

# 101. Growing Flash Fiction w/ Nancy Stohlman

**Daniel Dissinger:** [00:00:00] Hi, everyone. Welcome to another episode of Writing Remix. I'm Dan Dissinger, and I'm here with a returning guest, um, of someone, again, from my Naropa past, someone that was on the podcast before, uh, Nancy, author Nancy Stohlman. Nancy, thank you so much for being back. Yay!

**Nancy Stohlman:** Thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited to be back.

So much has happened since our last

**Daniel Dissinger:** chat. Yeah, I mean, we were talking about that, like, Just before we hit record and also over email and just been seeing it, you know, on social media, like your book going short, um, how well it's been doing and how well, well received this bin and you just put out the audio book.

So I would love to hear all about that, but let's, uh, let the audience know a little bit about who you are and then we'll just jump right in. Perfect,

**Nancy Stohlman:** yeah. So I'm Nancy Stolman and I'm an author and professor and writer, of course. My latest book is going short, An [00:01:00] Invitation to Flash Fiction, which is really my treatise on flash fiction and everything about it, but really it's also about writing.

So people have told me That the book has, um, spoken to them, whether they were flash fiction writers or even writers. I've had musicians and other sorts of artists, uh, comment that creative process is the same. So I'm very interested in creative process. Um, I run retreats in which we do creative process and, uh, I'm very.

Uh, I, I love working with other creatives. So it's really great to be here with Daniel, who I met way back in our grad school days at Naropa. Yeah.

**Daniel Dissinger:** Yes. Oh man. Uh, and it was funny where, um, you were just talking about your book and immediately all these things started jumping in my mind about even the idea of like, how's, You have this amazing text out there about writing specifically, but that everyone's connecting with other people

because [00:02:00] you have so many creatives that whether they know it or not, are writing in some way or using language in some way.

And, you know, it reminds me of the times that I. You'll felt like lost and I would do some of the artists way where some people might think is kind of corny sometimes, but it's like, no, like the artist way, like doing these things and reading texts that encourage creativity and encourage people and kind of carve a little bit of a path that people can kind of go down.

I remember meeting Natalie Goldberg in Boulder, which that was fun and kind of awesome. But yeah, I would love to hear kind of about now it's an audio book, which is. You know, a whole other way to kind of put the words out there. So what was that process like? I mean, I'm so curious about

**Nancy Stohlman:** that. Well, and before I answer that, I just want to say, I love the artist's way.

I think my whole life was changed when I read the artist's way, like several decades ago now, [00:03:00] and so I'm on you, I'm with you with the, with the artist's way. Um, The audio book has been such a fun process. So, uh, I, I'd always wanted to do something with an audio book. And, uh, after the book came out in 2020 and was doing really well, um, I talked with my agent and I said, you know, what do you think about doing an audio book?

And so she kind of did her magic. And, um, and we had an offer and I had said that I really, that it was going to be a deal breaker for me if I couldn't be the narrator because, you know, I have theater background, it's my text too, and I felt really strongly that, um, Unless there was some sort of deal, I just couldn't say no to that.

I really wanted to be the narrator. And so she found, um, Blackstone publishing. They were like, yep, sounds awesome. And Nancy can be the narrator and let's do this. And, uh, so it's been a whole different thing, like a whole different. process completely. And I went into the studio in January [00:04:00] and I was in touch obviously with the people putting everything together.

And I've been in the studio before as a musician and as a singer. So thankfully I wasn't green completely as to what it's. like to be in a studio. Um, so I assumed a couple of days in the studio, you know, a couple of half days, even no, they're like, okay, we're going to knock this out one day. It's like really one day.

Um, and, uh, yeah, they're like, you know, if we need you to go back in and redo things, we can do that. But we've calculated the time to be, you know, about a week. Yeah. Two hours when the book is all read. And so we're, we're going to schedule five hours. That should be plenty of time. And, and, um, we'll see that.

So I started practicing every day, reading my book without stopping so that I could kind of build up some stamina because here I'm picturing five hours in the studio of me just talking. So the first day I read [00:05:00] half hour, then 45 minutes, then an hour. And I just kept reading, reading, reading. Um, and. Of course, in the process, I realized, you know, I use a lot of French words.

Why did I use so many French words in this book? Now I have to get this French pronunciation right. Yeah, it was really funny. And, um, so I went in the studio the day that we had it scheduled and I was ready to go and I had all my little props. They had told me to bring Um, green apples, like cut up green apples to bite, like when I needed to clear my throat, which I thought was really a unique little tip, green apples.

