

Liza Donnelly

Female Speaker:

From the Library of Congress in Washington D.C.

Martha Kennedy:

This is Martha Kennedy at the Library of Congress. Saturday, August 30, will mark the 14th year that book lovers of all ages have gathered in Washington D.C. to celebrate the written word at the Library of Congress National Book Festival. The Festival, which is free and open to the public, will hold evening hours for the first time ever this year in its new location, the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington D.C. Hours will be from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. For more details, visit [www.loc.gov/bookfest](http://www.loc.gov/bookfest).

And now it is my pleasure to introduce Liza Donnelly. Ms. Donnelly has published 16 successful books, quite varied in type. They include children's books, a history of women cartoonists at the New Yorker, several collections of her drawings, and several collaborative collections with her husband, Michael Maslin, also a cartoonist. Her latest book, "Women on Men, Cartoons by Liza Donnelly" contains over 200 cartoons and sections of writing. Liza, thanks so much for joining us.

Liza Donnelly:

My pleasure.

Martha Kennedy:

Themes of gender identity and gender relations are featured in several of your books, including "Women on Men." Many consider you to be a feminist cartoonist, yet you recently wrote persuasively online, "Let's retire the battle of the sexes." What prompted you to create this book?

Liza Donnelly:

Well, I am a cartoonist who's a feminist, that's true, and I do cartoons about all kinds of things. But this book -- well first of all, "the battle of the sexes" is an old term I think, and what I meant by that was that we shouldn't talk about it being a battle. I think it's a collaborative problem we have, men and women. We shouldn't be fighting with each other, we should work -- you know, looking for ways to make things better between the two genders.

What I was prompted to do this book was because, mostly for humor, in that I feel that men have controlled humor for way too long, for decades. It's changing now, but I think I wanted to do a book of women making lovingly fun of men in a way we haven't done enough of in years. And I think, I just feel like women need to use humor more, because humor, when used creatively and not in a negative way can expose some of the problems we have in our day to day lives. So it's like, poking fun at men and poking fun at ourselves helps to change things. So it's like, I wanted to get the women's voice out as a humorous voice and make fun of our male counterparts.

Martha Kennedy:

That's great. Thank you.

Liza Donnelly:

I think laughing together is important, don't you?

Martha Kennedy:

Yes, I do too; very important. You are a contract cartoonist and writer with the New Yorker magazine, where you have been creating cartoons about social trends, culture, and politics for over 30 years. Some cartoons in this new book, "Women on Men," come from your New Yorker work, but not all. Can you tell us where the others in the collection were published, and did you also create new ones?

Liza Donnelly:

I did create new ones, and many of them were published in a variety of places other than the New Yorker. I found this voice of women being, for want of a better word, snarky back in the 1980's when I was drawing for the New Yorker, I published some there. And at the time we had more magazines to publish cartoons, so I did publish some of them in in hard copy magazines. But then, now I publish a lot more on the internet because there's no market in magazines anymore except for the New Yorker. So places like Huffington Post, Daily Beast, Politico. Medium is a blog platform that I am a regular on political cartoons, and then my column for Forbes, which is always about women's issues.

Martha Kennedy:

That's terrific to find out. Thank you. How do you create your cartoons? Do you begin with a visual idea and develop a caption line later?

Liza Donnelly:

No, it's a combination of both, Martha. When I first started out it was more visual. I was a more visual thinker, I think. Suspicious of words, but as I've done this for so long now I'm more comfortable with words. And so more often than not the idea comes to me through words and then I draw the cartoon to go with it. But it's really a collaborative effect, because you do visualize the idea that you're thinking. So it's a really hard answer.

Martha Kennedy:

No, no, no, that's really interesting and I'm not surprised. It's not a simple question and not easy to answer.

Liza Donnelly:

Yeah, yeah.

Martha Kennedy:

Sister cartoonist Roz Chast praises you for seeing people clearly, having a wonderful eye and ear for revealing details. What are some ways you gather material for your cartoons? Do you have favorite places or venues where you observe people?

Liza Donnelly:

Yeah, well, I use whatever I can. Roz is wonderful. She was so kind to write the introduction to one of my books, and she's an old friend. We

started out at the same time at the New Yorker, and she's an amazing voice. It's incredible, so I was honored to hear her say that. I love sitting in cafés, you know, the cafés that have the bar along the window where you can watch people while your drink your coffee or have your lunch or whatever. I love sitting there and watching people in New York, or they have these in all cities but I'm New York based. And then I get ideas, or I get seeds of ideas just reading all kinds of news, whether it's hard politics, international news, or pop culture, gawker.com, that kind of thing. You know, I watch some TV. It's like, you have to be aware of the whole culture to be successful at this business I think.

Martha Kennedy:

This book has more writing by you than several of your other books. Can you talk a little about how the sections of writing relate with the groups of cartoons?

Liza Donnelly:

This book has -- each chapter has a section of writing, and what I did with this book, "Women on Men," is I really tried to push myself to dig deep at what the issue was about concerning me particularly. And this is in the writing. Like, how did it get at what I felt, instead of just trying to create humor for humor's sake. I was trying to get at some personal stuff.

