

Season One, Episode Three: West Coast Women Writers with DC Frost, debut author of *A Punishing Breed*

Intro: Welcome to Red Hen Radio, a podcast brought to you by Red Hen Press. We're a nonprofit publisher fostering diverse stories every year. On this podcast, you'll get to hear from the people who are inside the literary world — the authors and publishing professionals who are working hard to keep independent literature thriving. Stay with us as we introduce you to today's segment.

Kate: I'm Kate Gale, the publisher of Red Hen Press. I'm here with Denise Frost, the author of *A Punishing Breed*. It's a pleasure to be here with you, DC Frost. Do you wanna tell us a little bit about yourself?

DC Frost: Hi, Kate. It's a pleasure to be here. My name is DC Frost, and that's Denise Cecilia, in case anybody is interested. I'm happy to be here. I wrote this book, *A Punishing Breed*, which is a noir mystery, and I love Red Hen Press.

K: I thought that maybe we could start today's conversation. I wanted to read you one of my favorite poems that Red Hen published. It's in a book, *The Palace of Contemplating Departure*, which is by Brynn Saito. This was chosen by David Mason to win the Benjamin Saltman Award. And for me somehow this poem kind of feels like it's symbolic of Red Hen, of my journey to start Red Hen, and to be with Red Hen. So it's called "Trembling on the Brink of a Mesquite Tree":

And the Lord said *Surprise me* so I moved to LA.
After packing my posters and scrubbing the bathroom and bidding goodbye
to the permanent circus, I drove through The South

with its womb-like weather, and I drove through the center
with its cross-hatched streams, and the century unspooled
like a wide, white road with lines for new writing

and the century unspooled like a spider's insides.
The country was a cipher, so I voted my conscience.
The country was a carton of ten rotten eggs.

The country was a savior—come deliver us from evil!—
and my car burned a scar across the back of an angel
and yes, I was afraid. No I've never gone hungry but I've woken alone

with a ghost in my throat and I've been like the child
who's sure she perceives some creature in the dark—
some night-breathing thing—and I know there is something I can almost see . . .

But the future's a bright coin spinning in sunlight

so fast that it's sparking a flame in the grass, and who knows
where they'll find me—on which sunken highway?—so I'm writing this poem

to remember my name. I'm writing this poem
to let something go, in the mode of surrender, since God
needs a ritual, like kissing needs another, or a knife needs the softness

of a melon in summer, and leaving New York is like leaving
the circus, and entering America is like entering a fortress flooded by soda and
we float to the bars in our giggling terror

and driving from one shore across to another?
That's one sign for freedom, one small stab at change
so when the Lord said *Surprise me* I moved to LA.

So in a way, somehow that poem kind of is a nice lead in to both Red Hen and my book because when I drove to LA, I slept in my car all the way over. I never slept in a hotel. I actually didn't also stop at any restaurants because I felt LA was going to be such an adventure, I should just eat chocolate on the way to LA and sleep at rest areas. I think America might have been a little safer then. I had planned to pick up hitchhikers on the way, but fortunately I changed my mind. I broke down in Texas, and somebody helped me out. I spent most of my money fixing my car in Texas. And when I got to LA to start graduate school, my plan was to start graduate school, become a literary person, and find a job. I had no idea what kind of job and how to figure my life out. I wanted to have a big adventure of my life, though. And I ended up going to college in Arizona, and then getting to LA from there.

But I remember the drive that was first from the East Coast to Arizona, stopping in rest areas, sleeping in my car, and eating the chocolate. One single chocolate bar got me across to Arizona. And then from there, I drove to California. But I knew I would eventually get to California. And I knew that when I got there, my life would be an adventure. I was just reading the latest issue of *Alta*, and it talked about how many people come to California to make themselves over.

And as soon as I got to California, I changed my name to Kate. It had been Kathleen before that, and thought that I could become a whole new person. And I was going to be a much more organized person, which actually did not really happen. But I was going to become a writer and figure everything out. And within a very short time, in a few years, I decided that starting a publishing company would make LA a more literary city. It was much, much more challenging than I thought it was going to be.

And so it's interesting to me, Denise, that both you and I ended up at colleges: You ended up at Oxy. I ended up teaching at a lot of community colleges and then at a state university. You know, the whole college system in California is a way to get from one place to another. When I got here, it was a lot less expensive than it is now. It's a lot more difficult.

