

# Lynden Harris & Hidden Voices

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## SPEAKERS

Omkari Williams, Lynden Harris



Omkari Williams 00:21

Hello, and welcome to Stepping Into Truth, the podcast where we take on the issues of race, gender and social justice. I'm your host Omkari Williams, and I'm very glad you're here with me today. Hosting this podcast means that I am privileged to speak with people who are out in the world making a difference with their day jobs, their programs, their art, their activism, and I love doing this work. If you would like to support me, you can do so for as little as \$3 a month by becoming a member of my Patreon community. You can go to [patreon.com/omkariwilliams](https://patreon.com/omkariwilliams) and sign up. There's also a link on my website [OmkariWilliams.com](https://OmkariWilliams.com).



Omkari Williams 01:01

Today, my guest is Lynden Harris. Lynden is the founder of Hidden Voices, a radically inclusive, participatory and co-creative collective committed to a more just and compassionate world. For 20 years, Lynden has collaborated with underrepresented communities to create award winning works, combining narrative performance mapping, music, digital media, and interactive exhibits. A founding cultural agent for the US Department of Arts and Culture, Lynden is a Blade of Grass fellow, a recipient of the Ann Atwater Theatre Award, and the 2020, North Carolina Playwriting Fellow. She is the editor of *RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW: Life Stories from America's Death Row*. And I am so pleased to have her on the podcast. Hi, Lynden. How are you?



Lynden Harris 01:54

Hi. I'm doing great. Thanks. Glad to be here.



Omkari Williams 01:58

Oh, I'm so I'm so pleased that you were able to join me today. Because in general, your work is amazing. And certainly your book RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW is really well, it's so many things. It's heartbreaking. And it's wrenching. And it's moving. And we'll talk about that a bit later. But I'd like to start by talking about the fact that you actually work in a wide range of arts programs that are designed to highlight the experiences of those who are often overlooked in our society. And I'm curious as to what led you to doing this work? And specifically, what led you to creating Hidden Voices?



Lynden Harris 02:38

Sure, what an interesting question. It was a good long while ago, but I was working as the artistic director of a theater. And at that time, there was a real movement to look at how do we diversify our audiences? So there was this idea of outreach, right? And basically, that outreach kind of looked like, "How do we get people to come see the show that we think they should be wanting to see"? So how do we get, you know, Black folk to come see the play that we're going to do in February? And how do we get women to come see the show we're going to do in March. So it was this kind of idea that seemed a little slightly, I mean it was a good idea, but it seemed askew to me. To sort of project that we kind of know, as an artistic team, what you want to see or what you want to hear. And so I thought, well, I wonder what would happen if we went out into communities and didn't just ask them what do you want to see, but what stories do you have to tell? And so that was what we did. I guess it was like the early 2000 - 2001 sort of went into communities who were interested in this process and project and we kind of over the years developed a process that we use, that's not an agenda it's just the questions we ask so that we together can create something that the community wants to see.



Omkari Williams 04:02

That is so fascinating to me, because I do think that one of the challenges often is getting people to share their stories. But when you are able to sort of crack that shell and get the story out of someone, it is the most transformative experience that I can imagine, because story connects us so profoundly. So I love that. That just really just gave me goosebumps and made my heart happy. So thank you for that. You're in North Carolina. And that is a place with its own complicated past and complicated present in regards to race. Why did

you choose to create this project in that environment? Because there had to be things that would have been easier to do.



Lynden Harris 04:54

Yeah, well, we certainly don't do this because it's easy. You know that's never been obviously, kind of a driving factor. We have generally gone into communities that invite us to come. So that's what I meant by we will go into a community and basically, you know, start with what did other people not understand. And so, you know, there's an impetus to share, a very strong impetus in this particular project, *Serving Life: Revisioning Justice*, we back in, I think it was 2010, or 11, we were working on a project called *None of the Above: Dismantling the School to Prison Pipeline*. And so there were some newspaper articles and magazine articles written about that. And one of the men living on death row in North Carolina, read one of those articles and tore it out and gave it to the head of programs there, the psychologist who is the head of programs and said, Can you get these people here to talk with us? So he emailed me, the director of the programs, emailed and said, "Would you be willing to come in and develop a project for these guys living here for a group of them?" and I said, "Well, we're too busy right now. But let's touch base in six months, and we'll come in, and we won't develop a project for the men we'll develop one with them. And we'll use the same process we always do going into a community and together that sort of, we call it a steering circle of stakeholders, but together, we'll create what the project is. So that's how we ended up there.



