

Episode Title: SC Dillon and Lisa O’Connell: Sharing Stories and Finding Joy

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Julia Barclay: Hello and welcome to the Hear Our Stories podcast by the City of Waterloo Museum for the people of KW. Sarah, Harkamal, and Julia, myself, are your hosts as we explore the 2SLGBTQIA+ and queer community of the City of Waterloo and KW and greater Waterloo Region area. Today we have myself, Julia, taking the hosting seats and Harkamal listening in on tech.

JB: Hello listeners, just jumping in here to give you all a content description of this episode – light profanity is used in this episode. There are also discussions of the intimate partner violence experienced by one of our guests. The impact of generational trauma on residential school survivors is also mentioned briefly. If this is something you might have difficulty listening to, we encourage you to tune in to another episode of the Hear Our Stories podcast and explore the links in the description of this episode.

JB: Now we begin every episode with a land acknowledgement to express gratitude and show respect for the land and the Indigenous peoples of the past and present that have resided here. Acknowledging the land is an indigenous practice that is just one small part of dismantling colonial world views. And ongoing process that we, your hosts, must be mindful of as settlers and students and partners of colonial institutions. In a virtual and physical environment, it's important to acknowledge the land that we end all of our supporting organizations each reside on.

JB: So, the settler City of Waterloo, home to the city of Waterloo Museum, and many of our participants is situated on the traditional Land of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and Neutral Peoples, the settler township of Centre Wellington, home of myself, is within the traditional lands of the Attawandaron or Neutral Nation, the Huron-Wendat Nation and the Grand River Metis Council. The land was negotiated as part of 23 in 1784 and Treaty 19 in 1818, signed by the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Both Center Wellington and Waterloo are on land originally set aside for the people of the Six Nations of the Grand River under the Haldimand proclamation of 1784.

JB: The settler City of Guelph, home of our other host, Sarah is part of the Between the Lakes purchase and is the triads of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation of the Anishinaabe peoples. The Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee people have unique long-standing and ongoing relationships with the land and each other, the Attawandaron people are also recognized as a part of these lands.

JB: The settler City of Etobicoke home to Harkamal, and Toronto home to the University of Toronto, are part of the Toronto Purchase Treaty Number 13 in 1805. It is the traditional Land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca and Mississaugas of the Credit. Etobicoke, known as Adobeegook, the “Place of the Alders” in the Michi Saagiig language is situated along the Humber River watershed, which historically provided an integral connection between Lake Ontario and the Lake Simcoe Georgian Bay regions of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat peoples.

JB: All of these lands are a part of the Dish with One Spoon Treaty, this treaty between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee, bound them to share in this territory and protect

the land in the spirit of peace, friendship and respect. So we would like to extend our gratitude again to the Indigenous peoples with whom we share all of these lands today, and in the spirit of peace, friendship and respect, we hope that all of our listeners will do the same as they listen to the stories shared on this podcast.

JB: And are you still comfortable speaking about your past relationship... SC, with intimate partner violence.

SC Dillon: Yeah. I feel fine about it, yeah...

JB: I guess this opens up with, was there a moment when in that relationship that made you realize that it was abusive and it was something that you needed to pull away from.

SD: You know, I didn't call that relationship abusive until... I started therapy a few months after I left it. It was a very insidious, calculated, slow process. I was in that relationship for six years, and it had ripped me from my family and my community, from my queerness altogether really. And my proximity to my life and sex and the core of who I was, and it felt very purposeful and intentional. And smart. My father had just died, he had been quite ill for a year and a half before passing, and I had not gotten to the place where I was ready to address that grief. I think there was a sense of relief that there was peace for him and my family was trying to recover. I wasn't paying attention, and I was completely dissociated, and she kind of snuck right in there and took over my life very quickly. It just kind of snowballed from small things to- and just rippled out to every part of my life, control over every part of my life. And that also was...

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SD: there was a lot of emotional manipulation and lots of gaslighting and just emotional mental abuse, a lot of forced labor work too, and sleep deprivation through work. By the time I left, it's actually kind of wild to me that I was able to leave. It was just a moment that happened, I had stopped writing, all of this stuff, whatever. I saw an old friend who had known me since I was 16, we usually saw each other maybe once a year, and they noticed something. And because I had the coffee shop at the time and I was working all the time, and I think my regulars saw, as I found out later, and they knew things were different, but this is someone who didn't see me often. And they showed up and they noticed and they said something and I kind of just dropped as a kernel of like, is this normal? And... Yeah, they just looked at me and said, "I think you know what you need to do." They didn't really say anything else to that. And it's like I had just been waiting for someone who is completely unrelated to my everyday life to give me that acknowledgement or permission, and I... And then I ended it the next morning and kind of, my life blew up in a different way. I had \$20 to my name and a car. I didn't have a bank card. I didn't I think I had been planning to leave for a long time, I'd been kind of pulling little parts of my life out, like my passport and a book that was really important to me, or just the small things. But I thought it would take me six months to a year to leave.

