

Interview with a Storyteller - Tonia Ransom

Lisette: [00:00:00] Welcome to Tales From the Hearth. A podcast with the storyteller project. This series is both experiment and interview. You may have listened to the first experiment, the wedding gift, and the following two months. I will be conducting interviews with fellow storytellers in a series called, Interview with a storyteller,

You can find your hearth@stormfireproductions.com slash storyteller. This is meant to be an uncensored resource of conversations between storytellers and the magic and craft of storytelling, specifically audio storytelling. It's about the worlds we create and the worlds we hope to build. And so, dear [00:01:00] listeners, I welcome you into our heart.

Cool. All right. Well welcome Tonya. I would like you to first introduce yourself in your own words, who you are, what you do, and what kind of storyteller you are.

Tonia: Oh, okay. I am Tonia Ransom. I'm the creator and executive producer of *Nightlight*, an award-winning podcast that features creepy tales from black writers from all over the world.

And I'm also the creator, executive producer, and writer for *afflicted* a horror thriller audio drama that is best described as Lovecraft Country meets true. Oh my

Lisette: God. I, I, I have to say, I did finally finish *Lovecraft Country*. I was like, in the last two episodes and that I did not finish and I finally finished

So I'm really glad that somebody's aiming for their [00:02:00] own take on that genre. Yeah. Or that genre bending. Yes. Set of stories. I'm excited to hear more about that. But first Tonia, welcome to Tales from the Hearth. The first question I have for you as a fellow storyteller is of course, to tell me a story now.

Okay. I'm gonna give you. Like 30 seconds to think of. And this can be any kind of story, any true story, something that happened to you this week, something you read, something somebody told you. I just want a story with more or less a beginning, middle, and end. And I'm going to, I'm gonna give you 30 seconds and obviously I'll cut this.

So 30 seconds out to think, and then I'm gonna give you, Five minutes to tell or less to tell me it.

Tonia: Okay. Does that work for you? That works for me. I'm sorry. Did you say it needed to be true or not true? Like it doesn't matter.

Lisette: It it could, you know what? It doesn't matter. . Okay. It really doesn't. It could be true.

It could be not true. It could be something you read, something you, [00:03:00] you heard. What, what have you, you can go for as long as there's no copyright infringement for you, . Right. Okay. You tell me. Right. . Alright. Got it. I, I guess I should throw that out there. So I'm gonna give you 30 seconds if you wanna like, make a couple of notes in your notes app or something of, of And then I'll have a timer and I will just post in the chat when you're a minute out.

Okay. If that helps. Okay. Yeah. And this is not like a competition. I just want to hear a story from a fellow

Tonia: storyteller. All right. All right. So, when I was a little girl I grew up like deep in the country, like in the woods, like my next door neighbors. You couldn't see their house. You know, I, I didn't live in a neighborhood.

and down the street from me, there was this old dirt road and at the head of the dirt road was an old church that had been abandoned. And over the years it had started to fall apart. Sort of collapsed in on itself. You know, I grew up in East Texas, so, you know, tornadoes were a pretty [00:04:00] regular thing there.

You know, nothing too severe typically, but, you know, we, we would see them pretty. . And one year we had a tornado and it came through and basically just kind of like put the church out of its misery, , for lack of a better phrase and just, you know, kind of collapsed it all the way down pretty much.

But nobody came to clean it up or anything for a really long time. Not until after I moved away from home. But I remember one day we used to go walk down that old dirt. Past that church that used to creep us out every time we walked by by it. But the whole road would creep us out as kids. And at the very end of that dirt road was a blackberry, I don't know, patch, I guess you could say.

It was more like, you know, wild blackberries that were growing like. Along this fence line, and we knew the people that owned the land and you know, the guy told us, you know, we were kind of family in a weird [00:05:00] way. But

he told us, you know, we could come out there anytime and pick as many blackberries as we wanted.

And so as kids we would go out every summer and we would pick blackberries and my mom would make blackberry cobbler with it. But as my sister and I got older, we would start to go take that walk by ourselves sometimes when we just wanted to get away, you know, explore in the woods, whatnot. And one day my sister and I were walking down that dirt road and we smelled perfume just like out of the blue, which was really, really odd cuz no one was ever on that road.

