Fair, had collapsed. Someone involved in the Canada Council, or some Canada-Arts Council asked Nick and I to start up a small press book fair, like a big one. And so, for 1989, quite a while after that we had these book fairs that would have thirty, forty small press publishers of chapbooks and zines and comics, and then presses like ECW Press would be there, and Wolsak and Wynn. Who did, you know? Ya know more conventional but small press books. And that ended up being the main way that I've sold. Also did a lot of trading back in those days. There was a magazine out of the US called Fact Sheet Five which had, like thousands of listings of zines and small press items from all over North America and England and Australia—I guess the English-speaking world and—and people would just, it was this culture where people just sent and traded, sent, you know. You'd send a dollar and get something, or you'd send one of your chapbooks or zines, and you'd get one back in the mail. So, a lot of it was this—this trading culture, which was absolutely, really exciting. So, that's really—I never really have nailed down the way to really distribute them. Eventually I end up giving much—more copies to the authors and giving them away, giving away my classes to students, cause I have a base—a few basement shelves full of chapbooks. And there's no great way of selling them. This Ain't The Rosedale Library, which was a fantastic Indie bookstore in Toronto run by Charlie Huisken, H-U-I-S-K-E-N and Dan P-A-Z-U-I-N. They ran this bookstore that was really—really supportive of small press, and they sold chapbooks there. In fact, they sold one hundred and twenty-five copies of my—my novel *Father, The Cowboys Are Ready To Come Down From The Attic*, which was a chapbook. I think it sold for three dollars or five dollars. I had my book launch for it there, my first—no, it wasn't my first book launch. But my first book launched at a bookstore. So, it's been really scattering shot, and I'm still terrible at distribution. I'm not a businessperson. I don't really keep records very well of anything. But I—my estimate is I've lost about ten thousand dollars publishing books and chapbooks over the years. But it's—it wasn't ever, ever about making money. I, when I was selling my books on the street, that was, you know—I would sell anywhere from—I would usually sell five to seven books—chapbooks in a day, which were two or three dollars each, and on Christmas of 1989, I think I sold sixty something chapbooks out on the street there. Mostly I sold, yeah five to seven. Good days I might sell ten or twelve, but it helped. I mean, it was sort of a part-time job for me.



Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Stuart Ross: But I never stopped to think of how much the-the books cost me, and how little my actual profit was. I'm a terrible businessperson. So, distribution was the last thing, and is still the last thing in my head when I, when I publish. It's more, I want to get this out there, and just make it possible for however many people to see this, and the most important channel of distribution was the authors and then if they ran out of books they'd ask me for more, and sometimes I'd sell them, for you know a buck, a piece, or sometimes I just give them a pile of them, and that's still the way it works.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I-I run my own press, too.

Stuart Ross: Oh!

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, and one of the things, yeah. We are Whispering Wick chapbook press. It started up in 2020, because I was in the creative writing and publishing undergrad, and it was the 1st time it had ever gone through, and we needed an internship. But it was, you know, the fall of 2020, and I was, like, all my problems would be solved if I could just start up a chapbook press, and that could be my internship, and I could bring my friends, and it would be great. And then I wouldn't be so stressed out and losing my mind. And then I said this idea aloud, and everyone said, "Do that, do that, please, do that." And I was, like, "Oh, okay." And so that's how that started. But I remember trying to figure out how to do distribution. And, like, you know, you have to have money to get off the ground. And a lot of it just came out of my own pocket or my parents, because, you know. Stamps are expensive or paper, ink, and it was, like, all of us coming together, like, I took my editor, Nate's laser printer because he wasn't using it at the time. So, he drove down and dropped it off outside my house because we couldn't really talk, because it was Covid and, like, another friend mailed me-her grandmother, who had passed away like a couple of years ago-her, like, entire thing of, like, embroidery thread. So, I had a ton. I still have a ton of embroidery thread, just, like, every single color you could think of. And so, it was really just, like, a team effort of, like, hodgepodge and trying to get it done. And, like, the thing I still say is that we do marketing. But it's "marketing" because I'm not gonna do it if it's not fun. Like, if it's not fun, why am I doing it so?

Stuart Ross: Yeah same. So, it's called Whispering Wick.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, Whispering Wick.

Stuart Ross: And do you-are-are your chapbooks some of the ones that are on the table at Take Cover Books?

Tamara Thompson: No, at take cover-We-so I've been trying to get the books 'cause Take Cover just, like, started up only a couple years ago at this point.

Stuart Ross: I just know that they had a couple of chapbooks up by the cash. I wondered if those were yours, but you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: They weren't hand sewn binding, so they wouldn't be yours. But anyway, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But yeah.

Stuart Ross: Might be a place to sell some books.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I'm thinking about it. They came around when I was still doing my Master's, and I was overloaded with being a TA and also reading like five books, full novels, a week, so I was a little bit in-as they say-dying.

(Both laugh)

Stuart Ross: All right.

Tamara Thompson: But my point is-is-I understand it's hard to do the distribution, because it's also so bloody expensive to send things through the mail. I'm one of those people who get my dad to go in and buy the stamps, and then I sit outside and stamp them, because the ladies are always, like, "No, this is a package." And I'm like "No letter mail." I know it's letter. Had the old guy who used to work here, who retired, who always was like, "Yeah, that's letter mail," and it just go through. And now you were stopping me. So no, it's letter.

Stuart Ross: There used-I don't remember when it changed, maybe in sometime early 90s. There used to be something called Book Rate in Canada and you could sell-you could send things for about half the usual price. Just said it was printed matter inside. There's a book or pamphlet, or whatever, and you could send it Book Rate, like, you get a little book rate stamp. You put it on, you take it to the post office, and it was so cheap to sell stuff. And it was devastating when they stopped that and-and ridiculous, as well.

Tamara Thompson: I wish they would bring it back, because it's so confusing now-on-and, like, stamps are so expensive. And it's just, like, the only way I can get my books out there if, I'm not going to markets, because literally, the only way I could sell my books, because it was-I literally couldn't see anybody. I couldn't go anywhere. It was through the mail and, like, it's bonkers, and, like, it's-God forbid you try and do anything like national, like internationally. Like, I have to, like, to contact the people and be, like, "so, we do international shipping, but you have to understand that we have to charge you for the extra money. Are you still okay? 'Cause this is gonna be, like, twenty dollars for, like, this ten-dollar chapbook."

Stuart Ross: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Are you sure?

Stuart Ross: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: People are like, "Yeah, sure." And I'm like, "Okay." I-

Stuart Ross: Published an author in Israel, an author in Norway, and an author in Russia just over the past five or six years and I don't-I don't have them pay shipping. I just-I-I pay all of that. And it costs unbelievable amount to send to those places. The trickiest one was Russia where I set the box. It must have cost about forty bucks or thirty chapbooks. It got lost in the mail in Russia and then the war occurred, and I had a friend, an acquaintance, who lived in a, some country that-whose name I can't remember, like Kazakhstan, or something, right near Russia, where there was still mail going between his country and Russia. There were still trains going, and he was visiting Toronto, and I gave him three copies of the chapbook and he-he mailed them from there and he told me even that, just from there to Russia, three chapbooks cost about twenty bucks. So I had to send him some money.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: And that was a-an amazing book by this amazing young Russian poet I've become friends with. She translated about twelve of my poems that were in a Russian journal. So, she and I co-translated beautiful chapbook of her poetry. And it's one of those beautiful chapbooks I've done. I don't know if there's one handy here. But yeah, and she's only ever gotten three copies of it which breaks my heart, and somehow, I wanna send her another bunch someday because it was a thrill for her. And then, and then, you know, the Russian Post Office lost them in-the first thirty. And anyway, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, well, I've had issues like that with just getting things up to a-Iqaluit, like, within Canada, like, just trying to send things. So, I had interestingly enough, my family met a gorilla-so, my parents are biologists. And we have a family friend who is a gorilla biologist from Cameroon. He worked in Peterborough. Now he is the head biologist of Iqaluit (laughs) and we try and send him stuff, and they'll open it up and take things. So, my mom had given him homemade jam, booties for his new daughter.

Stuart Ross: Wow!

Tamara Thompson: They took things, and so, like, I tried to send him chapbooks because he tries to support me. And it's like, "Yeah, we don't know where they went." And I went, "Oh."

Stuart Ross: Wow.

Tamara Thompson: That was the last one of those books. So, I ended up reprinting it so that he could get his book because he ordered quite a few of this one short sci-fi thing that we'd done and, like, it was, and that's in Canada, you know. But it's so far north, like once you get like a certain part, like part north, like people don't care.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, yeah. Wow.

Tamara Thompson: Right?

Stuart Ross: Crazy.

Tamara Thompson: So, I have one more press question, and then we're going to switch into some more author questions. But what are some challenges that the press has faced over the years?

Stuart Ross: I haven't really faced any challenges. Aside from getting the chapbooks out there into the people's hands. I mean, more recently, it's been, you know, in the last ten or fifteen years—these to be places that review like *Fact Sheet Five* used to review them. There's *Broken Pencil*, which I think reviews a little bit. But I had a pretty big feud with the publisher (technical issues occurred)—so I don't have anything to do with that thing anymore. But there used to be a real culture of this kind of thing, and it was a more of a D.I.Y. kind of a punk and zine culture than it came out of. And so, it was easier to get things to the people's hands, easier to get people to write about what you were doing. So that's—it's a small challenge. I don't have expectations that are very big. I noticed it's really interesting that the young-younger chapbook makers—the people who started doing chapbooks in the last ten years, tend to, like, they—they do, accounting, they—they, they—they see exactly, except for you—

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

Stuart Ross:—How much money. They try to turn a profit. And they it's—it's really fascinating to me. That's mostly what I've seen. There's not as many people doing it in this anarchist kind of a way. So, there's no, there's no challenges. The biggest challenge was trying to get books to Russia.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: You know, be an ongoing problem. And also collaborating. I really wanna keep collaborating with Gala Uzryutova, GALA U-Z-R-Y-U-T-O-V-A. I think Uzryutova amazing-amazing person. And now our emails are a little circumspect.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Stuart Ross: Lot of things we don't talk about at all that are on both of our minds, I'm sure. And we—we used to write every week or two, and now we write a couple of times a year. So that—that's not exactly a challenge, but part of a challenge I do. Wanna fill in one little thing that I didn't, about the press, since we're moving away from it, is I've published about a little document that I print it out, and it's gonna pull it up. Because I wrote a little history of Proper Tales Press very brief, a few years ago. So, I just looked at it, to remind myself, before we talked or attempted to talk yesterday. Where is this documentary? A document? Here it is So, over the years I've also published quite a few—I guess we could call them zines through Proper Tales Press. My first one was the one that went over, I don't know, maybe twenty years, no, ten or twelve years. It's called *Mondo Honkamooga a Journal of Small Press Reviews* that later became *A Mondo Honkamooga Journal of Small Press Stuff*,

and it was a magazine mostly for most of its life, of about twelve to sixteen pages, legal sized sheets folded over and stapled. I had about a hundred subscribers at one point, and it was interviews and reviews and articles and rants, all written by people in the small press, mostly friends of mine. But I got things from people in the States as well, and it was, it was sort of a pretty big deal for this weird little photocopied thing because there wasn't anything much like it. It lasted for, I think, twenty-one issues. I did a magazine whose title I would not be using now. But it's called *Dwarf Puppets on Parade*. Because, Mark Lava said—I said, “Mark, what should I call my next little magazine?” And he said, “Dwarf Puppets on Parade.” And I said, “Okay.” And it was a magazine of constraints. The first issue contained writing not using the letter E, and the second issue contained only writing about Huey Long, the Governor of Louisiana, from 1929 to 1932, and I think there might have been one more issue, I don't remember. I did one issue of a very big, ambitious magazine called *Sid and Shirley*, named after my parents with their photograph on the front cover, and it was a magazine in which I ran about twelve to fifteen poems by each of three poets. In that first issue Lynn Crosby, Jeremy Dodds, who's now been canceled and David W. McFadden. There was also a long interview with David McFadden and a lot of book reviews written by me and other people. It was about sixty pages long, and I managed to do one issue, and then I—it croaked because it was just too much, and it cost me a fortune, and I lost too much money. I did, I did a magazine called *Peter O'Toole*, the magazine of one-line poems. There's been a journal, published by a guy named Bill Berkson, B-E-R-K-S-O-N, in the United States. He was a New York poet and a favorite poet of mine. He had a magazine called *Roy Rogers*, and it was a magazine of one-line poems. I think that was in the seventies. So, and maybe (technical issues occurred)—I decided I was going to do a magazine of one-line poems, and it would be named after my favorite actor, Peter O'Toole. And I had all sorts of, I did four issues, and they were all about, I don't know, twenty-four to thirty-two pages each and they were full of one-line poems, usually about fifteen contributors in each issue. And I'm really proud of that. I did two issues of a magazine called *Hardscrabble; a little magazine of poetry*. Hard—when I moved to Coburg, I found out that Coburg had been either nicknamed, I think, nicknamed in the late 1800's *Hardscrabble*. So, I thought, that's a great name. I'm going to use it to start a magazine. And that's usually how I start magazines, is, like, I think, of a—come up with a—a name and think I want to make a magazine under that title and that was the case with *Sid and Shirley*, *Dwarf Puppets on Parade*, *Mondo Honkamooga* even. A friend of Crad had said, oh, your new book Crad is *Mondo Honkamooga* and Crad and I laughed over that, and then I decided I would have a magazine with that title. *Hard Scrabble* published about five poets in each issue with about six poems by each, and then in the US, a guy named... shoot, Joel, Joel, Joel! Joel can't remember his last name—a guy in New Orleans did magazine called the *Southern Testicle Review*, which he invited me to submit to. And I—it was a—it was just stapled downside, eight half eleven, very zine looking—Joel Dailey D-A-I-L-E-Y. So, I decided to do an issue of a magazine called the *Northern Testicle Review* and I knew I wouldn't do more than one. So, I think it said, the *Northern Testicle Review*, the *Debut*—wait—big number one, issue “The Farewell Issue.” And I actually published magazine called the *Northern Testicle Review*, and it is interesting to me and encouraging that about half the contributors were women who are willing to submit to a magazine with that

sort of disgusting title. It's a great magazine. I found the whole thing embarrassing the entire time. I have two other mags that I'm—collaborative mags that I've been talking with other people about doing for a while. One would be a one-inch by one-inch magazine that I would do with Lisa Fishman, the poet from Wisconsin and I've also been thinking of doing a magazine called *The American Friend*, named after the Vim Vendors Film, which would be a magazine of "published in Canada only" of American poets which would be slightly outrageous, given the whole Nationalist cultural thing that happens in this country. So, I thought that'd be fun. And I'm—I'm most influenced by Americans, so it'd be a little salute to—would just be a little chapbook scene. I also did one actual zine-zine, which was called *Pumpkin Head*, which I did four issues of, and it was literally one of those cut and paste things. I think I did it in the nineties and had a, you know, things, like, you know, photocopies of tickets to concerts I went, lists of favorite movies, and you know the real kind of zine things, and that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: That was the only zine I did that wasn't actually a literary zine. I just wanted to fill in that bowl of-of the mags.

Tamara Thompson: No, that's fantastic. I think the, like, the other thing that you were talking about earlier about, like, kind of, like, just the variety of what, like, chapbooks and zines, and kind of what they are. That's something that I've been having to grapple with. Because, you know, in Academia they're, like, define this. What is the zine? What is the chapbook? And I'm, like, well, okay, how do I do that? They're even being—asking me—like, when I was entering to the Ethics Committee I had to have criteria right, because my project couldn't be as big as the sun. So I'm doing it in Canada and talking to Canadians and stuff. And they're, like, just find what a Canadian is. And I went, whoa, okay, this is my best that I got, Joel? It's, what do you supervisor, sir? What do you think of what I said? And he's like, yeah, that works. And I'm like, okay because I didn't want to limit myself in what I described what a Canadian was. And I was like someone who lives here. But maybe someone who has lived here, but moved away because, you know, there are Canadians that don't necessarily live in Canada that are still doing stuff with other Canadians.

Stuart Ross: Right, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: The next committee might be, like, but that's not allowed, because that wasn't in your definition. And I'm like, really. Mull it over.

Stuart Ross: I'm glad, I never applied to graduate with my BA. And didn't go into academia. But more power to you for the things you're doing that's—and I'm glad you're infiltrating in this way. I just want to show I didn't notice that I have a copy of *Mondo Honkamooga*. This was—(hold up a larger newspaper formatting like mag. With large letters for the title and

Tamara Thompson: That's great.

Stuart Ross: Second issue. Every one of them featured one big interview. This interview is with bpNichol.

Tamara Thompson: Oh!

Stuart Ross: bpNichol talks about consumer resistance. And I remember when I went to his place, I had a really bad fever, and I was barely coherent, and he was so lovely to me and at the same time he showed me poetry, poems that he'd done on they looked like Pong, or one of those really early-

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Stuart Ross: -Video games, and he had words jumping around on the screen. I never see anything like it. Was he-was probably the first person ever to do those. But I was, like, everything was through this feverish haze, but he was amazing. So, it had that, and it had he, you know. He gave me some of his cartoons. (Open up the mag to show text and images drawn by bpNichol).

Tamara Thompson: That's great.

Stuart Ross: And what else is in here? I'll just do a quick look. Bibliography of his books in the back, a quote despicably selective bibliography had and there was an Ad for Underwhich Audio Graphics. Underwhich was a small press out of Toronto. I think it-I don't think it exists anymore, but they had cassette tapes so, and there was an Ad. So, it's-my subscriptions were three dollars for six issues. I Opa Lewis Nations, a great hero of mine small Press hero, who did a-an incredible Lit zine in the late sixties and seventies out of England, and then eventually Canada, called *Strange Faeces* F-A-E-C-E-S. The last issue is called *Endangered Faeces*. He became-I-I-I reviewed a little zine, a little chapbook of his. I can't remember what's called-a tiny little photocopy chapbook of his in the York University newspaper when I was the arts editor there back in my typesetting-first type setting days. And he phoned me up 'cause his wife went to York, as it turns out, and she saw it and told him, and he phoned me up. We became great friends. We're-we're still friends. He's in his eighties now. He's somewhere in Oakland, California. And he did umm, he did, he did this sort of, like, editorial fighting, the old farts. It was an attack on a Montreal poet, Steve Morrissey, who attacked him, and so he did an attack on Steve Morrissey. *Politics and Poetics* by Chris Fares. So, I think it's still around. He was a chapbook publisher for many years. Unfinished Monument Press. I can't remember. I can't believe how many of these things I remember so distinctly.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, it's really-and he was a real political poet. Another great political poet was Jim Smith. Jim Smith one of my favorite Canadian poets. I published some chapbooks by him, and I also put out two of his book-books through imprints I had. And he did an article about-what is this about, one poetry special to go. And I think it was about poetry, readings in restaurants and bars. I have no idea what. Then there was a whole book review section. So, review of Dennis Turbine from Ordinary Press in Ottawa. Peggy Leffler, JW Curry's now former wife, was published

by a little imprint of Mark Labas, called Coma Goats Press. Coma Goats Press. Aj Hebble is now a big jazz, academic and musician, had a little press called Ratea Press. So, there's a review of his short story collection, *The Burger Joint was Closed*. *The Burger joint was closed*. Arno Wolf, Jr. of the Tantrum Pres-Tantrum Press. He also sold on the street for a couple of years. Various other, oh, what's in here are the three-three books from a British press and they were reviewed by Peter Robinson, who was a poet at the time, who was now a very, very famous writer of mystery novels. I can't remember what his detective—he's published by Penguin and stuff. But at the time he was—he wrote—he did little chapbooks of poetry and oh, there's a review of Chester Brown, the graphic novelist. He was doing something called Yummy Fur Comics, and Mark (technical issues occurred)—reviewed *Yummy Fur*—*Yummy Fur* comics numbers one to three. And then it was a little section in the back of each called Small Mags by Brent Davis. I was Brent Davis, and I reviewed various small literary mags, and sometimes I put a little comic strip of my own on the back cover. So that was just a little tour through Mondo Honkamooga, which was—was really—really important, it was really well known in the eighties. So that's all. I'm sorry.

Tamara Thompson: No, that was great. Thank you for sharing and showing as well like that was fantastic. I—I love hearing—and again, I—because a lot of these things are ephemeral and stuff like that, like, the only way you find out about some of the stuff is people just telling and showing you things. So that's what I—I love it because, like, I hear the coolest things from people that are just, like, oh, yeah. And then there was this really weird, like, written object thing that had, like, little chapbooks in it that was about like Jonestown. And there was, like, a little pack of Kool-Aid in there and stuff like that. And this and I was, like, that's a really cool art object thing that was, like, commentating about like cults and behaviors and stuff. And it's, like, cool, you know?

Stuart Ross: Yeah, I just mentioned. There's a-a couple of the things that really stand—JW Curry did a lot of objects that were pretty interesting. One of the best was—I can't remember the title of it, but it was by Mark Lava. It was about worm, digestion, and excretion. It was a poem, and it was in a box. It was rubber, the poem was rubber, stamped in the inside of the lid of the box, and inside the box was a little cut out panel that had a little tiny baggy in it, with a desiccated worm in it and I still have it. It was probably published forty years ago. I've still got it, and the Worm is just—just barely still holding it together in there and—and that was an amazing little publication. I've read about one, *In Fact Sheet Five* that was—I can't remember if it was a magazine or a book, but it was only published in an edition of about ten copies, and it had an ant farm, a living ant farm. Are you—Are you familiar with ant farms? You know the two pieces of glass with dirt?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah.

Stuart Ross: It had an ant farm as a cover. That's a front cover and then somehow, they bound you know, pages into it, and I never saw it, but I read about it. It was then, yeah, edition of ten. A book with an ant farm as the cover, like, that's just mind blowing. There was a guy named Joe Sullivan, I don't know what's become of him. He lived in Bolton, Ontario.



He had a press called, I don't remember the name of his press—JW Curry would remember—but he did things like he rubber stamped poems on the soles of old running shoes. He had poems, he made grilled cheese sandwiches with poems in them, and he did very small additions obviously, my favorite one was, he took a walnut, I think, twenty-five walnuts. He carefully broke them open so that the shells didn't break, but the two halves separated. He scooped up the meat put a little poem in it and the poem had a thread attached to it, and on the outside, the thread so, and then he glued it back together, and on the thread it had the-the name of the publication and the author. So, I've got one of those somewhere here, and that was a really exciting object, as well. I've never done anything remotely, like, any of those things. But I-I salute people who do-did that amazing stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, just again. And that's the thing is, this is, like, Academia is gonna try and, like, get a definition out of me. And I'm gonna be, like, well, it's-it's a gradient, you know.

Stuart Ross: (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: There's the stuff that people do, like, I have some Knife Fork Book here, right? So, some, like, really beautiful, like, things like that. And then there's the walnut and then there's the zine. But I've also talked to people like Sonja. I can't remember her last name. I am terrible with last names. But I talked to her out in BC. And she's this visual artist, and she made these chapbooks, and she called them chapbooks, and people are like, "Oh, you're zine." And she's like, "No, my chapbook." But because it was art people, thought it was a zine, and so, like, sometimes I feel like what—the difference between a zine and chapbook is just what people call it.

Stuart Ross: Absolutely, I've had so many people call my chapbooks, zines.

Tamara Thompson: Yup.

Stuart Ross: Now—you know, I just gonna add-add one more thing into my that I occasionally do, sort of, occasional chapbooks. I-I was, I mentored last summer at Banff I had fourteen Mentees and then Canisia Lubin was also the other mentor. She had fourteen mentees, and he's but I did a-a workshop one afternoon and I was really-really excited by the work. It was—I was reading to them from John Ashbury. While I was reading, they were writing, and I loved all the poems so much. And so, I said, email them to me. And that night I made this quick little chapbook and about, I don't know, twenty-five copies *System Attic Poems after John Ashbury*, which had the poems of everyone in the workshop, and they were thrilled, thrilled to have this little thing. How many copies I did. How many did I do here? Twenty-five copies? Yeah. So, they each got a copy and there was more left over. And then another thing I did while I was at Banff is I went to the music people. They had a little sort of informal concert, and I went to it, and during the first piece by the first performers classical—it was mostly classical works; I like contemporary classical—I wrote a little poem and then during the second group I wrote another little poem, and then I thought, I'm going to write a poem for every one of the pieces. And I did, and it was really fun doing it. And then when I got back to where I was—the, my office there—I thought, I'm gonna make a

little chapbook of this, and I'm gonna give it to the musicians. And I made a little chapbook. I can't remember a *List-N-ing* doesn't even mean anything, but that was what it was called *List-N-ing* and-and I made about fifty copies on the photocopier there at Banff and the next night I went to the bar where people hung out and I-there was just a bit-I was so embarrassed about this-and I-I just handed an envelope with about, whatever, forty, forty copies of the zine to one of the people, the chapbook, to one of the people there. And I said, "Yeah, this is something I did well during the concert here", and I gave it, I and I scurried off. I'm very shy, and I was very embarrassed, and then about ten mins later, I was being hugged and kissed and-and hand shook by... all of these musicians are crowding around me, and they were so thrilled, like, they were, their-their minds were blown by this weird little thing that came out the next day. And then the next week I went to the-the final one of their informal concerts, and when I walked in the door they all stood up and applauded me. There was about fifty people in there. I got a standing ovation and then at one point near the end, everyone started looking at me and chuckling and these two people went up, and one was a pianist, one was a singer and the singer had a copy of one of my short story books, and he-he talked about me. And I said how much they appreciated me, and he was now going to read a story of mine that he had never read before, while the pianist did improvise music during it. And I have to say, and I'm almost getting teary-I'm telling you this, Tamara, because it was one of the most magical, amazing things I've ever had in my writing career. I guess this work is good. This is a good bridge into the writing. I'd never, I-I was so appreciated. And I had. I had introduced, to another set of artists, this idea of that poetry, and I guess it was Ekphrastic, or I hate that word, and I hate I-I really, I just hate that word. Anyway, I-I-I it was art about, it was writing about other art and when they were, they were thrilled. I'm still in touch with a few of them. I went to see these two operetta pianist and opera singer perform on Monday in Toronto last Monday in Toronto. And keep in touch with a few of them. Still, they're from all over the world. And that was-it was most-one of the most amazing experiences I've had as a writer, end of story.

Tamara Thompson: That's fantastic. I love-one of my favorite things to do as a TA is to show what I am doing, cause I'll have students come up to me and be like, you're a TA. You're doing a thesis. What are you doing? And I'm, like, "Chapbooks." It's, like, that's what my thesis is on. And like, cool, what's that? And I go "Okay, let's learn something together." And I give them a little session. And it's so fun to get people who do writing, or, I also teach graphic fiction, who do art and stuff, like, that, to come up to me the next day and be, like, "Look at this little thing I made." I only made one. But look at this little thing.

Stuart Ross: Wow.

Tamara Thompson: I literally had a student who likes to sew and do things while she's in class. She made a chapbook for me while we were talking in class, and she's like, here, this is for you. And I went wooah.

Stuart Ross: That's really cool.

Tamara Thompson: And it's just when you see—especially, like, my students—that's one of the reasons why I'm going through all the bullshit of academia is because I really enjoy teaching and seeing them get excited about this. And to see them engage with it and be like, “Well, this is really cool,” and I'm like, “Yes, it is engaged.” This is a fun community, and just to see them get excited about all the other things people are doing. And I tell them all the cool things I've seen and just see them get excited about it.

Stuart Ross: That's great. That must be really fulling. And yeah, that's really—And yeah, that's great.

(Technical issues occurred. Conversation moved onto Whispering Wick Books).

Stuart Ross: Wow!

Tamara Thompson: Rebecca did different washes, and she hand-did her titles and everything and she did for each cover. But it was. And so that was, and because it was bigger, so, the pages on the inside are slightly smaller. But I didn't want to cut for her cover, so they just lived with it.

Stuart Ross: That's nice, that's all right.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And so that was so—this was one of the first books we, like, ever created in 2020. So, you can see it's a little skewed here at the side, and we used a very nice embroidery thread, 'cause I was, like, we need to use really nice embroidery thread for hers. This is my partner who I did that horror story. So, this is his tiny little sci-fi one, which is about a cyborg, basically. And a moment, and one slowly dying, and then talking about it with a mechanic.

Stuart Ross: That's prose?

Tamara Thompson: And yeah, this is prose. Yes, so, fiction. The other one was a poetry by Rebecca. This was a reprint, because this was the one where we sent the last one, and it got lost—lost on its way to Iqaluit, so we had to make more so that was done. And Grace Regan does all of the cover work for us, except for obviously Rebecca's cover and the one I made in a fever dream. And she does all our layout. She's our proofreader, because I'm dyslexic, heavily. And that's why this is not really official press, because there's probably one thousand mistakes in there that I literally can't see but she—So Nate, who is our editor, was blind after a period of time, to some of the mistakes and stuff—so she's our proofreader. So, everything looks good. But she drew all this so that's her. And so, this is Rami Obeid's book, *Marooned on the Shores of Malaise*. And this is just a little bit of poetry, and this is a photo that Grace took in Port Credit. So, she went around and did some photography and, like, that. So, this is just a little book of poetry, and she did little-little things for the inside. What else do I got here? Oh, this one's fun! This is experimental fiction, and it's called *Band Aid*. And so, I sat at a table and painted Band-aids. And so, this is a real Band-aid, and I use

like a paint marker, and I slapped it on there with glue. And then Grace drew this little doll thing, and there was a Band-aid in the story. That's, you know—instead of Hello, Kitty, there's Salu Seagull. So, she literally drew this little seagull Band-aid thing.

Stuart Ross: Wow! Wow!

Tamara Thompson: And so that was a fun thing, and I have only two left. But they're some of my favorites that we've done, and these are both poetry, and these are hand carved stamps that Grace did out of rubber, and I sat—

Stuart Ross: Wow!

Tamara Thompson: Right?! They're gorgeous, and I love them, and we've used this one to make little notebooks, but they're different. And because we use the stamp so many times the arms broke here. So, it's not the same. So we can never recreate this as it was before. And I sat with my mom, and she did the yellow sun because I had black and blue and I didn't want to mess with the yellow sun, and so she did that for me. So, Grace did both of these covers.

Stuart Ross: Wow.

Tamara Thompson: And I love both of them. And this is Faizal's book. He doesn't do much writing anymore. But this is, like, all about the different planets. So, each poem is a planet, and it was just, like, some fun, you know, funky little poetry. And then Rachel's was just a collection about, kind of, the pandemic, but not really, but just, kind of, like, trying to live in this day and age. So hence, where do we go from here? Yeah. And just yeah. So that's some of the stuff we've done.

Stuart Ross: Okay.

Tamara Thompson: I don't think I grabbed the Grace book which oh, my God! Grace's book was so big. It was actually the reason why I was, like, okay, we need to have, like, a page break where we're not gonna go over this many pages, 'cause I was trying to fold it. And I was like this sucker's too big.

Stuart Ross: That's fantastic.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, thank you. I'm glad you like them. We—we work as, kind of, a collective, but I'm the one who pushes. It's my little baby, my thing, but everyone helps me doing it. If I'm at a market like Grace is usually there. If it's in Toronto, Rami, the one poet will come down and say, hi and stuff, you know. And yeah, we just, I love working on it. I, my parents usually help me because during Covid, people couldn't come and help me figure things out. So, my dad, I had—you'll—we have little “making” videos on YouTube, and you'll see a very old pair of hands. And that's my dad hammering with my mother's really, old rubber mallet from her master's degree. So, my mom said, you know every master's degree in a family I think we should get a new rubber mallet. So, she recently got me a new one, because the old one, you would hit it, and it would just break,

and there'd just be dust everywhere. So, some of the books are a little dusty from the old rubber mallet.

Stuart Ross: Wow!

Tamara Thompson: So yeah, that's some of the stuff that we do. And I-I-I just love making them. I love showing them off. I, they're just so fun. And I love the creativity, like, because it was Grace's idea to do the hand carved stamp stuff. I didn't know how it was gonna work out. And it's some of my favorite books and like covers and stuff like, I think they're just gorgeous.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, yeah, those are, they are beautiful. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you.

(Technical issues occurred).

Stuart Ross: I-I always drew a lot. Mark and I, we met when we were four. We-we-we always would take, after-after shirts went to the laundry-dad's shirts went to be laundered, their white shirts, they would come back and plastic with a piece of cardboard to keep them safe. So we would take out the cardboards and get all our dad's shirts wrinkly and draw pictures and comic strips and things when we were like six and seven, eight years old. And then at, so, I-I sort of got interested in poetry. The earliest memory I have of poetry is my dad came home one day with this really big reel to reel tape recorder. None of us had seen a tape recorder before. It was probably about 1964. So, I'm five years old and we all sat on the floor in the living room. Me and my older brothers and my mom and dad. And my mom went and got a book that I didn't know she had. I don't know what it was a very big book of sort of poetry and fiction. Maybe it was published in the 1940 or something. I don't really know, but she opened up to a poem called "The Charge of the Light Brigade," by Alfred Lord Tennyson and my dad hit record, and she read the poem, and then he rewound it. And it was like a miracle. Her voice came back again and read that poem, and we sat there reading things. Well, I didn't read. I was, I don't think I could have read stuff then. I probably talked and said stupid things, but my older brothers and my dad would read something from this book, and I think that's my earliest memory of poetry. So I don't know when I started writing, but I remember the first poem, the earliest poem I remember, and that I sent out for publication was when I was eleven. It was handwritten on lined paper. I didn't really know any publications then. I certainly didn't know literary magazines, but the only publication I knew is *The Toronto Daily Star*, it was called at the time. And so I sent it to them to publish. They didn't publish poetry, as their rejection letter said and the poem I remember it, I don't think I have title. "If you double a bubble, you'll have two bubbles. But this information isn't worth a pile of rubble." Incredible. Incredible! Like! What a-what-it is like genius! I was, like a, like a Beethoven writing symphonies at age twelve, and I sent it off to *The Toronto Daily Star*, and they-they took the time to send me a rejection letter, and it said, Dear Stuart, thank you very much. Everybody in the office enjoyed your poem. Unfortunately, we're a newspaper, and we do not publish poetry, but we wish you the best in your..." and I've got it somewhere still, that letter I-we-wish you the best in your-in your poetry

career and it was very exciting. And-and then, a little after that, probably when I was twelve or thirteen, that was when I discovered an American poet named Stephen Crane who was most famous for the novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*. But he also wrote a hundred and twenty-eight poems. Stephen is S-T-E-P-H-E-N C-R-A-N-E. Stephen Crane, and I was blown away by his weird, sometimes almost surreal little allegorical poems, and I still love at least the first, the first sixty or seventy poems that he wrote and that was really inspiring to me. And I started writing these little allegorical poems. And then, a few years later, maybe, when I was fourteen or fifteen, I discovered the poetry of a few poets. Most importantly for me, were, were Ron Padgett, the New York poet, who wrote very funny very odd, slightly experimental poems that were just wild. And then Dave McFadden, the poet from ha-then from Hamilton Ontario who, I think it was a book called *Night In Dried Plums*, or something and he wrote really funny, somewhat surreal poems, and they were about serious things. But they also—they were funny about serious things, and they had a very conversational tone to them. It was just, like, he's sitting and telling you something, and I didn't know poetry could be conversational that way, so they were really important to me. I soon came across the work of Nelson Ball who, again later, became a very, very close friend. I was with him when he had (technical issues occurred) death in 2019, and I edited his last five or six books as well, through one of my imprints. He wrote very minimalist, nature poems mostly, but they were sort of very magical and mystical and just real poems of observation, and I was very excited by those. And you know various other poets. I started, and that's when I think I started writing more seriously, like. Finally, I had actual influences aside from *Charge of the Light Brigade* and you know poems by Edgar Allan Poe, and stuff like that, than I'd read when I was a child, or had it read to me. So, there I was, getting influences and trying to write like those people. And that's what I do to this day, as I immerse myself at other people's poetry. And I go, how did they do this? This is incredible. I wish I'd done this. I wonder if I could do something like this or, you know, or certain aspect of what they do. I wonder if I can do so—that still is a very inspiring thing to me. And I don't remember specifically what your question was. But I started writing these sort of allegorical little poems when I was thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, and that is what ended up in my poems, in *The Thing in Exile*, and I'll just—where did that book go? here?—I just could actually read one of them to you, because the kind of things I was doing. So, umm... "Sitting on the curb, the man with no chin half mumbled about the lack of lower jaw. The passers-by laughed at this freak, but he could not complain, for if he did, he'd slice his throat." So that was one of the—the little, kinds of, poems that I wrote that were very influenced by Stephen Crane. And then, a little after this point, so maybe it was more like fifteen, sixteen, seventeen that I started really reading Dave McFadden, and then Ron Padgett, and my poetry really exploded into very, very different things, and I also was exposed to a lot of sound poetry. When I was maybe sixteen, I went to performance by the Four Horsemen. Are you familiar with them? They-

Tamara Thompson: I've heard the name before.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, it was bpNichol, Steve McCaffrey, Paul Dutton, and Raphael Alberto Rivera: four Toronto area poets that did sound poetry. I also was exposed to Bill Bissett's work. You might know his or his sort of

chanty, sound poetry, and also Joe Rosenblatt, the guy who came to visit us at our high school and teach for a week or two, who was doing all these bumblebee poems, like buzzz the bees, bring home the groceries, the bees bring home the groceries bees are insects and football jerseys, bees are insects and football jerseys, buzzzz. And Mark and I, Mark and I got together again when we were probably sixteen, seventeen. We started writing sound poems, and we very precociously began performing sound poems at open mics and things like that, and so sound poetry, the poetry of conversation, like through Dave McFadden, the poetry of observation through a Nelson Ball, the poetry of allegory little earlier, through Stephen Crane and the other great influence again, was Ron Padgett, P-A-D-G-E-T-T, the New York Poet. Poetry of experimentation like all his poems, were so different from one another. All his poems he just tried to do different things, and that has always been my own, my own recipe and my own interest: that poetry is this laboratory and instead of writing seventy-five books that all sound the same, like Charles Bukowski, that I-I write I ever, -I'm always trying to do new things in poems, which is why I'm a fairly unknown poet like in-in the Canada thing. I'm not a Karen Soley or a Ken Babstock or a Kevin Conley, or any of those people, whose poems are very recognizable. And they're amazing poets. But everything of mine is-is a mishmash and miscellaneous. So, there's no voice that people recognize and that's okay with me, and I'm happy with where I am as a poet. And one of the other things that happened when I was a teenager, I think, was when Joe Rosenblatt came to our high schools. He was being published at the time by Coach house press, and he brought us down to Coach House. Have you ever been there?

Tamara Thompson: I haven't been there. I've always wanted to go, and I was supposed to go, but it just didn't happen. The program was trying to figure out a way to get there, but because we were the first to go through, we didn't have things as set up, and then the pandemic hit. And it was like, wow, I guess we're really not going now.

Stuart Ross: Go to Coach House, or I'll meet in Toronto and take you there and take for a tour there. I-I took my-I did a class with U of T School Studies last week. And I, we went out and did little poems of observation walking around, and they didn't know that we were gonna end up at Coach House, and then we went into Coach house and got a little tour, watched some books being trimmed and bound, and was amazing. But I got-I got the Coach House. Joe had us have some of our classes up in the old coffee table up on the second floor. And it was like this. I was sixteen. This was like mind blowing to me, and you know there's the picnic bench out front where Alan Ginsberg had sat, and all these heroes, and I was, I'm such, still such a hero worshipper. And-and there was a- Victor Coleman was there, and David Young was there, and Robert Phones and Joe Rosenblatt. It was, and it was incredible. And that was always a huge inspiration for me, was Coach House and my, and my dream of someday having a book from Coach House, which is now gonna happen in September. My first with them.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic.

Stuart Ross: And it's as crazy a book as all my others. And-and I'm excited. Next week, they're going to be printing it. And I'm gonna-I

happen—I'll be in Toronto next week for a few days, so I'll be able to go to the press and watch, 'cause they do all the printing and binding trimming in-in-in house, and I'll be able to watch that happen. So, it's nice.

Tamara Thompson: So exciting! Congratulations.

Stuart Ross: It only took me fifty years to fulfill the dream. But it happened so. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I'm, I, like, congratulations! What's the-the name of the book? And when is it actually coming out.

Stuart Ross: Yeah. The book is called. It's coming out on. It's the release date is September 10<sup>th</sup> and it's called *The Sky is a Sky in the Sky*, and it has a beautiful cover. I wish I had, they're upstairs somewhere. Is the arc for it, the advance review copy. The front cover is a painting, beautiful painting. You could see it on Coach House's website. I think it's probably up now. By Nadine Faraj, F-A-R-A-J. Who I've been collaborating with. She's a painter in Montreal. We've been collaborating for the last year and a half, doing paintings with text in them. She does the painting. I do the text usually at the same time like my-my text isn't about her paintings. Her paintings aren't about my text. We have an idea, again, 'cause I hate that ekphrastic thing, really. So sometimes she does. A painting covers it up. I write text around it, and then the painting's revealed, or sometimes vice versa. Anyway, we've been, we've done about sixty or seventy pieces and we're starting to think about an exhibition, and-and she's done the cover, and I've also as a side note, I've—I think I've had twenty-three books, or twenty-four books and all but one of them, I have been able to choose the cover artist or designer. And it's-it's incredible that my-my publishers have let me do that. It's, and it's been really exciting, because I really like to have this kind of person. And it's always people I know, artists that I know. So, it's again, I really like that personal connection things, like, in the chapbook world of publishing people I know. And then having artists that I know and collaboration and all that stuff. Okay.

Tamara Thompson: No, that's-that's fantastic. And again, congratulations because Coach House does such beautiful work. And I, I have a lot of students who are, you know, first year, first semester writers. It's the first time in university, and they hear the name of my, like, old program, and they're like, you know, about publishing? What would, what do you know about, like, Penguin Random House? And I'm like, whoa, Buddy, let's like back it up a bit.

Stuart Ross: Wow!

Tamara Thompson: I know Wolsak and Wynn. I know Coach House and House of Anansi, and they're like, what are those? And I'm like, well, okay let's get a little notebook out and write these names down because they're important. These are the people who might actually publish you.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, absolutely. That's great. You're doing a great service.



Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I want, I want my students to succeed because I see the drive in them to do things, and some of them like, fucking get out of here. How are you that good? You're first semester? You're not allowed to be that good at poetry when you've never done anything? Like, what do you mean? Like, how you—like you are on the rowing team, a gymnast, like, you have no time to do anything, and you make this, you know and, like, it's fantastic. And I'm like, Wow. I was terrible at poetry when I started. And you're just starting. And you're making this beautiful thing. And it's like, I, I really want them to succeed. And even if the students aren't, like, making, like, the best fiction in the world, and they're just learning. Maybe we don't explain the story. Maybe we tell the story, you know, stuff like that? But, like, I see, they're driving, it's, like, you have the potential to, like, to go somewhere if you keep at it. That's the other thing. I always tell my students, it's not the good author that gets published; it's the persistent one because the persistent one learns. The persistent one gets out there 'cause the good author might submit two places. But there's a lot that goes into picking what gets published that season, let alone within that year. So, like, I also have to have the conversation with them of what is good. That's the other thing, too, because when some of them try and write poetry, and I'm, like, "Let's not do rhyming."

Stuart Ross: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I understand why you want to, they want to, but let's have some fun, and a lot of them sling to formats and stuff because they're scared. And I'm like, because for some reason, grade three and grade four teachers put the fear of God into you on, there are rules to poetry, and I'm like all of them, "No, wait! What did you say?" And I'm like, "There's no rules." Do what you want? Are you gonna experiment? Are you gonna have fun? That's what this is about. This is about expression and freedom, not rules. Yeah, sure, you can like follow rules if you want, I don't like doing that. So why do you have to do it? They're, like, "What do you mean?" And I'm, like, "Guys, poetry's, like, not that complicated. Like, do what you want. Have fun, and then they get introduced to like Jordan Able, or Souvankham Thammavongsa, or like Adrian Rich and stuff like that, you know? And they're just, like, wait a minute. This can be interesting? And I remember all of them really liked "How to Triumph like a Girl." And I cannot remember the name of the poet who wrote that poem, but they all loved it, and they all were like Whoa! This could be fun, and I was, like, an interesting and complex and not just hat, that and bat. And I'm like, Yeah, it's not all Dr. Sue's stuff.

Stuart Ross: Ada Limón.

Tamara Thompson: Yes!

Stuart Ross: Yeah, just looked it up. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Great poem—

(Technical issues occurred).

Stuart Ross: I kinda just gotta show you one thing, that's-that's just right there. I'm gonna grab it. I was writer-in-residence at University of Ottawa which I was so looking forward. I love Ottawa. I was looking forward to living there for four months, and then Covid. So, in the winter 2021 I was there, and I they-they couldn't pay me anything much like when I was writer-in-residence at Queens. I got twenty thousand bucks and U of Ottawa said, oh, "We got six thousand dollars for you." I said, "Wow!" (Technical issues occurred). That's quite incredible. And how they said, but if you create a course, you can teach a course. You get another six thousand dollars, and you can apply for some money from the Canada Council. So, I created a course in experimental fiction because I'm a big proponent of experimentation and prose, and cause there's so much in poetry, but so little in fiction and I had this class.

Tamara Thompson: Fiction's coolest stuff.

Stuart Ross: Yeah. And I thought, you know, so twelve students signed up for the—it was a fourth-year creative writing course. I'd never taught a university course. I've never taught, actually, university course. And I had four students a-twelve students, and I thought they were all excited about experimental fiction. But in fact, almost all of them wrote fantasy. But I didn't realize it was the only creative writing course taught in fourth year. So, I created it, and we did it, and they were—they blew me away. They were so incredible. And at the end, it took me a couple of years to get it done, but I finally made this. This is one of the few Proper Tales Press books with spine: An Anthology—

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Stuart Ross: *Sun Cows of the Petrichor new experimental fiction*. (Holds up a book with a black and white inter woven design with two scales that are blue and purple). And we had a little—we had a little group reading and a launch in Ottawa, and we had a little gathering when I handed out the books.

Tamara Thompson: (Holds up their copy of the book).

Stuart Ross: Oh! You've got one. So yeah, that is one of the most ambitious things I've ever done, and it's so nice to know that Rob Winger is such a popular Prof. And he does similar things. So that's nice.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: Oh, that's really—

Tamara Thompson: You gave this to me.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: —this is a part of my summer reading. I'm—I've got stacks of books over here that I've been putting off, because I haven't had time to read for pleasure. So that's why I have the Knife Fork Books here, cause I'm taking them up to read at my cottage.

Stuart Ross: Very nice.

Tamara Thompson: Two weeks of just reading ahead of me, and I'm so excited.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, good. It's good stuff. Wow! Two weeks of reading. I gotta make that happen for myself, too. That sounds incredible.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, and at Rondeau, near the lake and stuff. And I'm so excited to just like read things that I've been given and like, catch up on some graphic fiction and Manga and stuff that students recommended to me while I was teaching that course. So, like I have a wide variety—I have, like, of your book to experimental stuff, to arts and letters, like kind of, like, essay stuff to poetry, to regular novels, to again graphic fiction. I have a big old thing of a Manga here that I'm going to read because the student recommended it to me, this big tome. So, I'm going to be working on that. But I can race through something like this fairly quickly.

Stuart Ross: Wow! That sounds—that sounds like a paradise. Two weeks of Paradise.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Well, I've been doing interviews for about two and a half months now, almost constantly with not many weekends off, or any days really to breathe. It's more coincidental. So, I'm very much looking forward to just passing out and then reading.

Stuart Ross: Perfect. I know you have another interview in a couple of hours, so I'm sorry I'm—I'm babbling a-a-a lot, and I'll try to keep them. But go ahead. What else you have for me?

Tamara Thompson: I've got plenty more questions here for you, and don't worry. I've been really enjoying this conversation. This has been so fun to just engage and hear all of the stories and just hear what you have to say. Like, this is, this is one of the reasons I love my research, because just hearing everybody's experiences and stuff, because I was literally, like, when I first discovered chapbooks, it was in, like, 2019. And then the pandemic hit, and then I was stuck at home, and I was, like, "Let me out! I want to talk to you. I want to see things." And so I've been finally let out and been able to, like, see and hear what people have to say. So don't worry about—I'm thoroughly enjoying this.

Stuart Ross: Okay, me too.

Tamara Thompson: I'm glad. So, this next question might seem like a bit of like an obvious one. But would you, like, keep making chapbooks? Would you, like, for yourself with your own work? Would you work with other presses to create work because it is a choice to create a chapbook, and everybody's busy with their own stuff in life, and things get in the way? But would you, do you see yourself continuing creating chapbooks with your work?

Stuart Ross: Yeah, absolutely with my work and works of others, for sure. And just did three chapbooks, one by a short fiction, by a Kingston guy. Maybe you talk to him. Michael E. Casteels.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Stuart Ross: Yeah. And the other is by, it was pretty funny. Yeah, I was going through all my stuff, and I found this very ziney thing, and the front it was just scrawled Ted Berrigan and Stuart Ross by Clint Burnham. And then it was just eight and a half by eleven, stapled in the corner. It was from 1990. I don't remember ever see-seeing it before, though I owned it, and it had the name of one of my favorite poets alongside my own on the front cover. And it was a bunch of poems written by Clint Burnham, who's a very dear friend and-and is-he only did ten copies. And I thought, wow, I-I want to do a little really messy little chapbook. I don't have a copy down here but a-a really messy little chapbook, and I, and I asked Clint if I could reissue it, and he didn't remember the thing, and he asked me to scan all the pages, and he said, oh, that's pretty good. I have no memory of it. And so, I did fifty copies 'cause I really, you know, to be honest, it was cause I wanted-I loved something called Pet Ted Berrigan and Stuart Ross. Like, that was, like, that's like a dream for me. And it was really fun. It was a very funny, weird little thing. And I did a really scrawly magic marker cover, a portrait of me and of Ted Berrigan, and just scrawl, scrawl, and that was sort of an homage to the, to Clint's aesthetic in his publishing, which he's just published a little bit. But he's all scrawly magic marker. And it was really fun. So, yeah, how could I like it was the obvious thing to do for me. I saw this. I wanted there to be more copies and I had to make-I had to make a chapbook. And the third chapbook was by a guy I've been corresponding with since, I think, was since Nelson Ball's death or no, since our mutual friend, Michael Dennis's death, the Ottawa poet in 2020. Last day of 2020 he died. I-I ended up communicating with several of Michael's correspondence. One of this was-was this guy, John Levy, a retired lawyer who had been a poet, has been a poet for about thirty years or forty years in that Tucson, Arizona. And we write to each other every couple of days, like, just, he's an amazing guy. And I offered to do a chapbook by him. I want to do another chapbook by a Gala Uzryutova. I'd like to do, actually, a full-length book of her poems, collaboratively translated. I just-when I see things, it translates into my head as this would be a great chapbook. And I think chapbooks-I think, like, twenty-four pages, or whatever is like twenty-four to thirty-six pages, is really the-the ideal size for a poetry collection. Some of them should be bigger. Some of them should be smaller. But to me, that's about right and I think a book should be like the equivalent of a few chapbooks put together. That's how I see my books. So, the chapbook is I-I think as long as I can physically make chapbooks, you know, if I live into my eighties, I will be this eighty-year-old guy making chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: I love; I love the form, and I love being able to honor writers who I really-really admire, and also to publish things I wish I'd written, and it'll continue that way.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I feel very similar about the publishing things that you wish you had written. And just, I love seeing what even my friends are making. And specifically, Sarah Ibrahim. She does this to me every time. She sends me something new, and I'm like Sarah this is brilliant. Like, how did you come up with this idea? Like, very out there, very fun experimentalist like she's one of the few writer friends that I have that's like me and does the weird shit and does the blended genre thing which I love.

Stuart Ross: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And, you know, I always—I want to get something of her work out there at some point, because, like the world is a worse place for not knowing her work, because it-it need—people need to see it, and need to be able to read her stuff. I don't write for anyone, but I kind of write for her. She gets it. She gets my work. I get her work. And I tell my students if you find someone like that never let go of them because they're going to be the people who get everything you do and are excited about everything you tell them. So, this next question you can take in whatever you feel comfortable with, but what are some challenges that you faced as an author over the years?

Stuart Ross: I'll say first, I've been incredibly fortunate in that almost everything that I've written has been published, and I think I've only gotten three or four manuscripts rejected ever. I mean, I'm really careful about where I send stuff, like, I'm not gonna send it to just any press. I, I'm not gonna send to a press whose publications I haven't seen. My first poetry book was rejected by Coffee House Press in the US. But I really knew Coffee House well. They published Ron Padgett, and they sent me a beautiful rejection—handwritten rejection letter—I. Once a novel of mine in 2012 got rejected by Coach House. Publisher of Coach House Alana Wilcox is a very dear friend of mine. She said was excruciating for her to reject my book. And I swore I would never send another one to and put her on the spot, but I did luckily. So, I've my book, *The Book of Grief and Hamburgers* was rejected by Anvil Press, who'd published about five other books of mine. I don't know if you've seen that book, but it get—it doesn't have any answers at the end to how to deal with grief. And the—and then I showed to ECW. And he said, this is perfect. This is—this is exactly right; there's no answers and they publish it. So, I think I've—three or four times I've been rejected. So I haven't, so, I've been incredibly fortunate. I haven't had struggle that a lot of writers have. I'm getting, you know, seven or twelve rejections. I-I haven't you know, up until what? Ten, twelve, fifteen years ago, writers of color and so forth, and BIPOC, BIPOC writers and LGBTQ writers would have a lot more trouble getting published, and I don't fall into those categories. So, I haven't had those kind of resistance. I've just been really, really privileged to have publishers that have actually come to me and asked for manuscripts—often. The challenges: there's times when I've definitely felt that, you know, I didn't: this novel called *Snowball Dragonfly Jew*, the one that Anvil rejected. But then it got published by ECW Press. I thought it was a great book, and I thought it was going to be like the breakthrough book that was gonna make people sort of know my writing, and it got a few good reviews. It won a small award through the Jewish public

library in Montreal, got reviewed in a few places, but nothing much happened with it other than that it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: Don't, I don't think I ever, you know—don't think it ever paid off, my royalty, my advance against royalties. How many copies? Maybe it's sold five or six hundred copies. I—I don't know. I—I love the book. I think it's a great book like I—I think it's a great book of mine, and I wish that it had gotten more attention. I'm—I'm not one who expects to ever be shortlisted for any prizes.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Stuart Ross: The few times it's happened, it's been like mind blowing to me. And then *The Book of Grief and Hamburgers* was shortlisted for the Trillium for best book published in Ontario according to the jury of that particular year of course.

Tamara Thompson: Hmmm.

Stuart Ross: Crap shoot, that way. I—I was stunned, and then when it won, I was—it was absolutely—it's still unbelievable to me. I don't know how that could possibly have happened, and it was up against some incredible books: Emma Healy's book of memoir essays, and—and Charlie Angus's book about, where he lives, whatever the—jeez, anyway? Incredible, it was up against some incredible books. So, I don't expect anything like that. But I had hoped that with, that I'd be taken more seriously. I'm so—I'm a pretty fringe writer, I think, and I thought that would not get me into the mainstream. There's no mainstream in the kind of writing I do, but that...

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Stuart Ross: Yeah. So, the challenges have been with books that I thought would be kind of breakthroughs for me, at least widen my audience and maybe get a bit more attention and give me a bit more respect and maybe end up on university courses. I think maybe, I think, *Book of Grief and Hamburgers* now is on some and a couple of other books, maybe, but so what. And then, I did a poetry book in 2016, called *The Sparrow Came Down Resplendent*, which was my one book with Wolsak and Wynn. In fact, the founder of Wolsak and Wynn, Maria Jacobs, and the other founder Maureen can't remember her name—Anyway, they were in that George Miller poetry workshop I went to the Axle Tree Coffeehouse thing where I— (technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Stuart Ross: My first—so, I actually met Marie back then before she started, Wolsak and Wynn. So, it was very exciting to get published by them and my editor there was my friend Paul Vermeersch. He's a poet, I—I didn't, at the time, really write the kind of things I liked, but I—it was—he's really accomplished talented poet, just wasn't my kind of thing. He's more recently been writing more kind of things I like. And he said,

"Let's do a book that is a little more accessible than your other books, maybe with more stuff about your family." And so, I gave him a few hundred pages of poems, and he-he peeled back to about sixty pages of what he thought was easy, and more accessible, and more personal, and I thought it was more commercial, and we did that book and I at the launch at the Monarch Tavern, I stood out front, boycotting it with a-a protesting it with a sign saying, Boycott Stuart Ross, commercial sellout. And I was out there for about the first hour of the launch and the book got a little bit more attention. It got some reviews, and it got it, won again. A-a Canadian Jewish award for poetry. But it wasn't the breakthrough book that-whatever breakthrough means in poetry-I mean, I'm being not facetious with those. But I-I my expectations are still small even when I say breakthrough. I thought it might be the one that would get me a lot more recognition, and maybe get me more writer-in-residencies, and that kind of thing. And I've applied for about fifty writer-and-residencies over my career, and I've never gotten any of the ones I applied for. The only two I've ever gotten are ones where the University approached me and said, "You want to be writer-in-residence?"

Tamara Thompson: Hmmm.

Stuart Ross: I don't-I don't apply for them anymore. It's just humiliating. And I guess that's been the other challenge. I really, my Writer-and-Residency in 2010 at Queens University was one of the most exciting four months. The-the writers I met, including Michael E. Casteels's and others, Nicholas Papaxanthos, Christine Miscione. Amazing people, amazing writers! Still friends. And it was, it was glorious. I did very little of my own writing. I did about three times the number of meetings with students that all the other writers' residents before me had done, because I loved doing that. And it was, it was exhilarating. And I've applied for residencies in Vancouver and Montreal and Waterloo and Calgary, and nothing, so that's been, that's more a disappointment than a challenge, 'cause not something I'm gonna overcome. If someone comes and offers me another residency, I'll probably take it. Yeah. But I'd never even got an interview. I got an interview at Sheridan College last year with Paul Vermeersch. And I-and I didn't get it-was so humiliating. I knew two people on the panel, and-and then I did a great interview. But I guess there was someone they wanted more. So, challenge- I, so I guess overall what that means is the challenge is acceptance in a more mainstream world, or the academic world has really eluded me. And I guess again, it's-it's more disappointment than challenge, 'cause it's not something I'm fighting to overcome. It's stuff I wish could happen. But I'm not gonna end my poetry around or my fiction around to do things that will, like,-if I did have some book about my Russian Polish background and identity, and other relatives who died in the holocaust and so forth. Well, right, now that wouldn't get much sympathy, anyway. But you know that kind of thing. Things about identity are very big, and-and well they should be. I mean, there's-there's-there's incredible work being done out there, but it's not my interest.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: And I'm not going to do it just to, you know, get that Penguin Random House contract or get a residency. So, the challenge has

been, okay, we'll say this, the challenge, has been writing the kind of work that I really want to do and explore and not, you know, not having as big a readership as I would like, or it not getting to as many hands as I'd like, and it not opening the doors to as many things as I'd like. Though I have, you know, I-I-I've had an incredibly fortunate career, and I-I really can't complain like I write weird ass stuff. And among people who write weird ass stuff, I have gotten a lot of opportunities, school-hundreds of school visits across the country. But I generally—I create things that elude me. I create workshops. I create book fairs. I create reading series so that there can be a space for the kind of stuff that I do. Sort of, "if-if you build it, they will come" kind of a thing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: Challenges. I mean, I've had times where, you know, a-a year where I-I mean a-a year and a half, where I didn't write at all and I wondered if I would ever write again.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Stuart Ross: I look at my poems that are my favorite poems of mine; I think "Will I be able to do anything like that ever again?" But now I know that there's this—I'm sixty-five just turned sixty-five last week—and I know that there's—there's just all these hills and valleys, and they're natural, and until my mind starts going, I'll probably be able to if my mind starts going or I don't die before then, that I'll be able to—I'll write, and all times where it's a challenge to write, and it's eluding me, and then other times when and it'll just get better. But I also know a lot of tricks. If I—if I'm having trouble writing, I do things like writing (technical issues occurred)—or translating from languages I don't know, or other kinds of devices that will force me to write where I don't have to think. What am I gonna write about? Well, I never think that way, anyway. I'm not a—I don't have a topic I want to write about. I just I write, or a line, and then see what happens.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: So, I'm gonna say that I haven't really had many very serious challenges.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I understand. Though, what you were saying about, like, earlier, and like the disappointment that you're talking about, it sounded to me that you just wanted more people to be able to interact with your work. The people who would like it, you want them to see it. You want them to read it. So, I-I-I understand that challenge of just not necessarily—you don't need, like, the world's recognition, but you want people who would enjoy your work to be able to get it.

Stuart Ross: Yeah. Yeah. And when, and it's interesting, and I've—I've heard this from other writers like Gary Barwin. Did you interview him? Yeah, Gary Barwin who had that book that was shortlisted for the Giller, which I mean, that was phenomenal for his career, like, phenomenal. But it didn't mean that any of his other books sold like, there's not a lot of people like me who read a book and then want to get everything by that



writer, even go back decades. When *The Book of Grief and Hamburgers* won the Trillium, it sold a lot of copies. I got a, like, a thousand-dollar royalty check on top of the thousand dollars advance. Like, I've never, ever had that happen. It sold a lot of copies, but I had a book of short stories that came out at the same time from Anvil, which I think is, I think has one of the greatest short stories ever published in Canada, "At the beginning", and the book is called *I am Clothed Francois, and you are a Bathtub*. And I think it got one, maybe two reviews. And as far as I know, it hasn't done anything and so I won that award but another book I had the same year—No, like, people weren't going out looking at—for the other things that I've written. So that's—that's—that's too bad. But it's okay.

Tamara Thompson: It's something I tell my students that, like, you can't be writing for the imaginary reader or publisher or committee, because you should be writing because it's fun. Don't write because you want it to be good, because what is good? And if you're not having fun it will never be good.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, I would say that. I really like your thinking of that. You know this—is it? Sarah Ibrahim? Who you say, Ibrahim—who you say you write for? Maybe it was one other person you mentioned. Say, that's the person I write for. Like, that's my audiences.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: I love that idea of writing to please one ideal person, or someone whose aesthetics you so connect with. That's really nice. And you should write for yourself and hope other people like it. I—I am, I don't have fun writing, usually. Sometimes I do. Mostly I don't like the active writing, I find it excruciating. I love having written. I love reading my things after. I love tinkering with them. I don't—I don't usually edit very heavily, but I do tinker in line-edit, here and there, and I like that, and I like publishing and find. Like, should this be a chapbook? Should it be a leaflet or a postcard? Should it go in a manuscript? What should happen with it? And that—that to me is the really fun part and the right sort of is—is the hard work. I mean, I'm very fast at it. But I—I'm fast because I—I don't like doing it. I want to get it over with.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, you wanna get to the part that you really enjoy. And this is a means to an end, to the fun stuff.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, I—I can't publish if I don't write. And so, unfortunately, I have to write. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I, yeah, I love, like, a lot of people, like, ask, who do you write for? Like, what audience, romance or fantasy, or the literary criticisms? I'm, like, I don't know. I put a line down in the word document and I start going at it, and then I go, oh, I know what this story is about. Okay, let's go.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, I don't even know what, but when I finish them—but I do know that there's a direction, like, takes over, like, which I think is sort of what you're saying, as well. I write a line that goes, and then

and then there's momentum, and it goes somewhere, and sometimes I-I should say, sometimes I have fun, especially if I write some lines that I'm really proud of, like, sentences that I go "Wow! That's-that's pretty good!" I haven't done anything like that. Mostly I'd rather read. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That's fair. So, what has this, kind of like, smaller publishing taught you and your time doing it?

