This interview was conducted with Desireé Dallagiacomo on April 8, 2019 in Wilson Library 272, Western Libraries in Bellingham, Washington. Wyatt Heimbichner-Goebel participated in the interview. The interviewer is Sylvia Tag.

ST: It's Monday, April 8, 2019 and we are in my office. This is Sylvia Tag, and we're with, Wyatt, you need to say your own name, because Wyatt also has an incredible name. I'm in the presence of two people with absolutely unique names. So Wyatt, I'm going to have you introduce yourself and say your role, if that would be alright.

WHG: Sure. My name is Wyatt Heimbichner-Goebel. I am the president of the WWU Poets and Lyricists Society, which is the only poetry focused club on campus. And I helped to bring Desireé here today.

DD: Awesome. I'm Desireé Dallagiacomo. I am a poet and a teacher, and I'm here to read poems.

ST: Wonderful. And I'm just going to say that I'm very, very thrilled to hear you say Desireé Dallagiacomo because --

DD: (Laughing)

ST: I could not find anywhere on the Internet someone who pronounced your name, and so that is pretty wonderful.

DD: It's much easier than it looks. It looks very complicated, but the G-I-A-C sounds like Jack. That's what I always tell my students. And so if you just think of the G as a J.

ST: Great. So, how does it feel to be on tour? We're talking about your first book, *Sink*, which came out in 2019.

DD: Yes, just almost a month ago.

ST: So hot off the press, and you're on the book tour. So why don't you tell us a little bit about that.

DD: Yes, I'm stoked about it. Lots of things. It's really, really incredible. I've done, I don't know, maybe ten shows so far. I have maybe ten more. And at every single show, there's at least a few what I call super fans, which are people that drive really far or have been experiencing my work for years and years and years. It is immensely humbling to be witnessed in that way. It's interesting because people that feel really moved by my work, they feel very witnessed, and I simultaneously feel very witnessed by them, which is just kind of this really beautiful experience. And I think, it never gets old and I'm never not surprised by it. So that's been really cool.

I have my dog with me, one of my dogs. She's back at the B&B sleeping. That's been wonderful and makes things a tiny bit more complicated, but it's wonderful.

Another interesting thing about being on the road, I'm driving. I've driven over 5,000 miles so far. And there's stuff that comes, like logistical stuff comes up. There's the reading poems and selling books and selling merchandise and meeting folks - and then there's the life part of it. I have to do my laundry, and on this tour I will likely have to have some dental work done. I have a tooth that is giving me a lot of issues. And so I'm going to have to find a dentist somewhere. Living on the road for six weeks brings unexpected things. I'm still a person, even though I'm out here -- And I still have to pay my bills. And, I'm a landlord, so I have to deal with my tenants

and all that stuff. So it's been really interesting. The longest I've gone out on the road is four weeks. But it's been really incredible, and it's been a lot easier and a lot more fulfilling than I think I anticipated. I was really worried about logistics, and I was really worried about money, and I was really worried about just being at the shows and managing merch and reading and blah, blah, blah, blah. But it's been ten times better than I imagined.

ST: So you're doing this yourself.

DD: Yes, I am.

ST: Okay.

DD: I've been a performance poet for, seriously, probably six years, and so I've done dive bars and house shows, and I've done shows in Canada and Australia, and I've gone all over the country, and probably 35 states -- I've done readings. So, I'm used to being out on the road, but it's different having a real book (laughing). I've had books published on small presses, I have two. But to have a book in the world -- people are so stoked about it! People are -- the feedback has been remarkable, and I couldn't have imagined it. I was so worried about critiques or the negative things people might say, but I've really been overwhelmed by how positive folks are about it.

ST: So when I was reading this book, there was a point where I was reading through and all of a sudden it was the sense, Ah, this is a story. There's an arc to this. You are taking me on a journey. Did you know that? Did you want to shape this collection in that way from the beginning, or did you have a body of work and you wrote some things to fill in gaps, or did it sort of lay itself out naturally in this narrative that you've created? Because the experience when that clicks in -- is wonderful!