There were no houses on the road at that time. It. There was no reason for anyone else to be on that road because you know, like I said, we knew the guy who owned the. He didn't live out there, he just owned land. And you know, there was no, there were no houses for anybody to be at, so there was never anyone else on this road, ever.

So it was really unusual for us to smell perfume and it was really, really strong. Like someone, he was right next to us and you know, we kind of [00:06:00] looked around and were like, you know, what did you smell that? Like what is that? Where's that coming from? And. , we just kind of brushed it off after we couldn't figure it out, you know, we just figured, oh, you know, maybe the wind carried it, you know, somebody's walking down the street or something and maybe it carried it from the street or maybe somebody's in the woods and it carried from the woods.

Who knows? And we kept walking and probably about a minute or two later, We both just got this really, really like spooky feeling, like deep in our bones. It was, you know, it was something that, you know, we couldn't say, oh, it was that thing that creeped us out or that, you know, we were kind of already on edge with the perfume thing, but something else changed.

And I couldn't pinpoint it like right at that moment. But reflecting back on it later, I realized it was. , the sounds of the animals stopped, like, you know, typically in Texas summers you hear like cicadas and you know, all kinds of insects during the day and [00:07:00] there was nothing. It was just the wind and the trees rustling and.

And nothing else. You know, that, that all the wildlife had gone quiet and my sister and I got so creeped out just by that feeling that made the hair on the back of our neck standup that we were like no, we're not doing this. We're gonna turn around and we're gonna go back. And we stopped and we turned around and we walked back home.

And I guess it was probably about a week later something came up on. The news where they found a body in the woods right across the street, pretty much right across the street from our house. Right where that dirt road was, you know, not too far away from where the actual road itself was, but it was in the woods, like adjacent to the road and across the street from our house.

And I've always wondered, you know, ever since I was a kid, you know, , did we smell perfume of someone that was already [00:08:00] dead? Was it a ghost or was she still alive? And we narrowly escaped being killed by whoever killed her. The end. Oh dang. .

Lisette: I. Of course, what else should I expect from inviting or Storytellers podcast?

Tonia: Yep. That was awesome. Oh, thank you .

Lisette: So I, I, I have to follow up cuz that was such a well told story is why do

Tonia: you tell stories, man? Honestly, I think. I didn't realize it at the time, but stories really saved me as a kid. They gave me an escape from a reality that I couldn't quite make sense of and helped me make sense of that reality.

And I, you know, I just fell in love with stories at first as an escape and eventually it became a way from for me to. , [00:09:00] I guess sort of work out my feelings on the page. So, you know, a lot of the things that I write are me kind of working out things in my subconscious. My, my novella, my first book risen.

I started writing it and I didn't realize when I first started writing it that it was about my dad's death. But about halfway into it, I realized what I was actually writing about and was like, oh no, I can't do this. And I put it down and I didn't touch it for like, I don't know, seven years after that.

And then, you know, finally I picked it back up again. . But yeah, like, you know, stories were an escape for me in both the sense of reading them and writing them and you know, I think it took me a really long time to realize that that's what it was. It just felt right and you know, I kind of just followed that bug, I guess, ever since I was a kid.

You know?

Lisette: I feel like that's it was something you said was really interesting. [00:10:00] This idea that you put, you were writing and you put something down and you didn't go back to it. I, I always find it fascinating and, and I, I know that the mono myth is not really real, but it's a, it's a concept from Joseph Campbell that you know, the hero's journey or the heroes' journey, or the hero ex's journey, if there's a non-gendered term for hero or heroes, just non-gendered in itself there's a step of where you refuse the call.

You refuse the call to adventure. , do you feel like that, that that fear was, in a sense, your, your refusal to answer the call to be a storyteller or to tell your story? N

Tonia: not at that particular moment? I will say that I definitely had that in high school. I grew up in a really conservative. in East Texas.

And you know, I I, I loved horror ever since I was a kid. And so I started off writing horror and, you know, of course my teachers were not happy [00:11:00] about that. And, you know, they tried to coax it out of me. They tried to, you know, scold it out of me. You know, the, this isn't real writing and, you know, that sort of thing, you know?

Of course. Like if it, you know, if the assignment was to write something else, I did. But, you know, when it was just free form writing, you know, tell a story, you know, it was. You know, it had some horrific element to it. You know, when I wrote stories for like school contests, they were always horror as well, and I never won, you know, surprise, surprise.

