

>> From WXXI News, it's 1370 connection. [Background music] I'm Bob Smith and my guest for this hour, Maira Kalman, will tell you she's just looking. What she's actually doing is showing us and telling us a lot. She works in a variety of media including the written and printed word, the blogosphere of the online realm, the visual arts, and more. She is inviting you to look and read whether you're a child or a grown up. She writes and illustrates for both kinds of audiences and she's the latest to make a presentation as part of the Caroline Werner Gannett lecture series at RIT at 8 o'clock this evening in Ingle Auditorium and she's joining us right now in the studio. Maira, thank you very much for taking the time to be with us, we appreciate it.

>> Thank you. Thanks it's great.

>> I'm intrigued about the illustrated edition of Strunk and White's legendary Elements of Style which of course is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Folks who are listening in on the arts Friday segment last Friday heard Peter Iglinski talk with some of the people who are most closely associated with that event but yours maybe the most remarkable recent edition of that time honored book. How does putting pictures together with words on how to craft words happen?

>> I'm an illustrator and a writer so I love books and I collect a lot of books including language books. And one summer I was on the Cape and I found an old copy of the Strunk and White's Elements of Style which I really hadn't looked at in 30 years. And the minute I started reading it I saw that it was not just a normal grammar book. It was full of wit and humor and eccentricity, nothing like a dry, dull rule book. So I thought oh, of course I'm gonna do illustrations for this book. There's no question about it. And it took a while to contact the state and to convince them but once I did, they said do whatever you want. And I did 56 paintings illustrating the examples in the book. And the nice thing about a book like that is that you can create visuals that are--that enhance the text and make you see the humor of language and the possibilities. So--

>> They're striking images on their own.

>> The paintings.

>> Yes.

>> Thank you.

>> Even aside from their relationship to the text nearby but they also relate to the text nearby.

>> Yes. I mean, and the nice the thing about--a nice thing about a language book is you can just jump from sector to another which really suits me because I hate plots and I hate, you know and I get bored really easily. So it's wonderful to jump from a painting of a dog to a painting of a boy with a box on his head for a good reason.

>> So, if you had been around when Charles Dickens was publishing his original editions and of course a lot of them were very lavishly illustrated in the style of the time, would you have turned down that commission?

>> No, but I probably would have gone after the dictionary or something to say don't you need illustrations for your, you know, [laughter] Webster's third edition?

>> So is nonfiction easier to illustrate for in a way than fiction is?

>> Well, my life is a kind of fiction, I guess [laughter]. I say I live in some kind of a dream world. So it's easy for me to illustrate my life and that's what I do for my books and for my column. But there's also--it's nice to have a relationship to something very tangible.

>> Okay, that's an interesting comment in and of itself, my life is a work of fiction, in what way?

>> Sounds a little scary, doesn't it [laughter]?

>> No, it sounds very intriguing.

>> I had a really fantastic mother who never stopped me from daydreaming and in the sense that I didn't have any sense of what I was gonna do but I knew that I wanted to do something like writing or painting or sitting in a tree and reading a book. And I was allowed to completely float through my teenage life playing the piano and reading. So I don't think I ever lost that sense of naivete and sense that everything around me is really curious. So when I take a walk I concord a lot of images and that enters my work.

>> You never know what a chance comment from somebody especially a parent will do. I know all kinds of people in our realm, in the media realm especially those of us who deal with public affairs and the other nonfiction elements that get on the air, they talk about being encouraged to be curious and so they ended up being curious about current events, the real world issues, and they end up doing things like we do here everyday. You got a somewhat similar instruction book, took it in a different direction, wow!

>> There's luck involved. Who knows what--who knows why anybody does anything. But I wanted--but I love actually being a journalist in the sense that I am now that I can go to places and interview people and then make the story my own as opposed--you know, so not only do I have a painting of the person but I have a painting of the sandwich that I ate that day or the pair of shoes that I saw on the streets that somebody was wearing that were really incredible. So I can digress which is what happens in life anyway. That the most incredible things happen as digressions, things that you don't expect, and I can also tell the story that's about, you know, the Supreme Court which I just visited or Abraham Lincoln.

>> When you go to the Supreme Court, what do you say about it, what do you wanna say about it, what did you feel that you needed to say about it that oh, let's say Nina Totenberg filing for All Things Considered might not say?

