“Poetry is Endless and Welcoming of Everything”

An interview with Claudia Castro Luna, new Washington State Poet Laureate

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CHOOSING CRITICAL THINKING OVER CLICK-BAIT

Having tackled the vital role of informing the public for generations, the news media now has a PR problem.

By Julie Ziegler

IN THE LAST DECADE we’ve grown accustomed to news that comes at us fast and from every direction. In addition to traditional media sources such as radio, TV, and newspapers, the internet is saturated with information. With so many options you’d think we’d be satisfied. However, a 2016 Gallup survey reports “84% of Americans believe the news media have a critical or very important role to play in democracy, particularly in terms of informing the public—yet they don’t see that role being fulfilled.” What’s more, peoples’ perceptions of the news media’s credibility differ based on their political views.

Ironically, this lack of faith and division along political lines comes at a time when media production has never been more democratic. If you have an internet connection, you can put out your spin on the news or create it from scratch. Traditional news reporters have been joined by bloggers and vloggers, social media icons with millions of followers, and, unfortunately, people and organizations pushing particular viewpoints. More and
more we are getting news from our media — only reading the work of reporters and institutions whose viewpoints most align with our own. Further, who qualifies as “the media?” Can any news source be truly unbiased? Questions like these are increasingly important.

As traditional journalism is forced to justify — even educate people on — its core purpose, Humanities Washington will mount a series of programs this fall on the importance of quality journalism to a healthy democracy. Simply put, for the sake of our country’s long-term health we will explore why, in a world of click-bait, we should think deeply about things such as fake news, bias, and what constitutes quality reporting.

“Moment of Truth: Journalism and Democracy in the Age of Misinformation” will help Washington navigate through the messy world of politicians and pundits with a series of small and large events across the state. The series will open with historian Doris Kearns Goodwin in Seattle and conclude with New York Times journalist Nicholas Kristof in Spokane. Both speakers are Pulitzer Prize recipients. In between, we will showcase Washington State journalists and scholars as part of our Think & Drink programs, exploring issues such as journalism ethics, digital citizenship, and the importance of a free press. By combining the perspectives of internationally renowned scholars and journalists with local reporters, we will throw open the doors of the newsroom to reveal the process of how journalists—and we—can decipher what’s true.

Philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt noted in 1974 that “the moment we no longer have a free press, anything can happen. What makes it possible for a totalitarian to rule is that people are not informed and (therefore) are deprived not only of their capacity to act, but also their capacity to think and to judge.” Quality journalism, and the values journalists uphold, are a critical counterbalance to a healthy democratic government. We must take the time to study, support, and partake in it in order to preserve it. Our democracy depends on it.

With sincere appreciation,

Julie Ziegler, Executive Director Humanities Washington
On Really, Really, Really Old Food

Why would a museum in Washington State keep a 150-year-old pickle?

By Jefferson Robbins
HARRIET BASKAS finds hidden treasures — neglected marmalade, petrified bread, and abandoned pasta, for example.

In her Speakers Bureau talk “The Ancient Fruitcake: What Really, Really Old Food Tells Us about History, Culture, Love, and Memory,” the Seattle journalist, travel writer, and habitual museum-delver explores the wonders of foodstuffs that never quite made it into people’s mouths.

“From the Henry Ford Museum, I got a donut from 1890,” Baskas says. “The woman who made it was 43 years old and she was about to have her twelfth child. So what did she do before she gave birth? She made donuts for her family.”

Such stories are what make inherited food items special, she says, not just their age or origin. Take, for instance, the Passover lamb shank that was used at every family Seder for forty years and then handed on to grandchildren; or the pickle that was grown as a cucumber inside a hand-blown glass bottle in the 1840s, then pickled and left in the care of the Lynden Pioneer Museum.

Discovering that pickle during her research on a past Speakers Bureau presentation — which grew into her book Hidden Treasures: What Museums Can’t or Won’t Show You — helped spur Baskas to build a new talk around preserved foods. The best part of it, she says, has been the stories of heirloom foods that audience members share, like the central Washington family who for years passed around the last piece of cake from a party.

“Finally, somebody in the family who’s an artist took that cake and turned it into the base of a lamp,” Baskas says. “So it’s a lamp now.”

“Such stories are what make inherited food items special, not just their age or origin.”

Humanities Washington: When we talk about heirloom foods, are we talking about intentional preserves, or accidental ones?

Harriet Baskas: Both. There’s the food that people know about, like the food that was buried with mummies for their journey into the afterlife. Then there’s food that sometimes accidentally, but also intentionally, people have and keep and ends up having significance. I found a story about a 4,000-year-old bowl of noodles they found in China in 2005. There was an archaeological dig and they found an overturned bowl in that dig, and under that bowl, there were noodles. Then there’s bog butter — chunks of butter they find in bogs [in the United Kingdom] that are like 2,000 years old. I need to do more research, but I think because bogs are kind of cold, they used it like a refrigerator, to store things and maybe forget them.

Why or how do pieces of food become heirlooms?

