

# THE INTUITIVE WRITER:

## PASSION

### – WITH CARRIE KLASSEN –

Passion doesn't have to be big and bombastic. In this episode, Sarah Selecky speaks with Carrie Klassen about writing, aliveness, and ordinary citizen activism.

*August 28, 2021.*

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#### **Sarah Selecky 0:06**

Carrie Klassen is a writer and ghostwriter who believes that communicating with care is peace work. By practicing and teaching the art of intentional written communication, with nature, intuition, and each other, she's creating a more peaceful, connected world. Before the age of thirty, Carrie left her fancy corporate job to be creative director in the nonprofit sector. She led a team in publishing magazines and websites, and rolled out a brand that touched an entire city. From there, she became a marketing communications vice president working with teams on both sides of the Atlantic. At this point in her career, she says on her website, "*then it all came apart.*"

We all know that transformation takes time and is often painful. Carrie spent her proverbial cocoon time doing *Eat Pray Love* in Italy before Liz Gilbert did. And when she came home, she started her own business. Pink Elephant Communications opened in 2008. Her clients were in helping and creative professions, therapists, artists, and doulas, for instance. In her work, she aimed to make writing even in commerce, an act of connection, an act of love.



This is how I found Carrie, because I started my writing school around that same time. Her happy home page PDF is in the DNA of all of my professional writing, including the home pages on both of my websites today.

Years later, I was introduced to Carrie by a mutual friend. And it's been such a pleasure and a privilege to know her personally. I believe that we learn and grow best through friendship, and I've learned so much from having Carrie in my life. After eleven years, she retired Pink Elephant and became, finger flexions, Carrie Klassen, now with a.com, behind her name. As a ghostwriter, she works with people on social movements around the world who have meaningful and often difficult messages to communicate. Whatever it is, the message of their life, the core of their teaching, the thing they most ardently wish to convey, Carrie helps people communicate with clarity, precision, sensitivity, and care. When I was researching and reading about passion, which is this month's theme in our Centered writing membership, it dawned on me that Carrie Klassen is one of the most passionate people I know.

She's a writer, a web designer, flower intuitive, and an activist. She's a multi passionate empath who knows how to create conditions in her life and work for passion. I've seen her prioritize it. And I've been taking notes for years learning from her. I reached out to Carrie to see if she'd be willing to have a conversation about passion, and she sounded surprised. Maybe we'll talk a little bit about why that was her reaction in this call. We'd both agreed that we wanted to keep this recording casual and emergent. So neither one of us really knows exactly what's going to happen in this hour.

Welcome, Carrie.

**Carrie Klassen 3:06**

Hi. Oh, it's funny to hear you talk about me like that.

**Sarah Selecky 3:13**

You were surprised!

**Carrie Klassen 3:15**



*Sarah Selecky*  
WRITING SCHOOL

I was surprised. I'm still surprised hearing it again. Yeah, I think because, like, when I think of my personality, my sense of myself is a quiet person. And I think that I have sort of complete passion. Passion with like, a bigness or a, I don't know, a certain kind of energy that is is not my sticker energy, and things I care about a lot. So I [inaudible] think about passion in that sense. But I don't know, I don't know in what way you are thinking of it.

**Sarah Selecky 3:59**

I mean, it's true. We haven't really talked about this pointedly before in this way. So I just have a feeling that because of what you just said about imagining that passion has this bigness to it, specifically, because of that, that you might have some insights about it that might be interesting for writers to hear. Because a lot of writers are — not all, not all of us — but a lot of writers are on the quieter side of things. Observing often.

And so you know, feeling alive, which is one way that I've come to understand what passion is, it looks different and manifests in different ways for different people obviously. But yeah, there are ways that I have witnessed you feeling alive that stand out to me. They seemed simple and maybe even quiet, some of them but you really saturate some of these choices with pleasure in this way that, I have a body remembrance of certain choices you make. I have a little list. They're simple. A yellow dress, a really good bra, ordering a delicious meal in New York City, taking yourself out to an art gallery, the way you pay attention to flowers. And then of course, there's like, your more bold moves like writing and publishing a book of erotica, and taking your young daughter to Indigenous rights protests and events. So, question, do you see any of these choices as passions, even when they're in a list like that? What do you think?

**Carrie Klassen 5:42**

You know what, I love your, yeah, like it all dropped into place for me what you're talking about. Your concept of passion, equating it with aliveness. Like, I do care about that a lot. And that does... I do celebrate aliveness through a yellow dress, and through a rally, and my parenting, and yeah, a good dinner. And pleasure, like, like the idea of pleasure and passion being together, they look, they're sort of commodified in a certain way that I don't relate to. But when you invoke the yellow dress, I'm like, Oh, yeah, yeah, no, I get it. I agree with that. I'm passionate in that sense.



