

Hello and welcome to our Virtual Author Chat with Eternity Martis, author of *They Said This Would Be Fun*, an Evergreen award-nominated title for the 2021 year. Thank you for joining us for previous episodes, if you have before, or if this is new to you, please join us for a wonderful chat with Eternity about her writing her career, her life, and so much more.

Sara: All right, well, being a little mindful of time, we are at five after. So, if anybody else ends up trickling in, that's totally okay. I'll make sure to let everybody in on the back end here. But to everyone who is here: Welcome. Hi, this is Eternity, who wrote *They Said This Would Be Fun*, one of the Evergreen award-nominated books. I'm hoping you had a chance to read it, but if you didn't, that's absolutely fine. We'll try not to spoil anything too much for you, and then I think, Eternity if you're ready, if you want to tell us a little bit about yourself.

Eternity: Thank you, Sara. Hi, everyone. Nice to meet you. I'm Eternity Martis. And yes, I wrote the book that we're here discussing today.

A little bit about me. I'm a journalist and I'm an editor. I used to work at Extra Magazine. For those who aren't familiar with extra, it's an LGBTQ2S+ publication here in Canada and I was a former senior editor, as well as a health editor and I did that for four years, but I'm mainly a journalist.

I actually wanted to be a writer from when I was about eight, and as I think I went through my career, the only thing I would ever hear is that if you want to be a writer, you're not going to make any money. You're not gonna have a job, it's going to be a side thing, and I don't like being told what to do. So I was like, you know what, let me just try it. I'll try it out and see if I can do this. And I decided to go into journalism because at the time that I wrote my book and for those who haven't read the book yet, or finished the book, the book is about my experience being a student at Western University. And for me, I always want to try to write a book but my book changed form so often because I had come from Toronto, and it was the first time I was away from home, and I moved to London without knowing London's history, without knowing much about London, actually, I had no idea that there was a city called London until I moved there. And what I had experienced, I had never experienced anything like that. Like, in - I had in Toronto and that's not to say Toronto is not racist by any means. But I think I was very young when I left. And so for me, writing the book, it had started about me but I think as I had graduated in 2014 and gone on to do my masters in journalism in 2014, 2015, and 2016, the world really changed and I think a lot of things became quite polarized. There was Black Lives Matter movement a little bit later. There was Me Too movement and we kind of shifted in terms of the type of era that we are in; It's more of a social justice oriented era. And so it was important for me to have my story out there, but to illustrate the larger issue going on, that isn't new. I think if you know anybody who is a student of color, a woman on campus, a queer trans student on campus, no matter how many decades you go back, the story has happened to almost everyone we know.

So I did write the book in that sense but my other work really focuses on race and gender. So I read a lot about racism in institutions, namely, so Healthcare, the justice system, media, education system and as well as gender-based violence and I've been doing this work eight years now, I've been writing about race and reporting on race when a lot of journalists were unwilling to talk about race. So it's been a long journey and I'm happy we're here now, that we can actually talk about it, but I've been doing that for a long time.

And right now what I do is I teach, so I actually teach a course at Ryerson called Reporting on Race and it's - the longer title's Black Communities in the Media. So I've created and taught the first course like this in Canada, we don't have any other ones, and I teach

students how to accurately and respectfully and accountably report on Black communities in Canada, as well as the US. So I was doing that last September, I'm going to be doing that this fall as well, and last term, I was also the Journalist in Residence at the University of British Columbia, as well as I was teaching in the Gender, Race, Social Justice, and Sexuality and departments at UBC. So I taught a course called Black Women in the Americas. And we just talked about Black women's lives. We read Black women's lives through nonfiction. It's like a lot of things. I wear a lot of hats; currently on my little bit of a break and I had a really busy book tour that just kind of went for a year and a half. The paperback just came out on Tuesday. So, I'm just kind of taking it easy and trying to rest a little bit before things get rough again. But yeah, that's me in a nutshell.

Sara: Perfect, thank you. Did anybody want to jump in and start off with some questions for Eternity?

Too many Canadians, we're all too polite. Sure, Arlene, go ahead.

Arlene: Hi, Eternity. I want to thank you first of all for that book.

I'm going to make a few comments and I do have a question up at the last. I think the format that you eventually settled on was really a wonderful format, it was very at times, a very emotional deep learning for us, but for somebody I'm a privileged white person. So I'm glad that it was a mix of your personal experiences and statistics because I think you will reach more of the population. I'm glad to hear about this book tour, which is wonderful because there is a place for that. There's also a place for you know, just solid research and statistics but that is dry as dust and it doesn't reach the general population. And so, this is why I was just - and the fact that you included right from your young childhood, I think those of us who are not really aware of the racial move- or the discrimination within Canada, I think we tend to think of, "Oh, that something that happens to teenagers and young adults". And then, we don't think about how it affects a very, very young child. And so I thank you for, you know, it must've been difficult to write your personal experiences, your traumas. But I think that really was essential for us to have a greater understanding. As a sideline, I graduated from Western over 50 years ago and so that was in the 60s with the Vietnam War, when they put the first man on the moon. And when you were writing about the disrespect for women of the male college student - And I know it's not every male college student, and I know, it's not just in London, but that to me, has not changed in over 50 years and we've had so much change and improvement. And I think that is one of the saddest things when I realized that, and I didn't know all of these other things that you have accomplished since you've been writing and my question that I formatted before I came here, but you probably don't have any time - Do you have anything else in the works that you're writing that we can look forward to? Thank you.

