

* * * * *

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) is provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility. CART captioning and this realtime file may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings.

* * * *

>> Novella Ford: Good evening from New York City. I'm grateful to share this virtual space with you, so thank you for being was for Live from NYPL at Home. My name is Novella Ford. Our research center at the public library dedicated to the collection, preservation and interpretation of materials focused on global black experiences. I, tonight have the distinct pleasure of introducing tonight's program with two best-selling authors, Tayari Jones and Terry McMillan. Terry's new book is "It's Not All Downhill from Here." It is filled with her signature warmth, wisdom and deep seeded friendships and humor. My conversations between my then-16-year-old self and my aunt Willa as I made through her earlier work, "Waiting to Exhale." I know there are some throughout who understand that journey.

Terry McMillan was scheduled to speak twice at the public library, at the June festival, which has been postponed, but we look forward to sharing a new date. While we were so disappointed not being able to host her in person, we are so grateful that she and Tayari Jones decided to migrate this event online. You can purchase "It's Not All Downhill from Here" through the NYPL shop. You can go to NYPL.org/shop. While you're waiting for your book to arrive, check out Terry and Tayari on e-reader. Get our library card on our app. Visit our website, www.NYPL.org and all of our digital materials are available there starting from the home page.

Before I invite Terry and Tayari, there are a few housekeeping things I have to go over. If you incoherer any technical difficulties during the conversation, bear with us and we will sort it out as quickly as possible. I should tell you this event is being recorded, but only the event that is Terry and Tayari. You are not being recorded, but you can close out of Zoom or close the Youtube page at any time. Terry will be glad to answer some of your questions and you can send them to her any time during the conversation. If you have a question type it into the Q&A box, which is at the bottom of the Zoom app. We'll make sure that Terry sees them although she may not have time to answer everything, she will get through as many as possible. Please welcome Tayari Jones and Terry McMillan.

>> Tayari Jones: Well, I am so delighted to be here to talk to you, Terry, but for the last 20 years, you have been my best friend in my

head.

>> Terry McMillan: Stop.

>> Tayari Jones: I'm series. I am so delighted to talk about your new book, "It's Not All Downhill from Here." This is your 10th novel.

>> Terry McMillan: Is it? Don't count them.

>> Tayari Jones: Waiting to exhale.

>> Terry McMillan: They are not like kids.

>> Tayari Jones: I'm glad you said that, people say to me, are your books your children? No, they are my art.

>> Terry McMillan: Yeah.

>> Tayari Jones: This book is such a triumph. I got to read it when I was in early edition and I tore through it in a day and a half and I gave it to the lady at the post office and she tore through it in a day and a half. A new Terry McMillan novel is essential, especially now. This book gave me something to fall into.

I want to talk about it in more detail, but I wonder if you will start off by reading to us a little bit. Please.

>> Terry McMillan: I can see you clearly now. You know I have been a fan of yours, honey. I wish I could do what you do. I'm starting at the beginning here, huh. this is quick. Hi, everybody.

I don't want to know the surprise party, which is one reason why a few weeks ago when my husband called when I was walking our dog B. B. King to the dog park and asked what I wanted to do for my birthday, I said let's figure out how to get our second wind. He chuckled and I chuckled back even though I was as serious as a heart attack. I knew he didn't get my drift. Bounce we have more days behind us than ahead of us, how about we try to figure out what we can do to pump up the volume? It is not like our life is boring. Well, maybe it is. A little. We don't do very many things in that generate excitement; I love him more than Twizzlers. He is a retired contractor who refuses to retire and I don't qualify as a thrill a minute either.

I released B. B. King inside of the dog park, but he sat there and shivered. In human years, he and I will soon be the same age, 68. His whiskers and eyebrows are peppered with gray, but he doesn't dye his hair. he is our third German shepherd and I don't want to think about when it will be when he can't hop in the back of our Volvo station wagon until like me it stops running.