That makes sense to me. I took a course with Joanna Macy earlier this year, which was so beautiful, and actually really good for me as a person who is somewhat... I mean, I work on a computer all day. That's how I write. But I am resistant to screens and that kind of interface. I'd rather be, you know, in real life, with a person to feel most at ease, connecting. But I felt so connected through technology and realizing that that is possible. It's a gift. But that is not what I wanted to bring up. Something she said that has stayed with me, actually, a couple things that stayed with me and I think are relevant to what you're talking about is just the line: "*To be alive is holy.*" And, you know, she said we bless the world by our attention to it. And I think that that's what, when you talk about writers being maybe, we're noticers. We are noticers. That is a kind of activism. That is the kind of active participation in life, but it's also like making it work. Acknowledging what's sacred about it. So you noticing me wearing a yellow dress, I mean, that is, yeah, that's aliveness.

**Sarah Selecky 8:03**

Oh, I love that, that the noticing can become the noticing can become the noticing of the noticing. That's what makes it work. Joanna Macy's, to be alive is holy, reminds me of Mary Oliver. Who writes about paying attention as a form of devotion.

**Carrie Klassen 8:22**

Right.

**Sarah Selecky 8:23**

Yeah.

**Carrie Klassen 8:24**

Yeah. And what I love about writing, or what I feel like it is for me, one of the things that is for me, is then because we can live so much in the ethers and, you know, the realms of spirit, and the authorial, and being able to ground it in actual words, you know, with serifs, and that you can then hand to somebody. Like someone else can read it, they become tangible, they become mental, and rounded, and all of that. There's sort of a wholeness to that.



**Sarah Selecky 8:57**

Yeah, I mean, that's why I write by hand, like not even just the serifs but even before it comes to that, there's something of a pleasure in making something tangible, that has like a sound of a pencil scratching on paper, or the way that ink comes out kind of wobbly sometimes and imperfectly on the page, and the scratch. Like, all of that is part of the pleasure of this ethereal kind of airy, windy thoughts swirling around that sometimes. Even noticing can come into this place of like, not that it's abstract because in the moment of noticing something, it does feel quite embodied. But it hasn't been made tangible yet until you make something out of it. I think that's what artists do. And in writing, it's words, it's language.

Speaking of writing, one of the things I wanted to ask you about and talk about was several years ago now we both went with, a lot of amazing people were at this event, to adrienne maree brown's launch of *Pleasure Activism*, her anthology that she edited, in Toronto at Lula Lounge, and I was wondering what you remember about that night?

**Carrie Klassen 10:22**

Lots of things. I think one of the, I mean, sometimes something is memorable because it changes my thinking. And sometimes it's memorable because somebody said something to you that, like, better articulates your own loose thoughts. And I think she did that for me. And she talked about, and I won't get the words, right, but saying that those of us on the like, who want to, who claim to be progressive, and are seeking a more just world, that the world we create...She wasn't talking specifically about language, but you know, that's where I go with it. You know, the world, we want to articulate, this vision we have for a more just place, it has to be, we have to make it fun, we have to make it appealing and be a place that anyone would want to... we want to be a club that anyone would want to join. And so often, the discourse around, you know, different issues of inequity are presented in binary ways. You're either good or bad, or you're either with us or against us, or you think this way or you're evil. And they're really, like, there's violence in the way some communication happens. And I want to be clear to say that, like, how people, how anyone communicates, especially about oppression, especially, especially about their own oppression, is honourable, and I respect.



But I think of myself as a white woman who does not face a lot of oppression. How I communicate with other people, it requires... I think I have a lot of advantages I should use. And I should be more responsible with language. I should be responsible with, with my use of language, to just to really take care in how I speak about what I think is possible in ways that are... I don't wanna be... I don't know. I'm aware of how this will sound, but love! I want it to be loving. That's the world. Like that, at the foundation of it is what I want. And so the other thing that I think about when I think about that night, is how much love there was in that space. Like, we all loved her.

**Sarah Selecky 13:08**

Yeah.

**Carrie Klassen 13:09**

And it didn't matter what she said, or what she was talking about, there was just this, like, it was so thick and beautiful, you know, in the air and in the wood of the tables and in the dirty floor. It was just so present in that room, how much collectively we loved this lady. And it felt reciprocated. And so I thought, you know, in whatever I do, in the way that I talk to people, in the ways I share ideas I have, in the ways that I, you know, aim to build community as an introvert, as a quiet person, mostly through language, you know? I want people to feel in whatever ways I am capable — that's what I want to contribute to. I don't want to shame anybody into doing anything. I just want them to feel loved. And it's hard. You know? But I think there's a place for writers to contribute to that. And I think that's part of my work in the world.