There are lots of reasons. There was this man who actually got on Jay Leno with this fruitcake, which I think is a hundred and thirty-nine years old now. His relative made it, then she died before anyone got to eat it — or maybe no one was going to eat that fruitcake anyway. But then this fruitcake became associated with that grandma, and has been handed down for generations. Now it’s not only a family fruitcake, but it’s a famous fruitcake. One of my favorite things is a slice of bread at the Lopez Historical Museum — just a slice of bread in a piece of cellophane — the last slice of bread from the last loaf of bread that a woman’s mother made in 1899. It’s that same idea — this was the last thing a dead relative made, and they kept that last slice. The program’s changing all the time, because people are telling me new stories and sending me new things.

When you ask people about their own food stories, do you encounter a lot of jarred or canned preserves?

In fact, those have been some of the greatest stories, when I talk to people at the end of the presentation. In one of the towns in central Washington, someone said: “My grandma died in the ’70s, and Grandpa didn’t want anyone to touch her last batch of jarred preserves.” Then he died more recently, so those jarred preserves have memory. I don’t think anyone wants to eat them anymore, but they held that memory.
What’s the weirdest piece of preserved food you’ve encountered?

It’s the pickle in Lynden. That pickle I think is partly my favorite, because we don’t know the story of it, but I’ve kind of made up a story about it that might be true. And I’m thinking I might make a children’s book out of that pickle. I’ve also found what’s called the world’s oldest ham in Smithville, Virginia. They have a 24-hour “ham cam” on that ham. The Ball canning company had five brothers, and the third brother had a collection of canning jars—jars of fruit from the first World’s Fair held in the United States, which was in 1876. In Friday Harbor at the San Juan Historical Museum, they have fruit that was featured at Washington’s first World’s Fair that was on display in 1909.

Does every museum have some piece of food in its collection?

Not that they know of! No, not everyone does. A surprise one was the Andy Warhol Museum. The story with them was that Andy Warhol, for many years, the way his assistants got him to clean off his desk was they started giving him boxes and said, “We’re going to make time capsules.” Every couple of weeks or so, everything on his desk would go in his box. After his death there were like 290 boxes. The staff started opening them up, and in one of them was a piece of cake from somebody’s wedding. When we first started talking about them, these were things the museums weren’t really proud of or interested in sharing. But I realized that from museums and people’s families, there are stories that go with those things that are actually so much more than just “funny food.”

Harriet Baskas is traveling the state presenting her free Speakers Bureau talk, “The Ancient Fruitcake: What Really, Really Old Food Tells Us about History, Culture, Love, and Memory.” Visit humanities.org to find out where she’s appearing next.
“Poetry Is Endless and Welcoming of Everything”

An interview with Claudia Castro Luna, new Washington State Poet Laureate, on war, words, and the puzzle of place.

By David Haldeman

Photo by Matt Owens

THE TWISTING LINES of a country’s borders and the rigid lines of a city’s streets merge into lines of poetry for Claudia Castro Luna. Place—its shape, its rhythms, and the sense of belonging (or not belonging) it can evoke—is the main arterial running through the landscape of her work. How do the seemingly inhuman, utilitarian shapes of the built environment shape the lives of those within it? And why do some places foster peace and others violence?

For Castro Luna, these questions are not theoretical. When she was a child, the borders and lines created by politicians and urban planners could hold the difference between life and death.
Growing up in the early ‘80’s in El Salvador, those borders and lines contained death squads. Unfolding a map of your city and learning which spots on the grid were considered safe could keep you alive. But sometimes even that knowledge wasn’t enough. Fighting broke out or bodies laid on the streets she’d normally walk down. The death squads used the anonymity of the streets to their advantage—they often parked black vans where they could quickly capture, torture, and sometimes kill.

Schools were a prime target. Some words and ideas were considered dangerous by the far-right military government, and they believed students could be indoctrinated by leftist ideology. Castro Luna’s parents were both teachers, and were being watched. Many of her parents’ friends were murdered, including the principal of her school. He was killed in his favorite rocking chair while reading the newspaper.

One day while her parents were out of the house, two friendly-seeming men came to Castro Luna’s home. She opened the door with her nanny by her side and they asked where Castro Luna’s mother was. Proudly, she told them her mother worked at the elementary school. They thanked her and left. Her nanny was horrified. “You’ve told them everything!” she screamed. She had accidently given her mother away to the squads. Her family fled their house the next day, to a new place on the map. But the change didn’t offer much relief. One afternoon she woke up to the sound of machine gun fire two blocks from her new house. For the next three hours she hid under the stairs listening to the crack of bullets and grenades echo around her neighborhood. She was 13 years old.

The Salvadoran civil war between the government and leftist guerillas would last another 12 years and claim 70,000 lives—30,000 of which were civilians. Her family, however, crossed another set of lines into a space called the United States, and she was safe.

