

YOUR NAME: Lisa Castillo

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Suzanne Nielsen

TOPIC: Writing what matters

GOAL OF INTERVIEW:

To get to know more than the Professor of Fine Arts, Creative Writing and more on the Published Writer of Poetry/

WHAT DO YOU ALREADY KNOW ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE:

She has been my professor and mentor for 3 years. The advisor on the Haute Dish Literary and Art Magazine, a professor, Suzanne has recently written a book of Poetry called *Face Up* and is now working on a new collection.

WHAT DOES THIS INTERVIEWEE ADD TO YOUR TOPIC?

She Provides a real-world look into the literary work that my podcast 10,000 Plots MN explores and reviews.

LIST 15 QUESTIONS FOR YOUR INTERVIEW:

1. You are a Professor of Creative writing at MSU, what inspired you to teach people to write in higher education?

**The students, always the students.**

2. Face Up: A Collection of Outlaw Poems speaks volumes on diversity and character. Can you let me know how you translated life's challenges into such beautiful pieces?

Thank you for calling them beautiful. My poems are generally snippets of life. And with reflection I can find humor, exasperation, and the energy to write. Not all snippets are my life, but rather a memory of something I've heard, seen, felt, witnessed.

3. Your life is complex, as we have heard in your poetry, what made you write? I believe I started writing the moment I became aware of words.
4. Do you have a writing ritual? I write every day, always my first ritual every morning. I also write throughout the day several days a week.
5. Working as an educator, what would you say is your greatest reward in teaching creative writing? Knowing when a student has broken into their own house and grabbed hold of their voice.

6. This semester you took a sabbatical from teaching to work on your new collection, can you elaborate? I'm working on a project titled Hanging by a Wire, a collection of poetry exploring women's rights and freedoms. It's been a bit intense, and I've got a strong collection for a chap book, but it won't be a full-length collection. The topic is tough. It's draining. At the same time I'm compelled to do this.
7. What have you been doing with your time off? Writing 70 poems in 70 days. Today is day 66 of 70. It's been terrific. There's been four current students that have taken on this challenge with me, and I am happy to say they will be sharing their work at our April 11<sup>th</sup> poetry celebration.
8. What can we expect from you as far as publications? definitely another collection of poetry; who knows, I've got a couple of projects in mind with a few other artists and where ever these ideas go, they're fun to talk about.
9. Do you have any new classes in creative writing that you are thinking of teaching at MSU? Ed Lee will be developing/teaching Spoken Word soon, and that will be an

incredible addition to our program. Ed and I work closely because we both are student-centered. We have other things in mind, a possible BFA, as well as a few other course developments. Eventually I'd like to focus more on Haute Dish, and perhaps developing a course that incorporates the literary magazine's publication process. We are in the process of a reorg at Metro, and our creative writing program will soon be housed in Writing, Literature and Languages instead of Fine Arts.

10. We have reached a halfway point of your sabbatical, have you reached any goals you have set? Yes I have. It's been a strange sabbatical in a sense because as I mentioned our program is shifting to a new department. I think this will bring about exciting changes in collaborative teaching ideas, nevertheless I've been fairly active this semester with reorg meetings and such, so I haven't felt really removed. I have not been reading assignments, this is true, but that's part of what I love about my job. So...yes I have accomplished

projects, goals and such, but I feel I've still been connected with Metro, at my own discretion.

11. With Spring coming, do you have a special place to write that inspires you? I love the arboretum. I don't write there, but I prewrite there.

12. Who inspires you, writers, painters, ect? Salvador Dali, Mary Oliver, Marge Piercy, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, George Singleton, Al Franken.

13. How is your family? My sons are my heart, as well as my husband John. Challenges this past year: both sons got married, my husband has suffered a series of strokes, but we're here. As I've aged, I'd learned to live a day at a time.

14. You have plans to teach Travel Writing this Summer, can you give us a look into that class? Yes, six weeks of endless travel, literally and figuratively.

15. It's been wonderful talking to you, where can my listeners find your book? April 11, Tuesday at 4:30 p.m. I'll be reading from Face Up at the Fireside Room in the student center at Metro State for poetry month. I think we'll be able to sell

books at that event. If not, you can find the collection on Good Reads and Amazon.