**Sarah Selecky 14:19**

Absolutely it is. I think you do that with your... I think that is what you do with the care. Your love of what you do. Your love of language, it's... Love is definitely foundational. And, you know, it's funny, I have a little note about what I remember about that night. And similarly, I came away with, I remember that something about like, this has to be a club you want to join. Like we want to, we want to join. And the energy of everyone in that room, and her presence was just so electric. And what I said was just like we were all in her spell, but what you... I like the way you described it even more, which was just like, that thing that happens with love in a room or in a space, everything becomes imbued with it. It exponentially grows when it's shared. It's one of



those infinite resources. And that's what she was doing. She was like a power source. She was a love source.

**Carrie Klassen 15:25**

Yeah.

**Sarah Selecky 15:25**

And the other thing, the other thing that I took away, you know, I have the book, I haven't finished reading it because I keep getting like paused on the power of one of the essays at the very start of it by Audre Lorde. It was a presentation that she gave that adrienne maree brown included at the beginning of the anthology and said that that's sort of like what started her on this work was this essay. Really recommend going back. I just reread it again last week. And there's this section, I didn't remember what it was 'cause she read it that night. But now that when I reread it, I was like, Oh, yeah, that! There's a section where she writes about... The essay is called, I think, "*The Erotic As Power.*"

And she describes opening a packet of margarine as a child, and squeezing in the yellow coloring that's in this little bubble plastic, and mushing it around into the margarine, which was white before you coloured it to look like butter with a yellow dye. And she just described the sensory act of squishing up this dye into the margarine. And it's just, it's erotic. It's like laced with pleasure and love and joy. It's just pleasurable. And then in the essay, she's like, that pleasure is a power source. And you can, just like, I loved how you described like, the, the wood of the table, and the gritty of the floor. And all of that was just imbued with this pleasure and love. And that's exactly what Audre Lorde's essay is about. It's exactly what adrienne maree brown is doing. And it's like, it is a power source. It's that you can feel it when you're in presence, in the presence of someone who's finding that level of pleasure. In anything, you can find it in anything.

**Carrie Klassen 17:24**

Yeah. Years ago, I took a Tantra workshop. And the woman had us go into her backyard. It was done in her living room. And there was like a totally nondescript, I won't even call it a garden, like there were some plants. And nothing flowering, just some green things, nothing that had been tended. And she asked us to study the



different shades of green. And the longer you looked like, at first, it's this wall of green, and then you begin to notice how many different shades there really are. And the longer you notice, it becomes an erotic practice. Like it is such a turn on to have this connection to all of these colours, like, to feel the aliveness of the world. And you know, that you can do it with, like a bunch of weeds. I mean, I don't believe in weeds, but they're all wonderful plants. I love them all. But yeah, it's just in anywhere in any moment that is accessible to us. It's in the margarine, it's in the dirt on the floor. It's, you know, it's in a hedge.

**Sarah Selecky 18:42**

And you know, even beyond the simple or the banal. So I have a theory, a question. Thinking about the way you write, where, the way you have chosen and cultivated and curated a writing life where you get to write about things and help other people write about things that other people avoid even thinking about, let alone writing about. I'm thinking about the letter, the open letter you wrote to your daughter about your wishes should you be hospitalized. You help people with writing eulogies. You help people write about money and sales. You communicate with nature, you communicate with flowers. And of course in erotica, you write about sex. And my question, my theory, my question is — do you think that the more passionate you are, or the more willing you are to feel alive, or the more you feel alive, I don't know how quite to word that. It means that the more stamina you have for all parts of life? Like passion means loving, powerful sensations or accessing powerful sensations, feeling not just good or bad but like feeling alive.

So, you know, there's a whole spectrum of experience that that goes from the margarine and the different colours of plant leaves, right into like, fear and trauma and death and sex and money. I mean, you read about death, sex, and money. All the controversial stuff. What do you think?

**Carrie Klassen 20:26**

Are those controversial? I mean, they're so human. Oh, my gosh, I... Well, first of all, I don't know what the answer to that question is.

**Sarah Selecky 20:40**





Me either.

**Carrie Klassen 20:39**

So... It's not mine to give. As you were talking, I'm like, I'm at my father's deathbed. And I remember, I mean, it was such a transformative experience for me to witness physical death over many weeks. And, you know, to care for him through that time. Because there was so much about, I mean, for many reasons, but just on a purely human level, I knew so little about death, and had to confront how little I knew about death, in the process of witnessing helping someone I, you know, love so very much to die. And I would, in the beginning, because I didn't realize it was a process, like I watched the movies, and it's so romantic, and it's serene. And you know, your eyes are open, and then your eyes are closed. And that's kind of how it goes. But, and I'm sure it's different for different deaths. But in his case, and there are some, for people who go through this process, it's not a quick thing.