DCF: Yes. So first I'll say that I grew up in the suburbs of California. I was born in Los Angeles, both my parents were born in Los Angeles, and my son was born in Los Angeles. That doesn't mean I fought against Los Angeles in my life. I escaped to San Francisco for several years and came back to Los Angeles. But my dad was a teacher at Cal Poly Pomona at the last job of his life. And he really felt that the California system, which was supposed to be this grand idea of people being lifted out of maybe lower middle class or whatever, so that you could go to college. And that would be junior college, which would then be pretty much free, and then state college or state university. So that was his whole idea. So when I went to school, I did go to a junior college, and then I went to a state university, and I was a theater major.

I was in nonprofit work in my career for quite a while and then saw this job open at a small liberal arts college. And entering into that whole world of a small liberal arts college was just eye opening to me. I had worked in the entertainment business. I had worked in public television. And so being in this very, very small campus with a very strict hierarchy was very surprising to me.

And the first time I'd ever been into an admission meeting, the first thing that they said was that everybody that worked in admission had gone to Yale, had gone to all these like East Coast colleges, you know, all the Ivys. And I remember sitting there thinking: *I went to Cal State Fullerton. I don't know how I fit into this world.*

Yet the college was very, very focused on being all about diversity and all about sort of an equity issue, but the diversity actually exists within the people who do the gardening or people who do cleaning up. And, actually, it's very interesting that students pick up on that a lot. A lot of the advocacy for those groups of people come from the students who are being taught all about diversity and equity and inclusion. So to see that sort of idea happening, but at the same time not really happening in reality, was very fascinating to me and I wanted to explore that.

I also am Mexican American or half Mexican American, as is my husband, and obviously as is our child. So I feel like that whole world of first being Latino and then being kind of like half of what you are is a very interesting thing that exists in our society. That's not really you're neither here nor there. You're kind of in the middle, and I wanted to explore that also.

K: Yeah. I think that the differences between the private schools and the California State schools is huge. For quite a while, I was teaching between LMU and Cal State Dominguez, and it was during the Gulf War. And so recruiters would come to LMU to recruit people who graduated, the students who graduated, and they were in white uniforms. So they were recruiting the students to go into officer training. And the Marines would show up on campus at Cal State Dominguez to get the students to drop out of school and go into the marines. And, eventually, the students had a large banner around the student union that said "what is our oil doing underneath their sand". I don't need to explain that further. But, obviously, the students weren't happy with the Marines showing up and trying to get them to drop out of school. And Cal State Dominguez is almost completely black and brown. And so they're not being recruited to go into officer training after

they graduate. No one was recruiting them for that. Nobody was showing up in white at Cal State Dominguez. And I was just amazed by the differences in the different treatment of the LMU come almost completely white campus.

So, yes, there's huge differences in how the different campuses are treated. In Cal State Dominguez, the students had to pay for everything in cash. I don't know what they thought was going on at Cal State Dominguez, why they couldn't pay for anything with cards but cash as if the students didn't have any trustworthy means of paying for anything.

So part of the reason I had wanted to write my book was that when I had been teaching at the community college and when I attended community college, there's so many students that lived in their cars. When I had been attending community college in Arizona, I had off and on would have to sleep in my car when I was between apartments for a very short period of time. I would be saving up. But at this point, one in five community college students in California are in their cars. And when I look at whoever is running for office in California, this has never seemed to be on their agenda. And to me, it's like homelessness is such a huge issue in California. I know it was part of Karen Bass' agenda, but this particular group is working to better their situation. And to me, there should be more attention given to that.

So I wanna go back to the one of the other things you were saying about this whole issue of equity and people who have gone to Ivy League schools. This is one of the other things I found when I came to California and started working in publishing — there's a lot of people around the *LA Times* and so on who have gone to Ivy League schools.

I wrote an op-ed piece when this book came out that sort of referred to that. Because when I tried to get help or ideas, I didn't know anything about publishing or journalism when I was getting into this. Everybody that could have helped me seemed to me to be white men who had gone to Ivy League schools. And I couldn't get any help from anybody because that group was a group that I didn't have access to. They're just in a different world as a state university person. And so I also felt that whole thing of just being in a different class. I would just say, they were born into a room that I'm still struggling to get into. That's what I said in the article. And I would say, you can't tell people like you and me that there aren't classes in America. Not for a moment. Not for a moment. There is a class that went to Ivy League schools and then have access to everything, and then there's the rest of us.