Stuart Ross: Wow! Umm... there's a poem by Stephen Crane; I wonder if I have my Stephen Crane book down here. Most of my poetry's upstairs. But no, I don't have-no. Steven Crane-you might be familiar with it. It's something like "I saw a man pursuing the horizon. He ran and ran and ran. I-I chased him and said, why are you chasing the horizon? It's futile. And he said, I know, and he ran on," or something like that. And that's how I feel about small press publishing and about being a poet in general. You're-you're-you're trying to achieve something that's impossible. Like, you're trying to achieve or-I'm trying to achieve I feel like the perfect-I'm trying to write a poem as great as a Ron Padgett poem and I and I have to keep striving for it. And sometimes I think I get close. But I'm-I'm but I'm also trying to achieve, catch up or achieve something that I don't even know. I can't even define it. Like, I may have done twenty-three books. That's enough. Like, am I gonna do anything wildly new? Probably not. But maybe. I don't know. I keep writing to find out. So, I've learned, what have I learned? I've learned absolutely nothing. On the one hand, I've learned that I don't think I've learned. I've learned that the most important thing, maybe, is to, in fact, write to satisfy yourself, or to try to satisfy yourself. And then how exciting it is when some other people like what you wrote. And I've learned that-I've learned that, like, being more, being in the literary world, or you know, in the small press literary world, in the trenches, that really good writing is not rewarded necessarily. And I'm not talking about my own work and just talking about, generally. Sometimes I see a, you know a, you know again, I never expect to be on any awards list. So, but I just look at what's there and I go, "I can't believe this book won." It was just that one must have been a compromise choice by this jury. And then there's books that are terrible that get printed and published, that I think there is to a degree an objective good and not good in writing. My students argue with me that it's all subjective, and I argue with-I don't argue with them. I-I put forth the idea that saying a poem that says, I feel so lonely the walls are closing in on me-the poem we've all written at age fifteen-is not as good a poem as the broken-down wooden fence in the barren field finally collapses. A second thing evokes almost the same feeling. And there's an image. And it's interesting. And the first thing is just stating a feeling and that everyone feels, and blah blah blah and Rupi Kaur has done incredibly well in doing that. But I don't think it's good poetry, and I think that's an objective. It doesn't matter how many people like it. And that's another thing. How-however, many people I-I worked as a proofreader, and then a copy editor for three and a half years at Harlequin books and I-I proofread a hundred of them, and I copy edited a hundred of them and those things generally sell a lot. Some of the authors sell an incredible amount of-a number of books, and-and they're not, they're mostly not good. It's not good writing. It's writers cranking out these things quickly. Sort of, it's sort of a formula, general formula. And so I know I would never write anything, or I would probably never like

anything that sold as many books as-as a Harlequin. And I probably have read a few things that have. But generally there's a lot of great writers out there. I think of Lynn Crosby who, I think, is an incredible poet, an incredible fiction writer. I don't like love everything that she's done. But she's really tried different things a lot. I don't know if you're familiar with her work, but I don't think Lynn has ever been shortlisted for Governor General Award, or a Trillium and I think she should be like one of Canada's most, like, I think she should be as well known as Anne Michaels, or-or-or Michael Redhill. Or, when it's like we-she's so much more inventive. She's incredible and she's been ripped off, I think. And so quality of writing doesn't necessarily mean anything will happen. There's-it's-it's a world of flukes you know, who the jury is, who the person reading your poem at the publishing company is, or your-your manuscript, the publishing company that the whole, the whole racket, is just full of flukes, good timing, bad timing, all that kind of thing. Fair enough. That's just the way it is. And it's okay, you know? "So many people are-so many people in publishing are doing things-are-are doing it almost for free. No one's making a lot of money as someone who's runs a poetry press, you know. Like, I'm sure that at Wolsak and Wynn, Noelle and Paul are not making as much money as they could be making if they decided to do something outside of literary publishing, but they do it because they love it. It's important to them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: That's the nature of this this world.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I was recently at Chapters, because, you know, "author, give the book person the Chapters card." Yay. So, I was there, and I was looking at poetry, and I was so bored. I was, like, where's? And so, I just-every piece of poetry I'm taking with me to my, like, reading week, it's all chapbooks, because everything that's, like, traditionally published right now that I was able to find, because there wasn't, like, the whole Wolsak and Wynn, but, like the Buckrider Books, right?-like, they didn't have any of that at my local Chapters in Peterborough, you know? And I was, like, I'm bored. Everything's just Rupri Kaur, whatever and, like, if you like that sure, cool. But, like, I'm bored, man.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, those-those-those Chapters, unless it's a really big Chapters. If it's a smaller city Chapters, it's gonna have two or three shelves of poetry, and almost all of them will be published by Button poetry, and Andrews and McNeil, and all those publishers who publish Instagram poetry. Then there's probably gonna be, like, a Walt Whitman book and maybe-maybe a Canisia Lubrin book thrown in for a good measure and a couple of other things. But ninety-percent Instagram poetry. Take Cover Books is amazing, like, they only have two shelves of poetry, but it's really-really well curated. I mean, I would have different choices...

Tamara Thompson: Well.

Stuart Ross: And I don't always find a ton of stuff I wanna buy. It's all good stuff. It's not all my taste, but it's all interesting and good stuff, and...

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, so, and yeah, I'm—I really love them. I'm going to launch my new book there. In fact, on September the twelfth—

Tamara Thompson: Oh!

Stuart Ross: —at Take Cover Books, there. They're such wonderful people.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, I love them too. I go in there and just talk books with them all day, and they love talking to me and just willing to, like, I—we, my friend and I stayed there just talking about books. Nate Boulard-Patterson, the-my editor, and close friend of mine, he was living with me at the time, actually, like, with my parents here. And like, we just went in and started talking to them. And he, the guy was just, like, oh, I think it was Shawn, and he was, like, oh, sorry guys, we actually have to close. And I was, like, "Oh, my God!" And he's, like, "Yeah, it's actually like past when we should be closed. I'm so sorry. But, like, I have to kick you out." And I'm like, "No, that's fine. We're sorry we stayed so long. Thank you for talking to us."

Stuart Ross: We have a little indie bookstore here in—in Coburg called Let's Talk Books and mostly I don't find things on the shelves that I want. Maybe occasionally. Mostly I "special order," and they're really great at special ordering. I—they got me, Raymond Fetterman's *Return to Manure*, and I said, "Why didn't you buy a couple of copies for the shelf?" And they laughed at me. They laugh at all the books I ordered, but they get me everything, and they're really great. They're just here. In Coburg, there's not a lot of audience, probably, for weird shit. So, they get, you know, a lot of fantasy books and romance novels, and you know Micheal Ondaatje books and stuff like that. But-but I go in there, that's—it's my—it's and I've been in Coburg fifteen years. I haven't really made any close friends. But there, that's my-my social life is hanging around and driving them nuts in that bookstore.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Well, if you're coming down, I'll probably be in the area. So, I'll pop in and see 'cause I get their newsletters. So, I get updated on what they're doing. So, if I'm not teaching that day, I'll come down and—and see what's going on and buy your new book because I was planning on doing that, anyway. So might as well come say, Hi.

Stuart Ross: That would be great. So, have you, have you? Do you still have more questions on your list?

Tamara Thompson: I do. Unfortunately, this is the bigger, like Canadian questions here.

Stuart Ross: I'll try, I'll try and be more concise. So.

Tamara Thompson: Okay.

Stuart Ross: Take it away.

Tamara Thompson: So, are chapbook's important to Canadian publishing? If you think so, why or why not?

Stuart Ross: I don't know if they're specifically important to Canadian publishing. They are part of Canadian publishing obviously, completely, almost completely below the radar. They're really important to Canadian literature, for sure.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Stuart Ross: I mean they're the—that on the one hand—they're the sort of farm team.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Stuart Ross: If you really—and I think that a lot of young writers think of them as the farm team before they get published by Anansi or Brick, or you know, and—and then boy some of these—I don't know if you do is—some of these chapbook publishers, like, have contracts and stuff. Now it's so weird. It used to be—

Tamara Thompson: A letter of agreement, so that—

Stuart Ross: —There we go!

Tamara Thompson: Because we don't want our authors to get ripped off. Because I've had people be, like, so is there good royalties? I'm, like, no, no. So, it's kind of, like, the learning stepping stone. So, we, kind of, just do it so that they have an idea. So that when they go off into the world, they're not being as screwed over.

Stuart Ross: Oh, it's an educational thing for them that's good. No, in my-my publishing ideas, it's everything's just been a, "Can I do this?" Oh, sending management. Okay, I'm gonna do this. You'll get a quarter of the print run, and you can buy other ones for another buck.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Stuart Ross: After, and that's that—But-but people—it's really seen as a sort of career move now. And it's a chapbook. It's like an event if it's published by certain publishers like Knife Fork Books, which I don't even think they're chapbooks, because they have spines and—

Tamara Thompson: Some of them have spines now, but they still do the—

Stuart Ross: —Okay—

Tamara Thompson: —because this is some stuff that Kirby sent me. So, there was, like, the more traditional spine stuff. So, they're doing some traditional stuff. And then some classic kind of stuff. I talked to Kirby recently. That's why—that's how I know.

Stuart Ross: They're too fancy for me. I-I-I don't like, I don't like Knife, Fork. I like some of the books they publish, but printing them at

Coach House, and they glossy covers and the high prices. I, it's to me it's outside of the-the chapbook realm. I think chapbook should be cheap, fast, and dirty or handmade the way you do it. I think the two areas that chapbooks—I don't want a chapbook that just tries to imitate a trade book, but it's that-that it's small. I think they're really important because it is a place for people to try out different kinds of things that might, well, not be accepted by a publisher or a trade book. I think it is important for young people or-or—I shouldn't say, young people. I've known poets who started in their seventies, you know?—to have places to publish. I think they're important because they're something that anyone can do. Even if you just have Microsoft Word, might be ugly, but you can do it. And I think it's the-the real laboratory—the-where all sorts of things are tried out, and I've done some things like I just recently did a, I've done a few chapbooks now with Rob McClellan. I resisted for about twenty years, and then I thought, well, he does two hundred and fifty copies. A lot of people who've never seen my work will see it, okay? And I gave him one chapbook called *Espesantes*. It was a bunch of quasi homolinguistic translations or faux translations that I did, and it got published and he published it. I'm really proud of. It's about fifty pages long. I really like it. But I decided it wasn't going to go into a book-book that it was its own thing as a chapbook, and that's where it should stay. I did another one called Ninty Tiny poems, which was a section of an ongoing work of mine, that I may or may not ever finish. Sort of involves writing a thousand poems and then I did one that was a remix of—I took a Nelson Ball, but full-length, book and I put all the words in alphabetical order, and then I wrote a—one long poem out of all the poems in this book of minimalist nature poems. And it's about a—it's his—He doesn't have a lot of words in his book. So, it's about a fourteen-page chapbook, and Rob published it. I was really-really pleased to see it published in that form, and I really agonized about whether to put it in my next book. And it was mostly because I wanted Nelson to have a bigger audience. And if I did this thing that was a homage to Nelson, it could increase interest in Nelson. But really, to me it was a chapbook publication in it, 'cause that was the right format for it. Not that it's ephemeral, though that's not a bad reason to put things in chapbooks. But that it just—it worked just as a chapbook. It didn't need to be in a big book with other things. Yeah, I—I think you know, for a myriad of reasons, I wish there would be a store that sold chapbooks. This Aint The Rosedale Library sold quite a few chapbooks. The Printed Word in Dundas, Ontario, the best bookstore in Canada, or that I've ever been in. He has a lot of chapbooks in boxes, and he says people very rarely go through them. And yeah, it's just, it's-it's too bad that you know, chapbooks are such that they get wrecked easily. And also, you know they might cost three dollars or five dollars. It's who can, who can run a store where they're selling three to five dollars things and, you know, getting a forty percent cut of that or whatever. So, they have their—they have their challenges in terms of distribution. But I think they're essential, and people are excited about them—are really excited about them. So, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so do you think this kind of like smaller publishing reflects Canada, itself, in some way?

Stuart Ross: I think that there's a bigger chapbook culture in Canada than the United States. But there are a lot of, a lot of chapbook publishers in

the United States as well, I think. Per capita, we probably have more. I-I know there's some chapbook publishers in England. I even saw some chapbooks in Slovenia when I was there. I don't know how big they are outside of that. But in the sense that Canada is this sort of—almost everything cultural here is sort of underground in a sense it's in the shadow of United States. I mean, there's some exceptions. Obviously.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, I think it's sort of a—what's the word—an underdog kind of a form. And I think Canada a sort of underdog kind of a country.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I'm I have to ask this next question, because again, chapbooks and even the presses are so ephemeral. But why do you think a lot of micro presses have to close up shop after a period of time?

Stuart Ross: Oh, I don't know how many of them have to. I think they decide to either—they didn't expect to lose money, and they've lost money, or they had a lot of time. Now they don't have time, and rent is so expensive. Now, who has people have to get extra jobs to pay their rent. If you know, if you live in Toronto, it's—

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: I don't know what Peterborough is like. I know it's more expensive in Peterborough than it was. I don't know what it's like compared to Toronto or Vancouver. So.

Tamara Thompson: Well, I'm still living with my parents. So.

Stuart Ross: There we go!

Tamara Thompson: Some, my friends, just moved into a new apartment, and let's just say it's more expensive than when I was living in Mississauga. Yeah.

Stuart Ross: So, I think that, you know, people just have lives that—some people are disappointed because there's not as much response as they'd like. Some people stop writing; they stop doing the chapbook press. These are all the things that I've witnessed. Some people just grew out of it or have become more involved with just publishing their own books, with Anansi or Brick, or whoever or whatever, and they saw chapbooks as a stepping stone, which again I-I absolutely disagree with. You know George Bowring, one of our most you know renowned poets and fiction writers. He's been eighty-five now. He's just about, I think he's legally blind now. I think he's actually almost completely blind and he has published, I think, a hundred and eight trade books. And this past year he had this project, and he wrote to six chapbook publishers and said, I've got this project. It's about a hundred pages. So, if you each did about eighteen or twenty pages of it in chapbook form, the book will come out that way, and it will never come out as a full book. And it was, I probably have a copy of it. Well, yeah, I don't know. I'm sorry. I've gotta do too much digging to find it, but—

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough.

Stuart Ross: It was, he found an old manuscript by an old writer friend of his, Artie Gold. And he wrote a poem in response to all of Artie's poems and it became, I can't remember, I think it's called Romantic Words, the whole project. And-and he thought this would be great. He-he divided it into six sections. He approached six chapbook publishers. So, I'm-I publish the first volume. Turret House in Montreal published another volume. Nose In Book publishing, (technical issues occurred) BC. Which hopefully is not engulfed in fire now, did another one of them. I can't remember all the six presses were, but six different chapbook publishers have now published one sixth the book. So the whole book is done. And the-George Bowering is a Governor General multiple times Governor General Award winning, a retired, prestigious professor, the author of tons of books, and he has always wanted to have chapbooks. He's always approached chapbook publishers and gotten published. I love that. And I want to be like that. I wanna-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: -In my eighties, getting chapbooks published by younger writers or by myself. I-I don't remember what the question was, but maybe I've answered it.

Tamara Thompson: You have. It's-it's kind of like. Why do you think some places like-

Stuart Ross: Why people stop. Right? That's right.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: I think it's just-I think it's the circumstances of their life or disappointment in the response to what they're doing or just the-I don't think any of them have to close down. I mean, unless it's that they can no longer afford to publish them, and then they have to, because they can't afford to. But no one's-no one's forcing-forcing chapbook publishers to close down.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: People aren't forcing themselves, they're making a choice.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I liked what you're talking about, how chapbooks don't necessarily need to be a stepping stone. And I understand why people do it. But the way that I tell people is, I look and, like, I see it happen where people will do weird shit, then get published trade and then come back because their-their weird shit won't get published anywhere. They're, like, that's where the artsy cool stuff is happening. And I, like, for me, personally, I think if I ever like whatever's gonna happen in the future-who the fuck knows-but, like, even if I did do anything trade or, whatever, I know I'd always come back here because this is where I have the most fun and play. And like I love the tactile-ness of them. Like, I love being able to hold this and feel that this is ink, and I can feel the spine, you know, and like the small little mistakes of me, lining



up with my nails, like, to be able to flatten and press things down and stuff. Like, I love the feeling of just being able to hold these books, and from their little mistakes to their beautiful like covers, and, like, stuff like that. And everybody has their own way of doing them, whether that be in their basement or—God, for I was talking to Joseph of Block Party, and he said, "Yeah, we individually folded each page." And I'm like, "Joseph, what?" So yeah, we stopped that one pretty quickly once we figured out we could do multiple at once.

Stuart Ross: Rob McLennan folds and staples by hand all of his chapbooks. He has ninety of them a year or something, and editions of two hundred and fifty. Now Rob is in a situation where he's supported by his partner as so many Ottawa poets are, so he's got a lot of time on his hands. He watches a lot of bad TV and folds and staples all his chapbooks sets—saves him a lot of money.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: Absolutely incredible. I wanna, one other thing when I sometimes I say—and I say it as a blanket thing, but I don't really mean it as a blanket thing—When I—I tell my students to me, the ideal thing to happen with the poem is that it gets three lives. It gets published in a journal. And then it ends up in a chapbook and then the poems in the chapbook ends up in a trade book. So, this poem gets to have three different kinds of lives in the first life. It's among all these other poets' poems. So, it's a poem and conversation with all these other writers and poems, and in second life it gets this very concentrated attention, because it's one of only twenty-four pages, or whatever by a very small group of people who are very enthusiastic, and then, and then it gets to be in conversation with a whole bunch of your own poems that you've written over a longer period of time, that are maybe very varied, and will get into the hands of people who don't even know what chapbooks are not a lot of people, but maybe one hundred or two hundred people who see a book as—as a real book. And I like that idea of—of—the idea of poems having three lives. They could have another life. They could be a broadside, or a leaflet, or a—or a postcard, really. But those are the three basic lives that I see.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so we're getting into the like last three questions here, and these are more just to make space for like knowledge, like we've been doing before, but I'm still gonna ask a couple of them. But this third one here is: what's something you wish, like, people or the public knew about Canadian publishing just in general, or whatever you think they should know?

Stuart Ross: I don't think there's anything that people in general should know, or I think whatever people discover is what they know and that's reality. And that's fine. The one thing I do wish, and this is sort of tangential, like I did a reading at The Printed Word last Sunday with Clint Birnham, who came all the way from Vancouver and—

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: -All the way from Coburg and Gary Barwin came all the way fifteen min away from Ottawa, I mean. I'm from, excuse me, from Hamilton. 'Cause Dundas is right beside Hamilton, but we did this reading, and we got a full house. It was really good; I mean full house. There was probably about twenty people. It was really exciting. We did, I think, really good readings and a few people bought some books from the store, that were, you know, came a little early, or stayed a little late at the shop that was in the shop. Gary and Clinton, I did. Certainly, I spent two hundred bucks. That's less than I usually spend there and, but I think one of my books—I did a reading that got really great response. A lot of people spoke to me afterwards But, as far as I know, one person bought one of my books. One person bought Clint's books. I don't know if anyone bought any of Gary's books. And I sort of wish that the bookstore owner, James, who's an amazing guy had done a spiel about you know these people came out and read for free, they read for you and if you buy one of their books you support them. You support the store, and you support their publishers and.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: You got a reading for free. And this is the only way that this kind of literature can keep going in this country is, if it's supported in some way. And so, it drives me a bit crazy that so many people complimented me afterwards. Couple of people had a-a couple of books of mine. One person bought a book of mine there, but everyone there should have—everyone there should have bought a book. If I go to reading, and I enjoy, I always buy something. If I go to a reading at a bookstore I wanna support the bookstore. If I already have the writer's books. I'll buy something else. I'm not gonna buy something I don't like; that's different. But we went over really well, and I wish those twenty people, if they had all bought a book or two, it would have made a big difference to me. Made—especially made a big difference to the bookstore. And it would make a difference to the publishers.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: So, I see a lot of people, I don't think people are trained to even... Young writers, they come to things they don't; they don't buy; they don't support. And I say, you're gonna be in the same position I'm in and you're, you should be supporting other writers so that eventually other writers support you, by buying your books, you know. Don't buy things you don't like. But if you like something, buy it, if you can, if you can afford it. If you can't, take it out from the library because I make more—I make more money from public lending rights program which you're maybe you're familiar with than I do from my royalties or advances on books. I now—I get now—I get it usually four thousand to the maximum, which is four thousand five hundred a year, and I gradually built up to that over the years. But I don't make anywhere near that from royalties or book sales or anything. So yeah, get the books from the library, but support the bookstore, support the presses, support the authors.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, write down the names if you can't afford it, and go see if it's at your local library. Because again, it's very understandable that people's purse strings are tighter recently, but the library is a

great resource, and I think a lot of people have forgotten about the libraries there. I have, like three librarians in my family. Two are my dad's sisters, so very close with them, grew up with a lot of books, and they did specifically children's literature. So, it was constantly around me when I was growing up. And you know, like people don't use this great resource that they have. And it's a great place. And, like, there's so many things happening there, and, like, again I was talking to Joseph of the Block Party. He works at the library, and he prints everything of Block Party at the library, you know, and uses their resource center and stuff, you know? Like, use the resources that is available, that are available to you. So even if you can't purchase that book right there, like, that's okay. But if you liked it, why don't you go read it, and just take it out, you know.

Stuart Ross: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: Engage.

Stuart Ross: And but there's also the thing I remember: I once gave Rob McLennan a rough time about this, early in the days of meeting him when he-he came to his Toronto small press book fair back when I was organizing it, I think, and came to my table. Oh, this stuff! Oh, look. Oh, there's some great stuff here. I-I can't really, can't really afford to buy anything. And then he went out afterwards with a bunch of us, and he bought pint of beer after pint of beer, and it drove me nuts. So, six bucks a pint three dollars a chapbook you could, that's twelve chapbooks you could have bought from the various tables. But you, you valued beer which you'd be pissing out of yourself two hours later over literature which you claim to be devoted to, and I think that's pretty common. It's not so much sometimes that people don't have money, but they they're putting whatever spare money they have into beer, (laughs) as opposed to books.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: Books, not beer. That would be a good name for some kind of event. Books Not Beer.

Tamara Thompson: Anyway. Yeah. Might be problematic, though, if you do it at a bar or something where so many readings do take place.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, well, I was thinking, yeah, having series that are not a bar. I I'll just say, because I was a little critical of Rob, and I've been very critical of Rob over the years. My God, in my book *Confessions of a Small Press Racketeer*, and *Further Confessions of a Small Press Racketeer*, I really went after him a lot. And I really admire the fact that he has always tried to be my friend, and I know some of it hurts him. That I-what I've said-written, but he doesn't-he's a person who doesn't hold grudges, or he just, he really wants to be liked and appreciated. And although there's things like that that are annoying and have been annoying in the past, that guy has devoted his life to publishing chapbooks, losing well, maybe losing his partner's money on it and or his own. I don't know. And-and he's done so much for other writers. I think he does too much, but he's done an awful lot. And so- and all the online magazines he edits, and

the print magazines he edits. It's incredible, really, what he's done for people. And yeah, I-I-I really admire a lot of, you know-of-of what he's done for sure. And now he gets tons of free books from publishers all over, because he reviews so many of them. Not many people reviewing books so absolutely he should get as many free books as can get his way, because he might review them. My friend, Michael Dennis, the Ottawa poet, couldn't afford books and he loves books, and so he started up a blog in which he reviewed a book like every two or three days. He only wrote about books that he liked and he did it for eight years. And he, I can't remember how nine hundred or something entries he had, so, it's called today's Book of Poetry. It's still all up, online. And he got almost every day he got mail from all-over English-speaking world publishers sending them books. He's got all these books for free, from everywhere, like, Oh, my God! I was so jealous of the books he got.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: He put his time in also person, supported by his spouse and all his time into writing. Appreciate-I won't call them reviews, but appreciations of books that he liked and posting them. I learned about so many writers I never would have heard of through Michael Dennis's Blogs, through Rob's chapbook publishing. I subscribe to Rob's chapbooks. There's, as I say, ninety year you get, I don't know how, I don't know if you subscribe, but I get twenty packages a year in the mail. He must lose money just on the postage.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: I-I still have envelopes all over the place that I haven't opened yet, because they just come at such a velocity and I, when I do open them, now, I-I usually like about one out of the four things or one out of five things he publishes. And I separate them. Okay, I'm gonna keep this. I-I sample all the others and then I take them to those little libraries and put them in there. I used to recycle them, which I felt terrible about. But now there's this other opportunity. And on the topic of libraries, I hate those little free lot, little free libraries. I hate that phrase. I hate when people call it that because it implies that other libraries are not free and we have public libraries, and they're free, and I think people go, "Oh, little free libraries! Oh, I can, I can read books for free here." Well, you go to your public library and support it, and support all the employees there, and the publishers by taking books out for free.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Stuart Ross: Your local libraries, some of which don't even have overdue fines, anymore. Post Covid. So.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Stuart Ross: Anyway.

Tamara Thompson: I-I the term I've heard is little library. So, I don't know if that's just like Peterborough. Artists being like don't call them free little library, little library.

Stuart Ross: I hope so. Most people I know have referred to them as little free libraries, and it drives me crazy.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah that, that makes total sense to me. So and just to briefly, 'cause we're nearing the end here: when, like Rob reached out to me when I first started Whispering Wick, he really got me engaged in the community, and that was the first time I was able to actually engage with the community during the pandemic and it meant a lot to me at the time, because I didn't know where to look, I didn't. Like, I was just trying to figure this out, and he gave me this opportunity, like, he interviewed me and never had that experience before.

Stuart Ross: Okay!

Tamara Thompson: And like he does a lot of work for the community in that way, and I will always appreciate the fact that he did that for me, and Whispering Wick-

Stuart Ross: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And my friends, because we know about publishing, and we did our degree on creative writing and publishing and stuff, but to actually be able to be welcomed in and to interact. And that's one of the things that I've been so overwhelmed. But so, like, happy that I've gotten such a positive response for my thesis and people being like, "Yeah, I'll talk to you." Yeah, we'll talk to the point where I have in total-by the time I'm done this Saturday, because I have to finish, I'll have done forty-three interviews. I know I was hoping at minimum, I'd get five, maybe fifteen.

Stuart Ross: Incredible.

Tamara Thompson: And so, when you talk to these people like every-and everyone's been so nice-I have not had one negative interaction.

Stuart Ross: Wait, do you talk to JW Curry? Well, we'll see what happens.

Tamara Thompson: Well, he was, he was grumpy, and then he's like, I'm sorry I'm being grumpy. I'm just, you know. I have to go down to the thing and print out the paper and everything, and I'm like, no, don't worry. You will not find a PhD, Masters or a supervisor who does not have beef with the Ethics Committee. You are not alone.

Stuart Ross: He can be amazing. And hopefully, he'll be amazing with you. Yeah, he's fasc-he's actually fascinating, even grumpy and negative as he can be. He's fascinating. So that'll be a beautiful one. Yeah. And you had one more question or two more or something.

Tamara Thompson: Two more. You've kind of answered this next one about what's something important about D.I.Y., press history or something cool,

you've seen in your time that you would like people to know about? Just something neat that you wish, you know, "Hey? This was a cool thing!" Or a history moment that you're, like, I think it would be nice if people knew about this. It's more of a question of just making space. Because again, you sharing all of the lovely things you've done, and that you've seen is, like, that's one of my favorite things is just hearing what people have done. So, it's literally why I have the question in here, because I just want to hear about it.

Stuart Ross: Yeah. Another thing I'll add, is because I was so inspired by, I mean punk music—Oh, my God! That was, oh, punk in the New York New Wave. Those are such inspirations to me. I still listen to a lot of that music. And I listen to a lot of contemporary music, too, and—

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Stuart Ross: —by young people. As well as, you know, eight-four-year-old Bob Dylan. I listen to his record. I listen to Sloth Rust and—and Hurray for the Riff Raff and all—all these other young bands, because I see sort of chapbook, zine, and—and so forth. So, I know there were chapbooks before the punk era, but I think that it really blossomed in the punk era and post punk era and there are punks who have done literary publishing. Richard Hell from the band, Richard Hell and the Voidoids with their famous songs "Blank Generation" and "Love Comes in Spurts." It was one of my favorite New York bands I... some years later Richard Hells started publishing chapbooks and I don't know if he still does, but he published chapbooks by the late Susan Noel, by Ron Padgett translations of French writers. I don't know how many he published. I can't remember the name of imprint, but it was really cool. Richard Hell was done with punk, mostly done with music, and now he's publishing his own books of poetry, chapbooks, and everything. And there's other new wave alternative punk musicians came out of Toronto and other scenes who have gotten a bit into either publishing their own work or writing poetry. I guess I wish that young people who are really into really interesting innovative work by adventurous and queer and BIPOC young musicians, could see the link to the sort of equivalent in-in poetry and writing because it might—it might bring more people into reading poems. And it might give them, you know, they might not be able to be musicians because they can't play instruments or get a band together, but they—they—they can write poems. And it might be a fantastic—a channel for them. I'm working right now. My, I—I as I mentioned, I love to collaborate. I've done tons of collaborations. I was in a band, a noise band called Donkey Lopez, with two incredible musicians. And I just made-made weird noises with my mouth mostly. And I've collaborated on books with many people. I'm collaborating with this painter now. I collaborated with a Montreal filmmaker on a sound poem film last year, and my newest collaboration is with a really young musician. I—I-I visited her school and did a reading. It was my old alternative school which I visited fifty years later, and she was in the class, creative writing class and a—she-she really loved my work. It was a thing on zoom. And none of the students had their cameras on, so I didn't get to see or meet any of them. But one of the teachers said afterwards, oh, this one student in my band—in my—in my class! Demeanor Eliahu—she-she said, she loves your poetry and said that you write like a clown on a life raft. And I still have no idea what that means. I—I find it so freaky. It's just

amazing. So, I thought I—and I had a book coming out of short stories, and I asked Heather Borell, the-the teacher and a poet and friend of mine, if she could ask Demina if I could use that as a blurb on the back of my book. And what does Demina do? Oh, she's the guitar player for Bitch Stick this band and she's like nineteen years or eighteen years old or something. Anyway, so, I put this blurb, "Stuart Ross writes like a clown on a life raft," Demina Eliahu Bitch Stick. So, I went to see a Bitch concert. She was incredible. We had a great talk afterwards. I gave her a couple of my books, and we began corresponding her interest in music. And she really gets this connection between—she's a—she writes—she writes, sort of crazy rants and poetry, and all sorts of things that she doesn't even—don't really have— are not labelable. And we so we corresponded quite a bit, and then we, she came down to a reading I gave downtown at the Transact, where I also had a couple of musicians who performed. But we didn't perform together and somehow, as we talked afterwards, we thought well, we should do something together like we should do something where I read or recite or and she plays. She's incredible, incredible, innovative guitarist, like wild. And so, we've only had one session so far. But we're gonna start getting on it regularly. And I love this idea of, I mean, basically, Bitch Stick was a punk band, though her interests are way beyond, are—are not limited to punk. She does a lot of other things actually. Folk and all sorts of things. But we—we had an amazing jam session. And we're—we're gonna perform. We wanna perform live. We wanna make records, or, you know, electric—you know, Mp4 records that we can sell on Band camp. And for me it's a really interesting bridge, not only between generations given that she's two or three generations younger than me. She in the music world, and I'm in the—but we're sort of in the equivalent. She's in the equivalent part of the music world to where I am in the writing world. And—and it becomes this really neat bridge to me between sort of D.I.Y. and punk and the literary world of that. So, it's—it's sort of—it's an exciting collaboration.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So final question take us where you'd like: what's something that you wish people knew about your history?

Stuart Ross: I guess this thing of, I wish people knew, I've been a little resistant to it.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Stuart Ross: People know what they know and I—I don't think—well, I would say this is gonna sound—I don't want to end on a note of bitterness. Yeah, a lot of very young poets—

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Stuart Ross: —Young writers who have absolutely no interest in any generation before them. You know? In Ottawa, there's, you know, there's so many really talented writers in their twenties. I've published some of them, published the first book or second book by one of them. But they, when they have readings, mostly they go to each other's readings. I go—

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Stuart Ross: —meetings by young and launches by young people. But young people don't go to launches often by people of generations before them. I've always been a great worshipper of my elder poets, and there are some absolutely, some-some exceptions. You may be one of them, but there are—there are exceptions. But generally speaking, they're interested in what they do, you know? And I wish, maybe, if I was to wish anything, that maybe I look like-like to some of them, I'm some big shot poet, but I mean, I still struggle. I struggle with writing, I struggle with myself, I struggle with depression. I struggle with getting chapbooks out into the world. That nothing's easy for anyone, though it's been easy for me to get published mostly. That's the only easy part. But it hasn't been easy for me to make a living. That's why I—I make most of my living as a freelance editor and teaching creative writing in various kinds of venues. I don't make a ton of money as a writer. When I made that twenty thousand dollars—when I won the trillium, that was aside from a couple of grants I've gotten, that was the biggest chunk of money I'd ever got for writing. I don't know. So, it really—anything that's in my writing that might be autobiographical, they can find it there. So, if people are finding things out about me or things that they should know about me, probably the only things I want people to really know are in my writing. Though I'm not—not a—not really, a really autobiographical writer. I—I always think that I do write autobiographically, but I put it through like one of those circus mirrors where everything's distorted. That's what I'm most comfortable with. So, as I get older, my stuff is getting more blatantly autobiographical, and I write real things a lot more. Before, everything used to go through this circus mirror, so it came out almost unrecognizable as—sometimes, as even sentences. Aside from parts of my life, they're, you know, abstract like this painting across the way, which is by Nelson Ball's wife, Barbara Caruso, that script down the [turns to show painting]. You know, there's no way of—you can't see what that's about. And, but I think that Barbara was expressing things within her when she did things like that. And I think that's what I tend to do with my, with my poetry. One last little thing I gotta mention, but where I am down here in my crazy basement, Nelson Ball, I don't know if you're familiar with him, but please check out his writing. An astonishing writer, and he was a bookseller and a publisher of incredible chapbooks that were mimeographed. I did one mimeograph chapbook very early on Nelson's wife. Barbara was a painter. Nelson had a bookstore in their home in Paris, Ontario and he built about three hundred bookcases by hand, and he built about one thousand and two hundred frames for Barbara's canvases. And—and the reason, I was able to put this library together here, this—and look at how fucking mess that is. Someday I gotta get it all together—So, I've got about twelve of his bookcases down here and—and I'm sitting in his chair, and I have beside me his library cart that he kept beside his chair. Though he kept it, he kept it much more neat than I am and I—I have piece of Barbara's art hanging down the wall, here.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Stuart Ross: And I have this room is a...when my friend Michael Dennis was dying, my Ottawa poet, he was like a brother to me. He was incredibly close to me. I made this—I declared this room the Michael Dennis Library and used a painting that someone had done of Michael, and so I got to show that to Michael, that my, my new basement. He was really excited that I



was putting together a basement library during Covid and so I decided to name it after him. And so, just this thing of-of connecting and honoring other writers. And you know Barbara Caruso? So as a painter, and actually I'm going to be—I'm putting together her—she never published a book of poetry, but I've got all her manuscripts and everything. So, I'm going to be publishing her first, the first and last book of poetry. But I'm a great believer in honoring—honoring other writers and people who are influencers and people who have been comrades. And I think it's sort of the most amazing thing. And a writer can do. I know Rob does that a lot in his, he has a lot of books, homes that are for other people and you know, that's his way of doing it. But just reading these people, publishing them, hoping to just get their names out there I think, is really, really important. So that's that.

Tamara Thompson: I think, I don't know if you've noticed this with, like, younger students and stuff, but they're very anxious and very worried. The ones I've seen to the point where, like, Rob Winger, like will make them go to a reading. It's like, interact with this community. These people are kinda like, go out and meet these people, and so many of them come up to me, and they're like, "Well, when I do this and that." And I'm like, "No, you need to go out to a reading." And they're so scared to interact with the community. And some of them are scared of me. And like when I go in with a positive attitude, they start to warm up, and they basically clue into my positive energy and give that back to me, right? If I go and being positive because I'm the leader of the room, basically, they'll give that back. But I've noticed, and I don't know if it's Covid, or whatever, but they're very scared to go to readings. They're very scared to talk to other writers, and I'm like, "No, go up and talk to that person. That person's great." And even in my own ear I call myself an introvert that can act like an extrovert and, like, I'll, like, I talked to Grace Regan, who, again, great designer, fantastic writer! She'll write about a hot day, and it'll be the middle of winter, and you will be sweating. You will feel your legs stick together. You know? Great writer, great person, great editor. (Technical issues occurred). And I was like, oh, and this is Grace Regan. Or this is David Stevens. Or this is like Robin. Oh, God! Robin's last name's escaping me. Good Lord, you know I'd—I'd say, like, and these were my colleagues and stuff, and they'd go, "Yeah. I write." And I'm, like, "Oh, my God, do I have to like pitch you people cause you do such great things." And they just, like—

Stuart Ross: Wow.

Tamara Thompson: And I was just, like, Oh, my God! And even with Paul Vermeersch, because Paul was our Professor. Paul's kind of, like, a mentor to me. He was the first person I actually interviewed for this, so that I could kind of test the waters and see how I did. And he was.

Stuart Ross: Is Paul a chapbook publisher?

Tamara Thompson: No, but he talked about his experience as being published in chapbook. So, I talked to.

Stuart Ross: Oh, so you also talked to writers who had been published in chapbook form?

Tamara Thompson: And I even talked to pub-like small publishers. To get an idea of Canadian publishing, because again, it's an ecosystem, so I'm trying to, like, to encapsulate that ecosystem, because so many people who do chapbooks also do traditional publishing, but also do small publishing, who also write with other people. So, it was—I've been thorough and busy, but you know, like, they couldn't even talk to Paul, who they talked to. But, like, they hadn't talked to since the pandemic, and they had a really hard time. And he was, like, "So, what's everyone doing?" And they're, like, "About this job here." And I was just, like, "Grace, you've been writing, and you write this thing, David you've been writing, and you did this thing, Robin, come on!" So, even with, like, my own cohorts, and I'm kind of calling them out here—but, like, they struggled to talk, and I'm, like, come on. This is a person, you know who you look up to, but they didn't want to disappoint him and stuff, and I'm, like, "No, it's just a hard time to be published and in this world. But you're doing stuff. Tell these people that you're doing stuff." And it's so hard to get anything. I'm going out there because I have to, and I'm like, well, what do I got to lose? I'm interested in this thing. These people are interested in this thing. Let's talk about it. Let me at 'em. Let's talk about it, and I'm a very energetic person when it comes to that stuff. But I find, with even my own colleagues, and then my own students, I'm, like, they're scared. I'm, like: Don't be afraid. These are people who are interested in the same thing you're interested in. Go and talk to them. They're not going to be pompous, like, you know—I don't know JK, would be, like, well, you haven't made like thirty million dollars. And it's, like, that's from Universal Land, not books, Lady. Sorry I have feelings about that, as many young people do; but that's something I've noticed, anyway.

(Technical issues occurred)

Stuart Ross: I hope that your whole—you've got a sound-like, you have a shitload of material.

Tamara Thompson: I do too.

Stuart Ross: And it's great that you're doing this, and I wish you the best. I hope our paths cross again sometime.

Tamara Thompson: Me too.

Stuart Ross: Yeah, it's been a real-real pleasure talking with you, Tamara. I appreciate it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I—I appreciate you giving me so much time and rescheduling and even finding the time. I was so worried that I wasn't gonna get to talk to you. And when you responded I was, like—

Stuart Ross: Are you gonna be talking to Curry over Zoom, as well? I can't even imagine him on zoom like I—I he's such a luddite. It's—that's gonna be amazing. I hope you have a really-really great conversation with him.

Tamara Thompson: I'm excited.

Stuart Ross: You only get forty-five min to re-reconstitute yourself before you see him.

Tamara Thompson: That's okay. I don't mind. But thank you so much for talking with me.

Stuart Ross: Pleasure. Take care.

Tamara Thompson: You, too. Bye.

Elisha Rubacha

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson. The date today is July 13<sup>th</sup> the time is 2:09 PM. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview. This interview is for small press and author.

Elisha Rubacha: My name is Elisha Rubacha. My pronouns are she/her. I'm from Bird Bury Press, and I think location was next on my list there. Yeah. So, I'm from Lanark County, but I live in Peterborough and have for quite some time. I went to Trent and I'm also a poet, a writer, playwright, number of forms of writer. And I-do you care where I like work as a day job? Does that-is that relevant to you at all?

Tamara Thompson: If that's relevant to you. Cool. I've had people state their day jobs. It's literally just more like what you feel comfortable sharing.

Elisha Rubacha: Okay. I don't know if it's relevant. I-I work in the, in the nonprofit sector.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, cool. So just to get this ball rolling and to get the conversation started, how did you discover zines and chapbooks in this type of smaller publishing? Was there a moment where you're like, "Oh, cool! This is a thing that people actually, like, take part in"? Was there a moment for you like that?

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah. So, I was a zinester from like a very young age. I was kind of making things before I knew that zines were, like, a bigger thing in the world. So, I was, like, a very small kid, I was making the very first thing I remember making and selling was a kind of fake newspaper for the very small hamlet that I grew up in, and I sold it to my, like, one neighbor for a toonie and that's like a million years ago, when I was just, like, a kid, like a little child. And then through elementary school and high school, I kind of got more into making zines on, like, a regular basis. In high school especially I-I would make-I would go to, like, music shows, like punk shows in particular, and kind of write about them and then sell them, and then that would get me to the next show, and that was kind of a good system. And so, I was making for a really long time. I think I probably learned the word zine from a little show called *Our Hero*, which I doubt anyone has told you about, and you're probably too young to be aware of it. It was the first time I ever heard that word mentioned, I think, and she was, like; the main character was a zinester. She had the scene that she published, and she was like a high school student, and whatever, again a million years ago. But that was, I think, where I learned the word cause-I before that I was just like making things. And so that would have been-I don't even; you could probably look up what years that show aired because it wasn't a very long show.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I'm very curious.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, it was great. If you can find-you might be able to find it on, like, YouTube or something. But it was great. I really liked it at the time; but, yeah, that was kind of what got me into zines. And

then I discovered, like *Broken Pencil* magazine. There are a couple of really awful reviews of terrible high school zines that I produced, that you could dig up in archives, I'm sure. But I don't suggest you do. There's not really a point, nothing too juicy. And yeah, that, like those kind of, two cultural touch points were probably what framed my sense of, like, what was happening beyond, just what I was doing. And then the way that led into chapbook publishing was that I started publishing later on. When I graduated from university, I was publishing this little zine called *The Linen Thread*, which, I don't know, you can't see it on my wall. I can tell you can see some things on my wall, but it's up a little bit higher over here. But, yeah, this little-I think it was like a ten-part poetry zine, and it's actually how me and my partner, Justin Million, met was through that zine, because a friend of ours, he was talking about starting a reading series when he first came back to Peterborough. He'll probably tell you more about this, but when he was talking to you probably don't know Melinda Richter who runs Curated, but he was talking to her about running, like starting a new poetry series in Peterborough, and she had my zines for sale at her shop, and so she was like, well, maybe you should talk to this poet, and so that's how we met was through that kind of mutual connection we had, and then him and I after maybe about a year of being together, decided, like, let's start our own thing. And so, Bird Buried Press was born. There actually was a dead bird that we buried, and that inspired the name. But yeah, that's kind of the arc of going from zines to going to publishing chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: Cool. So, you started talking a little bit about, like, why the press actually started. But could you go into like just a little bit more detail about that, because I am curious?

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, I mean, it was like, kind of just like a natural next step moving from something that was just like my little itty, bitty guys to something like to publishing other people's work, basically, like, instead of just my own stuff. And I've, other than one piece of fiction I haven't really published myself at all through the press, but for one little story called *Scrap*. But yeah, it was, I mean, we wanted to do something. I'm like a design, like I was doing freelance graphic design here and there. I've done a lot of communications work. And so, it was easy for me to, you know, physically, design and assemble like, do all this kind of steps of production. And Justin is an amazing poetry editor. So that was a natural fit for him to kind of slide into that role we did try and make it like more like, more kind of co-leadership, but I think, because he was running the Show and Tell Poetry series, and I was doing the bulk of the like physical labor of the press. It just sort of split up, and that I was supporting his thing here and there, like with, you know, website and promotional stuff. And then he was supporting my thing with poetry editing and yeah, the-the balancing of trying to have like equal parts and leadership was very difficult.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I get that. I run a press called Whispering Wick chapbook press, and we started in like 2020 when the world was on fire, so.

Elisha Rubacha: Mmmm.

Tamara Thompson: I have like a whole team of people, and when I get busy it's hard to do things, because all of the printing, all of the paper, it's like at my house, I'm doing my master. So, I'm really busy, right? But like and don't get me wrong a lot of the team members are also really busy. But it's really hard when, like, you want to do something. But like you gotta like, manage your time and manage the people and manage also expectations, because I'm the person with the bulk of the stuff. But I don't have a lot of time, right? And so, I get that trying to figure things out in a way that'll actually function as well.

Elisha Rubacha: Well, I-

Tamara Thompson: To get it to work, yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: It has always been a juggling act, with like my day jobs wherever I was at time, and sometimes that's been like made more room for books like in 2017, we put out like an absurd number of books. I think it was like nine publications that year which.

Tamara Thompson: Damn.

Elisha Rubacha: Nutty for basically like one person with poetry editing support on the side but since then it's slowed, like, right down. I'm working full time now and have been for the last several years. So, it's a lot harder to find time to crank workout.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I feel that even just like it's such a slog to print things on like your own printer. And just-

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: My printer has a tendency just to be like, oh, we're too hot now, even though we've done like two copies. And I'm like this is, gonna take aaaalllll day.

Elisha Rubacha: My printer that I've been using for a really long time decided that it now needs to be hand fed individual sheets. So, I have right here on like this part of my desk, a brand-new printer that I haven't taken out of the box yet.

Tamara Thompson: Yup.

Elisha Rubacha: To get rid of this one, because hand feeding like sheet by sheet is not on, can't.

Tamara Thompson: No, no, I that's how I have to do my covers. And because we do them double side

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, we have to put them in one way.

Elisha Rubacha: Right.

Tamara Thompson: And we have to make sure we put them in the right way, and it's not necessarily hand feeding, but it's a little bit of making sure you're doing it right. And every time I'm always just like I really need to get a competent printer to be able to do this where it won't smudge the ink.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Printers are expensive, and so are their ink.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So does the press have, like, an editorial philosophy or maybe a goal. Could you maybe speak a little bit to something like that, because it's a lot of work to do this to do this stuff?

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: As we were just talking about.

Elisha Rubacha: So, when we first started, we were, like, super ambitious. One of the things that kind of bugged us about publishing was that a lot of places give you zero feedback. You get like a form letter in response to either rejections or acceptances. You get like no kind of content that's individual to you. So, we tried to give just like a bit of feedback. Justin always went overboard and gave like a page of feedback or more. I was a little more terse than that, but at least still gave the reasoning of why someone was being rejected or accepted. Sometimes it's weird getting a grant, and not having any reason given to you as to why you got it. Sometimes the positive reinforcement is important, too, not just like the rejection cushioning. But yeah, so we it was important to us to give feedback. So, we tried to do that for a long time but then it just like we were getting so many submissions, and it was just impossible to keep up with. And then we both started kind of working more. And yeah, it just got very challenging. So, we ended up closing submissions. And we've been like soliciting, basically, since those first couple of years of offering feedback, I think, were like very useful for a lot of people. And yeah, it was great to be able to offer it then, but it's just like it wasn't sustainable for us, for obvious reasons. And I get why, like bigger publishing places aren't doing that. I'm a lot more understanding about that now than, now that I've tried to do it myself, yeah. But in terms of, like, do you mean, like, what are we looking for in work like? Is that what you're asking.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, a little bit 'cause, like, my next question, kind of plays into that to like the kinds of work that you publish and the kinds of things that I guess like-like, why did you choose to publish some of those things, too, right? So, it's kind of like a question that leads into the other pieces.

Elisha Rubacha: Alright well, I mean, we publish what we like, which varies wildly, probably, and I think, yeah, we have a lot of overlap. There has been the odd time where we've gotten a poetry like some kind of

poetry work in and I've been like, oh, you're going to like this, and Justin's always like, well, I'll see. And then he does, and that's happened a couple of times. And so, there's things that are just like kind of obvious wins to both of us. And then, yeah, we have started soliciting. So, there's been a lot of the time it's just like people whose work we know we like, and they have something new. And so, we go after that. But we're both very, I would say, accessible poets. And like, I'm very much a minimalist poet. And I would say, Justin is maybe a little bit less minimalist. He has a lot of long poems, but still, like accessible language, I think we both appreciate. I don't, I don't love poetry in particular that like is very hard to penetrate what it means, and maybe it doesn't even mean anything.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: And there's a lot of that now, and I'm not super into it. A lot of the poetry I read and like, well, anywhere I'm reading poetry, I'm not that into and so, it is nice to find bits here and there that we do like and of try and give those a platform as much as we can.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I get that. So, would you say that you mostly do like poetry, kind of things just to like, confirm?

Elisha Rubacha: Not always. There's a lot of fiction. I've published one play, like just a very short play, which I actually also produced as part of a triple book launch. Yeah, it's, there is a lot of poetry, especially cause like Justin tends to have a little bit more capacity and knows a lot of poets also, so that people just, like, kind of come to him. And then I was publishing fiction more through, well, pre-solicitation like when we were still had open submissions that's when a lot of that came in. But it's just too overwhelming to keep up with. I do have a fiction work kind of on the docket right now. By someone we know that's local to Peterborough. Very prolific writer, Joe Davies. Do you know him?

Tamara Thompson: I've heard it before. I-I'm in Lakefield, right? So, ya know.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah. I know he's great, nice guy. We're going to have dinner with him again soon, and I should have a plan for what to say to him, because he might ask about where his book is at. And I'm not very on top of it yet. Yeah, actually, that's a good, like mental note to myself to reread his story. So, I can talk about it because I had some thoughts on it yeah, but I mean, it's-it's-it's what we like. We'll find the right people.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I appreciate that because there's definitely like a big space in chapbooks and like the smaller side of publishing specifically for poetry, but like even with Whispering Wick, we're like, give us your experimental fiction. Give us your fiction. Give us your like short sci-fi story, you know and some of those have been some of my favorite things don't get me wrong I love our poetry. But my partner, when we were 1st getting things off the ground I was like before we bring anybody outside let's figure out what we're doing with our own people. So, we used our teams writing to make the first couple books, and my partner,



who's the head of production, David. He did like a short story sci-fi thing, and it was very short, and it just had like this magicalness, and, like, talk of, like, death, and what it means to die in this sci-fi kind of like scenario. And I was just, like, cool stuff that I want to see. And we did an experimental fiction thing with an author. And it was basically a daycare provider where you don't know the gender of the person has been stabbed, and they're trying to like not tell the children. But then the children freak out. It's kind of like an allegory for like when something bad happens to you and nobody around you knows what to do, and they all feel like toddlers trying to hand you Band-aids, and it's like I appreciate it. But it's not gonna really happen you know, so like fun stuff like that. That was a fun book to make our designer Grace, because there was a doll or something in it. She, like drew up like a monster high doll, with like homemade band-aids on it, and we've made a Band-aid like I-I hand painted Band-aids at this very table, and then like used like one of those paint markers and wrote Band-aids. So that was the title. We didn't print it. We just made a Band-aid and stuck it on there with like cement glue, so it wouldn't go anywhere.

Elisha Rubacha: Nice. Yeah. Have you looked at the Bird Buried website? There are like covers-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I have!

Elisha Rubacha: One of my favorites is a book that Justin wrote called, *Kill Your Way North*, and the cover is just like the title in a match like an actual physical three-dimensional match.

Tamara Thompson: I love that. That's one of the things I love about chapbooks is how experimental it can be, and how like textural fun like that's the stuff that excites me about this sort of stuff is that you can play with format. You can play with what you can do.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, I would say, like this is less, I guess, as a like text editor and more as a designer of books. But my vision with the press has always been to have like unique handmade features like it's always very labor intensive. But to make sure that the form matches the content has always been very important to me, so like the match, you know, is relevant to that story. It's very narrative poem, but it is a poem but yeah, just drawing from the text and making sure that that's like very represented in whatever the cover ends up being.

Tamara Thompson: I-I-I love what you're talking about and, like, I love what you guys do, especially when it comes to like just content. And the book covers. Yeah, it's the kind of stuff that excites me, I guess, is what I'm saying. So now that we're kind of talking about making things I am curious about like what your process is like. So, you've talked a little bit about how you pick things. But how does the editor tutorial process go to, like, making a book? Like, what's that process like, actually like, because I just want to know just a little bit more what that's, like for, like, your guy's press, because everybody has their own way of doing it. Sometimes they do it with by themselves, like what I was saying with printed. Some people send it off to printers. So, I just want to get a bit of an idea.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah. So, I do everything like in-house, like in literally in our apartment, usually right here or in the living room, if I'm watching TV. But yeah, I do the printing here. I don't, I think I'm not sure, we've there might have been one cover that I outsourced the printing, did I-I'm trying to think of how which printer I would have printed that on if I'd done it here. Anyway, mostly, at least, I am printing on my own printers. Doing a lot of like, yeah, hand cutting, hand painting. A lot of like physical attention goes into every object. And a lot of the time. What I, like, kind of like the most about that is that it means every one of those objects is a little bit different. And so, we do very short runs because they're so labor intensive. And yeah, I guess, like, in terms of process, kind of from beginning to end, we'll find work, and whatever way we've done that. If it's poetry, Justin will have edited the text and had quite a bit of back and forth with the poet usually sometimes none at all like we just published Pete Gibbon, and he had a bunch of typewriter poems on like little index cards. And so those were just like scanned like we didn't, I don't think Justin edited it at all, or maybe he had some preliminary conversations early on, when he was still in like the midst of writing them, but I don't, because of the nature of them being typewritten. They were just kind of what they were, and then we scanned them in, and then I made them into like a calendar format. Because the book was about counting down the days until-

Tamara Thompson: That cool.

Elisha Rubacha: The birth of his child. So, I wanted that the calendar piece was important, and it was very simple to do. I literally was just like hole punching so that you can hang it on a nail very simple, but I like that idea of being able to kind of do one a day if you want, or just leave it up in your wall yeah. And so, then I like, then I usually will read things and kind of sit with them for a bit and find that like form and content, match whatever that like, find my inspiration in the text and pull something out that I feel like is representative of the book and also will like sell the book on a book table at various vending opportunities. That's important, too. I like things that catch people's eye yeah. And then, yeah and then it's once it's made, then it is about selling it. And I do go out to very like I go to book and zine and fest here in Peterborough. I have often gone to Ottawa for the small press fair. I've been to Toronto like once, but I don't really like Toronto, so I don't go very often. And yeah, yeah, it's that's kind of the arc of the process.

Tamara Thompson: Cool. So, you were talking a little bit about like how you sell them and where you sell them at markets and stuff. But do you do any online that is or is it mostly like hand-to-hand?

Elisha Rubacha: I do have an Etsy mostly 'cause, like, poets will have people in various places, and that, you know, living all over the place, and they'll want to be able to buy the-their friends or family member's work. And so, it's useful to have the Etsy. I don't do a huge amount of Etsy sales. I much prefer to sell in person, I find being able to talk to someone about books is a much easier way of like, not just like you know, talking them into buying something, but getting to know them and assessing like which book on my table is something they'll like, or something

they're looking for-for someone else, you know. And so that opportunity to have that back and forth is really, I've always found is really important. And yeah, without it I mean, I could do better, I guess, at selling online and a couple of times, maybe three times I've done book trailers which have really helped. So, I should do more of that. It's just another thing to do that consumes time, though. But yeah, I could probably make a better effort online, I guess you should say. But mostly I just like, it's nice to just talk to people like that's I prefer to do it that way. It's more fun for me. I can find something that works for the customer.

Tamara Thompson: Well, I get that a lot of the stuff there's things that we should be doing to market ourselves. And it's like, no, I'm going to do the marketing; it's going to take time. I'm going to do the fun stuff that I like. You know what I mean. It's technically marketing. But I also enjoy editing reading videos because it's going to take time. So, I might as well do the fun marketing because I'm still putting stuff out there and doing stuff. But, like, I don't know man, I'm just having a good time making little books, you know.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like, if-if I have time to make the production video, I will one hundred percent do it.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Or I will have a lot on my hard drive of just a lot of pictures of pages. And sometimes that's okay. I'll get there eventually, right? But like I get that mentality of like, yeah, I could technically do more as well. But if it's not fun, I don't really want to do it.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, and the ones I have done I've had fun doing and that's why.

Tamara Thompson: But it is labor intensive. Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: It is a lot of work and, like, the most recent one was Nick Taylor's book and we had them like roller skating around Peterborough, and it was adorable. And so, I was just like filming roller skating; like, it was very cute, and made a very cute, and we just had them read the poem and so I had an audio recording kind of overlaid. And it was a nice little clip. But yeah, it was fun to make, and so if I can make it fun, I'll do it. You're right. It is like this is a pet project, you know. I'm not going to do it if it's not enjoyable.

Tamara Thompson: I agree. So, you were talking a little bit earlier but I wanna like bring it back a bit on how the press actually makes decisions. You're talking a little bit about it, more on how like Justin will, like, find somebody, or you'll find somebody. But I just wanna like, ask the question again, just for a little bit more clarification, if that's cool with you.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, I mean, it's often people we just are friends with at this point because it's easiest. We are pretty confident we'll like the

work people do approach us sometimes, and we'll, like, consider those. But it's again, usually through, like, our networks and relationships. And so, we don't you know I don't shut down those conversations, but I'm always like very clear with people that it's very slow like I'm you know, as I said, doing this as like kind of off the side of my desk usually

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: Lot of other things going on my own writing. My day job, whatever else and so I've warned them that, like, you know it might take some time. If people are approaching me rather than us approaching them. If we're approaching them, it often moves a little bit more quickly, because we have sort of initiated the whole conversation. But yeah, if it's just like someone kind of random who we sort of know but whose work we may not have read before. That's that situation I'm always like, okay, like no guarantees.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: But I will look; but it will happen slowly, if it happens at all, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: There's a lot of waiting for people which I feel bad about, including Joe Davies, who we're going to see soon. Yeah, was there something more specific that you're trying to get out there with that question.

Tamara Thompson: No, it's more just like trying to understand how like decisions are made with the press. And you've already kind of explained it. But I just wanted to ask, like, again, a little more specifically. But yeah, you explained it just fine.

(Technical issues occurred, conversation shifted to Elisha's writing).

Elisha Rubacha: Like, kind of making books, I was writing a lot of like fiction, especially like fantasy type fiction. Maybe some like sci-fi type stuff and was like a very serious reader as a child. And read just like constantly I grew up in the woods, and all my siblings were way older than me, so I was like books were what was around, you know. And so, I would spend just like hours and hours, like full days, just reading books. And that resulted, and I like I've always been a writer also. Ever since I was very, very young I've been a writer. But what I remember writing first was like usually fiction and wasn't really making it physical until a little bit later.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So why did you choose? Because it is a choice to like, make these objects. Why did you choose to have your writing in these lovely, lovely objects that we call the chapbook or zine?

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, I mean going back to that, like, fake newspaper that I wrote. I think I just like wanted the connection, I guess, you know? And then, later on, I self published like a novelette that I wrote when I was

a high school dropout for a little hot minute. And yeah, I mean, that was, like, I printed, I think, two hundred copies of that book, and it was very hard to sell them. I think I still have like a hundred of them left in a box somewhere, but I managed to sell half of them, which is kind of crazy, because I just like was selling it myself, or like, quite like approaching bookstores myself. So, like, I wanted the work out I guess you know, you want people to see it. It's yeah. I've always like, been a very serious writer, even when I was pretty young and like had no business being as serious as I was.

Tamara Thompson: So would you-I know that you're very busy with everything that you're doing now, but let's say, in the hypothetical future you get a chance to make a chapbook or zine or something like this. Would you do it again?

Elisha Rubacha: With my own work right now, the projects I have are rather large. And I want them to be like kind of more mainstream received like maybe not fully like McClelland and Stewart mainstream. But, like you know, Coach House level publishing like, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: More traditional.

Elisha Rubacha: Establish small press publishers. And so, and I also just want to get paid for my work. Like, I feel like my work deserves to be paid well. I feel like artistic labor generally is something that we should be paying for and so I believe that for myself too, and I feel like publishing, like, a lot of my poetry, especially because my poetry is so tied to, like, specific conceptual, like book ideas. There's not a lot that I can just, like, put out to magazines or put out-I mean, I sometimes do that, or I'll put them out for like well, you know other opportunities. But the, like, the whole overarching collections, like they have to kind of be a thing fully on their own together. And it's, I don't know, it almost feels like kind of a waste to just publish it myself, if that makes sense. Yeah. And so, yeah, it would just be like, I don't know, it's less profitable, I guess, in a sense. So that's not the main thing, but it's just like it won't be as seen if I publish it. Comparatively, like Coach House publishes it, like, they're gonna get it in more hands.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, the other thing, too, is-is like, you can only make these things so big. So, if you want them to be bigger, you kind of have to go into more traditional avenues because-

Elisha Rubacha: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: I have tried. There was one book that we did, and that's when I learned that we needed a much smaller page limit, because my God! was it impossible to fold! It was less than the forty-eight. Yeah, it was less than the forty-eight pages which most people capped for a chapbook. So, it was less than that, but it was more than I ever want too again.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, fair.

Tamara Thompson: Like, no, I've learned my lesson, no more of that. So, this next question you can take wherever you please, and whatever you feel

comfortable with sharing. But what are some challenges that you faced as an author?

Elisha Rubacha: Hmm. I mean, just like getting work published, I think, is everyone's kind of problem. It's, there's a lot of competition like it's very competitive to get into a magazine and or win a contest, or whatever and so I've had a lot of like luck with granting more than I've had with any of those other avenues. I mean, I've been, like, shortlisted for a contest before. I have won one. I've had work published in, like, small publications, not any of the like big publications I would like to see my work in. I think there's just, like, I don't know if my work necessarily is like the work of the moment, you know? Like what people are currently publishing because it's very minimalist, like very short. I've been told it's too short by one publisher who I won't name that I submitted it to. And yeah, I just that's the struggle, like the struggle is always finding the right home for the work, and then also finding the time to write the work and like energy to write the work. To begin with like when you're working full time, and a lot of my like, who I am is wrapped up in my work. And so, you know, at the end of the day I'm kind of spent and don't have a lot left in me to write, so I find when I do write effectively, it's when I can like get like a few days away, especially if we're like physically, not in our own apartment, like if we go to like an Airbnb or something for like even a weekend. But like ideally, like, a week. Then I can just like pump out work, because I'm just like this is all I'm doing like I'm just here for this, and I don't have to worry about my job or too many other things. You know, it's all about just being there and focusing on my own writing practice. Yeah. So, finding the time and the money and the space to do that is a challenge what else is a challenge, jeez. I think those are the big ones like getting it, like getting it written and then getting it published.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, cause it's so much it's so much effort to write the darn, the damn thing. And then it's so much effort to get anyone to look at the damn thing. You know I teach so, like, I tell my students I'm like the person who gets published isn't necessarily the good writer. It's the person who just stuck around the longest. They just didn't give up. And they tried to-

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, persistence is important.

Tamara Thompson: You learn on the way. Don't say everybody's a big dumb head I had to explain

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah that.

Tamara Thompson: So, like, my big thing is that my students are like, well, I'll just get really big, and then I won't have to listen to anybody. I'll be like Margaret Atwood. And I'm like, yeah. And when was the last time you heard of a good book by Margaret Atwood.

Elisha Rubacha: (Surprise sound)!

Tamara Thompson: Or by Stephen King. That's actually had cultural impact. And they're like a long time. And I'm like, and why do we think that is?

And they're like, I don't know. And I'm like, it's because they don't listen to their editors anymore, because they're Marget Atwood or Stephen King, or their editors are too scared to tell them. Maybe all speculation ya know but gets the point across to them.