There are stages that I didn't know about. And, you know, in the beginning, I would sort of, there were all these small losses, small, not small, but stages of loss. And so I was, you know, loving him through food, and I would make his favourite foods, and then I would bring him something, and he would take a bite, and he couldn't taste anymore. And he'd lost taste. And I didn't know that that could happen. And he wept. And I realized, Oh, I need to understand, like, some things about this. And so while he slept, I would be reading hospice PDF manuals and trying to figure it out. And in being so close to that, it was such a strange... He brought me into the place between worlds. I was there with him.

But I was also having to be in this world. And realizing that that's possible, was quite something. But also being so aware of the loss of each sense, and how it went, you know, one by one, and that when they are gone, they are gone, and being so aware in his dying of my aliveness. And it took me a long time to come back to this world after being in the inbetween place with him, and having to, like, consciously find my way back to, you know, what, like, that this life... Like that I, that there is so much, ahh, see this is the place beyond language that I keep striving to find the words for. But I, I write about dying, because I don't want my daughter to, I want her to understand about death, because I learned about life from witnessing death. And I want to appreciate the taste of



food while I am here. There's so much that I took for granted that I realized, this all ends. And, you know, there's nothing mundane. And all of it... If I notice it, you know, if I really, I mean, I go through a lot of my day totally unconscious to this existence.

But when I do pause, and then if I can, like, you know, I don't have... There are lots of gifts I don't have but I think language is one, you know, a sensitivity to language is one that I do. And that is my practice of reciprocity with life is being able to, you know, is attempting to put some of it to work so that others can sort of pause and share that with me. Another way to connect with life, with humans, with my humanity. I have no idea what question you asked. That was my answer. Thanks for riding it out with me.

**Sarah Selecky 24:47**

It's perfect. It's perfect and as you were talking I was thinking about something else that we share as writers, and I'm curious about your thoughts. How it plays into, or how it has affected your life as a writer, and that's that we both share a Catholic upbringing. As girls. And initially I wanted to ask about, because you write about death, and money, and sex...

**Carrie Klassen 25:24**

[laughing] And flowers, Sarah.

**Sarah Selecky 25:29**

And flowers! But you know, there's a spiritual aspect to those things and I was going to ask if reckoning with shame was a part of your journey as a writer. But I also, you know, there are gifts to that upbringing of believing in some things that we can't see and also the like, facing death all the time. It occurred to me on my walk this morning, as I was trying to figure out how to ask this question or what even there was of a question in this point that I wanted to talk to you about. It occurred to me that the Passion Play, like the Catholic Passion Play, is so much a part of that. And I just wondered if, if you've thought about that. And if, if there's a role in where you are now as a writer, and those beginnings as a girl?

**Carrie Klassen 26:28**



Yes. It's funny, I was just writing about this, this week. I was away with my daughter. And while she was with somebody else, I had some time to myself to explore Guelph. I've never been to Guelph. And I was just walking the city and there's a beautiful Basilica up on the hill. And it's just really beautiful architecture. And I was aware of my body, of the old pining for old churches. And you know, what I got as a young girl, because I would go to church by myself. I was a weirdo. My family had left it, and sometimes my dad and I would go, and then we would critique the sermon together. I'm very lucky. I think the reason that I fare better than some, where shame is concerned, is my dad. That we would sit and then just tear it apart, you know...not even tear apart. I shouldn't say that. But he would ask, what do you think? He would interrogate it, interrogate the ideas. And so I grew up knowing that this man who stands up there in the robes doesn't have some kind of monopoly on truth.

And I get to question it. And that is not a real authority. It's just some guy. And you know, my ideas about that, and my questions were welcome. And so we would have really good discussions. But I remember, I mean, very clearly, the last time I was in... I'll go back to churches for funerals and maybe that's all. Weddings, if I'm invited. This is a Catholic church. I have been to other churches since where, you know, there is a more welcoming language. And, what I felt standing on the sidewalk, this pining was for the ritual, and the incense, the ceremony, the singing about grace together. The praying together, the believing something together. All of that. There are moments, I mean, there are moments in a Catholic church, I suddenly feel nervous that I'm talking about this, I don't, I don't, for those who find their god in it, I don't want to criticize. So this is just my personal experience.

But there was, there were moments of some of it as rote, some of it for me was rote, you know? We're just repeating words, but they were....And this is where we are and this is where we sit, and you're part of the club or you're not. You get the bread or you don't. But there were moments that were so transcendent, where I felt with adrienne maree brown, that you know, there are moments when something is being said or shared, or there is a reading that really touches us all. And you feel that. You feel that connection. And that's... Those are things that I miss, I miss that place of belonging. The church for me was a place of belonging until I was old enough to understand that it wasn't. And you know, I wrote to the pope asking to be permitted...



