The mission of Pittsburgh Arts & Lectures is to connect celebrated authors with the community, elevate civic discourse, and inspire creativity and a passion for the literary arts.

Our commitment to knowledge, learning, integrity, and artistic excellence guides and informs our work.

We endeavor to inspire members of diverse communities by providing opportunities to experience authors who speak on issues that reflect our values such as justice, compassion, civic responsibility, acceptance, courage, and equity.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Happy 35th Anniversary, dear friends!

Two years ago, when I first joined Pittsburgh Arts & Lectures, a patron told me about the time she picked up Kurt Vonnegut from his hotel before his Ten Evenings lecture. I was surprised to learn that Vonnegut was here, but I was even more amazed when she told me that was in 1992. She has been attending our lectures for at least 33 years!

No organization can sustain such loyalty without intentionally building community. It is true that Pittsburgh Arts & Lectures brings the most celebrated authors to Pittsburgh, but you keep coming back because we are a place of convening, where you are aware that you share something in common with the stranger next to you. A place that values your passion for the literary arts.

As we look back over the past 35 years we are thrilled to celebrate the community that we have built with you; and as we look forward to the next 35, we are more energized than ever for the work ahead: tending to our foundation, fostering open dialogue, offering opportunities to challenge our perceptions, and always grounding the work in love and community. This season is a testament to that.

We open our season with historian and professor Jill Lepore, who will guide us to a better understanding of (and relationship to) the very foundation our forefathers gave us in the US Constitution–all in time to honor its 250th anniversary.

Together we will contemplate the meaning of friendship and acceptance through the works of Jess Walter, Angela Flournoy and Elizabeth Gilbert. Calvin Duncan will share his story of courage and perseverance in the face of injustice. Padma Lakshmi will bring us all around the table to savor all that the United States have to offer: a beautiful melting pot of identities, cultures, and experiences.

Beth Macy will remind us why dependable, honest journalism (especially in our rural communities) is imperative in uniting our country, while Merlin Sheldrake will astound us with the power and wisdom of nature–and what we can learn from it as we seek to build a truly supportive future.

This season, as we celebrate our community and passion, I encourage you to look to the future as well and contemplate how you will continue to build bridges. I know it feels increasingly harder to do so...but we are readers! We can spend days or weeks reading a book, knowing that patience and empathy are what we are made of. We know that a good ending is worth waiting for, and we have the focus, discipline, and trust to get there.

Now more than ever, we are called upon to lead and show the world why community will always prevail over division. We will remind the world why the arts are vital and deserve to be championed and sustained for generations to come.

I am honored to break bread, be in conversation with, and walk alongside each one of you. Thank you for being here.

Sony Ton-Aime
Executive Director
Pittsburgh Arts & Lectures

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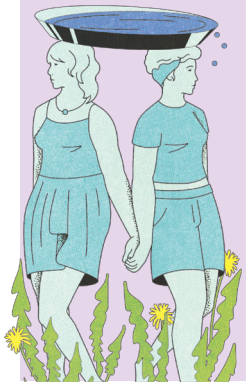

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Directed by Kim Weild
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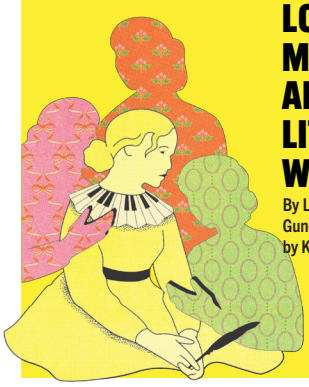

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LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S LITTLE WOMEN

By Lauren Gunderson Directed by Kaja Dunn

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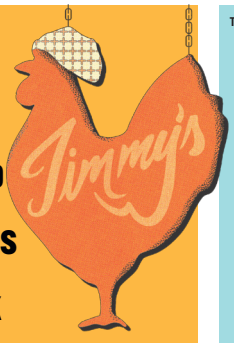

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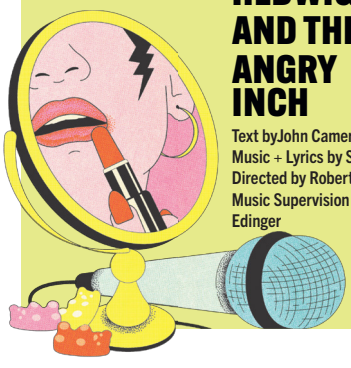

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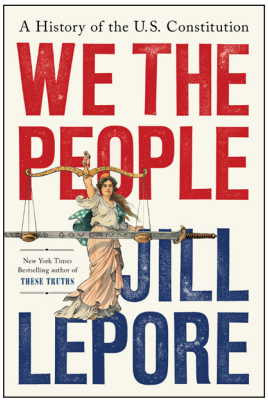
Jill Lepore

Monday, September 15, 2025



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How did one historian cope with the recent presidential transfer of power?

Jill Lepore started to read from Penguin Little Black Classics, a collection of slender paperbacks "each as thin and sleek as my phone, bound in black, with white type on a plain cover."

"(The) Penguin Little Black Classics smell like a stationery store, and they have a small flat-footed, big-bellied penguin on the front cover, with his head cocked, and the words inside make sense, none of which can be said for the daily news about the state of the nation," she wrote in an essay for the *New Yorker* in April 2025.

Lepore is Harvard University's David Woods Kemper '41 Professor of American History and the author of 19 books and numerous essays. Her work ranges from a look at the origins of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to the legacy of environmentalist Rachel Carson born in Springdale, Allegheny County to an examination of

mortuary practices in America.

"I have a lot of energy," she told the *New York Times*' Jennifer Schuessler in 2018. "If I'm not writing, or doing another project, I'm quite difficult to be around. It's really like a fix, a need."

But the crux of most of Lepore's recent work has been the story of America, "a stirring, terrifying, inspiring, troubling, earthshaking epic," she told Schuessler.

Lepore's interest in history, and specifically local news, was born when she rode with her family in a 1972 Oldsmobile station wagon delivering Sunday newspapers in West Boylston, Massachusetts.

"The centrality of the newspaper to how people navigate their way through the world was really clear to me," Lepore told Cherise Forbes of the *Manchester Journal* in 2024.

What has happened to newspapers, and politics, Lepore thinks, is that the pace of technology (including the emergence of the internet) has created an imbalance that has not been corrected.

"What's different in the moment we're in now is that this technological revolution, which created a lot of disequilibrium, just keeps churning," Lepore told Forbes. "We haven't arrived at a state of equilibrium since then. It's like our politics just continue to get more and more disordered, and the parties become hollower and hollower."