>> Well actually I met Nina Totenberg but I went--I also met Justice Ginsburg and what I'm going to hopefully do is do a painting of her in her office and do a painting of the room that I stayed in while I was visiting and a woman wearing a pink coat in front of a magnolia tree because the ambiance of what's going on around you affects everything. So I'm gonna be talking about the Supreme Court

and maybe Hammurabi's Law or maybe Susan B. Anthony and how she helped women get to vote and leading in to Justice Ginsburg. So there are many paths to follow that could be really wonderful. But I did have a great photo of, you know, fried chicken and corn on the cob from the not so great Supreme Court cafeteria. So I think I'm gonna do that too.

>> So. Okay. What's the matter with Supreme Court cuisine and why should we not necessarily go there? I'll get to justice of Ginsburg and the images she conjures in your imagination in a moment. But first of all why is the Supreme Court cafeteria not a stop on culinary Washington's itinerary?

>> Oh my god. I'm gonna [laughter], I'm gonna get in trouble with the wonderful people at the cafeteria. Ah, I don't know. It's just a, you know, it's--but it's classic--but it's wonderfully itself. So I can say that that's, you know, it's not pretending to be anything else but itself and that's pretty great.

>> It is what it is, I guess [giggle] is an all purpose phrase for everything, I guess.

>> It's a polite way of saying and the--but the justices have their lunch from the cafeteria. So we're all eating the same food.

>> So they do. Is it something reminiscent of KFC?

>> I've never been in a KFC, but I can imagine. Well, no. I think it's a few notches better. Now I'm insulting KFC but you know.

>> Okay. Well, so it may not be quite fast food but--

>> No, it's not. It's medium fast. It's--

>> It is what it is.

>> Right. It's okay.

>> And now when you get to portray Justice Ginsburg, in both words and pictures, what images do you want to see come to the readers of yours might?

>> First of all you have to paint her in her robes with that incredible doily collar that she wears which you know comes from France and I went into her chambers and saw--and she showed me her robes and things like that. But, and also that she is the only woman on the court. That's a startling image. She's incredibly petite and brilliant, just utterly brilliant. So I wanna be able to portray the fact, excuse me, that she's this extraordinary woman who works in this vast chamber of history, you know, and upholding the constitution and interpreting the constitution and it's, I guess I wanna talk about the enormous responsibility of that kind of job and how much she loves it and how much she loves her work and everything that's connected to it and then it's all about language. So we'd throw in a little bit of Wittgenstein in there just for fun.

>> Wittgenstein gets involved in jurisprudence. Well, I can see the link but that's interesting, what I haven't heard before.

>> Yeah. Well, also there's a new book out, The House of Wittgenstein, which, you know, everybody in his family was completely nuts. So it's always fun to

read about a family that was totally crazy. But the concept of how you use language, how everything you say makes a difference in how you can parse and debate a sentence which is what the lawyers are doing in front of the judges. And, but you know, then you hear--just to hear the phrase "may it please the court," and you just repeat that a whole bunch of times and that's becomes an opera.

>> Sort of a light motif for the whole thing then, that sort of veneer of courtesy. At the same time, Ruth Bader Ginsburg herself is interesting. I'm imagining her in her robes with the lace collar and looking at her, it seems to be a couple of things going on at once. There is that the delicacy that the lace implies but she strikes me as a very strong formidable tough person. Am I catching her right in both of her aspects?

>> Completely. Yes, yes. I mean she is formidable and when the lawyers start to argue when I was there, she was the first one who stopped them after two sentences and was relentless in clarifying and so she's one tough person up there.

>> How do the others compare? If she is a particularly intense, tough minded person, what about the others that you happen to see in action there? How did they strike you?

>> Well, you know what, I need my cheat-sheet to remember who is who. I think Souter had a really good sense of humor about things. Clarence Thomas never said a word which I think he's famous for. Every--the wonderful thing about listening to them and listening to the lawyers was that this is what they told me, "Your adversary is not your enemy. Your opponent is not your enemy." And that concept to grasp that and to try to make that work in real life where you could say, "Okay, I disagree with this person but I'm not gonna kill them in 2 minutes." That's something intense to learn.

>> Very different for the legislative realm.

>> Yes, yes. And they also, they all shake hands, I guess maybe you noticed. They all shake hands with each other before they come out from behind the curtain into the court room. All of them shake hands with all of the others which is how many hand shakes is that, 80 something, 5000 something. Anyway they all--[laughter].

>> 9 times, let's see. 9 times 8? I'd say 72 possible combinations if my math is any good.

