



Guinevere Turner - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

Matt: [00:00:00] Hello writers and welcome to the London Writer Salon. We are Matt and Parl. We're your hosts for today's interview. We are also the co-founders of the London Writer Salon. In our salon interviews, which we do just about every week, it's a chance for us to sit down with a writer that we admire, to explore the craft of writing and the art of building a writing career.

Parul: And today our guest is Guinevere Turner. Guinevere is a writer, director, an actor who has worked in film and TV since her 1994 debut film *Go Fish*, which she wrote, produced Anne Sladen. She teamed up with the director, Mary Herron, to write the film's *American Psycho* in TAU's Betty Page. And in 2019, the film, *Charlie Says*, she was a writer and story editor on Showtime's *The L Word* where she also played the recurring character, Gabby Devoe.

In that show, she's written and directed seven short films, two of which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and her memoir, which has recently come out. It's called *When the World Didn't End*. It's being published by Penguin and it. Yeah, that was recently published. We're really excited to dig into her story

Matt: today. [00:01:00]

Yeah. And so today we've prepared a bunch of questions for G Guinevere about her multifaceted career and life as a writer and actor. We're gonna go into *Go Fish*, *American Psycho*, the new memoir, and all those good things and how this will work. We've prepared a bunch of questions for G Guinevere and about an hour or so in though we will hand it over to you.

So if you have a question at any point throughout this interview, please share it in the chat. We'll give you a chance to ask it at the end. Without further ado, let's dig in. Welcome to the London Writer Salon Guinevere.

Guinevere: Hello, and thank you so much for having me. We

Matt: are so happy to have you. Such an honor to be here in the room with you.

I'm curious where do you like to write? Where's your favorite place to sit down and write? Maybe it was a favorite place where you sat down and wrote your memoir.

Guinevere: Ooh, it's such a big and juicy question. So I have been a teacher in grad school programs like N Y U and U C L A Columbia, et cetera.

Talking to people about writing screenplays. And one of the [00:02:00] things that I telegraph to students in my own way is that the number one thing you need to understand and I wish that someone had told me maybe when I was in my twenties, is that you need to find your practice. So that means it's not, Ernest Hemmingway necessarily, or maybe it's Maya Angelou who said that she would just take a pack of cards and go to a hotel room and like a little bit of sherry.

And she would do that until noon. So I worked a lot to, to find my practice and the thing that I found a little too late, but you know what better than ever is I need to be awake alone and it needs to be five in the morning. And so that is what I do. Thank God I have a partner, my darling Isabel, who is just a sleeper.

So I can get up, I can go and [00:03:00] do I, she always says to me like, you would live an entire life before I wake up. I wake her up at eight 30. She allows me, I think it's the only thing I really need in a partner is some one who is actually compatible with my writing needs. And my writing needs are that I wake up at five 30, in five in the morning.

I'm writing by five 30. And it needs to be as I am right now looking at a window. I need light. I need light and silence. Beautiful. Thanks. And I need for, to not let anything else in.

Matt: Beautiful. Thank you. And a nice reminder that everyone has their own Writing practice and love, love hearing yours.

Thank you. Thank you, Guinevere. So we really enjoyed studying your career and we read that you went to Sarah Lawrence College, and feel free to fact check any of the stuff that we say by the way. But you thought you were going to be a no novelist when you first started out there. And you were, but then you were bemoaning the state of [00:04:00] lesbian cinema and you decided that you were going to fix that by writing a script, which became Go Fish which is now Oc Cult Classic today, and really set the trajectory of your career.

And we're curious, what gave you the confidence at that time to think that you can pull off something like that? Did it feel like such a big project at the time?

Was it sheer, youthful, naivety, or something else that compelled you and gave you the confidence to back this project? This is a

Guinevere: hilarious question.

Sheer naivete, absolutely. But also naivete, but also the profound feeling that there was nothing in cinema that represented us, us meaning lesbians. There were many lesbian films, but they were always about some women struggling or oh, am I gay? Am I not gay? I am alone. I'm tragic.

And we're like we're not just, we're just out here living our crappy lives and why have I not seen that? And so me and the director Rose Che, [00:05:00] we were like, ah, let's do it. I don't know, let's just write something. So like naivete political drive, identity politics. And also I'm a writer.

I've always been a writer. And so I was like, I literally said this baby. I can write a script. How I, can it be? People walk into a room, they say shit, and they walk out. And if you see Go Fish, it's, it's very talky. Thank God we have sex scenes. Because otherwise it might be a little bit talky, but what's incredible to me about this movie and what's incredible to me about the fact that I just thought I could do it and that I did is that 18 year olds talk to me about this movie, like that this is the most analog movie.

It is. It's black and white. It's, we're like on phones, they're even cordless, like it, it's very analog and yet like an, a [00:06:00] generation of new young women, gay and straight or queer or however they identify are actually like, this movie was incredible to me and I'm like, What?

Wow, that's incredible. And I think when I think about it in writing terms, I think that the reason that, that it lasts or, withstands the test of decades is that it was written from a place of not wanting anything but representation. And I didn't think that it was gonna give me a career.

And she, rose, didn't think it was gonna give her a career. What we thought was like, we have to do this, we have to write this. And we said to each other if it doesn't get into any film festivals or if it gets into one film festival promise me that you only go if they invite me to. And we had our expectations of our success were so low and [00:07:00] what it is, and what it became for both of us it like thanks.

Thanks everybody. I didn't know that I was like the right person at the right time, but I apparently was the right person at the right time.

Matt: You sure were. And origin stories like this, it reminds us of that creative energy when you have everything to gain and yet very little to lose. And that naivete is able to shine forth and propel you.

But as you get older I don't know if you feel this, but definitely I feel this, and I think we all feel this as you get older, it feels like the stakes become higher when launching new things and it's harder to hold onto that energy of the screw it, let's do it. Curious, is that something that you've struggled with as your career has gone on and how have you held onto that?