SD: But yeah, I had nothing, and I was lucky to not face any serious systemic barriers, I was able to...I hadn't spoken to... I hadn't seen my mom in four years. I hadn't spoken to my sister in five years. My brother kind of would pop in. Yeah, but I called my mom immediately and just kind of... Sobbed. We just started to rebuild from there and yeah, I feel really lucky for them, and I'm thankful for them. And I had built a community of friends at the shop, and I don't think I had even realized that I had... And these are people who knew and saw things, and they just kind of...

When they knew and they found out that I left, they just showed up, and I hadn't realized that I had built these really incredible connections with people for six years at this... At the time, I guess it would have been four years at the shop that I wasn't allowed to consider... I had any sort of connections or value. So, all of a sudden realizing I had friends, I didn't... But these were people who called me their friend and I didn't know...

SD: And yeah, I will say though that the fact that I didn't really know that there were places that could help me is a sign that I think, especially for... As a queer person, I think that there is some knowledge, some vague knowledge that there are places that people can call if they need to get out. I just don't think it had even registered to me that there were spaces that I could call, and I was also... My abuser had really drilled into me the idea that I would never be believed because of how I looked. That no one would believe that I was the person being abused, which is very untrue. But it worked, it really worked. She really played on my anxiety of being perceived as an aggressive person because of how I looked. And I think too, because most of the abuse was overwhelmingly not physical, that it was so rare that that happened, so lack of evidence really put me at a disadvantage too, and I acknowledge that, and I think that that's very true across the board. There is a way that we identify and name abuse as being legitimate when you can see physical signs of abuse, and that is entirely legitimate. However, there are a myriad of other ways that people can abuse that don't show those signs. I guess over the long term, for me, like I was falling asleep standing up, so people noticed that. I also had clothes that didn't fit me because I wasn't allowed to have clothes.

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SD: So it was like, there were other signs, but nobody... People might not necessarily connect that with abuse and... Yeah, I lost, I lost a lot. And I had a moment where I was going to take some legal action, there was a separation and I got a very small amount of money and I got the shop, but I lost everything, pretty much everything. And it took me a very long time to recover, and I'm still, I think, recovering from that. Both like... as a human... And just as a person who lives under late-stage capitalism.

JB: Thank you for sharing that, and I'm glad that you had those people around you and that just that one person even that brought that clarity to help you begin that process. That's a familiar story to someone close to me, in my life. And yeah, just that one person and the power that one person identifying, bringing that clarity to you is a very important thing, and I'm glad that you had that and had that group of people from the coffee shop that you mentioned that you've been building, because I think the fact that it was a queer relationship can put a lot of... We spoke to expectations and perceptions of external folks earlier, and a lot of intimate partner violence within queer relationships goes under-reported and under-discussed. Yeah, you spoke to therapy and how you're still healing from this now, so what other, I guess, including therapy, steps are you taking to protect yourself and heal going forward from this? What is that process like?

SD: I think one of the things that can be the most painful as we recover from intimate partner violence or inter-generational violence and trauma is the acknowledgement that our abusers will likely do it again. And that there is no... there's no recourse, there's almost like there's a... Getting away with it, I'm not sure how to word it. It's been going on six years since I left that relationship, and there are parts of me that are- that will not recover, and I'm okay with that.

There are parts of me that don't- that are different and have changed. Thankfully, the parts that I really liked didn't... But therapy was essential. It made a huge difference. I think I needed somebody who didn't know me to believe me. Not just people who saw things that I needed. I needed to know that if I said this, that somebody who didn't know me or my past would say, I believe that. I believe that that happened to you.

SD: And that's, and I did, and I had one, I go to therapy every two weeks, I've been going for the whole time. And that has helped me try to find some sort of balance between what feels like kind of ungovernable anger and hurt and shame that sometimes feels overwhelming, and kind of, how do we redistribute that, how do we make space for that and feel that...and grieve it. Grieve the time that was lost. Grieve what I participated in as a result of that abuse and also that, in balance with trying to understand my body again, because it had been so depleted. It was like, there was there was so much malnutrition and sleep deprivation that it had affected my short-term memory. I had... I couldn't write for a long time after actually, because I just couldn't find words. And this kind of long-term damage that has taken years to recover from. The sleep deprivation took... I think, I feel like I'm pretty much at a normal state for a 40-year-old who...

