

Women at Warp 123: Conversing with Kate Mulgrew Transcript

ROBERT PICARDO:

This is Robert Picardo. And when I'm not aboard the Federation Starship Voyager I spend my free time listening to Women at Warp.

intro music

JARRAH:

Hi and welcome to Women at Warp: A Roddenberry Star Trek podcast. Join us as our crew of four women Star Trek fans boldly go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name is Jarrah and thanks for tuning in. Today with me I have Sue.

SUE:

Hi everybody.

JARRAH:

And we have a super super exciting guest that we are interviewing in this week's episode. But before we get into that, our usual housekeeping and a couple of extra announcements. First of all, just wanted to remind you that we are supported entirely by our patrons on Patreon. You help keep our show up and running. And if you are able to contribute to our show for as little as a dollar a month you get access to cool exclusive online bonus content like watch along tracks and things like that. So check it out at Patreon.com/womenatwarp. That's P-A-T-R-E-O-N.com/womenatwarp.

SUE:

We are also in the midst of a giveaway. We have, thanks to Molly over Adopt-a-tribble a giant rainbow Tribble that we are giving away. And to enter this giveaway all you have to do is send us an email at crew@womenatwarp.com and tell us what you would name this Tribble. Now at Adopt-a-Tribble Molly has a tradition of naming her Tribble after activists, so keep that in mind and every email we get will be put into a randomizer and we will choose a winner for this giveaway. So again shoot us an email to crew@womenatwarp.com with the intended name for your activist rainbow Tribble. And deadline for entry is October 13th at midnight Eastern time.

JARRAH:

Can I just say that I took a look at Molly's Adopt-a-Tribble Etsy store and I basically want everything in it. This is in no way a paid promotion and I just was like *laughs* I love her Queer-positive Star Trek pins and stickers and I'm super thrilled that she gave us this rainbow Tribble to give away.

SUE:

Yeah her Etsy store is Tribble Orphanarium If anybody wants to check that out.

JARRAH:

Cool, we will share it in our show notes. Yeah so, today we are interviewing The Captain. And by **laughs** that we mean Kate Mulgrew who of course played Captain Janeway. You know when we started our show, like three years ago now? We talked a little bit about Captain Janeway in our very first episode, and then our 10th episode was all about Captain Janeway. She is someone that has meant a lot to us. And Kate Mulgrew, over you know the past several years we've talked about her first book *Born With Teeth* on our book club. She had a second book that came out this year called *How To Forget* which we talk about in the interview. And we were super thrilled to co-present a signing of this book at Star Trek Las Vegas, and really just *wowed* by all of the work that she is doing on other TV shows, in theater, and it was just such an honor to get to talk to her.

SUE:

Yes. So she joined us by phone to record. So you will hear some *phone related* audio, let's be real. **laughs** But we think that the conversation was a lot of fun and super thrilling, for me anyway, I assume for you as well Jarrah. If I could go back in time and tell, you know, 15-year-old me that "One day you're gonna be on the phone with Captain Janeway." I don't think I'd believe it.

JARRAH:

I know. I used to have a poster of Captain Janeway, have I told the story on the podcast before?

SUE:

Tell it again.

JARRAH:

OK. **laughing** Well like, I had a poster by my bed and I would ask it for advice. It was like my "what would Captain Janeway do?" as a kid. And I would have lost it if I knew **laughs** that this was going to happen. So it was very very exciting and awesome to talk to her and really can't thank her enough for the time. So as I mentioned in the interview we talk a little bit about her latest book, *How to Forget*, and we don't give a lot of background in the interview so just a brief bit of background. Sue and I have both read it. It is a Daughter's Memoir about the illness and eventual deaths of both of her parents in very different ways. Her father died very suddenly of cancer and her mother very slowly of Alzheimer's disease. And it is a really really powerful book and especially, you know, the half about her mother was really gut wrenching, for me, but also really kind of cathartic and just a really valuable experience that I still feel like I'm learning from.

SUE:

Yeah. I mean, obviously I agree with you there when **struggling for words** what are my words? It's interesting to come to an age where your parents start to have illnesses and you begin to become caretakers for them in a sort of way. And that stage of my life I feel like is beginning somewhat. So it is- even though it's *her* story I think it's felt by a lot of people on a deeply personal level. And we certainly saw that in Vegas at the book signing. A lot of people in line to

get their book signed talking to us about their own experiences with loss of a parent or illness of a parent. And it's just it's deeply personal and yet somehow universal.

