

Christine

This podcast is produced on the ancestral homeland of the Nooksack and Lummi people. They have been its' stewards since time immemorial, respecting the land, river and ocean with the understanding that everything is connected, related and alive. We acknowledge the elders and their collective and individual plights and achievements. We consider the legacies of violence, displacement, migration and settlement that bring us together today and we pursue ongoing action to build lasting relationships and grow together so that all may prosper.

(interlude music plays)

Neil

WCLS in Whatcom County presents Library Stories, a podcast to open your eyes to all the ways your local public libraries matter. Join us as we reveal the power of sharing at the library. I'm your host, Neil McKay, Online Experience Coordinator for the Whatcom County Library System and today...

I'm here with my boss once again, Mary Vermillion.

Mary Vermillion

Hello Neil McKay.

Neil McKay

Hi, how are you doing?

Mary Vermillion

I'm so excited for Open Book. We're counting down the days and that's really the focus of today's podcast. We have two amazing interviews for you. But, yeah, Open Book. It's the second time we've done it. It's noon to 5:00 PM Sunday, November 3rd, at the Ferndale Event Center. If you were there last year, I know you want to be there.

Neil McKay

I was there.

Mary Vermillion

Yeah, what do you remember about it last year?

Neil McKay

Oh man, I just remember almost being overwhelmed by all of the booths and the activities and the people talking about library things and there was authors, and there was, oh man, just activities to do, it was fun.

Mary Vermillion

Yeah, it was definitely fun. And I remember one of the comments we got was from a young person. I don't know, I think he was younger than 10. He told his mom, so his mom wrote in the comment, he told his mom "this was the best day of my life." And I felt some of that too. It was so exciting to be in the middle of that, you know as a reader and a writer to like see all these people who love books and writing and love libraries, you know, coming together and in such a positive space.

And you know, I saw friends and neighbors greeting each other and "oh, how are you?" And you know, just good conversations happening among the guests who were there and then with the guests meeting the people who were, you know, hosting experiences at all the booths or the staff from village books or the staff from Bison Book buying, just connections being made. And I love that.

Neil McKay

Yeah. Yeah. And I felt, you know, and as a person who works for the library system, it really gave me a sense of pride about what we do and what we, what all the things that we do for the community.

Mary Vermillion

Yeah. And that's why we, you know, we host it. We came up with the idea of Open Book. You know, I think many of us have been to either book expos, or, you know, library conferences or bookseller conferences. And we thought, you know, just knowing what we know about the community here in Whatcom County and our goal to connect more people with all the amazing things you can do with your library card, we really thought a book festival was a great way to do it. And last year proved that it that it was.

And so we're really thankful and I can't say this enough to the Whatcom County Library Foundation and to the donors who make gifts to the foundation for fully sponsoring this year's Open Book. They're making it possible through their financial support for us to come back again to host Open Book on November 3rd, Sunday, November 3rd.

Neil McKay

Sunday, November 3rd in Ferndale at the Ferndale Event Center, which is close to the McDonald's there.

Mary Vermillion

Yeah, exit 262. It's easy to find, we'll have signs out there etcetera, but I know we have so much to talk about with Open Book and I hope people will just go to the website and I'm sure you'll have a link in the show notes. wcls.org/OpenBook. There were two people in particular for this little like preview podcast episode.

Neil McKay

Yeah.

Mary Vermillion

There were two people in particular we wanted people to meet. Do you want to?

Neil McKay

Well, we had. First of all, we have an author who's going to be featuring at our mainstage, Jamie Chang, who is out of the lower mainland BC, our Events Coordinator Claire McElroy interviewed her, and what a wonderful interview that was. She, you know, she talked, of course, about the books that she has and what she'll be talking about at the Open Book. But also it just became a talk about family and history and just so many things. And it was just kind of a, it was not very scripted, it just went where it went and it was a wonderful, wonderful little interview that you're going to hear.

Mary Vermillion

Yeah. And Janie is a historical fiction writer.

Neil McKay

She writes historical fiction.

Mary Vermillion

With many, many with many books, including a recent one co-authored with Kate Quinn. Who a lot of people know, but if you love historical fiction, Janie is a writer that you need to know about and that you need to read and hey, you can meet her at Open Book.

Neil McKay

Yeah, she's here. She's a local, so and then.

Mary Vermillion

Yeah.

Neil McKay

Mary and I traveled to Birch Bay to visit an artist's studio where we met Kim Morris, who has designed this amazing sculpture made of cardboard.

Mary Vermillion

Yeah. Kim is an incredible artist out of Birch Bay. I was really fortunate to meet her. Here's a shout out to my sister 'cause I know she's going to be listening. "Hey Sarah". Sarah and I went to the Blaine Arts Council event. They had a gala in Blaine a few months back. And I saw Kim's work there. This installation she had created for the gala, and I was blown away, it's all out of cardboard. It was like under the sea environment. It was really beautiful and I thought, wow, that would look so great at Open Book as like a backdrop for a photo, you know, photo backdrop or for selfies. However, people want to interact or just interact with this piece, which as you mentioned is, it's I think like 7 feet wide and maybe 7 feet tall.

Neil McKay

I think it's even wider, but yeah.

Mary Vermillion

It's definitely because it was taller than you, a little bit taller than you.

Neil McKay

Yes.

Mary Vermillion

It's about probably about 7 feet tall and wide. And it's a book loving dragon in his library with some of his woodland friends. It's all out of cardboard and the detail is just amazing. It's intricate. And Kim herself is just such a fascinating person and she's been so generous with her time and talent, I'm so glad that you had the conversation with her so people can meet her and you guys, if you're listening to this podcast, stay, you know, don't go away. Wait until you the very end because that's when Kim is going to come on and she's just a hoot. So, great to talk with her.

Neil McKay

Yes. Yeah, it was wonderful meeting her and she is so excited about, well, everything in life, but in particular, you know, making something beautiful for the library system just for this Open Book, specially for this Open Book Festival.

Mary Vermillion

Yeah, I think you really, I mean, there's lots of reasons to come to Open Book, but having an opportunity to see this original piece of art created by a talented person in our community. And all that creativity fueled by her love of libraries, I think it's really something you're going to want to see. Have your photo taken with Lloyd the Dragon and his friends.

Neil McKay

Lloyd the Dragon. And we'll have some pictures on our podcast notes.