But but yeah, like I, I, for a long time I really did. You know, they, you know, young minds are really imp impressionable and they convinced me that what I was doing was not okay. That it was wrong in some sort sort of way and, , although I really didn't believe it deep down, I, I stopped writing. Not just because, you know, superficially, I kind of felt that there was something in me that was broken that made me write horror, but also because I [00:12:00] just felt like my community wouldn't accept me if I wrote horror.

And I think the thought of that really scared me and. . And so I stopped for a long, long time probably like 10 or 15 years. And then I started writing again. So I, I did two stints in college, . I started writing again in my second stint in college. I needed to take an elective for my degree.

And I was like, oh, I'll take a creative writing class, . And I started writing again and my professor was like, wow. You're really good. You should, you know,

consider writing more. The world needs your voice. Those were the words that she used. The world needs your voice. And I was like, what? And like, cause I mean, I wrote a horror story, , you know, like, you know, so I wasn't expecting anyone to say like, yes, write more of that.

Didn't, you know, cause you know, I, it just never occurred to me that anybody thought any different, you know? And, and I don't know why, you know, like I read horror books. Like I knew [00:13:00] that there were horror authors being published. I just didn't think that it was something that I could do or should do until I needed an elective and I wanted to do something that I liked and not, you know, take an elective and a subject I wasn't interested in.

So,

Lisette: if that was kind of your ex first kind of acceptance to being told Right. That your, your voice matters. I, I feel. I mean, humans, obviously we're, we are a, we're a social species. We need that validation in many different parts of our lives. So I kind of wanna go deeper into this as you have, again, kind of look back in, in the past few years of your writing.

what ha who have been those voices of validation and how have they actively taught you how to be a better storyteller?

Tonia: Oh, man, that's a tough question. Honestly, like I don't, I [00:14:00] try not to seek validation from anybody else. You know, I know that, that's, I know that you should , you know, to some degree, you know, if you wanna be successful in this career.

I, you know, and I guess my experience growing up, you know, and having been invalidated for all of those years and then having, you know, one person validate me, I kind of learned that it doesn't matter what other people think of what I do, what matters is, did I enjoy it? Did I get something out of it? Did someone, one person resonate with that story?

And if so, then I consider that story successful. So, yeah, I, I, I don't know. I mean, I feel like this is kind of like a cop answer, but yeah, I don't, I don't seek validation from any single person. You know? I just, I just want at least one person to enjoy something that I write, and as long as that happens, I'm good.

I,

Lisette: that's a [00:15:00] really interesting answer because one, I mean obviously I just, like, we, yeah, I, I, I made a kind of a truism of, of it, but that's, that's actually a really good point, and that's something I need to, I'm personally trying to be better at is not seeking validation or not relying so much on validation, because you're right, there's, there's also I've heard.

Other storytellers I've, you know, interviewed or, or talked with that have this very inner drive to write, like they won't stop writing because somebody else told them yes or no. It's, it's really something that is internal to them to be able to continue to write. So, in the last few years. What, how's your kind of, I guess, lessons learned, been some big lessons learned around like, I, I, like you've just brought up, I, this, a lesson learned for me to continue to learn is to not be so reliant on oth what [00:16:00] other people think about my work.

What have those lessons been for? and where have

Tonia: you learned them? Oh man. You know, I'd say like in the last few years what I've really learned about writing is that , everyone is going to criticize a different piece. of everything you write and some people will find something to criticize just cuz they don't like who you are.

You know, like with nightlight, you know, it's all black authors and, you know, somebody wrote a review for nightlight that was, you know, saying all you know, all the stories about are about, you know, how cops are bad or all they talk about is how cops are bad in segregation. And at the time, like I didn't have any stories on the podcast that had cops or segregation.

In them. So it was pretty clear that they didn't listen to it and like they worded it like they thought, I guess that it wasn't a fiction podcast. Cause I didn't always have like a horror fiction podcast in the. And the title. And at the time they wrote that review. It was just, you know, nightlight, a horror podcast, a Black horror podcast.

And so I, I [00:17:00] think that they probably just saw it and they were like, oh, you know, they're just, you know, they're just, you know, complaining about, you know, how cops are bad and segregation, racism and, you know, they, they assumed it was just like a talking podcast and not a story telling podcast. So, you know, I guess, you know, for me, the biggest lesson that I have learned is that you have to be true to yourself.