**Sarah Selecky 29:58**

You did?!

**Carrie Klassen 29:58**

I did, I said, women should be able to be priests and priests to be able to marry. And I think I should be a priest. And so I will say still that I think I would have been a very good priest if I was able to marry and also have children.

**Sarah Selecky 30:12**

Oh yeah! 100%.

**Carrie Klassen 30:13**

Like my sermons, I think they'd be lovely.

**Sarah Selecky 30:15**

I do too! I do too!

**Carrie Klassen 30:18**

If there are any priests listening, who would like, you know, someone to ghostwrite some sermons I think that would be fun. Yeah, and maybe that is my work, you know, maybe those are my Facebook posts. Maybe that is what I'm actually doing. Trying to be, I don't know, I'm not trying to be a priest or trying to teach anything, but I am trying to say something beautiful about the world that we're in, and what's possible.

**Sarah Selecky 30:39**

And create that space of belonging that you were just saying that you miss.

**Carrie Klassen 30:43**

Yeah!

**Sarah Selecky 30:43**

You know, it sounds like what you were describing, I don't know if this is quite right, but it sounds like something of what you were describing in the class you took with



Joanna Macy was another one of those spaces.

**Carrie Klassen 30:57**

Yeah. And the rest of the church story is me sitting on the sidewalk, feeling the pining, seeing that some kindred spirit had painted blood red, the hands on the steps. And knowing that I, you know, I am not welcome in that space, and my friends are not welcome in that space. And I do not wish to be in that space for those reasons. There's just too little alignment with my own beliefs and values and things that are important to me and how I want to be a human in this world. And so I walked on. But there is, with you know, a grief, that beautiful teachings, I mean, Jesus said great things and was a radical.

But those teachings could be twisted and confused and then manifest in such harm and such violence, in such unrepentance when there is the possibility for something different. I continued on and outside the fence surrounding this church was a huge patch of wild bergamot. And as I stopped to observe it, feeling my feelings of loss and my feelings of rightness in walking past, and my feelings of appreciation for the person who put the handprints there. You know, the kinship with someone honest. This beautiful yellow tiger swallowtail butterfly landed right in front of me. And I was reminded, again, that this is my church, and I belong to this world. And, you know, the building and those practices, that it's okay that I'm outside the building, because there's all this.

**Sarah Selecky 32:54**

Yeah. In the material. In the sensual. In nature. Thank you for sharing that. I relate to a lot of what you're saying and I think people listening also will. Thank you for, thank you for sharing that story. Can we talk about writing about sex? It feels like a great segue. Can you tell us a bit about your journey writing and publishing *Rouge*. And, in particular, I'm curious, did you, were you reading a lot of great erotica before writing your own great erotica? How did you know? Where did you learn how to do it? As a writer, I'm really curious about what empowered you to do it. And how you knew not just that you wanted to do it but how to do it.

**Carrie Klassen 34:02**



I like that you think I knew how. No, I'm not a reader of erotica. I have read some and not particularly enjoyed it. And so I thought of it as a genre that is not necessarily for me, I'll just live it, I didn't need to read it. Gosh, okay, we're going back in time. So my process... this was... I'm trying to... I decided to take a month. I was married, I decided to take a month living in Paris. I rented this lovely, charming little apartment in the 16th. And outside my window — it was November, I was spending my birthday month there and I was going to write every day. And I was going to write erotica. And I don't know why. Don't you have these things that just come to you and you're like, oh, what I'm supposed to do! I'm just gonna do that. And with no, like, nothing more beyond it than that. So I moved a little side table into this window alcove. And it was November, but there were these red geraniums blooming outside the window. So I could open the windows and it was very sunny. And so it was actually warm. Like that smell. I've never really enjoyed geraniums, but I loved them, and have loved them since for that gorgeous, earthy, luscious perfume that was coming into this apartment.

And yeah, I just wrote. And then it sat for a while. Also, while I was in Paris, I was taking this month to decide, not that it was my decision alone, but I needed some clarity within myself whether motherhood was something for me or not. And at the end of that month, I did decide, I am now a mother, that was something that I did want to experience in this lifetime, if it was going to be possible from my body, and in my relationship. And a few months later I was. And so *Rouge* was, then became a part of my...

There is such a narrative about what a mother is or should be. What a woman is and should be. And it's so oppressive, and so confining, and so sick, and so inhumane. Because even still, I will, like I'm sitting here now talking to you and I'm like, I can't believe I'm a mother. I don't feel like a mother. I'm me, I'm still the same. I've never changed. My responsibilities, my life has changed dramatically, and my obligations, and my practice of servitude in the world, my capacity for other things — those have all changed. My writing practice has certainly changed. But who I am, has not. And so writing erotica and publishing erotica, as a mother of a baby was kind of this, f-you to what I was supposed to be.