So the -- and I was trying to be -- I was trying to push myself, because I'm kind of a nice cartoonist. I try not to push anyone's buttons, because I really don't think that's a good idea, but I try to push myself to be even stronger in my humor and more forceful in my ideas. So the written parts are more autobiographical and they relate to the subject of each chapter in that way. That make sense?

Martha Kennedy:

Yes, it does. That's great. I think that will pique people's interest, and I personally found it very helpful too, in enhancing the whole.

Liza Donnelly:

Well good. Great. Also the book is hand written, which is --

Martha Kennedy:

That's a great point.

Liza Donnelly:

Which is our idea with the publishers to make the book feel like a journal. That lends itself to the idea that this is my thoughts. And also, between some cartoons there's writing that is reacting to the cartoons, like I'll make a little note on one page about a cartoon, like where I thought of it, or what I think of it, or how it came about. So we try to make the book have a journal-like feel, diary-like feel.

Martha Kennedy:

It does, it does. Which makes it really appropriate for the Graphic Novels Pavilion too, I think. So there's a nice narrative quality to it. This year you received an honorary doctorate from the University of Connecticut and delivered the commencement address to the graduate school

ceremony. Could you tell us a little about the content of that speech, and perhaps elaborate on the power of the cartoon as an art form, and how it continues to operate effectively in today's world?

Liza Donnelly:

Yes, that was a great honor; I was humbled by that. And I wrote a speech because I wasn't sure -- these students were older, the graduate students, so I tried to find something that was personal to me that would have meaning for them and also relate to the culture and what's going on now. And the main thrust of my speech was about listening, and how, as a cartoonist, as I just mentioned I think in some ways, it's important to listen. You know, we look a lot. We see things, but we also hear things. And when I say listen, I mean listen closely to what people are saying, what people are doing and what's going on in the culture, or other cultures as well. And because the world is so fast-paced right now and we're all, most of us, are caught up in the buzz of the internet and news and fast paced social media and whatnot.

When I use that stuff -- and I love it. I love Twitter and Facebook. I gather what I can from that, and I stop and I listen. I turn it off and I listen to myself think. So I was offering to the audience to stop every now and then and listen. Listen to yourself and find out if you're really doing what you want to do, what you mean to be doing and not what other people think you're doing. So it's all about listening to yourself, and I extended it to listening to other people, listening to other cultures internationally to understand what it is they need from us. You know, if you want to help, because if you listen to yourself and know what you want to do, then you're much more adaptable to helping other people, and listening to what they need and figuring out what they -- because they're not going to tell you what they need. And the women in Iran, they're not going to be able to tell you. You have to listen to what they need. Not presume that they need what you need. So that was the -- I think that's basically what I said.

Martha Kennedy:

It was a wonderful speech. I listened to it online, yeah.

Liza Donnelly:

Oh thank you. Thank you.

Martha Kennedy:

Very thoughtful. Yes. And thought provoking, too.

Liza Donnelly:

I'm glad, I'm glad. That's what I was going for. Also humor. I was trying to be funny at times too, Martha, but it's not easy to do that.

Martha Kennedy:

Oh, I'm sure it isn't. Yes, yes. Well, you managed to do it.

Liza Donnelly:

Oh, thank you. Thank you.

Martha Kennedy:

Well, I'm coming up here on the last question. As you may know, this year's national book festival theme is: stay up with a good book. Is there a book you've read recently that you enjoyed staying up to read?

Liza Donnelly:

The most interesting books I read recently was the autobiography of Justice Sotomayor, Sonia Sotomayor. It's an amazing book, really a page turner. I like to read a lot of non-fiction, although I do read fiction. But I love that book. And I also read a book recently called "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Crying" by Carol Leifer, who is a comedian, but she's also a writer for a television. She wrote for Seinfeld, many episodes for Seinfeld, Modern Family, and other places. But that was a fun book and a really good book as well, to hear about her past writing, writing humor. So those are two examples. And Roz's book is great too. I read Roz's. I stayed up to read Roz Chast's book.

Martha Kennedy:

The graphic memoir, yeah.

Liza Donnelly:

I do read graphic memoirs every now and then when I come across them.

Martha Kennedy:

Great, great, yeah. I loved Sotomayor's autobiography too.

Liza Donnelly:

Wasn't it great?

Martha Kennedy:

It was, yes.

Liza Donnelly:

I'm now reading Hillary Clinton's book, which I really enjoy too.

Martha Kennedy:

Oh, good, good. That's great.

Liza Donnelly:

"Hard Choices." That's great, I really look forward to coming to the Festival. I've never been and I can't wait to see it.

Martha Kennedy:

Well we look forward to having you. This will be fantastic.

Liza Donnelly:

Thank you.

Martha Kennedy:

We've been hearing from Liza Donnelly, who will appear on Saturday, August 30th, in the Graphic Novels Pavilion at the National Book Festival at the Washington Convention Center. Thank you so much Liza.

Liza Donnelly:

Oh you're very welcome, Martha. It was a pleasure. Thanks so much.

Female Speaker:

This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress.

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