As a historian, Lepore doesn't examine the history of the presidency or other august bodies of American government. What seems to fascinate her most is the behind-the-scenes machinations and movements that comprise the history of the country. While working on her new book, *We the People* (scheduled to be published in September 2025), she came across a report from New York's constitutional convention in 1821.

"There's a proposal at the convention to add the word 'white' to the suffrage requirements," Lepore told *Time's* Olivia B. Waxman in 2023. "So instead of 'free inhabitants,' it would be 'free white inhabitants.' And then also they want to add the word 'male,' so it'd be 'free white male inhabitants.' There's just this incredibly interesting argument about that that goes on and on. I hadn't realized just quite how strenuously the case was argued on both sides starting in the 1820s. They get the word 'white' in, and then it takes a really long time to get it out. But it also is useful to remember how long it took to get it in. Things were almost another way. Things could still change."

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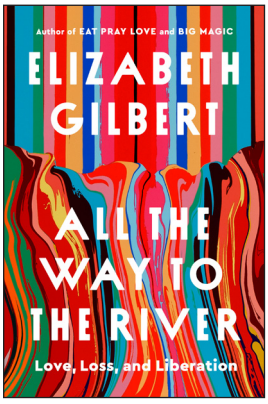
Elizabeth Gilbert

Monday, September 29, 2025



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In the winter of 2023, Elizabeth Gilbert shaved her head to a fuzzy brilliance, like the late Sinead O'Connor at the apex of her fame.

That decision was something Gilbert had been thinking about doing for years. In a 2024 essay for "Oprah Daily," Gilbert wrote that she had been contemplating shaving her head since reading an article in the *Village Voice* in the 1980s that described shaving a woman's head as akin to going to the gynecologist and the dentist on the same day.

But the main reason, aside from the difficulty of maintaining her self-described "difficult" hair, was inspired by one of Gilbert's spiritual teachers, a woman in her eighties, the "freest person I have ever met," Gilbert wrote, adding:

"Why am I still pretending that I'm not getting older? Why am I afraid of looking my age? Why does any of this matter at all? What if I just allowed myself to become a gorgeous old amazing woman, like her? What if I were just free?"

Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia*, has become a touchstone for women trying to change their lives. In a 2013 interview with *Slate*'s Margo Robb to promote the novel *The Signature of All Things*, Gilbert acknowledged the first book's significance.

"*Eat, Pray, Love* is the most important book I've ever written because I've seen eye to eye, face to face, and heart to heart women whose lives were changed by that book, who felt it gave them permission to ask dangerous questions about their existence, and gave them permission to travel, and gave them permission to wonder what they're going to do with their one life," Gilbert told Robb. "Word for word, pound for pound, I think this book is better written, but I don't think people will come up to me in tears and tell me they'll never be the same person again, and that's something *Eat, Pray, Love* did, and I'm proud of it."

Gilbert, whose works include the September 2025 release, *All the Way to the River: Love, Loss, and Liberation*, a memoir that is her first nonfiction book in a decade, has embraced her role as a public speaker. She told Charlotte Cowles of "the Cut" in 2019 that she enjoys speaking before an audience, even if it's not about her work.

"There'll be a topic that I am really interested in, and it's nice because not everything has to be a book," Gilbert told Cowles. "Sometimes an idea can just be a 45-minute talk. If I didn't have that outlet in speaking, then I would probably be writing more essays. My public speeches are public essays, in a way.

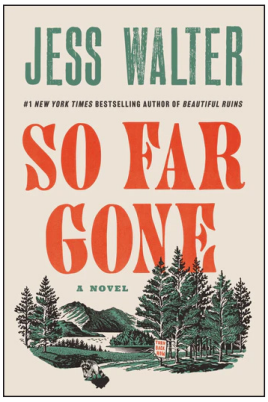
"But I also want it to feel intimate. I love the communion of it, and sometimes I'll make people sing. When I was in Sheridan, Wyoming, just a couple weeks ago for a speaking event, I made the entire audience sing John Denver's '*Take Me Home, Country Roads*' with me."

Writing, to Gilbert, is a sacred pursuit. She took a few writing classes while an undergraduate at NYU but decided that the best way was to avoid workshops and write on her own.

"I believe that – if you are serious about a life of writing, or indeed about any creative form of expression – you should take on this work like a holy calling," Gilbert wrote in an essay on her website. "I became a writer the way other people become monks or nuns. I made a vow to writing, very young. I became Bride-of-Writing. I was writing's most devotional handmaiden. I built my entire life around writing. I didn't know how else to do this. I didn't know anyone who had ever become a writer. I had no, as they say, connections. I had no clues. I just began."

Jess Walter

Monday, October 27, 2025



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Before he became a novelist, Jess Walter was a journalist at the *Spokesman-Review*, his hometown newspaper in Spokane, Washington.

In 1992, when the Ruby Ridge standoff occurred in Idaho, every reporter wanted to cover the story, including Walter. Instead, he was assigned to stay in the office and work the phones.

He decided to track down the family of Randy Weaver, a survivalist who was involved in the standoff.

"I'd heard that he'd worked at a John Deere plant, so I began going through phone books, Iowa phone books," Jess Walter told Cori Brosnahan for PBS's *American Experience* in 2017. "I'd call libraries and have them look through their phone books and tell me which towns had John Deere plants, until I found a cousin. That cousin led me to another cousin, who led me to Vicki Weaver's family. I got them on the phone – and they had not heard from the FBI or the U.S. Marshals Service

or anyone – so they had as many questions for me as I had for them."

For his work, Walter was part of the team nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1992. It also launched his literary career in 1995 with the publication of *Ruby Ridge: The Truth and Tragedy of the Randy Weaver Family*, a nonfiction book about the incident.

Walter's career as a novelist began with 2001's *Over Tumbled Graves*, about detectives trying to find a serial killer. *Citizen Vince* (2005), a crime novel, involves a credit card scam artist who becomes involved in a murder against the backdrop of the 1980 presidential election.

His work then began to branch out and become more inventive. In 2009's *The Financial Lives of Poets*, a writer starts a website devoted to financial journalism in the form of blank verse.

Walter told Weston Cutter of the *Kenyon Review* in 2012 that his story ideas are fluid and that he never uses charts or graphs to flesh out plots.

"The ideas tend to be pretty specific, but also open-ended –what if an Air Force survival instructor went to Las Vegas to rescue his stepsister from a life of prostitution – then I just write, figure out who these people are, why they're doing what they're doing," Walter told Cutter. "I think character is elemental; if you pay attention to the people, you'll get the action right. I usually have three or four things going at once, a story or two, sometimes even two novels, and if I get stuck, I just jump over to the next one. I do this so I won't leave the desk, and I've found over the years that it makes me both more productive and less worried if something hits a wall (and everything always hits a wall)."