And so I think that's a lot of what goes into your book is the idea that when something bad happens, the first people you look at are not the people who went to those schools. It's the rest of us. Can you talk a little bit about that? Because I was fascinated with the idea that a flashlight comes out and you start looking where to put the high beams, and you're always going to put it on the rest of us. We're the possible guilty ones.

DCF: Right. So I have a big chip on my shoulder about California and about Los Angeles in particular because I see it portrayed in a certain way in books, on movies, and in television shows that does not reflect the reality of what, you know, we experience here living in Los

Angeles or in California. And I completely agree about the, you know, the access to Ivy League schools in the East Coast. I worked for a while for WNET, which is a New York public television station and was housed there. And just the attitude about me from Los Angeles was— I always laughed at it, I thought it was kind of funny, but it's not really funny. And there's a snobbery that I found really hilarious because I think that in Los Angeles, you can reinvent yourself, and people are there to help you do that, and they accept you for that. That part of Los Angeles, I love, but I feel like you work at an institution like a liberal arts college, and they import people from the East Coast, from Ivy League schools to be the gatekeepers, which is admission. Or if you work in a non-profit or even a for-profit, I worked at *Variety* for a number of years, and most of the writers went to Ivy League schools. So you're kind of looking at a world that should be more, I think, open and should be more accessible, and yet we import the gatekeepers from the East Coast, which I don't really understand.

And I think the attitude towards Los Angeles, you hear like, *oh, it's crazy out here*. We actually had a salon, and I read several quotes from East Coast people about Los Angeles, and you'd think we lived in a completely chaotic circus clown city, and we don't. We live in a serious city, and there's lots of serious things going on here. Is entertainment a huge business here? It is. But it's the business of entertainment. And I think it's not really explored in the way that it should be or even looking at society and the different elements of it.

One of the reasons I made the chief suspect in my book, a Latino gardener, is because I feel like when something happens like that, it's not the wealthy white person or white man that's the first suspect. It's often the person that maybe has a record or maybe just happens to be Latino or Black. That's who is looked at first.

K: Coming back to the idea of publishing, publishing generally happens on the East Coast, although there are some significant publishers on the West Coast at this point. When Red Hen was started, the publishers of the West Coast were going down pretty quickly— MacAdam/Cage, Capra Press, Sun & Moon, Black Sparrow were closing. North Point was closing. And so that was part of the reason I was excited about getting Red Hen started.

But now in terms of significant publishers on the West Coast, Tin House in Portland, there's McSweeney's, and there's Hayday, there's City Lights. So it's not like we are the only press on the West Coast. And yet there's still this sense that all the big publishing happens in New York. Again, Minneapolis has three big presses— Coffee House, Milkweed, and Graywolf, all big significant independent presses.

But to me, the other issue though about LA culture is that, what you're talking about, ignores that there's a huge art scene, music scene, architecture scene that's all hugely significant, that's happening here. So to say that it's really about movies is also not true.

One of the things that you work with in your book too is this whole idea of the women that are in your book managed to kind of swirl around this main male character, and they are not the first

ones that end up getting suspected of anything. And you write really funny women. Can you talk a little bit about these really funny women that you've got going?

DCF: I definitely wanted a male character who was not the smartest person in the room, who thought he was, but was not. Got a lot of prejudices even though he's Latino because, obviously, that happens. And his view of women is very much how they affect him, not seeing women for who they are.

And all the women in the story, I would say almost all of them, if not all of them, have a very strong sense of self. And like most women— you're a woman, I'm a woman, we have women in this room, I see men buzzing around me. I don't see them as the center of life. I think men often see themselves as the center of life, center of the story, and women are tangential to them. So I really wanted these women to be strong, to have their own sort of destiny.

And this guy who thinks he's the be-all, end-all is not. He's living out his own little psychodrama, which involves his ex-wife who he messed up and disappointed and still can't figure out why she won't take him back. I mean, in his deepest soul, that's what he really can't figure out. And I think like a lot of us, you know, we go through a lot of bad boyfriends or partners before we find the right partner. And I just wanted the women to be the strong, capable ones, and the man who's the center of the story or the men— there's several men who are very full of faults, and some of them are fatal flaws, should just sort of expose them that way because I think mostly you see men as being the hero of the story, and I didn't necessarily want that. I didn't want that.

