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This interview was conducted with Kwame Alexander on October 21, 2015, in the Special Collections Conference Room, Western Libraries in Bellingham, Washington. The interviewers are Nancy Johnson and Sylvia Tag.

ST: So we are here with Kwame Alexander, who is in Bellingham for several days for the Compass 2 Campus program, as well as lunch with Western students and high school students, and this evening is giving a community presentation.

NJ: Sponsored by PoetryCHaT.

KA: Welcome to Fresh Air, with Nancy and Sylvia, and Kwame Alexander.

ST: If only I was as smart as Terry Gross.

NJ: Yeah, really.

ST: So, in the tradition that we're trying to start with these oral histories, we're hoping that you can talk freely, and we'll see where it goes. And just kind of a free flow conversation opportunity for you to kind of riff on your own thought process, writing process, what you --

NJ: History as a writer.

ST: -- some of the insights you have about your own books, interactions, intersections.

So we could start out with just some of this. We were just looking at some of the titles, and I was just noticing, myself, some of the interplay between the books.

NJ: Are you even aware that you do that?

KA: Yes, I'm certainly aware that the poems speak to each other and the books connect with each other. Some of it is intentional. Some of it is like when you get into this sort of rhythm, into this zone of the writing, it just -- it happens, you know. It's sort of the writerly destiny of it all just takes over, and that's really exciting. I don't know how to sort of -- If I could bottle that, it would be wonderful. But I think most of it comes from BIC - Butt In Chair. Like the more you just sit down, and you're writing, and you're just living this writerly life, as Langston Hughes's Jesse B. Semple character used to say, "Everything is connected." And so the connections sort of find themselves. And it's kind of cool, it's exciting, especially when readers like yourself are able to pick up on that.

The titles I think are really important to me. I remember my first play that I wrote. It was back in college, and it was a play called *Self-Discovery 101: You Gotta Have It*. And so, I was at Virginia Tech, and there weren't a whole lot of black students there, and I really wanted to write a play to talk about what it means to be a black student on a predominantly white campus. And I stayed up all night. I'd never written a play before. I'd read plays, I'd acted in a few plays. I acted in a play on Broadway when I was 13. So at some point, I thought I was going to be an actor. But I was familiar with the theater enough to think that I could write a play. And so I stayed up all night and wrote a play, a two-act play. I remember calling my father about 7:00 in the morning and saying, I wrote a play last night. And I remember him being really excited and telling me, asking me, "What are you going to do with it?" I said, "I'm going to produce the play."

And so I started reading and researching how do you produce a play. And of course you need a director, you need a cast, you need a venue. And so naturally I didn't have a whole lot of resources at my disposal, so I said, Well, I'll direct it. I wrote it, I'll direct it. I'll get my friends who are in the theater department to act in it, and that was my cast. And then of course I had to find a venue. Well as it turns out, I had received a letter inviting me to a student leadership conference at the College of William and Mary, and that was taking place in about four months. And I said, How cool would that be? They've got to have entertainment there, so why not my play as the entertainment? And I'm a sophomore in college, and I remember calling up the director at the College of William and Mary of the student leadership conference and saying, "My name is Kwame Alexander. I'm a playwright at Virginia Tech, and I'd like to offer my play as your entertainment for your student leadership conference."

The sort of the audacity to do something like this is something I was raised with, that level of confidence, to think that the world is at your disposal. And something my father always tells me is that you have to behave and act like you belong in the room. If you don't believe that you belong in the room, then people are going to notice and you're not going to be sort of embraced, and there are going to be some opportunities that you're going to miss. And so I've always believed that I belonged in the room, even times when I probably didn't.

But, Dr. Carol Hardy was her name, and she said, "Tell me more about this play." I said, "It's about student leadership." I had all the buzz words. "It's about black students and how they can, you know, sort of reach their destinies" -- And she said, "Well how much are you charging?" I hadn't thought that far. I said the biggest number I could come up with. I'm a sophomore, I didn't have any money, any food in the fridge. "What would be a good amount?" "A thousand dollars." "Hmm, well, that's too much." "Can you do it for \$500?" "Yes."

