

From the Catbird Seat: Season 2

Making “American Conversations”: Part 3

[RECORDING—Tracy K. Smith at New Haven Library]

Tracy: It’s such a delight to be here and I’m so grateful that you’ve all come out on a beautiful Saturday morning to listen to poetry. I have really enjoyed the visits so far that we’ve made to different parts of the country, and meeting people and learning what their interest in poetry is and what their observations about the poems that they hear might be, so I hope we can have that kind of a conversation today. I’ll read some poems and tell you what I can about where they come from, and what I was mindful of in writing them, but maybe I’ll pause here and there, so that at the very least you can ask questions about them, but I’d also love to hear what ideas come to mind for you, what these poems might have to say to life as you’ve experienced it.

Anne Holmes: Welcome to “From the Catbird Seat,” a poetry podcast from the Poetry and Literature Center at the Library of Congress. I’m Anne Holmes, the Center’s digital content manager.

Rob Casper: And I’m Rob Casper, head of the Poetry and Literature Center.

Anne: This is the third and final episode in our three-part series revisiting some of U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith’s travels around the country as part of her current project, “American Conversations: Celebrating Poems in Rural Communities.” In our previous two episodes, we followed Tracy’s trips to rural New Mexico in January 2018 and South Carolina in February 2018. Today, we’re exploring her travels to Kentucky in March.

At the beginning of the episode, you heard Tracy K. Smith opening her event at the New Haven Branch of the Nelson County Public Library.

Rob, you traveled with Tracy to Kentucky. Can you talk about the set-up for the Kentucky trip?

Rob: Yeah, as you said, we had already traveled to New Mexico and South Carolina. This was the last of our three pilot project visits to states around the country in preparation for “American Conversations” in the fall. This was also a first for us, this was the first time we worked exclusively with the State Center for the Book. In New Mexico and South Carolina, we worked with a senator and a congressman and their respective staff. In Kentucky, we worked with the state humanities council—Kentucky Humanities—and the Center for the Book, which is based in Kentucky Humanities. I want to give a special thanks to executive director Bill Goodman and book fair manager Brooke Raby for all they did to set up our great, wonderful, exciting trips around Kentucky. As in South Carolina, we focused on a

particular district and a particular representative: the second congressional district of Kentucky, which is in the west central part of the state, represented by Brett Guthrie. So we flew in to Nashville, Tennessee, and then drove up interstate 65 with stops in Bowling Green, Glasgow, and New Haven before we finally flew out of Louisville on Saturday morning.

Anne: Great. So let's talk about your first stop in Kentucky, which was the Men's Addiction Recovery Campus, or MARC as they call it, in Bowling Green. What was that event like?

Rob: Yeah, it was a fascinating event, but I need to give a little bit more context before I can talk about what that event was like. In New Mexico, we focused only on targeted private events, and in South Carolina we had all public events. So we wanted to mix things up when we got to Kentucky. We started with our only targeted event for the trip at MARC. MARC is an inpatient substance abuse recovery program for adult men. So Tracy was speaking to almost 120 men who are in this center dealing with recovery issues. Let's listen to the conversation we had as we walked in with program director Phillip Justice.

RECORDING—Phillip Justice (MARC)

Rob Casper: All right, well, thanks so much for having us.

Phillip Justice: Oh, thanks so much for coming.

Rob: Mr. Justice, tell me about what that was like for you seeing everyone here at MARC spending a good couple of hours thinking and talking about poetry.

Phillip: I think it was a very powerful experience, watching the guys engage with Ms. Smith about the poetry. You know, we use writing as a tool here for healing and the fact that they were so into it really warmed my heart, it really did. I think they've gained a lot from this experience.

Rob: The first person who talked said "you know, maybe people are gonna give me a hard time about this, that I'm interested in poems" and I wonder what that was like for you hearing him say that, and what that created in terms of space for other people to talk, other men to talk.

Phillip: So when he said that, it kind of caught me off guard, because what he's said was true—generally around here, you're in a facility with 118 men and they kind of pick on each other. The whole, you know, men's thing of trying to be manly, and the perception of what is manly. And for him to say that, and to open up the door to conversation really was great, I thought.

Rob: And those were really challenging poems to, and I felt like the men had a number of interesting and surprising interpretations—interpretations that I felt took me to a new

place with those poems. Does it say something about how observant they are, how engaged they are, that they can do that kind of work?

