



THELMA VIRATA de CASTRO

Transcript: “Legacy, Language, and Laughter”

Sarah Greenman:

My name is Sarah Greenman, and this is Collaborative Alchemy. I was first introduced to Thelma Virata de Castro's work a few years ago while scanning an arts calendar that featured the work of women artists. Thelma had written a play called *The Fire in Me*, which is based on a series of interviews she did in San Diego's diverse Filipinx community, all of whom were connected in some way to the issue of domestic violence, including survivors. After attending the play. One of the interviewees said, "Today, I felt vulnerable and strong. Today, I found more hope and a sense of community. Today, I felt liberated knowing that my story, like so many other stories in your play, was heard." Thelma Virata de Castro is a creative alchemist. Transforming lived experience into art. Her work is profound, timely, expansive, and very funny.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Creativity can take many forms and everyone can be creative. That's why we live.

Sarah Greenman:

Thelma Virata de Castro is a Filipinx dramatist whose plays explore identity and belonging. Her interview based work with Asian story theater investigates history and race within specific communities, with subjects ranging from the incarceration of Japanese Americans to contemporary mixed racial identity. She's acted as playwright and community liaison for AST's California Humanities project *Hollow Hollow*, which centered San Diego Filipinx stories. With AST, she won the San Diego Foundation's Creative Catalyst Fellowship for her play *The Fire in Me*. And she also received two Hedgebrook residencies, and attended the A Room of Her Own Foundation retreat.

She's also founded San Diego Playwrights, and serves the Dramatists Guild on the Regional Affairs Committee, and as San Diego co ambassador, she builds community in affinity spaces with United AAPI artists, Pinay Playwrights, and Honor Roll!. She worked with incarcerated writers as a Playwrights Project teaching artist, and she also serves on the board of directors for San Diego Writers, Inc. In 2022, she became a commissioned artist with the Old Globe, and the San Diego Union Tribune included her in its list of Phenomenal San Diego Women Creators and Performers.

Thelma. I am so excited to talk to you today. Thank you for agreeing to sit down and have a conversation with me about your creative practice. Welcome.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Thank you, Sarah. I'm so excited to just chit chat.

Sarah Greenman:

Me too. Me too. Truly. So, for those of my listeners who don't know who you are, although they're going to know real soon, tell us about yourself. Who are you and where are you calling in from?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I am a Filipinx playwright, and even that, we have to break that down.

Sarah Greenman:

Break it down.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

So Filipinx is spelled F-I-L-I-P-I-N-X, with an X at the end. And the reason I've chosen that is because I could call myself a Filipino. I could call myself a Filipina-

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Because those are gendered terms. And this originates in the Philippines, which was colonized by the Spanish. And so that's why we have the gendered Filipino, Filipina. So I've chosen Filipinx because it's not gendered, and I just want to be more inclusive with that term. But it is an ever evolving term.

Sarah Greenman:

Nice.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

It might not be right a week from now. It might not be right two years from now. Who knows.

Sarah Greenman:

Isn't that the beauty of language, though, that it actually is large enough and expansive enough to hold the way we think and change with the way we think?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

It is so important. It's not static. It's evolving.

Sarah Greenman:

That's why I love writing.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

And people want such certainty. "You said this." Okay, but now I'm saying this. I've changed my mind.

Sarah Greenman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think, though, if we're going to be in a consent based society, we also have to let go of certainty around language. What works right now for someone won't work tomorrow for them. And so the kind of ... I love the way you are loosely holding the way you're identifying yourself, and also using it as a way to uproot yourself from the colonizers of your people.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Thank you.

Sarah Greenman:

That's huge.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I'm actually part of another group that we're calling Pinay Playwrights, which is very gendered, but it is for female identifying playwrights. And so we've explored that, too. What do we want to be called? And that word is just so cute to us. But maybe it won't be cute in the future to be Pinay. I have T-shirts that say, "Proud to be Pinay." So I am of Philippine ancestry, and I'm very proud of that, and it is a part of me. It is such an eye opening experience to go through the decolonization process every day, and with my children.

Sarah Greenman:

Yes.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

My parents were born in the Philippines. I was born in the United States, and I grew up in the United States. So I'm in that position of what are you. Do you feel more comfortable with me because I don't have a Filipino accent? I majored in English literature at UCLA. That blows my mind. Why do I know more about the literature of England versus the literature of my home country? So I grew up in San Diego, went to public schools. I started writing plays in my last quarter at UCLA. And it was a form that just really fit with me, with the voices in my head, and the snappiness, and the humor.