Mary Vermillion

Sure. Yeah.

Neil McKay

So, you can get a glimpse, but I'm telling you pictures are amazing, but in person this is an experience.

Mary Vermillion

Yeah, you have to just like slow down and crouch down and look at all the detail that she did. And we'll have a little artist statement there that describes her process and how she created this thing. But. But yeah, that's enough from us. Let's get into these great, great conversations we've been having.

Neil McKay

We'll start out with Claire McElroy interviewing Jamie Chang.

Mary

Great.

Claire McElroy

All right, well. Well, let's go ahead and get started. So, my name is Claire McElroy and I am the Adult Programming Coordinator for the Whatcom County Library System and I am so delighted because today I get to have a conversation with our featured keynote speaker for

our upcoming **Open Book Festival for Readers and that is** Janie Chang. And Janie, thank you so much for being here today.

Janie Chang

Well, thank you so much for inviting me. I've quite a spot, soft spot for the Whatcom County area 'cause I have been invited previously to other events there and they've always been beautifully organized and full of enthusiastic audiences. So, thank you for bringing me down again.

Claire McElroy

Yes. Oh, it's my pleasure. Yeah, this is actually our second conversation that we've had because I got to interview. I had the privilege of interviewing you way back in 2017 for *Dragon Springs Roads*. I'm so happy to see you again. I would like to start with, just a personal question for you, so if you could please share with us where were you born and where did you grow up?

Janie Chang

I was born in Taipei, Taiwan. But I did not get to live there for very long because when I was four years old, my father got his first job with the United Nations and we moved to Manila in the Philippines and after that my father was transferred to various places around the world, courtesy of the United Nations. So, we spent like three years living in the Philippines and three years living in Tehran, Iran and four years living in Bangkok, Thailand and then we emigrated to Vancouver, Canada, and then when I became an adult, I decided I wanted to see the South Pacific so, I lived in New Zealand for three years and got homesick, came home to Vancouver.

Claire McElroy

Wow, you have lived many places and what such fascinating places. Wow. Of those places, what was your? So you were homesick for Vancouver, so maybe I'm going to guess Vancouver is your favorite, but what was the most interesting place that you've lived of all those places?

Janie Chang

You know I'd say it had to be Tehran, because in retrospect it was so different from any other place where I've lived because before I mean Manila was in Southeast Asia, Thailand was in Southeast Asia. Fair amount of Chinese culture had dispersed into those countries, but the Middle East was completely different, and even then, even as a child, you really got

the feeling of ancient history because it was still there. Still hadn't been ruined and overrun by tourists yet.

I still remember when my father took me and my mom on one of his field trips. And we went to the cities of Shiraz and Isfahan, and I saw Persepolis and even when you're only 10 years old, you cannot fail to be moved and intrigued by, you know, sort of presence of such antiquity. I just loved it. I love that part of it there.

Claire McElroy

What, approximately what years, what those have been?

Janie Chang

67 to 70.

Claire McElroy

OK. So, what kind of reader were you as a child?

Janie Chang

Oh, you know what? I don't even remember learning how to read. I was like I told you, I was four or five years old when we first went to the Philippines. So, I have two brothers who are much older than I am. And to make sure that they could fit into the school system, my dad hired a tutor them to get them started on English and I just sort of sat there and next thing I knew I was reading, I was reading everything. I was reading cereal boxes, you know, and speaking English and because when you're a child, your brain is so spongy.

You just learn these things so quickly. And you have no discrimination at all when you're a child. You just read whatever is put in front of you, you don't know what's good, what's bad. So yeah, and I just remember the first time I was at elementary school and I discovered the Enid Blyton books. You know.

Claire McElroy

What's the name again?

Janie Chang

Oh. Enid Blyton.

Claire McElroy

I actually. I don't know Enid Blyton. Well, what's the title? Give me a title.

Janie Chang

She wrote a whole series of stuff, you know, the fabulous 5, you know, was five children in England who solved mysteries and.

Claire McElroy

Ok, so that sounds familiar. That sounds familiar to me. Maybe I just did not know the name of the author, Enid Blyton. So, mysteries, you were you drawn to mysteries as a kid?

Janie Chang

Oh, Nancy Drews, all of those, right? Yeah.

Claire McElroy

Yeah, and your books have an air of mystery to them too, in some ways. At least, yeah, so.

Janie Chang

I think it's, yeah.

Claire McElroy

Yeah, so. That's great. Can you share with us what was your relationship with libraries when you were a child? Do you have a favorite library story?

Janie Chang

Well, I was pretty introverted as a child, and I was also a real book nerd.

Janie Chang

So, I was one of those kids who would be hiding in the corner of the library at lunchtime, quietly eating my lunch and trying not to, you know, let the librarian see me, but I'm sure the librarian saw me like there was a little group of us. We ate our lunches instead of going out to the playground, and I'm sure the librarian knew we were there, eating our lunches even though we weren't supposed to bring food into the library. But, also recognizing that this is a good thing you know. I think on purpose did not come into that corner of the library. So, it was really a place where I felt the most at home with other book nerds like me. And of course, that corner of the library I borrowed every single book in that corner.

Claire McElroy

And where would this have been? Which location?

Janie Chang

This was when I was in Bangkok at the International School in Bangkok. Yeah. And they, it was a private school. They had an incredible library compared to what I had seen before, you know.

Claire McElroy

Really?

Janie Chang

Oh yeah. Yeah, they were very well funded, so.

Claire McElroy

That's nice.

Janie Chang

It was also where I entered my first writing competition 'cause there was like a class, a school writing competition. I didn't win anything.

Claire McElroy

Do you recall what you submitted? Like what the nature of your submission for that writing competition was?

Janie Chang

Not a clue anymore. Yeah, OK.

Claire McElroy

OK. So well, what drew you to writing? When did you start becoming a writer?

Janie Chang

You can blame it on my 4th grade teacher in Tehran, Miss Wilson.

Claire McElroy

Oh, I think I will thank your 4th grade teacher in Tehran.

Janie Chang

Because she said to my parents one day. Because, you know, we had to write book reports in school and she said to my parents one day that I was going to be a writer. That I was going to be an author so, first of all, it never occurred to me that there were people behind the books I was reading. That human beings actually wrote these books. And then the

second thing was, “oh, maybe I will write a book one day, Miss Wilson.” And what happens is that plants a seed in the back of your head and it always makes you wonder, could I? Could I?