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I talked to some friends and so I knew -- I'd written a play, so I knew the number of actors it was going to require, and it was nine. And here I was getting paid \$500 for a play that was going to take place three hours, four -- five hours away from my school, and I had to get everyone there, and I had to pay everyone, got to have a place to stay. So I said, "Well, I can do \$500, yes, but we'll need hotel rooms." She said, "I can give you two rooms." I said, "Done. And, we'll need to attend the conference for free." This conference cost 300 to 400 bucks. And I'd been invited but none of the cast members, I knew, would have been invited. So she agreed to all that.

I got my cast together, started rehearsing. The play happened on a Friday night, the opening night of the student leadership conference. It was the main attraction. And I'm 17 years old, I'm thinking, Okay, this is cool. I'm going to be a theater minor. My minor was theater. And, the auditorium was 800 people filled. I mean it was exhilarating and it was like, Wow! It was Broadway to me. Like I knew I had arrived (laughter). And we -- the play happened. It went off exactly as we had rehearsed it. It couldn't have been any better. That is not to say that it was very good, because I only knew so much about the theater. But within the constraints of what I thought was good, it was excellent, at the time.

Standing ovation. And of course the students, who were my peers, didn't know any better either. Standing ovation, the teachers, the professors. The administrator was like, Whoa, what just happened? So, me thinking on my feet, which is another thing that I've sort of been groomed to always do.

When we were kids we'd be in a grocery store. My father didn't cook until very later in life, but he shopped. So my sisters and I would be in the grocery store at the checkout line, and he would not let the cashier take an item and ring it up until we could tell him the cost, with the sale and the double coupons. Unless we could tell him what the price was, he wouldn't let it go through. And this happened for every item. So you had to be able to think very quickly on your feet.

And so I remember saying to myself, We're about to do a question-and-answer. We can do a Q-and-A. And part of it was my ego, like wanting to savor the spotlight. And the standing ovation, and then I said, "Okay, we're about to have a Q-and-A." And the actors sat down on stage, and I stood up, and we started taking questions, and it was amazing, the energy in that room. And the whole time I'm answering questions, I'm thinking this is my life. This is what I want to do. I knew it in that moment. I wasn't able to articulate that it was going to be some combination of writing and presenting, but that's what I had just done. So I said, this energy, this spirit, this feeling right now, this is what I want to do in my life. And I just got paid \$500. It's a wrap. And so, the Q-and-A goes on for an hour, and it's 10 o'clock, and people are -- you know, at these kind of conferences for students, Friday night is time to party. So kids, nobody's like trying to get out of there to go party. They're staying around asking questions.

So one kid asked a question, she's from Rutgers, and she says, "Kwame, have you thought about taking this play on tour?" And I, come on, I was barely in the room. I barely made it into the room. But my answer was, "Yes, we are doing a tour." So as she's saying that, thoughts are going through my head, How can this happen, how can this happen? And so I say, "Well, after everything's over, tomorrow..." because I knew that my father, who was a book publisher, had a -- Another thing that I'd been able to negotiate was for my father to have a booth, and so he would sell books. So I said, "At booth number

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so-and-so, I'll be giving out information on our tour." So everybody's like, Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I did something I probably shouldn't have done. I said, the tour, "It costs \$1000 for us to come to your school." I should have never given the price out in front of 800 people, even though I was sort of married to it. But they clapped again. It was over. And we did an 8-city tour to Rutgers and Fisk and NYU...

And it was sort of the first time that I was able to sort of understand that writing is, for me, is more than pen to paper. It has to be writing with sort of the goal of being able to share your words with the world in some profound way, and you now have the capacity to do it. So you don't have to just write and it ends up in a drawer or under a mattress. You're going to share your works with the world, and the degree to which you do that is only limited by your vision and your dreams.