You have to do what you think is going to fulfill you the most and bring the most positivity into this world that you can. And some people are gonna hate

you for it. And that's. and you know, they can kick rocks, , you know and there are some people that you just won't resonate with. You know, like you could write the best story ever and it just won't resonate with some people, and that is totally okay.

As long as you are authentic and staying true to yourself, then I consider that [00:18:00] to be a success. .

Lisette: I think that's a really important life lesson, not just a recently lesson, .

Tonia: That's fair. That's fair point. Yes. .

Lisette: So for you, what has been something surprising that has come up either a surprising obstacle or a surprising event to you in your journey this far?

Tonia: Oh well, I'm gonna make a long story short here and just say that my best friend and husband now, both exes are married, and, you know, heavy emotional damage from that. And man, it's, it's just been really, really tough to come. From that and to be able to write consistently and, you know, tell stories and all of that.

But, you know, part of all of that happening I ended up leaving my job at the time because I worked with said friend, [00:19:00] and two weeks later the lockdown happened. , you know, I had interviews lined up. You know, I was on my final interview at like three different places. So like I knew I had a job in the bag, so I was comfortable.

Quitting before my birthday so that, you know, I could just like, you know, start fresh on my birthday. That, that's what I wanted to do was start that trip around the sun, fresh, you know, let go of all that emotional baggage and move on, move forward, you know, start a new job. All of that was the plan. , and then mm-hmm.

You know, lockdown happened and then all those places that I was interviewing with were like we don't know what's going on, so we're not gonna hire anybody right now. I'm sorry. . And so, you know, I was kind of sitting there like, oh, I don't have a job. I don't have income. Like, and no one's hiring right now except for like super high risk occupations, which my child has asthma.

And I was like, I can't, you know, go take a job somewhere and potentially bring this home to him. No kidding. So I had to figure out a way to make it work and all I had at that time was nightlight and a draft of my Novelli. Cause I had

picked it up [00:20:00] again at that point and finished, I think it was the second or third draft that I had finished at that point.

And I. You know, put it back down because I was focused on, you know, my career working, you know, and all that stuff. You know, life got in the way and you know, I just kind of let it collect dust in a drawer, so to speak. But you know, when all that happened and I had to figure out how to scrape together some income you know, to make it, I, I was like, well, I've got this podcast and I've got this novel.

if that's a good start. I'll start with that. . And you know, it's interesting because it kind of lit a fire under me in a lot of ways. And, you know, nightlight started winning awards and getting, you know, a lot of recognition and, you know, it was crazy. Thank you so much. It was crazy though, like how, how things just kind of happened and, and then the George Floyd protests started happening.

In the midst of the beginning, you know, months of the pandemic and, you know, that brought a lot of [00:21:00] attention to black creators and, you know, nightlight and myself specifically as well. And so, you know, I, I guess I just kind of rode that wave to try to get to where I am now. But but yeah, it, it was definitely tough and it still is tough, you know, it's something that I still struggle with.

It's some, it's something that I'm still working on healing from. . You know, I actually just had a nightmare last night about it. I, I, I have ptsd, T s d I, I didn't mention that earlier. I actually had it from my dad's death. But then the whole situation with them, kind of, you know, I don't know, like, I don't wanna say brought it back because like I still had it, you know, but it was very well under control.

Like, I didn't have very many bad days. Or nightmares or anything like that. Like for the most part it didn't really affect my daily life. And then, you know, I kind of backslid even worse to where I was before with the P T S D and you know, it still affects my daily life. Even today, three years later or I guess four years, almost four, like four years later now.

But yeah,

Lisette: it's, yeah. Internal [00:22:00] and external traumas? Yes, both collective and personal traumas. Yes. And it very

Tonia: difficult reintegrating. I can only imagine. Yeah. Yeah. And my circle's very small. You know, they, they were the only two real people in my circle, and so when I lost them and then immediately after, You know, this lockdown happened where it wasn't safe to be around other people.

Like I was very alone. My sister was a nurse at the time, you know, she's the only other person that's really like, you know, in my life pretty consistently, somebody that I confide in and things like that. And she was isolating herself so that she wouldn't get us sick. You know, my son in particular and my.