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SD: Works a Monday to Friday job, but... It was a very long time. Yeah, so I think that connecting with my body, being- becoming a sexual person again, was kind of the first place I went because it felt the most familiar to me. Here's how I know... sex was a part of the abuse in that relationship, the withholding. So I hadn't been touched, even with affection, for five years. So, I went back into that very quickly, I needed to feel like I was desirable, that my sexuality was appreciated. And while doing that, I also needed to really practice boundaries and expressing them and holding them, and also knowing that boundaries change and changing them as they come and communicate all things that I don't think I've ever done in a very clear way. I knew my hard no's, but I really have a boundary about what I can offer you, emotionally, what I'm willing to o-... Well I might be able to offer it to you, but I'm not willing to do that right now. And learning these boundaries and knowing that I'm allowed to have them, which I think that I was always taught to respect people's boundaries and to hold their space for that, but not to have my own...

SD: Yeah, I was really good at that. I was really good at that, but I'm also like a real romantic, so even though there were limitations to what I could offer, I also wanted to connect with people that I was dating, but I was also so deeply traumatized, it made a particular kind of vulnerability feel unreachable, and that probably confused and hurt. In fact, I know it was, I have spoken to some of these people who I confused or hurt them in those early days when I was dating and having sex again. But yeah, I think therapy... I really gotta double down on the therapy, I don't think I've ever felt this embodied in my entire life, and I don't think I've felt like the integration of how I feel and how I express myself so aligned and at the same level before... I don't know how long it would have taken me to get here if that hadn't happened. I'm certainly not thankful for that experience, but it has – it really pushed me to do some very brutal and painful work.

JB: Thank you again for speaking to that, and now that you're on your healing journey still, 'cause healing from something that doesn't end, it continues to be a process. Are there places that you find joy now that you can go to that bring you to yourself again?

SD: I feel that having lost my community and my identity as a queer person... surprised me how devastated I was when I realized how much of it I had lost. And so I really... that is how I started to connect with queer history. And one- I actually was reading a book called Persistent Desire. It's like my church, and it's a collection of stories about and from butches and femmes. It was, I think it was published, I can't remember, the 70s or the 80s. And the person who compiled it, Joan Nestle, who is a very important Jewish femme elder who grew up in New York, and she is one of the people who started the Lesbian Herstory Archives in her apartment. So it's a collection of stories from butches and femmes and conversations that really like helped me come back to myself... It's called a Persistent Desire: a Femme Butch Reader, Joan Nestle. Yeah, lots of notes and dog-ears. Also delighted to say that this is one of the things that I took when I left. And so, from her, from that book, it just felt so good and very joyful to read about our history. And it's so important to me, and I probably talk about it a lot, but it gives me a lot of joy and... Yeah, community gives me a lot of joy and fairy tales give me so much joy, and also like, queering everything that I watch and see and everything...

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SD: From my childhood and being like, “Oh yes, Ursula the Sea Witch, of course, that's why that makes sense.” And yeah, queer history, queer sex, queer sex, it's all intertwined for me. And I think that maybe queerness and sex is contentious for some people, but that's how I feel personally. And they're kind of inexorably linked for me. And part of why I think we've experienced so much violence and oppression in the past is 'cause we have sex with one another. That really upsets people, those are... I love, I'm very happy to be writing again, I do it for my job, and I also do it personally... And my partner gives me joy, my family and my nieces and nephews. I think, you know, it's not a silo, we do carry our grief and our pain and our joy all together, and I think that's what makes the joy feel so good and the grief feel so bad when we lose it.

LO: Writer to writer, you expressed that beautifully.

SD: Thank you.

LO: Every portion, that'll help someone. And we know that, right? Because that's what it all is. And as you get older, as horrible, I'm sure I can't imagine- I can actually imagine. It becomes richer and more beautiful. And in many ways, I think opens you up to community in ways that are beyond what you can understand... The Indigenous journey right now is all about that. All the work I do, it's all about healing. With everybody, everybody. I think everyone's just... Pulsing. I mean I.. Thank you. That was beautiful.

SD: Thank you.

JB: Now, I think it would be lovely to hear what brings you joy, Lisa, and what are the projects that you're working on right now with Pat the Dog.