So you start -- we started with me talking about titles, and of course we ended in another place, in terms of this first experience where I knew I wanted to be a writer and live this writerly life, in all of its different aspects and capacities. But the title for that play was really not that good. I had borrowed it from a Spike Lee movie called *She's Gotta Have It*, and so I said, *Self-Discovery 101, You Gotta Have It*. It seemed pretty cool. I guess the kids liked it. But from that point forward, my titles got progressively better, and so the next couple of titles...there was a title called *Ebony Images*, another play that I wrote, which was still okay, probably bad. But titles became very important to me. I really wanted titles that A reflected the subject matter of the book, but B, that sort of had a little bit of edgy and coolness to it, and so the titles got a little bit better over the years. I remember a really good friend of mine, my best friend, who was an actor in that first play. He's always ribbing me about my titles. He's like, Dude, you don't know how to come up with titles. That used to be a really sore spot for me. We used to argue about that. And I think, you know, now he's like a huge fan of my titles. So I think he really inspired me to sort of work on those titles. And so, when you think about - there was a play -- After *Ebony Images*, there was a play called *8 Minutes Till 9*, which was bad, like what does that mean? The play was about a Muslim and a Christian who were twin brothers, and who were trying to figure out how to live in the same space when they had these sort of different, distinctly different, views on religion and the world and spirituality, and their mother. And so their mother -- And they hadn't spoken in a while -- and their mother was in the hospital on her deathbed, and she died at 8 minutes till 9. Not a very good title.

And then my first book of poems, *Just Us: Poems and Counterpoems*. What are counterpoems? I have no idea. And I think probably -- And then *Tough Love: The Life and Death of Tupac Shakur*. That's kind of cliché. I think probably the transition into like really coming up with a title that was concise and represented the book and still had an edginess was the book *Crush*, and that was 10 years, 10-15 years into my writing. But I think that sort of when I hit my stride, if I can say that, *Crush: Love Poems for Teenagers*, I felt like it was really simple, it represented what the book was about. It had sort of an edginess to it. Just the word "crush" in and of itself has some energy. And from there I felt like it was on, with the titles.

NJ: I am curious as you were just talking about that play, the 10 minutes to 9?

KA: *8 Minutes Till 9*.

NJ: *8 Minutes Till 9*, thank you. It really impressed me --

KA: Yes, it's just, it's a horrible title.

KA: Yes, 25 minutes past 11.

NJ: Yes. And *(The) Crossover*, and twins, mother on a deathbed... Do you find you come back? And what do you come back to in different maybe iterations?

KA: Wow. So that's great, because we're talking about the books talking to each other. And here's this play that I wrote that has this direct link to this novel that I wrote, which was 20 years later. And so the thing I didn't tell you about *8 Minutes Till 9* is that -- this was my third sort of, my third attempt at producing theater, okay. So after that first play had just wild success, as a 17 year-old, of course, I can do this. I can do this now. I will become a theater impresario. And so part of this whole idea of finding your rhythm and saying yes is that there are going to be failures. And I think that, the thing is, you got to be willing to deal with the failures. Like you've got to be willing to let those happen, embrace them, and learn from them. And that way you're able to sort of find what's possible. And so with *8 Minutes Till 9*, it was my third attempt, I felt like I was in a rhythm, and it was now time for me to actually go to Broadway, like literally.

NJ: Oh my gosh.

KA: And so I found a theater in my home town, in Norfolk, Virginia. It's called the Norfolk Center Theater, I believe, and I had 800 students in the first play, because the students had been registered for the conference from all around the country, so they were -- that was my audience. I didn't have to market, just had to show up and do my piece. Well now I had to market to the Norfolk Center Theater, and I remember getting my scholarship money from school, I was now a junior, and I had leftover money. And I decided I'm going to use this money to produce my play. The theater sat 2,000 people. I'm going to do this. Everybody's going to love this play. And there were 5 people in the audience. And I remember feeling like, or feeling a number of things. Two of the people were my parents. And I remember feeling like it was the end of the world, like it's a wrap. I mean, just thinking about it right now makes me just want to, wow, it was devastating, because I had done everything I thought that I knew, everything that I thought I had to do in order to bring people out. And certainly a theater with 2,000 people in there and there are 5 people in the audience, there's no way to sort of think positively about that, especially as a 19 year old, who thinks he wants to be a writer/director/producer. And so I was devastated.