If you have.

Guinevere: Sorry, I'm like already answering your question. One of the things that struck me so much, so like our film, *Go Fish* went to Sundance and like I was like literally six months before I was like, what is a film festival like that's, and *Rose* is that's what we're gonna be. And I [00:08:00] was like, okay.

One of the things that struck me when we were there and it was just a whirlwind of publicity and attention and I didn't even understand what publicity was like. I really was just in my own little gay head. And people kept saying to us in interviews, so what's next? And I.

What's next? Did you see what I just did? Like I didn't understand that what's next is the question you always have to have the answer to if you want a career. And I I was like the lesbian James Bond, cut to now. I was like, but I was just making shit up. I didn't understand that to be an artist, to be an artist that is, acknowledged is to have a next thing.

I, the pressure, especially after that, because *Go Fish* was like, people I think thought it was a documentary. Like I don't think they thought it was written and it was very much written. I. [00:09:00] I just, I became new to that, like that, that feeling of oh, you did something good.

What are you doing next? I was like wait, don't I get to just lay back and be like, I did a thing? Apparently not.

Parul: Of course, you've gone on to do many things. One of the other films that of course you're well known for is co-writing the screenplay, the classic film, *American Psycho*, and we have writers in the room.

We're all very curious about write writing processes, completely understand that everyone's process is different, but we're just curious about what that daily

writing process with Mary looked like for American Psycho. Can you paint a picture of where you were, perhaps the two of you in a room working together, what that

Guinevere: felt like?

Yeah. A funny thing about American Psycho is that Mary and I were already writing the screenplay for a notorious buddy page, and though we thought. A movie about a gorgeous woman in her underwear would be an easy sell. It was not [00:10:00] because we were telling a story about an actual person. And Mary, because she did, I shot into Warhol, was approached to do American Psycho, and she, I'm gonna, she hates it when I do her accent.

But she is she's Canadian, so she doesn't really have an accent, but she was educated in Oxford. So this is how she talks. She fucking hates when I do this. Oh, Quinn. Oh. Have you read American Psycho? And I was like, I don't like, I don't know what rock I lived under, but I was like no, what is that?

And she's oh, you're gonna hate me. You're gonna hate me. I don't, I know you don't like violence and you don't like all of these things, but I think it's really good. I think it could be a really good movie. And I was like, okay. I just, I, this little known fact about me, I am not a cool girl. I am not like the girl who loves like horror movies, whatever.

I like can't even watch [00:11:00] a trailer for saw two. You know what I mean? I'm just like, Nope. And so I read it and I was like, God damn, you hear it? This is a fucking brilliant. I see what you're talking about. But I'm so mad 'cause it was so hard to read for anyone who in the listener of viewers who hasn't read American Psycho, the book.

It is brutal. It is brutal and relentless. It is a, it is violence. It is sexual violence. It is like sex that turns into sexual violence. Like it is the worst. It is like really like a questionable narrative. And yet I was like though. Yeah. I actually get it. I get it. I see how we can, I and I, now we, I, I'm friends with Brett Ellis who wrote the book, and I even then I was like, oh, I feel like he was going for something that he missed.

Like he was really, he was going over [00:12:00] the top to, to prove a point, but he's a man and he maybe went too far. So we, I was like, okay, fuck you Mary. Yes, we can do this. And I we went to Randomly Rosarito Beach in Mexico, in the, the I don't know why, I can't think of what it's called.

Anyway, the Peninsula, not that continent. And we were like, fucking get into it. And we would be like, we would read each other pieces of the book and be like, this has to be in the movie. This has to be in the movie. And we'd read 'em out loud and we'd be like, what the fuck is wrong with this guy?

But yeah. Yeah. And then we had not one, but actually maybe three actors who were friends of ours come down and read us scenes out loud. And once we heard them, we were like, oh, that feels like important dialogue. And so we just spent this time together, three [00:13:00] weeks, Rosato Beach. We were just like, Ugh.

Ugh. Oh, mad are you right now I'm too mad. What gave you nightmares last night? Blah, blah, blah. But in the end we at least crafted like what we knew needed to be there. But we were still like, we were really stuck on. So for people who have not read the book, there, there are chapters that are just the lead character, Patrick Bateman talking.

He's talking about clothes. He's talking about music in this way that is so brilliantly written. And we were like, what do we do with this? We just, we fucking love this. It's so fucking, yes, Brett Ellis. It is so fucking well written and so hilarious if you get it. And we had that breakthrough and Rosarito.

Where I was like, what if I, I said I, it's, I have no idea who's to, who to credit this to because, she and I are still, [00:14:00] we're on our fourth movie right now. What if every time he starts talking about music he loves, he kills someone that is not in the book. That was us. And we were like, oh my God, we are geniuses.

Yes.

Parul: That's really interesting to go behind the scenes with you. I'm curious how much did, how much plotting was involved upfront, or at what point did you have to think about the structure of the screenplay? Maybe it was, I suppose you're following the plot of the book, but you are adding your own

Guinevere: twist to it.

The plot of the book is, it ends with a super ambiguous, was it all in his head vibe and hilariously. We laugh about this all the time. Mary and I agreed and we didn't even know each other that well. Like we've, now done so many movies together. But she was like, I hate ambiguous endings.

I hate It was all a dream. I hate it was all in his head. And I was like, me too. Fuck [00:15:00] that. And then we realized, and I laugh about this with her a lot, I'm like, oh. So we actually made an ambiguous ending by accident. We thought it was very clear. It was not all in his head. He goes a little nuts at a certain point and you're seeing certain things that are from his perspective, but an actual fact it he is a serial killer.

We failed. We really wanted it to be clear that he was a loser serial killer. And we did not succeed.