>> There you go. So 72, they all shake hands which other to remember that they really are a family and that's how they operate.

>> Some say a dysfunctional family at times but there's at least some kind of civility beneath it all?

>> Completely. Complete--that's the nature of it.

>> Anytime you see pictures of them, you almost never hear recorded audio of what goes on. It's extremely rare but they release that out. But anytime you see pictures, you get a sense whatever they do it must be very calm and almost quiet

and you must have listen really closely to catch anything, is it that solemn, quiet, almost church-like?

>> Completely. It's reverential. It's really like you're in some holy sphere, an ivory tower slash holy place. And the decorum of how everybody acts and where you sit and how you rise and sit down, the ritual of all that, you know, that there are people there wearing morning suits and oyez, oyez, oyez, the language is archaic on some levels. So you really are in a different place in a different time.

>> If you had a chance to go over to the capital to see either the house or the senate in action, I don't know if you did, but if you did, would you get a totally different impression on wanna treat it totally differently?

>> I will. I am going there for one of my columns and I will go to both houses and find out what's going on. I can't, you know, that's the great thing. I know nothing about American politics and I never really cared. But except for this year that I'm doing the column, you know, the column that's called And the Pursuit of Happiness. I'm going to all the different places in--that relate to American government and say, hello, you know, let me take a picture of this.

>> Will you go eventually to a White House news conference either see Press Secretary Bob Gibbs in action or maybe if you're lucky try to get to the press gallery when the president himself talks to the media?

>> Well, I hope to go--spend sometime with the housekeeper of the White House 'cause I'd love to see the linen closets. I have a special fondness for ironing. But I hope to spend some time in different areas of the White House and that would be interesting for me and not even necessarily with the first family but with the people who run the place. But if the first family were available, that would be amazing.

>> If you had a chance to sit down with President Obama, how would you want to draw him and also, or paint him, and also what do you think you'd ask him?

>> [Sigh] That's really hard, you know, when you come across people that are so tremendous and inspiring. I would probably ask him what he had for breakfast that day, something really mundane just to start me off so I wouldn't be that nervous. But I think that I would ask him, what are the things that are important? So I would like to find out about the lighter side of things and, you know, say what in his life is important and what does he do to relax and also what scares him.

>> I imagine all of those topics would get you a lot in return.

>> There's never any trouble having a conversation with somebody and also finding images to paint. There's always so much. So--

>> A few people have already tried, what do you think of the attempts that have been made up to now to depict President Obama?

>> Well, you know, the--usually they're characters which make him with big ears and I don't think there have been any paintings of him that I've seen or paintings in context also of the White House interiors that are--that have been

really interesting to me. So, you know, that's nice. I'm sure they're out there. I just haven't seen them.

>> But he strikes me again as a guy who's multilayered, very strong, powerful, bigger than life but accessible at the same time. How do you capture somebody like that with so many different things all at once?

>> I don't know. [Laughter] That's my--That's what I'm gonna find out when I go there with my little camera and my sketchpad, I hope.

>> Which gets to how you work which we're gonna find out as soon as you remind everybody. You're listening to 1370 connection at WXXI. I'm Bob Smith and you're invited to be a part of the conversation either by calling in at 263-WXXI or by writing to us at asktalk@wxxi.org. We're on the Caroline Werner Gannett project and this year's lecture series Visionaries in Motion. Well, our guest speaker is here with us right now, Maira Kalman who is both a blogosphere inhabitant and an illustrator, writer at both the written and the printed word and just about any medium that you can imagine and brings us a lot of our lives in a different way. She's here with us right now to talk about that and I wanna find out how you do what you do. You talked a little bit about profiling the Supreme Court. When you take on any subject, first of all, what draws you to a particular subject whether it's illustrating the Elements of Style, illustrating the life and the personality of the Supreme Court justice or maybe even dipping into the presidency or the workings of congress? What draws you to that any particular subject?

>> It's completely instinct and that's the nice thing about the job that I do that I never have to depart from what I love to do and so the first column, the first blog column I did for the New York Times was called The Principles of Uncertainty which I did 3 years ago and it just followed my life paintings and writing. There was no particular subject. It was just about the nature of how vulnerable we are or how much joy and tragedy there is in any given life and I was able to ramble about all kinds of subjects then I stopped doing that 'cause I said well I've had enough of that and then when Obama was elected I said well clearly there's a new world that we're inhabiting. It might be interesting to take a peek at America and democracy and what the means and what, how we're all dealing with all of these.