Phillip: Absolutely. I think a lot of our guys, they're smarter than a lot of people give them credit for, and they're more intuitive and in recovery that's one thing—you really learn a lot about yourself, about your inner self and about your feelings. I think that directly relates to poetry and what they were hearing in there. I think it engaged some of the senses and maybe got the thoughts going. It was great to hear them speak on that.

You know, in recovery, we experience a lot of pain. And there's a lot to those men's pasts. And I think we try to get them to be open and engaging about their feelings and about their lives and about the way things make them feel because, you know, we tell them all the time feelings aren't facts, but you need to learn how to process them because when you go out in the real world you're faced with daily situations, the way you feel about something can either cause you to do the right thing or the wrong thing. We're always encouraging them to be open and just to really speak about what's on their mind.

Rob: I'm wondering too, Tracy, just that sense of what we talked about, how poems can let you enter into them with your own stories, what that was like, listening to you, and I know sort of recovery came up around the edges in some ways in some of those poems, what that was like for you to see, the men attributing those poems through that lens.

Tracy K. Smith: I think that it was really exciting, and it felt valid in each case. The poem that was called "Broke Heart" became a story of addiction for some of the listeners or readers, and in some ways, you know, any kind of deep pain or loss can occupy the space of loss in that poem. It was interesting that they articulated what we all kind of intuitively do when we're reading a poem, which is to say, "I'm going to put myself or feel invited to be in or next to the place of the speaker. It's going to be the conditions of my life that are going to help me feel what the speaker is feeling." When you talk about how in addiction, you're talking about feelings, I think that's a big part of why nobody seems shy, or at least nobody who spoke seemed shy, and often when I say "Oh, I know poetry is intimidating," I imagine that it's because of the idea that there has to be some sort of outside knowledge. But I think that's only part of it. I think the other part must have to do with the fact that poems invite us to be vulnerable and talk about our vulnerabilities, and that's scary sometimes. Not everybody can do that instantly with a room full of people, but it's exciting when people are willing to say "this makes me feel like, you know, my life is part of this story, for these reasons." That's really exciting, and I think ultimately that's kind of why we read poems.

Anne: After the event, Tracy spoke with several MARC clients, who wanted to share their thoughts, reactions, and experiences. One of them was Ashton Ricketts, who actually read one of his own poems to Tracy.

[RECORDING—Ashton Ricketts]

Ashton Ricketts: I'm Ashton Ricketts, and we're at the MARC Center in Bowling Green.

If I wasn't an alcoholic/ I'd drink every day/But I'm no alcoholic the young man would say/The playground inside him/where loneliness and agony play/the track/his self will run riot/the airstrip his mindful flight/the man sent him here one day/ in search of a cure but there was only one way/through God he survived his old sinful ways/through steps and his fellows/loneliness and agony no longer had somewhere to play/composed of three parts but only one way/he found that solution and that solution was AA/I am an alcoholic the young man would now say/but if I weren't, you can bet your ass I'd drink every day.

Rob: As you can imagine, it was a powerful experience to be there with Tracy and the MARC residents. When Tracy walked into the room, I heard somebody whistle, and I thought, we're in here with almost 120 men, many of whom have been court-ordered to get treatment for months at a time, and we'll see how this goes. But after Tracy read a couple of her poems and then turned to some poems that we'd pulled from the anthology and we'd given to the residents as handouts, everything changed. There was a resident who began by saying, "you know, I'm gonna catch some flak for this, but I write poems." And he proceeded to offer comments on the poem that Tracy had just read. And it seemed to give everyone in the room more room to talk about what they saw in the poems. It was a really beautiful experience. And in fact, the residents' interpretations of the poems, their ways of seeing what the poems were capable of doing, surprised both Tracy and me. Their interpretations seemed a bit darker than what Tracy or I saw, but we also realized that the poems had room to include those interpretations—that in fact, poems can do so much to connect to where we're coming from at any given moment in time, no matter who we are or what we've experienced.

Anne: Later that day, Tracy had her first public event in Kentucky at the South Central Kentucky Cultural Center in Glasgow. I know she shared the stage with Kentucky Poet Laureate Frederick Smock. What was that event like?

