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MBS ([00:01](#)):

During peak COVID, I would visit Australia and I'd be quarantined. I'd be locked into a hotel room for 14 weeks. Quarantine means 40 days, but luckily 14, not 40, before I could go on and see my family down in Canberra. Now lots of people went through that, lots of people found it hard, but I actually enjoyed it. I didn't call it quarantine, I called it my writing retreat, and I mostly just potted around. I actually felt like I was in some version of a John Dunn poem, an entire universe in this single moment, in this single room. The very first hotel that I got quarantined into, I looked out over Darling Harbor in Sydney. I had this big picture window and I looked across the bay, the harbor itself, and then kind of slightly up the hill towards the central business district. Over to my left, I could just see a little bit of the Harbor Bridge.

([00:59](#)):

I knew just over the rise was the Sydney Opera House. It was my only view for two weeks, and I came to love it. It changed constantly. It was on fire, lit up by a sunset. It was looming with threat as a storm passed by. It became lit up at



night. There's actually a Ferris wheel, a carnival like an underworld at my feet. We're constantly searching for what's new. We're constantly distracted, and sometimes it's wonderful to be forced to look and look again and look again at what's right there in front of you.

[\(01:39\)](#):

Welcome to Two Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Miranda Keeling trained as an artist initially with a degree in glass making, but has gone on to grace the big stage, and to attack the tyranny of the blank page.

Miranda [\(02:04\)](#):

I am an actor and a writer. That's the way I always have said it, but I'm starting now to say I realize I'm a writer and an actor.

MBS [\(02:08\)](#):

That, swapping words, might seem like an insignificant difference if you're not really paying attention, if you aren't really noticing. But those small differences are kind of Miranda's thing. Noticing the details of everyday life and elevating them with the various forms of art that she makes. And to be honest, this is something Miranda's done from the very start.

Miranda [\(02:31\)](#):

I have been fascinated by telling stories since I was, I think, about four years old. So everything I do is in some way about telling a story.

MBS [\(02:42\)](#):

Do you remember the first story you ever wrote?



Miranda ([02:49](#)):

Yes. Now I was six and my mom had one of those old fashioned, I say old fashioned, it was normal then, typewriter that had-

MBS ([03:00](#)):

It was typewriter then. It's not old fashioned at all, it just was a typewriter when you were six.

Miranda ([03:07](#)):

But it was like a real one with the keys made that noise and everything. And I painstakingly typed out this story about my best friend and some kind of peril that we were in. It was quite dramatic. It was really short. It was about two paragraphs. And that was really interesting. I think that's the first time I sat down and actually, with my mom's help, crafted a little tiny story.

MBS ([03:39](#)):

Yeah, I'm getting flash... I think the first story I ever wrote, I probably would've been a little older, like seven or eight.

Miranda ([03:48](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([03:49](#)):

It was some version... I think I just read about Sir Francis Drake and in a very kind of like a children's Ladybird book around Elizabeth I and Francis Drake, and it was something to do with boats and pirates and being heroic. I was the hero, unsurprisingly.

Miranda ([04:08](#)):

Yes.



MBS ([04:13](#)):

Exactly. What's the dance between being an actor and being a writer?

Miranda ([04:18](#)):

I think it's a really close and relevant dance between the two. And in fact, sometimes when I watch TV, really good TV now, I'll be unsurprised to find out that the writer or director has an acting background because there's something about noticing and being present that is, in acting, as a thread that runs through it. You can't do it well without that presence.

MBS ([04:45](#)):

Yeah. How is the physicality of being an actor? How does that influence the way you're a writer?

Miranda ([04:56](#)):

Wow, that's an interesting question. I think physicality is really important, and even when you're doing radio, it's really important. Bizarrely, you'll find directors will say to you, "Can you put a smile into that line?"

MBS ([05:15](#)):

Yeah, totally.