Sarah Greenman:

Why do you think that resonated so deeply with you? I understand the lock fit of, ooh, voices in my head, and the kind of humor you can bring to it. But it's definitely a restrictive form.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Yes. That's the heartbreak of it. It requires so many resources.

Sarah Greenman:

It does.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

It's also the joy because it's collaborative. It is so much fun to play with actors, to give them a script. I know you know this because you're a playwright.

Sarah Greenman:

Yes I do.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

And just to see what they bring to it. I'm learning to be more specific in my stage directions, and in creative ways too, like stage direction. Maybe the line is no. And then I might put in the stage direction, "This is it. She really means it." And that informs the actor, instead of just ... Before, I was told, "Oh no, it needs to go in the dialogue. The actor will interpret it." But hey, I'm a playwright, and I want you to know that this is what I meant by this line.

Sarah Greenman:

Absolutely. I love stage directions. I had a writer once tell me, a teacher writer, tell me that I needed to have no stage directions, that Shakespeare had no stage directions, so you don't need any. But I do a lot of highly stylized work. And so, if I just have it in the dialogue, then it's all actor dependent. It's all me just betting that the director is psychic or something.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Yes.

Sarah Greenman:

And so I love that you're really leaning into robust stage directions.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

And we get to make our own rules, too.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah, we do.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

May as well.

Sarah Greenman:

Right?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Like, "Oh no, your play is lacking because it doesn't fit this form." Nope. This is a story I want to tell. And this is a form it needs. And I've gotten permission because I attended a workshop through the Dramatists Guild that gave me that permission. So that's my source I'm citing.

Sarah Greenman:

Oh, the permissive Dramatists Guild. On your website, you have this beautiful artist statement, and you say that you explore challenging issues with honesty and compassion, and that you employ humor as an opportunity to breathe and build trust. I love that. I've never thought of humor as a form of oxygenation, but I would love for you to say more about that.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Oh, the value of the breath. I have a loved one who could not breathe recently due to asthma. Let's not take that for granted. And just in these times, the value of the breath, it is a privilege to be able to breathe, as we know, with the murder of George Floyd and all the tragedies in our lives. So humor, it makes us pause. It makes us think of things in unexpected ways. It builds our community. Sarah, you and I could sit in a room and laugh for an hour and not know what are we laughing about. Oh my gosh. We could never attend a conference together where it was very serious.

Sarah Greenman:

We would definitely be church laughter folks.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Stop it, Sarah. Don't. No, don't look at me. Don't look at me. So when you can laugh, it's saying, "Let's not take this too seriously." Even though it's the absolute, most serious subjects in the world that we're exploring. And that's the trick, is the horribleness with the joy, all mixed together. Whoopee.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah. You seem to hold that complexity really beautifully in your plays where you're dealing with just some very powerful issues that have gravitas and really affect your community. And yet there are these threads of giggle and fun, just abject fun through them. And I just ... I love that, that is a way in which you express the beauty of being a human.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Thank you.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

It is hard to escape the heavy stuff. It would be great to write a play about nothing, that didn't mean anything, that had no heartbreak. So for example, I'm taking an ancestor class, ancestor space, with my friend and fellow ... Fellow, is that the right word?

Sarah Greenman:

Fellow? Yeah, maybe.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Pinay Playwright, Amanda L. Andre, and she gave us these assignments. And one of them was to watch a movie that was made in your homeland, in the mother tongue of your homeland. And I looked through Netflix. Okay, what Filipino movies do they have on here? There is a lot of crime and gritty subjects. And so I chose something that I thought would be lighter. I think they said it was a comedy. It was called Lola Igna, I think. It's, I-G-N-A, if I'm getting that right. And it's about this woman, she's like 118 years old, and she's hoping to get this prize. Her whole village is hoping she gets the prize of being the oldest grandmother living. Like, okay. That'll be fun. And then I watch it, and it's about poverty. You can't escape it. It's family issues. And it was a perfect movie to watch because that's what I want to explore in this play I'm working on. But, I don't know. Maybe I should look for tragedy, and then I'll find comedy.

Sarah Greenman:

Maybe. Go in the opposite way. Possibly. It's funny you mentioned ancestors. My next question to you was going to be who are the ancestors you draw strength from?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Oh, you're so sweet, Sarah. My mom passed away in 1999. So she's around.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

And my mother-in-law passed away in 2020, and I wear her clothes.