DD: Thank you, thank you. I think a big part of that is the order of poems, which I spent a lot of time thinking about.

ST: Exactly.

DD: I have all these complicated -- And my friend was like, "Just do it chronological. Why wouldn't you just do it chronological?" And I'm like, Well, that sounds so basic and lame. But, it's what a lot of the writing process was like. What do I want and what does this book want? What do I think is going to be good or edgy or creative, but what actually is this book and these poems asking of me? Because it's nonfiction and because it's very -- I just tend to write, and lots, lots and lots of folks have asked me if I'm going to write a memoir. My whole adult life, people asked me that, because I just write in a way, I think, that calls that up. So I think

because I write so much about childhood and because I write in narrative and because I write mostly in linear narrative and because I decided to put the poems in chronological order, I think that makes sense.

The book is not what I thought it was going to be. I thought I knew what it was about, but then the book was, "No, that's not what this about." (laughing). Then it changed, so I had some poems. I probably had seven poems in the very beginning, which was -- I signed the contract for the book deal in October of 2017, so about a year and half ago, and had about seven poems then. Then I kind of started filling stuff in. I taped them all to my wall, pulled a bunch back. And then, once I got to that point, to where I pulled poems back and then had probably 20, I had to start filling in the spots. I had a couple poems about something that I needed something else to fill -- to fill or to expand or to develop this character or this narrative or this idea. That was a really interesting, challenging, and wonderful part of the process.

ST: So, did you propose the book, or were you -- was it mutual? Was there kind of a back and forth when you say you had the book project in 2015?

DD: Yes.

ST: Did you approach Button?

DD: Yes, so the folks who run Button -- Button kind of started as a, they just would film poems at competitions, and they were friends of mine who would run it, and I would help them film sometimes. Sam Cook, who runs the press, has always from the very beginning really, really believed in my work. I had one poem that got really big and was viewed a lot of times and shared a lot of times, and Button posted that video. Button has probably 15 of my poems on their YouTube channel. In October of 2015, I would say probably in August of 2015, I was teaching full time and was the program director for a youth spoken word organization. And, I just kind of felt like I had done that, I had had a lot of really big accomplishments doing that. I coached a team, a youth slam team, to an international championship. I founded two new programs. I made a curriculum for all of East Baton Rouge Parish Schools to be taught poetry. I kind of felt like, I kind of was, I need, I want to do something else. I've been teaching full time for a few years, and I've been organizing for a few years, and I want something else. So I would turn to my coworker, Donnie, and I was like, I think I want to write a real book. I don't want to just publish it myself, because with small presses I can make more money selling that book, which is a part of it. I want a real book deal. And so I emailed Sam, who runs Button, and asked him what he would -- He had told me years ago, you know, he said, "If you ever want to publish a book, we would love to do it." I nervously sent him an email, and he passed it on to the

editor, who is also -- we're both mutual fans of each other's work. His name is Hanif Abdurraqib. And Hanif was like, "Yep, good, here's a contract, we're good to go." I sent him seven poems, and he was like, "These look great, let's do it." (Laughing)

ST: Marvelous.

DD: So it was very much a certain form of nepotism and also it was just -- Button is an organization that has always, always, always believed in my work, and it felt like a really perfect home for it. So they were the only ones I reached out to, and they took it.

ST: That's great.

So, let's dive in a little bit. So I'm looking, it was difficult for me to even think about which book [sic] to talk about.

DD: Well I appreciate you spending so much time with it.

ST: I'm looking at "Strength" and the line: "Let me come from that and never be that." Could you talk about that line?

DD: Yes, that line was -- really a sense of when I wrote that poem -- I was grappling with this idea of -- I would never want my mother's journey, but I feel grateful for being a part of that. If

that makes sense? I think that's the hard duality of coming from trauma or coming from -- coming from what we come from. I don't want that for myself but I'm grateful that I was born from that trauma. I think writing that poem and even writing about my mother, which is a challenging thing because my mother's one of my closest friends. I talk to her every single day. When I was writing this book, what was really important for me was I didn't want to try to save anybody, and I didn't want to try to make anybody out to be a perfect person because people just aren't. I think it can be dehumanizing and unfair to put people on pedestals, especially maybe people who have died or people who are parents or people who are matriarchs or patriarchs and families.