And so they were sporadic attempts along the way to try and write something and I actually got through a lot of my high-tech career by being a good writer, whether it was writing user documentation or, you know, marketing materials, you know, putting together presentations and transcripts for them and everything. But that is not the same as writing a full-length novel.

And what happened was in the late 2000s, my mom got really sick and she had dementia and we had to move her into care. She couldn't live on her own anymore and I would go visit her at the care home and I would look around and I would see all these people and I couldn't help but wonder “how many of these people are sitting there wishing they had tried harder to make their dream come true?” And I was thinking I do not want to be sitting in my rocking chair at the end of my life saying “I wish I tried harder to become an author.” So, I took a creative writing class. It was a one-year certificate program at Simon Fraser University. It's called the Writers Studio. And it was life changing. It was absolutely life changing. You know, it taught you about the craft of writing, about the business of writing.

So you know, hit you across the head with the reality of how hard it is to be actually published and the business end of it.

Claire

Yes.

Janie Chang

And really importantly, the community of writing, because then you were in with a bunch of other people who are talented, creative, wanted, you know, had some drive to be authors and you were doing this together. And you know, I've kept a lot of those friendships. All through. All through now.

Claire McElroy

And they provide accountability, too. When you have, when you have a group of people that you, you know, that are y're accountable to, for, you know, bringing your work and sharing with them that I think that's such a great motivator.

Janie Chang

It is because we workshopped each other's writing, and we had to bring in 20 pages every week and distribute them and you had to figure out how to critique them. And so it's a

really good learning process that you are being critiqued and you are also critiquing other people's work. So anyway, that was the year that I was going to write my first novel during class. How stupid and naive was that?

Claire McElroy

You mean that didn't happen?

Janie Chang

No, it didn't. You know, but what I will say to people who want to get published and who want to have an agent is everybody has their different success stories, and my particular one was that I attended the Surrey International Writers Conference up here in Surrey because what a lot of these writers conferences have now is they will have literary agents there that you can meet and give them your pitch. And this is really important because you're going to see so many literary agents online who say not accepting new clients, not accepting new clients, the ones who are going to these conferences, they are accepting new clients, they are looking for fresh talent. So, you're already doing better than that.

Plus, if you're there, you've met with them, pitched to them. They'll know that you are really motivated because you've actually paid money to be at the conference. You've got this much of a manuscript and you are not some random crazy person who feels entitled to bombard their inbox with queries because believe me, my agent literally receives thousands of queries every month and a lot of them are, they have no clue what is required before you can approach an agent. So, I'm just recommending if there's a writer's conference near you and they have literary agents there, it's a good place to go, but make sure you have something worth pitching already. Did I wander too far? I wandered off topic.

Claire McElroy

No. No, no, that's what wandering is great. We love wandering. That's where often the gold is when we wander so. So, let's talk a little bit about your writing. Your books frequently contain mythological creatures from like and magical elements from Chinese lore. What prompted you to include magical elements in your stories, in your writing?

Janie Chang

It's kind of hard for me to keep them out of my writing. I think it's because when I was growing up, my father would tell me stories about our ancestors. So, my dad's family has a recorded genealogy of 36 generations.

Claire McElroy

Wow.

Janie Chang

And also, as a result of that, there's this treasure trove of ancestral stories and he told me that the stories he remembers aren't even like a 10th of what his older sister, Nubia, his older sister had been alive when their grandparents were still alive and so on and so forth. But what he told me was already pretty amazing.

You know, like I had this one particular ancestor who saw a dragon and then he spoke to Immortals, who asked him if he would like to give up this earthly life and join them in the land of Immortals. Then, eventually he did walk through a porthole and disappeared into the land of Immortals, you know and about you know a room in our in our ancestral home, which was haunted by the ghost of my grandmother, who was still mourning the fact that her oldest son died when he was just a teenager and this one of our ancestors, who was a little boy, saw a ghost dancing across the roof of one of the other courtyard houses on their estate. And now the little boy's grandfather said, "oh, and was it wearing white?" And he said "yes." And he said, and the grandfather said someone's going to die there tonight. And sure enough, the next morning someone had died.

With all of this influence, like, how could I not write supernatural things into my stories? How can I prevent them from nosing into my stories?

Claire McElroy

Great. And are all of those stories written down? They're documented somewhere? How?

Janie Chang

Oh, yeah.

Claire McElroy

How have you preserved all those from generations handed down?

Janie Chang

So, first all one of the best things I ever did was when my father was still alive, I asked him to talk into a tape recorder and just tell me everything that he could remember. Because when people say, "oh, I would really like my grandmother to write down something." It's like, stop making your grandmother write stuff down, just have her talk. We have recording devices and whenever she feels like it, right, you know.

Claire McElroy

This is, I can't tell you how like serendipitous this is, Janie, because we're doing library programs, right now that's, it's the great story share and it's all about how you can capture the stories and record them from your family and loved ones and how to go about recording them. What you can use to do this like we just had a program on this last week. So, it's just alarmingly serendipitous right now that you are saying everything you're saying.

Janie Chang

Absolutely. And you know, you don't wait for them to die, you don't wait for them to fall into dementia and lose all of that. Memory is ephemeral. You need to take advantage of it. So anyway, I did transcribe some of the tape recordings. Unfortunately, my father died back in 2000, so I was never able to catch up with him and say, can we talk some more about this and I actually composed them into separate stories and they are on my website and they're on my blog, but if you go on my blog and just click on the category 'family stories', they'll all pop up selected that way.

Claire McElroy

Oh. That's great. Wow. 36 generations. My goodness. That's amazing.

Janie Chang

Well, I want to say to you that at, there was a time when this was not so uncommon in China because China being, well there, there's all sorts of religion, but the Confucian philosophy was like pervasive for thousands of years, and to honor your ancestors, one of the things that you did was you keep a genealogy, right?

So, there were other scholarly families like my dad's. And what my dad's family did was every few generations, whoever was the patriarch of the family would issue a new addition and print them and distribute them to all branches of the family and in my great grandfather's case, my great grandfather was the last one to do this. He was a 36th generation that was recorded, but you know, actually there was a printing press in the house and there were artisans that he hired to write Chinese characters backwards on blocks of wood. And then there were artisans, who then carved out those characters on the blocks of wood cause they were reversed and then people who would print them and bound and bind them and distribute them and. Yeah. So I have one of those.