As well. So, you know, she was living out of a hotel room and you know, all this other stuff. So, you know, she was isolated because of that. And, you know, that took her away from me as well. And then I also didn't have the opportunity to go out and try to make, you know, new friends and things like that. So, yeah, I mean, it was, it was incredibly difficult.

And you know, I think that I'm the type of person that I will hyper fixate on things. Mm-hmm. to [00:23:00] avoid. Uncomfortable emotions. And you know, that's something that I'm really trying to work on is, you know, facing those uncomfortable emotions and, you know, transmuting them into something positive. But, you know, at the time I was very much in a head space where I was just like, Nope, that's not happening.

I'm not dealing with it. I'm just gonna focus on this. And, you know, like I'm, I'm gonna be honest, most days I couldn't work more than an hour or two. . I think my mental health just would not allow it. There were many, many days where I couldn't work at all, but every single hour that I could work, I did.

Lisette: How did this interplay?

I mean, you know, I, I feel like certain years are very, like for anybody's, like, can just be like that where it feels like the, and especially in the last few years where everything just blows up internally and externally. , I'm curious of how you felt that affected your creative life. In addition to whether it, but whether [00:24:00] like, I'm not going to assume that it helped it

Did it hinder it? Like how Oh yeah. How did your creative, how did the creative life, what was the interaction, what was the relationship you had with your. with your storytelling, with your creative ability, your creative Well, during that

Tonia: time, man, it was super, super tough. I actually put out a notice on the podcast Patreon that I wasn't gonna be putting out episodes for a while, you

know, that I was in the midst of a difficult divorce and you know, my patrons are super, super.

So I didn't have to worry too much about producing episodes for nightlight, and so I just kind of focused on the novella for a little while. But I mean, it was, it was extremely hard to write and I found out last year, actually early last year That I have ADHD and like I've had it solidarity, , and like I've had it all my life, you know, thinking back, like, you know, I, I, I can see things that had happened in the past and see the [00:25:00] signs and blah, blah, blah.

But the thing about ptsd, T S D is that it makes like everything else with your mental health worse. So with my ptsd, t being bad, like it made the d h ADHD bad enough that like, I couldn't focus, I couldn't concentrate, I couldn't do things. . You know, like I said, you know, there were many, many days that I couldn't work and I didn't realize that the reason that I couldn't work wasn't because I was too sad to work because, I mean, I was sad.

Don't get me wrong, like I was devastated. But that wasn't why I couldn't work. I couldn't work because I couldn't think. And once I got diagnosed with a D H D and got medication, Like my brain started working again, , and I was like, holy crap. Like this is, is this how normal people, it's exactly what I said.

Like the first day that I took my Adderall, I was like, is this how like normal people's brains function? Like I have lived my entire life with my brain functioning this way when it could have been functioning this other way. . No [00:26:00] kidding. I was, I was mesmerized.

Lisette: I was like, how? People live

Tonia: like this. People live like this by default without any me right.

right. Like I was amazed , it's like the whole first week was like a freaking miracle to me. But you know, now that I'm medicated like it, it's so, so much easier. But yes, it was very, very difficult, you know, the external circumstances, you know, the things going on with me personally, but also the things going on with, you know, the pandemic.

, know, I mean, like, honestly, like I believe in this collective consciousness, right? You know, I, I believe that, you know, we can all tap into this collective consciousness and that, you know, when something is wrong with this world, we can all feel it. When something is good with this world, we can all feel it.

You know, I remember on nine 11, I woke up I was in college at the time. I didn't have cable or anything. Like, I didn't turn on the tv, like I didn't know what was going on. But I woke up and I was like, so, is wrong, you know, almost immediately. And I didn't know what it was. And like I went to go [00:27:00] get on my computer or something, you know, to work on an assignment.

I think, you know, still not turning on the tv and you know, I didn't have like a homepage that had like news or anything on it. And you know, so I started working on something and, you know, eventually, like I ended up stumbling upon the news. I can't remember, you know, how exactly I, I found out what happened.

But yeah, like it's like that. And I think the pandemic had a very similar effect, you know, but more sustained and less, you know, of a intensity, I guess, than nine 11. And I, I think we're all, you know, feeling kind of battered and bruised from the pandemic, you know, everyone. Stressed and, you know, we've also got this whole situation with, you know, everybody being overworked and underpaid and, you know, it's just, you know, it just, it makes it difficult to even go out into the world because everyone is so [00:28:00] stressed out and it's hard not to let that stress like infiltrate your own mind.