And that specific line was one -- I wrote that poem, I think, 2014, and I really like that poem and I really enjoy it. And it means a lot to me because I think there is something, something that doesn't quite sit right with me with this idea of resiliency or this idea that you've been through so much and you're so strong. I feel like it's a weird, condescending way to tell people that they deserve what they went through, or that what they went through has a brighter, has a light at the end of it. I just don't think that's true, and I don't think it has to be true. I can say I never want that for myself. I still have gratitude for -- But again, I have gratitude for anything. I have gratitude for my mother no matter what her story was, if that makes sense.

ST: It makes a lot of sense. And this word *let*, I think is such an interesting choice because it's sort of getting at what you're talking about, because there are other words that you could've chosen to say than *let*. And *let* somehow is a very empowering word to me that says that you're choosing the word *let* rather than this happened to me. Letting is your -- That's just my interpretation.

DD: Yes. And it feels soft, right?

ST: It does.

DD: But it's also -- it feels like a soft -- And I think I felt that too. I felt the gentleness of -- I love you. I love what I come from, I'm never going to diminish that, I'm never going to judge you, I'm never going to judge my mother for the way that she mothered. But I'm not going to -- that's not the world I'm living, I want to live in.

ST: And you have an ampersand here, and I also think that's a really interesting choice to have that ampersand.

DD: (Laughing) Thanks.

ST: So what's going on with the ampersand?

DD: Yes, I think ampersands also act as a -- there's some poems that use ampersands and some that don't. Most of them don't. But I think it looks a little bit like a knot to me, and it looks a little bit like a tying of two things. It looks like a symbol and not a word. It looks like a handshake or two things, to me. It just looks like two things holding, and it looks like a marriage of opposition, if that makes sense. The word is just like you look at the page and it's just another word, but people are -- I think our eyes are drawn to symbols or ampersands or semicolons or whatever it might be. I felt like those two ideas live in a marriage.

ST: It absolutely does. I'm so intrigued by this because as part of your spoken word, I don't know if there's an ampersand gesture that's just part of the experience of the written word.

DD: Yes.

ST: Because that's different. And I love the visual that you're creating with that, the twining of these two ideas.

DD: Yes, I think that's an interesting idea that the reading verse -- like my performance versus the reading of it, and the poem in the book , *Sink*, which is the title poem, has slashes. But when I perform it I use the word *or*. I struggle with that too. I wonder how people do read it when they read it with just the slashes. When I read it aloud, I obviously don't say *slash*, I say

or, which feels like the same, similar, not the same but similar. That's interesting because I think as a performance poet, people have certain ideas of what a book I would write might look like. I was really excited to have a collection of written work because I am a writer, and I do spend a lot of time reading, and I spend a lot of time writing, and I spend a lot of time revising. I think sometimes as slammers or spoken word poets, people don't think that we do. People think it's just like blobs of text, which is also fine, but we also take what it looks like. I can say I, as a performance poet and as a slammer, very much care what it looks like on the page and very much think they are two sister representations of each other. They're not the same thing, but they're sisters.

ST: Yes, yes, very much so. It's not a big capital *And*.

DD: (Laughing) Yes.

ST: And I don't know of another place in the book where there's an ampersand.

DD: Well, I think that whole poem --

ST: I couldn't find one, anyway.

DD: Really? I think that poem uses ampersands. And there's not a ton in there, but there's definitely a few.

ST: Mm-hmm. There are throughout, yes.

DD: And there's one other poem, there's one other poem that uses ampersands. And the rule that I generally set was one poem is the word *and* or *ampersands*, not the whole book, but one poem has its rule. So every poem, whether loose or developed or not developed, every poem lives in its own world of rules, some very rigid and some not so rigid. So that one for example, all the "ands" are ampersands. And there's one other one, I think, but I can't remember what one it is.