JARRAH:

Yeah absolutely. I know and some people, including myself you know, hearing about the topic wonder you know "Am I almost ready to take on reading this book?" you know "Will it be too hard?" and I mean I just have save for my own experience, my father passed away I guess about a year and a half ago, and even though it was a very different story I still found that there was this sort of human commonality of the way that we handle the loss of a loved one. That was very *healing* and kind of just reassuring that this is something that we share as humans and to read about it just really put so eloquently by Kate Mulgrew.

SUE:

Of course we do talk about Star Trek as well. So..

JARRAH:

Absolutely. And we get to break some exciting news about a new project that she's working on. So listen through to the end and you will hear about that. And we are both very very excited about it. So without further ado I enjoy our interview with the captain herself Kate Mulgrew.

comm chirp

JARRAH:

So Sue and I have a couple of questions about your most recent book, and a question about Star Trek, question about Mr. Mercedes maybe? So we'll just get right into it then. I wanted to ask, we had the pleasure of reading your first book Born With Teeth for our Women at Warp book club. And recently we've also read your second book How To Forget. And I was wondering what was it that first drew you to memoir writing in particular?

KATE:

Well it seemed the most *organic* way to go. I wanted to write a book so as to tempt the literary process. I was quite old when I started it. I was in my late 50s and memoir came naturally to me. And so did How To Forget, the second book. It was just sort of- not a natural byproduct of first, but it sort of *pauses* it *evoked* a necessity in me. And so the second book was written I think is as a result of having written the first and the next one will be fiction.

JARRAH:

Well that's pretty exciting.

KATE:

Yes I am excited about it.

JARRAH:

In your book one of the things that really impressed me was how you make every scene come alive by describing details like the lighting, the set of someone's jaw, the temperature, things like that. I'm wondering, how do you capture that level of specificity when you're recounting memories?

KATE:

Well I think that that's the way I recall. I photograph things. I'm the same way as an actress. I'm the same way when I'm learning a text, I can sort of photograph things. There's a vividness to them and it sort of runs through my entire family. Everybody in my family is a genius at specificity. So the set jaw with a cigarette with a drink with the sun slanting a certain way comes naturally to the recollection of the memory itself. It's the stage, and I'm used to that.

JARRAH:

Amazing. Sue do you want to ask a question next?

SUE:

Yes. So in *Born With Teeth* you talk a lot about the importance of your work in acting for facing life's challenges and just now, about how that helps you recall very particular details. How much did acting experiences play into the events you describe and *How To Forget*.

KATE:

You mean in remembering them? Is that what you're saying- asking?

JARRAH:

I guess or coping with the experiences that you describe or-

KATE:

How did my acting help me to cope?

JARRAH:

If at all. *laughs*

KATE:

I think I mentioned in a few of the chapters that it *had* simply by virtue of the fact that there's a discipline required in acting. There's also an anticipation required. And there's also a schedule required. And those three things really helped me assist in my parents respective illnesses and deaths. Particularly my father's which was far more urgent than my mother's. There's a kind of very strict discipline to acting that I was able to bring to the effort of all that sadness. It also helps you hold the grief in abeyance for a very long time. Actors are very very adept at keeping those feelings at arm's length until such time as they need them in the characterization of the role.

SUE:

I was really struck by your description of receiving a phone call right before stepping on stage in Tea At Five and how you needed to *step into* the role of being Katherine Hepburn for those next two and a half hours before returning to the realities you were facing. Does that- it feels to me like that would cause a, I don't know, feeling of guilt if it were me to to put that aside for two and a half hours or more. Did that feeling ever come upon you or was it a release?

KATE:

All my life. It's part of the deal. What do you think Star Trek Voyager was all about?

SUE:

Oh I can imagine.

KATE:

I had two boys. I had two little children at home. I was a single parent and then I was of every day for 16 hours. Devastatingly hard, but manageable if you can compartmentalize. All actors, all good ones, must learn to do.

JARRAH:

I feel like one of the incredible things about your book is that it brings up a lot of feelings while you're reading it, but then even just recalling it, thinking about these other dynamics of emotions in our lives and the relationships we have with our parents and our family members and I feel like I'm still really learning from it. So thank you for that.

KATE:

Oh thank you very much.

JARRAH:

I'm wondering what advice you would have for our listeners who might be considering writing about their own lives?

KATE:

bluntly Be careful. I would caution great self reflection and I would caution just *discretion*. And also a kind of hyper awareness of what it is that you're about to excavate and to reveal, and be aware that there will be repercussions of whatever nature. They will visit you because you cannot unearth all of those memories and all of those emotions and you cannot unearth those memories without going through those emotions without paying some kind of price. I suppose more adept writers more prolific writers understand this, understand the process better than I have but I have found that tricky business. Which is part of the reason I'm going to try fiction next but only because I think I need to exercise the possibility of *really* writing. I think memoir, these two books, were a very strong effort. Sort of the second one more than the first, but I think to really test my literary chops I have to get into a novel and then we'll see what we shall see.

