

Episode 4: Coming of Age

Gather introduction:

[A delightful sound of choir leading into plucked guitar and different voices introducing the show, with guitar continuing underneath]

Woman's voice: Ah everyone, you are listening to Gather

Child's voice: You're listening to Gather

Woman's voice with dog bark in background: To Gather

Woman's voice with American accent: Gather

[Same guitar doing a sweet little riff with the faint sound of pencil scribbling beneath. Sound of guitar continues beneath the host's introduction]

Amy Tsilemanis (Gather host, smooth and calming): This is Amy Tsilemanis and this is Gather, with Minerva's Books and Ideas, where we'll explore the lives of books and the ideas they ignite and illuminate.

Electronic Music by Floc.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): "Some books are tool kits you take up to fix things, from the most practical to the most mysterious, from your house to your heart, or to make things from cakes to ships. Some books are wings, some are horses that run away with you. Some are parties to which you are invited, full of friends who are there even when you have no friends. In some books, you meet one remarkable person, in others, a whole group or even a culture. Some books are medicine, bitter, but clarifying. Some books are puzzles, mazes, tangles, jungles. Some long books are journeys, and at the end you are not the same person you were at the beginning. Some are handheld lights you can shine on almost anything." These are the words of Rebecca Solnit in the book, *A Velocity of Being: Letters to a Young Reader*.

Hey, it's Amy, and in this episode, we look at the by turns painful, joyous, confusing, and generally angsty time of transition as we become our older selves, something that never really stops evolving. As Virginia Woolf wrote, "A self that goes on changing is a self that goes on living." And we ask what role books and art play in our becoming us.

We take Maria Popova's *Brain Pickings* and her associated books such as *Figuring* and *A Velocity of Being*, where beautiful illustrations accompany letters by a range of creative people, like Solnit, on why we read and how books transform us. In addition to these books, for the last 15 years, Popova has been bringing us a regular newsletter filled with bookish goodness, as she gathers wisdom and tells stories of artists, writers, scientists, and more.

We also refer to Australian coming of age classics, *The Getting of Wisdom* and *My Brilliant Career*. Other books discussed are the work of Leanne Hall, who we chat to and hear her new work created for our segment, *Things Found in Books*. And our indie book feature is the exciting recent collaboration between the Indigenous

Literacy Foundation, Stick Mob, and Gestalt Publishing, who launched three new graphic novels during NAIDOC week. And we speak to young writer and mentor, Declan Miller. We also hear the sounds of Ballarat electronic musician, Floc, and we have our voice messages, the brave souls who sent through their favorite coming of age books that you'll hear as well.

Jenny Fink: Hi Amy. It's Jenny Fink here from Ballarat Libraries.

Sian: Hi, Amy. Sorry for the delay in sending this to you.

Ruth: Hello everybody. My name is Ruth.

Erin: Hello, Gather. Hello, Amy. Thank you for of the opportunity to think back and remember.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Note, all my guests in this episode were recorded online due to geography or lockdowns, so excuse the varying audio sounds.

So to begin, as a child of the 1980s and 90s, cassette tapes were still very much a part of life, recording songs off the radio, buying the best of Smash Hits, meticulously creating mix tapes for our beaus, and recording our own voices.

Now it might not surprise you that I wrote a lot of teenage poetry, and for better or worse, one such poem has lived on, on tape. It's incredibly bizarre and embarrassing to hear my teenage voice and all its drama. I'm going to share a bit of that with you. But a short, preliminary tale. In 1990s Melbourne, there was a heroin pandemic. And as a teenager, it was a rite of passage of sorts to have some kind of altercation with desperate city junkies. Mine happened one day when and I entered a shop, dutifully left my school bag at the desk, only to have my bag stolen by said party. To their disappointment I'm sure, there would've been little of value in there. Some change, some old food perhaps, some homework. But to me, one of my most precious items was lost, my notebook of poems. I remember sitting on the back of the 250 bus back to Ivanhoe feeling bereft, and quickly trying to write down as much as I could remember. This snippet of teenage poem refers to this event as my soul under souls in the rain. Here we go.

Rough recording of Host Amy as a teenager reading her poetry.

Shooting stars are so rare. I don't think anyone can stand my eyes. Too many things in one place. Fever is a dangerous thing. Waking up, dreams can seem bad, but others leave you with a craving. You can taste it, but your fingers are always too short. My knees shook among the cold and faces look ugly when you're strange. Riddles, a world riddled with languages and everyone's driving bumper cars and wearing blindfolds. It's only words, but my soul is under soles in the rain, and maybe parasols on boats in the sun. This is almost fun. But what's left? What will we eat for supper? I'm going to get a fine because I'm blind. The milk crate was safe in another time, hours before. If you want to fly, buy a cannon. I wish I was a bear, not one unchained, but one in a cave. Come on in, the fire's alight.

Quick stab of rap music.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): The tape is interspersed with various bits of music, including rap that I'm pretty sure was my friend's brother's, and that I decided to tape over. Sorry about that.

And so growing up, we all go through it, and discovering the world of books and art and self-expression is all part of the journey. How does what we read shape us as people? Maria Papova in her labor of love, Brain Pickings, is described as, "A record of my own becoming as a person, intellectually, creatively, spiritually, poetically, drawn from my extended marginalia on the search for meaning across literature, science, art, philosophy, and the various other tentacles of human thought and feeling." She's such a beautiful writer.

While I couldn't get Popova on the line, I was so happy to chat with a young writer that she has inspired. Rochi Zalani is a 22-year-old writer, content creator, and self-confessed binge reader based in India. She writes poetry and cultural commentary, and last year she began her own bookish newsletter inspired by the one and only, Brain Pickings.

Woman's voice (Rochi Zalani): I am Rochi. It's R-O-C-H-I. And it's a funny story of my name. It's just a combination of my brother's names. So I have two brothers, Rohan and Chintan. So it's just Rochi. So I'm from a small town in India, and I began reading books at the age of, I think, 10, because I wanted to copy a sister, because I thought she was really cool and I wanted to be like her. So that's when I started to read books, and I've never stopped since. Soon after, I began writing my own stuff, writing poetry, as soon as I realized that books are not coming in the world by magic. Some people are writing it. So I started, I think, writing poetry and stuff like that. I have a poem on hand. I'll read it because, I got a lot of good response on this poem. It's called Record Everything. And it goes like this.