Walter's masterpieces, *Beautiful Ruins* (2012) and *The Cold Millions* (2020), are both novels flush with history. Set in Italy during the early 1960s, *Beautiful Ruins* takes place in a remote coastal town with the arrival of an actress and jumps forward 50 years to a young woman working for a Hollywood producer.

The Cold Millions is about two brothers from Montana who arrive in Spokane, Washington, seeking work during the early 1900s.

Both novels straddle the line between commercial and literary appeal.

"I hate thinking in those terms, because they pretend to know the writer's intent," Walter told Jillian Tamaki for the *New York Times* in 2000. "I imagine that every writer wants literary respect and every writer wants commercial success. These terms suggest a lack of respect for how difficult both things are.

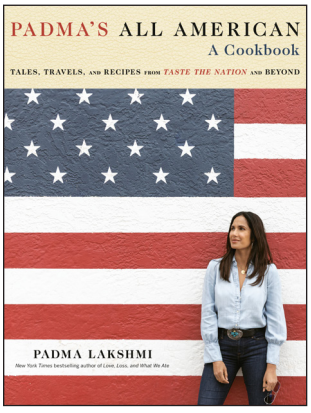
"Once, during the eight years between novels, my mail carrier caught me at the mailbox looking for a check. He asked what was taking so long with my new book. 'A novel takes time,' I explained. 'You have to research it, craft it, find the thematic strands, tear it apart, rework it.'"

"He shrugged. 'James Patterson published three books this year and I liked them all.' Point, mailman."

Walter's latest novel, *So Far Gone*, was published in June 2025.

Padma Lakshmi

Monday, November 10, 2025



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Padma Lakshmi had been through a lot by the time she turned 16.

At the age of 14, she was diagnosed with Stevens-Johnson syndrome, a rare illness caused by hypersensitivity to an infection or a potentially fatal reaction to certain kinds of medications.

Two days after her discharge from the hospital, she was injured in a car accident in Malibu, California, which left her with a fractured right hip and a shattered right arm.

But that was not the worst of it.

In a *New York Times* essay in 2018, Lakshmi describes being assaulted and violated at the age of 16.

"Now, 32 years after my rape, I am stating publicly what happened," Lakshmi wrote. "I have nothing to gain by talking about this. But we all have a lot to lose if we put a time limit on telling the truth about sexual assault and if we hold on to

the codes of silence that for generations have allowed men to hurt women with impunity."

Lakshmi survived her ordeals and has become a popular chef, being named one of Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People in 2023. Currently the host of *Taste the Nation* on Hulu, she also was the host and executive producer for Bravo's *Top Chef* for 18 years. Her most recent book is *Padma's All American: Tales, Travels, and Recipes from Taste the Nation and Beyond: A Cookbook*.

Lakshmi has often been forced to react to disparaging remarks about Indian cuisine. When a columnist for the Washington Post wrote a scathing review of Indian cooking in general, Lakshmi responded in the same newspaper in 2021.

"When I started in food 20 years ago, White male chefs dominated the industry and were the only authors getting book deals. I'm happy to say the landscape has changed somewhat since then," Lakshmi wrote, "but it's a constant process.

"Recently, the restaurant industry and food media have gotten a much-needed wake-up call, from exposing the brownface incident and workplace racism at *Bon Appétit* to the influx of BIPOC (Black, indigenous and people of color) voices in the culinary world, one of which is my show *Taste the Nation*. People are slowly realizing there's a lot more to the world of gastronomy than the French, Eurocentric worldview."

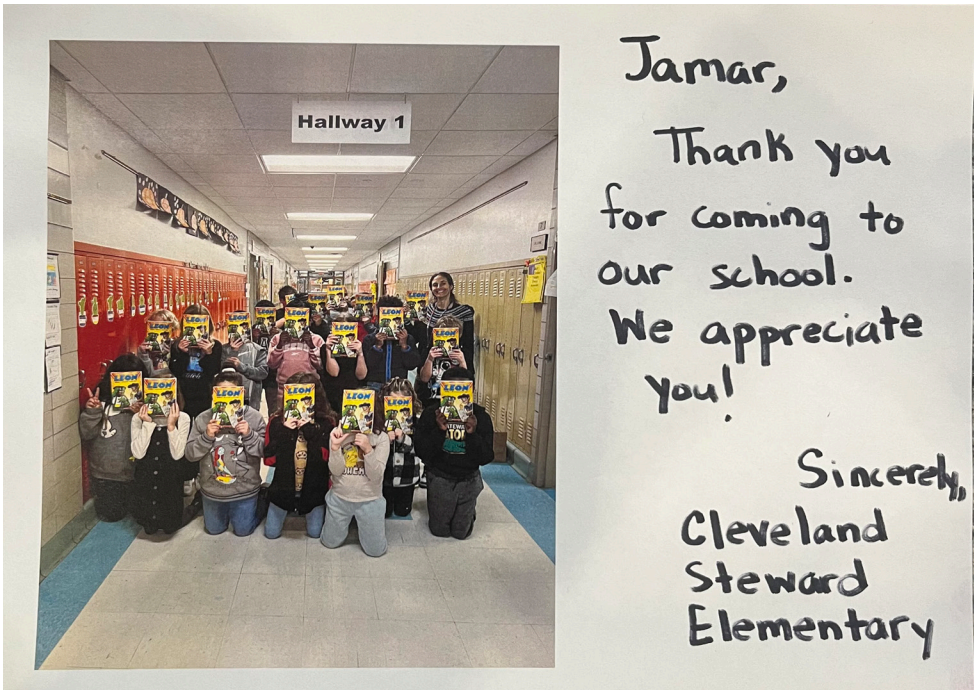
When Lakshmi was young, she and her mother would shop in the different neighborhoods in New York City – Spanish Harlem for sugarcane, tamarind, or cilantro, Chinatown for Asian vegetables. Her interest in various cuisines grew from there.

Through food, Lakshmi thinks, we gain a better understanding of each other. By hunting and gathering for spices and ingredients that were in Indian cuisine, she told Jane Burnett for Oprah Daily in 2023, she experienced Puerto Rican, Dominican, Chinese, and Thai cuisines. And that gave her an understanding of not only different types of food, but also of different people.

"*Taste the Nation* uses food as a jumping-off point, or as a vehicle, to go into deeper issues that affect our culture: family, economics, political views, art, literature, music," Lakshmi said. "It delves into every aspect of a particular community's culture. And it seeks to understand that community as deeply and as well as is possible. The food is just what gets us in."