Questions of place initially led Castro Luna to study urban planning at UCLA. But not long after graduation, she felt the pull of writing. Her father was an avid reader and had amassed a large library in El Salvador that included “forbidden” books by people like Karl Marx and the Salvadoran poet Roque Dalton. He was forced to hide the books wherever he went: in false ceilings, under stairs, or buried in the backyard. Growing up, she saw that words could get you killed, yet were worth risking your life for. She enrolled in an MFA program with an eye toward writing that had “strong consciousness around power and class and race.”

After moving to the Northwest, she has produced the Seattle-rich topographies of the poetry collection This City, as well as its darker counterpart, Killing Marías, in which each poem is addressed to dozens of real women named Maria murdered in Juarez, Mexico—a border town often referred to as the world’s most dangerous city. She was appointed Seattle’s first Civic Poet in 2015-2017, where her poetry and urban planning themes merged even more strongly with the creation of the Seattle Poetic Grid, an interactive map where poetry appears as dozens of small dots all over the city. Each dot is a poem about a specific location, giving human meaning and experience to the angular shapes of a city’s gridlines.

As Washington State’s fifth poet laureate, recently appointed by Governor Jay Inslee and sponsored by Humanities Washington and ArtsWA/The Washington State Arts Commission, Castro Luna will travel the state presenting free workshops, readings, and school visits. And her sense of space will expand dramatically. Among other projects, she is hoping to create a poetic grid for Washington State. Through it, writers from urban centers to small towns will be able to distill, like Claudia has, the landscapes, roads, and spaces that surround them into poetry.

The following interview was edited for length and clarity.
So tomorrow I’m going to tell the students why I didn’t go in-depth into a discussion about technical elements because I don’t want to burden the class [with the technical]. I want students to read. And the more you read, the more you discover for yourself what’s happening in a poem.

What drew you to poetry as opposed to narrative storytelling?

I think poetry, for me, frankly . . . I had no choice. It chose me. I really feel that way. Once I started writing, it just allowed me in. And it wasn’t limited to English. I could use Spanish, and that was very welcoming of who I am. I could tell a story or make an observation or I could speak in Spanish. Poetry just never rejected what I tried to do. That’s what attracts me to it. And [former Washington State Poet Laureate] Tod [Marshall] said that after his poet laureate experience, he realized that what was important to him in his role was words, language. He would encourage people to engage with words as much as possible. If they loved the Declaration of Independence, he encouraged them to look at it and memorize it. If they liked the Gettysburg Address, he wanted them to think about it, work with it, memorize it – Sort of an embrace of the possibilities that language offers, rather than a formal understanding of it as poetry.

What was the final push for your family to leave El Salvador to come here? I’m assuming that the political situation became simply untenable. Could you describe a little bit about that experience?

I think 1980 was probably the worst year of the war. It was just so extreme, the fear and the terror. Teachers were targeted. Teachers were killed on the way to school. They were sought out because they were thought of as planting seeds of insurrection in people. They helped people think, and thinking was considered dangerous. That was why teachers were persecuted. Both of my parents were teachers, and a lot of their friends got killed. It wasn’t far away. It wasn’t something that was out there. It touched everybody, the war. It was a dark time. My mom, two years before, had submitted papers to come here. When my family came from El Salvador, we left with green cards, which is very rare. Most people leave with a visa, not with permanent residency like we did. That was because my mom...
submitted papers way in advance, kind of foreseeing that there was very little we could do. We were missing school a lot. There were a lot of work stoppages that ended up in massacres on the streets. There was a constant derailment of going to school and working. I think that that was the final thing: It just seemed like we were doomed if we stayed. We were in danger of being killed. It wasn’t one thing. It was just death all around, and fear.

In a blog post for us a couple years ago, you told Jefferson Robbins that “war and the aftermath of war shaped to a large degree the person I have become.” How did the shape the artist you’ve become?

Well I think the two of them are together. I did not understand the effects of the war until I became a writer. The choices I made in my life and the things that made me afraid were there, but I didn’t have the deep understanding I have now.

That whole poetic grid is an experimentation of place and belonging. Partly because I’m curious about that—I want to see how people express themselves in relation to where they live, because I’m constantly doing that. You know, I love Seattle. From the moment we moved here I felt so—it’s kind of strange to say—at home. What is it about this place that is so familiar to me? What is that something about it? So I’m curious about that. I think we as humans have the ability to attach ourselves and love many places for different reasons. So I don’t find it an aberration that I would love living here as much as I do, even though it could not be more different than my place of origin.

Part of this has to do with me being an immigrant I think, but I’m also really interested in the way in which place affects who we are, our sensibilities, what we think, and how we feel, and the possibilities of being able to exert some power over the spaces we occupy. The Seattle Poetic Grid is a marriage of those two, of planning and my interest in poetry.

If someone comes to one of your readings who hasn’t been exposed to much poetry, what do you want him or her to come away with?

