

Ep.94 Lilit Keshishyan

[00:00:00] **Dan Dissinger:** [00:01:00] [00:02:00] [00:03:00] Hi everyone. Welcome to another episode of Writing Remix. I'm Dan Dissinger and actually [00:04:00] today we're in person doing an episode, which is like so amazing because we haven't done, or I haven't done an episode in person in about really like two years. So this is like a momentous occasion. Um, and I'm here with an amazing.

[00:04:15] **Dan Dissinger:** I'm here with Lilit Keshishyan. Lilit, thank you so much for being here and being in person. This is

[00:04:21] **Lilit Keshishyan:** exciting. I'm excited. Thank you for having

[00:04:23] **Dan Dissinger:** me. Oh, I'm, I'm looking forward to this. There's so much that I want to jump into and get to. You're doing so much amazing work. So, but, uh, why don't you let the audience know a little bit about yourself and then we'll just jump right

[00:04:34] **Lilit Keshishyan:** in.

[00:04:35] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Um, let's see. How far back should I go? I was born and raised in Los Angeles. I am a lecturer in the writing program at USC and a research associate at the Institute of Armenian Studies here at usc. Um, I did my undergrad and grad work at UCLA in [00:05:00] comparative Literature.

[00:05:02] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Um, and my dissertation focused on three Armenian writers writing all around the world. The texts I, um, worked on were based in the us, uh, but written in Armenian, um, and I basically looked at how they negotiate identity. Within their works and argued that the diasporic identity, basically these writers base positioned them, um, the diasporic I identity within the search for identity.

[00:05:38] **Lilit Keshishyan:** So the constant negotiation of identity and the different spaces, um, of Armenian that were created in the various parts of the world that they were in.

[00:05:52] **Dan Dissinger:** Okay. There's so much immediately, but I love this idea of storytelling, search for [00:06:00] identity, but you know, and you're working with like the, like you said, the My Armenian story project and the, which, when I saw that online and you were talking about it, it just made me so

excited to see this use of storytelling because here we are, we're teaching in the writing program at U usc and we.

[00:06:20] **Dan Dissinger:** It's the academic essay or whatever that is . But a lot of it now you see a lot of students, you know, wanting to lean towards kind of speaking about identity journey and this idea of like telling one story or the search for one story. So I'm curious like how this project came about and how you kind of got into working on that project with, uh, with the people

[00:06:41] **Lilit Keshishyan:** on campus.

[00:06:43] **Lilit Keshishyan:** So, um, I was teaching at ucla, uh, at East LA College and I met the director of the Institute of Armenian Studies at a conference, and I picture some ideas that I was thinking about. I, um, [00:07:00] was really interested in, you know, community engagement and how, um, the Armenian community. Contribute to the, you know, historical record and some of the, I, I'd seen some Instagram accounts where people were, um, sending photographs.

[00:07:22] **Lilit Keshishyan:** I think it was, I believe, um, of their experiences in LA in the eighties and nineties, and just photographs and the, I forget her name, um, but, uh, Instagram account owner was basically curating these photos and, uh, reconstituting the, uh, la Latino, Latin Latinx story through these, um, re uh, through these images that the community members were sending.

[00:07:55] **Lilit Keshishyan:** And I thought that was really, at first, it's just interesting, right? I, I love looking at old [00:08:00] photos. Um, and that just caught my eye and I thought, this is super interesting. People have all these resources in their homes, right? Just even through pictures and letters and concert tickets, all the ephemera kind of lying around.

[00:08:14] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Um, And they have their own stories and their voices. And so I had, you know, I was a fan of just story core and things like that and just story storytelling in general. Um, so I pitched, uh, or a few ideas. I was at the institute, already had some oral history programming going on. Um, I can talk a little bit about that.

[00:08:35] **Lilit Keshishyan:** It's super interesting, the Displaced Persons Project. Um, And, uh, a few others that were, and so I kind of joined the team on a part-time. Basis. And then a position opened up in the writing program here, and I thought it would be great to just be in one location and do the two things that I really love

[00:08:55] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Um, which, uh, I mean, I love many things, but these are the top two. Yeah. [00:09:00] Um, and yeah, that's, that's how I came Wow.

