I was interested in Lynn’s story from the moment I met her. My father was career Navy, and she had attended the Air Force Academy with ambitions toward being an astronaut. In my experience, all military-affiliated people possess an invisible bond, no matter their affiliation, and I felt kinship with her merely from observing her posture and the way she formed sentences. The career and life Lynn intended to pursue was derailed by a terrible series of events that befell her before she was twenty-one, and in February, Beacon Press released her memoir, *Caged Eyes*, about that derailment. Lynn is a woman of extraordinary intelligence and grit, and I couldn’t wait for her to dish about books that had gotten on her bad side.

**Tell me about your hatred of books. Do you hate certain kinds of books, certain authors, or just particular books when they come along?**

I hate books that damage forward progress in the fights against social justice issues. Books that normalize everything from microaggressions to outright violence. Bad books have potential to do actual damage to our culture and to people’s lives.

*Fifty Shades of Grey* comes to mind first, as it does, I suspect, for many of us. Someone once told me that the book’s popularity is proof that all women (yeah, he said “all”) fantasize about being raped. His point was that rape isn’t necessarily all that bad and is sometimes the fulfillment of the female species’ deep need to be dominated (as if being dominated and raped are even the same thing).

**I think I need a moment.**

Yeah. Needless to say, every time I see a glimpse of one of those books or movies I have the urge to stab someone with a fork.

When I was a cadet at the Air Force Academy, we were required to read and
memorize part of a book called *Into the Mouth of a Cat*, which is the story of Lance Sijan, an Academy graduate who became a prisoner of war during Vietnam. The Academy used it to establish the bar for our heroic behavior. We cadets were to epitomize his courage at every step. After all, anything we were going through couldn’t possibly compare to the struggle of crawling through a jungle with broken bones, attempting to evade enemy capture. He didn’t feel sorry for himself, so we must not either.

Years passed before I realized how much that expectation damaged me. Sometimes human beings need to cry or process what we’ve been through or, heaven forbid, see a therapist! This stoicism/denial-as-bravery narrative is harmful for all of those who aren’t in active combat situations. What I mean by that is that it causes actual damage to people’s psyche and lives.

Your words here made me think of the problem inherent in latching on to a common narrative – the problem of internalizing other people’s stories as what our own should be. It seems like you knocked that problem cold by writing *Caged Eyes*. Was the idea of not being the story someone else told about you in your mind when you wrote it?

Yes, that was very much behind my reasons for writing my memoir. Part of *Caged Eyes* deals with the 2003 “scandal” that happened when seven of my classmates went public with their stories of having been raped as Air Force Academy cadets. I always felt like the media misunderstood them – and therefore us – and always simplified our stories. My first impulse to write a memoir came from the need to counteract the narratives the media told about us.

Good impulse.

The last book I want to hate on is Jon Krakauer’s *Missoula*, and this is where I’ll get myself into all sorts of trouble. Some people really love that book. Here’s the rub: Krakauer himself admits that until three years before *Missoula*’s publication, he didn’t know rape was a thing.

I think I need another moment.

To be fair, what he actually wrote was, “I’d had no idea that rape was so prevalent, or could cause such deep and intractable pain.” Props for coming to that realization now and doing something about it, Mr. Krakauer, but I can name dozens of professionals, people I personally know, who could fill whole volumes of books with their insight into sexual violence. I’d argue that any one of them could write a book significantly more powerful than *Missoula* simply because they’ve spent their lives in that world, working with victims and fighting for them. But because Krakauer has the platform and the ear of the publishing industry, he is the one with the book and royalties.

Sounds like a darn good reason to hate that book.

Maybe there’s more good than harm to it? Maybe books like *Missoula* reach and affect a different audience. Personally, I’d much rather see those publishing contracts go to those who have more insight, who can add more significantly
So why these books?

These books injure me personally. Like anyone, I have a need to be understood, and yet I find myself at the intersection of several identity contradictions. I’m a feminist but a veteran. I’m a veteran yet a woman without the hailed warrior stories. I’m an ultra-marathoner but a chronic-pain sufferer. I don’t seem to fit into any single group or mindset. When books overgeneralize or contradict my core beliefs, they become yet another liability in others’ ability to understand me and therefore in my ability to connect.

I bet a lot of people can relate to that. We hate books that don’t align with our experience of the world.