>> How is it different in a new world apart from the changes in policy and emphasis that always happen when an administration of one party is succeeded by an administration of a different party and a politician of new emerging generation with all that usually coming. What makes this even more different than the usual happenings whenever administrations change hats? What's different about this and what's special?

>> Well, the special is that once in every great while somebody comes along who seems so much above the rest that you are--that it's breath taking and that's how many people felt about Obama and you know the relationship that you feel to Lincoln, to FDR, somebody who is coming in at a time of colossal crisis and challenge and it seems to be hopefully you never know, hopefully a visionary who has the right personality to take the country out of the negative aspects of what I felt we were in, many people obviously did, to a place of hope and optimism and it's hard to be optimistic about anything in government ever but I think that that's the feeling now.

>> You have to have a lot of faith to be optimistic right about now given the struggles that we're in.

>> Right. What's the choice? I'd say, would you?

[ Laughter ]

>> I guess so you got a hope if nothing else.

>> Right.

>> 263-WXXI. We have Ed on the line from Gates. Hello Ed, you're on the air.

>> Hi. I was intrigued by the description of the work you did with the Strunk and White's Elements of Style and I wonder if you are familiar. There is another two or three set of books about usage and grammar that use, I think, kind of an ink drawings and it seems to me one of them sort of has a vampire theme and the first name I believe of the woman who wrote them is Catherine and she also uses a great deal of humor in all her examples. Are you familiar with that?

>> No. I'm sorry to say I'm not.

>> And I'm not at home now so I can't get at the books but it's--her name is Catherine something or other--

>> Alright, we'll Google it later and find out who else is--she illustrated a grammar book?

>> Yeah. They're about different usages and I think one is even about arts of speech and they're very funny and they're illustrated and I just found them great fun. I used to be an English teacher so they were of particular interest to me.

>> That's good. Whenever you can make grammar more fun you've done a service to the world.

>> Certainly.

>> Hey, thanks very much for calling in. I have many more questions and I'm sure you do too at 263-WXXI and we have some questions to dip in to in our internet mailbox at [asktalk@wxxi.org](mailto:asktalk@wxxi.org) in just a moment but Maira Kalman will continue with us right after this short break. It's 1370 connection on WXXI AM 1370 and FM HD2 continues.

>> You're listening to WXXI AM Rochester or WXXI FM HD2 Rochester.

>> 1370 connection continues at WXXI AM 1370 and FM HD2, I'm Bob Smith and you can be a part of the conversation by dialing in at 263-WXXI, 263-9994 or writing to us at [asktalk@wxxi.org](mailto:asktalk@wxxi.org). As we continue our conversation with Maira Kalman who is the latest presenter in the Caroline Werner Gannett lecture series which this year is about Visionaries in Motion, she's gonna be talking at RIT's Ingle Auditorium at 8 tonight and talking with us right now in studio. Maira we have a question that's written in from Kate here in Rochester area on our internet mailbox site [asktalk@wxxi.org](mailto:asktalk@wxxi.org). Short question, big one. Why are you creative?

>> [Chuckles] I could say 'cause I'm really foolish, because I'm completely insane which actually maybe the answer but no, I am actually a very normal person who just has a very nice job. You know it's funny, how can you answer the choice that you make in life. I think that you're born creative or you're born with something and then something happens and it's a series of unknowns so I don't think I had a choice is my answer and I think I always knew that I wanted to be in the realm of the creative arts and I think it's something that you feel inside you and basically, I think everybody knows what they wanna do more or less kind of by the time they're 8 years old and I think that there was a wonderful series of movies Seven Up 21 Up--28 Up, Seven Up 28 Up by Michael Apted and he interviewed children at, you know, at 7-year intervals beginning at the age of 7 and a lot of them ended up doing what they were doing when they were 7 so there's something about the nature of how you feel about yourself. You're in tune to some other vision of the world and some answers--something is pretty clear at that age. It gets murkier during the teenage years but hopefully you come out the other side knowing something.

>> And at the same time the tittle of your collection of observations and essays from your work on the blogosphere, the Principles of Uncertainty, makes it sound like either something existential or something like an experiment in Werner Heisenberg's random occurrence physics say [laughter] that's in a sense, there's faith but at the same time there's uncertainty in random change going on here?