Um, and so I showed up with my green apples at my text and, um, and it was just me and the sound guy. And then I had in my headphones, I had the publisher coming remotely. Um, so all three of us were in conversation and we just went from beginning to end. And whenever there was a mistake, we would stop and just [00:06:00] begin again at the beginning of that sentence.

But, um, yeah, we just did it. And five hours later, my jaw, my face, it was like I'd had some sort of massive face workout. Um, but I was really excited. It was like, once we got the momentum going, uh, I just felt like. We were just nailing it, you know, and, uh, when I finally got to hear the finished product, which wasn't until after it came out, I was like, Oh my gosh, look at that.

So it's great. So it was cool. It was fun.

**Daniel Dissinger:** Wow. So, um, um, that's a great story because like, I'm just so stuck on the one day thing because I'm like, that's a lot of work to do in a single day. I mean, luckily, like you said, like you, you know, our musician, so you're, you know, the studio, you have like vocal training in some way, like, you know, how to take care of your voice, but still five hours of nonstop reading.

That's. [00:07:00] That's a, that's more of work than people might think, uh, like just talking in general.

**Nancy Stohlman:** It's true. And I don't think if I hadn't had that training, I might not have made it. I might have been really hoarse by the end or kind of struggling. I already felt like I was getting hoarse at the end, but, um.

And, you know, this was my first time being a narrator too, so of course I didn't want to show up and just like fail completely. I'm sure other narrators who have done multiple books, you know, have all these same sort of tricks so I was just really proud of myself for doing it and having it come out really well and Um, yeah, it was really fun.

It was really fun to read my own work.

**Daniel Dissinger:** Yeah. Did you see anything new in it while you were reading it or, you know, I I've heard a few audio books before, like when, when I listened and it's interesting, there are two different ways that people do their audio book. There's like one part, there's one way where people read it.

They just read, they're very strict about reading it, which is great because you, you [00:08:00] know, some, that's not, no way is good, bad or whatever, but, and then there's another way where some people read it and they go, Oh, I have this like story about something, or this thing I wanted to add, I can add in and they, they like jump in and add a little something in there and then continue back in the narrative, the narrative.

Um, so like, were there things that you saw that you were like, Ooh, I have something for this. And did you add anything extra or did you stick pretty strict to what you did?

**Nancy Stohlman:** I stuck pretty strict to what I did, partially because, um, the publisher was in my other ear, correcting me, you know, and even as I was reading, you know, sometimes I might like make a contraction out of something that in the text was not a contraction.

He would stop me and have me go back and say it the way it was in the text. Um, so yeah, they were really diligent about making sure that those were an exact match, but I definitely felt as I was reading it, like, Like I was almost wanting to edit, you know, like I could have just made a [00:09:00] contraction there, you know, so much more simple.

Or one of the things I found that I did a lot is slash like using slash slashes in my text, you know, so I can't think of an exact example, but how do you say that? In an audio book. So we did have to come up with a way for me to say

that, you know, this or that. Um, so yeah, it's like I figured out my own or I saw my own writing quirks slash style for lack of a better word when I sat there and read it in this other form.

And I think that's really, you know, what the audio books do in some ways is it's cross pollinating a whole nother form. And bringing in a whole different sort of reader. Um, I didn't realize until I kind of went down this, this journey myself, how, how many people don't read books on the page for whatever [00:10:00] reason, can only hear it as an audio.

And that could be, you know, any number of reasons from preference to ability, you know? So in some ways the audio books kind of open up. accessibility for a whole lot of other people. And, um, and then just, you know, people who are multitasking, people who don't have time to just sit and, you know, hold the book in their hand, but really want to absorb that information.

Um, I have a whole new appreciation for how this form is. It's reaching a whole different sort of reader.

**Daniel Dissinger:** It's, uh, it's so interesting that when, when we were in our MFA program, how the audio book didn't really, I mean, it was, it, it was nothing, nothing. There was nothing. I mean, it might be something that in a library, but it wasn't this huge thing where it's like you hear on every podcast, except for this one where it's like audible and then it's just [00:11:00] like, get this audio book.

And I never. Thought about it too, as a teacher, um, I had one student once say that they, they, while they're reading books in my class, they got the audio book. They found a track that they can listen to because it's hard for them to kind of stay. Like in rapt attention while reading and I was like, Oh, you know what?