LO: Joy is such a— Joy is such, or delight, are such wicked words... I mean, my present state. We kind of talk about the emotional Weather Report whenever I gather with creators or folks who talk about where we are, and it's kind of just... I use the word pace and peace all the time now. It's literally just the hardest to just move forward. The best we can try to stay as positive as possible. Knowing we're in, I hate the word, “pivot” and “unprecedented,” should be stricken from the lexicon at this point, but it's really true. Because the whole world is kind of burnt out

right now, it's not unusual feelings. So it's... I work with predominant storytellers or folks that have an in-or-a desire to tell a story... or to get a story. Some may be brand new with a story, so may be people that have won major awards, it's just always that impulse, but the impulse is to share a story in some form, be it in an installation or a piece of theater or in a novel, or in a web, in a Twitter play or on tiktok or whatever the forms are, because there is a desire to connect. I mean ultimately, it's always about the desire to connect and to find community and to not feel alone and to get that for- At times it's about healing, sometimes it's just about expression or provocation, but all of it is that impulse to want to connect, which I think is incredibly beautiful.

LO: What gives me the biggest joy is when I see that work, when we can have a situation where we have that kind of voice come forward and that expression comes, is able to get out there and really touch somebody. I'm like the big geek in the room that totally gets it. I get really jazzed by that still, and it drives me to continue to do this work. 16 years later, the work that I do now. Founding a theater company, now a catalyst for theater, and it came directly out of my work as a journalist. I became... And I was always a freelance journalist. I did write a column for three years with The Chronicle, but predominantly wrote for magazines, to freelance work, I wrote for Today's Parent and Chatalaine, and I did op-ed for Toronto-Star.

LO: But I grew somewhat disillusioned, if you would, with that work because you would write these pieces that were out there that usually were about situations that need to be looked at in marginalized communities, or situations that needed to be... you'd hope folks would look at... And someone might read it and send you an email or a letter, tell you how amazing you were, but did it really change the political process? How really could you change the discourse? How could you affect any kind of real change, a conversation? How to get people together to care? And it kinda came to my attention that, for me at least, it was less about telling people and more about showing people. And I think that's what art does. Art invites people to come into a space or to come and take a look at work, then to kind of maybe approach a feeling, approach a sensation, and I think we can potentially, not that we're gonna change hearts and minds totally, but allows someone to really be affected by something, if given the opportunity to wear it for a little bit... Or experience it a little bit. When you see a Rothco painting and it's just big beams of color, right? But if you really go in there and you feel in and you see it, then you might understand the sense of what depression really is and really what it is, as you see the grades of color change, you spend some time with...

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LO: poets speaking a piece of poetry, and even if you don't like the words and you don't like poetry... In the cadence of how it kind of rolls through and the rhythm is much like a river or water, or a cloud coming to you, you might feel something that is in some sort of similarity. And if you're interested, not all ways, but if you're interested, it might be something that encourages you to go forward and do that work. I've seen a good play affect how people feel. I've seen a good play talk about some of our most complicated emotional issues, which is all emotion, and allow us to really think about what those differences are. And look at the complication where it's not just good or bad, it's that in between. We know that we can take a look at who and what we are...

LO: So it was really for my frustration of as much as I loved doing journalism and I seemed to be good at it, and it seemed to be working for me, and that was back in the day when you got paid for it too. You actually would get \$2 a word. It was actually a paid gig, SC, can you believe

it? Like, Holy crap, eh? I felt that for all the energy I was putting forward, this was something that was just more powerful and I became consumed by it... It was really significant to me for a myriad of reasons, a lot of it... I'm sure tied... And I don't think I made those connections. I was aware of it sort of tangibly, but the really the deep connections of how I lost my story. I'm third generation residential school, and with all the cliches that it'll take seven generations. Yeah, I'm smack bloody in the three of it, and my kids are the fourth and... And all of those things that we read about that we know. Yup, they're all true, they all happened. Kind of sad, it's a bloody cliché, but it's there in the manifestation, and it's brutal, and it's horrific. But it's also really beautiful because we continue, we live, we persist. And there's something really kind of cool about that. Like your persistence, SC, to get out the door and just decide. Like, what courage, what fear, what horror. And all of it together is what we feel and I think that's the best of who and what we are. And there's a self to that if we share and we don't feel alone. Not everyone has the ability to have therapy, not everybody has... I've also benefited from it and I'm grateful, but I have some privilege and I have a community, that has that happened. But we don't have that, necessarily, everywhere. So, sometimes a good piece of art, while it won't do the same job always, but might provoke those kinds of conversations.