Eternity: Thank you, Arlene. And thank you for those comments. I especially, I've spoken to so many people who went to Western other schools and the 50s and 60s, and they said the same thing about just the way that women on campus are treated, it hasn't changed at all and there hasn't really been anything in place to address that. So yeah, I think it's just, it shows a legacy of trauma of post-secondary institutions and how it still persists. So, thank you for that. In terms of things that I'm working on, I tried to take a break so that I could work on Another book. I had two book deal when I signed the deal for this book. So I do have to , I will be writing another book. I don't have to, I want to, but I haven't decided yet, but there is

actually a TV show in the works for this book. So I've been writing the TV show, currently. It's a little slow moving, it's weird. I'm a really impatient person and I thought publishing was slow, but TV is way slower. So we're working on the TV show version of this.

And in terms of things that I am writing and working on, I would say, the most recent thing I've been working on is a series called *Black in the Jury Box* and I won a - I'm the recipient of this scholarship for this fund, it's called the Joe Burke Fund for Social Justice Reporting and it's through the West End Phoenix Newspaper in Toronto and they post the stories online eventually. But what I'm looking at is how the jury system in Ontario basically keeps Black people off the jury through systemic issues. And that's what I'm working on because I was actually a juror while I was writing this book in 2018 2019 and I was just appalled by the way that our jury system runs. And so I'm working on a four-part series. I'm on part 3 now. But the first part looked at all the systemic issues that keep Black people off juries, from compensation - Ontario is the probably as I think it does have the worst compensation, hasn't changed since '95. It looks at how white affluent people tend to be jurors in cases that involve young black male defendants. And then the second part, looks at how bias and implicit bias could actually cause a jury to convict somebody unfairly. So, what I found in that piece was that when there is a jury of all white people, which happens a lot in Ontario, they are more likely to convict a Black person 16 times more than a white person. So I was looking at that. So that's kind of what I'm doing now. And hoping that I will get to write a book, soon. I'm hoping to kind of start writing in the fall that - there's a lot of things going on.

Arlene: Thank you.

Linda: Hello, Eternity! This is Linda. First of all, your book was just a page-turner. And it was - certainly I agree with Arlene that it is disturbing that things, you know, haven't changed. As you can see, I'm an older woman and my daughter went to, my daughter went to high school. When she was in Grade 9, it came to her attention and she told me that some of the older boys, the boys in grade 12 were asking the grade nine girls out and they had a rude thing where they said, it's called "breaking them in" and it was you know the older boys taking advantage of the grade nine girls who were flattered that these boys were asking them out. So that was certainly, as a mom, you know, discouraging, because I had gone to school in the 60s and so, you're hoping by the 90s, you know, that things had changed and then I read your book and, of course, and then you talked about the same sort of thing, where, you know, the older students that were supposed to be supporting the new people that were coming into the post-secondary, were taking advantage of, you know, the newness and all of that.

And also I read your book just after the tragedy happened in London, and you know, it just it's so - you know certainly as an older woman it's discouraging and I have grandchildren now, but I - it's so generous of you to write it. I'm so glad they're making it into a TV series. I'm so glad that there will be a broader audience for your messaging because I think Canadians need to wake up to the fact that even, you know, we would think that the progress was slow, but we thought we were progressing, but you know, we're not progressing enough and I just don't want to stay here. I don't want to stay where we are. So thank you because you had to put so much into that book, and you were so brave to do it and we really appreciate that you've done that and I don't really have a question. I just wanted to thank you and I just hope you keep with that message.

Eternity: Thank you. Thank you so much. It was a long process, I think, of writing the book. And I, I think I always felt like I had the conversations with, with family and stuff because when I - actually, I wrote the book and it was ready to come out after the book came out in the book at the end of March, I didn't give the book to my family until February like late February, because I was so afraid - for years, I wrote the book and they'll be like, "what are you writing about?" And, "I'm just writing about my life". Like I said, that's all they knew and it was so frightening to put it out there, but I think that it was, it was a necessary thing to do because we weren't - I don't think we were really talking about any of those issues. Even after Black Lives Matter had happened, we were talking about race, we were talking about sexual assault to an extent, as something almost that happens outside of years, you know, your personal group for example, and we're talking about police brutality as that being the center of racism and it wasn't, there was all these things happening on campus and no one was talking about.

And when I actually pitched the book and I was shopping it around to editors, a lot of editors didn't get it, which I thought was kind of shocking. It showed the extent of the problem. They were like, "I don't get it, you're a student on campus and you're having fun. So what's the problem? What's happening on campus?" And then, when I started researching the book, I was shocked to see that every single campus in Canada, whether it was University or college or anything really, there was all this White Supremacy happening, alt-right flyers everywhere, Posters, white pride groups, like, in had taken another level and it felt important that I get to put myself in it, but also kind of illustrate that, because, yeah, just been years and decades of us not talking about it. Thank you, thank you for your comments.

