

**0:00:00.0 Nicole Antoinette:** I'm Nicole Antoinette, and this is Real Talk Radio, a podcast filled with honest conversations about everything. As I shared in early June, we are in the sweet and tender wrap-up phase of this podcast, which will be ending on July 21st. Yep, this is the second to last episode. That feels very wild to say, but I am so glad to be joined today for the third time, I think, by my friend and one of my very favorite writers, Carrot Quinn.

**0:00:29.4 Carrot Quinn:** One of the themes in my book is definitely forgiveness and how... Especially when you've experienced abuse, how hard it is to forgive the people who've hurt you. And for years, my inability to forgive my mom caused me a lot of suffering. And when I finally came around... I mean, obviously it took a long time and we should never forgive people before we're ready or whatever, because not forgiving someone can be very energizing and can help us escape situations and can help us make different choices and get safe or whatever we need to do. But when I finally forgave her, it also allowed for me to forgive myself.

**0:01:19.4 NA:** Carrot is the author of two books, "ThruHiking Will Break Your Heart," which is the book that first got me into long distance hiking back in 2016. My life would not be the same without Carrot and this book. And she's also the author of a new book called "The Sunset Route," a memoir of a childhood marked by neglect, poverty, and periods of homelessness in Alaska, which she leaves behind to travel the country via freight train and more. It's a story about forgiveness, and self-discovery, and the redemptive power of nature. And it was just published yesterday. And, oh my God, I freaking loved this book, as well as this conversation with Carrot that goes deeper into the behind the scenes of it all.

**0:01:56.6 NA:** That will start for you in just a moment, but first, I wanna once again thank our truly wonderful Patreon community, the 400 plus people who have made this listener-funded show possible for the past six years. Wow. I was super unsure back in 2015 of whether or not a listener-funded show was even possible, especially one that could eventually pay everyone involved, the guests, the sound engineer, the host, the transcriptionists. I didn't know. I didn't know if that was possible. And so creating this podcast in this way with that sort of funding model felt like such a wild leap into the unknown. And the people in my Patreon community, who took that leap with me and said, "Hell, yes, let's do things a different way." Those are folks for whom I will always be supremely grateful. And even though this particular podcast is ending, our Patreon community is not.

**0:02:43.5 NA:** So, those folks and I are currently in the process, it is a fun process, of co-creating what the next phase of this work together is gonna look like. It would be a delight to have you join us if you feel drawn to a space that prioritizes honesty and intimacy and possibility, with different offerings each month, including essays and live gatherings and audio content and more. We operate on a sliding scale, with all tiers getting access to absolutely everything. And you can find us at [patreon.com/nicoleantoinette](https://patreon.com/nicoleantoinette). That's [patreon.com/nicoleantoinette](https://patreon.com/nicoleantoinette). Okay, let's get into today's episode.

**0:03:19.7 NA:** Alright, we are good to go. Carrot, welcome back.

**0:03:23.1 CQ:** Thanks for having me, Nicole. It's great to be talking to you once again.

**0:03:27.1 NA:** I was doing the light math this morning, this is your third time on the main podcast, plus we have done in the past, I think, one bonus episode, maybe more, for my Patreon. And then I interviewed you in person at one of the retreats, so apparently my favorite hobby is interviewing Carrot Quinn.

[chuckle]

**0:03:43.4 CQ:** Hell, yeah. Well, you're my favorite podcast I've ever been on, so the feeling is mutual.

**0:03:48.9 NA:** So we'll just keep... You just keep writing new books, and then we'll just keep having reasons for me to interview you again.

**0:03:54.8 CQ:** We can keep, yeah, hanging out and talking.

**0:03:58.3 NA:** Is that a career?

**0:03:58.3 CQ:** Yeah. It sounds great. If that's like... That is a life well lived. If I can just keep creating, writing, and being on your podcast, and I'm...

**0:04:09.2 NA:** That's great. Your new book, "The Sunset Route," was my most anticipated read of 2021, and it did not disappoint, seriously. Congratulations. It's a beautiful book.

**0:04:17.8 CQ:** Thank you. That means a lot.

**0:04:21.0 NA:** I loved it. I loved your first book so much, I love this book so much. To get us started, I guess, can you share what the book's about for folks?

**0:04:28.8 CQ:** Yeah. It's this... I don't know. It's hard to describe, I guess, what a book is about. It's kind of about my relationship with my mother, but it's also an adventure story, so it's like... I try to write things where you can put yourself in the main character's shoes and kind of go on an adventure with that person, so you're sort of in this book, you're sort of on this adventure, riding freight trains in the US, and then there are also a lot of chapters about my childhood in Alaska, and you sort of learn about my relationship with my mother. And in the book, the freight train part, I'm sort of... I'm having these adventures, and it's exciting and lonely and all these different things, and I'm cold and hungry and whatever, and I'm also thinking about that relationship and pondering these big questions. And then in the end, it kinda comes together and there's some nice catharsis at the end.

**0:05:32.1 NA:** Yeah. You write catharsis very well.

[chuckle]

**0:05:33.8 CQ:** Thanks. That's what I...

**0:05:36.2 NA:** I definitely felt satisfied. At the end of the book, I was like, "Okay, yeah, I feel like we've been through something together."

**0:05:40.7 CQ:** I feel like in life, in real life, we get very little... We rarely get the kind of catharsis or closure that we need or want, that we want. We have to give it to ourselves, and so in writing, I try to give it to myself and give it to the reader. If the reader can relate to the story, to the emotional story, I try to give people that because it's hard to come by.

**0:06:09.4 NA:** I feel like so much of my own desire to write is making meaning for myself of my own life, even if it's arbitrary and I've made it up, when I complete the piece of writing where I'm like, "Ah... " And it all comes together, even if it's just... For me, it feels better.

**0:06:21.3 CQ:** Oh, my God, that... Yeah, you just summed it up. It's like writing is literally making meaning, because I feel like so much, all of it is out of our control and feels like chaos. And it's suffering, and it's like, "Why so much suffering?" And then being able to make meaning helps us or helps me make peace with the amount of suffering that we experience and will continue to experience until we die. [chuckle] So it's like... Yeah, so writing definitely. And maybe other kinds of art, too, it's like you're making meaning and it helps... It gives us these moments of grace and helps us tolerate the chaos.

**0:07:03.0 NA:** I think of it is like digestion but for life experiences or a pain that we've been through that otherwise it just sort of sits there, heavy in the gut and being able to make some kind of art out of it.

**0:07:15.7 CQ:** Yes.

**0:07:16.5 NA:** It helps.

**0:07:17.7 CQ:** Yeah. Even though the art we make is always more ordered than the event actually ever was, being able to make something beautiful and ordered helps us think of it differently and makes it, yeah, less scary. Even though it's not... It's true, and that it's like, yeah, these events happened, but it's not true in the sense that it was as ordered when it happened. It's like we are just making patterns and making order.

[chuckle]

**0:07:45.4 NA:** I have to remind myself of that a lot when I get jealous of either other people's work or what I perceive in their stories. I get it a lot when I'm reading memoir, obviously, 'cause I write personal stories as well. And I can have these moments of, "Wow, that person's life makes so much sense," or, "It was so wild, or so adventurous, or so this," or, "They're so self-aware," and then to remember that's true. And also what you said is true, that we make it way more orderly, and we cut

out so much of the boring and so much of the chaos in the retelling.

**0:08:13.9 CQ:** Yeah. Like we get this raw data, just the raw data of reality. Essentially, this is what our brains do, right, is we get all this input, and then we order it into our conception of reality and make sense out of it. But then on another level, with making art, we take that, which is still just like this raw data, and we weave it. And we do pattern recognition, and we find rhythms, and we find... It's kind of like music. We find this nice melody and then we find this nice rhythm. Anyway, we weave it into this beautiful tapestry and... I'm like, "Why do we do that?" I don't know, but it feels good.

**0:08:52.7 NA:** It does feel good. Well, we are gonna today talk about the beautiful tapestry that is this book, so very excited to dig in. I'm gonna ask you to read a passage from it, it's one of my favorite pages, just the amount that is conveyed in this one page for the book. For context, for folks listening, it's a point of the story where you and eight other people are living in a two-bedroom house, which we will come back to, 'cause I have some questions about that, being creative and how you're making that works, sourcing food from dumpsters, grappling with not wanting to trade hours for dollars in that normalized never-ending year-round exploitative capitalist way. Will you read that page first?