Rob: It was a wild and wonderful event. Glasgow is a smaller town than Bowling Green, it's about 15,000 people. We were excited to be at the Cultural Center, and the event was totally full. That event included the Kentucky Poet Laureate, as you mentioned. After Tracy gave a reading, she, Frederick Smock, and I talked about what the Laureateship position can offer communities—urban and rural. But it also included Representative Guthrie, who'd just flown into town that day. He began by introducing Tracy and it was interesting: He quoted Robert Kennedy speaking after the Martin Luther King assassination. Kennedy quoted Greek dramatist Aeschylus, who he called his favorite poet, in a way to try to help calm the crowd. And it was a remarkable moment of connection with Representative Guthrie between the power of poetry and the power of oratory, the role that our elected officials play in helping guide us and soothe us and make sense of difficult moments, and how poetry fits into that.

Afterwards, we had a wonderful reception. The representative stayed for a good long while and so did we. And we all had the opportunity to wander around the Cultural Center and meet the citizens of Glasgow and the neighboring communities. To think that we had almost 150 people come out that night to see Tracy and to hear about poetry and to meet the state Poet Laureate was really inspiring.

It was a late night, and the next day we had to get up early to travel to New Haven for the final event of the trip. New Haven was the smallest town we visited—it's just over 900 people—and it was the first event we did at a public library in all of our pilot projects. We were in the New Haven branch of the Nelson County Public Library. And I have to say, when we walked in the front door and I saw that front desk with a couple of librarians serving the people who'd come to check out books and look around, I thought, *oh, we're home*. The event itself was pretty small, we had about 50 people. But it was also very intimate. Tracy spent a lot of time reading her own poems and talking to audience members about them. Here's a little clip from the beginning of our event with Tracy reading her poem, "Annunciation."

[RECORDING—Tracy K. Smith at New Haven Library]

Tracy K. Smith: So, I'll read some new poems. And then we'll see, we don't have to commit to only new work. We'll start with a poem that maybe kind of helped me refine that idea that I just described. *Annunciation*. So of course, the great annunciation that we think of is an angel appeared to Mary and said you're going to have this child. She ceased to be ordinary at that moment, and this is a poem that is longing for something like that, but I think maybe perhaps in a different direction. "Annunciation."

[Tracy K. Smiths reads "Annunciation" from *Wade in the Water*]

It's funny, S=so I just said that poems guide you to be honest, be true, this is true. And sometimes it terrifies you when you realize, at least in some moments, is true, like this wish to be almost shaken free of the world that we've made, full of all its human miracles, and to be regarded by something that's, I don't know, inconceivable. Something that is real and large, how frightening. Um, where to go from there.

Audience Member: I just want to say that poem took me back to my childhood, playing in the yard, under the clouds. I used to race the shadows. It really reminds me of something I struggle with every day, because I remember a time before computers, and what life is now, and what it's going to become, and that scares me. But that just brought me back to my childhood.

Audience Member: That poem more or less reminded me how society has guided us to pay attention to our synthetic world rather than look at nature and how the Earth has created something for itself, on its own accord, rather than having been tainted by the

society, by the humanity. It took me to how nature has its own perfect flow, and how everything is balanced and perfect by itself.

Tracy: Yeah. I mean I've only been here for about 24 hours, but I imagine that must feel so poignant in a place that's so incredibly beautiful, right? And so much of what I've seen is not developed of all the concrete stuff that you're talking about, so you see the hills and the animals. I mean, what does it feel like living here on such real land and also living in the world of little clicks and pings?

Audience Member: It's a constant struggle for me, because I don't want to leave that behind—that nature, and the beauty of the world. It feels like its slipping away.

Audience Member: We're raising our children to leave it behind. I'm worried that they're so buried in their computers and their technology. I worry that they'll forget what it is to sit outside, play in the mud. We played outside longer, childhood lasted longer. It wasn't influenced by the outside so much, by all the technology. But again they've got such a wider view of the world, too, that we didn't have. I never dreamed of China or anything like that when I was little; we were too busy playing in the weeds, you know, splashing in the river. But now they see more of the world as well, so it's kind of, it's gotta be a balancing act and I don't know how we're going to get there.

Audience Member: It's like a double-edged sword. Like it's teetering on the brink of being gone, but it's still there—

Audience Member: I just hope we can leave some of it for our kids, that we can get it through that it is important, as she says, because without it, what do you have?