Omkari Williams 06:30

Wow, that's remarkable. And it's one of those sort of serendipitous moments that then shifts things in very profound ways. I really like that.



Lynden Harris 06:41

It's so true.



Omkari Williams 06:43

You just never see them coming. And then all of a sudden, you're in a direction that you had not necessarily envisioned. And it's a really remarkable path that you've gone down. And coming from a theatre background myself, I really appreciate it when people use art to tell their stories, especially the stories that get overlooked. And when *Hidden Voices* is looking at doing a project, what criteria do you use to determine what stories you want to

tell? And in what ways other than you've heard the story out in the community? Is there, are there other criteria that you that you use?



Lynden Harris 07:17

That's such an interesting question. I think one is that we we are always kind of asking ourselves, does this community actually really need us. Because sometimes a group will invite us in, but we're looking at them and feeling like, you know, what, y'all are good, you've got the resources, you're doing a fabulous job, you know, we can point you towards some artists to work with. But it's not a situation where, you already have a pathway or an avenue to have your voice heard. And so that's really, you know, people have often referred to the folks we work with as voiceless. But that's not the case. They have powerful voices, what they don't have as an avenue, or a platform, or a way to share their voices. So really, if there is one sort of defining piece that would be it. Is whether or not we look at the issue or the community that's inviting us and can see that yeah, we're really the right match for them.



Omkari Williams 08:18

I appreciate that. Because I think often it's just easy to say, yes, someone invites you to do something and you just say yes, rather than taking the time to take a broader view and assess whether this community actually is going to benefit from what you have to offer in the way that another community might, because you do have limited time and limited resources. So if you're spending it somewhere that is not necessarily the biggest bang for your buck, then it means you're not spending it somewhere else. So to have that perspective, and to say, y'all are good, you can take this and run with it without us. That I find really impressive, because there's always that impulse, I think to say, yes, let's just do this. And I think that discernment really matters. So thank you for that. And thank you for bringing that up. I think it gives listeners something to think about in their own activist work.



Lynden Harris 09:16

Yeah, it's definitely not I'm not the smartest financial. It's not real savvy financially. (laughter) We kind of really look for the, you know, look at the communities that have the fewest resources in that sense, but it actually makes the work very powerful.



Omkari Williams 09:34

Unfortunately, those two things don't necessarily go together. Darn it.



Lynden Harris 09:39

I know. It's like when we were starting out. I thought it was really pretty funny that we had taken two underfunded, expressions Arts and Social Justice and put them together so that it was really even, even less fundable.



Omkari Williams 09:57

Yeah, way to have even less money to use. Great!



Lynden Harris 10:02

It was pretty funny. But that has actually started to change a little recently, which has been an interesting thing to see. But 20 years ago, people were just baffled, you know, they had no clue to what we were doing 20 years ago,



Omkari Williams 10:15

I don't know that the term social justice was even out there in the zeitgeist at all. I mean, arts was out there, mostly because people were complaining about getting defunded, but social justice and arts. Oh, no. So it's, I suppose we can look at that and think there is some progress there. And we can take some comfort in that.



Lynden Harris 10:20

Yeah.



Omkari Williams 10:21

In these very challenging times. One of the things that I know from my own experience of doing theater and political theater, is that it's impossible to sustain those kinds of projects without significant community buy in. So how have you all gotten your local and extended community to become an ongoing part of your process?



