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Katy G. 00:00

United Lutheran Seminary presents the Seminary Explorers podcast: conversations on faith, art, people, politics, theology, life, and more, with voices from around the corner and around the globe.

Katy G. 00:19

Welcome to the Seminary Explorers. I'm Katy Giebenhain, my guest, is Pennsylvania writer and advocate Will Lane. Will is the author of five poetry collections: Moonlight Standing In as Cordelia, Elegy for Virginia Redding, In the Barn of God, Trust Rust, and kin, he studied classical Greek at Gettysburg College for over a decade. He worked in the building trade before earning an M.A. from the Graduate Institute at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland. He taught for many years in the English and Environmental Studies departments at Gettysburg College. He was a professional wedding photographer and social worker. Will serves on church council at Saint James Lutheran Church, and is an integral part of Green Gettysburg and DFA, Democracy for America. He lives in Adams County, with his wife and partner in democracy, Anne, one of the founders of the Interfaith Center for Peace and Justice, and Project Gettysburg Lyon, which is the town's sister city in Nicaragua, Will has been an anchor for ethics and citizen sensibility in the greater Gettysburg area for decades. It's a pleasure to talk with him today. Will, welcome to the seminary explorers.

Will L. 01:49

Thank you for having me. Glad to be here.

Katy G. 01:52

Recently, I was in Göttingen, Germany. In the city museum, there's a special exhibit about Adam von Trott zu Solz. It's about his civil resistance during the Second World War and his connections to Gottingen. Von Trott was a lawyer and diplomat, and part of this exhibit was a large poster, which is interactive, with the title "What Have I Done for Democracy Lately? People can write hashtags next to different categories, and there's a lot of variety. So, from I voted to I argued fairly, or I informed myself, I ran from office, even I helped someone. I was standing in the museum in Gottingen thinking about Will Lane, and I would like him to start off with a song that he has written. And did you want to say anything about it before he's?

Will L. 02:57

Well, I actually wrote it a while ago, and then revised it recently because it seemed like a perfect fit for the time that we find ourselves in right now. So it's called "Are You the One?" and it's an uncomfortable question for all of us, including me. So you know, but anyway, here it goes. We're the ones to carry on

the work that must be done? Where are the bold and brave and true to see this matter through? Where are the ones to take our fate and break it like a dinner plate? Are you the one who will not turn and run? you one who will not turn and run? There was a country far away where bright hopes snapped like sticks. All day the careful children played beside that town's barracks. When tanks came rolling down the street, they felt it with their naked feet, but there was one who would not turn and run. Always one who would not turn and run. How fragile is our liberty when men have hearts of ice? Was this the best that we could do? Free cheese for jobless mice, it's bad news for democracy when money can buy and sell the free. Are you the one who will not turn and run? Oh, are you one who will not turn and run? You know a little history. You've seen all this before. When small men, wild with righteousness, come pounding on the door, seems we must drink a bitter cup till better days are built with love. Are you the one who will not turn and run? Are you one who will not turn?

Katy G. 06:48

Oh, thank you, thank you so much. Well, the question-it's something we sometimes ask of others and need to ask ourselves too, isn't it? It

Will L. 06:58

Sure is, yeah. And it's-I guess the song is is directed to me more than anybody to the onstreet You know it's and really you know how to cope how how to connect how to act and speak effectively to our current moment, I think is something that preoccupies a lot of us. Inevitably, we can't get it. We can't get away from it. You know, we really can't. And I guess some surprising power words that have come across to me are words like connection, the human connection, and collaboration, working together, kind of shoulder to shoulder to solve problems across divisions, and conversation. You know, and they seem to be words that don't scare people so much as you know. So many words do those S words, you know, socialism, even solidarity. That's like I don't know. That's like from Eastern Europe or something. What's you know? So, and the truth is, none of us, of whatever persuasion, really know exactly what to do about the moment we're in because it's complicated, it's difficult, and it's going to take a lot of collaboration, and conversation, and connection to sustain us, to really to to actually do anything about anything because our our crisis is environmental, it's social, it's political, it's economic, and it's all of that in one big tangle. Yeah.

Katy G. 08:55

Well, I find it relieving and refreshing to hear you state that because sometimes I think we tend to want to either not think about it or look for some sort of easy answer, sort of one thing, and that's not going to happen.

Will L. 09:11

Right.

Katy G. 09:12

So it's I appreciate when that's stated.

