Vignettes Episode 2: Stick - Transcript

**Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh:**

Hi there!

Welcome to Vignettes: The Emerging Writers Festival Podcast. My name is Ruby and I’m the Artistic Director at EWF. I am coming to you from the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.

For this episode, we invited Lorna Munro, Harry Reid and Damien Becker to respond to the theme of *Stick.* We asked them to consider the sticking points of life - from stoking flames to building bridges, and we can’t wait for you to hear what they have in store.

First, we have Lorna Munro.

**Lorna Munro:**

*Stick:*

How you hold up the sky with those opinions will always amaze me

like the way you tell lies just to erase me

place me in a box

caving in

displacing

my own ideas about myself

how fucking dare you

Tell me my mother wasn’t human

or that my grandmother was truly

the last of her kind

while i stand here in front of you

Im the one that spent all the time

learning and listening

yet you will praise someone that stole my voice and has been trying to wear my skin

ever since

while I stand here in front of you

transmuting trauma so deafening

gathering these leaves and figuring out what is medicine

you never carried that water

so why do you get to swim?

on the hottest of days

while we wait for your children to stop mocking us

knocking down trees

destroying estuaries

and the very things we all need

to continue to breathe

and be greedy in the knowing

that you do not belong here!

theses bones ache for some growing

the same as these trees with roots destroying pavement

pushing out powerlines

screaming wait a minute!

can i just be

can i just bundi this disbelief

right back to the sea?

swing my war stick above my head

watch the fuck out

the prophesy has been read

reinterpreted

and turned into code

you should have known before you carry the lies your ancestors told

this sacred ground is not for free

**Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh:**

Thanks Lorna. Next up, we have Damien Becker…

**Damien Becker:**

Hi everyone, I’m Damien, pronouns he/ him, speaking to you from Bundjalung land in the beautiful Northern Rivers town of Murwillumbah. I write and perform spoken word in between my job as a youth worker and being the dad of an 18-month old. I am recording this from a small room at the end of the house. During the day I have a view north across cow paddocks and sugar cane fields to the mountains bordering NSW and Queensland. But at night, like it is now, the bats in the giant fig tree in the park cry out. You might hear some in the background. In the next room my little one is sleeping in her cot, so I am keeping my voice soft. Today for vignettes I’m reading a single story poem, ‘Stick’. It is a new piece, a reflection on teenage years spent in hospital with fellow cystic fibrosis kin. About half of my friends from that time didn’t make it to adulthood. Thanks for listening and supporting the work of emerging writers such as myself. You can find more of my work on Instagram @seasaltskin all one word. This is ‘Stick’.

She was / like all of us in this place / encased in a layer of salt. Scientifically / we were always a bit hazy on specifics / truth being more important than facts / but it was something about our cells being unable to transfer sodium / into proper form / sending organs into lifelong storms / cascading waterfalls of phlegm and failure / so that we were always staying here / hospital kids on high rotation / and

these were days before the evidence of cross infection / turned the policy directions / ending face-to-face friendships like this / when the two of us could just hide out / on nights out / with the lights out / in the Ward 3 East kitchen / blinking visions of the big city / pulsing through windows / in rhythm / like taunts of what we were missing / inside all the time / our bodies slight as damp kindling / tiny legs brittle on bench edges / ankles

swishing / sweat behind knees leaving crystal mysteries on stainless steel / until / morning-shift cleaners could strip it back to sterility. Salt / like medicine / both preserves and corrodes / so I wonder aloud if these bodies of us / with cystic fibrosis rot more quickly in the ground / slumping cavities half-rotting already / full of infection / or maybe / the opposite effect / pickled indefinitely / in our own hypertonic salinity / like glass jars of herring. … but she says

I don’t care to know / and if my mind goes there / I may not care see with my own eyes again. A stick is dead wood not yet turned humus. We understand this / so we hang humorous conversations / like nursery mobiles / off our collar bones / between rasping coughs / like rising to gasp between sets of breakers / choking on our own jokes / spitting them into cups / our bodies drowning themselves from inside / breathing in clouds breathing out rain / the pain of fading away / clear as a Spring day / on her face / made

for charity-paid advertorials / story-filled Good Friday Appeal-ing smiles / dialed up to nine million / pity-feeling dollars / for MRI-buying child saviours / while / at school / a boy would grab her arm / and claim / I could just snap this like a twig / and her careers advisor / confided that if I were you / I would be enjoying life’s / every precious moment. But / in the kitchen / after the final IVs of the night / gorging on cold fries and lemonade

as per our dietary requirements / we allowed the shadow talk of well-founded despair / to sit in the air between us / like hovering feathers / til dawn / talking as if she were already gone / the flowers selected / the funeral mixtape perfectly constructed / her reluctance to tell her mum / she wasn’t religious / that the church service / planned with the priest / who had barely met the kid / and would mix her name

with another parishioner’s child / this confession to me / that weighed so heavily / that she would stay silent / a final act of grace / that traced / her silhouette in the dirt / with the jagged ends / of a stick/ disappearing on the forest floor / like memory.

**Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh:**

Thanks Damien! And now, here is Harry Reid…

**Harry Reid:**

another day in paradise

down the ROWY again, on facetime with Lucy looking for wood to burn. I’d like to be a little taller I say, then I could reach those lemons. sometimes it feels like I’m living in a procedurally generated history I say — you know? like every day waking up in a new room. today computer is to “head” chair is to “back”, sun half on my face half falling over. point to a good bit of broken fence and put the phone down. Lucy asks how will you get it home it’s not far I reply, I’m up for the fight. but they only stopped using arsenic to treat wood in 2005 I say, so you can only burn new fences. that looks old says Lucy yeah it does I say. better leave it. if wood is to “rot” then wind is to “give”— I’ve got to be a little smarter about my spending soon I think. Lucy asks how far does the ROWY go I don’t know I say. almost to the end of the street. but no one uses it, so we can shoot arrows here. good after a day at the desk and being council land it keeps the landlords happy. a few holes here and there— as long as it’s not *my* gate! not that we worry too much about landlords, or at all. chilly now! pick the phone up again, Lucy points out a broomstick. no good I say, too 80s.

ROWY a bust so keep walking around my neighbourhood. still on the phone with Lucy. I’m picking up branches, breaking them down and putting them into a hessian bag I carry with me. good for kindling, and with so many gums around there’s always a few dropped limbs. talking with Lucy about the football, I see a man stuffing pamphlets into mailboxes. one has blown down the road and I pick it up. what does it say asks Lucy. tomorrow may be too late I say and show Lucy the pamphlet. I hate this I say why asks Lucy. my extended family is all Jehovah Witness and they don’t talk to us anymore why asks Lucy again. I dunno I say because we’re not “in the church” I guess. think it also had something to do with my cousin living with her boyfriend. I put the pamphlet in my pocket to help start the fire tonight and think many if not all of these pamphlets will be looked over once and thrown away. what a waste I say. I gotta go and start dinner says Lucy. okay see you later I say, say hi to the cats for me.

back home now. the wind has died down but has left a chill. I’m building a fire in the backyard drinking wine with Emma. tonight we are drinking a pinot noir. good amount of sticks today says Emma yes I say, a few gums dropped in the wind. and there it is again— that new room feeling. a kind of anti-deja-vu. are you okay asks Emma yes I say. I forget how well she knows me how she can tell when I go funny. time together will do that. too much computer I say too much screen time today maybe. Emma seems unconvinced. it seems to me that evening is to “stretch” like morning is to “crunch”. maybe tomorrow I will feel more settled. I look at my wine and wonder if I should cut down but know that I won’t. not the type to “nip a bud”, but nights like this are small pleasures and I try to relax into it. my back hurts I say I think I need a new chair for my desk.

it is now that we see a head peering over our fence into the yard. this happens often as even someone short need only tiptoe to see over it and we live on a corner block in a popular area. it is a woman. oh don’t mind the pollution she says. what about the pollution I say. it’s not good for the environment she says. what’s not I ask the fire she says. better than running the heater all night I say and it’s cold tonight. I don’t have a heater she says. what do you do when it gets cold I ask. blankets she says. that seems needlessly miserable Emma says and at this she walks off. she’s right, a fire is polluting— it’s unavoidable. but so too is my day at the desk, my call with Lucy. so too this wine, the pamphlets. that was strange I say yes it was Emma says and very rude. I hadn’t even thought about it being rude but now I suppose it was. it’s none of her business if we have a fire or not I think. it’s none of her business if we have a fire or not Emma says and I agree.

**Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh:**

That was Harry Reid, Damien Becker, and Lorna Munro up the top. Thank you so much for listening to *Vignettes: The EWF Podcast.* If you enjoyed this episode, please drop us a review, recommend us to your friends and hit ‘subscribe’ wherever you like to listen. And of course *– stick* with us as we bring you more Autumnal readings over the next few weeks!

This podcast was produced by EWF Program Coordinator Millie Baylis. Our audio producer is Jon Tjhia, and our theme music was created by Thu Care (Thao Ly). You can find out more about the team behind this podcast and the artists featured in this episode on the EWF website.

This podcast was created and edited on the lands of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge that First Nations peoples are the first storytellers of this land, and that their sovereignty has never been ceded. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and to the Elders of the lands this podcast reaches. It always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.