LO: So, it just seemed to me if I was gonna... As a practical person, if I'm going to spend all this time doing this work, where can it have that- the greatest impact? And it wasn't something tangible, like I wanted to change everything, I think it came from probably that deep sense of where I came from and what I'm from and what my curiosity was that sort of led me to do it. And so I founded this organization 16 years ago just as a collective, and it's been a huge surprise to me that it's become what it's become. 'Cause that wasn't ever my intention. I'm a dramaturge by training, which is basically the geek in the room that asks all the questions and read the footnotes. That's always been who I was, and it just grew from 5 to 10 to 100. And now full identification in the last number of years for us as a catalyst for regional theater in Ontario. We've won a number of awards. And basically, all that does is it... it's for the people, it's not me, it's not the organization, it's a representation of our voices.

LO: And it's led me to found a festival in Northern Ontario and Sudbury called PlaySmelter. A new works festival, the only professional Northern New Works Festival in Northern Ontario. And our anniversary is 10 years this May. And then I founded a festival here called Femme Folk Fest, which is for... It's now in its third year, it opens in two weeks, so when I get off with you guys, I'm back on into it. And that's for story, art always, story, art installations of women, identifying, women presenting, and non-binary folk. And it's because that work still does not have- it's not seen as a commodity, it's terrible to say, but just not at the same presentation and does not get the same payment just not provide the same opportunities for femme folk as it does for the traditional patriarchy. So, despite the fact when we think that that's not a conversation we need to care about, it's still an issue. Pay equity in Kitchener-Waterloo, the last quarter I have I think is at 68% on the dollar. That's not great. And these are things that need to come to attention, so my work now is less about joy and more about responsibility, and that comes with elder... 40. I hear you, 40 was a long time ago for me, but it becomes a bit moreso if you do this work. Because it's a responsibility, once you're able to kind of make these things happen, to make sure that those platforms are open, that you stay on your mandate, that you assist those folks and that you pivot as need be. We were in the midst of our Femme Folk Festival, which is the one in Waterloo...

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LO: I found... It took me two, three years to basically find it, get it ready, strategize it, have all the money, and we opened three years ago in March 2020. So, we opened in March 2020 for three weeks. It was... We were to have 40 events in 11 venues in Kitchener-Waterloo. We ran three days because we hit Covid. And so, you talk about a pivot. And I had... It took me two years to raise the money for that, we were funded by all levels of government, which is wonderful, and we had to close and it forced us really quickly to take a look at how we go forward and quickly... And it was difficult. It was a sucker punch. Everybody was terrified. Nobody knew what they were doing and we migrate really, fairly quickly in a period of a couple of months, to full digital programming. And we were by the seat of our pants, like everyone else... I reached out to colleagues, I hired a couple of really savvy young artists that are mid-30s or 40s who are really great with tech, as I'm not... And empower them for us to play, and we just took a lot of risk and it paid off as very successful.

LO: So, the last two years, even though with hitting Covid... We've been a strong contractor of local artists in terms of providing income for them, micro-grants, a number of different programs we've done... If you would have told me this, SC, 25 years ago, when I interviewed you, that I'd be doing this work, I would have told you you were crazy. I was writing op-ed, I was writing journalism, but every question led to another question, led to another question, and the desire to be sort of really curious. And I'm in a place right now, you know, where we're luckily in extreme abundance with the work we're doing and the work is quite strong and successful, so we continue on and... In ways that I couldn't anticipate it. It's wonderful, it's beautiful. It's terrific, it's fantastic. It's quite an important, huge responsibility. I care about the mental health of my artist, I practice self-care for myself, I'm not always successful with it. Burnout in my industry is huge. And then it's something when I do- I do a lot of mentoring with young folks and young artists. Usually femme identified. I spend a lot of time doing that.

LO: My festival in Northern Ontario called PlaySmelter, it's in Sudbury, hence the smelter, and it's been one of the first places for emerging artists to come oft times to get their first professional contract. Because we pay professional industry wages. So, all of these parts of advocacy are extraordinary, and I never went to theatre school. Like, this is all grass roots, this is all just coming from identified community, what we need, who we are, what we do. To a certain extent, when I got the email request to have a conversation, it was about my work as a journalist, it was like going back to another life. 'Cause it feels like another life, but in many ways it wasn't because my curiosity... It came from that and my frustration and my curiosity for that to effect change probably led to this. And who knows what this will lead to as well.

LO: So it's... Yeah, it's a really interesting time to see how things cycle, to see how they change or come back. I thought when we got out of the Harris years and... that we would be through with a lot of... the right wings. And we see this coming back, and that's interesting to me, I think of what responsibility I have as an artist and as a curator and artistic director in terms of shaping the dialogue or assisting the shaping of a dialogue for that. I think about what my community needs. I think a lot about mental health lately, 'cause there's just an awful lot of pain out there and fear. Boy is there fear. Mostly folks oft times are motivated by fear. And I think about what we need in terms of what we can provide or could do. I think about what delight actually means and what does joy really mean. Do we really know what that is. So, I am one of those geeky people at a dinner party- I'll be in a corner with a glass of wine and we'll be talking like ridiculously deep thoughts, and it's not for everybody. It's... not everybody wants to engage in that, but I love it. And I think it's really important, and I think it's endlessly uplifting.