Will L. 09:16

Yeah. So you know, it came up recently. There was a letter to the Gettysburg Times, where a reader had checked out the Democratic Socialist website, and and he wrote the letter about that. But then he also referenced our Democracy for America group at the end of the letter, so it really seemed like it needed a response, and he was quite stirred up about the the Democratic Socialist website platform, the platform on that website, and he's you know listed a couple of things that they were advocating and said, "Would you really want to live in such a?" Society that that ran that way, and he specifically asked DFA, "Why don't you? If you look at this, would you want to live in a in a in a world that they're they're defining? So I thought, man, I better respond, and I did. I clicked on the the link he provided, and I thought at first that I had landed on a fake, like a right-wing version, you know, propaganda version and stuff. But lo and behold, when it went independently and back around through the the homepage and got to the same platform, lo and behold, that was the platform. And I think the people who created that are have good intentions, they really do, but they tend to couch everything in outdated language, too much, too much Marxism, too much talk about workers and such, and I think we need a new language and a new approach to really deal with our moment, and but I realize that offers that language offers a simple, simple, seemingly simple solution to things, a simple approach, but I don't think it'll work. It certainly won't work as a strategy for communication with with folks, and we need-we may not need everybody, but we need almost everybody on board here, realizing we have we have big problems, and we need to get to work and stop all the talk, the big talk, the angry talk, and and get to work. So that's that's really what's I've been preoccupied with recently in my own advocacy work in the community, trying to figure out how to how to speak effectively across divisions and across assumptions, to to really to get that process of of collaboration Going, yeah.

Katy G. 12:02

Well, one thing that I appreciated about that letter to the editor is that it acknowledged that, and it was a prompt and respectful response. But it also pointed out the meaning behind these words is actually supporting things that there's more consensus on than so this is also an example of I don't want to say correcting might sound too you know I don't want it to sound critical but when we hear and see things that are different than is is accurate, so that's also part of being a a good citizen. I think is saying, well, this is just want to respond to that and doing it right away. Yeah. Yes. Right. Yeah.

Will L. 13:47

As I said in the letter, though, I'm willing to talk about it. I get it. I mean, while. and Montana. Yeah, a senator and inequitable. First thing. Yeah. Filling with wildfire smoke. Yeah, yeah. Well, wait a minute. I think we ought to pay attention, maybe, to what's happening right in front of us. Yeah. Let's talk about that.

Katy G. 14:52

Yeah. And the Green Gettysburg book group. Could you say something about that? Yeah.

Will L. 14:58

That. That's a. That's an. Become an online book club that's very much open to new members. We started on Valentine's Day in 2020, right as COVID was beginning, so we quickly had to shift online because of COVID, and we found that we liked being online, that it meant people could participate from

a distance. We've got members in Maryland, and we've had members as far away as New Jersey and different places. And people can actually tune in from California if they're willing to get up that early. And we've read a ton of books having to do with not only environmental issues but the whole human-earth relationship and some fiction and so forth. We have met once a week every Friday at 9 o'clock for over five years now, which is sort of wild to think about. But and it's it's it's a group that's evolved. Some people have left the group. Other people have come. We have three scientists, you know, retired biologists, chemists, and so forth, and an interesting variety of people. So it makes for a great conversation every week as we discuss the books we're reading, and I kind of wish-I mean, I've sort of shifted my own activism, activism to other groups than the book club per se. But we are-I've learned a lot from other people and from the books too, over the years,

Katy G. 16:43

and the fact that it has such continuity-I mean, you know, every week for over five years-that's that's impressive.

Will L. 16:50

It's kind of crazy. At these times, people don't keep doing the same thing for five years like that. It's it's kind of sick, really. But not really.

Katy G. 17:01

And how about a couple of the other sort of writing and editing projects that you're doing right now? You just mentioned on because some projects, some fires are burning hotter than others at different times, and so yeah.

Will L. 17:15

Well, I also edit a monthly newsletter for Gettysburg Democracy for America. It's we call it now Democracy News and Notes.

Katy G. 17:29

Yeah,

Will L. 17:29

because that's been a kind of issue. If your name begins with D, there's an assumption that you're just a Democrat, and we a lot of us are Democrats. Some of us aren't, but so we're really focused on keeping a conversation about democracy going, and also on connection with as many of the local groups that exist now that are doing good work and making sure they are aware of one another and making sure their work is seen and and and appreciate it, you know. So that's groups like Pathways for Racial Justice, Gettysburg Rising, Blue Storm Action, the Town Hall Committee that puts together town hall programming, and I'm sure there's some I'm forgetting. Well, actually, the Green Gathering, the Gettysburg Green Gathering, oh,

Katy G. 18:22

the event, yes, is

Will L. 18:23

different from the book club.

Katy G. 18:25

Correct, yeah.

Will L. 18:25

And they are doing a variety of things, bringing speakers, and they have a environmental homesteading symposium thing they do at the Recbox that got canceled because of weather, but it's coming up again in August. There's a lot going on in the Gettysburg area. It really is, and so that's the role of the newsletter is to connect with those groups and to create a have a space for people to really write more extended pieces reflecting on the times, so we're really blessed with our writers because we have people with real expertise who have retired to this area and are still full of energy, and they they need a place to employ that expertise. And so,

Katy G. 19:21

I have found it to be a really this the monthly newsletter. It's a trusted site because it's good information. It's it's not anything anything that's printed in this newsletter because I know you edit it. It's it's going to be it's not going to be fake news. It's not going to. There's nothing. There aren't like hidden agendas behind it. It really emphasizes the connection, and it emphasizes also what's going on. There's a lot going on in the area to be hopeful about and to. Just to provide more details and show people where they can go to find more information, and whether it's healthcare or candidates who are running in upcoming elections, or a lot of different ways to to participate. Yeah, it is. Yeah, and it's it's a lot of work, you know, editing, but it is-it's important. It's really important.