K: No. Who needs it? Can you read us a little bit from *A Punishing Breed*?

A Punishing Breed by DC Frost just came out in 2024. Just got a New York Times review. We're very proud of this book here at Red Hen Press. Can you read us a little section?

DCF: Yes.

So, there is a detective DJ Arias who is leading a murder investigation, and somebody keeps saying he should go to the dead man's house. And he does go to the house and finds a dog that is abandoned in the bathroom. He actually ends up adopting the dog, and I'm gonna read a portion of a chapter called "Ghost Dog":

"Why am I here?" DJ asked. It was five minutes past midnight. The start of Saturday morning.

Evidence licked his hand.

"Yes, girl, you are why I'm here."

Lying to himself made DJ feel better.

He stood a few yards from the entrance of the Emergency Pet Clinic. The building was shipwrecked on lower Eagle Rock Boulevard, close to Hesperia College; a double-wide street of auto body shops, run-down mom and pop eateries, massage parlors.

Tonight, Lillian Sing, doctor of veterinary medicine, was in residence. DJ's ex-wife, Lillian, ran the Emergency Pet Clinic every Friday night through Saturday morning. Lillian didn't keep his last name; in fact, she never bothered to take it in the first place.

DJ kept tabs on her; some people might call it spying. After she left him five years ago, Lillian received her degree in veterinary medicine. Crushing his dreams allowed Lillian to pursue hers. DJ couldn't help feeling sorry for himself. It had become a habit.

For the first time that day, Evidence began to whimper. DJ hated whining, but tonight he sympathized.

"I'm afraid to go inside too. But I need to find out who you belong to."

What if Evidence did belong to someone? Better to know now. Before he grew attached. DJ had a way of ignoring attachments until part of him went missing.

The door to the pet clinic opened and a couple came out clutching a cat that resembled a gray feather duster. They looked at him suspiciously until they saw Evidence in his arms. The couple smiled sheepishly and waved.

DJ looked behind him. Were they waving at him? Maybe holding Evidence made him appear to be a regular Joe, a nice guy with his dog.

He waved back.

The clinic's front door was heavy plastic, fake tree rings etched into its surface. DJ stepped through the entrance into an antiseptic linoleum-tiled lobby. The walls and fluorescent lights were so white it hurt his eyes. A sign instructed, "Ring the bell."

He rang and waited.

A young man wearing doctor scrubs greeted him from behind a door. His badge indicated his name was Rolf. DJ disliked him immediately.

"I need to see Dr. Sing," said DJ.

"And how about your friend?" Rolf said.

DJ looked down at the dog. Rolf was making a joke. Dislike confirmed. Rolf wore his hair short on the sides, longer on top. He had smooth caramel skin. DJ thought women probably found him handsome.

DJ pulled out his badge with his left hand and showed it to Rolf.

"Listen, funny boy, I need to see Dr. Sing on police business. I'll explain the dog to her."

DJ hoped his woman didn't find Rolf handsome, even if she wasn't his woman anymore.

"Are you the ex-husband?" asked Rolf.

Young Rolf didn't intimidate easily.

"It's police business. I don't answer questions. You do."

"I guess that would be a yes."

"Shall I take your smart ass down to headquarters?"

Rolf sighed deeply and rolled his eyes. "Follow me."

The younger man turned around and walked down the hallway. Rolf had broad shoulders and muscular arms beneath a short-sleeved smock. He opened a door into an even brighter examination room.

"Wait here," Rolf said. "I'll tell Dr. Sing that you and your friend are here. What's the dog's name?"

"Evidence."

"Of course it is," said Rolf. He shut the door before DJ could reply.

As DJ waited, he held the dog on his lap. Evidence looked up at him. Her eyes resembled golden raisins; her cockeyed ears framed a wizened face. The dog reminded DJ of something. The answer blazed into his mind. Yoda. Her face looked like Yoda! No wonder he had fallen for her. The original *Star Wars* was his favorite movie. He'd watched it at least twenty times when he was a kid. It was his cousin Frankie's favorite. He felt a pang of loss for his cousin, for his ex-wife, for the life he had meant to live.

DJ looked down at Evidence.

"Yes, it's true. Love her, I still do."

K: I love that section. As you know, Evidence is one of my favorite characters in the whole book.