I never think of that. And, and I know even now a podcast thing too, like then there's the people who need the transcript and that's a whole other financial thing and trying to provide transcripts, which that's what I'm trying to do, like figure out with, with this podcast, but you start thinking about all those things, see access, ability, um, people with neurodivergent brains and just like trying to get.

information out to everyone and anyone because there's a writer in all of us and it seems like having the text and having the audiobook really says that there's like whoever you are, however you do this. You can do the, you can make, you can have your [00:12:00] story out there,

**Nancy Stohlman:** right. And, and even just thinking about, you know, as fellow teachers, um, different learning styles, you know, there are people who need to hear as opposed to look at, and, uh, yeah, it's, it, it, it almost seems too simple.

Like I should have figured this out a long time ago. Of course, the audio books are going to be so helpful for people. Um, and some people really like to listen to the audio book while they're reading the book, you know, so they're kind of getting it. At the same time, um, my daughter does that a lot where she'll listen to the book, but while she's reading it, um, or people who've read it, you know, who already have the book in print and they've read it and now they're going to listen to the audio book and get a whole new thing out of it.

Actually, as a writer, as a creative, that's one of the things that I've been doing is revisiting. Some of my favorite books, fiction books, novels, whatever, as audio books to see if I can figure out some of the musicality of those texts in a different way. You [00:13:00] know, we can study a text on the page. We can reverse engineer it.

We can break it open. We can mimic it. We can do all these things, but I think listening to it through the ear just kind of brings in a whole other host of. Body wisdom, you know, from listening to it. So there's a lot of possibilities, I think, with this form. And yeah, you're right. Back in, back in our grad school days, we might've called these books on tape.

**Daniel Dissinger:** Oh my God. That's right. Books on tape. Oh my God. Right. Oh man. Oh man. I'm thinking, I was thinking about how, um, a lot of these new forms, they really would have been perfect for like, you know, the beats as much as anyone. I mean, they were already recording themselves. They were already doing these things and, and then there's like this huge gap and then it's like, well, here we are.

And it's amazing to think that. [00:14:00] How a simple, how that simple step to the side, which opens up this other possibility and it like, as you're going into other writing, do you, do you feel like having read it out loud that you saw things just stylistically? I know you said a little bit here and there, like kind of the slash marks, but how did you get to know yourself even more as like.

A creative by like Bill having to read for five hours straight as you're kind of moving through your

**Nancy Stohlman:** words. I did. And I'm happy to report that I was really proud of the book, because it's been a long time since I wrote the book you know it

came out 2020 so I wrote it before that. And I haven't even necessarily revisited the text in its entirety for years.

So, reading it out loud all in one sitting with so much distance from the actual creation of it. I just sort of felt like, like I was silently cheering [00:15:00] myself or it's like, yes, you know, good for you for saying that, you know, and, um, and even by the end, like I read as I was reading the final pieces in there, which of course the final pieces of any book you'd labor over extra, perhaps, uh, I was just like, Damn, I nailed that, you know, and so it was, it was actually really satisfying to feel like what I did stood up in this new form.

**Daniel Dissinger:** Wow. That's great. You know, I want to ask you like taking a step back to the release of the original book in 2020. How has the response been in the last Two years since the book's been out.

**Nancy Stohlman:** It's been really great. And it was a really great decision to release it because, you know, a lot of people decided to hold back on their books in 2020 for various reasons, you know, you don't get to have that book tour you wanted to have, or it looks very different, et cetera.

And, you know, I contemplated that as well, but there was a part of me that just felt like [00:16:00] now is the time. And, and. Something in me just felt like it was the right time. So I just decided to use my creativity as part of the promotion now, which I think people need to do regardless of whether you're in quarantine or whatever it is, but, um, so often creative people, you know, create these, these artifacts, these great products, and then they freeze when it comes to like, how do I find the people that I wanted to talk to about this, you know, and, and it all goes under this umbrella of like.

Promotion, self promotion or wah, wah, wah, you know, and, and, but I think of it more as like, how do I find the people that I'm trying to serve? You know, how do I find the people that need what I've got? Because I, I made it for them. And if they don't know that I have it, then neither one of us is winning here.

Um, so I just got really creative about it and I was like, all right, everything about this book is going to happen virtually. So what can I do? So I thought about, um, You know, [00:17:00] how can I let people know that this is happening? What can I do to build community and creativity and, and, uh, a sense of belonging, even if I can't be in person in places.

So I created a little virtual book club and had people, you know, who had, um, pre ordered the book would all go in and they all had this access to this virtual



book club space where we could talk about the book for the first six. I did a lot of virtual readings, of course. Um, and a lot of things like, you know, coming on your show, which was amazing, but I just felt like I, I just embraced it.