Right. So

Lisette: what do you think. The role of storytelling in this point in, in our culture, in our world, in our nation, our society, in your community, like what is the, like, what is it that people aren't, you feel people aren't talking about enough or that people don't truly recognize, or what is emerging from this cultural, unconscious or this collective unconscious.

you've been, that has, has piqued your interest?

Tonia: Well, you know, I think, you know, last year I would've had a different answer than today, honestly. But I think especially lately, I've seen a lot of people, you know, talking about healing from trauma, moving on from trauma you know, letting go of toxic traits that they have and coping mechanisms that they've developed because of their past [00:29:00] experiences.

And I feel kind of like. , a lot of the world is on the verge of an awakening of sorts. You know, I don't wanna necessarily say that it's just spiritual, you know, I, I think it's more encompassing than that. But I think, you know, as far as

storytelling goes, you know, the reason that I tell the stories that I tell is to give other people an.

You know the same way horror wasn't escaped for me, but also to show them my own culture, my upbringing, you know, the things that, that most people aren't aware of unless you grow up as a black American. Especially, you know, a Black American from the south specifically. You know, just sharing that with the world.

And I think that that is part of the healing that the world is going through right now, is beginning to understand different cultures in this world, different people [00:30:00] in this world, different traditions and, and learning to honor those differences. And I think, and I hope, I really hope that. More people tell their authentic stories to bring their own experiences to the light so that other people can learn from their perspectives and grow from other people's PERS perspectives.

This

Lisette: is something that actually came up in the last person I interviewed. And this is something that's coming up for me as well, and I, I think this is probably going to be an ongoing question and thread I kind of wanna explore throughout these particular interviews. But you, I think you nailed it.

There's I, I have always been, as a third culture kid, very interested in cross-cultural stories and. Being able to tap into [00:31:00] some kind of translation, mediumistic, I don't know, just something that can translate or transfer or bring people over the bridge of so that they can hear stories that are outside of their experience.

And I think it's something. . I, I know I'm very, very much interested in it. And I'm curious, like, what do you, what has been your experience also listening, reading writing or just watching like on television or the news stories that are outside of your experience and what have you learned from them?

Tonia: So I have a niece who is Afro-Latina. She, her mother is from me or her mother's mother is from. , my family is very much , a very colorful family. Like we've pretty much got every race and ethnicity in our family. And you know, when she was younger I read Shadow Shaper and of course the protagonist is an Afro-Latina.

And [00:32:00] you know, I thought like, wow, like I should give this to her so that she can read it so she can see herself in a book. Because I didn't see myself in a book until I was in my. Yeah. Yeah, there weren't too many, you know, black biracial protagonists out there. So yeah, so I, you know, I, I gifted her that book for her birthday one year, and I mean, she devoured it and, you know, she asked me, you know, was there another one?

And I said that he's working on one. You know, it wasn't out yet at that point, but it was supposed to be out like a few months later. But I said, you know, I'll get it for you when it comes. And I did, and she devoured , you know that one too. And I don't know, man, it was just, it really, it really brought home the fact that.

I think the reason a lot of kids, I mean, there are a lot of reasons that kids don't like reading, but I think one of the reasons that kids, some kids don't like reading is because they don't see themselves on the page. They can't connect with [00:33:00] the main character and you know, so they, it just doesn't resonate with them.

So they put it down because they don't feel anything. And when we have this, you know, depth and breadth of stories, , you know, different nations, different ethnicities, different cultures than. People can fall in love with reading the same way that I did. You know, I fell in love with it because it was an escape.

You know, I didn't need to see myself on the page, you know, I was, I was fine here reading about, you know, little white boys , you know, running around, you know, defeating monsters or whatever, you know, like that was, that was okay with me. But, you know, not everybody is like that. And I think that, . The more stories from various perspectives that we have out there, the more the more people will learn to love to read or, you know, listen to stories, watch movies, whatever it is and find an escape in it.

But I also [00:34:00] think that it, it helps us see other people as human. You know, it's very easy to dehumanize someone. when you don't know anything about them, when you don't know anything about their culture, you don't know why they do what they do. It's easy to say, oh, that's stupid, that's silly, you know, whatever.