Authors t

In 2024-2025: 3,400 students reached at 30 schools, 760+ free books distributed.



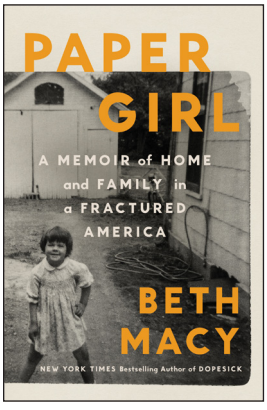
to Schools

Pittsburgh Arts & Lectures' subscribers and donors make it possible for our writers to visit local schools through the Authors to Schools program. Pittsburgh Arts & Lectures is often able to offer this program at no cost to the schools, and we also provide free books, tickets, and even bus transportation.

One highlight of last year's Authors to Schools was a memorable visit by author Percival Everett to Woodland Hills High School. The students presented Everett with original works of art they had made inspired by his novel *James*; Everett was effusive and praised them at his Ten Evenings event that night. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction just a few months later, in May of 2025.

Beth Macy

Monday, December 8, 2025



Presented with Support from Press Forward and Jewish Healthcare Foundation

On her website, Beth Macy sums up her philosophy with a quote by Annie Dillard:

"You were made and set here to give voice to this, your own astonishment."

A native of Urbana, Ohio, Macy was the first in her middle-class family to receive a college degree, in journalism, from Bowling Green State University. She worked for the *Roanoke Times* before publishing her first book, *Factory Man: How One Furniture Maker Battled Offshoring, Stayed Local – and Helped Save an American Town* in 2014.

Macy tracks John Bassett III, who fought against Asian competition and cheaper furniture and, in the process, saved the town named after his family. When Macy first met him on a newspaper assignment, she felt judged, the look on Bassett's face indicating she looked like a "damn hippie" in hiking boots and with her hair pulled back.

But the day the article was published, Bassett called her.

"He was kind of a pariah in this industry. A lot of people weren't happy because they had to pay a little bit more for furniture," she said during an appearance before the Arlington County Government in Virginia in 2014. "He felt very affirmed for the first time."

Dopesick: Dealers, Doctors, and the Drug Company that Addicted America, published in 2018, gave Macy a national pulpit. Chronicling the opioid crisis in Appalachia, it won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Science and Technology, and, in 2021, the book was adapted into a Hulu miniseries starring Pittsburgh native Michael Keaton.

During an interview with Michael Martin for *Amanpour & Co.* in 2018, Macy called the conditions that created the crisis in *Dopesick* a "perfect storm."

"The coal mines were shutting down," Macy told Martin. "The factories, textile mills, and furniture factories were going to China or Mexico, so people had this desperate need to pay their bills. And so, when Oxycontin came out, people figured they could also sell them on the black market for thousands of dollars, especially if they had a Medicaid card. They could buy them for a dollar or two and make a lot of money."

Macy's follow-up, *Lazarus Man: Hope, Justice, and the Future of America's Overdose Crisis*, looks at the divide in treatment between law enforcement and medical professionals, and how pharmaceutical companies have done little to ameliorate the harm they caused.

Macy told Landis Wine for R*VA Magazine* in 2013 that there's still a disconnect between reality and how the opioid crisis is perceived, especially among students.

"I don't want to put more on public school teachers, 'cause they're about all we have left of our social safety net, but we need to be teaching this stuff," Macy said. "I'm shocked during my visits home, when I hang out in the schools, just how little it is.

"I've been there on a couple different election days, and the kids don't know what's going on. There's just so much mental illness now, especially since COVID – untreated mental health. The number-one issue in rural America, I think probably everywhere, is untreated mental health. You're looking at these rural counties that don't have a single psychologist or psychiatrist and the waiting list to see a counselor [is about four months long] right now. And suicide is on the rise."

Macy's new book, P*aper Girl: A Memoir of Home and Family in a Fractured America*, is scheduled to be published in December 2025, and looks at the changes that have overwhelmed her hometown.

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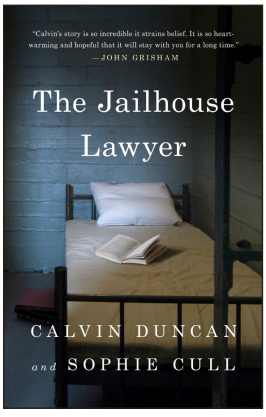
Calvin Duncan & Sophie Cull

Monday, February 9, 2026



Calvin Duncan knows what it means to be fighting for his life.

In 1981, he was arrested, charged, and determined guilty of a murder he didn't commit. Duncan was incarcerated at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, known as Angola, or the Alcatraz of the South, and put on death row.

What could he do?

His lawyers, up against a judge who had sentenced other men on similar evidence, told him he had one recourse: to study the law while imprisoned.

On his website, Duncan writes that an "old timer," Slim Jenkins, who taught GED and self-help classes, offered to assist him. Duncan was hesitant – he didn't want to owe anything to a fellow inmate.

"But Slim was different," Duncan writes on his website. "I could tell right away he wasn't offering to help so he could demand something in return. He saw a young kid in a desperate situation, and he wanted to help.

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"So, I took him up on it. Every day, we sat at a desk in the day room, working through that civics textbook. He taught me how the U.S. government was supposed to function: the balance of power between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. And with his help, I gained a sense of how laws were made and implemented, laws that were having a huge and immediate impact on my life."

Duncan, along with criminal justice reform advocate Sophie Cull, has written *The Jailhouse Lawyer*, released in July 2025.

While at Angola, Duncan was subjected to the same conditions that affected hundreds of Black men in the prison. He told the Innocence Project's Danielle Selby in 2021 that there were men forced to work the same land slaves had worked 120 years before, while white men with guns looked on from atop horses.

"Doesn't that sound like slavery to you?" Duncan asked Selby. "When people say this is modern-day slavery – this ain't no modern-day slavery. This sh*t *is* slavery. It's no different. It's identical.

"They take us from our land, our country, which, in this case, is New Orleans, and they put us on a boat – only now, that boat is a bus, and they ship us to jail, until we go to the auction block," he added, saying that he thought district criminal court was akin to the areas where slaves were sold in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Duncan became the longest-serving inmate counsel – known as a jailhouse lawyer – at Angola, helping other inmates with appeals and legal issues. He met Cull after being hired by her law firm, which specialized in helping those on death row, as a paralegal.