You know, it was like, you know, this isn't, this doesn't have to be seen as a less than it could be seen as like a perfect opportunity. Like we're talking about to pivot into another creative space that will allow me to reach people in a different way. So how many people were able to say, Come to a reading of this book who live in New York City, Delhi, London, you know, etc, [00:18:00] etc, who would never be able to fly around and see me in person, it would never have happened.

And I was able to have conversations with these people real conversations with them. So, I feel like it has been as wonderful as it could have been. Just different. And I'm really happy about it. I'm really happy about the way it was received. It won several awards. So it won the reader's view award. All right.

And then, yeah, I know. And then it was a finalist for the next generation Indy. Award and the International Book Award, so it, people responded to it right away and I think they, they saw that there was a hole that needed filling to really, you know, talk about flash fiction as a craft as a genre. And the fact that I did the book in flash fiction so I demonstrated.

The form as I was talking about it, um, I [00:19:00] think people just responded really well to it. And it, I've visited many classrooms since then of students, you know, reading the book and, and I've got a chance to be part of many groups who were using the book in some way, or had found me through the book in some way.

So, um, yeah, I think, you know, quarantine, sch quarantine, it's like you gotta do what you gotta do.

**Daniel Dissinger:** Right, right. I mean, It's really amazing to hear how well the book did. And it's great to hear, too, about the, you know, the expansion, I feel like, of knowledge on flash fiction, like that. I feel like what we use, I'm not surprised, but it seems like the flash fiction community just kind of started, you know, was growing, has been growing since, like, I found out about it when I was, you know, back at Naropa.

But then I feel like. You know, you have all these writers and they're kind of in this maybe community that like they know of, do you [00:20:00] feel like the, with the book that it allowed more exposure to flash fiction that, you know,



even people being validated that, yes, that's the style I do, we finally like people can finally be seen in a way.

Yes,

**Nancy Stohlman:** both. And, and that was really my goal. So it was sort of trying to hit two ends at the same time, which I didn't know if it would work or not, because I really wanted to, as you say, like honor and validate the people who've been building the genre and speak to new people who are like, what is flash fiction, you know, and, or maybe people who are not new to writing, but, you know, uh, not working in that genre.

So it was really a challenge to try to create a book that did both, you know, that didn't talk down to one group, but didn't bore the other. Um, and I think it worked because I, because there, there's a progression through the book. So there's really like, you know, it begins, what is slash fiction? Let's just get this out of the way, you know, [00:21:00] like, let's, let's dismiss some of these mythologies.

Okay. Now how do we write it? And then as the book goes along, it's like, okay, and now how do we edit it? Okay. And now how do we put it together? In collections and now how do we so I feel like people even who've been writing flash fiction for a while can just skip to the section they need you know if they're editing they skip to the editing section if they're needing new inspiration then they go back to the beginning.

Um, so I think it has done that and it has allowed, it has been like a, an invitation, hence the title, but it has been like, here's an invitation for you to come to our party. Anytime you want to come, like, here's where the party's at. And a lot of people have dropped by the party and decided, some people have even said, wait a minute.

That's what I've been writing all this time. I just didn't know there was a name for it or. Yeah.

**Daniel Dissinger:** That's something that I feel there are probably a lot of writers. Out there thinking what they're doing, no one, there's no [00:22:00] one doing what they're doing and it's not to kind of go, it's not in the way of like being like I'm, I've created something but like, who can I come to, to learn more or is there a community that I can be a part of for support, right, especially like you know we were talking also before this about, you know, As creators as

teachers and everything like this idea of burnout and how much now we're seeing it much more prevalent in a prevalent way.

So like as a creative, you know, and especially as a flash fiction writer, if you don't know there's a community and you feel out there by yourself, who's going to help support when you burn out or you need help, right? So it feels like it develops community, which writers don't know that they need. I feel like they think it's very, it is this solitude thing there, but you need community sometimes to support most of it.

I would say all the time, not sometimes.

**Nancy Stohlman:** No, you do. Even if that's Um, even if that's just people that you can text and [00:23:00] say, like, how's your writing going? Because, you know, I, I'm having a day here or, you know, or that you can celebrate. Like I just came up with the title of my new manuscript. Finally. What do you think?

You know? So, yeah, I do think that we need that. And I've been talking a lot about burnout actually. Um, in fact, a couple of weeks ago, I had been so burned out myself that I decided. If I'm burned out, I bet other people are burned out. Let's do like a week long burnout thing together. And so I put that out there and I said, you know, how many of you are feeling any of these symptoms, you know, and like this could possibly be burnout.