I have an incessant need to record everything. Mom did not say, "I love you" before getting married. Dad used to be a math teacher. Kay holds the spoon like it's heavy. R hates rats and heights and rains. Didion did not know why she wrote it. Neither do I. I don't know why I see cancers in dashes of Dickinson, in rooms of Wolf, in solitude of Sontag, in tall trees of Mary reading the secrets of poetess storing leaves as brown and rusty as my memories, a perennial desire of the sunshine to not go away. Writing everything that I ever heard, saw, felt, tasted, drank, lived. Nothing makes sense later. But mom used to play table tennis and harmonium, dad reads passages from the same book daily. Kay changed his name in primary school. R used to be called another name in pre-nursery.

Yeah, that's it. Yeah, it's about how I try to record everything that I encountered and I've seen that it's a common theme among poetesses and writers, they want to write about everything. They want to record everything like it's scary to forget it. So yeah, I wrote a poem about that. And then my brother was really impressed that I'm writing so he pushed me. So he made me a website in 11th and I used to write there on and off. I just on some like side pocket money in college from writing. And last year during the pandemic in December, I took the plunge and went into writing full time.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): So yeah, I was thinking we met online through our shared love of Brain Pickings. And I was thinking today, it's kind of hard to explain what it is. I was wondering how you would explain Brain Pickings to someone that didn't know it.

Woman's voice (poet Rochi Zalani):

Yeah, that's true. So when I started reading Brain Pickings, it was again, through my brother, he said, "You enjoy reading about books and poetry and art and stuff like that. So I think you will enjoy this Brain Pickings." And I subscribed to a newsletter in

the beginning and I used to get those weekly emails and I thought her writing is about everything from books to life, to art, to poetry, and from hustle culture and productivity, she writes about a wide area of subjects. So I think, yeah, Brain Pickings is great. I think it has inspired a lot of my work and pushed me to start my own newsletter and write more poetry and focus on things that truly mattered.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): And what are those things to you?

Woman's voice (poet Rochi Zalani): So I really enjoy poetry and books. And especially during in the pandemic, I think it became my coping mechanism towards everything to refocus on living a good life and becoming this person. So if you've read the about page of Brain Pickings about Maria Popova, she said that I wanted to record myself being a person through the things I'm reading and the opinions I'm forming. And I was inspired by that. I wanted to do something similar by poetry and art and comics and finding humour in life.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): It's so important, isn't it? I'm loving your, yeah, like you were saying, the mix of little stories and visuals and links off to recommendations and things. It's good fun.

Woman's voice (poet Rochi Zalani): I was just so bombarded with content on the internet. There's so much to read and nothing feel like enough because once you just finish a book or finish a blog, there's just another one to read and there's a lack of minimalism in content. So my purpose was to combat that and also get a regular writing practice. So that was my intention when I began. I began with, I think, 104 people. They were friends and family acquaintances, people that I know, kind of pushed into subscribing that, you know, give it a try, give it a try. But now it's turned into a big family, like 600 people, so it's great.

I definitely share a very funny comic or a funny tweet that I read that week. I also always share a poem. Sometimes I share my poems as well. I try to share it every alternate newsletter. And then I share something about a book and good stuff that I found on the internet. It may be thoughtful. It may be funny. It may be interesting to read, maybe a cultural commentary and then there's one self reflection question for you. So yeah, that's what it is. There's a definite structure, but it's just things that I think matter.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Oh, that's amazing. And you talked about it a little bit, yeah, how has Brain Pickings inspired you?

Woman's voice (poet Rochi Zalani): I really loved her story, how she began with seven friends. So she would just love talking about books and what she's been reading and what she's been thinking and she shared it with seven friends via email. And now it is this huge community of people. And like I said, I love the fact that she portrays it as a fact that it's a record of herself becoming a person. I think her book is truly great in the sense that she talks about artists that are not that well known, along with artists that are already pretty famous, authors and musicians, and there's no bar there. So I love discovering new authors from her page. And her work is inspiring.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Are there any particular Indian writers or artists that you'd like more people to know about?

Woman's voice (poet Rochi Zalani): For sure. So I love Rega Jha, if you've ever heard of her, she's an essayist and she used to work for a big company earlier, but then she quit and now she writes essays and she works with NGOs and I've always felt really inspired by her work. So I've connected with the people from Brain Pickings, the Brain Pickings community. I have connected with people who share the love of Popover because I love that her writing is not specific to the Indian scenario. All of her writings, they're about the internet, the hustle culture and the cancel culture and other cultural commentaries that can be read by a global audience. So I would recommend anyone to read about her.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): I'll check that out for sure. And yeah, so I'm asking people for this episode about their favorite coming of age novels if you've got any you'd like to tell us about.

Woman's voice (poet Rochi Zalani): So I've had so many. You know you share that we would discuss like coming of age novel, that's the theme, I was like, "Oh my God. Now how do I choose about so many amongst so many great novels?" Because I love a good bildungs roman [German] literally speak for coming of age. But the first one that came into my head was a book I read recently, I read it during the pandemic and it successfully distracted me from what was going around in the world. So I'll give it that. It was My Year of Rest and Relaxation by Ottessa Moshfegh. And it's about this woman who wants to escape adulthood and she has a good financial privilege to do it so she has taken a year off. And she's experimenting with drugs, she's thinking about her past and she's kind of hibernating, if I would say that. It has the vibe of The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath, but it's more in the modern context. And another bildungs roman that I love too, in the older books like Emma and Little Woman. So Emma is, she's a very unlikeable character. That's what I love about that novel because she's the protagonist of the story. And it's hard to read a book when you don't like the protagonist, and even Austen, who's famous for saying that I'm going to take a heroine who no one but myself will much like, and that book taught me the power of unlikable characters because we see how she was elitist and she was very opinionated and privileged and how she has grown and learned more about society and discarded her biases. It was a pleasure to read about her poems and even Little Woman. They're four people who are coming of age, all the sisters and like everyone else, I love Jo's storyline the most, but I also find Amy's story really interesting, Amy and Beth, they're really interesting characters.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): What do you think it is about those characters that we fall in love with like Jo?

Woman's voice (poet Rochi Zalani): I think she's relatable, especially for maybe unfeminine standards because she's not that feminine. And her qualms are very, even though it's like a very old novel, her qualms are very modern about wondering about her career and not fitting into a cultural stereotype, but I love Jo's character. I found Amy's character also really interesting. I think it was a challenge for me because I wouldn't like a person like Amy if it was in real life. But when you get an inside perspective through a novel like Little Woman, it challenges you to think about your own biases towards people.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): I wanted to ask again, we've talked about it a bit, but how books sort of shape us in those years where we're transitioning from children into adults, I guess, and how they help reading or through writing as well, or other kinds of creativity, what role do they play in us becoming who we are? Not a big question at all.