ST: Well, you know better than I do.

DD: (Laughing)

ST: What this echoes is the *I Forgive You*, *I look at the girl I was. I look at the girl I am*. It's a similar, those lines on a separate -- in that sense, they're on a separate line, so you're reading them separately, which is a different convention than putting an ampersand.

DD: Mm-hmm, for sure.

ST: But it's that same device, right?

DD: Similar -- kind of an end stop. Similar -- kind of, a way to notice.

ST: Do you think of yourself as political?

DD: I think of my person, myself, my non-writer self, yes, for sure. People usually don't like having conversations with me because I have very (laughing) political opinions. But I think that the personal is political, right, as Audre Lorde said, and I think we can't deny our personal, our personhood as politics. I think that in storytelling, we get to the heart of the matter by telling a story and not a fact, telling a story and not an idea. So every idea I want to convey, I tell it in a story because that's how, for all of time, that's how we've conveyed our thoughts and our feelings. You don't watch a movie because of the idea of the movie. You watch a movie because of the story. You don't read a book because of the idea of the book, but because of the story. And so I think that that's what I've always leaned into was telling the story and not the -- telling the story and trusting my audience to get it, to get what I'm saying. I feel really strongly about that, and I feel strongly about showing and not telling, and that's sort of what I always teach my students. Okay, if you have an idea, boil it down and tell a story that conveys that idea, and trust your reader or your audience to get what you're saying. We can watch an

interaction between two people with no words exchanged and know what's going on because we're humans and we're really smart. We can hear a story and get why it matters without somebody telling us why it matters, if that makes sense.

ST: It does make sense. So when you were a child, was there someone who really believed in you or showed you?

DD: Yes, I mean, I think everyone believed in me. I'm the youngest of six kids.

ST: And you have an aunt too?

DD: I do, yes. My mom has two sisters, my Aunt Diana, who died, who is in the book, and my Aunt Carol.

ST: Yes.

DD: But when I was a kid, this is kind of a little bit to your earlier question in this next question. My mom was in Narcotics Anonymous. She is still, my whole life. I would be in the playrooms, and that's where they'd tell stories, that's what they do. And in NA, you just kind of tell the shittiest thing about yourself and everybody listens. And being in the playroom was just like a corner of the same room, listening to people telling stories or people speaking --

ST: So the circle is here --

DD: Exactly.

ST: -- and then the space for the kids is the --

DD: Yes, is oftentimes in the same room, right.

ST: -- yes, the room. And I find that really fascinating, that here, as you've been talking about in terms of structure. You're creating the structure from very young age.

DD: Yes. And I think everyone believed in me. I had a very -- I had a really -- my mother and four sisters, who I'm closest with my brother, Michael, who I'm very close to in a different way. But I was really protected as a kid, really protected by the love of my family and the love of my siblings. And by Aunt Diana, my Uncle Kentiner, who was her husband. And we have, still have a really tight knit, immediate family. I have six nieces and nephews, and we just are a really tight family. And my paternal side of my family, which is my dad's side of the family, I grew up with them when I was really young, and they also loved me very deeply in a different working-class way. I was really protected as a kid. My siblings dropped out of high school or middle school and were not -- because I was the youngest, I kind of reaped the benefits of our mom getting clean, my mom got clean when I was 8, in a way that my older siblings didn't. I think as

the baby of the family, I was inherently protected, and I was inherently -- You know, although it wasn't the same way as some other families where it was. I always knew I was really smart, and I always knew that I was really easy to be around, and I always knew that I was really cute, and I was really protected. And that mattered a lot. I think that watching my siblings, in some way watching my siblings make the mistakes they did, as a young person I was really just an observer, which is in many of my memories, which is also in the writing, as I just watched a lot of stuff happen. Because I was a really quiet kid, and I was, didn't want to cause any trouble, and I was nervous, and I was anxious, and I just watched the world happen around me. And through that, that offered its own version of protection, I think.

ST: So when you talk in your poem that you mother says you were a quiet child, but you feel like you came in screaming, that's -- right?