Miranda ([05:16](#)):

Because we can hear it. And so I guess I realize specifically what I do is observing things and observing people. And so, I'm often looking for tells because I don't know them and I see them for a couple of seconds. I'm looking for the thing that when I look at them tells me who they are and what they're feeling as much as I can. So it might be the way they're walking or something about the way they're holding themselves or the pace that they're moving at. All of those things are a kind of character. So I think the physicality of being an



actor involves stepping into somebody else's shoes and working out how to do that physically and then emotionally, right?

MBS ([06:01](#)):

Right.

Miranda ([06:02](#)):

And I think as a writer, I'm really fascinated by what makes people tick and what their unique experiences are. So that's the relationship.

MBS ([06:11](#)):

Yeah, that's really interesting. When you introduced yourself, you said, "I'm an actor and a writer," and then you're like, "Oh, but maybe I'm now a writer and an actor." What does it mean to move from... what does that shift in language, that shift in perhaps identity of different weightings, what's that been like?

Miranda ([06:33](#)):

I love acting and it's part of my soul in a way I can't describe to you. Doing it is incomparable to anything else. It's astonishing. And there's a back and forth that you get as an actor between yourself and whoever is taking in what you're doing. There's an energy back and forth that's absolutely amazing. But it is a really tough industry, and there is a real sense of being a hamster in a hamster wheel sometimes because you can get somewhere great and then there isn't a natural route where you just think, "Oh, I'm following this route." Not for most of us. It's a graft, and I haven't stopped grafting and I still want to do it and all of that.

([07:23](#)):

But in the pandemic, when I was approached by a publisher to make a book out of what I've been writing, after that, it just felt like things started to flow towards me in a way that... Yeah, I mean I've had phases of that as an actor, but this feels kind of different. An approach about a book, and then the book does well. And



then I'm approached about a podcast and now talking about a second book, and it feels very fluid and very like a path I'm following like the yellow brick road. So the reason I've swapped it over is just to kind of rest in the part of my creative self that is flowing at the moment.

MBS ([08:03](#)):

Beautiful.

Miranda ([08:03](#)):

Does that make sense?

MBS ([08:05](#)):

It does. It's like you're actually being swept along by what being a writer does, so why not give it due prominence? Because that's where the energy comes from at the moment.

Miranda ([08:17](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([08:18](#)):

I'm curious because I've written some books, so I'm definitely an author.

Miranda ([08:25](#)):

Yeah, you've written lots of books.

MBS ([08:29](#)):

I have. But I'm also trying on the identity of being a writer. So this question stems from just my own exploration of this, which is to ask you, what do you have to let go of to fully embrace the identity of being a writer?



Miranda ([08:52](#)):

I suppose I have to accept that it's potentially a solo, solitary place. And so I let go of that. Okay, this is almost true what I'm about to say, and then I'm going to bring in a but. I have to let go of, or I thought I had to let go of that feeling that you get when you're putting a play together and you're working with a team of people and you're part of this thing that's much bigger than you.

([09:21](#)):

You're still part of something that's bigger than you, but it's more like you and whatever you believe in, God or the universe or whatever it is, the flow, right? But it's just you and the flow. There aren't all these other kind of people with you, but that depends on what you're doing. And certainly, for example, with the podcast and even with the book, there are other creative people that I'm working with and they are pitching in and telling me what works and what doesn't. So it's not as solitary as it might be. If I was maybe a novelist, which I'm not at this point, then I probably would hold myself up in my... Is that where... You're going into fiction?

MBS ([09:57](#)):

No, I'm not. So for me, I have books that I've written, but I have a bunch of other things that I do. I give speeches, I design training, I run meetings, I do a whole bunch of stuff. And so, up until now, writing has been something I've done along the edges of the other stuff, obligations I've had of building a small business. And I'm trying to shift putting writing more at the heart of what I'm claiming as an identity.

Miranda ([10:31](#)):

Great.



MBS ([10:33](#)):

And I'm just trying to figure out what I need to say no to. It's kind of like what aspects of my old self do I now need to say, "If I'm saying yes to being a writer, I need to say no to..." Some of it's doing stuff, like giving as many speeches as I've given in the past. Some of it is more of a being stuff, which is feeling I need to be in the hustle of making business work.