Elisha Rubacha: Hmmm.

Tamara Thompson: They're just like, is that why? And I'm like, well, it probably doesn't help.

Elisha Rubacha: Interesting.

Tamara Thompson: It's-it's always very interesting when they point to the big successes and how they don't have to listen to anybody. And I'm like, yeah, but when was the last time you read something, you enjoyed that they did, and they go oh, I'm like, yeah. The point of an editor is not to take over the work. The point of an editor is to help.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You say more what you're trying to say.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, one hundred percent.

Tamara Thompson: Get it on the page.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That's what their job is so like. Yes, a bad editor is a person who's trying to rework it or override it. That's not what an editor is supposed to do.

Elisha Rubacha: Agreed.

Tamara Thompson: Big red flag run, away.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, one hundred percent. I actually withdrew a piece, a short fiction piece once because the editor was making edits to it that I was like you clearly don't understand the point of what I was doing here, and so I don't want you to publish this. Like I'm taking it back and like that was at a point when I hadn't like, and I still haven't had a ton of work published, and so, like, that was kind of a bold move. But I just, the editor was not the right editor for me. And they were, yeah. So, respect to that, we need good editors who respect the work and understand the work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's one of the things, too, that I think is also difficult is getting people to understand the work. And they're just like, well, I don't understand why this is this, and it's like, well you know John, this is about gay cowboys, so I'm not going to get rid of a gay cowboy in the gay cowboy story that would kind of like lose the whole purpose. It's like, well, why do you have to be gay? And it's like, because I want him to be, and it's an integral part of his character.

Sorry, but like the amount of times that's been told to me, it's just like, "why it have to be gay". It's like, important. I want it to be.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, who's story is it?

Tamara Thompson: Any other reason and it's just like, oh, but why? And it's like that's what I enjoy writing, and if I'm not enjoying writing it why am I writing it? That's the other thing I tell my students I'm like don't try and make something good or publishable, because then you'll never write anything good or publishable, write something fun or enjoyable like you enjoy writing it, even if it's sad or depressing, or whatever have fun making it and then people will recognize that you liked making it, and then they'll like the work. You'll find your people you know. And they're just like Whoa. I've never thought about it that way before. And I'm like yeah, don't get caught up in it being good because good is too arbitrary and too blah. You'll get, you'll-you'll drive yourself into the ground if you try and do that. This is fun.

Elisha Rubacha: Make yourself happy first.

Tamara Thompson: You should enjoy.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Don't make something for an audience, and a lot of people are like, well, I feel pressured to do that, don't you? And I'm like no.

Elisha Rubacha: (Small laugh).

Tamara Thompson: Because why would I be writing if I was going to do it for somebody else? I'm one of those writers where I go a little loopy if I don't write for a period of time. I'm like everybody go away. I need to do an art thing. Recently, my, everybody go away because I've been so busy with interviews was, go away, everybody I need to draw a picture of a cat and then I need to paint it, and have him like absolutely tearing up a carpet specifically with just green and yellow paint. Everybody leave me alone. I only had green and yellow, and it kind of worked. But you know.

Elisha Rubacha: Hmmm.

Tamara Thompson: I'm-I'm one of those people where it's, like, I'm overwhelmed. Everybody, go away. Let me do my art thingy. I need I don't care if it's good or not. I just need to make it make the thing. Sorry I'm a talker-

(Technical issue occurred).

Tamara Thompson: What are some challenges that the press has faced since you've started this whole shebang.

Elisha Rubacha: Ummm, I mean, again, time. Like, that's the biggest thing is finding the time and energy to build it into my days. Financially, we've done very well. Like I have a pretty good system of, like, you know, selling one book and that funds the next couple of books; like, I have a



pretty good, like-I didn't pour too much money into setting things up at the beginning. And now there's plenty of money like if I wanna buy like a weird art supply that's specific to a book, like, I can do that. I can buy a new printer. I can buy an office chair like. There's stuff, you know. There's a, enough money there to do kinda whatever I feel like doing and that's without having invested like repeat, repeatedly having to invest in it like it's just kind of self sustained, and I don't draw money for myself from that, except for things like office chairs and printers.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, you know the stuff that you need to be able to make it and not break your back.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, it's like, I don't expect to make a profit off of it, but I do expect it to continue to pay for itself. Like it's not dipping into my own, yeah, and so that I mean I guess I kind of learned that at a young age when I was using it to pay for music events like to go to concerts and stuff, you know. Same idea just like get it to perpetuate itself and so that's been good. But in terms of challenges, it's mostly just finding the time and energy we haven't had, like a huge problem. There's some books that I've had in like the back catalog for a while that haven't sold through. But a lot of those are very good, and they're just like there's one that's like there's one that's challenging to sell because it has a twist. It's a fiction like a sci-fi story, and it has a twist. So, I can't explain enough about the story to hook people, and it's always a problem at the table. I really try hard with this book because I love it. I think it's a great book, but because there's just that little bit of information that I can't give, I find it like is enough that people don't buy it very often, and I, so, I still have a ton of that book. The it's hum two seven hundred, and it's a great book. But.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I have the same problem with another one.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it is.

Elisha Rubacha: I even tried.

Tamara Thompson: Anthology one, and I try and sell it. So, I sell it more as like, it's an ex-you have to experience it like, just get into it, you know.

Elisha Rubacha: Right.

Tamara Thompson: That's the angle I have to take, because I also can't, because they're really short little stories. It's like, well, it's kind of woodsy, and this is the vibe you need to experience it.

Elisha Rubacha: (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: It's recommended by our lead editors. So, like, that's how you have to do it, though, because you can't give it away because they're so short. So, I totally understand that.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: You need to read this because it's really good. But how do I, someone to buy it? But if you can't say much on it. I totally get it.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, I did coin a like genre term to try and capture it, but I don't think it really worked very well, so I call it "debt horror," like debt, as in like credit, card debt, and horror, as in horror. And I think that like to me that's a captivating way of explaining it. But it's not enough to hook people, and I always have to when I say debt. People are often like, wait, what did you say?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: Across a table at like a noisy fare. And so that it's always like a little bit of an explanation. And then it just doesn't hit right? I guess and so it's yeah. But I don't know what it is about that book, but it sure is a good one. But yeah, there's like little challenges like that. But mostly time.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I also get that struggle. I say, I don't say that we're part-time. I say, we're extra time when anybody has extra time, that's when the press gets worked on it.

Elisha Rubacha: Right. I kind of like that.

Tamara Thompson: It's very true, though, because that's when everything happens. So, what has this type of publishing like taught you over the years like this type of smaller, like handmade publishing.

Elisha Rubacha: Well, a couple things, I guess. The first is that I find people really like the handmade book object and they like it being exclusive. You know that you get something that's like part of a very small run, like we've done runs of like five books before, and I think the time, I think the time we did that run they were all sold before we'd even made them, we just like announced that we were doing this live event where Justin was doing his like keyboards, typewriter, live writing event, and he was doing it with a friend of his and so, the book is called Dual spelt like two, not like fighting, but the idea is that it plays on that idea of like dueling keyboards, on typewriters and or no was that that book? Maybe that was a different book. I'm trying to think there were a couple that we did live. Anyway, the one I'm thinking of had like extra poems in it that were you got like individual type written poems. So, you got one of a kind like, I think you got two, one-of-a-kind poems in Dual and that would be like pasted into your copy of the book. Yeah, at the event. And then, like then it's ready. The inside pages were, I think, all they were correct (technical issues occurred). Yeah. So anyway, there books that involve like all of these extra little pieces that make them unique. One of a kind, are really appealing to people. They like the exclusivity of that. They but, they also, it's not just the exclusivity. It's also like having something like a part in something. So there.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: Like togetherness, but also the apartness. If that makes sense.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: Kind of those two things together. There's a real appeal around that. I feel like I'll not enough is said about and so yeah, like being a part of a small group of people that have this thing. But your thing being a little bit different than their things, is.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: Also, important.

Tamara Thompson: It's like that unique special like experience together that can't be easily recreated or won't be recreated the same. Even if it was done again, it would be different with different sets of people. It's-

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: The unique situation kind of stuff. Yeah, I-I get what you're trying to get at, though. Yeah, it's fun. So, what-we've been talking all around it. But I'm going to ask the question a little more directly. Why are chapbooks important to you?

Elisha Rubacha: Well, I think, what I, well, maybe this isn't to me, but what I've seen be a really important for others is, and I know some people like hate hearing this, but chapbooks are a stepping stone. They're great in themselves, like I don't mean to diminish them as that I think they're important and like need to exist in and of themselves. But they also launch people into trade books. And we've seen that happen a number of times. We have several poets in particular, who have moved on to trade books, some of the multiple trade books. And so, we do see that progression. And I think if you just like took chapbooks out I don't know that you'd see people get to that point in the same way. Think it is like a very important piece of the like, what I like to call the literary ecosystem. And so that's a big thing and yeah, why are they important to me? I mean why zines were important to me. This is again a slight variation on your question. But why zines were-

Tamara Thompson: No, its okay.

Elisha Rubacha: To me was that I was like, completely in control, right? Like, it didn't. I didn't have anyone telling me that I couldn't say certain things, you know, other than like the Government of Canada, saying that hate speech is bad, which I agree with.

Tamara Thompson: Pretty easy rules to follow, though.

Elisha Rubacha: Yes, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: (Laugh).

Elisha Rubacha: So, you know complete control, being able to do whatever I want was great. And so, the chapbook now, at least for me, like publishing other people's chapbooks, I still have that creative control. But I'm working with someone else's text but that's kind of, it's kind of nice like it's a step I don't have to do myself, because again, time is so limited. And yeah, it's just great to like, give people more of a platform. Like share that workaround, get it seen even if it's, you know, a very small run, and seen by a small group of people. There's still something special about that. I just like, it's just a great form that we need. And it's yeah, I don't know. It contributes in all kinds of ways to that ecosystem.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, you're kind of answering a little bit of the next question that I'm gonna ask, which is: are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not? So again, I'm still gonna ask it.

Elisha Rubacha: Yes, I would say absolutely they are, I mean, like magazines, like periodicals like that kind of stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: Fulfills like a similar role. But it doesn't like you're getting like one or three, maybe poems published at once, and you can't do as much in three poems like my, the way at least, my writing. I write like suites of very short poems, and I like the space between poems and like what happens when you connect one poem with another poem like there's an, you know it's it builds, I guess, is what I'm getting at. And so, you can't do the types of projects that I'm trying to write myself without something more extensive. So, like the chapbook offers that at a level, that's like, you know, still pre trade book. But...

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Elisha Rubacha: A necessary level that a magazine can't give you, I don't think. Like, you can't do a concept three poems in a magazine like it like, maybe if you're responding to a theme, you kind of can, but they probably won't even print more than one like, you know. It's not the same thing. A chapbook you can like go with a con-you can write the concept album, you know. You know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: You can do that, you can work through something, and you don't have that option really, with magazines. So, it is like a very important piece of Canadian literature overall.

Tamara Thompson: So, this next question is like, really open, take it wherever you desire. But does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way?

Elisha Rubacha: Ummm, I kind of hate nationalism personally. So, I don't know. I mean, I like the idea like, well maybe some background I'm

currently writing a book about my through hike of the Bruce Trail a couple of years ago, that I did with my mother when she was sixty-eight years old. We hiked nine hundred kilometers together, which was intense. Over forty-seven days. And I would like to think that, like, because the Bruce Trail is a nationally significant trail, I think that's why I got Canada Council funding to do the trip. And so, there is like that, you know, Canadiana thing happening with that book in particular, and my other, the other book that I've been trying to shop around that's too short for anyone to publish sadly is about Roberta Bondar. I don't know if you know her. And so, like again, like, Canadian kind of royalty, almost, like icon of STEM. She's amazing. And so, I'm like, I'm writing these books that like could be seen as very Canadian and I do kind of like the idea of like artists building like the national identity. I think there is something there. But I'm-I'm more interested in like regionalism, though, than I am in nationalism, I think. Like kind of representing your place is more like your, you know, smaller place your town that you're in, or in the case of the Bruce, like the towns that we passed through. I think that's more important than like representing the country as a certain thing. So, I don't know. I have some like inner conflict around that idea, but I do think art more broadly like, not just literature does contribute to like how a nation is perceived internally and externally so. Yes, long winded, yes.

Tamara Thompson: No, I totally get it. And I'm always interested on how people take that question, because even when I was trying to define what a Canadian was for my project, because again, I have to have some sort of scope, right? And because this is I'm talking to like you. But I've talked to people out in BC. I've talked to people out in like the East Coast, and like the Prairies and stuff like I didn't want to limit myself to just like Ontario, because so much of what people do is just Ontario. So, I wanted to show the scale of this in Canada, because there are a lot of people everywhere doing this stuff. And so, like I had to describe what a Canadian was. And I went uhhhhh, this is my best because I like had to do it so many different times, because, like what if I wanted to talk to a Canadian who moved to the States? But they did a lot of work in Canada, but they're not technically living in Canada. You know what I mean. So, I can't just be like lives in Canada. Damn! There we go, you know. It's like, oh, damn! I don't want to limit people who have worked here, and maybe who were born here, but currently aren't living here right? And so, it's like very hard to like, what is Canada? What is all this about? So, I get like the regionalism aspect that you're talking about. I think that's, I also think Canadians are much better at that type of like place writing. Then the-

Elisha Rubacha: Right.

Tamara Thompson: The Great Big Wonder that is Canada because it's so big. Even an experience from Peterborough to Lakefield. There's slight changes, right? In little pocket communities, or even like Douro, or like Bobcaygeon and stuff.

Elisha Rubacha: Sure.

Tamara Thompson: These places are not far from each other.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But they're almost like their own little pocket places, same with like Toronto, like the different like-

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Neighborhoods and streets like-like you could be on Dundas. But Dundas, like here and here, is completely different areas, right? So, I think it's really cool that you picked up on the regionalism stuff. (Technical issues occurred). What does this type of publishing offer that other types of publishing can't offer, and like maybe vice versa? We've talked a little bit about it. But I'm gonna ask the question again still, directly.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah. Well, I do think like the form offers different opportunity, like I was saying, with like magazines like, that's a very limited scope of what you can write. It's kind of, they're gonna be occasionals like that. If you're familiar with that term, I'm sure you are as a TA, like they're going like it's just going to be you know, not something that has, like, an arc or a story, or a like concept overall. You can't, you don't have that wiggle room in that form. So, I think the chapbook gives you that. I mean, it's again like a smaller scale than a trade book which gives you that like in spades like you can, you can kind of do whatever you want. And so yeah, I think it like, it's a form thing. It provides an opportunity that other forms don't.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, one hundred percent. So, we're getting into the last couple of questions here. So, I do have to ask, like, for some people a little more sad question of why do you think most small presses and, like micro presses, have to close up shop?

Elisha Rubacha: Well, because they're not really sustainable operations a lot of the time, I find, especially if you're relying on fundraising constantly. We get, like Justin and I get so annoyed about that. I'm sure if you ask him this question he will say the same thing. Like the GoFundMe approach to publishing. Just don't bother doing it. If you can't do it, don't do it and like, especially if you're not paying people for their work then you don't have enough money to exist like just don't exist, and I know that's harsh. But if you, if you can't pay people, and you can't produce it without like begging for money all the time. Then I don't really understand why you think you can do the thing.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Elisha Rubacha: Like I have run Bird Buried with sufficient funds like I don't think we even put in very much. We, I think we accepted donations at our launch event. Just in like a jar but we never did like a crowd sourcing campaign. We didn't do any of that. It was mostly out of our pockets. I think Justin bought this printer that no longer feeds paper. It was good for a long time, but now it's no good.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: And then, yeah. And now I have enough money to buy the things out of the press money and still publish books and still pay writers. So, like I don't know to me. It's if-if you're expecting to make it your actual job that's tough and like I, at the scale of chapbooks that's tough. And in trade books like, I think that it is possible. And there's grant funding and stuff to sustain that. And I love the granting programs. I am all for grants, and more grants, more funding for grants, but the like the crowdfunding your thing really bums me out.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: Care for it. I think that yeah, it needs to be sustainable somehow. And if that means you're doing it, like if you yourself as the person who's leading the thing is volunteering like I am then great. But if you're expecting it to be your job and doing it, that's harder, and if you are constantly asking for money, then maybe just don't do it, or don't pay yourself or something. And I don't know. I yeah. What was the original question. I spiraled there, I think.

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: Why do you think most small presses and micro presses have to close up shop?

Elisha Rubacha: Oh, yeah, yeah, I mean, and it's with the crowdfunding thing like people get sick of it like you might get money the first time like to launch or something. But like, if you're doing that every year, like every six months, or something like that's not gonna work for people. And they're gonna taper off and then disappear, yeah. And then another issue is again, time like, if you're doing it like I am then, you know, you get busy with life, and then you put it aside with me like, because my vision for Bird Buried press is to do it in whatever way I can for the rest of my life. I would like it to be like an ongoing project, but let it be slow, like it doesn't have to be, you know two books each like spring and another two books each fall like, I don't need a schedule. I don't wanna create an environment where people are expecting a tight schedule for me. It was great in 2017 to do like a bajillion books in one year, but like I'm not gonna maintain that. And I don't have to maintain that it's like my pet project. I can do whatever I want and so like that's easy to sustain, except for the time.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: You know the time is where it's that's the precious thing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, you're kind of answering my next question as well. It's like, how and why do you still keep it going? You kind of answered a bit of the how.

Elisha Rubacha: So, why, yeah, I mean, I just like making things. And I like offering other people opportunities it just feels good to do it. It feels good to talk to people about books at vending opportunities. It's I don't know. I like making like-it gives me an excuse to do some like

design, like visual art and design, and like crafty work, which I don't always build into my life otherwise.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Elisha Rubacha: There's a million reasons, but it's just like it feels good. It's the short version.

Tamara Thompson: No, I totally get it. So, we've got three questions left, and they're more interpretive giving space kind of stuff. So just have fun with them. What's something that you wish maybe the public or people knew about Canadian publishing?

Elisha Rubacha: Hmm.

Tamara Thompson: Take that wherever you want.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, well, I find something I'm often telling people is how slow it is because people are like asking me like, especially with my Bruce Trail book. People are always asking me about it. They know I hiked the trail like in 2022, so like almost two full years ago now and like well, August/September is when we were gone, so I guess at the end of September it will have been two full years since I finished and so, like, I'm a slow writer. So, there's that part like, I'm gonna take forever just to write the thing, get the manuscript together. Then I have to submit the thing. Then I have to wait for people to even respond to me, which can take like a year which is insane. I mean, like, I'd be okay with like six months or something. But a year I've had happen. And like, that's a long time to wait, especially if you're like only submitting one place to like the no simultaneous submissions thing is such a big problem like, let people submit simultaneously and they'll alert you if it gets published somewhere else. Like, just accept that as a publisher. And then yeah. And then it goes, you know, through their channels. If they, if it gets accepted. That takes like a whole bunch of time just to get on their schedule like you're probably one to two to three years away from publication still, even after all of that, when they've accepted you. And so, like I'm when people are asking me when my books coming out. I'm like five years from now, maybe like, yeah, like, I don't know.

Tamara Thompson: I'll let you know.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, like, I will definitely be shouting it from the rooftops when it's available. But, like, it's not gonna be available anytime soon. So please don't hold your breath like that's big thing like it's just so slow. It's very competitive. You know there aren't, there's not a lot of room for people to be accepted, because all like-like, you know, you're saying it's hard to be a sustainable operation, as you know, so like you can only publish so much work. And like hundreds to thousands of people are submitting to you. And so yeah, it's slow. It's competitive. And yeah, you might not just, not be what they're looking for also. So, there's a lot there.



Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's-it's rough out here. 'Cause you can get, the- the other thing, too, is-is, I think people think if you get the grant then you automatically get published and it's like.

Elisha Rubacha: Definitely not.

Tamara Thompson: And I-I also try and explain to my students and like, well, I'm gonna like, write for this trend, and then I'll get published that way. And I'm like so the trend's gonna be dead in a couple months.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, it's fast.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, how fast can you write and how fast you think you could get this published? I'll tell you, even if you do Amazon publishing it ain't gonna happen that fast, boyo. They're just like, what do you mean? And I'm like, don't do it. All right. What's something important about D.I.Y. press history, or something that you've seen in the community that you would want people to know about. So, this is kind of giving space for history, but also just like there's so many ephemeral, beautiful things that people don't know about. I don't know about a lot of the stuff. And I love asking this question because I get to hear about such cool, interesting things that have happened and being created that I would have never heard about before, or something interesting that happened. So, this is like a giving space thing so like, what's something important that like D.I.Y. press things that you would like someone to know.

Elisha Rubacha: Hmm.

Tamara Thompson: Something you've seen. And you're like people need to know about this thing.

Elisha Rubacha: Hmm! Well, I mean, I did talk about like the control, like having control over what you're making is awesome. And you know you don't get that everywhere, like if you're like a professional like, if like, when I was doing freelance graphic design, for instance, I ended up hating it because you just end up what I like to call a design monkey, where you're just like doing a million little edits, because the person thinks they know better than you, and they want all these little changes, and it's like a nightmare cause you're making your good design worse in order to accommodate all of their like little edits, and it's infuriating. So being able to just like, do your own work that has nothing to do with other people, and they have no say over what you're doing. Well, that's great (does a chef's kiss). So yeah, I mean, the do-it-yourself movement is good for that reason. It gives you a lot of creative freedom. Yeah, I don't know. Can you read me the question again? I'm not sure what else to say about that, you said D.I.Y.

Tamara Thompson: Like press history, or something that you've seen out in the world so like it might be a chapbook. It might be a zine, you're like, well, that was a really cool concept, but there were only like five of them. Again, just giving space for the cool stuff that the community does basically is what this question is.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, I mean, I could talk about stuff I've made. That's like weird shit. But I already kind of did. I told you about *Kill Your Way North*. I really let, proud of that cover. One of my other favorite covers was like a hand painted cover. Which someone actually asked me if I still had any after I had sold out of them, and I was like super self satisfied to be like, no, those are gone like you can't have one. It was someone who I have like mixed feelings about. And so I was, and I love that he like wanted it, but couldn't have it. It was just like very like, and it was a beautiful cover. It was a great book too. That was Miami and I don't know. Yeah, just like, I'm not sure about history like it's hard that you'll get a better answer out of Justin, maybe, for this than me do really like, if you're well, maybe this is less do- yourself. But small press related certainly. We have a friend. Are you familiar with Apt. 9 press Cameron?

Tamara Thompson: Oh, absolutely! Cameron's great.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah. So, Justin's very good friends with Cameron. Cameron published my chapbook a couple well, a few years back now the pandemic just ruins our sense of time. So, it was actually quite a few years ago now and he has this great Instagram account. I think it's called small press bookshelf, and he posts all like just stuff from his bookshelf. But some of it is like very cool him and I don't always have the same like taste and poetry, but his, like aesthetically I feel like we're very similar kind of in terms of visual art and like cover design and stuff like that and so that might be worth looking at.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: That's his Instagram, and it's great and would give you, are you interviewing him? If you're not, you maybe should.

Tamara Thompson: I've interviewed him like weeks ago. At this point he was one of the first ones I reached out to.

Elisha Rubacha: Perfect. Yeah, he's amazing. We love Cameron. Yeah, I feel like he would have much better answers to this question than I do, because most of my knowledge is like about what I've done. I'm not as like tapped into the community as Cameron or Justin. They have a lot of connections through their in/words work, as I'm sure Cameron has told you, and Justin will tell you extensively. Yeah, so I don't know less of an answer for me on that one I think.

Tamara Thompson: No, still great answer. Final question. What's something important about your history that you wish people knew about?

Elisha Rubacha: Oh... huh.

Tamara Thompson: The hardest question yet you must talk about yourself.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah...what do we wish people knew? I don't know. I mean, I try and capture like I did an installation once for this one book, the-the book was cut-what was the book called I called the installation was called Cutting out Lake Huron, because I was literally like cutting out the shape of Lake Huron with an exacto knife from all these covers. But I had all

these stations that showed like they had, like videos and stuff of like the design, like the digital design process on my computer screen, the like cutting, like the because I had to cut the paper down to size, and like I had to cut the well, I was actually physically in the room cutting the covers, but I had all these clips that you could see and view all of the steps, the many intense steps of the process like, and then you would, I think I even did the folding and stapling in the room, too maybe, I forget some of that might. I think the insides might have been like pre-folded. But yeah, and the idea was just to illustrate how work intensive it is, and like, be an example of, like the invisible labor of the arts. And like publishing specifically this type of publishing specifically. And so, I've tried to like, the things that I wish people knew I've already been trying to illustrate, I guess, is what I'm saying.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, you're already trying to share.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: With other things your doing, I get that.

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah, and so, and I'll do like little stuff on Instagram, too, like on my personal Instagram and just show, like, you know, I'm hand painting, or I have, like my clothesline of covers that are all drying. One time, a couple of years ago, like during the pandemic, we did a twenty-four-hour marathon, where Justin would write a poem every hour, and I would make a book cover every hour, and we called the book Impossible Book because we asked for prompts. So, you would before the twenty-four-hour, marathon we asked for a prompt that was like something impossible to write about and so Justin had to write from that prompt and so we-we had twenty-four people sign up and offer a prompt, and then each of them would get-they had to pay for it, but they each got a book, and it was like the book that they got had the cover that was inspired by their prompt and then all the full set of twenty four poems would be in every book. And so, the clips the we did like a live stream of that event, and it was insane. We actually got a lot of people on the live stream who were like very dedicated to watching us through it, and it was kind of amazing. We ended up like being able to kind of chat with some of them and that was cool. We had like a tech kind of support, and they would yell out what people were saying to us, and then we would just like talk and respond. But the-the, my favorite thing about that is that the footage of it that we cause we have a recording that's like sped up and so, Justin, just like sitting there you know, type-like writing his thing just like calmly, barely moving. I'm like frenetic, like making things running around like cutting things out, painting things, gluing things on and like I just never stop moving for the whole twenty-four-hour. And so again like to me that's another way of like showing that labor right again to answer the question in the same way, but in a different way. I like, it's I've kind of made it my mission to illustrate that. And I think in some ways Justin has too. It's yeah. The invisible labor of artistic labor is something that people do not know enough about, and I wish they did. I once had a woman I think it was at that dueling keyboards event actually she came, and she took one of my zines. I think it was one of my linen thread zines off of the like sales table.

Tamara Thomspson: Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: And I'm sitting at the next table over like making books, and she takes it. Doesn't pay for it, puts it down in front of me takes her pen and writes something on it and then walks away with it. And I was like, okay, like do I go after this woman for the like I think I was selling them for like two bucks or five bucks or something. Yeah, like, oo I go after her for that when she just like completely disrespected the work by writing on it. Like I just I was, too, in shock. But I think like there's too much of that, and not enough respecting the labor that goes into these things. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I've had one person be like, why did you do this?

Elisha Rubacha: Ooof!

Tamara Thompson: What is this? Why? And I was just like, oh, you're very much a parent who's trying to understand, but also really doesn't understand.

Elisha Rubacha: Oh no.

Tamara Thompson: And I was just like, oh, okay. Ummm, I love it here, you know?

Elisha Rubacha: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Great weather, go way.

Elisha Rubacha: Some people don't get it.

Tamara Thompson: They don't get it, and that's fine. For the most part I get like a lot of curiosity about it. But, like my thing is that it's just like some like the one person being just like, but like why? And I'm like cause I enjoy it. And is that a good enough reason. And I want to share the work. That's a lot of effort. Yeah. I know. Yeah.

Elisha Rubacha: Yes, it is.

Tamara Thompson: Okay. Do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording?

Elisha Rubacha: No, I don't think so. I'm good.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough. I always like to ask.

Karen Schindler

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson. And just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview time. This interview is for small press. Please state your name, press, part of Canada you are from, pronouns, title at press and other titles you wish to share.

Karen Schindler: Karen Schindler, publisher, she/her, Baseline Press, London, ON

Tamara Thompson: Why did the press start?

Karen Schindler: Baseline Press began in 2011, with our first roster of titles published that fall. I'd been involved in various forms of local arts administration and participation for several years at that point. London, for a mid-sized city, has an incredibly vibrant literary community, and I'd had opportunities to help run a local reading series, participate in writing workshops, do some peer editing, etc. Starting up a chapbook press felt like a natural next step. I knew I'd have the support of my local community behind me.

Tamara Thompson: How did you discover zines, chapbooks and this kind of publishing?

Karen Schindler: Part of the inspiration for starting a small press came from being introduced to some chapbooks that JackPine Press co-founder Jennifer Still brought along when we were both attending a Banff Centre poetry studio in 2005. I'd never seen anything like it. The care given to the creation of those books was so obvious. That kind of attention made sense to me and really drew me in.

Tamara Thompson:

Karen Schindler: What is the press's editorial philosophy?  
I'm not sure this is a philosophy, but I'll explain Baseline's editing process, which has recently changed. When the press began, I worked with each poet to fine-tune their manuscript, with several rounds of back and forth occurring over the span of two or three months. I always enjoyed working with the poets in this capacity—it felt like such an honour to be allowed inside someone's writing. Then in 2021, Baseline began a new editorial approach which saw each poet paired with an external editor, with editors recruited from across the country. This broadening of Baseline's 'team' partly stemmed from watching larger publishers make efforts to diversify not only their author rosters but also their own internal structure. I was looking for a way that this might translate to micro-press operations—a level of publishing where typically just one or two people run the press. The idea of a rotating editorial board seemed

like a good solution—a way to expand the roster of voices involved, and a way to provide a small mentorship opportunity for each poet, ideally with someone whom they admire or feel a special affinity to.

Tamara Thompson: What is the press's goal?

Karen Schindler: To provide beautiful homes for poets' words; to produce books that readers want to hold.

Tamara Thompson: What is your process (i.e. from submission to production)?

Karen Schindler: Baseline is open for submissions every few years. In the years between, we select manuscripts by invitation. We publish between three and seven titles every year. The books are all hand-made, with quite a bit of attention paid to paper selection and design. The paper cutting, printing, and binding are all done 'in-house.' Our chapbooks typically house between twelve and twenty pages of poetry, with run sizes between sixty and one hundred copies. Prior to Covid, our timeline followed the calendar year, beginning with manuscript editing in the first months of the year, followed by book design through the spring. All of the year's titles progressed on a parallel timeline. The chapbooks were printed and hand-bound during the summer. And everything was launched together in the fall, with events typically organized in London and Toronto. The last couple months in the year would be devoted to reprints, participating in festivals, and lining up the next roster. In the last two years, Baseline has switched over to a 'one at a time' timeline, with one title published every few months. Although Baseline still actively participates in publicity and promotion, and supports any readings the authors line up, we no longer set up annual launches. (In lieu of this, the authors receive a larger percent of the run.)

Tamara Thompson: Where does the press sell their books?

Karen Schindler: Books are sold through the Baseline website, at literary festivals and reading events, and through a couple of independent bookstores.

Tamara Thompson: What are some challenges the press has faced?

Karen Schindler: I would say the biggest challenge to date has been Covid, which resulted in the cancellation of in-person readings and festivals for essentially three years. However, I'm grateful that book sales remained relatively steady during this time, and I definitely have the authors to thank for this—for gamely participating in on-line launches and taking on larger roles in publicity. The switch to on-line events was a tough one though—out of my comfort zone. I'm not exactly sure if this interruption

was the catalyst for backing away from planning and hosting launches (even though in-person events are back as an option). The decision may have just been due to general event-planning burn-out. But I do feel that Baseline lost a bit of momentum during Covid that I'm still catching up from. I'm very happy to be back at bookfairs and festivals though! I really love the camaraderie and support that they provide.

Tamara Thompson: Why are chapbooks important to you?

Karen Schindler I've always felt chapbooks exist in a very special realm—we don't seem to be at the mercy of any current economic/publishing climate, the way larger presses are. Micro-presses keep chugging along... the books keep selling... A large part of my love of chapbooks simply stems from the love of small scale art forms. Quoting publisher Guy Bennett: "Another reason to focus on the chapbook as a format, perhaps the best reason, is simply for love of the small work. All branches of the arts possess a tradition of the miniature/short/chamber composition, and many, like myself, are irresistibly drawn to it." I certainly relate to that—a draw to the small and ephemeral. And I'm really intrigued by the way in which the size of the book informs the content of the book. It's as interesting to me as the way form and content play off each other at the scale of a single poem.

Tamara Thompson: Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why, or why not?

Karen Schindler: I definitely think they're important! Chapbooks are an excellent entryway into the publishing experience for new writers, and a wonderful way for mid-career poets to keep momentum going between full-length collections.

Tamara Thompson: What does this kind of publishing offer that other types of publishing can't? And vice versa.

Karen Schindler: What micro-presses offer: often a special attention to design, materials, and construction that you don't see with larger publishers; and often more author involvement in design decisions. What micro-presses can't offer: any kind of wide distribution system; an unlimited supply of a given title, especially if the books are hand-made.

Tamara Thompson: How are chapbooks important to the publishing landscape in Canada?

Karen Schindler: Anything that brings more attention to a poet's work is a win, as far as I'm concerned. And chapbooks do that. They prepare new writers for what's ahead, and they help poets stay in the public eye between collections.

Tamara Thompson: Why do you think most small presses/micro presses close up shop?

Karen Schindler: Most micro-press publishers do this work on the side, while employed part-time or full-time in other careers. The only funding I'm aware of for this level of publishing is from local arts councils, ie. nothing at the OAC or CC level. But even with municipal funding, most micro-presses still just aim to break even financially. So I would guess that micro-presses often close up shop because a non-money making side venture is typically only sustainable for so long. Though I'm sure there are a variety of reasons.

Tamara Thompson: How and why are you still keeping the press going?

Karen Schindler: I'm able to keep the press going largely because of the support from the London Arts Council, which has provided funding for Baseline every year through their Community Arts Investment Program. I'm not sure I would continue without their support. But with their help, I've kept publishing because launching new poetry into the world continues to feel like an immense joy and privilege to me.

Tamara Thompson: What's something important about D.I.Y. press history, or your history that you wish people knew?

Karen Schindler: I'm not sure if this is exactly answering your question, but something that is occasionally misunderstood about this level of publishing is that publishers take on this work with the hopes of growing bigger. ie. that a micro-press will start small, with the goal of eventually increasing the number of titles printed, or the size of the runs. I would say that micro-presses, in general, are exactly the size they want to be.

Tamara Thompson: Any additional comments you would like to make?

Karen Schindler: Thank you for the invitation to be part of this project!



Kate Siklosi

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and today's date is May 30<sup>th</sup> the time is 12:06 pm, and just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out within the deadline of a week after the interview. This interview is for small press and author.

Kate Siklosi: Hi, my name is Kate Siklosi. I'm the co-founding editor of Gap Riot Press, which is a feminist experimental poetry press. It's based where we live in Toronto, in the area. But we serve mostly Canadian poets across the country. What else was I supposed to say about myself?

Tamara Thompson: Your pronouns and your titles.

Kate Siklosi: Yes, okay. And so, I go by she/her pronouns. And yes, I'm based in Toronto, which is the dish with one spoon territory, Treaty 14.

Tamara Thompson: And do you have any titles that you have? Like you said that you were the co-founder, but.

Kate Siklosi: Yeah, so yeah, co-founding editor. I do a lot of things. Co-founding editor of Gap Riot Press. I'm also the director of partnerships at Raise which is a, an employment firm, and I specialize in employment, justice and equity, and building programs that reduce barriers for folks to access employment.

Tamara Thompson: Okay, let's just get right into it, then. So why did Gap Riot, like, start? Why did the press start?

Kate Siklosi: It's a great question. My best friend and partner-in-crime, Dani Spinoso, and I had been dreaming of starting a press for a long time. And you know, a lot of the impetus behind starting the press was that we noticed that there was a lot of white guys in publishing in Canada, and it's not a diverse community whatsoever. And so, we really wanted to find a way to change that and kind of intervene on that space. We also kind of found that the poetry community can be a bit cliquey and very inward focus. And we wanted a way to kind of open spaces. You know that we're a bit more collaborative and a bit more inviting for folks, especially, you know, people who are just starting out on a publishing journey. It can be very intimidating to enter the poetry community. And so, we really wanted to open a space where people felt welcome. To come in and really experiment with us. And-and, you know, give us give people space to really do some creative exploration. In as, a supportive environment as possible. Another impetus behind the project is the late and lovely Priscila Uppal, really treasured Canadian poet, is a good friend of the press, and especially of Dani. And in 2017, when we started the press, she was touring her play, *What Linda Said*, and was like, I really want you know, a chapbook accompaniment to this play that includes all of the beautiful poetry that was incorporated in the play and so she kind of nudged us, being like, I know, you guys have been wanting to make a press like, let's make this happen. I'll be your first author, etc. And so thus began the first season of Gap Riot, which also included poets like Canisia Lubrin, one of her earliest publications, and also Adeena Karasick. You know, to name a few. So, we were really, and you know had a really blockbuster

first season and created the energy. That was really what you know Gap Riot has become today.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely. How did you discover zines and chapbooks and, like, this kind of smaller publishing?

Kate Siklosi: Yeah, it was basically through my undergrad. I did my undergrad at Brock University, and at that time they had just hired Gregory Betts as the Canadian literature specialists there. And you know, Gregory's work really opened me up to a lot of experimental poetry, but also publication in Canada. And so, you know, introduced me to really obviously you know, ground laying writers like bpNichol, bill Bissett, Adeena Karasick, you know Tish, the writers out in Vancouver. All of these like small, you know, poetry collectives that we're not only challenging how-how poetry looks and feels and sounds, but also how it's produced. And so that was a really inspiring kind of beginning for me to really explore, you know, where my place was in that lineage, and how to really use my voice in that way as well.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, we've talked a little bit about like, why, after Gap Riot started, and it's like, it seems like there was very much a clear goal and stuff. But do you guys have like an editorial philosophy? Or if, like, there was a mission-statement-like goal that you could like direct to?

Kate Siklosi: Yeah, you know. We always say our mission is to give folks space. And that kind of goes back to what I was saying earlier about you know, really wanting to invite collaborative and creative connections between people. Too much of publishing is about gatekeeping and about shutting people out of the process. And again, like I said, you know, for new writers especially, that can be a really alienating and intimidating process. And so, you know, one of the things that's really great about like, let's say, Rob McLennan as well as such a, you know, forefather in the poetry, print publication industry in Canada is really giving people a lot of, a lot of folks' first poetry. Books are published with above/ground, and you know, we have a similar ethos. Like most, if not a lot of our chapbooks are first publications for people, and we really love that, not all of them. But you know we do try to focus every season that we produce on, on giving folks who have never published before. A chance to work with us and also, I mean Dani and I are card-carrying anarchists. And we believe in you know, communal and communicative and models of production that lie outside of, you know the traditional means, which tends to be really patriarchal, colonial and-and really opening access for folks therein. And so, it's a, you know again, collaborative and communal run press, run exclusively by women. And we work with a very small printer as well. And we also engage artists and other editors at different times. And so, it really, again, has that kind of communal nature at heart.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I love hearing about the-the new author stuff. Cause that's what we're spring with us about, too, is just like we want that experience and give them that.

Kate Siklosi: Exactly.

Tamara Thomspen: Like, we have a little package, and we want them to be like here this is like kind of little bit like on a much smaller scale, but like what? Maybe someone might ask of you if they wanted to do like marketing thing with you.

Kate Siklosi: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: And I just I love hearing that kind of stuff.

Kate Siklosi: That's what chapbooks should be, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Kate Siklosi: That's what.

Tamara Thompson: Agree.

Kate Siklosi: You know, try something on. If-if it works great, if it doesn't, cool. You learn something, and you'd keep, you keep going right. So.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, to kind of talk about like the content and type of work you publish. It seems like you mostly focus on poetry. But does the press do other things or is it mostly poetry?

Kate Siklosi: Almost exclusively poetry. We've published a couple of things that were like, you know, dramatic drama poetry kind of infusions. But it's mostly poetry. We do tend to favor the more experimental works. However, we have been known to publish some-some lyric poetry that really knocks us off our feet. But we do tend to really yeah, place prominence on experimental works.

Tamara Thompson: Lovely. So, what's your process like from submission to production to getting books in people's hands?

Kate Siklosi: What's it like? Well, it's pretty straightforward, I mean, you know, we send out a call. It's usually a general call. We don't usually do themes and that's generally over social media and through word of mouth. We will also at times solicit manuscripts from folks that we want to hear more from. And then we go through a, an adjudication process between Dani and I, looking through all of the submissions and you know we tend to stretch ourselves a lot. Our last season that we produced before this current one coming upcoming was, I think, eight books, and that was our record. Our newest season that's coming out this summer has seven titles which is a lot, because again we publish these, you know we-we do all the layout and everything by hand, and we try to do at least one kind of hand-crafted element, whether it's a, you know, hand sewn spine, or some kind of additive that's hand crafted to each of our seasons. So, it's a lot of work, and we both work full time. Outside of publishing and so-so yeah, so we do that we so anywhere from, I would say, like four, five to eight titles a season. We publish bi-annually. So, we're looking at. Yeah, anywhere from ten to let's say, I don't know ten to twenty per year. And yeah, and then we send out our acceptances. We have a very brief author kind of understanding agreement that we send out. That's just, we used to

have a more formal contract which we didn't love, but I also know that it's important to some writers to have some things in writing. And so really, it's just a common understanding document. Here's what you can expect from us. Here's what we can expect from you. Just so we're kind of all on the same page. And then, yeah, then it goes to layout and-and to design, and we always work collaboratively with our authors. So, upon acceptance, one of our first questions is, do you have any like thoughts about covers, design, shape. How you want this to feel like, what's the vibe that we're going for here? And you know, many a times our authors have provided custom artwork, or they've referred us to artists who they would like to work with. You know, and or I have, like Dani and I have created custom art ourselves for the, a lot of our books. And so yeah, so then it goes to layout. Dani and I work really collaboratively with that and just kind of split the work, and layout, and we work really closely with the authors during that process to ensure that they know exactly what the chapbook will look like when it's finalized. Like I said, we work with a very small printer here in Toronto. He prints out of his garage, and it's great, and he is also really collaborative with us. And you know, we'll often offer suggestions, like creative suggestions, as to how you know different papers or textures or inking, and all those things might work together. And then, yeah, we print the books, and we open up the shop, and we broadcast you know, mainly on X, I guess, or Twitter and you know again, a lot of a lot of that happens by word of mouth, too. Getting sales, and we also go to book fairs. When we can to sell our books, and I organize a book fair with the Toronto International Festival of Authors every year. And as well as there's a. the meet the presses one that happens in Toronto and Rob also host the Ottawa Book fair that we try to go to sometime. So yeah. And then we hopefully sell books and make enough money to make another round of books which is always just the goal.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so how does the press make decisions? It sounds like you and your partner and crime are usually the ones who are making most of the decisions. But you also like to have that collaborative experience so like.

Kate Siklosi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Could you talk a little more about that.

Kate Siklosi: Sure. Yeah. So, you know, all of the decisions rest with Gap Riot, right like at the end of the day, like, you know, because someone has to be in control of things. And so, so, yeah, so I mean, again, we really-really emphasize collaborative working relationships. So, and obviously, we-we don't do things that would be uncomfortable for writers. And-and so we, you know, make careful sure to kind of bring people along in every step of the way and really make sure that folks are involved, that they're heard, and that their ideas you know, we wanna make something beautiful, and we want you to be a part of that, because it's your work, and we're kind of we see ourselves. You know, Dani says sometimes that we just see ourselves as midwives of chapbook babies. And so, we just really see ourselves as facilitators. And really just you know, bringing the work that you're imagining, and that you want to see into the world. And so as much as possible bringing that in and it's always we've never had an issue. It's just been very lovely and really consultative. And 'cause we

like, that's why we love doing this work is that creative connection that we get with our authors, and it really feels like a collaborative project. And you know us sitting in a tower somewhere isolated, creating books without talking to our authors just would not work for us. And-and again, I think it's anti big book publishing to be like that. I feel like when you publish books with larger presses, you are largely absent from that production process, and so we wanted to again intervene on that. And I think that's one of the beauties of small press is how collaborative and creative it is. Between multiple folks working altogether on something so that's really important to us.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I'm gonna get in a bit of some of the author kind of questions and stuff like that poet kind of questions. Why did you publish your work as chapbooks?

Kate Siklosi: Pardon me.

(Technical issues occurred).

Kate Siklosi: I have. Yeah, yeah, I publish six chapbooks and yeah, did you want to know about them? Or what? Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Like, why did you publish those?

Kate Siklosi: Why I did, I publish. Sorry. I should say, like Dani and I don't self publish with Gap Riot.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kate Siklosi: That's actually one of the things that's kind of important to us. Not to slander people who do. It's just not our jam. We started Gap Riot to open more space for folks and not to center or highlight ourselves. And I know a lot of small presses publish their own work. And so, all the power to ya; it's just not part of our model. But why, I mean, you know, for a long time I did a PhD. And it was, I was always kind of doing creative work. But for me, doing a PhD and doing creative work was a lot of brain work. And I just I-I ha like its kind of like a left and right brain thing for me. And I just I think that the PhD-like, and again, I don't need to tell you this, but, like, you know, academic circles really enforce imposter syndrome like no one's business, and I just I don't know, I felt scared to share my work, and I felt like it wasn't good enough. And I was always writing, but I was just always scared to share it, and because a lot of writing for me is the value that I get out of it is not necessarily through publishing it, but through creating it. And I don't know how much you know about my work, but I do a lot of hand-crafted collage work. That's very it's very analog, I-I don't, I will occasionally use Photoshop when I'm taking an image of something, but otherwise it's entirely analog and hand created. And I think for a long time I was really struggling with like, where does that fit? It's not quite visual art. It's not quite poetry. It's somewhere in the cool, messy middle. But I know where that community was. Until I found the community in an international community of you know, object poets or visual poets that do this type of, you know, collage and object type work that I really love doing. I also, I'm a creature of experimentation. And so, I like a lot, my work has quite

a breath, because I tend to get really obsessed with something. And then I, wanna you know, do a do it really hard. And then I move on from it, and I do something else. And so, I really and again, that's one of the things I love about even small press publishing is that you can really obsess over and a little experiment and publish a chapbook and then kind of move on from there. So yeah, like, I've worked with a bunch of different small presses internationally. With my work, I-I have two full length collections out as well. But small press is really I don't know. Full length collections are hard. I love chapbooks. Because again, they're kind of like a moment in time almost like a snapshot, and something that you know again, like there'll be times where I'll do something, and I'll be like I don't know what this is. But I got fifteen pages, and I'll just publish it and see what happens. And I love that about small press, right? Like it's actually something that you can only do in the small press format. Like, you're not gonna send Penguin Random House your random like weekend obsession like it's not gonna work. And so, so I love working in chapbook form because it allows for that type of brief burst of experimentation. That's really important to what I do. But yeah, is there anything else you want to know about that? Or did I cover that.

Tamara Thompson: We're gonna get a little bit more into it. I just wanted to quickly call on to the fact that you were saying that there's so much pressure and imposter syndrome, and you never want to share anything with anybody. And I've been trying to get this into my fellow colleagues' heads, and my students' heads that if you're not writing for it to be fun, it will never be good. Don't write for it to be good.

Kate Siklosi: Yeah, such a good point. And honestly, it's something that undermines Gap-or undermines, underlines Gap Riot Press as well. You know, Dani and I are always saying like, we want to see you, even when you're not at your best, like, what does it look like when you are up till two in the morning on a Saturday working on something that you're not sure about. We want to see that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kate Siklosi: That's actually, like the beginnings of creative exploration. And even if it's not what you would consider perfect, who cares? Like there's way too much focus on you know, even in a, in a, in academy, but also in publishing about, you know, divinely birthing perfect projects from the first get-go, and again through gap riot. We really like our editing is very light, too, because we believe that something, you know, will evolve, and it doesn't stay within the chapbook form. Like it gets published, and then hopefully, it ignites conversations, it gets circulated. People will talk about it. People keep circling back, and it creates this kind of like, you know, economy of creative exchange. That then informs your work and informs your next project, and you know empowers you hopefully to-to keep growing and what you're doing, and I firmly believe that. And I think that's one of the strengths of small press, and why we started the press, because Dani and I were both feeling like-like we didn't publish our work for a really long time, as writers. Mostly due to-to that. So yeah, so, like, you know, opening a press to do that, but also then joining a community and publishing within that community that shares those values is really important to us.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, from the sounds of it would you work with a small chapbook press again for your work?

Kate Siklosi: Heck, yeah. I mean, yeah. I am all, I am at all times. Yeah, no, it's so true. I just, you know, it's interesting. And I think, I just I became a new mom. Recently I have a one-and-a-half-year-old daughter, and I was furiously editing and finalizing my full-length book *Salvage* that just came out last April with Invisible. And you know, I sometimes forget that I just produced a book a year ago. And I kind of hate that about our culture of like constant productivity that, like, you know, like, it's always like, oh, on to the next thing onto the next thing. And I'm really trying to resist that I'm currently working on an innovative novel like an experimental novel. But I've really said to myself, I'm not gonna set any goals. I'm just working on it when I want. I want it to be as low pressure as possible. It's something I'm not comfortable with, as a like, you know, writing prose, but like it's gonna be fun and weird and janky. But like I just, I wanted it to be a project that I could be called to and not feel called upon to do if that makes sense.

Tamara Thompson: It does make sense. I love experimental stuff. I love that you post it, but also that you're doing it yourself, (technical issue occurred) very experimental, like fiction things, and I love that stuff.

Kate Siklosi: Yeah, yes; I know, me too.

Tamara Thompson: It's so exciting and fun.

Kate Siklosi: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, I'm going to get back to the press a little bit. What are some challenges that the press has faced over time?

Kate Siklosi: Mmmmm...you know there's a couple I mean, I think, and you know I don't think these are just particular to Gap Riot. You know two that come to immediately to mind is one the cost of paper and the actual cost of production is huge, and people really don't understand how much it costs. And how little money we actually make from our production. Which leads into the second thing, which is, I think, you know, broadly speaking, there's a lot of misunderstanding about small press and the money that it brings in and the role that it plays. And you know there's been a lot of discourse on social media within the last couple of years of authors, you know quote unquote, I guess, like rising up against small press, and really demanding, you know, like higher royalties. And all of this and expecting get paid for everything. And you know, I gather, I we're it's really important to us like royalties. We've, we've had royalties since the beginning. We-we knew that it was important for us to pay folks for their work, even if it was a small amount. And we've had authors, you know, when we cut them a fifty dollars check be like that helps towards my groceries this month, and like cool, like as it should. However, we do not make a lot of money and, in fact, a lot of the money comes from Dani and I's personal finances. And you know, our goal, like I said, is to sell enough books that will fund another run, and that's like we don't have, we don't have large caches of cash stashed away, and we

have never taken any money for our time that we put into the press. And I think that more education is kind of needed. As to actually, how-how small press operates, because we are not these, you know fat-cat publishing barons. You know, that are making all kinds of cash off people's backs, and sometimes that feels like the climate from folks that aren't in the know, and it's frustrating because you know, Dani and I going back to your point, we always said, if it doesn't if it doesn't become, or if it's not, if it's no longer fun, we're not gonna do it. And I think that there's a balance to be struck there about keeping it fun keeping it light, and that's kind of hard to do sometimes when you feel like you know, folks are really misunderstanding what you do. It's not all the time it's and in fact, it's very a small majority of, or minority of folks that I think feel that way most. It's very smooth, very, you know, very appreciative, very you know, collaborative. Like, I said, but yeah, like I guess those are the two biggest things that come to mind in terms of challenges. But you know we-we work through.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What are some challenges that you faced as an author in Canada?

Kate Siklosi: What are some challenges? (Both laugh) I mean, you know a lot of it has to do with-with again the kind of work that I'm interested in there's not a lot of presses that take a lot of risks in terms of experimentation that is changing. You know the wonderful Jordan Abel has just published his, you know, experimental fiction. You know yes, exactly with it's I'm gonna say McClelland and Stewart, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I, Rob Winger makes the kids read that, and their minds go, "Whoa."

Kate Siklosi: I know. I think it's empty space.

Tamara Thompson: *Nishga* right?

Kate Siklosi: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Oh, sorry. It's-it's Penguin Random House. Why do I think it was McClelland and Stewart? That's weird. Anyways, a big book publisher has published an experimental novel. And so yeah, traditionally, it's very difficult to get the type of work that I want to do published, and I was actually speaking with a young writer who I've been mentoring recently, and she had expressed similar concerns like, should I make this manuscript that I'm working on less experimental to make it more palatable for big book publishers. And of course, my answer was fuck no.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kate Siklosi: But I also understand, like the impulse and the desire for folks to get publish.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kate Siklosi: That's a valid impulse and desire but for me, personally, I-I really don't care. I wanna work with a-a press that I feel is collaborative that appreciates experimentalism, and that really wants to,



you know, share a little bit more diversity in-in the genres of work that gets published. And so, you know the two presses that I've published full lengths with. The first is Tim Lassette out of Sweden, and really awesome person to work with. Did a beautiful job, was able to print in full colour, which is not something that you find in Canada, which is another challenge that I run into because a lot of my works really resonate with full color and that's really hard to do in Canada. And then my second book was with Invisible. And again, that press is just amazing. And it's dedication to experimental works and super collaborative like everything from, you know, start to finish, was really, really collaborative, and I felt like I was really part of that process. And that is extremely important to me. And yeah so, I think you know, I think the color thing for sure. I think, I think the way the process operates can be a challenge for me. Sometimes, because of all the bureau-bureaucracy of bigger presses and the kind of exclusion of it yeah, those would be like the two main things I think, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What has this type of publishing taught you?

Kate Siklosi: By this type of publishing. Do you mean my own?

Tamara Thompson: The smaller stuff. Yes.

(Technical issued occurred).

Kate Siklosi: Oh, what has it taught me? Well, a heck of a lot, because we wouldn't have started Gap Riot without, you know, having built relationships with folks like Rob. You know, Kyle Flemmer you know, also with the Blasted Tree and really beautiful experimental press there. You know and so, it really opened a community of folks that like it's such a vibrant community because you know, and I'm speaking with you as part of that community. You do it because you love it. That's the only reason that you do it right like it's-it's a labor of love and you do it because you love it, and you can't imagine not doing it. Am I right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kate Siklosi: So, like, I think, like you know, you don't get, there's no financial reward. There's no like, you know and again, a lot of the times especially if you're not publishing your own work like you're amplifying other people. And it's for us like a way of kind of, yeah, like, you know, giving back to that space. And-and further, you're building community you know, for-for generations to come. And I think there's been some really good groundwork laid leave there. But what I've learned is that you know there's a space for, there's a space outside like I think, outsiders to small press publishing my favorite I'm-I'm really speaking staccato sentences here. I'm so sorry for your recording, but I think.

Tamara Thompson: It's okay.

Kate Siklosi: One of my favorite things about small press is the surprise that people have when they encounter it, you know. And there's a lovely anecdote from Stuart Ross in his book, small press racketeer where he recounts hanging out with bpNichol, and B-he asked bp, like what is small

press publishing, and bp takes a book from his shelves, flips through it and goes, "What the fuck is that?" and puts it back. And he's like, "That's what small press publishing is." And it's about that kind of, like, surprise, like, what is this? And whenever I go to small press fairs, and you know we hang out with other small presses, and you know the foot traffic that we get from people are like, what is this, you know, and they pick up these like beautiful art objects, and like, you know, pamphlets or whatever. And they're just so surprised that this exists right? Because when you think of publishing, you think of the Penguin Random Houses, McClelland and Stewart's, right? You think of, like, hard, like, books, you know, in traditional, perfect-bound form. And so, I-what I've learned is that there's a vibrant community of people who are producing, you know, books and works and art that really kind of go against like traditional thinking on what those items can be and do it in a very collaborative, loving way. And you know, when you pick up like I just actually recently got Derek Beaulieu published one of my-he just reached out to me. I like, had some put something online like, and his like can I publish that? And, like, he just he made like a billion copies of this. And it's like this beautiful blooming, you know, work, and he hands oops. (Shows beautiful print object). He hand-stitched it at the top, and when I got in the mail I was just like holy crap, like there's so much care and selflessness that goes into small press publishing, and when the world is such that it is, and it can be a really alienating and really dark and really brutal place. I'm continually reminded of the lessons of small press in care and love and community building, and how I'm getting emotional because it, like, it's, it's really radical in this day and age to have that community have those values and live them out so incredibly, beautifully. And yeah, I'm just like, always touched by that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so why are chapbooks important to you?

Kate Siklosi: Hmm, yeah, I think I touched on that earlier.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, we've been kind of touching about a lot.

Kate Siklosi: Yeah, yeah, yeah no, no, no, just, I'm just recalling my, my, my earlier thoughts. You know, I think again, I think chapbooks provide in their kind of size. They allow you to experiment with something. That you might not want to go full tilt into. Or maybe it's something you just like, I said get obsessed with for a weekend, and you move on, you know, and also just kind of gesture to the world and show something to the world and be like, what do you think about this? Like, is this something? I don't know, you know. Should I pursue this or not, or maybe it's just something that you did on that weekend, and that's all that comes of it. That's most of a lot of what I do and but then sometimes you'll pick something up like I've had folks reach out to me because of like an above/ground chap or something like that that they that they received and they're like, hey, like, I wanna know more about your work or like, where can I find out more? Or like, you know, I'm doing this project, and I love you'd to get involved. And so like this, the distribution and the circulation of-of chapbooks, I think, can be really important for writers to get their work in themselves out there and start other conversations and it tends to be that kind of classic like, you know, not everyone does like stand on the corner like they used to handing

out leaflets and chapbooks, but, like you know, Rob McLennan's distribution is massive. His runs are huge, and he just he literally just sends it out. And so, you-it's a great way of getting more eyes on your work. And-and really, I think you know, getting energized by your work and a-again for me, it's about creating safer spaces to try stuff on that you might not be sure about. And-and really, yeah, just like work through and explore and experiment. And I think the form of the chapbook is just ideal for that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not?

Kate Siklosi: Yeah, I mean, I feel like I've been talking a lot about that, too, which is yeah hell, yeah, they're important. And you know, like they, you know, there's been a lot of talk in the news lately about like the mergers of these big publishing giants and what it means. And you know I'm always like, well, what about the small presses that make up you know, like a large part of-of the culture of small press, like, you know, like bpNichol once said about small press that it is the guardian of literary culture and free speech and I think that that is so important to remember that again, all of these interactions we have with our authors right? Like bringing authors in collaborating creative these, like, creating these really, like, surprising and unexpected works together, like, that's how you build a literary culture. From the ground up and-and a literary culture that's rich, that's supportive. And that allows for kind of, you know, a proliferating over generations. And so, chapbooks are incredibly important. They always have been important, and, in fact, like, you know, have been important, for, like social justice, I mean, I think back to like Bill Bisset's work, you know, having been like censored by the Government for his work, and him standing up, you know, for queer rights and for the ability to print things that you know, might not be agreed upon by other people, and how foundational that was to publishing in Canada now. Right. And so, I think the chapbook always has and continue, will continue to be incredibly foundational and incredibly shapeshifting in terms of the literary landscape. And we're lucky in Canada that we have such a rich, small press culture. I always hear from folks from abroad, I mean, the Uk has a lot of stuff going on, too, but they're always mentioning how you know. Kind of jealous they are in Canada that we've got poets and a and publishers working on such cool stuff. So.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way?

Kate Siklosi: Oh, I don't know. What do you mean by that? Like Canada nation idea? Idea?

Tamara Thompson: Maybe it's people, maybe specifically just its artists. It's one of those things where I try and keep my questions open for interpretation.

Kate Siklosi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And this one specifically is very open because people have been taking it into a lot of different fun directions. So, take it where you think you-you would like to take.

Kate Siklosi: Can you repeat the question again.

Tamara Thompson: Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way, so like the smaller little stuff.

Kate Siklosi: Yeah, I mean, I guess, like I would say, what is Canada?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. (Laughs.)

Kate Siklosi: What is it? It's an idea. It's a colonial idea. It's exclusionary in a lot of ways. As opposed to how it likes to report itself to be inclusive. And so, I think that, I think that this type of publishing I would say that it pushes and challenges what the conception of Canada is. You're hearing more and more presses that are run by more diverse folks that are putting, you know, mandates in place to publish more works by folks that we need to hear more from who are always, who are always here in so called Canada. And so, I think in that way you're starting to see this kind of turn towards a more inclusive and equitable publishing industry. It still has a long way to go, just as Canada has a long way to go. In terms of acknowledging truths and human rights. So, you know I don't know, I don't know, Canada is just like, yeah, it's a floating signifier. But what small press-it doesn't really matter that it's in Canada, I guess, is my opinion; it's just like, small presses are borderless. Also, especially recently, like there's a lot of cross-ocean and cross-border sharing between small presses; like, I'm, I have really close connections with presses all over the world now because of the Internet. And so, I don't think it necessarily even needs to be reflective of a certain border land I know I'm probably not giving a satisfactory answer, but I just I don't know.

Tamara Thompson: Your answers your answers are ...

Kate Siklosi: I don't know how to answer the question.

Tamara Thompson: ... wonderful. I love how people have been interpreting this question in so many different and variety of ways. It's the reason I pose it the way I did.

Kate Siklosi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Cause what is Canada? I had to technically define it for my thesis.

Kate Siklosi: Okay. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And it's like.

Kate Siklosi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, I was like, what is Canadian. What does that mean? Okay.

Kate Siklosi: Right.

Tamara Thompson: I had a hard time.

Kate Siklosi: Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Yeah, that's a difficult question.

Tamara Thompson: I think.

Kate Siklosi: And just it makes me I just it makes me like angry. That question.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

(Technical issues occurred).

Kate Siklosi: Right.

Tamara Thompson: Okay.

Kate Siklosi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Kind of wakes them up.

Kate Siklosi: Yes.

Tamara Thompson: (Technical issues occurred). But what's something that you wish people knew about Canadian publishing?

Kate Siklosi: I think that I wish, I guess, I wish that people knew more about small press publishing here, and how vibrant it is, which is one of the reasons why I partnered with the festive authors to start the small press map. And I've gotten a lot of feedback from people that were like, holy crap I had no idea! Like, coast-to-coast all the work that people are doing; and again, it's only a snippet of the work. But you know it's-it's vibrant, it's rich, and it's rooted in a care and love of community. And I wish that there was just more exposure of the great work that people are doing, and I also wish that that exposure was more distributed and not as focused on just Toronto and Vancouver. Which is another reason why I started the map is to kind of hopefully distribute attention to some of the other work that's happening throughout our provinces and territories. And so yeah, like, it's always just about more exposure, more eyes on books, more eyes on work and voices that we need to hear more from that's what I want. I want more attention on the good work of small press.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So why do you think most small presses and micro presses close up shop? Because it is true that they sometimes have, you know they come, and they go. Sometimes they stay, but like, why do you think so many close up?

Kate Siklosi: Cause it's fucking hard to do this work. Like, I always say, small press work is heart work [makes heart hands]. Heart work. And I think you know you put so much love and care in it, and it is mostly a thankless job. You know again, we try to really build relationships with authors as much as possible. But you know, sometimes the relationships are fleeting, and that's okay. But it can be really hard to put a lot of care and love into something that's such a-a passion project and then to be faced with, like, you know, increased prices of-of production. And you know your books not selling and therefore just not creating a sustainable model. To be able to further do that without syncing yourself into further debt like which has happened to most. It's all about money, I think, a lot of the times, and that's understandable because it's if we don't sell books, we can't create books, right? You can't create ...

