RECENTLY RETURNED – Midsumma

# S01E04 Transcript

[Start of recorded material at 00:00:00]

Kirsty: Welcome to ‘Recently Returned.’ Today we’ll be chatting about some LGBTQIA+ literature in honour of Melbourne’s Midsummer Festival.

 Now in its 33rd year the three-week arts and cultural festival runs from January 19th to Feb 9, 2020. There are a bunch of events across Wyndham this year and once again the library will have a presence at Park Lounge, so if you’re in the area drop by and say hello to one of our friendly staff members. And speaking of staff members [0:00:30] I’m one of your regular hosts, Kirsty, and I’ll just get my three lovely guests here to introduce themselves.

Jess: [0:00:38] Hi, I’m Jess.

Michaela: [0:00:39] Hi, I’m Michaela.

Lachlan: [0:00:41] G’day everyone, I’m Lachlan.

Kirsty: [0:00:42] And we’re just going to get into chatting about books now. So, who wants to go first; who’s got a book to talk about?

Lachlan: [0:00:51] I’ll start. So, I have just – well, I’m part-way through actually; I haven’t finished it. That’s a lie. I’m reading a book called ‘Bold’ which is stories from older lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. It’s obviously a collection of collected personal reminisces edited by David Hardy.

 A strong Australian bent do this work which is great, so stories drawn from Australia, New Zealand and also PNG. So, yeah, it’s a really [0:01:21] great little set of recollections. Some pretty challenging memories in here as well, and I think that while we celebrate Midsummer it’s worthwhile remembering that the journey for LGBTI people has been very challenging over history and it still remains so in many corners. But this book is a great way to celebrate, commemorate and share stories from the LGBTI community. So, this book is called ‘Bold.’ [0:01:51] It is in the library collection.

Kirsty: [0:01:55] Excellent.

Lachlan: [0:01:56] So, it’s available for everyone out there to come in and borrow. And yes, strongly recommended.

Kirsty: [0:02:02] Excellent. So, you’re only part-way through. Is there any particular story so far or reminiscence that is really...?

Lachlan: [0:02:09] I knew you’d ask me that, Kirsty. I didn’t prepare a particular one.

Kirsty: [0:02:13] That’s all right. He’s flipping through the book now listeners.

Lachlan: [0:02:15] Yeah, I am flipping through a bit. Now, there is one in particular which was Bob Brown.

Kirsty: [0:02:28] Does that not have a contents page?

Lachlan: [0:02:29] Well, it does, but there you go. So, Bob Brown who was Member of the Tasmanian Lower House and then ultimately elected to the Australian Parliament. An openly gay man, a Member of the Australian Greens Party and Leader of the Greens for a while, he writes about a time in his parliamentary career in 1987 when he was elected to the Tasmanian Parliament and the unintended consequence of emotion he put up was to effectively ban [0:02:59] lesbianism in Tasmania.

 And I just thought it was intriguing that this man who is very savvy and very intelligent, in order to try and make parts of Tasmania’s Criminal Code gender neutral he unintentionally broadened the offence of homosexuality to include women as well as men. And then the story is essentially him trying [0:03:29] to undo the damage that he had done.

 It’s quite short, so it’s three pages. And something that is actually quite good in this book is that all of the stories and recollections are quite short, so you get a lot of different voices in this work. And of course, if you’re reading something and you don’t particularly enjoy it the new story is just over the page.

 But yeah, I thought that was really interesting. So, for a progressive politician -

Kirsty: [0:03:56] Oops!

Lachlan: - oops!

Kirsty: [0:03:58] But I’m noticing as well, looking over your shoulder, that the production values of the book are quite good as well; it’s got some...

Lachlan: [0:04:05] Yeah, a lot of photographs. Yeah. Colours. Colours, pictures and text, so, yes, a reader’s feast.

Kirsty: [0:04:15] Excellent. Okay, did someone else want to take a book? Yeah, Michaela?