**Sarah Selecky 37:39**



Sarah Selecky  
WRITING SCHOOL

Yeah.

**Carrie Klassen 37:40**

Because it is, like you said, What empowered you to do it? And to me, it's like, it wasn't really, I don't know, nothing empowered, like, What's so, what's so risky? Is that the word, or what's the word? It's just another kind of writing. And to me, it's not different from the other writing I do. I think, what I'm trying to do if I ever articulate it, I mean, if I were to try to articulate it... You articulate it back to me better than I can think it myself, is being alive, you know?

**Sarah Selecky 38:17**

Right.

**Carrie Klassen 38:17**

And being alive to the, to what's growing in my garden, and being alive to like, the, I mean, another of the Joanna Macy lines that, so saying for me is she said: "We're not nouns, but verbs, the magic that can be found in interactions." And that reminder that I'm my body. And I am life expressed through Carrie and through this form, and my writing and certain things that I do, but I'm also like, constantly, like, we're interconnected, but I exist in the interplay between me and you. And, you know, my voice and this technology, and the tree that is waving outside, and the moth that just fluttered by the window. All of it is aliveness.

**Sarah Selecky 38:17**

Yeah, the erotic is power.

**Carrie Klassen 38:35**

The erotic.

**Sarah Selecky 39:19**

Yeah.

**Carrie Klassen 39:23**



So yeah, so writing about bodies, and like, bodies enjoying other bodies. It's just a way of being in our nature, like our natural humanness. Maybe that's it. That was part of the thing that I got in a new way from being with my father, was an awareness of my humanness, like what it is to be human. I had thought, I'd spent, I mean, I'm a thinker, you're you're a thinker. I love your brain. And part of how I interface with this world is through the mental and through analysis, and I love that about, I love that about your brain. I appreciate it about mine. And so, trying to figure out, and maybe it all started in church... Why am I here? What is the greater purpose of all of this? And watching my father die, I left his hospital room that last time with an understanding that I'm just here to be human. I'm just here to have a human experience. And it doesn't have to be some greater purpose. That is the greater purpose. And so what are the ways that I can do that?

**Sarah Selecky 40:38**

Right, okay. And... I love all of that, it's really ringing true. And when earlier you were saying that writing about bodies, writing about bodies having pleasure in other bodies, it's a lot like the other writing that you do, which I get. I understand. And this is like a logistical thing. But it's just interesting. And keep in mind that it's mostly writers listening. So you use a pen name, Em Demaison, for your erotica. So, what, I'm just curious, what led you to that decision, and was it about your professional life? Was it about your choice to be a mother? Was the exposure in there that you wanted to mitigate? Or what, like, what was that about? What led you to that decision? And then what does it feel like to have a persona who is you and not you, like, can you talk about that? Because I think as a writer, I have not done that. I've always written under my name. And I know that this is a real thing. But I don't, I haven't had a chance to ask someone who has a pen name, like, what is that like and why do you do that?

**Carrie Klassen 42:01**

At this moment, my child walks in the door. [Laughter] So let me get my thoughts back in order as I've been pulled into another part of myself. Why do I do that is such a good question that I'm gonna walk up the stairs while I reflect on it. And you know what? Like, is it, is part of it about exposure? I mean, I'm, if I'm honest, there is a seed of that, I'm sure. But that wasn't the reason. It was more like... I thought it'd be fun. I want to do this whole other thing. What if I do this whole other... Like I'm married to a





performer, I'm married to an actor who gets to, like, kill people on stage and there is something cathartic for him in that and I'm like, oh, but like... I mean, I could, like I could... it's on my Carrie Klassen dot com website. So it's not like it's something that's secretive.

**Sarah Selecky 43:32**

No!

**Carrie Klassen 43:33**

So yeah, and like, people know, but I think it was also... Like, when I told my mother, she did not enjoy that conversation. I was really uncomfortable about it. This comes up in writing all kinds of ways. I mean, there's, you know, I have pieces of memoir that I don't, I would never, I'm not... That I sit with the question of whether to share or not, because we're verbs and we're in, you know, it's in the interplay. And, yes, my story is my story, and my version of my story is my story. But I also want to be clear that the erotica is not my story, it's just stuff that... I um, I mean, there was a time in Italy, but anyway.

[Laughter] Yeah, but there is overlap, you know, in what I say about somebody else, and so I'm not sharing that. So there is sort of like the, I am me, and I am my own, you know, life being expressed through Carrie. And there are, you know, confines that are my body and identity and all of that. But also I am in a relationship with a child, and I'm in relationship with a mother, and...