DD: Yes, yes. (Laughing)

ST: What does that next line mean, that you came in screaming?

DD: My mom got clean when I was eight, like I said, and I think I was, as a young kid I was just invisibilized. I think because I wasn't causing any trouble, I was often just forgotten. So because I was an easy kid, my mom didn't have to -- versus, you know, a lot of my siblings were incarcerated. My sister, one of my sisters, had her first son when she was a teenager. Because

I wasn't causing any issues. I know you have kids or if you teach, you know the kids that are going to need a little something and the kids that are going to be fine. I was always the kid that was going to be fine. So in that way, I was made to be invisible. I think I learned that if I don't cause any issues, no one will notice me. And at times I didn't want to be seen. But really, I think, in my heart of hearts, of course I did. I was a kid, of course I did. Of course I wanted to be acknowledged and seen. But I do think that I was kind of forced because of my family structure, which is this last poem, I was kind of forced into being the good kid, being the kid that didn't cause any trouble so I didn't have -- I didn't get to be -- It wasn't that I wasn't allowed to make mistakes in the way that some other families are, but I knew that if I did, it would cause more drama, in a space that had a shit-ton of drama already, if that makes sense.

ST: It makes a lot of sense.

DD: Because I think that's an interesting idea, because in some ways I do feel like I was a quiet kid but I wished that I didn't have to be, I think is what I'm saying. I was, and I wish I didn't have to be. Because I felt like I was because I had to be, not because I wanted to be, if that makes sense.

ST: It makes a lot of sense.

Is there something that you think about leaving your audience with? I don't mean this in a manipulative way. You know when we were talking earlier and I really just like what you were saying about your expressing what you have to say and you're not in charge of other people.

DD: Yes.

ST: Other people show up. And you have some super fans, but those people are doing that on their own. Is there something that you think about?

DD: Yes. I think what I've learned, I think when I started performing, I didn't have an intent. I think my intent was for myself. What that kind of innocence offered me is that because I was given this platform and felt like the thing I wanted to say had to be said immediately. If you watch a lot of earlier videos of my performances, there's such a force that feels -- in that moment. I felt like the only thing I could do was say the thing I needed to say.

ST: And stay standing.

DD: Yes, exactly. I think what I learned though is that people feel awakened when you offer them a genuine moment. And I, everything I say I mean, and if I -- I'm not going to perform a poem or read a poem that I don't think fits the space or doesn't -- I don't ever choose a set list before I get to a space anymore. I used to when I was younger, when I was a younger writer.

But I have a general idea. I read a lot of the same poems in some of the spaces, but I definitely don't come in with a preconceived idea of what I'm going to do, because the space and the people matter. And I think that the best thing that I've learned as an artist is to offer people a genuine moment of vulnerability that allows them to be invited into vulnerability themselves. And when we let others see us, then we can be seen, and they can say -- they can feel seen too. As human beings we can either like hunker down in our shells of our self or we can open up and hope others accept the invitation. And I think through my writing, what I've learned is that people largely really, really want that invitation, and people really largely really want to be seen and they want to hear, they want to be moved, and they want to feel something.

And my poetry is not for everybody, and it took me a long time to be okay with that. (laughing). But it's not. I've had event organizers be like, it's too vulgar for us, we can't -- Or it's too, it's not exactly what we're looking for. I used to be hurt by that, but I'm not, if it's not what you're looking for, that's okay.

There are people who come to some shows that text the whole time or kind of space out. I've had people walk out during readings, for whatever reason. But there are always people -- all eyes on me. And if I get obsessed with the people that are walking out or I get obsessed with the people that aren't paying attention, that person who is all eyes on me doesn't get their

moment. And I think as I performed for a while, I learned you can either try to convince people to stay or you can be there for the people that have stayed. And I think that was maybe the biggest, most powerful lesson that I learned. And it allowed me to perform. I do readings if ten people are there, and I've done readings with hundreds of people. Every one of those people came and deserves their moment. And if I'm a hundred times better if there's a hundred people, then those ten people that came to that small show don't get the best version of me, which sometimes I, sometimes I can't do that as a performer. I think the best thing as a performer and a writer is -- be vulnerable and allow people to take the invitation if they want to.