Miranda ([10:57](#)):

For sure.

MBS ([10:57](#)):

It's just what I'm trying to figure out.

Miranda ([10:59](#)):

Yeah, for sure. It's so interesting, actually. I feel embracing the solitariness and embracing the incredible courage that it takes to try and be a writer, it does take courage because it's not like other jobs. You're not swept along by somebody else's agenda. In the same way, you've got to set your own agenda. You've got to go into wherever you work and start and look at that blank page, and it's a very different way of being. But it sounds like you feel similar to me in that you just feel like that is what you are and you're trying to step into it.

MBS ([11:40](#)):

Yeah.

Miranda ([11:41](#)):

It is what you are. But then...



MBS ([11:43](#)):

Yeah, I feel some of that energy flow, but I also feel it's my best contribution to the world, which is like of all the things I can do, writing feels like most distinctly me and most distinctly helpful. So, how do I try and do more of that?

Miranda ([11:59](#)):

I feel like as well, we have these in theory, and I would hope we have these kind of unique voices, really. And that's perhaps why this experience is flowing for me more than the acting. Because I mean, I could call myself unique as an actor, but there are loads of people who look like me and sound like me and are my age. And whereas your writing voice is yours, isn't it? And it's...

MBS ([12:22](#)):

It's interesting.

Miranda ([12:23](#)):

Yeah, I think with all the AI and all the panics we have about... Somebody said to me the other day, "Oh, I want to put into one of these AI programs, "Write a Miranda Keeling style observation." And I got this really strange feeling. I said, "Oh, I don't want to do that. I don't want to know what it would come up with."

MBS ([12:42](#)):

Right. How do you describe your voice?

Miranda ([12:48](#)):

It has been described to me as clean and economical and slightly magical.

MBS ([12:59](#)):

And of those three words, the descriptions, which one brings you most joy?



Miranda ([13:07](#)):

Magical.

MBS ([13:10](#)):

What does slightly magical mean to you?

Miranda ([13:14](#)):

I think it means that it's out of the ordinary. That it's a window onto something that's a bit sideways.

MBS ([13:25](#)):

Out of the ordinary is perfect as a phrase because your observation is of the ordinary, but it takes it out of the ordinary.

Miranda ([13:33](#)):

Yeah. And sometimes in a very subtle way and sometimes in an overt way.

MBS ([13:41](#)):

Speaking out of the ordinary, what book have you chosen to read for us today?

Miranda ([13:45](#)):

I was just thinking it's so relevant, isn't it? This is a book written by Charlotte Zolotow. It's called *Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present*. Just trying to open the front now and check when it was written. Yeah, 1962. And it's illustrated by the wonderful Morris Sendak.

MBS ([14:07](#)):

Who is a legend.



Miranda ([14:08](#)):

Who is a legend. And it's an unusual little story, but it's his illustrations, I think, that make it so out of the ordinary and elevated. But the cover is just so strange. You would pick it up in a bookshelf and think, "What is this?"

MBS ([14:34](#)):

Who is this appropriate for?

Miranda ([14:36](#)):

Exactly.

MBS ([14:37](#)):

When did this book come into your life?

Miranda ([14:39](#)):

My mom read it to me when I was a child.

MBS ([14:41](#)):

Yeah.

Miranda ([14:42](#)):

Yeah, a lot. I asked for it all the time. So it's the same copy that I've had since a thousand years ago.

"Mr. Rabbit," said the little girl, "I want help."

"Help, little girl? I'll give you help if I can," said Mr. Rabbit.

"Mr. Rabbit," said the little girl, "it's about my mother."

"Your mother?" said Mr. Rabbit.

"It's her birthday," said the little girl.



"Well, happy birthday to her, then," said, Mr. Rabbit. "What are you giving her?"

"Well, that's just it," said the little girl. "That's why I want help. I have nothing to give her."

"Nothing to give your mother on her birthday," said, Mr. Rabbit. "Little girl, you really do want help."

"I would like to give her something that she likes," said the little girl.

"Something that she likes is a good present," said Mr. Rabbit.