ST: So as part of the consequence of having the tremendous confidence and self-assuredness, when it doesn't happen, it sounds like there's some extremes going on. I mean, that's a challenging way to move through the world I imagine.

KA: Well again, it's no way around that. You can't, I don't care how much confidence you have, you can't rationalize there being 5 people in a theater of 2,000, in front of the people you care the most about, and the actors who you promised that this is going to be. And it was just, like you really just felt like you wanted to be in your mother's arms. You wanted to just be away from the world. And it was

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the lowest -- it's one of the lowest points in my writing career. And then the other thing happened, because you can't take away confidence, 19 years of confidence being instilled in you by your parents and being reinforced daily. That doesn't just end because you're devastated. It takes a hit. It doesn't go down though. And so we did the play. We did the entire play. And it was the hardest thing I've ever done. Of course I'm only 19, so how many hard things have I done? But when you start looking at the future, in terms of my writing career, it definitely laid a foundation for how I would move through the world, how I would deal with the nos, because that was the biggest no. It's probably one of the top three biggest nos I've ever faced in terms of the rejection that I felt. But we did the play. We did the play. I don't know how that 2 ½ hours -- I don't remember how I made it through that 2 ½ hours, but it's not, you know, we did.

And when it was over and I got home, yes, I felt a whole lot better because I was out of that space, and I was able to look back on it, and I knew that I would never be in that position again. I would never be in that position again. I mean, I gave up my scholarship money for this, to produce this. I didn't, obviously, I didn't market it and promote it well. And so, yes, yes, yes.

And so, to go back to your question and the idea when we look at *The Crossover* and we have similar sort of themes, in terms of twins, rivalry, parent, parental illness. I kind of I guess when I think back on it, I guess I feel like I never -- that story never got told. And so maybe I needed to be able to close that chapter in some way, and this was sort of a coming full circle. I don't know, I'm speculating, but I think our subconscious acts in ways that we don't necessarily know. So when you bring it up, maybe that had something to do with it. I needed to have some closure, because I always felt like it was a great idea. So I needed to circle back and deal with some of that.

But oh, I get chills when I think about that theater. It was the hardest thing. But again I mean, we can't have the yeses without the nos. You can't have the mountains without the valleys. You just you can't. The world doesn't work like that. So, yes, *8 Minutes Till 9*.

NJ: Music. It's everywhere, in your work.

KA: Yes, the music. I told my parents that I don't remember music being in our house. I don't remember you all listening to music. You know, I remember gospel music because my father was a Baptist minister, and so I remember church, and I remember my father didn't listen to secular music. So he never, I don't have that recollection of him listening to music outside of church. I remember him trying to sing in the pulpit and sounding horrible. I remember that. I remember my mother humming songs and singing songs around the house, *If you want to be happy for the rest of your life...* I remember her singing, *How much is the doggy in the window?* I remember her singing songs like that around the house. I remember that a lot. So I remember those two things. And I remember, certainly, my sisters and I loving Michael Jackson and sort of going through our phases. And then I remember falling asleep at night listening to the oldies but goodies, every night. I had a little alarm clock radio, and so I'd fall asleep, *Breaking up is hard to do. Now I know, I know that it's true. Don't say that this is the end. Instead of breaking up I wish that we were making up again. I beg...* So I used to listen to these songs. Yes, I guess there was music in my house. There was a lot of music. I used to listen to those songs every night, loved the stories, loved the stories.

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But you know, the music in the books, I think, comes from a couple different places. Obviously it comes from that. But it comes from, I love writing while listening to music. The writing, it centers, it calms me, it inspires me, so I love listening to music, especially instrumental jazz music. The music has to be instrumental. I can't have words when I'm writing. So I think the biggest thing in terms of why the music is so much a part of my life now, and therefore a part of my writing life, I was a sophomore in college and I'd come home, and again, the only music I ever heard my father embrace was gospel music, and I came home -- and this is a man who didn't, he never said I loved you. I didn't hear that. Like you knew he did, but you didn't ever hear it. He wasn't very emotive. But he was emotive when he fussed. But you didn't really get the warm and fuzzy, Oh come here, son, give me a hug. That never happened, ever!