But when you learn about their culture and why they do those things, you start to understand that, oh, maybe, you know, just because I felt it was stupid, you know, that it's something that's deeply religious or something, you know, to this other group of people, and it creates compassion in. Stories are, we are a

Lisette: storytelling animal.

Yes, . So of course, we would want with the, the, our brains are hardwired to absorb stories and tell stories. Of course, one of the best tools we have at our disposal to connect with each other is storytelling. I, I think [00:35:00] that's, that's really poignant and. , thank you for bringing up to that, the, this, the importance of not just reading stories outside of our experience, but recognizing that those experiences can connect with people who have lived them, right?

Yeah. That by knowing, by knowing, like, you know, by simply knowing and have read a story outside of your experience, you might now have a tool or a resource you can then give to somebody else. And I think that's, that's super. It's one of the reasons why I love stor. I both love, I love reading, listening like a consuming stories and telling them, cuz I think it, it, it is a relationship.

And it, and it, it can be that tool as well as it can be a destructive tool of, like you mentioned dehumanization, . . I, I, so one of the things that I've I'm also kind of curious and the collective level here [00:36:00] is for you, how, how do you, how do you know that you've done your job as a storyteller?

Not from the audience person, not like, you know, from external. Like, like, we'll bring it back from the beginning, like not from external validation, but from internal, from, from when you, when. You know, close your laptop, you put your pen down. Like what, what happens to make you feel you've done your job?

Tonia: I have not experienced that feeling yet.

actually you know, I just, I kind of write something and, you know, I have a deadline or you know, like somewhere that I wanna send it to or whatever, and then it just kind of goes out. But yeah, like honestly, like when I write pretty much anything that I write, I hate it at first. You know, I just, I read it and I'm like, God, like I'm so terrible at this.

Like, why am I even trying, like, you know, what am I even doing here? But , you know, as time goes on, when I go back [00:37:00] and read some of the stuff that I've done, you know, in months and years past, I'm like, wow, this was actually pretty good. So yeah, like, yeah, I, I haven't experienced that feeling honestly.

I just you know, one of the things that. It has really helped me is I attend something called Al-Anon. It's not aa, it's not for alcoholics, it's for families and

friends of alcoholics. And I had a therapist a long time ago that suggested that I go to Al-Anon and one of their slogans is Progress Not Perfection.

And I really try to carry that. With me. Because for a long time I did want my writing to be perfect. I wanted to come away with that feeling of it's done, you know, that deep breath and oh, I did it. And, you know, I never said anything out, nothing. You know, nothing was ever quote unquote finished because it was never perfect.

It never met my standards. And I had to learn, and I learned this in my creative writing class because one of our assignments was Submit something you wrote to, you know, a litera. Journal or magazine, and I was like, well, crap, I guess I [00:38:00] gotta send something out, and, and it kind of broke me of that. It has to be perfect before anyone else can see it sort of thing.

So, yeah, no, like I don't, I don't have that feeling that it's done. You know, I just, I read through it and I know if, if there's nothing major broken, then, right, okay, maybe I can put it out in the world and it may not be great, you know, may not get accepted to wherever I send it to or whatever, but, you know, it's done and I move on to the next thing.

And I try to forget about it, honestly, because I, I just expect everyone to hate it, you know? Cause I hated it too. So I try to forget about it. And then, you know, surprisingly, someone would be like, oh, I really liked your story, blah, blah, blah. And I'm like, wait.

It worked. Yeah. I'm like, okay, well, you know, I guess, I guess I did all right. You know, and so, you know, progress not perfection, huh?

Lisette: Yeah, it, it's interesting cuz it does kind of fly in the face of what you, you mentioned about external validation and I [00:39:00] think it's interesting cuz maybe, maybe the lesson here is not to take external validation personally.

but rather that it is simply like I did what I needed to do. I needed to get this out there as progress, not perfection. That's what I needed to do. I, I like that. I, I kind of like that. Different level of, of, of. Message. And this actually kind of comes back to something that was talked about in the last episode, or which will be the last episode.

I have not yet posted the episode that I recorded that actually brought up perfection being a tool of white supremacy and. that it, there's, there's, there's like a list. I believe it was like out of the University of Minnesota. I posted, I,

I'm gonna be posting it in the show notes of the last episode and I'll post it again in this one that lists out the different characteristics of white supremacy, of culture, of white supremacy.