Michaela: [0:04:19] Yeah. So, basically kind of drawing on that I wanted to talk about a book that is a little bit tricky to get these days apart from one line. It’s called ‘The Men with the Pink Triangle.’ And basically I had read this initially in year 12 when I was doing a history project, and it tells a story – it’s a personal account of a gentleman who experienced being in a concentration camp during the Nazi regime [0:04:49] in Germany and sort of his experience with that. Because I think what a lot of people aren’t aware of is that it wasn’t just Jewish people that were put in the concentration camps; it was a lot of society’s “undesirables” as well and homosexuals kind of fell under this umbrella as well.

 So, basically a lot of his accounts are actually quite [0:05:19] eye-opening and they are quite rough to read at certain points. So, it is a bit of I guess a trigger warning or a content warning if you’re wanting to read this book. But I think it’s important to read it because it very heavily outlines the struggle that people have experienced in society over history and while we have come a long way it’s still I think appropriate to understand where we have [0:05:49] gone through this journey into being more accepting of people who identify as LGBTQIA+ and just sort of the injustice that they’ve experienced. And I think it’s very grounding to read it.

 It’s definitely worth a read. I think as a seventeen-year-old even then I was really appreciative of having read it and understanding the [0:06:19] various injustices and just learning a little bit more about Nazi Germany as well because I think when you learn about it in history and documentaries and things there’s only a certain aspect that you get all the time whereas this kind of made it a bit broader. And it was just very interesting.

 So, it was written by Heinz Heger and he had carried out a series of interviews [0:06:49] with Josef Kohout and basically Josef, he gave his story and Heinz sort of created a book from it. And yeah, it’s a very interesting read.

Kirsty: [0:07:08] Excellent.

Michaela: [0:07:09] Yeah.

Kirsty: [0:07:11] I’ve noticed Lachlan flipping through the second book he’s got while you were talking and I’m wondering if there’s a connection between the two?

Lachlan: [0:07:20] No, there’s not. I was just trying to prepare.

Kirsty: [0:07:22] Oh, okay. There we go.

Jess: [0:07:24] Caught. Caught.

Kirsty: [0:07:26] I was reading too much into that one. Sorry, that was straying away from the point there, Michaela, but it sounds like a really powerful book.

Michaela: [0:07:37] It is very powerful and I think, yeah, like I said, it’s about sort of appreciating the journey to where we are now and thinking about how we’ve gone from one extreme to now being a lot more accepting and a lot more open while there still sort of the challenges that we experience. You know it’s very humbling to read this, I think.

Kirsty: [0:08:00] Yeah.

Lachlan: [0:08:01] So, it’s a survivor’s story?

Michaela: [0:08:04] It is. It is. And just talking about sort of his friends and his lover and how they didn’t survive the concentration camp and sort of the reflection on that and appreciating the aftermath as well because it kind of gives a slight account into how the laws haven’t changed even up until the 1970s, I believe, in Germany and how homosexuality was illegal for a very, very long time.

Jess: [0:08:38] So, I’ve also got a history one but I might just flip the mood and talk about something that can be used as a resource for anyone wanting to know more about different topics in gender and sexuality and things like that. If you see a word or a phrase and you’re not exactly sure of the context or how it’s used I’ve [0:09:08] got ‘The A-Z of Gender and Sexuality: from ace to ze.’

 It’s a great resource even though it is sort of a dictionary-type format because it does go into a bit of detail as to the context of the terms that are used. And what I found really interesting is it does touch on some terms that, while it’s [0:09:38] explained how they’re used it also gives reference to whether it’s best practice to still use them or whether there’s any issues there around using certain terminology.

 I found even for myself there were some things in there that I didn’t know the context of and it was good to get the context of different terms. But anyone wanting to know more about different terms that are thrown around when talking about [0:10:08] LGBTQIA+ people it’s a really good resource to get you started.

 So, I really enjoyed that one and I think it’s something that even though there is context given for each of the terms used it’s not incredibly long, so you can just sort of flip to a term that you want to know a little bit more about and get sort of a very concise overview of what it is and how it’s used.

Lachlan: [0:10:37] It’s also got an entry for LGBTQ itself, which, of course, is one of those contested acronyms or one of those variable acronyms. So, today we’re using LGBTIQA I believe or QIA?

Michaela: [0:10:51] Yeah.