Woman's voice (poet Rochi Zalani): Yes. It's a lot of pressure to not talk about the is because yes, everyone goes, yeah, you know what? Books are important. I know we should read. But I actually don't remember a time in my life when I wasn't reading, because I began so young, but it helped me become the person who I am, even if I do not remember what exactly I read in the books, it impacted me maybe sometimes subconsciously and they shifted my perspective. I think the biggest things that books have done for me, especially. fiction books, is building empathy. Because when you read about a character, you may resonate with them, you may not resonate with them. It truly helps you build empathy. And that's what I think books have done for me. And especially when you are young and the kind of books you read and the kind of people you hang out with and how much time you can devote to creativity, kind of impacts a lot of your thought process. And a lot of the person you're going to become, what are you going to value as you get older. And it's ironic because all those screens and everything have made us so connected, they've also packed our calendars. And I think a packed calendar is like an enemy to creativity. So, you have to make a deliberate effort now to get more creativity in your life. Earlier, it would have been simpler, I wouldn't say it was easy back then as well, but it would have been a little bit simpler to find creativity every day. But now you have to make time for it.

Woman's voice (Amy Tsilemanis): You're going to read a poem for us, aren't you?

Woman's voice (poet Rochi Zalani): So I'm about to eat Wendy Cope's, The Orange. So, when we discussed that we'll read one poem, I was wondering which poem should I do because there's so many good ones. And so many that have influenced me and changed my perspective about life and things. But this poem is about, it's a very simple poem, that's what I love about it, It's a simple, concise poem. And it's just about a very good day. It's an ordinary day, but you are just in a good mood. The weather is good. You've finished your work early. And it just reminds me that the big stuff is great when it comes, but life's about the little things, about little gray days sprinkled every day.

At lunchtime, I bought a huge orange, the size of it made us all laugh. I peeled it and shared it with Robert and Dave. They got quarters and I had a half. And that orange, it made me so happy as ordinary things often do just lately, the shopping, a walk in the park, this is peace and contentment. It's new. The rest of the day was quite easy. I did all the jobs on my list and enjoyed them and had some time over. I love you. I'm glad I exist.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Big, thanks to Rochi and go check out her writing and sign up for her newsletter. So we heard there about simplicity and creativity amidst our screen lives. As well as the amazing global connections that can be made between people sharing the love of books, poetry, cultural commentary, and ideas. And writing and creativity as a way of moving through and processing the teenage years, school, family, identity, relationships, sexuality, art,

love, loss, technology, and dreams of who you want to be, or what is expected of you. Learning and exploring the world around us and its diversity. Before we hear more from our wonderful guests, here's what some of you said about your favorite coming of age books.

Woman's voice: I was advanced in schooling and everything, and then when we moved to the big city, called Creswick, my new English teacher noticed that I was reading adult level books. And he introduced me to my first ever fantasy novel called The Sword of Shannara. And I can remember reading it besides soccer pitches in the freezing cold in the middle of winter. And I just couldn't stop reading it. When I got to the end, I continued on reading and reading. But this one particular book has really stuck with me over the years. So much so that I named my son for the main character in the book, Shea Ohmsford.

Woman's voice - Erin: My coming of age characters and books were Nancy Drew Mysteries. It was a revelation to me that a young woman fictional character could drive a story. I ate those books up. And then I guess followed quite a few years later with Buffy, also a young female character, fictional. Also not only driving stories, but also driving stakes through vampire hearts. I mean, God, what's not to love. This is Erin. Thanks.

Woman's voice: It took me a while to pick a book that I loved as a teenager because I had so many favorites. It's I Capture the Castle by Dodie Smith. It was written in 1949 and was a huge success for her before she went on to be an even more successful author with 101 Dalmatians. At the age of 13, this book had everything for me, a very eccentric Bohemian family that I loved. A wonderful crumbling, romantic castle that they all lived in. And a complex love story. I also desperately wanted to be the narrator, Cassandra. I've read it many times. But reading it again as an adult doesn't have quite the same magic as when I was younger. But it's still a terrific book that withstands time and well worth a read today. Thanks.

Speaker: The child who found reading so difficult and not really a pleasure has made a life in reading as a profession now. And I would have to say that reading brings me the greatest source of joy and comfort. I don't have a coming of age book. I think I probably have a coming of age to reading. It was a gradual process that I'm very, very pleased to have undertaken. Okay, thanks.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): We turn now to our indie book feature, and a chat with young writer and mentor, Declan Miller. Here at Minerva's, we love supporting great organizations like the Indigenous Literacy Foundation. And we were super excited to hear about this project that they were part of recently, and that launched during NAIDOC week, an annual celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia. Teaming up with Gestalt Publishing and Declan's design studio, Stick Mob, three graphic novels have been published. They address topics such as climate change, intergenerational trauma and healing, and two-way cultural learning against the backdrop of life in central Australia. The three female authors and artists, Lauren, Seraphina and Alyssa are Australia's first ever Aboriginal female graphic novelists with published books. Woo. And Declan, the second male, to mentor Brenton McKenna.

So Declan has recently finished high school and has been busy. His first graphic novel, started Stick Mob, has run workshops in the community like Comics in Crisis, and became Centralian Young Person of the Year. But he found time to have a chat with me about his book, Mixed Feelings, published along with Extra Dimensions and Storm Warning. Each book is described as a treasure trove of intricate storytelling and eye watering illustrations. Expect to be delighted, shocked and intrigued.

Man's voice (graphic novelist Declan Miller): My name is Declan Miller. I am a graphic novelist, recently published. I'm from central Australia, Arrernte land in Mparntwe, Alice Springs and NT. And I just turned 20. So yeah.

Woman's voice (Amy Tsilemanis): So you've just come out of your teens.

Man's voice (graphic novelist Declan Miller): Absolutely. So this has been a lifelong dream to actually get my book published and all that kind of stuff. Yeah.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Amazing. Well, yeah. Tell us about it, it's called Mixed Feelings. How did it come about? And the launch recently for NAIDOC week?

Man's voice (graphic novelist Declan Miller): Mixed Feelings is about a girl named Pam who goes through school feeling like a bit of a weirdo and a bit of an outcast. And she's kind of labeled like that. And she eventually gets mixed into the wrong crowd does things that she's not necessarily proud of or wants to do. And when given the opportunity to be able to take all that back, like time travel for instance, she goes ahead and does it. And just kind of runs away from this whole world that she's stuck in the moment. But that's not always the right thing to do. That's the point I'm trying to make. And just to kind of push through your problems and just like, yes, they happen, yes, I did do that, yes, I did do that. But just kind of keep going and just accept it, I guess.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): So there's a mix of real life stuff and a bit of sci-fi in there?