Linda: I think it's hard to talk to family when they, you know, when you try and it sounds like you tried, But at first, they couldn't see how it affected you because they were thinking of you as South Asian - am I correct? South Asian ancestry and they were, so they weren't thinking of the fact that you, that your, that, that wasn't there because that was only their experience. And so that part was new to me and it was good to learn that, because I think, you know, family, but I think it's hardest to talk to the people closest to you, I guess. I'll leave it at that. I think it's almost easier to talk to strangers about such personal things, unfortunately. But it, I'm glad that your family, you know, you were able to persevere and talk to them because, you know, it's so important and they became your advocates too. So.

Eternity: It's interesting. Everyone gets it now, we're all on the same page finally but yeah it took a long, long time to get there. I think there's some family members I can tell like they're like, "I don't get it," still. But what's nice about this time period, I think also their kids who are, you know, are similar in age, they also get it so now they can go home and teach their parents and you know, they can teach their family members that everyone is on the same page which even like four, three-four years ago, I think would have been much harder.

Linda: And we learn from our children and our grandchildren so that they open us up. Thank goodness.

Gemma: I'm going to go next, Sara. So, Eternity, thank you so much for that book. It was brave you were unapologetic. I remember when I first heard about it last year and I was so surprised that our community library actually had this book, so I did sign it out. I live in North Bay which is 15 minutes away. As a Black Caribbean International student, your experiences mirrored a lot of what, I think, I left, I graduated in 2007, So way back - the conversations I

had with other International students. I attended Nipissing University here in North Bay and I currently work at the institution. So reading your book, I have been - before she heads off, she's six, now I think you can hear her in the background - Now, I think you really touched on a lot of things. I think you did a very good job of - for folks with that lived experience and intersecting identities. We really, really Jive with the material and you had a very good writing style, I don't know anything about journalism. I'm a geography major. But you wrote it so well, I felt like I knew you at the end. It was very honest, you infused humour as well, which is a great way of doing the work. And so, I'm so happy to see that you're, you know, reaping the benefits of all - unintelligible- someone mentioned when you went back to talk about your family and that pieced in their field is related with me. I think my internet is unstable as usual, rural internet. And it was really really really good book, really good. Well written. So thank you very much for that.

And as I reflected on it just because of the nature of my work in student affairs, I was just wondering two things, you know, how do we begin to do the work? You know, I am in a predominantly white institution. I also appreciated the way you were able to say White Supremacy. I think it's a really hard thing for Canadians to navigate and it becomes even more difficult in Northern Ontario, sometimes, to have those discussions. So, how do we start that work in our respective institutions and recognizing as the minority, or the few folks with the lived experience, the trauma of constantly reliving your past experiences, and how do you navigate balancing that and your mental health, but still be genuine in the work that you want to undertake?

Eternity: That's a great question. Thank you Gemma, nice to meet you. [**Gemma:** You as well.] So yeah, I think there's so much work to be done and I think what's scary about it is that a lot of it hasn't even started like even the most basic stuff has not started and I think that we have a lot - especially in the last five years - I think we owe a lot to students and student activism and faculty and staff, and not necessarily the higher-ups. I personally think the higher-ups were blocking a lot of the change that needs to happen and I think a lot of schools the very first thing that needs to happen is that they need to admit that there is racism on their campus and I never understood why they couldn't admit it because like, maybe this is technical but to me, it's an institution, there is institutional racism. That doesn't mean the institution is inherently racist, it means the people in the institution are carrying out the racism and the bias, whether that's the people in housing or wherever it may be. And I think that that unwillingness or fear of even just saying, "Look, we have to acknowledge that we have racism on this campus." they can't even do that. So how can we move forward? I think - the thing I would like to see on campus, I think I would like to see a lot more resources for dealing with race. Because I remember being a student and - I actually got into a fight with Western a few years later because they lied and said that the Office of Equity and Inclusion, I had like had meetings with them as student and I hadn't, and I didn't even know what it was and when you're a student and you're like, "oh my goodness, where's my class? Like, what's this building?" You have no idea what the Equity Office of Inclusion is, or what it is, you know? And then even when I was researching the book, I'm like, "what is this?" So I Googled it and it deals with human rights complaints. So in this ere right now, we've hit A record number of hate crimes in 2017 in Canada. London, Southwestern Ontario continues to surge. London increased by nearly half last year alone. Hate incidents which are things Like, "go back to your country" or other kinds of microaggressions, those don't violate the law because our laws are outdated, but that is increased too. So, if you are a student and this happens to you on campus, where do you go? And like, does anyone even

know how to deal with it? I don't think they do. So I would like to see services, support services BIPOC professionals, as a completely separate stream of mental health services available for survivors, for BIPOC students, for queer and trans students, that's separate from the waitlist because you could sign up for mental health services And you could graduate like two times over and still not get in right. So I think that's important because what's happening in the research proves that students, especially Black students, they're dropping out because they don't see themselves represented in the curriculum, in the materials. They don't have students who look like them, they don't have faculty that looks like them. They feel like the faculty favors white students, and they drop out. And some of like the greatest Elite schools in the US don't even have Black admission anymore because students are saying, "you know what, it's my choice. I don't want to go there", so I think even just understanding how racism functions. I think in Canada, we are assuming racism is this explicit thing, so think when a lot of the time, it's also incredibly subtle and shady. And it's those things that, you know, those 1,000 cuts and end up being the reason why you drop out or you don't do well. So I'd like to see that and I also would like to, I think we need to like, re-evaluate the zero tolerance policy. I'm very gung-ho about the zero tolerance policy because when I chose Western, I was like, "Okay, nobody looks like me, but they told me there's a zero tolerance policy for racism, for sexism Etc". And then, when that issue happened on campus, for those who read the book, and the students were calling us the n-word and telling us to go back to our country, I'm like, "It's okay. I'll go to campus police and I'll talk about the zero tolerance policy".