"But what?" said the little girl?

"Yes. What?" said Mr. Rabbit.

"She likes red," said the little girl.

"Red," said Mr. Rabbit. "Well, you can't give her red."

"Well, something red maybe," said the little girl.

"Oh, something red," said, Mr. Rabbit.

"What is red?" said the little girl.

"Well," said, Mr. Rabbit, "there's red underwear."

"No," said the little girl. "I can't give her that."

"There are red roofs," said Mr. Rabbit.

"No, we have a roof," said the little girl. "I don't want to give her that."

"There are red birds," said Mr. Rabbit. "Red cardinals."

"No," said the little girl. "She likes birds in trees."

"There are red fire engines," said Mr. Rabbit.

"No," said the little girl. "She doesn't like fire engines."

"Well," said Mr. Rabbit, "there are apples."

"Good," said the little girl. "That's good. She likes apples, but I need something else."



[\(16:33\)](#):

And then it continues like that. So she doesn't know what else. She likes blue. They find some grapes. She likes yellow, they... And eventually she ends up with this basket of fruit for her mom. And then I'll just read you the last bit, actually.

MBS [\(16:33\)](#):

Please.

Miranda [\(16:49\)](#):

Because it's so strange.

[\(16:51\)](#):

She took her basket and she filled it with the green pears and the yellow bananas and the red apples and the blue grapes. It made a lovely present.

"Thank you for your help, Mr. Rabbit," said the little girl.

"Not at all," said Mr. Rabbit. "Very glad to help."

"Goodbye now," said the little girl.

"Goodbye," said Mr. Rabbit. "And a happy birthday and a happy basket of fruit to your mother."

[\(17:18\)](#):

And it's Sendak's drawings that make this so strange and spooky and beautiful. Because I don't know how you imagine it when you hear it, but I guess I could have easily imagined a sweet little bunny rabbit kind of figure. And he's drawn this very strange, tall man-sized rabbit who stands on two feet. And in the final drawing when she's saying goodbye, she's standing on the porch of this house that feels like it's in middle America and it's nighttime and outside the porch there're just kind of mountains and fields and stars going into the distance. And this shadowy rabbit man on two legs is waving over his shoulder and walking off into the night. It is so strange and so beautiful.



MBS ([18:05](#)):

What is it about this book that is so compelling?

Miranda ([18:10](#)):

For me, I'm thinking about actually looking at these images and for me it's exactly what we've just been talking about. It's about elevating the ordinary. It's about how the simple things that you might not notice are the things that could be the most important. So she feels like she doesn't have any gifts for her mom, and yet she's in this place full of nature and apples on trees. And he is able to help her understand that what she's looking at, the simple things are enough, are more than enough as a present for her mom.

([18:47](#)):

And her mom will be delighted with this fruit basket. Of course she will, because the girl's taken the time to go and gather all of these things and to think about them. And it's also about lateral thinking too in that way. Each time he comes up with these silly suggestions, roofs and underwear and stuff like that. And eventually they realize what the distillation of these things is. Oh, it's the color. Well, what's the simplest thing that's this color of yellow? Well, it's a banana. So it's funny the resonance with my own work that it has. And when I chose the book, I hadn't really made those connections. Yeah.

MBS ([19:29](#)):

How have you learned to notice?

Miranda ([19:37](#)):

I've always done it. I've always noticed. I think I was a very imaginative child and my brother was too, and we lived in our imaginations together a lot. And that sounds like a sideways thing to say because imagination isn't noticing in a sense, but it is. And the way that this book does too, because you look at what you have, which is like a cardboard box or a little space behind an open door. You



look at it really carefully until you can see a rocket ship going to the moon or a cave on Mars because you've arrived there. And so, I think I've just always done it. And my mom also was a big noticer of things. I think the world is really fascinating and I feel incredibly grateful to have the senses that I have to notice things with.

MBS ([20:43](#)):

Yes. One of the things that I noticed from the reading and your description of the illustrations is the... You can imagine just hearing you read that this is drawn in bright colors, white background, kind of childish figures. And in fact it's kind of a more twilight experience.