So I remember coming home sophomore year and being in our attic. My grandmother used to say that I was a meddler. "Why is that boy always meddling in my stuff?" He's in my closets and then, "What are you, Ed, come down!" She used to call me by my first name, Edward. "Edward, come downstairs and stop meddling up there." I loved going in drawers and finding things and being under beds, and there was always little things that you could find, and it was just so cool to me to discover all these wonderful things that you knew had stories, had these sort of backgrounds, these histories...medals in your grandfather's drawer, and fur coats, oh and fur hats. Oh, my favorite thing was papers, anything that was paper, because papers had things written on them. And whatever was written on them, you knew was going to be something that you didn't know before. And so you got this sort of peek into these people's lives who were your family. My grandmother used to say, "Why is he meddling?" And this is both of my grandmothers. My mother's mother and my father's mother, I did the same thing.

My mother's mother had an attic where her mother had lived, so it was a whole apartment up there. Oh my goodness! I found watches, encyclopedias, you know, can I say bras? I mean, I found everything, and it was all so exciting! And so, I come home sophomore year and I do what I always do. I'm in our attic, because growing up I'd never discovered everything that was in the attic, so it was always cool to go up there. So maybe I was up there looking for something from my high school days. Everything was in boxes. And I find two crates of records, and I started looking at the records, and the records are like Ella Fitzgerald, *Live in Berlin*; Duke Ellington; Ornette Coleman; Miles Davis, *Sketches of Spain*. And I'm like what is this? And I look at the top of each record, and in stencil, which is what these guys in the Air Force used to use to identify their records, it said, Property of The Big Al. And I'm like, That's my dad. My dad's nickname in the Air Force was The Big Al. My dad has a record, "I've Got You Under My Skin." What is my dad doing with Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith? What is he doing with these? And then it hit me, My dad was a huge jazz fan. Anybody who loves jazz has to be okay. That's when I sort of fell in love with my dad. That was the moment. I took those records back to college. I took them all back to college, bought a record player, and began to just fall in love with jazz music. And it has informed and influenced my writing ever since. And I guess in some way, it's sort of me, reestablishing or reconnecting with my dad in a really profound way.

ST: I don't know if you could hear your dad while you were giving your Newberry speech, because you were up there, but --

KA: I've been told.

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ST: Oh you have. I loved it! It was --

KA: It was church.

ST: It was church, and it was -- it was church. He was so loving and so supportive and exhilarating about what was happening.

KA: Yes, I think for them, for my mom and dad, the whole, you know, awards, the Newberry Medal in particular, it was -- it was validating for them in some way. Because when I got the call on February 2, at 7:16 a.m., I called him. He was the first person I called. And his response was, "We did it." Which I was like, Dude, we didn't do anything. But of course we did. Like I wouldn't have been getting that call had he not done all that stuff that they did. And my father and I -- again, he wasn't very emotive, so we didn't -- We talked every couple months. We had conversations every now and then. It was cool. And as he'd gotten older, we talked a little bit more. But beginning February 2, we talked an hour a day, which is -- I mean, there are some days where I just, I can't, I can't do it tonight, Dad. I'll have to call you tomorrow. But we talked an hour a day. And I think, what better way, what is more important for a parent than to see their child living a life that they have always hoped that they would be able to live. Maybe they didn't articulate the specific, but that everything we put into you, we see it coming out and we're very -- we feel good. We've done something. And you know, me fighting or me fussing because I have to read *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, and him not being able to understand. Why are you fussing? And me tearing...