[00:09:04] **Dan Dissinger:** To work here. So what is it that you think about the, the oral story? Mm-hmm. , right? Like, you know, We talk a lot about writing and um, obviously cuz we work in the writing program and like the written word, but what is it that you feel like the oral story provides that possibly the written can't?

[00:09:22] **Dan Dissinger:** Or does the oral story also offer maybe more access? Possibly. I'm just really curious

[00:09:28] **Lilit Keshishyan:** about that. I think it fills in gaps that. Historical text there, there's only so much you can include. Mm. Right. Mm-hmm. . And, um, the oral story includes emotions. Mm-hmm. , um, memories, uh, uh, relation personal relationships.

[00:09:54] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Mm. Um, the focus on one person at that moment and how [00:10:00] they're seeing the world around them is very interesting and. I think it just fills in, it brings the human element to the historical record

[00:10:13] **Dan Dissinger:** and the human element. You feel like kind of, what role does that play you think, in providing the filling the gap, like that human element?

[00:10:22] **Dan Dissinger:** Like why is that something that's so

[00:10:24] **Lilit Keshishyan:** important?

[00:10:26] **Lilit Keshishyan:** I think it helps. Understand all of the impacts of these larger historical events. So we can read about it, we can talk about it, but when we, once it becomes about a group of, uh, a larger group of people, um, I think we become desensitized to the impact of real, uh, traumatic events, war, um, even. Less, kind of less traumatic immigration stories, for example, [00:11:00] right?

[00:11:00] **Lilit Keshishyan:** So for example, someone says, my dad moved to the United States for, um, economic opportunities, right? And it was a leaving of ch they weren't necessarily thrown out of the country or exiled or anything like that. But there's all these emotional elements. You know, how were they received? How did they feel when they got off the plane?

[00:11:24] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Who greeted them? What was the community like? All we ask all these questions to create a picture of not only the space they were in, the road that they took, um, but also the space they are entering. Changing, right. Even through, just through their presence. Mm-hmm. ? Um, with my Armenian story, I think, so we have a, uh, at the institute we have a larger digital diaspora project where, um, the institute's staff does more formal oral history interviews, uh, with [00:12:00] community members and, for example, the displaced person story.

[00:12:04] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Uh, we select the interviewees. Um, Interviews, basically, uh, there's a displaced persons community, Armenian displaced persons who during World War ii, um, during Germany's, uh, occupation of, uh, Russia, when Germany was defeated and had to retreat Hmm. These Armenians were either taken as forced labor Oh wow.

[00:12:29] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Or, um, left by choice because they didn't want to seem like they had been, um, working with the Germans, and then they would've been sent to labor camps in the, in the Soviet Union. Right. So they essentially retreated with the German soldiers and were used as slave labor after the war. Wow. They, um, were put in a camp, there's like four, um, I think three to 4,000 Armenians and lived in this camp in Stuttgart, Germany Oh wow.

[00:12:57] **Lilit Keshishyan:** For four years and. An Armenian [00:13:00] community in these old barracks. Wow. . So we basically, we interviewed the survivor, whoever, basically the survivors of that camp. They're now in their eighties. Yeah. Um, those who are still live, we interviewed and that is part of one Right. Project. So we have specific questions related to that, but we also ask, uh, you know, questions about, I mean, it, it's all connected right.

[00:13:26] **Lilit Keshishyan:** You know, where were you born? Mm-hmm. . Uh, what was life like back, you know, uh, in your village or in the city you, you were living in? Why did your parents retreat with the army? Mm-hmm. were they forced, things like that. Mm-hmm. , but they also, when they came to the United States, um, In the early, late forties, early fifties, they became very, very successful and they settled a lot of them early, early on in Detroit, and then moved from Detroit to Montebello and East la Wow.