Sarah Greenman:

You do?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

And I am figuring out how her energy comes to me through the clothes.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Because I get pretty mad. I don't always show that, and people get surprised. So when I have this mad energy, but I'm wearing my mother-in-law's clothes, I'm like, she was the sweetest woman on the planet. So how ... I guess I would be a lot more stinky if it wasn't for her calming me down and saying, "Be nice."

Sarah Greenman:

I love that you're using her clothing as a way of infusing her best qualities into your difficult moments.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I hope so. I'm literally walking in her shoes.

Sarah Greenman:

Wow. Wow, Thelma.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Filipino women.

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Sarah Greenman:

Today I'm talking with San Diego based playwright, Thelma Virata de Castro. There is a quote from Audra Lord featured prominently on the poster for Thelma's 2019 premiere of *The Fire in Me*. It reads, "There is no thing as a single issue struggle because we do not live single issue lives." Thelma has dedicated her creative life to surfacing and amplifying the multilateral needs, expressions, and yearnings of her community.

Sarah Greenman:

You are a part of San Diego community. What knowledge is your community passing down right now to the younger generations?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

What a tough question, Sarah. Yeah, because our young people are in pain.

Sarah Greenman:

Do you feel like there are things that your community is holding for them, supporting them through, or do you feel like that's not happening?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I'll start with some positives. I'm part of this group called Silayan Filipina, and they have a program for young women. And they support them by doing all kinds of trainings, like self-defense is one, and dancing is another. It's just really a variety of programs that young women can engage in. And I have to give a shout out to one of my friends and colleagues Anne Bautista. She was the president of Silayan Filipina for several years, and she was my partner in the project about domestic violence in San Diego's Filipinx community. She's an immigrant lawyer. I'm just going to go over her bio, too. But she was a lawyer who aided survivors of domestic violence with their immigration status. And so she has been such a leader in providing programs for immigrant women, not just young women, but of all ages, to find empowerment. And the big message is you are not alone. So, I am part of some organizations that are available for community to show that you are not alone.

Sarah Greenman:

That's beautiful. That's beautiful. The play you referred to, that was The Fire in Me that you wrote.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Yes.

Sarah Greenman:

What knowledge do you think your community is forgetting?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I think we're forgetting to center ourselves in so many ways. We are the community. The reason politicians want to hang out with us is because we have power. We are authentic.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

We have culture. We have values. And they want to come take pictures with us. They want a piece of us. So I would like us to just enjoy ourselves for who we are. Hey, I took a picture with a politician this past week. But I want to center ourselves. It's not, oh, we're important because this representative asked us to have a meeting. No, we're just important.

Sarah Greenman:

You are. Yeah, you mentioned power. How do you define power?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Power is knowing yourself.

Sarah Greenman:

I love that definition.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Oh good. I got it right. It's knowing your priorities. Then you're not waiting on the big institution to bless you.

Sarah Greenman:

For real.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

The big institution should say thank you for sharing your creativity with them.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah. Boy, howdy. Well, where do you find power in your life? I mean, I can imagine knowing you. But where do you find power and agency?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I find power in being able to talk it out with my peeps. I just have to keep going, and charting, and charting. I'm ... all day. And then when it clicks, like okay, this is how I can handle it. So for me, power is in the process, which you're so great about.

Sarah Greenman:

Thank you. You know me. I love a process.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

A process and a practice.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

It's not about okay, I've complete ... This happened, too. I got a certificate in social justice this week. Check.

Sarah Greenman:

In social justice?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Yeah.

Sarah Greenman:

Awesome. That's great. Yeah. We'll put a check by your name.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Next time I get in an argument in a parking lot. I'm going to whip that certificate out.

Sarah Greenman:

You can say, "Look, excuse me. I have a certificate in social justice." Oh my God, I want to be there. Or no, you should write that scene, Thelma.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

So many funny scenes to write. So it's not in a degree. I'll have to be honest, though, the credentials help.

Sarah Greenman:

Sure do, especially when you're trying to talk to somebody about what you're trying to do.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

An affiliation with one of those institutions that I pick on helps, and I've benefited, too. So I guess the nice thing would be to balance all of that. Because the institutions are part of the community, too.

Sarah Greenman:

They are, and they're made by people. That's the thing I have to keep thinking about. It's not an entity unto itself. Power is enacted in the moment in a relational way, which means people are maintaining it. People. And I believe in people. So, I'm there with you where it's like, ugh, sticky. Sticky wicked.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I think you and I both have an appreciation of all the admin work-

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah, we do.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

-that goes into running things.