Rob: I was really excited about the audience that showed up to the library for this event. We had everyone from mothers and their children, to major donor of the creative writing program at the University of Kentucky who'd driven over from Lexington, to an eight-year-old who spent much of her days outside of school at the library. She was quite the enthusiastic audience member and had a lot to say about the poems. Something magical happened at that event. I felt like everyone in the room—no matter where they came from, no matter who they would be when they walked out the door—were at the same level, all working together to try to respond to the poem. It felt like a democratizing space where everyone had to look inside themselves to try to understand what was going on in the words they were listening to, and that couldn't have happened without Tracy's great humility and willingness to be open to whatever interpretations the audience had to give. I was excited to talk to the audience afterward, and I was thrilled to discover a familiar face among them—someone we had featured at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. just a few years back talking about fellow Kentuckian, Robert Penn Warren. I'll let him introduce himself.

[RECORDING—Rob Casper interviews Maurice Manning]

Rob: So, just tell me who you are and where you live!

Maurice Manning: Morris Manning, and I live about 30 miles from here in Washington County.

Rob: So this is your, this is your, home, this part of the country.

Maurice: Pretty close, pretty close.

Rob: What's it like to have Tracy come here?

Maurice: I think it's a wonderful opportunity. Unfortunately a lot of people these days are intimidated by the idea of poetry, and to bring it to the people is a great opportunity for the people; it's a great opportunity I think for poetry in general. It has to matter outside of a university.

Rob: Was there anything about this event that surprised you, any insight that you got?

Maurice: Well, I was very encouraged to hear the young people in the room who clearly have not just a taste but a real affection for poetry, and some of the questions and observations these young people in high school or younger—it's an encouraging sign that they would come out on a beautiful Saturday morning to do something as unlikely as listen to poetry.

Rob: And what more do you think Tracy can do as she continues her outreach to rural communities to not only talk to people but to make sure that in talking to people about poetry, in reading her poems, she helps make even the littlest shift.

Maurice: I think it's a great mission that she has, to bring poetry to rural communities. As she was reading, and people were asking some questions, I reminded myself that for most of us in the room, from around here at least, our parents or our grandparents would have spent time in school memorizing and reciting poems. And so that would've been, you know, a nationwide commonly held experience a couple of generations back. And not surprisingly a number of the people who came today were older, and would very much have spent time in grade school memorizing and reciting poems. And to have that practice returned to rural communities, to have it kind of modeled, as Tracy does, I think it's a great resource, and obviously our young people and our older people appreciate it.

Rob: Good deal, thanks.

Maurice: Yeah.

Anne: So Rob, after listening back and reflecting on this trip to Kentucky, what are your takeaways? What are you thinking about?

Rob: I'm thinking about how meaningful it was to go to these very different locations that aren't that far from one another, and really aren't that far from us, and yet offered us the opportunity to meet people and talk to them about poems in ways that I had never experienced before. I'm thankful we had the opportunity to go to New Haven, Glasgow, and Bowling Green; thankful that we had the opportunity to speak to the men at MARC; to go to a public library; and to connect to a community center in which we got to feature not only the state Poet Laureate, but have the representative from that district welcome us and set the stage for the conversation to follow. And mostly I'm thankful for all the people who were willing to speak up and talk about the poems that Tracy read, be they her own or others. I felt like the conversations we had there about the poems were instructive for me, not only as someone involved in this project, but as someone who loves poetry and continues to look to poems to see what they might offer me.

Anne: Great! Thank you so much, Rob. Before we end the episode and the series, I'd love to hear from both you and Anya about your thoughts on the "American Conversations" pilot trips. So, welcome back Anya.

Anya Creightney: Thanks, Anne.

Anne: I'm curious to know, after revisiting your trips to New Mexico, South Carolina, and Kentucky, what resonates for both of you?

Rob: Well, I was so happy to see how informal the trips were, how much time we had just to spend with one another and with the people that we met along the way where we really engaged with them, and how we figured that out as we went along in really exciting ways. But, I figured, it really started with what happened in New Mexico. That really set the tone for the trips to come, so maybe Anya you could talk about that.