Man's voice (graphic novelist Declan Miller): Yes, absolutely. Sometimes I get a bit too crazy with the sci-fi, but I really enjoy it. Because I grew up watching cartoons and shows that were just chock full of sci-fi and chock full of these amazing story tellers and amazing writers. And my dream is to be able to get people excited for the next book, get people excited for the next episode. And I've thought about it a lot recently and I'm just really giggly with myself at the moment.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Big congrats. So good. The graphic novel form, that bringing together of story and visual and text, what do you love about it? What do you think it can do?

Man's voice (graphic novelist Declan Miller): Well, so two years ago I was diagnosed with a rare case of dyslexia. And so I suck at reading and writing. So I was never good at reading and writing. I always tried my hardest and just stressed myself out to be able to try and get good grades at school. And I just could never wrap my head around reading or spelling or just grammar in general. I would miss

out on words and all this kind of stuff. And for the longest time, up until I was diagnosed, always thought I wasn't wasn't good enough and I wasn't able to do it. But I always really enjoyed, even from a young age, really enjoyed drawing. And I really enjoyed creating these complex stories and creating these weird and amazing stories in my head. And trying to put them on paper was always difficult. So, very young, I picked up making comics, just drawing and adding texts and all that kind of stuff to it. No one read them because, now that I look back on them, I can't even read them because of my handwriting and the spelling and all that kind of stuff. I've always used them to be able to help give myself a voice and express myself in that creative way and be able to become a storyteller like I've always wanted to. And I think it's really helpful because it empowers people to be able to, one, challenge the art style and see how they can position their characters and what they can do as a storyteller. And also how they can pretty much get their point across. Yeah, I think it will help a lot of people.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): And I'm interested about how where you live inspires your work as well and your culture?

Man's voice (graphic novelist Declan Miller): So I'm Arrernte on my dad's side and I'm Scottish on my mom's side. And cultural awareness and just racial awareness, so understanding that this town I live in is very mixed and there's a lot of different cultures and there's a lot of different people in this place that have different experiences and different traditions. And you can walk into one house and they could be Christian and you can walk into another house and they could be absolute Muslim or from an Asian country. And it's just understanding their culture and understanding who they are and just accepting that instead of questioning it, is what I've grown to understand in this town.

In Alice Springs here, it's very diverse, half my friend group is Aboriginal and then I'll have a couple of New Zealanders and people from Asia, I've got a Chinese friend and he's amazing, he's so smart and all that kind of stuff. And people are really confused when I go on trips to other places, I went on a trip to Japan and Bali, and they're just confused about how diverse our friend group is and how we just get along, even though we're all so very different.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Yeah. And it must be a big moment to all be publishing together this year. Can you tell us a bit about how that's happened and what you've done with Stick Mob?

Man's voice (graphic novelist Declan Miller): Stick Mob actually came together through a need that we all wanted to continue making the books. We really enjoyed our company with each other and we really enjoyed the journey of actually making the books. And I wanted more of it and the girls really wanted a lot more of it. And they wanted to make money out of it. And we're not just doing graphic novels, we're actually doing art and we're helping campaigns and doing certain things and exploring different avenues that we can do. Not just solely the graphic novels, it's more a mixture of different things. And Stick Mob came together like that. And for the past one and a half years, I've been working on it with Wendy Cowan, my teacher from year eight, that actually inspired me and pretty much pushed me and drove me to actually keep working on Mixed Feelings. And get it turned into this big thing and this actual book that's been published.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): That's so cool. So do you think there's any themes that are crossing the three graphic novels that have come out, that share the same sort of challenges or ideas people are trying to share?

Man's voice (graphic novelist Declan Miller): My theme for my book is accepting change and accepting your past and moving on and all that kind of stuff. And I'm kind of a hypocrite, I hate change and all that kind of stuff. So me making a book and just trying to help other people get through it and like, I want to get through it, is the theme in my book.

For Extra Dimensions, it's about complex families and about, you might not always like your family or like the people you're stuck with, you could say, and you don't get to choose your family, but it doesn't mean that you don't have to be around them all the time. It doesn't mean families have to be simple. And if you have a really toxic family member or someone that you don't really like, you can move away, and that's okay. And you can get away from, amidst all the blood and guts and zombies and all the combat and fight scenes and the amazing graphics and all that kind of stuff, that's the core of it. And also really complex storytelling and family ties and all that kind of stuff.

And I think with Storm Warning, it's about ... Well, Storm Warning, it is about climate change and trying to, instead of just talk about climate change, show what it could look like 20/40 years down the track when if we don't change ... the possibility, if we don't change how we look at the world and how we look after this world, what could happen? Places have hail storms or storms or earthquakes when they're not really meant to, when it makes no sense. And in a way, that's just showing the world fighting back or something like that, just making it really interesting.

Lauren Boyle, the author and all that kind of stuff, and Alyssa Mason, the illustrator, just both really amazing. We crafted this together and worked together on it. And they're really keen to make another book. We're all really keen to make second books and continue reading books for all this.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Well, I wish you all the best with it. Where should people go if they want to learn more about Stick Mob?

Man's voice (graphic novelist Declan Miller): Go to www.stickmobstudio.com.au and check that out. And yeah, find out more about us. We've got contacts there. Get in touch, if you want to tell a story, get in touch with us. If you work for a school or work for a group or something like that, please get in contact us and get us to do a workshop and pretty much support you in creating whatever creative stuff that you want to do.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Sounds good. And did I hear something about a possible podcast project?

Man's voice (graphic novelist Declan Miller): Yes. So, this is a working title, Heroes Next Door. So Heroes Next Door is a project that we're working with Centralian Senior College in Alice Springs with the Ab study class, Aboriginal studies class. It's pretty much working on the stories that not a lot of people hear. So you've got the typical Albert Namatjira, you've got all these amazing stories of these people. But we want to bring out these stories of people's aunties or people's uncles or grandparents that helped with like, I don't know, the Ghan or building Alice Springs

or doing something amazing that they haven't really been given the recognition or remembrance of. And we want to create the stories and get kids from Centralian Senior College to get these stories together. And we'll work with them on creating a script to be able to produce these stories. It'll be a lot of fun.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Look forward to listening to that. So I wanted to ask, as someone who's just turned 20, what do you think the big issues are facing young people in 2021?