[00:13:57] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Right. So this is a huge part of the LA [00:14:00] story Yeah. That not a lot of people know about. Armenians don't even know about it because that's a, that's kind of a Right. They know Armenians live in Montebello, but don't. How they got there. And these people who lived in the camp are still friends. Oh, wow. Their kids are friends.

[00:14:15] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Oh boy. Their grandchildren are friends. Wow. Um, and that's a huge part of LA History. They created, you know, businesses thrived. Um, so, and that's one community. So there's only, so, so we have maybe 35 interviews with them. Um, and so we were thinking there's all these interesting stories. , it's impossible to get all of them

[00:14:42] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Yeah. Oh yeah. So why don't we have PE if people are interested, let them tell their own stories. Hmm. Um, you know, interview your dad, , interview your grandmother. Mm-hmm. . Um, and it's democratizing the process to a certain degree. Yeah. And also adding [00:15:00] to this historical. archive that is super important. Hmm. Um, for both Armenian history and um, a scholarship, but also I think la, California, larger United States.

[00:15:13] **Lilit Keshishyan:** I mean, we've interviewed people. It's open to anyone.

[00:15:16] **Dan Dissinger:** Hmm. Yeah, I saw that like it. . There's also that the truck, the traveling mm-hmm. , which is like story core, which is interesting to kind of see the connection between story core and, uh, the Armenian project. Because like to me, um, well living in New York, you would sometimes see the story core trucks and see the story, core popups and things that would be sitting there.

[00:15:36] **Dan Dissinger:** But I, this idea of collecting stories, I. It makes so much sense, specifically act when you have such a one, a forgotten history, and two, like something that people don't know about that's growing inside their own neighborhood. And when you have such a, um, a forgotten diaspora and a [00:16:00] forgotten. Like a history.

[00:16:02] **Dan Dissinger:** You need those stories. You really need those stories and the idea that they also like landed in Detroit and stuff. It really is a connection even to my partner's, um, family from Cyprus. How many Cypriots live in Michigan and how many, um, um, oh, uh, Chaldeans live in Michigan and how Michigan is like this really interesting like space that.

[00:16:25] **Dan Dissinger:** You when people I didn't know anything about until I met, um, my partner where when, when we went there I was like, wow, it's so different than I expected Michigan to be. So it's really interesting to hear that. But then also then the migration to to LA as well. That's really

[00:16:40] **Lilit Keshishyan:** awesome. Anytime I ask, why did you leave Detroit?

[00:16:43] **Lilit Keshishyan:** They say It was cold. It was cold. .

[00:16:46] **Dan Dissinger:** That, that, that would, I think, make anyone, but like I, it's funny because that is, my partner's always like, I just don't understand why we ended up in Michigan. Um, but you see a lot of that, uh, I think it's, um, such a [00:17:00] thrive, uh, city that's was thriving and then has, you know, since been like something that's trying to be rebuilt.

[00:17:06] **Dan Dissinger:** Um, so what kind of impact do you see this project having? Well, not having, maybe in the future, I guess we could talk about that, but how it's having, what is having on people right now? Even when they get to tell their stories, like what is the initial

[00:17:20] **Lilit Keshishyan:** reaction? So, um, for the month of April, we basically, and I, I'm gonna tell you the, his why it's a food truck cuz that's important.

[00:17:30] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Um, , we basically converted this food truck into a mobile studio, and we're parking the food truck for the month of April because a, um, April is Armenian history or Heritage month in la um, because April 24th is the commemoration of the Armenian genocide. So we're parking the truck in various locations throughout Los Angeles and asking people to come in and I.

[00:17:59] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Um, or [00:18:00] get interviewed, right? So it's a way of basically exposing them to the larger project. This is, the truck part is temporary, um, with the hopes that the project will get more exposure and people will contribute to the archive. Um, you know, when they do interviews at home. So the. truck. Um, the modern kind of iteration of the hot food truck was created by, um, an Armenian man.

[00:18:32] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Wow. Okay. Who still has this business? Wow. Uh, in South la and he's a supporter of the Institute. So we had this idea, why don't we ask Mr. Via Gar to lend us a truck for a month. That's amazing. . That's amazing. And so, wow. Um, yeah, he ma he makes. A lot of the food trucks, he manufactures them. Um, wow. So, yeah.