"You saw your own role as clearly someone who could do something about the situation [incarcerated people] were in and do something about other people and the situations they were in," Cull told Duncan during a YouTube interview. "What's remarkable to me about your story is not only what it reveals about our justice system, but also the incredible opportunity you created for others by knowing the power that you had as an individual in that system."

Duncan says he was initially hesitant to talk about his prison experiences, let alone write them, lest he be viewed as a braggart. But Cull, who listened to his stories without judgment, made him realize that it was okay to let people know what happened.

"When a lot of people come home from prison, especially people who are innocent, we need somebody to talk to," Duncan told Cull. "And you were kind of like my therapist."

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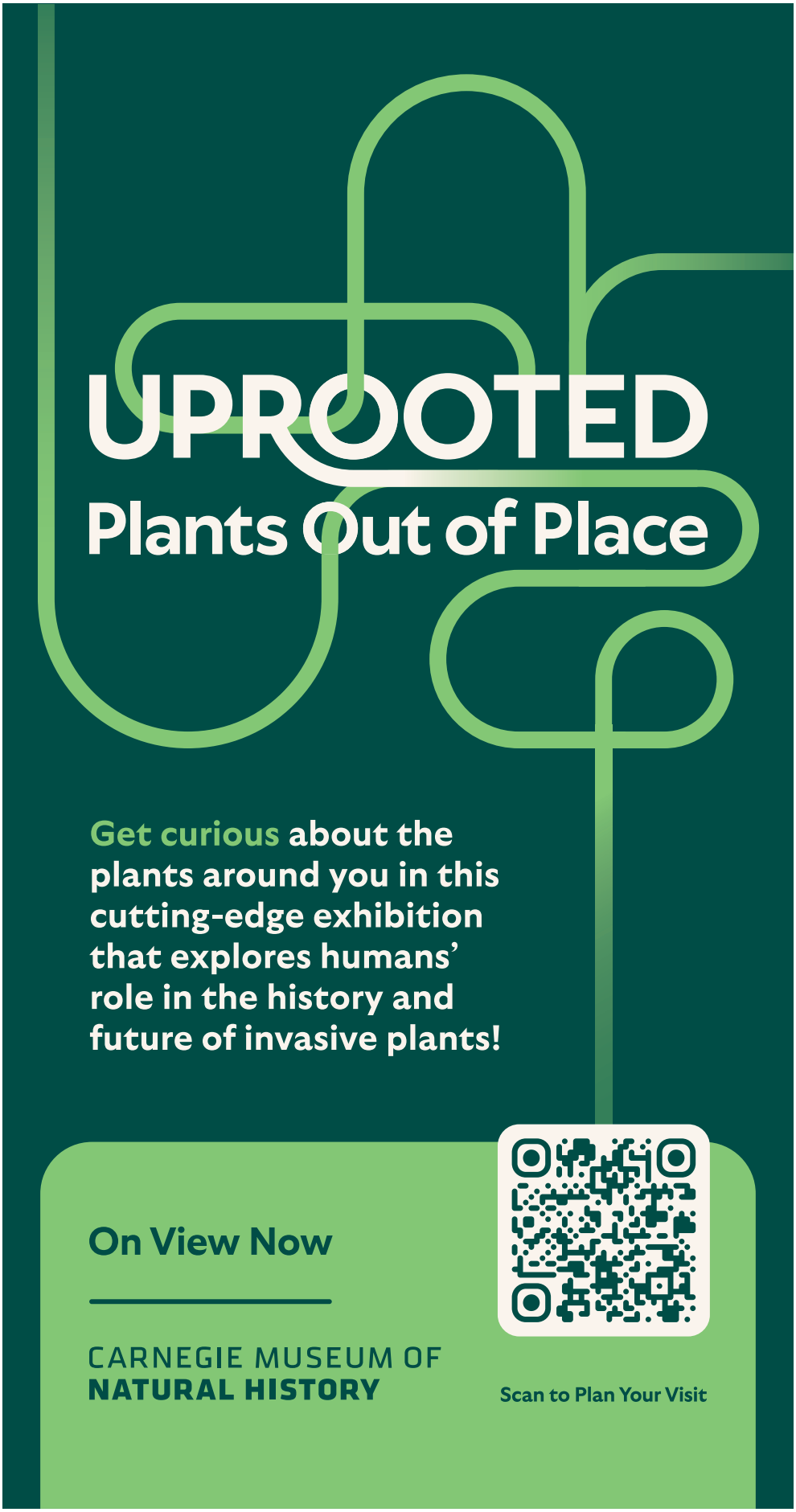
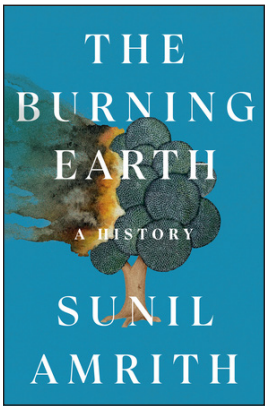


Sunil Amrith

Monday, March 2, 2026



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Natural History

As a professor of history at Yale University, Sunil Amrith has studied environmental history and climate change for nearly two decades.

In his latest book, *The Burning Earth: A History*, Amrith combines the histories of environment and empires, of ecosystem deterioration and genocide. It's a sweeping overview of how mankind's imperial nature contributed to the fragile climate now plaguing the planet.

Amrith admits the scope of his new book was daunting, but one reason he took on the task was his children.

"The question of what made me want to take on the story at the truly epic scale, as I do in *The Burning Earth*, was the coming together of various things," he told Kathleen Davis for Science Friday in 2024. "One was my own children, who are 10 and under, starting to ask me questions about how we've ended up in

a place where the environment around us is in such peril, and I found that I didn't really have a clear answer for them. And so, I thought I'd go away and put my historian hat on and my citizen–parent hat on, and it's really the synthesis of those two things that produced *The Burning Earth*."

Amrith, a MacArthur Fellowship winner in 2017, was born in Nairobi, Kenya, to Indian parents and grew up in Singapore. After receiving undergraduate and doctoral degrees from the University of Cambridge, he taught at Birkbeck College, University of London, where, according to his website, Amrith learned to "make historical research as accessible as possible to a curious but busy audience."

Amrith's first books, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal* and *Unruly Waters*, focused on the history of migration and ecology in Southeast Asia. But *The Burning Earth* takes a more comprehensive look at the global impact of climate change.

In 2025, Amrith told Lisa Prevost for the *Yale News* that humans can longer ignore the impact of their actions.

"The paradox of the story I'm telling is that many of us now realize that it is an impossible quest to continue to expand the frontiers of human possibility while disregarding the health of the planet," Amrith said. "Part of the book is about a period of human history when, at least some parts of the world, or some sections of society, people began to behave as if that wasn't the case. You could see it as a kind of forgetting."