Miranda ([21:12](#)):

Yes. Yes.

MBS ([21:13](#)):

And I'm just wondering how that twilight or that hint of something else shows up in your own work, in your own observations?

Miranda ([21:29](#)):

I think it shows up a lot. I think sometimes I find frustrating a lot of people understand what I'm trying to do and it resonates with them. But occasionally I'll get somebody saying to me, "I read your book and it was really sweet." And there's something about me that goes, "Oh." I think that people underestimate small things in life, don't they? And my work is incredibly small. It's very, very short and tidy, and so it might appear surfacey or sweet if you were to look at it quickly. But a lot of what I'm observing has a great sadness in it, or a strangeness or just a boredom, which doesn't sound compelling, but it is for me. I think that fabric of humanity is essentially what I'm trying to capture, not just a one particular way of looking at things. I think we talked about this before, that we have both in our backgrounds, living in different countries and traveling and-



MBS ([22:33](#)):

That's right.

Miranda ([22:33](#)):

... trying to work out where we're from. And I was moved so much as a kid, and I don't know where I'm from. I feel relatively comfortably from London now. Because you can do that when you live here. It's great. And I didn't always have the easiest time being a small person. So, I think I learned quite quickly to just focus in on what was helpful or what was interesting. Yeah.

MBS ([23:01](#)):

You said noticing sadness, but you also said noticing boredom. What do you mean by boredom?

Miranda ([23:08](#)):

Yeah, I found it really interesting in old days Twitter, when Twitter was a fun old days place.

MBS ([23:13](#)):

Nicer place, yeah.

Miranda ([23:14](#)):

And there were lots of accounts it felt like that capitalized on how fascinating we find boring things. I remember there'd be an account who would just post pictures of, I can't even remember, boring paint colors or something. But these accounts were compelling to me. I remember thinking, "I quite like the comfort of this."

MBS ([23:40](#)):

Right.



Miranda ([23:40](#)):

And the person who just photographed bollards. Everyday Bollards I think it was called. And I think the boredom aspect interests me in lots of different ways. I like observing people who are bored. I find that interesting, the things that they do when they're bored to try and distract themselves. Or when they're waiting in train stations and all that kind of thing. But boredom is really interesting. My 4-year-old has just started to conceive of boredom. Before that her whole life was this and then this and then that, and now she's starting to go, "I'm bored." And I've read that that's really positive, bizarrely, that we need to feel bored.

MBS ([24:30](#)):

Right. Because it forces you then to go, "I now need to invent a cave on Mars."

Miranda ([24:37](#)):

Yes. And as a writer, you must know that, I think, that if we allow all of the distractions, the really attractive distractions to take us away, we're not going to write anything. We have to have that emptiness of kind of, "Okay, I've sat down to do this. The page is there."

MBS ([24:56](#)):

The tyranny of the blank page. And I have to wait, be patient enough for something to show up.

Miranda ([25:04](#)):

Right.

MBS ([25:08](#)):

There's a curiosity I have around the tempo at which you move, how would you name that? How would you talk about the tempo?



Miranda ([25:22](#)):

The tempo in which I move creatively or you mean literally physically?

MBS ([25:27](#)):

I'm not sure, Miranda. There's something about observation requires typically slowing down-

Miranda ([25:34](#)):

For sure.

MBS ([25:35](#)):

... and being still enough to see it. But I also didn't want to be reductive enough to say it's just about slowing down. It feels like tapping or choosing a different rhythm or pattern or tempo in terms of how you interact with life. And I'm just curious to know how you think about that or whether it's just something that's integrated in terms of how you move through the world.

Miranda ([26:01](#)):

I do think about it quite a lot and I have a really complex relationship to this. Sometimes if you were to have a cup of coffee with me in a cafe, you might find me actually quite rapid and distracted because although we're having a conversation, I'm trying to notice all of these things and I'm also trying to make a note that they've happened. So I'll often be talking and I'm saying, "Sorry, that was so funny. I'm going to write it down." But the other thing that happens, and particularly for the book that I'm working on at the moment, that involves a lot of me going to a place, even just a tube platform, opening my notebook, sitting and letting the trains go while I just notice what happens.