If it’s a writing workshop, I would feel successful if people either tapped into place or tapped into memories. Those two things are very potent—everyone has something to say about those topics, and in a workshop setting they surely end up writing something. And the important thing is for them to write and see themselves reflected, and to experience some sort of a connection with themselves on the page. Because one of the reasons I love poetry is because poetry is endless and welcoming of everything. Poetry rejects nothing. [For writing your own poetry], you could have a memory. You could have a limerick. You could have a little piece of a commercial. You could have something somebody said or insert part of a conversation. I mean it really is inexhaustible. If you understand it that way, then poetry, the act of writing it, opens up all sorts of possibilities. For me, the idea is to discover yourself in writing. And if it’s a reading and not a workshop, I always tell folks to come and hear and discover what poetry might do to them. It’s an invitation to be—an openness.

As Washington State Poet Laureate, Claudia Castro Luna presents free events around the state. Find an event near you at humanities.org and check out her blog at wapoetlaureate.org.
In my dream
the troll walked out of his cave
—sparkling with the loot of centuries
came to where I stood
alone in a forest’s dale
and demanded all the words I had
give me all of them! He snarled
give me the green ones dappled with sunlight
the slick ones like pebbles on a river’s edge
the ones impermeable as raven’s feathers
leave not one behind, he threatened
I want those that throb and ache
the pithy and the paltry ones too
Words! Words!
He exalted to the heavens
are the greatest treasure
more precious than any gem
ever more valuable than gold
For centuries, razor clamming has been a vital part of life for many Washington coastal tribes. Yet it took decades of court battles for their rights to be acknowledged.

By David Berger

TRAVEL TO Long Beach, Washington, and you’ll see not only a statue of a giant razor clam (insert 25 cents and it squirts water), but the self-proclaimed “World’s Largest Frying Pan,” used to fry up a giant clam fritter in the 1940s during the town’s Razor Clam Festival. The existence of the frying pan and statue—not to mention the thousands of people who dot southwest Washington’s beaches during peak season—speak to the near-mythic status of razor clams in the Pacific Northwest. Like salmon, razor clams have become a part of the state’s cultural identity.

But while public clamming and festivals in places like Long Beach and Ocean Shores draw the most statewide attention, a large portion of each season’s catch is shared with coastal treaty-tribe nations. Razor clamming has been an important part of tribal life for centuries, yet it took decades of court battles for their rights to be acknowledged. For the tribes, clamming isn’t just about recreation—it’s about income, sustenance, and cultural connection.

The Quinault Indian Nation (QIN), located on an isolated reservation thirty miles from Ocean Shores, has never had an iconic razor clam statue like the city of Ocean Shores had and the city of Long Beach has, but it does have a fishing treaty:

“These Treaties Mean Something”
“our all-mighty sacred treaty with the United States,” as one tribal fisherman put it.

The QIN numbers about three thousand tribal members, including people of Quinault, Queets, Quileute, Hoh, Chinook, Chehalis, and Cowlitz heritage, all of whose ancestors traditionally razor clammed in the highly productive beaches north and south of Ocean Shores. About half of the QIN people live on the reservation, and the rest mostly in neighboring areas. On or off the reservation, virtually every Quinault member has dug razor clams at some time.

“Razor clams are part and parcel of tribal life, and a staple food for some,” says Ed Johnstone, the QIN’s policy spokesperson. “They’re guaranteed to appear at festivals and Sunday dinners.”

In 2013 QIN hosted that year’s Canoe Journey, and tribal members dug and froze razor clams for many weeks in preparation. When they welcomed eighty-nine large canoes from seventy-five tribes, plus thousands of guests, after a paddle journey of hundreds of miles, they served razor clams as part of the celebration and feasting. It was unthinkable not to offer razor clams, along with other traditional foods, as part of the five-day event.

Every August there’s a back-to-school dig for tribal families and kids. The dig takes place over two consecutive days, and participants gather on the tribe’s reservation beach near Point Grenville. It’s a chance to earn money for clothes, backpacks, and iPads in sunny summer weather. The tribe’s commercial “buy truck” is right there to weigh out and pay cash for the clams.

For many years the Quinault people could razor clam only on the reservation beaches, and off reservation on public beaches with the same recreational opportunities afforded to all state residents.

Two landmark court decisions transformed the situation and fishing for everyone in Washington. First came the so-called Boldt decision of 1974—the case of United States v. Washington—in which U.S. District Court judge George Hugo Boldt affirmed the right of Washington’s tribes to fish for salmon “in common with all citizens” in their “usual and accustomed grounds and stations.” That language was from the treaties of 1854 and 1855, concluded by Isaac Stevens, then superintendent of Indian Affairs and later governor, with more than twenty Indian tribes in what was then Washington Territory. The treaties ceded millions of acres in return for reservation lands and the ability to retain certain rights; terms were less negotiated than harshly forced on the tribes.

Boldt, a conservative appointed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, was tasked with determining what the treaties meant for the modern era. He heard testimony from legal scholars, anthropologists, historians, and tribal elders, and then said that fishing “in common with all citizens” meant the opportunity to harvest 50 percent of the allowable catch, plus the right to co-manage the resource.