I realized I was hoping and praying I wasn't going to have to sit through another lackluster party and nobody thinks about dancing that you have to be 70 to remember, and that includes me and that includes doing the Cha, Cha, Cha with 2-inch rubber soles to a different beat. I watch music videos on Youtube and I rock my future-size 12 hips and popping my fingers to the likes of "Single Ladies" or "Uptown Funk" by that cute Bruno Mars. I forgot how to dance. Carl will lean back in his recliner and watch me in my 3-inch heels they wear to work because I like to feel glamorous. I feel pretty and sexy and 40. He agreeing until his smile begins to disappear and he might hold up his index finger and slowly push his way up to a standing position and limp down the hallway to take one of his little blue pills. Oh, hell. Here I go again. I will have to stop apologizing for it because from what I have been reading, in my AARP newsletter this is only the beginning. Forgetting what I was talking about and going on tangents isn't Tuesday to me.

Back in my 20's, I smoked a lot of reefer with my friends and we would talk about how we are going change the world but then we stop talking because we were mesmerized by the lava lamp and then someone would realize they are one minute away from freaking out and snap out of it and then they would say what the fuck that we were talking about? We did not have a include, but thank God, I liked the way I felt when I was not in the influence of anything. When I didn't like how I felt, it was a hell a lot easier to deal with it when my head was clear.

>> Tayari Jones: Thank you. That was fantastic. Did you record the audio book yourself?

>> Terry McMillan: Yes.

>> Tayari Jones: That is awesome.

>> Terry McMillan: I never listen to my audio books, because I don't like my voice. I sound like a man.

>> Tayari Jones: It is a great audio book. You did a great job.

>> Terry McMillan: Thanks anyway.

>> Tayari Jones: Let's talk a little bit about the book. I don't think it is a spoil to say this is a story of a woman who lost her husband.

>> Terry McMillan: Nope, it is not a spoiler.

>> Tayari Jones: I was quite shocked by it when I read it. I was cruising along, preparing for her birthday party and her adorable husband and I felt like I was as shocked as she was when he died so suddenly in the first chapter.

>> Terry McMillan: Me too.

>> Tayari Jones: Tell me more.

>> Terry McMillan: I didn't know that was going to happen. I don't have this stuff planned out. I don't plot my books. I don't know what is going to happen in this chapter or that chapter, but when they get to the resort and she is looking at the chocolates and the champagne and stuff and she fell across the bed, I just said oh, shoot. I started crying and I kept writing and when she wakes up, she goes to that stairwell and you know, I was a mess. I was a mess. I was thinking, what is she going to do now? What is she going to do without him?

I mean, you know, of course I'm in charge here, but the bottom line is I'm not in charge. It wasn't from me. You know that. We are not in charge. I was like, you know what, there he was and I was a mess. I cried like a baby.

>> Tayari Jones: I was moved by it, too, he was a solid man. He is not an overly romanticized man, but this is your talent, they don't seem like they jumped out of a television show. They don't seem like actors. They seem like people. When he died, I felt like that is a good person that died. I did ask myself, what is she going to do and this is a story about loss and repair.

>> Terry McMillan: Yeah, maybe recovery, same thing I guess.

>> Tayari Jones: Different, I think recovery is better.

>> Terry McMillan: Well, I put it this way there are a lot of things that happen in our lives that we don't anticipate it and it can change everything, it is not always death. It could be a pandemic. Someone could hurt your feelings and change everything, tell you something you didn't want to know, but I think more than anything, I was also interested in, I mean because my big question is what is she going to do now? What is she going to do now? I was like, I do not know. I thank you I knew who she was and I kind of know my characters, you know, what their idiosyncrasies are and what lifts them and what makes them fall, but this is different. As you know, that is the beauty of what we do. I don't know. If I did know, I would not waste my time.

>> Tayari Jones: I think what is so intriguing about your work is how dedicated you are writing the contemporary moment. It seems like your muse is the moment you're in, your characters are going through life at the same pace that you are. Loretha is turning 68 years old this year. I know a lot of writers have found, as people say their ministries are writing the stories that our grandmothers couldn't or wouldn't tell. I think that is important, but I think if I'm writing my grandmother's story and my granddaughter is writing my story. At

what point, are we going to write it forward? I feel like you're a great example of writing the right now. What is it to you?