**0:09:29.5 CQ:** Yeah. Yeah. I'm 20 years old living in essentially my first plank house. "Exchanging labor for capital is not something that we, the residents of the Witcham, had much interest in. We jealously guard our labor, choosing to squander it on our own projects. Scenes on DIY abortions, elaborate shadow puppet plays on the history of the North American Free Trade Agreement, bicycles built from salvaged parts, gathering tea from the tea dumpster that smells of bergamot and rose, and hummus, busy with fermentation from the hummus dumpster, wild travel south on freight trains to escape the winter rains. Because of this, of course, we have little money. When we need money, we work in manic spurts, going to North Dakota for the sugar beet harvest or to Southern Oregon in the fall to trim weed."

**0:10:14.2 CQ:** "You can offer up your body for drug trials or pickled clothing by the pound from the Goodwill outlet, model it yourself and resell it on eBay. You can hawk your dirty underwear online, let a strange man watch you get a pedicure, or wrestle with your friends in a baby pool of Jell-O while this strange man jerks off. When you have a couple thousand dollars, you quit, because you can. You are young, healthy, and you need very little. You can subsist on day-old bread from the trash and boiled pinto beans. Life is breathtakingly short and western civilization is definitely going to collapse in the next five to eight years. Paid work is a sort of death."

**0:10:47.7 NA:** Oh, it's so good.

**0:10:52.9 CQ:** That is a good part.

**0:10:53.0 NA:** How much of that still speak... It's so great. I mean, this whole book is so good. How much of that still speaks to how you feel right now?

**0:11:00.6 CQ:** Like how I feel about "work now... "

**0:11:04.6 NA:** Mm-hmm.

**0:11:05.8 CQ:** At the age of 38? During this time that I just read... So I decided I wanted to be a writer when I was 9 years old. It's weird, my life has been... I'm very mercurial in how I... How do I put this? I have a hard time feeling safe, [chuckle] and so I will get involved in things like jobs, houses, relationships, whatever. And then at some point, something will happen that feels like disappointing or scary or hard, and I'll just be freaked out on a cellular level and just fail. And so it's really hard, for me, to have followed. And because of that, I've lived seasonally for 18 years. I lived in one place in the winter and another place in the summer, I've done that for 18 years, and various other things I do that reflect that, just cellular difficulty feeling safe. And because of that, it's really hard to have follow-through with, for example, creative projects, or career paths, or things I'm interested in, or I never went to college, or I started going for half a year when I was 28 and then I quit.

**0:12:18.9 CQ:** But weirdly, this is the weird thing, when I was 9, I decided I wanted to be a writer, and that has been the one thing that I have felt consistent about my entire life, and that has never failed. So, the passage I just read, when I was 21, I was still in that space where I was like, "I wanna be a writer, I wanna be a writer." And to do that, yeah, you know this, everybody who's trying to do this knows this, in order to make a living as a writer, you need a lot of time that you're not working another job because you need that time and energy in order to invest in your writing, in order to get better at writing, because it takes hundreds of thousands of hours of just writing to get better at writing, to figure out how... You have to figure out how to write, how you wanna write. It takes thousands of hours.

**0:13:08.8 CQ:** So, you can't be working full time year-round. I'm sure some people have pulled it off, but you can't be working full time year-round, for most of us, if you're going to invest the time and energy into writing that it takes to eventually build up to being able to make a living off your writing. So, that was part of how I was feeling in that passage, where I was... I've always been like, "I don't wanna work full-time because I need to focus on my writing." So I continued to do that all through my 20s, where I would often get a summer job in Alaska, and save my money, and then go back to Portland. And back then, Portland was very cheap. I would live in like... I literally lived in a shack in my friend's backyard one year, and there were spiders crawling on me at night. They're really friendly spiders, but I would hear them fall from the ceiling and hit my bed frame at night. Or I would live in a moldy trailer or someone's gross basement room and live off the money I'd save and just write all winter long.

**0:14:03.6 CQ:** And eventually, because I was... Because, yeah, I needed very little. I was fortunate in that aspect, where I was like my shitty diet, and not having a car, and not having health insurance, and not having any money for really anything ever, I was still okay enough when I was young. Obviously I need... Now that I'm older and I'm not so young, I need more to feel good. I need better food and various things. But I was able to make it work on that little money and just write, and then eventually I was able to produce a book and make money off the book, and slowly

build these other income streams. And then eventually I didn't have to work half the year doing something else. I mean, I still do some other things that aren't writing, but mostly I just live off my writing.

**0:14:55.4 CQ:** So, I still feel the same way in that we should jealously guard our time as much as we're able, because then if we do have something that is a dream, or if you wanna make a living off your art, if you wanna do this or that, if you give all of your time to a full-time job, you won't be able to do that. And obviously a lot of the time people don't have a choice. And if you do make that choice, there's a lot of risks, and you don't have real stability in a lot of ways. So I still feel the same way that, if it's possible at all, that we should be very possessive of our own time.

[chuckle]

**0:15:41.5 NA:** How long did you work on this book? How many years? 'Cause didn't you start this a long time ago?

**0:15:47.0 CQ:** Yeah, 14 years. I started it in 2003. Wait, is that right? Maybe that's not right. 2005, I think, 2006? 2005 or 2006. I don't know how many years that is, but something like 14 years and... Yeah. So in my early 20s I started writing zines about my travels on trains, and about my adventures, and about my mom, too. And every year I would out one and it was 100 pages. It was so thick, I could hardly fold it. And a lot of those original stories are now in "The Sunset Route," and I've rewritten them so many times. So, yeah, a long time. And then some of the material is more recent, for sure, but a lot of it I started working on 14 years ago.

**0:16:36.3 NA:** I find that very comforting that... I don't know. Not to say that it should take that long, but I think sometimes, because most of the writing that I have done, pretty much all of it, has been more like blog format, like internet-type writing, something that you write, and that gets published and turned around really quickly, and it happens on more of that faster pace. I think that... Or the same can be true for people on social media or that type of thing, we get really used to the really fast turnaround to really instant gratification of people interacting with the work, that I find that it sometimes makes it more difficult for me to do longer, slower, maybe more frustrating projects, things that are gonna take... Fourteen years, I know you weren't working on it continuously for 14 years, but that's a really long time. And I think sometimes I, selfishly, need the reminder that big works of art, or athletic achievement, or anything really that we wanna do in our life, it's more than 500 words, so to speak, takes time, and that that's okay.

**0:17:36.3 CQ:** Yeah. And definitely my first book, "ThruHiking Will Break Your Heart," which I self-published, could have benefited from more time. [chuckle] But I felt I'd done a Kickstarter to pay for it, and I was a year late, so I was like, "I gotta publish this." But I do think that... 'Cause I get so much out of having stuff published, and pre-seen and perceived by others, having my art consumed feels like it finishes the process, where I'm like, "Yeah, I made something beautiful out of this hard emotional thing, and now other people are seeing it," and that makes that the catharsis.

**0:18:11.3 CQ:** So, I get a lot out of having things... It is hard when something takes a long time,

'cause I'm like, "I want this to be out there, but then I just..." I try to tell myself that once it's out there, it can be out there for a long time, so there's not necessarily a rush. But I definitely would have been hard if this had been my only project, because I think... Yeah, all the blogging I've done, and then the first book that I kinda rushed out, all those things have given me that... Have fed me the way I feel like publishing something and having people read it really feeds me, so it would have been hard if this was the only book, I would have been like, "Ah," but since it had been like a back-burner thing for so long, that it wasn't like the only thing I had, but yeah, I think it is hard to have that... To have that patience. For me.

**0:19:00.9 NA:** Yeah, same, completely. Okay, I have to ask, in that passage that you read when we were setting that up, so it's you and eight other people that are living in this house, and in the book you share that there was one bathroom for nine people and that it was never once cleaned in the entire year that you lived there, and I cannot... Carrot, what is that?

**0:19:19.4 CQ:** Okay, I have to say that the maximum number of people that lived there... While I was there, at one point was 11 for what it's worth.

**0:19:25.8 NA:** That doesn't make this any better.

**0:19:27.2 CQ:** [chuckle] I know, it was... So this is something I think about a lot and I still haven't found the answer to, so back then when I was sort of coming of age, it was like the punk anarchist... Back then, we called it Primitivists but that... Now people call it rewilding or people have different terms, scene in Portland at that time, there was this pride in never bathing, and I've thought about it a lot. And for the life of me, I can't remember why. I literally can't... I feel like now the different life trends that come and go, you're like, oh yeah, people feel that this personal lifestyle choice is honorable because X, Y, Z, and then personal lifestyle choices, because we have all these big systemic issues we can't change, and so we like to latch on to personal lifestyle choices, 'cause it feels like something we can control. And what we feel like we can control or what will make us feel better, goes in and out of fashion all the time, like, "Oh, let's be zero ways, or let's do this, whatever." Anyway, one of those things at that time was like, it was literally a point of pride not to bathe. It was considered morally better, and I have no idea why.