[00:18:56] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Wow. And it's in terms of, so the [00:19:00] first reaction is when we ask people to interview or get interviewed, um, and share the project with them is, I have nothing to say. Mm-hmm. . Mm-hmm. , right.

Or why would you interview me? And then they'll suggest, um, people who they think are important within community for, for to be interviewed.

[00:19:19] **Lilit Keshishyan:** And the whole point is that you are important for the community, right? Your story is important. All you know, how you got here, where you came from, your experiences. Um, they're important. And a lot of people are hesitant, , but I think once they, I mean, some agree, some don't. Once they get, I. Often they thank us because they realize that once we ask the questions and they talk and they share, they realize the significance of their experience and that that contribution.

[00:19:55] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Oh wow. Um, and [00:20:00] everyone's excited. I think it's a really. Emotionally, uh, potentially like daunting task to interview someone. I think that part of the hesitation is there. Um, I mean, I do this for a living and it was really difficult for me to even start the interview with my dad because I knew that there were emotional elements to it.

[00:20:20] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Um, but I did it. Yeah, because I think it's important. I'm, I think halfway through, I still have a lot more to go. Yeah. But he's a talker. Um, . So we, we've got a few hours, um, On the record already and we'll, we'll do a few more. Um, But yeah, they can last. So with the truck, we're doing it in, uh, in one hour time, slots, but oral histories go longer.

[00:20:44] **Lilit Keshishyan:** So the idea is that you start in the truck and then you continue later on.

[00:20:50] **Dan Dissinger:** Oh, wow. So they cont that. I, I was actually gonna ask that, like, so people can go, they can continue to con like interview and add to it, so Yes. It's just like [00:21:00] a running Oh,

[00:21:00] **Lilit Keshishyan:** that's amazing. Mm-hmm. . Wow. So some of our interviews. Like in two parts.

[00:21:05] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Um, I've interviewed someone four hours one day, and then two weeks later, another four hours. Um, yeah, it's, it's, once you ask que there's a lot of details that come out and people want to share. Most people want to share. And, um, the more they share the more questions arise. Yeah. And answers.

[00:21:29] **Dan Dissinger:** So what kind of things have, you know, been surprising during these interviews?

[00:21:33] **Dan Dissinger:** I mean, it's gotta be for you. I mean, I know even when I do this, I'm. I am trying to, I guess, direct an interview. Oh, I don't know. And then sometimes I forget that I'm doing one and I'm literally just listening and learning, and I feel like I've learned, I don't know so much from just sitting and hearing people, uh, talk with me.

[00:21:55] **Dan Dissinger:** How, how has it impacted you as like you're kind of doing the interviews [00:22:00] and what are some, are there, have there been interviews that just kind of just were so impactful, um, that just left like such a, a mark while you were listen?

[00:22:10] **Lilit Keshishyan:** S several, uh, they're very emotional. I mean, people are opening up. Um, we don't force them to, we, you know, we, we will stop the interview at certain points.

[00:22:21] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Um, we give the interviewee control in the situation. Um, you know, but I'm surprised that people are willing. To share so much, and I'm honored that they're sharing it. And, um, I had

[00:22:40] **Lilit Keshishyan:** people talking about their relationship with their parents, like older interviewees. Um, that really impacts me because you see kind of the, the impact of the parent at, even at. Late, like someone in their eighties or nineties mm-mm-hmm. , um, will talk about their relationship with, with their [00:23:00] parents, and get really emotional.

[00:23:02] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Yeah. Um, some people I ask if they'd like to share a song that they learned when they were a child Oh, wow. Or a poem. Oh, wow. Those always get to me. Yeah. Um, I had, uh, this, this one, um, lady where after she recited a poem, , she was an actress. And so her, uh, entire life, she had dreamt of being an actress and at the camp in, um, Stuttgart, Germany mm-hmm.