**Carrie Klassen 45:02**

As I say this to you, I don't think a writer shifts. I do and did.

**Carrie Klassen 45:14**

As I'm saying this to you... I don't know what I said after that. This is all out of body, Sarah, just, the words are just coming, and then I'm gonna, like curl up in a ball and be like, oh my goodness, what did I say? Yeah, I think what I was getting at is that we're like, yes, I am myself, I don't think writers should make a decision about a pen name based on the feelings of other people. I mean, I think that that is really a restrictive way to go.



But in my humaneness and out of respect for what would make me feel more comfortable being, like sharing something like that, publishing something like that. It did feel better to not make a choice for our child, or for my mother, that they might not make for themselves. So being aware that they can't consent to that. And I mean, they would like they would deal with it and be fine. And it's not such a big deal. But my mother felt uncomfortable. And I just didn't want to visit that on others.

**Sarah Selecky 46:24**

Right.

**Carrie Klassen 46:25**

The name came from going way back, I was researching my mother's line. And it is an old name from my family. I thought at the time, based on what, you know, the other members of the family had believed were our ancestors following my mother's mother's mother's mother. In the last couple of years, I've come to learn that in fact, I have no relation to a Demaison.

**Sarah Selecky 46:56**

Oh, interesting!

**Carrie Klassen 46:58**

Yes. But the mother line is entirely different from the one that I thought. So it is really, truly a borrowed name. But it's just lovely. So I don't know what to do with it, but it, you know, it arose. And I do trust those things. And I trust that it felt, the choice was really more about the fun of being mysterious.

I mean, we talked about this at the time, but you know, one of the short stories in the collection was performed as a spoken word opera. And so I attended this event where this mezzo soprano is reading my words and afterwards there were copies of my book there, and people were asking me to autograph it. Which is an experience you would have had, but I'm like, Oh my gosh, I have to sign this name that I don't like, how does Em... like what is Em's signature like? And it was just all so strange, but kind of wonderful. Really wonderful actually. It was fun. I fully advocate doing things just



because they're fun.

**Sarah Selecky 48:10**

I mean, it sounds... That's the thing. My curiosity was how much of it is the exposure piece and consideration of other people piece, and then how much of it is just like because it would be fun to play. And it sounds like as per human, human nuance, it's all those things! I mean, it's like, why choose? Why choose?

**Carrie Klassen 48:40**

Yeah, yeah, I'd say 80% fun.

**Sarah Selecky 48:42**

It does seem fun! It does seem fun. I would love to talk to you more about whether you'll write more of it? And have you ever taught a workshop around it? But we can follow up on that later. Because we're getting close to an hour, I'd love to ask you about passion as it relates to a sense of integrity, and truth telling, and justice, and to specify a little, to take it out of the abstract a little, in specific like when you go to protests. So as an introvert, I find crowds very difficult. Even way before the pandemic that stopped crowds from forming so all over the place. I find crowds overstimulating and overwhelming and my nervous system actually fritzes out when there's more than six people in a room. I'm not... I'm not 100% there. And I know that you're introverted as well. And I see your activism, your physicality in groups. I know you do it in lots of other ways, but I'm particularly interested in this and how you budget for it so you can participate in the causes that you're passionate about that way. Is there anything that you do or don't do to make that more comfortable or possible?

**Carrie Klassen 50:20**

Um, well, I also have a six person cap for managing my nervous system and energy. So I definitely get that. For me, attending rallies and protests feeds me. So it is not, because it isn't like a dinner party of ten, or like a party where you have to interact with all those people. Or where there is a taking, in, you know, in an exchange, you're having to listen to many people... For me a protest is like church. It's like the adrienne maree brown. It's, we sing, you know, like, this is what democracy looks like, this is what community looks like, this is what love looks like. And people drumming together, people singing



together, people walking together, there is such a physical resonance because we are all in, in communion around an issue.

And it's always around care for people or the earth, or it's love. And, for me being in a space where there are so many people, so many different people, so many people I might not otherwise interact with, or share space with, who care and love the same things. And it is showing up in this same way. And we're doing it together. For me there's just something so, it's just such, it's just such a gift. And we spend so much of our lives, feeling, I think, lonely and isolated. If we're people who are thinkers, even just people who are notices, because you are always somewhat separate. I mean, they're in the practice of noticing you can mesh with what you are noticing. But done more casually as a way of living, it can also be a way of being separate. And so this togetherness of it, but I feel the same way...Like in the subway, like I just fall in love with humans as a concept.