**0:20:42.3 NA:** You can't see my face right now, but like...

**0:20:44.0 CQ:** There were literally people who... Like this one guy, Andrew, who would live at that house when he was in town, 'cause a lot of people traveled constantly, and then when they were in town, they would live at the house, there were always people coming and going, and he would say that he only bathed in natural bodies of water, so he would only bathe if he was near a creek or a lake, and also you wouldn't wash your clothes, that's another... That was another point of pride, and it wasn't like... I mean, it makes sense if you're traveling, if you're riding the train, there's no way to bathe whatever, but this is like people at the moment in their year where they were living in a house, and his clothes were so dirty that they... Like his carharts shone like they were waxed canvas, they were like shiny, and he could run his thumb nail along his carharts and it would make a curl of wax, basically, but it was like just oil from... [chuckle] I don't know what.

**0:21:45.0 NA:** So nobody was inclined to clean the bathroom, that makes sense, that checks out. [chuckle]

**0:21:48.3 CQ:** So also the other thing is we just didn't have a good system for chores, I think, because there was so much chaos and so many people coming and going all the time that... Yeah, and the other thing I think about a lot and kind of shudder is there was a towel hanging on the towel rack that never got washed or changed, and if you washed your hands, which probably nobody did, you would dry them on this towel, and if you showered, you would use this towel...

**0:22:16.2 NA:** There was one towel also for nine people in this bathroom that didn't get cleaned?

**0:22:20.7 CQ:** Yeah.

**0:22:21.1 NA:** I think this is where you've lost me in this book [chuckle]

**0:22:22.6 CQ:** It was disgusting... Even back then, I remember thinking that it was really disgusting.

**0:22:29.0 NA:** Okay, was it a thing that you thought it was disgusting, but it wasn't cool to say anything so in your head, you were just like, "I guess I'm gonna deal with this?"

**0:22:37.4 CQ:** I think it's not that it wasn't cool, it was... The thought of trying to create a system for so many people and so much chaos was overwhelming, so I just like took a backseat and I was like, "Okay," I was like, "This is just the way it is." I lived at that house for less than two years, and then the houses I lived at after that were marginally better as I got older, which was definitely a relief for me, I... That level of filth in the bathroom was gross to me, but I definitely was like, "Alright, I'm not gonna... I'm not gonna try to touch this," but... Do you wanna hear the scabies story?

**0:23:11.2 NA:** The scabies, story? Sure. Yes, I guess, I don't know. Do I?

**0:23:15.7 CQ:** So... I don't know if you've ever had scabies, but...

**0:23:17.0 NA:** I have not.

**0:23:18.7 CQ:** Okay, okay. Because in the Western world, we're so obsessed with bathing and changing our clothes, for most people, it's actually really hard to get scabies because if you change your clothes every day... Scabies, they'll maybe get on your clothes from someone else, let's say. And then it takes them a little while to embed themselves in your skin, and so if you change your clothes every day, it's hard to get scabies, if you bathe everyday...

**0:23:43.4 NA:** Are they similar to bed bugs?

**0:23:45.4 CQ:** No, they're these tiny mites that are so small, you can't see them and they burrow into your skin, and then when they shit in there, you are allergic to their shit, and so you get... It's a nightmare. It is a nightmare.

**0:23:56.1 NA:** Oh my God. What kind of content warning do I put on this story.

**0:24:01.4 CQ:** It is a nightmare. Anyway, if you bathe every day and you change your close every day, it's almost impossible to get scabies, so they're really rare in the US, they're obviously more common in houseless populations or you see them sometimes with children, but because houseless populations don't get a lot of representation or care, a lot of doctors won't even know how to check for scabies because that's probably the only population in the US where you still see them a lot is houseless populations. So this house was a perfect environment for scabies because nobody ever bathed or changed their clothes, so they came through and 14 people ended up getting scabies, but no one could figure out what they had because when we would go to the free clinic, they'd be like, "I don't know what this is." Because it's something that doctors just don't know about anymore, because it's just houseless people who aren't getting care, so we find by the time... That's why so many people got them, because by the time we figured out what they were it had been a while, and so they'd been passed around, but scabies is a nightmare, essentially. So this is really funny.

**0:25:10.6 CQ:** Before I got scabies... I like to think about this all the time. Before I got scabies, I never had trouble sleeping in my life, I would like... But they also say this about when you're young, it's like the golden age of sleep, and then as you get older, your sleep gets less good, but I'd always just been a great sleeper. I never even thought about it. And then the scabies are most active at night and so that is when your whole body starts itching. The itch is insane, it's so insane that it feels almost orgasmic to scratch, and you scratch so much even when you're asleep that you end up covered in bruises and you just can't sleep, and it's this torment that happens every night and I got... I couldn't sleep, and then ever since then, I've had chronic insomnia. [chuckle]

**0:25:50.9 NA:** Oh my God.

**0:25:52.8 CQ:** It definitely triggered something that my body is like, "Okay, it's time for us to get..." It's not good. But anyway, so for months, I didn't know what I had and I just had this horrible itch all night long, anyway, we finally figured out what it was, and then the way you treat it... So this scabies have been around for thousands of years, and the way the Romans used to treat it is they would cover themselves in this heavy cream, like some sort of oily heavy cream, head to toe, and they would do it day and night for two weeks and that actually smothers them, and that's the only natural treatment that works, which is obviously too messy to really fit into people's lifestyles these days. So now what people do is there's this Permethrin cream, which is like a... It's like a pesticide and it's a neurotoxin, and it kills the scabies by destroying their nervous systems, and you cover yourself in it head to toe and then you go to sleep and in the morning you wake up and you wash it off.

**0:26:44.3 CQ:** And it's really bad for you, you actually absorb it and it comes out in your urine, but that cream creates such a bad rash that usually... And this happened to us, everyone thinks they still

have scabies and then they treat again, and you're only supposed to use the cream like a couple of times in your whole life because it's really toxic, and we all got scabies twice like... Actually... So I ended up treating it four times, anyway, eventually the nightmare was over, and then we all got really careful... I was living in a different house by this time, we all got really careful about never lay on someone else's bed, like all these different things. [chuckle] But that's the scabies story.

**0:27:23.7 NA:** Wow. That's your scabies story. Now, I have learned multiple things.

**0:27:28.6 CQ:** Scabies are terrible, and I'm so grateful that...

**0:27:31.6 NA:** TLDR, scabies are terrible. Oh my God. So, okay... So you're living in this house and is that when you started riding freight trains?

**0:27:39.1 CQ:** Yeah, yeah. So that was another sort of thing people were doing at the time as a lifestyle choice, was people were like, peak oil is coming, consuming gas is bad. So riding freight trains, sneaking onto freight trains... Obviously it's illegal, sneaking onto freight trains and riding them across the country as an ethical way to travel because you're not consuming any gas, so it's like you're not being... The idea was that you could somehow opt out, obviously you can't, but the idea that you could be not participating in these systems, so if you travel on freight trains you're not using the gas and also things that were illegal, but in a low-key way, were very popular, so like shoplifting, riding freight trains, things that would get you like a misdemeanor at max, so that was also something that was really popular, so... Yeah. Freight trains were popular.

**0:28:32.6 CQ:** Everyone was doing it, and it was definitely like something that made you cool, and the irony is that sort of scene I was in, it was very white, and a lot of people came from money, like almost everyone I would say, came from money and had gone to very expensive liberal arts schools, and then they were part of the scene where everyone was performing poverty so hard obviously to compensate because everyone had realized how fucked the system is and how complicit we all are, and I feel like white people and people who come from money, when you sort of have that awareness of like, at whatever point you realize how these systems work and there's all this guilt and shame and then people scramble to try and figure out how to make themselves feel better.

**0:29:17.2 CQ:** And so I think the sort of extreme to which people performed poverty was part of that, but it was definitely very cool, and it was funny 'cause I didn't come from money, but I still got the appeal where I was like, "Yeah, these systems are fucked, and I don't wanna be a part of them." So I'm going to not bathe and ride freight trains and do these different things. I mean, we didn't actually have money, but a lot of people had access to familial wealth, but on the day-to-day, yeah, people chose not to work very much because they wanted to do all these other projects they were doing, and so it kind of fit with that, but I wanted to be cool, and I also had never really had adventures and I also hadn't really traveled, and it also... It was something that really scared me, it was the first thing I ever did that was truly empowering, I feel like this... This happens for a lot of different people in different ways. Maybe they get into long distance hiking or maybe they get into whatever thing that seems really scary and overwhelming and hard, and then they figure it out and it kind of changes their life in a way, and I feel like riding freight trains was that for me, 'cause it was

the first thing I found like that where I was like, "This is scary and intimidating." And then I learned about it and did it and felt so empowered and I was like, "Wow, I can do stuff like this," so that, it really changed me in that...