So one of the things that's great about that, for all of us who have an ex, is the rhythm you have between him and his ex. Percival Everett, who we also publish, has a book called *Wounded*, and he has this rhythm in it between the main character and ex-wife that works really well here and that feels recognizable for those of us who have been married more than once. And in this one, I feel like I recognize this. Not like I've had exactly this kind of thing happen, but I think, you know, we've all had moments when you have an ex, and one or the other of you has some level of control that you're trying to exert over the other person. And, really, it's because in a married relationship, there is a level of control that people exert over other people, some more than others.

And another thing that I thought about with both of our books is, you know, we are looking at issues in Los Angeles. And one of the things that you talked about too was that I think we both have a bit of a love-hate relationship with Los Angeles. I mean, I very much wanted to move here. And when I got here, I remember one of my first memories was going down to Santa Monica and seeing, you know, so many homeless people and feeling I was afraid that I would end up there, but I did not. But I also have a bit of a love-hate relationship with LA in many ways.

But I also think that the LA that people see in movies is not as realistic as it could be. I agree with you on that because I think that most people in LA, the majority of us, work several jobs and we don't live at the beach. We barely go to the beach. My daughter-in-law moved here from South Africa. I think she was shocked at how little people actually went to the beach. I think she thought that people went there a lot more often and was just surprised at how many jobs people have to work to just stay indoors here, and just how densely crowded the city is. That idea that that group of people that are partying, going to nice restaurants, and going to the beach at all, is

a tiny, minuscule fraction or tourists. And I think that's part of what you get to in your book is this idea of how hard people are working to just sort of breathe the air. And that's part of what you wanted to get at, I assume.

DCF: Yeah. I think so. I think that when you see what actually creates a place, it's built on the backs of people who are cleaning after, not only the college president, but all the senior staff, all of the staff members, all of the students. And then you see the cooks in the cafeteria— they're mostly Latino, and you see the gardeners, and you see everybody else. And I think that when you actually delve into what people are doing, yeah...I'll tell you a story: One of the people that works in the marketplace is this lovely gentleman. And I went to Whole Foods, and he was working at Whole Foods. And I was like, *oh, this is your oh— This is my second job.* And I was like, *oh my god.* He was so friendly. At first, I was like *oh my should I talk to him* and should I say *hey what are you doing here.*

But I think that's true. You have to work a lot of jobs, particularly when you're young, and you don't necessarily, you know— look at all the apartments that are stacked up all over town, and those are where most people are living. Or in the valley, you see apartment after apartment after apartment. And those are all things that I think show how difficult it is to live here— how many jobs you have to have, people who are barely living in a house or apartment or in our car.

And that's one of the things that I really appreciated about your book because even though those things are exposed and there's a lot of effort to see what can be done about it, it's still not the reality necessarily. I really loved that in your book, you really talk about the reality of living in a car— what you're eating, what you're wearing, the clothes, you know, how many clothes that you have to change into. The idea of having more than three or four sets of clothes is ridiculous. And yet we live in, you get to a certain level, and you've got people who are now trying to get rid of all of their clothes and their stuff because they have too much. So I thought that your book really tackled what it's like to just survive and the interactions of people who really don't understand that at all, what that's like, and can't place themselves in that position.

K: Yeah. People have someone come in and help them “clean” their closet. I'm gonna read you a tiny bit from this. This is focusing on a couple who, at the beginning of the pandemic, have this babysitter, and she is our main character, Mia, who lives in her car. They don't know that. They haven't really looked into where she lives. And the mother is really not capable of taking care of the children herself. And I think that there certainly were people during the pandemic that as long as there were schools and nannies and other people to help them with their children, they could manage, but they couldn't manage without that.

The house after the twins arrived felt like the deck of a ship that things were always sliding from one side to the other, but Richard is always a calming presence, always there to bring on more help.

"Honey," he says, "I've been looking into this virus situation, and if it gets worse, if it really becomes a pandemic, they'll tell us to shelter at our houses and not to see other people."

"What does that mean?"

"Shelter in place means you would always be at your house and people would not come over. Just you and the kids. I would be at the hospital."

Sheryl stops eating. "How soon could this happen?"