Lynden Harris 11:08

Our projects last years. So part of it is just the, the evolutionary nature of the work. Which again, you know, makes funding challenging. Because we, as I mentioned, we don't go in with an agenda, we go in with a process. And so when we're working together to figure out what it is the community wants to create, part of that is, like, really who's at the table, you know. And so one of the last questions we're asking is, who else needs to speak and who needs to listen, and that's kind of the outreach piece. And so that's a piece that's always evolving, as the project kind of grows and changes and the projects, for instance, Serving Life started out as a project on death row with the men there. And we created with them a performance, where we took their stories, and then we worked over six months to direct a performance. And then they performed that for about 80 other men living on death row and mental health professionals, and some of the administrators and officers and it was just extraordinary. Like, I can feel chills right now. And for a lot of the guys, they said it was the high point of their lives, you know.

L

Lynden Harris 12:26

So this, that kind of power of having your voice heard, and acknowledged and responded to. But then out of that came the desire on their part to see it, how could this reach a wider audience, right? So then we developed Count, which was a play that premiered at Playmakers Repertory Company, and used professional union actors, right. So there was that evolution. And then we also always create what we call a story cycle. And what it is, is that we put these monologues together, so they can just go out to book clubs, or churches or classes and, and people can literally sit in a circle of 20 people and each read one of these stories aloud, and then respond to it. And so the evolution keeps happening because someone says, How can we get this word out to, you know, this other community.

L

Lynden Harris 13:27

And then after one of the performances, we had invited family members to come, we had had a dinner. And, you know, it was amazing, because most family members like the mothers had never met another mother who had a child sentenced to be killed. So that in and of itself was extraordinary. But then there was an audience of, I don't know, 400 or 500 people at the end, who were just on their feet, you know, they were weeping and clapping and whistling. And the families were really quite astonished, I think is the word for it. Because they had never imagined people would care. They felt so isolated.

L

Lynden Harris 14:02

So after that, one of the mothers came up to me, and I thought she was gonna say something about how, what an amazing experience it was for her, you know, and she

came up to me, she said, Well, what I want to know is, when are you going to tell our story?



Omkari Williams 14:16

Wow.



Lynden Harris 14:17

And yeah, that was exactly my response. It was like this chills went all over my body. And I said, I can't say when, but I promise we will. So that started another piece of this same project. That's called A Good Boy. And it's a musical theater piece. So sharing the stories of family members. So that's how these things evolve. And so the participants and the audiences both kind of stay with a project. You know, they kind of want to see where it's going, what other voices are going to be included, what kind of shape it's going to take and then finally, most recently, well, the musical theater piece is ongoing. But the book RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW.



Omkari Williams 15:07

Well, that actually leads me perfectly into my next question, which was recently, your RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW now was published by Duke University Press. And this book is a collection of stories from people on death row. And it has a really unique structure. You start with stories from the early childhoods of these men on death row, and you progress in age throughout the book. And the storytellers are not identified. And yet each story I read, I felt like I was hearing a story from someone that I might know, and not because my life is filled with convicted criminals, but because my life is filled with people. And these are the stories of people and yes, each of these people was convicted of murder, you don't get put on death row for robbing a jewelry store. But what comes through every single time is their humanity, and almost always also the places where society just failed them. And you've mentioned how you came to this project. But I'm very curious as to what it was like for you working on this project?



Lynden Harris 16:18

Oh, well, you know, part of working on this project, what that meant, was going into a maximum security prison. And that in and of itself, is a fairly unusual experience, in that you are going into a space, a physical space, where you immediately come face to face with the fact that you are powerless in this situation, you know, that you are not in control in any way, shape, or form. As those huge pneumatic doors like close behind you, and you

hear this sound door after door after door, you know that you're not getting out, unless somebody lets you out. And I think that was really a beautiful way to begin the project. Because the physicality of that experience kind of brought us a little bit home to what it's like to live there, and to never be allowed out. So that piece of it was very dramatic.



Lynden Harris 17:27

Working with the initial group of stakeholders, the men that we develop the project with, was just beautiful. They were very excited, very open, very receptive. And the first question we asked when we go in to work on a project is about outcomes. Like what outcome would you like to see nationally, from this project? What outcome would you like to see in your community? Whether you mean the neighborhood you came from, or your community here on death row? And what changes would you like to see in yourself? And you know, that just opens the doors to so much reflection and sharing. And the number one goal that the men identified was, we want people to know, we aren't monsters. So that has been like a real beacon, I think, for everyone who's worked on this project, is to make sure that we're facilitating that recognition.