**0:30:45.0 NA:** Yeah, it doesn't matter as much even what the thing is, but doing something that feels initially too hard for you or impossible for you, if you actually manage to do it, it's incredibly empowering.

**0:30:55.2 CQ:** Yes. Or if it's something that you... Also if it's something that you grew up, being told that it wasn't for you or that you couldn't do, whatever sort of intimidating thing that you weren't socialized, like we're socialized to be like, "These are the things you can do, these the things you can't." And so it's one of those things that you feel like you were told you couldn't do then it's empowering in that way too.

**0:31:18.9 NA:** Okay, so I would love to hear the story of your very first freight train ride, as you just mentioned, it's illegal, you didn't mention this, but you talk about it in the book that it's actually quite dangerous so, set the scene and tell me the story.

**0:31:30.6 CQ:** One of my fears about this book coming out is that... Which I think is legitimate, and maybe I should have thought about this. [chuckle] Is I'm actually maybe encouraging people to do something very dangerous. [chuckle] Honestly, I'm like, "Wait, now that..." I'm like, maybe there should be a disclaimer in the book, maybe there is... I don't think there is. I don't think...

**0:31:54.3 NA:** I don't remember there being one.

**0:31:55.7 CQ:** There is no disclaimer. [chuckle] Oops, oh well.

**0:32:00.5 NA:** I don't know, I think there's lots of memoirs and stories that have things that are equally or more dangerous that don't come with disclaimers.

**0:32:09.7 CQ:** Well, fingers crossed.

**0:32:10.9 NA:** I didn't read this thinking that Carrot's telling me to go do this thing.

**0:32:15.4 CQ:** Fingers crossed. Anyway, yeah, it's very dangerous. So the most dangerous thing about it, which is the thing that I was like, "I should have thought about this," is if you learn about it and try to do it on your own, that's when it's really dangerous. It's kind of like driving a car whereas, if you didn't know how to drive and you just got in a car and went for a drive, it would be incredibly dangerous because you wouldn't understand traffic laws, you wouldn't understand how the car works, like all these different things, but if you learn to drive from someone else and learn all these... Driving... Traffic laws aren't intuitive, you have to learn how traffic works, and it's the same with riding a freight train, it's not intuitive, so you have to learn these things that aren't intuitive in order to do it safely, so the danger is... And this is where the vast majority of accidents happen with... In train yards and with trains and people is people who don't know anything about train yards

or trains, and then they either walk across a train yard or try to ride a train for fun, 'cause there's things you don't realize that are very dangerous that are actually super dangerous about trains.

**0:33:18.6 CQ:** So I learned... So I actually know someone... I know someone who is very injured, who is alive but is disabled for life because they rode a freight train pretty young, they didn't know what they were doing, and I learned from other people, which was really great, so if you ever wanna ride a train... Disclaimer, I guess, don't ride a train. It's illegal and dangerous. But if you were to ride a train, you would wanna find someone who knows what they're doing and you wanna learn from them, and you would not wanna attempt it alone, 'cause if you do learn from someone who has safety in mind, who doesn't do reckless shit just for fun, and who does it with a mind of safety, it's actually very safe because trains don't derail very often, and whereas there's car accidents all the time, so if you actually understand how freight trains work and how train yards work, which takes time to learn, you can actually... Aside from the exposure to the exhaust, which is kind of toxic over the course of days, especially if you go through a tunnel, it's super toxic, aside from that, it's actually very safe if you do it carefully, so I learned from people...

**0:34:25.5 CQ:** And I definitely made some mistakes and ended up in some risky situations, but yeah, my first time I was in Portland, and at this house, the Witcham house with all the people and the extremely dirty bathroom, and my friend Sammy and I, it was February, and we were very depressed, 'cause it was very cold and rainy and we didn't turn on the heat in this house because we couldn't afford it, and we would just drink Mason jars of tea all day and just be kind of cold and miserable. We decided we wanted to ride a freight train to Texas and then take a bus to Guatemala, and that part where we go to Guatemala isn't actually in the book, 'cause it didn't quite fit in the story, but... So we wanted to ride a train to Texas, and so we asked Andrew, who is the guy whose pants were so dirty that they looked like they were waxed canvas, who only had bathed in like sand rivers, we asked him... And Sammy had ridden freight trains before, so she knew the safety... The safety elements of it, but the thing is, every place you wanna go on a train, you get there differently, and so if you wanna go some place, you actually have to find someone who has ridden that route and you have to ask them questions, and that's the only way... Aside from like maybe months of trial and error, that's the only way to really figure out how to go somewhere is to find someone who's done it and be like, "Hey... "

**0:35:46.8 CQ:** I'm not gonna go into too much detail 'cause I don't wanna tell people how to ride freight trains, but you have to get basically instructions from someone and so Andrew was like, "Yeah, this is how you catch this train that will take you to LA and then in LA you can take another train to Texas," and he wrote down some directions for us, for once you're in LA, and we were like, "Well, how long does the train take to get from Portland to LA?" And he was like, "I don't know, like two days." And we didn't...

**0:36:15.7 CQ:** I didn't really know at the time how much water I needed over the course of a couple of days, I had never really back-packed or done anything like that, and so we just brought two litres each and we went and waited at the spot... At the catch out spot in Portland, and it was February, so in Portland, it was like 45 degrees and raining, but the train would take us up into the Cascade Mountains, which I didn't realize at the time where it was actually very cold and snowy,

and we got on our train and by that time, I'd drank one of my two liters of water, and it ended up taking... I can't remember, it says in the book, like three or four days to get to LA, and the first thing that happened after we left Portland is we were riding in this car that had these huge holes in the floor, and either side of the hole there was a little metal ledge that was just wide enough to roll out your foam sleeping pad and your sleeping bag, and then you had to be very careful not to let your stuff fall into the hole, so I rolled out my sleeping pad and my sleeping bag and then I crossed to the other side of the car, carefully around the hole to talk to Sammy, and then the train picked up speed and the hole turned into a vacuum and my sleeping bag was sucked through the hole and I lost my sleeping bag.

**0:37:26.0 CQ:** Just a few hours after leaving Portland, before we climbed up into the Cascade mountains, so I was like, "Oh no." And so Sammy had this tarp, she had an extra tarp, or she was carrying a tarp so she gave it to me, and I wrapped it around myself and put on all my layers, and then we got up into the mountains and it was very cold. I don't know how cold it was, but another thing about the train is when you're going downhill, you really... Or on a totally flat stretch, you really pick up speed, you're going like 60 miles an hour and you have nothing to protect you from the wind except like this little lip of metal, and so I'm just being pummeled by this cold wind and there's just snow outside and it's night and the trees are all sparkling, and I was so cold and I'd heard... And Sammy was asleep, deeply cocooned in her sleeping bag and I was just... Had this tarp around me just so, so cold, and I'd heard that at the front of the train, there are a bunch of engines and that they're only crew in the first engine, but that all the engines are heated and they all have a little room with captain's chairs and a heat and a little fridge full of water and a bathroom.

**0:38:37.9 CQ:** That's what I'd heard. And so I got it in... 'Cause I couldn't sleep. I got this idea in my head that every time the train would stop, I would get off and try to run to the front, and if I could make it to one of those engines, I could warm up, but you know, trains can be two miles long and normally you're riding near the back because you don't wanna be seen or because when the train stops, where the back end is where it's safest to get on because you're most hidden. So we are close to the back, so the train would stop and I would get off and just start running, super numb, just stumbling from being so stiff from the cold, running on the ballast, which is steeply angled next to the tracks and covered in snow, my boots breaking through the snow, trying to get to the front of the train, and then I would hear this hiss as the brakes released, which means the trains about to start moving again. And I would be like, "Oh fuck," and so I'd have to turn around and run back to my car and try to get on before the train started moving, because once the train's moving, it's really dangerous to get on or off, because it creates this...