[00:23:30] **Lilit Keshishyan:** They had created a theater group. Oh, wow. And she was the star Oh, wow. Of the theater group. Wow. Um, and that was her dream. And then she came to the US and, you know, she worked at a bank, but she kept talking about, you know, herself as an actress. Mm-mm. Wow. And then she recited a poem at the end and I went, we were done.

[00:23:54] **Lilit Keshishyan:** And I went into the car. I wasn't doing the interview. Uh, it was a colleague of mine he was doing [00:24:00] the interview and I went into the car and uh, I turned. I don't know. I turned on the radio and I

just started sobbing in the car because it was so emotional. And I texted , uh, my colleague and I said, I can't stop crying.

[00:24:17] **Lilit Keshishyan:** And he was, and he was right there with me. We were just basically, um, it's, it's, it's a super emotional but rewarding experience and you just, the amount you learn and that stays with you. Um, when you hear it through, when you hear. about historical events through stories. Yeah, I think it's such a great tool.

[00:24:43] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Yeah. Um, that can, should be, I mean, we know this, right? We'll watch a movie and the, the movie has an impact. And often, you know, if they're historically inaccurate, it's problematic. But , uh, when they are accurate, it could be a, um, a great resource for teaching and [00:25:00] learning. And stories are the same way when someone tells you their experience, um, Hmm.

[00:25:06] **Lilit Keshishyan:** I imagine the trains that they talk about when they're, you know mm-hmm. go, or the airports and the, the way that they describe it, it, it sticks with you. Yeah.

[00:25:16] **Dan Dissinger:** Hmm. I just started, like, I just was thinking about the. Just that power that, you know, listening has like, in just a like kind of creating that space for people to speak their story and how, just like even the elements that they bring in, like the, the poem becoming like this amazing, like, Oral archive, like oral artifact that just is in there.

[00:25:43] **Dan Dissinger:** And then we could probably, there's probably a whole history and, and and thing behind the poem and then going into why we're citing that poem. And it's, um, I think a lot of the times we forget how important it is to hear people's stories [00:26:00] outside of, you know, just. You know, doing the work that we do or , like going by day, day by day, just like, you know, not listening to that one single story.

[00:26:09] **Dan Dissinger:** And I'm always, um, interested in that because there are so many gaps in the things that we try to discuss or try to learn. And it's because. You know, many times in academia or the intellectual space, like the personal story isn't celebrated as much as it should be, and I can't even imagine the amount of value that's coming from just being in that space with, with that person.

[00:26:34] **Dan Dissinger:** What was it like to interview, to start these interviews with your dad? I mean, that's a whole other thing. I mean, because.

It's obviously like you're connected to the interviewee when you're just doing this because you're in the room with them, you're speaking with them, you're hearing their story. But now this is like way more personal as familial.

[00:26:53] **Dan Dissinger:** Like what, did it change how you approached it or is it like, did you learn things? Any new things

[00:26:59] **Lilit Keshishyan:** about that? [00:27:00] Um, I think there's benefits to interviewing someone you know really well and then, um, some things that you have to really be conscious of. So, , I have to make sure that when he's explaining something, that I know that he's thoroughly explaining it, because this isn't only for me.

[00:27:18] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Mm-hmm. , right? So sometimes he'll just take it for granted. He is like, oh, you know so-and-so, right? Uh, and I'm like, yes, I know so-and-so, but you say the name and you know, explain the rel your relationship with that person and all of that. Um, but I could. . It also gives me some points of reference where I can start the questioning off from, with, with my dad again, because he's, he can talk forever, so, um, it's a little bit easier.

[00:27:44] **Lilit Keshishyan:** But for example, I knew that he was born in a village in Iran, uh, outside of Tehran. And when he was, um, I think six or seven, they moved to Tehran. Um, and. [00:28:00] Twen, uh, about 15 years later to went to Armenia. So I knew that, you know, a lot of Iranian Armenians repatriated from Iran to Armenia. Mm-hmm. , and this is a community that had lived in Iran for 500 years, and during the Soviet Union there was this repatriation.