Lynden Harris 18:21

You know, really the project, the purpose of the project is to humanize the rest of us, to really humanize us so that we see clearly, the choices that we as a society are making around these men around massive incarceration. The effect that we're having on families and neighborhoods and communities. So I think one of the things that's really happened for everyone who's been involved in the project, is, first of all coming to understand something astonishing in that most people have never thought about who lives on death row, much less about their families. And having people see exactly what you said, which is the specific human, individual person through that story, because when we think in terms of stereotype, we aren't dealing in reality. But these stories share such an insight and particularity that I think we are drawn in and are invited to look more deeply at the choices that we make.



Omkari Williams 19:29

I really love what you just said, especially because it puts the onus back on us, as we sort of are easily able, often, to look at people in prison for whatever reason, much less people on death row and just dismiss them and say, Well, you know, they made a bad decision and they got what they deserved. Or whatever and it forces us to look more deeply, it forces us to look at our privilege, it forces us to look at the opportunities that we had that



directed our lives in a different direction than these men. And I really appreciate that. Because I do think it's easy to make sweeping generalizations that not only do not serve the people we're making generalizations about, they don't serve us. They disconnect us from our own humanity, they disconnect us from our own ability to be generous in the world. So I find really important. Thank you.



Lynden Harris 20:38

I love that. Yeah, our ability to be generous in the world. That's so true.



Omkari Williams 20:43

Yeah, it's, you know, it's life is so busy. And it's so easy. And these are people who are out of sight for us, for most of us. And it's too simple to just say, you did a terrible thing and you're a terrible person. Where the truth is, none of us would ever want to be judged for the worst thing we've ever done. That's not the thing we would want our whole lives to be judged for. And I do think we need to be more aware of our tendency to do that, and how damaging it is in whatever context that occurs.



Lynden Harris 21:20

So one of the first readings that we ever did of the story cycles was in a classroom and of non traditional students. And when we finished, one of the older women was just sitting there, she was just crying. And she said, You know, I drive by a prison every day, and not once have I ever thought to wonder who is inside. And then she said, it makes me wonder what else I've never thought to wonder about,



Omkari Williams 21:49

Oh, I love that, you know, and that's the truth. We get so, we just become so jaded to things, and we become oblivious to things, and we don't notice it, anything. And, you know, we'll drive the same way to work every day, and we won't notice the things on the path to work. And maybe there's something remarkable there, that if we just opened our eyes, and gave ourselves a little bit of time to contemplate, we might find something remarkable. I think it's really important, I think, especially now, as we are confronting as a society more directly, the injustices that are so much a part of our structure, it's really important that we pay attention, and that we notice things. And I'm glad that woman asked when you're going to tell their story, because I want to hear that story. I mean, I actually did an interview with a woman whose husband is in prison. And what we talked

about was the impact on the people on the outside. And something we don't think about very much. We just think, well, that person's in prison, but we don't think about their mother, or their father, or their siblings, or their kids, or their friends, or the people in the community who relied on them for various things. And I think it's really important that we start considering the whole picture when we look at what our carceral system is doing.



Lynden Harris 23:19

Yeah, because it is a big system. It is a it has a huge impact, the ripples just go on and on.



Omkari Williams 23:26

Yeah. And we don't really notice them often unless we are directly impacted by those ripples. And yet, I do believe that those ripples impact us all. It's just they're so below the surface that we can let it slide by.



Lynden Harris 23:39

That's really true.



Omkari Williams 23:41

So I want to ask you about another project that you did that I think people might find surprising given that you have this project with your death row individuals, you have a project called At Ease: Bridging the Military Civilian Divide. And that is something I've always been fascinated by. And I would love to hear about the genesis of this project. And also, what has evolved from it.