But if I had to talk with each of them, I couldn't handle that. But being in a space and taking our child and showing her there is so much to despair in our world, there is so much to grieve, there's so much that has been lost, and that it's in the process of dying. And so many who don't know, don't care, but being with others who do and remembering that this too, is part of the human experience. This too is part of this world — that there are so many who want a more just life for all and being connected with that is a power source for me.

### **Sarah Selecky 53:31**

This is why I reached out to you about passion, because of how you answered that question and how you interact with life in this way. I do remember, we have had this conversation about being on the subway. I, you know, quote unquote, escaped the city and moved to a space where it's just like an open horizon and I feel really lucky and calm to have all this space. And I remember you saying like, Yeah, I love space too. I love nature and like, I love the subway and like the people and the city and humanity! And it sounds I mean, this conversation is so good and so nourishing. And it's feeding me and I really see how the writing that you do, the ghostwriting, writing *Rouge*, communicating with nature, and going to the church of a rally and standing up for marginalized voices. They all do have something in common at the source of it, and that is, this is what...



This is really what I have come to learn from you in our friendship and the work you do is like, how I can recognize more of my passion, and access it. That deep pleasure and deep energy of connection, and use it in more of what I do like writing and otherwise. Thank you for sharing how you do what you do, and why you do what you do. Before we go, I wanted to ask you if there was a book or two that you would recommend we read that reflects this theme of passion. Is there anything that you have been reading or would recommend that we read, fiction or nonfiction or otherwise?

**Carrie Klassen 55:45**

Well, I've talked a lot about Joanna Macy. So I'll say, *World as Lover, World as Self*, and just read into it. She's really worked it, she was just finishing it up for the thirtieth anniversary release while I was taking the course, so we got to read some of the excerpts. I just find that deeply inspiring. So that would be one. I'm also, a book that is not about passion, but is imbued with passion is *Medicines to Help Us* by Christi Belcourt. Her painting, *The Wisdom of the Universe*, is normally at the AGO. I mean, I could look at that forever. And the book *Medicines to Help Us*, she cares about things that I care about. So that's beautiful to me. But it's very practical. It's a very short book, it's about certain plants. She shows the beautiful traditional beadwork designs from her artwork, or each plant, she gets the names that they have been known by and are known by as a way of reclaiming language. And, you know, it just reminds us that the earth is so generous. And so, that she has these, she is so passionate about the reclamation of wisdom, Indigenous wisdom. And that it takes this form as in this book, I often think to myself, you know, what is... What is my version of that? And how am I doing that, too? And how she brings together, you know, herbalism, and language, and art, and all of these things that we think of as disparate and that creativity.

And so, you know, we sometimes as artists get told that, you know, this is your medium, this is what's yours to make, this is your particular skill, this is the thing that you're meant to do. And so I look at this, little tiny book, and it reminds me that passion, to use your word, can show up in lots of different ways and lots of different expressions and that I may have, you know that even to be a writer like writing, there are so many ways to be a writer.



**Sarah Selecky 58:17**

Yeah.

**Carrie Klassen 58:19**

So those are two.

**Sarah Selecky 58:20**

Those are beautiful. I don't know either one. I mean, I know Christi Belcourt and I know Joanna Macy, but both titles are new to me. So I'm going to get them and I'll include the links on the site, on the post where we post this recording so other people can order them as well.

**Carrie Klassen 58:37**

Wonderful.

**Sarah Selecky 58:38**

As well as *Rouge*, of course. And I wanted to just add that *The Wisdom of the Universe*, the painting, the mural, the painting is actually painted, Christi Belcourt painted it on the back of a church in Picton, where I live. In this small town where I live, and we often go, there are a couple benches right in front of it. It's right next to a beautiful garden for the food bank and an epic labyrinth with a big maple tree in the center of it. It's a really beautiful church. I've never actually been inside the church but it's gorgeous on the outside and I go all the time. I didn't know that it was... This is silly. I didn't know that it was inside the AGO. I just thought it was this mural.

**Carrie Klassen 59:23**

So perfect.

**Sarah Selecky 59:25**

Full Circle moment. Thank you so much, Carrie. I'm really pleased to introduce you to our writers if they don't already know you and I think they can find you at [CarrieKlassen.com](http://CarrieKlassen.com). C a r r i e K l a s s e n. And, that's right?



**Carrie Klassen 59:48**

Yes, that's right.

**Sarah Selecky 59:51**

Okay, and we'll be in touch about maybe some erotica workshops in the future.

**Carrie Klassen 59:57**

[Laughing] Okay, I'll think about that.

**Sarah Selecky 59:58**

Okay. Think about it.

**Carrie Klassen 59:59**

Sarah, thank you so much. It is such a pleasure to talk with you. Always, always.

**Sarah Selecky 1:00:05**

Always, always. Thank you.