**0:39:38.4 CQ:** It pulls you under the train in a way if you fall, you're most likely to go under the train once it's moving because the way it's pulling. So I never made it the front because it was so far and the train would only stop for 10 minutes, so I did that all night, and then finally day came and we were still in the mountains and it was so cold, and now we are out of water too, so I was pretty thirsty, so it was hard to eat much, and then that night... I can't remember if it was that night or the next morning, it's in the book, but at some point, we finally dropped out of the mountains and into the warmer part of California, and we were warmer, but we were super dehydrated and my tongue was swollen in my mouth and I was so thirsty, which was my first experience with dehydration of

that sort, and then finally we got to LA and got off the train and found a Tacoria and drank so much water and ate, and I was able to find another sleeping bag, but that was my first long train ride.

**0:40:39.5 NA:** So you're in LA and you're finally having water after being so thirsty that your tongue is swollen in your mouth, are you thinking like, "Fuck Yeah, that was awesome. I'm excited to do that again"? What's going through your mind after this first experience?

**0:40:52.0 CQ:** Yeah, I think I was, I was very young. [chuckle] Obviously. Now, I would be like, "I hate this so much." But I stopped feeling like wanting to have that sort of adventure like 12 years ago, which is the last time I tried to ride a train, but at that point in my life, I was like... I was like, "Fuck yeah, this is so incredible." So then we found what we thought was the spot... Judging from the directions we had from Andrew, we found what we thought was the spot to catch the train to Texas, and we literally built this little house out of tumble weeds, it didn't have a roof, but it had walls, and we could like hide in there, so we would just chill in there, and then it took us three days to get a train or something, because it turned out we were in the wrong spot and we had to find this other spot, but... Yeah, I was definitely having a great adventure.

**0:41:45.3 NA:** So some additional sort of logistical questions, you mentioned that obviously the water that you're drinking when you're on the train, you're bringing with you, 'cause it's not like backpacking where you're crossing water sources or refilling your water, so you have to come on the train with everything that you need, what are you eating and what's the going to the bathroom situation?

**0:42:02.1 CQ:** Good questions. So I think on that trip, I brought Trail Mix, dried mango, probably like some bread, I think I brought canned beans, because weight wasn't as big of an issue as when you're backpacking because you do have to carry it to the train, which is really heavy, 'cause often you're carrying... If we were smart, and later on we learned this, but you're carrying two gallons of water and then all this heavy food, but once you're on the train the weight doesn't matter, and often you're on the train for three days at a time, so... Yeah, I would bring canned goods, a lot of canned beans and maybe some hot sauce and bread and cheese and... Yeah, that kind of thing.

**0:42:45.4 NA:** Yeah, so you're eating these things out of cans and then you have to pee, what happens? Or you have to poop, what happens?

**0:42:50.0 CQ:** So peeing, you can... Once one of your gallons is empty, you can cut off the top, or if you have a different water bottle, you can cut off the top and pee in that, throw it over the side, or you can... If you're on a car that has a lot of space, you can go all the way to the other end and just pee on the metal and the wind will just blow away and dry it up, taking a shit, you can either get off the train when it stopped and hope the train doesn't start to pull away while there is a turd coming out of your butt or this is what I liked to do, you wait until you're kind of in the middle of nowhere, going through a forest on the mountain side, far from any road, just kind of in the middle of nowhere, and then I would... Obviously, this does not leave no trace, but I would take a shit on a piece of cardboard and just throw it over the side, or you can shit in... Obviously, I don't recommend these things, but... Or you can shit in a couple plastic grocery bags layered inside each other and

then tie it up like a doggy bag and take it off with you, you know?

**0:43:54.7 CQ:** Yeah, shitting is kind of hard, and obviously, if you're with someone else, you want to go to the next car to take a shit. So normally, the porches, you can jump from porch to porch, which is dangerous if the train is moving, and even if it's stopped because the train can just start moving at any moment, you don't... Since you're so far from the engines, you have no idea when the train is gonna start to move, so it can just jerk forward and you can fall between the cars, but you can... If you are with someone else, you do wanna go to the next car to take a shit obviously, unless you're close like that. [chuckle]

**0:44:29.4 NA:** Yeah, so it's like the roulette of, "Well, the trains either gonna start moving or it's not gonna start moving, while I'm pooping." Oh my God, that's...

**0:44:42.1 CQ:** It was gross.

**0:44:42.3 NA:** Yeah. I felt... I told you this earlier, when we were talking, it was such an interesting experience for me to read this book because I felt like I was trying to read it as three different people at the same time. I was trying to read it as if I'm someone who doesn't know you, and I'm picking this stand-alone book up off the shelf and I don't know anything about you, and then I was trying to read it as someone who was gonna be interviewing you about the story, and then I'm reading it as my actual self who has known you for years, and... As my friend, I'm like, "Oh, I'm getting so much more context," it made so much sense to me why you wound up loving long distance hiking the way that you did, it seemed like the easier, more chill version of your entire life leading up to that.

**0:45:21.6 CQ:** Yes, it was. So in 2009 was the last time I tried to ride a freight train and it was actually in Alaska and I got busted immediately because I'd always wanted to ride one in Alaska, but the problem is in the summer, it doesn't get dark at all, so it's really hard to sneak around so I convinced my friend to do this and we both got caught and it was a bummer, but after that I just... 'Cause riding freight trains, everything happens in the middle of the night, and it's a lot of playing cat and mouse with the rail cop, which is fun when you're young, it's like, "Oh, you gotta run, you gotta hide, blah, blah, blah," and you know the worst thing that will happen is a misdemeanor or trespassing ticket. So if that's not something you care that much about, then it feels exciting if you're young and you're into that, obviously having a bunch of misdemeanors on your record will affect you and it has affected me some, but it... There are worse things. There are worse things I could have done, I was young and very traumatized and needed to feel certain things, but yeah, at some point I was like, "I'm too old."

**0:46:21.8 CQ:** "My adrenals are very tired, I can't do all these things at like 3:00 AM anymore," and I also didn't want to be... Also... Oh, It had gotten to the point... This wasn't a big part of it, where my favorite parts... Maybe this is always true, my favorite parts of riding the trains had been the way it takes you through wilderness, because often railroad tracks go in a place where there's not a road system, because the way they built roads and the way they built railroads is really different, so if you're going through North Dakota, for example, the train can take you through all

these beautiful prairies with crumbling old houses next to them that were built up around the railroad, but the highway is nowhere in sight, because when they finally built the highway, they built it somewhere else and so... Or the trains will take you up through the mountains on this narrow track where it's just forest on either side and there's no road to be seen, and so you get took at all these really cool places and that... And then you get off the train, you sleep in those places, you walk around in those places, you wait for more trains in those places, and that was my favorite part.

**0:47:23.8 CQ:** And when I learned about long distance hiking, I learned that you could just walk through the wilderness for months at a time, and it was also an escape and also an adventure and also very hard, but you didn't have to worry about criminal charges and you didn't have to worry about... You were able... You could get a full night sleep and you... You could just take care of yourself better. It wasn't as hard on the adrenals and also all the exercise, all the movement felt really good, so it was... I stopped riding freight trains and for a couple of years, I didn't have anything like that, and I was really depressed. That's when I tried to go to college and I was like, "I hate this." 'Cause I've always been really bad at school, I just can't focus, and I just get all this anxiety, and then I discovered long distance hiking and I was like, "This is so cool," 'cause it fills that need, but I don't have to ride freight trains to do it.

**0:48:16.7 NA:** Yeah, that totally makes sense. So the book goes back and forth, timeline-wise between ride these free trains and adventures and things that are happening at that age, and then back and forth with your quite early childhood, which was really interesting to read the like, "Okay, this is what was happening at five years old, six years old, eight years old. And then this is kind of fast-forwarding like 10 plus years into that," which I found as structurally really, really interesting, but one of the things that I was curious about in reading that, because you talk about your experiences as a kid growing up in poverty and the stories that you tell about your mom, and then some of that sort of leads into what you've already talked about so far, but I would love for you to talk a bit about your experience in moving from one world to another world, and class as you've gotten older.

**0:49:11.0 CQ:** Like my growing up versus my adult life?

**0:49:13.0 NA:** Yeah.

**0:49:14.7 CQ:** Yeah, I think the thing that I think about the most is... And I feel like one reason I wanted to write this book is for people who can relate, because I feel like childhood poverty is actually really common in the US, and it's actually just becoming more common, but growing up in extreme poverty in the US is like... I experienced the world one way where I was like, "Oh, this is the world." And then when I became an adult and I was able to... I was no longer helpless and so I could... I could work and I could feed myself and I could interact with the world in a different way, I was able to slowly sort of find this other world, but that first world stayed with me as like a shadow, and I still feel it layered under this world, it is very much two worlds laying on top of each other and it never goes away and... Obviously, it really affects what I perceive as possible... Yeah, I have such a hard time feeling safe because for the first 14 years of my life, I was only safe when I was alone. So I have a hard time feeling safe in relationships, and obviously life is built on

relationships, and also relationships are the only thing that make life worth living. [chuckle] And I want them and crave them and have them, but it's... The way I struggle is unique in that way, and I do... I feel like partly because I'm white, and so I was able to...