LO: Almost... even in the deepest darkest piece of brutality, there's almost always something that is overwhelmingly interesting and potentially positive. I know that sounds horrific, but how else can it be. Three generations from a residential school is this... And that says something about the human condition too. And who knows what'll be 10 years from that as well, but it doesn't mean it's not difficult to have those conversations. I think it gives me grace too, to understand when people get so angry. Because I'm a flash point, thfore folks, when you bring work together. So I will get people... name a slur, it's come at me, that's... stalkers, you name it, I've had that stuff, right. But that's because it's a provocation, that's something you hit a nerve and rather than avoided or gaslit or saying, yu know, those aren't the jedis you're looking for...

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LO: We need to engage in to take a look and what that is and who we are and what that means. And what we're for. It's alsmost always a beautiful conversation, but it needs time.. You're not gonna get the answer or that. Like good therapy, like building a good garden, with a good friendship, takes time. And that's been my truth, because I'm older and I've had that happen, right. But it's not for everyone, but it's what I like to do. A long answer to your question.

JB: We love the long answers here, this is a podcast, we love to hear it and you are right. Your work is so important, Lisa, thank you for sharing.

LO: Yeah, it's similar to what SC is doing, it's similar to what you're doing as well. I really think it's just... That's really all we have. The first thing we do when a wee human is born, to express, to say some kind of conversation, a song, a story. And usually, if we're lucky enough, we have those moments. The last breakthrough drama might be some sort of a similar thing, it's more than a salve, it's an expression of what can be there. But a lot of folks are afraid of it, to talk about really who we are, what we are, and a lot of folks are afraid of how to express it, so sometimes it comes out in diatribes, or polemics, or something that could push... Those are important ways to create work as well, but what are the different means we can go forward to have that expression and to have that work as well.

JB: Amazing. SC, would you like to speak to what you're currently working on a little bit, we got a little sneak peak of it in your bio earlier on, but you're writing... What are you working on? What's next?

SD: Well, I was lucky enough to recently, as I had mentioned, I owned a coffee shop for about seven years, I passed that on to a friend in the summer of 2020, noodled about with some other work for about a year as I finished my MFA in creative writing, and then I was quite lucky to get a job as a copywriter for a digital marketing firm that works with non-profits, organizations, and it's really important work and also very enjoyable for me. To get to actually do this for my job and do it in a way that feels like it aligns with my beliefs. And so, that's great, and I'm very happy about that, and as a result, it's really opened up my brain or actually maybe laser-focused my brain on that kind of creative writing area. So, it's helped me step back into that again. I wrote a personal essay about my experience of abuse and how that works as, how do we recover after abuse? What does that look like? What does recovery and healing even look like? And it was quite well received. And so I've been doing some more of that, which I've never done before, personal essay stuff.

SD: But yeah, it also feels very nice to be closing in on finishing fiction again and getting to talk about all the weird intersections that interest me and how that looks... Yeah, I'm hoping to really just... I don't know if I wanna close up what I'm currently doing or just keep expanding it or just keep writing in general, but I feel very thankful to have found words again and to be able to do that for my life. I think that they are gorgeous and dangerous things, and when they're used the right way, they're still both of those things, and they move people the same way music does and the same way art does, and theater and all of these things that... It's like an essential part of who we are as people in the world. So, I feel very, very... I have a lot of gratitude for being able to do that. Every day.

LO: I'm gonna step in for a second one thing to pitch in here as well, so we met because I was writing a column for a community newspaper and trust me, I didn't get paid very much, but I got paid something. And these tools are increasingly being- in the time, since that was 25 years ago, right? God, 25 years ago. And she was that old too, now that I think, about it... But that long ago that we had that happened, how many opportunities exist like that now? How many community papers do we have where content is truly locally generated or not picked up from something else? And so, I've noticed, and just the commodification, since there's lots of stuff on the internet, too, there's no question in terms of... There's a ton of stuff there in terms of all the different places that one can place...