[00:28:21] **Lilit Keshishyan:** So I knew a little bit about, I mean, I, I knew it based on, again, family experiences and what they've told me, but, I mean, it's a, his historical record. So, but then I asked why did they move from the village to Tehran? So like, you know, specific questions or what was Village life like? Yeah. Um, what were the differences between Tehran and uh, the village?

[00:28:45] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Yeah. So the, the s more specific questions that build a pic, a larger, clearer picture of what life was like rather than. We moved from [00:29:00] here to here to here. And these are the dates. Hmm. Right? Yeah. Um, and on a personal level, that's important for me because, I dunno, I'm just interested in my parents' history.

[00:29:13] **Lilit Keshishyan:** It's, yeah. Part of who I am, um, and. . But I think it's also really important because again, that's a lot of the people who moved to

the, he talked about how they struggled financially. Mm-hmm. , when they went to Tehran mm-hmm. , because there was already these established communities, these were villagers, um, they didn't have the skills mm-hmm.

[00:29:35] **Lilit Keshishyan:** uh, that a lot of the jobs, you know, uh, and Iran, uh, and Tehran were asking for. So all those, you know, little details that then paint a clear picture of life. Wow. and he, he cried within the first 10 minutes. .

[00:29:53] **Dan Dissinger:** I, I mean, I probably wouldn't be able to sit through, I wouldn't be crying as well. I think it's just, that's the thing [00:30:00] that I think we forget about, you know, history and how, you know, sometimes we're so disconnected from this, from this work, from, from the information.

[00:30:08] **Dan Dissinger:** And I feel like, and I said this on another episode, I'm like, I just feel. Bell hooks and is like the spirit guide of this podcast and this idea of like how education and intellectual material needs to be, like a fully embodied experience and how much we like disconnect ourselves from the emotional aspects of it.

[00:30:26] **Dan Dissinger:** The spiritual or like the mental, like the physical parts that it's all in the mental right, but this project and just this, you know, focus on storytelling is so rich. . Um, I'm curious, like, do you, does some of what is what you're doing kind of come into the classroom now that like you're being really steeped in this work and then all of a sudden it's like, how do you utilize some of these, uh, skill sets in the,

[00:30:55] **Lilit Keshishyan:** in the class?

[00:30:56] **Lilit Keshishyan:** I think what's changed maybe [00:31:00] in my teaching, or not changed, but a little bit more pronounced is my focus on questions and the importance of questions. Oh, wow. Um, and writing basically is about asking questions and then trying to find answers. , right? So this , uh, so I'm a little bit more aware of that and try to, uh, kind of stress that in the classroom, um, you know, in the pre-writing stage and, um, all of that.

[00:31:31] **Lilit Keshishyan:** But I actually. With the 150 classes. It's a hard, a little harder to incorporate. But my 340, um, courses, I did incorporate oral history element in there, so I asked very loosely. So I, I was testing it out and I think it worked, and I'm going to change a few more things, and, and try it out a little bit more.

[00:31:53] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Yes. But I ask students to, um, choose a topic. . So if, let's [00:32:00] say someone's topic was, um, women, uh, in banking, corporate banking, right? Mm-hmm. and, um, the lack of female representation, right? Mm-hmm. , uh, I asked them to interview someone familiar or who had experience in that world. Hmm. Wow. Right? Okay. Um, and do an oral.

[00:32:25] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Slightly revised. Right. But, um, and so they had to come up with a set of questions they were gonna ask. Um, and the focus there is the, the experiences of the person. Not necessarily, we're not asking for their expertise in banking or how to maneuver, right. But their experiences in Right. You know, that world.

[00:32:48] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Hmm. Um, and they did , the oral , they did the task, what I said. So they could, they were given an option [00:33:00] of incorporating the oral histories in their papers. Mm-hmm. . Mm-hmm. , um, be but with, because with just one, I didn't want it to be forced. True. Right. Yeah. So if it wasn't working, if the interview didn't go well, if they didn't have content to use, they didn't have to use it, but if they did want to use it mm-hmm.