**0:50:51.6 CQ:** If you grow up poor, but you're white, then when you're an adult, you can pass as someone who maybe... People don't look at me and think like, "That person grew up poor." White people are just default seen as... I don't know of a certain class or passing as a certain class. And so I kind of... And also the communities I chose... Ironically, even though I was around all these punks performing poverty, they were all people from wealth with expensive college educations, and so even then, being around all these punks, I had jumped class, I had changed the class that the people I was around pretty intensely, like everybody had these very good sense of educations, and I could... That's easy to do when you're white, you can sort of be... You know, when you're white, you can be whoever you want, you can just control how people perceive you essentially, and you have more... You're able to do that. So I think that that first life...

**0:51:58.2 CQ:** Yeah, it's this shadow that haunts me and that I struggle to reconcile with the world I'm in now. Now it's like I'm able to pay my bills mostly with writing, and that feels like... Even though I'm not wealthy, it makes me feel incredibly wealthy, the fact that I can pay my rent with writing, it's insane. Who gets to do that? And the fact that I can go to the grocery store and buy food when I need it, it's like that will never stop blowing my mind. The ability to just buy food, will never stop blowing my mind and I'd love to be able to own a house some day. I can't right now, but I would love that if I could. And yeah, it's really interesting. It's an interesting world, the way we... The way we deal with class in this country is we just don't... We just ignore it, obviously. If we organize around class, that would be such a huge threat to this pyramid scheme called capitalism, and maybe that's one of the reasons that it doesn't happen, it's because that it would be such a threat. Yeah, does that answer your question to some extent?

**0:53:12.2 NA:** Yeah, I wasn't looking for a specific answer, I was just curious on what your reflection is on that. I guess this is sort of related... One of the things that was really clear for me was that the stories you were telling in this book felt very honest and reflective, but didn't read at all like trauma porn, and I would love to hear about some of the intentional choices that you made in deciding how to write about the painful experiences from your childhood.

**0:53:38.7 CQ:** Oh yeah, so there's actually a lot that I wrote that didn't end up in the book. I originally wrote kind of about every bad memory I have as a child. [chuckle]

**0:53:49.5 NA:** What was that like? Oh God.

**0:53:51.4 CQ:** It felt important to do just initially just to... 'Cause you... You just wanna talk about the pain you've experienced, but then when it was time to shape this... The original draft, when I sold this book, the draft I had was like 140,000 words, I think that the finished book is 90,000 words, maybe a little more, but it included so many more. I just dragged the reader through all of this pain and then reading it back to myself I was just cringing, I was like, "This isn't fun to read." I was like, "This is terrible to read." And I think there are authors who, writing memoir, what they

wanna do is literally drag you through all the pain, and I think there's some readers that probably want that too, and I've read memoirs like that and reading memoirs like that is hard for me because it feels traumatizing. I'm like, "No, don't go back," and then they go back. And then they leave, and then they go back and then they leave and you're like, "No, don't go back," and it feels really hard... I'm like, "Is this triggering?" This is so hard. And I didn't wanna do that to the reader.

**0:54:56.7 CQ:** Also because... Yeah, I didn't wanna make a book that the whole appeal was being dragged through all these horrible experiences, [chuckle] and I was like, "I can just allude..." I can give enough examples to allude to the fact that I was living in a horror movie for the first 14 years of my life, and it's like, okay, the reader gets it. And then that creates the depth for the rest of the book. But I was like, "I don't have to drag people through every single thing," which is hard because you do wanna just tell all the stories.

**0:55:33.6 NA:** But that question of, what's the experience that you're trying to give to the person on the other side of it, it feels really generous actually.

**0:55:43.5 CQ:** Yeah. I guess because I have read a few memoirs that were really good, but I... Personally that's not the experience I look for when I read, and I guess that's how I write... I assume that... I'm like, "Well, whoever wants what I want, I'll just give them that." But I didn't want it to be too painful, I wanted to be more catharsis, more healing, more freedom, more... All these things and less dragging the pain. [chuckle]

**0:56:11.0 NA:** It goes back to what we were talking about at the beginning of the purpose of writing, trying to find meaning, trying to create order out of chaos in order to have a finished product that reads that way and it's understandable that way, you have to pick and choose what you're including, and it doesn't make the final version not true, but there's... Unless someone lived every single moment of your life by your side and also had access to the inside of your own head, there's no way to have it be the complete exact map of what happened.

**0:56:37.7 CQ:** Yeah, totally.

**0:56:38.9 NA:** And that's not the point, that's not why we're reading books.

**0:56:41.4 CQ:** I think that can be good for the first draft just to get it all out there, 'cause then you also know everything you have to work with, so then you can look at all the pieces and try and figure out what you wanna include, so just to vomit it, I'm really a big fan of just the like initial vomiting, that really works for me, [chuckle] but yeah, definitely it won't serve the story to include every single thing.

**0:57:03.5 NA:** Okay. So process question, so you have this 140,000 word draft, where you have this really long draft where you have memory vomited, or painful trauma vomited onto these pages. What did you do? Did you print it out and then go through it and be like, "This one's too painful, cross it off." What was the actual process of getting to the book that you have?

**0:57:21.2 CQ:** That's a great question. I listened to this podcast once, that talked about different creative careers and how they progress over the course of a life, and how it relates to the way that your brain changes as you age, and they said that with writers, most writers don't come into their careers like the vast majority, vast... It's a really rare exception, most writers don't come into their careers until their 40s, and they think it's because the way your brain changes as you age, and I'm 38 and the last couple of years working on this book... So my first book was just a trail blog, so it was just like day after day after day, so there was no... It wasn't hard to figure out the structure. It was just like a series of consecutive days, very easy structure. This book was actually structured like a novel, and I'd never done that before, and for my whole life, I've been trying to write novels or trying to write manuscripts, trying to write books and writing these things that are just chaos, a lot of them have been previous versions of "The Sunset Route", I've tried to write it multiple times and it's just chaos.

**0:58:23.1 CQ:** And I was just like... It felt like it was too hard for my brain, I was just like, "I can't fucking do that, I can't... It doesn't fit, it doesn't fit in my brain, it doesn't fit in my brain," and I definitely think as I'm aging, I'm getting... There's a lot... There's things I'm losing, I feel less quick, I feel less clever, but weirdly, the last couple of years, the ability to hold a book length project in my head has started to happen. It's incredible, and I always think about that podcast and I was like, "Oh my god, this is why writers come into their careers in their 40s," because book-length projects are really hard to hold in your brain and it takes... Your brain has to change before you can do it. And it even started, it was happening as I was working on this, because at first I just had those 140,000 words of chaos and I was like, "Fuck fuck, fuck. This is overwhelming." And I never printed it also, it was just on my computer screen, which is extra chaos.

**0:59:18.8 CQ:** And then I would just work, try and try and try, and it started to happen in my brain where I was like, "Oh my God, I can move these pieces around, I can hold it, I can..." It still was extreme. It felt like every day I was trying to do the Sunday, New York Times crossword puzzle. Is that the hard one? The Sunday?

**0:59:41.6 NA:** I think so.

**0:59:42.4 CQ:** Yeah, every day I was waking up, and it was so... My brain hurt. I was like, "This is so hard," but eventually... And I had to change a lot of things. Like at first I was like, "Okay, I'm gonna have the..." I was like, "Okay, maybe it'll be chronological, just all chronological." And then I was like, "Oh, I don't like that." And then I was like, "Okay, the train parts will be present tense and the parts for my childhood will be past tense," and then that was really hard to read weirdly, so then I actually had to do research because my editor was like, "Okay, I don't think this works." And I re-read it and I was like, "Yeah, you're right. It doesn't work," and then I was like, "I know people have..." 'Cause I really like writing in the present tense, it's also supposedly a trend right now. It's also supposedly... Apparently, some people are just repulsed by it, which explains I have a number of one star reviews for my first book that people are just upset to the point of rage that it's written in present tense. First person. First person, present tense. First person present tense, like they are in rage, they want me to die. Because...