And [00:40:00] something I've been thinking about a lot has been how does storytelling affect a culture or create a culture and. , at least for me, I, I don't know how you feel about this as well. At granted, I have, I have I've also listened to my black and indigenous mentors and leaders including Katrina Hopkins, who taught me in in leadership trainings.

She's a black woman in dc leader, like leader teacher. Spiritual mentor, et cetera, et cetera. And she brought up to me, you know, as a challenge to me to really think about what does what does it mean to be, you know, fighting white supremacy as a storyteller . Hmm. And I think that, you know, it's funny cuz this has been brought up twice now about perfection.

And that artists have a, like, struggle with perfection. And if the perfection's a tool of white supremacy, then. By fighting against it as a storyteller, that is [00:41:00] something to be conscious of. I don't know. That's something that it has come up for me recently. I don't know. With, with, obviously with regards to the work that you're doing, actively adding to adding to the lexicon of wonderful black horror and audio what is your take on this idea of creating a better culture?

Tonia: In storytelling. Yeah. You know, I think, you know, I, I, I found something interesting that, you know, that I've noticed while listening to music. Like, I listen to all kinds of music. I mean like all kinds. I listen to rap, I listen to metal. I've had, I've had songs from like the 1920s on my playlist, , like, you know, really old, you know, bluesy sort of things.

And you know, one thing I've noticed is that a lot of black art, is about black struggle and a lot of the lyrics to songs written by [00:42:00] white bands, like outside of pop, like let's, let's exclude pop from this. But you know, outside of pop, white bands tend to write, I mean, they write about the same sort of things.

Yes. But there are more white bands writing about. The human experience and you know what it, what it is to be human, what it means to be human. And you know, I, you know what you said, I think that's spot on. And I think it was, I can't remember if it was Tony Morrison or Maya Angelou who said that basically, you know, racism is a tool to distract us from our work.

And like I've really found that to be true in music and. , you know, I, I see the same thing in storytelling as well. You know, but they're, but they're gatekeepers, right? You know, there are people who, you know, and, and this is something that I've certainly experienced a lot of white editors, you know, most of them subconsciously, you know, it's not a [00:43:00] conscious racist thing, but subconsciously they expect black writers to write about black struggle, and they will reject stories that aren't about black struggle.

And I think that same thing probably exists in music. And that's why we see a bunch of black music that deals with black struggle and white music. That's what we see in movies.

Lisette: Yes, yes. We see in movies all the people. Exactly. Like who's nominated in the

Tonia: Oscars. Exactly. Exactly. And you know, yeah. I just, I think that.

I think that now that those gates aren't quite as impenetrable, we'll start to see other cultures talk about the human experience more. We'll be able to get access to those stories that have probably existed all along. We just didn't have access to them before our time or

Lisette: resources or energy for those, those storytellers to be able.

not focus so much on the struggle and the concern about their community, but more about, [00:44:00] you know my, my, my teacher I just mentioned Katrina, she recently said something to the effect of like, she was reading a book some sort of philosophy book and was just, and just told, like was telling me and a couple other people like, oh wow, this person must have had all their bills.

to be able to sit and think

Tonia: about stuff. Right. . Exactly.

Lisette: So bottom line we need to have, you know, bills paid more or less to help us, you know, expand and progress the human conditions. Yes. So I'm gonna, I'm gonna wind us down with one last question. And this last question is also a very important question, which is again, why do you tell stories

Tonia: Tonia?

To give people an escape. To give them, you know, something to think about if, if they're more philosophical or intellectual, you know, I [00:45:00] hope that they find, I hope they find in. The questions that my characters are struggling with, questions that they may be struggling with themselves and a different perspective to help them.

Shift their perspective and consider others.

Lisette: That's a great answer. Thank you so much for joining me and by this virtual heart. Thank you for having me. I will obviously be putting all of Tonia's stuff in the show notes. Please support Nightlight Se. Please support the work that Tonia's doing in all the spaces that she's doing them in. And yeah we'll, we'll be back for another storyteller.

There are many of us out there clearly doing the work. Yes. So thanks again and

Tonia: talk soon. Thank you so much.[00:46:00]