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kate Siklosi: ... books out of thin air. And so, I think a lot of it has to do with the ability to get awareness out there of your books and sell those books? Which is an unfortunate side of small press publishing. And now, you know you have you know, like there's different ways of producing chapbooks, too. Right? Some require more or less resources. But also like it depends on the time that you have like. Like, I said Dani and I work full-time jobs. Like, we don't have time to be like-like, this is Rob's job; like, this is what he does. This is, like, he's, a - he's also a full-time dad. But, like, you know, he has the time to be running back to and forth to Staples to be making these books, right? And so, you work with what you've got. And sometimes it doesn't work. Sometimes maybe you don't also have community support like that, you should. Or you know, you're feeling really like, like, I think that that's been incredibly important. Like is-is just tapping into and-and trying to bring folks together in the community to talk about things that are important to us and the challenges that we face. Because then you feel like you're not alone in it. But ultimately, I think it does come out-come down to that. If you don't have money, you can't make books, and that can be really defeating when you put a lot of work into something, and it doesn't land. And it's not selling and-and that's just the reality of-of what we do.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, how and why are you like still keeping this press going?

Kate Siklosi: Because I get to do it with my best friend and it's so fun. And you know I-I have a lot of privilege in my life. Like I, I'm gainfully employed, which allows me the mental and financial freedom to be able to do this work on the side. And I think Danny would say the same. And so, you know as much as we've gotten from this community we want to give back. And I think that's really important and-and I love it. And I couldn't imagine not doing it. And it's yeah-it's just it's really fucking fun to do. And it challenges us, right? Like it challenges-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kate Siklosi: Many different ways, like, you know, even just like having learned Adobe like. And I'm no expert. But I'm able to kind of like, do a decent layout and design a cover now and, like, you know. So, I'm always

kind of growing and being involved in the kind of, you know, paratext, if you will, of the small press community, so like doing like the math, doing these like book fairs, that's been incredibly rewarding for me.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kate Siklosi: We need to be able to open more space to-to give more attention to the small presses in this country. Yeah, it comes down to just it's really fun to do.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kate Siklosi: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What's something important about D.I.Y. press history that you wish people knew.

Kate Siklosi: What's something important about D.I.Y. publishing that you wish people knew? I don't know. Again, like I think like for me, it comes back like the history of D.I.Y., and just kind of how scrappy it is. You know? It was, like, I love like hearing lore about you know small press publishing in Canada, and like, you know, Stuart Ross, like standing on the corner of downtown Toronto, like, just like, you know, slinging pamphlets into people's hands, and like as a means of distribution. Like it's so scrappy. It's so, like, it's kind of lo-fi in the best way. It's just, like, but again, like that-that spirit is what prevails today in small press publishing is that kind of you know I always kind of describe it as like the like-like the scrappy, like younger sibling of big press publishing is small press publishing right? Like, the, like, the kind of, yeah, like pesky younger sibling the disruptor, right? The kind of the but also like the change maker. I think there's a lot of capacity for change in D.I.Y. and handmade. And you know, like works that are made with love instead of necessarily just mass-produced machinery. And that D.I.Y.ness is the source of the love that we see in these works. That they-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kate Siklosi: You know, even if you produce, you work with a printer, you're-you're still, there's something about that act of, and even just like, you know, during the pandemic when we were producing books like, there was something incredibly soothing and meditative, and also like useful about, like licking envelopes of books and sending them out all across the country to people that were isolated you know? And so that even that D.I.Y. aspect of being your own distributor for me has been like really fulfilling, I guess, to be able to distribute people's work, and you never know where work will hit people at any given time like I said, I got this package from Derek the other day, and it like reduced me to tears, because I was just feeling like a certain way about the world, and I was so incredibly touched by his like generosity and care, and so like-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kate Siklosi: That aspect, I think, is, is like not to be understated about the power of D.I.Y. and small press.

Tamara Thompson: What's something that you wish people knew about your history?

Kate Siklosi: You don't need to know about me.

(Both laugh.)

Tamara Thompson: From your writing to Gap Riot's history.

Kate Siklosi: I don't know. You know I mean; I think you know I'm the first-generation immigrant and daughter of immigrants. I'm the first person on my both sides of my family to go to post secondary education and I come from people that work with their hands. But I'm a knowledge worker, and I'm the only person in my family that is that and experimentation with poetry allows me to kind of almost get back in touch with like you know the roots of my family and working with my hands. Like I'm-I'm actually not very handy, and everyone in my family can like build you a house and wire it properly. And so, when I'm working with my hands, it maybe even allows me to kind of get back in touch with that side of who I am and-and yeah, like, I just... yeah, I don't know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's-that's a really nice answer.

Kate Siklosi: Yeah, okay, I'm like (laughs).

Tamara Thompson: I'm gonna stop the recording there.



Andrew Steeves

Tamara Thompson: Hello. My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is Thursday, the 20<sup>th</sup> of June. The time is 12:19 pm. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview. This interview is for traditional press.

Andrew Steeves: And my name is Andrew Steves, and I'm the co-owner, co-founder of Gaspereau Press in Kent Hill, Nova Scotia. I go by traditional male pronouns and what else can I tell you? Is that everything in your list?

Tamara Thompson: What part of Canada you're from, and then just titles, I think.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah, we're, we're from Kent Nova. This is in Kent, Nova Scotia, and I usually don't go by title. But you could, you could call me the co-founder or the co-publisher, anything like that as well.

Tamara Thompson: Cool. So just to get the ball rolling, how did you discover zines and chapbooks, and like this kind of smaller publishing was there a moment? Where in your mind you're like, "Whoa! Wait."

Andrew Steeves: Well, I mean it, I would say to some extent that kind of object was just always out there in the world. It wasn't always a literary sort, but-but the notion of anything from a student you know, high school magazine to a church bulletin to-to an advertising flyer. These are sort of like near relatives to the chapbook, and so the world is just always full of, particularly in the sort of pre-digital age of my childhood things. You know, the world is full of these-these ephemeral printed objects, and I guess, probably, probably by high school I was seeing some of those kinds of objects that were creative in the sense of that they were carrying, you know, graphic art, they were carrying poems. They were carrying stories, and-and so that that sort of zine, chapbook world was evidently out there. There's also out there in the sense of if you were into music, and you know, bands that were not the top forty stuff. Then there was probably somebody somewhere putting out a zine, a fan zine about that thing. And so, these things would, would show up, you know, if you were into at that time an obscure band like U2, or something Irish band, you know that that somebody you knew was getting like the little fan zine you know, because there wasn't a Facebook page, and there wasn't Instagram. There wasn't all these other places where you know we, you know we now go for that information. So the idea of this sort of very utilitarian object that was inexpensive and-and often produced very, you know, very lo-fi as opposed to at a at a big print shop a little in that, with extra colors and things, like these things were out there floating around, I would, I would go a step further and say that as far as like literary versions of this. I did my undergraduate at the University of Ottawa, initially Criminology, and then then I tacked on a second undergraduate degree in English. And I was starting to see those kinds of publications floating around in Ottawa. People like say, Rob McLennan would be a contemporary of mine. He was really just getting going when I was a student in Ottawa. And you know, so-so some of that stuff was floating around that, that Ottawa has a very active sort of zine and a lo-

fi publication scene and, and that, and that certainly was on my radar. I've seen those in used bookstores I was going into. I've seen them on, you know, around at readings and things. So-so yeah, I guess it in one way, it was always- that-that physical object was always kind of there, but the notion that it was something that was a link to contemporary literature, kind of sort of settled in an early university.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I find a lot of people say that it was always around and easy, where they were even making things when they were younger, but they didn't really understand that they were making like, say, a chapbook or this little zine thing, but it was always kind of there. So that's-that's interesting.

Andrew Steeves: Well, I definitely was making stuff like that, but not literary stuff, because I didn't see, you know, we were very pragmatic, rural people. Literature was not our domain. And so, I was making like, at the age of thirteen or fourteen, I was making a photocopied hand-written, you know, summer newspaper, you know where we spend our summers, and you know, near Richard-(technical issues occurred), New Brunswick, and there was this, a kind of cottage, me there, my brother and I, we were always making things. My dad was an engineer who, I think, had always wish he was an architect. So, I grew up at a drafting table, making, you know, drawings of houses and-and-and floor plans and, you know, with, you know, perfectly spec windows and doors and-and so we were, we were in the habit of making things, and-and of imagining ourselves into a more adult world. So, whether it was, you know, we made up a company, but then we also made up a business card and we made up a logo. We made up, you know, brochures; you know, we would like draw this stuff. And so, so in that sense, we were making things. But it wasn't connected to literature. For me it was a more general in some ways. It's connected to more, you know, to commercial the, you know, to a commercial design. I suppose I wouldn't have thought of it that way at the time. And it was only when I you know we-we just what, what our house was not full of books. We're not really big re-we were big readers, but we were readers of newspapers and magazines and, you know, very religious. The Bible, of course, was, was probably the closest we came to a book.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: So, so it wasn't until, you know, university, where I kind of started brushing up against, even though I wasn't studying it, brushing up against literature and seeing how these things connected, how these things connected, how there wasn't literature, just wasn't the domain of New York and London, you know, far away places it. It was something that the kind of renegade localized version that was-was happening everywhere, as people were making zines and chapbooks, and so on. So yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I understand the, the magazine and newspaper kind of thing, my parents are very much into like literature and science and stuff, but, like my grandfather, was from Economy. So Economy, Nova Scotia, and so-

Andrew Steeves: Ummm.

Tamara Thompson: Like it was newspaper, Bible. That's it. Like we don't got money to be spent.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah, covering all the bases.

Tamara Thompson: He didn't need them right now.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah.

(Technical difficulties occurred.)

Andrew Steeves: No, it's a very common kind of particularly, you know the rural sensibility is one utility often, and so that if-if you know, if there was extra you weren't, well, there usually wasn't extra. There was extra you probably weren't spending it on entertainment of that sort, because literature would have been seen as a sort of as opposed to understanding. Literature is the kind of underpinning, essential that it is, in our salt society. In our culture, literature was seen as a kind of thrill, like an ornamentation, an extra and that-that was the big transition for me was coming to that understanding, that you know, literature was, was not an ornamentation with an extra.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, my, oh, my grandfather, you couldn't get him to read a book to save his life, even on something that he might be interested in because he's like I need the newspaper, got the news. I don't need anything else. I've got my fish, you know, like he never got into it, but my mother and her sister eventually did, and my father comes from a long line of readers, you know, we got three librarians in the family on that side. So, you know.

Andrew Steeves: Yep.

Tamara Thompson: But yeah, the-the-the only reading you needed was the newspapers, so that you knew what was going on in the world.

Andrew Steeves: What was that sense of like, I remember very clearly having a conversation with my, a friend of my-my in-laws in Ottawa. They were very again very religious people, very pragmatic and umm, and it was very, you know, I-I published a book of poems with, with Goose Line Editions. They're very early on, and we were there visiting. And this this very, you know, nice guy, friend of my father-in-law is very, you know, well, you know this is very exciting for you, but you know I don't, I don't read that kind of thing. I like to read things that are true. That was, that was his, and, and again he meant no insults in that at all. But it was very telling about it, cause it's like, well, wait a minute. This this, you know, this is more chance of being true than anything you read that you think is found because it, because it is a like, its job is actually to try to get as deep as possible in to as close to true as we can get as humans as, as we try to understand who we are to each other. And-and so there was this, this fundamental, you know, night and day difference in understanding about, about what books can do, what books are, which books are a doing what kinds of jobs. And again, the poetry was ornament. You know, it was extra.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: Whereas, like, you know, these guys that were guys men and women both, you know, who were a, you know, you know, making little zines and getting them out, you know. On, on you know, near the days of gestetner and, and, and those kinds of things. But later photocopiers became like this, you know, incredible boom, you know, for these that generation of-of makers of things lo-fi things. They very much understood that they were engaged in the truth like that, in fact, in getting things out, you know, that were a value. They were building tools; this is not ornament. In fact, the-the chapbook aesthetic is kind of counter like, there's different branches, and we'll get into it, I'm sure, later. But-but you know that kind of like zine, zine infused level of chapbook making if anything was a sort of anti-aesthetic like it was; it was a trying to, it was saying, it's more important than it's out there than that it's like, you know, perfect. And so it-it was very pragmatic. It was, you know, cut and paste it was it was, do what you can afford and get it out there on the street, and the cause they were on fire to tell us, you know, to tell the thing that they had in their heart to tell.

Tamara Thompson: I agree, I'm gonna go on to the next question. So how did the press originally start.

Andrew Steeves: So, our press we are, I don't know, I mean, I-I re- you're hopefully, inevitably, you are interviewing a broad range of people, and I think we're going to be a-a sort of an outlier, like a strange one, because we're actually a trade publisher. We publish a mostly, you know, high-end paperback books, you know, poetry and-and-and-and nonfiction mostly. And you know, using offset presses and-and so on bindings, and you know that are perfect bound. And so, we-we essentially have a reputation of making about as good as a book is made in the whole country. And so, but we are also really interested in chapbooks and do a lot of chapbooks, and we do chapbooks on two ends. We do chapbooks on the very basic, you know, stapled, you know, offset, printed, and stapled, and-and then on the other end, I-I do chapbooks that are handset and metal type, printed on pretty gorgeously multiple colors on-on really expensive papers. And, and so there's that whole continuum, we kind of like, we have a lot of tools in our toolbox, and we are really interested in finding which jobs in which applications are best to use for those different things. So anyways as that, as a preamble, we got into this initially aiming to be a trade publisher but starting off with whatever tools we had. So, we were never really a zine publisher, or we were never really a chapbook publisher that, that then evolved. We jumped into being a trade publisher, and we had a literary quarterly that we published for about five years at the beginning, and we had and we're making trade books. And so, the first chapbooks that we really intentionally made, as you know, a vehicle to move, you know, to move literature into a public, to a readership we made really, towards the end of our time, as a, as a-a literate journal publisher. About four years in that fifth year, you know, when we're, when we're publishing what we call the Gaspereau review. We were thinking about stopping it because we weren't-it wasn't publicly funded. We were funding it out of our own pockets as a kind of way to kind of leverage our way forward to build rapport within the literary community. Because, you know, starting from-from a dead start and then suddenly having good writers that

want to publish with you, I mean, that's a bit of a haul right. And so-so we did this journal as a way to kind of interact with more people to get something out there to start building that trust, and that faith with the community. And-and so, as we-we looked at, we were at the point where we had to either put more resources into it and make a jump like, grow it bigger, get into applying for funding for it and or, or not. And we decided not because it just seemed more important to put what resources we had, what energy we had into, you know, expanding our publishing list from four books a year to, you know, seven, six, seven, eight, eventually twelve books a year. And so that was kind of the fork in the road. But the thing that I really liked about the journal, it was a really small risk. So, whenever you said yes to something, and someone sent you poems, and you said, yeah, no, I'll-I'll take these three, we'll publish those. Those are-those are great. Your responsibility to that author, and your risk that you're taking is quite small, like you're not committing to a lifetime. It's a date; it's not marriage, you know, and-and-and there's something really interesting about that. It allows you to publish things that you're not one hundred percent like behind that you're kind of like, well, that's interesting. But I don't know whether I really get it, you know so, but-but I want to encourage, you know, so magazines are great place to play that you know, to-to contribute in that way. You don't have to be you know, like a book is a can range from a ten to twenty thousand dollars, just as a sort of basic money in, you know proposition. It's not a small risk. You have to kind of get, gotta get to zero very least and-and more often you need to actually make some money. So, if you want to do another one, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: So-so you know, you're really being very calculating in the best sense of a about who you're building relationships with. You take a book from somebody. It's probably gonna be a second book, and there is nothing worse than taking a book and then saying no to the second book. It's-it's not fun. So, you you're-you're trying to find people that you have faith in. The longer arc of what they're doing and not just one offs. Well, that was fun, but the next book, who knows? So-so the magazine gave us that kind of space right, where we could engage with more people be helpful to more people, help more people find their, you know, leverage, the way forward but with low risk. So, when we stop the magazine, it to me that we should start a chapbook series. And-and so we started our what we call the Devil's Whim Occasional Chapbook series, and-and it, it didn't always add up to four a year, but that was kind of like on the upper end. We would do four chapbooks a year, but often it was maybe two, you know, just dependent on what came in because we weren't out there soliciting. We were often, if we get a book even from somebody that was, they intended to be a trade book, and there was a really good section and didn't feel like a commit to the book, just wasn't sure. But I still want to be helpful. So, I'd say, hey, you know, if you want, no, thank you for the we don't want the book. But you want like, I'd take section one, and I'll publish a chapter. And so that was our-our way of-of continuing to interact with more people at a low risk level for us. I mean, we had the infrastructure we had, and you know, like to-to us running four hundred sheets of paper through a press was a negligible cost.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: We're-we're like in the running of our year, to do a couple of chapbooks is, you know, didn't matter. It was-it was-it was pick, you know, often it was extra paper from other jobs, right?

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Andrew Steeves: It was, so, it's like we're not gonna order a new, a cover stock for your book, but we'll-but do you like blue, or do you like red? Because that's what we have left over, you know. So-so there was this element of-of thriftiness about it. And umm, it-it just wasn't a big deal, but for-for the, the author, if they had gone to a print shop and tried to hire someone to print the same product, would it cost them, you know, one thousand bucks, or whatever right. It would have been, would add it up too fast, but for us it was like, ahh... so-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: So, we use that capacity to try to do some good. You know, in the literary community the other thing we did with it is that they were often, (recording issues) -ethical person, I hope, I think and certainly try to be, and so I've never been one who's like chatting up other people's office like, hey, you should publish, you know. Forget Coach House you should come, you know, you should do a book with us. If someone has a relationship with someone, and it's in this clearly ongoing I don't mess with it and-and that's not normal in publishing. That's not to say that there are ethics in publishing, there are obviously-are, but people are more, there's this kind of, in trade publishing, there's this kind of underlying, a priority put on winning, getting the best book, you know, winning the prize, winning the thing. And then, you know, like, it's almost like a pressure that a lot of editors feel to have them to pick the winners, and I've never cared about that. I mean, I try to pick books I can-I can get behind. I try to pick good things that I think are a value are making contribution, and it's great when they win something, and it's great when they, it's sell well, I mean, that's helpful but it's not the goal. So, I've always behaved more like the chapbook publisher, even though I'm in the trade game. But all that to say, the other thing that we did with chapbooks is that there'd be authors that we wanted to work with and do something with, you'd meet them, you'd find they were great people, and you wanted to have some part of their life in their world and see, say no like if you want like, I'd love to do a chapbook with you because that will mess with your trade publishing, you know, relationship. It's just this little thing in the side for fun, for fun, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: And-and so we use it in that way, too, like, so we would, you know, help those people starting out. And then we would like. Yeah, get to do something fun with someone who's already in the game and doing, have has their relationships already. So that's how we use it. It was it was really meant that way. And so, it was like, back to your original question. We got into it very early on in the life of Gaspereau as a trade publisher and-and found ways that it fit in and complement our-our series,

our-our like our list, our general list and the letter press stuff is kind of similar. It-it really evolved much later.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fantastic. I love hearing your philosophy on books, its-

(Technical issues occurred.)

Tamara Thompson: But you were talking a bit about like your philosophy, and I think it's really interesting how you do things in the trade business like-like for considering what everyone else does. So literally, my next question is, what's the goal for the press in the editorial philosophy? And you've been kind of talking around that. But could you maybe, like-like your mission statement, if, if you will.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah. And I-I mean, I-I don't think. It's interesting. Usually, organizations that have to hammer out a mission statement don't really have a mission.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

(Both laugh)

Andrew Steeves: Because they've had to construct like they've had to, you know, workshop and think about it. But, whereas, like you know, the more organic. Hey! What are we doing, you know, is often harder to arrive at for institutions, but I think for smaller organizations that they usually kind of pretty heavy. And yeah, I don't know why we started this, like in in this, I don't think you know; we didn't sit around a table with drinks and pound the table, and therefore-and therefore we must! Yeah, there wasn't the moment like that. I mean, I know that my-my graduate work, after I did the criminology degree, and then did an English degree at the University of Ottawa I took a year off, and then came to Nova Scotia to Acadia and did a graduate degree. It was a very small program, really, mostly just promoted their own honor students rolled them over into a very lackluster master's program that was essentially at the level of, say, a UFT Honors year like it-it-it very, and that's I don't mean, to be disparaging. I'm not sure it's that way anymore. May-may still be, but it's a small undergraduate school that just happened to have a few graduate programs and the advantage of that was that that it was small program, and there were maybe a dozen of us in the graduate program. Some part time and there was just a lot of room, so like, you know, I, they-they-they were, only there were only four courses that you had to take. And-and then a thesis, and I didn't like two of the courses. So, I did two self directed studies, just as an indication of you know what was possible and that were the areas I was interested in and-and then the thesis work. And when I went out to sort of do some research. I was going to write about this, the poet Alden Nolan he grew up in was born in Nova Scotia. Spend his adult years in New Brunswick as a journalist and a short story writer and poet. And he I went off to University of New Brunswick to-to look in their archives. It's some materials there, because I was writing about, I was gonna make a comparison between a short story writing style and his journalistic columns. Because I thought there was a connection in terms of style. And so, as I went out to do that, I stumbled on a

collection of letters, and these col-this collection of letters that he wrote to another author over like a period of 27 years. He's sort of detailing, you know, his activities. You know all the little magazines he's submitting to all, his relationship with his publishers. All this kind of stuff he's talking about the scene in-in quite a bit detail from the perspective of, you know, a, the guy with a grade, three education self educated guy, essentially in the East. So, he's dealing with this sense of regional alienation, and so on, which that time I kind of felt, there's still a thing going on, very much. And you know, not seeing people-not seeing my people represented, you know, in literature. And that's shifted, you know that-that started to shift. But anyway, so I saw an opportunity, to do some original work, because this, this material needed to be organized needs to be contextualized and ended up taking an extra year and doing a very thorough job of it, you know. And it became this kind of like education, um in-in you know, literary print-printing or literary publishing in Canada. In that period all the things that set us up for the present, because he, Nolan, died in the early eighties, and it was really, it was an ascending story until about the early eighties and the economy kind of went bust at that point and-and that everything shifted in publishing, significantly never really bounced back. And so, cause you know, he goes from that sort of post cent-Canadian centennial boom when we threw money at culture like crazy because we wanted to have one. And-and so we sort of like, just, yeah. Just went at it without and-and-and then it kind of coasts out until about the early 80's. And then it, you know, the harsh realities, you know Thatcherism, not that Thatcher was here, but, you know, like that kind of Reagan economics, Thatcherism, conservative ideas.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: And like really constricted the amount of public interest and ability to-to sort of find the arts in Canada. And-and lots of great things have happened since, there's been other ups and downs. But like that was a pretty important moment. That early stretch, the Canada Council really got its legs and-and-and did a lot of interesting stuff, a lot of wasteful stuff too, but that's they way it was. And-and yeah, so that kind of set us up so-so out of that, I am getting to your question. Out of that, when I graduated, and I was looking around for what to do with my life. And I was thinking I was gonna end up doing journalism. I was working, you know, writing for small publications, doing some special work around the university and little odd jobs and things, and working at a farm, and whenever I can, you know at this point I'm married, I have a-a, you know, a one-year-old and-and-and Gary Dunfield was someone I knew. From around a little bit, he's a little bit older, stay home Dad, you know. And for some reason we just thought it might be interesting to start to literary press in the journal, and I like, going back I, I can't think how that math added up like why we thought, that's what we should do. But we did, and very quickly got into the manufacturing of-of things like we, we weren't content to just do the white collar and farm it out so that it all became kind of a package where we-we wanted to control that whole scene. And so, like the-the mission or the of the press sort of quickly evolved to being, hey, you know, we're both, you know, we're publishing literary work. We're not a regional press, but we because we're here inevitably, we're gonna do more stuff from here because it's the closer,



a, when you're close to people. And you're in an actual physical community. That's comes your sort of primary objective goal, and-and we're we were really interested in the hands-on manufacturing element of it, much like a micropress would be but with a, you know, jumping in the deep end to offset printing and perfect binding and sewing books, and-and then later, letter press and typesetting and-and umm I-I-I personally sort of became the person that you know, sort of took on the design as well as the editorial. So, the con-the whole of the content was kind of coming, filtering through my head and through my hands and my eyes, and then being applied by my business partner and the staff, as-as you know, built the company. But it-but, it-but it had this very from the beginning. Even though we were not set up as a micropress, we-we essentially set ourselves up as a trade press that functioned like a micropress. And-and had micropress values. But had the scale that allowed us to get into the-the, you know the-the growing up granting situation for trade publishers and into the trade publishing market as far as distribution and sales. And so, we've just been a weird hybrid for the beginning.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: But the mission. But the mission was at the core of the mission was, to do really good work, to make really good objects, but also to, you know to try help and figure out how to help the community talk about itself to itself. So, I was really interested in place and not in the kind of, you know a traditional way that we talk about place or how we teach Canadian literature. We're like, not in terms of regionalism place, but in terms of like, no, I'm interested in people who have their feet planted somewhere, and they're asking the question, what is it to be here now, engage with these people around me. What is that? What is that? What is my role, and these, that mission kind of tuned itself over time. Particularly as I started to try to understand what we were doing, I encountered people like the Porcupines Quill. Another trade publisher in Ontario and-and Coach House Press, in Toronto. And they were also manufacturing as well as publishing and-and-and they had a stronger divide between their editorial and their production strength, where we had it sort of highly unified, but they were like they gave us context. But the other thing that really gave us context was, for me it was the particularly the Kentucky writer, Wendell Berry, and his writing and thinking about agriculture, and small communities, about what a community is.

Tamara Thompson: Mm.

Andrew Steeves: How community works. When I started to read Wendell Barry, she might have been like six, seven, eight years in even, maybe-maybe a little earlier than that. What I found, I didn't go looking for this, but what I saw was the light kept coming on, and I saw that there was a like, a an analog between, what we were doing as a small press in a rural place like outside of the center. By-by being a literary press that was kind of somewhat a micro press, but also somewhat a trade publisher, and just figuring that out that we were a lot like small, small firm that we were a lot like, there are challenges that, like the values we brought responsibilities we had, the challenges that we faced the-the way in which scale was like the issue of issues to sort out and self sustaining. To be

able to self sustaining was a that they should be certain was like almost a one to one to the you know what small agriculture is dealing with. And so, that for me, like became sort of a way to understand what our mission was. And if, well what our role to community was.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. I-I always find it interesting how people answer this question, because for some people, the reason they start the press is they're like, well, there's not enough of this, and I want to see more of this.

Andrew Steeves: That's right.

Tamara Thompson: Oh! I'll make that then.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah, it wasn't for me like I was publishing. So, I didn't have a group of friends. I didn't have a scene that I was like. I'm going to like advocate, because that's such a legitimate and such a common reason, particularly for micro presses, is you're not seeing your folks in, you know, out there being talked about like so you-you-you start something to resolve it, and awesome like that's the way-that's great, for me it was less that, I mean I did, I was kind of looking interested in rural writers. I-I'm not a lot of like really super trendy, brewery or-or urban stuff like it's not really, like Coach House has that scene covered, and lots of the other people that seem covered. We weren't chasing any last time. I-I was but we weren't exclusively doing maritime writers or-or rural writers, or it just seemed to be, you know what we attracted. Anyway, so it, it's but it wasn't like a like I wasn't one of the writers that we were publishing right? Not me, I mean; I publish things I've written. But ultimately that was always about stuff I was writing about publishing, writing about printing. It wasn't stuff, but like my own literary works, not really very present in our list. So-so yeah, so it-it is a little out of step. We always, we came in intending to serve a broader readership and a broader authorship. Then a lot of small presses, do you know, start off trying to serve.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm, yeah. So, what-so you've talked a bit about like your process and stuff. But what kind of work do you publish like? Do you like do more fiction things like, can you talk a bit about that? And why you-cause you've talked a bit about why you choose certain authors for ruralness. But, like, could you talk more a bit about what kind of work.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah, and I, I primarily, I mean, poetry has been where a real strength has been. And in some ways, that's just like pragmatic, because in trade publishing the big money is on the fiction that does well. And-and the-the nonfiction that does well, that's-that's where the big multinationals are kind of like draining. They drain that into the pool like that's the, they-they dominate because they've got-they've got money. And they put that put money behind the winners, the people, the people that really are clearly taking off and do well. They'll infuse cash into that, and they'll-they'll sell that, you know, into other markets, and they'll-they'll they'd make they're good at making a commodity out of fiction. And then there are certain kinds of, and so we looked at that and thought, well, why compete with them? Because, you know we certainly publish novels, but you know we're selected because every once in a while,

a good novel comes along, and you say, well, you know, if-if the author seems to understand what-what we're capable of and is not thinking that we'll be Random House that will behave like Random House. Then we can take a risk on that. But-but, generally speaking, the people who are writing those kinds of books are not bringing the little presses; they're taking them to the place where they think it can make the most cash. So-so we-we said, why-why be this? Why be this? You know, why pursue something that someone else is in a better position to pursue?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: You know what is the thing that we like, but also we can excel at, and-and publishing poetry which I cared about I mean, that's I came into this, but it also was evident that like, oh, we can do like we can do a better job than most of the small other small presses do, because we can put a lot more attention into the physical object. And-and then we can, you know, we absolutely can get the best poets like no problem like where's the-the you know, we're never gonna pub-we're not gonna publish Margaret Atwood's next novel, which is what it takes to succeed at the, you know, publishing novels is to get the-the really great stuff. We could get experimental stuff but can't get, you know. So, we just ended up focusing on-on what we you know what made sense. So, poetry is the big part of the program. But we, also I, I took a real interest in creative nonfiction, particularly that was related to literary topics and-and pursued in a literary fashion. So, we published a lot of really great literary nonfiction by John Terpstra, Don McKay would be good examples of that, of authors that we've done well with, and that but-

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Andrew Steeves: You know. So-so, we-we look for the areas where it was possible. If what will grow on the, you know, you know, if you're and certain types of soil, there's no sense feeling bad that you can't grow potatoes. You figure what you can grow. Your soil is not gonna change, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: You gotta, so you work with what if what is suitable for that location and for us poetry was suitable. So, we did it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fantastic. I am very interested, so, if you'll indulge me, what is your process like from okay, we've been gripped by a piece so to getting it edited and printed into people's hands. What's-what's that whole process like for you guys?

Andrew Steeves: Well, for us, like that whole front end of that is-is, sits at my desk. So, I mean, I'm selecting to work and then I'm doing an initial edit or two, working with the author to-we have not tended to take work that needs to be, you know, that is like super rough, and needs like a heavy editor, right. Like I like authors that write them. I don't want to write their books for them. I don't, so-so, the work that we end up doing, when we-we take a book it's-it's got a pretty sure voice, and it's got a pretty sure center of gravity. It's not needing us to sort of like,

you know, parachute that in and make something out of shoe box full of stuff, right? A lot of that happens in publishing more than you think. And so, we're taking people who, you know, the-the shape is there. The work is strong and-and we're coming in and helping the authors to sort of you know, get it from one, you know the-the eighty grit sandpaper with the two twenty grit sandpaper. It's just like to get, you know, getting it as smooth as possible, holding them to the thing that they're evidently trying to do. So, things that are sticking up and-and not really making sense there, you're asking this question to help them through it but because I'm also designing the books I tend to design the books pretty early in that process. So, I'll do an initial edit, probably on their own manuscript, and they'll go back to them, and they'll send me a file with the, with the revisions, whatever they've decided to do, to address the questions I had, and then unless there's exceptions, but generally at that point I'll typeset the book, which is super early. Most publishers don't design till the tail end and there's some real advantage from a-a, from my vantage point, you know, the earlier you can get control the book so, you're the one making the corrections and changes. You just have better control over how it's gonna go. It's not that I mean, the author has to approve everything that you asked to be changed, but nonetheless, you know, you're probably less likely to (technical issue occurred) it than they are. And but also there's this whole other side to this, which is that the minute that I set a book into a page layout, and I show that back the author. The next time they read that book they see things that they wouldn't see if they just went over there. They've been spending a year, two years, five years looking at a word document. The same font, same index, same, you know, whatever. And it's, they're blind to it. But the minute you set it into a book page it feels like their sense of like oh shit; they feel responsible. They-they, there's like, oh, this is a real book I have, and they see things that-and they read it differently. They get it, creates distance, I guess is what I'm saying and so I find it from editorial standpoint super helpful kind of get them to look at it that way on early before-you don't want them to be dealing with that at the proof-reading stage, where they're like changing, making major changes. You want the proofreaders to be after major changes so they're most reliable. So anyway, so that that's there's that kind of at some point in there I'm-I'm-I'm doing that type setting and-and making corrections (technical issues occurred). I'm also then able earlier to see my own mistakes and problems, I'm seeing things that are working, not working. Good design requires good reviewing. Good, you know, proofreading after the design has been started. It's-it's just not something you sort of lacquer on at the tail end cause if you do, it'll just, you know, you'll-you'll miss that you didn't change all the en-dashes to em-dashes, or you'll miss that you didn't deal with semicolons all the same, or you'll miss, you know, like, so the more time you have, the more looks you as the designer have to look at it. You know where it goes, away comes back something magical about it going away comes back that creates distance. Then then you have a better chance of like, you know, getting it right. And then we do a couple rounds of proofreading with external proofreaders afterwards. So, in terms of the editorial process, the time process, that's how it all, and once the author signed off it goes to film and plates and onto the press and away it goes.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. I-I think that's a really good way of kind of doing that process, because as soon as I even print out that same word document, just having it in a different like way of seeing it, that's not on the screen. Or even when-my God bless my layout and designer and proofreader, Grace Regan, who does all of the stuff for Whispering Wick and that way she's one of our proofreaders, but she does all the layout and design, and as soon as she does it and I print it. I see so many things, and we're able to collaborate immediately and same with our editor. And it's amazing how such a small difference in changing this-the way something is formatted. And you're like, oh, okay, this is what the problem was here. This was the problem here. Oh, we didn't think of this, which sometimes there's just such simple things. But you just don't see it because it it's almost like going nose blind, but your eyes get blinded to your own-just little things. It's I find, the same thing when you're writing something it is better to read it aloud after a period of time.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: 'Cause you'll catch the mistakes that your brain feels fills in. I always give that trick to my students, because I'm like you've read it a thousand times, read it aloud, and you'll be surprised how many mistakes that you will catch before you hand it in, and they're always on tight turnarounds. And oh, well, I just need to get it handed in. I'm like, take the five min and read your essay, you will be doing yourself a big favor.

Andrew Steeves: Yep, for sure. And I mean there's so many, when you can't create, if you have, you know, if-if you can't create the distance of a change in person. You have to create these other distances. You have to, you know that, allow you these other tricks that allow you to see it see what's there as opposed to what you think is there. And-and that's-that's fine, and-and it-it, there's not one way to do it you know, it's a very uncommon thing that the person who is selecting is the person who's editing is the person who's designing. Is not, that tight loop is not a normal thing in publishing that's more common in-in the chapbook world than it is in the trade publishing world. But-but you have to build into it other safeguards to create those distances. So, it things are always like a liability and a super power at the same time, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: Like this, and so you-you being able to be, have the presence of mind to recognize what works and what's problematic, and then just contend with it like, that's a, such an important part of the kind of objectivity that an editor has to has to cultivate.

Tamara Thompson: So, I am interested because it seems like you're doing a lot of decisions when it comes to the editorial piece. But I am interested on how the press makes decisions. So, is it you and your partners sit down and like, pick something together? Or is it like, no, I'm really passionate about this, and this is what we're going to do for this and like, how does that work?

Andrew Steeves: No, I've always been this sole editor, the sole picker of things and a, and what Gary the other, you know, partner in the business is never had-you know it, it's... I soldier down the other end of the building and say a really interesting manuscript come in today it, it's this, you know, anyway, I'm gonna take it.

Tamara Thompson: Interesting.

Andrew Steeves: That's how it goes. So, there's-there's a kind of like sharing of information, but there's not an actual, it's not uncommon for us to have a book out in the world, and Gary's still catching up, getting around to reading it.

Tamara Thompson: Right, right.

Andrew Steeves: It's, you know, that's-

Tamara Thompson: Where do you-. Yeah, it's just the way that it works. Yeah, it's interesting how different places, sometimes people will have a board meeting, and sometimes people will just be like, no, just-just me.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah, I mean that, I mean, it's, hmmm, I always try to find a fair way, but also honest way to characterize it. And like there wouldn't be Gaspereau Press would not have been what it was if I was alone. Like, and yet umm the-the creative content, and the-the physical form that all the work is taken which is what is most recognizable about it is 100% me like that's me. That's me but with the support of others, my partner, and you know, staff we've had over the years.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: Getting on board and-and applying those decisions, you know. So, it's-it's this funny, it's not a contradiction at all, I suppose, but it, but it is kind of like there's two parts to the truth. The truth is like, that's all, that's all out of here, all out of my head. I'm the person that did that, but also once I articulated what was to be done, I had good help or to execute, and that, and that help was critical. So that's the partnership. Sometimes some partnerships are more firm discussion about the content. We do have those kinds of discussions about making, you know, broader decisions about production matters and the business side of things. But from the creative side, it's like this, really, not a conversation. It's kind of, this is what I have selected for us to do.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: This is how it works.

Tamara Thompson: Has its own ecosystem, and how it works, and how it's able to get things through the door and stuff. And sometimes there's bigger pushers that push things forward so, that the press can keep going. Or this person makes the decision and the teams like cool. Let's support this decision, or you know, and I don't think there's a right or wrong way

to do it. It's just very interesting how everybody has their own ecosystem.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Publishing itself as an ecosystem.

Andrew Steeves: 100%.

Tamara Thompson: I just find it very interesting how everybody has their own way of doing it. And it's one of the reasons I asked the question, because it is so varied.

Andrew Steeves: Good.

Tamara Thompson: And it's so interesting.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah. And the, and the structure, structure dictates outcome to some extent like that I mean, that's a little too extreme. You know, world wobbles. It's not perfect, but-but to but largely, you know we are what we construct. You know we are, if you build a system, if you build a system, you know it-it a system that you could build to make you know the widget A does not also evidently make widget B, you know like it, it's depth. And-and so it is a really important question because from the outside it isn't always evident. Yeah, it-it it's but it, but it's critical, and it and it often these things evolve too. And sometimes people things that are started as collectives for example, or as partnerships become the struggle like between egos or between visions. Right? It's not always egos, so is it, just visions for things and-and so you either get a consensus, like a consolidation of those ideas into a direction that is purely neither one or the other but like creates a third thing. Sometimes somebody just wins that power struggle the other person leaves in a huff, or sometimes somebody wins, the other person just gets on board like there's all kinds of dynamics, right? That could happen between people. Here there's never been a creative, mine is not the stronger of two creative pushes that one out. It just is the 100%, the creative push that in here from the beginning. And you know, the-my partnership has just enabled it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. You're both pushing forward to the end goal. Even if your jobs to the end goal are different.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah. And I don't think, I mean, I'm very doubtful that that the books that we make today would in a million years ever been made. Gary would never arrive at those things if he'd ever even tried. They just like the hours I put in handling and looking at books you know, led us to a conclusion. Well, let's make this kind of. Let's make this kind of work.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Andrew Steeves: And-and-and I mean, I say we. The conclusion was originally mine. But when I came and articulated it you know, Gary, what we really need to do you know, I really want to do, get, run, use this kind of paper. And we really need to buy a sewing machine. And we really

need to-and I didn't get like, oh, I don't know. We, you know-it was kind of like, you know, he was on board like we-we, he accepted the challenge, and-and off we went to solve the technical riddle that is under underlying every aesthetic riddle is a technical riddle like a, you know, if-if you're manufacturing. It's like, yeah, well, you know, of course, that would look good. How do you? How do you officially do it? How do you officially do it? You know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: And-and-and I think that, so from the outside, the creative like, which books do you publish? And what do they look like? People grab onto that because it's just evident. And-and in our case we stand out so much from the rest of the-the industry. That's an easy thing for people to kind of grab onto but every bit as important is the sort of hidden riddles behind it where Gary and I sat down and you know me saying, but we have to get this result. And Gary said, yeah, but it creates this problem like economically, mechanically, whatever it is. And-and then he and I solve the riddle right.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah.

Andrew Steeves: So that's like this wouldn't exist with that out. That second bit of work that's every, I think, bit as creative and important as the front-end stuff, but it's not-not visible right? So, anyway.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree. I-I have a team of people, and like what I want Whispering Wick to be is so much of all of them together to make it what it is. Right like, I have a reviewer on our website, and he is just as involved in some of the other idea making, and he'll be like cause he's an artist as well. And I'll be like, well, I'm having this problem because I need to stick this real-life Band-aid on this piece of paper, and I can't use a glue stick, and I can't use a high glue gun. And so, we'll like solve the problem together. And even though he's technically only doing the reviews, he's doing so much more, that's-that's Faizal Eidoo who I'm talking about.

Andrew Steeves: But like conversation at give and take. Yeah, so important.

Tamara Thompson: And same with my partner who does production because I make everything in the house, but he's the one who sources all the paper, and then I don't have to worry about that. He's like, here's where we're gonna buy our paper. Here's where we're gonna buy our ink. Here's this really cool, medieval style of like sewing a spine which I'll put in this document. So, if we ever wanna do it, it's there, you know.

Andrew Steeves: Yup.

Tamara Thompson: And stuff like that. So, I my point is-is-is that I really understand what you're talking about with. There's the stuff that people see like what-

Andrew Steeves: Yep.



Tamara Thompspon: On covers and then there's, you know, the other stuff of like solving the problems and all the inner workings of the press that are just as important to make it what it is. So again, another more practical question, where do you like sell your books, and how you do sell them?

Andrew Steeves: I mean, because we're a trade publisher one of the advantages we have both just for our normal books, but also for the chapbooks is that we're we have access to the, you know, the general trade market. So, you know, we are, we are-we were one of the first publishers in the country, one of the first three that that you know was capable of doing EDI orders you know, for Amazon and Chapters back when that was, you know, that's been a while now that that's been around. But when it first started to small publishers were like, just devastated because it was expensive infrastructure you had to make, we just built our own system. Gary being the "we" in that case, because I don't and-and we were able to kind of like be there, you know, before the big guys were. So-so, we're involved in the big in the mainstream of the trade. You know we are-we have the enough volume in those sales that you know booksellers are not afraid to buy them, because they know that they can return them and get credit, you know, like we're so-so, we're not having to deal with consignment stuff like that. So, we're-we're out there in in good independent bookstores. We're available online through the big retailers. So, we don't have as much stock in their stores because it's not fruitful and-and we're also more and more particularly leading up to the pandemic and afterwards we're doing more and more direct sales through our own website. And this is particularly true of-of our, of the other end of the spectrum you know, if our five-dollar chapbooks are on one side. The trader books are in the middle, on the other end are the limited-edition letter press books that I do many of which are chapbooks. And they're, you know, hand printed hand, hand sewn and-and-and there may be, instead of being a five-dollar chapbook they're thirty dollars chapbook, you know, and-and they're in a limited edition. So, a lot of those sell, directly-directly to the end buyer and the end, not through the retail chain but directly through our website. And because, you know and like and it, you know, the thing is, anyone can put stuff up for sale that the problem is to drive traffic to have people paying attention to what you're doing. And I would say that with our particularly with our letter press stuff, but the one of the main drivers would be Instagram and I'm very thoughtful I think about how I use Instagram and-and as a way to show mostly process and-and to talk about the the-the values of the press and what the press is up to as opposed to 25% off for black history month stuff like-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah

Andrew Steeves: Which is how most publishers use it, which it's like kind of shitty they just-it's constant. They have an author and a microphone is one thing, or there's a stack of books, with picture stack of books and-and it's kind of boring. I don't look at most publishers' websites or-or-or Instagram or social media, because I find it very tedious.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: We try to make it a more human story and to talk about what it is to do this work. There's a lot of shop photos, a lot of process. But if we have the advantage because we're doing that side, there's something to take a picture of. But so, but that surprisingly, without it being like a marketing strategy cause really, it's just not. It's-it's a brand strategy, I suppose, or it's as? if I'm really interested in the world changing how do I show something different than what the world is doing? Kind of strategy. That's how I've been trying to use social media. I think of it like the way (technical issue occurred) uses journals where he was writing for himself, but also not and so that has interestingly driven a lot of the traffic internationally to the press, particularly to the letter press stuff, because I tend to focus on the other stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Well, it's-it's interesting because we do, Whispering Wick, because I'm doing it all myself in my home with my partner, and sometimes my parents have to help me. Just because there's so much. I record me printing things. I record my mother, and I like stamping the paper, because that's more interesting to me than just as like showing the covers of the books when the covers are drying is my favorite especially if we do anything with ink. And I, you see this just like sea of covers that are drying out in like my family sunroom, you know, and that's just so much more interesting to me then, you know, oh, you know, this is what our authors said. I want our marketing quote unquote marketing it's more just hey, I want to do this fun thing that we can post on social media like author playlists and stuff, you know, like, I would it rather be something engaging and fun. Then you know-

Andrew Steeves: Ground it.

Tamara Thompson: Just the cover of the book, like.

Andrew Steeves: Surrounded in the real like, you know, like.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, the real.

Andrew Steeves: It's such a strange space. I mean, we're, it's a very performative space, just you know, not-not always negative, like-like it's but it's a factor and it's, there's just a lot of things that aren't about anything in that space.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: And so, to-to look at it instead of saying like, alright, it's a garbage can, I don't want to be in that garbage can, like to actually make a real effort. You're not, I'm not really the main demographic of that space. I mean, yeah, I'm fifty-four, right? Like, I'm-I'm not someone that uses social media really personally, it like, it's not my world but-but to go into that space, say, well I believe there's a responsible and non shitty way to be here, and to-to use it to say something of value that that you know I publish a book, and that when I'm lucky, you know, like a chapbook like our chapbooks you know three or four hundred copies get out there. But you know, if I post something on Instagram I can reach, you know thousands of people. And if my, if my broader goal for the press is-is to sort of create this sort of, is really

community development is to try to create this social bid of helping people to think about where they are and who they are to each other, to talk to each other about what it is to be here. Now then, you kind of have to be in that space, being part of a conversation, and maybe try to raise it sounds a little goofy and elevated, but I mean to try to raise the bar like I get at the very least, maybe a better way to put is I get to choose how I'm gonna act. And so, I act, how I'm going to act, you know, and-and hope that it is helpful to other people and meaningful to other people.

Tamara Thompson: It's very interesting because a lot of people feel like they need to react a certain way to be on social media. And they have to, like, keep up with all of this stuff. And I'm like, create stuff that is fun and interesting because people will connect with that like, I'm not just doing the production videos because, oh, I gotta do a production video, I think it's cool and I want to show people.

Andrew Steeves: You're excited, and if you're excited and then it, it translates through that space for sure. Yeah, and you know, and if you're thinking, I think it's possible still to be artful about it, that you're not just doing same thing over and over again, or that that you view it as all, hmm everything we do in a public space is a kind of exchange and needs to be conscious of the fact that if you're asking for people's attention you need to give them something to pay attention to that's of value. And I mean, that's just a basic sort of ethical standpoint, you know, like a-a about discourse of a public discourse. And so even in that space, if it's just you're just there doing you, I mean it's a little much like you're not it's not gonna add up to people sticking around. But if you're actually there and you're-you're thinking about what you're doing and what is needed. You know what other people around you can take from it, how it is helpful. And you're not being a condescending prick, you know, like it's like you're actually being positive and helpful and-and optimistic. And then it will work, you know, and we've been, I mean, hardly, I'm hardly like doing all the things that people say you ought to do, you know, in order to succeed that space. But you know we have I don't know, like seven thousand followers, or something which is you know, not Kanye West. But it's okay like it, like it's a, it's enough of a following that it, it has an impact. We see it impacting sales of books. We see it impacting people's interest in our authors. It connects people. And that's-that's a, that's helpful.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's a net positive.

Andrew Steeves: Yep. Worth it and a little bit after. Ties back to where the books like how the books sell.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Yeah. I want to change gears a little bit here-

Andrew Steeves: Which ties into how the books sells.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah. But what are some challenges that the press has faced over the years, if you don't mind sharing.

Andrew Steeves: I think, but you know, normal challenges that being human, normal challenges of running a business like I-I-I think publishers are really good at whining.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah (laughs).

Andrew Steeves: There's like a-a creating, a kind of sense of like, I'm gonna I'm overstating that, but I mean it like a sense of persecution, a sense of like it's not fair. It's not like, you know, somebody else has gotten the attention, and I should have gotten the attention. It has a real danger of becoming really comparative like that right cause. We're all-

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Andrew Steeves: And allegedly, we're all doing the same thing except we're and you know, I don't know how many what that number is like, how many thousands of books are publishing Canada each year. But if you're doing a good job, your books are not interchangeable with other presses, books or with each other like on your own list like that. They really are these individual moments or act, you know, within the culture. And-and yet we have this desire to kind of like, line them all up and then rank them. You know, who made Canada read? Who did this? Who got you, got the Giller, who got the-it's silly, it's-it's not actually cultural. That's, that is a product of the commercial world, not of the cultural. And yet we got here blind and sick. So, there's, so between that, but also on the you know, there should be more public money, we should, our grant should have been bigger, or you know we didn't get our grant. It's not fair, you know, like there's all of those factors which underlie sort of basic things in-in-in publishing. So, a lot of publishers say to you, you know public, you know that the public policy is a big issue. We're not, you know, not enough funding in the areas, whatever it's like. And I-I mean, I mean, they're welcome to that opinion, I guess, but it, it's kind of a like I like a deeper view of-of history than that. And I-I look, and I realize that you know a hundred or so years into printing hundred and fifty years in the printing, you know a printer like (technical issues occurred), who has one of the best print shops in Europe during his period in the center early baroque it baroque period, and he's in he's in the Lowlands. And he's there at a time where like, if you publish something that's a little too Protestant, when the Catholics happen to be run in the town like your head's on a pike.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: But within like a-a year like that power can shift. And suddenly you don't want to have looked to Catholic if you suddenly have to deal with the Protestants right like. So, like, those are real problems. Those are real problems. So, we don't have those problems in our culture. Like, we're-we're at a point where we have a very free Press in Canada. We have, I think, a considerable amount resources publicly put in, you know, at a provincial and Federal level put into helping publishers of various sizes to do their work. Are there like problems and hiccups? Oh, yeah but also like, you know, keep working at like it's not a big deal. So-so, in terms of challenges, take all the ones off the table that are just normal

stuff like cause I-I'm not interested in in thinking about those. They're just the-the challenge of running any kind of creative business and-and that the if you're not interested in the puzzle. How to take a small amount of money, do the most with it. If you're not interested in that puzzle like, go get a government job. Don't do this 'cause you have to like love. That puzzle you have to love the-the kind of the underdog challenge of like, you know, things didn't go right you know. So, what can we make, you know, they, you know they were supposed to ship us this, but they ship us that. What will we make with like if like, if you don't like that challenge. You're not gonna do well in this, in this line of work. So, or you're going to be tedious to listen to cause-cause there's lots of tediousness to do in publishing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: But in terms of very specific challenges. So, I'd say that the one of the big early challenges was picking at the right scale because our culture, but also like the way that the Arts funding is structured is all very geared towards growth.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Andrew Steeves: Growth is a sort of like the great unquestioned value of our time and the post-war period. And it-it is what is destroying us is this notion of endless growth. That's-that's not balanced against just the reality of the available resources, the available market, you know what's a good of growing and making more poetry books if there's not more people to read those poetry books like it's-so, the-the-the great challenge early on especially, was to find the right scale, like what's enough activity but it's enough staff you know, what's enough. How many books realistically can you make? How many can realistically sell? What you know, how do the grants come into that? What is that ecosystem? And at the beginning we didn't know, there's not a handbook they give you and say, do X, and it will probably work doesn't happen that way. So, we grew pretty fast, and we-we we're doing a lot of books, putting a lot of books in the market, had a lot of staff and at that time, Chapters and Indigo we're both changing the landscape of retail in Canada, and they seem to be selling a lot of books. They seem to be very dedicated to like Canadian books and it turned out to all, just be smoke no fire.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: And so, like-like a lot of publishers in the late aughts, you know, we get a lot of inventory dump back on us, that, that the size that we grew to thinking that there was a market there with the market was bullshit it didn't exist. And um, and we had to, we had a very difficult moment about, it was maybe 2008, or nine, where we had to downsize dramatically and reconfigure and try to figure out what the right size was and that might have done us it. That might have done the same-it was, it was tricky. So-so, that would be one finding the right scale. Never really had a lot of trouble finding the right vision or find the right market. We seem to understand that for early in state with it. But yeah, that's scale pieces. And then the rest of it is a lot just human stuff like, I think a challenge of day after day dealing with individuals who are not. You know,

we-we now, we're careful about who we work with. We want to work with people, that we will be a fit for, share the values we have, understand what we are and what we're doing and but every once in a while, I you misjudge it and-and so dealing with people's expectations, relative to what you're capable of delivering. I mean, there's a lot of normal human stuff, you know. Of being, like winning in an argument is of little value. I mean, if your big goal is to actually, you know, be this thing in the community and create this social good. You gotta bring people with you. You can't just win the argument. So, there's a lot of swallowing your pride and just being patient and trying to understand what-what people are, not what they're saying but what they actually need. And but the real issue is behind their frustration or anger for expressing. And then, you know, trying to get everybody across the finish line with their dignity intact and that that is like the I don't know one's gonna like put that on their top ten list other than me, probably of problems to face. But like, if you want to, you know, book is a social space, right? Kinda like houses is, more connections between building houses and building books that you'd imagine. But you're building a space in which something social happens where an author and a reader met, where community meets. And if you are, if you want to do that right, then all of the human relationships you have around it have to be is careful and is thoughtful and it's ethical you know, as-as possible. And so, there's a lot of responsibility in that. And you know one of the challenges is not burning out on all of that care that is required.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: The-the other stuff is fun and easy even when it's going, you know, like how to deal with a-a paper that's discontinued, how to deal with a machine that's broken, how to deal, you know, you know. Just normal stuff, right? Like that's just, that's just getting out of bed in the morning. Make it so, that's what that is. That's the human thing. That's the big one.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Why are chapbooks important to you?

Andrew Steeves: I think chapbooks are kind of the very pinnacle of demi-democratic publishing like a-a of-of access, you know. So, they have this sort of like efficiency and this economy about them, which is really great. There's, you know, the only barrier to entry by and large is your own creativity, like having the-the nerve to have something to say and investing with a little bit of time, put it together and do it, you know. Any anybody you can push you know print on a photocopier and-and operator stapler can make a chapbook and so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: So, there's this, this great, you know, leveling aspect. And so that that's a big part of it. I think also, I like the succinctness of it. I'd like that. It's a piece of thinking that we can engage often in a single sitting so like the scale of it. It's almost the perfect size. I like that it's made out of what is at hand, you know, most, I mean the except-there's exceptions. But you know, when we think about chapbooks, you know, like, particularly with zines and those things where like

nobody's getting bent out of shape at bringing something special, you're using what's available and I think it's sort of often again we're-there's a whole other end of letterpress stuff that's a little different. But-but it-it umm, it's a place for risk as possible with without great cost, you know, for the, for the creative person that you can try things. And if it doesn't work and if you're really unhappy, you cut them up, throw away, no one sees it. If-if you're, if it doesn't work, if you put it out there, it'll work for some people or not work for other. You know whatever, like this-so that like, it's a very controlled amount of risk. And-and yet it also is a tool in which extraordinary things are possible, like it's-it's aesthetic limits, as far as the aesthetics may not word, it's like it's mechanical limits of-of what it is physically, in no way limits what its cultural possibilities are for what it can accomplish. Whether you spend a little money or a lot like the-the determining factor is not the economics. It's not the-the physical space available. It is, it's all here, like it's all here.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: That's what I love about is just this, this incredible, it's-it's like, it's, it's like a pencil, right? Like it's just ubiquitous. It's essentially available to anyone who wants to make the effort. And it's not that much effort. And with that thing, you know, you don't need a MacBook Pro to write the book that changes the world. You-you need this [shows a pencil], and something to sharpen it, but and-and a substrate in which you can record the things on. We're never really limited, like I-I this is, you know, for someone say, struggling to pay rent, this statement is evidently tricky, but on the whole, as a culture like taking an aggregate like money is not usually our problem. The economics are not usually what hold us back. They have to be contented with. They can't be ignored. But what holds us back is our ability to sort of conceive a way forward, to imagine what is possible to understand like the value of making a choice and then to pursue it because it's important. That's what restricts us, because whether it's that MacBook pro or a pencil, like a good idea, is going to follow.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree. So, I'm gonna ask, kind of like a bigger, broader question. But our chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not?

Andrew Steeves: It depends how, on your definition, I suppose. But in my definition, okay, publishing within would encompass micropress and-and I think that some people would not bother, they would see those outlying outside of-of the mainstream. I, inside personally, and so in that sense, I think, yes, it's like critical. I mean, there's a kind of like, historically, there's been kind of like a testing ground farm team element of it, where it's like publishing some chapbooks is a leg up, you know, when you're then going to the mainstream publisher and saying, I'd like to do this because you-you know, you've done some work. You've proven this of readership and audience. You've proven an editor has taken you seriously, you've shown some, you know, like the like the magazines do. It can have that element, but I don't think that-that I think that's a rather that's not-that's untrue, but it's that-if that is like your whole, where you put that kind of work solely, then it's a kind of paternalistic and

condescending view. And so, I-I, cause I think there are people who are publishing at that, you're-you're using that medium of the chapbook who are not, you know, publishing chapbooks because they can't figure out how to get bigger, right? Like it-it, they're publishing them because they-they believe in the thing that they do, and they want to accomplish that very specific thing. And they're very intentional about it. And so, in that absolutely a critical part of the culture. It's, you know, also has this incredible function for authors, you know, where go to a reading for someone to sort of lay five or ten bucks down on the table, and to get this um, intermediate work like not a full book, not-not just a-a poem made in the air to disappear after you've heard it. Not a-a slick publish book, but this other thing, this other space like the broad side as well. I think it's really kind of handy even from a commercial standpoint, you know, as-as a commodity for authors to, you know, be selling these like CDs out of their guitar case. There's a real value in that. Anyway, so yeah, absolutely, it has this this important place in the ecosystem.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way-?

Andrew Steeve's: No.

Tamara Thompspon: And you can take that wherever you desire.

Andrew Steeves: No.

Tamara Thompspon: (Laughs).

Andrew Steeves: Canada is not special. Let's-let's just get rid of that. Canada is, you know a, the-the local is always special I you know, like on that level. But like in the sense of like this Nationalist, like, we need to stop with the Canadian nationals in both sense like it's-it's it was-it was very useful to the sixties and seventies and eighties, as we tried to imagine, you know, imagine ourselves into being. But you know Canada is a, I think, a mature, I'm becoming a more mature nation, and I don't think we need to be near as silly about, you know our exceptionalism. You know that we're special somehow.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: Like I don't it-sometime in the-in the early 2010, I started working a lot more, not publishing Americans but like, I started looking across the border for colleagues. 'Cause it's really not really many people doing anything much like I'm doing in Canada. And there's and there's definitely on the letterpress side, there's definitely a very small number of people, kind of relative to what's happening in New England and-and in the States in general. And so, I started looking cross the border for people to talk to and you know, needed friends.

Tamara Thompspon: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: So, and I, one of the things that really was driven home to me is that like this, it's like well, you know, it's whether it's-it's Ireland or-or the UK or, you know, States, I mean, of course, there's



cultural differences. But like, there's nothing particularly special about Canadian publishing, other than some of the structural stuff related to the granting program, some of the dynamic of the English and French. It's a little unique, but you know it doesn't add up to, it doesn't add up to a lot. And we-we publish Canadian writers nearly exclusively because this is where we are and I'm interested, like, in the community and-and contributing. But it's not because I think that we're, I think whenever we sit back, and we try to like, build a narrative around like some, why Canadian literature is so special, especially unique, it's just, it's contrived. It's silly, it's-it's a, it's a make-work enterprise and-and I would say that our relationship to chapbooks absolutely falls along, I-I-I can't really point to a-a unique application of the chapbook concept in Canada relative to what's happening, you know in other places. If anything, there's probably more of a, there might be some kind of a rural-urban divide in terms of difference as opposed to American Canadian divide. like, you know, rural America and rural Canada more in common than urban America and rural Canada, urban Canada, brilliant like-like it's so. But-but as far as this particular tool we didn't invent it; we didn't perfect it. We're just using it. We're just along for the ride.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I love how people interact with that question because they can be interpreted in so many different ways. And I think it's always really exciting how people talk about publishing and all we need to see the specialness of it- (technical issues occurred). Let's-let's move on here. So, we talked a little bit about this. But I'm gonna still ask this question, anyway. What does this kind of publishing offer that other types of publishing can't offer, and, like vice versa, you talked a little bit about that at the beginning, with like the kind of the experimental ground of things, and why you decided to do the chapbook stuff. But could you talk maybe a little bit more about that.

Andrew Steeves: Umm I don't know if there's a whole lot more to say, but I mean definitely it-it, you know, because of the scale. both of the objects like, like, we talk mostly about the scale of the economics and-and but also you're usually making fewer of them, and it takes less work to make them, because it's, you know, sixteen pages or twenty-four pages, or thirty-two pages like it's-it's doesn't get, so yeah, because it doesn't, because that scale of the work is not as great as a as a trade book, you know the inputs are fewer economically, but also creatively. I mean, you-you just-but it-it also has an impact on-on how-how the reader interacts with it. But it also has this impact, like the number-usually, they're limited run you know, either like close, only this many or only this many at a time often. So, you're you know you, you're only making two hundred or making one hundred. And-and sometimes when they're gone, they're gone. Sometimes when they're gone, you make another round, and maybe you make changes or-or don't, or you couldn't get that covered anymore. So, it's a different cover, so there's a kind of like, a control like a self, self-limiting element to it maybe is better way to put it, which is different than conventional publishing. Where it's like sell as many as you can, you know.

Tamara Thomspson: (Laughs).

Andrew Steeves: Like, no, this is, this built-baked into this is this sort of self limiting. We, acknowledgement of like it's only gonna reach so far, it's only do so much so and even if we'll make more if there's a demand, we're, we're limiting from the beginning, this you know how much we're doing. So, it-it, I think that's-that's a critical difference.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: But probably that, combined with what I said earlier is probably covers the ground okay.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, thank you. I appreciate you expanding on that. What's something you wish maybe the public knew about Canadian publishing?

Andrew Steeves: Mhmm, I don't, I don't think that it never hurts for more people to be aware that people in their communities are-are engaged? at a very high level. You know making things of value, like that is always worthwhile. And that's different from saying, you know that, like the question always has an implication that the public doesn't know enough. And that, and that is you know-and it is, it's this underlying economic all the time.

Tamara Thompson: Umhm.