Amrith finds hope in the shared human aspiration of making a better life for one's children. He told Craig Thompson for EcoWatch in 2024 that all people long to improve conditions for their heirs.

"There are deep human dreams which you can see shared across cultures to simply want one's descendants to have a better life, to want one's family to continue," Amrith told Thompson. "I do see that there is a progression in human beings' ability and power to mold their surroundings, to make those surroundings more hospitable or more habitable for the human societies.

"I think we need to bring the environment into everything, not just into environmental history, but I think we need to be thinking about these questions across our humanities curriculum," Amrith added. "I mean, in that sense, that's partly what I was trying to do with *The Burning Earth*, which was to say, let's not separate the environmental story from perhaps more familiar stories about the rise and fall of empires, about unfree labor, about migration, about global transformations. And I think more broadly, that's what I would love to see happen, which is a kind of weaving in of the more-than-human, the planet, the ecology into how we study literature, into how we study philosophy."

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Angela Flournoy

Monday, March 23, 2026

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Angela Flournoy's debut novel, *The Turner House*, started out with a single character, Lelah, the youngest member of the Turner family. But having just one character didn't fit Flournoy's own experiences.

"I come from a very big family," Flournoy told PBS NewsHour Correspondent Jeffery Brown in 2015. "The more I started to think about what her life was like and who shapes her experiences, the more it just felt right to include a big cast of characters and a lot of voices. I think there's something very specific – it really influences the person you become – when you're one of such a large network of people."

A faculty member with the MFA program at Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, North Carolina, Flournoy also is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. *The Turner House* was shortlisted for the National Book Award and the PEN/Robert W. Bingham Award for debut fiction in 2015.

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Flournoy was doing a mundane, workaday task when she heard about the National Book Award nomination.

"I had just sorted my clothes to take them to the laundromat, and my phone started going nuts in my back pocket," she told Nate Brown for *American Short Fiction* in 2015. "Someone on Twitter had tweeted I was on the National Book Award list. I dropped the bag of laundry and screamed. I'm not a writer who pins their hopes on outside recognition, and especially not on national award attention, so I shocked myself by how happy I was. Before then, I'd felt like my book had already done better than I could hope for as a debut. Getting on the long list was over and above what I had thought was even possible."

The Turner House is set in Detroit in 2008 as a family struggles with an ailing matriarch and a home that has lost its value. The house also appears to be haunted.

The political history of Detroit, including the migration of Blacks from Arkansas to Michigan and the city's then crumbling infrastructure, are also elements in the story.

Flournoy told the *Paris Review*'s Jeffrey Gleaves in 2015 that after starting with Lelah, she drew from a house similar in condition and geography to her father's childhood home on the east side of Detroit.

"I remember thinking, what is the future of this house?" Flournoy said. "But then, obviously, a house is only as important as the people and the relationships within it. Coming from several large families, I thought that showing the various opinions about what should be done with the house would highlight how difficult the situation really is. I wanted to show how so much can change in one generation."

In an interview with Deesha Philyaw for *The Rumpus* in 2016, Flournoy said she was immune to writing a follow-up. (Her second novel, *The Wilderness*, is scheduled to be published in September 2025).

Nor did she feel overt pressure to succeed because of race.

"I don't think I need to succeed so that the race can succeed," Flournoy said. "We've seen that. We've been succeeding since we were sneaking to learn how to read. We've been showing ourselves to be exceptional, and it doesn't change anything.

"I understand that burden; I do not feel that burden. I feel the burden on the page when writing a story to do justice to the Black people I am rendering, but I don't necessarily believe that my successes or failure will have some greater impact on the way that people view Black people."

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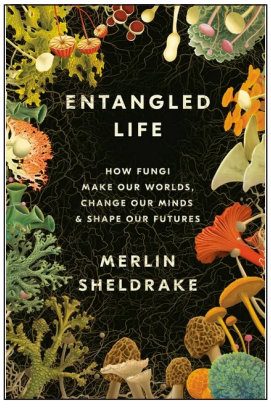
Merlin Sheldrake

Monday, April 13, 2026



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Mention fungus to most people and you'll likely get a discomforting or negative reaction.

There are reasons for that.

According to mycologist and writer Merlin Sheldrake, unlike China, Japan, and the eastern world, the West has been slow to understand fungi. And it wasn't until recently that technologies allowed a full investigation of fungal elements once invisible to the naked eye.

"There is an entrenched disciplinary bias," Sheldrake told Rachel Cooke of *The Guardian* in 2020. "Fungi weren't seen as their own kingdom of life until the '60s. Mycologists were put in a corner of the plant sciences department, rather than in their own fungal sciences department. This had a huge impact – if you're not training researchers, it will be neglected.

"It's as if we could only see the flowers

and fruit of a tree, and not the rest of it: its leaves, stems, and roots."

Sheldrake is the author of *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds, & Shape Our Futures*. He has a Ph.D. in tropical ecology from Cambridge University for his work on underground fungal networks in tropical forests in Panama and is a research associate of Oxford University and the Vrije University Amsterdam. Sheldrake is currently the 2025 Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Human Rights and Global Justice at NYU.

In a 2021 conversation with writer Edward St. Aubyn for Lit Hub, Sheldrake said he's tried to view fungi from a new angle.

"When thinking about the living world, I feel like I have a responsibility to try to step outside my human-centered perspective," Sheldrake said. "Even if my attempts to see the world from a fungal point of view are doomed to failure, I feel that it's good manners to try. We won't be able to understand fungal lives unless we start thinking about the worlds that they're exposed to from their point of view."

What would that be like? It would be beyond any human experience, he told Jennifer Kahn for the *New York Times* in 2023.

To start, imagine life without a head, a heart, or centers of operations.

"If you could taste with your whole body," Sheldrake said during an interview with Kahn, "if you could take a fragment of your toe or your hair and it would grow into a new you – and hundreds of these new yous could fuse together into some impossibly large togetherness. And when you wanted to get around, you would produce spores, this little condensed part of you that could travel in the air."

Sheldrake says that one way to change human relationships is through how the world is addressed. Instead of referring to a rock or a tree as a *thing*, he told Ayana Young of the For the Wild podcast, it's better to refer to them as *you*.

"By honoring the entity as a locus of experience, by calling it a you, and by putting yourself into direct relationship, by using the second person, all sorts of wonderful things start to happen," Sheldrake told Young in 2024. "And it's quite subtle, but can be quite, quite amazing how it just changes the tone of one's engagement. So, it's not that we expected the stone or the pine tree to understand our human language. But it was more an exercise to remind ourselves that humans aren't the only organisms worth addressing, that we live in a world of relationship and interrelation, and a world of communication.