No school actually knows what it is, like, do you get suspended? Do you get an education? you get expelled? Is there a transparency process? nobody knows a thing. And so when I was researching the book, I looked at a dozen Universities, actually, many dozen universities, and look at their campus Police hate crime sections, I would say of all those schools, maybe two or three even have the category of hate crime or hate incidents, which means nobody actually knows what it is, how it is defined or they're not being followed through.

So I think if we start there and you mentioned something about agency and not burning out, I think it's important that staff, Faculty, administrators, they don't force students to talk about their experiences and re-traumatize themselves, but I do think they need student input, but students should be compensated or they should have the option of coming to a town hall, for example, or filling out a survey, but it shouldn't be mandatory. And I've heard from a lot of students who - I've had students, I've talked to them in settings like this and they'll wait till their staff member leaves and they're like, "No offense, but I don't want to be here", "I was forced to be here," or "I got several emails and I'm tired, I don't want to talk about it". So I think there's this belief that because their students and they're BIPOC students that they want to share their experiences, and that's not the case for everyone.

But those were a lot of things. But those are even just baseline things that we need to start doing.

Gemma: Thank you.

Sara: So I know you've done, like, a lot of research into the background and how these things are happening, and I was hoping you could talk a little bit more about what makes London and Western like, so, primed for these sorts of situations to keep happening. Like, how is this happening? And I know that it's across a lot of universities, would you say that

Western has a particular issue of racism? Or do you find that it's pretty common across most Canadian and US universities right now?

Eternity: Yeah, I think it's a two-pronged issue, because the city itself has a White Supremacist problem, and that's something for those who aren't familiar with London, it actually was like the favorite place of enslaved people who came to Canada. That's where - they would rather be there than Toronto. They built lives there. They made more money. But it was also one of the first places where the KKK got to escape and people really in that, in London, in Southwestern Ontario, really looked up to the KKK and so it has that history already. They had segregated schools, and all of that. So I think what happens in a place like London from the research I've done, is that it's a homogeneously White, Christian conservative, but then they've had this massive boom of 8 to 15 percent of immigration come in in the 10-year period. And so, what normally happens when people, you know, who have their cookie cutter homes, everyone is white, When you start to see these faces that maybe you've never seen these faces unless it was in a TV show and it was carrying a gun, or being violent, you start to become afraid and then you're angry and that anger, which really roots from fear begins, you start to take that out on people. And in researching the book, there were so many violent incidents in London, and also many of them were tied to the words, "Go back to your country". And I'm not exactly sure necessarily what it is about Southwestern, Ontario, aside from just being probably quite homogeneous and when it comes to Western, Western has a lot of international students but Western's non-International students, they tend to come from the neighboring areas like Bath and - I won't even try to name all the Ontario places around - Bath and Sarnia and all of that. And so these are also students who have never seen a Black person, a brown Lives aside from in TV and we know what those tropes are like. So you combine that with the prestige of the University, a lot of these students come from money and privilege, they come from high schools where making fun of, you know, students with accents was funny and cool. They bring that into here and then they come into this environment during frosh week where it's okay to talk about women, like, like parts, right? And objectify women and have these violent fantasies about women, And that reaffirms so many different things. So I think part of it is that it's all these different issues coming at once. And then also the University's just refusal to acknowledge that so much of what happens off campus, because it's such a bar heavy scene, they don't want to acknowledge that "Yes, our students went out and assaulted this person at a bar, but because it happened off campus it doesn't matter". And so there's a disconnect between the community and Western that allows it to continue.

Sara: Do you ever wish that you had done your University experience differently, like transferring at any point? When you realized how uncaring the professionals at Western were being towards you?

Eternity: I definitely had considered it, and a lot of my friends by the time I was in third year, I would say maybe seven of friends were considering it and a couple did actually most transfer but some actually just dropped out of University completely and never went back. And I thought about it, but then I thought what if it's worse somewhere else? and it is worse, it's bad everywhere. So I'm like this is something I'm used to this kind of discomfort I'm used to, but at the same time, I had a lot of really good support in place, like by then I had a very good friend who was the administrator in the women studies department and she was Caribbean. So I was always with her and, you know, I found my people on campus. It's Was

important for me to stay, because I was what if I go, and I have to do this all over again. So, I decided to stay and I made the agreement with myself that, if I decide to stay, I have to stick it out. Like, I can complain, but I can't complain that much because I've decided to do this, but I remember like every single day, especially the last year counting down every day. There's, like, you know, there's 32 weeks left, there's four weeks left, there's two days left, and just really like dreading every single day. And I think a lot of students feel that still.

Sara: Did you find your master's program any better when you know you went to a different school for your master's program? Did you have the same sort of experiences or was the, maybe the more mature students that you were around, make any sort of positive difference for you?