[00:33:15] **Lilit Keshishyan:** they were, um, welcome to. , and then it gives also this, uh, a lesson on primary sources. Right, right. Yeah. So usually the students are working with secondary sources. Mm-hmm. , um, , the, in this case, they, it's a lesson on, on what primary sources are and also like you can create these sources. Yes. Um, and they're not always usable.

[00:33:41] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Mm-hmm. .

[00:33:42] **Dan Dissinger:** Yeah. Right.

[00:33:42] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Exactly. , and that's okay. Part of it is you, Uh, trying it out. And there's value even in, um, the experiment, , uh, and the, the act of doing that. [00:34:00] And I found that students, I asked for a kind of reflections on the project and students said that even the ones who didn't use it said that they questioned their assumptions.

[00:34:14] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Oh, well, okay. because the interviewee answered questions like they were looking for certain answers. Mm-hmm. , and the answers didn't match what they were, their expectations. Mm-hmm. . So it led them to then explore the, the issue in different ways and not go in with certain preconceived ideas about, Hmm, what banking looks like, for example, for a, you know, woman top level position.

[00:34:42] **Lilit Keshishyan:** And that I think, enough in and of itself. And it's also interesting. I'm all about, if it's interesting, do it. . , like interesting in and of itself Yeah. Is okay. Yeah. Um, because that's, that's where we, that encourages curiosity, and curiosity produces good content. [00:35:00] Mm-hmm. . Mm-hmm. and, you know, ideas and ev Yeah.

[00:35:06] **Dan Dissinger:** Yeah. . No, I mean, I think a cur, like, that's something that like, I think. Well not, I don't think we, like, I would say like, uh, maybe in the general scope of like teaching of writing or whatever that like to follow one's curiosity has, is kind of downplayed sometimes when it's just like, when I think of when I did the, my best work, it was when I was curious about it and I didn't really need someone to tell me to continue that work.

[00:35:33] **Dan Dissinger:** I was like, no, I want to continue to talk about this or write about

[00:35:36] **Lilit Keshishyan:** it. Writing is difficult. , that's another is. I told my students that all the time. I don't, I, you, you, you think it's easy for me. Sometimes I'll actually show them the, my draft revisions. Oh God, thank God. Just on the big screen too. Very, very brave.

[00:35:51] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Very brave. This is just a comments. I get from people who have reviewed, you know, my work or my, the comments to myself. I mean, it's really quick. So they [00:36:00] they can't read all of it, but it's, it's hard, it's thinking and it's hard. It's personal. You're, you're being judged on your. Mind and your output like that, you're, it's a different, I feel like it's a different kind of vulnerability even when it's an academic essay.

[00:36:20] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Yeah. And it seems dry or, you know, academic or, um, you know, something not necessarily personal, but you're, feel like you're being judged on how you think. Mm-hmm. And especially for someone at a who's, you know, at a USC or at a, you know, a university that's, , you value what people think about. Yeah. You know, your brain and how you think

[00:36:47] **Dan Dissinger:** So I mean, it's amazing how much we, once you finish your dissertation or you finish the work in your head, you're like, yeah, all right. We, I did it. But then like, [00:37:00] Going forward. Everything is a judgment. All the stuff trying to, I mean, I was just rejected, you know, from , from a journal. I took it so personally at first because I was like, but this is what I, I want to get this out there.

[00:37:14] **Dan Dissinger:** Like, please, like please let me write this article. Like please let me be part of this thing. And at some point you're feeling like, like, I guess I've put myself in a lifetime of judgment and homework, but. It's something that I'm curious about. So I feel like when you flip that to like curiosity, it's like, all right, we'll just go to the next thing and figure it this out.

[00:37:34] **Dan Dissinger:** But writing is difficult. I think that's a great way of putting it. The honesty of just going, it's hard. Like there are no, there's no tricks. There's just. Continue to do

[00:37:44] **Lilit Keshishyan:** it. I guess when it works out though though, it's so rewarding. I think that's just what pushes up us to keep

[00:37:50] **Dan Dissinger:** going. Yeah. I mean, even when I write the emails for this, uh, podcast, I get so nervous.