ST: Are you heading down towards Chico? You're going to California next. Is that down toward family, then?

DD: Yes, I came up from Chico last night, so I was in Portland, drove down to Chico, and then drove back up. I'll be in Seattle for two days, and then I'll be in Chico. One of my sisters is going to keep my dog for a couple days. And then another one of my sisters lives in Humboldt County, and so I have a show there. My cousin lives in the Bay Area. No, I'm super close with my sisters and my mom.

ST: Yes, heading that way --

DD: I always like to get West Coast shows because then I can see family.

ST: I was going to say. But you planned this one -- so you had people hearing about you, right?

DD: Exactly.

ST: How did you, what made you want to bring Desireé here? I mean, that's an obvious question but we're going to have you say it anyway.

(Laughing)

WHG: Besides the fact that Desireé's poetry is wonderful. We've actually had Desireé on campus before. She did a workshop with our club, two years ago?

DD: Yes, two years ago.

WHG: Yes, and one of our club members, one of the officers, her name is Jasmine, was in contact with Desireé for something. I think she ordered a T-shirt and got the order wrong.

DD: And Jasmine sent me her book.

WHG: And then, they just started talking about it, and Jasmine was like, Hey, we should bring Desireé. And then that's what I've been working on.

DD: Yes, and Wyatt's really been -- he's been a rock star. I came up here two years ago. There was someone else in the club, and I think they just saw me post that I was in the area, and then I came and taught a workshop, and then met some more of the young poets here. I'm just kind of, "Follow me on Instagram." Then I always post when I'm going to be in a region, and then if folks can make a show happen, it pretty much will happen. Wyatt really made it happen.

ST: That's wonderful. So, this might be a predictable question.

DD: (Laughing)

ST: Do you -- the number of *I forgive yous*, is there a number that is significant in -- was it the page format, or the number? What --

DD: That's not a predictable question. I haven't been asked that question. No, there's not a significance in the numbers. But I did want it to end -- I wanted an entire page of it. So the very last page, I wanted an entire page of it. And that originally wasn't the ending. Then in the editing process, my friend, Heiu Minh Nguyen, who has a blurb on the back and is also an incredible poet. Are you familiar with his work?

ST: Incredible, yes.

DD: Yes, he's the bomb. He helped me edit, and we Face Timed, and he was like, "Okay, read me the whole book, front to back, right now." I'm like, "Okay." So I spent three hours reading it to him. And that particular poem, I had a different ending line, and he was like, "I don't think this should be your ending. I think that should be the last poem in the book." And I was like, "Okay." Because I didn't know what my last poem was going to be. I wasn't sure on some things. And so he suggested it, and I really liked it, so I did it.

ST: And the jumble here is --

DD: Yeah, there's some spacing stuff.

ST: -- again, some text choices that are --

DD: Yes, that felt to me -- that felt significant. There's not a lot of ways on paper that can look beautiful -- that we can show pacing. So, it felt like a matter of -- it just reflects for me the way that we grapple with forgiveness. Sometimes it's slow and easy, and sometimes it's fast and harder, and sometimes it's slow and hard, and fast and easy.

ST: Sometimes there's a space in between the *I* and the *forgive*, and --

DD: Exactly. And some deserve more, some forgivenesses deserve more space and some take up more space.

ST: And so this is, to you, that's speeding when it starts.

DD: I think so --

ST: It cannot be or can be. Part of me is thinking that somehow it's wrong to deconstruct a poem that is so -- deep

DD: Yes, I don't think it's wrong.

The main significance is the last page, which is just, the last page feels overwhelming, and I wanted it to look overwhelming. I wanted it to look overwhelming but I didn't want it to be monotonous. So a way to break up the monotony was spacing. Because if I didn't change any spacing, you look at it -- Oh, and I know what all of this says, which you still can. But it was a way to make it a little, to make the page overwhelming.

ST: Right. I can look at it and know what it says.

DD: But you're not like spacing out on it.