"I don't know. But it could. It could happen. We'd be fine. We have food stored up. We have a generator in case the power goes out; you work from home on your projects so you could supervise the boys if they have to do online schoolwork. I'll feel bad for Mia if she loses all her jobs, but I'm sure she'll go back to her parents or whoever. These Gen Zers are resilient; they all have plenty more money than we did at that age. We will all be fine." Sheryl loves baingan barta, and at that moment had been ready to spoon some on her plate, but she has paused in midair. "Are you okay, honey? Did you drink wine earlier?"

"No," she says, "it was just Candy drinking the wine. Just a moment." She leaves the table. Richard slides himself a piece of lamb tandoori.

"Are you okay in there?" He can hear his wife steadily vomiting in the powder room. He pauses. He hears her swishing the mouthwash and then she comes back to sit at the end of the table. "What's up?" he says, "seriously?"

"I'm having a panic attack."

"Mia's here," Richard says, "we can leave first thing in the morning." He gets up and goes to talk to Mia, leaving Sheryl alone. Sheryl stares at the food. The last time they went to Santa Barbara, they went by train, and it took forever to get home because someone threw themselves in front of the tracks. They had to wait four hours for the body to be cleared. It was a woman; they had been told. She thinks of that woman now. Was she lying face down or face up as the train sped toward her?

So this is from *Under A Neon Sun*, my new novel, pandemic novel. And I thought a lot about that whole idea. So I used to take trains to Santa Barbara and San Diego a lot. And one time, there was a woman who had thrown herself in front of the train, and we did sit on the train for four hours, which sort of gave me the idea of that. But I thought a lot about the whole idea of people who became paralyzed during the pandemic because they weren't used to taking care of their kids, and they're used to having a lot of help.

And you and I did a reading recently with Lily Hoang, who's one of the Red Hen authors who wrote the book *Underneath*, who wrote about a mother who is a terrible mother who ends up killing her children. And I had loved that book so much partly because, you know, in *Under A Neon Sun*, the mother of me, I didn't really want to raise children, loosely based on my own mother who did not wanna raise my sister and I. And I think that in our culture, there's a lot of emphasis on the idea that mothers love their children. And Mother's Day is such a big deal because mothers just love their children. And you and I are mothers, and we very much love our children. And, even though I certainly wasn't a perfect mother, I made only about a billion mistakes, but it certainly threw my back into it. And I think though not all mothers do love their children.

I sometimes think of Los Angeles as female, San Francisco as female, and Chicago and New York as male cities. But I think of Los Angeles, if it is a mother, she does such a terrible job of taking care of her children. I think she is drinking too much wine and champagne, running her hands through her palm tree hair, just eating too many oranges, and shoveling sunshine. It's not taking care of her children. Because we should be doing better than this in Los Angeles. We really should. And I think that's sort of the heart of what our books are about— trying to get to Los Angeles is such a great city in so many ways. There's so much art and culture. There's so many great people living here. But as a culture, we should be doing better. And we should be doing better for those of us who are women and children, who are not the great white men of this city. What else would you say on that?

DCF: I think it's very interesting that Los Angeles is basically a city of a million other cities. It's actually one of the cities, if not the city, in the world that has larger communities of foreign peoples in it than sometimes that are in their own country's main cities. So we are an international hub.

And what I find interesting about being in Los Angeles is that because there's a lot of inequities, maybe it's the mother, or I would say it's more the father, who just kind of doesn't really pay attention. I think people turn away from that, and they don't really understand. I've spent some time in the South, very short periods of time, and I've always been shocked at how people don't interact as much as they do here in Los Angeles. So, sure, we have all these problems, and there's racism, etc, but at least we have points where we interact, and those often are public schools. Private schools try to. But jobs— typically, if you're in any kind of an office position, you're at least interacting with people of different ethnicities, religions, all kinds of things. I think that's a very good thing.

But I also find it fascinating that in Los Angeles, you have such strong communities that are insular because they're able to just completely have a life in Los Angeles in this insular community. And the elders don't have to learn to speak English. The kids will. They have their own sort of culture and ideas about what works, their own food. And then, of course, everybody else tries to come in, taste their food, and get out of there as quickly as possible. But I find that really fascinating about Los Angeles. And in some communities, I think that they're like, "We

don't need to go outside. We're doing really well, and I'm a millionaire or billionaire in this community. So why do I need to stick my toe outside!