Parul: And yet the fans love that. Actually, I think many people love the fact that it, that can be interpreted many different ways.

Guinevere: I literally did an a m a on Reddit I don't know, like 15 years ago, where a man got into an argument with me about what the, and the movie meant.

Parul: I wrote it. Oh, the cheek of, oh, the cheek of that guy. The cheek. Indeed

Guinevere: The cheek.

Matt: So are we right to think that you never studied screenwriting [00:16:00] and this was like your entry into the screenwriting process with American Psycho? No, my,

Guinevere: my entry into screenwriting was my first film Go Fish, oh

Matt: s sorry, but before Go Fish and before American Psycho.

But 'cause not you teach screenwriting and it's just interesting. You, you learn by doing, Then now you're teaching it. And I'm curious, like with that hindsight of learning by doing and now being in the position to teach, what advice do you give new writers who want to sharpen their skills as a screenwriter?

It's a broad question, but where do you find people getting stuck and you find yourself giving similar advice? Time and again

Guinevere: as I said before, I feel like step one is find your practice. Like you are not anyone else. You are not like any sort of writing heroes.

You are not romantic. Writing is actually a little bit grubby. You need to figure out where you need to be. And I'm like, and I, this is the way I talk about it. I [00:17:00] say, Consider your writer self, a child that you have to foster. So what snack does she need? When does she need a, to relax?

What are her rewards? Actually do everything like the night before, put out a table, which I do every night, exactly where she's gonna write. And then remember that she might be hungry at this time and treat her like this weird fucking creature that you have to foster. And I say that to all of my students.

And then for in particular, first screenwriting, I think I, I've found myself, people often in their first screenplays write about themselves or some version of themselves, or, something about their story. And the hardest and most challenging thing for me as a teacher consultant is. To tell them like just random [00:18:00] example, like your, the story of your grandmother dying doesn't move the story forward.

And that, and how, like I obviously I've found very diplomatic ways to talk about this, but I like, it's very interesting and I feel like a therapist sometimes because I'm like, I love what you're telling. I love this. This is very beautiful. This is very unique. But this is just you talking about you and it's, you're not a storyteller right here.

You're just a unloading. And you have to understand that the difference between being someone who's unloading and being a storyteller is you have to be concise and you have to be brutal. And you have to just say no. I mean in this book there are like, At least 12 stories that I didn't choose to tell because they didn't move the story forward or because they felt like indulgence rather than I'm like, yes, I'm telling the story of my childhood, but [00:19:00] I'm also like, I need to tell a compelling story.

It needs to have great structure. It needs to move the story forward, and it needs to compel the reader. And so I had to like actually look at myself and say just cut that out. Keep going. There's something better. And try to see yourself as not like me telling my story. Understand yourself as storyteller, like you, like otherwise just go to a therapist.

Also go to a therapist if you want.

Parul: Yeah. We have, we've had writers talk about writing from the scar and not the wound. Which yes, that sounds a little bit like what you're saying.

Making sure that you're not just telling it for your own sake. It's actually reflection and telling a story.

That's me writing it down. Wonderful. And you mentioned your memoir. Now might be a good time to segue into your memoir. Of course. Your memoir is, which you kindly showed us the cover a second ago. Feel free to do it again when the world didn't end. And this is a memoir that details your childhood growing [00:20:00] up in the Lyman family.

And I read that you'd been thinking about writing this memoir. In fact, you'd been approached and made very generous offers to publishers. Wanted you to write this in your twenties and in your thirties, but you just didn't feel like you could do it. And now you've done it and it's published. Why is now the right time for you to publish this?

Guinevere: It's a big question. I. It's one I've been answering a lot because I've been like talking about the book and, doing interviews and whatnot. And I don't know that my, as a writer, it's hard to not have the perfect, lovely answer. But I will show you what I'm workshopping. I I wrote this film, Charlie says, again with Mary, although that's the first one that I wrote.

Just me, not her. And because we're friends and collaborators and et cetera. I just [00:21:00] gave her the script as she gives me her scripts and she said, this is the best thing you've ever written. I would love to direct this. And I was like, pretty sure I can make that happen. But because of Charlie says, I, I wrote that movie because I was approached to write it because they were like, oh, she wrote American Psycho, blah, blah, blah, jackpot for these producers that I was like, oh, I actually grew up in a cult too.

And because of that, I at first I was like, Ew ugh, Manson girls, blah, blah, blah. Like another, like how well tried can this story be? And then I found this incredible story that's about them being in prison. And then Mary directed the movie, and then we made the movie. And then I was like, fuck Mary, I am so sorry.

We're about to do a press tour for this movie, and everybody's gonna talk to me about growing up in a cult, and it's gonna be boring, and it's [00:22:00] gonna be long, and it's gonna be digressive. And Mary said, I was gonna try to summon her accent. She said why don't you write something about it and get ahead of it about going about a cult.

And I was like seriously the chip that whatever the chip is that they planted inside of us to not ever talk about it was, I was like, I don't know, like 50. And I was like, I don't know why this is like hurting me and scaring me so much, but I already low-key backed myself into this corner. I have to talk about this.

I, and so I wrote this piece, which amazingly got into the New Yorker. I didn't die and no one died and no one came to try to kill me. It wasn't even a real fear that someone would try to come and kill me, but I'm speaking out about a cult that like, no one, I come from a generation [00:23:00] of, I would say there's 60 of us who are my age.

No one has ever spoken about it or written about it or done anything publicly. I am the first, and that was really hard, but like incredibly liberating and oh my God, the power of writing as if I didn't already know. But now I really know. And because of that, I because of that piece, which was like, I couldn't even believe the people that came out of the woodwork.

I wrote it's like a 4,500 word piece, I think. And it's, a slice, a sliver of what it was like. And the world just came at me in all these wonderful ways of people A just, crediting my writing and b just like people I grew up with. And then people who also grew up in college, just like reaching out to me.