>> Terry McMillan: I don't know. I don't think of it that way. I think about what is bothering me at the moment and sometimes it is timely. I just turned 68, but also you know, I have lost a lot of friends and family members who are younger than I am and you know my thing is how do you start over? How do you start over when you didn't know you had to and especially later in life. How do you know life is not over at 50, 60, 70? It is not over. I want to live to the last minute and break the rules and all of that and to some extent, I didn't create Loretha, she is not me. I wish I could be her, more like her, do you know what I mean? A lot of times, tragic things happen to us, I don't like to play games with my readers.

>> Tayari Jones: I feel like this is a story when something tragic happens, but it is not a tragic something. It is a story of great hope and it is a story of humor. I mean, come on there is a dog named B. B. King.

>> Terry McMillan: Yes.

>> Tayari Jones: And her mama calls her Otis Redding.

>> Terry McMillan: There is always humor in my books. I can be depressed by myself. I do not write to depress, do not. It does not mean that we don't experience different types of tragedies and there is sadness in our lives and I'm interested in writing about recovery at all levels, because when you fall you have to get back up. My mother used to say that. Don't be crying all of the time.

>> Tayari Jones: You know how some people say laugh to keep from crying, in your book, they don't laugh because there is actual joy. Things work out, but they have to work for it. Can you tell us a little bit about Loretha and her twin sister?

>> Terry McMillan: Oh, honey.

>> Tayari Jones: they are fraternal twins. How does that work?

>> Terry McMillan: There are no twins in my family. I write because I want empathize for those and her sister, I did not like her. She you know they are twin, but they are not really twins. They are born on a different day, a different year, but I believe, too, sometimes families, you have family members that you don't necessarily get along. In some cases, I know family members that don't like each other and I like that idea, but they love each other, but sometimes it is hard to a lot of people even when they are in your family.

>> Tayari Jones: I'm surprised you say you don't like her. I can see

why some people may not like her, but you don't write with a judgmental pen. You write people the way people are and it is almost like the book provides them a safe space to be themselves, so as a reader, we get to see -- you know how --

>> Terry McMillan: She is a bitch.

>> Tayari Jones: Some people are, but I felt like you encouraged me to get her, to understand her.

>> Terry McMillan: So did it. I didn't write her, like, I tried and I ended up loving her. She surprised me. I said she has a heart that really beats.

>> Tayari Jones: I saw it from the beginning. A Terry McMillan novel would not be a Terry McMillan novel if there was not a story about friends.

>> Terry McMillan: I had friends like them, but we don't do the things that they do. I created a fantasy where they all have different personalities, they were friends from high school, I don't know anybody from high school, few of them, but I wanted them to lead different lives, but they still respected and admired and loved each other and they were more like sisters and they were closer to each other than their own siblings, because they didn't have to be pretentious. They can be honest when they were hurt or blue or when something tragic happened in their lives, they knew they could depend on each other.

I have friends that I have known 25-30 years, you know, one of my BFF, she was there when my son was born in New York and you know, I was like, Val, do we go back -- yes, we go back that far, but we -- I don't know. I've got some friends in my life that we trust each other and that's what is important. We respect each other, because all of us no matter how old you are, you will go through some stuff that will be difficult to handle, sometimes we keep secrets talent are certain people you know you can tell your secrets to and they will not judge you. Even if they do judge you, it is not going to be forever.

>> Tayari Jones: That is the feeling, yes, the safe space to be your authentic self. This book is as about parenting, parenting adult children and I think that is an under explored subject and it is about being the sandwich generation with the mother and the adult children and there is Loretha in the middle.

>> Terry McMillan: I will put it this way, I know of and I read families where their children don't live up to their expectations and sometimes they are disappointed in their children and sometimes there are reasons for it. I have known, not so much of my family, but I have known about mental illness in our families. Back when I remember, it

was a shameful thing. You would not dream to go talk to a psychologist as an African American. Sometimes they just give you a pill or you self medicate and I wanted to explore that because sometimes we judge each other too harshly and mental illness is a big deal everywhere, not just in our communities.

Now, I think we have started to accept the fact it is not a weakness or a character defect. It is an illness and there are things we can do to manage it and don't be ashamed of it. There is nothing to be ashamed of. Nothing.

>> Tayari Jones: One of the important things too, is that your work, I read on the back flap of this book that every one of your novels has become a New York Times seller.

>> Terry McMillan: No, they haven't. That is a lie.