**1:00:41.2 NA:** Oh, my God, most people need to get a different hobby if that's the...

**1:00:42.5 CQ:** Because my book is written in first person present tense, 'cause apparently...

**1:00:46.2 NA:** Which I love by the way.

**1:00:47.1 CQ:** Yeah, I love reading books like that, but apparently some people have this visceral reaction... Anyway, I love it, so I was really dedicated to having at least part of this book in first person present tense, but I was like, "How do I... " I was like, "How do I move back and forth in time? And with first person, present tense?" Then I had to get a bunch of books, like I just bought a bunch of books on my Kindle or downloaded them from the library that are written that way, and there's a number out right now that are really good, and I had to read them and just flip through and read chapters and be like, "How the fuck do you do this?" And I had to copy people, I'd be like, "Oh, this person... " Okay, the chapter starts out, she's sitting on the train... If you can guess what book this is, she's sitting on the train, and then she flashbacks to that morning when she's talking to this detective, and during the flashback, it goes to past tense because she's sitting on the train flashing back, but then the next chapter is two years earlier, and that's in present... It's first person present tense because it's not a flashback.

**1:01:44.7 NA:** Yeah.

**1:01:45.1 CQ:** It was "The Girl on the Train" which is... I really like that book. And also, it's a really good example of that writing style, the author is really... You don't even realize that that's what's happening and reading it, I was like, "Holy shit, this whole book is written in first person present tense, even though it jumps around in time, like every couple of pages." So all these things were really hard for my brain, but I... It was a real process, but I eventually figured it out and then I was like, "Oh, okay, this is getting easier as I get older to organize... " Oh, and then at one point, the thing I think that was really helpful is I'd figured out more or less the order, but it still felt off, and so I just wrote... I took index cards and on every index card, I wrote down a section name, and then I put them on the floor and I was like, "I'm gonna order them like this and see what feels intuitive," and that created the final order of the book.

**1:02:39.6 NA:** That is a very useful tool. It's always funny recording a podcast where like, this is just you and I talking, but then also holding in my mind at the same time that other people are gonna be listening and they're gonna get whatever it is that they get or don't get from it, so I don't know what anyone else got from what you just said, but selfishly, very much what I'm getting as someone who a couple of years ago, two and a half, three years ago, wrote... I don't know, an 83000 word draft of a book that was just bad, like Carrot, it's just not good, and I hated it so much and felt all this kind of embarrassment, or why isn't this better that I just didn't really touch it for years, and I'm working on just even if it never sees the light of day for myself, to go through the process of picking the draft up again, being someone who can re-write a bad draft, cutting out the parts that are boring, figuring out what is the actual narrative, oh, Carrot, that feels worthwhile for me to do, even if the project itself never goes to anyone else. And just hearing, A, that yours took you on and off 14 years, and that also you had a hard time holding it in your brain, the way that you just described,

feels very, very comforting. So if that feels generous that you are willing to pull back the curtain a little bit on what this process has been like.

**1:03:50.5 CQ:** Yeah, writing those books that never come to anything are never a waste. I feel like it's like training for an ultra-marathon, which I don't want just to make people think I run ultra marathons 'cause I never have done that, but when you... But I've tried to train various times, haven't given up, but when you train it for an ultra-marathon, you run lots of really long runs, and none of those are the ultra, but you have to run them to train for the ultra. And it's the same with writing. And you write many, many things that are book length, that are close to book length that you end up hating or not understanding or not knowing what to do with, and that is how you eventually... For me, that's how I eventually got to a point where I could finish something that I actually liked, but it's not a waste because it's the training.

**1:04:39.6 NA:** Totally, but also that's one of the problems of being really conditioned into the quick gratification turnaround of doing anything on the internet, is that you don't have a lot of what feels like training. And so it's almost like switching your brain into doing something that feels similar because it's still the same art form, but it's actually really different, so... More perseverance necessary, which I'm glad, I'm glad to hear that. I'm gonna ask you to tell another story from the book that I loved very much, the much later in the book than the first train ride that you were just talking about, is the story of your Craigslist ride to Alaska where you're headed back to Alaska, basically after having left. Will you tell that story?

**1:05:19.3 CQ:** Yeah, yeah, so I wanted to go to Alaska one year, it was 2009, and I had already been back a few times in the summer, and this was March. And I wanted to go up and meet this person, Tara, who I'd met on the internet. Because we both had blogs, I started blogging in 2008, and it was such a more efficient way to put my work out than writing Zines, and I was really into it 'cause you don't have to pay for copies and anyone can read it. And I'd been looking for other cool bloggers, and I found this person Tara, who I thought was so cool because she was from Alaska, like me, but she grew up in lower Alaska, I grew up in Anchorage, which has a city, and she grew up on the subsistence crop line, like eating beaver living in a cabin made of spruce poles, and she had a dog team and she would go out with her dad and set traps and snares and... Anyway, that's where she grew up.

**1:06:14.7 CQ:** And I found her blog, which was called Hobo Stripper, and she was at the time traveling around the lower 48 in a van and working, doing sex work and also like skinning rabbits and making herbal medicine, making tinctures in her van and writing this blog about all of it, and she was an incredible writer, she is an incredible writer. And I thought she was so cool, and she just bought some land in Alaska about five acres and she lives there, and we become friends, I reached out to her and we became friends we would email each other all the time. And I was like, "What if I came to Alaska and hang out?" And she was like, "Hey, you should come up." And I was like, "I really need a job." And she's like, "Come up, we can get you... Find you a job."

**1:06:56.7 CQ:** And so I sort of was looking on Craigslist, I wonder if anyone's driving to Alaska, and I found this listing and I called the guy, and if someone's driving a vehicle that's not fuel

efficient and you split gas, it can be really expensive. So I asked him about that because if it was a lot of money, then I would just fly because it would be cheaper. And he was like, "I don't want any... I don't want any money, I just want riders." And at first I was like, "Oh, is that kind of weird," but he was taking two other people also, so I was like, "Oh, I just..." I didn't get any weird sketchy vibes from him, and I think... I don't know. So I have hitchhiked across the country a few times, at that point, I'd hitchhiked to Alaska two other times before and I would always try not to hitchhike alone, but it would end up happening for sure. And for some reason, I was always very good at sussing out people's vibes maybe because as default, I just didn't feel safe, so then I was really unlikely to get myself in a situation where someone was giving off red flags 'cause I would like... I was already hyper-sensitive, but I was pretty good at making those sorts of choices about people for some reason. But I was like, "I don't think this guy is sketchy."

**1:08:02.1 CQ:** And so he picked the three of us up and the other... It was this couple, Meadow and Barry and I'm still friends with Meadow. They are these young sort of hippies who were just... She was from rural Alaska, and he'd been like in San Francisco and they were going back to Alaska and they were very free. They are both just very free, had very few belongings and just very chill and just traveling around, playing music and being free, and our driver was... He was Israeli-American, and there was definitely like a cultural communication barrier where he... He just kind of won't listen, I think 'cause you know, Meadow and I were women too, he just wouldn't listen to anything we said or really... But he was very kind and very generous, but he would not listen to our suggestions and he would just kind of shout at us a lot, and not in a mean way, but just that's the way he talked. He was just like shouting and his business... His license plate said showbiz. And he was pulling a trailer and he was like, "I work in showbiz, I'm rich. I'm driving to Alaska to be Sarah Palin's advisor because she needs me." And I was like, "Is Sarah... Do you know Sarah Palin?" And he was like, "No."

**1:09:14.2 CQ:** And later on I was like, "Oh yeah, this guy is like coked out of his mind maybe," but... So to cross into Canada, we had to have a story that sounded very chill, or they would run our records and for me, they would find my misdemeanors and maybe he had a DUI... Anyway, we didn't want them to run our records. So we created this story that we are all in a band together, and we've known each other for 10 years, and that we were traveling with our band, which was really funny, and they let us into Canada, and he was a terrible driver. As soon as we got into Canada, it was winter, like Portland had been cold and rainy, and in British Columbia it was snowy, and I looked at Meadow and I was like, "Where were you planning to sleep at night?" And she was like, "I'd been planning to sleep outside what about you?" And I was like, "Yeah, I was planning that too, but obviously, it's really cold." So one thing that our driver did that was extremely generous is he called ahead and upgraded all of his hotel room so we all fit, and it was one...

**1:10:08.8 CQ:** He did all these things that were extremely kind of generous, that made us feel like we couldn't really challenge him, he didn't ask for any gas money, he let us share his hotel rooms, but his driving... So the highway was very icy, the whole way he went between 60 and 80 and while he was driving, he would take pictures of the road with his camera and he would be looking at the camera screen, so he would just swerve back and forth 'cause he wasn't looking at the road and the whole drive he was like, click, click all these pictures, and he would swerve into the oncoming lane

and then back into our lane and then into the oncoming lane and back into our lane. And we were like, "What the fuck?" And so we were like, "Can you slow down?" And after once we were a little bit north, it was just ice, and he was driving an SUV, pulling a trailer and... "Really, can you slow down? Can you stop taking pictures?" And he would just ignore us. And so Meadow and I, Barry was just asleep the whole time, but Meadow and I would take turns sitting in the front trying to convince him to drive differently.