So I think that's fascinating about Los Angeles and just geographically how huge it is. Trying to define Los Angeles is very difficult, which I find fascinating in an adventure, and I've met all sorts of people who love that adventure. There used to be a gentleman that would drive me around when I'd get my car fixed or drive me home, and he used to take the train and just go to the terminus wherever it ended, spend the whole day there, and get back on the train and come back. And I thought, what a great adventure that would be. But so few people do that. They get in their cars. They're at A. They go to their destination B. And I think that's really missing out on what Los Angeles is.

But I think if Los Angeles is a woman, she hasn't found her right partner, whoever she or he is or they are.

K: Yeah. I agree with you. I think you haven't really experienced LA unless you have, you know, been to the Hollywood Bowl, been to a Dodger game, gone to a Korean spa in K-Town. You need to go and see all the different parts, have gone to Chinatown and eaten Chinese food there, eaten sushi in Little Tokyo. I've done all that stuff, and I do it all the time, and I love all that every bit of LA. I love going down to Olvera Street and going shopping. I mean, I like experiencing LA in all of its bits. I also think, though, that there's a great richness to LA and to experiencing all of it. And I think that what it means to live in a city is to explore the parts of the city and that LA has many different villages within it.

I also don't think though that we communicate with each other. I think at work you're right that at work we do. My kids went to public school and had a great time in public school, in the magnet programs in public schools. But in our towns, we don't communicate as well as I think other people probably do. I've been living in the same house since 1998, and I don't know my neighbors. If there were an earthquake, we might go out there and say hello. But, you know, I don't think there's a tendency for people in LA to get to know their neighbors in the same way they would in other parts of the world.

Again, I think that what's great about being in indie publishing in LA is that no one pays attention to what you're doing, so you can kind of do whatever you want to. And so Red Hen has been here for thirty years. We're gonna be here for another thirty years because we have a great team and a great team of Millennials and Gen Z, young, imaginative, smart people who are going to take us forward.

Something else you said reminded me that I think about ten years ago, there were a couple people on the board that were like, what you should do is just bring in a New York editor. And I was like, no. The whole point of being here is to have West Coast editing. And so we've stuck with that— No, we're not gonna have a New York gatekeeper. Then why not just move the whole press to New York and be done with it? So we've stuck with our roots. And we're training

the next group of editors who are some of the people that are at the press now. But I look forward to who Red Hen will continue to become.

We're very excited about this book. If anyone's listening to this who works in the film world, we do think *A Punishing Breed* would make a great movie. It starts with someone being killed by a samurai sword on their desk. So it's a very picturesque beginning. We just think this would just be great. And, then it gets more exciting from there as we go to try to find out who could have possibly done this. So working with you has been a great joy.

DC Frost is out there now. She's been on tour ever since the beginning. We're very excited about this book because it takes noir in a whole another direction. And noir is one of our favorite genres here at Red Hen. We just hadn't had the opportunity to publish any noir. But we do love noir films, and we love noir books. So we're so excited that we got to work with you on this project.

Any other last comments that you wanted to make?

DCF: I just wanted to say that I got involved with Red Hen, and I love Red Hen. I think that it is, like, the place in Los Angeles that's publishing the reflection of Los Angeles. I think the diversity, the lifestyles, the poetry and novels and fiction and nonfiction that I think the concept is all of Los Angeles. I really feel like, Kate, that you are the heart and soul of it, and you live it twenty four hours a day. And it's like I've seen even at this place I'm at. People with that kind of passion and that kind of dedication create beautiful things. I think it's up to us, the people who love to read and who appreciate independent literature. Look at the world. We need to support places like Red Hen.

Because if we don't, we're going to end up with a big East Coast publisher— and I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that. Some of my favorites, but, you know, authors are from the East Coast. But if you want something that reflects the West Coast or people who live differently than people who go to Ivy League schools and who live in New York, then we should all be supporting Red Hen, and that's by buying their books, by supporting the press. It's a nonprofit. I have to say that when I'm having a hard day at work, I have stacks of poetry on my desk, and I pick them up and I read them because they transport me out of where I am. If you're someone like that, then you should be supporting this press. That's all I have to say.

K: Denise, thank you so much. It's such a pleasure to be here with you today, and I just wanna end by saying that when I left the farm, when I decided to come to California, what I wanted was books and an adventure. And I'm so glad that I found them, and I'm so glad to have met you.

Outro: Thank you for listening to Red Hen Radio, the podcast where independent literature takes flight. We hope you enjoyed today's episode.

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