Eternity: So, the master's program, I think, in a master's program, students are just a little bit more mature because you're getting different types of people. So, I think that helped. I didn't have the same issues that I faced in London at Ryerson but our year, there were two Black students, me and somebody else, and we had a total of four students of color. So, two Black students and then two non-Black students of color and up until now that's the most diverse group that masters program has had. Like I've gone and spoken at that school their masters for women, it was completely white in the following years. So I think it helped having that we put out the first Diversity Issue ever at the Ryerson Review Journalism which is now the Review Journalism.

And that was a struggle, so it was a different type. But I think that the racism experience in that program was less about me as a body there and more about the work I was doing none of my professors understood why I was writing about race, they didn't get the purpose, they didn't understand why I wanted to write personal journalism, which now people love, but at the time they were like, "It's selfish to do this". They didn't get anything I was writing and then BLM happened the year, I think the month before, Mike Brown was killed the month before I started my journalism program and there was a lot of conversation about, are you like, are you going to cover this? You can't cover this.

And for the first two, three years of my career, I was not allowed to touch any Black Lives Matter story, or any story about Black issues because I was Black, and it was seen as a political affiliation. And so I dealt with a lot of that. For a long, long time, I would say up until 2018-2019. I was constantly, my credibility was constantly called into question because I was reporting on Black issues and it was seen as a conflict of interest or like a political thing. So looking back, it's incredibly ignorant because it's an expertise to have right? Like, look at how many positions are being created right now. Like, you know, the beat is anti-racist Media or something and all of these students including myself were told no, you can't do this. This is not right. at the CBC They asked me can I write about anything else? Besides Black issues at CBC? I wasn't allowed to write a Black Black Lives Matter, Black people. When I would TA the teaching assistant like I was a teaching assistant at Ryerson, and a professor asked me, are you going to brainwash the students through Black Lives Matter agenda? And I'm like, "I get the same education as everyone else". So there's a big double standard. It was a totally different type of racism. But I'm relieved that we're at a place now where, like I'm happy I didn't give up because I think, if I had given up, and been discouraged, it would have, it would have not been good. I wouldn't have been able to write my book and I wouldn't have been able to do this work, and it was clearly needed. And I think a lot of Journalism schools are very gung-ho about forcing students to do who like Legacy papers. do the Globe and Mail, do the Toronto Star, you know, don't think of a podcast, don't think

about Indie. They just want you to go straight through this place. And for a lot of us, who like like me or have My experience, we don't belong in those spaces.

Serena: Well, more just a question of curiosity because it's obvious, you've made it as a writer, right? So if the starting point is like, well, you know, can you be a writer these days? Well, obviously you can but I'm also mindful of all the ways in which so much of your labor is probably not compensated appropriately. You know, like, this amazing course you developed at Ryerson, I'm guessing you probably got paid as a contract faculty member, right? And, you know, there are so many of these side gigs, and the mentorship and the development, that's not compensated. just curious, Like in your dream world, you know, not the one that exists but what would it look like to really be recognized as a writer, professionally by your peers but also in terms of compensation, workplace, environment, That kind of thing?

Eternity: That's a really good question. I need to think about this more for myself too - it's a good question. I think, like, at least for me, to really have made it as a writer, especially in Canada, it sounds kind of ungrateful. But it's also to get my book, the rights published elsewhere because I think still, like, for the stuff that I write about is still more valued and discussed outside of Canada.

And so to me, it's getting work out of there, but it's also I I think the stuff that I get to do, I - for a year, I quit my full-time job at Extra, to just talk about my book and I talked about my book six, seven times a week. And so I think that to me, that's a dream, like I never thought that was gonna happen, right? And I, like, people pay to hear me talk, you know, like it's weird, right? You grow up thinking, like, you know, you have nothing valuable to say or you're, you're young, what do you have to say? And then you get to do that. So to me, I think a lot of, a lot of what I would want, is already happening.

But I think in terms of compensation, and especially when you come from like, journalism or an industry where you're ready, you go into it knowing, you may not be paid. Well, there's a lot of internships. The industry is completely broken if you're likely to lose your job or get laid off, you go into things taking what you can and I think for me, I didn't have any journalism connections. I am one of the few. At the time I was an Extra I was there's three full-time Black, female editors in Canada and I was with her. And so, I know that there's not a lot, so you just take anything.

One of the things that has changed for me since the book has come out is I have an agent who handles my speaking stuff, and he is a white man and it makes a difference because there are a lot of things that he can ask for that I could never imagine asking for or there's a lot of things that I would be afraid to ask for or they say I'm hostile or aggressive, or maybe they wouldn't say that, but I'm still afraid. So it's been nice to get to this point, making it to me as having somebody else kind of negotiate on my behalf and taking the stress work out of that. But then by doing that, that also means that it buys me writing time in the future. And that means that I can say no to things to protect my energy and the hardest thing that's come out of all of this is that I've been really sick multiple times. I had pneumonia back in March, I've just been run down for a year because when you talk about this stuff it can be re-traumatizing, but you don't notice it, like you don't feel it until it's kind of too late. And so having somebody kind of manage that for me and being at this place means that I can now protect my time, and protect my health as well. So, yes. And then also making it would be having this TV show out and about. I would be really happy about that. So yes, I would say all of those things and definitely making it will also be having time for a nap. That'd be really nice.

Serena: I just realized I was muted. I just want to say thank you. Yeah. It's a beautiful vision and really really glad to hear you have an agent, it sounds like such an important buffer and advocate. Yeah.