Claire McElroy

Oh my goodness. What a treasure. Wow.

Janie Chang

You think it would be like a huge treasure, but it's not full of stories like I'd hoped. It was just the names of all of our male ancestors, not a single woman mentioned by the way.

Claire McElroy

Well, yeah, I guess that's the way it was done. Wasn't it?

Janie Chang

You know what? It's wonderful just to have it, right and the problem with why they're so rare now is because during the Cultural Revolution, family genealogies were seen as a very bourgeois conceit. So, families who had them destroyed them or threw them away for fear of, you know, retribution.

Claire McElroy

Oh, interesting. Huh. Well, I am very intrigued by the mythological creatures and myths that are included in your stories. Which mythological creature do you relate to the most? Or if you could choose which one to be, what would you choose?

Janie Chang

Without a doubt, I would be the fox spirit, like in *Dragon Springs Road*. And that's kind of a cheating thing because the Fox Beard is a shapeshifter, right? So you know you can be all sorts of creatures and people when you're a fox spirit. So, it's sort of like, "no, I'm not settling on being one. I'm settling on being one who can be anything she wants to be." Fox spirits are just very, very popular in Chinese mythology. And they've come through in pop culture like a lot of the horror films or the supernatural movies that you see coming out of Asia will feature fox spirits.

Claire McElroy

That was, I really, really loved the fox spirit element of *Dragon Springs Road*. And I wondered if you would say that one, but I thought, "oh, there's so many." But you did choose that one, that's great. So, we are going to be hosting you at Open Book, our Festival for Readers on November 3rd, and I was hoping that you would tell us a little bit about the *Library of Legends* because I think that that book is the one that's going to be sort of featured in your presentation. And maybe talk about how it's going to be featured. What your topic is going to be for Open Book.

Janie Chang

You actually made it kind of tough, Claire 'cause you said *Library of Legends* because we're being hosted by the library system, and then you also said, well, maybe you could talk a

little bit about your latest book, the *Porcelain Moon*, and maybe also a little bit about the *Phoenix Crown* which you co-authored with Kate Quinn and sort of. All right, let me see what I can do.

But I actually have prepared it. I've prepared. I've written it all. It's ready to go and I want to talk about called Inspiration, Research, and Serendipity. So I'm going to talk about these three things that happened while I was working on the book that became the *Library of Legends*. But I'm also going to bring in other examples of serendipity and inspiration from those two other books that I mentioned, *The Porcelain Moon* and *The Phoenix Crown*, and that experience. So, yeah, I'm going to start off with a question which is people always ask, "where did you get the idea for that book?" But you know, I really think it becomes, "where did you get the idea for that book? How did you turn it into a full length novel?" And then finally, "what is it that you as an author, hope that readers will get out of that book?" So, I'll be.

Claire McElroy

I'm so excited. I'm so, so excited. Can I ask you some kind of fun book, questions about your reading life?

Janie Chang

Yes, absolutely.

Claire McElroy

OK. What is the last great book you read?

Janie Chang

You know what the last great book I read, it's called *The Thousand Crimes of Ming Tsu* by an American author called Tom Lin. And it is amazing. It is your classic Western, except that the antihero is Chinese. And there are strands of the supernatural in that book, and the writing is so propulsive, the story is so original. This is, I have a TBR list that's like 300 books long, right? So I'm really far behind. This book is probably a couple of years old and I only got to it now, you know, so that was, it was great. I also love...

Claire McElroy

Can you say the title, the title one more time? 1000 crimes.

Janie Chang

A Thousand Crimes of Ming Tsu, M-I-N-G, Tsu, T-S-U by Tom Lin, L-I-N, Lin.

Claire McElroy

Thank you so much.

Janie Chang

But I also want to put a plug in for the best trilogy I've read in a long time, which is by an English author called Claire North. And she has written books that I have loved, always with some strand of you know, there's a twist to reality in her books. But this one it's a trilogy based on the story of Penelope, you know, Odysseus wife.

Claire McElroy

Yes.

Janie Chang

So yeah, so the first one is called *Ithaca* and the second one is called the *House of Odysseus* and the third one is the *Last Song of Penelope*. And this woman is an absolute prodigy.

Claire McElroy

Claire North.

Janie Chang

Yes.

Claire McElroy

OK. Great. Thank you. Alright, you're organizing a literary dinner party. Which three writers, living or dead, would you invite to that dinner party?

Janie Chang

I hate questions like that because I know for a fact. I know for a fact that when I am in front of one of my writing idols, I turn into a gibbering idiot and there is no dinner conversation. I'm just sort of, you know, trying not to try not to sound like my IQ has just dropped by 1 decimal point.

Claire McElroy

Ok, so maybe you're just sitting there listening to them, observing a dinner party of the three.

Janie Chang

So Emily Bronte.

Speaker

OK.

Janie Chang

And Louise Penny. And this is a possibility because she's Canadian.

Claire McElroy

Exactly.

Janie Chang

And it's 6° of separation kind of thing, you know. And also, there is an author who unfortunately is no longer with us. His name is Barry Hugard. And he wrote a book called *The Bridge of Birds*, which is a fantasy novel about an ancient China that never was and when I read that, when I read *The Bridge of Birds*, I could not believe that Barry Hugard was not Chinese.

Claire McElroy

Oh wow. Okay, well, thank you for telling us about that. Sounds like I mean, I'm not familiar with Barry Hugard, but. I know that any dinner party that includes Louise Penny is going to be very entertaining because not only is she fascinating, she is hilarious. So, it would be a fun evening too. So, well, I just want to thank you so much for answering my questions and doing this little warm up for Open Book. We are so excited to see you on November 3rd. Is there any, do you have any questions for us or any parting comments that you'd like to add?

Janie Chang

No, I'm just so thrilled that I'll be seeing you in person again and meeting all the wonderful people who are organizing the Open Book event. And thanks so much again for inviting me.

Claire McElroy

All right.

(interlude music plays)

Neil McKay

And now let's take a tour of Kim Morris' studio.

Kim Morris

My name is Kim Morris. I think I am just a creator of artwork. Right now, I'm using cardboard recycled from cereal boxes to soda can boxes to water heater, large pieces of cardboard and I just seem to create and make whatever I want to.