Lachlan: [0:10:52] Yeah, one of those orders. But obviously we don’t mean to exclude by choosing to use a particular acronym or not. So, yeah, it’s got an interesting little section there on acronyms and also, of course, on the word “Queer,” which as it notes is a reclaimed slur. And of course not everybody in the community is comfortable with the word “Queer.” And yeah, actually this book is good because it describes it as a “Deliberately elusive word.”

Michaela: [0:11:24] Mm-hmm, it’s got a lot of really good sort of descriptions like that that really outline how things can be reclaimed or things can be used in certain contexts by certain people from the community but it’s not best practice for people outside of the community to use those words. So, I really liked that for a, I guess informative but also friendly way of just saying, “Hey, these are some terms that are used by the community. Best practice is if you’re not [0:11:54] in the community to maybe not use these words.”

Kirsty: [0:12:00] Especially as language is evolving; it’s really -

Jess: [0:12:03] So fast.

Kirsty: - it’s really good to know the context of some of the things that you’re hearing or saying or not just with this type of language but every type of language. I mean some of the slang that some of the kids are using these days I’m like “But that was a perfectly innocent word before and now you can’t say anything.”

Jess: [0:12:25] And now it’s not.

Kirsty: [0:12:26] You’ve ruined that word.

Michaela: [0:12:29] I think I liked this title especially. I know a lot of people who want to use the right terminology, want to say the right thing and want to convey their support but don’t necessarily know the right language to use. And some people are perhaps less comfortable or don’t know where to get the correct information, so it’s good to have something in a dictionary format that they can just flip to whatever they want to know more about and get something short.

Kirsty: [0:12:59] And it means the person wanting to know is not expecting other people to be that information resource for them -

Michaela: [0:13:07] I think that’s really important.

Kirsty: - they’re not expecting people of the community to constantly explain things to them, which can be an issue even when people want to be supportive.

Michaela: [0:13:17] Yeah. And that was the first one of mine.

Kirsty: [0:13:21] Excellent. So, Lachlan, you’ve got another title there?

Lachlan: [0:13:25] I have, Kirsty. So, my second book is ‘Out of the Shadows: Reimagining Gay Men’s Lives’ by Walt Odets. And I devoured this in about two days. So, I didn’t know what to expect going into it because I hadn’t seen any reviews, I hadn’t seen this come up in a publisher’s catalogue.

 So, Walt Odets is a clinical psychologist of 20 years’ experience with a specialisation in working with same sex-attracted men. And [0:13:55] the lives and the history that he collects in this book are drawn from 20 years of casework. They are anonymised and in some cases kind of one story incorporates multiple facets from different lives. But I mean talk about richness and diversity and complexity.

 The opening recollection of this book [0:14:25] is the story of an older man who was in his 70s and was married to a woman for five decades. And when she died he felt that it was time for him to come out. So, he was a gay-identifying man but he had been in a marriage with a woman for 50 years. So, he obviously wanted some support in doing this and went to see Walt Odets as a clinical psychologist to get some support [0:14:55] and advice.

 Shortly after his first meeting with the psychologist this man was diagnosed with terminal cancer and he died just a few months later. And Walt Odets uses that as ... so the context of his passing was in a hospital setting and the only person who was here with this man, at this man’s request, was indeed Walt Odets, his psychologist [0:15:25] because the man felt that the only person who had ever really known him was the psychologist that he’d come out to -

Michaela: [0:15:33] That’s powerful.

Lachlan: - yeah. In his mid-70s. So, that kind of sets up the stories. And there’s a great tragic mix, so be prepared for some very challenging memories in this book. But a great mix of stories drawn from many decades of life in and around the LGBTI communities. It’s got a heavy US bias, so Walt Odets is an American [0:16:03]. And there’s also some occasional homophobic language, et cetera, which is drawn from reported speech. But the book itself is, yeah, really – I was really surprised by the power of this book and I strongly recommend it and it’s ‘Out of the Shadows’ by Walt Odets.

Kirsty: [0:16:27] Excellent. Yeah, that sounds really good.

Lachlan: [0:16:29] Yeah. But it’s one of those books where you start reading and you just sort of don’t know where it’s going and then you realise that it’s two o’clock – like it’s 2.00am. And like “Oh, okay, I’ve been reading for five hours” you know.

Kirsty: [0:16:39] Yeah. “I’ve got work in the morning.”