Eternity: Yeah it really is. It's really saved me a lot of grief and also good to learn. Now I can tell my friends how to negotiate because now I know how to negotiate which, you know, women rarely ever do. It's empowering.

Sara: I have another question for you, from - See this, this is part of the problem is that, I think that, one of the things you spoke about in your book is how often us pasty white Folks are trying not to step on toes in such a way that it only makes things worse. Like, asking you permission to play rap music at their parties and things like that. Like, ridiculous things like that, but that I'm sure also come off in the smaller ways like the smaller gestures of deference that you end up noticing. So I'm wondering how do we find that balance between being able to learn more about what is acceptable for someone who maybe wasn't raised to know what is acceptable, or came from another really small town and doesn't have a lot of Multicultural experience, and just being two normal humans in a room together. Like, how do we find that balance?

Eternity: Yeah, that's always the question and I think a lot of people are afraid to touch the question, with good reason, but to me, we're also doing our best. I think it can be really tough to know what people want when it changes so quickly. Like language, right? Like one day we have proper terminology and two weeks from now we don't and so it's important to stay on top of things and like the great, the best example, I can think of was when we all posted the black Square on Instagram, and then a lot of the Black community came out and said, "Don't post the square because you're flooding, you're flooding Instagram," and it's being aware of that and being like, "Oh no, I messed up, but that's okay". We just, we go with the flow, Now, we fixed it. and I think for a lot of people, a lot of allies, they get frustrated by that process. They feel like, you know, like, "Well what do you, what do they want?", like, "I'm always wrong", and I think it's okay to be wrong. It's okay that things change, but I think, you know, on our side also, we also need to be aware that people who are genuine allies, they are committed to doing this work and so we also have to cut them a little bit of slack. They didn't grow up with our experience and I don't think anybody - personally, I don't think anybody is - there's nothing that says, "you have to understand another person's lived experience and want to help them do better". And so to make that decision, and there's a woman named Sheri Atkinson, she talks about this, to be an ally is consistent, it's a lifelong process of consistent, genuine work, putting the work in and out, and if you ask an ally, you asked say, me, "Do you think I'm a good ally?" I'm not gonna lie and I was like, no. Then you have work to do, the group that you want to Ally with needs to agree.

And so, to me, I think I, a little bit more empathy for folks who are trying their best. And then I also think that there are things that maybe you don't want to be doing like a lot of, a lot of allies that are spoken didn't realize they were doing like, maybe you say something inappropriate, or then you apologize like five times, and what you're doing is you're putting the emotional work and labor on that person of color to validate you because you feel bad, and so you can apologize once, make a commitment to do better and you move on. or it's asking a person of color to educate you: "Which books do you recommend?" There is a Google! You can Google it! Have those conversations with other allies and other white folks.

And these are the little things that you may not think, you may think that, by asking a person of color, it's like getting you brownie points, but it's not because you're making them do the work. And so it is hard to kind of follow along with the ebbs and flows of things, but one thing I always caution against and I'd see this actually from colleagues of mine who are white and consider themselves allies is they were posting during, Like the summer that George Floyd protests happened. She was posting, she was like, "I'm so exhausted. I have like, I have allyship fatigue". And I remember thinking, like, "Okay, I get that. But you get to take a nap and then wake up and you're refreshed. I live like this everyday, this is exhausting". And so, I think it's important to remember that. Yes, you can be tired, you can be frustrated. You may not think, you know, you may think everything's all over the place, but at the end of the day, you're not living that experience. And so there needs to be some empathy on both sides as well.

Sara: Thank you. I think that's something that especially with the Evergreen Program, we've run up against a few times and Linda - is a fantastic Library Patron, we've spoken about it a few times - and that we get to speak to these amazing authors who often are writing about deeply personal, difficult to write about things that as, you know, cis white women, we have a pretty easy gig a lot of the time. So it's sometimes hard to ask the questions in a way that doesn't feel like we're being too intrusive when we're trying to learn, or, you know, just saying things wrong, when we don't know better, for anything that may be new to us. So we really appreciate the opportunity to be able to learn more and ask more from people who are actually informed. And, you know, especially you've done so much research into all of this, that it's, it's great to be able to pick your brain on these topics.

Eternity: Thank you, yeah, I think any, you know, any person who is in a position where they like to teach people, or they are willing to be a little bit more generous with their time will also understand that. Yeah, people make mistakes all the time, and it's not even just in regards to, to race, too. We're having a lot of conversations about pronouns and, and misgendering, right? So, this is happening across the board. And so, I think like, as long as people's intentions are pure, and someone is able to kind of understand that when people make mistakes. I think we'll all be a lot better for it, you know, you can ask the questions if you mess up with messed up and move on, but it's a learning opportunity for everyone.

Sara: That's awesome. I was sort of curious along the line with all of the research and everything you've done, what is it that there's such a huge gap in Canada, like so many times throughout the book you were like, "Well, here's the stats of the US, and Canada doesn't track this", and "Canada, doesn't track that", and "these stats are wrong even though we do track them". So what is going on there and how do we fix it?