It was like incredible. Actually. It was like one of the most incredible fucking writing moments of my life because I was like, oh, that thing they say or write what you're afraid of. [00:24:00] Run toward the fear. Yes,

Parul: indeed. That's really interesting. Thank you for sharing that with us.

And I read somewhere that you were, you were daunted by even just the process of your book coming out and having your personal life out there about your, about the family that you grew up with. I'm curious about now that your book is, has been out for a couple of months. Was the experience of revealing or writing about people that, was it better or worse than you anticipated?

Have any of your fears been realized?

Guinevere: I'm sorry. That's just like with in itself a question that is a fear being realized. Has that any, have any of your appeals been realized?

Parul: Can I ask this the context of why I'm asking this is we have writers in the community who often worry about writing about personal matters, writing

about people that they care for, and so just, it's always, we're interested to just know what your experience has been.

Guinevere: Absolutely. And [00:25:00] it's been such a fascinating journey, I think for most of us, writers are not writers. The thing that we fear is fear itself. Like I, I spent way more time. Worrying and stressing than actually manifested. Because what actually has happened to me is that a lot of the people I grew up with, even some of them who are still in the cult have written to me and said you captured it.

In particular, like you captured what it was like to like, have this, like beauty and anxiety all at once. And that, and then, subtext being don't ever tell anyone I message you. But that validation has been amazing because even the people who are still in are like, you got it.

What's interesting and [00:26:00] complicated to me is that they, I. Almost all say the ones who are still in, or the ones who were there for, I left when I was 11. They almost all say, you made it sound so beautiful. And that's like this entire conversation about the responsibility of a writer and of a memoirist and of what it means to represent other people because obviously if you're writing a memoir, you're representing other people.

First what I wanna say to them is you may have be, you may have Not, you may be so desensitized that you don't realize that there was violence and child brides and like I did write about that in the first half of the book and you guys are just so used to it. You don't even recognize that's a really disturbing.

But also I realized that of course in a, utopian ideal community gone wrong, teenagers will happen. [00:27:00] And they all became teenagers. And they have all said to me, some of them are my friends, some of them are just like secretly writing me that it got insane. Like it got so violent. Everybody was really drunk, everybody was beating each other up.

Like it was like madness that I didn't experience. And I just feel this like confusing responsibility to tell that part of the story even though it's not mine. It's not my, I aggressively told my story just from my perspective. So I'm working on that. Like a lot of, especially the women that I grew up with, they're like, fuck yeah, I will tell anyone my story.

And I'm like, okay, how can, how do we do this? How don't we do this because I need to honor. I need to honor what came in actual fact that sort of like cheeky kind of hilarity about my book is no, the cult wasn't that bad actually. I feel like

when you read my book, you're like, God, please let her get back to that [00:28:00] goddamn cult, and that's my own cheek. But also just true. I think that, cults, most cults and I know a lot about, a lot of cults are just fucking hyper manifestations of patriarchy.

Parul: Interesting hearing you talk about wanting to honor the people that you're writing about. And it's, there's something that you wrote you said that you, the challenge with this book, and this is what you, I think you've been saying, is you wanted to share the experience in a way that made sense to the outside world without sensationalizing it, which, and having read it, definitely there's this beauty in seeing that world through your eyes.

Your eyes, you being a child and seeing the beauty in the fun, the friendships, the sort of highs and lows. But the darkness is, hidden a little bit. I'm curious about how you thought about the construction of your memoir. Were there certain decisions you made about what to keep in and what to take out?

Are there any decisions you made about yeah, I suppose the voice you were trying to [00:29:00] bring across to the reader?

Guinevere: I just, I know. First of all, like trauma porn. Like I read 1000 million cult books, especially ones written by women and like really listened to them and really absorb their style and like what I thought was great or not great.

And one of the number one things I noted is that almost every single woman who wrote a book about growing up in a cult wrote that was the first thing she ever wrote. And I was like, okay, first of all, I don't have that. I am a writer. I know how to do all these things. And so I come from a much more, like a much less urgent place I guess.

But that is an asset. I don't need to tell the story right now. I have always needed to tell this story. I just, I. Was trying to find the time or, and I [00:30:00] don't mean like the time, but I mean like the moment. Sorry, it's a very profound question. Can you remind me again of the, one of the things that

Parul: I'm just curious about I suppo, I guess I'm trying to ask you, how did you keep it so simple? How did you manage to make us stay with you as your, as you said you're in this, I suppose as an adult, one might look on it and say it was a difficult situation you were in, you're writing about, you're, things like your not being close to your mother, being dependent on adults, taking you under their wing and granting favors, I suppose to you, you make it seem so beautiful.

How did you capture that innocence of yourself? I just wondered if there were any decisions that you had made along the way. Conscious decisions. I'm not gonna, I'm gonna make sure my memoir does not do this. I really want my reader to feel this.

Guinevere: I in my journey of reading a million memoirs, I identified something that I did not want to do, which is if I only knew then or what I knew now, know now, or, and that's when I finally [00:31:00] understood, because I don't actually think this is the way, especially as children, that we process things.

I didn't want my adult voice there. I'm like, I don't even really know what to make of this experience. I don't want to tell anyone else how to feel about it either. I think the truest, purest way to tell this story is as I experienced it. And because I have these diaries, that I was writing at the time and I was like, and this girl was already writing half a book for me.

I. I think I was so overwhelmed by making sense of it as an adult and because I'm still not ready to do that, that I was like, you know what, just fucking go there and be like, walk in those little shoes and just remember what everything looked like and smelled and just be there and [00:32:00] let other people, readers decide what they think, and it and accidentally made my cult life seem very enchanting apparently. But it was, I mean it was, there were a lot of really traumatic and difficult things about it. But like the thing that when I was going back and I was reading my diaries when I was just like trying to get myself into that space, I was like, here's the thing about my childhood that not a lot of kids have.