Michael Chabon

Monday, May 11, 2026

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He's written about comic books and was transformed into a cartoon character on *The Simpsons*. He's penned scripts for the *Star Trek: Picard* series and co-authored lyrics for the Mark Ronson album *Uptown Special*.

He's also won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, in 2001, for *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*.

Michael Chabon, a University of Pittsburgh graduate, is one of the most versatile and diverse American writers working today. His novels, from the adventurous romp of *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* to the comic book artists in *Kavalier & Clay* to *Telegraph Avenue*'s vinyl record enthusiasts, have a dynamic range rarely found in contemporary literature.

Story ideas, Chabon told Killian Fox for *The Guardian* in 2012, are the easy part. "I spend a lot of time batting them

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away, trying to keep them from distracting me from what I actually have to focus on and finish," Chabon said. "A lot of times they are a siren temptress beckoning me with the promise of a much shorter, simpler, more slender novel over the horizon, but of course that's very dangerous."

Chabon's teachers through the years included the late Chuck Kinder, who taught him at Pitt and was supposedly the inspiration for the character Grady Tripp in *Wonder Boys*. But he also learned from popular music, notably from the band Steely Dan and its songwriters, Donald Fagen and Walter Becker.

"For example, in (the song) 'Reelin' in the Years,' the person he's singing to, are they ex-lovers? Are they friends and one of their lives hasn't turned out that well? Is it a girl who the male singer is singing to?" Chabon mused in an interview with Dexter Kaufmann of WCBN-FM in 2022. "Trying to figure that stuff out from the clues in the lyrics and the diction, I learned a lot about writing from that, and you can hear the Steely Dan influence creeping into my work. In the book *Wonder Boys*, it has a little reference to *Any Major Dude Will Tell You*. Crabtree and Tripp spend hours trying to decide what was meant by the lyric about the squonk's tears."

Baseball also has been a touchstone for Chabon. In both *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* and *Wonder Boys*, there are references to Forbes Field, the baseball stadium that was once in the heart of the Oakland section of Pittsburgh.

"I have always been drawn to lost worlds, lost paradises, lost cities, etc., maybe because my father grew up a Dodgers fan in Brooklyn in the lost world of the forties," Chabon told ESPN's Rob Neyer in 2024. "Whatever the reason, I was entranced by the idea that there had once been a huge (remarkably beautiful) ballpark right in the middle of Pittsburgh, a place where Wagner and Kiner and Mazeroski and Clemente had played, which was gone forever. It made that part of Pittsburgh seem forever haunted to me, and somehow bereft."

Despite Chabon's distinct interests, literature remains his calling. He told Erin Barnett for the Electric Literature newsletter in 2018 that it's the one art form that places you in "someone else's shoes."

"It only works – that's *how* it works – by putting you into the mind and the experience of another," Chabon said. "When you pick up a novel, and start reading – whether it's the character living in a time, living in a place, living in a set of circumstances that are completely alien from those that you live in, or whether the author his or herself is writing from a completely different experience – as soon as you immerse yourself in the narrative, as a reader, you are living another life, another person's life. And there is only one way to do that that we've ever invented, in the whole history of the human race, and that's through literature."

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Gellman, Rabbi Marc	1/22/2001
Gergen, David	9/11/2000
Gilbert, Elizabeth	9/21/2009
Gilbert, Martin	10/28/1991,
	11/4/1996
Gilligan, Carol	11/10/2003
Gjelten, Tom	1/23/1995
Golden, Arthur	1/23/2006
Goodall, Jane	4/1/1996
Goodwin, Doris Kearns	4/5/1993
Goodwin, Doris Kearns	10/29/2019
Gordon, Mary	3/23/1992
Gould, Stephen Jay	3/3/1997
Gray, Spalding	4/2/2001

Greene, Brian	4/4/2005, 11/23/2020
Greider, William	2/3/1997
Groff, Lauren	2/20/2017
Gross, Linda	1/20/1992
Gurnah, Abdulrazak	9/15/2022
Gyasi, Yaa	12/6/2021
Halberstam, David	1/10/2000
Hamid, Mohsin	3/26/2018
Hamill, Pete	1/27/2003
Harjo, Joy	3/27/2023
Hartman, Msgr Thomas	1/22/2001
Hiaasen, Carl	10/16/2000
Hillerman, Tony	11/2/1998
Hoffman, Alice	1/22/2007
Hoving, Thomas	12/7/1992
Hylton, Antonia	9/10/2025
Irving, John	10/25/2004
Isaacson, Walter	11/25/2003
Isenberg, Nancy	9/25/2017
Ishiguro,Kazuo	10/9/1995
Ivins, Molly	5/4/1992, 1/14/2002
Iyer, Pico	9/30/2024
Jaffrey, Madhur	11/1/2010
Jones, Judith	4/6/2009
Jones, Tayari	11/19/2018
Jong, Erica	11/16/1998
Karr, Mary	10/4/2010
Keefe, Patrick Radden	12/12/2022
Keillor, Garrison	12/1/1997, 9/29/2003
Kendi, Ibram X	10/14/2019
Kennedy, William	1/6/1992
Kerry, Sen. John	10/5/1997
Keyes, Alan	11/29/1999
Kidd, Sue Monk	4/10/2006
Kidder, Tracy	2/21/2011, 3/25/2024
Kimmerer, Robin Wall	4/11/2022
Kincaid, Jamaica	11/24/1997
King, Lily	11/16/2020
King, Stephen	3/11/1996
Kingsolver, Barbara	11/6/1995
Kingston, Maxine Hong	2/23/2004
Koestenbaum, Wayne	1/13/2003
Kolbert, Elizabeth	3/3/2008, 11/16/2015, 5/12/2025
Kozol, Jonathan	11/7/1994
Kuang, R.F.	4/28/2025
Kushner, Rabbi Harold	12/3/2001
Lahiri, Jhumpa	11/20/2006
Lalami, Laila	10/26/2020
Lamott, Anne	3/11/2002
Lawrence-Lightfoot, Sara	1/22/1996
Leavitt, David	1/24/1994
Lee, Min Jin	4/1/2019
Lepore, Jill	1/14/2019
Lessing, Doris	10/26/1994
Lin, Maya	2/26/1996
Lively, Penelope	9/29/1996
Lockwood, Patricia	2/20/2023
Lopez, Barry	3/25/1996, 2/8/2010
Love, Susan	2/24/1997
Luiselli, Valeria	3/11/2019
Macaulay, David	4/5/1999, 11/17/2008
Macdonald, Helen	1/30/2017
Machado, Carmen Maria	1/20/2020
Maguire, Gregory	4/5/2010
Mailer, Norman	11/12/1991
Makkai, Rebecca	12/11/2023
Mandel, Emily St John	2/15/2016
Martel, Yann	3/21/2011
Mason, Bobbie Ann	1/13/2003
Mattheissen, Peter	4/10/1995
Mayes, Frances	10/30/2000
McBride, James	11/4/2002
McCourt, Frank	3/29/1999, 3/31/1999, 3/6/2006
McCullough, David	6/22/1992
McMillan, Terry	6/8/1992
McMurtry, Larry	9/25/1994
Millard, Candice	10/24/2022
Miller, Arthur	3/1/1999
Miller, Madeline	10/8/2001, 11/11/2019
Miller, Sue	11/19/2001
Min, Anchee	4/23/2003
Mitchell, David	11/2/2015
Momaday, N. Scott	4/8/2002
Moore, Lorrie	10/5/2009
Mortimer, John	3/20/1995
Moshfegh, Ottessa	2/19/2019
Mosley, Watler	11/20/2000
Mukherjee, Siddhartha	9/26/2016
Nafisi, Azar	9/24/2007
Nguyen, Viet Thanh	4/9/2018
Niffenegger, Audrey	3/22/2010
Nordan, Lewis	1/13/1997
Nunez, Sigrid	9/23/2019
Oates, Joyce Carol	11/11/1992, 9/24/2018
O'Brien, Edna	5/26/1992
O'Farrell, Maggie	11/22/2021
Okri, Ben	11/23/1993
Ologboni, Tejoula (TEJU)	1/20/1992
Ondaatje, Michael	4/6/2020
Orange, Tommy	2/10/2020
Orlean, Susan	10/9/2006
O'Rourke, P.J.	9/27/2004
Orringer, Julie	11/22/2021
Ossana, Diana	9/24/1994
Ozeki, Ruth	3/13/2023
Pamuk, Orhan	10/8/2007