Neil McKay

That's wild. And I'm standing in your studio here and I'm surrounded by these cardboard pieces of, it's indescribable here. We have the piece that we're going to be featuring at Open Book, of course, which we'll talk about. But, also there is a cardboard boat that is about 6 feet tall. A sailboat. The sails not cardboard. It looks like it's a real sail.

Kim Morris

No, that is actually, I go through a hardware store and I research. I go from department to department and kind of like make a mental note on what I might need. And actually that piece looks like muslin or what could be a sail cloth, but what that actually is, is a painters drop cloth very inexpensive and it's waterproof and I can use it. I can sew on it, but I just pick that up when I have to use like for snow, like for a tablecloth or something. So, I thought, well, why not make a sailboat sail out of it?

Neil McKay

Absolutely. It's kind of like you're making something out of nothing or it's not really nothing though, is it?

Kim Morris

No, I always think it's like I'd go into the forest and it's kind of like I would say there's like \$1,000,000 of creativity out there even though I don't, I don't do this for money. I just do it mainly to get the reaction out of people that might enjoy this artwork. Who would have thought that cardboard would be so enjoyable for others? I always just thought it was my little secret, you know.

Neil McKay

Like a child playing with something like that.

Kim Morris

Right, right, right. And so, it's like, and it's like the hardware store. Yes, you have the craft store, yes, but it's at the hardware store where you have to think outside the box. So that's kind of like what I do first I find out like you know like Whatcom County, the libraries they said they would like something. Well, everyone has a budget, and cardboard is basically free and you can do anything with cardboard, you just paint it, shape it, glue it, cut it and there you have it.

Neil McKay

And there you have it.

Kim Morris

You have a whole library.

Neil McKay

And what I'm looking at is this amazing 7 foot tall and probably 8 or 9 foot wide installation of, you know, sculpture made out of cardboard.

Kim Morris

I know.

Neil McKay

That is, it's a dragon, and his and his library, his bookshelf.

Kim Morris

It. It is, I know.

Neil McKay

And it's something to see and I can't describe this well enough on the radio.

Kim Morris

Oh. I know, once the ideas came, then it was just like, "OK, I have to do my thumbnail sketch" and then it all kind of takes place. And then I always try to think of what's going to be first and then second. And then all the details that come, but I get so tickled with it and sharing that...

Neil McKay

Yeah. I mean, it's amazing. And so, part of this is the dragon, apparently we have dragon sounds out in the distance, the wailing dragons.

Kim Morris

No, they're saying it's 12:00.

Neil McKay

Oh, is that just the noon bell?

Kim Morris

Yes. Well, yeah, I know.

Neil McKay

Wait, it's not 12:00.

Kim Morris

Oh, sorry, it's Cherry Point, it's the refinery.

Neil McKay

OK.

Kim Morris

I know it's OK. OK, I know.

Neil McKay

That's fine.

Kim Morris

I know.

Neil McKay

We'll it'll just be part of the whimsy here. I mean that's the word I would describe walking into this, basically it looks like a wood shop. A wood garage, you know, but it's whimsical. Like whimsy everywhere. There's a chicken with goggles on.

Kim Morris

Yes, I made that, I used to work for a hardware store and so they would let me do pretty much anything I wanted. I painted on the floors, I paint, you know, so I would make these displays and that was for an ice cooler. So, I wanted her to be pushing this ice cooler. So, I made that and then I continued to use I think she's like over 20 years old and I, when I

worked at the Air Museum, I put her in the red biplane, you know, so she's flying the biplane and so.

Neil McKay

Oh yeah.

Kim Morris

And then I've done like paintings of her. You know, like gift cards and such.

Neil McKay

And she's cardboard.

Kim Morris

So, and she's all, that's kind of like how I got started, you know, painting on cardboard because she turned out so good.

Neil McKay

So, she was your first cardboard arts.

Kim Morris

I think so, I think so.

Neil McKay

OK, what's her name?

Kim Morris

Oh my gosh, I don't have one that is so strange. It is a girl.

Neil McKay

Haven't you named this chicken that you've had for 20 years?

Kim Morris

I know that's weird because my cars are named, the dragon is named Lloyd.

Neil McKay

Let's talk about the dragon being so.

Kim Morris

OK.

Neil McKay

So now we can't see him because his back is to us.

Kim Morris

Oh no. He needs to be turned around. I know. Oh, good. Mary's going to turn around.

Neil McKay

Mary can turn him around. We're here, of course, with my boss, Mary Vermillion.

Kim Morris

There's yeah, there's the handles.

Mary Vermillion

Got handles on a dragon. It's very handy.

Neil McKay

So the yeah, the back of the dragon.

Kim Morris

Don't worry, don't worry. I can repair him any, yes.

Neil McKay

Mary's in there. Oh man.

Kim Morris

That's a cute picture of you.

Neil McKay

We gotta get that. We'll do some pictures here.

Mary Vermillion

We'll do photos later but that's one thing that's cool about it, people will be able to stand.

Neil McKay

Behind the dragon and get pictures. So much better than one of those things with a cut out face that you stick your face in. This is like so much more real.

Kim Morris

Yes. Oh, I know, I know.

Neil McKay

This is like, this is like, so much more real.

Kim Morris

And these all the tones of a cardboard. Uh. Because,

Neil McKay

Yeah, the shading, yeah.

Kim Morris

well, there's on the other side, of course you can see. You know what it was.

Neil McKay

Yeah, the manufacturer.

Kim Morris

I mean, it could be, you know, like we said, Coca-Cola, Cheerio box, detergent.

Neil McKay

So, all this cardboard is like different textures and different thickness.

Kim Morris

Yes. Yes, yes.

Neil McKay

And so, it's really a layering process, it looks like.

Kim Morris

I was really particular, I would go through my stack that that they gave me and I didn't want all the same color. If you see all the different shades, so I would get all my different colors of tans, browns and I tried to mix it up so it's not all the same. You know, so I was very tickled when I would find like, the Coca-Cola. It was just a little shade darker, so like this is primo. This is primo.

Neil McKay

OK.

Kim Morris

Sorry, yeah, I get like I know it's weird that you get so excited about.

Neil McKay

No, but when you, you know you're looking.

Kim Morris

This is like gold, you know.

Neil McKay

So we're looking at this pile of cardboard cutout pieces.