Just me and a bunch of funeral kids running around all the time like that culture like that is so deeply who I am. And I really wanted to capture that because I'm like, I don't know. It was weird, it was crazy, whatever. But like I, because in the second half of the book, I'm not there anymore.

That was the thing that I was broken hearted about. And so I needed deeply, I needed to, I needed for the reader to [00:33:00] understand what I was longing for. Yeah.

Parul: And that you definitely did. Ve so quite a few memoirists in our comm. There are quite a few memoirists in our community, and I've definitely heard one of the challenges that they face is how do you plot your own life?

Because it can feel so contrived to have a beginning, middle, and end of my story. And I wondered, How you thought about beginning, middle, and end of the story you were trying to tell?

Guinevere: I got lucky, I guess because there's a very clear narrative point in my story, which is that like I grew up in a cult and then I was kicked out of a cult.

And so that was like, okay, there's this and there's that. A C B C

Parul: bcbc. What advice would you give? What advice would you give a memoirist in this group who maybe is struggling to consider how to plot their memoir or maybe retrospectively try and make sure there is a an arc in their memoir?

Guinevere: I [00:34:00] guess I would say, it's a huge question and like we all have had different and exceptional traumas.

Always. It's the same way I think about screenwriting, like what's the turning point? What? Like when did this thing become this thing? When did you realize this? When it like, just find that turning point and build the story around it. That's true of scrutiny. That's just true of storytelling.

It's if you corner me in a party, you, your story better have a turning point.

Matt: Thank you. I am curious, as you're writing about your childhood, were you thinking about how to safeguard yourself in case you ended up going down a place that felt very traumatic or re-traumatizing yourself? Is that something you were thinking about or something that you experienced through the writing of it?

Guinevere: It was something that I, the minute I knew I was doing it, I was like, man, you know what's gonna happen? People are gonna be like, oh, this must be so cathartic. This must be and I'm like, actually [00:35:00] as I'm doing it, I was like, no, it's just retraumatizing. I'm not actually entirely sure. Day to day, minute to minute why I'm doing this.

I'm retraumatizing myself and I'm gonna retraumatize everyone who doesn't know every single beat of my story, which is everyone. 'cause it's not a thing I talk about. But I laughed and I cried and I drank a lot of Tito's vodka. And I like, then looked back at the words that I wrote when I was sober.

And I was like okay, no, you got it. I think I had to ask myself many times, why are you doing this? Because I, once I realized it's not for me, like this actually hurts a lot. And what I discovered was, That if I see my creative brain as a hallway and there's a thing at the end that I'm always working toward, and I'm writing along the way, there has always been this [00:36:00] like, weird pile of boxes that is this story.

And it's just in the way, like I just, it was in the way of the rest of me evolving as a storyteller. I was like, this story I'm not telling it to heal myself. I'm not telling it to hurt anyone. I'm telling it because it's just this thing. It's fucking get out of my fucking way. And because as a storyteller, not as a human, I am like, that's a really fucking good story.

And it's like the storyteller in me was like I don't wanna but no, put it away, blah, blah. And so I was just like, okay, let's open these motherfucking boxes and let's tell this story because. It's the storyteller in me that was like, that's just too good girl.

Matt: And you had all that experience and all that life as a storyteller to be able to approach it with that third party zooming out perspective, which which is amazing. And I'm [00:37:00] curious, does it feel have some of those boxes moved to the attic or other rooms, or disappeared since now the book is out?

Guinevere: The hallway might just be full of a stack of books, but I think as I I'm, I grew up in a cult. I come from a lot of trauma, so I process things really slowly. So I have no idea what's happening to me right now. But I. One of the things that has emerged as so interesting for me as a writer, and especially writing something that's about me instead of what I normally do.

I like, I feel like I do feel relief. I'm like, okay, the hallway is clear. But I also feel what I can only describe as low level anxiety because I've been holding onto this story for so long and now I've written it, that it [00:38:00] officially just replaced my actual memory. And I'm like, okay, I needed to do that, but I'm like, now I'm gonna believe everything.

I'm gonna believe this as the truth. Which I do. Obviously I wrote it, but there's a part of me that's Ooh. There's so much nuance that you couldn't put into the story because of all the reasons of being an actual professional writer that I'm like, okay, bye. But like what, I know we've all had the experience of being at this, having the same experience with a friend and then two days later they tell the story differently than you do.

And the nature of memory is the most slippery, elusive thing. And I just turned memory into fact and it scares me a little.

Matt: Thank you for that honesty. Yeah. Thank you. Just thank you. I don't know if I have much to say other than That's very [00:39:00] yeah. I'm sitting with it right now. So thank you for sharing that.

Guinevere: It's been like, it just occurred to me two weeks ago, 'cause somebody asked me a similar question and I was like, oh, the letting go is like more than relief. It's actually I don't know, it's like getting older. It's like you can't hold everything right. You cannot hold everything.

You write it down because you can't hold it. But then I'm like, oh my God. Bye.

Matt: Now you said something in a New Yorker, in the New Yorker article. And also you said something in this interview too, to the effect of, this is the quote from the article. I'm starting to learn that I can't be afraid to reveal the hard things.

Guinevere: How did I in the New Yorker article?

Matt: Think so. Yeah. So a nice reminder of what you've done but for someone here who is maybe struggling to reveal the hard things the darker stories that they have do you have any advice for them? And maybe this is a piece of advice you might want to give yourself at [00:40:00] the start of this journey.

What

Guinevere: might you say? Yeah, no, it's a good one. It's a hard one. So for those who are listening or seeing I write about, sexual abuse and violent sexual abuse among many things. It was really hard. That was really hard because I had never written about it. I knew exactly what it was, and I knew for myself that like, I.