([26:40](#)):

There's a meditation technique I did years ago, and I sometimes do still, where you imagine that your mind is a theater, a blank theater, and the curtains are



open and you just wait to see what comes onto the stage. You try not to follow it or get too emotionally entangled, but you notice the players move across the stage. They your thoughts. And that's what happens with a lot of my longer form writing is that I just wait. If you're really still, then eventually the pigeon comes over to say hello to you and I don't know. Something happens, but if you rush through it all too much, you're going to miss everything.

MBS ([27:18](#)):

Yeah, that's interesting. We've just adopted two cats that previously had been feral.

Miranda ([27:24](#)):

Wow.

MBS ([27:25](#)):

And they've had time to be deferalized, if that's a word.

Miranda ([27:25](#)):

I like it.

MBS ([27:32](#)):

But they're extremely skittish and nervous. We've had them for five days, so we're right at the very start of this. And my wife and I just have to be very still and just sit there and wait for them to get curious enough and feel safe enough to come out and come over and say hello. And it's a very interesting patient experience.

Miranda ([27:55](#)):

Oh, well done doing that. Yeah, I fostered four cats who had various different issues and one of them just wouldn't come out from behind the washing machine for about three days. And you start to think... Every time I tried to pull



the washing... I mean, not three days, obviously not that long, but it felt like that. Every time I moved the washing machine to try and get him out, he just was just panicky. And in the end I had to do what you're saying, which is just wait really quietly. He ended up doing well in the end, but... Oh, good luck with that. How exciting. Are they kittens or cats?

MBS ([28:30](#)):

It's a mother and her son.

Miranda ([28:35](#)):

Ah.

MBS ([28:35](#)):

The son is just beyond the very kittenish stage and the mother is a year older than that roughly.

Miranda ([28:41](#)):

Ah. Amazing.

MBS ([28:44](#)):

When I notice and read your observation, sometimes it's a moment, but quite often you're observing a brief exchange of conversation between two people.

Miranda ([28:54](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([28:56](#)):

What's at the heart of those observations that you capture? What attracts you about those sweet moment?



Miranda ([29:06](#)):

The back and forth, yeah. The amazing thing about it when it works is that it's a tiny little play. And within this brief conversation, you know who the characters are, what their relationships are to each other, what they want, what they're not getting. And it's all in this tiny... I'm trying to give you an example from my memory. My copies of my book are all in the kitchen and I'm out in the garden studio shed. What's that one? Man on the train, "I'm tired." His wife, "Oh, we're all tired, Brian." And it's such a tiny exchange, but you just... Yeah. I had this lovely thing of all the responses to it, either identifying with Brian or with his wife quite specifically because they would, "Oh God, I'm tired too." Or blimey, my husband always says this kind of thing.

MBS ([30:03](#)):

Right.

Miranda ([30:04](#)):

Yeah. Little gems.

MBS ([30:09](#)):

You had some wonderful success with *The Year I Stopped to Notice*. And as you said right at the start of the conversation, that's created a flow of opportunities and conversations and a new book. Has that changed your nature of your observations?

Miranda ([30:33](#)):

It's something that people ask me quite often, and it's something I think about myself. I hope not. The only positive change that I think is there, and I've been kind of encouraged to make it, is that there's more of myself in them than there was. I have little observations of parenting or how I'm feeling. And in the podcast I find... Because in the podcast, in the writing, I'm editing and it's edited to heck before you guys see it. And in the podcast it just comes out of my head.



I'm just talking to myself. It's quite strange. And therefore I end up saying, "Oh, that reminds me of when I was at school and this thing happened and blah, blah blah." So, that's definitely a change. If you look at my stuff right at the beginning, I was nowhere to be seen. I was just a vehicle and now I've brought myself in a bit more.