Photos by Quinault Indian Nation and Larry Workman
The ruling created shock and controversy—half the salmon!—and, for its part, the state fought Boldt’s interpretation all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which refused to consider the appeal in 1975.

In 1994, twenty years after Judge Boldt’s landmark decision addressing salmon, U.S. District Court judge Edward Rafeedie presided over another protracted legal battle, a continuation of the original U.S. v. Washington, this time addressing shellfish rights. Rafeedie, appointed to the bench by President Ronald Reagan, listened to experts and spent a week touring shellfish beds and commercial operations by plane, van, and boat.

Judge Rafeedie, like Judge Boldt, interpreted the treaty language as the Indians would have understood it at the time. After hearing testimony that the “right of taking fish” in the 1850s would have meant harvesting anything that lived in the sea—not only fish but also clams, oysters, geoducks, crab, and marine mammals—Rafeedie delivered another shock to fishers and the general public by extending treaty fishing rights to include naturally occurring shellfish on privately owned lands.

The crucial treaty paragraph reads: “The right of taking fish, at all usual and accustomed grounds and stations, is further secured to said Indians in common with all citizens of the Territory, and of erecting temporary houses for the purpose of curing, together with the privilege of hunting, gathering roots and berries, and pasturing their horses on open and unclaimed lands: Provided, however, that they shall not take shellfish from any beds staked or cultivated by citizens” (emphasis added).

The “Shellfish Proviso” in the Stevens Treaties, prohibiting Indians from taking shellfish in staked or cultivated beds, reinforced the understanding that Native people had shellfish harvest rights. Why would there be a qualification if the shellfish harvest right wasn’t there in the first place?

Rafeedie’s decision was appealed by the State of Washington to the US Supreme Court, which in 1999 refused to consider the request. Sharing the shellfish fifty–fifty was the law. The Rafeedie decision addressed the tidelands of Puget Sound, full of oysters and hard-shell steamer clams, but it plainly had implications for all of Washington’s shellfish and treaty tribes, and thus for razor clams as well.

“On or off the reservation, virtually every Quinault member has dug razor clams at some time.”

Justine James, a QIN cultural resources specialist, remembers being astonished by the Rafeedie decision. He realized it meant razor clamming was back in a huge way—50 percent of the razor clams in the usual and accustomed places. Those traditional grounds amounted to twenty–three miles, or more than 40 percent of Washington’s prime razor clam beaches, including the razor clam management areas of Copalis, Moclips, and Kalaloch—basically everywhere but Long Beach and Twin Harbors.

“These treaties mean something,” says John Hollowed, a non-Indian legal and policy advisor who has worked for more than twenty-five years at the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, a consortium of twenty Washington State Indian tribes. “These are obligations and guarantees that the United States and therefore the states need to do. They are not something that disappears with time.” QIN divides its 50 percent share of the clams between ceremonial/subsistence use and commercial digs. Tribal authorities supervise the digs and provide enforcement. The ceremonial/subsistence digs put food on the table and serve a variety of cultural purposes. They are open to any Quinault tribal member with an identification card, and there is a hundred-clam limit per dig. The commercial digs put money into pockets, as individuals harvest and then sell clams to the QIN seafood enterprise, which processes and markets them. Participating in a commercial dig requires a permit issued at no cost by QIN authorities.

There are only so many good clamming tides in a month. Out of necessity, tribal and public recreational razor clam digs take place during the same good low-tide periods around the full and new moons, but on different days. The two digs are like ships passing in the night. There are practical reasons for separation, to keep count of the number of diggers and clams taken, but it’s emblematic of a situation that is often misunderstood or invisible to the public. Many, if not most, recreational clam diggers are unaware that their weekend digs are often bracketed by tribal subsistence or commercial efforts. The anger that exploded following the Boldt and Rafeedie decisions has eased with time and generational changes, but some coastal residents are still surprised or resentful when they see a tribal dig in progress; it just feels wrong to them.

Few realize how the various tribal and state razor clam authorities have learned
I realized just how important the commercial dig is to some Quinault people. Frank, fifty-one, was basically a professional digger, relying on the clams for a living. But there would be no commercial dig during this set of low tides.

“Is it hard to eat a hundred clams?” I asked.

He laughed. No, he said. Many households contain multiple families, and a hundred clams doesn’t go that far. All this time the sun was descending, becoming a warm glow on the horizon, and he was pounding the beach with his shovel handle in a fan pattern, left to right—five hard pounds, a couple of steps, five more pounds, each bang throwing up a skirt of water and sand. But no clam shows. Normally they are all over, he said. He’d come early, way before the low tide while it was still light, to dig clams and not bother with a lantern. The water was thick with plankton, soupy in places like brown tea. Plenty of food for the clams. But the clams weren’t showing despite all his pounding. When the clams are hiding like this there’s not much you can do. It’s just one of those things. Humans don’t dominate the situation.

The breakers were coming in hard and rolling far up the shore; it made it difficult to cover much beach. Finally a hole appeared and Frank inserted the shovel, pulled back and compressed the sand, and reached in for the clam. The clams were starting to show now, and he was in constant motion, flowing and quick, just like the flocks of sandpipers and the light breeze.