Breaking it down detail by detail was essential to making it true. And making it weird. And making it horrible. Like I knew you got, you can't half step this, so for people who are trying to write that, I say, yay, you went through trauma. And so you probably have a com compartmentalizing tool that you can do.

I actually just because I didn't, I was very like, I was very like, fucking do this. I think [00:41:00] I, I would say to anyone who's trying, who's on that precipice it matters. It matters because people need to hear that this happens, whatever it is.

Like you are not alone in your trauma, and the only way you can make it better is by.

Articulating it, bringing it to light, sharing it with other people. You will be amazed as I was, I have been about what comes back at you because you made this brave choice. Oh. But it's really hard. It's really hard. Just don't lie to yourself. Don't lie to yourself. Don't try to make it better because it's hard for you to write.

And my friend, this wonderful writer, Vivian Gonick, said to me when I first started out writing this book, she said, don't make yourself a hero. And that was like a little bit hard to hear at the time. 'cause I was like facing writing [00:42:00] around like the, it's such intense trauma. But I was like, yeah, this is what makes people, characters, everyone interesting. We are flawed. Like I it gave me a lot of freedom. And I hate that I emerge as a hero in my book. Just because I was, had vivian's words in my mind like, don't make yourself a hero. And I'm like, oh no. I was also a weird, complicated person, but I was a kid, so I don't know.

That was a long, it's a huge question. It is so hard. It is what I would like to say to every single writer. Please do it. We need you. Everybody needs you. It's not gonna be pretty, but you are doing it for the good of humanity, especially women.

Matt: Thank you Guinevere. I think that's exactly what some people probably need to hear.

Beautiful words. Just a time check. We probably have about maybe five, seven more minutes from us, so maybe time for one or two, maybe three questions from us. And then we will turn it over to everyone here. So if you do have a question for Guinevere, please put it into the chat. Some are [00:43:00] already coming in, but now's the time to put in the chat and we'll give you a chance to ask it at the end.

All right, couple more from us. Maybe another big one from me. Looking at the through line, through your work so far, it seems as though a lot of your work is about exposing the, some of the shadow side of humanity, the darker side, whether it's Charlie says or your memoir, or American Psycho.

I'm curious, and this might be too soon to ask, I'm curious, any early thoughts you have? Do you feel like there's a bigger overarching question that you're

trying to answer through your work or maybe through your life? I love this question.

Guinevere: Feel free to legend. I was actually gonna tell you guys earlier when I was when I wrote that New Yorker piece, then I, got a book deal and I was like shopping around my, book proposal, which for writers in this conversation who don't know, like you have to write a book proposal that is sexy and well done and proves that you could actually write a book, which was a whole thing for [00:44:00] me.

But anyway I met with this one, incredible. Oh God, she's like in her seventies and like pearls and red suit and whatever. And she was like, what? She's the legend in the publishing community. What is the through line? Of your work. What does your book have to do with American Psycho Have to do what Charlie says, blah, blah, blah.

And it was the first time anyone ever asked me that and I said, toxic masculinity. And she went, toxic masculinity. That is so clever. And I was 100% did not make a, that term. But yeah, toxic masculinity or in the case of Go Fish, the, first of all, I made absence of men entirely.

Matt: Oh, thank you for sharing that.

Okay. Maybe a couple more from us, Parl.[00:45:00]

Parul: Yes. I'd love to ask you a question. I guess about your focus for the coming year. I'm curious about, what dreams do you have working towards? Is there a mountain top you think you're working towards at the moment? I.

Guinevere: All of them. All of them. Number one, I'm adapting my book to a screenplay, which is hilarious because when I wrote it, I would I had a lot of energy toward me about, adapting about what the movie would be.

And I was like, just, no, I cannot talk to you about a movie if I don't know what the book is. And I aggressively wrote it, not like a movie. And now I'm like, it's so hard to adapt. So that I'm also incredibly interested in a space that probably people don't know about which is called G Programmers.

It's a real thing. It's a whole culture, it's a whole, set of madness and ethical conundrums, et [00:46:00] cetera. And so I'm working on a TV show about that. Imagine Best in show meet c s i, but cult g programmers. And the one thing that

has emerged for me, and that is so important to me, and I hate sometimes how slow my brain works.

I want to write a piece, an essay that is about why we are fascinated with cults. Obviously I know why I am, but like, why is it that people feel completely comfortable saying oh my God, I'm obsessed with cults. Are you obsessed with human trafficking? Do you know what I mean? There's something about cults that is so marginalized and so weird that like people feel totally comfortable just talking about it.

Like it's not like actual humans. And. I don't know. That's just a really fascinating topic for me, and I'm really exploring it and really talking [00:47:00] to a lot of people. And obviously I've been on a lot of like cult related podcasts and I'm like, why do we, here's the essence of it. When you call a group of people something that they wouldn't call themselves, that's already an issue, right?

So no cult calls themselves a cult. And I'm not a cult apologist, and I didn't think that I grew up in a cult until I was, it was pointed out to me. But I am like, what is this? What is this phenomenon? And like, why does America in particular think that it's not happening in and among us? Like, why does America feel so safe?

Being like, I'm like, ah, those are so weird. Popcorn. Popcorn. Do you know what I mean?

Parul: Yeah. Really interesting. Some fascinating questions you're raising. I'm really excited about your your adaptation of your memoir. I'm curious, you said that you found just a quick question from you. I know we have just one more from us and then we're heading to audience questions.

You said [00:48:00] you are finding it difficult to adapt the memoir as it is. What would it, what would you do differently if you wanted to write it with a screen potential screenplay in

Guinevere: mind? First of all I loathe when I read a book and it sounds like it's just waiting to be a screenplay. So that was part of my ethos when I was writing the book.