Sarah Greenman:

That's true. I do.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

So when I think of people in these institutions, I'm thinking at the admin level, too. Who sent out that email? Who's ordering the food?

Sarah Greenman:

Yep.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Who's doing-

Sarah Greenman:

Who are they answering to? Which board members wanted to see that version of the email first, and then changed it before they sent it?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Ooh, you're saying truths.

Sarah Greenman:

We are saying truths. It feels good, right?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Yeah. I feel better afterwards.

Sarah Greenman:

Me too. Me too. You mentioned practice and process, and I would love to hear about your own personal creative practice, and what that looks like, and what that's meant to you.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Sarah, you know that I scramble. I need a deadline. I need something outside of myself to keep going. That's how I've been most effective. There we go, using those words. So it's nice to have that framework like, oh, that grant is due on Monday, and so I better write the first draft of the full length play that they asked for as part of it. But once I can get to that point of it's creativity time, then, like you, nature is an inspiration, my ancestors are an inspiration. And what the heck, Sarah? We went through a pandemic, and we talked earlier about bringing our whole selves. I'm bringing out tarot cards. On grant applications, I'm bringing that.

Sarah Greenman:

I love it.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I'm saying, "Yeah, you want to know what I'll doing on this residency to connect with my ancestors? I'm bringing my Oracle cards." In that ancestor class I talked about with Amanda, she has us looking at astrology to connect to our ancestors, and herbalism. Sarah?

Sarah Greenman:

You know you're speaking my language.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

So, that's a wonderful part of the creative process that has been opened up to me in the past few years. It's not all about the scholarly research in order to write this play. I need to connect on the spiritual level. I want to know ... I just learned what a moon sign is, but what is the moon sign of my ancestor? What's my moon sign? And it clicks because you see themes in the tarot cards, themes like the hanged man tarot card where you see things from a different perspective, the opposite perspective, and it opens up your eyes to what is going on.

Sarah Greenman:

I think of those kinds of ways of knowing as usually ancestral, usually cultural, usually matriarchal. And these are ways of knowing that our society has not only erased, but invalidated in every way. So the fact that creatives like you and I, and so many across the country, are reinvesting in older ways of knowing, more traditional ways of knowing, ways of knowing from our own particular cultures, you from Filipinx culture, and then me from Celtic, I think it's revolutionary.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Absolutely. And you said you're studying Gaelic language?

Sarah Greenman:

I am, yeah. I'm really looking to rematriate.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I'm really proud of you because-

Sarah Greenman:

Thank you.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I'm so intimidated that my parents did not teach me Tagalog, and they call it Filipino now, because their thinking, and the prevailing thinking at the time, was if you want to speak English better or well, don't teach them another language.

Sarah Greenman:

Right. Right. I just think, though, that this verbal tether, it literally is the air moving through our bodies that comes out in the language of our original people. That is, to me, a lifeline to information, untapped knowledge that is my birthright. And that's why I started badly learning Gaelic. I was actually reading a little bit of Robin Wall Kimmerer the other day, and she was talking about learning the language of her Potawatomi ancestors. And she was saying even badly speaking and mispronouncing a few words that were in the mouth of my grandmother's grandmother is a kind of reckoning, that it doesn't require my perfectionism or my whole knowledge, even. Even if I'm just learning some poetry to recite, and I don't have a conversational understanding of my language, even that in and of itself is me opening up a channel back, and reaching back and grabbing my ancestors' hands.

I love the way she writes about that. I was able to let go of perfectionism around the Gaelic language for me, because I'm never going to learn it. I have no one to speak it with. There's only 33,000 speakers in the world. And that's better than the 13,000 that there were in 1991. So it's growing and coming back. But I don't have anyone to speak with, and I have to learn at my own pace. And I've just forgiven myself for not knowing it and not being able to speak it fluently. Just pieces of the puzzle is all I need.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Wow, Sarah. In my community, people have started schools. They offer classes, and it's taught in the high schools, too. My husband speaks it, and you know who taught him? His mama. She was a Tagalog teacher.

Sarah Greenman:

Oh my gosh.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

So, maybe that's hopefully what will come through with me when I'm wearing her clothes, a little authentic language.

Sarah Greenman:

[crosstalk 00:26:51] Well, and that's some of the knowledge that your community is passing down, too, then, and trying not to forget. I love that.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

It's so hard because things become a lesson. Oh, you need to take Tagalog, and you need to register for a class. And what your creative alchemy cycle has shown me is you put it in practice, just like what we said. Just live it.