Let's hang out for a week and talk about it. And so we did we talked about all these different angles of what could burn us out, not just the physical but you know you have to start with the physical Are you sleeping Are you eating Are you exhausted, like, no wonder you're not writing you're exhausted, like, let's begin there.

And then even into this idea of [00:24:00] like. Are you playing enough in your creative work or is it all drudgery? Are you always coming to the page doing like the thing you should be doing, but there's really no joy. There's really no delight. There's there's no, as Julia Cameron would say in the artist's way, uh, have you been on an artist's date lately?

Have you just gone and done something delightful for your little artist self in there who will then soak up all these great ideas? Even just from a walk or a museum or whatever that may be. Um, so are you giving yourself that? Because if we're never playing, if everything counts so heavily, then that can burn us out, not having community.

As you say, we'll burn us out. It will leave us feeling alone or, you know, why does any of this matter? Um, or jealous, you know, if all we're looking at is the social media feeds of other writers and they all seem like they're, you know, on top of the world, which we know isn't true, but, um, yeah, then you're going to feel isolated or, or jealous.

And, [00:25:00] and so often I think when people are burned out, what they'll do is they'll take a class, right? Okay. I'm burned out. I need to take class. Right. But I can tell you as a person who offers many classes, there's always some people who sign up and they never show up to the class. And I know that this is not because they're forgetful.

It's because they're burned out. They don't really need me to give them homework, right? They don't really need more exercises. What they need is to. Play, delight, you know, all these other things and then we're ready for some exercises. Then we're ready for a class. So I think if you've ever signed up for a class and I've done it, trust me, you've ever signed up for a class and then just been like, I can't handle this right now.

I'll just, I'll just save all this material and read it later. And you never do that. Um, it's because you're not ready for that yet. You're ready to go. write some things that don't count, or maybe even make some music or do some painting or something that's not even writing just to [00:26:00] remember the joy of creating.

So I did this, and then we ended the week with a virtual retreat. So we all met on zoom. It was about 75 people on zoom. Wow. Right. And that's just the people who showed up in person. And we just, you know, we went deep for an hour and a half. We just talked a lot about burnout and did some exercises to kind of excavate what's going on and what we really need.

And it was so successful that I've made the material. perpetually available for free. So if you go to my website at [www.nancystolman.com](http://www.nancystolman.com), you will see a little, um, free five day burnout series that you can register for. And, um, it will just automatically send you, you know, five modules of things to think about not homework, but things to think about and angles to come at your burnout and.

Ultimately to reinforce that we can take little tiny micro steps that make things 10 [00:27:00] percent better. And that's, that's a much more realistic way to deal with burnout, you know, 10 percent better. And then maybe 10 percent better

after that. Uh, so yeah, I invite any of you who are feeling burned out to go check that out and know that you're not alone, that we all feel it at some

**Daniel Dissinger:** point.

How do you do it? Because I, I'm sitting here thinking like you get the audio book, you have your own writing, you have new work coming, you're teaching, you do retreats, and now you put this module to get these modules together. How does Nancy Solman not like battle back that type of burn burnout or, I mean, obviously you, you experienced it, but what, when you experienced that burnout, what is it that you do to kind of like.

You know, refill the well as this.

**Nancy Stohlman:** Yeah. Well, and yes, as I, you know, these things are all true. And as a human being, I'm also experiencing all the life events and all the burnout. And that was really what motivated me to do it. It was almost [00:28:00] like, Okay, I'm burned out. So rather than pretend I'm not burned out, let me go explore what I can do to bring back my own sense of vitality.

And while I'm doing that, let me just see if anybody else wants to do that with me. So it was almost like, Teach what you need to learn. And I do that a lot where it's like what I need to learn. I just decide to teach it. And then together we learn it. And I think that for me, it, it really has to do with authenticity because, um, yeah, I had some pretty interest or not interesting, but some, um, really challenging life events happening over the winter and.

Uh, I was in the middle of teaching and all these sorts of things. And I just decided like, okay, I've got two choices. I can pretend everything's fine and slowly die inside. Or I can just let people know, like, by the way, have life events going on. But I want you to know, like we're, I'm leaning in. I'm going to, I'm going to take this as opportunities to go [00:29:00] deeper in my own creative work and to let this feed me in strange ways.

And I'm inviting you to do the same thing. So that was one of the most enlightened, enlightening things that I did when I realized I was burned out, because I think if I had tried to pretend I wasn't, it would have all fallen apart, and I would have been people would have known I was hiding something, you know, and then I was just sort of faking it.