I in this particular case, I don't know who wrote this book, but it's very challenging to adapt. I'm, what I'm struggling with is my diaries are a huge part

of the book and I really don't like voiceover. What do you do with that? What do you do with that? And here's the thing I'm thinking about.

'cause in addition to that, I'm also like every single, like in, in a book, you are allowed to say, this is what was happening, this is what I was thinking, this is what was happening, this is what I was thinking. And so I'm like, how do I represent that? That is so important. And in actual fact, it's a human experience, right?

[00:49:00] We're always having this happen to us and this is what we're thinking, hopefully not, to an exhausting degree if you love people. But I'm like, what if I read it with subtitles? What if this story is me as a kid? And then there are subtitles of what I'm actually thinking. Oh, I know.

It's so weird. I know it's weird, but I'm like, no one's done that. Also, we're all super used to subtitles now because like sound design is so weird and streaming is the way it is, and I'm like, Is that gonna work? So I'm struggling with that. I'm struggling with voice, basically. There's the experience of me and then there's everything that was going on in my head.

And I'm trying to figure out what is the most inventive and unique and specific way to represent that. And I haven't I've been trying the subtitle thing and it's my boy, it's my angry adult voice that's coming out in the subtitles. I'm like no. Not the [00:50:00] point. A friend of mine said, will it be the subtitles, be the way we think?

And I was like, okay. Can I, Represent that. Can any of us represent that? And I'm like, oh, yeah, you're a writer. Okay, so try, but can you imagine you're watching a movie about it, like a, a 10 year old girl and then you see what she's saying, but it's disjointed words. Does that, would that work?

I don't know. Yeah.

Parul: I don't know. But I'm certainly curious. I tell you what, I wish everyone came with subtitles. It'd make life.

Guinevere: Oh, it's true.

Matt: It's so fun to hear your creative process though. So just you workshopping this and sharing it with us. Thank you. It's really fun. We'll be hanging tight and seeing what, what happens with it all.

G, you. Thank you so much. So we've got some questions coming into the chat. If you do have a question for g Guinevere, now's the time to put it in the chat. And how this will work is we will invite you to show your face in a moment so you can enter the room in a [00:51:00] moment, hopefully there you can do it.

Now if you press the stop video, you can properly enter the room here and then Gu can see all the lovely people who have been listening to every word and how this will work. If you ask the question in the chat and your camera is on, we will give you a chance to ask your question directly. If your camera's off and you ask the question in the chat, we will ask it on your behalf and we'll see how many we can get through in the next 15, 20 minutes or so.

All right, and we'll take turns picking on you, Parl and I, so Parl, who is up first?

Parul: We start with Jenny, if you'd like to ask your question, Jenny Moon, feel free to unmute yourself. Let me just check. You can do that right now. You can unmute

Matt: yourself. Go ahead.

Parul: Yeah, sorry. Try again, Jenny.

Matt: Not yet. Almost give it another go. There we

Guinevere: are. Are we there? We're there, can you hear me? Yeah. Okay. I'm just wanting to know since you write on so many different projects, Guinevere, if you are able [00:52:00] and do write on more than one thing at a time.

It's a really interesting question. Something that I trained myself into because to be a professional writer means that you are always writing one or more things. I actually just give myself days, but again, it's just really about understanding who you are as a writer. I am not, I'm, I like, Gemini, born in the year of the monkey you just only have to do this to me.

And I'm like, what? That sounds amazing. So I know for myself, because I've trained myself to my question, I'm listening to somebody

I've trained myself to understand that for me, I need a day. The day needs to be about this project. And the next day needs to be about this one. I feel I every writer has their own challenges. Mine is focus. I'm like, I like wandering around the house, scribbling down a million ideas.[00:53:00]

But the gold the me is when I sit down and say okay, this is what I'm doing. So I would recommend to every single writer to understand who they are and. Just treat that kid like the baby that you are raising, that is gonna be the thing that makes you feel good about yourself.

Thank

Parul: you for the question, Jenny.

Matt: Thank you. Thanks Jenny. All right. Let's see who is up next. We've got Nessa. Actually no, that's more of a comment. So Ness, a beautiful comment. Tracy Bakley, if you'd like to ask her question around emotional support during the writing over to you.

Parul: Hi,

Guinevere: Jenny. This is really interesting. Thank you. I was just wondering, when you are talking about your work, it just feels so physical. When you were doing your memoir, did you have any sort of support, either emotional or physical? What did you do to help physically process what was coming up or emotionally or mentally if [00:54:00] indeed you did at all?

I did. I have a lovely partner that I've been with for three years, so there's her. Also she takes care of my dog which is great because I love my dog a lot, but she looks me in the eye like this when I'm riding as if like I'm the most useless human in the world. But most importantly, I created a space like I needed, I realized I needed to go somewhere that represented that and that, luckily just a friend actually gave me his studio and it was a five flight walk up and I was like, weirdly relishing the pain of it.

I was like, you are not walking up these stairs without writing something. I think that I. It's that it's creating a space, creating it for you, not when you think you might wanna write, but having it be there for you, have let it haunt you. Let it be this place that is [00:55:00] just come to me, this is what you need to do.

That's it. That's what I did. I just created a space that would haunt me. Thanks

Parul: for sharing. Thank you for the question, Tracy. Next up we have Jill Fraley, if you'd like to ask your question. I think it's wrong story arc. Thanks.

Guinevere: I actually wrote this question before. You mentioned how difficult it was to take the book into a screenplay, but I was thinking in terms of.

Editing your memoir and thinking about the story beats method, which I know a lot of screenwriters use, and I know you mentioned the turning point being the most important. So I was thinking when you were editing the memoir, were you thinking in terms of story beats and put things in or take things out as a part of shaping that arc?