Eternity: Yeah. Okay. So what I know about this, but I think I know about this is that in the 90s there were. So in Toronto there was like a big influx of Jamaicans, particularly, and Caribbean people that came into the city of Toronto and a lot of white folks at the time were afraid and there were several - So there were a lot of like turf wars and gang wars already happening but when Jamaicans came in, a lot of them would -became part of like, a lot - not a lot - ome of them became part of, gang members, became gang members and apart of groups. But then what happened was that there were these turf wars playing you Out in like real life. and media actually use that as an excuse to try and get Jamaicans deported. So they would write stories and say that all Jamaican men are criminals, they were raised by

their grandmothers and they're criminals. So that was the narrative that was going on and so what the race based data was people were touting race based out of we should have to actually see what's going on. Is it actually Black people that are causing this, you know, these issues who's dying, who's doing what.

But then the Black community was really afraid that that data would be used to further surveil them to further upon them and cause more police intervention. So they're like, "Look, we are going to scrap it," and then never came back. And there have been so many excuses along the way despite so many advocates saying, "We need it. We need it for health reasons, we need it for, you know, there's mothers are dying in childbirth, three to five times more and we need that information. We need to know all these things," and they just refuse to do it. I think the only time we get to see this kind of conversation come up again was during COVID and there's a perfect example of why we needed it because - black communities were amongst those hit the hardest, some of them were hit the hardest, And when you looked at the factors, they were living in poverty, they were highly, you know, just neglected areas. So, in the book, it's so frustrating. And I think my journalist brain is like, "I have to say, it's, I've got to be transparent and say, I don't know because we actually don't know". So, the conversation is still at the stage where I think, if you ask most people most people would say "yes, let's have the data because we are so behind," and then there's a little bit of, you know, I guess the higher-ups are better like, you know, "well, we don't want to be responsible for This data and then it's misused". So that's where we're at and it's a shame, it's a real shame because everywhere else, even countries that have, like, Australia, they have less Black people than, you know, the US and they are conducting some really good research. So we have not, we will not catch up anytime soon. But at least we have the data from the US.

Sara: Oh, Mary. I see you've joined in here and I don't know if you wanted to take the opportunity to ask Eternity anything or if you're just hanging out that's fine too.

Mary: Sorry, I'm late. I - hi Eternity sorry. I left my camp to come home and then when I got home, you know, all hell breaks loose, there's - everything's happening. So I'm so sorry. I loved your book. I was absolutely horrified, I'll be honest. I had no idea of what you, you know, went through, racism in universities, I was feeling actually kind of pissed off at these Canadian universities. My kids have gone. We dropped them off and they went and did their thing, and it all sounds so wonderful in the brochures. And I was really horrified at what, at what you went through. I just did not know that. And I just kept turning page after page and saying, "oh my God, oh my God! Oh my God, there's more and this is terrible, terrible, terrible." So, yeah, I'm dumbfounded actually. I think everybody should read this book and talk. Yeah. It's - I'm alarmed at these universities that all sound so good and we all know somebody who's gone to London or gone to wherever and they all sound so wonderful and if you didn't you know, open the lid on that, I don't think we'd know that stuff. So I think that's really valuable for us. I'm pretty sure it was valuable for you to get that out of your system and write the book and maybe it's not out even - does it ever get out of your system?

Eternity: I think that, yeah, it definitely is out.

Mary: Oh good.

Eternity: When I wrote the book I actually had sent a version to my editor, and I wrote the book as a humour, like a humorous book, a book of funny essays, and she called me and

was like, "This is not funny." And I was like, "What do you mean it's not funny, it's hilarious!" I was thinking of like these younger, female memoirists who write these funny books, like Sloan Crosby and *I Was Told There'd Be Cake*, and like, that's what I'm going for, and she's like, "No, this is the bad." And it like, took me so many drafts. I think up until a few months before I submitted, the final draft was like, oh my goodness, this is really bad and I never gave myself permission to sit with it and say what you went through, especially as a child, your age, you're 17 or 18 or 19, you're in this time period where you're supposed to figure out who you are and everyone's throwing everything at you. How did I get through that? And that made a lot of sense that the person that I became or the adult that I became was because a lot of stuff that happened, but when you would tell people, they would say "That's not real, you're exaggerating, that didn't happen, I had kids who went there", you know, "I went there and it was great so I don't know you're talking about," so when everyone's telling you that you start to believe it and so I really thought it was funny. and when I wrote my, published my book about a lot of messages from BIPOC students who were saying the same thing. They were like "oh no, I have like a lot of things came up when I read this," or, "I actually just, it's been 20 years, it's been 30 years and I just processed what I had gone through because I also thought it was funny because there was no other option other than thinking it's funny". So it was really therapeutic to write it and I think I had too or else, I think I would have - I don't think I would have understood why I was the way that I - why I am the way that I am, if I had not written it and I think I was walking around really angry which is also a side effect of experiencing racism. When I'm really angry very - just like a dark cloud over me all the time. Very short, I had very short fuse and when I worked through it I feel like some demons came out, you know, and now I feel a lot lighter, but I think that's the case for a lot of students, they were told it wasn't a big deal and so they internalize it and it really is a big deal. It's - you're traumatized. And no one ever wants to put that word, along with that experience, because you go to university, to have fun and have a time of your life. And but really, that's not actually what it is.

Sara: Sorry. Go ahead Linda.