Sarah Greenman:

Live it. Yeah.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

And who's around. How ridiculous. I'm taking an ancestry class and it's getting me to talk with my father. I see him every week. We go grocery shopping. But now it's a little more official. All right. Let me ask you these interview questions. Let's just live it.

Sarah Greenman:

Sometimes, though, like you said at the beginning, a structure isn't a bad thing. Sometimes it's an instigative moment. Sometimes it's the little launch pad you need to actually have a real conversation with your father. I felt like this with my grandmother. I had this book that was like a journal, 40 questions to ask your grandma. I gave it to her, and I said, "This is part of a class project. Will you write your answer to some of these questions?" And she said, "No, but you can ask me and I'll tell you." And she want-

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I love this.

Sarah Greenman:

Isn't it great? So she wanted me to actually get into it with her. And so we used that structure as a way to do that. But from that bloomed so many other beautiful pieces of our relationship that I didn't know were possible. So I love the structure as a way of setting you free. But then, like you say, ignoring some of the rules and lifting off in your own direction.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Look what art can do.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Because my brother Emilio Joseph Virata is now a filmmaker, and the pandemic really set him free, I think. He had some video from my ancestors, from us as we were growing up, and it was digitized. And my nephew Roman Virata, his son, interviewed my dad for a school assignment at university.

Sarah Greenman:

Oh my gosh.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

And he put together some of that interview with some of the footage, and it's been shown in film festivals.

Sarah Greenman:

Wow.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Like, okay, there we go using the status. Oh, he's been in film festivals and been nominated for awards. But it all started with connecting with your family. But then you transform it into art.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah. I love that, the way that we metabolize information, and the way it comes out in this more alchemical, creative way. I think it's one of the things that makes us totally human. When people say, "Well, what makes us human?" I really think creativity is where it lands.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

For sure.

Sarah Greenman:

We do most things that other animals do. We do. You can check them off. But I think make art is kind of our own thing.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I'm just laughing because I was in Costco the other day, and I was trailing behind the person with the trash can. And she was going to all the people, giving out samples and interacting with them. It's like scene one over here in the deli section. And I was being a human because we're just shopping, getting food, but it was already transforming in my head like, what is this play about?

Sarah Greenman:

What's my inciting incident? Here it comes. I know it's coming.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

The structure is moving from sample station to sample station.

Sarah Greenman:

I'm glad to hear that I'm not alone in this.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I got to take notes because this is my next grant application.

Sarah Greenman:

You're like, "It's a play that takes place in the Costco, and I'm going to bring my tarot cards. It's going to be great. So 10K, let's go." Actually, speaking of residencies, you are a Hedgebrook alumna, and I have always wanted to do Hedgebrook, which is a writer's residency for women. It's in Washington state, right?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Yes, on Whidbey Island.

Sarah Greenman:

Oh my gosh. Please tell me about your experiences there and why you think it's important that women artists have retreat space.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Thank you so much for bringing that up.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I was an early Hedgebrooker. I went in 1999, which is the year my mom passed away. So that sucks. But I was a lot younger then, and so I had this innocence and ego, like, "Oh, I'm a Filipinx playwright. How many of them are there? I know I'm going to get in." And I did get in. But word has spread since then, and thousands of women writers are applying. And so Hedgebrook has transformed since then to make it more than just the residency, but a community.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

But for the actual residency, it's just gold. And I think the most valuable part that Hedgebrook gives is saying you're worthy. Unfortunately, it's an institution telling women writers that they're worthy, but we need to hear it.

Sarah Greenman:

We do.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

We need to hear, "Hi. You can have this cottage all to yourself for two weeks to write. And don't worry about food. We're going to feed you. And the food is going to be homegrown and special from our chefs. And you can have all this time during the day, do whatever you want. And then at night, come together with the other women writers who are just like you, who are worthy, as well, and have a great dinner with them. You can have readings if you want in the farmhouse."

Sarah Greenman:

It sounds dreamy. It sounds beautiful.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

It was a dream. And so, that's a lesson to ... Here we go again with lessons. It started as a dream from Nancy Nordhoff, who founded it, I believe with her partner. But you can go to the Hedgebrook website to see the specific origins. And it's still around supporting women writers.

Sarah Greenman:

Oh yeah. It's expanding.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Since I have a certificate in social justice, let me just say that I have realized that is my social justice practice, is advocating for women writers and writers of color, and expanding opportunities. And I realized, well, how legit is that, expanding writing opportunities as social justice? Extremely important.