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LO: But where are those places in community that we can come together? Where there's some sense where there is a broad base community, not just particular sectors that weave and come together. We have a lot more available now, in terms of availability, what's out there in terms of all these conversations, but do we have a means to really have a platforming of that that allows our local communities to have that occur? And this something I think about all the time because in many ways, I wonder how, for lack of a better word, terrible, but how ghettoized we are in terms of all of these different areas? And communities stick with communities, and are we really having a conversation that allows that. It used to be that was a newspaper. I don't know if that's the case anymore. It can be certain spaces that people create, but it seems to be more displaced now in a sense, in terms of a noise. Social media tools are great, the notion of Twitter initially was wonderful, but we've all seen what it can do. And as Instagram becomes more commodified, is it more to sell stuff or more to have a conversation? And I'm not even gonna talk about Facebook, which I'm off it. I'm not going on that one, but where are these places where we can have these types... There's so much noise right now, but are we really listening... And where are those places to have it... Listen.

LO: I mean, I come from oldschool, but it used to be there were places you could do that and it would be in a receptacle of a newspaper or something like that, and I think we'll find a new form, I think we're towards a new form. In my own practice, I experiment with that with my festivals which started out as theatre and now they're multi-disciplinary because they're expressions of whatever an artist wants to bring forward, and I'm pushing them more and more to be free. The one we're doing this year, we're not gonna charge anything for it, it's gonna be totally free and open source. It means more work for the institution to raise those dollars, but I think it's an offering to community to have that. But where are these places to have that happen? There was probably, we left instruments when Sarah was there, Sarah then, but SC and I met 25 years ago, but that little column, it made me think when you reached out to me for- to have this

conversation, that had an impact. I know a lot of people stop me over eggs at Zehrs over that column. And letters, and there was... And we always say for one person that reaches out in a letter that 20 people maybe more... So where are those places? Both in anger and apathy and jot to come together to have that, and I think about that because as we create more content and have more stuff... Are we really communicating? Are we really listening? Are we really allowing ourselves to take that forward. I don't know, what do you think SC? I think my answer is to create more art, but I don't know.

SD: Yes absolutely... Always, always always. I think always make more art and... Yeah, I think the way we communicate will ebb and flow and always has, and the way we share information. And information is dangerous and, to some people... Or I guess depending on what the information is. But yeah, I think the solution is to find more ways to reach people, and I think because we're lucky to live where we live, I suppose, or... I feel... I'll speak for myself. That's probably better. I have privilege as a white person, I also have some form of privilege, as I said, in my community as a masculine person, but there are... I think things like podcasts are incredible because of their reach. If you can get internet access, you can access... Well, again, caveat that, in some places, without censorship or laws, but I think that this is the thing, it's we... We have to try it. Everybody has to try. We all have to try. This is where pirate radio came from. We have to try to work outside of whatever the regulations are, to reach as many people as possible, and I think the most consistently successful way of doing that is telling stories, however that manifest in... In whatever medium that manifests. I think that that's a way to do it, and it's the thing that has always survived, so I'm with you there.

JB: Art... And telling stories.

SD: Aren't we just...

JB: Yeah, right? If you guys are happy sharing for our listeners where they can follow you or lend their support, if they can, any social medias that you'd like to share with us or Go Fund Me, I'll give the floor to the two of you if you have anything you'd like to share with our listeners now.

LO: Yeah, so you can find me at Pat the Dog dot org, and it's P-A-T-T-H-E-D-O-G dot org, that's the organization. We're a catalyst for theatre creation, really story creation, with a special interest in regional Ontario, although we're a national and international organization...

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LO: We do do a lot of work internationally in the UK as well. In exactly less than two weeks, we open Femme Folk Fest and if you go the path of dog website you can find it. That's Femme Folk Fest dot ca that runs March 8th to the 20th of this year. I don't know if the podcast will probably be after that, but the festival runs annually in Waterloo region, and it always opens on International Women's Day and it always closes on the Equinox... 'cause that's the time of supposedly international parity, so kind of a lovely little 13 days. And I also... We also run the PlaySmelter festival, that will run May 9th to 15th this year in Sudbury, Ontario. And if you go to the website, you'll see all our social media handles, we do all of that stuff. And you can find me if you're interested as well, because it's a contact information when you look under contacts, you just hit it and send me email and... Easy enough to find me.

JB: Perfect!

SD: Yeah, you can find me on Twitter. It's- I had to look it up, actually, I forgot what my Twitter handle as it's SCDamnDillon and I also very sporadically throw up new episodes, I do a podcast called The Butch Femme podcast, where I talk about fictional and real, butch and femme people or characters. I think there's about 9 or 10 episodes. I really try, but it's a lot to do on your own. But yeah, you can... Check that out there. Yeah, I like to support both. I mean, ACCKWA, we talked about that, and ARCH in Guelph here, Rainbow Railroad is doing really great work internationally, helping bring queer and trans folks into the country. BlackCapTO, which is the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention in Toronto, and NYSHN as well, the Native Youth Sexual Health Network. All great, really great organizations that are doing important work for community or any local organization that's doing something for the people. But yeah, mostly I just make weird jokes on my Twitter. And I have a few pieces, essays published on Autostraddle, so you can just look up my name on Autostraddle and it's all on there.