JARRAH:

Well we look forward to reading it and discussing it on the show.

KATE:

Oh good. Good.

JARRAH:

I had one more question related to the book which was, after your mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease you became very involved in raising awareness and funds for the Alzheimer's Association and I'm wondering how you would suggest that listeners get involved supporting that work?

KATE:

Well it's you know, all about money. I'm sorry to be so sort of cynical about it, but after all these years I've learned that every city has its own chapter you can certainly go and involve yourself in your local chapter. But if you've got *any* money at *all* the thing is to find a group of scientists, a hospital, a research group that you have a great faith in and send them funding because that's what it's all about. And that's why we're not very much further along than we certainly should be by this point. But there's not enough money to cover these clinical trials and it's millions upon millions of dollars that are needed. And science is just not getting what it needs. So I would urge everyone to be generous.

JARRAH:

Absolutely.

SUE:

So if we can switch gears a tiny bit and talk a little bit about Star Trek. Voyager, as you're well aware, will be turning 25 next year. How do you feel about having played Star Trek's first woman captain to lead a series? And have your feelings about that changed over the last twenty five years?

KATE:

No and they won't change. I feel **pause** I feel great about it. It was a singular honor, it really was. It was a real adventure. I think I was given quite a gift when I got this role. Which as you know I got after Genevieve Bujold accepted it, which I'm thankful for that as well for her foresight and her courage. But I understood while I was doing it that it was going to change my life forever. Little did I know at that time it would change other lives as well, particularly women in science. And that has been the single most gratifying aspect of the job. Aside from creating a character whom I've grown to really love, which is maybe three four or five times in a lifetime for an actress, but to be able **pauses** to be able to permeate the greater world, to effect it, to influence it is a wonderful feeling and I've been nothing less than grateful for it. This a wonderful wonderful thing.

SUE:

Do you recall what your first impressions were of Captain Janeway when you were first auditioning or reading the lines? And how you saw her change over the years in the series?

KATE:

My first impression of her was that I was going to own her. I was. I had a great high sense of confidence about it. I didn't know anything about Star Trek. I had never watched any science fiction or read it, aside from you know George Orwell, and I- it was not my genre *at all*. And yet I immediately liked her. I immediately understood her and there was an instant creative simpatico. And I went into the audition room, without a nerve I'd say, and thoroughly enjoyed myself in front of about 40 people in suits and I learned about two or three days later that I'd gotten the role.

JARRAH:

Is there anything that you see or saw in the character when you were playing her that you think that fans might not have picked up on?

KATE:

Aside from my terror? *crew laughs*

JARRAH:

We definitely did not pick up that.

KATE:

Yeah, well initially there was great great nerves. It was just *overwhelming*. I mean my audition pieces were not techno-babble. They wanted to see a kind of you know- I don't know, a kind of strengths and weaknesses what kind of nuance I'd bring to Janeway. It's when I hit the bridge, when I got the part and hit the bridge, you know, six o'clock on a Monday morning and I had three pages of absolute crazy techno-babble. I thought "Oh my God. How am I *ever* going to do this?" And that was the single hardest thing I think I've ever undertaken as an actress. Not just the technobabble per se, but my work ethic as an actress which demands that I understand and absolutely *control* the material so that I can be free with it. And in order to do it took me months to understand that. I had to endow all of that scientific jargon with authenticity and that was hard work. But after about six maybe eight months, it began to happen naturally. And after that the sky was the limit as they say. I knew what I was doing. It was all mine. And it became quite happy.

SUE:

That's wonderful. With the ubiquity of streaming services now we are seeing a lot of new fans coming to Star Trek. So when people are watching Voyager for the first time what do you hope they take away from the show and what do you hope they take away from Janeways journey specifically?

KATE:

Well of course I want them to take away the humanity I hope I brought to the franchise in playing the first female captain. Janeway was an ardent and very accomplished scientist when I got us lost in the delta quadrant. The moment I recognized the seriousness and the gravity of what I'd done, what had come to pass I understood that I had to somehow get this complement of 165 back to earth and that in so doing I was going to have to do everything I could to reconcile certain law warring factions. I was going to have to transcend certain things, I was going to have to teach the Prime Directive all over again. And I think that there was a depth to Voyager and right next to it a quality of great intrepid courage. Janeway loved adventure. She was really fearless. And I would say that my hands-on crew of mine are equally fearless. And I would like to think that we've left people with *pauses* what am I trying to say? An excited and stimulated imagination. A love of science and a confidence that women are capable of anything.