>> Tayari Jones: It is a lie I like, because I'm thinking of the sheer popularity of your work helps to get the message out. There has been other topics about mental illness or substance abuse, but I feel like your work is in a format that it is accessible. I was reading this, but I did not feel like I was eating spinach or doing my homework. It made me want to turn the pages.

>> Terry McMillan: Thank you. That is very kind of you.

>> Tayari Jones: That is just the truth. You open -- I want to say, I want to complement you that one of the many ways you have open doors for other writers, you have reintroduced what I call the black page Turner. I just finished doing something for PBS published in 1948. It sold 1.5 million copies in 1948 and that was the first blockbuster by a black woman and it did not happen again until "Waiting to Exhale." It reminded --

>> Terry McMillan: I don't know if that is true.

>> Tayari Jones: A blockbuster like that, the short junkie --

>> Terry McMillan: What about "The Color Purple?"

>> Tayari Jones: That is a different kind of thing. Just take this love, girl. Take it. What I'm saying it was a contemporary story, which made it different than "The Color Purple" and everybody was reading. There was a thing where Baby Face was doing this with "waiting to exhale" and I was listening to the sound track. That was the sound track to my younger adult, but the book was a story track for a generation. It is true and I want you to thank you for it and opening for the door that so many of us have walked. I want to thank you in front of all the so many people that I can't see. Would you be willing to read a little bit more?

>> Terry McMillan: You're welcome. Don't make me cry.

>> Tayari Jones: Can't help it. You made us cry in such a good way.

>> Terry McMillan: I think there are a lot of good writers are out here and a lot of us don't give us permission to tell the way we want to see it, the way we want it to be and there are so many young writers out here who I just hope on their voices and the world that they either live in or want to live in or the one they perceive is something that they can own and honor. And tell it in their own voices that is what I, I mean I'm a voice person. Literally, I don't think New York Times is that crazy about me about a literary writer, but I don't care. Maybe I shouldn't have said that. There are a lot of writers who need to own their voices, so when I pick up book, I know Tayari wrote that book and people who pick up my book.

>> Tayari Jones: You know what is interesting, I got this cup, somebody sent it to me and you're on here and there is my mentor and there is me and you.

>> Terry McMillan: Yeah. Where did you get that cup?

>> Tayari Jones: This woman makes them. She mailed it to me and she makes socks like this and bags. She is on Etsy. I put this on Twitter. I was proud to show it off and I asked people if they could identify the people on the mug, I see California even Cooper and Bernice and you recognized them, I've met them. I was like yes, you are a witness. What do you think has changed over the course of your career and what has stayed the same?

>> Terry McMillan: In my career? I don't know about all of that, I don't really know. All I know is that I just wish there was more of us. I wish like the young sisters that wrote "The Hate You Give" that is powerful. I just want us to tell our stories, especially, not because of the pandemic, but there are young people who are going through what we didn't go through, what I didn't go through. I want to know what their problems are, their issue, what they wish for that they don't have, how different their lives are than what they thought it should be and what their dreams are. I want to know and that is all I did. I basically was sort of like, I don't know, I sort of documented what it was like to be 32 in New York City to some extent or growing up or what was like to raise five kids.

I didn't know what that felt like, so I just wished because there are so many of us out here and our lives are different and what the young people are going through, we didn't necessarily go through it. Love is the same, I don't care how old, ethnicity, color, none of it. I want them to be braver and document what it is they see or what they wish they could see or do and not be afraid of it, because so many young

people seem so strong and all of this, and I just feel I want to see how vulnerable they really are and own it and get passed it, but I will read this little section. This is one of my favorites.

>> Tayari Jones: Please do.

>> Terry McMillan: This is quick.