JB: Perfect! Thank you both for everything and for meeting up and making time and coming together for recording this with us. This has been really, really great, and I've loved hearing from both of you. So, thank you again for joining me today.

SD: Thank you. This was really lovely. I really... Getting that Twitter DM from you was... I actually was like... It kind of blew my mind, I think I responded, "Oh wow, wild." It was wild to me to get that message from you and I was so thrilled. I thought this is going to be very fun. So yeah, thank you so much, and this is a really, really amazing thing that you're doing, and I love that this is happening in the area and Lisa it is so lovely to see you again, and you were... I remember that time and you were so lovely and warm and 25 years later, here you are still a bad ass, still very lovely and warm.

LO: It's so good to see... And like, Julia thank you, it's more like, I got the email and it was like, it was so weird because that was a whole other lifetime. Like I'm in a different marriage, it's like we... And I'll share like, I was in an abusive marriage and I did not know till I was out of it. So, everything you said, believe me... Yes, all of it. Yeah, exactly. The emotional cruelty is the worst because people don't understand that, that's what that is. So, incredible. So to get the email, it was just like... It was weird, it was a total mindfuck, it was like, I cannot believe... This is back. And then to see your name and it was like... And it's so wonderful to see you and it's so fantastic to hear everything that you're doing, and it's so wonderful. And I feel like who you talk to, SC, then, that was a baby, I was such a child trying figure stuff out... I was like, negotiating my way around Waterloo and it was like we're back in time. It was just for me from Toronto, I was just eager for answers, so I got way more from you, I'm sure then you got for me. It was totally collaborative. Just talking to you and please give your mother my best, eh?

SD: Oh, I will, yeah.

LO: So, yeah, this is a pleasure. I think this is a great project, and I was just talking about corporations and ACCKWA because those are institutions that may not survive, some of them have... They're very important ones...

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LO: They need to be remembered, there needs to be something that's put down, they were in use in existence. And the folks at Club Ren, the community, the safety, the beauty, the grace, the kindness, and the space. It was remarkable what they did. They saved a lot of people. Great

people. And those are the types of things that I think needs to be in... What's in a city museum and everything else, but these are what should be institutionalized. If you're gonna institutionalize stuff, that's the story. And in fact, it doesn't exist the fact that there's a tech thing there now, and the fact that there's not enough queer spaces right now... That's a whole conversation. We don't have enough spaces. Yeah, so that's just the kind of pushing it to... It was an important conversation for that... To put that forward to... so thank you for that.

SD: I am also so glad that you reminded me of Gen-X. That place was... Yeah, I saw a lot of queer films that I would not have been able to access, especially because the internet was so new. You couldn't find anything. And Gen-X, I got to see foreign queer films and even B-reels, they had an absurd selection that... Yeah, also helped me, especially from being from Waterloo.

LO: Yeah, it was important, everybody. And what was so great about how they had, and I can still remember that they were around the back, but it wasn't like cordoned off... You could go through... My children ran through it like it was... It was the way it should be in a conversation. This is just part of our community. And it was fantastic, all of it, and that was a really important instrument, that was the cultural... That and the Princess Theatre was really all we had here and for the longest time, and that was a really significant place for expression of all voice in all areas. I mean, sure there was lack and there should've been more, but there wasn't enough Indigenous or Black- really at that time in terms of the Marketing Canada, but that was a really significant space and that should be remembered, I think, because it was... And again, it shows the persistence and the positivity of people that are looking... You'll find it, we found it. We found places there, we found those conversations and... People forget it. We think that that's never been here in Waterloo. That's always been here.

JB: Hello, Hear Our Stories listeners, thank you so much for tuning in to part two of our episode with SC and Lisa! This is actually the last episode of the Hear Our Stories Podcast series, so we won't be seeing you next week, but you're more than welcome to re-listen to the series and explore the links in the description of this episode to follow and support the groups and organizations tied to its content. And, as always, you can go to the City of Waterloo Museum's website at waterloo.ca/museum to explore the virtual exhibit of this podcast series that features some extra bonus content from each episode and art from local queer artists in KW!

JB: We, your hosts, would just like to thank you all again for listening to this podcast and Hearing Their Stories – it has been an absolute honour to work with each of our guests and we're endlessly thankful to each of them for sharing their stories with us and with you, dear listener.

[54:14]

[End]