Lynden Harris 24:11

Yeah, that's a very different project. You're right. Then, like all our projects, it has morphed and changed. But initially, we were invited to develop some workshops for military service members. And one of the things that came up when we were talking with, again, a steering circle of stakeholders, there were several things that came up. As far as you know, like that question that we often ask or always ask what to others not understand about your experience. So many people said everything, when we were talking to service members, you know, like everything. And they had such a strong sense that there was no way to make that connection, like that was a bridge that couldn't be built and crossed between people who had not served in the military, and those who had.



Lynden Harris 25:05

And I think in life, you know, we always have an I mean, in one sense, that's true for everything, right? If you haven't had a particular life experience, it's can be very challenging. And you may feel like, Oh, well, if you haven't had a child, you can't possibly understand what it's like to raise a child. Right? And that is both true and not true. Right? So this was the same sort of thing was like, well, how can we bring people into this experience through the sharing of the stories? And so and, you know, sharing your story takes a certain amount of courage, a willingness to let down defenses, a willingness to believe that matters. So we we worked a good bit on that. But one of the things we discovered which was really interesting was also that the service members male or female, and the spouses, male or female, that there could be quite a disconnect there for the same reason. That people just didn't share their lives in detail in stories. So as we were sharing stories, we found out that it was kind of fun, because it helps strengthen maybe a strong word, but it helped connect families too, to hear stories, they had not heard about each other's experiences.



Lynden Harris 26:20

So that was the genesis of it, we ended up, the final version, because we do we always do exhibits also that travel with different projects. And we ended up working with female military service members, because we felt like that's kind of an overlooked population within this population. And we asked them what part of their body they connected most to their military service. And to talk about that, so we have these gorgeous photographs of these women pointing to like, it might be a tattoo, one woman was pointing to her combat boots, one woman had a traumatic brain injury, you know, and so they would, we got these great photographs of them sharing that visually, and then talking about their experiences.



Lynden Harris 27:12

And we also invited service members to create these care packages is what we call them. And what it was was they wrote a letter that began with the words, "you have no idea". So they wrote a letter to a public audience, and sharing an experience and then create these care packages. They're like little dioramas, where if you open the lid and look inside, there's a little scene being told. So anyway, so the that's how the exhibit kind of evolved. And we have a story cycle. And, and that's just a little bit about At Ease, but it, you know, that might have been the group that was most, typically reticent about sharing their experiences. And sometimes they could if they were in Special Operations, or something they couldn't, you know, there was a limited amount they could share. But I think we also did some workshops for the whole family with kids, too. So it was just an opportunity to

connect around an area that's not often looked at, and to build some bridges there.



Omkari Williams 28:17

I really liked that because I, I have a couple of friends who were self described military brats, their parents were stationed all over the world through throughout their growing up years. And they do really look at their lives as very different than the lives of those of us whose parents had normal jobs, and were not in the military and stayed in one place for most of the time.



Lynden Harris 28:46

Right.



Omkari Williams 28:46

And there's a way in which I think that they would themselves say they always felt a bit disconnected from the civilians in the world, and that finding their way into civilian life was a process for them. And I think that in a society where we have a volunteer army, it's actually on us, the civilians, the majority, to pay attention to what the sacrifices and specific needs of the military and military families are in ways that we, we tend not to. I mean, you know, Memorial Day, and Veterans Day are sort of holidays, but we don't really, I don't think, celebrate what the intention of those holidays really is, and what they are meant to represent and what they are meant to memorialize. And I think that that might be something that's rather hard for people who are in the military. Or who were in the military to accept because they do make huge sacrifices. And whether we agree with what they're doing or not, is kind of, to me, irrelevant. It is still what is being done. And we they are still members of this society. And we need to figure out how we, as a society, embrace everyone.



Lynden Harris 30:23

It's so true. We were working on a project, it was called Home Is Not One Story about home and homelessness. And, you know, we talked with a lot of former military, who were unhoused and, and had traumatic experiences and mental health issues relating to them, and lots and lots of issues that arose from what you're correctly describing as sacrifices. And, you know, at that time, there were more unhoused veterans than there were names on the Vietnam Memorial. So that was a wow, a really striking thing to look at and ask No, just like, I mean, it is our responsibility to take care of people who, whether or not you

agree with any of the political ideals or agendas, these are other people who have done something very difficult, and we have a responsibility to take care of them.