ST: And you're pushing against that.

DD: Yes, yes, yes.

ST: Wow.

DD: I also didn't like the way it looked when it was rows and rows and aisles of it because then you just look at it and it is what it is. Obviously, you can still look at it and see what it says, but when you use the same words over and over on a page, every line looks exactly the same. And I didn't want that.

ST: Well, and it goes back to me thinking of the steps of certainly Alcoholics Anonymous. This idea that here I imagine you in this room overhearing things and what it means to get to the point where you are actually having those conversations with people --

DD: Yes, yes.

ST: -- and your own healing is actually dependent on that.

DD: Yes. I think for me, I have a really, really remarkable therapist. One thing that she has done for me is that, you can't -- you can't rely on anyone for your own healing except for yourself. And so it doesn't matter, for me, which might buck up against the idea of 12-step programs. I think specifically, you know my father's in the book, and I haven't spoken to my father in

probably 15 years. I think a lot about, with my father particularly, my whole life, my grandmother, my great-grandmother, who was a huge part of my life, and my dad's family are constantly -- because I still see them, they live in Medford, and so I still go and visit them. And they say, "You know, you should talk to your dad. You should have a conversation with him." And it always circles back to -- I think some people think a good thing to say is something like, "What if he dies and you've never talked to him?" And I just think that's (laughing), as you shake your head, I think it's a flawed, and I think there are some people that I don't forgive, and that's okay too. And really, truly, yes, there's a lot of characters in that poem, but really, truly, it's about myself and not about anybody else. And it doesn't matter. I can't control what other people do, and I can't control what other people have done to me. I will never be able to. If we can practice and look inward, then it's truly remarkable what can happen when we center ourselves and our healing and don't try to change other people or try to get affirmation from other people.

I think that that poem at its heart, is that. A lot of people feel really moved by that poem, and I felt -- I have honestly sometimes felt just a tiny bit of confliction with it, a tiny bit conflict because I don't forgive everybody, and I don't think we have to, and I don't believe that forgiveness is the answer to everything. And I think sometimes especially with people that are

abusive, when we forgive them it's for them and not for us. So if I were to forgive my father, it would be for him, and then I would have to carry the truth of that, if that makes sense. If my father is on his deathbed and I tell him I forgive him, he gets to die with being forgiven, and I get to live with the reality of that not being a closed chapter, if that makes sense. I'm just using that as an example, but I think sometimes we offer forgiveness because of the pressure, because of the idea that that's what we're supposed to do. But I think at the end of the day and at the heart -- that poem is about me, and the book is about me, and there are other people in it, but they don't really matter.

ST: Well the title of the book is *Sink*, not rise.

DD: (Laughing)

ST: So when you get to the end, it's not wrapping it up and now look, forgive, okay, everything. This is what you chose to title the book, and so it's still about moving through the thick and the gritty and the --

DD: Yes, right, right. And we can sink by choice or we can be sunken. I think that that's something that I think a lot too - you can bring yourself to the bottom of something, or think of the difference -- drowning versus diving. How one is a choice and one is not. I think when I was

coming up with the title, I had a lot of conversations about the word itself. My sister Laura said some really wonderful things to me that kind of solidified wanting to have the title what it is. She knows my work, but she didn't know the book. She's not super-duper familiar, and she was really moved by the prospect of the title *Sink*, and she had a lot of really wonderful, important thoughts just on the word itself. And I think that that really stuck with me and was really important to me. I think we can be in pain and still be okay (laughing).

ST: Ampersand.

DD: Yes.

(Laughing)

ST: We could keep talking, and that would be wonderful, but we're going to probably need to finish up so that you have some time to prepare --

DD: Thank you so much, Sylvia. I appreciate it.

ST: The privilege of hearing your thoughts on just the publication and the journey on the road and your reflections on the writing --

DD: Yes, your questions were really meaningful.

ST: -- the poems, wow, it's just emergent from the poems and the poetry, that's for sure.

DD: Thank you so much.

ST: Thank you so very much.

DD: Yes, likewise.

(End of audio recording)