I think it’s deeper than misalignment. It sounds like you’re talking about being a misfit in multiple different tribes, and these books make you feel like you ought to belong in one or the other or you are beyond help.

That’s it exactly. “Beyond help.” That’s the level of damage these books can cause.

Do you think this hatred has altered your reading habits? What about your writing?

Certainly, I’m skeptical every time I see a book written by a big-name journalist who isn’t an expert in that particular field. Is that unfair? Yeah, probably.

As an author, I consider myself socially conscious, so I try not to write anything that renders another human’s experience invisible. Obviously, that’s easier said than done.

Zoe Zolbrod’s memoir comes to mind. The central questions she asks in The Telling are about the effects of the sexual abuse she experienced as a child. Did it harm her? Her answer is that maybe it didn’t injure her as much as therapists and others would like to project onto her. Even right there, I edited myself because at first I said “the sexual abuse she suffered as a child,” which is a judgment, isn’t it? I wrote with similar biases in my memoir, and perhaps that tone makes it harder for survivors like Zolbrod to express their truth. It’s very difficult not to step on other people’s toes like that, but that doesn’t mean we can’t strive not to.

I loved that book so much. It was the first memoir I’d ever read that felt profoundly intellectually invested in its story.

Wow, that’s a great description for The Telling. Yes, it is intellectually captivating.

What was the last book you read that you loved?

I just finished Lidia Yuknavitch’s The Book of Joan, and that reminded me to
go back and find her first novel, *Dora: A Headcase*. Yes, everyone loves *Book of Joan*, and so do I, but *Dora*! I want to talk about *Dora*. So, I’d definitely recommend it to a friend because of selfish reasons: I need to discuss. Please.

**I’ve read it. Let’s talk. What do you love about it?**

The narrator’s unique voice and her kickass strength. I love her. Sometimes when I have a strong reaction to a book like that I turn to Goodreads so that I relate to other people’s reactions; yeah, that’s right, I read reviews after the book itself. Because surely other people will respond similarly and that takes the edge off of my need to discuss. Otherwise the not-talking-about-a-book gives me the feeling of an imminent implosion.

**I felt that way after I read *Peyton Place*, but no one I knew wanted to read it!**

Why don’t your friends let you dictate their reading list? See, that’s where they are going wrong.

I was disappointed with some of the reviews I read for *Dora*. Some people found Dora’s voice annoying (what the heck?) and several people described Dora as a typical angsty teenage girl or her antics “cries for attention.” Hey, people, let’s back up. Dora was an emotionally and sexually abused teenager, as were most of her friends. They were operating in screwed-up familial and cultural systems. It seems like Yuknavitch is saying something about that – themes lost on those readers.

Anyway, the point is that sometimes it isn’t the book itself which makes me all ragey but rather the reviews. (Any other *Dora* readers out there reacting similarly, please hit me up and let’s have a support group.)

**The book has a huge following among people I know. They love Dora’s fury and her artmaking. And I so agree about reviews! When reviewers just miss the point completely I want to slap them.**

Yes, exactly. I have to keep myself away from the stabby forks again.

**Do you keep books or give them away?**

I’m greedy! I hang on to books. I will lend out but only if someone specifically asks, that’s how bad I am. I rationalize the stinginess by saying that if we love a book so much we want a friend to read it too, we should support the author with that extra book sale. Of course, that’s not always financially possible.

**Have you ever physically thrown a book across a room?**

No, only because I’m a crazy cat lady and I try not to disrupt the kitten-children. I hold in my rage pretty well. It’s healthy to internalize, right?

**Right! What are you reading at present, and do you like it or hate it?**
Right now I’m reading *All Quiet on the Western Front* and if you ask me again in three months I’ll tell you the same. Kidding!

Ha! I had to read that one in high school. The copy I had included a printing error where 50 of the same pages were inserted in the book again, instead of continuing to the next 50 pages, and I had an existential crisis about whether it was OK to throw the book away, because my goodness, you should *never* put books in the trash.

That’s a conundrum, for sure.

I’m also listening to *Stalin’s Daughter* by Rosemary Sullivan on audio, and I am finally reading Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen*. These are interspersed with much lighter reading, a memoir called *Nowhere Near First*, which is seemingly about ultra-running but actually about so much more. I’m liking all three for that reason — they are about so much more than what can be summarized on a back flap.