Tribal cultures have formalized their thanks to salmon, in the salmon homecoming celebrations that honor the return of the fish in the fall, but according to Justine James, the QIN cultural resources specialist, there is no analog for razor clams, even though they’ve been a traditional food from time immemorial. James thought maybe some elders said a prayer before they went out, and typically some clams would be given to elders or contributed to a family meal. Frank expressed his appreciation in his own way. “A million clams last year for the tribe, a million for the state,” he said, referring to the tribal and non-tribal harvest on Copalis and Mocrocks beaches. “That’s amazing. And they tell us it’s going to be as good this year. You dig, and then next month, and next year, you can come back to the same spot, and they keep showing up. Just go back to the same spot and get clams,” he said in a voice tinged with wonder.
Stories of Service

Through a course in history, literature, and philosophy, veterans use the humanities to heal and foster community.

By Jefferson Robbins

JEB WYMAN remembers the day in 2003 when a young student at Seattle Central College approached him. He had to drop out of his classes halfway through the fall quarter, he told his instructor—he was being deployed to Iraq.

“He was the first of my students to identify as a post-9/11 veteran,” says Wyman, who has taught at the college for more than twenty years, “and in the fourteen years since then, I’ve had a lot of veterans.”

That’s no surprise, with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan now deep into their second decade. Wyman, not a military veteran himself, nonetheless felt a need to seek out insights and educational solutions for those returning from service. He toured fourteen community colleges around Washington, interviewing close to ninety student-veterans enrolled there.

“Many didn’t come from families that had higher education as part of their family culture,” Wyman says. “So community college is where a lot of these folks make their first entry into education, and they see that as a way to find their new next chapter in life.”

One result is What They Signed Up For: True Stories By Ordinary Soldiers, a book Wyman compiled from eighteen soldiers’ true accounts of their service. Another is the nonprofit organization of the same name, which uses proceeds from commercial sales to distribute free copies of the book to veterans, service organizations, and student groups, to broaden understanding of U.S. veterans’ experiences. Yet another is the coursework Wyman guides student-veterans through in specialized classes as academic director of the Clemente Course in Humanities for Veterans, which he has worked with for the past three years. There, the syllabus includes Homer, Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, the Bhagavad Gita, Epictetus, pre-Colonial North American history, Native culture, and slave narratives.

“This is not like a college course,” he says. “We don’t have textbooks, we don’t lecture. It’s conversation, discussion, and primary texts.”

In his Speakers Bureau presentation for Humanities Washington, Wyman explores the personal stories of veterans he has interviewed, and links them to the age-old stories of war, survival, and loss that can be found in the study of human cultures worldwide.

Humanities Washington: When we talk about veterans finding meaning
in the humanities, what do we mean by “humanities?”

Jeb Wyman: The humanities are the disciplines of history, art history, U.S. history, philosophy, literature, writing. I like to kind of characterize them as the endeavors that tell the story of human experience. We have humanities that go back to the dawn of culture or civilization. We have art that precedes literacy. We have, for example, Homer's stories — 2,000, 3,000-year-old literature and continuing on to the present. For a lot of veterans, this is an opportunity to engage in an intellectual endeavor in a community of all-veterans, so they have that kinship with each other, to engage the world of ideas. And as we discuss pieces of art or poems or stories or events in U.S. history, they relate their own experiences to them. Part of what happens, I think, is they realize their experience has been recounted over the centuries. The veterans who preceded them faced similar issues, similar feelings. It tends to be a pretty powerful experience.

When veterans come into the Clemente program, what prior experience of the humanities do they usually have?

We take anyone who has been a veteran in any discharge status. We have had young Marines in their twenties — and in the last of our cohorts, we had vets in their seventies, who were Cold War vets from the ’50s. Some of them have had previous education; some have had no education whatsoever. So it's really a new experience. For one, it's studying something that's a world of ideas, rather than purely utility training, which is what encompasses most of their previous experience. If they could engage with the humanities, then they would have this recognition: They could engage any level of society, and they were fully worthy, intellectually, of education too. So we’re one of two in the country that are exclusively veteran-oriented Clemente courses. There’s one in Phoenix and this one here in Seattle.

What hurdles are there to grappling with the material?

My background in community college kind of serves me in this, because I have had literally thousands of students entering into higher education, and realizing they can engage any material. Ancient Greek literature, at first blush, might seem challenging. We'll sit down and we'll read a passage together, and they will readily start discussing the characters and their motivations and actions and what’s at stake. A lot of that is developing the confidence and practice of reading texts. That’s one of our missions, to lay the groundwork so they can go from our class and succeed in college, learning how to discuss knowledge.

Every soldier’s experience is different, but what’s universal about military service?