Lachlan: [0:16:41] Yeah. “I’d better go to sleep.”

Kirsty: [0:16:42] So, that time to just stay up and up and keep reading until it’s...?

Lachlan: [0:16:46] Well, that’s it, and you sort of write it off and just keep reading. But yeah, I recommend this book.

Kirsty: [0:16:53] Michaela, have you got something else for us?

Michaela: [0:16:57] Yeah. So, basically my next suggestion is kind of more on a lighter note. So, my next suggestion is a YA fiction book called ‘Simon vs. the Homosapien’s Agenda’ or most people would currently know it as, I think it was ‘Love Simon’ which was the movie adaptation.

 So, basically I really enjoyed this because while it kind of addresses the struggle of being like [0:17:27] a closeted sort of homosexual teenager it’s very, very light-hearted and it’s in a very current setting as well, like it felt very relevant for teenagers today. And it really just sort of follows the journey of you know trying to, I guess, be okay with who you are and then the struggle of also coming out [0:17:57] to your friends, your family, struggling with a first love, all of those things. And it’s just really – I don’t know. It just felt like even though it was dealing with some really heavy issues it was just doing it in a very sort of YA light-hearted sort of way.

 And for me it felt really good to read it because it felt like any other [0:18:27] generic sort of YA love story.

Kirsty: [0:18:34] It just happens to be...

Michaela: [0:18:35] It just happens, you know, and it’s like it really helps in terms of normalising these experiences. I think it’s really good to see that there’s a lot of fiction out there now for LGBTQIA+ teenagers to read. Because even thinking back to when I was in high school, which was like ten years ago now, there wasn’t really a whole lot. Like it was starting to emerge and there were [0:19:05] certainly novels around but like there’s so much now that it’s fantastic to see, and there’s so much that they can read if that’s what they’re wanting to read.

 I think most of the LGBTQIA+ content I’ve read personally has been in the YA sphere; there’s just a lot of it and it seems to be easier to find as well. Yeah.

Kirsty: [0:19:32] Absolutely, in the [Unintelligible 0:19:34]

Michaela: [0:19:35] It’s very accessible, which I think is just fantastic. And I think, yeah, just the way that a lot of these stories are addressing these issues it just makes it easy to read, it’s easy to find, it’s light-hearted, it’s always got that same message of like “Everything will be okay” which is I think what they really need especially at that age when everything feels like the end of the world already. Exactly. Exactly.

 So, definitely I rate this –it’s a nice, easy read [0:20:05] whether you’re like on a plane or just at home on a Sunday arvo. Like it’s just a nice little book to read and it’s sort of something I would recommend if you’re sort of easing into this type of fiction as well.

 So, this one was written by Becky Albertalli if anyone was wondering. Originally published in 2015 and yeah, there is a movie adaptation now.

Kirsty: [0:20:33] Excellent. I’ll have to give it a go. And Jess, I’m looking at you know.

Jess: [0:20:38] So, I was going to go ... I’ve also got a YA called ‘From Prejudice to Pride’ which is a non-fiction and it’s a history of the LGBTQIA+ movement. But I think I’m going to put that on pause for just a second and also talk about a fiction that was actually recommended by Kirsty.

 So, how is the last name of the author pronounced? Noyse?

Kirsty: Noyse. That’s how I’ve been pronouncing it anyway.

Jess: [0:21:17] Yeah, that’s also how I’ve been pronouncing it. So, it’s E.J. Noyes ‘If the Shoe Fits.’

Kirsty: [0:21:25] I didn’t recommend that book.

Jess: [0:21:26] You didn’t recommend that one but that’s the one that I sort of found. I’m not really a fan of romance fiction and have never really been, so it was very much reading outside my comfort zone. Having said that, I picked it up, or rather clicked on it via Audio Book, and was very surprised and had a moment quite like Lachlan did of reading of [0:21:56] listening rather to large chunks of it and sort of having time get away from me a little bit.

 I think the main reason I want to mention it is it’s one to offset sort of some of the heavier titles we’ve been speaking about but also on the back of what Michaela was saying about finding things in the fiction section that [0:22:26] the community can identify with and see themselves into a certain extent.