>> Yes. Well, that's all, you know, that's a thousand hours a day and the thing to do is to try to make some kind of sense of it or none. You know I prefer to make nonsense out of sense but at the same time there--it's a very grounding force. So you can observe the immense, you know, absurdity of it all and also have a really great time and also, you know, be despondent once in a while because that's just the way it is.

>> Well physicists have charted out a really strange paradoxical world in which you step back, you look at patterns, organizations and structure, and then you zero in, you take a zoom lens of observation and when you get down to the smallest observable realm you got total chaos, total unpredictability.

>> You've been to my house, obviously.

>> Okay, okay but how do we resolve that paradox? Are we living in our own lives on that same kind of paradox that they tell us that the physical world is living in? I mean are we living in a world in which we try to impose structure on something that is random and chaotic and how do we work that out?

>> I don't know. We take a lot of antidepressants so [laughter] we know what we do. Not I, but I know people who do. That's what's so amazing to me, that people actually get up in the morning and they're so heroic to go through an entire day and do all the things that they're supposed to do and actually, you know, and then go to bed at night and you know, men have nightmares and then wake up the next day. So it's something inexplicable to me, the living force. I don't think we understand it. And so, you just kind of live it in the best way you know how and that's why I was saying a lot of time the best thing to do is to not think and just to actually try to do what you need to do and not over think it because then you could really go crazy.

>> Is that kind of what an artist does?

>> [Laughter] No artist think, right. They're all idiots. No, I think that what you have to do is rely on your instinct and your--some inner feeling and your heart and your mind. It's a big combination of course. You know it's thinking and not thinking and trying to be smart and trying to be stupid and trying to be knowing and trying to be naive. And those are all the forces that are at work when you're creating anything.

>> And of course we invite you to jump in at 263-WXXI, 263-9994 and be a part of the conversation here on 1370 connection. And by the way I understand I have been told by another correspondent here at 1370 connection writing in at asktalk@wxxi.org. Your paintings are gonna be coming here next month at the Memorial Art Gallery, specifically the ones done surrounding elements of style.

>> Yup, all of the paintings and a little bit of film from the opera that we did of the elements of style.

>> Now I'd like to know a little more about that if I can. Tell me a little bit about how a grammar book, even one with wit, becomes operatic.

>> That's a nice thing. You know, Richard Nixon and China can be an opera so Strunk and White can be an opera. I was singing the words when I was working on the paintings because music is a big part of my life and I studied music in high school. So I contacted a young composer who happened to be a friend of mine, this brilliant young guy named Nico Muhly and said I think that we should do some kind of musical piece with this and he took the words from Strunk and White and I asked him to--the only request I had was that he would create music for real musicians and amateur musicians, the amateurs being me and some of my friends. And that we would plan vernacular found objects like clattering teacups and saucers and slinkies, jars, bottles, typewriter, all kinds of, you know, meat grinder, just a rolodex to make sounds and music with these objects as a counterpoint to the real musicians and the singers singing the words from the book. So we did it.

>> So it's sound effects and melody and it's mixed media all at once.

>> Right, right.

>> Is it recorded yet?

>> It's recorded. We performed it at the New York Public Library. We performed it at Lincoln Center. We performed it at Dia:Beacon, the museum, and it's recorded and hopefully will be coming out soon, a half hour. It's nine songs from the Elements of Style and hopefully it will be at a CD place near you if there are places anymore to buy CDs.

>> At the same time of course it invites the question of what attracted you to that particular work in the beginning and you've talked about, a little bit about what still resonates with you in that. What attracts you to some of the things, for example, that you've done in the past like kids' books? What attracts you to try to communicate with a child audience--children audience?

>> I like [laughter], I like the kids. I was an illustrator and then I had two of my--I got two of my own, not illustrations but two children of my own. And the nature of living with children and the surreal fantastic wonderful atmosphere of play and imagination was something that really suited my work. My

work has a naive quality to it. So I was able to write and paint really the life that I have with my children. All my books are diaries and journals of my life, you know, thinly veiled with some kind of, you know, MacGuffin of a plot but that's not really necessary. And I just tell you what's on my mind and there is always amazing stuff to look at, you know from a broken chair on the street to a painting of an 18th century Tudor, well no the Tudors were earlier. So, you know great stuff everywhere.

>> Which makes me want to ask you a little bit about that first, just looking and I, in case you don't have a copy of it or you'd like to read from it rather than just throwing it out from memory. I have it here because I thought it was particularly remarkable and I hope you might share it because it's the fascinating sort of thumbnail sketch of a lot that I wanna ask you about later.