Kim Morris

Yes, every piece.

Neil McKay

And we're just, you know, you don't even think about it unless you're an artist, I guess. The shades and the variety of textures and stuff in just this pile of what looks recycling.

Kim Morris

Well and then doing the roots and such. See how it's like just it's cut on a bandsaw but it's a straight edge, right? So, but then you want that 3D look. So I would take like say the trees and if you look, it's edged, so I would take the roots and then I would brush my hand, my exacto knife, the soft end, the plastic edge then I would score it and then it would bend the edge of the cardboard.

Neil McKay

So you you're beveling it almost.

Kim Morris

Yeah. So that was something that I did. I, you know, discovered on this on this yes, on this..

Neil McKay

This project.

Kim Morris

and then of course the hair that was.

Neil McKay

So, the hair I have to say because I haven't said this on camera, on the mic yet, but there's a beaver and a bunny rabbit along with this dragon and a bird. There's some mushrooms. Is that a? That's the log that the Beaver cut down.

Kim Morris

That's the log he chewed on. Yeah. He chewed on both ends, yes.

Neil McKay

There's a whole story behind this. And there's such personalities. The rabbit here looks like it's right out of Beatrix Potter, you know.

Kim Morris

Which is like one of my favorites. Well and Jackrabbits are like one of my favorites so I always I had to put one of those in and I draw them, I illustrate them quite often because they are such a crazy animal to look at and to draw. Oh, so, oh and his eyelashes. I know, I know. And all my burns have healed on my finger. Sometimes, sometimes you know, after I get all done then I take like a paint brush. A little bit stiff bristle. And then I have to brush all the cardboard because all the little fine plastic, you know, the glue hair.

Neil McKay

Oh, sure.

Kim Morris

So it's constantly and then my fingers, I had to. It's like, "Oh no. A drip!" And so I have to sacrifice my finger and then wipe it off. And then it's like "God darn it, God."

Neil McKay

Oh, with hot with hot glue you're talking about oh, man.

Kim Morris

So I try to keep it clean. And then, oh, and then to give it that 3D look, there's like little spacers. So, if you look sideways, you'll see like, OK, say this is the root correct and then it's going to go.

Neil McKay

OK.

Kim Morris

It's going to go on another root, so I make these little spacers.

Neil McKay

Little pieces of cardboard that are that are hiding.

Kim Morris

Yeah. And then I glue, glue, glue. So, some of them might be 5 stacked to give it that that depth instead of just laying on top of each other.

Neil McKay

Yeah, you can see there's a lot of depth in this thing. I can't even. I mean doing this on audio is ridiculous.

Kim Morris

Don't know.

Neil McKay

Because there's, you guys have to come down and see this thing.

Kim Morris

Oh, I hope so, because this is was like because of the gala that's when I met Mary and when she said, "oh, would you be, would you think about it?" She was the one person I was, really to hear from. So, literally I was telling my friend Trudy, it's like, "please, please, please. I sure hope they call me. I sure hope they call me."

Mary Vermillion

Because you love libraries, right?

Kim Morris

I love libraries because my mother and my father was an art teacher and my mother was just an avid, avid reader.

Neil McKay

Oh yeah.

Kim Morris

Just continuously.

(Interlude music plays)

Kim Morris

But you know, it's been the last year that I finally kind of stepped out of my shadow, I guess, and said, "oh, gee, I guess I should do something, you know?"

Neil McKay

Wow.

Kim Morris

I've always kind of kept it a secret.

Neil McKay

Well, a secret artist.

Kim Morris

So I have. I do so as I have a lot of things and so I've just kind of like, hmm, I guess. Hmm, I think I'll get out there.

Neil McKay

Just let people see.

Kim Morris

And just let people see, yes.

Neil McKay

This amazing work.

Kim Morris

I know.

Mary Vermillion

How fortunate we are that the library is one of the 1st clients.

Kim Morris

Oh my gosh.

Mary Vermillion

And that you agreed to work with us because of your love for libraries and yeah.

Kim Morris

Yes, yes, yeah. The Ferndale one is so wonderful. You know you have that. Where there's the free section of course, I always go through and then the inexpensive ones. I always go through.

Neil McKay

The friends, Friends of the library bookstore bookstore.

Mary Vermillion

And you had your work on display at the Ferndale Library, which I didn't know. We met at the Blaine Arts Council.

Kim Morris

I did, yes.

Mary Vermillion

I was there with my sister and Kim had her work up, her cardboard, which was painted white.

Kim Morris

So that gala, there's another one, there's fishes behind you.

Mary Vermillion

And I looked at it and I said "this would be so great at Open Book if she would do the work", and I'm just so glad we made that connection there. Yeah.

Kim Morris

I was very tickled. I was. I was just like, it was just kind of like I could see my mom, you know, just being "Oh my goodness". Because anything I did, you know, she just thought I was just like something special or something, you know like "Oh, a noodle necklace. Oh my gosh".

Neil McKay

It's nice to have that support from. That makes a difference in your life, doesn't it? Yeah.

Kim Morris

Anything. Anything. Oh my gosh. Oh my God. Oh. My mom. Yeah, yeah.

Neil McKay

So this is amazing. So one of the things that I did want to mention was that the way that you got this cardboard, we, in the library system, we put out a call for people to donate cardboard. And how much did you get? I mean this is a ton.

Kim Morris

Oh, heavens. Well, I can show you it's behind the ladder right there. But so, let's, I hate, let's see. There's a green post right over there. Can you see? So, if you if you probably went out about.

Neil McKay

Here you can if we just. If we just walk over the bandsaw.

Neil McKay

We could be mobile.

Kim Morris

Oh my goodness.

Neil McKay

We're the mobile units, so.

Kim Morris

Oh, I'm much better at this then, so I would have to say the sheets because I tried to organize it by size and by grade, you know, it's like, "oh, this is like gold."

Neil McKay

Oh yeah. OK.

Kim Morris

It's like, oh, this is gold.

Neil McKay

OK, high quality work.

Kim Morris

High quality. This is Primo and so it probably stuck out to here and I have just a little bit left back there that you. Yes. And then.

Neil McKay

You've used.