But I think as soon as people realize like, oh, you're human you're having life events, you're burning out, but. I'm also a human, I have life events, and we're

gonna do this together, and we're gonna just like, suck the marrow out of life, good or bad, and we're gonna put it on the page, because we're artists, you know, we're artists, we're artistic people, and we know how to take life events and turn them into art.

So let's do that now, together. So that's how I do it. I just sort of do it in motion, because yeah, if I pretended I didn't get [00:30:00] burned out it would, it would be a disaster. Yeah, I,

**Daniel Dissinger:** I feel like That's something that I'm always working on, like, how do I make sure when I feel burned out to take a step back and to kind of like, uh, to acknowledge it.

And I think that's the thing that like, for me, that I have the hardest trouble doing, like acknowledging that I'm burned out because I'm always like, well, I have to get this done or I have to do this. And if I'm sitting still, like I always feel guilty about those things. And I think, you know. Academia plays a big role in that, I think, for me, where it's just like, if I'm not producing something or if I'm not grading or if I, if I'm not doing X, Y, and Z, going to some committee meeting or whatever.

That, you know, what am I in this for? Like that you're not burned out, you're being lazy. And then I start to kind of get down on that and it really kind of [00:31:00] compounds. Um, and I think in 2020, that definitely came to a head for me. I'm feeling, you know, with this podcast too, like. Now we, I release every other week now, like if something's late, I try not to worry.

I'm behind on an email for a previous episode and I'm trying to put that together. But I think we hold ourselves so tightly to so many deadlines sometimes that really there are zero consequences for. But they feel so detrimental to our existence and, and I think like we then even sometimes as teachers, like that bleeds into the way we interact with our students.

And right now they need like they need care like they need to see that you're human too and I think, right. It's been a good approach.

**Nancy Stohlman:** Yeah. No, I think you're right. And I think that we have a sort of like worship of the productivity gods, you know, and, and yeah, it's so many people who hung out with me over this burnout week, uh, said like, [00:32:00] it's so great to remember that I'm burned out.

Not that I'm lazy and horrible the way, you know, society would make me think. And it's so true. Um, Burnouts real and if you didn't have a big life event to burn you out just existing the last two years in this like very strange altered reality. That's enough to burn a person out. And I have to remember when I'm teaching.

And I'm not teaching freshmen in college, mostly at this point, but the freshmen in college right now are kids who were virtual in their senior years of high school, you know, so this has, this transition has been extremely wacky for them. I'm sure. And add any, I'll add all the other things, add the politics, add the wars, add the fires, add the personal tragedies, um, add the ongoing COVID, uh, up and down.

And. You know, if we weren't burned out, we would be robotic. I [00:33:00] would think.

**Daniel Dissinger:** Yeah. Yeah. And that's

**Nancy Stohlman:** why I think artists need to catch this and take care of themselves now, because we need artistic people to lead us out of this. We need visionaries and I think all artistic people are visionaries, and, you know, when the world is ugly.

We need the visionaries to step up and say, how about this? How about this? Look at this, you know, let's, let's remember we could go this way. Hey guys, there's a path. Let's try this, you know, and, and I think that that's where that's what we've been preparing for all our lives is to step up in these dark times and be the visionaries.

So we need to take care of ourselves or we're not our burnout is not serving anybody, including us.

**Daniel Dissinger:** Yeah. I'm so, uh, interested and enthralled by that idea of the artists taking care of themselves because like the romanticized vision of the writer or the artist is like someone who literally [00:34:00] allows their creativity to drive them into the ground.

Uh, and, and we see that over and over again, we see that with writers and actors and musicians a lot of the time, and we're watching that happen over and over again. And I mean, I also like, you know, in March I did a whole three episode on Kerouac and here's another artist that literally drove himself into an early grave.

And we see that. And we, we don't talk about that, that aspect of it. We really just focus on like some of the work, which the work is the work, but you really, the, the lessons that need to be learned from past creatives and artists and like how new artists need to go, well, my job is to stay alive as long as quite possible as possible.

That, that is my job to stay alive. And. I think that's a really big it's it's a huge thing that needs to be discussed so I'm glad like what you did that [00:35:00] workshop because that's that five week retreat sounds like something everyone needs at this moment.

**Nancy Stohlman:** Yeah, yeah, I think it is and I and you're right I think that, you know, the romanticized version is, you know, will abuse ourselves and make art till we drop.

But think about all the artists that we've lost who could have given us so much more if they were able to keep going, you know, if they had been supported in that way. And I think, um, one thing that's, that's very clear to me. Uh, as a mother of, you know, teenage age children and you know, a professor of, of young people in college is, is that the new generation of young people, they are more aware of this.