[ Pause ]

[ Stuttering ]

>> The day is long and interesting. I wander about and look at people talking to each other, broken chairs on the street, dogs and babies, I will stare at buildings, trees, shoes, hats, and watch this hustle and bustle until I go home and write impressions and paint visions. I really do not need to think, just look.

>> I guess the first thing I thought of in that regard is something that Yogi Bear has said, you could observe a lot by just watching.

>> Yogi Bear is a genius. [Laughter] Everything he has said was brilliant.

>> You're on to something there.

>> Yeah, totally. So I think that if you, you know, if you are really having fun looking at the world around you and really it's about fun. I depict things that I love. It's not from a cynical point of view. It's from this kind of naive optimistic point of view but appreciating the complexity of it all. Then it's never boring, that's for sure.

>> Naive and optimistic, is it sometimes tough to maintain that openness and frame of mind at times when a lot of bad news just bombards you?

>> Yeah, I get, you know, I get really depressed [laughter] like everybody. But some, there is a resilience. I mean it's not about not going down. It's like writing about Lincoln. It's like well of course everybody has their moods and sadnesses. It's just about what you, you know, how you recover from it.

>> Given what he had to deal with over especially the last half dozen years of his professional life, it's kind of hard to imagine why you wouldn't have felt down sometimes. He would have been crazy not to.

>> Yeah, you'd be crazy not to, and that's the thing. I mean if anybody tells me they're never down, I think well they really must be insane. So you, you know, you soldier on, perseverance is a good, good word.

>> Is it tough at times when tough personal things happen to you, tragedies, losses, to keep an optimistic frame of mind in the face of that because I mean we've all had them.

>> Yes, and I, and you know it's of course is different for different people. Some people have things in the world that they can turn to that nourish them in a tremendous way and then you can go to those things when you're feeling besieged.

>> What's the most nourishing thing in your view that helps you out whenever times do get tough as they get tougher on everybody?

>> That candy. No, [laughter] I shouldn't say that, such a superficial answer. No, my family, okay, candy then my family. No, my family then candy, my family and my work, and you know that's always, that's always the equation is to have some people that you love and to have work that you love and then you're really gonna be okay no matter what happens pretty much, more or less, and Sneakers bars, you know. Why not?

>> So Sneakers bars keep you going?

>> Once in a while. Well, I've done a painting of a Sneakers bar so clearly, I have an affection for that particular candy bar.

>> And what is it about a child's eyes and ears that makes a child such a good audience even better, maybe better than an adult audience in some respect. So what's the wrong with adults that we maybe aren't as open to things?

>> Look, children really like--children really appreciate the stupidity which is always very, very refreshing and I mean that in the truest sense of the word that you don't have to be clever or right. You don't have to be right and that's something that really happens when you're an adult. You have this pressure to be right all the time. With the children you can just experiment and say God, I have no idea what I'm talking about. But that was a great conversation. And the conversations that you have with children really can go in so many different directions, so they know it's like being, you know, would you rather inhabit a Marx Brothers world or a, you know, well I was gonna say a law, a law convention world. But maybe those are friend too, but you know for me I choose the Marks Brothers world.

>> I know some lawyers who could have been one of the Marx Brothers.

>> Yeah that's true. I mean I don't wanna generalize. That's really silly of me but--

>> And then I've known the Silver side lawyers who acted more like Margaret Dumont, so.

>> Right, right, and she's funny too.

>> Without knowing it.

>> Right, without--well, that's right.

>> The character doesn't know it.

>> And I don't think she knew it either but the--there are some liberate, hopefully there are some liberating, you know, curiosity and fun, looking for fun, fun is key with kids.

>> So find then--is it up to us then to find the Groucho within all of us?

>> [Laughter] Yeah, if it soothes--You know that it would be a nice thing. It's, you know, with that humor your sunk.

>> Do you seek specifically to bring out the Groucho in your reader?

>> I'm not trying to bring that. No. I'm not trying to do that. I'm trying to just say this is my story. Here it is.

>> And if it happens, it happens.

>> Right.

>> Is anything at all, any subject good for an illustration? Could you illustrate just about anything and make a jump out of the reader and make it more meaningful?