Or did you just think about the turning point and otherwise that, that, that was like the way that you made the story fit that kind of a traditional sense of [00:56:00] narrative? First of all, it should be clear. I had a publisher and editor who's like a pro. She edited Matthew McConaughey's memoir.

I don't know even what, how that matters, but She would say gently maybe you're veering off a little bit you need to like, stay here. Or This is what's interesting about the story, or this is what, the lay person who didn't grow up in a cult would be interested in.

So I was incredibly privileged in that regard. Did I write? I knew where I was going. I guess that's a really important thing as a writer. I knew that my book ended when I was 18. I knew that it ended when I went back to visit this cult, and I knew that there was this turning point and I knew that there was this turning point and that was like four markers.

But the thing is like I'm a screenwriter. There are so many rules to [00:57:00] screenwriting, and I would start to write a thing and I would have a goalpost and I would be like, oh, what? I told the other story, oh my God, there's no rules but goalposts. So I don't know. I don't know if that's even anything that's useful to a writer starting out, but like to me it was about identifying where you need to go.

That's, and that's my screenwriter brain too, identifying where you need to go and just see how you get there.

Matt: That helps you. Any follow ups?

Guinevere: Thank you. Yes. Was that a lot? Thanks, Jill. I'm sorry, everyone got really quiet.

Matt: I'm like, what? No. We're all, it's all sink. It's all sinking in Guine. This is, it's all so good. Thank you. Let's see. Julie has some questions. She wants to know more about the sexy book proposal.

What did you learn by writing the sexy book proposal? Anything that surprised you?

Guinevere: Oh, wow. Yeah, [00:58:00] I, first of all, I, I come from, screenwriting we don't have book proposals, whatever. And so when I published this article in the New Yorker, and then I got an agent, like a sexy lit agent who I adore, and I was, he was like, okay, now we write a book proposal.

And I was like I just give them my New Yorker article on a, a little like paragraph about me. He's no, girl, not on my watch. You need to write two chapters. And I. Fuck. Okay. He's you need to if you really wanna sell this book, you need to show them that you can write, not like an essay for the New Yorker, but write.

And I was like, okay. And I deliberately, weirdly, self punishingly chose two of the hardest fucking moments of my life. And I was like, you know what, a, I need to see if I can write this. And b I need to see when I meet editors if they can handle it. 'cause I'm ready to write [00:59:00] this. I don't need emotional editors.

So the sexy book proposal was like a lot of tears and a lot of are like, are you even a person who could write a book? I was like, I went through it. I went through it. But I was like, you know what? I am, and you know what I'm fucking really. Compelled to tell the story and I'm good at it.

And I like, I would write these things and I would just be like then I was like, no, fucking go. Face it full on. And it worked.

Matt: Wonderful. I'm curious, did you have any pushback or any questions, any reservations when you sent that proposal out that you either had to clarify, change or adjust?

No,

Parul: which

Guinevere: was so surprising to me. It's so everyone was, like salivating to publish this book, which was a little bit confusing to me because [01:00:00] in movie world, you are always pitching, you are always telling people like, oh, you're always selling yourself, blah, blah, blah. And all of a sudden people were selling themselves to me and they were like, this proposal is so blah, blah, blah.

And I was like, I don't. No. What compliments look like. It was incredible. No, absolutely not. Everyone was like, yes, please pick me.

Matt: No. Thank you. G guava, we're coming to the end here. We so appreciate your time with us. I'm curious, do you have any hopes for the book? Or for people reading it?

Yeah. Any, as this goes off and continues to sail off into the world, what's your hope for it?

Guinevere: The dedication of the book says for Anna Lee, which is one of my sisters and for all my sisters, and that is for all of the women that I grew up with.[01:01:00] What I hope for this book, and what I really hope always in my writing is that it like touches people. It changes people. It moves people. I'm not just talking about myself.

I'm actually trying to, I'm inviting everyone into a conversation that is I don't know, authentic or whatever. I don't know. Yeah, that I just want people, women in particular, the women I grew up with in particular, to feel seen and to feel empowered to write.

Matt: What a beautiful note to end on. One of your Thank you. Thank you so much. Other than grabbing the book, reading the book, buying it, sharing it with our friends. Any asks of us as a community, as an audience,

Guinevere: It looks like it's almost all women who I'm talking to. Just right. It's really, you'll find so much power and joy in it.

It is [01:02:00] like beyond. It is beyond. Thank

Matt: you. Thank you. For these beautiful words, we're so appreciative. And we actually have two copies of your book that we're going to give away. How will this work, Paul? So if

Parul: you could just raise your digital hand if you would like a copy of When the World Didn't End we'll choose two at random.

Alright. I'm

Matt: just gonna, you Great. So if you'd like a copy of the book, you can raise your hand, your digital one, and we'll pick two of you all. Okay. Who are

Parul: the winners? Jenny Moon and Nessa. You've both won a copy of the book. Just email us with your physical address.

Matt: Hello at London Writer Salon.

Parul: Sorry. For everyone else, please do pick up a copy. It's a wonderful memoir. And actually, now that you've heard talk about the craft of it, you'll find it even more interesting to read. Members of the audience, I w s I think now's a good time to give Gwen beer a round of applause.

Please unmute yourselves. Please unmute yourselves and give gu what we've got. Thank you so much.

Matt: Thank you, GU. Woo. Thank you. [01:03:00]

Guinevere: You so much. Yes. It will not heal you, but it will make you feel better.

Matt: Thank you so much for your time, your wisdom, your insights. We're rooting for you and everyone.

Grab the book and if you did win the book at hello@londonwritersalon.com. Email us your mailing address and we will send that off to you. Thank you everyone. We'll post the recording in a few hours. Thank you, g Guinevere.

Parul: Thank you so much. Wish the best. It's been such a pleasure. Have a lovely rest of your day everyone.

We'll see you soon.

Matt: All right. Cheers everyone. Until next time. Bye.