Like this is part of the conversation now, you know, we, it, there's language around it, you know, there's at least an awareness of it. So I think that's helpful, but. Yeah, there's I think there's a lot more to overcome. [00:36:00] And I think just being in these conversations, as you said is, is really helpful to let people know that yes we're not machines, we're not going to just like puts more gas in there and just keep going like we do have to take care of ourselves.

And if you think about the creative process, even, you know, as a microcosm. Every time we sit down to write, we don't have a brilliant idea. You know, sometimes we have to spend weeks and weeks and weeks like thinking, using, playing, considering, you know, digging as Natalie Goldberg would talk about, you know, like planting the tulips in the, in the ground so that one day they shoot out.

And it looks like it happened all of a sudden, but actually there was a lot of care intending that went into those seeds well before we saw a flower. So. It's, it's the same thing in our actual process. You know, we have to do a lot of things that people don't see behind the scenes in order to get that one good idea and, you know, harness it.



**Daniel Dissinger:** Right. I [00:37:00] mean, it's amazing that when we, even what, what I, what I do at USC is when teaching the academic essay or quote unquote, the academic essay, whatever I do in my class, but, um, how much is discussed in our department about. All right, we need them to write four major projects in 15 weeks, and if I think of putting that up against like the creative process and kind of how we know how writers write and work.

Four projects in 15 weeks is, is kind of, you know, impossible and sort of, you know, mentally and emotionally abusive to the creator, because how are you supposed to do that? Right? And when you, when you are faced when the students are faced with that, they're also faced with all the other projects you're doing in their other classes, so they're not just doing your projects they're doing.

Projects for three other professors that are [00:38:00] going along the whole semester, no wonder like they're, they can't produce and it's like, are we there to kind of like have this, like, like this veil of like academic rigor, or are we trying to teach them something like there's like two ways of approaching this and it's so amazing, like, as you're talking about, like process and I'm like, Well, we talk about writing as a process in the class, but we're really contradicting that with four gigantic projects or four projects, you know, one, maybe one or two over the course, like would be feasible in like a step by step mentality.

**Nancy Stohlman:** Absolutely. All the way to, you know, I work with a lot of grad students on their thesis and stuff and same thing with, with that, you know, I mean, it takes me on average four years to write. finish, publish a book, right? So every, about four years is my average there, you know, a grad student has to pump that out in a year or two, perhaps, you know, with much research involved in all of that.

Um, so yeah, I think in a way it's a theater, [00:39:00] you know, what we, what we do. And I try to say that as I go along, you know, we're only doing two workshops in here, but in real life, you would revise this 25 times, but we don't have 25 weeks. So we're going to do two, but We're going to pretend, you know, this is pretending you're pretending to be a writer here for a minute.

And this is a taste of what it might be like in real life, but yeah, you're right. Um, so I think in a way we focus so much on, on gradable outcomes and we can't grade that other stuff. So it just doesn't make the cut, even though. You know, as artistic people running these classes, we know that it's part of it.

**Daniel Dissinger:** Yeah. Yeah. So what's coming up for Nancy Stoltman? Like what kind of stuff you have? I mean, I know you always have something, you're

always holding a retreat. You're always doing this. You're just out there in the world, you know, [00:40:00] putting it out there for everybody. So yeah, I'm really curious, like what's coming up.

**Nancy Stohlman:** I'm excited about what's coming up. So I am hosting two different retreats this summer. One is going to be in June the first, uh, second week of June in, uh, Spain in Southern Spain, and that one's just about full. I think I have one spot left. You can go to [nancystolman.com](http://nancystolman.com) for any of these things I'm talking about, by the way.

And then I'm doing one in Colorado in August, actually two in Colorado in August, so they're back to back one week and then the next week, and they are up in Grand Lake, Colorado, which is in right by Rocky Mountain National Park. It's amazing. It's beautiful. So, um, what we'll do in those retreats is You know, have some workshop time, have some generative time.

They're mostly generative and then have lots of like go get inspired in nature time and then hang out with other creatives and talk about writing time. And then maybe like enjoy a meal time and then maybe go to [00:41:00] bed early time and all this restorative stuff so that people really come back feeling more.

able to do their work, which is really what we need to be doing. So I'm really excited about those. And, um, if, if anybody wants more information about those definitely contact me at [nancy.stillman.com](http://nancy.stillman.com). Um, and then I have a new book coming out next year, 2023. Yes. So pre orders will happen in September. So you'll hear me start talking about it in September.

I'm really, really, really excited about this book. It's called after the rapture and it's coming out with Mason dar press and they, they got what I was trying to do. I was really nervous about it because it was a book I had written. I may have talked about it last time. It was a book I had written pre 2020.