Andrew Steeves: Like we should be more successful, and I mean, you know, it's okay, too, but I think the more interesting question is about is a cultural one about the value of this work. So, it's possible that when you make a chapbook, and you make hundred copies but that you know by-by luck actually lines up perfectly with the readers who really ought to see it. But there aren't a hundred thousand people for whom that works going to be meaningful or useful and so the better job we do aligning you know, the volume of what we make with those who can make something useful out of participating with it. And-and the better we can connect those, the-the more successful it's been as a cultural, as an economic one not necessarily.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: But as a culture enterprise, definitely. And so, we make the mistake of kind of conflating these things, right? That the, that-that the thing you want is the one million readers, always that that's always what's best. And it's kind of hard to look at any author and argue otherwise. But-but the thing is, it's silly. It's a silly notion that that-so like I may not give a crap about jazz dance; like, as a consumer of cultural things, that may not speak to me at all. But it's important for the jazz dance community that I'm their guy, like I'm in their quarter, saying, I'm so glad that there's jazz dance in my community and somebody's going and taking part in it, you know. Whatever the correct number, like the ideal platonic number of-of audience members for that are, you know, but that needs to happen. Like so-so our we have to, as a as a community, we have to be able to take joy and what is meaningful to others, and not only what is meaningful to us. And so, this is the reason that and it takes a thing is like... hmmm trying to think of a good example like, you know I'm-I am not interested in, I don't know like I'm-I'm a

straight, white, male, gay-gay pride is not my get out of bed thing like I, it's not, my God, I'm so glad! And I'm so supportive of-of those for whom you know this month, and a parade, and this you know like, and-and that that they're able to have a-a that community has a space in our community and all-all of our community, right? But they are my community because they are this corner. And-and so what is the ideal number of people marching in a gay pride parade, right? Like it doesn't have to encompass everybody, but everybody benefits from it happening. Everybody needs to be supportive of that kind, of ideally whatever, and be supportive of that, and-and being-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: Not my thing, but I'm so glad it's your thing like, right? So that's it's-it's-it's and that's not, that's not tolerating. That's not- no, no, it's for that has to be joy. It has to be something where you see the benefit to all of us. By they're being spaced for everyone in the community. And so, I would say, chapbooks in terms of like what should the community know whether or you know all that-whatever basic question was the beginning? You know it's important that the community understands that there are people, you know, there are people in your community making things. And there are people valuing those things. And it's happening at a high level, and that's not the same as everyone should be reading this work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: But it's to value that it is present, and to understand that it it's not an ornament, back to where we talked about at the beginning.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: That it's something that is an essential. That is, like we always, we're really, we're really bad at ecosystem notions, even though it's, you know, since the seventies, sixties and seventies, we talk more about it. It's become more popularized and using as an analogy to think about our-our broader things beyond like literal ecology. Yeah-yeah, we're really bad at. And so, you know, we're always thinking about the megafauna on it. Most people in the public know there's a McClelland and Stewart, and they may know that they get bought by a German multination, or they may not. But they-they the notion of like there are Canadian books. They're okay; they're interested in that to some extent and, but they don't realize that, you know, they're interested in the caribou, but they're not interested in the lichen, and if you don't have the lichen, you don't have the caribou like-like-

Tamara Thompson: Yup!

Andrew Steeves: This is, this is the whole. You gotta have that whole spectrum of activity in order for it to be healthy and sustainable and-and so I guess I guess what I you know to wrap all that up. What I really think I you know, I want the community, the-the broader public to be more

aware of is that there's this activity. This kind of activity is not just people, its not just game, it's not just a-a the people who can't-aren't good enough to be big, right? That it is like this is the lichen.

Tamara Thompson: Yep.

Andrew Steeves: To the caribou. You don't like it that it's part of this this ecosystem. That's the thing I wish they knew.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I always find it interesting how people react to the Canadian questions because I have to-I can't do the world. That would be a PhD; I have to focus this thesis. So hence I chose Canada because I knew the community myself, because I was a part of it. But I just find how Canadians and just people who live in this space that we call Canada, like and how they interact with that, and how they answer these, you know, quote unquote Canadian questions, and I find it really interesting. Because again, I needed to have a certain you know narrowed kind of specific area, if I was going to do this so that it wouldn't take thirty years.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah, very true.

Tamara Thompson: But you know, I-I find it really interesting how people are interacting with certain terminologies. My supervisor was like, well, what does Canadian mean? And I was like, well, I guess I have to define my version of that, and that was really hard.

Andrew Steeves: Hmm.

Tamara Thompson: The closer I thought I got to getting it. I felt like, well, no, that doesn't account for you know this person. So, I find it really interesting.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah, there's always, I mean, we're getting better, and I hope it's not just a moment we're in I hope it's just a general you know, shift, but we are getting better as a culture at-at being broader in our, in what we try to encompass in our and what we say and what we do. So, it's not just this sort of centralized mainline culture. But that there's a cost to that. And the cost is a diffusion which can make it harder to talk a, well generally can make it harder to sort of organize our view of in a pragmatic way. But what-what, so-so therefore, this needs to happen.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah

Andrew Steeves: And it like and I, that cost is a fair, like a worth-it's that trade off is worth it, for fewer people being outside of the circle.

Tamara Thompson: Mhm.

Andrew Steeves: But it, but it is still a cost you-you have to-we have not yet, so we started to do the work of opening and we've not yet done the work of rebuilding functional structures that really accommodate like, you know. So yep, land acknowledgments. But yep.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: But-but-but the actual like, how do we still get shit done? Right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: I mean, like your-your whole ethics process, so perfect example, absolutely that process is important. Absolutely these are important questions. And-and there's this disproportionate of power between the institution and-and the student versus the interviewee. You know, that has to be kind of like dealt with ethically and properly, but it creates signal loss. You know, it creates a slogan. It creates congestion. And so, it's you know, it's gonna take time hopefully we'll stick with this project of being having a bigger circle and-and figure out those details, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: But it just doesn't happen on bad, right? You-you can't like tear down like a narrow system and expect that things just-just keep running properly as, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Mmmh.

Andrew Steeves: Introduce more and more stuff like-so, it's an interesting problem. And chapbooks are kind of like, the-the topic that you're talking about is kind of systematics, probably not quite right, but like-like, but it is a case in point of-of this thing is it is this this tool that has those who have access to it have continued to broad-it's been gentrifying some extent. So, it-it was one thing.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Andrew Steeves: This was, this was the process that the Black Community Center used to make to get their voice out there because the mainstream publishers wouldn't touch it. And the Black Community Center said Bob's got a lot to say, Bob's interesting and eloquent, and we're going to like, take the (technical issues occurred) machine and we're going to make Bob's poems. It's put back there for our community because the broader white community won't. And-and so it has, it's always had an activist underdog element, right? And-but now, you know, chat books have also just become gentrified it-it's just this other thing. So, you know, it's like it's not a twenty-five cents, it's a thirty dollars chapbook, right?

Tamara Thompson: Right, yeah.

Andrew Steeves: With a, with a signed and number all this kind of, you know, pulling all of these kinds of structural ideas out of the world of limited addition, fine printing and-and print, making right addition-addition to print, making, pulling those pretensions out of that world, and like lacquering them over top of what was like this ravel rousing underdog, you know. Get the word out to the people and change, you know, change the world. So, it's really interesting, complicated relationship.

The chapbook is kind of the fault line, you know, as we see, these shifts happen.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I-I do have to ask-that's a I guess more downer of a question.

Andrew Steeves: Oh!

Tamara Thompson: Why do you think more like a lot of small presses and micro presses close up shop?

Andrew Steeves: That's not a down of a question.

Tamara Thompson: Well, it was a pretty big downer when I was researching.

Andrew Steeves: When did your grandfather die?

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

Andrew Steeves: 'Cause we're temporal? We live in a temporal world, and we're mo-we're mortal beings, you know, like nothing lasts forever.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: You know like, do you think that an annual flower is less valuable, beautiful than a perennial? Things have a, things have a job and they-they have a life expectancy. They-they have a cycle. They come and go like that's-that's that is the human story. And-and the notion that it's a very kind of institutional bias we have that things should be established and grow and grow and continue and continue.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: It's-it's just, it's-it's you know, we've managed to sort of create that kind of Frankenstein thing in the corporation because corporations don't have the same mortal limits that we as humans have or the small businesses or family businesses. And they just kind of roll over and roll over and keep going and keep going, and the damage, like to take the negative side of it the damage that I can do as a human being is bounded, it's limited by you know how far I can reach, what I can do and how long I live. It can still be a lot that is bound. Corporation is the unbounded damage that they can do cause they're-they're outside of time, and they're outside of humanity. And so, the kind of thinking that is you know, the notion that say a-a you know, something that's something negative is happening that should be changed because-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: Chapbook publishers are-can be kind of ephemeral and not live-carry on very long. I don't-I don't see that as anything negative or structurally problem, or I see that is like the human story. It's like someone has an idea, and they have a passion, and they go till it burns out and it stops, or they it goes until something else, maybe more important, comes up in their life, and they pivot or goes until there's a

gigantic argument, something shitty happens like-like awesome, also human stuff. So, I don't see that as a negative question, I don't see the short liveness of many of these outfits as being a negative story.

Tamara Thompson: So much of being human is finding your way of dealing with death. And so that's why I said, it's kind of sad, because a lot of people have a hard time with the death of anything, whether that be living, something that was once there, whether that be the favorite coffee shop that closed up, and now it's not coming back again, right?

Andrew Steeves: Yeah, we creatures of habit.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: We'd like to build.

Tamara Thompson: It's comfort.

Andrew Steeves: It you know, we often, we cope but structure you know, whether that structure is a formal and external one like a religion like we're, you know, gives us meaning and explanations, and an after life to hope for.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: Or that structure is, you know, more homemade or-or intellectual or academic. I mean, we, we-we build structures, and we build routines and things. So, that we can efficiently understand the experiences we're having and each other. And so, you know, publishing and culture is part of that enterprise of-of sense making, of logic making and-but when it's at its best, it-it has a kind of wild element to it, too, that it that that resists, too tidy a summing up of anything and-and also is open to its own fallibility, its own mortality. And so, you know, we have to be, well, we don't have to be anything. That's the point, isn't it? You know it works better when we are able to sort of look at it with a long view. And so, as a publisher, I mean the amount of like impact that I can have on the culture or on any particular community the grand scheme of things pretty small. And you know, when you think about the grand stretch of time, I mean the fact that where I'm sitting right now a mere ten thousand years ago, was under a mile high sheet of ice.

Tamara Thompson: Mhmm.

Andrew Steeves: My story is pretty small and pretty new. And so, if you can kind of keep that in context, then you're not as tempted to kind of make a grand story or a great tragedy out of what is, just how it goes.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I a...I'm glad to hear you say some of these things, because when I talk about the death of things, or when things, and people look at me like I have two heads, and I'm just like, well, if I'm dead, I'm not going to know any better. So, you know, just embrace what happens, and things will move on. And the other thing, too, is-is that even if something is technically over or dead, that doesn't mean that that person isn't still, let's say, creating something just because a chapbook press

doesn't exist anymore doesn't mean that the person isn't like they haven't completely stopped creating, you know, and there's chance for a new thing to happen right?

Andrew Steeves: Also, that the work that they did in the moment they were creating it continues to ripple outwards.

Tamara Thompson: Yes!

Andrew Steeves: This is the really super thing that appeals to me about the book, is that it is, if you make them well and-and granted a lot of chapbook stuff it's-it's-it's goals the opposite is not to make it well, but to make it fast cheap and get it out there and-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: So, it, but-but even still, like the impact that it has in lives, the lives of the author, the life the person who made it, the life of the person who reads it. The life of the person who doesn't read it is angry about it. Everybody, you know, like there's a whole, right?

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

Andrew Steeves: There's a whole spectrum of responses that that choice to act, that-that somebody, that the author's choice to write the thing publishers choice to make the thing like all of those choices have an implication in the culture accumulatively over time. That is much greater than thy you know, the literal life of the enterprise of the press. And that's you know, if you were making, if you're making objects or if you are investing in people, you are making it, you are a person who believes in the future. You have person who believes in-in-in, in a good that can accumulate over time from an action in the present. And-and so, you know, I think about say, a trying to think of a good example. I mean, you know something oh, like a, you know many of the small presses that were around a small magazines around the sixties and seventies. I mean, they clearly had an impact on-on what I'm doing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: And yet they were often half-assed drug nonsense, that through was, you know, it happened you know accidentally, sloppily, you know, momentarily and yet, and yet their impact creates other impacts. It's you know, it's-it's just, if you take that bigger view that it's not, it is never a sad story.

Tamara Thompson: What has like, small publishing like, what does this kind of publishing taught you?

Andrew Steeves: Hmm! That's a hard, that's a hard question? I mean it; it's been, I mean, a lot of just practical things like-like in it, like what happens if you fold too many sheets of paper and try to stay for them altogether. Well, still, you know so, right like?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.



Andrew Steeves: There's a lot of just like mechanical and-and physical things that the ability to experiment with making things teaches you about the properties of those things. You learn that like, if you mix the grain of paper so that somebody is running with the spine and somebody's running against the spine it's gonna create this problem, right? So-so, all those kinds of things. So, the lesson of paying attention to materials is one that you learn whether you're making big things or small things. And so, it's been part of that. I think it's some of it, we just talked about that. It's helped to teach me that lesson of how a culture works and-and what the impact over time can be of even a small act. And the fact that there really are no small acts. And it's-it's taught me about hmm... it's-it's taught me about how, how people, how people view objects like you know how people handle objects. The difference between you know, the sub person that they become into possession of a chapbook and they kind of look it over, and that's like handling a piece of white bread or something, or whatever.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: And then the next person look, down the chain comes, and, like you've given them their own personal copy of the Mona Lisa like it's-it's-it's like, you can start to understand, you know, it's helped me to think about people's reactions and what-what underlies those reactions. And you want to make of those reactions. Yeah, I don't know. Yeah, I find this sort of trickier question. I mean the whole enterprise of publishing, not the chapbook specifically, but the whole enterprise of collaborating with other people to create a physical expression of the thing that they wrote has been just extraordinarily formative in terms of my thinking about how-how the community works.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I'm gonna ask you one more question about Gaspereau, why do you keep doing it? How do you keep this thing going?

Andrew Steeves: Well, unfortunately, I'm not gonna keep doing it much longer. Press is selling because my business partner wants out and I decided, I didn't want to run an enterprise this size by myself. And I didn't want to downsize it, because that seemed wasteful to-to bring this thing, do it the right size and get it working, and then like, then-then buy out my partner and then make it small. So-so it's gonna sell. Someone else is gonna take it on and carry forward with it a guy named Keegan Hawthorne who runs a micropress. And then then I guess I'm the micropress still working that out. But I'm going to keep making books using letterpress equipment, but some of them will be inexpensive. Relatively speaking, chapbooks, and some of them will be, you know, higher-end limited edition books. Because, yeah, I don't want to stop. I'm not ready to stop.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: So how and why? I mean, I guess. So, part of it is that the gift of this work, if you are willing to-to make it so is that every book is a new beginning.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Andrew Steeves: Every-every chapbook, every book doesn't matter like that's terrifying and also auxiliary. So, it's terrifying because it doesn't matter how good your last book is, doesn't matter shit about whether the next one's going to work you. You have all kinds of experience and knowledge you can bring forward, but if you don't show up for that work. You don't, created anew in in the new project. If you don't engage fully then it won't be good. Like, so you have to show up every time. It's not like running at Tim Horton's franchise, right? So-so that, that's a big part of it. But also, it's like understanding, seeing the value that it has in the life of a, about both the broader community and the abstract, but also the like literal community in terms of the lives of the people that you work with. So, you see what it means to recognize something that has value, to help, to sharpen and polish that thing, to its best state that you and the author can accomplish and then to embody it in a way that is, it's equal. Like that is-that is showing up also with its whole heart to do the work. And putting that out there in people's hands, and then seeing people make use of it, appreciate it, do something with it. I mean that whole, and that whole thing is-is it's just a good way to live. It is something worth spending your time on. And-and again like I said earlier, thinking about farming, you know, and comparing like as a way to understand I mean, it is a lot of work. It's a lot of work. And one of my boys, is a farmer, and on it he and his wife and there's sheep on it and you're trying to, he's come through this. He's watched me be an entrepreneur. Do this thing with Gary and I do this thing and watching him take those values and that sort of, you know, develop a vision and try to like throw himself into the-there's so many easier ways to-to make your life go by, certainly more lucrative but to see him sort of invest in a piece of land, take responsibility for that work, for that place, for the animals that he's working, you know that he's raising and for his family and his neighbors see him put himself in a community and give something of value to that community. To his work is it's-it's extraordinary. And that to me is what publishing has been like, and you know, makes up for a lot of like really niggly little details, you know. A lot of bad days, a lot of struggle... economically, or you know, socially.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: Like you know, that-that if you have that, if you, if you-if you feel that joy in the work in, if-if the actual act helping of people and creating the object. If that just on its own, and in it's own right brings you joy, and then on the back end of it you see how it is useful the people around you, and I mean that that keeps you going. And you can't-it doesn't steadily come as external validation. You have to kind of be a self, like you've just gotta be on fire about doing it whatever anyone else thinks because-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: If you're doing it well, there'll be ex-there will be external validation. There'll be things that happen. A people paying tribute to what you do that is gratifying to hear, but that can't fuel it that, that is not enough gas to get you through. You know the work you

have to do. You have to take that as the extra, the kind of grateful for it when it comes but it's not what you rely on. And so-so you have to have of that vision that sets a purpose, that understanding whether anyone else gets it or not in the moment that you know that you're-you're doing this thing, it has a value; it has a context, you found a scale that's sustainable. You found you know, a method of doing it that does not erode your life or hurt your family or hurt your, you know, like that does not do you harm. This is not about heroism, right. But you-you find that-that you hit that stride, and you hold that stride, and you can walk a long ways. And-and I think that's kind of how it works.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, well, we're in the home stretch here.

Andrew Steeves: Okay!

Tamara Thompson: So, I've only got two more questions left which are just basically opportunities to give you a chance to share? What's something about D.I.Y press history that you wish, you know, the average person would maybe know about? It could be a specific. It could be a general thing, I just like giving people the space to be like, oh, this thing! This was really cool, you know?

Andrew Steeves: Yeah, I don't, I don't know whether I fit into that question. I mean, I would say, yeah, back to we talked about earlier, this is kind of a-

Tamara Thompson: Okay, yeah.

Andrew Steeves: Different version same question. I think there's an importance, a general knowledge of something of value is happening in your community is-is good but in terms of like-like the like the history-history of-of do it yourself publishing is of interest only to someone who decides to do-do it yourself publishing but I-I like, I've often been quite discouraged by the fact that most of my colleagues, their knowledge of Canadian publishing in-in general begins at about the day they started it into it and they're not curious enough to really like put themselves in a context, as it has been so valuable to me to think about what I'm doing, you know, reaching way back to the beginning of printing and-and forward, and thinking about those patterns in-in-in the production of these objects in human culture and-and to see what, just out of curiosity like, what lessons can I drag forward with that. So, that's important to me. I don't know that the general public benefits anything from-from the kind of like from nerding out on the details of like you know that bp, Nichol did some awesome thing, or whatever like. It's just, you know that's, I'm all for it like that's what I need to know. But the general public I think it's like in the grand scheme of things like-like, let's throw ourselves into having a clean drinking water-

Tamara Thomspson: Yeah!

Andrew Steeves: And yeah, like, when I think about where the public attention should go, and I often get into this kind of difficulty with my colleagues on arts funding. It's like there needs to be some arts funding. It's useful. It helps. But like, if I gonna go to-when I go to my MP, like

arts funding is like down the list. I'm not, even though I'm a partisan in the sense that I like, this is my industry I'm supposed to represent like, like, it's like, okay, well let's talk about Gaza. Okay, can we talk about Gaza.

Tamara Thompson: Yeaahhhh.

Andrew Steeves: You know the-the crisis in healthcare. Oh, and then let's talk about, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: A relationship to the original (technical issues occurred). Let's talk about-and we get a twenty item down like, oh, yeah, no, like we probably could use a little more funding in the cultural sect.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: Because it seems to be like, if my overarching goal is to be a citizen, not to be-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: Like an-an industry advocate. Then, yeah-yeah, the arts do it. Okay, relative to a lot of other questions. And-and again, it's not an either or.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Andrew Steeves: You know its-I have had, I had that there's so a few one days in a-a meeting a big meeting with a bunch of a provincial government bureaucrats, and-and one of them I was just being a dick. I don't know what his problem was, but he was, he's like, well, you know I think the general most voters would much rather have a-a new road and a hospital you know, than to have this program that you're argued for. And I can't remember whether I ended up saying or not to him. I just certainly said it later in the letter, but I mean my response is like, well, what-what's good is a road? If you don't have anything to drive for or to? Then what good is a hospital? If you've got nothing to live for? Like what like this is not in in either, or this is like we-we have to strengthen and build our community, and that includes the cultural sector. Otherwise, who the fuck cares about the roads? Like we won't need roads because there won't be, you know, they get us worth bothering with. So-so yeah, I don't know if that answers your question.

Tamara Thompson: So, look, I have really enjoyed our conversation so far, because you've interpreted my questions in such interesting ways, like, it's been really great conversation for me. I've just been really enjoying how you've been interpreting all of these questions and in the areas that you've taken them.

Andrew Steeves: That's really gonna skew your, skew your study (laughs).

Tamara Thompson: Well, look, I have lot of people who have been asking me. They're like, well, are you gonna do graphs and statistics and stuff. And I'm like, oh, yeah, sure, you know, maybe with the ones that are more yes or no, sure, yeah, whatever. For the ones that make sense.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah, that's right.

Tamara Thompson: I'm more interested in the specifics that people have brought up. They've used a really good analogy here about this. They've brought up a really good point here. That's the stuff that I'm more interested in. Science majors have may you know need that, like what to me, what's the most interesting is what people's opinions and insights are. That's the cool thing and broadening not only my perspective, but also my project in ways that really excites me. That's what's exciting to me. Not that, oh, a lot of people have agreed with my hypothesis. No!

Andrew Steeves: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Challenge my hypothesis!

Andrew Steeves: That's the great value of an interview, is it leaves you enough space to gather a lot of that sort of ungainly information that that doesn't show up in a you know, on a scale of one to ten, you know, stuff like so much more.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah!

Andrew Steeves: It's you know, it's not as, it's not as tidy and echo of a scientific study as-as some would like, but it-it brings a great value. In-in-in particularly, you know when you're writing this, you're going to be juxtaposing, building things that are similar, you know, looking at you know, these different views and these different experiences, and I certainly don't I mean my- my, as I think I said earlier my experience of publishing is kind of uncommon and I built it that way. And-and it doesn't a, it-so, it is an outlier in that sense that, like how applicable is I-I think there are pieces of what I'm saying that are absolutely applicable to almost anybody working at any scale. But-but there are other elements of a you know, I had this experience because I chose to do this thing weirdly and-and valued certain things and certain actions. And so, therefore I had this experience. And you, you're not going to get that experiential information rather. But you are going to see them. They all-we all solve the same problems, you know. We have to make a thing efficiently within our means and we have to get it to a readership that's published right.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Well, we're down to the last like full question-

Andrew Steeves: Oh okay.

Tamara Thompson: Which is just a basic one of what would you like to share about your history? Again, gives people the space to share something, because again, I can only ask the the questions I have and I just-just like hearing people's experiences. So, what's something, maybe, that you wish people knew about you, or what you do?

Andrew Steeves: I think, like I think in the context of like what we've been covering, I think maybe and speaking about my-my personal life I would say that the I have a really cool job, and I've been able to do a lot of really cool things and work with a lot of interesting people and haven't, I think a kind of measurable impact on the cultural life of the country in a way that surprises me, looking that. 'Cause it's not why you do it, or but-but looking back over the better part of three decades it's added up to something interesting and-and that's really great. But also, it's not the most important thing I've done with my life.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

(Both laugh).

Andrew Steeves: So, and I would say, it's the most important thing I've done with my life, and it's not for everybody but is being a parent. I mean, I raised with Karen, I raised three really interesting kids, and I have a great deal optimism about the future because of you know the value that I see in the time that we put into their-their lives. The-the way that this you know, the work that this is taken to do the-the kind of, my children watching me do this. Is maybe the real, the real thing I've made because they're, you know. They're like, you know they're all their twenties. My youngest one's twenty-four. My oldest one is twenty-eight, two boys and a girl. And they're embarking on their lives, and they're doing the way that they see the world, the way they think about the world are, have been impacted by you know Karen's in my lives and the time we've put into theirs. So, you know, through all of this, and it's one of those cruel ironies you know of our Western lives that that the time in which we are often embarked on the problem of like building a career is also the time often, we're embarked in the career building a family and it they can really come into conflict. If you're not careful. Culture kind of pushes us you know, more towards one than the other, it is where the value is-is the important thing, you know and-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: And its horse shit, like there's like the whole thing I I've said earlier books are a social space like-like houses, there are a social space, or a place where things happen between people and so the most challenging, the-the most difficult, the most joyful thing that I been able to do with my life is to raise three, I think sane, that's proving to be three sane functioning you know, engaged kids and-and watching them go out in the world. I think about like, well, it's only so much damage I could do as an individual, but I've just tripled it right. So just triple it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: Because they're now headed out. And they're taking these values. And they're figuring how to apply them to their own situations and their own things. They're gonna do their own relationships, figure out what their roles are. And I think that that is that's the real work, that's the real work, and-and some people don't raise families, and they

find a way to have those impacts, you know in other ways. But I think for me, particularly as-as a you know, somewhat conservative rural male. Seems like an important thing to say because it's not kind of what normally think of. It's what you think you're, your important accomplishment was as a man. My important accomplishment was being a decent dad.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Well, even in like one, of the things that brings me, such great joy is because a lot of people like well, what are you really proud of? And I'm like, I'm really proud of the fact that I get to teach people who are fun and enjoy my classes. Like when people say, well, how do you stay so optimistic? And I'm like it's them.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: There's so much excitement and joy. And I get if I can make that university experience a good one, if I can give them a positive seminar experience, if I can give them a way of thinking about something which they've never thought of before I always find it funny when I blow the first year's minds, when you can blend genres they're like whoa, wait you can blend of nonfiction and fiction. What's that? And they're just like whoa, you know? And it's just like I don't need to be creating this great art, which will, you know, win an award, or whatever the-the hell is, a lot of people and artists think is important for me.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: For me what's important is the fact that I did a good seminar that day and I got such a positive response from, I-I call them the kids, you know even though they're only a couple of years younger than me just to see that response. Look there-I had to do my own classes, and I had to teach their class, and my dad had to understand the difference. So, we said the kids just so for scheduling purposes. But like just seeing that positivity. And you know, I understand why people put a lot of value on like, you know, the-the status, see kind of things and the things because it is important for them. And that's great.

Andrew Steeves: It's all part of it yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. But for me it's more just like, hey, that kid on my year end evaluation said that I did a really good job here, and then I allowed them to have a fun experience, you know. That's, like I-I go back and read those on an off day because it's like, hey I-I did something positive. There, I'll take that! That's a win.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah, it's like we're, you know, th-the-the more we can do, like to just to be helpful.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: Like-it's like what you know, it's the I'm not comp-you know, I like being, I like doing the things I'm I like making these things I-I like being good at the skills that I have to be good at to do these things. I-I you know, when you are, you know you're running the rapids of a something about solving a problem and it shouldn't work. And you buy

hook and crook, you just sort of somehow you land at something like there's a lot of joy and a lot of mischievous grin in that outcome. And-and I-I mean it's definitely part of it. But-but ultimately if I was doing that in a vacuum, and it wasn't you know, to the betterment of like the lives of other people somehow like-like not-not in a grand way, but just in a just general way. Like if it was, if this wasn't about people, I don't know that it would be interesting.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: I think it would I think it'd just be you know, eventually you'd solve all the rules, and you'd be yep, can do that, you know (laughs).

Tamara Thompson: Get a little boring.

Andrew Steeves: Yeah, probably but-but also just like that's, you know, when we think about at-at the heart of-so we're-we're occupying an in between space as makers of objects, you know, like and-and so our, we're building these transmission machines. You know that that move human story through time and through space they-they, they hold something, and then they-they, they rehydrate it, like, you know, like they reanimated in the brain of the of the reader and so that's better done well, like better done carefully and thoughtfully, and in a way that that honors the responsibility that's been given. But at the end of the day like is-is the people on either side of that enterprise. That's where the real importance is.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Andrew Steeves: So, we're, you know, we're you know, it's a handmaiden task. I mean, it's-it's in service of and-and we want to do it with as much excellence as we can muster. But also, we not, want to not elevated you know, sort of pathetically into some you know, heroic, extraordinary thing I mean, it's just.

Tamara Thompson: Yup.

Andrew Steeves: Just you're doing a human thing. You're just doing a human thing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah so, before I end this recording, do you have any additional comments? Anything you'd like to say before I pause it?

Andrew Steeves: No, I've talked way too much already.

(Both laugh.)

Andrew Steeves: Thank you for asking me and thank you for thoughtful question. And I-I hope that it helps.

Tamara Thompson: It does.



Mallory Tater

Tamara Thompson: Hello, my name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is July 8<sup>th</sup> the time is 6:08 pm, and just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview time. This interview is for small press and author.

Mallory Tater: My name is Mallory Tater. She/her and some of the collect, oh, I work for Rahila's Ghost press, or RG Press, where I was publisher. A few of the titles I edited with us from our chapbook collections were *Arrhythmia* by Natalie Lim and *Leaving Change on Reed* by Jane Shi. I myself am—I'm also an author with a novel called *The Birth Yard*, and a Poetry collection called *This Will Be Good*.

Tamara Thompson: And what general part of Canada are you from.

Mallory Tater: We are on the unseated territories Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh, and Tsleil-Waututh land of aka, Vancouver, BC.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic, great answer. So, let's get the ball rolling. And just to kind of get an idea of a bit of your background and history: How did you discover, like zines and chapbooks in this kind of like smaller publishing? When was the moment where you're like 'Whoa'?

Mallory Tater: I believe it was in my undergrad years. I did my Bachelor's in Creative Writing at the University of Victoria. My poetry instructor there was Doctor Tim Lilburn, and he introduced our class to a wide range of literary magazines, opportunities to get our own work published, and would bring in alumni and folks making chapbooks within the greater Victoria area. And we also have access to this amazing art space called Open space, which had interdisciplinary artists through galleries of their work, and I think the first time I went, was a giant bean exhibition. We just got to kind of have the tactile feel of them. So probably, yeah. So, in my undergrad years.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So, I wanna ask a little bit about the press history. Like, why did the press itself start?

Mallory Tater: We started because we were a group of fellow poets living in Vancouver, and we realized there weren't really any active small presses based here in Vancouver, and we thought we would fill that kind of void or gap in order to: one, support authors in their first debuts; and second, to have excuses, I suppose, to gather community, to celebrate these small books. And so, it was just kind of a gap within our own Vancouver writing community. And also, we were all graduating with our MFAs and wanted a reason to work towards something together outside of school, so it was quite a bonding experience. All volunteer work and super fun.

Tamara Thompson: Cool. I love, I love hearing how places start. It's always interesting, because everybody has their own reason, because it's a lot of work. So, I always find it interesting how these things grew and began.

Mallory Tater: And I-I don't actually think we realized how much work it was. We were very, like, just excited and keen, and all hands-on deck. I-I think we started with a larger kind of editorial board than a lot of small presses, to kind of share the—share the weight with our different roles. And so, I think that helped us sustain ourselves for a while. But I don't think we had any idea how much actual work it was going to be.

Tamara Thompson: Well, you don't know until you start doing it.

Mallory tater: Exactly.

Tamara Thompson: And I think the other thing, too, is like, once you start getting some of the major things behind you, then you see the vast ocean of everything else you have to do. And you're like, oh, I thought I was like making a lot more progress, because that seemed really big.

Mallory Tater: No. One hundred percent. And then we were also just getting such incredible support and great feedback and reviews and chatter, and so that really motivated us so, even though it was a little more—we were biting off a little more than we could chew. I think initially, we just felt like we had to keep going and keep it afloat because we were so welcome then received by, I thought the Vancouver community. But then it turns out, like, the writing community in Toronto and the writing community in Halifax—our books were getting sent out all over the place, so we kind of, that motivated us, I think, in the early days to keep going and see what this could turn into.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I—the reason why I'm, like, talking about, like, I do this is because I also do this. I have my own chapbook press that I started in 2020 which is probably one of the reasons why I'm so excited to talk to people are because I literally—

Mallory Tater: Hmmm—

Tamara Thompson: —couldn't even leave my own home and see people I liked. But I was doing this fun thing, and I couldn't really talk to anyone in the community, except for online, which is fine, but actually discovering people at markets, and, like, talking and having those, like, in-person conversations, and, like, connecting or even doing something like this was very rare. So, it's, like, for me, I was, like, someone finally let me out. I'm able to talk to people. Finally, this is great.

Mallory Tater: No. One hundred percent. It's such a cool way to connect with other writers as well. You have this, like, shared love of a particular author's work in common. And if you're part of actually bringing that into a physical object that ends up in their bookshelf, like, that's the most amazing kind of connection you can make with another writer, or just readers alike.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree. So, you talked a little bit about, like, why, the press actually started. But did you guys, maybe, have, like, a goal, maybe an editorial philosophy, or something along those lines?

Mallory Tater: Yeah, we always set out to publish work by authors who were kind of traditionally left out of the mainstream publishing. So, we were—we were definitely open to anyone's work. But particularly, we were looking for BIPOC voices. We were looking for queer writers. We were looking for writers with disabilities to try and platform their work. I always tell people who don't know what a chapbook is that EP and your full-length book might be equivalent to the full album. So, to give authors this platform to help kind of launch their career, or to get to connect with more writers through their work, we are definitely prioritizing folks who might not have the access to do so in traditional publishing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, there's been a lot of music comparisons, I-I've noticed, with chapbooks. Jamie Kitt and Emma Rhodes were both, like, yeah, it's, like, the concept album, like, not every album has to be a concept album, but, like, they specifically referred to chapbooks as just like this really fun, short conceptual idea. So, a lot of—I-I'm finding it interesting the musical parallels, because I do agree, "like an Ep" is a great comparison.

Mallory Tater: It is, because we also were like wanting to really be transparent with our authors, who were also, some of them, learning what a chapbook was. That's not always universally understood. So, for them to also know that the rights go back to them—just as with an EP, it can go into your full collection later. So they can still use those poems towards future publications. So, I think that distinction was a pretty, yeah, universally understood outline. EP's help.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I think so, too. So, what kind of work did you publish, like, what kind of, like, genres, were you? More poetry? Did you do some fiction? I just wanna, like, understand a bit of, like, the types of subjects and stuff that you were covering.

Mallory Tater: Yeah, absolutely. So, Rahila's Ghost Press was mainly all poetry, all poetry chapbooks, some more traditional to form. Some were one long poem, for example. Some were really just the writer's whole kitchen sink and portfolio at the time. Some were more specific concepts, you know, writing toward a particular film or date and time. We did publish over twenty-eight. So, it's hard for me to, I'm being kind of general.

Tamara Thompson: You're good.

Mallory Tater: But near the end we were really fortunate to publish, like, near the end of our last run, with Manahil and Nimra Bandukwala, their sisters. Manahil is a poet with a full-length book that came out last year with Brick and Nimr is a visual artist. So that was the first book we did in printed colour. Nimra did a sculpture to go with each of Manahil's poems about Pakistani folklore. So that one was a little bit more, I don't know, experimental for us. For the first time, we did have to charge a little bit more to print it in color, but it was well worth it. It turned out really beautiful.

Tamara Thompson: That sounds so goddamn cool.

Mallory Tater: I mean mainly poetry.

Tamara Thompson: I-I just had to add that in there, I love how experimental chapbooks can be, and I love, like, the mixing and the collaborative efforts, and I-printing in color, I applaud you. That is not easy. Keep things straight, and to make sure there's no errors, because you can. Like, oh, when the printer's ink doesn't quite do its job, especially with color. There's more room for error, or maybe that's just my laser jet.

Mallory Tater: No, no.

Tamara Thompson: Might also just be that.

Mallory Tater: Layout's really complicated. So earlier on, we had Shazia Hafiz Ramji, who's a writer doing—and she has lots of publication and lit mag experience. She was doing outline for us, and the pandemic happens, and I think she had other work. So, we decided to teach ourselves, kind of, in house. And so, Curtis Leblanc, our managerial editor, learned how to do all by himself. But I do think, by the time we were doing the colored, like, photo beside each poem, he was tearing his hair out. But it turned out great.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I don't—

Mallory Tater: It was worth it.

Tamara Thompson: God bless my designer Grace, who also does my layouts, and is also our last-minute proofreader.

Mallory Tater: Umm perfect.

Tamara Thompson: Look at all those amazing jobs, God bless! I can't see half the stuff she picks up on. It's great, and my editor is already blind to all the mistakes.

Mallory Tater: No, absolutely. And I think that's why it was so helpful that we had such a big team. There were, yeah, I believe seven of us at the start of the press. So, we would rotate who. An editor based off of who would be the best fit, who was available. That way, none of us got, like, too burnt out for any particular season. And then we would all, kind of, take a turn second reading. So, I mean, typos happen. There's a couple of our chapbooks in the early days. The table of contents doesn't, like, there are a few errors or doesn't quite match up and things like that. But we were able to help avoid most amateur disasters in the beginning, because we had so many readers on our team.

Tamara Thompson: Also like I-I find with chapbooks. When I see a little human error, I'm like, oh, that just adds to it, for me, you know.

Mallory Tater: That's a good way to see it.

Tamara Thompson: Like, yeah, even with my—even with my own books that we first did when we were, like, first starting out, I have a lot more grace

for them, especially now, because I'm, like, damn, you know, this was made by human and that's becoming more concerning that I can't tell the difference. But like that very human common spelling mistake, that spacing error the fact. We didn't punch the holes all in a line perfectly, cause we're still figuring out how to do that. And everything like that, you know, and I just-

Mallory Tater: No, I think, yeah, that's a good point. Like, chapbooks are this, like, handmade archive.

Tamara Thompson: Also, I-I'm also one of those people who get upset when they call, when the person calls up the publisher, "Like you have a spelling mistake on page thirty-two." And it's like, Gee, thanks. It's not like I printed a thousand of them already.

Mallory Tater: I know, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I really needed to be told that.

Mallory Tater: No, you have to forgive yourself later and try your best.

Tamara Thompson: Well, it would be different if it was a content mistake. That would be bad. But if it's a spelling mistake. Yeah. So, talking about process and all this stuff, I actually want to know a little bit more about what your process is like from submissions to editorial to like actually making the books physically? You're already talking a bit about it. But yeah.

Mallory Tater: Yeah, I touched a little bit, but I can go more in chronological order for us. We get a lot of submissions. We would take turns going through the inbox of them all and-and trying to see, you know, work that really popped out to us, really felt special, really felt like it was doing something interesting, and then, kind of, compiled them into another folder. And then we would have a meeting all to go through that folder once everyone on the team had read it. And so, what did we do? We did two seasons a year, three chapbooks at a time. So, six books a year on average, is what we publish. We would then send that author a contract, and we mostly paid in physical copies of the book. And that author would go back and forth with an appointed editor, either sometimes, by their request-they knew one of the poets on our board, and really wanted to work with them-or one of our editor's felt kind of a call towards that particular author or book, and they would go back and forth until they felt pretty satisfied, over a few months. Pretty low key. We didn't want our authors to feel like this pressing thing all of the time. We could always push back, you know, print runner deadline, if need be, which we did a couple of times, just to honor people's lives and process. And then we would print our books. So sorry. Nope, gonna go back a step: design cover, design. Every round up, with the three books at a time, we had-we hired a different graphic designer and that way the books would feel really distinct, each like biannually. But the three books at a time would kind of feel like they were in conversation, or like a set together, and that was always really fun. We chose a lot of designers, because we could only pay a pretty modest honorarium. So, we chose a lot of designers who were interested in gathering materials for their own resumes or grad

school applications. A few favors from friends in publishing did us up some beautiful design; someone's cousin, who just wanted to try it out. We were really open to different—working with different graphic designers and artists for our covers. We're very proud of our covers. And after that we would print them at Island Blue in Victoria, who were very good to us over the years. We formed a really good relationship with them. But they would print the books. We get a proof, you know, at first. Just like traditional publishing, you get a proof, and you look through it and flag any mistakes. That's why it was frustrating if we did miss it after that step, but for the most part that was—anything was caught during the proof round and then we would use Big Cartel, I think, was our yeah, our platform online to sell them. We would base our print runs off of pre-orders. How many pre-orders did we get/ What can we anticipate? Is the author planning on having a big launch, a Median launch, or a more intimate launch? So that way we didn't go flat bankrupt or in the hole each time, because it is just a labor of love. We weren't really paying ourselves out by any means. Just enough for the graphic designer to pay the authors in copies of their book, and to ensure we had enough money in our pre-orders for shipping. We would all get together and mail, here in my apartment, here, and it would be a couple hours, mail out. Everyone had a little different station. I was really—I liked camping, and so that was always a nice bonding experience. Sometimes we had just, like, volunteers who wanted to come hang out and do that with us and then off they went. And so, you know, that's from submission to actually getting them off in the mail.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, fantastic. So, you said that there are multiple people working on this project. How does the press, like, make decisions? So, you're talking a bit, kind of, about an editorial board. So, I'm interested in that.

Mallory Tater: Yeah, I would say, ultimately, like, my title was publisher. I suppose in some ways the press was kind of my baby, but everybody—I think we were kind of just this, like, very democratic. And how we made our decision once in a while, if we were caught between you know which manuscript felt right for us at the time, we would all kind of go away and come back with our ideas. So, a lot of discussion. I mean, sometimes a little bit of disagreement, but for the most part coming into a consensus altogether, was like really something we all valued. So, a lot of conversations, a lot of reading.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah naturally, lots of reading. So, you said that you mostly sell through pre-orders and a little bit of launches. But do you also do, like, markets? Is that—I'm a little interested also in, like, how you actually sell the books to people and where they are sold.

Mallory Tater: Absolutely. So we had—we were fortunate enough to strike up two great relationships with bookstores, one being, which is now closed, but Glass Bookshop in Edmonton. We would sell books, too. And then Massy Books, which is an amazing bookstore here in Vancouver. So they would physically carry our books in their stock, which is really neat and fun for local authors to go in and sign them or have an event there. And we also attended a couple of times on the Island a small press fest, where we'd have a table set up and do sales. But for the most part, we mainly

relied on our online store, particularly in the few years of the pandemic, right?

Tamara Thompson: Oh, yeah, big time—I—that's all—that's the only way I did it for a while.

Mallory Tater: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Especially when we first started, because, like, I'm not allowed to see anybody.

Mallory Tater: No, no, no.

Tamara Thompson: No one was going into stores.

Mallory Tater: No, absolutely. So, yeah, having the online platform already pretty well established by that, kind of, you know, plot twist in society, was a good thing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, agreed. So, I wanna switch a little bit more to some of, like, my authority kind of questions.

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, you have—I know you have a book with Book\*hug. But have you ever published like a chapbook, yourself? I'm interested to kind of know if you've done that for yourself.

Mallory Tater: No, no, I've—I've never published a chapbook, actually. It's something I've made my own. But just for me, like as far as just like an art experiment. Like I made some with my students last summer. We, I brought in a ton of art supplies, and we made very, like, crafty fun looking small books together. So, I have like found and done my own work in a tactile form. But I've never officially published a chapbook. I would say some of my friends have, and they're great. I think Anstruther Press, for example, does like really-really beautiful chapbooks. Frog Hollow. So, but no, that's something I haven't actually embarked on. I feel like by the time I'm ready to shop a manuscript, it's too big to be a chapbook.

Tamara Thompson: Right? Yeah. Would it be something that you would be interested in doing in the future, though?

Mallory Tater: Absolutely. I love, I love the tactile feel of the chapbook and yeah, I think I would want it to be a, really, like, specific concept of sort—rather than just an extract of my current larger manuscript, I think I would go out and write a chapbook that's strictly a chapbook.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, the concept album. It's very specific, and what it's supposed to be.

Mallory Tater: Yeah, so kind of converse to an EP, I would want this to be, yeah, absolutely, like, like, stand alone, concept.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I—I totally get that.

Mallory Tater: Maybe one long poem.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, you said that, and that really got my-my head turn in a little bit. There, I've actually been seeing if I can do something with, like, a graphic novel work, I got.

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Maybe make it kind of like accordion or scroll like, because it goes with the song. And I'm just, like, oh, a long poem would also be cool in that form.

Mallory Tater: Oh, that would be gorgeous. Yeah, I like that idea.

Tamara Thompson: Right, yeah.

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: See it works for the graphic fiction cause it's very much flowing with the song and goes with it.

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It's very fun. So, you need that flow to keep up with it. But I was, like, oh damn, for a poem that also be really cool-

(Technical issues occurred).

Mallory Tater: I am of the- I'm in the class that kind of always knew they wanted to do it. I believe I was in-six years old, grade one, and I think I was having a bit of a trouble with my confidence. I love telling stories. I loved scrawling down, you know, making little books and things like that. So anyway, I think I was maybe on the shy side. So, my mom, you know, with my full consent and enthusiasm and a little bit of nerves, decided to enter (technical issues occurred) storytelling contest they held in Vancouver when I was growing up here, and from that point onward I wrote a short feminist narrative called the *Dragon That Couldn't Blow Flames* and performed it. I did well in this contest, although that probably wouldn't have mattered because I was so little. I was just excited to be up there, even though I remember it being kind of scary. And then, from that point onwards, I was, like, okay, maybe my writing doesn't just have to be for me. Maybe it's something I do want to share. And I do want to see if people resonate with it. And I do want it to kind of yeah, turn in from this internal to external collective thing. Whether I was able to see it that way, at the time, likely not (laughs). But so from then on, I've just been writing ever since. I grew up, I moved to Ottawa as a tween, and then I went to Canterbury Arts High School. There I got in for writing, so I've been writing and workshopping and craft talking for a very, very long time now. So, I'm very fortunate. I kind of like got to really focus in on something I love from a young age and obsess over it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I love-  
(Technical issues occurred).



Mallory Tater: That's so sweet, I know, and it's something you still treasure, right? Like you love to story tell. I just think that's so wonderful, and to have you know, adult or, like, you know, figures in your life remember that, or who maybe, who helped—you know, helped you indulge and keep sparking that interest, I think, is so—I don't take that for granted, was very lucky in that way. A lot of us writers are very lucky that it was fostered rather than dismissed, because going into the arts professionally scares a lot of authority figures in your life as a young person.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, cause it's not easy, as a lot of it is about—like, one of the things I always tell my students is that the writer that gets published is not necessarily the better writer. It's the more persistent one that's the one, like—

Mallory Tater: Hmm.

Tamara Thompson: And keeps trying to evolve. And they're just, like, "What do you mean?" I'm like, "How many rejection letters did Stephen King get?" And because they're reading *On Writing* by Stephen King, and they're just, like, a lot. But he's also Stephen King. And I'm like, yeah. And he's also Stephen King, the guy who publishes like literally every year now. Like, he started with like mountains of rejections. And they're like, that's just because he didn't see his talent. It's like, no, that's because he worked on himself, and he kept trying.

Mallory Tater: Absolutely, absolutely. It should never be like a fixed thing. You always want to try something new. But that resilience can be exhausting. So, I—I get—I get both sides of that climb. It's not easy, what we do.

Tamara Thompson: No. And I tell my students it will never be easy. And it is not easy. That's why, when I have students be like, yeah, I'm going to become rich and famous by my writing, and I went, "Okay. So, first, publishing no money. I'm sorry to burst your bubble but, like, there's—you want money, don't go into publishing, man. But bad, bad first step. You'll be severely disappointed, and I'm so sorry you need to be told this now."

Mallory Tater: Absolutely. No, I think it's for those hard truths that honesty is important, and I think, like it's occupation versus vocation. A lot of the time.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Mallory Tater: Or both, but it is a vocation.

Tamara Thompson: One hundred percent. So, I'm also interested with some of the challenges that you've faced as an author. And you can take this in again whatever way you want.

Mallory Tater: Absolutely. I get rejected often. I also tried to write like nonfiction. When my novel was coming out, to write some articles talking about the themes in my actual novel to kind of help with

promotional material, because a lot of the time as a writer, you're asked to contribute and help with the marketing and promotion of the book, and I, for the life of me, could not get any nonfiction picked up anywhere. My agent and I sent out to a lot of different places, and I just don't think I have the ear or the gift for it, yet. So, it was like I was just, it's not that that genre is completely closed off to me. It's just, like, it's not a "right now." It's a "maybe later." So, learning that was, like, a little hard because I tried but it didn't—it doesn't come that naturally. So, I guess learning what doesn't come naturally and when what does, and applying to your strengths, while also still wanting to kind of dive deeper on craft-wise can be difficult. My first novel also came out March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020, which was a really bad time, if you're trying to travel and promote things and meet other people and go to readings. So, like all of the press and tours for that first book were cancelled and you know we all had a tough go in March 2020, no matter what kind of roles or jobs or things you valued. Like a lot was stripped away from us. So that's just something, like, I've taken with a grain of salt. But at the time, it was like, you know, a little disappointing, for sure, and I think it did set back actual sales, and me being able to kind of home in on talking more about the book and going to festivals and that sort of thing. So, I mean, that's the most—those are my two most, like, recent adversities I can think of.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think, especially because you said the timing. It was in March. It was right when everything was changing. If it had happened like in later spring, people would have already pivoted to, like, do all the online stuff. But you were right at that point before everything went down, and before we realized how much change had to happen for these other things to still go on.

Mallory Tater: Yeah, like, we didn't know what Zoom was as a collective then and so yeah, it wasn't just, like, "in lieu of in person, it'll be online." It was just, like, "No." And so that was difficult. I believe by the fall, though, I was able to do some online events and things like that. But I had a couple of events I was really excited about. I love people. I love community. That's why that RG press exists. So, I was excited to kind of have an opportunity to do those things with my own work. And so that's okay. It didn't quite pan out. But yeah, yeah, what are you gonna do?

Tamara Thompson: It's still okay to be frustrated, especially if that was your first experience. It's very exciting. And then you got cut off at the legs, so, like, I understand you—your mentality of "What can you do?" But I also understand the "Damn it!"

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: This was going to be fun. Now the world's on fire, and it's not fun, and I can't do my cool thing.

Mallory Tater: Yeah, yeah, I was holding both emotions, being like, well, my family's safe, but I'm also sad.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, my, my world isn't completely screwed over, but God damn it. Yeah.

Mallory Tater: Yeah. And I think a lot of authors, particularly debut authors, went through that at the time. I've met a few since, and, like, it was just universally tough for all artists, I would say.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I was in my tail end of my degree. So, I was in, like, my last semester of third year, and it was, like, well, you don't get to finish your college experience, and it's, like, cool.

Mallory Tater: I know. No, yeah. I really felt for the, all students at that time. You know, high school students, university. It was, yeah, it was so tough and isolating.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, they haven't fully recovered from that. As someone who teaches them, their anxiety is through the roof, like, it's crazy. I'll look at them all and be like, "It is okay. We are in a good environment. It's chill."

Mallory Tater: Hmmm.

Tamara Thompson: Good. It's only fifty min, lads, we'll be fine. And once I give that energy to them that, like, "Hey it's okay. We're here to have a good time. And I'm not going to like grill you like your high school teacher said." Because I teach first years. And then they're like, "Oh." And I'm, like, yeah guys we can have fun here. We're talking about comics and graphic fiction. Let's have some fun where we're writing poetry about hams. Or my favorite exercise is to get them to write a poem based off of a Garfield comic. They love that.

Mallory Tater: Oh, that's so fun! I love that.

Tamara Thompson: Isn't just, yeah, I love it.

Mallory Tater: Play with. Yeah, that's great.

Tamara Thompson: Well, it takes in something that they know so well, and that's so culturally known. Sometimes I do Peanuts or Calvin and Hobbs. But Garfield is like the universal figure, and there's so many comic strips. So, like, he is very much well loved, especially, like, with the weird Internet resurges he's had, which I love.

Mallory Tater: Right.

Tamara Thompson: Love that. *Eldritch God Garfield* is a whole other level of weird Internet. But it's great. So, I'm also interested in hearing some of the challenges that the press has had, because, again, you were talking a bit about the pandemic when it comes to your own writing endeavors. But also, that definitely affected the press, 'cause it affected my press.

Mallory Tater: No, absolutely, it did yeah. Our sales were a lot lower, because I think folks were buying less books, because it was hard for everyone to stay afloat and make money at that time. And people—a lot of

people were going on Serb in Canada. And there's a lot of uncertainty, a lot of layoffs. And so, I did find with more readers tightening their purse strings. Our sales dipped quite a bit in the pandemic, which is difficult for us, because we, you know, really only depend on pre-sales and-and sales. So that was a bit trickier, obviously, for our authors not being able to have in person launches to sell some of their books. I think our authors felt a little bit more isolated in the experience which was never the ideal.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Mallory Tater: Yeah, yeah. But I think there were some pretty successful-successful Zoom Events. Like you do what you can online, and yeah, so it definitely just kind of dimmed our light just a little bit there, for sure.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, were there any challenges that you've had to face throughout the, like, lifespan of the press, so far, other than the obvious pandemic?

Mallory Tater: I don't know if anything—if anything—I think we lucked out with the way that we kind of spread the weight of our press with so many people. So, we kind of avoided a lot of burnouts. Or, if someone was moving away, like, let's say, one of our editors was moving away. And when he was close by to work with us, or couldn't take on a particular editorial project, there was enough of us to kind of pick up the slack, here and there. So, it was actually quite a pretty well-oiled machine. I can't really—oh, I can think about inflation also affected our printing costs at Island Blue, and that was quite a big hit. No offense to them. Of course, you do what you need to do. But all of a sudden, yeah, their rates just skyrocketed, and that was a bit of a sting, for sure. So mostly financial stuff. But time and capacity-wise I felt like we were pretty-pretty okay.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Pretty good ecosystem.

Mallory Tater: We did have a pretty good ecosystem with a lot of, like, transparency and space. I think there was a couple times during the pandemic, particularly where we might have like skipped around because the authors weren't ready. we weren't ready, and we were just kind of, like, flexible on that. I think that's what's nice about a chapbook for us is. It's like, it's playful, and it's supposed to be, you know, fun, a fun endeavor, you know, it's supposed to kind of just have this, like, feeling of celebration. So, if ever that didn't really pass like the temperature check, we could just kind of defer it. So, we did a couple times.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Makes sense to me. And I also felt the inflation when I went to go buy ink, and I went into Staples and went "Why?"

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Whoa!

Mallory Tater: Oh, no—it's just—it was, yeah, it's just brutal. It's really hard for, yeah, artists, mom and pop to, like, keep up with that kind of—those rates. It's wild.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it-it got to the point where, like, near the beginning, I was, like, we're going through so much paper, 'cause we're fucking up so much. Put it in a box, and I'll pulp it and make my own paper. We shall not waste paper.

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Even all of my little notes here and stuff—It has all my questions. I'm writing down things you're doing, well, not, like, things you're saying, like, Island blue, and the Massy books.

Mallory Tater: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: But even this will be pulped and made into paper. So, I'm not allowed to keep this.

Mallory Tater: (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: So, I'll pulp it, 'cause I'm, like—I'm not wasting it.

Mallory Tater: Yeah, pulp it.

Tamara Thompson: Cause that's a lot of ink buddy. But yeah, so, I'm also interested in—sorry just to get back on track here. I'm also interested in what this kind of smaller publishing may have taught you over your time just doing it, right?

Mallory Tater: Definitely taught me—patience is the first thing I can think of because when you're working with other people, I'm a very organized. I say I'm type A minus, because I am a little relaxed. But I'm type A, very organized and I don't love things that aren't always in my control. But when you work with others you work with other artists, you want to honor creative processes, people's schedules and things like that. A lot of it is out of your control. So, you know, re-adjusting timelines and being flexible, I think to me that just taught me a lot of patience and also, good communication skills. Let's say the cover designer—as this is an example that came up quite often—let's say the cover designer, like, you know, misinterpreted, or had a really good draft, but it wasn't quite what the author had in mind. To be able to communicate that between both parties respectfully and to keep their working relationship, you know, strong and respectful, was something that, yeah, I had to do a lot of times. And I feel, like, I learned how to yeah, navigate different personality dynamics and things like that just to keep it, yeah, just to keep everyone happy and feeling supported.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, cause miscommunication can just happen.

Mallory Tater: I think, yeah, exactly. I think a lot of people skills for me were garnered and it's made me a better teacher. It's made me better

writer; probably made me better person. I don't know. I don't know how to measure that.

Tamara Thompson: probably.

Mallory Tater: I probably am a better person because of Rahila Ghosts.

Tamara Thompson: Chapbooks. They make you a better person?

Mallory Tater: Yeah, that's a great tagline.

Tamara Thompson: So why are chapbooks important to you? We've been talking about a lot of different stuff, but I want to ask the question more directly.

Mallory Tater: Yeah, absolutely. I think I like their tradition. I like the idea that a chapbook was just something that you could make with effort, but on the cheap and just dole out to friends and other poets. I love how tactile they are! I like how not messy, but how a little bit chaotic they can be. I like their archival purpose to just share your work in just a short bite. I like how beautiful they are, as art object. Right? To me there's book, and there's art object. And so somehow, these two things get to push against each other and complement each other, and that's a chapbook. I love them, and I like how you can read them in one sitting. No problem.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I love going back to like the music analogy, like, how you can just, like, sit and enjoy it in like, one sitting and also have the ability to reread, especially poetry. I love chapbooks that are poetry. Like, don't get me wrong I have my favorite collections.

Mallory Tater: Hmmm.

Tamara Thompson: The shortness I just love. Yeah, the-

Mallory Tater: Mmmm.

Tamara Thompson: The bite-sizeness of poetry.

Mallory Tater: Me too.

Tamara Thompson: So, are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not? Because so we're getting into-

Mallory Tater: Hmmm.

Tamara Thompson: Bigger picture, kind of questions.

Mallory Tater: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think a lot of—I think chapbooks are a pretty cherished tradition in Canada in that there are a lot of micro presses that have, you know, stood the test of time and are still—there's, you know, metaphorical doors are still open, and they give a platform to all kinds of authors. So I think they are really valued. I'll speak specifically within, like, the Canadian poetry scene: they're

very valued. But as far as, like, you know, as soon as the publisher gets a bit bigger, and it's more about the market and more about profit, I don't think that they can quite hold a candle to a full hardcover novel, because that is what more mainstream readers want to read. I think chapbooks are particularly for something that other writers like to exchange or-or hold amongst each other in a lot of ways. So, like, yes. And then also, I think there's a-a gap between how chapbooks-but don't quite make-always make it into the hands of yeah, I was gonna say, it's a mainstream readership in Canada.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm! Do you think they're important to like the publishing landscape itself, like in Canada?

Mallory Tater: I think there's-every year there's just such gorgeous work coming from other authors, and I think it can help the author themselves launch their career with a bigger publisher having kind of, you know, the first publishing experience. So, I think it's quite important, for I think they-they're a value to the author themselves. Do-yeah, but I don't know. I don't know exactly where the chapbook itself falls in the way of, like, the way the publishing landscape sees them. I don't know enough, I guess.

Tamara Thompson: I find we've been kind of talking about, like-I use the word ecosystem when talking about how your team worked and how the press actually ran. But I also think it's very true for publishing. You have your editors, and then your big publishing houses, your smaller publishing things, and I feel like, especially in Canada, it's such an ecosystem because there's like so much overlap. But then it's their own thing, and like, because Canadian publishing is like that big [shows small space between fingers]. The parents are like, "Oh, is, like, Canadian publishing like big?" And I'm like, "Oh, this big, actually." [shows small space between fingers].

Mallory Tater: No, not that big. And I think that actually makes the chapbook presses get more attention, and there is kind of, like, an intimacy there between-between the Canadian readership who does, like, chapbook. If you are a chapbook, reader, and really voracious about it, you probably have Canadian chapbooks on your shelf from almost every chapbook press that there is, right? And I think that's a good thing. I think it connects us in a, in a tighter way. Would it be great if it was expanded, and bigger and more inclusive? Like, for sure I would welcome to if they were even more, you know, popular. There are more presses, but for now I do think there is such a lovely sense of community among these micro presses and among the authors that come out of them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, this next question, take wherever you like. It's another abstract kind of question. Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way? And take that wherever you desire.

Mallory Tater: Hmm! You know what? When I-when I look at the books that we publish, I think it creates a beautiful mosaic of who of-of so many different voices and experiences of all Canadian authors. You know, we've published authors who are first generation Canadians, or who just arrived here or like recently, or are yeah, queer and trans writers working in Canada. So, different viewpoints of what it means to exist and live here.

We have a lot of books by indigenous authors who are challenging. You know the conception of, you know, living in this like colonial state, that you could say, is Canada, right? Like, I think we had all these books kind of pushing up against identity in interesting ways. So, I think if I spread our collection out, I would say, that's exactly the kind of Canada that we need—is what I see in those authors gives me a lot of hope. If I think about it that way.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, whenever I ask that question, it's—it's a personal favorite of mine to ask it, because I love the different directions people take it into, whether that be an international perspective, a more localized perspective, a more artist perspective. But one of my favorite things is, because I have to have a scope for my project, right?—Can't do the world. That would be a PhD. This is already getting into PhD territory—But, like, I had to for the Ethics Committee I was going to have to at some point define Canada and Canadian when I looked at my definition, and I went, oh, how do I? But what about this? And this and this? And it's like, what is Canada to begin with, you know? Like, where do we start even from there, you know? So, I love how people answer that because everybody's person—excuse me—Everybody's, like, definition of Canada or Canadian is so different because I remember being, like, I have to make sure that if I'm talking to, like, a Canadian who is published in Canada, but no longer lives in Canada, I can still talk to them because the Ethics Committee would come down really fast, like, “That wasn't in your definition.” and then I wouldn't be able to talk to them, or I'd get in trouble. So, I was like, I don't want to exclude Canadians who have left Canada, also, because they're still doing that stuff, you know?

Mallory Tater: Yeah, yeah. Totally.

Tamara Thompson: So, it was like, wow, I really have to, like, to expand this definition and, like, really think about it. And it got to the point where I showed it to my supervisor, and I was, like, that's, I did my best. Like, at the end I was, like, I did my best.

Mallory Tater: Absolutely. Well, and I think, like, to me, the role of chapbook can be, kind of, an empathy engine to see someone's voice on the page in bite-size form that can shift your own thinking, or make you question your own internal biases and things like that, just as all art does. But I think the chapbook does it in such an artful, accessible way. Yeah, I'm trying to think, actually, don't think any of our chapbooks really celebrate any kind of, like, Canadian identity. It's more, like, we just publish Canadian authors who exist here and...

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Mallory Tater: are resilient here and are challenged here and try to thrive here. So, I think that's yeah. Interesting question. I like that question.

Tamara Thompson: Thanks, worked really hard on them.

Mallory Tater: That's a good question.



Tamara Thompson: I can, I can only ask so many. So, I had to be very specific.

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So why do you think most small and micro presses like have to close up shop? Because it is true they are sometimes an ephemeral thing. They don't always last forever. So why do you think so many places have to close the doors or go on hiatus and stuff?

Mallory Tater: Time and money. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Literally, bare bones necessities to keep it going that are so hard to find, because it's not a major priority, right?

Mallory Tater: Yeah, you can't necessarily make a micropress your day job, so it's just about seeing it as like an incredible hobby of sorts, labor of love, a passion. You know, it's a hobby that has the role of a job. So yeah, I think you can only find so much time and capacity. And then to be able to fund that sustainably has been made extremely difficult in this end-stage capitalism we're living in.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so like, correct me if I'm wrong. But is the press on like a hiatus? Or is it just not accepting submissions, or like—I just want to make sure.

Mallory Tater: Yeah, yeah, yeah, we are temporarily retired. Yeah, we just, yeah, we gave up the ghost. Not really, though. The ghost, yeah, we're just taking a rest. Whether that's a few years we don't know, yet. I think it would be lovely to come back, in a bit. I, basically, like our whole editorial board, we all turned thirty, and it was all, you know, grad school chums of mine, and we all kind of entered our thirties and had to yeah, get full-time day jobs and then focus on our own writing. Some of us have gone on to, you know, consider what, like, our family lives will look like. And we have other responsibilities. Some of them are caretakers and things like that. So yeah, it was just a freeze in capacity, because I realized we weren't giving our authors the same attention, excitement and elbow grease that we were back in—when we first started. So, I think a break is the healthiest thing before we decide to move forward. So, I'd say temporarily retired.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Mallory Tater: With, yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's really understandable. Because, at my press, we're on hiatus currently, because I'm in my master's and I was, like, I, like—I'm the main person that pushes because I'm the head of press and everything like that. It was my brainchild that I brought—and I brought people into it and, like, if I'm not pushing, things won't get done, and a lot of stuff, like, we make the books here, right? We print them here, right? So, if I'm not here to—

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson:—do it, or someone else is not here under my roof, helping me do it or doing it themselves, it's just not gonna happen, right?

Mallory Tater: Yeah, totally.