[00:37:54] **Dan Dissinger:** That's why some of 'em are so late. Sorry. But like, they're like, I'm like, okay, I'm writing this [00:38:00] note and I'm like so freaked out. This is going to maybe 250 people. And I'm just like, what are they gonna think? Is anyone reading it? And when they read it, do they care about like what it is and writing?

[00:38:12] **Dan Dissinger:** Vulnerability. Um, I guess when you can be vulnerable, cuz there are pieces that you don't have to be vulnerable in, nor that there are a lot of writers that choose not to be vulnerable. But when I think of the cross section between a project that this, the story pro, like the storytelling project, like the Armenian story project and how you approaching writing and just writing it's vulnerabilities when we really get to the core, I feel

[00:38:37] **Lilit Keshishyan:** like.

[00:38:38] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Yeah. And I also wanna add that. The website, the My Armenian story website, um, ha has all of the resources for people who want to do the work at home and want to do the, uh, interviews. So there's an, you know, FAQ [00:39:00] guide. There's guidelines, how you know where to put your camera for best results. If you wanna do audio, what to use.

[00:39:08] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Question guides. So there's a shorter question guide and a longer question guide. Um, sections are Armenian specific, but they can be adapted for any community, for anyone. So if anyone else is interested, there's uh, guidelines in Spanish, um, Eastern and Western Armenian, English, Russian, and French I believe.

[00:39:27] **Lilit Keshishyan:** And we're hoping to add more. Um, so anyone who's interested in interviewing and.

[00:39:37] **Dan Dissinger:** That's amazing. I, I'm, it's, hmm. I mean, what am I gonna say now? , I literally am thinking in my head, there's so many things that I'm thinking of because I,

[00:39:50] **Dan Dissinger:** I, I see the, the, so much value in just. And just this idea of allowing people to kind of have access to telling their own [00:40:00] stories, especially with, um, with a history that gets ignored most of the time. I mean, I think that's the other thing I, this project to me is like, it's archiving a history and archiving experiences that, you know, gets overlooked, gets.

[00:40:16] **Dan Dissinger:** It doesn't get acknowledgement at all considering the Armenian genocide, like how long it took for any sort of acknowledgement of it, um, that this project really puts such humanity into something that people kind of just really brush right over. So, I mean, congrats, I mean this is, uh, I mean, I just wanna acknowledge how great this is in the work you're doing.

[00:40:37] **Dan Dissinger:** I'm so glad you were able to come on and talk about this, and I hope people, you know, when you hear this that like, if you want to, you. Do this, like go to their website, we'll put the link in the show notes, it's there. Um, and tell people about it. And I don't know, support this project by listening as well.

[00:40:56] **Dan Dissinger:** I think, I mean, that's something that everyone can do. [00:41:00] Um, is there anything that you would like to say before we wrap up?

[00:41:02] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Um, thank you. This was really fun, .

[00:41:05] **Dan Dissinger:** Thank you . I'm glad, I'm always happy when someone says that because I know it's like, People come onto a podcast and they're just like, I have no idea.

[00:41:14] **Dan Dissinger:** Like, almost like with the interview, like, I don't know if I'm gonna have what I'm gonna be able to say. I don't know if I have anything to say. I'm like, we'll just see. Like, we'll just let it run and see what happens. Um, but I'm glad and, uh, and I learned so much. Really. Uh, thank you for, for doing, for

[00:41:29] **Lilit Keshishyan:** coming on.

[00:41:30] **Lilit Keshishyan:** Thank you for your great podcast. I'm a listener, .

[00:41:33] **Dan Dissinger:** Okay. I'm so glad someone's listening, . But everyone, thank you so much for listening. Thank you for coming and being an amazing guest. And everyone, please support this project. The website will be in the show notes. Tell us what you think about this show.

[00:41:50] **Dan Dissinger:** Leave your questions and comments. Um, hit us up on Twitter @writingremixpod, and I'll see you in the next episode. Thank you so much.[00:42:00]