I thought I was borderline to the doctor, are you sure? She looked like she was about to roll her eyes and changed her mind. Numbers tell us everything. I don't want to take any pills. You don't necessarily have to take medications; there are injections you can give yourself. Was she nuts? I am scared as hell of needles. My mom had to hold me down when I was a kid and I kicked a few doctors in the process. You have to do one or the other, either will help you lose weight. I believe I have lost 8 or 9 pounds. You did not. In fact, you gained 12. I do not like this bitch. My husband passed away and I got derailed. So I lied. I hoped if Carl was listening, he would forgive me. I understand, she said and I'm sorry for your loss. The receptionist told me I was the reason that you canceled your last two appointments, but you need to focus on your health now. Since I was sitting on the edge of the examination table, I started pulling on the tissue paper and I jumped off and stood off right. She moved to the side as if I'm going to hammer. Look, I said, I don't mean to sound combative, I heard of people reversing type II diabetes if you change your eating habits and exercise. I have tried to convince you for the last two years, but you're not taking my advice. I have tried, I lied. The truth is it don't like exercising. I don't like to sweat and I like being lazy. I suppose it really was time to make a change. It is not too late, is it? It depends. Your age may make it a little tougher. I could have cut her the way I looked at it. What does my age have to do with anything? It is not like I have stage three cancer. A burst of cool air made her hair on her head waft to the side. I can see her pink scalp.

I apologize she said with half an ounce of sincerity. It is OK, I have never really trusted you, if you know the truth. You doctors are all alike. You like to scare the hell out of people, you don't cure the problem. You postpone it. I'm going to find a doctor who has a better attitude about how a person can improve their health regardless how old they are. I will show her ass and I will come back when my numbers prove her wrong, not starting today, because what I need was a double cheeseburger, soft fries, a Diet Coke and three Twizzlers. After all, I need to process the promise I just made to myself. She is so full of shit.

>> Tayari Jones: That is a humorous scene, but it is a about a serious issue.

>> Terry McMillan: Now, I can't see.

>> Tayari Jones: Here I am. It is a humorous scene about a serious issue there is a lot of talk about health.

>> Terry McMillan: And fat shaming, you gain a couple of pounds and people think you're obese. I was almost guilty of it at first and it was brought to my attention.

>> Tayari Jones: It does seem that people pretend to be concerned about your health, but they just don't like the way you're look. They say it is your health, but they don't care if you do other things that are unhealthy, but Loretha and her friends take up walking. It is like the balance of caring for your Hale and not being -- not giving into the idea that you must look a certain way.

>> Terry McMillan: They decided also that they were going to do whatever is necessary. One of the women friends she is like 6'1" and she teaches, what is it called -- Silver Sneakers, she teaches a hip-hop class and she has been trying to get her friends to come in there and they resist up until, it takes a while for that to happen. I mean the one thing I do know is nobody is trying to look 50, you know and my attitude at 68, I'm not trying to look 55 or 60. I know how old I am and the bottom line is all I want to do is to slide into home instead of being a contributor to my own death based on my negligence.

Right now, I'm having a good time and I walked a hill yesterday, but it was hard to sit down today.

[LAUGHTER]

>> Tayari Jones: I feel like they are so much fun, what about when they go to Vegas?

>> Terry McMillan: Oh, the one thing I do know is these characters there's is a Ying and Yang. You can marry somebody, but certain things that he does piss you off, but you tolerate that. These friends are like that. One doesn't drink. One doesn't want to do this. One is a closet lesbian and they have to bring it out by making her go to a strip club, but they love each other and they know each other's faults and idiosyncrasies and shortcomings and their virtues. They know all of that and try to give each other a little kick, which is what good friends do. If you have a friend that has been drinking too much, you say something.

>> Tayari Jones: I wrote on a note card here, because I needed to remember what I wanted to say, this is not a book about aging, but a book about living.

>> Terry McMillan: People do think, technically after a certain age it is all downhill and that is how the title came to me. My mother died at 59 years old and when I turned at 59, I was like oh, my God. It

must be around the corner. I think that is one of the reasons why I haven't had a drink in 37 years, I don't eat sugar and I exercise. It is not because I'm trying to look like 50 or 60, I don't want to be responsible for my own demise and there are too many people in my life and my family that died tragically, and it was so unnecessary. Back then there were things that we didn't know, but now we know. We don't get a do over. If I can slide into home that is how I want to get there.

>> Tayari Jones: Even Loretha's husband didn't get a procedure that could have saved him.

>> Terry McMillan: People lie about a lot of things to make it go smoother, but it doesn't go smoother. You have to face it that is the bottom line, but at the same time, I will say this, I also believe in humor and that is one reason why I don't write books. I can be depressed all my days. I don't write to depress anybody, but I'm not trying to, I mean I'm not Oprah. I love Oprah. I know you love Oprah.