Tamara Thompson: I like to say that we aren't part-time. We're extra time. So, when anybody has extra time—

Mallory Tater: Hmmm.

Tamara Thompson: So, when someone has the time to do something, that's when something happens.

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And we haven't been able to, like, publicly to say what we've been doing recently, because we are doing things. They're just very small, slow things. Because, whenever, because I have friends who started and helped me during the pandemic and it was our internship, actually. So, we could focus and like, put a lot of time behind stuff, right? Now we can't, because they need to pay their bills, they need to pay their rent.

Mallory Tater: Exactly. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: We can't be full-time anymore. You know?

Mallory Tater: So, Rahail Ghost, and with your press Whispering Wick, what is that, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Mallory Tater: Yeah. So, we're in the same boat. It's, like, yeah, I feel, like, until we can do our best again, 'cause we're hard on ourselves. We wanna do our best. We're just gonna wait it out. But I didn't want to say hiatus, because I—I like retired because I don't want people to send us work and get their hopes up, and that kind of thing. So, it's like, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: No! I—I understand.

Mallory Tater: Maybe like, with a cute little possible wink. But that's it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I—I understand the desire to use the term retired. I say hiatus because we're still more new at it. So, people—

Mallory Tater: Yeah exactly.

Tamara Thompson: —You were a blip. And it's like, no, I just had to go to grad school.

Mallory Tater: No, absolutely. And I hope it's something you pick back up afterwards. And you know, what? Yeah, in time, I hope we do, too. But maybe there was, like, really light chatter at one point of, like, passing

it on to another set of writers with the name and training them on how to do it. That could be cool, a package, if you will, like. I wouldn't mind sharing the experience if anyone wanted it. They would just have to know what they're getting themselves into, I guess.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that is one thing as a person who enjoys teaching and I guess is technically a teacher now, like Prof. person, I guess. I don't know. I'm a TA. Whatever. You know? I don't worry about it, but, like, as a person who does that, I want to teach a course on small press and actually get people excited.

Mallory Tater: Oh, you should.

Tamara Thompson: I love doing it, and I'd love running workshops where people make zines and stuff like that and teaching them about it, because the other thing is this is that so many people like a lot of my students, get very excited once they hear what my Master's is, because they had no idea it existed. Because they're always, like: "What are you doing for your research?" And I'm like, "Oh, chapbooks." They're like, "Oh, cool. What's that?" And I go "Oh. okay."

Mallory Tater: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: "Let me explain." And then they're like, "Oh, that's so fun!" And, like, the next day I'll have, like, a couple of artsy students, like, bring in some cool stuff. I'm, like, that's awesome. And they're, like, "Yeah, we tried it out." And I'm, like, "So fun."

Mallory Tater: No, that's great, and it can be such a cool, learning archive for students to, like—last year, my graduate class, last summer, I taught, we made chaplets at the end because we didn't actually have enough time to make whole chapbooks. We were only together a few days, and when we laid them out on the table, everyone's got their phones out like we made a little library, and it was so great.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's a lot of fun. And I think I had a similar course that introduced them to me in my undergrad. But it was just a self publishing course, so we also had to learn about other things. But my professor was like, "We're also going to learn about the fun cool side, which is zines and chapbooks." And we were tasked with making ten, and we had a little chapbook fair at the, for the last class, and then everybody could exchange. So, I still have some of those ones, and I think they're still, like—so Sheridan in our program has, like, a little archive of all of the students chapbooks that they've made in that class. And that's so fun, love, that.

Mallory Tater: That's so cool. Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: They had to add them to the library. But then they were worried because so many people put so many—so much effort into them, they didn't want people to take them out and then never come back. So, they made them part of an archive so that they would be preserved, to a degree. We were the first cohort to go through, so I remember when that decision was made, and we were all very excited.

Mallory Tater: That's so exciting. Yeah, yeah, it's a neat—you should teach a class on that one day. That would be great.

Tamara Thompson: I, it's more about getting people on board, you know.

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: This is an important thing that students—

Mallory Tater: I know.

Tamara Thompson: —able to learn about in-in school, and you should let me teach it. That's—that's the only the only kicker. So, we're almost done. We have about three questions left, and they're very much more room for sharing and just kind of open and just giving space. What's the thing that you wish maybe the public knew about Canadian publishing? And again, take that wherever you want. You can do big, small, personal.

Mallory Tater: I like that question. I'm gonna keep it pretty general of my first thought here. But it is, that's like a huge question I'm, like: do you have a week?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I know right.

Mallory Tater: So, I know, no—it's a good question, but it's like a big question. I would say I guess what I don't think everyone understands is that when you're picking up a Canadian book on a shelf, no matter what genre it is, the blood sweat, tears, possible rejection and timeline and artistic process that that author has gone through, and the fact that that author kind of navigated their way from submission to an actual art object or book on a shelf for you to then buy and read, and I think people don't understand, I think from the outside, looking in, you're, like, oh, that sounds hard. It sounds hard to write a book. And it is, like, it's messy, enjoyable, you know, all-encompassing, incredible. But I think what people don't realize is how hard it is to actually publish a book, and how many authors never make it there. They never get their work out of that inbox or spam folder, God forbid. And so, I guess, yeah, I guess, like, the process itself. So, by the time you walk into your local bookstore, or, I guess, Indigo, or wherever you know, if you're going in there and picking up a book by a Canadian author, how much labor and time has gone into that, you know twenty-two novels that you're buying? And that they beat the odds in so many ways. They're seeing way more manuscripts than they are able to say “yes” to, in the world, and it doesn't matter if it's a big press or small press. We rejected an RG way more than I ever thought we would. We were only taking like five percent, three percent by the end. I couldn't believe it.

Tamara Thompson: I know it's crazy how high that number goes up.

Mallory Tater: It's yeah—it absolutely is that. I think a lot of people that realize that they're, like, “Oh, you wrote a book; that's so great. Like, when's it coming out? Where, you know? Can I buy it at Costco?” And

I'm always like, "I don't know. Like it's so much more laborious and emotional, and, you know, rare, than that."

Tamara Thompson: Go to your local bookstore, order it from them. They're nice people. Go order from them.

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: That's what I always say when people are, like, oh, "Where can I get this book?" I'm like, "Well, you can go to Chapters, or have you heard of Take Cover, our local bookstore. They also sell it." And everyone's like "We, we have a local bookstore?" I'm like, "Yes, please go."

Mallory Tater: I will, no, absolutely. I just got our department at UBC to—this is, like, a humble brag, because I'm glad we and another colleague decided to finally ask like, why do we get all of our colleagues? We do, like, colleague, professional development, or like book club stuff, like: why aren't we getting these locals? Why are we getting these through our doors like from Amazon? And my-my colleague, the chair, was, like, oh, yeah, you're right, like, I love shopping local. Why are we doing that? So now we just get through local bookstores and a lot of them have like made it in the past few years. We gotta keep supporting them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I know it's, like, they're fantastic. Our one downtown also does, like, readings and stuff like that. They're very much into queer—

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: —Literature, and like they'll order anything you want, like.

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Mallory Tater: So, they, you know—the only downside is that they don't have scented candles, I don't know, like, and keep up.

Tamara Thompson: I get my home goods from Home Sense.

Mallory Tater: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: It'll be cheaper, and maybe last longer.

Mallory Tater: I mean, I think also, to, like, my conscience is a little fair shopping at local stores these days, anyway.

(Technical issues occurred).

Mallory Tater: Yeah, exactly. And with—that's like zero point zero one tacking that onto my answer to your saying the other thing, I wish that like the mainstream, you know, average Canadian reader knew, Yeah, I

guess, like, how much money the author putting in their own pocket, or you buy their art. I think that not that, like, it's—it's just interesting. I think it's—it is something a lot of people don't know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, they're absolutely flabbergasted. They're, like, the author doesn't get fifty percent. And I'm like, yeah, no. Why would you think the publisher is the one that makes it. You gotta pay the people who made the book.

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And they're, like, but then why does Chapters take so much? And it's like because they have a monopoly. That's how monopolies work. And they're just, like, "What do you mean? I hate this place, though." And I'm like, "Well, welcome."

Mallory Tater: No, it is eye opening, so I guess I wish that was more, like, I guess, public knowledge.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, one hundred percent. I totally get that what's something about like the D.I.Y. press history or something in the chapbook or zine scene that you wish maybe people knew about. I never hear about something unless I am told about it, or I stumble upon this really cool thing. I've learned so many new things by asking this question. And it can be a moment that happened in history, but it could also be, like, hey, I saw this really good chapbook where you could knit the poem that was really cool, right? So, like, even just, like, a single object, or even something that you made, that you wish, like—

Mallory Tater: Right.

Tamara Thompson: —that you wish people knew more about, like, just the fun stuff that, like, is cool and interesting.

Mallory Tater: Hmm.

Tamara Thompson: Because the best way to keep this sort of stuff that's alive and known is to just tell people about it.

Mallory Tater: No, absolutely. I can think of... what do I want people to know that is interesting? I can't remember what book this was, is the only problem. But there was a chapbook that was just made of different scents, was very experiential, and I liked it. I thought, it's small press that in Victoria last year. But again, unfortunately, I can't remember the title at this point, but it was just, yeah, a chapbook filled with different scents that send you on different experiences to scent memory so powerful. And I hope that was kind of playful and interesting and would be a fun collectible of sorts.

Tamara Thompson: So fun. Yeah, so fun.

Mallory Tater: I just can't remember what it's called. So maybe do a little digging, and see if there's, like, copies, or I'll have to look it

up. If I look it up and figure out what it is, I'll send it to you. It was a couple of years ago.

Tamara Thompson: That's really cool.

Mallory Tater: Now I wish I had bought it, but I mostly just like played with it at the table. And it was really, really cool. One of my favorite chapbooks, too that's by a poet that a lot of Canadians really like, is Kayla Zagan. I think a lot of people don't realize she had a chapbook come out. I'll put it in the chat for you, but it's about Stalin and Russia, and I think it's quite interesting, and it's about her own family heritage but not-sorry that auto, corrected Kayla Zag-Kayla Zagan's *Enemy of the People*. It's one of my favorite chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: I love her work so much.

Mallory Tater: Well, I know, and a lot of people didn't realize that she published a cheeky chapbook in between her other books. So yeah, I- that's also something I'd like people to know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. *Dunk Tank* was also such a great collection.

Mallory Tater: I love that book. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I-It's one of the books that I recommend to my students. I'm like, "Do you want to get into some cool poetry?" Because they're all terrified.

Mallory Tater: Okay, yeah, it's so fun to share with, yeah, because it's just pat-it just like captures the, like, humor and embarrassment and restlessness of, like, youth, so well. So, I feel like reading it with younger students. It always resonates.

Tamara Thompson: Well, not even just that. They. They realize that, like, there can be more experimental things and find it doesn't have to be all stuffy, grand, like the Muse, Greek gods, kind of like enlightenment.

Mallory Tater: That's true. It can be colloquial and first person and specific. And yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Personal. Not, like, it can be personal on the small way, not in the grand, momentous "I've written this for the first time, and no one's ever written it before," kind of way. Because sometimes I think they get in their head about it. And I'm like, yeah, man, you can, like, that's the other thing. I like showing them random poets that are, like, writing really cool stuff, or things that are doing things with sound and visuals like Joshua Whitehead, like.

Mallory Tater: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: My students are like oooooo...I have one which I can't remember the name of the poet, but she's fantastic, and the poem is "How to Triumph like a Girl," and it's just so good. And they just realize they're, like-like it's immediate, readily recognizable, is, like, power

and strong women. But she didn't say power and strong women. And I'm like, "See?" And they're like, "Whoa." Okay, so this is my final question, and it is usually the hardest question for people.

Mallory Tater: Okay.

Tamara Thompson: What's something that you wish people knew about your history, or something you've done?

Mallory Tater: Hmmm, my history, as in the capacity of author, in the capacity of publisher, of a chapbook in the...?

Tamara Thompson: Anything you want to share.

Mallory Tater: Hmm, good question.

Tamara Thompson: It's a hard question.

Mallory Tater: Yeah. I think even though it's not like a—it's not like a huge secret, because it is on RG's website, but I will answer this with an RG kind of lens. With *Rahila's Ghost*, I get asked this a lot, like, what is the name like? What? Who is Rahila. What does that name mean? So, while it's pretty easy to go on our "About" page, or, like, founding history and figure that out, I will say I would be excited for more people, that are interested in what the name is, to know it. So, I'll just speak to that quickly, which is that I got a research trip. So, look at my Romanian ancestors who came over here escaping like famine and war, and you know a totalitarian regime in the early 1900s. And they lived on the prairies where the Canadian Government said they could have, if they could tame the land. They could keep what they—their acreage or whatever, and they lived in, like, sod homes made of like blocks of straw and mud. Sounded pretty grim, pretty horrible, and my great grandmother, who came over with her husband and baby was Rahila. When we went—I went to Regina to do research to look at where their sod home might have been, and where this town was called Dysart, in the parish registry of the Orthodox Church. There—they said that she died at age twenty-six and translated from Romanian. Her death was extraordinary, which I still don't know what that means. She's not buried with her family. Her husband, I think, was speculated to be abusive, and remarried someone else, and had another family with her after Rahila died when she was twenty-six. And so, anyway, I just like the idea of, like, a story being unfinished or unanswered—is, like, haunts me a little bit. And so, the idea of, like, loving to story-tell and taking some women in my own matrilineal sense of who I am, and how I became a storyteller, forward through the press was something I wanted to do. And I also just thought I like horror and haunted things, and speculation in all ways so, like, to depersonalize it slightly, too, I just thought something ghost would be an appealing, interesting name. And so that's where the name comes from.

Tamara Thompson: That's really cool.

Mallory Tater: Kind of, like, yeah—it's, like, honoring someone I wouldn't have ever gotten to meet, but who I still have a lot of questions about.



Tamara Thompson: Yeah okay. Do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording?

Mallory Tater: No, I think I've like-like I've overshared. There you go.

Tamara Thompson: No, that's fantastic. Okay, I'll stop the recording.

Paul Vermeersch

Tamara Thompson: Hello, my name is Tamara Thompson. The date is May 15<sup>th</sup> it is . . .just turned 3 o'clock. A reminder that all of this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out within the deadline of a week after the interview is taking place. The interview for this transcript is for small press and traditional press and author, as per the participants request.

Paul Vermeersch: My name is Paul Vermeersch. I am a poet, literary editor, creative writing professor, visual artist, experimental musician, among other things. I have worked as the poetry editor for Insomniac Press 2001 to 2012. I have worked as the senior editor of Wolsak and Wynn publishers Limited and 2012 to the present day at Wolsak and Wynn spring of 2014, so, ten years ago as of this call I launched my own imprint at Wolsak and Wynn, called Buckrider Books that publishes poetry and fiction. I have been peripherally involved in other small presses as a freelance editor. As an author, I've published five books with ECW Press, and two books with McClelland and Stewart. I have been the editor of two anthologies. In 2001 the Ivy Lounge reader came out with Insomniac press, and in 2009 *The Al Purdy, A Frame Anthology*, was published by Harbor publishing in British Columbia. And I have self-published a number of small pamphlets and chapbooks and things of that nature and I have published some chapbooks with-with other people over the years and I'm not sure I would have clear list in my head of all those things. Stuart Ross published a chapbook of mine many years ago under his Proper Tales, perhaps imprint. Poet Jennifer Lovegrove published a chapbook of mine in 1999, under the imprint Wayward Armadillo press and there have been others. Carlton Wilson's Junction books published a chapbook of mine in about 2002, and I'm not sure I can remember much else.

Tamara Thompson: That's okay. You gave me plenty. So, thank you very much for that. And the only other thing I-I would ask just for forms and stuff like that is, what part of Canada you're from, and your pronouns.

Paul Vermeersch: I was born in Mississauga, in 1973, I spent my childhood, the earliest parts of my childhood growing up in London, Ontario. Most of my young life growing up in the, in Sarnia, in and around the Sarnia Ontario area. Went back to London for my undergraduate education, the early to mid 90s and have lived in Toronto since 1997.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you.

Paul Vermeersch: Between-between Western and moving to Toronto, I-I spent about a year living in Poland, where I taught at the English language Teachers Training College of which was my first teaching job outside of underground and I have-I have lived in Toronto since Fall of 1997.

Tamara Thompson: Thanks, Paul.

Paul Vermeersch: Pronouns are he/him, although pronouns do not offend me, except it.

Tamara Thompson: Well.

Paul Vermeersch: And anything else?

Tamara Thompson: That's it for the intro, I think.

Paul Vermeersch: As a, as a creative writing professor, I am employed at Sheridan College, where I do, where I mostly teach and the honors bachelor of creative writing and publishing program, since-since it launched in 2017.

Tamara Thompson: Alright! Why did the small press start? This is a very open question. But like, why did some of the small presses start that you have been a part of? Maybe the imprint that you were part of.

Paul Vermeersch: I can talk about the imprint. I can, so, I didn't start any of the presses I've been affiliated with. I've been employed by them as an editor. I can talk about Insomniac press; Insomniac Press started as a chapbook press. The publisher, Mike O'Connor, was in-in those early days, and I think this goes back to the early 90s. At one point he was employed by McClelland and Stewart, and was interested in publishing his own work, and-and-and-and publishing other people's books, and starting his own press and, as far as I know, Insomniac Press started as a chapbook press, and-and some of the earliest publications were Mike's own-own publications, and it evolved from there into-into a press that published perfect bound books, poetry, fiction mostly, some nonfiction and by the time I moved to Toronto in 1997, Insomniac was emerging as one of the hot new presses on the scene, and Insomniac always seemed to have the biggest launch parties and-and a lot of the, a lot of the independent publishing scene. Now, keep in mind in small press, independent press, traditional press. All these terms are amorphous and don't really have clear definitions. So, by independent press, in this case, I mean not one of the big five, an independently-owned Canadian publishing house that is not affiliated with Random, Penguin, Simon and Schuster, Harper Collins, any of those. So yeah, in those days Insomniac was in its ascendancy and a lot of the scene, which was very active in those days seemed to, circulate around a handful of presses and Insomniac, being sort of the new kid on the block, and therefore very exciting. And some of the first events I attended Toronto were Insomniac which always seem to be big and-and full of interesting. And so, it became sort of a-a goal of mine in-almost immediately to get involved with press and when the poetry editor prior to me moved away, and I think, I think ended up living in Phoenix for a spell, I asked Mike O'Connor, who you're gonna get to be your new poetry editor? Yeah, I had, I had by this time been running a reading series in downtown Toronto, for a number of years, called The Ivy Lounge Reading Series and had published with Insomniac press an anthology called the Ivy Lounge Reader which was, an anthology of-of poets and fiction writers who had appeared at my series and that Ivy Lounge Reader, was based on an anthology from New York City that emerged out of the KGB Bar reading series called the KGB Reader, or the KGB Bar Reader and I saw that anthology in a bookstore, and I was, like, I have to do this for my reading series and so that anthology, the-the Ivy Lounge Reader came out in 2001. And-and so I asked Mike, who's gonna be your new poetry editor? And he said, I don't know. And I said, it's me. And he said, okay. And it was the, the, the boldness of youth. I didn't really know what I was

getting myself into, but I'd had a good time making that anthology and running the reading series, and I felt, I felt fairly plugged into the-the poetry scene. Enough that I could books together. So that's what I did, and I did that for ten years or eleven years, and over that time Mike had moved away, he had relocated press to London, Ontario. So it wasn't that much of a it wasn't so present on the scene anymore. And kind of the-the culture around book launches had kind of changed, and we didn't really have those big parties anymore. And I can't speak for Mike, but it seemed to me that the energy of the press was in decline, and the press no longer exists. So, think that tore out to be somewhat true and are the-and I also felt that I had accomplished everything I could accomplish in that framework. It was around that time that Noelle Allen of Wolsak and Wynn publishers approached me to become her poetry editor. She had approached me once before and said, want you to come and be my poetry editor? And I said, I'm already the poetry editor of a press, and it just seemed like a lateral move, and I didn't really have an impetus to move like that and then she approached me again. That was sort of I had already begun to feel that maybe gas and Insomniac was kind of running out or that I had accomplished everything I could accomplish there and moving over to-at that time moving over to Wilcock and wind seemed like an opportunity where I could do more. And the agreement to create a new imprint was sort of hashed out, and-and at that time Wolsak and Wynn wasn't really publishing fiction, and I was interested in publishing fiction. So, I worked out as part of this agreement, I would come on board, and I would take over the poetry list and I would introduce a fiction list, and we would combine those into my new imprint called Buckrider Books. So, I started working there in about 2012, and it took about two years to put the imprint together. So, the imprint was launched in spring 2014 I probably edited, six or seven or eight books that weren't Buckrider books before we officially launch that imprint and also as part of those original meetings, I thought it would be fun if I said, you know, you want me to come on board and be editor. But can I be senior editor? And there was nobody under me so sure, you could be, you title could be whatever you want, and I still, they still have the business cards let's say senior editor on them and my-my role at Wolsak and Wynn has changed a little bit over the years. At one point I instituted an editorial advisory Board. The first iteration of that board was made up of Canisia Lubrin, Jen Sookfong Lee, and Jordan Abel and they all sort of came on board to-to help me build Buckrider books as an imprint and Canisia brought in a number of poetry titles, and edited them, and Jen Sookfong Lee brought in a number of fiction titles and edited them and Jordan was there mostly in an advisory capacity and after a few years everyone sort of moved on. Jordan wanted to focus on his own work and his-his academic career and, I think, ultimately resurfaced as part of Coach House books, editorial board for their poetry list and, which is a much larger board and more of a voting board, and I think it suited him; and Canisia moved on to become, on the one hand, poetry editor at McClelland and Stewart replacing Dionne Brand, who had moved on to build a new imprint called Alchemy books, which I think is published through Knopf Canada and Canisia also into a position where and I'm not sure exactly sure what the job title is, but like program coordinator the MFA and creative writing at the university of Guelph.

Tamara Thompson: Oh.

Paul Vermeersch: Jen Sookfong Lee left my board to become acquisitions editor at ECW Press. So, I was also sort of viewing my-my board, also is sort of like a like a training ground for editors who might then move on.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: Who could move onto larger roles elsewhere and I after that I brought in Liz Howard who came on board to kind of pick up some of the slack with our poetry titles, and she brought in a number of titles, and-and edited a few of those and I brought in the Mahak Jain, who had been the admin person at the University of Guelph MFA program and had-had subsequently joined our faculty at Sheridan and I brought Mahak in as kind of like a, an advisor for the fiction list and after a couple of years Liz stepped away, after having been hired into a tenure track job at Concordia University and needed to focus on her academic career- (technical issues occurred) I said the door is always open if you ever want to come back, otherwise thank you. And I have subsequently brought on board to our, to the Buckrider editorial board Natasha Ramoutar who has just joined and is also one of our poets who I have acquired, and whose second book will be publishing this Fall called *Baby Cerberus* and her first book, *Bittersweet*, was published a few years ago by Mawenzi House and so Natasha first joined us as an author and then I thought she would be a good fit for the board and I have walked her through the steps of acquiring her first title as acquisitions editor, and she's now at work editing it and so I'll be mentoring her and the editorial side of things and that's kind of where we're at now. So Buckrider books has been around now for ten years, in that ten years we've published seventy, or eighty books all poetry and fiction. And that's more books than I published in the in the eleven or so years I was at Insomniac because I've been doing at least three or four books a year, mostly four books a year at Wolsak Wynn and I was only doing two or three books a year at Insomniac.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, that's quite a big back list of books that you've been able to accomplish. And ten years, right?

Paul Vermeersch: I've been editing professionally or if we want to say like, when I when I became well, prior to becoming poetry editor at Insomniac, I was, I almost forgot about this, I was the editorial assistant at Thomas Allen Publishers, which no longer exists as an independent, as its own company. But I was the first editorial assistant when Thomas Allen Publishers started as an offshoot of Thomas Allen and Sons Publishing, which was a-a lot of different things over the years, but at the time was just a large distribution company but had been in the early part of the twentieth century, had been, and a-a trade publisher in the Toronto area and the-the owner at the time Jim Allen family business wanted to return to. And so hired Editor Patrick Crean to start a new imprint called Thomas Allen, publishers Limited, and in the well, Patrick was getting things started first hired Katya- (technical issue occurred) first managing editor of Thomas Allen Publishers, and then, shortly after that hired me as the first editorial assistant, and I was there for about a year and then after that I, that's it's, that sort of leads into me, joining Insomniac as poetry editor.

Tamara Thompson: Nice.

Paul Vermeersch: So, if you include Thomas Allen, I've been in publishing in one capacity or another professionally. Did Thomas Allen start? I don't know. I can't remember.

(Technical issues occurred).

Paul Vermeersch: I've been doing, I've been doing it for, you know, over-over twenty years.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: Yeah maybe, almost twenty-five years. Thomas Allen folded in like 2013, and Dundurn Press bought their backlist.

Tamara Thompson: Hmmm

Paul Vermeersch: And sort of half ardently kept the imprint alive for a little while Thomas Allen Publishers as an imprint of Dundurn, but they actually, I think they eventually just did away with it kept the backlist and Patrick, of course, moved on to Harper Collins, where he started Patrick Green editions his own imprint there and I think he's, I think he's retired now. And so, that's me in terms of trade publishing as an editor. Books I've worked on over the years have won the Governor General's award, have won various sort of provincial awards. Saskatchewan Book award, BC Book award, Trillium Book award. One of two, two, two of the novels I've published have been long listed for the Giller prize. So that's me in trade publishing and I would consider all of these to be independent presses, and I would, I would characterize Insomniac press, and Wolsak and Wynn as small presses. And of course when we talk about the small press as-as sort of like a collective noun that that means different things to different people, and for some people it evokes sort of like chapbooks, zines, ephemera, and that kind of things and-and for some people it also includes small literary presses like Wolsak and Wynn, like Insomnia, perhaps, like Coach House books like Brick, and things like that. And there's like a like a mid-size sort of press which is almost like as big as Canadian publishing gets. ECW press I would consider a mid-size press Harbor publishing out in BC would be a mid-size press, maybe even Goose Lane, in New Brunswick be a mid-size press. Big presses when we talk about big presses in this country. We're mostly talking about multinational. I think, I think for a while the-the only big press that was Canadian was McClelland and Stewart. And now that's owned by Random House, which is owned by Penguin and Random. And I did publish two books with McClelland and Stewart but when I published with them, they were still an independent. So, all of my books have come and some people, when they say independent publishing what they're, is just euphemism for self-publishing. So, all of these terms get kind of kicked around.

Tamara Thompson: Yep, I've been having to do a lot of definitions of terms specifically for my thesis, just so that everyone's on the same page as what I mean when I'm using the term, because it's, is interchangeable, like, what's the difference between micro and small and like to different people it means different things. Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: A lot of times when people talk about the small press. What they're talking about are what I would consider to be micro presses. So, if you shop at the small press book fair mostly what you're getting are like chapbooks and broadsides and zines, and that kind of thing and I consider that to be my, so I will endeavor to clarify what I mean as much as possible about these things. Am I giving you the kind of background information that you need?

Tamara Thompson: Yes, it's kind of covering some of the stuff that I was interested in, because *Insomniac* they are no more, I was interested in some of that, and to hear that you have some background on that that was good to hear. And then the imprint that you made at Wolsak and Wynn, but would you mind if we move on to the next question, because I am interested to know how you discovered zines and chapbooks like, how did you like stumble into this world?

Paul Vermeersch: That's a good question I would say. Most of my exposure to this part of the publishing landscape came from what used to be called the Toronto Small Press Book Fair that was started by Stuart Ross and Nicholas Power, I think back in the nineties and that-that entity the Toronto Small Press Book Fair was run by different people at different times, and I wouldn't have an accurate account of who was running it when but it kind of petered out in the mid-aughts and I think I think maybe it had been, maybe I don't know what happened.

Tamara Thompson: It was where you discovered all of this kind of publishing?

Paul Vermeersch: Even a little earlier than that. Like I moved, I moved to Toronto in fall '97, and I probably went to my first like small press book fair, either-either that fall or-or the following spring, because it used to happen twice a year. It'd be a spring one and a fall one. After the Small Press Book Fair kind of fell apart. A bunch of small press workers got together and formed the Meet the Press is collective and its kind of, and they started up a new-new market, to kind of take its place. And that's as far as I'm aware, that collective is still going and still planning market events and in fact, last fall there, at the invitation of the Ampersand Review of writing and publishing which I edit. So that's another thing we haven't talked touched on yet, is journal editing. We did a two-day literary festival out at our Hazel McCallion campus location and invited The Meet the Presses collective to have their-their fall literary, independent, literary market as part of our two-day festival. And they did. And so, I don't know that they're gonna do it again right away. I think we might just put together our own book fair for the next one but yeah, that that collective still, is still in operation and still doing, so I went to one of these small press book fairs in either 1997, or 1998, and was just blew my hair back so many wonderful creative brilliant little things, and sometimes they'd just be like in a run of like ten. Absolutely not commercial, absolutely grassroots art for art's sake and I fell in love with that, and that's you know, and-and similar things happened in other cities. There's the Ottawa small press book fair that I think Rob is involved in that sure there's something in most-most of the big cities.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think there's one in Montreal too.

Paul Vermeersch: So that's, I had seen chapbooks prior to that, but I had never encountered the culture of people getting together to buy, sell trade, read handmade micropress, ephemera. I just loved that. I loved the community building aspect of it. I loved the non-commercial aspect of it. I love that you could like make something (technical issues occurred) fold it over and staple it and sell it for five bucks twenty copies of it. Maybe you make a hundred bucks.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: So, I would go to pretty much every small press book fair event I could possibly go to for years and I still enjoy going whenever I get the chance to Meet the Press is collective in the literary market whenever it happens, and these things have to be local grassroots the more handmade the better. And so, it was probably yeah, it was probably through the-the small press book fair that I first sort of engage that scene, and-and I just thought it was awesome.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: Important part of this sort of the-the writing and publishing ecosystem.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Paul Vermeersch: Almost like a plankton.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Paul Vermeersch: It's the, it's the, it's the bottom of the food chain. In a way, as everything grows.

Tamara Thompson: That's-that's one of the core principles of my thesis is understanding how chapbooks fit into this ecosystem, and I keep using that term. And everyone, when I say it the email like, yeah, it is an ecosystem like.

Paul Vermeersch: Yeah. And I mean, it's a place to take risks, creative risks. It's a place to be to build community. To discover new voices, to be a new voice, to share. So, there's a lot of fruitful cross pollination exchanging of sort of genetic creative material. That I think, also helps the scene evolve and in some ways some of that community building or community engagement has moved into cyberspace in some ways, but nothing beats the face-to-face you know a few hundred people getting together in one room and just seeing stuff and touching it, and being very tactile. I don't know that I'll ever enjoy reading something digitally as much as I enjoy paper, and especially like handmade small run things.

Tamara Thompson: Different experience to do it online than it is to actually hold and feel something that someone has actually taken the time to create.



Paul Vermeersch: The tactile nature of it. The-the objectness of it, the physical nature of like the object. That's what I love about it. So and-and-and like chapbooks and chapbook presses, and the people involved in it. Scenes also go through phases and evolve and change. And as we've seen like this Toronto small press book fair kind of get big, and then kind of peter out and then Meet the Presses collective rise up and-and it has changed over time as well. There's the only constant is evolution is change. Yeah. And in that case, it-it also the metaphor of the ecosystem is about. Systems change. There is erosion there are population explosions. There are-die offs, wildfires.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: It's always there.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, a constant. I'm again gonna like, I think everything that you're mentioning is absolutely wonderful for the interview. (Technical issues occurred) What are some of the presses like philosophies, or maybe the goals that some of these presses have had that you've encountered from either being an editor or an author? I'd like to get a bit of that range if you, if you would.

Paul Vermeersch: I mean, sometimes these presses have slogans, and I don't know that slogans function as mission statements.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: Like House of Anansi, for example, their slogan is House of Anansi publishes very good books and it's-it's, I mean, it's kind of basic. It's kind of true. And umm, but I don't know that that kind of factors into any kind of a mission statement. Also, Anansi, I would also say, is a mid-size press, to be a small press. It's now a mid-size press. When I first encountered House of Anansi in my professional life, it was, it had three employees and was owned by, or housed in general publishing Stoddard and I don't know if it was an imprint of Stoddard or just sort of housed there.

Tamara Thompson: Can't remember the details on that one.

Paul Vermeersch: When Stoddard failed, when General folded and Anansi survived, I think, because Scott Griffin bought it, and it has since grown into a larger operation. But at the time it was three people. It was Martha Sharp was the publisher, Matt Williams was the sales guy and there was a in there named Adrian, whose last name is escaping was like the managing editor, editorial assistant, or something. So, it was just three people. And when you have a small press and three people are running it, it's like everyone does everything, and then everyone does everything else.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Paul Vermeersch: I mean the presses I've been involved in to start with Insomniac, and then later, Wolsak and Wynn. And then there's very much an awareness that a small independent press can make creative risks that the

big multinationals are averse to. And it wasn't always the case that larger presses were-were averse to sort of commercial risks. I would say that Jack McClelland who was the publisher and owner of McClelland and Stewart and let's say, mostly like active from the late '60s all through the '70s into the early '80s. His tenure as publisher of McClelland and Stewart, was marked by making some pretty out there decisions. And just he was really interested in literature and-and-and what makes a exciting book, and probably published a lot of books that McClelland and Stewart wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole today. I don't think McClelland and Stewart today would publish a, some Mordecai Richler books that came out back then specifically *Cocksure* and maybe *The Incomparable Atuk* I don't think I don't think McClelland Stewart today publish those novels by Leonard Cohen, I mean, I know they still do.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: And because he's Leonard Cohen. But if someone else had written, that somebody, if somebody they'd never heard of had written *Beautiful Losers* or *My Favorite Game*-or *The Favorite Game*, they wouldn't publish them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: You know? They're two out there, too much sex, too much, you know, and are things like Marian Engel's *Bear*. They wouldn't do it, but they did back then. All that risk taking kind of got pushed down the food chain a little bit so, and small operations, you know expect to sell smaller numbers of books, so they're more willing to take risks commercially, artistically and at some level artistic risks and commercial risks are the same risk. So, the-the answer to your question is like, what's the philosophy? What's the-the organizing principle of these small presses? I think I think by and large the small press strata of the ecosystem, the small-small presses everywhere see themselves as risk takers, as discoverers as developers we find the talent, we take risks on the talent, we develop writers and their careers, and if at some point they become successful enough or interesting enough to the larger presses that they can sort of graduate and get paid more money and reach-reach a wider audience. Then we're happy for them you know. If, speaking for myself, if one of my authors says I, I'm publishing my next book with-with Penguin because they're paying me ten times as much money, and I'm gonna reach a larger audience. I say that's awesome; congratulations. I don't get territorial about stuff like that. But maybe that person wouldn't have reached that opportunity without working with a smaller press first, like us. So, I think, I think most of the people who work in small press publishing independent Canadian publishing specifically, are aware of their role at sort of this level to take artistic risks, to take commercial risks to invest in author's careers and-and a lot of this sort of I'm talking about, suggests that what I'm talking about is discovering emerging writers and investing in them that way. But there's also the other side of it, where writers go to the big presses the multinational and then end up in the mid list, and then kind of fall out and-and sometimes a, we-we pick up authors who maybe gone to the multinationals and not seeing that kind of commercial success that might have been possible. And big presses aren't as interested in investing and author's

development as they were kind of, like you've got maybe two bucks to make a commercial success. And then but yeah, these are still really great writers. And so sometimes authors come to us that trajectory as well. It's-it's not just about discovering new talent. It's-it's about, it's about finding a place for books that are that are great and that for one reason or another the multinationals don't see commercial potential. But then our criteria can be, and I'll speak mostly for myself, but I think I'm not alone in this, instead of commercial potential, I'm interested in literary potential. How good is the book. How interesting is the book. How necessary is the book. How unnecessary is the book. Maybe that's exciting. And book net numbers and projected sales, and all those kinds of things don't necessarily have to factor into editorial decisions. And then maybe it's our job to convince people to read these.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: Instead of catering to pre-existing market we are offering exciting options for readers to discover.

Tamara Thompson: I think it's a starved market at the moment. So, having something new and different, I think, is really important, especially right now.

Paul Vermeersch: And unfortunately, the multinationals have sort of gone so far into projected sales dictating acquisitions and publishing programs and publishing strategies that something hits, and they just want to do that fifty more times. How many Harry Potter knockoffs do we need instead of looking for something that might be completely different, but as-as appealing. So, I, that's how that's what I see. The *raison d'être* of independent small press. Literary publishing is we get to be an alternative to commercially driven, multinational publishing.

Tamar Thompson: Do you find that like on content when it comes to, maybe, for more like the chapbook side is it more poetry? Do you find maybe there's more fiction and less poetry, and some of the stuff that you work on-on, maybe not that like micro press level on-on the higher, a little bit higher, like, what kind of content are you seeing? Is it leaning one way or the other way is nonfiction like, what kind of content are you seeing.

Paul Vermeersch: Micropress stuff?

Tamara Thompson: In micropress stuff, and the stuff that you're doing with well, - (technical issues occurred).

Paul Vermeersch: My imprint is poetry and fiction, micropress in the same way that independent trade publishers can take risks that multinationals don't take, micropress publishing can be even more wild and unruly. I mean, you can publish stuff that's just like, and-and if you factor zines into.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Paul Vermeersch: Because, like, chapbooks tends to a note a kind of literary orthodoxy of some kind, whereas zines can just be like you can have a zine about chicken nuggets. And have a zine about-about anything. So, and sometimes so it's not; it's poetry, it's fiction, it's nonfiction, nonfiction can be documentary, nonfiction can be polemic argumentation; nonfiction can be life writing, memoir, personal stuff you can. You can have zines about, you know, breaking into buildings. You can have zines about, you know how I dealt with a death in my family. You can have zines about what it's like raising Irish wolf hounds. You can have a zine about anything, fan zines, I mean it all evolved out of the punk scene so, zines have counterculture in their DNA, and they and they purposefully don't want to fit into a box. Chapbooks go way further back than that, just go back to like pamphlet publishing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: So, go back to, they go back to Gutenberg, basically.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: And the, so the-the form, something tags can be dictated by its origins. Chapbooks are-are literary and-and-and ephemeral. Zines are counterculture and resist categorization. Things like broad size are decorative and meant to be displayed and therefore are more like object d'art. And then there's any kind of then in art books and I don't mean books about art. I mean books that are works of art, I saw a art book that was a Margaret Atwood poem about a snake and it was letter press printed on like handmade paper and the, and-and then it was like which was about a snake, was printed on this long piece of paper that was then accordion folded between two boards. So, when you opened it-it opened like into a long object, like a snake. So, I mean that that's absolutely not a commercial object and it might end up being worth a lot of money to a collector. But you know, there's probably yeah, I'll probably also only make like ten of them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: So, when we talk about the small press it encompasses all these things that to varying degrees our grassroots uncategorizable is that a word? They defy categorization and might be extremely cheap you know, xeroxed in someone's office after hours and then snuck out, or they might be letter press hand printed on a printing press, with, you know vegan ink on really expensive paper and-and everything in between.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: Micropress can be all those things, because it doesn't have to fit into a box. And as you move up the ladder people start building boxes.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: Trade publishing has to cater to the book trade. How it caters to the book trade, then can be the boxes get tighter the further up

the ladder you go. Small independent presses can take a lot of risks, but they're still making books that are intended to be sold in bookstores, and I think, I think, though, as you move up the ladder the further away you get from grassroots, the less risk artistically or commercially the press will take.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I'm, I'm interested in because you've had some chapbooks made with your own work in it, and I'm interested into why you chose chapbooks as the medium for some of those works.

Paul Vermeersch: Because it's fun.

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

Paul Vermeersch: Because it's fun, and sometimes it's fun to make your own chapbook, and sometimes it's fun to hand it off to somebody else and see what they want to make with it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: It's because going to those small press book fairs and independent literary markets and those kinds of grassroots events, are fun, and they invite participants to come and take part. And how do you take part? You show up with your own chapbook. That's why it's just, it's-it's-it's-it's-it's a culture that-that requires, if you're gonna participate in it, you participate in it, participate in it by bringing something to the table, literally bringing something to the table.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Paul Vermeersch: And the, so I have, I have on occasion wanted to put some things out. Either make them myself or but else make it to take part in that, in that community, and I find great joy.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: I haven't done it as-as much as other people have but I also think that my output is a bit slower, and I'm so sort of, I'm so involved in so many different things that I don't have time.

Tamara Thompson: Well, that leads into my follow-up question of like, would you ever? And obviously you said, you're busy now. But would you ever think of doing something like this again? And would you work with someone? Would you create your own?

Paul Vermeersch: Absolutely would. I don't know when. I just received a contract for a new trade collection two days ago and that-

Tamara Thompson: Nice.

Paul Vermeersch: That should come out in fall 2025. And I really don't see there being time to do like a chapbook between now and then, because all of my energy will be going into completing and working on the trade book.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: But, like, I mean theoretically, yeah, I've-I've never had a bad time making a chapbook so.

Tamara Thompson: Nice.

Paul Vermeersch: Just right now. It would seem like a diversion of energy away from the task at hand, which is to complete the trade collection.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, that that makes sense. I'm going to get a little bit more into like kind of the author side of things. What are some challenges you've faced as an author and trying to get work published? This is kind of a general open statement which you could take where you'd like.

Paul Vermeersch: I mean, in some ways it's been really easy for me, and in some ways it's not. I certainly, I certainly cannot claim oh, poor me! I've had such a hard time getting my work published. Every book I've written has been published. I mean, I've got a lot on the cutting room floor. I don't publish every word I write. I'm picky, about that, but I to date and knock wood so I feel very fortunate. I have not had too much trouble seeing my books published by presses I would like to work with in in a lot of ways. It's harder to get poems placed journals I have always. And I think this is true of anybody. You always, you get rejected. You gotta you're gonna suck it up. If you're going to be placing your work in journals, and-and I think, and maybe poets more than anyone else, because we send the most stuff out small. So, you got, you know you got send them out. Twenty pages poetry could be twenty poems, twenty pages of fiction could be two stories you know. So that's maybe ten times as many rejections if you're a poet than if you're a fiction writer.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's, it's hard and.

Paul Vermeersch: But you keep doing it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: And the challenges evolve with the scene too, like if the industry evolves, the challenges evolve. Some of those challenges involve I mean, I've been around long enough to know that, like it used to be you would send off an envelope with your submission in it, with a self-addressed, stamped envelope inside and then you would wait for it to get mailed back to you, and if it was a rejection, you would take it out put it back into a fresh envelope and send it somewhere else that very day. If you were determined about it. And now everything's kind of moved online, and people are using submittable and content manager and things like that. And I think, as things move online volume has increased exponentially when sending a submission to a magazine meant printing it out, editing it making sure it was the way you wanted it because you didn't want to wastepaper printing it out, getting a stamp, getting a stamp for the self address stamped envelope. It was a lot of steps. It was physical, and you had to leave your house to do it. I mean, I, I'm sure that cut out a lot of like just people who are like, I'm gonna send this off, impulsive. And now that everything is online, you can just you know, you can send, you

can send the same thing to twenty different magazines in an afternoon and that has, I think, bloated the-the slush piles at-at magazines. It's so, it's harder to place your work in a literary journal, because you get lost in the shuffle, of all these sorts of half-hearted people who would never send a submission out to a journal if it meant they had to print it, fold it, put it in an envelope and write an address on it. Walk to the mailbox, put a stamp on it. I mean all those steps have been eliminated, and I think it a lot of people to submit stuff that maybe it's not ready. They haven't-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: Lot of impulsive stuff. So that's what you're competing with. And I think maybe and-and to us to-to a lesser extent that dynamic has also arrived in the slush piles of book publishing companies. But it's much harder to write and submit a book than just like a couple of pages of fiction or poetry, or whatever.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: I think it's harder now to get work published in-in magazines and journals than it used to be because I think there are that many more submissions to choose from. And I'm saying this as a magazine editor and as somebody who contributes work to magazines, certainly, we see a great number of submissions at the magazine I work at, and-and a lot of them just look like very impulsive kind of sobs that maybe if there were a few more hoops to jump through people wouldn't send.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, not everyone is as painstaking in the sending off of that email, as some people I know, myself included.

Paul Vermeersch: So, I think having a few hoops to jump through is-is like, editorially, a good thing. Weeds out people who aren't serious. And unfortunately, the thing that seems to be evolving to take the place of jump through is submission fees.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: So, a lot of a lot of magazines, now they charge like three bucks or whatever to submit and-and then that becomes, I think that's the wrong barrier.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: I don't, I don't think economic, economic power is the barrier we want to create I-I don't know what the answer is. But yeah, having some editorial hoops to jump through, I think, really separates the serious from the non-serious submissions. And I think, I think that's a good thing. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: I'm gonna move on to our next question here, which is, what did this kind of publishing teach you as like an author?

Paul Vermeersch: Umm... it's got to be the importance of community. The importance of community collaboration, sharing feeling that we are in dialogue with one another. Feeling that members of this community are engaged in some kind of cultural enterprise collectively and it-it and explodes the myth of the solitary author writing alone and you know maybe one day they'll be discovered in some you know. I-I don't believe in that at all, I don't believe that exists, I mean, certainly there are lonely people out there who are writing, but I think it is so much more fruitful when one realizes that they are part of a culture, and a culture is made of people.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: The small press, micropress scene is such a fruitful collaborative, sharing enterprise and I think that's really good lesson to learn, and I don't I learned it, probably primarily, from attending these small press fairs and maybe literary markets. You-you see the community at work meet your peers and you, and then you join in-in that community. And that effort and that culture building and community building. That's what I've learned.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's, thank you. Very well said. Going on kind of a little bit of ground we've touched before, but why chapbooks important to you? It might be covering a little bit of other ground, but I figured I'd still ask the question.

Paul Vermeersch: Chapbooks are important to me artistically, precisely because they're non-commercial and because they're non-commercial, they can be anything. They can take risks. They can present work in ways that don't rely on convention, they can be unconventional, they can, they can be small, they can be beautifully made, or they can be cheaply Xeroxed. And anything in between. There are so many possibilities with what a chapbook can be what it can contain, how it can be made and-and the fact that it is a-a non-commercial object, for the most part ten bucks, five bucks, twenty bucks. A really beautifully made letterpress object on fine paper hundred dollars or whatever. Because it can be anything it invites it; it invites make them so the creative potential of the chapbook is unlimited and as something that exists at that fundamental level the writing and publishing ecosystem. It needs to be that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: It needs to be, it's like, it's like, it's like cultural stem cells. They can become anything.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Okay, going to get into a little bit more bigger picture, less kind of specific things. But are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If so, why or why not? So, kind of talking again about that ecosystem sort of thing we were touching on earlier.

Paul Vermeersch: Yeah. They're absolutely important to Canadian publishing not as, not as a commercial object but as a place where creativity is developed, absolutely. Not just a place, but a way in which creativity is developed when you have the opportunity to do anything you imagine doing



and you aren't hemmed in by the expectation that it be a commercial success, you can develop all kinds of skills. You can develop all kinds of techniques, talents. In many ways the expectation of commercial success is deleterious to culture building. It's not deleterious to career building, but it you know, and I have no qualms with commercial success. I wish it upon anyone who seeks it but there also needs to be a place where there needs to be a place where there is no expectation of commercial success, so that creativity can just work on itself just where-where artists and writers make things for the sake of making it and explore what they're capable of without that being directed by commercial expectations. Chapbooks are absolutely place read.

Tamara Thompson: Agreed. Okay, another more kind of other question. Do you think this kind of publishing reflects Canada itself in some way?

Paul Vermeersch: That's a great question, and I don't know that I have a good answer for that, because I'm not familiar enough with what sort of chapbook publishing scenes are like in other countries. So, I would say, certainly Canada has a really interesting history of and community of chapbook publishing and micropress publishing, and I'm just ignorant of how that might be reflected in in other cultures. I-you know I don't know what it's like in New Zealand.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch Texas, Ireland maybe it's robust. Maybe it isn't. Maybe it's transient. I-I wouldn't be able to answer that question, I would say, absolutely in Canada it's-it's a, it's very strong.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Paul Vermeersch: And I hope that it continues to be so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: I don't know that I can say more about that, well.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: I lack a comparison.

Tamara Thompson: That's fair. But Canadians are very closely attached to their publishing. Since the Massey Commission, and everything like that, like identity, has been very much associated with publishing-(technical issues occurred). What is Canadian? But do you think that chapbooks kind of express that Canadian side of maybe our literature, and maybe that Canadianess?

Paul Vermeersch: It's-it's interesting, going back to the Massey Commission the kind of Centennial nationalism that birth of Coach House, that birthed House of Anansi, that birth, I mean a lot of these projects go back to 67, and or shortly thereafter, you know, in the oh, hello-

(Cat-technical issues occurred).

Paul Vermeersch: So, yeah, the sort of Canadian nationalist CanLit, Canadian publishing industry that sort of grew out of the Centennial fervor and the Massey Commission, which was part of that. It's-it's certainly helped create our publishing industry. But I don't know, does the average book buyer who goes to Type Books on Queen Street and I, are they looking at the spines? Do they, does the average book buyer give a shit if something is published by Coach House Press or, or Random House like I'm-I'm not sure that they do. So, from at the cash register I don't think it matters, you know. It does matter to the people who-who write and make books. And so, do-does, do chapbooks, are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? Yes. Are chapbooks important to Canadians. I mean... it's not hockey.

Tamara Thompson: No, it's, yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: It matters more to me than hockey. I think I'm in the minority.

Tamara Thompson: It's-it's that question of oh, what are you doing your thesis on? Oh, chapbooks! Oh, nice! What's that? Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: Yeah. I mean, I certainly think, I certainly think, and like a new chapbook by Gary Barwin, Stuart Ross or Wade Compton, or anybody you know, to me that's more important to Canadian culture than game seven somewhere. But I don't think that-that's true of most Canadians.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: And-and you know, we could, we could talk a lot about whose fault that is but certainly the media collectively and I'm talking about radio, television, new media, print, magazines, newspapers used to spend a lot more time and energy covering culture and literature and publishing than they do today. And-and-and so in many respects the-the activity of literary publishing in Canada is hidden from view. Most Canadians go back forty years, and it would not be unusual for Peter Gzowski to be interviewing Dennis Lee on CBC. And I don't think that sort of thing happens quite so much anymore.

Tamara Thompson: Unless it's Canada Reads or the Giller. But those are like big events now.

Paul Vermeersch: Yeah. And it's certainly, I think people care about what they, what they, what they know about. I think people care about what they see. So, if there were a more concerted effort on the part of popular media to put Canadian publishing, Canadian authors, poets, chapbooks in their view. People would care more about it.

Tamara Thompson: Do you think education might also have a role on that? Because I know that there's been more of a push, especially in high schools for film, for Canadian films to be shown to students at that age and stuff. Do you think maybe I know that's made a significant change in high schools like that.

Paul Vermeersch: It shouldn't be a controversial topic. I think I think every-every country around the world proudly teaches their own culture.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: It is not controversial in Poland, for example, to teach Polish literature and to show Polish films to polish students and certainly in American schools there's never a discussion about should we be teaching American literature.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: It's the only, it's the only literature they know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch So, it becomes this, it becomes this almost.

(Cat-technical issues occurred).

Paul Vermeersch: Think it becomes almost this controversial notion in Canada precisely because so much of it is not seen as commercially viable. And then there's this attitude that the only culture worth engaging with is commercially viable culture. And then so then it seems like teaching CanLit in school is some kind of subsidy or some kind of like, helping something that couldn't make it on its own kind of thing. Instead of viewing homegrown culture as being intrinsically valuable to our communities for its own sake.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: Yeah, I can't imagine anywhere else on earth that-that wonders, you know should-should our educational institutions be teaching culture produced here in this country. I don't think, I don't think there's another country on earth that asks that question. Of course, our educational institutions, kindergarten to the top have a role to play in teaching Canadian culture. I think-I think that's true in any nation. No less here, certainly I was exposed to a great number of things in my education from early days on up, and not just Canadian stuff-stuff from around the world. But I remember teachers saying, and this is from Canada. And then hearing a Gordon Lightfoot song, or this is from Canada and reading a Farley Mowatt book and-and it mattered that it was from Canada.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: The CRTC used to enforce CanCon regulations on our broadcasters. A certain portion of every broadcaster's daily program had to be Canadian content, and this applied to radio stations, it applied to television stations, and some people would call that protectionism. And I don't know that I am opposed to what some people would call protectionism. I think Canadian movie theaters should be required to screen Canadian films for a certain specific portion of their, of their screen time. I think radio stations in Canada should be required to broadcast Canadian

music or a certain portion of their air day. Same with television stations, and it gets it gets trickier with new media because how do you monitor.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: Like where a website goes or if you, if you, if you're, CRTC regularly what somebody does on YouTube like, I don't think so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: As long as-

Tamara Thompson: What is also considered Canadian as changing and evolving, and what would count?

Paul Vermeersch: Well, I that was gonna be in my next point, like what-what we consider to be Canadian is certainly a moving target. To that end I would say, just, you know anything made here. anything made here by people, anything made here, and maybe specifically with the intention of the audience being here, but that could be anything.

Tamara Thompson: Isn't that the beautiful thing of it though? I find it so exciting. But it could be anything.

Paul Vermeersch: But it made here. And I and I, and I do think that people care about what they see.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: People become interested in what's in front of them. And-and so, in a way it all comes down to discoverability.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Paul Vermeersch: And if people can't find Canadian books, Canadian chapbooks, Canadian poetry, Canadian fiction. If they can't find it, if they don't know about it. They won't become interested in it.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Paul Vermeersch: So, discoverability is a big thing and-and so I do, I-I do think it, it's beneficial to have regulations. That require certain kinds of media to have at least a designated portion of their content be content made here. It used to be so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: There might, the Tragically Hip might never have become the Tragically Hip that we all, you know became so-so, fond of if they hadn't been given the opportunity to be exposed in their earliest day, days because of these regulations, and my cat wants back in.

(Cat-technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: So, I think I'm going to move on to just another general question of what's something that you wish people knew about Canadian publishing. Kind of tying into the themes that we were talking about. What's something that you wish the general public knew?

Paul Vermeersch: Which they knew what we published (laughs). I think Canadian literature is as good as writing anywhere in the world. I think Canadian literature has never been more exciting, diverse, and I mean diverse in every way possible style, voice, background, there's so much good stuff. I just wish, I wish people knew about the books so that they could choose to read them. I don't know if a lot of casual music listeners for example know what company put out the records, they listen to I don't know that a lot of casual filmgoers pay attention to the studio the film they're watching. And in the same way, I don't think a lot of casual readers look at the spine and see who published the book that they're reading. I certainly encounter a lot of people who can't remember the name of the author of the book they are reading. I wish we had a culture that was more invested in celebrating the people who make our culture.

Tamara Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: I wish people cared who wrote the book, who published the book more than they do in the same way that people should know who made the film that they enjoyed or who produced the record that they enjoyed. It's certainly more than the name on the front.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: I wish people were more interested and who's making culture. And-and I think because, what I think once there's a human face to it becomes more inviting.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: When people can see the work that goes into it, I think they've become more interested.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah,

Paul Vermeersch: What do I wish people knew about Canadian publishing? Maybe it's the people.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, very, very well said Paul. Now I have to get a little-little sad little dower but why do you think so many small presses and micro presses close up shop? Because we've been talking about presses that are still around. But you know some aren't really the same anymore, because they've been bought up by bigger things. But why do you think so many places kind of run their course and then pass away. We've talked about the evolution right.

Paul Vermeersch: In some ways that's just the nature of the ecosystem. Yeah, it's not that I mean it, it does like it does come down to economic pressure and there have been in living memory lots of different caused

things to fail. The arrival of Chapters can't be understated. Chapters directly led to the failure of General Publishing, General Distribution, and Stoddard General Publishing, General Distribution was Canada's largest independent publishing enterprise and so many small presses were distributed by General Distribution when-when that failed which happened, almost, you know, in publishing timelines like practically overnight and publishers who couldn't get their stock out of the warehouse all that went into liquidation, a lot of presses out of business because they lost their stock. So, the arrival of big box stores, chain stores, the Internet, Amazon. All these things drive margins down from the top. And even with subsidies and support of-of funding bodies like Canada Council or Ontario Arts Council, you still got to sell some books? Yeah. And why do so many presses go under? I mean, is it, a lot of independent small presses are based, are usually, come down to one person.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: And they might have other people working with them. But if that one person runs out of gas, then that press is done. And if there is no succession planning in place a lot of presses disappear. This is something, this is a-a barrel we are now facing right down the middle of. We were talking about Massey Commission, Centennial Nationalist fervor presses popping up, a lot of presses that popped up, and in the wake of 67 are still owned by the people that started them, and these people are in their 80s. Now and they don't have succession planning in place. What's gonna happen to them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: But small presses are like mushrooms, you know something. They pop up, they disappear more pop sometimes.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: Like some people, a lot of presses that are like, basically one person operations. People burn out.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: People just want, you know, it's-it's harder to raise a family. It's harder to buy a house. It's harder to do so many things, economically speaking, and sometimes running a small press just isn't gonna do it for you. Want to raise a family. You gotta make sacrifices. You gotta make decisions. You gotta do something else.

Tamara Thompson: Mmm.

Paul Vermeersch: You gotta sellout whatever that means and its hard.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: Nowhere whatever that means and so many small presses fail because it's hard.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: It's hard, it's a lot of work for-for not much money.

Tamara Thompson: Or any if you're in the chapbook scene.

Paul Vermeersch: So, people get busy with other things.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: It is ephemeral; it can be a really tough go and-and-and I mean, and there didn't used to be publishing programs. So, a lot of people didn't know what they were getting into, or have, or they had to learn all the skills and all the information by doing so that could be a little bit like falling upstairs and like you know, we could ask the same question of restaurants.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: Why do so many restaurants fail? It's just part of the industry in a way. With small presses and especially micro presses, the people who make the books, are there because they love books.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: So a lot of, and especially in the micropress. A lot of people who run micro presses are that are themselves writers and at some point, they need to at some point depending on the on their reserves of-of energy and cultural capital they might have to decide. Am I going to keep publishing or am I going to be a writer.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: There are many reasons, but they all boil down to finite reserves of energy.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: Finite reserves of willpower Finite reserves of resources, financial and otherwise and time.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, time and energy. And then the big one money, where does it come from? Where does it go?

Paul Vermeersch: Money's getting harder and harder to come by because everything's getting more expensive. And especially, I mean, there's always been inflation, like obviously things cost more than they did forty years ago. But things cost more than they did three years ago. Like it's-

Tamara Thompson: It's brutal.

Paul Vermeersch: We are in a period of rapid inflation right now. And I despair that-that might cause some market pressures.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I agree. So, to kind of wrap up our conversation. What was something about D.I.Y. Press history, or even your history, that you wish people knew?

Paul Vermeersch: Maybe we'll try to answer both of those separately, because I don't think it's the same answer.

(Technical issues occurred).

Paul Vermeersch: I, from the audience's point of view what I want them to know about D.I.Y. culture is that it's exciting. It's risk taking it requires effort to sort of sift through it, because, like anything, there's a lot of dross or there's a lot of stuff that's not for you. But there, I guarantee you, there is stuff for you, and when you find it, it'll blow your mind, and it'll be delightful. For writers I want them to develop an awareness of the difference between D.I.Y. culture and a very commercial industry that pretends to be D.I.Y. culture and that what-what we now call self publishing is anything but D.I.Y. and it is a heavily industrialized industry designed to separate writers from their own money and give them actually very little in return and that if-if your aim is to participate in the book trade in any way self-publishing is not going to help you. But actual D.I.Y. culture small press, micropress, handmade small runs, non-commercial literary culture is exciting and essential. Thrilling and absolutely the-the soil which all literary culture grows. But like forking money over to Hulu or Amazon and getting a box of books printed that you keep in your basement is-is not, is not that. And it's also not trade publishing, and I feel that, that industry is very predatory and-and I think an author, writer has to ask themselves in any transaction who's the customer? And if the customer is the author, then they're not getting the most out of it. What do I wish people knew about my career? I don't know, that almost seems like I want, like a more embarrassing question to answer. I wish the people who would enjoy my books could find them more easily. And what more could one ask for?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Paul Vermeersch: I would, I, my-my greatest wish is that people-people who would enjoy my-my work can find it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah simple, but also very true because those are the people who want to see it, and or even people who would like it but haven't known it yet.

Paul Vermeersch: In a way it all comes back to discoverability.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Paul Vermeersch: And this leads me to like one final point. The competition that a book faces in the sort of the marketplace of attention isn't other books.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.



Paul Vermeersch: It's everything. It's TV. It's the Internet. It's video games. It's making dinner, the commodity is time. And I think much more effort needs to be just put into the basic idea that reading is worthwhile and convince more people to spend their time doing it and maybe a little less time surfing social media or playing video games, or whatever- whatever is taking up the bulk of somebody's non-income making time. A return to the calm, meditative act of reading book, I think, would do our industry a great deal of good, and I think it would also do our society a great deal of good. Maybe I'll end there.

Tamara Thompson: So. No more additional comments you'd like to make. Sounds good. Well, thank you, Paul, for meeting with me I appreciate all of the lovely insights you've given. Thank you so much.

Tali Voron

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is June 19<sup>th</sup> the time is 3:06 pm. Just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after the recording of this interview. This interview is for small press.

Tali Voron: Hi! I'm Tali Voron. I'm the founder and publisher of The Soap Box press which is now no longer operating as of 2023. I'm also the managing editor of the Ampersand Review, and a professor at Sheridan College. My pronouns are she/her. And did I forget?

Tamara Thompson: What part of Canada you're from. You can also, like, do- I'm trying to get a little bit of geography.

Tali Voron: Yes, perfect, perfect. So I am from Ontario, and the Soapbox operated from Toronto, specifically.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you. Alright! Let's just get into this. How did you discover zines and chapbooks? Like, when was your aha! moment to "oh, this is the thing that I enjoy kind of; I like that" first moment?

Tali Voron: Yeah, great question. I kind of found it, I guess, in a roundabout way, where I was listening to a lot of spoken word. And then Button Poetry had a chapbook contest, and I thought, what is a chapbook contest? And that's how I discovered what they are. And then from that point I started discovering a bunch of different micro presses and learning about the medium and really falling in love with this idea that you could have a little book that was forty-eight pages or less, and you could be as creative and as experimental and as flexible as you wanted with it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, to kind of get directly into like, why you started the press; why did your press start?

Tali Voron: Yeah. So, I started The Soap Box in April of 2016. I was doing my undergrad at the time at the University of Toronto. And I just had this overwhelming feeling like there wasn't enough space dedicated specifically to supporting emerging writers. And so that's what I wanted to do, and the initial idea was to publish a creative writing anthology by a bunch of different writers and from there we branched out into also publishing chapbooks and all of the other programming related things that we do. But really it just came out of a desire to create a space specifically for emerging writers.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So, do you think that would be kind of like the press's goal? Or maybe, like, your editorial philosophy was just trying to get emerging writers out there? Could you maybe talk a little bit about that?

Tali Voron: Yeah, I think it was; it was certainly both, where we wanted to publish really, really good writing, but we wanted to make sure that we were serving emerging writers. So, yeah, I think that was ultimately our

end goal. But it also guided essentially everything that we did. It was certainly our mission.

Tamara Thompson: What kind of work did you publish? And why did you choose to publish that kind of work? Because I'm not sure if you'd like did you do more fiction, poetry; because sometimes people lean more to poetry or.  
 . . .