>> I could illustrate a mortician's conference and make it attractive to the reader. Yeah, I think that it depends what you're looking at because there's always something. Again, it may not be the--it may not be what you expected, it maybe something like you know the flowers in the ladies room of the thing you sent me to cover are and said of something about what I was thinking about which is what I painted on the way to the inauguration. So there's always something delightful and wonderful and interesting and quizzical about all the things, yeah. There's nothing I couldn't, you know, having said that probably. The next thing I do I'll go "oh, my God, I hate this" but you know.

>> Does that mean a lot of times people who are doing straight reporting and trying to zero in on the big central issue or item are missing it?

>> I don't know because everybody has a different point--you know that--I approach things from a lyrical narrative loopy point of view. I guess not everybody should be doing that 'cause then there would be too much loopiness going around.

>> Can there be?

>> [laughter] I don't know.

>> What?

>> We haven't seen that world yet but.

>> What would happen if we got more in touch with our inner loopy?

>> [Laughter] There'd be a new candy bar called Loopy. We'd, I don't know. We'd stop making a living. I don't know what we'd do.

>> Would the world be better off? Or at least happier?

>> I think that sounds like it might be true, yeah.

>> Why do you think we don't?

>> Why don't we?

>> Yeah, why don't we? What's keep--what do you think is holding us back?

>> I don't know. It's embarrassing. I don't know what happens. You, the responsibilities of the real world start to--the old responsibilities of the world weigh you down.

>> Should it be that way?

>> I don't know. We'll see what happens in the next lifetime of which there is not one, so I don't know. There's a lot of I don't know in my vocabulary.

>> Is that what keeps you going forward to fill in some of the I don't know blanks?

>> I wouldn't ever be able to fill in [laughter] the amount of I don't know blanks I have. I think the more, you know, that's filled, the more I know I know nothing. And it's so completely true that it's dazzling.

>> Maira Kalman with us right now, she's going to be speaking this evening at Ingle Auditorium at RIT at 8 o'clock tonight. That's part of the Carolyn Werner Gannett lecture series. You're probably familiar with a lot of her work or illustrations and her words and everything from the New York Times, to the blogosphere in general, to the pages of the illustrated edition of the Elements of Style and more and incidentally, she is going to be part of upcoming exhibition at the Memorial Art Gallery starting May 2nd. But she's here right now in studio here in 1370 connection and you can join in in the observations and the calling at 263-WXXI or write to us at asktalk@wxxi.org. Lines and our internet mailbox are open all during the course of this hour. Influences artistically, who do you think help you formulate your style as an artist?

>> You know I didn't study art, I studied literature so there was some--there was an intuitive search for who I thought was incredible. And of course many roads lead to Matisse so I'd have to say that he's the number one influence on my work and on the way that I look at the world. But there are many artists from, you know, from children's books--children's book artists, Ludwig Bemelmans and you know and writers, children's book writers and illustrators. So Ludwig Bemelmans and Lewis Carroll who illustrated the first Alice in Wonderland though the illustrations weren't that great but still inspiring, and Dr. Zeus of course. So those are influences for--in the children's world, people who appeal to both adults and children at the same time which is possible to do in a children's book and hopefully desirable.

>> So there are many different levels operating. And then in the art world there are other incredible, you know, I mean I'm going high, I'm going lofty, Cezanne, Matisse, Van Gogh, Bernard, you know just a few guys who are okay.

>> So the great impressionist in post impression has really got to you then?

>> Right.

>> As a writer, who strikes the chord? Who inspires most?

>> I think first I'd have to say Nabokov. You know there's a big list also but it would be Nabokov and Jane Austen, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, people who play with language in a way, deconstruct language in a way that really affects me.

>> That's an interesting combination. Nabokov first, what gets you about a man who wrote so many different and diverse kinds of work from Lolita to Ada and everything else in between spanning a couple of continents in all kinds of ages while he was sitting in an office at Goldwin Smith Hall in Ithaca, New York at his typewriter scribbling all this stuff down, what gets to you about him?

>> And collecting butterflies [simultaneous talking].

>> And collecting butterflies, right.

>> Well he was a complete, you know, he was a complete genius with language and not only did he manage to play with language in some kind of extraordinary way, he also showed the stupendous beauty of his life and his work. And my favorite of book of his is Speak, Memory which is his autobiography and that lyrical vision of his life as a child in Russia and the life that they led. And my family comes from Russia. So I think there's some connection even though we were peasants and he was nobility, but I can dream. But there's some cultural affinity that I feel for him and just his ability and his language. So--but I just read Madame Bovary by Flaubert of course and that's a perfect book. So, there's a wide range of--W.G. Sebald is incredible and the way that he uses photography, found photography in his text and illustrates his text with these odd photographs, elusive images, I love those too.