Omkari Williams 31:22

Yes, I lived in Savannah for a while. And Savannah has a fairly large population of unhoused former military.



Lynden Harris 31:33

Right



Omkari Williams 31:33

There are a couple of bases in the area. And you know, it's a climate that makes it easier to live in, if you are unhoused.



Lynden Harris 31:42

Exactly.



Omkari Williams 31:43

But it was definitely a challenge. And in recent years, the city is addressing the challenge in more active ways. You know, they're constructing tiny houses for some of the people who actually do want a home, because not all of them do. And I think that's something people don't recognize is that some people are unhoused by choice. And that is what they want, and shoving them into someplace is not the solution to that problem. So yeah, it's, I really do so much feel like what you're doing in shining these lights on these different stories that are not immediately in one's mind connectable, but really all do have to do with appreciating the fundamental humanity that we all share. And I really appreciate what you and your company are doing with this work. It feels very important. So let me ask you this. How has Hidden Voices navigated the inherent challenges of being a very progressive company in a traditionally very conservative environment?



Lynden Harris 33:03

Can you mean like locally?



Omkari Williams 33:05

Yeah, in your local community? I mean, North Carolina is it's changing. Its demographic is changing, but it's still a conservative leaning state. And what you're doing is definitely on the progressive end of the spectrum.



Lynden Harris 33:23

Yes. Well, North Carolina has become much more conservative over the past 10 or 15 years. And I think we see that, gosh, all over the country, though. I think perhaps that pendulum is starting to swing back. That would be nice.



Omkari Williams 33:40

Yes, yes.



Lynden Harris 33:41

But I do. I do think there is a shift. I mean, I think we are seeing that, but boy, it's become much more conservative over the past yeah 10 or 15 years along with so much of the country. But the thing about about the state is that it's a very purple state, you know, what it always votes oh maybe 52%, democratic, that kind of thing. So, but in terms of geography and political agendas, the voting redistricting has made it so that despite this kind of 50/50 split, there is more like a 70/30 split in terms of representation, which is really unfortunate, because it doesn't represent the actual people here. So that was definitely a little bit of an aside.



Omkari Williams 34:28

But it's, that's fine.



Lynden Harris 34:30

Yeah. So but I mean, we also see that you know, around the country, the great thing about being in North Carolina is that it's a university state in many ways. There is not one central city, sort of like Atlanta is in Georgia. So there are numerous midsize cities across the state. And anywhere you get the cluster of counties around a university in that area, you end up with a fairly progressive area that's true of the whole state. So you've got exactly the same breakdown here you do everywhere in the country, whether you're

looking at New York, or Pennsylvania or Ohio, which is you have rural areas, and you have more urban or suburban areas. And the way that looks is, we typically have less, quote, progressive areas in rural areas and more so in areas with a denser population and more education. So we've been fortunate that we live in one of those very progressive areas. So I, you know, I will say that. We have a lot of, but we have had support from the State Arts Council, the State Humanities Council, lots of those kinds of folks who want to have stories shared. So that's been one of the, I guess, benefits of having a strong humanities and strong arts presence here in the state.



Omkari Williams 35:52

Yeah, you are so correct, in that having a university or college in an area makes such a huge difference.



Lynden Harris 36:01

Yeah, it really does.



Omkari Williams 36:02

It totally makes things, that would not be possible otherwise, possible. So our time is growing short, I want to ask you a couple more things. The first thing I want to ask you is, when you think about Hidden Voices, and where it goes over the next decade or so, what's the vision that you have for it from the perspective of Community and Social Impact?