**1:11:01.6 CQ:** And at one point we were yelling at him, we were like, "You need to slow down. This is really dangerous." And he would just ignore us. And we were like, "Well, can we help you drive?" And he's like, "No, I wanna be able to say I drove the whole way and if you drive, I can't say that." And we're like, "Okay." And on day three, we were in the Yukon territory, it was 15 below zero, we were like a couple of hours from the last town, just driving through the Boreal forest on this empty highway, everything covered in snow. And he was taking pictures and he lost control of the SUV, and we spun across the highway and then flipped on the other side, and the trailer stuck in the snow and stopped us and then the SUV rided itself, but all the windows were smashed in and it was totaled and amazingly, we were all okay. I was eating a can of beans of black beans, and they'd like flown out of my hand and purple juice had covered the inside of that car, and it was all over my face. And Meadow and Barry had been laying down in the back seat, and they were okay, like Barry had a bloody nose but he was like, "I'm fine." And the driver was okay too. But we were like, "Oh my God."

**1:12:09.3 CQ:** And so the driver got out and he was like... He saw that the trailer was busted open and all his furniture was in the snow, and the first thing he said, he was like, "My stuff... My life is ruined." And we were like, "What?" We were like, "You almost killed us." And so he took the keys and there was a snowplow passing, going back towards the last town, which was like an hour away, and he flagged it down and got on it. And we were like, "What are you doing?" And he was like, "Put my stuff in the trailer, I'm going back to get another vehicle, I'll just tow this car." And then he left and with the keys, and I hadn't been planning to hitchhike, so I had stuff that wasn't really easy to carry, like I had a suitcase and a backpack, and the only gloves I had were these little wool-like mittens, kind of finger-less gloves with a little mittens part that you can put over the fingers and it was 15 below zero, and we were all in shock. So we all put our stuff on our clothes on then we were like, "What do we do?" And I was like, "I'm gonna hitchhike."

**1:13:05.4 CQ:** I'm not gonna ride with Barry anymore... Oh sorry, with our driver, the other guy's name was Barry. I was like, "I'm not gonna ride with our driver anymore." And Meadow and Barry were like, "Oh, okay, we'll come with you." So we all started hitchhiking and... There was no one on the road. And finally, this sedan pulled up and stopped for us. My driver came back and he looked at us and he really saw us as if for the first time. And he was like, "You're leaving me?" And we were like, "Yeah, we're leaving you. You almost killed us." And he was like, "You're leaving?" And he was like, crestfallen. And we were like, "Yeah. Dude, sorry." But... So the sedan, it was this young man who was driving to the North Slope to work in the oil fields, and he was wearing this Hawaiian shirt and he smelled so bad and he was like, "I haven't slept since Seattle." And his car was full all the way to the ceiling, so we had to... I had to lift all this stuff out of the back seat, sit down, and then put it all back on my lap, so all I could see was to the left of the window. And then

the front seat, Barry sat with Meadow on his lap and then their stuff on her lap, so they were like cramped in the front seat.

**1:14:13.1 CQ:** And then this guy pulled out and he went 90 miles an hour. And he looked at me, he looked at us in the rear view mirror and he would tap the breaks so the car would fish tail and he was like, "You like that? You're scared. You're scared," and I was like, "Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God." But Meadow was like, "Oh my gosh," she was like... We all acted very calm, she was like, "So, where are you from?" And sort of talked him down, and then by the time we got to Whitehorse, we'd convinced him to stop and get... And split a hotel room with us for the night and sleep. So it was like St. Patrick's day or something, I don't know, there was something going on, but we got a hotel room and I was like, "Oh my God, oh my God, I'm fucking..." "I feel like insane with just like adrenaline. And they all went out and went to the bar together and had a great time. And I laid down, the spot I was sleeping, it was the crack between the bed and the wall, I laid down my set of bags. My heart just raising and I was like, "I can't fucking hang with these people."

**1:15:15.5 CQ:** And the next day, I was like, "Alright, you all ride with this guy." I was like, "I'm gonna stay in Whitehorse for a few days and just chill and then hitchhike on my own," I was like, "I can't ride with this person." So they left and then I hung out for a day at the hostel and then hitchhiked the rest of the way and had actually a much better time. I got picked up by this First Nations family 'cause it was too cold to sleep outside, so I hadn't been planning to hitchhike but people kinda had to take me home, which is really sketchy when you are hitchhiking. You are never supposed to do that, and normally I wouldn't, but I just got picked up by really nice people. Like I got picked up by this First Nations family who took me home and fed me really good food, then I slept on their couch and then they dropped me off at this spot to hitchhike that was really bad and I got frostbite on my thumb, but then I hitchhiked back in into a gas station and got a ride with a couple who actually bought me a motel room that night, and eventually I made it to Fairbanks and to Tara.

**1:16:12.9 NA:** Oh my gosh, so this book is 300 pages of really good story. So many good stories. Is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you wanna mention before we wrap up?

**1:16:27.5 CQ:** No, I think that's good. Thanks for letting me tell these stories.

**1:16:30.3 NA:** No, it's great, I could listen to you tell stories forever, I feel like it's a great primer for our folks of what you expect in this book... Okay, so if you could leave everyone with one call to action based on our conversation, what would that be, maybe a question to ask themselves or a small action to take, what would you love for folks to do or think about?

**1:16:47.7 CQ:** That's a great question. I guess this is something we didn't really talk about, but the theme of my book, one of the themes in my book is definitely forgiveness and how... Especially when you've experienced abuse, how hard it is to forgive the people who've hurt you, and for years, my inability to forgive my mom caused me a lot of suffering. And when I finally came around, I mean, obviously it took a long time and we should never forgive people before we are ready or whatever, because not forgiving someone can be very energizing and can help us escape situations

and can help us make different choices and get safe or whatever we need to do, but when I finally forgave her, it also allowed me to forgive myself because we all have shadows we all fuck up, like all of us, and when I reject other people's shadows, I also reject my own shadow, and so when I can't forgive other people, I also can't forget myself, which also causes so much suffering and so much difficulty.

**1:18:01.5 CQ:** And when I finally saw how she was doing her best, and that she was the way she was because of all the trauma she'd experienced, and I was able to forgive her, I was also able to accept myself, and it brought me all of this peace that I hadn't known before, and I think that's one of the biggest themes in the book, even though I don't know how well it comes across... Yeah, I don't know, but I think one question that I wish I'd asked myself a long time ago was like, what's getting in the way of me forgiving myself because there's so many ways that... There are so many things about ourselves that are hard to forgive, like at the very, at least, the way we're all complicit in these systems that are terrible, like this pyramid scheme that we live in, it's really demoralizing and terrible and causes so much suffering and we're all complicit in it. We live our day-to-day lives in it, and there are so many things that are... It's really hard to forgive ourselves and that causes... It interrupts like our ability to heal, it interrupts our ability to have compassion or forgive others because we like... Yeah, it's like they're intricately tied. So yeah, what stands in the way of forgiving yourself for whatever it is, I guess that's my question.

**1:19:18.1 NA:** That's a beautiful question, and definitely something that I don't know that I have a good answer for, and will be in my journal, so thank you for the prompt. What's the best place for people to find you and say Hi, I will make sure that I put links to the book and everything in the show notes, but do you have a favorite way to connect with new folks?

**1:19:33.9 CQ:** Yeah, I think I'm most active on Instagram, which is Carrot Quinn, so... That's always a good place.

**1:19:38.6 NA:** Yes, I will put that in the show notes too. Carrot, Thank you so much.

**1:19:42.0 CQ:** Thank you so much Nicole. It was great.

**1:19:44.3 NA:** And that's our show for today. Thank you so much for listening to this labor of love. Our music and sound editing is by Adam Day, who it has been a total Dream and a pleasure to collaborate with for the past six years, and thank you especially to the people in our Patreon community who have made all 200 plus episodes of Real Talk Radio possible you can find that community of ours at [patreon.com/nicoleantoinette](https://patreon.com/nicoleantoinette). It's a wonderful group of folks who crave honesty, intimacy and possibility, and for whom I love creating essays, live gatherings, exclusive audio content and more each and every month, if you'd like to join us, I will see you over there, [patreon.com/nicoleantoinette](https://patreon.com/nicoleantoinette).

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