Paretsky, Sara	2/18/2008
Parks, Suzan-Lori	2/6/2006
Patchett, Ann	10/22/2007, 10/7/2016
Patterson, James	12/8/2003
Pearl, Mariane	2/21/2005
Pepin, Jacques	12/4/2006
Philbrick, Nathaniel	11/19/2007
Pinker, Steven	10/7/2002
Plimpton, George	3/1/1993, 9/27/1999
Pollan, Michael	3/5/2007
Potok, Chaim	11/8/1999
Powers, Richard	12/9/2019
Prose, Francine	4/3/2000
Quindlen, Anna	9/30/2002
Rakoff, David	3/25/2002
Rehm, Diane	11/14/2016
Reich, Robert	10/22/2001
Reichl, Ruth	10/26/2015
Richardson, Heather Cox	10/28/2024
Roberts, Cokie	11/8/1993
Rodriguez, Richard	1/11/1993
Russell, Karen	2/22/2021
Russo, Richard	10/20/2008, 11/20/2017
Rybczynski, Witold	2/6/1995
Sapolsky, Robert	3/20/2006
Sapphire	2/7/2011
Satrapi, Marjane	3/30/2009
Saunders, George	3/21/2022
Schama, Simon	1/8/1996
Schieffer, Bob	12/6/2004
Schiff, Stacy	4/4/2011
Schlosser, Eric	9/26/2005
Schorr, Daniel	2/1/1999
Sebold, Alice	10/27/2003
Sedaris, David	10/18/1999, 4/2/2007
Shaara, Jeff	11/13/2006
Sheehy, Gail	4/20/1992
Shields, Carol	10/5/1998
Shortz, Will	12/1/2008
Simon, Neil	10/7/1996
Simon, Scott	3/17/2008
Smiley, Jane	3/9/1998
Smith, Alexander McCall	11/7/2005
Smith, Anna Deavere	1/11/1999
Smith, Clint	11/7/2022
Smith, Patti	10/10/2016
Smith, Zadie	9/18/2023
Sobel, Dava	11/21/2005
Solomon, Andrew	12/7/2015
Sontag, Susan	9/21/1992
Sorkin, Andrew Ross	11/15/2010
Steinam, Gloria	10/4/1999
Stern, Isaac	11/8/1999
Stevenson, Bryan	1/25/2016
Strout, Elizabeth	12/5/2016
Stuart, Douglas	1/24/2022
Styron, William	9/19/1993
Tan, Amy	10/20/1992
Tannen, Deborah	3/19/2007
Terkel, Studs	1/10/1994
Theroux, Paul	10/19/2009
Thurow, Lester	2/9/2004
Tobar, Hector	9/21/2015
Tobias, Andrew	11/10/1997
Tóibín, Colm	9/16/2024
Totenberg, Nina	10/24/2005
Treuer, David	1/18/2021
Trillin, Calvin	9/14/1998
Turow, Scott	12/9/1996, 10/13/2003
Updike, John	3/15/1999
Uris, Leon	9/15/1997
Urrea, Luis Alberto	10/8/2018
Verghese, Abraham	11/13/2023
von Hoffman, Nicholas	2/1/1993
Vonnegut, Kurt	3/2/1992
Vowell, Sarah	3/25/2002
Vuong, Ocean	3/22/2021
Walcott, Derek	10/19/1998
Waldman, Ayelet	2/5/2007
Walker, Alice	3/24/1997
Ward, Jesmyn	5/13/2024
Wasserstein, Wendy	1/12/1998
Watson, James	2/4/2002
Weil, Andrew	12/5/2005
Weldon, Fay	4/6/1998
Whitehead, Colson	2/19/2007, 10/24/2016
Wideman, John Edgar	10/18/1993
Wiesel, Elie	12/13/1995
Wilkerson, Isabel	5/9/2022
Will, George	9/16/1996
Williams, Terry Tempest	11/8/2004, 10/12/2020, 5/12/2025
Wills, Garry	11/1/1999
Wilson, August	3/20/2000
Wilson, Edward O.	3/30/1998
Wofford, Harris	10/4/1992
Wolf, Naomi	2/2/2001
Wolfe, Tom	10/20/1997, 11/2/2009
Wolff, Tobias	10/11/2004
Woodward, Bob	12/4/2000
Wright, Lawrence	11/8/2021
Yamanaka, Lois-Ann	2/19/2001
Yanagihara, Hanya	5/8/2023
Yong, Ed	4/29/2024
Young, Damon	12/7/2020
Yu, Charles	10/18/2021
Zakaria, Fareed	2/10/2003