MBS ([31:32](#)):

Interesting,

Miranda ([31:33](#)):

But there's a risk there and I want to be really careful. I don't want somebody to come and have a cup of coffee with me and think, "Is this conversation going to end up..."

MBS ([31:45](#)):

Be a snapshot? Am I going to be in her play? Yeah.

Miranda ([31:45](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([31:49](#)):

And you talked about being a writer and an actor, but you've also had a background in working with glass.

Miranda ([31:57](#)):

I have indeed.

MBS ([31:59](#)):

So how does that past experience bleed forward into who you are now and how you show up to the world?



Miranda ([32:07](#)):

Well, specifically the sculptures that I ended up specializing in were very, very small. Each one would fit in the palm of my hand. I also did a lot of using... This is just me thinking about it. Because I always give the answer that my pieces are small, and that's true. But also I ended up using entirely recycled materials and not at a point when the environmental impact of that was a big deal. But just because in the hot shop, the environmental impact is a big deal, but we weren't so aware of it.

([32:41](#)):

In the hot shop, the glass blowers would... there'd be lots of debris leftover from their work, and I would take that glass debris from the floor and use it in my pieces. And then I would also set some of my pieces in recycled car parts that I would find in junkyards or even in building sites that I'd ask builders to go and have a look around. Bits of metal, that sort of stuff. And I would make lighting out of it. And my point being that that's again me taking something pretty ordinary. It's a piece of junk. It's literally going to end up in landfill and I'm trying to get the best I can out of it and elevate it into something else.

MBS ([33:24](#)):

This is a very random question, probably like all of my questions so far, actually, now I think about it.

Miranda ([33:29](#)):

No, not at all, in fact-

MBS ([33:31](#)):

But I'm curious to know if you read poetry and if you do, are there poets that you know and love?



Miranda ([33:39](#)):

I do read poetry. I should read more poetry because I think it's wonderful.

MBS ([33:43](#)):

We all should. I think it's like a moral obligation. We should read more poetry.

Miranda ([33:50](#)):

Wonderful. When I was at school, my favorite poet was Roger McGough, and I used to be able to recite his poem. "The driver of the lethal lorry trembled out and cried, 'I'm sorry,' but it was his own fault. Humans snuggled round the mess in masochistic tenderness as raindrops danced within his womb." Something like, "The twisted metal broken cane, his chair spreadeagled in the rain, the fallen birdman." And I don't know... That's not recited properly. It's from my memory of a thousand years ago. But what he did that was so beautiful and devastating was he... Yeah, it's beautiful and it's devastating. It's basically about a man in a wheelchair who's hit by a lorry.

([34:40](#)):

And when he says the "raindrops danced within his womb," we know that he's terribly wounded by this accident. But the way that he describes it is so beautiful. It's hard to describe how it makes me feel. It's so moving. It makes me feel a bit sort of nauseous but also awestruck and... Rarely does prose make me have that particular feeling. And then I love people like Ian McMillan who does The Verb on Radio 3, who's just got this lovely soft, observational kind of funny, dry way of looking at things. But I wish I could tell you that I read lots of poetry and certainly that I could remember the names of all the poets that I read, because I can't.

MBS ([35:35](#)):

Yeah, I can't either. But I love that you mostly recited the poem for us. It was fantastic. It captured exactly what we wanted to hear or know about that



because it also... Beautiful and devastating is a little bit like the experience I get when I read some of your stuff as well.

Miranda ([35:55](#)):

Oh wow.

MBS ([35:56](#)):

It's that same kind of... there's that twilightness that we talked about earlier, that dimensionality to it, which is like it's capturing a moment and capturing the echoes of something beyond that in your observations.

Miranda ([36:11](#)):

Thank you. I mean, even an observation that I love, which is just of a pigeon who has found as if it's a treasure trove, a packet of spilled Wotsits, but he can't. He's trying to eat the Wotsits. You know what Wotsits are? Those big orange crisp things. But because of his shape of his beak and the shape of the Wotsit and the bounciness of it on the pavement, he can't manage to get one of these things and he's sort of chasing it around the pavement. And that's incredibly sad if you see it that way. And also hilarious.