Will L. 20:26

Yeah, it's fun. It's fun too, actually. Now that I finally mastered the platform to some degree and have transitioned from Dell to Mac, okay, which I did. There are a lot of little little tricks to learn along the way. It's been good.

Katy G. 20:46

What's an example of something that you would encourage people to remember that they can do in a time that feels kind of overwhelming, and we often think more of the things that we can't do. What's something that that we can do?

Will L. 21:05

Well, there are so many things, really. I mean, one of them. I mean, is the words that pop into my head are one is just to step back from the flow of information, quote unquote, which is not always information, and and create spaces for themselves or for ourselves where we can be more fully engaged with the complexity of things, even if it's just the complexity of breathing in and out, you know, and more time to read. I'm getting nervous about the the decline, the perceived decline in reading, sustained reading, and I noticed that in my last years of teaching, that students were really having trouble completing

reading assignments. It's become a cliché to say that, but it's I noticed it too. And related to that, of course, is this whole matter of our attention and being aware of how we spend our attention, And you know, I notice even in myself. I really don't go on Facebook very often because there's this temptation to scroll and just sort of get absorbed in one picture after another, and it's not it's not a good use of one's attention. And you know, becoming aware of one's attention and how you're spending it is, I think, is an important thing that people might not think of. And the other thing, of course, would be conversations. Have the conversations. You know, even if you're, I mean, it doesn't. You don't have to go and talk to the meanest guy of all. You talk to people, even that agree with you, and engage the complexities a little bit, or talk to people that agree with you about some things but not other things. That's ideal, and and see where you have common ground. That so conversation, attention, and taking and practicing reading, read people, because it's you know visual arts are like film, etc. Media general visual media are so powerful in the way they work on the senses that you know they can be so effective at manipulating people and deceiving us. Really, to to really get into the complexities of matter, you really have to read. Maybe that's old-fashioned to say, but I think you really do. You really have to read, and you have to read carefully. Might even have to take notes to really understand something. Yeah, so those-that's my recommendation.

Katy G. 24:06

Well, and thinking of attention is one of the most important things that any poet has-is attention, right? And that comes out in the writing. Would you like to close us out today with a poem?

Will L. 24:25

Yeah, I would. A while back, I read this at the UG meeting on a on a Sunday at the end of 2025. So that's the

Katy G. 24:39

Unitarian Universalists at Gettysburg. That's right. They were the host for this event. Correct. Okay.

Will L. 24:44

Yeah, I gave the sermon and I finished this quote sermon. I don't know if they call it that with this poem, and I always wanted to write a poem about Gettysburg because I grew up here on York Street, lived much of my life here. Almost all of it, really. It's a tough subject to write about. So this poem, you know, it may work, it may not, I don't know, but it's my my best attempt to to really engage the place where I was born. That is really so important to so many people in our country and really around the world. So it's called "E pluribus unum, one out of many, for the dead at Gettysburg. It might be might be hard to find these dead who died in rows on a hillside near this room. In rows, each one alone or stranded, alone in a meadow, knee-deep in grass, falling down in soft grass, alone. But now it's us walking around. Now our well-instructed feet can feel their absence. Our legs, long or short, notice a sunken place. With our legs walking, we find a sunken place of temporary burial, where scholars walk too, and talk us through their last lunges-the last lunges of some union dead, understood at last, on a field trip with scholars. But now, right now, what about right now, in this hour of need, in our shared hour of need, O eager, but unsteady citizens, with the back of a hand can could you feel this summer from under some mighty tree, the subtle breezes that might pass for their spirits arriving, dead spirits arriving

alive, or departing, disappearing, departing, soundlessly into the air. Who knows? Some other night, some other time, in winter they might lie in wait for you like stars in a forgotten pail of clear water, meant for pet chickens in a shed, or an old dog in his last days of loyalty. They come, they go. These uneasy union dead, working the seasons, rippling the smooth ponds of our empty minds. Can you hold still enough now, right now, to think these things and test with your own extended fingertips my gently wild claims? Deep in your own mind, bend, rest on one knee, citizens, and listen for their soldier truths, whispering like shrapnel in the blue air of July 118, 63. Bend down now, and on one knee, breathe deep, and claim as yours at last, as ours, this undone task, the stopped song of shared freedom, the one out of many we have yet to make.

Katy G. 28:12

Wow! Thank you. Can you hold still enough to think these things? Wow.

Speaker 1 28:21

Yeah.

Katy G. 28:22

Well, thank you so much for your time today.

Will L. 28:25

Thank you. It's been a pleasure to be here.

Katy G. 28:27

You have been listening to the Seminary Explorers. I'm Katie Giebenhain. My guest has been writer and advocate Will Lane. Learn more about Gettysburg DFA at GettysburgDFA.org for more information about the Green Gettysburg Book Club, send an email to Will at wlane@gettysburg.edu. Thank you.

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