>> Can any writer instruct us with something?

>> Yeah, either how not to do it or how to do it to the best of your ability.

>> What do you want to do next? Think ahead, beyond even the Pursuit of Happiness project that you're on right now in the in the middle of, what looms beyond that?

>> Well I would, I would very much like to--I live in New York and which is stupendous and I adore but I think I would really like to live and take a walk around the world if such a thing is possible. I mean there may have to be some kind of transportation here and there. But I would like to spend a year just roaming the world and doing more of what I'm doing which is just sketching and photographing and finding out what's going on.

>> Where would you like to go the most?

>> Today?

>> Yeah.

>> To visit Susan B. Anthony at the cemetery.

>> Right.

>> But in bigger terms, you know I'd like to go to Spain and see Granada and Cordova and the great mosques, the great gardens. I'm gonna rewind back just a bit to Susan B. Anthony. When you go either to visit her grave or just when you think about her, what about her speaks to you more strongly?

>> Well actually, she ties in, she and Elizabeth Cady Stanton are tying in to this piece about Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The notion that there are some people who seem to be visionaries in their time and clearly she was one of them in 1830, 1840 you know with the idea that a woman should have vote or you know property rights was extraordinary. So you read about people, they say how do they do that, how do they know, how do they have the courage to fight for something that seems so out of the realm, out of the norm? And I think I don't know what you do with that information. You just look at it and maybe it gives you courage in your own life to do something that you think is really meaningful and that you might be afraid to do or you might not have confidence in yourself and you see people who have so much confidence in themselves. You think wow, that's pretty amazing. I'd like to be like that.

>> Failure is impossible is a nice motto.

>> Failure is impossible. It's a good thing to say to yourself once in awhile.

>> Is there somebody like that today or are we living in an age where we just don't have people with that same capacity to inspire and that same certainty about what they believe and what they're gonna do?

>> I think there always must be people like that. I just think we may not know them yet because we have--I mean they're there and people are identifying them. I'm just not thinking of somebody right now. But that there are people who are the people who will say well wow, that was pretty extraordinary. And maybe people who are working in the realm of science or mathematics and really in realms that aren't that visible right now. I mean, but you could say that, well I don't who's amazing.

>> How do we find people like that, especially if they may not necessarily have been discovered yet by the massive mass media?

>> Well then it'll be up to the journalists and people who write books and biographers and autobiographies.

>> Wow.

>> I think.

>> That's a big responsibility for the journalists. Do we always get it right?

>> Oh, does anybody always get anything right? You gotta give it a try.

>> What do you think--did you think you have a place perhaps with your art in helping us to discover more of those folks who are out there?

>> Oh, I don't know. I can't think about having a responsibility. That gets me a little bit nervous. I just think I have to tell you what it is that makes me

that, you know, that moves me and makes my heart full. And then we'll see what happens with that information later.

>> One other thing too about illustration especially, are there things as you head out on your voyage of discovery that you definitely wanna put on paper, on canvas that you'd like to get your own visual take?

>> Well, I'd like to visit every garden, every great garden in England and show you how beautiful they are. I happen to love gardens very much. But that's what's so nice about it. I don't know what I'm gonna be interested in 6 months from now or a year from now and I didn't know I was gonna be interested in politics and here I am. So that's kind of--that's one of the wonderful parts about it that you know, you look at something and say okay, I'm kinda through with that or I've digested that, now what? And so there's a really nice now what feeling in my life.

>> Just let it happen to you?

>> Yeah, and there's always stuff to choose from. There's a lot of stuff going on.

>> That sounds like it's gonna be a fascinating itinerary.

>> Yeah.

>> You think of yourself as maybe a global Jack Kerouac on the road?

>> Oh, that's a nice idea with paintings, yeah.

>> Can't wait to see what comes from it. My thanks to Maira Kalman [background music] who is with us this hour in advance of her presentation as part of the Caroline Werner Gannett lecture series at RIT, starts tonight at 8 o'clock at the Ingle Auditorium, the RIT campus and thank you all for being a part of this hour, 1370 connection here on WXXI AM and FM HD2 Rochester. I'm Bob Smith. We're back in just a moment after the news.

[ Music ]

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