The thing is we all go through something and to me, a good novel, you know this, is how we get through things and that is what a good novel is. It does not mean it has to be a fairytale, but that's -- I get that out of every book, out of every book, when I close, I'm in tears. I'm a mess and I was thinking because I'm so happy for these characters that they got through this. They are trying to bullshit and skirt around it -- I'm sorry for swears.

>> Tayari Jones: It is just us.

>> Terry McMillan: You can't hide. You can't run. The longer you try to hide, the longer it is going to take you and it is going to chase you. I don't care what it is and that is one reason why I think that, you know, it is important that we be good people and treat ourselves with respect and everything that is going on now, and what we heard about today about the brother in Wisconsin or Minnesota, wherever it was, there is just things that make our lives valuable and all that is going on now that and the beauty of it, too, is how many of us are trying harder to take care of each other? It is beautiful to me how far a lot of us are willing to go for each other during this, some not so much. I don't know.

>> Tayari Jones: One of the things I wasn't wondering about the moment we're in, what are you doing to keep it together? I feel like I'm keeping it together, but I don't know how much longer I can keep it together, so what are you doing to keep it together in this crazy moment of history we're in?

>> Terry McMillan: I have been reading. I have been walking. I talk to my friends on the phone. We run our mouths and I'm watching a lot of CSI Miami and law and order.

>> Tayari Jones: You like to unwind with a little murder?

>> Terry McMillan: I like to solve murderers.

>> Tayari Jones: There is something satisfying about those shows, you figure them out and order is restored at the end.

>> Terry McMillan: A lot of times, I don't figure them out, but I love how smart some of them are. Law and order, criminal intent, I was in love with him.

>> Tayari Jones: This is how you solve anything on law and order, if there is a famous person on law and order, they did it. That is the rule.

>> Terry McMillan: The thing is it love, I think what I always liked about -- I like how they solve problems. I like how they go under and around and over and they say, got you.

>> Tayari Jones: You like criminal intent because he is like --

>> Terry McMillan: Back when the show was popular I liked it and now watching it because of the pandemic.

>> Tayari Jones: It is like nostalgic viewing. What are you reading? What son your night stand?

>> Terry McMillan: Good feminism, the travelers, I read short story, Tommy orange, I love him. He can write. I love his voice. There is this do not say we have nothing by Madeline.

>> Tayari Jones: I haven't read that.

>> Terry McMillan: She lives in Canada.

>> Tayari Jones: Canada writers, they are always talking about books that are not out yet. Today this has been out for a couple of years, 2016. It is so dense, but her writing, oh, my goodness. I read short stories and right now, I'm reading short stories from the south. I love short stories.

>> Tayari Jones: I love that.

>> Terry McMillan: Tell everyone to read this.

>> Tayari Jones: OK, from your lips to everybody today. Are you watching anything? I need more content. I am climbing the walls in this house. Are you listening to any podcasts?

>> Terry McMillan: I don't listen to a lot of podcasts, I mean, I don't listen to a lot of podcasts, I spend time -- I read -- I don't read as much as I would like to. I have about 100-125 pages on my new book.

>> Tayari Jones: That was my next question.

>> Terry McMillan: I started it a couple of years ago before this one and I was under the impression that it needed to sit some place for a while and I got some good advice about some of the problems and so I just put it aside. I thought it wasn't good and then I was corrected and I went back to it and I don't know. It is not like being in a relationship where you break up and you realize why you broke up and you still love that person and you go back and you realize this is all that is wrong and let's fix it, so that is what I did. I'm thrilled, but the pandemic is it can't worry about them because I'm worried about myself and all of us and it is hard to go there, but it is OK, because I have enough pages. I'm on a binge. I have a stackable bookshelves and I have one in my bedroom that is no that tall and I put all of these books that I'm determined to read, hopefully in the next two months and I just pull them out and that is where I got these when I thank you might ask me.

>> Tayari Jones: I'm trying to read short things, too. I can't read long things. Writing is easier when it is the most interesting thing happening and during this pandemic, I'm so panicky about the world. I'm like I'm in your house, you're in your house, other people are out being racist, what is happening?