Linda: When you were talking, it reminded me of something I read about Barack Obama and someone, and this person said, they didn't think he would ever have become the president if he'd been an angry Black man because people don't respond well to anger unless it's a white male anger, then that, you know, that's considered strength. That's considered Okay. And I think that is the same for, I think, women, too. I think that it's harder for people to accept a strong woman who, you know, it's expressing passionately something that they don't think is right. And so, you know, you're such a you just sparkle with joy and you know, I think that that is something unfortunately that, you know, the messaging - that people want that message to come from a positive place, even though it's such a negative thing you went through. So you have that ability to present, you know, it even in the book, a really disturbing message but in such a, you know, there's a hopefulness to it that that things can improve and that you want to be part of that and that you have a plan and you're not giving up until it's better, but in a positive way. And it just reminded me of that, that I read about him and I thought that is so true that some people, there are some parts of our society that aren't allowed to be angry without being dismissed, like you're, I don't know all sorts of negative words. I can't think of one right now, but I - watching you, you know, present tonight, you just are the perfect person to take this forward, not in a strong way, but in a way that people will be open to you, and we should be open anyway to messaging, but

unfortunately, it seems it has to be - there's a some resistance just to messaging, you know, from some people.

So what has been your experience with pushback in your messaging?

Eternity: I think I have been way luckier somehow, I wanted to keep going but like, somehow got a whole lot luckier than a lot of like other women writers that I know or other Black women activists and advocates. I haven't had a lot of pushback and I don't know what it is and some of it, I think maybe because the book is necessarily, to me, the book isn't actually about race like there's so many other things in it and so I always thought maybe if there was one part you disagree with because you don't have that lived experience, maybe you identify with trying to fit in. And so I thought some of it was that but I also realized that. But the stuff that I do, like, I'm talking about the book, usually, to people who don't look like me or share my lived experience, I'm teaching courses about Black communities with mostly like 99% of the classroom does not share that lived experience. And so I think I learned very, very early on you have to change the messaging, because if you're yelling at someone, someone's yelling at you, you get defensive and nothing gets through. And so I think I have to kind of like open myself up a little bit and be a bit more compassionate about how I present this message.

Because for a lot of people, you know, I've had students have conversations in class, and one student will say, "I can't believe this is happening in Canada". And another student who's BIPOC saying, "Well, I can't believe you're saying you can't believe this is happening in Canada," and they get upset with each other. And with the reality is a lot of people are shocked. A lot of people are shocked. And when you bring in data and you bring in lived experience, you bring those together, it becomes like this, one-two punch of like, "Oh my God, I cannot believe this is happening". And so to me, I think I have to be compassionate and allow for the, you know, for the questions and put the message out there in a way that everyone can understand it.

But the writing that I do and the mission that I'm on is for my people as well. And so I knew I never want them to feel like I'm doing this for other audiences, it's for them. And so for me the joy in the book, the laughter in the book is for BIPOC students because that is exactly what we do when we're in the situation. When we're so depressed, Like you will laugh about that. Like somebody like made a comment about your hair, you like laugh and you can't stop laughing and then everyone staring at you. And so it was mostly for them to understand that you're not alone. This will replicate. This will be your friend. This will be your hug when you are at University.

So It's a, it's a, it's a balancing act, I think. But I do know that if I went the other way and was just kind of like upset about it and was kind of yelling at people and being like, "You have to understand this," it would never work because everyone's going to come to that conclusion or their going to want to be an ally, or they're going to learn things in their own time. And I think especially as a journalist, I'm not there to change anyone's mind, but I would like them to have the information that they need in case they want to change their mind.

Sara: I know we're running a little over on time, Eternity, but I have one last question, if you have a second that I have to ask as a librarian: what book have you read recently that we should all be reading, what is it that we're missing?

Eternity: This is like, not good because I never get to read any more. I love to read. Probably read, but one of the best books I've ever read was Alicia Elliot's *A Mind Spread Out*

on the Ground. That was like a life-changing book for me. So that book, I see a lot of nodding. So I'm guessing it must be somewhat well read but amazing, but also *Luster* by Raven Leilani, I don't know if anyone has heard of that book. It's like, done phenomenally well. So good, such a great, like, character study. It's really good and she's a young Black woman and she wrote this, like, bomb book that has exploded and I highly recommend it.

Sara: That's wonderful. Thank you, yes. I have read Alicia's book. I think that that was one of the Evergreen books last year, I want to say is why it's so familiar, and it was spectacular. It was another one where as I was reading it I was like, "Come on, like locally?" This is how it is like you said, the eye-opening things that you don't really notice and then you read it you're like, "She's talking about Toronto, like this is not far." So, same vein of, you know, mind blowing, I guess.

But on behalf of everyone here, thank you so much for joining us, Eternity. I know we could all keep picking your brain for hours, we're having a lot of fun, but thank you so much for your time.

Eternity: You thank you so much, it was so nice to meet you all.

All: Thank you, thank you so much.

Thank you for joining us for this latest episode of our Evergreen author chat sessions. This was episode 4 out of 6. So we have two more authors remaining.

Next week on July 29th, we will be chatting with the author, Michelle Good of *Five Little Indians*. The following week on the 5th of August, we will be posting the podcast if you would prefer to listen in podcast form. If you would like to join us for Michelle's chat, please feel free to contact the library. We would be more than happy to have you join in so you can ask questions along with us. Thank you again for joining us and I hope you enjoy.

As a final note, this episode alone will only be available for three months after its release date. So I encourage you to listen to it and share with your friends and family who would like to hear it as soon as you can.