Kim Morris

And then those. I don't really get rid of any pieces. It's kind of like all this that's underneath my table, I'll go through and I'll pick it all out. And I will keep it and I do that same thing with, I love driftwood, I work with driftwood quite a bit and then wood. I work with wood quite a bit too. And so I save every little tiny piece of wood like, oh, that piece of pie. And I, oh, we have to keep that. So it goes in the keep bin and in nails and you name it the.

Neil McKay

Old Irish saying I always keep in my mind, if you keep a thing for seven years, you'll find a use for it. And you should see my garage.

Kim Morris

Really. Oh.

Neil McKay

Yeah, but I'm not nearly as artistic as you.

Mary Vermillion

Can you tell us a little bit more about because we kind of we gave you an open-ended like just create something and so why the dragon and what, how did Lloyd the Dragon come to be?

Kim Morris

Well, I always, my one thing what I started doing fish and then I knew I really couldn't do an aquarium with books. I mean I could you know?

Speaker

Mm.

Kim Morris

But then I was just trying to create something that children would like. And then it's like but. I like Dragons. I'm an adult. You know? And then I thought, OK. But then I was thinking about the different dragons and the first two that I drew. They were way too mean, way too snarly. I don't think this would be very good if Mary comes and then I have this, you know. A scary. And I thought, oh, this is not going to work. This is not good.

I did them over and over and then I thought, Oh my gosh. Once I changed his grin to a happy guy and then not a long snout, but a cute short little snout. And then his eyes were really important. But the funny thing is, which I've done this before. I think in layers. You know, like how, if you're going to paint a painting, you would do the sky first and then the ocean and whatever comes forward.

Christine

OK.

Neil McKay

You start in the back, yeah.

Kim Morris

So no matter. No matter what, even if it gets covered with like he has his little glasses on his little spectacles. But there's some beautiful lashes underneath there. But. I knew I was going to cover it up, but I had to do it because his eyes are the first thing I would do. So we get a personality and then it becomes that instant connection. So when I first start this, you know, Steve's out there working, working, working. All he is this and he has no legs, no nothing, and he just becomes this shape. He has no ears, no horns, but once I start with his eyes and everyone of these little guys, I just sat and I just cut them, you know, with the chairs. Yes. But, you know, you know, because even when you look at your dog, you know, it's very. They're short around his nose and then of course it gets bigger and bigger and bigger, but he couldn't be scary.

Neil McKay

Yeah, yeah.

Kim Morris

Just he's not.

Neil McKay

And he isn't.

Kim Morris

He's not, he's not.

Neil McKay

To me, he looks very serene.

Kim Morris

Very sweet.

Neil McKay

That's what I would say. He's a serene and wise face and.

Kim Morris

He does. I know. And then I wanted everybody, of course the rabbits looking at you. But I wanted the beaver to be looking up at him. And then then I had to cut paper. You know, so I thought, how am I gonna make pages?

Neil McKay

You're cutting pages out of cardboard.

Kim Morris

Yes. And look at this. This was a doozy. This was this is one huge book.

Neil McKay

Oh man. Huge book.

Kim Morris

So I had to cut it on the bandsaw and so 'cause so it makes it look like pages and so it's like are you sure I have to them to you? You sure? I mean I would keep Lloyd. But it's OK.

I mean, I wish I was going to be there to see how everybody likes it, but I mean, I know it's going to a good home, yeah.

Neil McKay

Oh yeah.

Mary Vermillion

We can put a guest book by him so people can sign and say thank you and their comments about him.

Kim Morris

Oh, that would be wonderful.

Mary Vermillion

So, come to Open Book so you can see Kim's work and then tell her how much you love him.

Kim Morris

Oh, definitely, definitely.

Neil McKay

It's really great. So, what is he reading right now?

Kim Morris

Oh, he's reading about cones and nuts. Oh, oh, this one? He's just reading about the different tales. So, you have to and.

Neil McKay

Like tail that you wear that you have.

Kim Morris

Or either or.

Neil McKay

Either or.

Kim Morris

He's not a very good speller like me. So like I'm a little dyslexic and I think he is just a smidgen.

Neil McKay

OK.

Kim Morris

He really likes. He likes visual. He likes smells.

Neil McKay

And it's and it's like this is his stack of to be read books.

Kim Morris

I know. But he has read.

Neil McKay

Well, he has the whole library. Oh.

Kim Morris

He has read all of these books.

Neil McKay

In the back, yes.

Kim Morris

He has. Yes, he's a young dragon, but he's. He's a young dragon in dragon years, but he might seem like very wise and older to us, you know, so.

Neil McKay

Yeah.

Mary Vermillion

How many hours have you? Roughly.

Kim Morris

OK, so the weird thing is, so once I start buckling down like the last three weeks, I pretty much don't do anything. I don't go to the beach. I don't. You know, Steve has taken on cooking dinner. He has did the grocery shop and he took the dog to the fields every day.

Neil McKay

Oh wow.

Kim Morris

Took it all on because then it's kind of like an urge I have to. It's like I will work six hours and the next thing I know, I look up and it's like holy mackerel, what. It's 5:30. My. And it just flies by. And I've never only with my artwork, I'm quiet, you know, and I don't talk a lot. It

just sends me into this realm of happiness, I guess. It's like I just get so tickled with myself, you know?

I just want to share like anybody. Like, oh, come on. Come on, come on. But nobody knows out there that this was all going on.

Neil McKay

Oh yeah.

Kim Morris

So it's so it's kind of like. Oh, come see it. But. Oh, no, no, it's a secret, you know. Secret. Yeah.

Neil McKay

Well, it's amazing work if people are going to be just blown away by this by this Lloyd the dragon.

Kim Morris

Oh, and then I got to do it for the library system.

Neil McKay

Yeah, yeah.

Kim Morris

Is that not the best ever?

Neil McKay

It really is.

Kim Morris

It really is. It really is.

Neil McKay

I mean, if you're going to do something good for people.

Kim Morris

I want to do that. Yes, I know.

Neil McKay

This is, yeah, so, so. So are you a reader, right? Are you reading anything right now, or are you just too into your artwork that you haven't been in? Yeah.

Kim Morris

I have a hard time. I always think when I slow. I won't say that slow down. No, I will, but not yet.

Neil McKay

Just wondering if you're reading anything interesting these days.

Kim Morris

Well, I do have the book that you did gave me.

Neil McKay

Oh, OK.