>> Terry McMillan: I will put it this way, I mean I just feel like we shouldn't be going through this. I don't want to start preaching here, but I just think a lot of us are going to be stronger and closer, a lot of us are clearer headed about what is important, what is not important. We know what is not our fault and I think some of us, especially when it comes to voting will realize how much power we do have and the love that we are showing for each other and the respect for our country and each other that's what I'm getting out of this. We are being kinder to each other, the people that are kind and that is what is going to ultimately be the beauty of what's ugly. It is not magical thinking. But we should not be going through what we're going through. People out here suffer enough. My bills are paid and I was thinking about people who can't pay their rent, who don't have a job anymore, maybe. I don't know, you know, and this is a major monumental test and I just feel that we're going, the majority of us are going to pass it and we see it every day. People are humble, they are scared, but they are humble and people are being kinder, except for some people who -- don't get me started. At any rate, we're going to get through this because I think we know what to see credits are.

>> Tayari Jones: Yes, I think we can rely on what our ancestors have

shown us.

>> Terry McMillan: I'm going to vote by mail that is all I can say.

>> Tayari Jones: Yes, we are going to vote by mail.

>> Terry McMillan: We have questions.

>> Tayari Jones: We have to vote and we all need to get someone else to vote. Here is a question for you, oh, this is a good question. What was your writing process from the idea of a book to the completed manuscript? How do you go about organizing your stories? You said you don't outline. I don't either. So you just let her rip and see what happens?

>> Terry McMillan: When it is a multiple character story, I figure out which characters are in the story, but the protagonist, the main character, I usually know there's a trigger there is something that makes me jump into this story and into this character's life right now, because I don't have all day to tell it. I'm worried about what this character is going through. I mean really worried, and the bottom line is it I always believed I don't try to write about characters who are perfect or who are victims. Victims to me are boring because it means they have no power. I write about characters who fall down and this story to some extent is how they are going to get back up, how are they going to get through whatever happened to them. I'm not writing a fairytale. I'm writing stuff that real characters go through.

>> Tayari Jones: How do you know you have finished?

>> Terry McMillan: Because they have evolved. Sometimes they don't get what they wanted, but they learned something and they are stronger and if it happened again, they would do it differently, but that usually doesn't happen. Something else happens and we're always tested and always tested and we get stronger as we get older if we learn what we have been through, so we don't make the same mistakes over and over again and lean on people.

>> Tayari Jones: That is the hardest thing to learn. Some people, just like in the book, are good at providing help, but they are not good at asking for help. Here is a sweet question, what is the best thing in your day?

>> Terry McMillan: I went for a nice walk, I mean a really nice walk and I don't live far from the Rose Bowl. I used to walk with another woman before the pandemic and we had to stop. I knew I was taking the easy route and something said, Terry, she showed you how to walk down the hill and how to get back up the hill, so I walked. When I walked to this hill, I walked down it and when I turned around to step back

up, it was killing me and I remembered what she said, Terry, turn around and walk backwards and I did up the hill. When that got a little hard and I turned and walked the other way and there were older people on the other side of the street. They were not walking backwards, but I could tell they lived in the neighborhood. I did it twice and I saw that street sign and I was like I made it.

>> Tayari Jones: Here is something lovely that happened to me. I face timed with the baby. The baby says good night to anything it perceives to have a blanket, so I had a towel on my shoulders because my hair was wet and he said good night and he says good night when he passes a barbecue grill, you know the cover over the he says, good night. Just an open-hearted baby, he says good night to the sofa with the throw over the sofa that is what I kept with me for three days, good night baby. We need to send more questions, question sender upper.

>> Terry McMillan: Has the pandemic affected your writing, yeah, I don't write.

>> Tayari Jones: Here comes more. Nobody told me about this glasses thing. Like three years ago, I couldn't see a damn thing. I don't know what happened. Here we go.

>> Terry McMillan: Which one.

>> Tayari Jones: I think about this one that says oh, OK, as a young writer, Ms. McMillan, how did you learn to step out of the way and allow your characters to speak no matter what their stories were, specifically when you mentioned their stories are not your stories?

>> Terry McMillan: First of all, you know one of the things that a lot of people thought about me that all of my stories are auto biographical. They are not. One maybe close, but even then I lie my butt off.

>> Tayari Jones: You create.