Tali Voron: Yeah, so for our annual creative writing anthologies, we were publishing short stories, creative non-fiction and poetry, although it was very heavy on poetry and short fiction, not as much non-fiction. And for our chapbooks, they were predominantly poetry chapbooks, except for two, which ended up being in the same season, and they were both short stories which we were really, really excited about. And then we also published two novels. So, we started with the creative writing anthologies. The goal there was, okay, let's try to give a platform to as many writers as we can. And we were unifying all of the writing in each volume by a theme and then, when it came to chapbooks, I discovered the medium, and I thought, I really want to spotlight one writer really beautifully, and what is an accessible way for us to do that? So, the answer was, chapbooks.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. What was your process like? Kind of from like submission to finding people, to trying to create it, to trying to get into the people's hands?

Tali Voron: Okay, by finding people. Do you mean finding contributors?

Tamara Thompson: (Nods).

Tali Voron: Yeah. So, what we would do is before any open call would start. We would try to figure out, okay, what is the theme of the issue that we're putting out? If we're talking about the anthology specifically, then we would spread the word about our open call. So, we would do that in a variety of ways, much like what you would expect through social media, word of mouth doing a lot of outreach to academic institutions where we knew that there were English or creative writing programs or classes. And then, yeah, we would receive the submissions we would we had a policy of having blind submission. So, we wanted to make sure that we were not biased in any way by who was submitting. We wanted to look at the work exclusively and then we would accept the amount that we could accept, and then we would go through the production process. So very, I guess very standard.

Tamara Thompson: What was production like for you? Was it like printing things out? Did you give it to a printer, like, were you at home like hammering the holes to sew the spines or were you more stapling?

Tali Voron: I really wish that we were a D.I.Y., do-it-by-hand kind of press, and I went as far as to buy a photo-like a like an art printer. And we were very close to doing that. But it just was not feasible for us, and at that point it would have been just me essentially doing all of the printing and the binding, and I realized that I would run myself into the ground if I took that on, so we always worked with a printer. We worked with a variety of printers throughout our run. We did print on demand for

a little bit, especially when we were just starting out. We printed through Coach House. We printed through TPH. So, trial-and-error with a bunch of different printers, but we were always happy with our final product. So, when it came to production, we had freelance designers for our first couple of years, and then one of our team members became our in-house designer, and she was our artistic, our artistic director, which was really incredible and definitely changed and streamlined our process. And then, once we were happy with how things looked. Then we would go to the printer that we were working with for that specific publication.

Tamara Thompson: So how did the press make decisions? 'Cause you're kind of talking about how like if you didn't do the like stapling and folding, it wouldn't happen. So was this more of a kind of one-man show. But it sounds like you had, like other people sometimes coming in, like collaborators. Like could you talk a little bit more about that?

Tali Voron: Yeah, absolutely. So, we had a team. So, we had an editorial board. We also had a designer. And then later on in our operation we also had a dedicated marketing director. So, when it came to making decisions, it was always with our editorial board when it came to what was being published, and how it was being published. But I would work very closely with our artistic director or our designer when it actually came to production. So, when we were talking through, okay, if we were to print and bind these things ourselves, I felt that it was my responsibility to take that on, as I was the one managing the printing process with our printers. I didn't want to put it on the team to take on that additional labor.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. It's a lot.

Tali Voron: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Where did the press like sell their books? And how were they sold? Was it more online, markets?

Tali Voron: Yeah, great question. So, we sold them off our website. That was definitely the primary place of selling. We attended a couple of markets where we were able to be there in person and to hand sell our books. We were also, of course, selling at our launches and any events that we organized. We were carried in Knife Fork Book when they still had a bookstore. We were also carried at TCAF, out of the Toronto Reference Library. Is that TCAF? I think so, or maybe not.

Tamara Thompson: I can't remember.

Tali Voron: They they've since they've since closed, so may want to fact, check what the name of the shop was, and Alien Art Market, which still carries some of our backlist.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, nice!

Tali Voron: So, all in Toronto, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I'm just gonna write that down. So that sounds vaguely familiar. So, what were some challenges that the press has faced, like had faced over time.

Tali Voron: Yeah, I mean probably a challenge that is common amongst many micro presses is funding. We were only able to receive grant funding for one of our projects, which was our anthology on the theme of the hyphenated generation which I can talk about a bit later if you're interested but because we were not eligible for grant funding, because of the kinds of things that we were publishing, and also when we were publishing, everything that we did was self funded. And so, I remember every year saying, okay what can we do next year? Are we able to publish the same amount of books and print the same amount of copies. And how much money do we need to raise or earn? So that was definitely one of our major challenges of figuring out, how are we going to sustain ourselves. And I mean, I'm very proud of the fact that we were able to sustain ourselves for seven years, and I think we did a lot within that timeframe, but it's- it's a hard thing to do, because it's not, everything costs money. Let's put it that way.

Tamara Thompson: As it's one of the easier, more accessible forms of publishing. But that printer ink can really hit your wallet.

Tali Voron: Absolutely. And then also you want to be able to pay your team and to offer honorariums or payment to all of your contributors and to all of your writers. So, when factoring it all in, you have to figure out how to make the numbers work.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, why are chapbooks important to you?

Tali Voron: Oh, well, many reasons. But I think I see chapbooks as an entry point, right? And so much of my career has been focused on how do we make the publishing and writing world accessible, especially to those trying to enter it? And I find that chapbooks is one of those ways that you can get your hands in the publishing process, whether from the writing or from the publishing side, and actually experience what it means to put your work out, to have it read, to be able to share it. And yeah, just to kind of enter that process.

Tamara Thompson: Are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing kind of as a whole? If so, why are why not.

Tali Voron: I definitely think that chapbooks are important to Canadian publishing. I mean, publishing is one vast ecosystem, right? And we have different pockets of it. We have the really large, you know, big five publishers. We have our smaller indie presses, and then we have the micro presses which operate at the grassroots level, and I think, having options at that grassroots level is really important. I wish that we were able to more sustainably support all of the different micro presses and lit mags that operated in that space, because that is what offers so many writers opportunities, right? To get started, and also to continue their practice.

Tamara Thompson: One hundred percent agree with that, because it's such a, I've found it's such a welcoming place, and especially because publishing

is such an unknown. It can be a place where you can learn so much, not only just about yourself as maybe an editor, as a publisher, as an author, but just about yourself, and how you work, and what your work can be as an artist.

Tali Voron: Absolutely. And I found that in Canada we have a really generous micropress chapbook, press, lit mag community that is incredibly supportive and welcoming of people looking to create and to try something new, and it never really felt competitive to me. And I've learned so much from, I'll say. Like, my colleagues in the space, and my peers in the space that are doing this kind of work. And so, I feel like part of my mission is also to make sure that we are able to support people who are doing this kind of work to support writers as well, and just to create as healthy of an ecosystem as we can.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I keep using that term ecosystem as well, because everything kind of leans into each other. And that's why I'm not just talking to people who've done small press. I'm talking to people who have done more traditional publishing, and then also authors and poets, because they kind of all interlink. And I've had people check off all three check marks for, because there are people who have done all three and can talk about all three, because there is so much overlap, especially in Canada. It's-it's about this big.

Tali Voron: Exactly. Yeah. It's a really small world. And it's-I find that it's impossible for you to kind of exist in one space without having absolutely anything to do with the other areas. You know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, you have to be pretty unaware of the scene in Canada, like you, you'd have to be one of the authors who got picked up out of nowhere and immediately got a trade publishing book deal and become a roaring success overnight. But usually, those roaring successes take ten years. So, most of the time that doesn't happen where they know nothing.

Tali Voron: Exactly, and if by some chance you know nothing, it won't be long until, until you know something.

Tamara Thompson: Exactly. If you want to stay in this world, and especially if you're a Canadian, you'll slowly find other people, and even in America, people, you'll find a way to-to find something about this, because the other thing, too, is-is, it's so, it's a world full of excitement and new things going on. To not see it and get excited by it, personally, I don't know how it would be possible.

Tali Voron: I agree.

Tamara Thompson: Does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way? And you can interpret this in whatever way you'd like.

Tali Voron: Hmm, does this type of publishing reflect Canada in some way? I mean I think it has to, because I think a lot of these presses get started as a way to reflect authentically what is happening in Canada, who it, like who it is happening to our lived realities, our lived experiences and then offering a way to share that yeah, maybe we can come back to this

question, and I'll see if I can form a more coherent answer, but I think the answer is, of course, yes.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's-it's a big question that a lot of people have been able to take a lot of different ways. So, I love asking it because I love the different interpretations of it. But I've gotten a lot of "Whoa, okay. Give me a second!" Because it's a fairly big question. But we'll move on, and we can come back if you'd like. What does this kind of publishing offer that, you know, maybe traditional publishing can't offer, or maybe vice versa?

Tali Voron: Yeah, I mean, I think it just leaves a lot of room for experimentation. Like, I, I love to say to my students that what you can do with the chapbook or zine. You can't do in other places like one example. I say, if you want to write a zine all about chicken nuggets and how much you love them, and you want to make it shaped like a chicken nugget container, and then make every poem that you put in, shaped like a chicken nugget. You can do that, and that's totally-totally fine. And it's great, and everyone's gonna love it. And you will find an audience for it, and you can do it, and you can do it in a run of one or in a run of ten and a run of ah hundred. And that's it. Also, this idea that you can create something that's ephemeral, that once it's done, it's done, there is no other copies. It's limited. That's a really exciting thing. And also, the idea that what you create you can, it can be art for art's sake, where the idea isn't, you know? How much do I have to make off of this, or profit off of this? Or you know, I think it just breaks that business sort of mindset, for creating an object that often than not, even in this space, we're selling.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I was talking to derek from Banff, and he does a lot of, he's no press and stuff like that right?

Tali Voron: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And he showed me a chapbook which was a pack of cigarettes that you open up the pack of cigarettes, and they're all labeled, and that's how, like, by number. So, they're numbered, and you pick it up and open it. And that's how you read the story. And then there's a smaller version of a smaller cigarette, which is the condense version of the bigger pack, right.

Tali Voron: Oh, that's awesome.

Tamara Thompson: A-a regular publisher is gonna look at that and be like, well, that's not a book. I can't sell that to, you know, Mima down the street, you know. That's something-that one's hard to produce unless you're doing it yourself, and something that the average, you know, consumer is not looking for but someone, but it's so fun and experimental. So, the idea of the chicken nugget thing like it is true you can do that. And I remember when I was doing myself publishing course at Sheridan and I was like, okay, I-I only have to make ten. So, I get to do a lot of fun things. So, I literally stitched into, like symbols into my paper. My hands hurt so much after my hand stitched into like three pieces of paper for each book. There's like only ten copies of those, and I had like, it

was a dark, moody kind of thing, and but it was kind of, like earthy. So, I found like this like moss ribbon thing from the Walmart, and I cut it into scripts and put it on the corners of my book, and I was like, I don't have enough to do like a ton of copies with this, but I had just enough to do all of my copies.

Tali Voron: That's awesome.

Tamara Thompson: Right and like there's such a tactile, like, feel, and like the other things that people created for that I know my friend Sarah McCallum did a Taylor Swift fanzine, and they were all with the different eras of Taylor Swift. And she did glitter and collage. And it was so fun. It's like, yeah, glitter went everywhere. But that was kind of also part of the appeal.

Tali Voron: Yeah, exactly, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: It's just so fun. And it's I-I find in a day and age where there's so much tech-feeling of technology coming over to feel something that is so handmade with the imperfections to the personalization, and you can feel it like even just those, even if the whole thing's printed. Just having that, you know, five out of fifty that's been like handwritten. Even the five just little things like that just feels, there's something so in your hands. And again, like you said, like ephemeral. Just, it's so amazing about this kind of publishing.

Tali Voron: Yeah. And it's personal. And I think, no matter what the product looks like, you know that it was truly made out of love and excitement for putting that specific thing out in that way.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I agree. What has this kind of publishing bought you? And again, this is, can be in any way you wish to interpret.

Tali Voron: What has it got me?

Tamara Thompson: Taught you.

Tali Voron: Taught me? I don't know how to interpret that. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough.

Tali Voron: Yeah, what has it taught me? It has taught me a lot. I think this kind of publishing taught me a lot about myself. I mean, when I started, I thought you know I wanted to be an editor, so this will give me the experience of figuring out what kind of editor will I be, and I mean I-I had already done a considerable amount of editing work at that time, but not in the capacity of starting a press, and then, you know, being at the helm of it. But by the end of my time, with The Soap Box, I realized I love editing, and I enjoy working actually with people's work. But really, what I like is working with people. And I love organizing. And I love building community and organizing events and kind of creating something meaningful both, and absolutely like putting out the book. But also, how can I bring people together in various different ways. And so, I think if it hadn't been for The Soap Box, it probably would have taken me a lot



longer to figure that out as well. And I mean, that's not necessarily a let's say, a chapbook, specific realization. But I think when you immerse yourself in something that you love, you give yourself that opportunity to really figure out who you are, what you enjoy, maybe even what you're good at and you just get to explore and then also share that with other people, where I think the best part of what we did is that it was never done in isolation. I got to work with a fabulous team that we're so excited about every single title that we put out all of the contributors that we worked with. We're just really-really great writers, and I loved when they would keep in touch, and then they would reach out and say, this was the first thing that I ever had published in my life. And then, now look, here's the second thing, and the third thing, and now I have another chapbook. But, like I have a chapbook coming out, or a full-length collection, or I'm going off to do my MFA. And it's really-really rewarding to know that. You know, we were part of somebody's journey, and that's why we started, right. We wanted to be able to offer that first landing place for them and then see where they would go from there.

Tamara Thompson: Do you feel like the more community based, and maybe lower stakes and more experimentalism allowed for you to kind of learn some of those lessons, or do you think it was just because you discovered it, and it allowed you to kind of find it? Do you think it was something like you said that you would figure out on your own? Or do you feel like the community in the space help to take like, bring that out of yourself? Sorry

Tali Voron: No, I think yeah. But no, no, I mean.

Tamara Thompson: Okay.

Tali Voron: It's a good question. I think it was definitely the community feel of everything that we did, and generally of let's call it micropress culture because, knowing that already we were operating in a space that was very flexible and not rigid. I felt totally comfortable to possibly make mistakes and then completely change things the next time around, and that's what I think allowed us to grow every single year where I didn't feel like we have to do the exact same thing all the time, because when we first started and basically knew nothing, this is what we thought was correct. And then, if half a year, a year later. We're like, actually, that was kind of wrong, and we can do it much better. We could do that. And then that would happen year over year, season over season, and we were always supported in every change that we made, both within the team, and then also by the entire community that we were building.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I feel that, too, because it's kind of when I so I do, Whispering Wick, as you know, and like when we first did our first print on scrappy books love them to death, though because I can see the improvement, and I kind of love the small imperfection we hadn't quite figured out how to do the line down, so all three holes were perfect. We got it down packed now, but you can kind of see the last hole at the end wasn't like one hundred percent perfect and stuff like that right? And I love those imperfections because it shows kind of, we were really doing it by ourselves. We had supports and stuff but like we were kind of figuring it out as we went, we were all isolated because of Covid, and we were

still able to make this really cool in person thing. And then we were able to change and grow. And I love the stuff that we did. But I also love the stuff that we're doing and that we've created since then. And again, I don't think we would have been able to create that if we hadn't started, you know, with the-the holes not being perfect.

Tali Voron: Absolutely. I mean, that's kind of the only way. And that's the amazing thing where you get to just try and try and try again and then change things as you go. And yeah, I-I also love that idea of seeing kind of how far you've come, just through the way that your publications change to.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, and no one's gonna judge you for the first book that you created it was your first book and they kind of, I feel like in this community people love that stuff that's scrappiness. And it's like, oh, you can really tell. This is like your first booking, really trying hard. And it's like really fun. And it's not a diminishing thing. It's a positive thing. But it's like, oh, this is so cool. You were figuring it out. And it's like, yeah.

Tali Voron: Exactly. It's kind of like, look what we can do when we're figuring it out.

Tamara Thompson: Mhm.

Tali Voron: Let's see what happens once we figure it out a little bit more.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what's something that you wish people knew about Canadian publishing. So, like, what's something that you wish the public of Canada knew about their own publishing?

Tali Voron: We all work so hard; I don't know a single, not hardworking, probably burnt out and exhausted person that's working in any area of publishing. I wish that people knew just how much it takes to create one book, and how much value is in a book. Where the consumer, let's say, your reader, I don't want to say consumer. I just did an interview with Canisia Lubrin a couple of months ago for the Ampersand, and she said that she never thinks of the reader is a consumer, and that really stuck with me. She goes, the reader is the reader, and they complete the work. They're not consuming it in any way. So, I don't wanna repeat that usage again, since talking to her. But yeah, a reader may pay, let's say, thirty-five dollars for a book. That book is not actually worth thirty-five dollars. It's worth so much more. And I just wish that the Canadian public understood what actually goes into book publishing how, like kind of what that process is, and they could appreciate it. I feel like the value of a book is not the same if you're not in the publishing industry.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Tali Voron: And that's a really hard thing to convey without sending somebody down for a really long monologue or lecture or talk. You know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's interesting. When my students talk to me, they're like, well, how do you get into publishing? And I'm like, well, you have to face some hard truths. You're not gonna be the George R. Martin, the Margaret Atwood. And you're going to have to listen to an editor, and that doesn't mean they should railroad you. But you have to listen to other people, because this is a collaborative experience, not just in making the book, but in sharing the book, and you have to learn to accept that. It's okay. That's actually some of the best parts of writing a book, in my opinion. My mother says I'm a frustrating author to read, because I never give her any answers. She'll come to me and be like, who is this guy? And what is he doing later? Are you gonna write more about him? I'm like, no, the story is over, and she says, well, who was he? And I was like, I don't know. I can't remember. She's just like, but you wrote it. And I'm like, yeah, but I don't care what I think. What do you think? What do you think that guy's doing? She's like? But you should have the answers I'm like, I-I didn't have the answers to start with, yeah, I really don't have them now. It doesn't matter if I'm the author. Tell me what you think, because, trust me, will be a lot more fascinating of a conversation, and it's what I enjoy more, and she'll grumble.

Tali Voron: Yeah. Oh, I love that.

Tamara Thompson: And then she'll tell me what she thinks, and we'll have a good conversation.

Tali Voron: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: So, I do have to ask a little bit more of a sad question of why do you think so many small presses and micro presses have to close up shop?

Tali Voron: Well, I mean, rather than speculating generally about why other presses do I can share why, why, we closed.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Why did it? Why did it end for you?

Tali Voron: Yeah. I think it was a number of factors that kind of converged all at once. But I think, I mean one part of it is, you grow a lot right over time. And the people that we were when we started, we're not the people who we were seven years after the inception of The Soap Box. So, I mean, I started as a student. Our entire team was comprised of students, and by the time we were done. Everyone was already heading off in very different directions. So, I think part of it was, you know, sometimes you have to acknowledge when you need to let something go and kind of, before a project becomes a burden, or you're just keeping it alive out of emotional attachment, you know, rather than serving the work in the way that you used to. I think that was a really-really hard conclusion to come to, because I really felt like The Soap Box was my baby. We grew it out of nothing, and we did so much, and it really became a big part of who I was, and so to kind of look at myself in the mirror and say, am I keeping like-am I still getting the same thing out of it? Am I still serving our community and the way that I want to? And I realized that at least for me personally, I felt like I could be serving my community in other ways that I was already doing through projects outside

of The Soap Box, that maybe the right thing to do would be to kind of close that chapter, to leave room for something more. So that was one really big part of it. And that's kind of the-the personal side of it, of realizing that we grow, we evolve, and not everything is meant to exist in perpetuity. And I mean, maybe that also goes along with the ephemeral nature, right of chapbooks, and micropress in general, where you're not supposed to have an unlimited print run. So, we-we reached the end of our print run there, although we still have a ton of inventory, so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Tali Voron: Which is ha-ha, the-the other side of it. But that's one part, and I mean I touched on the challenges of funding, too, right where it also just became a point of doesn't make sense for us to continue operating in this way. And I think that's also a really hard reality for many, many micro presses, and realizing that if you can't get that grant support and that grant funding, how do you continue to operate? And so, I wish that we could implement some sort of infrastructure to support the arts at various different levels, even micro levels, both in the province and in the country. I think we still have along way to go with figuring out how we can support others, but then also, possibly overhauling the way that publishing runs in general, which is a whole other conversation but yeah, so I think it was twofold. There was kind of like the personal emotional side of it. But then there was also the at the end of the day, if we're treating this as a business still makes sense.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah... what's something important about the D.I.Y. press history that you wish the public knew about? That just it can be anything.

Tali Voron: I just think it's really important to actually read and listen to what those voices are saying because, ultimately, why the D.I.Y. side of things exists is because those stories, those voices, were not able to be heard otherwise, and they often have something really, really important to say.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, actually know what it is. And then listen and read it. Yeah, yeah.

Tali Voron: Yeah, exactly.

Tamara Thompson: What's something that you wish people would know about your history? Second hardest question, maybe hardest.

Tali Voron: What do I wish people would know about my history? I don't know. I'm very curious how people have answered this.

Tamara Thompson: I-over the past bit it's been that they wish people knew what they were doing. Know that like if they wanted, if the public who was interested in reading this poet's books could actually know it was there and get access to it. If the public wanted to interact with this specific side of like the creative world, to know that they were there. And because a lot of what chapbooks and kind of what these people do is very still like, I come up to people, and they'll say, hi, how are you? What are you doing for your thesis? And I say, I'm doing chapbooks, and they're like,

cool. What's that? I'll go, oh, okay. And so many people don't know what it is. And I'll talk to my students because they again, they're like, okay, you're my TA. What you-what are you doing? And I'll say I'm doing a thesis and like cool on what? And I'm like chapbooks, and like what the hell is that. And then I tell them, and they're like, that's so cool I can make a book by myself. And I'm like, yeah man, yeah, printer-use the Trent printers, like. And so, a lot of people have just been like, I wish they knew about this specific thing, just-just about access and about knowing that there are people there in the artist community who are doing things that these people like, or also want to maybe be doing, because there's a lot of the suffering artists by themselves, and it's like, don't do that.

Tali Voron: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: None of us are doing that because that's depressing, and it doesn't yield good work to begin with because if you're not having fun with what you're creating it will never be good, because if you're not enjoying it, even if it's not necessarily fun, if you're not enjoying making it, no one's going to enjoy or want to read. I had to explain that to my students, because I'm like it doesn't matter if it's good. It'll never be good if you don't even like writing it.

Tali Voron: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: If it's fun or enjoyable for you to make there will be other people who will recognize that and connect with that.

Tali Voron: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And they were like, whoa! wait! I don't have to, like, think of this imaginary person who I'm trying to pee, please, and I'm like, no, please yourself first because you're not going to be able to please so many people out there start with you and then the people will find you. And they're like, whoa!

Tali Voron: Yeah, and not to mention you won't really want to talk about it or be excited in any way about talking about it either.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. And I think the people who might actually connect with it on like some shared, like you get a certain amount of people following you. They're gonna recognize pretty quickly that you do not like this thing that you're doing.

Tali Voron: Yeah, for sure.

Tamara Thompson: So, I ask again, what's something that you wish people knew about you?

Tali Voron: Mmmmm...you know, okay, I'm kind of gonna like skirt around the question. But I think something that I wish people knew in general, I think my personal philosophy has always been. If you can't find that thing that you want to be doing, or you can't find the right opportunity, or you can't you know just find that space for yourself that you can create it. And that's just kind of been how I've lived a really big chunk of my life,

and I find that it's never steered me wrong. And so that's what I tell my students all the time, too. There's so much opportunity out there, and you should seek out all of it. But if you do not find what you want that it already exists, just create it yourself and I think that was also a big part of The Soap Box, too, right where I said I felt like emerging writers didn't have a space. So, then the solution was, okay. So, let's create that space.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Do you wanna go back to the question that we talked about before? Do you have any more thoughts on, the does this kind of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way?

Tali Voron: I think, I think I'm just gonna leave it there.

Tamara Thompson: That's totally fair. I figured I would still ask.

Tali Voron: Thank you. I appreciate it again.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, no problem. Do you have any additional comments or anything else you would like to add, before I pause, the recording.

Tali Voron: I'll just add that I think you doing this thesis is a really big contribution to what we do and micro press, and with chapbooks in general, and I think for a long time I've been wishing that-that more research exists. And so, the fact that you know you are generating this research, which I sincerely hope is I'm going to generate further research and scholarly work is a really big deal. So, thank you.

Tamara Thompson: I just I love it so much, and it was so frustrating to me that there was nothing being done on it and I-I love it, and it's something that is again so ephemeral like it-it's gone. And it's like, oh, there's so many cool things that are happening that no one will know about, because it's not being written down, or it's on an old blog archive that no one can access anymore. That has been one of my toughest things is outdated emails and outdated websites which just don't work because a lot of it is just lost because people aren't maintaining it because people get tired, and there's not like a big system or place where everything can just be and exist. Right? There are a couple resources like the small press map. And then there's the Canadian small press like Wiki Page, which has a ton of people on it. But again, a lot of it is just names and not necessarily links, or what those people have done. It's literally just the name of a press, and if you try searching it up. You get a dead-end page.

Tali Voron: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So even because it's a master's, I keep being told, I have to like not to go too big with it. So, it's more focused. But there's so much that can be and should be done in this field that I-there's so much opportunity. And there's nothing, as someone who is doing their research on this there is practically nothing. There's some in small press, some in publishing like Cameron from Apt 9 Press. He's done his master's and PhD on it but like he gave me resources so that I could look at it. I've been reading like even publishing texts that are just about publishing are almost always based in the United States, and the only one

that isn't is The Perilous Trade. And that is like the book that everybody referenced when it comes to Canadian publishing. And then there's memoirs and stuff like that. Then there's like, you know, the History of the Book Canada, which is like this giant anthology thing that goes all the way back to all the way to more modern stuff. But even then, that whole series of like big tomes of text has, like that much on self publishing like on the D.I.Y., small, like even on small press. It's like that small.

Tali Voron: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And it's, like, guys.; there are so many interesting, fascinating things going on. Let's talk about it a bit. So, I-I really appreciate you saying that because I'd be doing this anyway, and I'm glad that other people see the-the value in it.

Tali Voron: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you.

Tali Voron: Yeah, absolutely.

Tamara Thompson: Alright, thank you for your time.

Bruce Whiteman

Tamara Thompson: Hello, my name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is July 16<sup>th</sup> time is 1:06 p.m. And just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant could drop out a week after this interview time press and (technical issues occurred). Yeah, and that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview time. And this interview is for small press and author.

Bruce Whiteman: So, my name's Bruce Whiteman. My press, which is a very small press, is called Poets and Painters Press. I grew up in Peterborough and Toronto. So, I'm from Southern Ontario and in addition to running a small press which would be a so far from a full-time job, it's hard to know how to characterize it. I was, I spent my life as a rare books and manuscript librarian and I also teach, have taught and do teach currently. I'm teaching a poetry course at the University of Toronto.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Okay; so, just to get the ball rolling, how did you discover zines and chapbooks in this kind of publishing? Was there like a moment, or did it like-? I just kind of want to know a little bit of like how you discovered this.

Bruce Whiteman: Well, I mean my literary, to sort of allude to Stephen Leacock, my so-called literary career goes back to the seventies, the 1970s. And I guess I was kind of aware of chapbooks right from the beginning. My first two books or chapbooks, as someone who studied English literature, but also became a-a special collections librarian, I was aware that you know, poets such as Augustus, William Blake and William Carlos Williams and others. Ezra Pound had started their literary lives, their publishing lives with chapbooks. I knew about those books, and it just seemed an obvious way back then to ease into print, when it was, you know, obviously very challenging to find someone to publish a commercial size book for me. So, I-I guess I've just known about them pretty much since the beginning.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. So why did the press start? Because it's-it's a lot of work to manage these things. I run my own small press called Whispering Wick, like chapbook press. You can actually see some of the books that we've made behind me there. So why did it start for you?

Bruce Whiteman: Well, the first book that had the press's name on it was a-a book I did with a painter friend of mine, and in the late 1970s. He-he and I had known each other, for I can't remember maybe two or three years. He's a fairly well-known Toronto painter, and he admired poetry; he read poetry. H -we talked a lot about poetry, and one day he just said we should do a book together, and so we did this not small-in-size, but small-in-length book, which included drawings that he had done to poems that I had written at that time. I was reading Heraclitus, and a lot of the poems deal with time and memory, and-and actually quote a little bit from the Heraclitian fragments. So, we put this little book together. And then we needed a name. And we kind of huddled and thought, well, we want to represent both sides of the equation. And in this book, both sides of the-the creative equation. And so, it became Poets and Painters Press.



That was the first book. So yeah, that's-that's how I that's how I got to call it that.

Tamara Thompson: Cool, so I know not every press has, like, an editorial philosophy or a press goal. But do you guys have something like that?

Bruce Whiteman: Well, first off there's no more you guys cause he's now dead. My-my friend died what two years ago, during Covid, but not of Covid.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: So, it's just me. And honestly everything that's been published under that imprint has been either by me or by a close friend. So, there's not really a philosophy, Tamara. It's more just, you know, we have this text or I have this text. It's too short to be a commercial book. It's not gonna be part of, probably not gonna be part of something else, although often, or at least sometimes that does occur. I wanna get it out there in some way to give to my friends to send a few copies around. Maybe even send review copies, which basically is a pointless exercise with chapbooks, but one does it anyway. And so, it's-it's more just kind of the spur of the moment. It's not really a philosophy, I mean, I have a I have an ours poetic as a poet, and I have very definite ideas about poetry and literature, generally speaking, but-but it doesn't, I couldn't, we've never had to apply for a grant, and never will. But if I did and had to write a one paragraph philosophy, I really would have to sit down and write something, because I, it's not really in my head.

Tamara Thompson: Well, I think sometimes the whole I like idea, or mission is also just to create; like, that's a big part of, like, why I do what I do. And like, yeah, we have our philosophies and missions and stuff like that. But the idea is just, I want to make something, you know?

Bruce Whiteman: Right.

Tamara Thompson: And that's for a lot of people that's good enough of an explanation.

Bruce Whiteman: Yeah, I mean, I don't know if you've seen Jim Johnstone's recent Gaspereau press book about micro presses. Yeah, and he says that.

Tamara Thompson: Right there! [Points to stack of books behind].

Bruce Whiteman: Oh, okay, he's-I can't see what's actually on your shelf.

Tamara Thompson: Very small book, so.

Bruce Whiteman: Okay. Well, he kind of says that. You know it's just to express your creativity. Yeah-yeah, agreed.

Tamara Thompson: So, you were talking a little bit about the first thing you published, but do you mostly publish like poetry? I just wanna get an idea of the kind of things that you actually like create like work wise.

Bruce Whiteman: Okay, so yes, primarily poetry but I've also published, I-I wrote an essay about a painter friend of mine, not the painter who's involved in the press but a Peterborough painter and decided to publish that, and that actually marked the (technical issue occurred) of the press because I was doing that. And I thought, oh, well, maybe I'll put this under the old Poets and Painters imprint, it made a lot of sense, because while it wasn't poetry, it wasn't essay about a painter. So, I've done that. I've done a couple of poetry, books of friends. What else? A friend of mine, and I had a long conversation on email about the long poem in Canada because we've both published long poems, you know, like not quite lifelong, but-but getting close to it. And so, after that long conversation, we decided to publish that as a book. So, it came out under my imprint, so I guess you'd call that criticism. But in a kind of friendly format, because it's just a conversation. So, no fiction, mostly poetry. Now that there's a Poets and Painters Press due from the printer today, which is exciting as always, it's supposed to come from Coach House either today or tomorrow. And it's actually a critical essay. I wrote a critical essay again on my friend's long poem. It's about thirty pages in type, and we decided to publish that as a-as a little chapbook. So, I guess in that sense we're with one book we're branching out into criticism. Not that I oh, the book on-on John Climenhage. The painter was kind of criticism, but very personal. This particular piece is not so personal, even though he's a friend of mine. It's more the kind of essay you might expect that they don't publish things like this too much anymore. But you might find in a place like Canadian Literature in the old days, essays on Canadian writing or studies in Canadian literature, scholarly or critical magazines. So that's-that's about the breadth of it. And it's not a big breadth.

(Technical issues occurred.)

Tamara Thompson: Sorry about that. Basically, I'm just really happy to hear that you're doing, not just like the-I really like the painter and like poetry aspect, but also the criticism aspect, because it's not something that everybody does. But it's something I really love to see in this community, because I think it's so interesting and unique a lot of different takes and a lot of different criticism which you might not find anywhere else.

Bruce Whiteman: Right.

Tamara Thompson: I love that.

Bruce Whiteman: Right? Right? And you know there's always a fairly limited, or you probably got a question about this later on. But there's always a pretty limited community for any given chapbook. I mean the-the one I just sent to press and I'm expecting today or tomorrow. We printed a hundred and I fully expect to die with half of them, I mean, let's be honest. The poets taking half, and I'm taking half. But you know it's something I'll give to a few friends. I might actually send a few review copies out just because it's a critical essay.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Bruce Whiteman: Rather than a poetry chapbook. But a hundred is definitely gonna be more than we'll probably need. It's a pretty small reader community for that sort of thing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I am interested in, like your process of like, how you pick something to how you actually get it into like editing, and then layout, and then send it off to Coach House. Like I'm interested in that process for you, like, from "I want to make something" to having it in your hand. What's that like?

Bruce Whiteman: Well, it's well, it's always fun. I mean, it's not again these the projects that have come up that have been printed are published by this little press have been just kind of there. There's been. No, I don't do five-year plans. I don't even do one-year plans. It's just kind of when something comes up that seems like it might have a small audience that a chapbook would satisfy and there's no other obvious way to publish it then. Oh, well, let's do it as a chapbook kind of thing. So, in most cases, I guess I'm responsible for getting a getting the text into perfect form. So, I'm the editor. I'm also the proofreader, although I usually ask someone else to proofread as well and it could be the subject of the essay. It could be the poet; could be anybody. Almost just so there's a second set of eyes on the on what goes off to-to the press. So, it's not always been Coach House. The more recently it has been the John Climenhage essay, which I only did in fifty copies was entirely produced by Jeff Macklin. So, you know him, I am assuming?

Tamara Thomspson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: So, Jeff typeset it and looked after getting it printed. I can't even remember who printed it. It wasn't Coach House. It wasn't a recognized sort of printer publisher like. That's just some printing establishment he found. So, he proofread it. I proofread it. I think one other person proofread it, and we only did fifty, and I kind of now wish we'd done more, because it's almost gone. You know, it's like you never know your either sorry that you don't have any left, or you're stuck with fifty for the rest of your born days. But more recently I have been using Coach House. So, I, with the one that's coming today, I actually had Jeff design it. So, I used him as the book designer. So, I sent him Word files, basically for the cover and for the guts. And he put it into the pdf forms and designed it and put page numbers. You know, all that stuff and he sent those back to me, and then I passed them on to John De Jesus, who's the printer at Coach House press. So, there was me as editor, Jeff as designer, Coach House press printer all for a topic of thirty pages. But I mean, obviously, one could do it more simply. I don't have design skills, particularly myself and I've always preferred to have somebody else do that. I mean, I know a lot because of my lifetime in rare book libraries. I know a lot about typography, and I know a lot about the history of book design, but I don't really have you know the artist eye I you need to make a book look convincing and readable and good. So, someone else has mostly done that you know, I often think about when I'm thinking about chapbook history. I often think about Raymond Souster who's a Canadian poet of the beginning in the forties died sometime after the year 2000; I can't remember. And Ray started to press with a couple of other poets in 1952, and the first book they did was a proper commercial size book. It was an

anthology, I think. They had it printed in England. And then the more books he did, the more he realized that the audience was so small that it didn't pay to do it this way. So, he started, first of all, I don't know if you wouldn't, if you know what mimeographing is, but it's kind of part of chapbook history. So, he started mimeographing books and the first couple he did were a hundred copies. Then he did a couple that were fifty copies, and he still couldn't get rid of them all. So, the last couple he did in mimeograph form, before he went back to real books, he did in twenty-five copies. There's a certain sadness in that, you know. It's like you aspire to sell even a hundred in the whole country of Canada, and you can't do it. So, you lower it to fifty still can't do it. They're still sitting in his basement. So down it goes to twenty-five, with the result today that those books that were done in an edition of twenty-five are incredibly rare and expensive and they don't look like much. They're just mimeographed and stapled at the corner you know. That's it. They're not even, really, I guess they're chapbooks, but they don't have a binding. They're just staple in one corner. But anyway, so the numbers I don't know how many you print of the things you do. But you know, typically chapbooks are twenty-five or fifty or hundred copies, and I've never done more than that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, we do seventy-five. And we give up that, depending on what we're doing is seventy-five to eighty, and we'll give thirty to twenty-five to an author for them to sell, and then we try and sell the rest which I still have some from our first print runs. But we did sell out of one book that we did. *Senescence*, which, strangely enough, was a-a short story that was sci-fi. And that's really cool. Yeah, it was; it was a really interesting moment. It dealt with he's like a mechanic, basically in a cyborg man, and he's slowly dying and just their conversation and it was popular, I guess it was also just a very small, just little thing, too so.

Bruce Whiteman: Well, you know, Gaspereau Press. I don't know if this will continue, but Gaspereau has always had this chapbook series and their deal with the poet is so, they print four hundred copies of the chapbook series and sell them for five dollars; like this is letter press printing, full color, the whole, you know everything, and they sell them for five dollars. But the deal with the poet, and I know 'cause I had one, is that they print four hundred, and you get two hundred. That's your pay; to do with whatever you want. And I did mine in how many years ago is it now? Several years ago, I was still in Toronto, probably seven or eight years ago, and of those two hundred that I was given, I've only sold a very small handful. I've mostly given them away, and I still have a hundred left and they're really nice, you know. They make beautiful books.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, I know.

Bruce Whiteman: Everybody aspires to have a Gaspereau book because they're so handsome.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: But I remember thinking jeez four hundred is pretty-pretty optimistic, pretty aspirational. But you know, with letter press printing

once you have it on the press, and once everything's done the-the whole preprinting process is done. It's just as cheap to print four hundred as to two hundred the paper. So, I guess they figured, and maybe with some other poets more popular than-than me, they did better. But yeah, small audiences, as you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think the other thing, too, especially with like Gaspereau, is that it-it, they it, just might make more sense to print as much as they do just because they have the material, they're like, well, we have the material, and it's left over anyway. And if there's only like this much left like we might as well use it, you know, because they just have the resources.

Bruce Whiteman: Well, it's interesting in the history of printing. Certainly, in the period before printing got mechanized in the 1820s and 30s and 40s. The biggest cost in making books was paper, not type, not paying people to do the-you know the type composition, not ink. The biggest cost was paper. But that's different now. So, as I say, once you've gone to all the trouble and paying, although Gaspereau doesn't have to pay you know, to have to have someone design it. You have to have someone do make up on the press and all that other stuff. Once that's all done, you-you really might as well print more than last, because paper, unless you're using handmade paper, which is a different story. But you know regular printing paper, even if it's acid free, is not that expensive.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I am interested in how the press makes decisions. And you were talking a little bit about it. And some of the answers that you've given me earlier, but I would like to ask the question a little more directly, if it's okay with you.

Bruce Whiteman: How, how I make decisions about what to publish?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: Oh, well, it's just me, and it's-it's you know it's-it's it's kind of the decision, I don't, I don't plan at all. I-if I don't do another book for another year, it's no big deal. It's just kind of the imprint is there for when it's needed for something. So, you know, something might come along that will get a Poets and Painters press imprint in the next year or two. Something might not. It's-it's, I don't-I don't really think of it much more seriously than that honestly, Tamara. It's just kind of-it's been a way to get certain things out into the world that I've wanted to do that too. And I mean I-I had one it was first used in 1970 I think it's eight or nine. I used it once when I was living in France because I did a little chapbook in France, so I put the Poets and Painters Press in front on it there and then I think a little later I used it again, actually, for another essay on a painter and then it went dormant for decades. I didn't even think about it honestly. That's how-how sort of off the cuff, and unserious it was. But and then, now, more recently, I've done what five or six things, and-and it's kind of fun.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: You know it's-it's a little expensive when you use Coach House, but-but some things are, you know, just have to be done. So, the money secondary. So, the decisions are very off the cuff as I said earlier, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I love the variety in this community of how people do things and the freedom that chapbooks allow people like you don't have like, so many presses that are more traditional. They have quotas, and we have to publish so many books this year, and so many have to sell, and I love the freedom that chapbooks and zines and smaller D.I.Y. publishing gives people it's like, well, it didn't happen this year, but there's next year, and there's no rush, you know.

Bruce Whiteman: Right, and that, that's partly an economic factor, right? It's like if-if you're publishing commercial books, you're getting money from various councils, federal and provincial, and you can't just like let six or twelve months go by and think, oh, well, I didn't do anything this year. I'll have to do something next year. Because if you don't, they'll lose your council grants, right? So that economic pressure becomes really a serious part of their publishing program. We have to do, we promised to do six books this year, or four or twelve, and if you don't live up to that, you could get cut off from Canada Council or OCA support, whereas with chapbooks and micro publishing of various kinds, there are no pressures like that. I mean, someone has to pay a few dollars, like this book that we're expecting from Coach House today wound up costing about eight hundred. So, you know that money has to come from somewhere. But it's not like the thousands of dollars that you're investing if you're doing you know, real books. And I don't mean the chat books are real books. I just mean books of more-

Tamara Thompson: Traditional published ones.

Bruce Whiteman: Yeah. Books of more than forty-eight pages, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, I'm interested on, like, where you actually sell your books. Do you sell them online? Is it more hand-to-hand, like markets?

Bruce Whiteman: Where I sell them? I don't really feel like I have enough of a backlist to do any of the fairs. You know, I enjoy going to the fairs. I meet some friends. I buy a few things, but I've never taken a booth, because I'd only have, what five or six or seven books to put out. It doesn't really constitute much of a list. So, it's mainly a-a lot are given away frankly. I don't really need to, or care about making back my eight hundred dollars, half of which was paid by my friend. I mean it'd be nice to make it back. But I'm not really that concerned about it. If it were eight thousand, I would be really concerned about it but. So, I give a lot of way occasionally. There's an opportunity to sell like I did a reading at Take Cover books in this in the spring, when a different book of mine came out a commercial book and so he-Andrew and Shawn said, well, if you have any other things you wanna bring to sell. So, I brought, I

took two chapbooks to sell there. Lord knows if they have. I think I think a couple of copies of each maybe have been sold but essentially, I don't really work very hard at selling them. I just assume I'll give them to people that I know. We'll read them and will enjoy or get something from them.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: Now w-with the, with the book I alluded to about the conversation on the long poem. So, we print-we printed two hundred of those. Which was definitely visionary. And we, I sent out thirty review copies and then, you know, with each one I put a note in saying, this book is available from Poets and Painters- Poets and Painters Press add such and such an address, and the cost is, I think we put fifteen dollars on it. I think I got one order and one review, like out of thirty review copies, and that review was one paragraph long in the Malahat Review. That was it. I mean, I might as well have saved the postage and my breath, you know, and I might as well actually have only bothered to print a hundred, because two hundred is too many, and I don't really have other venues for selling a book like that. But-but selling, sales and making money back or covering costs has never really been an issue with me particularly. Most of the things I do are relatively cheap and it's a pleasure to give books to friends, you know, and even to some people who aren't necessarily friends. But you-you meet them at a reading, or wherever, so.

Tamara Thompson: And you just want them to engage with your work.

Bruce Whiteman: Right, right yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I understand that,yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: Sometimes there's, in choosing that particular book to do that particular book. The other poet's name is Ken Norris and Ken's my oldest poet friend, and Ken and I sort of conspired about-you know we've written these lifelong, almost poems. Nobody's written about them in the scholarly literature they-they were under reviewed as they came out in individual books and fascicles, and so on. So maybe we better do something about at least putting on record what it was we were thinking about, who we were reading, who our influences were. You know how we chose titles and subjects, and all that stuff that goes into a fairly large, a long, long poem, and so it would. Whether the book sold or not wasn't particularly important. It was more just for the record, and you know, even though the record in this case probably just means somebody may be finding this book in the National Library of Canada, because we always send our two copies to them or somewhere else in the future. We could hope, you know. I mean both Ken and I have degrees, I mean, I don't have a degree in Canadian literature; he does. He taught Canadian literature all his life and we both know a lot about the history of Canadian literature, and how at various times people have just disappeared off the face of the earth until somebody comes along, and you know, either by happenstance or serious researching, turns up some book that everybody has forgotten about. That's pretty interesting you know, and it's especially true, there's a if you look at the history of-of well literature, but poetry, especially after the writer dies, there's always this period when their work just goes

underground, you know, like no one cares anymore. And believe me, this will happen to Margaret Atwood just as it happens to more minor writers like people, will stop caring once she's not around, and then, you know, later it will come back, I mean, she's always going to be part of the canon of Canadian literature unless she's discovered not to have reported that her daughter was molested by her husband, or, you know, some.

Tamara Thompson: Yeaaaaaaah.

Bruce Whiteman: But any I'm sorry, but.

Tamara Thompson: I know; it's okay. Everyone's been trying to handle and deal with that and it's a no easy roadmap.

Bruce Whiteman: No easy roadmap. Yeah. So, these things do have an effect. But in the long-term, the good, the good writers usually do persist, but-but often they disappear for a while, and with Canadian literature more than American or British literature, this is true. So, we just wanted to put something down in published form that recorded because no one else asked. So, we answered unasked questions, as it were, just recorded, what you know, what our process of putting together such a large-scale poem was now, that's maybe a special Poets and Painters press book. It's the only one of that kind that I've done and mostly it's just to get some good work into print, you know. I mean, I don't, did I bring? I brought it. I we can still get together for coffee, and I can show you things in in fact, give you some of them.

Tamara Thompson: I would love that.

Bruce Whiteman: You know this is the book I've been talking about. (Holds up book).

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: And then Poets and Painters also did a book of poems by him by Ken Norris. That was, I think, a hundred copies. Yeah. Coach House a hundred copies. So, I brought a few other things, but they're not-they're not Poets and Painters Press. Oh, that's-that's my Gaspereau book.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, very nice, yeah, that's awesome.

Bruce Whiteman: And you know, two color cover. I mean two color title pages. I don't know if you can see that but it's black and deep red or brown. Right on my God, and you know that I mean you never get that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: The-the-the poem titles are in a separate color, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: Pretty-pretty cool. But that's yeah.



Tamara Thompson: The shape of it as well like it's not standard folded, like it's longer.

Bruce Whiteman: Right? It's almost square, actually.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: Yeah, it's almost square. four ninety-five, four dollars. They sell this for four ninety-five, letter press printed, and an addition of four hundred. And I have to sell this for fifteen dollars. Now, admittedly, that does have a full color cover. Coach House said, oh, we can do that for a hundred bucks that, well hundred bucks sure great. Usually, the covers are just typographic. The most inexpensive way to go.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, we do; so, the one that's right. There is a hand carved stamp that my friend on, my designer did, and so she carved out rubber, and so just me and my mom. For hours I would have the black and the blue, and she'd do the sun, which was yellow, and we'd stamp it together so that I didn't get my black and blue hands on the yellow sun. We stamped them together for all the copies.

Bruce Whiteman: Rubber stamp. How many copies?

Tamara Thompson: I think that one was eighty. That was Rachel Smalls but we've used that stamp again to make like little notebook things.

Bruce Whiteman: Oh, sure. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Blank pages inside, but they look very different, because well, it's just made out of rubber. So, the stamp of the woman broke in half and instead of doing a yellow sun, we did a gold sun. So, even though it's technically the same, they don't look the same.

Bruce Whiteman: Right, right.

Tamara Thompson: And it will never be the same, because that's stamp was good and okay. And the new covers that I did for the notebooks, the stamps broke, right.

Bruce Whiteman: Right, sure. Well, that's cool, though. That's great.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Thanks.

Bruce Whiteman: Yup, yup.

Tamara Thompson: Okay. What are some challenges that the press has faced over the years? And you can take that and whatever come like direction, you feel comfortable with.

Bruce Whiteman: Oh, I guess the biggest challenge really is distribution.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: Getting-getting the books out there, I mean. I probably you know I have a lot of friends and-and acquaintances in the literary community, and I should probably just sit down and-and you know, make up a big list of people who always gets sent a copy of what we do, and just like forget about trying to sell them. I mean, I don't personally know Margaret Atwood. I don't personally know George Bowering. Or who are the other great living poets? I don't know-I, Michael, Ondaatje, but I-I know the addresses for these people for various reasons. And I and-and actually, it's kind of good we're talking about this because it might make me do this. But I think the answer to distribution apart from friends and doing book fairs, if you have enough stuff to do book fairs.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Bruce Whiteman: Like the one at the Fisher Library, or the one in Word on the Street, and so on. I think the answer is just to send out as many copies to as many people as you can manage. You know, I don't really see any other way, that you want to get these things into the hands of people. I mean, if I send a copy of my-actually, I sent a copy of this to Ondaatje.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Bruce Whiteman: He sent me a postcard, saying, thanks so much, great really enjoyed it.

Tamara Thompson: Nice.

Bruce Whiteman: I know. And I should make sure he gets a copy of everything we do, and probably everybody else who would, who would have an interest. I mean I, it's funny I tend to know the older generation of Canadian writers and have some friends in the very youngest generation of Canadian writers, but I don't know a lot of people kind of in between except by name, and often not even by name. I'm always amazed when the-the Giller list comes out, or the winners of the Pierre Berton residencies, or the, you know this, even the Governor GG's, often I don't know any of these-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: Poets of those at all; never heard of them. And that's just that's partly because I'm an older generation, and also admittedly partly because I spent seventeen years out of the country sort of in the middle of my life, so certain developments passed me by. But anyway, the distribution problem, I think, is the main one, like there's no printing these books and having them sit in a box in my bedroom, right? I should just as we all should get them out there somehow.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: That's-that's the main problem. Not finding things to print; economic money is not, I mean, I'm-I'm I get by, I'm not well off or anything, but I can always find you know, three hundred dollars to make a chapbook if-if there's a good reason for it, so yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I don't know if this is helpful. But I also know that some places do half tables at their markets, like, you don't need a full table, because there's so many people, so they do like half ones, and I know the Ampersand Review does a market, and then The Meet the Presses does a market but like, just even if you don't feel like you have enough for a full table, even just to do a half a table just to get your stuff out there because you do some cool stuff and like what you're showing me looks really neat, so like, I think, like I don't know if that's helpful in any way, cause they're both in Toronto, but I know that they do half table. So, if you don't want to do like a big full table of your stuff, you don't have to.

Bruce Whiteman: Well, that's interesting I mean, right? Yeah, that might, I'll think about that. Right now, I probably only have one, two, three, four, four, or five books, of which I have enough copies to go to, something like that, like there's no point going with one copy, right or two, that that wouldn't be very helpful to anybody. But-but maybe at some point. I don't have a car, so Toronto is always a challenge. But-but maybe someone else from here. Does someone else from here go To Meet the Presses.

Tamara Thompson: I go to Meet the Presses.

Bruce Whiteman: You do?

Tamara Thompson: I'm-I'm go, I'm planning on going to the Ampersand Review one and The Meet the Presses one. The Ampersand one is in October, and The Meet the Presses one is in November. I'm not sure to the extent of like our, like how big of a table, how big our table is going to be, because it just depends on how many people sign up in a group.

Bruce Whiteman: Right, right. But from Peterborough. Are there other small publishers going that you know of?

Tamara Thompson: Oh!

Bruce Whiteman: Justin and Elisha ever do that?

Tamara Thompson: I don't know. I-I talked with Elisha recently, and they mostly do the one that, like the art space downtown. They have a little market fair, but-

Bruce Whiteman: Yeah, right.

Tamara Thompson: I try and go to it, and either the car breaks down or there's a snowstorm, you know, like just my luck right.

Bruce Whiteman: Yeah, I've been, I go to that every year for sure.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: Yeah, I don't show there, I just go to attend. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, but I don't know if Elisha and Justin, I can ask Justin cause I'm talking to him tomorrow? Yeah. I'm talking to him tomorrow. But yeah, I can, I can ask. But yeah, it's-it's one of those things where it's a pain in the ass to get all the books to Toronto or to Ottawa. Cause you-you have your books, you have your tablecloths and your signs and stuff, and I have like to actually prop the books up I have little art easels which I got from the Dollar store, which I just pop up.

Bruce Whiteman: Oh, does the Dollar store sell those.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, (technical issues occurred).

Bruce Whiteman: Right, right, right.

Tamara Thompson: And so, I have them flat out on the table. But then I also have them propped up so people can see them.

Bruce Whiteman: Right. I have a, I have a couple of those for a couple of really beautiful letterpress printed books of mine that I have but only two. I that'd be a good thing to have more of actually, I'll have to look.

Tamara Thompson: And I, just from the Dollar Store. And they're like, I think, my friend Grace who's also my proofreader, layout and design. Bless Grace. She found them at the Dollar Store in like Mississauga for, like, two dollars, I think.

Bruce Whiteman: Oh, really. Oh, great. Okay.

Tamara Thompson: They might have gone up in price, because you know everything does. And she got them a long time ago at this point. But yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: It's the Dollar Store.

Tamara Thompson: It the Dollar Store. So, it's it can't be that crazy but yeah, we-we have our little setup and stuff that we have everything I have, like an old Halloween tablecloth that my mom has that's like this beautiful dark blue lacey thing. So, I bring a white sheet and then put the other thing on top, and we got a sign made up and everything. And I'm like, damn, this table looks good, and I got like a light from Michael's. That was a moth that I painted with like our colors. And you know I was looking at our table from across the market once, and I was like, damn we did a nice job at that, for a lot of dollar store things. It looks pretty good.

Bruce Whiteman: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Good, and you know for a bedsheet.

Bruce Whiteman: Right? Right? I-I used to go to Antiquarian Book fairs a lot, and it was always interesting to compare booths, because most antiquarian booksellers just brought you know, the basic-basic wooden shelving, and-and you, and also a display case. But-but some obviously hired a design, you know, like an architectural designer or somebody like that, because they would look really beautiful.

Tamara Thompson: Mine is, look around the house and see what you can find, and a little creativity goes a long way.

(Technical issues occurred).

Bruce Whiteman: But so, oh, yeah well, thanks. Thanks for mentioning that. I'll think about that. You don't do the one at the Fisher-no, the Fisher Library, maybe not. But do you know about that one?

Tamara Thompson: Which one?

Bruce Whiteman: It's a-it's a small press, fine press book fair at the Thomas Fisher Library, U of T. And it happens every fall-

(Technical issues occurred).

Bruce Whiteman: Well, the-the nutshell version. I started in high school.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Bruce Whiteman: I was reading poetry as a teenager pretty seriously and started writing it as well and went on doing so all through university and integrate, and-and thereafter, really, I've-I've never stopped. My first books, as I suggested, came out, I had two books. One of them is this (holds up book) which came out in 1978, and then the other one was the one that I did with my artist friend about the Heraclesian fragments and then I've been working and writing ever since. I feel like my first I can well not feel like it's true. My first real book of more than forty-eight pages came out in 1979, and since then I've had, you know, lots of books. If you want the list, you can. I actually have a Wikipedia entry, and they're all there. And then, in the early eighties, I kind of had a very serious change of direction in my work and decided that I wanted to stop writing lyric poetry and do something more large scale and philosophical. So that's when I started my long poem and the first book of that came out in 1984. And then the last book, book nine came out in 2022. So that was a forty-year project. Basically, I-I it's always I've you know. I've always had a job apart from literature. Man, I do a lot of things besides write poetry. I-I write a lot of book reviews. I do some classical music writing. I've written books on one of the group of seven painters. I did a little book on the history of English publishing in Quebec. I-I have fairly broad interests, and so I've always been writing a lot of other things, too. But the poetry's been the consistent one, I guess. Yeah, I but I always had a job to you know. Raise a family and own a car and buy wine that didn't cost seven dollars a bottle and that was as-as a specialist in rare books and manuscripts. But despite, I think most poets are part time poets in Canada, and I don't know anybody, really, who's a full-time poet, do you? I'd-I'd be surprised if you did so yeah. And-and I don't know what else you would like me to comment on, as far as the poetry goes.

(Technical issues occurred.)

Tamara Thompson: Which Group of Seven painter did you talk about? I'm interested a little bit in that. If that's okay.

Bruce Whiteman: Oh, sure. My JEH MacDonald.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, okay.

Bruce Whiteman: And the book came out in 1995. It's my favorite of my books. It's absolutely beautiful. Full color, it's oblong or landscape. It's a paperback, but it's really beautifully produced. I think it was, I think it was printed in Singapore or one of the Asian countries that we're doing a lot of color printing in those days.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: And it was remainder very shortly after it was published. Unfortunately, because the publisher went broke.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: These things happen, so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, why do you think a lot of small presses and micro presses have to close up shop?

Bruce Whiteman: Well, I think a lot of factors are there, some close-up shop because people just get tired of it you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: Doing all the work, putting the money in getting no financial returns there so, there's a fatigue issue. And then there's a discouragement issue, I think as well of you know, you really believe in the work you're publishing, but it's very hard to as we've already discussed. It's very hard to distribute it to get it around to get any feedback. I mean, sure you get feedback from your friends, and it's always the same because they're never gonna say anything other than praise for the books you do right. If your mother actually sat down and had a critical conversation with you, you might be a little bit surprised. I know I would be. But so-so, there's in the beginning, there's a lot of enthusiasm because you feel like you're contributing to the culture. But that sense of elation at-at making a contribution, I think, often wears off, because-because it's all one way, you know there's not, you don't get much back and I'm not talking about money not at all just in terms of provoking a conversation with the culture. Getting reviews or getting people responding in various other kinds of informal ways. It's not always easy, and so, I think people, I think most-most little presses or chapbook presses or micro presses, have a fairly limited lifetime. And that's okay. You know someone else will pick up the mant-you don't pick up a mantle. Someone else will carry on after you know you've done your five years, or your ten years, or whatever-whatever it is. I mean, we've seen that over and over and over again in the history of publishing. And can poetry publishing in Canada you know, a few bigger presses go on and never like Coach House is founded in 1965, you know. That's thirty-five, fifty,

that's over fifty years. But they're not, they're not as they're not a chapbook press. Obviously, what's older, McLellan and Stewart is older, but they're basically a shadow of what they used to be. Hmm, nothing. Nothing older than the 60's. And probably most presses are a lot younger, too. So.

Tamara Thompson: Like even Coach House.

(Technical issues occurred).

Bruce Whiteman: Okay. Alright! What were you saying? You started to say something about Coach House.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. Both Coach House and House of Anansi Press are some of the oldest presses that are Canadian that I can think of, and they both started in the sixties that are still around anyway.

Bruce Whiteman: Right-right. And you know, in the sixties and seventies there were a bunch of others that got going, and none of them has lasted. But those two have, and those two are actually founded, I think, in the same year, or within a year of each other, so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah-

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: But my follow up question, I guess, to what we were just talking about is, how and why are you still keeping your press going?

Bruce Whiteman: Oh, I guess, I guess it's, be, I mean, mine is a very, very part time press, and I guess it's because things come along that I want to have a hand in getting published you know. Not necessarily of my own, although occasionally that, too. But you know I really believed in a couple of the little poetry chapbooks by Ken Norris that we did and-and I'm sure other things like that, well, I-I-I'm not sure that I really wanna advertise widely and get start getting manuscripts in the mail, although that would be fine, I guess. But it, it's just to respond to things that I believe in, I guess, and that I feel should be in print, and that I want to try to give a leg up to get into the culture even though past experience suggests that that's uphill work.

Tamara Thompson: Fair enough. So, I love, so, it is a decision to publish-

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So why did you decide to publish some of your work as a chapbook? Because it is, we've been talking about it, but I'm still gonna ask the question directly, if you don't mind.

Bruce Whiteman: Throughout my career, you mean?

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Bruce Whiteman: Oh, okay, well, of-often I had something, was just, was chapbook length rather than full book length. But I did sometimes publish parts of a larger project along the way before they got gathered into a bigger book, just because I was excited about them. I wanted to share them with friends and other people. So, for example, one book of my long poem consists of smaller projects, some of which did come out as chapbooks and that was just to have a way to distribute the book a little out, distribute the poems rather you know, to friends and even to literary magazines. So, it was kind of a stopgap a little bit. I was always planning that they'd become part of a larger book that would be commercially published. But I, just too-too excited to wait, as it were before the actual book, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Would you like-you're still creating things right now-but would you do you plan on continuing to create chat books with your work?

Bruce Whiteman: Yeah, if-if there's I might well, I- you know my last book apart from the long poem, my last book of shorter poems was quite a while ago. And I have accumulated a bunch of lyric poems, and I don't know if I'll ever have enough to make up a full book manuscript and if I've ultimately decided that I won't, then I might very well do those as a chapbook. Just so they get published in some form for the record, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: And while it's true that a lot of poetry and chapbooks doesn't you know, make doesn't, make much of a splash in the literary culture. At least they're published, whereas if you don't do that, they're in your bottom drawer and nobody sees them. So that's not good.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, this next question you can share whatever you feel comfortable sharing. But what are some challenges that you faced as an author over the years?

Bruce Whiteman: Umm, I, well, I because I've never had to depend on my writing to pay the bills. Umm, I would, I would say the challenges have been two, really and primarily number one. Primarily, it's just been psychological challenges. I mean, not that I have any diagnosed diseases or anything of that kind, but there have certainly been lots of times when writing has been difficult, for whatever reason, life reasons or just writerly reasons, you know, not getting to a certain point where I wasn't really sure where to go from what I'd done in the past. So those are kind of I guess you'd call those writer reasons, and then, secondly, are what I would call bourgeois reasons honestly. And I use that word because I'm just putting together a manuscript now of memoir pieces that I've written over the years, and when I lived in Montreal I published an essay called "Notes of a Bourgeois Poet" and that essay was about the difficulty of trying to balance the writer's life with the life, with the domestic life like the life of having a family having a job having to pay bills and all that. You know, life insurance car insurance, all that stuff, and how that took up, you know the majority of my time and the writing had to be kind of fit in, and the little holes of time left over. So that was for a long time a problem as well. And throughout much of my working life I've I had



periods when I beat myself up because I didn't decide when I was twenty-two that I was going to be a writer and nothing else. Which is easy to say, especially in retrospect. But I think, despite having been a full time you know, having a full-time job for my whole life. My output is not bad, so I should, kind of learn to accept that I was doing an okay job being a writer, even if the writing sometimes seemed like a hobby a word which I despise. And when applied to something like poetry. I mean it's a hobby to make macrame baskets, but it's not a hobby to write poetry. There's a certain, you have to have a certain degree of trying to be as full time about it as you can and take it really seriously. So.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: Sometimes I felt I wasn't doing that, and that that was a problem that made it difficult. But I guess in the end I got through all that, and now writing is my full time, life.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what has this kind of publishing taught you over the years?

Bruce Whiteman: What has what taught me?

Tamara Thompson: What has this type of publishing taught you over the years?

Bruce Whiteman: Oh, you mean chapbook publishing?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, the smaller kind of publishing.