Anya: Sure. I mean, we started in New Mexico which is, as I've mentioned, my home state and Tracy was excited to travel to New Mexico. She'd already met with the senator, the New Mexican senator, and was eager to get her feet wet with the project. And so I think we were still figuring out what it was we were attempting to do, but we had this sense, as you say, of a sort of informal project that we knew would gain traction. And it was clear that, as we went along in New Mexico, that really was the case. We had these events, they were sort of scrappy at first and a little unclear how they would relate to what is now *American Journal*. But, it was clear that people were ready and willing to listen to poetry and wanting to give their feedback, and as the trip went on Tracy became more and more vulnerable to those in the audience and to hearing other stories. And I think it was such a pleasure to watch her, or watch that process unfold. It really was empowering and quite moving to see how something informal yielded this real vulnerability.

Rob: So, I love that you bring up *American Journal* and the poems that Tracy brought to these various communities. It was interesting to see her read her own poems and talk to

various audiences about them, but she really got into the poems that she brought from other writers and it was great to see how differently people responded to those poems, too, depending on where we were. I feel like Tracy figured out along the way how to deal with different kinds of audiences. In New Mexico, she dealt exclusively with targeted audiences in private events, and then in South Carolina we did all public events, and in Kentucky we kind of figured out how that worked. But, of course, in each place there were larger or smaller audiences, they were made up of different populations, they were all rural but Tracy, in effect, had to figure it out when she walked in the room.

Anya: Yeah, I would say that was accurate. You were along for the ride in the latter two trips but I knew in New Mexico after seeing her pivot so quickly between the Air Force base, and then to the Santa Fe Indian school, and then to a pueblo, it was clear she had the chops to navigate these communities, rural or elsewhere. It was clear she had the real charisma to make people feel comfortable and welcomed and seen. And I think the poems were her vessel.

Rob: Yeah, and in some ways the challenge I saw with those events was: how does she give people room to respond? She figured out how to let there be silence in the room. She figured out how to engage people in different ways when it was clear they were a little bit stopped by the direction she was going in. She figured out, I think, how to make people feel comfortable talking about what they really cared about in the poems, really feeling like it wasn't scary to offer an interpretation to the U.S. Poet Laureate in front of, say, a bunch of other residents at the opioid rehabilitation center you're in for six months. And that's a remarkable thing.

Anya: It's really unusual and a joy to see. And, this may be jumping ahead, but seeing Tracy reenact this event, these events, where she says a very simple question which is, "What do you see?" having seen this event over many months now, and even an event here at the Library of Congress for a congressional group—talk about informal. It was a way and, as you say, a meeting ground or this place where everyone was equal. Here she sat down at a table with senators and their staff members, some very junior, and everyone was just there reading a poem, sharing their responses, and no response was privileged over the other and no insight was privileged over the other and there wasn't any competition, which was such a pleasure to see, amongst the respondents, which can happen also sometimes. And it felt more about understanding the urge to write the poem rather than to solve the poem or to unlock the poem or to resolve what is unresolved at the end. So, it was just some people in a room trying to get to know each other better in a way, though they weren't saying it, though they weren't explicating it, and I think that's Tracy's grace that allows that kind of movement.

Rob: You know, it's interesting you bring that up because I felt that the most democratic space I was in throughout these pilot project visits was the New Haven Public Library in Kentucky. It was the last event we did of the pilot projects, and after we did that we were in a room with about 50, 60 people and they ranged from kids—an eight-year-old who sat in the front who gave great comments—to parents and to teachers and to some senior citizens. It was a real powerful mix of people from that community. We drove about an hour north up to Louisville and it was such a shock to get back into the world of urban

America. It was just so impersonal in a way and we had to all adjust to—and there was so much stimulation, it wasn't about all these people in a room engaging one another equally over something that was profound and powerful and mysterious and life-affirming. It was about, you know, advertisements and going to a restaurant and having the wait staff give her rehearsed little spiel and it just felt like, oh yeah, this is the world we enter back into.

Anya: Yeah. Tracy often talks about poetry as a place to slow down and to listen and I think that was beautifully captured the way you described moving from this sort of beautiful safe space to this sort of urban stimulus, this overdrive, this hyper drive, which is all about logistics and arrangement and performance. And it seems that Tracy is saying that poetry can be the antidote to that kind of inclination, and I think that's useful, and it's clear that this project is proving that out.

Anne: Yeah, and so, based on what you've all said about these pilot projects and Tracy's sort of deft ability to be informal and kind of meet people where they are, how do you think these pilot trips then informed or impacted the "American Conversations" visits that she started in her second term, this past September?