Man's voice (graphic novelist Declan Miller): I think for young people in general, I think a sense of identity, and just not a big hope in the future you could say. If our future is stable enough, because it's all the talk of global warming, all this type of stuff. The pandemic hasn't helped much with anything. It's helped a lot of people being creative and finding hobbies and finding things that they like achieving their dreams that they weren't really able to do because of work and all this type of stuff. But I think it's hard for them because they want to change jobs. If they want to find something that sticks with them and a lot of kids want to be able to go travel and experience the world, but the moment where feel really shackled. I, for one, want to explore. I want to check out the world. I know I'm kind of stuck in Alice Springs, stuck in my little square, but I want to go check things out. I don't want to be stuck by one set of things. I don't want to get a job that I absolutely hate. I want to enjoy it. That's why I think Stick Mob is important for me. But, yeah. And also the sense of identity, especially for indigenous people and for non-indigenous people just figuring out who you are in this big world and all that kind of stuff.

Music by Floc plays and continues under host Amy's voice.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Thanks so much to Declan and look out for more of his work and the Stick Mob crew in the future. We're exploring in this episode, roving around Australia and around the world, looking at what books and creativity mean in our formation as people. As we've seen with Rochi and Declan becoming writers and storytellers. This can come from being inspired by what we've read or wanting to create new stories and ways of telling them. While issues facing young people today are compounded by the massive challenges of climate change, pandemics, and life with technology, the common coming of age themes thread through of identity and belonging. And it seems that our beloved heroes and heroines seem often to be misfits one way or another. This certainly has always resonated with me, and one of my favorite is Miles Franklin. In what was captured in her semi autobiographical, *My Brilliant Career*, written in 1899 through the character of Sybylla Melvyn. Written when Miles was 17, mind you and championed by the poet, Henry Lawson, a step up from my angsty poetry. She dreamed of having more from life than what she saw as the menial country existence of women and what she called an uncongenial family. She felt herself different and destined for more, and we all fell in love with her.

For Henry Handel Richardson, the pen name of Ethel Richardson. She also felt herself as square peg, and her character of Laura Rambotham in *The Getting of Wisdom*, which is set in the 1880s and published in 1910. It is school life that makes the setting for her getting or perhaps not getting a wisdom. It is Melbourne's PLC, the Presbyterian Ladies College whose early aim was to provide for the daughters of our

colonists as high in education as their sons. My grandmother, Valerie, attended the same school later on. This is my mom Margot and Auntie Lynn.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Yeah. The next episode of the podcast is going to look at The Getting of Wisdom and Henry Handel Richardson's time at PLC, which was a bit earlier and a bit different.

Margot: With our mother's school.

Lynne: A lot earlier!

Margot: Yeah, the PLC, we heard stories about PLC when it was in East Melbourne, didn't we?

Lynne: We did.

Margot: About how our mother used to smell the hops or whatever it was the brewery that was up just up the road, the smell coming from that. I don't know if the girls were affected. But anyway (laughter), she remembered the horrible smell.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Richardson's character of Laura leaves school, quote, "with the uncomfortable sense of being a square peg, which fitted into none of the round holes of her world, the wisdom she had got, the experience she was richer by had in the process of equipping her for life merely seemed to disclose her unfitness."

So how were we shaped by young experiences such as school? I made my way through three different high schools before finding one where I felt like I kind of fit. And how can writing young adult fiction explore the complex worlds of growing up. We chat now to Leanne Hall, an award-winning young adult writer who also happens to be a friend of mine after we met working at Readings bookshop in Carlton. We talk here about her books, about bookselling, her experience growing up and writing as a Chinese-Australian. And we hear especially created piece for this episode called Far away, Far away for our things found in book segment. You may also hear the lovely, comforting sounds of her snoring dog. Enjoy.

Woman's voice (writer Leanne Hall): Hi, I'm Leanne Hall. I am a writer who lives in Melbourne. I write mostly for children and teenagers. And my writing is, I guess, always plays with the boundary between like real and strange or surreal. So I like playing around with that kind of barrier between the normal everyday world and strange and surreal things happening. I think YA, one of the great things about it and why I love reading it and writing it is that it's got a pretty freewheeling attitude towards genre. Like there's a lot of genre fiction and cross-pollination of genre and just kind of weird mashups. And I feel like there's slightly less restrictions, sort of less boundaries between genres that then you might find in adult fiction. In young adult fiction, I feel like anything goes.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Yeah, that's interesting. I need to read more. I feel like the main stuff I've read is yours.

Woman's voice (writer Leanne Hall): Yeah. Yeah. You should get stuck into it. I mean, the benefit of YA which I always... I try not to evangelize about it too much, but I do actually think if you're looking for books that are really like a little bit shorter, a little bit easier to read and like highly entertaining and very plot and character-driven, always with interesting settings, I think you really can't go wrong with YA.

Yeah. We met a long time ago at Readings, and I have been there for a long time on and off as well.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): How do you think that's sort of coexisted with your writing?

Woman's voice (writer Leanne Hall): It's actually coexisted really, really nicely. I have, in my on and off, maybe 13 years at the bookshop have worked in a variety of different roles. So I started in the kids section at Readings, Carlton before it became a separate Readings kids shop that was next door. I started on the shop floor and was on the shop floor for many years. So that's really being on the counter, unboxing books, putting them on shelves, helping customers with recommendations. And since then, I've worked in a variety of roles, helping manage the Readings Foundation, which is the charitable arm of Readings. And for the last sort of five years also, I've really concentrated on digital content. So blog content and in the kids' web page and that sort of thing. So I think it's been a great job that you can work out three or four days a week. It's related to my passion, which is books and writing but it isn't... I just feel like it's a really nice compliment to my writing. My first book, *This Is Shyness* came out, and I can kind sort of tack the second book onto that one as well because it was a sequel, *Queen of the Night*. And those two books are set in an imaginary place called Shyness, which is a suburb of a larger city, very similar to Melbourne, but this suburb has been in darkness for three years. So the sun stopped rising over this suburb three years ago. And since then, the residents have lived in eternal night.

I think my impetus with those two books, really the focus was on setting, like a really strange setting. And then I put two ordinary/extraordinary teens, Wolfboy and Wildgirl into this strange setting but really created a very real relationship and friendship between them. I kind of think that might be my thing is to explore unexpected friendships and relationships between two very ordinary seeming young people and put them in a really strange and challenging setting and seeing what happens. So I kind of carried that through to my third book, *Iris and the Tiger*, even though that one was for a much younger audience. So that one is more for a nine to 12-year-old audience. But again, it features, an unlikely set of friendships taking place somewhere really strange. And in the case of *Iris and the Tiger*, it's in a magical country estate in Catalonia in Spain. And I sent very ordinary Chinese-Australian girl, Iris Chen Taylor to stay with a mysterious, great aunt who happens to live in this incredibly odd place where surreal things happen. And my most recent book, *The Gaps*, I guess, would be seen as a bit of a departure for me. It's young adult fiction, but it is strictly contemporary and realist. It's set at a private girls' school where one of the students has been abducted. And it's about how all of the other girls at the school cope with this horrible crime happening in their community.