Lynden Harris 36:28

Well, I tend to be very focused on whatever we're working on at the moment. And I bet as an artist, you can really appreciate how that is. So because I don't know what's coming next until it appears before us, I have a vision for what I would like to see Serving Life accomplish. And I really want us, this project, to be a factor in ending the death penalty in, ending life in prison without parole, and in ending the inhumane practices that we regularly implement in our carceral settings. I think the moment is now. I think it's been incredible to see the focus over the past few years on mass incarceration and on ending the death penalty, and people starting to question whether the correct alternative to the death penalty is life in prison without parole, because it isn't. I want to see us stop sentencing children to death, meaning sentencing children to life in prison without parole, you know, other countries don't do this. So it's not that we need to reinvent the wheel, there are shining examples of how to educate, provide therapeutic settings, how to bring

families into the process, it's all been done. It's just a matter of us, as a society, recognizing what we're doing, and then deciding to do something different. And I think that time really is now. So that's the vision I have for this project.



Omkari Williams 38:12

I hope that your vision comes to pass. And I think that if we, as a society, if those of us who believe in that vision, just keep applying the pressure, that we will be able to move this country in the direction of a more humane, appropriate, an actually correctional system rather than a penal system.



Lynden Harris 38:41

Yeah.



Omkari Williams 38:42

So I sincerely hope that you are successful in your work to advocate for that. So the last thing I'm going to ask you is what I ask all of my guests at the end of each interview, which is to give the listeners three simple actions that they can take to advance the work that you are doing. So what are three things that people can do to make a difference in your work?



Lynden Harris 39:07

That is such a great question. I love that you always ask that. You know, one of the things we do with every project is we'll have a board that says, "Do One Thing". We invite people to pick something that they feel like they can do and we usually divided up about around time required. So in thinking about this question, I would say if you have 10 minutes, then send a copy of this book, to your state representative to a senator, a judge, faith leader, an educator, an attorney, because these men's stories can be used for everything from an organizing tool to conversation starters for book clubs. I think one of the reviewers said these stories will open your heart and may even change your mind. So I really think that that is something You can do quite quickly is to share these stories with someone else.



Lynden Harris 40:04

If you feel like you can spend maybe half an hour a month, then I would suggest writing to a prisoner. You can, you know, do an online search for pen pal organizations, because



you'd literally may be someone's only contact with the free world. And I think we forget that, that these people are, they tend to be, you know, they listen to the radio, a lot of them are NPR junkies, they are very interested in sharing articles, books you're reading, political perspectives, you know, and that can lead to a an ongoing relationship over decades. So I think, you know, if you have 30 minutes a month, and you want to get to know someone inside, that's another great step.



Lynden Harris 40:50

And then if you have more time and are really moved, then I think, consider sharing your talents and skills with a local facility. There was a study done that estimated that 75% of adult prisoners are illiterate, and 85% of juveniles. So if you have literacy skills that you can share, or cooking, or finance or art, and considering that most people living inside prisons have experienced great trauma in their lives, if you teach yoga, if you teach mindfulness, I've a restorative circle keeper, any of these sorts of things are offerings that a lot of institutions will allow, and that can be so powerful. So those are sort of the three things that I would suggest.



Omkari Williams 41:44

Thank you. I love those. And I love that you broke them down into time slots, because I think that that is really helpful for people. Most people feel time crunched, and to know that they can just do something in 10 minutes or 30 minutes, feels doable, and they are more likely to then go out and actually take that action. So thank you for that.



Lynden Harris 42:07

Yeah.



Omkari Williams 42:08

And thank you so much for this conversation. I had been looking forward to it. And I am so glad we got to speak because your book is remarkable. These men stories are remarkable. And the work you're doing really not only inspires me, but sort of fills my heart with with joy for the community that you're creating, and sustaining. And I'm I'm really grateful for that.



Lynden Harris 42:36

Oh, thank you. It was such a pleasure to talk to you. Oh, I loved it.



Omkari Williams 42:41

Thank you. Thank you so much. And I will be circling back around to keep an eye on your project. So we'll be in touch again in the future.



Lynden Harris 42:50

Oh, good. I'm so glad. Okay, thank you.



Omkari Williams 42:55

And thank you all so much for listening. Lynden's stories remind us about how important it is that we do tell our stories, that we share stories with other people, and that we receive the stories they have to give us. So as I do every week, I'm going to sign off by saying, remember that change starts with story. So keep sharing yours. I'll be back with another episode of stepping into truth very soon.