Kim Morris

No Two Persons and I told my friend Trudy. I said, will you read this for me? She's gonna ask me questions. But no, no. On my trip I am going to have it in my backpack and then I can take it out and I will actually read it because I will be pinned in an airplane. I won't have any.

Neil McKay

The audio book is nice for that too. Yeah, what a great.

Kim Morris

I will. Isn't that yet?

Kim Morris

Yes, I go to the Ferndale Library to get the audio to make long trips and it just saves me.

Neil McKay

Oh yeah.

Kim Morris

Yeah, it kind of just sends you into another imagination.

Mary Vermillion

You can ask this question. Since maybe something you have read that?

Neil McKay

Yeah. Is there something? Is there something that like, what's your favorite book of all time maybe?

Kim Morris

Oh my gosh. When I was younger it was *The Island of the Blue Dolphins*.

Neil McKay

Oh yeah.

Kim Morris

It was about this young girl who, who indigenous family lived there and she missed the boat. They were all sailing away because of big volcano was going to erupt. How awful. But and then her family thought she was down below. You know, and she wasn't. And then it was like "oh no, I forgot my boots, so I'm gonna run." You know the typical story. "I forgot." And so she runs back. And then she sees the ship sailing away. This is way back, way back in the olden days and then it's just her survival on this island. And she made a dog friend. And so I remembered. I love that one. And then and then. Oh, don't ask me the author. But it's called The Highest Tide.

Neil McKay

OK, we can find the author.

Kim Morris

Oh, I have it.

Neil McKay

We work for the library.

Kim Morris

And that was I read that about last year, and it was about a young man who lived in the Great Northwest. And he lived on the coast, and he found this very, very large squid. And it's an adult book. And it's just, I guess I had kind of, it's kind of another adventure. I'm sorry I don't know the author.

Neil McKay

No, we'll find that.

Kim Morris

Very good book, but I have a tendency to kind of go to that. And then of course I read *Where The Crawdads Sing*. Again, that was about this young girl that collects feathers and rocks and sticks, and I seem to be just that, you know.

Neil McKay

Yeah.

Mary Vermillion

It's called highest tide?

Kim Morris

Highest tide could be the.

Mary Vermillion

Novel by. Oh, I've seen this cover. Oh, it's a Jim Lynch book.

Kim Morris

Yes.

Mary Vermillion

OK.

Neil McKay

He's local, Seattle.

Kim Morris

Really?

Mary Vermillion

Yeah, Jim Lynch is from around here.

Kim Morris

Oh, OK, no.

Mary Vermillion

He used to live in Blaine.

Kim Morris

No.

Mary Vermillion

Mhm. Pretty sure he lived in Blaine.

Kim Morris

Isn't that something?

Mary Vermillion

But that Border Songs was a book that you should read. Border Songs if you like Jim Lynch, yeah.

Kim Morris

OK.

Mary Vermillion

Yeah, because it's kind of this area, yeah.

Kim Morris

I see. That's why, OK. So see, I do read if I can sit still, I will do that. If I'm not out collecting sticks, shells.

Neil McKay

There you go.

Kim Morris

Yeah, but I know it to have this done. It's like, well, now what's my purpose? You know now. Am I going to do? So, I have to find something else to kind of.

Neil McKay

A new a new project, yeah.

Mary Vermillion

You said you're going to have your work on display I hope.

Kim Morris

Yes, in December at Blaine Art Gallery. It's all going to be one big gift shop, so it'll be all these artists that belong to the organization and so it will be much, much, all kinds of different artwork. And so I have one little sliver corner. So I hope to have. I Always want to do some more cardboard, so I'll do a little corner. And then, umm, I'll just like make stuff.

Neil McKay

Wow, you'll be making stuff there.

Kim Morris

Yeah. There's a squirrel. He's under my car. Oh, there he goes. OK, I got sidetracked.

Neil McKay

The literal squirrel. Wow. Well, this has been a great conversation and I just love this dragon, Lloyd.

Kim Morris

Lloyd.

Neil McKay

The bunny and the beaver don't have names yet and the bird.

Kim Morris

No, they're free spirited.

Neil McKay

But we'll see what happens with that.

Kim Morris

Yes, yes.

Neil McKay

You don't need a name.

Kim Morris

Well, I still have a like I said, I have like chocolate chip cookies to put on there and some nuts to put on there. Some more birds.

Neil McKay

A little bit of work to do still, but it's amazing. So, and it's going to be at Open Book on November 3rd, Sunday, November 3rd. So, everybody should come down and just gaze at this wondrous.

Mary Vermillion

Take your picture there.

Neil McKay

Oh yeah, you can have your picture taken with the dragon, which is what I'm gonna do when we get off of this interview. Because I just.

Kim Morris

Yeah.

Neil McKay

I get to be the first one, yeah.

Kim Morris

Oh. Yeah. Well, I was hoping that maybe Lloyd can like be in one of your offices and you guys would take turns.

Neil McKay

I've got room.

Kim Morris

Yeah. Oh, you got room. Yes, I know, I know.

Neil McKay

That would be amazing.

Kim Morris

Yeah, I know. He's very quiet.

Neil McKay

He'd just be reading, sitting in the back reading.

Kim Morris

I know I love him.

Neil McKay

But if I mean, it looks like that was someone I would, I would ask Lloyd for advice. I would say, Lloyd, I got this situation, what do you think? And he would look up over his glasses at me.

Kim Morris

Yeah, you would. He would.

Neil McKay

I can see that and say just.

Kim Morris

Calm down.

Neil McKay

Calm down exactly.

Kim Morris

It's OK. Let's have some like a little bit of pinecones and some nuts and a chocolate chip cookie. Now here, yeah.

Neil McKay

It's nothing as bad as you think. We're just, you know, here, take this book on cones.

Kim Morris

Well, thank you. I enjoyed it.

Neil McKay

Oh, thank you so much for talking to us and for putting this amazing piece together.

Kim Morris

Oh well, I love doing it.

(Interlude music plays)

Neil McKay

Well, that's our show. I want to thank our guests author Jamie Chang and artist Kim Morris. Special thanks to Claire McElroy for agreeing to interview Janie and as always grateful appreciation to my boss, Mary Vermillion. Don't miss our Open Book festival on Sunday, November 3rd from noon to five.

Come and celebrate readers, writers, dragons and bookish experiences at the Ferndale Event Center at 5715 Barrett Rd. Just off exit 262. I hope to see you there.