Chloe and Natalia, I wanted to have two really different young women that you wouldn't think would be friends connect unexpectedly over an art project. So Chloe's a scholarship student at the school and Natalia is kind of on the surface, a queen bee type character that fits in very well at the school. And they strike up this friendship over an art project that Chloe does for art class. But she's very much inspired by the events that are happening at the school with the abduction of their school mate. But also she's inspired by the images of young women that she sees around her in crime fiction, on the covers of crime fiction books, in billboards and advertisements for television crime shows. She's also really inspired by her

childhood fairy tales as well, all these depictions of young women. And she kind of rolls that all into an art project that kind of explores, I guess, some of the darker side of being a young woman. And Natalia kind of jumps on this art project. And unexpectedly, they find that they get along quite well. For Natalia's point, she's just relieved that somebody isn't pretending that everything's okay, that they are looking at the dark side of things. And I guess I did want to explore that art as a means of exploring difficult events and uncomfortable feelings and the ways that you can use art to process grief and trauma in your life. And so that's definitely what Chloe and Natalia are doing together when they work on that art project.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Yeah. And how did you use your creativity when you were going through coming of age?

Woman's voice (writer Leanne Hall): I mean, writing was a real source of comfort to me. I was a very compulsive writer. I guess when on the... I always wrote stories, but when adolescence hit, I real went hard on the writing. So I was very much like a daily journal writer. I wrote many, many diaries over the course of my adolescence. And also, I was constantly in creation and constantly writing. I used to like do comic strips in each week of my school diary. I wrote poetry. I wrote theater. I tried to write short films. I wrote short stories. It was very, very prolific, even though most of my writing was quite secret. I would show it maybe to a few friends for comment or appreciation, but mostly, I did it for myself. So it honestly really, I think, was a really important part of my teenage years in just kind of just letting out all of my emotions. I think it's like a bit of a cliché, but the teenage years are very emotional. I think it was really helpful for me just to put my emotions on the page and name them and talk about them. And also just trying to figure out who I was and where I belonged in the world. I really think that writing helped me a lot.

My predominant feeling during my teenage years was all the ways in which I kind of was different and didn't belong. And again, that's actually something I explore in *The Gaps*. The main difference was that I'm Chinese-Australian. So especially in primary school, I really felt culturally, like I didn't fit in anywhere. But that feeling obviously has extended throughout my life, that feeling of kind of having a foot in both camps, both Australian and Chinese at the same time, but also for other reasons at school because I was a scholarship student. And so, I was in a kind of mixing in different socioeconomic circles from what I was used to. So all of that added up to a feeling of being different and not belonging. But I do think that that is a real hallmark of the teenage years for almost everyone. I think that everyone's secretly harbors a feeling that they're kind of a freak in some way and don't belong. I just think some people are a bit more open about it. It's a bit more obvious in some people. But the teenage years are difficult for everyone. Your body in your mind is going through this massive transformation. So you do feel pretty freakish most of the time.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): It's a good word for it.

Woman's voice (writer Leanne Hall): Yeah.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Yeah. We do seem to be drawn to those misfit characters don't we in the classic coming of age books.

Woman's voice (writer Leanne Hall): Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I do think that misfits and outcasts really make for great protagonist in coming of age stories. I think it's much easier to relate to and barrack for those characters rather than the characters that seem to sail through life easily. They just don't make for good conflict written protagonists if people are in the world too easily. But I do think one of the things I wanted to do with *The Gaps*, particularly with the character of Natalia. On the surface, she appears like she is coasting through her teenage years because she outwardly speaking really belongs at the school. She's pretty. She's blonde. She's rich. She's white. She's got a group of friends that kind of idolize her. Everyone kind of looks up to her/is incredibly scared of her. She's that popular. But then when you just dip a little bit further underneath her surface, you realize that Natalia has a lot of struggles. And that actually, her way of being in the world is quite strange. And she is a misfit of sorts who has some pretty unusual thoughts and problems. And I did want to get across that feeling of like you can't take people at face value. Like most people have internal struggles and most people kind of have trouble fitting in and have trouble feeling like fully belong.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): I just heard the big snore there. Your dog's not bothered by a feeling of belonging.

Woman's voice (writer Leanne Hall): My dog is belonging very well next to me here and having a good snore.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Yeah. And *The Gaps*, it's the first person narration that goes between the two characters. So you really get that chance to go in deep into their thoughts and, yeah, perspectives on life and how they change through the book too, I guess.

Woman's voice (writer Leanne Hall): It's a bit of another thread that runs through my books for me is that dual narration. I've done it quite a bit. I love that gap between how you perceive yourself and how other people perceive you. And I remember when I was young... And when I say young, I mean, not just teenage years, but all through my twenties, I remember feeling particularly obsessed with what people thought of me. Like the most delicious thing in the world was finding out what somebody thinks of you and how you are seen by other people.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): That's so true.

Woman's voice (writer Leanne Hall): And so writing a dual narration gives you that satisfaction of seeing how a character thinks of themselves and then seeing this other view and seeing what other people think of them. So I like that kind of 360 degree full picture that you get from a dual narration.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Yes. Everyone should read it. It's heartbreaking and wonderful at the same time. So we'll move along now to another book very different from that, although both set at school and with young people going through the angst and confusion and all of that. But yeah, *The Getting of Wisdom*. Can you tell us a bit about your relationship with this book?

Woman's voice (writer Leanne Hall): Yes. I first read *The Getting of Wisdom*, I think, in year seven. To be honest, I was a bit of a nerd. It was a set English text in year seven, which meant I probably read it at the end of grade six because I was preparing for my high school career in advance. Yeah. So we read it in year seven, and it is set at the predecessor to my high school, which is why it was on the curriculum. And I remember really, really loving the book. I was 12 when I read it. Laura Tweedle Ramsbotham is 12 at the start of the book. And we were in very similar circumstances. Laura is on a scholarship to a new school, and in year seven, I was on a scholarship to a new school, and we both felt like fish out of water. And so I really related to all of Laura's agonies at high school. And I was asked to write an essay last year about a book set in Victoria or Melbourne and to reflect on it. And I chose *The Getting of Wisdom* and reread it. I was really, really surprised at how much I still enjoyed it, like classics or favorite books from your early years don't always stand the test of time when you reread them. But this one definitely did. I still think it's an incredibly brilliant book.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): And how did you approach that piece of writing that you did reflecting on it?