 This fiction sort of has a lot of I guess the romance, especially a paperback romance tropes; it’s very sort of intense in that everything is sort of overblown and dramatic in the way that a lot of [0:22:56] I guess paperback romances are, which was for a woman-identified to woman-identified romance was really interesting to see because I don’t think I’ve actually read anything like that before. So, it was really interesting to see that dynamic done in the style of sort of paperback romance.

Kirsty: [0:23:18] Can I ask?

Jess: [0:23:19] Mm-hmm?

Kirsty: [0:23:19] The other books by this author that I’ve read, they’re an Australian author, and the other books I’ve read have been set in America. Is this one as well? I’m just curious.

Jess: [0:23:31] I was really surprised to see that it was an Australian author because yes, this is set in America and it is a little bit American sort of centric.

Kirsty: [0:23:40] Yeah. And the other ones I’ve read they really feel American as well.

Jess: [0:23:43] They do.

Kirsty: [0:23:45] Like one is set in the military during the ‘Don’t ask, don’t tell’ era, and another one is a bit more kind of mystery – not Sci-Fi but a bit stranger, but they both feel very, very American and the setting feels very authentic. So, it’s interesting that it’s an Australian.

Jess: [0:24:09] Yeah, it’s not poorly done. You do feel like it very much works. It’s interesting to see some of the tropes of romance like you know saving the damsel in distress-type things happening but with just a bit of a twist on the gender dynamics and the different things that are emphasised [0:24:39] and sort of held up in the romance element has just been really interesting.

 I just enjoyed it. I think it was sort of like something really different that I hadn’t read before and that’s the main reason I’m recommending it, and yeah, just a bit of an offset to some of the heavier stuff we’ve been talking about at the moment. So, yeah, that’s in our collection.

Kirsty: [0:25:04] Excellent.

Lachlan: [0:25:05] We’ve also got some great LGBTI reads in audio format and also in eBook. So, if print books aren’t your thing check out our ePlatform. So, we offer Belinda’s Borrow Box platform, the RBDigital platform and also Access 360. And I just wanted to mention a collection of again biographical stories and recollections that I’ve been listening to in the car. ‘Growing up Queer in Australia’ which is edited by Benjamin Law, [0:25:35] narrated partly by him but also by some of the contributing authors, so there’s a multiplicity of voices in the audio book, which is always great

 There are some laugh-out-loud moments in this, so I recommend it again if ... you know there are very heavy stories and memories in community but this is also an opportunity for some sort of moments of hilarity drawn from school and whatever.

Michaela: [0:26:11] We have that in print too, don’t we?

Lachlan: [0:26:13] We’ve got it in print, we’ve got in audio book as well and we’ve got it in eAudio.

Kirsty: [0:26:17] Is it the same – it’s from the same publisher and the same series as ‘Growing up Asian in Australia’?

Lachlan: [0:26:22] Yeah, and ‘Growing up Aboriginal in Australia’ too. Yeah. And the series itself is a really successful way of capturing community memory and publishing it and making it more accessible for everyone really, but yeah, on the specific topic of LGBTI history and growing up LGBTI in Australia. I recommend ‘Growing up Queer in Australia.’

Kirsty: [0:26:45] Excellent. Well, I’m glancing at my clock and that’s probably about all we have time for today unless we’ve got a very quick one-second? No.

Michaela: [0:27:00] No.

Lachlan: [0:27:00] Oh, well, no.

Kirsty: [0:27:05] So, you’ll all be able to see the list of titles we’ve mentioned in this episode on the Episode Notes for the Podcast and keep an eye out for the LGBTQIA+ booklist which will be floating around at each of our branches.

Lachlan: [0:27:21] You can also come and visit at the Park Lounge event in Werribee.

Kirsty: [0:27:25] Yes, again we will be at Park Lounge, so come...

Lachlan: [0:27:28] We’ll have a presence there with some great books and other things for you to come and have flick through.

Kirsty: [0:27:32] Come by.

Lachlan: [0:27:32] And you can join up on the spot as well if you’re not a member.

Kirsty: [0:27:35] Excellent. And as always you can contact the Podcast team at libraryadmin@wyndham.vic.gov.au or message us via Facebook or Instagram at librariesinwyndham. Thanks for listening.

[End of recorded material at 0:27:50]