Bruce Whiteman: Huh. What has it taught me? Well, I don't know if it's taught me anything I didn't know before. I mean most people aren't interested in poetry and poetry has a pretty, is pretty low generically in our culture. I mean, for every person who reads a poetry book, they're probably twenty-five people who read a novel. It doesn't have a lot of honor, as it were, as a literary form, it seems. You know, we could talk about that endlessly. Why that happened. But and I have some theories on about why that happened. But poetry doesn't get a lot of respect, I guess, to quote Dangerfield of all people; and, you know, publishing has shown me that, I mean listen, I published a book of the last two books of my long poem were published in 2014 and 2022, and they were both published by the same publisher, ECW Press, which is a kind of medium-sized publisher in Toronto, and Tamara yesterday I got my annual royalty statements for those two books. Now remember, one of the books was published them ten years ago and one was only published two years ago. And you-you know what a royalty statement is, right? It's when they tell you how many books, how many copies were sold, and how much money you're owed as the author. So, between those two books I owe the publisher a hundred eighty dollars. That, that's because when they were published, I got an advance of three-hundred dollars on each book not in advance in the way you know big American novelists get advances, obviously just a token. But and I still haven't worked off the three hundred dollars on either book. And this is a medium-sized press that sells, sells into the United States market you know, has representatives who represent their books in Canada to bookstores and libraries and after ten years one of my books still hasn't

even made back the advance, so that caused me some moments of depression yesterday. I mean, I-I always were those moments of depression, because, you know, I just think about the work, and how important it is to me at least. But you certainly learn, as you publish, that the economic side of it is almost a joke. It's just, there really is no economic side to it, in a way so I guess I've learned that. But I've also learned more positively not to leave you with the impression that I'm a-a gloomy Gus, as people say. I've never used that-

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Bruce Whiteman: Expressions before in my life by the way. No, I've also learned that there's a pleasure in seeing your work printed and being able to, or-or, in fact, the work of other people. If you're making it public and being able to give it to people and get it around a little bit. You know that that's-that's definitely pleasurable. I don't think it's warranted to make too much of it in terms of what it does for Canadian culture or Canadian literature, Canadian poetry. But-but it's still it's still a pleasant thing to do, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: Nice to see those books sitting on a little cradle on your bookshelf right.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: It encourages you to do more, I think.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah so, we've been talking about this in like general terms again. But I'm gonna still ask the question in a more specific way, why are chapbooks important to you?

Bruce Whiteman: Umm, in terms of my own work. I guess they're important to me too to get things out more quickly. Like as I said, I had a I had a book in 2014, a commercial book, I had another commercial book in 2015 by chance and then my next one wasn't until 2022. And so, in those intervening years, when I'm working on things. Chapbooks are a way to help you get work out there a little bit. They're not I don't know that they're I would say they're a substitute for commercial books, or but they-they certainly are a way to, you know, to encourage you to go on and to get your work when it's still fairly fresh into the hands of some people, you know, will welcome it. I guess that's how I would answer that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, jumping off of some of those ideas there, are chapbook looks important to Canadian publishing, you think? And if so, why or why not?

Bruce Whiteman: And if so, why? What?

Tamara Thompson: Why or why not?

Bruce Whiteman: Oh, oh, the-oh, there's no answer to that question, except yes. If-if you look at the history of Canadian poetry right from the

beginning and by the beginning, I guess I mean the late eighteenth century. There have, there has always been work which has gone public in chapbook form. Sure, everybody kind of longs to have, you know a commercial book, especially if it has a hard cover on it, and a dust jacket, or whatever. But much of the work that's mattered in the history of Canadian poetry first came out in chapbook form in one way or another, and, as I say, beginning with Abrams P  
lains seventeen, whatever that book is. Right up to the present, you know, a lot of important work has been made available to readers even if sometimes you had to look pretty hard to find it as-as chapbooks and so and-and that's not only true in Canada. That's true elsewhere, too. William Blake's first book of poems was a chapbook. Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, you know. The list goes on and on. I don't think he can call *Leaves of Grass* in its first edition of chapbook, because it has a hard cover on it, but it's chapbook size, length. Lots and lots of important writers made their debuts with chapbooks and kept on publishing books, chapbooks, even when they were well known. And you know we're publishing commercial books because they, too, wanted to get the work out there for people to read. Yeah, so if you, if you-you know, if you I don't know how much, you know, but have you done Can Lit at Trent.

Tamara Thompson: I did my undergraduate degree at Sheridan. Actually, I did a Creative Writing and Publishing program. And so, I spent most of my undergrad actually writing plays, poetry, some video games, some like TV scripts and stuff like that, or actually learning about publishing. So, I had a couple of classical kind of reading courses, and definitely in my master's year. But my master's year was very specific, and not a, or more out there kind of thing. So, I've never technically taken a traditional Canadian lit course in university. They've all been very specific to like, you know, maybe more idea that are out there. Ideas of like research in Canada-

Bruce Whiteman: Sure.

Tamara Thompson: Or more about Canadian publishing.

Bruce Whiteman: Right.

Tamara Thompson: And stuff like that.

Bruce Whiteman: Okay.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so, my a-

Bruce Whiteman: That's perfect.

Tamara Thompson: My background is a little different . . .

Bruce Whiteman: Right.

Tamara Thompson: . . . than average student here.

Bruce Whiteman: Right. But you are writing poetry, right?

Tamara Thompson: Oh yes, I do write poetry. Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: Right? Yeah, right? Okay, well, you know, when I think of the I don't know, someone said to me, what are the five most important books of Canadian poetry in the twentieth century at least one, two, maybe even three of them would be chapbooks. You know, they're-they're, they were the way that work got into print, when I mean, if we think now, it's hard to get published in a commercially published edition as a poet, and-and I know it is. It's nothing to the way it was before 1960, I mean, there was almost no one interested in publishing poetry even, and the big publishers like McMillan of Canada, or McLellan and Stewart or Ryerson Press. Their poetry books were often published only if they Poet paid for them, and they were commercial publishers. And oh, for example, oh, here's a good example, I mean, a lot of them are bad. But the Ryerson Press, when Lauren Pierce was the so-called editor from 1920 to 1960, had a series called The Ryerson chapbooks and Pierce did. I'm going to say, about two-hundred and ten poetry chapbooks over that period and they are all classic chapbooks saddle stitched, unillustrated, twelve to sixteen pages and none of them sold very well. Quite a few of them were paid for by the poets, they never made any money. Pierce was not the owner of the press. He was the editor, so he was always responsible to the money bags people and they were always, they were always after him for publishing books that fail to make any money, the chapbooks not being the only one's so-so chapbooks about have and-and if you look at those two hundred and ten chapbooks I guarantee you that if you recognize more than five of the poets you know, I'll give you a bottle of champagne, because most of them are by people who are long forgotten, but a few are not. Al Purdy had one. I can't just think off the top of my head who else. But if you oh, Louis Dudek had one, Raymond Souster had one. There were a few of those two-hundred odd poets who did go on, you know to have major careers as poets. So, chapbooks have always been really important in our literature and continue to be, so I think. You know that chapbook you published for your friend X next week. Who knows? Right? It could turn out to be that person's first book, and they go on to be an important poet. That's kind of the way it works or should or does.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, do you think this kind of like publishing and chapbooks and stuff like that? Do you think it reflects Canada itself in some way?

Bruce Whiteman: I... you know I don't think so. I think it's- I think it's pretty common in all of the Anglo-American literary cultures. I think the same kind of thing goes on in Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, Wales, England certainly in the United States, I mean all the English-speaking countries. I don't know that there's the same kind of tradition in other like when I think about European books and I know French better than others, but I don't think they do that so much and like not really sure why, that's the case. But it does seem to be a kind of English in the broadest sense English tradition to do chapbooks. So, you'll find them in Australasia. That's not the right way to put it in Australia and New Zealand definitely in the States, and still in all the different parts of the British, of the United Kingdom. So, I don't think it's specifically Canadian. Other people might say differently, but.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What do you think this kind of publishing offers that like traditional publishing can offer? We've been talking about it, but I'm-I'm still interested in what you think it can offer that traditional publication can't, and, like vice versa.

Bruce Whiteman: Oh, what they used to call using a Marxist term. What's the expression? Not control of the presses, but something like that. I mean, it's control to publish what you want, to make it, look how you want it to look and not to have to be worried about the economic factors that influence commercial publishing. If-if you, if you wanna pursue this a bit, Louis Dudek, who was a Montreal poet who taught at McGill published a very interesting book called *Literature and the Press*, and there's a lot in there about these questions. About-I don't know if he has exactly a chapter on chat books. This book came out in 1960 by the way, it's an old book. But he-he and I think it was actually his PhD dissertation. But it's readable, nonetheless and he talks a lot about how writers need to take control of the means of production. That's the Marxist phrase. But so, it mean, I mean, there's still money involved. But it means you make all the decisions on everything, from you know the size and kind of the type, to the paper, to the design of the book, to the length of the book and to the contents of the book. You know all of those things are out of your hands when you get into the hands of a commercial publisher, and that's not meant, that sounded more evil than I mean because I have nothing but respect for-for commercial publishers. But the book I just published in March, which is, you know, three hundred and some odd pages. It's a real book. I had no, the only say I had about how the book looks, I didn't have any say about the type the page design anything like that. The cover design, I was given two options and asked to comment. That was it. Unfortunately, the one I preferred is the one they used. Otherwise, all those decisions were made in house by the publisher. So, it's control I guess, Tamara, really, basically, you can make your book, or you know, look the way you want it to look and do exactly what you want to do, because you're not beholden to any other forces except your imagination.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, we're coming up to the last couple of questions here. So, what do you wish people knew about Canadian publishing like the public, that you wish that they just like maybe understood a bit more?

Bruce Whiteman: Oh, I do wish they understood a bit more, publishing, said I, I'm, I-I know a lot about the history of publishing and publishing has always been a bit of a mugs game, I mean, that sounds like a funny thing to say, but you know, publishing as such began in the 15th century, and by the end of the 15th century you know, forty five years after the Gutenberg Bible there were already many, many, many publishers in Europe who'd gone broke. And the history of publishing and printing ever since is littered-littered with companies and individuals who went broke. The economics of it are somewhat marginal it's and the now it's 1 thing to talk about history these days still, the economics of publishing books is a very fraught and marginal kind of business, because sure you can have. You know the odd book that, to everyone's surprise, instead of selling thousand five hundred copies, sold one hundred fifty thousand. And suddenly you're rolling in money for a moment, which is nice. But most books published in Canada don't make money that's a truth most don't. And if there were no

Canada Council and Provincial Arts Councils. There would be almost no commercial publishing in Canada. Almost every book, you know, if you look in any book you buy. That's published by a Canadian publisher, and you look on the verso of the title page. Inevitably you will see published with the assistance of XYZ. And sometimes, you know RS and T as well. It's all published with support from government almost-almost entirely. Of course, that's another thing. That chapbook publishers don't need to care, you know a dam about you're never gonna go to an Arts Council and get a grant to-to publish twenty-five copies of a fourteen-page poetry book. So, it would be interesting to know what the publish would, what the public would make of that I think they tend to think. Well, you know, publishing is easy. You just take a manuscript, and you make it into a book, and you sell five thousand copies, and you make lots of money, because the book twenty-five dollars in the bookstore. But if they knew if the book cost twenty-five dollars in the bookstore if the average-you know the average public book buyer knew how much of that money actually is profit to the publisher. They would probably decide that publishers are crazy and should be in a different business cause it's so small... it's so small. No, 40% of it goes to the bookstore 20% of it goes to the distributor 10% at a minimum goes to the author. And what's left after that forty, that's 70%. So already, 70%. And you know, I'm sure there are other things I'm not thinking of. It's-it's an economically weird business, plus if but yeah, I'm sure you know this. But if the bookstore orders ten copies of Tamara Thompson's new book of poetry and after three months they've only sold seven. They send the-the remaining three back to the publisher. No question.

Tamara Thompson: Yup.

Bruce Whiteman: Right. There's no other business like that, if you think about it. I mean a car parts business doesn't send car parts back to the manufacturer when they fail to sell right or whatever. So that's-that's one aspect of bookselling that a lot of publishers would like to see changed. But and I have at least one clever friend who's a published author who, when he finds copies of his books in bookstores, we'll sneakily sign them because once they're signed, they can't be returned to the publisher. (Both laugh). He used to do that all the time with his books, so that the booksellers couldn't return them. But so, I think it would be interesting if the general public knew a little more about the economics of the publishing industry. But you know they just buy books, and that's about as much as I know, and I guess. When I think about it, I don't know anything about the economics of making cars like if I pay, I don't own one even, but if I pay twenty-five thousand dollars for my car on the lot and it's a Toyota. I wonder how much money of that actually goes back to the Toyota Car Manufacturing Company. I don't have the vaguest idea so.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: -asking this next question, and just like hearing about all the cool stuff that people make. But what's something important about D.I.Y. press history that you wish people knew about, or even just a really cool traffic or zine that you saw, that you wish people knew about it, 'cause it was just a cool thing that was created?

Bruce Whiteman: I'm not quite sure what to answer that question; I mean, the most beautiful things I've ever seen up, you know, outside of commercial publishing aren't so much zines or chapbooks as letter press printed books in in my lifetime's job I got to hang around a lot with so-called letterpress printers, people who still print in the old fashioned way the way books were printed before 1830, roughly by hand, at every level, and I've seen some examples there which are so breathtaking their works of art. I mean they really are when-I'm when, if we get together and I bring a few things to show you. I'll bring one example. It's not you know, the-the-the best example ever. But one of my books was done in such an object. And they're just they're really, they-they take your breath away. They're so beautiful and you know they are a text. But the dress the text is wearing could, you know could sell for thousands of dollars in a high fashion shop? This is a stupid metaphor, but so tho-those are the things that really stick in my mind. But I mean Gaspereau press books. Of course, they're kind of letter press, too. That's not really your usual, do you do it yourself or zine sort of thing. I like quirky like one. I-I hope you would never tell him this, but one of the things about Rob's, you know, Rob. Probably I'm assuming Rob McLennan.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Bruce Whiteman: Yeah. So one, I mean, Rob does great things, and I have nothing but respect for Rob and I-the fact that he must sleep like twenty minutes a day to get everything done and he gets done. But his book publishing is th-those are just, you know, there's nothing individual about those books. For the most part they all look pretty much the same, he just, I assume he just does them at the sort of whatever the new equivalent of quick printing is, and they're getting the work out, but they're not particularly exciting visually, whereas some other, oh like Espresso press, which is in Toronto. It's run by my old friend Cary Fagan. They-they only do three or four chapbooks a year, but they're all different. They're all designed, you know with the thought, well, what are we gonna do this time rather than doing the cookie cutter method of-we'll do the same thing that we did last year and the year before that, and the year before that. Those stand out in my mind. Do you know, Espresso?

Tamara Thompson: Yes, I believe they're going to be at the Ampersand Review market, and like little festival that they're doing.

Bruce Whiteman: Oh, good! Good! Well, introduce yourself to-to Cary. He's a really, really nice guy, and he's a good writer, too, by the way novelist and children's book writer. But they-they that press is run by a triumvirate of three people, and they all have to agree on the text. You know they have to all agree they want to publish something. I'm not sure. I think the design is mostly done, not by Cary, but by Bernard, who's one of the three, and I think he has a design background. So, they make chat books, always chapbooks, nothing else that really are pretty memorable. I don't always remember the poet's names, because they're usually people I don't know, but I often remember what they looked like which I guess says something doesn't it.

(Discussion side track on how nice people are. Like Cary and Jim Johnstone).

Bruce Whiteman: Right? Right? Yeah. Well, it's-it's a, you know. It's a Mostly it's a community of like-minded people who you know care about poetry. What-what's nicer than that, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I have my last question here for you. What's thing that you wish people knew about your history?

Bruce Whiteman: Ha! My history?

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Bruce Whiteman: Well, like every writer in the world, I wish my work were better known. It often feels. As I said, poetry's, you know in the genres of literature poetry seems to be more towards the bottom than the top these days, and I do you know, in moments of-of despair, it does seem to me that I've you know, spent a whole life writing, and I haven't really got much back from it in terms, not in terms of money but in terms of-of knowing that it's been read and appreciated, or even that it's been read, and you know, maybe not necessarily appreciated. But you know it's so. I'll give you a couple of examples. So, in my lifetime. I have published three hundred and fifty book reviews. Now, now some of them will. Those are four-hundred-word reviews for the newspapers, and some are three thousand five-hundred-word reviews for-for literary quarter quarterly. So, it ranges quite a lot. Most of it is on either poetry or literature. Some's on music sums on publishing history etc. But you know, three hundred fifty book reviews is a lot, right. I have, I have only three times ever heard back from anyone about any of those reviews. One was from a distinguished professor of literature at Amherst College who wrote to me and said, who the hell do you think you are for giving Philip Larkin a negative review? One was actually quite nice. It was from someone who you know said, thank you for reviewing my book. I really appreciate it, and I can't even remember what the third one was. So there-there's often a sense that as a writer and this applies to poetry even more so than book reviewing or anything else that you-you know. You put your heart and your soul and your guts into your work and you go through the whole process of getting it published, which can be long term, sometimes harrowing and out it goes, and that's the last you ever hear of it. You know I used to joke that my books never write. They never call. It's like they, that's an old joke about mothers. But I think, I think I if I had my druthers, I would just wish the-the work provoked more of a conversation. You know?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: Even when I've written, I don't very often write negative reviews of poetry. In fact, very rarely. But I have negatively reviewed a couple of very distinguished Canadian poets. One was Leonard Cohen, and the other was Dennis Lee and they were in a fairly prominent magazine not in some obscure, you know, little magazine printed in somebody's basement and all that sort of stuff. And I thought, in both those cases, okay, I'm gonna get some, I'm gonna get some people coming back at me for these reviews because Leonard, especially, as you know, has a worldwide fan



base. People love Leonard Cohen or used to; I-and Dennis Lee, by contrast, doesn't have a worldwide fan base. But everybody, you know, he started house of Anansi Press. He-he made a billion dollars with his children's books, and he's very respected as a poet and even as a sort of philosopher, thinker, and I got nothing, nothing. Not even one email saying, you know, fuck you and the horse you rode in on, or you know, or.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: I've been wishing for years someone would say that about Leonard Cohen you know nothing, nothing. So that that's the discouraging part of being a, an author of any sort in Canada and you know, with the handful of exceptions which we would all name like Margaret Atwood, for example, she doesn't have to worry about that. But most writers and maybe there, maybe this is less common with novelists. But most poets and certainly, most book reviewers. Just you don't, you don't get much feedback. That's the worst thing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: And in a way to come full circle here. That's kind of what chapbooks help you to do. They help you to get immediate feedback. Right? You don't have to wait. It's not like a commercial book that goes out there, and you get a review six months later with chapbooks, you know you hand them to your-your friends, or your colleagues, or your teachers, or whoever, and if they have any anything about them that's civil, they respond pretty quickly. Right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Bruce Whiteman: So that that's a nice thing about chapbooks it's the-the community is small, but usually willing to speak its mind and give you some feedback.

Tamara Thompson: Do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording?

Bruce Whiteman: I don't think so, Tamara. I think that's all.

Tamara Thompson: Okie dokie.

Kirby

Tamara Thompson: Hello! My name is Tamara Thompson, and the date today is July 11th the time is 11:15 am. And just a reminder that this call is being recorded, and that the participant can drop out a week after this interview time. This interview is for small press and author.

Kirby: Oh, my name is Kirby. I'm a poet and publisher of at Knife Fork Book. Knife Fork Book is a micro press here in Toronto. I go by, she and they and what else did I forget.

Tamara Thompson: And any other titles you want to give yourself.

Kirby: Oh. Fairy, I'm a, I'm a book, fairy.

Tamara Thompson: There ya go!

Kirby: Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: All right. So, to start this conversation off, I would really be interested to know how you discovered, like, chapbooks and zines, and this kind of smaller publishing. When was the moment where you're like, "oh, cool"?

Kirby: Well, you know, I opened a-a-a poetry shop here in Toronto around it was, what was that? 2016, I think. Yeah, around there. And part of that was because, well, Toronto needed a poetry shop and also because there was no place to really handle, caress, chapbooks, chapbooks are normally only found at book fairs and or online, a lot of online business for chapbooks. And so, I wanted to have a-a space that where people could actually come, hold, browse; you know, things that, chapbooks were our-our best sellers at KFB. They were fronted. They were at the center, the core of the of the shop, and that's when, and also because I saw how rapidly they were moving. It was a no-brainer for KFB to start publishing chapbooks. So that's what we did.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. I, I've heard about this shop, and everybody talks about how this mythical place that it was, and all that, like, has talked at length about how everything like that is, and stuff like that.

Kirby: They were good times. They were very good times. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: What's the presses like editorial philosophy, or like, maybe goal?

Kirby: For me it's about the beauty of the book in hand. I like making pretty things. We primarily use Coach House press to do our printing. I know I have some examples here. If you want me to hold them up.

Tamara Thompson: I would love that.

Kirby: So, things like this gorgeous Neil Sukran and this is one of our most recent chapbooks. Gorgeous end papers, the beautiful, the zephyr paper that is distinct from Coach House press [Holds up chapbook with

white cover and blue end papers]. So, and then we this lovely a little, tiny Dale Martin Smith book. Really, you know, classic; classy [holds up small dark blue chapbook]. Like, look how gorgeous that is; it's, you know, they're so pretty. And then I'll look at this *Rainy Day* by Norma Cole [Holds up another chapbook that is black with blue reflective text]. That's also one of our most recent books stamped and foil. R. Kolewe, who is also a really fine poet, he does the execution of the design and layout. I come up with the-the cover, and how, the-the-the look. So-so I'm, I'm, I'm a poetry lover, a poet and a poetry lover, and often, when we had our shop, I would hear somebody read, or I would meet somebody, and I would say, oh, I'm interested in, I'm interested in more. Do you have more, you know? And almost everybody that we've published has been somebody I've met through-through KFB. So, that's you know, it's-its very community based in that sense. We started a little side imprint called What Queer Reading which was a primarily a BIPOC, a BIPOC imprint. Our first two publications with What Queer Reading were edited by Fan Wu, where the first Cody Caetano, a book called *PLEASURE DOME POEMS* Yeah, *PLEASURE DOME POEMS*, I think? Yeah- (Technical issues occurred) gorgeous, gorgeous. So, there's a look it's kind of, I like to think of it as kind of classic, and but I want what I love is, I love texture you know I love the feel, and I love and-and I, I prefer the book in hand as opposed to something online because my eyes are older and tire easily. So that's part of it, too. It's just a different experience, that's all.

Tamara Thompson: I one hundred percent agree with like being able to hold the book and feel the textures. I, I'm also a big nerd when it comes to textures and certain design elements, and just like the tactile feeling.

Kirby: I know. Look at this gorgeous Kate Sutherland called *Nuptials*. This came out through a series we do at a festival called Fertile, which is going to be this coming August, the twenty fifth at the Printed Word on Dundas. And so, we do kind of a special focus on what's new and inventive and poetry, and these are gorgeous collages is that Kate did called *Nuptials* where she found old photographs of weddings and-and celebrations and-and made them.

Tamara Thompson: The colours, the details like I'd like; I have my own chapbook press, and just like me trying to imagine how that would even be created. It's like, it's so gorgeous.

Kirby: You know it. It helps to work with, and this is their one of our newest two. It's that's the cover.

Tamara Thompson: That's lovely.

(Technical issues occurred).

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Kirby: Anyway. It, you know, it helps to have a good relationship with printers and, and, and talk through John. Always John. John De Jesus, who works at Coach House, is the-the master printer at Coach House, and he'll always say, oh, Kirby, that's going to be expensive, and so give me three options. He's been really, really, really good with me, and we always

choose, why not go with the most expensive option? But it's nice to have a few choices. And then the-the digital color printing is a different story altogether. It's for me, cause that I want it to be a-a certain quality, right, which doesn't always happen, and just have to find the person to do that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's, the work is absolutely beautiful. And it's just like the, a little, you got me really thinking here, and really excited because beautiful-beautiful books. So just to keep this ball rolling here. It seems like, you guys, do you mostly like publish poetry? Is that kind of, like, that seems to me kind of more where your kind of aligning the press, with what you're talking about.

Kirby: We publish poetry.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so yeah why did you-

Kirby: Poetry, poetry. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Why did you choose to like-because it's a decision to do, like, what you're gonna actually publish, right? So why poetry? I have a feeling I know why, but I'm still gonna ask the question.

Kirby: Well, it's what interests me.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

(Both laugh).

Kirby: How-how KFB opened was I was in a class-(technical issues occurred) her famous legendary Sunday afternoon classes, and I've been a poet, and reading and collecting poetry for at least fifty years and upon opening KFB, how we opened, was I had a forty year collection that my mom always used to say, "in by in by sixty out by seventy," meaning you can only collect shit til your sixty, and then you better get rid of it. And I kind of thought, oh, I'd like to see where my collection goes to. Believe me, I've got plenty still in my home, but we started out with a with much of my forty-year collection of poetry- (technical issues occurred). So, she had all these chapbooks and that's how we opened; with my forty years of books and about a hundred chapbooks. And no, we opened with absolutely no money and just made it fly. So that's how that works. So, poetry, just poetries, you know, poetry, a poetry chapbook is kind of, like different than, let's say, a zine tends to be more graphic and or visual. There is visual poetry, but it's a different creature.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I've-I've been having to try and define the difference between a zine and a chapbook, because I know it'll be a question on my defense; and it's a very important before I start doing a lot of writing, and I've had to kind of look at it more as a sliding scale, because it's, like, well, this person said, this is a chapbook, but this could also be considered a zine. But you know, and I think it's really interesting how people have been able to play in this medium, and how there's such a, such a broad variety, like just the sheer amount of variety people are able to create. I don't know.

Kirby: Yeah, in the UK these would be called pamphlets.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: The poetry pamphlets. I like that too, although, a chapbook sounds maybe slightly more substantial. I don't know. I don't know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: But we have, like, we have books that are, one second. We have books that are like single, poem books. I hope you're getting my best view there, like a single, like a single poem. So, here's this gorgeous. Oh my god, Jim Johnstone. (Holds up a beautiful chapbook.)

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: It's got a little texture thing here, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: And it opens up, and it's and it's a single poem. So, and the ending, is this gorgeous, it ends up with this gorgeous text at the end, that all the text flooded in the Ouroboros, stunning, stunning, stunning. So, I and I love this, I would call more of a pamphlet as a single poem. But so, I guess it's-I don't know if that has to do with marketing, or... I don't know.

Tamara Thompson: I-I feel like for like I'm gonna have to define my terms for my paper. But I feel like the terms are all just kind of used; however, that person has it. So, I know in my own thesis, I'm gonna have to say, this is how I'm defining them and using them. But just know, out in the world people might associate these with other things.

Kirby: Yeah, zines tend to be like, I would say more in the comic-online. Or music. There's music scenes or punk zine, that sort of thing to diff. And then chapbooks and pamphlets for poetry, maybe for more literature.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Kirby: I don't know. A chapbook, you know, is only up to forty-eight pages. Past forty-eight pages, it's a full length. It's no longer a chapbook. So, in terms of poetry at least. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. So, I am, we've been talking, and you've been showing me all these beautiful things. So, I am very curious about, like, what your process is like in actually creating these beautiful little books, like, from kind of submission? You talked a little bit about production to even getting it into people's hands. I kind of want to get a bit of a broad view of what that's like for you.

Kirby: Well, my tendency is, I like to do things in seasons and so like a season might be, a season might be- This is *The Lake* by James Lindsey, and this is *Rain* by Mark Truscott. So, I wanted them to have a similar look,

in terms of pairing, just like the Jim moment and the Ralph Colette moment. Right? So, I tend to do things in a season, the season presenting, you know, kind of like the Paula Ferrante. And okay, there was a couple other things, so each season has a look and part of that is marketing. Part of that is, I don't want them to buy one, I want them to buy the season.

Tamara Thompson: Right, yeah, yeah.

Kirby: That's just being smart in terms of marketing, and that works. But so, I actually, then I-I get the material. I get the idea of the look; like, you know, *The Lake* being I wanted it to look like something was surfacing. And then, with *Rain*, which just kind of made perfect sense to go hand-in-hand. So, the material has a lot to do with how I select a season and what I want that to look like and then, once I, I do, I do my own mock-ups. I'm not good at doing the I can't do fine-fine layout work that Ralph does.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: In my own mock-up say, this is what I want it to look like. And then Ralph takes it and does the-the layout, the proofs, and we do the proofs. Send them back to the, back and forth to the poet. Make certain everything's tickety-boo and then go and get our bids with our-our printer John at Coach House. Sometimes we use a printing house for-for digital stuff. And so, we get the quotes priced out how we're going to price it as a result and then do a pre-order. We always do a pre-order. There's a little boom about, this is coming up, coming and I mean, when we had her in shop it was a little easier because I was there and made certain that the book went into the person's hand, and that's always the best way about it still, but much of our books are sold through readings online. We are, we do have a worldwide distributor. We work with Asterism books. Asterism is our distributor. They're really good. They're based in Seattle to do international shipping. So, because some most-most of our poets are Canadian, but we have some American poets as well.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Or from America that are now living in Canada.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it always surprises me with Whispering Wick how many people order from the States, and even just like South America, had a lot go to like Mexico and Brazil.

Kirby: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's yeah, well, you know, so exactly.

Tamara Thompson: So, I'm interested in a little bit about how like the press makes decisions and stuff like that. So, is it kind of you find someone that you want to work with? Like, I just want to know a little bit more about that process.

Kirby: It normally comes to me. We've had a few open windows for submissions, but as a rule, I will hear something; I will meet someone 'cause I go out to a lot of readings. I still, I'm going this Friday night

to the new Jayson Keery chapbooks coming up for Midnight Mass press and... I get turned on, and when I get turned on, I get turned on, and when I get turned on, I go, I'm interested in working with you.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Let's-let's make something. Let's make something pretty together. That's how that works. And I, you know, it's not, it's not as I have, I would hate the, I hate the idea of it becoming regimented to a point of... no, I still like the kind of hands-on, let's work sort of thing. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, no, I, I agree.

Kirby: Yeah, yeah, it works best. It works best.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I, we do submissions every once in a while, and I'm glad we have, because I've been able to meet a lot of amazing poets and stuff like that. But sometimes when I just hear something I'm like oh! you, you eighteen-year-old child, who just handed in this paper, I can't ask you to give me some of your poetry because we have this TA thing, but like in a year, I will reach out to you, because that was good.

Kirby: Yeah, get back to me, get back to me. So, keep me, keep me posted on what you're doing, and you know if you have some work show down the road. I'm open really.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I've been so surprised by how many comic students who have done adaptation assignments. And like they don't do art, or they're not thinking about doing this as like a career or anything they're like. They say "no, I just had fun". And I'm like, this is really good.

Kirby: Well, there's something to be said about having just having some fun. I think that's major component of it's no longer any fun time to get out.

Tamara Thompson: That's one of the things I try and tell my students is, they're like, well, no, it has to be good. It has to be good. I'm like, what is good? Have fun and people will find you. Don't try and make it good for the critics, or whatever; it'll be good if you have fun.

Kirby: Well, I'm glad they're getting that advice from you, darling, because, unfortunately, I mean... the times I have opened up submissions, and I used to work for another two of the two different small Canadian publishers I worked for, and I was part of the readings. You know, the initial slush pile stuff. And you could, you could just tell when someone's the young ones they try to impress. And occasionally it works. But mostly it just feels like a lot of work. Oh, you worked really hard on this, but there's no, there's no song there, there's no flight. But you know I need. I need an entry point. Give me some, right? So yeah. Yeah. But I'm you know, as we're both writers. And I'm constantly learning and working with new mentors and, because I want to go, I want to learn something new. And yeah, so there's that, too. That happens and I'm not, I'm not, I don't want to poop on that, but I'm not sure that-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Through an MFA class. I think reading, reading, and seeking out actual poets that you want to-to work with. That's my experience, anyway.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I feel like it depends on the people you're surrounded with. Right? And who's your supervisor, you know, like I-I did my undergrad at Sheridan in creative writing and publishing and I had a really good group of people who actually helped me. And then I had some people; I'm, like, oh, you don't understand what this poem is about, and that's okay. But, like, it's very clear that you're not gay. I don't know how you're not because everyone's gay in this program. But, like, you don't, there's a clear miscommunication happening here, and I need to not take your advice too harshly.

Kirby: Well, it's a strange thing. It's a strange idea to think that way. You don't get it because you're not queer, and I'm being my queer self here, and you're not. I'm kind of going you can be your queer self all you want, but if you want me to be a reader, you got to give me something, right? And I'm not saying that not everything's for everybody. So.

Tamara Thompson: That's the other thing, too. It was just sometimes I would sit there and listen to other people's advice for certain works, and I'd sit there, and I'd go, oh, you don't understand what this person is trying to do. Like, there's been a core fundamental miscommunication that's happened here, and all of your advice is very strange.

Kirby: Huh.

Tamara Thompson: It was always, it was one of those things where you don't you? You don't think it's gonna happen, or it's not gonna happen as badly as it did, and I'd go, how did we get here?

Kirby: Yeah, that could be, that there, that that sort of art focus can be a king, you know.

Tamara Thompson: But I also found, like some of-

Kirby: Oh sorry.

Tamara Thompson: No, it's okay. But I also found some of like the best people to help me, and like they were able to state their edits in a way, and I'm like that's really helpful. Just the way you even described it, you know. And I'm like this person's going to be a great editor because they were able to explain the edit to me in a way that I really understood, because sometimes it can get really abstract.

Kirby: Yeah. And that doesn't mean that the secret, of course, is to make certain that the-the writer's voice is what remains intact. And I don't, I don't take on anything that requires a heavy edit.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.



Kirby: It's either a light edit, or it just needs, there needs to be more work done.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. More time.

Kirby: Or I'm not your publisher.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I-I find that's something that I have to tell my students. I'm like an editor is to there to try and help you make your idea be heard on the page. If they're trying to replace your idea of replacing your voice that's not an editor that's someone who wants to write, and who isn't writing their own stuff.

Kirby: I want to be in your class.

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, me at three am thinking about all the things because I-I'm very much a person who wants to give to my students. So, it's literally just me going over in my head all the stuff that I'm thinking about. I've, especially during the pandemic, I had a lot of time to reflect.

Kirby: Oh, my yeah, true enough. True enough. Yeah.

Tamara Thompson: And my students seem to like me. So, I seem to be doing okay.

Kirby: Well, I like what I'm hearing. So.

Tamara Thompson: Thank you. I've been called the bomb like THREE times in like reviews.

Kirby: The bomb girl!

Tamara Thompson: The like, the-the anonymous reviews. It's like, yeah, Tamara's the bomb. They should be paid more. And I'm like, thank you.

Kirby: Keep that. Yeah, yeah, those are things you, those are things you want to point out. Hello!

Tamara Thompson: I kept all of my things, 'cause I just love what they all say. They're, like, oh, I had such a good time, I felt safe and like, oh! Cause you know, in university classes we can talk about some really heavy things. So, my top priority is making sure that everyone can talk about these things in a safe way, because sometimes professors put some really heavy stuff on the course list.

Kirby: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's so, it's a very different time from-from my time of university. Very different time. But yeah.

(Technical issues occurred)

Kirby: -oh, I started young, I was, I started young and my good fortune is I also found my queerness in poetry through poetry. I'm not, I certainly read gay fiction as well. In fact, this was back in the seventies, so, there was a huge explosion of, you know, for the first time in bookstores there would be gay and lesbian literature in a section, you know. That's how, all of a sudden, for the first time it was being marketed in a very new way. Like the Edmund White novel *Nocturnes* for the King of Naples would have the whole back page of a magazine; it was, there was an explosion. It was a great time to, it was a great time to be interested in in lit and in Gay lit whatnot and one of my earliest poets that I grew enamored with was Cavafy. Into, this today, C. P. Cavafy Constantine. To this day, Cavafy 's been my-my constant companion, but that's, that's just good fortune, the good fortune of already going to libraries, the good fortune of finding a librarian that could, you know, say, here's the section.

Tamara Thompson: Hmmm.

Kirby: Things like that when there was a card catalog, and I'm looking up under the letter H 'cause it was homosexual at the time, and there was a lot of H. There was a lot of H of that card catalogue but, and again bookshops that had new sections that were, and Christopher Street Magazine was, was such a Bible of that time, and you know, New York Native, and After Dark, and there was some great. And then I-I wrote, I started writing for a publication, I wrote a few pieces for publication called Steam Magazine which was a quarterly about, w-bout-about reviews, about where men for public sex and there was a I had a little piece call- (technical issues occurred) then there was a competition, like a porn press competition, and Pat Califia, or now Patrick, now Patrick Califia was the judge and three of my pieces were selected, including a piece called a Cock Suckers Prayer. That was the invocation or the front of this, of this book and called Stallions and Other Studs, which is just crazy fun, and it was at the Outright Fest in Boston, and got to meet one of my heroes, Scott O'hara, that was the publisher of Steam, and there was a new magazine coming out, called Wilde, spelled like Oscar Wilde. So, we're talking a bit when I first met Pat Califia they came here when they were still Pat, now Patrick.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: And-and we met for lunch, and they go, you're Kirby. I said, oh yeah. And they said, you're dirty and I said, oh, my goodness! Can you please put that on a napkin for me? Because this is coming from the person that wrote Macho Sluts. A and I'm going, and the whole reason why all of that is pertinent and important is because that's how I killed my self-censor. I killed myself censor, writing early, gay porn and erotica because I would say, oh, Kirby, you can't possibly say that! And that's exactly what went on the page. And then I would get, and I would go, oh, Kirby you can't possibly say!

Tamara Thompson: (Laughs).

Kirby: That-that became my game of like, oh, darn! I don't, honey, anything you think you can't say put it on the page. So that was, you

know, that was my twenties and that's at the stage for-for me continuing, one of my-my first see if I pull together my, my debut collection that Katherine Mockler edited is, is this lovely work called, *This Is Where I Get Off* and it was- it's a collection; and Lynn Crosbie did the foreword; and it's a whole, it was of this time where-where going out and enjoying yourself was the point. (Laughs) Anyway.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Thank you for sharing all those lovely anecdotes.

Kirby: Yeah, I hope that's useful.

Tamara Thompson: Extremely; even like, even just personally, just, I also have those moments where I'm like, oh, should, I can't put that down. No, and it's like, no, I need to know.

Kirby: Exactly-exactly. It's still a little thing I go back to. But you know, like, but like I'm older, my focus is different.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: I'm still queer as fuck in my case, but you know, it's funny, and- and my I have a new collection up, called *She*.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Kirby: Have you seen it?

Tamara Thompson: Yes, everybody's been talking about it.

Kirby: Oh, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Kirby: And some people said, I found my new tender voice which just makes me laugh. But you'll find that one; I'll send you a copy. I'll send you a copy.

Tamara Thompson: I would love that. I, if you'd like I could send you some Whispering Wick books. I'd love to, like, see what you think of them. We're still very much little babies in the thing; we've only started in 2020 when the world was absolutely burning.

Kirby: Well, you know, you buckled down and did some work.

Tamara Thompson: Well, we needed to; we needed an internship in my program, and I was like, I can't get anything. Our program's brand new. There was nothing happening. There were no jobs. And I was like, oh, this far-off dream of me starting a chapbook press with my friends! What if I could do that? it'll never happen. And then I said it aloud, and everyone said I should do it. And then I went to the co-op leader, and she was like, yes, do it, and take as many people as you want.

Kirby: Okay, so forgive me. What's the name of your press?

Tamara Thompson: Whispering Wick chapbook press.

Kirby: Whispering wet?

Tamara Thompson: Wick.

Kirby: Wit?

Tamara Thompson: No like a candle, so like wick.

Kirby: Whispering Wick. Okay, I got it, Whispering Wick. I like that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, our, we, because we focus on poetry and short fiction. And we don't really have like a genre whatever; our, like, theming and branding, I guess, you could call it, is like old Hollywood, like film noir kind of stuff. So yes, the name of the press is actually Wick, because it was a w word. But there's a film noir called *Whispering City*, and I love that. So good.

Kirby: Yeah, see, we did Knife Fork Book, it was also completely for marketing, 'cause the book is the meal. So, we would set up a book and then put the knife and fork down. And here's what we're serving. Here's what we're serving so.

Tamara Thompson: Excellent.

Kirby: That's how that came about. So, I love hearing about how you come up with your Whispering Wick title, which is lovely. Now I'm thinking of, now I'm thinking of zines and the first thing that came up with was *Young Frankenstein*.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Kirby: I just revisited the film. So-so much fun. So much fun.

Tamara Thompson: It's so fun, and it's something my family's really into *Young Frankenstein* and *Robin Hood: Men in tights*. Those are the two that we adore and like. Someone will be in the other room, and they hear a bit of me like quoting something, and they'll-they'll do the response. You know?

Kirby: Yeah, yeah. That's when you know it's good. The things I always say that about talk about something I want to publish. What I always say is, give me something I wanna go back to, give me something I want to return to, give me something that's gonna stay with me or make me stop on the page.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Give it to me. It's not always the easiest thing, but it's doable.: right? So yeah, that's, that's, that's what turns me on. It's like whoa! whoa! I just came to a full stop here. I went back. Yeah, that's, that's the good stuff.

Tamara Thompson: So, you have shown me some of your books that you've done. But have you published any chapbooks yourself?

Kirby: Oh, of my own?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, of you're on work.

Kirby: Well, we did publish, *She*, but *She* is a whole-length book.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: The full length. My, the first chapbook, one of the first chapbooks we did which is actually-why I called this the new book *She* is, let me see if I can find it. (Holds up pink chapbooks with a silhouette of a woman with a large puff pink skirt.) This was *She's Having a Doris Day* when I was going by Jeff Kirby. But now I'm just Kirby and oh, my god Del Shannon. You know the *Montague Twins* the series, Del Shannon I was working with them at the time, and they designed this cover, which, just like, makes me swoon, it's so beautiful, and then wait! Wait! Wait! Oh, my goodness! Oh!

Tamara Thompson: Oh! (Kirby opens up the chapbook to the second page where a silhouette of a woman sitting on a swing chair wearing a tutu and has wings, her hair done up in a bun. The title starting above her and Doris Day in diamond shapes going down beside her. All balanced on the page with illustration.)

Kirby: And I oh, my goodness! So, I mean part of the reason why we published this in the first, of the first, like two or three chapbooks we did is I just I had, I had to have something to sell, and I knew I'm so, this sold four hundred copies, you know which is not, which is, that's quite a bit for a chapbook.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Yeah, so, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: There's, so was there a specific reason why you wanted like that set to be a chapbook, because it is a decision. Like full length or chapbook; like, why did you make that decision for yourself with this work?

Kirby: Well, it works; it just-you know, there's things that work as a chapbook. I have two pro-I have, I'm working on my follow up to poetry is queer right now, called *Fairy*, which is full-length, but in the meanwhile, there'll be two chapbooks that-that come out between now and then.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Yeah. So, part of that, I mean when I was reading your, you know your information about today and-and what the with the purpose of chapbooks. Well, they're-for me, they're ephemeral. They're completely ephemeral. I mean, I've got, a few boxes, a few of things that I, even

though they're ephemeral I keep. But for me a chapbook as far as my approach is I-I can't see it as something other than a chapbook. And often there are people that will submit something that they want it to be full length, and I go well, this this is there's a great chapbook here, but there's not a book.

Tamara Thompson: Right.

Kirby: Okay, so part of that is just paying attention to the material. And what's what works? You know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. What the material needs.

Kirby: Yeah, I mean, and this was also written as a chapbook as opposed to, I'm working on a big thing, and I want to pull some stuff out for a chapbook. This was, this was intended as a chapbook to begin with, so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Just like *Blur*, this is, this is a chapbook is his new book that we published *The Size of Paradise*, which is just stunning, crazy gorgeous.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: That's embossed. Yeah, full-length. But-but this was a standalone.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: As most chapbooks should be. They need to be stand alone things, right?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Yeah, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, one hundred percent. I, I'm kind of the same way that like, sometimes people take things that might be a part of a bigger collection later. But I sometimes just feel like a chapbook, that's it was made for this, and I love poetry, chapbooks, and I love how consumable it is, and I can sit down and think about it, and then read it again, like right there, you know, like, don't get me wrong I love my collections absolutely. But there's just something about the poetry chapbook, or even like a short story or an experimental fiction chapbook that I go, oh, perfect. I get to think about this a lot.

Kirby: Yeah, it's a, it's the perfect, that's the see, I'm not, I'm not into sweets, I'm in the savory. But every once in a while, I can have a truffle. The truffle is like in and of itself, oh, my God. I don't need anything else. Perfect, right? And that is interesting; chapbooks are truffles, and books are savory. Could be true.

Tamara Thompson: So, this next question, you can take whatever way you want, and whatever you feel comfortable sharing. But what is some

challenges that you faced as an author through the time of you, creating things?

Kirby: Well, I'm, I'm, I'm a, I'm well practiced now. There isn't a day that I'm not writing. Would say rarely there is a day I'm not writing. And I'm really good with deadlines. Oh, my god, I'm really good with deadlines and because I sit down and get to work. You gotta sit down and do it, and I'm good at that. So, I mean in writing *Poetry Queer*. I wrote I it was supposed to come out a year later. And Jim, my editor, said, do you think we could get this by a year earlier? And I said, if I sit down to do it. So, we set up a schedule and boom! boom! boom!

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Kirby: But that's I, yeah, I like having that kind of focus. Yeah, and so you, but you mentioned challenges.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: You know the challenge, the one challenge is never change-is not to-to just make certain that I keep my-my critics at bay.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: So, I don't ever edit or do that shit in my writing process. There is always something to come back to. So, I give myself, (technical issues occurred) I-I do, I do play with different, let's say, structures like I'll do the twelve-line column that sort of thing, but you know the only the only thing that's ever challenging is a roadblock I might put up for myself.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.

Kirby: (Laughs)not much else, really, not much else. And I'm grateful that I'm have a time now where I realize oh, you're just in the slump. You just need to like pause. Come back.

Tamara Thompson: I-I get that sometimes you just need to give yourself a little bit of space from the work cause you I get in my own head. Sometimes I'm like, this is really good. And it's like, no, okay, I just need to give it some space and like, don't delete anything. Take a time, you know. It's one of the reasons I save so many different copies of my work.

Kirby: Yeah, I mean, I'll, I'll give you, I'll, I'll give you a little secret trick I do. It's, like, 'cause people always say, Kirby, how do you come up with your lines? Because there's memorable. They are lines that stick with ya and cause there's no time I don't have a-a dock open and the minute the minute that something comes up I'll just put it on the dock and then keep doing other stuff that I'm doing, and if something else comes up I'll just put that in the doc. So, you never want to lose something. Don't-don't ever think, oh, I'll remember this because you-doesn't matter how old you are, you won't. So, you just keep that, Doc open and write it

down. And you know most poems are a decent sentence one after the other, anyway. So, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: That's one of the things that I play with.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, I think that's like a great piece of advice. I-I try and do stuff like that. But that doesn't mean I would I always stick to it as well as I should.

Kirby: It's it becomes, you know, again, it's just becomes a practice and if it's useful, it's useful.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: But you know it's-it's again, if it, if it kind of makes me giggle or I stop, I go, oh, darling, you, you need to write that down, right? So, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: So, I'm also interested because Knife Fork Book has been around for a little while now; like, what are some challenges that you might have faced like that you have faced or deal with? Like again, share whatever you feel comfortable sharing. But, like, what are some challenges that the press has faced?

Kirby: The press. You know there's only one real challenge ever and it's do I have the money, or don't I.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: It's, there's only one challenge. It's what's going to, what, what's gonna make this happen and or not. And-

Tamara Thompson: Yuup.

Kirby: I've-I've all you know, somebody asks how do you do all this? And I go, well, you know I'm accustomed to flying by the seat of my pants. That's, and I'm actually okay with flying by the seat of my pants, which isn't okay for everybody. So that helps. And it's never been for me, it's never been dependent upon money entirely. Of course, I've got to keep it in mind but in my budget, I always go well in actuality, and for many of these topics we have to sell one hundred copies to break even.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: That's basically how this goes, right? So, and I go. There's no way we're not going to sell one hundred copies, cause I'll make certain that happens. But-but it really is, its things are tough right now.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Things have been tough since we're not, things have been tough since Covid.



Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Things have been tough since we've had to close the physical shop.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: And it's ten times the work and there's little to no money. So, what, instead of calling it challenging, I would call it inventive.

Tamara Thompson: Yes!

(Both laugh).

Kirby: Okay. And how am I going to, la, la, la, la! But that's why when I-I said, well, I know that *She's Having a Doris Day* is gonna bring in some money, part of why we publish *She*, I mean, there was other options in terms of publishers, but I thought, I'm always going to give this the attention that I'm gonna bring to it through KFB, and I knew it would, I knew it would be moving. So, there's certain-I, certain things that go. You always want to make sure you've got something that you feel strongly it's gonna keep, you keep, keep you afloat. Well, because I mean a lot of our-our books that we publish aren't, I would say new.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Kirby: That's why, when fertile, is called Fertile: Festival of New and Inventive Works. It's, I'm, I-I am interested in what's going on new. And I'm interested, I like inventive work. I like perhaps experimental work is what they used to call it. So, that interests me. But you can only do so much of that and stay afloat. You kind of have to like find the, what's gonna, what's gonna you know, you know, you gotta find the fast food that's also gonna go with the-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

(Both laugh).

Kirby: Sure, I don't consider myself fast food. I enjoy a good burger, but-but sometimes you just have to know, so, the product's gonna move.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, what people are actually gonna pick up.

Kirby: But it's-it's, you know, I'm in, I'm in a sweet spot, because, I have a readership and that, and that's been cultivated over a number of years, and that certainly helps, so.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I'm also-so this next question here is, what did this kind of publishing like, what has it taught you over the years? I'm interested to hear your-your answer to that.

Kirby: What has publishing taught me over the years.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Everybody wants to get published. Everybody wants to get published.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: And there's a glut right now and I'm not wrong, I mean, I'm not saying any of that's right, wrong, good, bad and I want to steer people as much as possible away from any kind of self-publishing platforms. Things like that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: There are, I've seen some people really get screwed by that; for as beautiful as our books look and they're gorgeous. People are paying twice as much, if not three times as much through a self publishing platform to get a product that is at best mediocre.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: That I would call, even much of it is disposable.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: So that's unfortunate, steer clear of that. You're far better off to find a micropress and or do something quite, you know, make, create something quite pretty yourself. My first four chapbooks were self-published even before KFB.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: So, every yeah, there's that, and also, I wish there was a little more. I wish things were slightly more collegial encouraging.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Between everyone. But there's-there's a tendency of everybody just only caring about their-their wedge to the pie.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: And I sort of get it, because funding is part of that. We're not funded at all. I've never got funding. We've got some-some monies for readings and stuff like that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Publishing wise, no; we do have a Patreon that's been helpful.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Kirby: In terms of just a, a base to know what we've got something but there's a lot of, because-because the blood is there because the need is so great because everybody wants to get published because everybody's trying to make that, a lot of the social is put aside. And I and-and

social media unfortunately, has just made it more one sided more, one side more, one sided so-so many ways, feels competitive.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: It's you know. It's-it's a thing; it's a thing I have to use. Because it's it's-it's it is advertising period. It's just advertising. But that's why it's the in terms of, I could say it that I just wrote about this. And-and I have a column, called The First Time and part of what I wrote was, the-the mythical poetry community. So, there's no such thing. What there are-are pockets of community that are created by those that are meeting the needs within their immediate community. And that should be celebrated.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Helpful?

Tamara Thompson: Extremely.

Kirby: Okay.

Tamara Thompson: So, I'm gonna ask this next question, which is, are chapbooks important to Canadian publishing? If you think so, why or why not?

Kirby: I hate the word important.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. (Laughs).

Kirby: I don't find them important. And then and I really, honestly, the true nature of chapbooks are they're lovely pieces of ephemera that-

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Might be a hundred copies-we-we publish our-our copies they usually run about two hundred copies per.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Chapbook. Sometimes a hundred, depending on experimental or not. But... and oh, is it important and important to publishing.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Well, you know, some publishers pay attention to what's happening with chapbooks, and then that's the springboard for a full-length collection. But it's just as easy where somebody has something already scheduled to come out, and they use a chapbook kind of as a promo for what's coming out, I did that with *She*, I, there was one of the-there's a long form poem from *She* called "Last Licks" and Jim at Anstruther said, oh, Kirby, I'd love to put this out of this chapbook like I said, oh, let's do it as a single. We'll do it as a single, right? Because I also

love, you know, music, marketing, and that said, oh, I love the idea of a single, and I was able to record it on Bandcamp as a single.

Tamara Thompson: Cool.

Kirby: So, these things they're all kind of, that's-that's the inventive part that you know. Not challenged, but inventive.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Right, and it keeps me playful, and it keeps it kind of active. And all of a sudden.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: That's so, these are, that's-that becomes fun. But in terms of is it important to Canadian publishing? I'm glad it exists, but it often exists quite separate from, I mean, a lot of like book-book, Book\*hug, Coach House they, they used to do chapbooks all the time I've got some old Book\*hug, Coach House, Annasi.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: I think I'm pretty certain I can envision that. So maybe for some and even us we went from chapbooks to now we're putting out some full-length collections, so perhaps it is a stepping stone for, it can be a stepping stone. If that's part of the question.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. (technical issues occurred) that I like to see how people interpret. So, take it, wherever you desire. Does this type of publishing reflect Canada itself in some way?

Kirby: Well, I guess only insofar as it's published in Canada. Oh, my God, there are so many reflections of Canada these days, isn't there? I'm not even certain there's a reticence even to identify.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Kirby: Let's say I'm not even certain what that means, except this is where we live.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: So...If we're looking at the-the kind of like old model of Canada content. I think that's, it may have been important at one time, and I think it might be important in terms of, if you're only, if you're looking at in terms of Canadian content, as it relates to other countries. Or you know there's still that, when I first arrived here, I'm originally from the States. I arrived, I was, I was, I was born in Ohio. Reagan was elected. It was time to go, and I'd come up here for schooling and meet a boy.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Fell in love and all that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: And but when I first arrived, I was so surprised that the idea of well, you haven't really made it until you've made it in the States, or until you've made it in Europe, and like.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Kirby: Peaches was, Peaches is big, you know. The-the singer Peaches.

Tamara Thompson: Hmmm.

Kirby: Peaches, and but they had to go to Berlin, and they became big in Europe. And then all of a sudden, oh, she's big! She can come back. There's that I guess it depends on-on what your ideas of-of what's important around nationalism and-and stuff like that. I don't know is that I don't know if there's much more to say. But.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, it's so like even myself I had to describe what a Canadian was for the Ethics Committee like what my definition was. And I went uhhh, uhhhhh.

Kirby: I mean, I'm Canadian. I became a Canadian citizen in the nineties. If I had to choose between la, la, la! There's no question in my mind. Here I am. I've been here for

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Kirby: Over forty years. So, a, but I'm not so certain that we're easily swallowed. As perhaps we used to consider ourselves being.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: I don't know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: I, just I, I, I... here's where we are.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: This is where we create from. And I wish people were, I would love to see more of a cultural, some cultural care as opposed to commercial. There's more cultural care. I hate the shift from exhibition to event. I hate the shift from something in the bed that it exists, and it's important that it exists as opposed to how many numbers came in this day.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: I've worked in gallery spaces. I've worked it film reference library at TIFF. It's entirely a numbers game. And just like, and unfortunately, with this stuff. It's did you get funded, or are you

awarded, or blah? Blah blah blah blah! That shit doesn't interest me at all, not slightest. In fact, one time when I attended one of the award events. Because I was invited, Kirby, what are you doing here? Kirby what are you doing here? And I'm thinking I'm just taking it all in darlings.

(Both laugh).

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic.

Kirby: Hope that's helpful.

Tamara Thompson: It is and it leans into the next question. Kind of what you were talking about is, what's something you wish people knew, or the public knew about Canadian publishing?

Kirby: There's some really, really striking good work and just like everywhere else, there's a lot of crap, you know. It's like anything. There's good work. And then there's just a lot of work. Okay. But and like poetry. Oh, my God, it's there's really, really good poetry. And then there's stuff I'm going well, I don't know what this is, it's-it's not for me to decide. There's a market clearly. Booksellers will say, there's a market for everything. Might not mean but be my cup of tea right now, everybody, Jesus, I'm not (technical issue occurred). What's the, what's the few people that actually read poetry?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Right. So, what do I know what they know about Canadian publishing? Unfortunately, I think what they know about Canadian publishing these days is just the drama.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, yeah.

Kirby: Unfortunately, we're known for that drama and that's tiresome.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: That's tiresome and unfortunate, but also tiresome. And maybe that's just what we're a little cycle going, going through right now. But I'm hoping.

Tamara Thompson: I've getting over the hump there, you know.

Kirby: Yeah, yeah. And some of it's self inflicted. And a lot of it is, and, and a lot gets lost in that kerfuffle. Me, I like to spread myself with Pam and be drama free, drama free darling! (Laughs).

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Don't put your complexes on me. I'm drama free.

Tamara Thompson: Oh, I get it! It's so much work, and it's so exhausting and mentally draining don't need it.

Kirby: Everybody. Everybody has got their causes. And I, and I applaud. I think that's all important essential. I've been gay activists, Aids activist blah, blah blah and-and there's room for all of it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Unfortunately, I think there's that's the difference between what I've experienced in the past and what I'm experiencing now. There's room for all of it. But right now, it just feels like everyone's being attacked.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Everyone's being attacked, you know.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Didn't say this. She didn't do this. You're not doing this blah blah instead of looking at who we are. We're losing people in that, we're losing each other in that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: It's not a lesson that serves.

Tamara Thompson: I've been trying to tell my students since they have to give themselves a lot more grace, because, like, yes, you're gonna make a mistake. And that's okay. You are human. You're going to make them. And they're like, well, no like they're worried about like the Twitter mobs and stuff. And like how people are going to perceive them, and their art. Is it offensive in someone? And I'm like, hey, like, you can talk to people and stuff like that, and there are things you can do. But at the end of the day, you cannot please everybody. So, to have some grace for yourself, you know?

Kirby: No! People are offended reading the global mail for fuck's sake. I mean.

(Both laugh).

Kirby: It's and I'm glad to hear, I love your take on. Yeah, we're human. I can fall down and get back up. I can make a mistake and make amends for that mistake. But if I have to think about what comes out of my mouth before my mouth opens. You know, you know how I, works for me I have claimed myself as a non-violator, I do not wish or intend harm upon anyone including myself, including myself. So that's where I operate from. That's where I work from. That's where I write from. I don't. Yeah. I don't intentionally. There's no vicious intent. Cause I'm a non-violator.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: I think that's an important thing. I think people need to make a choice around that.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I think the other thing, too, is-is a lot of people like if just because I didn't mean to, didn't mean that I didn't hurt you, and I'll apologize for that. And they're like you. You'll apologize for that, like, yeah, cause I didn't mean to, but that didn't mean that I still didn't do it. Miscommunications happen. I didn't understand, you know. And that's okay.

Kirby: Miscommunications happen.

Tamara Thompson: I can apologize.

Kirby: Miscommunication happens all the time, especially through text, especially when there's no right, emoticon, fuck emoticons. That doesn't tell me nothing tells me nothing. Anyway, okay.

Tamara Thompson: So, we're wrapping up into the last couple of questions here. So, I-I'm gonna ask this question more directly. You've kind of been answering it throughout this whole interview. But why are chapbooks important to you?

Kirby: Oh, sweetie, I'm a, I'm a book fairy. I really love pretty things, and I mean, that's part of the challenge in terms of being invented, because pretty things can also be more costly, expensive and if I can no longer make it pretty, then I'm out.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: But every time I do a chapbook it's because chapbook and or a book. But listen, we're doing chapbooks. It's because I want to see this. Want to see this and there's no other reason to do it of because when I see them in the world it delights me.

Tamara Thompson: Hmm.

Kirby: And I trust that-that-that might be true for-for others as well. So yeah, keeps, keeps me pretty, keeps me pretty, keeps me, keeps me a little younger, my-my-my spirits intact.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, there's I keep saying this in a lot of the interviews. There's just some type of magic in a chapbook. There's just something about them that's just there's something there.

Kirby: Yeah, yeah, it's a well, I guess it depends on delighting in objects as well.

Tamara Thompson: That's true.

Kirby: And-and so the book in hand my again, after a certain amount of time on a screen, I get floaters. It's not good, I have to put how to wear special glasses now for the most part, and-and this the fact that I can have a reflective as opposed to something that's entering my retina constantly.

Tamara Thompson: Yes.



Kirby: The, that's also why I do it.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah, so we're coming into the last bit of questions here. We have three questions left. So, let's see if we can get through them. But why do you think most small presses and micro presses have to close up shop? Because a lot of them they do, they-they stop.

Kirby: Well, I you know I don't see that as a bad thing, I think I think, and often some things were on the course.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Things run their course. I think some things need to recognize that. That's those due dates done, you know. There's I just click, you're still beating that dead horse. There's nothing new coming out of there. I mean, yeah.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: So, it's, it's, it's an important thing to know when this-this is completed. This is complete.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: You know, unfortunately, because we I guess, are geared a little bit more towards drama. We tend to wait till oh, we've got a close or.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: And we're closed. We always hear the bad reason why something was when, in point of fact, you know, I'm older, and I might just be tired.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: You know, and that that could be, we do, we're doing half of the publications that we used to do. Part of that is cost. Part of that is, I'm older.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: So, I know what I'm capable of.

Tamara Thompson: So why do you still keep doing it still making these pretty things.

Kirby: I'm not dead.

(Both laugh).

Kirby: Oh, honey, I pay attention to when doors open. If something crosses my desk, or-or whatever, and I go oh boy what a what a gift to have this be a possibility.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah

Kirby: So as long as I continue, and long as it holds my interest, I'm gonna and keeps me in this place of bliss and talking about it then, yeah, I'm in it. I'm in it.

Tamara Thompson: I think that's a great reason. Okay. So last two questions, and this one is more just to give room for maybe a bit of history, or just, you know, a space to share a bit, because a lot of the ways that I find out about people is just hearing from people like you about some of the other cool stuff happening in the community. So, what's something an important or cool about D.I.Y. press history that you would like people to know about?

Kirby: I'm sorry which-which?

Tamara Thompson: Just like D.I.Y. press history, like, what's something cool or interesting that you're like, oh, I wish people knew about this.

Kirby: Well, I'm you know what? It continues to be inventive. I'm interested in one like going to-to book fairs and seeing what people are-are creating. I love being surprised.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: And that still happens which is pretty cool. I'm less interested in digital stuff.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: I could care. Sometimes, you know, sometimes, and sometimes it's just I go. Oh, that couldn't happen any other way. That's the point.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Like even films where I go, oh, this could only be cinema! Cinema could do this as opposed to the-the strange, the consistent narrative thing all of a sudden, I'm watching what's that great film? Love, love, love, love is the love of, Love is the Devil. It's a, it's a film about Francis Bacon starring Derek Jacobi. It's Francis Bacon, brilliant, brilliant because it's cinema, because it could only have been a film. And it's true to this film. So, I think that's I think that's, that, that line of seeing things probably influences me more than anything else. Oh, you know, there's-there's like it always goes keep trying to make the film into a musical or whatever.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Lord, Lord, that's so rarely works. But anyway, does that help answer those? Does that answer that.

Tamara Thompson: Yes, it does. Now, final question, what's something about your history that you wish people knew about.

Kirby: Well, your gonna read about that at my new book, *Fairy*.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: Which is my follow up to *Poetry Is Queer*. I-I have a keen interest in what delights and what enchants, I believe that's my fairy.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: That knows where enchantment, dwells. It's kind of like I learned early on through Cavafy, you know. I haven't been on Church Street yet today. I wonder what's what I'm gonna see or what's gonna meet me there as opposed to Church Street, Jesus Christ, it's fucking Church Street. So what? That-that's the preset. Well, my preset isn't, you know, because that's certainly how I'm going to find it if that's going to be my preset that's going to be, Oh, fucking ugly Church street and-and then, you know, there's days, it is just fucking ugly, but I haven't been out yet today what am I gonna, what's gonna capture my eye? what's gonna delight?

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: And yeah, that's how I operate. So, on a good day.

Tamara Thompson: Fantastic. Do you have any additional comments you'd like to make before I stop the recording.

Kirby: I wish everybody well.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: I wish everybody well. I wish everybody that wants to get published has their-their dream publication. I want; I want publishers out there to know, I so, I see you. I see you poets, poets, I see you, I read you. I am blessed by your work. I see how hard everybody's, it's-it's hard, right now I share that with you. It's a courageous choice to continue. It really is I don't think we able, I don't think we're able to say that enough. I don't think that's conveyed whatsoever online in terms of social media and shit.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah.

Kirby: I so know that I'm with you on this.

Tamara Thompson: Yeah. I think that's a really nice note to end on.

Kirby: Tamara it's been great.