>> Terry McMillan: thank you, the whole thing with my ex-husband and stuff, the way I met him is true, but that is what a good novel is, it is a continuous lie or you tell the truth so it is believed, but -- what was the question again?

>> Tayari Jones: How do you get into stories that are not your own? In this book there are so many voices? How did you inhabit people of so many different experiences and I'm going to jump in and say what I love about this is how the people of so many different -- I'm going to hold the book up, so how many socioeconomic groups are in the book because that is a thing, I think about black life is there are so many people in a family, but how did you step into so many shoes?

>> Terry McMillan: I don't know.

>> Tayari Jones: You just did it. It is your gift.

>> Terry McMillan: I don't really know. I will put it this way, you can't -- I don't write fairytales, so I deliberately pick characters who rub each other the wrong way or don't understand each other, maybe not totally, I don't want to stay respect, but some people are more sympathetic, some are empathetic, some people have a sense of humor, some people aren't, some people are judgmental, some people are pushovers, so I through toy pick characters that have a good effect on each other and some cases a negative effect, but that effect, whatever it is that has something to do with what fuels a story. To me, every story is an unfulfilled wish and you want something and you can't get it and if it is love, if it is peace, if it is a job, if it is to lose a few pounds, if it is to feel good, whatever, there is something you want. Otherwise, I would be literary masturbation. They want something. Something is wrong with their lives and that is where I come in and they have to earn how this book ends. They have to earn it and I go right along with them. I never know how a book is going to end, ever, ever. I didn't know her husband was going to pass away and that was the first chapter. I was a mess. When she saw that cheese and the stuff on the table, I was already crying.

>> Tayari Jones: Don't forget the yellow gift box.

>> Terry McMillan: Oh, I was like, Lord have mercy.

>> Tayari Jones: Here is another question, Terry. The person says I appreciate that your catalog includes black women across women in time, will you go back and write younger characters and their center points or do you not have an interest in telling those tours?

>> Terry McMillan: I don't have an interest in telling those stories. Well, I don't know.

>> Tayari Jones: Never say never.

>> Terry McMillan: I have written something -- I have lots of stuff in here that I have written from a child's point of view, but not a novel. I don't -- I don't think my next book is going to be about somebody who is 72.

[LAUGHTER]

>> Tayari Jones: You never know.

>> Terry McMillan: I like writing from men's points of views, too. They don't get enough and I wish we had more male writers out here, straight and gay, whatever. We just need more male voices and there are not enough of them. There aren't. All ethnicities, we need more

men to write, because their feelings are important and, you know, their feelings are important, really important and not only will men understand some men better, women will understand some better and we did have quite a few back in the day, but we don't have very many now and I wish we did.

>> Tayari Jones: I think it is interesting in publishing, because women publish more books and men win more prizes. Women do the bulk of the reading and the writing, but men get the accolades. It is a strange kind of industry. They are going to send us out, so I'm going to ask you one last question. Let me see, which is the last question, so hard for me to choose. I guess I will ask you this is kind of open ended, it is kind of big, but I think it is very appropriate; there are a lot of peel out there who have books they want to write. You want more men to write, I think I want more people to write, how do you stay inspired is the question and what advice do you give to people who have a story they want to tell?

>> Terry McMillan: Write without thinking it is going to be published. Don't look over your shoulder, write without stopping, don't edit as you go along, just keep writing. Don't go back. You write from right here. This is what you edit, write it as nobody is going to read it then go back and read it.

>> Tayari Jones: Do you write by hand? I use a typewriter.

>> Terry McMillan: A typewriter, typewriter?

>> Tayari Jones: Typewriter, typewriter.

>> Terry McMillan: I type almost 200 words per minute. What did I do. I can't see you. I hit the keyboard.

>> Tayari Jones: You don't have to see me. You look the same.

>> Terry McMillan: I type really fast. My first job after working out, my first job was at a library. I type really fast, I can type as fast as I think, which may not be that fast.

>> Tayari Jones: That is lightning fast. They are coming out here with the hook, so before we wrap it up, Terry McMillan, I want to thank you for the conversation, but I want to thank you on behalf of the culture. Thank you for everything you have done and we are looking forward to what you will do in the future.

>> Terry McMillan: Thank you, Tayari. We know what you have added.