When I started this book project, I had a mentor named Peter Schmidt, director of mental and behavioral health for the Department of Veterans Affairs. From him I learned that every veteran's story is like every other veteran’s story is like no other veteran’s story — which is to say people’s experiences are unique, but there are universals, and universals that really stretch across time. One is that intense sense of community, and fraternity and sorority, among veterans. Something they desperately miss when they leave the service are those bonds. There’s the hardship that they’ve all experienced; there’s the physical hardship of training; there’s the physical hardship of deployment; there’s the separation from family, leaving for seven to fifteen months back and forth on deployments and trainings. There’s a sense of pride and discipline, intense honor, which is intensely important to them, and integrity and responsibility. In the military system, everything ends up being a matter of life or death. They’re literally, at every level, feeling this really overwhelming responsibility — and that wears. That’s a point of long-term stress for them. The military is kind of a closed universe of values and relationships, and having to leave that universe can be one of the most painful things about being a veteran.

What’s the importance of seeking out and recording soldiers’ stories?

Some of the therapeutic value is organizing the story — and I’ve seen this happen with vets, when they see their whole story laid out and it kind of makes sense. If they have trauma in their story, trauma fragments memory. Some of the value is in sharing their story — “I don’t have to carry it alone.” I feel that we as a country, and as individual citizens — we’re participants, and we make decisions to send men and women into war. We have a moral obligation to know their stories and understand what that actually means for those folks, not just during the war, but in life after they come home. We go see movies, and we might read books, but every veteran will tell you that most of the movies and the media reports don’t represent war as they really experience it. I did come to this conclusion: That the closest a civilian can come to really understanding war is to sit with veterans, and hear the story directly from veterans.
Apprenticeship Program recipients selected

The Center for Washington Cultural Traditions is pleased to announce the first recipients of the Washington State Heritage Arts Apprenticeship Program. The program, which is designed to encourage people to learn a trade, craft, or skill, aims to conserve and carry on cultural practices integral to different Washington communities and identities. From across the state, ten apprentices are partnering with master artists in an effort to support the transmission of cultural knowledge. Masters and their apprentices will meet regularly between July 2018 and June 2019 to advance their skills, culminating in a single event introducing the public to these traditional skills and techniques. The cultural practices and crafts that the recipients pursue include Indian painting and dance, Salish weaving, Skokomish beading, traditional cheese making, Croatian dance, Chinese cuisine, blacksmithing, Tibetan music, and stone carving. Visit waculture.org for more information.

Increased funding from state legislature

Led by an outpouring of support from community members, Governor Jay Inslee, Secretary of State Kim Wyman, the Washington State Legislature, and others secured increased state funding for Speakers Bureau and the Center for Washington Cultural Traditions. In a divided Washington, we need opportunities to come together and explore our common history and culture. This effort for support was led by people from across the political spectrum who know that bridges can and must be built. The extra $74,000 of Speakers Bureau funding will go toward bringing more talks to rural communities. The Center for Washington Cultural Traditions received $80,000 in support for the Heritage Apprenticeships program. Thank you to everyone who generously gave their time and effort so that Washington can be a more connected, thoughtful, and understanding place.
Humanities Washington welcomes new staff

With this summer edition of Spark, Humanities Washington has the pleasure of welcoming four new staff members: Maria Abando, Dustyn Addington, Anne Morgan, and Hannah Schwendeman.

Maria Abando is Humanities Washington’s program and development coordinator. She received her B.S. in Biology from the University of Washington, and was previously an organizer for The Access for All Proposition 1 campaign with Cultural Access Washington. Maria was raised in Tacoma, and is also an active community volunteer and local artist.

Dustyn Addington is our newest program director. After receiving his Master’s in Philosophy in 2012, he is now a PhD candidate in philosophy at the University of Washington. Dustyn has taught philosophy at UW and Seattle University, and for K-12 students through the Center for Philosophy for Children. Dustyn leads the Think & Drink and Speakers Bureau programs, which aim to expand the humanities through provocative and enriching public conversations.

Anne Morgan is Humanities Washington’s new development director, focusing on connecting people, organizations, and resources to strengthen our communities. Anne has held a variety of development and community engagement roles in the nonprofit and education sectors. As lead fundraiser, Anne builds relationships with our donors and volunteers, in support of our mission to create public spaces where diverse ideas and dialogue flourish.

Hannah Schwendeman is our new program manager and communications coordinator. She received her B.A. in anthropology and law, societies, and justice with honors from the University of Washington. Upon graduating, she was one of six individuals selected to represent the College of Arts & Sciences 2016 class. She volunteers with University Beyond Bars, tutoring currently incarcerated men pursuing higher education.

“Moment of Truth” speaker series

Addressing the need for a strong free press in the United States, Pulitzer prize-winners Doris Kearns Goodwin and Nicholas Kristof will headline the statewide fall event series, “Moment of Truth: Journalism and Democracy in the Age of Misinformation.” The series kicks off on October 1 in Seattle with a lecture from Goodwin at Benaroya Hall. This marks the start of an extensive statewide sequence of Humanities Washington’s popular Think & Drink events exploring the importance and role of journalism in democracy. The series will conclude with an appearance from Kristof on November 5 in Spokane at the John J. Hemmingson Center. “Moment of Truth” represents the first statewide events series to explore issues of journalism ethics, digital citizenship, and democracy in an age of fragmented information. Tickets for the Seattle event will be available through Seattle Arts & Lectures after July 16. Tickets for the Spokane event will go on sale in September. All other events will be free of charge.