So it was a social satire basically. Um, and. Then I finished it in 2020 and then the world just collapsed and I [00:42:00] just watched this manuscript sort of coming true in a weird way, almost like not exactly true but slant. Every little, you know, satirical detail I had put in this manuscript was now like a reality.

And. So I was like, Oh, no, this whole book is obsolete. You there's everybody's just gonna think I wrote about the quarantine. But no, I think because I did write it beforehand, there is, you can tell the difference, you know, and It does comment on things and it does comment on them pre, uh, pre quarantine. So I'm really excited to have it come out and just see what people think.

The people at Mason jar have been awesome and just like, um, so heaping so much praise on it. And so I'm like, yes, they get it. Okay. It was either going to be awesome or obsolete one of the two. So, um, I'm feeling really hopeful about it and I'm really excited. It's a flash novel. So it's, um, it's a novel length idea.

[00:43:00] In flash fiction pieces. So,

**Daniel Dissinger:** Oh, okay. So it's like, I was actually going to ask you about that. Like when you said flash novel, I'm like, Oh, that's interesting. So, cause in my head, as soon as you said that I'm like, Oh, like what would be the difference between that and a novella and like, you know, I think you might've answered it, but do other bigger differences because like, if it's a collection of flash pieces, like how

**Nancy Stohlman:** does that.

Yeah. It's more than just a collection. Um, it definitely has the feeling of like, the journey of a novel, a short novel. Um, but it's, it's like broken, like a mosaic. It's like all the little flash pieces are then reconstructed into this mosaic that makes the full picture, but then the individual pieces are also interesting as flash or micro pieces on their own as well.

So, um, I'm This is the thing I'm most interested these days is this sort of fragmented flash novel.

**Daniel Dissinger:** Wow. Wow. It sounds like you're really [00:44:00] pushing the genre because I mean, that's it's, and it sounds like a genre that can be pushed around, like not put, you know, Mal, you know, we can reconstructed disassembled and, you know, and you know, me, I like fragments, like, so as a writer and worked with ellipses and fragments and, you know, this all really.

you know, interesting to kind of see the, the potential for what's between a fragmented piece and, and kind of the, well, how I think it's broken and a mosaic and a reconstructed that's sounds so exciting, Nancy. I mean, we're coming down to the end of the episode. I'm So glad you came back on to talk about this.

So many things happen. I feel like I can have you on probably every week and there's going to be something new. I love it. It's just sounds so exciting and I'm so happy for the success of the book. And now with the audio book, is it come, is it out the audio book right now? The book

**Nancy Stohlman:** is out. It's Only on Audible until June.

So Audible has an exclusive 90 days on it. [00:45:00] So if you have Audible already, it will come up as one of your options. If you're new to Audible, you get a free book when you join Audible. So you could actually, um, get going short for free if you're new to Audible, but yes, you should be able to find it easily there.

And then, um, after June it will be available on other sites as

**Daniel Dissinger:** well. Wow. Excellent. Wow. And anyone, you know, let everyone know how they can get in touch with you. Um, social media and everything. Yeah, I'm on

**Nancy Stohlman:** social media. I do. I'm on Facebook. I'm on Instagram. I'm on Twitter, but I neglect Twitter terribly.

So I would say, find me on Instagram or Facebook or, um, go to my website and there's a contact sheet. You can get ahold of me that way. I'm always really good about responding. And, uh, yeah, I love. Getting to meet new people and just kind of hash it out with, you know, what other people are doing in all sorts of places and ways.

So I'd love to hear from you. Come talk to me. If you're just new with flash fiction, you can just come say hi. Um, I'd love to hear

**Daniel Dissinger:** it. [00:46:00] Excellent. Excellent. Wow. I'm so happy you came on. This has been so much fun to hear about your. Again, like about the success for the book and this new project coming and hold the retreats.

I mean, everyone, Nancy Stohlman is a dynamo. So definitely get in touch, support the book, learn about flash fiction. It's. An amazing genre. I feel like it's just an amazing way to express, express yourself. Um, as a writer, I'm hoping to be like flash academic essay soon because that'll be, I think really be awesome.

Oh, Nancy, thank you so much for coming on everyone. Please, please leave your comments at the, in the below the episode. Hit us up on Twitter at writing remix pod with every, all your questions, thoughts, comments, ideas, and yeah. And then we'll see you at the next episode, Nancy.

**Nancy Stohlman:** Thank you. Perfect. Thanks so much for having me.

I had a great time