Woman's voice (writer Leanne Hall): So I decided to kind of focus in on how much I related to Laura as a character. So I wrote it as a letter, and it started off as being a letter to Laura about how much I kind of felt all of her agonies and pains during the novel and all the reasons why I related so strongly to her. But one of the strange things for me about books that I read when I was a child and with classics is that I loved them and related to them and connected to them much at the same time that those books completely excluded me as a person. So as a Chinese-Australian, I did not have the privilege when I was growing up to see myself in stories. And that was any story like in books, on television, in movies. It was almost as if I and my family did not exist in Australia. That's the message I got from all of the stories around me. We were just completely absent. So my relationship with those beloved books is really fraught. I relate to them, but also they're actively excluding me from the story, and that was the approach they took with *The Getting of Wisdom*. And when I reread it, I remembered the character of Chinky, who is not Chinese despite her racist nickname, but she does have slightly Asiatic features, and that's given us a reason for her nickname Chinky. I remembered the character of Chinky and how awkward that was for me hearing that name when we were studying the book in Year 7, and then I noted some other really minor references to Chinese people in *The Getting of Wisdom*. And it's set in the gold field, so of course there were plenty of Chinese people around at the time, and they just make really, really small, small appearances in *The Getting of Wisdom*.

Then at the end of my essay, what I really wanted to do was to reimagine a place for my ancestors within a classic story. And so I wrote a missing scene, a purported missing scene from the book, in which Laura does encounter a Chinese Australian girl her age out on an evening walk. And I picked a point in the book where she does actually go for a walk, and there's a storm, and I just extrapolated from there, and inserted an imagined ancestor of mine into the book. And I just found that such an incredibly satisfying experience. There's something about just that thing of writing that missing scene from the book that featured someone like me or a member of my family. I just enjoy doing that so much.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): What an amazing thing to be able to do.

Woman's voice (writer Leanne Hall): It was so, so satisfying and it was a really interesting exercise as a writer to take the setting in character and the writing style that had already been provided, and to try and write something that fit in with that. It was a really good technical exercise as well.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Well, that's sort of fed into your thinking about the piece you're going to read for us as well. So Things Found in Books is the segment we do where artists respond to that idea, whether it's ephemera, we've had stories based on bookmarks or the advertisement for a cruise ship library. We've had soundscapes, which were about country and indigenous experience that isn't found in books. And in the last episode, we had the kids writing comp, where they reimagined fairy tales. So there's a bit of a crossover there with what you're going to read as well. But tell us how you approached this and then we'll hear you read it.

Woman's voice (writer Leanne Hall): I mean, I think this story is a direct descendant of my Getting in Wisdom essay, and then when I was thinking about Things Found in Books in a slightly less literal sense for this episode, I thought, "Things found in books not me." And so I wanted to revisit another childhood favorite of mine from a bit earlier than the Getting of Wisdom, and just explore that idea of like, "Well, I wasn't in the original text, and what would happen if I tried I to put myself in the book?" And because the theme of the episode is Coming of Age, I sort of thought, "What would happen if I tried to revisit these characters and settings from my childhood, but we were all teenagers?" And it came from this... When I was, I think, in my early twenties, I went with an old school friend back to our primary school and we walked around the school and we looked in the windows, and we walked into the toilets and had a look in there, and then we played on the monkey bars. And the overwhelming feeling was that everything was so small and nothing looked how we remembered it. It was like a doll house. We were so much bigger that everything looks tiny. It was this weird warped perspective. And not to mention we could not swing on monkey bars to save ourselves. So I think it was so lovely that Lucy, in your previous episode, read from The Magic Faraway Tree, because The Faraway Tree books were massively important to me as a child, and they really were some of the first books I read when I could read independently.

Child's voice reading: "'Good,' said Jo. 'We'll ask Moon-Face and Silky.' Beth wrote a note and gave it to the little white goat to take to Moon-Face."

Woman's voice (writer Leanne Hall): And I know from my work as a children's book seller, Enid Blyton is still incredibly beloved, and people come in and ask for The Magic Faraway Tree books every single day. They're the kind of books where there's a bit of a resistance to people changing things. Customers at the bookshop get really annoyed by the changes they made to the character's names to avoid words like Fannie and Dick. And they're really upset about any changes to illustrations or covers. They want the old covers and the old illustrations. So for me, they're really interesting books to pick, because I love them so much. They were so important to me. People are really resistant to any changes with them, yet obviously there's also some outdated attitudes and things in those books as well that's interesting to bump up against as an adult.

Things Found In Books theme music plays.

Woman's voice (writer Leanne Hall): "I was asleep when the little white goat came, nudging its snout against my frosty bedroom window. It took me a minute to untangle from my dreams. No one expects a goat to come for them at midnight. I opened the window, and the goat spat an envelope onto my bed. It wore a crown of pink roses on its head. 'You dear a sweet little thing,' I said, which is not how I normally talk, but you should have seen the eyelashes on that animal. The goat disappeared into the night. The envelope held an embossed card, 'The Faraway Tree reborn. Seven year reunion occurring now. All welcome.' Was I surprised? For about a second. But perhaps a part of me had always known that chapter of my life wasn't fully closed. By the time I reached the dirt road in the backs of the quaint thatched houses, my sneakers were wet and I couldn't feel my nose. I switched my phone off, stared into the horror-film depths of the Enchanted Wood, then jumped the narrow ditch. 'Wisha-wisha-wisha-washa,' said the trees. Their whispering followed me along the path to the tree. In my memory, the Faraway Tree was a towering giant, with a monstrously thick trunk and rough bark full of knots and holes. But this ordinary eucalypt, I almost didn't recognize it. Did I have the right tree? No sooner had I thought this than a rope dangled in front of my face. I grasped it and began to climb. I was out of breath by the time I reached the topmost branch. A pillowy white cloud hid the crown of the tree. A ladder dangled from its center. 'Here goes nothing.' I spoke out loud to prove to myself I wasn't dreaming, but instead I came off sounding like a character in a book that talks to themselves alone in the woods at night for no good reason. A hysterical laugh almost escaped me.