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A selection of upcoming Humanities Washington events around the state

BREMERTON
AUGUST 3, 6:00 P.M.
KITSAP HISTORY MUSEUM
The Hidden History of America’s Favorite Music

Songs like “Camptown Races” and “Turkey in the Straw” are the basis of America’s soundtrack, but there is a troubling side to some of our country’s most recognizable songs. A significant part of our country’s shared musical heritage emerged from 19th century blackface minstrelsy. Minstrelsy was the first uniquely American entertainment, and the first American entertainment craze. Pioneering DJ Amanda Wilde explores how this controversial phenomenon laid the foundation for American performance, and how its influence reached beyond its era of popularity. The talk discusses race in American music by looking under the blackface mask and coming to terms with this mixed heritage, concentrating on music as a powerful agent of transformation.

BURLINGTON
AUGUST 7, 6:30 P.M.
BURLINGTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
Emerald Street: Race, Class, Culture, and the History of Hip Hop in the Northwest

From its beginnings in 1979, to Sir Mix-a-lot’s “Posse on Broadway,” to Macklemore, Northwest hip hop has been informed by local history as well as the diversity that defined the scene. Discover the history behind the Northwest’s Grammy-winning rappers, world champion break dance crew, internationally read hip-hop magazine, producers, clothing designers, and grassroots organizations dedicated to community service and education. Led by author and professor Daudi Abe, discover how Northwest hip hop is a living document of our region’s social and political movements, styles, energies, and ideologies, and how it embodies a unique sense of community.
Many of us fall into habitual patterns of selfishness when speaking with others: interrupting, not listening, and constantly shifting the conversation to ourselves. In this talk, Professor Tony Osborne traces dialogue to its ancient roots and discusses its pre-conditions, such as the necessity of quieting the ego and suppressing the urge to “one-up” the other. Cultivating a desire to engage in dialogue teaches humility and broadens a person’s horizons. Discover how at the deepest levels, dialogue may even bring about inner and outer serenity while checking aggressive impulses, which can be directed without—or within.

In the lead-up to World War II, Japantown in Seattle featured grocery stores, cafés, and native-language services, as well as labor and music clubs. In Eastern Washington, Japanese farmers prospered. Then came Executive Order 9066. Those born in Japan, as well as their American-citizen offspring, were interned without due process. Throughout the West Coast, 120,000 Japanese Americans were forced from their homes, and when they returned, most had lost everything and could not find jobs. How did they face this injustice and rebuild their lives? Mayumi Tsutakawa will reveal her family’s 100-year history against the backdrop of this dramatic American story.

Real people and real experiences are the foundation of folk music and stories, and are codified in the lasting representations found in our oral histories. Acoustic trio Trillium-239 shares stories and songs of working life in the Northwest, beginning with American settlement of the West and ending with modern high-tech industries. Thoughtful music selections and interesting historical tidbits reflect the evolution of these workers’ experiences.
ABOUT HUMANITIES WASHINGTON

Founded in 1973, Humanities Washington is the state’s flagship nonprofit for public humanities programming. Our work brings people together to learn about their unique pasts and shared present, promotes respect for other perspectives, encourages community dialogue, and nurtures relationships that enable us to move toward a more prosperous future.

By acting as a catalyst and facilitator, we support and partner with a wide network of communities, organizations, and individuals across the state. Together, we provide low- or no-cost, high-quality cultural and educational programs that engage audiences in conversation, critical thinking, and build community.

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Humanities Washington is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in Washington State.
OUR MISSION

*Humanities Washington sparks conversation and critical thinking using story as a catalyst, nurturing thoughtful and engaged communities across our state.*

OUR PROGRAMS

**FAMILY READING** uses storytelling and discussion to explore cultural and ethical themes in children’s literature and emphasizes the importance of families reading together.

**GRANTS** assist local organizations in creating opportunities for their community to come together to discuss important issues using the humanities.

**SPEAKERS BUREAU** draws from a pool of leading cultural experts and scholars to provide free conversational lecture events for community partners to offer local audiences throughout the state.

**THINK & DRINK** brings hosted conversations on provocative topics and new ideas to pubs and tasting rooms around the state.

**WASHINGTON STATE POET LAUREATE** builds awareness and appreciation of poetry — including the state’s legacy of poetry — through public readings, workshops, lectures, and presentations throughout the state. (In partnership with ArtsWA/the Washington State Arts Commission.)

**CENTER FOR WASHINGTON CULTURAL TRADITIONS** is a new effort to amplify our state’s rich, diverse living cultural treasures through research and special programming. (In partnership with ArtsWA/the Washington State Arts Commission.)
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