So there was this phase in my life where we lived in Brooklyn, and we lived in this awesome row house on President Street, between New York and Brooklyn Avenue. It was owned by this older woman who had first editions of quite a few books, Alexander Dumas. She had everything. And she left the books, and there were built-in shelves in every room. So I had a room with built-in shelves everywhere, and I hated it. Because I knew I was going to have to read these freakin' books. And he made me read them. And so, when he traveled, I would rebel. This is not the kind of thing to share when you're talking with librarians and English professors. It's a part of my life. I would take books off the shelves and start tearing pages out. That was my way to rebel. I would only do it when he left town. I wasn't crazy enough to do it when he was there. To come from that place --

ST: And would you get rid of the pages, then, or would they --

KA: I don't remember. I'd tear a page out. I'd tear a page out and then throw the book. My mother would come in. We won't say what she did, but I had to stop. That was sort of my way. So to come from that place to now be here, I think they're just very thankful, and my mother said -- I remember my mother saying to my father, "Where did he come from? Where did this guy come from?" So I think they're just very proud. I know they're very proud. I'm really happy to have -- I feel like it's good. It's sort of my way of saying thank you for all the stuff I put them through as it related to literature. But they never, they never stopped. They never stopped, I mean, "We don't care. If you don't want to read, too bad you're going to do it." That thing never stopped. And so yes, he's right, we did do it.

NJ: Do you think work, know when something's going to end up being a picture book or a novel or a collection of poems? Is that conscious? Does it happen organically?

KA: Yes. It's a good question. I have not always, I haven't been -- Quite a few of my writer friends are very sort of, and I say this in the most respectful way, in the clouds. They're inspired, and the muse comes, and that's all good. And to a certain degree, yes, I have muses. But I am also very methodical about my approach to writing books. I'm going to sit down and I'm going to write a play tonight. That's always been my mindset. I'm going to sit down, I'm going to write a picture book. This morning I was working on a picture book, looking out on this beautiful water and listening to the trains, and I'm going to write a picture book. So it's very, it's very planned. I mean, it's very intentional. I know what genre it's going to be. I've thought about it over and over in my head because there are -- before I can actually sit down to write, I have to know what genre. There's not going to be any I don't know, maybe this is something else. No, it is what it's going to be. I have to know the title. I have to know that from the beginning. And I have to know the whole -- and I have to know the entire story. I have to know the beginning and the end. I don't have to know the middle. But I have to know those three things. And so it becomes very -- it becomes less, let the muse sort of inspire me, let me find out what this is, and more of, alright, muse, you ready to do this? Let's make it happen. This is what's about to go down.

NJ: Do you think the muse is percolating even though you're not aware of it?

KA: Yes.

NJ: So by the time --

KA: Yes, the muse is definitely -- yes. By the time I actually write, I've already started writing, and the muse has been working with me and inspiring me. So all that happens up there while I'm presenting, while I'm traveling around, walking my daughter to school, the muse is working. When I sit down to write, I'm taking all of that that I've gathered and culled together over the weeks, months, or years.

It's interesting because when I present to students or when I'm giving a keynote, it's weird because two things are happening up there. Number one, I am present in the moment, which is why I try to make sure that I connect with students and get names. And it's not just so that the students can feel connected. It's so I can feel connected too. Because there's another thing going on. I'm also actively at this simultaneously, I'm involved in this whole other process, and that process is -- I'm not even sure if this is something I should say. That's the thing about this, in this age of Twitter, stuff ends up everywhere.

ST: Nancy and I do not know how to Twitter.

NJ: We don't tweet. We do not tweet, so.

KA: I'm being facetious. I'm being facetious.

ST: I'm not.

KA: My mind, my mind is in the moment and I'm trying to connect with you, but I'm also thinking about what I'm going to be doing over here. And over here could be, I heard four kids up there laughing and being rambunctious. Okay, at some point during this presentation, Kwame, you need to make your way up there, and you need to do that poem that's on page 46 in *Crush*, because that poem is going to resonate with that boy, because you saw the way... So I'm having this whole other conversation as I'm connecting with this student over here. And I don't know if that's multitasking or literary schizophrenia, or whatever it is, but I have stopped trying to understand it and just do it. I don't know, I don't know how it happens, but I just do it.

NJ: I think I mentioned to you at Singapore American School that that's what I hope I get better at as a teacher. I mean, watching you yesterday, watching you at the Singapore American School, you are so present for the learners, the kids, whoever's there, even the grownups, that we're sure you're -- It's like when I go to a really good church service, it's like, Oh, that sermon was for me.

KA: Right.