MBS ([36:48](#)):

Exactly. It's hilarious and that kind of deep existential futility all at the same time. And they're Wotsits.

Miranda ([36:58](#)):

Exactly.

MBS ([37:01](#)):

Miranda, it's been such a lovely conversation. I'm wondering what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said to complete it.



Miranda ([37:10](#)):

It's funny. I want to say thank you for your questioning style because you give your speakers, I mean, I don't know if you always do, but certainly with me, a little space to think. Which is perfect for me, because I always need a bit of time to unravel what's in my head and get it right until I'm happy with it. What else needs to be said? Wish me luck for my longer form writing because it makes me nervous to step out of my comfort zone.

MBS ([37:10](#)):

Good luck.

Miranda ([37:43](#)):

What's coming next?

MBS ([37:45](#)):

It'll be so much more than a pigeon chasing a Wotsit around a pavement. I'm sure of it.

Miranda ([37:49](#)):

I hope so.

MBS ([37:58](#)):

You remember I asked Miranda about her voice and she said, "It's clean and it's economical and it's slightly magical." I mean, how delightful those three descriptions are, particularly combined. And how delightful that she doubled down on magical. But really I thought was magical, was delightful, was that Miranda knew how to describe her voice. When I was writing this, I'm like, "Okay, so how would I describe my voice?" And I'd say, this is my best guess for now today, "enthusiastic and metaphorical and playful." But honestly, I'm not sure. I do know that I started writing newsletters, gosh, in university, let me see, that must've been close to 40 years ago now. So I have written many, many, many,



many words, newsletters and books and scripts like this one that I'm typing now. And that's how I've come to get close to what my voice is or find it enthusiastic, metaphorical and playful.

[\(38:57\)](#):

You find your voice by exercising it, by finding a space where you might have something to say and finding a way to say it. Last night I went to the Law Revue in Canberra. It's a variety show put on by law students. I was in that show 30 years ago. I famously or infamously did a skit called Synchronized Nude Male Modeling. And honestly, it wasn't very good. And I had so much compassion for those 20 year olds because they were all starting to write and starting to find their voice. And I could see that that's what was happening. It wasn't very good because they were just at the beginning of finding a way to be good. You have to be bad before you get good.

[\(39:41\)](#):

I mean, my brother Gus, he specializes in selling vintage clothing. I know, how cool. And he has a really distinct way of writing about his items that always makes me smile. In fact, even as we speak, I'm rocking an amazing blue brown plaid, 1970 suit, lapels, flares, and I bought it from him unseen because of how he wrote about it. So I'm curious, if you only had three words to describe your voice, what would those three words be? And of course you can think what I mean by voice. It might be the written word. It might be the spoken word. It might be like my friend, how she describes her work through ceramics, which is her work and her artwork. We all have different formats in which we play. What's your voice in that format? And perhaps behind that is a bigger question, which is do you even want to have a voice? Do you want to have a distinct way of talking about and engaging the world? And if you do, where do you practice? Where do you find and practice your voice?



[\(40:50\)](#):

Two possible interviews for you to follow up on. McKinley Valentine, *How You Get Good At Something*. You can see the connection right away. She's really interesting. She pursues extreme things. She's done a lot around physical stuff. Being a fighter, an MMT fighter, being a bodybuilder. She's often pursuing extremes of physicality as a way of learning about herself. And then Neil Heyde, who I went to high school with and has gone on to be a professional musician, teaches in the London School of Music, which is fancy, and my conversation with Neil was how to practice.

[\(41:24\)](#):

You want more of Miranda? You'll find her on most of the social medias at Miranda Keeling. That's just her name. Her podcast is *Stopping to Notice* and the book is called *The Year I Stopped to Notice*. I like stopping and I like noticing. I think that's a good combination there. Thank you for listening. Thanks for loving this. Thanks for reviewing it, blurbing it, writing nice notes to me, passing it on through word of mouth, however it is that you appreciate this. And if it's just by listening to it, then I appreciate you. I think you're awesome and I think you're doing great.