Rob: Well, of course, we were able to go to many other places with the American Conversations tour. When we organized the pilot project visits we focused on states that hopefully wouldn't be impacted by bad weather. They took place in the spring so we focused on the south. By contrast, the first place we visited this fall was Alaska. They were in many ways very similar—the set up these trips for "American Conversations"—but, of course, we had an anthology with us instead of handouts of poems. And that was really exciting, we got to give anthologies to anyone and everyone we met. And it felt like it was a gift that would last beyond those visits, beyond those moments when the people we encountered met with Tracy and talked with her about poems, it would be something they could turn back to, something they could learn from, something they could be excited about, something they could share. And, it had such a great range of poems and poets, not just the few that she would read over the course of an event, but 50 American poets really addressing all sorts of issues in ways that I think people can relate to.

Anya: I think that's accurate. I think *American Journal* formalized one part of the process anyway, which is these poems that you're describing that we had as leaflets almost at these events. And we would sort of pass them out and people would flip through their packets and it felt like an informal school workshop in the best way. But, this book having a life of its own is something palpable and I know Tracy spent a lot of time collecting voices that were—I don't know if "appropriate" is the right word, but accurate for our time and place and they're all living writers, they hail from all over the country, and I know Tracy wanted these poems to help extrapolate our—not just the human condition, but what is a sort of very American moment. It's a pleasure to spread that wherever we go and to sort of give them to people who are hungry to hear about their friends and neighbors whom they don't get to meet in the same capacity as Tracy travels the country. So, it's a way that the attendees can travel and meet folks in all different parts of the country, be it rural, urban, suburban, what have you and extend the work that Tracy means to do with this project and that is the best kind of formality without removing the kind of mystery and beauty of the one-on-one engagement that Tracy has in the room.

I think that poems at their best are all about engagement, and I think Tracy would say that's accurate. And, again, it's beared out in the conversation—speaking of “American Conversations”—that we have again and again in these environments. It just seems people are eager to tell their stories. I think it's a human inclination to both hear a story and tell your story, and a poem can do that so capably as long as people feel comfortable and welcomed. And we've talked a lot about empathy here in the office, as it relates to the Laureateship, as it relates to Tracy, as it relates to this project, and I think what you're describing is really an act of empathy. Here, we're all sitting in the same room and reading a poem from someone who is not necessarily in the room and has their own complex life with their own story, their own background, their own complication and mystery and joy and awe, and we build our own association and relate to this poem in that specific way. Just like I learn something new from you, you learn something new from me, and hopefully the goal is that we're able to replicate that idea for others, and hopefully the engagement helps us see each other more capably, more honestly, more openly, more thoughtfully. I think all of that can come wrapped up in a book that we give away for free, no less. What could be better? That's what I find exciting, anyway.

Anne: Well thank you both so much for talking about your involvement in this project, your passions and Tracy's passions. I would love to hear from Tracy about her impressions of “American Conversations”—so here she is.

[RECORDING - Tracy K. Smith]

Tracy K Smith: One of the things I've loved about American Conversations is the opportunity to visit different parts of the country and to talk to people whose lives are different from my own about poems that I love. It's been amazing to see someone take a poem about, say, childhood, and make it useful to them, where they are, in a family or in a life. It's been instructive to me to witness people who have no background in poetry reading with a kind of attention and insight that enlarges poems for me, a poet. It, more than anything else, affirms my sense that poetry comes from and strikes us in a place that is alive, that is ageless, and that is acutely aware of how powerful our feelings are.

I'll also say that during this moment in America where division is almost all we hear, talking to people whose lives are different, whose perspectives and values are different, and finding that we actually have something to say to one another. Coming away from these experiences feeling like maybe we're even friends—that's been one of the most reassuring things I think I could have done as an American, and I hope that documenting some of these trips in the way that we have can share some of that hope and reassurance with you, wherever you might be.

Anne: Thank you so much, Tracy. And that concludes today's episode. Thank you for joining us on “From the Catbird Seat” for this short series on Tracy K. Smith's “American Conversations” project. Thanks also to all the folks in New Mexico, South Carolina, and Kentucky who so graciously contributed to this podcast series, and to Rob Casper, Anya

Creightney, and the dedicated interns who made this possible. To learn more about “American Conversations,” and to follow our poet laureate’s travels, visit the project online at read.gov/americanconversations. As always, you can learn more about poetry past, present, and future at the Library of Congress at loc.gov/poetry. We’ll be back soon with another season of “From the Catbird Seat.” Stay tuned.