NJ: And that's what I hope I can learn to do as a teacher so that when I leave they go, Oh yes, that lesson was for me. I needed that one. And you don't even seem to think about it. I think it's kind of who you are.

KA: Yes.

NJ: You're saying, No, I'm not a teacher. You are a teacher at the core.

KA: Well, yes, thank you. I tried teaching, I tried teaching.

NJ: Well you're still doing it. You just don't do it with a certificate.

KA: Yes, right.

NJ: You don't have a teaching certificate. You're still teaching.

KA: Right, right.

NJ: I saw you with your daughter.

KA: Right.

NJ: I mean, you're still teaching.

KA: Yes.

NJ: And in ways that sometimes we can't get away with in a classroom. Cool, we're lucky to have that happen.

KA: Right. I remember Scott Riley, one of the teachers in Singapore. At the Singapore American School, he told me, it was like, "The kids are the curriculum." And so, if you're teaching the curriculum, you got

to teach to the kids. And we forget that sometimes. And I think that one of the beauties of presenting with students, like the 5th graders at Western Washington, is that you get to -- it's sort of like jazz. When you have a jam session, you have to be present in order to riff off of your bandmates. In order to follow along, in order to get in the groove, and you don't know the kind of magic that's going to come out of that, but you got to be willing to do that and discover it. And I think each time I go into a class or into an auditorium or what have you, I want -- it's a jam session for me. We're all involved, and I may have some ideas about what I'm going to do, and I'm also open to wherever this is going to take us, because there may be some teachable moments here. There may be some things that I'll discover about myself. There may be some things that some student will discover about her or himself. And I think that's really magical. But you got to be willing to have five people in the theater to do that, and that is not easy.

ST: Thanks.

KA: Thank you.

NJ: You got two people in the theater.

NJ: It's easier. --

KA: Yes. It's good to be able to talk about it. A lot of this stuff I haven't shared in a while, just remember. It's good to remember that.

ST: Yes.

KA: Yes.

ST: We have a few more months until the next announcement in January. I hope it carries, I hope it flows over. You've talked about this year as this platform that you're honored to be on and to reach out, and I don't see it ending, to be perfectly honest.

NJ: I think you're booked for the next two years anyway, right?

KA: Yes.

NJ: I think you've found the theater. I mean, it is really not gone.

KA: Right. I think I was able to sort of merit all those things, right?

NJ: This is your theater. That one was temporary. It was a placeholder.

KA: Right.

NJ: It's a placeholder theater.

KA: Yes.

NJ: Right? I mean, this gig is not Broadway, but for you, you're on a different Broadway.

ST: Well it's the trifecta that you were talking about of who you are, what you're writing about, and the connection with the audience, that initial rush that you had from that first place.

NJ: Yes.

KA: Right.

NJ: Sharing your words with the world.

ST: And then here you are now --

KA: Oh, you're right.

ST: -- in that same experience. It's like it's that whole spiral, cyclical thing going. And it's like, wow, that does make a lot of sense.

KA: You're right. That's exactly what it is.

NJ: And so it's no wonder it's like it feels like you've come home when you do that. It feels right because it is right for you.

KA: Right, right.

NJ: Not for all of us --

KA: Right.

NJ: -- but it's right for you.

KA: Yes, yes.

NJ: And that's why the other people who have a muse that is different, that's right for them.

KA: Right, exactly, exactly.

NJ: And that's right for them. This is you, and to try to find that, we don't always find it at 18 or 19. We're looking.

KA: Right.

NJ: We're meddling.

KA: Right, right.

NJ: Right? Yes. So you kind of hope that there is that place. And it's just lovely when you know. I mean when you know it, it's like, I am so lucky.

KA: Right, exactly. I was telling Sylvia, I wake up every morning, I just laugh. It's like, "No way, really?"

NJ: Really, seriously, right? Hey, Dad, I am going to talk to you for an hour because really?

KA: Right.

ST: Well, that's a good place to end.

NJ: But you wouldn't have known that when you had five people in your audience.

ST: But you knew it when you had that previous feeling. It was the feeling to repeat.

NJ: Yes, yes. Thank you.