I clambered up into a huge green field in the middle of the countryside, an avenue of paper lanterns lighting the path before me. A hand-painted sign was hammered deep into the soil, 'The Land of the Unsupervised House Party.' Shadowy silhouettes clumped around a cottage on the distant peak of a hill. The swamp, swamp, swamp of heavy bass carried down to where I stood. I took a deep breath. I could do this. I followed the lanterns to the top of the hill and launched myself into the throng. There were toddlers through to senior citizens, squirrels, deer, bears, brownies, goblins, and elves, even clocks and dolls come to life. A dusty dance floor was populated with barefoot pixies. The DJ wore a suit of clanging pots and pans. An older woman dressed in more skirts than seemed necessary, stood amongst it all and flung buckets of water about.

I found the plastic tubs that held ice and bottles of beer, cracked a beer open and kept moving. If only I could find the food, it would be the easiest place to strike up a casual conversation. I set off in a likely direction, but a short girl with long brown hair stopped me. 'You look familiar.' So did she. The last time I saw her, she had a short bob that flicked out at the ends, and wore flippy little dresses with Peter Pan collars. 'Hi Fannie,' I said. Another girl appeared over her shoulder. 'Ah, hey Beth.' 'She's called Franny now.' Beth had a peroxide, blonde shag and wore an oversized lambskin coat. 'And my full name is Bethany. Who are you?' 'I'm Leanne.'

I'd only spent three whole years of my childhood whizzing down slides and fending off enchantments with these people. No big deal. 'I think I remember you.' I could tell Franny was only being polite. 'Do we know you from boarding school?' 'No, I'm from here.' I gestured around us, even though we'd never been to this particular land together. 'I mean, I'm from the village. We spent a lot of time climbing the tree together as kids?' Frannie still wore a blank look. 'Wait. Joe?' called out Bethany, as a tall boy in a flannel stumbled past. 'Do you remember this girl? What's your name

again?' Joe was board-shouldered and strong-jawed, with golden hair that cowlicked at the front. He was also blisteringly, staggeringly drunk. 'I say,' he said in a deep baritone, his eyes unfocused. 'No one told me we were coming to Rocking Land. I don't like it one little bit.' He clutched onto a nearby friend. They swayed back and forth like a storm raged around them. 'I don't know what he's taken,' Frannie said to Bethany, 'but he's being a real pain in the ass. I vote we leave him here.'

"Joe reacted like a bad pantomime actor. 'Do you think this land will swing away from the Faraway Tree soon?' 'Oh no,' his friend froze, 'I don't want to live in this queer little place forever.' 'We have no way of escape.' The words shot out of my mouth reflexively. 'The only way down is through the ladder.' 'Do you mind?' Bethany said. 'It's hard enough as it is living with this entitled prick. Don't encourage him. He set fire to the squirrel's general shop earlier.' Joe finally focused his bleary gaze on me. 'Wait, I do remember you. You're Moon-Face.' Frannie clicked and pointed at him. 'Yes. We called her Moon-Face, remember?' 'That's not right,' I said. 'There was an old man called Moon-Face. You're thinking of someone else.' 'You had such chubby cheeks back then,' Franny explains. 'They squished your little eyes up.' She comes dangerously close to pushing her eyes up at the corners in a way that I recognized from long ago playgrounds. 'I'll be going then.' I reversed hard and fast ricocheting through the crowd until I found myself at a ring of toadstools piled with food. There were cakes, biscuits, sandwiches, pots of strawberry jam, baskets of plums, glass bottles of lemonade and steaming mugs of cocoa. Someone slid up next to me. 'Hey, I've got an extra pop biscuit. Do you want it?' A girl in a sparkly jumpsuit with a shaved head gave me the friendliest smile of the evening. 'I know you,' she said. 'It's Leanne, right?' I scanned her face, green eyes, a nose ring, a set of gently pointed ears. 'Silky,' she prompted me. And as soon as she did, I saw it. 'Oh, right. You used to have the hair.' I wave my hands around my head to indicate Silk's signature flowing curls. 'Ugh,' said silky. I could never have my hair that long again. These creepy little gnomes used to try and use it as a blanket.'

"She handed me an ordinary looking biscuit. I bit into it, and my mouth flooded with sunshine. 'Wait, this isn't spiked is it?' 'Just a little,' Silky winked, and began loading up the plate with cake and fruit and cream. I swallowed, then asked, 'Do you remember this guy from the tree called Moon-Face? I run into some others, but they don't know him.' 'Yeah, I remember him. We don't talk anymore.' 'Oh?' I took a sip of beer. 'Why is that?' 'I used to respect him, that magic he did, the chanting, drawing on the ground in chalk, but then I started my Wicca apprenticeship, and realized that he'd actually stolen those spells from teachers of mine.' 'Oh, I didn't realize you were a witch?' 'Trainee witch. It was either that or hairdressing.'

"Silky put her plate down and started cramming handfuls of jelly straight into her mouth. In between mouthfuls she said, 'There was this whole generation of mediocre white men who appropriated magic from this lineage of strong female witches and healers, and totally took credit for it. Did you notice how all the enchanters and wizards and magicians were men back then? Urg, it makes me so angry.' Silky wiped her jellied hands on a passing rabbit. 'Do you want to go to the poppy field?' she asked. 'I'll take you there.' 'Of course,' I said straight away. I wasn't worried about getting stuck anywhere with her."

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis): Thanks so much, Leanne. And we have a copy of her latest book, *The Gaps*, to give away to one of you fabulous listeners. Jump online and share a pic of you with your fave coming of age book, and tag Minerva's Books & Ideas. Thanks so much for listening. Thanks to all our wonderful

guests, Rochi Zalani, Declan Miller and Leanne Hall and the music of Floc and you should check out all of their work. I'll put links in the notes. The lovely folks that sent in voice messages, thank you. Thanks to Maria Popova of Brain Pickings, the book seed for this episode, and a big inspiration for Gather as a whole. A massive thanks also to Creative Victoria for supporting the production of this episode and the next two to come, completing the first season of Gather. This means all the creative folk get paid. Yes.

Next up we have the theme of Adaptation, and our guest artist is the awesome musician Gelareh Pour, along with lots of other goodies, including a chat with playwright, Christine Davey, about her adaptation of My Brilliant Career. It's described as a theatrical re-imagining of Stella Miles Franklin's tale of love, language and landscape, a beautiful and life-affirming story from Skin Of Our Teeth Productions. And shows are on in September, so check out the link I share to that too. This episode was produced by me, Amy Tsilemanis, with sound engineering by the amazing Dav Byrne. Connect with us online, via Minerva's Books & Ideas, and we'll see you next time.

Music by Floc plays out and then fades away.