JARRAH:

That's lovely. I definitely take some of that away from it myself. So you know, coming into today Star Trek fans know Captain Janeway as a hero usually promoting the ideals of the Federation. But in Orange is the New Black Red was somewhat of an antihero and in Mr. Mercedes Alma is *much* more the other side of things. Does your approach change as you play these different roles. What is that like to play *not* the Starfleet captain?

KATE:

Well I think it says something about where I feel I needed to go. I think that after seven years of playing Kathryn Janeway I needed to exercise the other muscles that have lain below. In the muscles that are perhaps not as brave, not as self examined, not as wise, not a good perhaps but equally interesting. And you know, Janeway was a gift, as I said to you. And a life altering one, but that doesn't change the fact that I'm an actress and I've been an actress since I was a very young girl, way before I knew this character was going to come into my life. So it's imperative that I return to the thing that I love which is acting itself and walking the plank and jumping into uncharted waters with other characters. And at this stage of the game I'm in my 60s now, 50s when I got Red. It's not uncommon that I was drawn to a character like Galina Reznikov. A fascinating fascinating character and wonderful character to play and the same goes for Alma Lane, although a very different kind of creature. I've never played a psychopath before and I've never dreamt that I would have such joy in so doing but I did. Alma Lane actually, I felt like I was 22 years old. I can't explain it to you but, free. I just felt free and completely unshackled. She's outrageous. I had not seen it. But I know when I did it it was pretty outrageous *laughs* but having said that I would just say that I would do it all over again in a heartbeat. I was only sorry that she died. As for Red Reznikov, that was quite a different journey. A very very examined and excellent journey beautifully penned by Jenji Kohan about what would probably happen to a woman like Red in today's prison system, and I think that it was captured beautifully and I only hope that I rose to the occasion.

SUE:

Awesome. Well we know you don't have a lot of time tonight. So just is there anything else that we didn't touch on that you'd like to discuss or any other current or upcoming projects to make our listeners aware of?

KATE:

Well I think I'm about to start a play about the life of Marie Curie called *The Half Life Of Marie Curie*. I think I'm going into rehearsal in a couple of weeks. It's two handed, just two characters. Marie Curie had a great friend whose name was Hertha Ayerton, a scientist. A renowned scientist in her own right. That's the part that I'm playing. And it's the story of what happened to Marie Curie after Pierre's death when she'd had a love affair with Paul Langevin and had been ostracized from the scientific community. And she was dying from radium poisoning, and Hertha Ayerton's therapy saved her life. So it's the story that chapter in their lives and it's quite lovely. So I'm going into rehearsal for that and that will be at the Manetaine in New York until about Christmas time.

JARRAH:

That is really really cool.

KATE:

Yeah it's cool.*crew laughs* Well a little dose of science right?

JARRAH:

Yes! And another you know really inspiring woman in science.

KATE:

Yeah that's what I was- I was captivated by it. I didn't know who Hertha Ayerton was. She was also a great suffragette. A *leader* in the movement. And we're talking of course about you know just after the turn of the century. So it was- it's not only edifying but it's poignant, it's exacting, it shows us the Marie Curie that we've not seen before and it introduces us to a new person, Hertha Ayerton, whom everyone should know. And it's the story of a great great friendship.

SUE:

I'm so excited to see that this fall.

KATE:

Good! I'm glad. I hope you do.

JARRAH:

Amazing. Well thank you so much for making the time to chat with us tonight. It's been an absolute pleasure having you on the show. And you've been and continue to be an inspiration to the two of us and our other co-hosts who couldn't make it tonight. Thank you so much.

KATE:

Well thank you both very much and thanks for everything you did to help me in Las Vegas with my books. I'm very grateful to you for that.

JARRAH:

You're very welcome.

SUE:

Anytime.

KATE:

Bye bye.

comm chirp

JARRAH:

All right well, thank you again to Kate Mulgrew for being with us on the show. It was a really great experience and we're delighted we got to share with you. Sue where can people find you elsewhere on the Internet?

SUE:

You can find me on Twitter @spaltor. That's S-P-A-L-T-O-R.

JARRAH:

And I'm Jarrah and you can find me on Twitter J-A-R-R-A-H-Penguin or at Trekkiefeminist.com. And if you are looking to get in touch with the show, which we highly encourage, you can find us at Womenatwarp.com. We're also on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @womenatwarp and you can e-mail us at Crew@womenatwarp.com and you can also leave a rating or review on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcast which helps people find our show. And for more from the Roddenberry podcast network visit podcasts.Roddenberry.com. Thanks so much for listening.

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