Sarah Greenman:

Extremely important. Oh my gosh. Let me tell you, that is a worthy cause. And I'm not an institution. I'm just a friend telling you that. Oh my gosh, Thelma stories, that's our history. That's how it went down. And if women get to be in charge of their own story, it's going to change everything.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

People can't see you looking at me, but you are fierce.

Sarah Greenman:

Because I believe it, and I know it in my bones. I don't even know where I saw it. There was a quote I read recently from an older writer, a female writer from the turn of the century. And she was saying if women wrote about the truth of their daily existence, it would blow our understanding of the world wide open. And she was writing about domestic life, which was for so long thought as why would we write about domestic life? I'll find who said that. But, I really think it's such an important thing that you're doing, Thelma. I believe in it wholeheartedly.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Thank you. I'm at a point in my community building where I am also thinking about myself and doing that publicly and unapologetically. I've done a lot of community building work. I've founded San Diego Playwrights, which is a local network to support local playwrights. I'm part of Dramatists Guild as a San Diego co ambassador. I've been involved in different groups that advocate for writers. And at this point, I know I need to focus more on my own writing. And I think we all should focus on our own writing.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah. Yeah, we should. That's why I think everyone should have a writing practice. And most people are like, "I'm not a writer. I don't want to write." But I really do believe that if you put words on a page and string them together, and just say something true about your life, it changes you first, and that's enough, even if it just does that. But if you share it, whew.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Power.

Sarah Greenman:

Power.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Where is power?

Sarah Greenman:

That's where power is. Power is in the story. Story should be leading culture, not following it. Yeah.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I love how you focus on creativity because creativity can take many forms. And everyone can be creative. That's why we live.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah. Thelma, what is bringing you abject joy right now?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I'm so glad I met you, Sarah. We haven't even met in real life yet, but just connection-

Sarah Greenman:

It's going to happen. It's going to happen.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Yes. I wonder when.

Sarah Greenman:

It's all a mystery, but it's going to unfold. I know. I'm going to come find you is what's going to happen. I'm finally getting down to Southern California, hopefully sometime this year. And I'm just going to borrow a car from a friend in LA and make the rest of the trek down to San Diego and come find you, maybe down by the San Diego River and [crosstalk 00:37:31] you, your favorite spot.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Okay, put your tracking beam on because I can meet you.

Sarah Greenman:

Okay.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Yeah.

Sarah Greenman:

I love it.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

By the LA River.

Sarah Greenman:

Awesome. We'll just follow our waterways to each other.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

So, connection. I'm meeting some new fun artists who ... If I can just giggle with you, it's done. That's it. So one of the new artists I'm hanging out with is a choreographer, Trixi Agiao, and we've had many conversations about how to pronounce her last name. So it's spelled AGIAO, I believe. And she called me for a meeting, and-

Sarah Greenman:

Did she?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Yeah. We were going to talk about the San Diego arts community, and we ended up riffing on the dance she would choreograph with me in a place that had a lot of arches, because dancers love arches. Just silliness gives me joy.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah, silliness. It's kind of its own medicine, isn't it?

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Absolutely. And you have a big jar. I can see it right behind you.

Sarah Greenman:

Big jar of silliness.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

That you share freely. Thank you, Sarah.

Sarah Greenman:

Oh my gosh, Thelma, it's such a pleasure to talk with you. Thank you for being in my world. I have so loved being in community with you. It makes me feel like we can do this. This thing we're trying to do, we could do it.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Yay. That's the secret. Because then someone else says, "Oh, okay. If you say so."

Sarah Greenman:

Yep.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

You go first. I think I've said that to you. You go first.

Sarah Greenman:

You did. You have, and probably will continue to tell me to go first. I'm happy to go first, but you're doing your own firsts, too. I'm following you, babe.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

Oh, cool. Thanks. What has brought me to this moment, something I'm experiencing is my honesty is much closer to the surface now. I'll ask the hard question, still try to be nice about it, but I bring it up like, "Hey, you said this. That's where I'm coming from," instead of hiding it, and being good, and not saying it, and just taking what you give me. Thank you very much.

Sarah Greenman:

Right. Yeah, you're practicing power in real time. And that, in and of itself, is joyful. I love that.

Thelma Virata de Castro:

I love you, Sarah.

Sarah Greenman:

Oh, Thelma. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Sarah Greenman:

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