

Knic:

Welcome to the pilot episode on Wandering Locals, a show about Tacoma artists and what it means to be a local. This first episode is a unique experiment, and it has a quirky back and forth format that we changed in subsequent episodes. Thank you for wandering on this journey with us. Enjoy the ride.

Knic:

There are 30,000, or so, cities and towns in the United States. If we sort them by population, Tacoma, Washington ranks 101. That's bigger than Salt Lake City, Utah. It's bigger than both Spokane Valley and Bend, Oregon combined. That ranking comes from a population living on the 49.7 square miles comprising the official city limits of Tacoma, so not including University Place, not Fircrest, not Lakewood, Parkland, Milton, Fife, or Federal Way. Plus, the entire population of Ruston's 767 people is technically a completely separate city.

Knic:

And official Tacoma is growing by more than 2,000 people per year for the last dozen years, and somehow I hear many people refer to it as a "big small-town" where everybody already knows each other. This is a logistical impossibility. Look, I love meeting new people. And even if I met a new person every hour, 12 hours a day, not only would it be an introvert's nightmare, it would also take me 50 years to meet everyone once.

Knic:

The point is, Tacoma is a big, big place. So here's a question that's been nagging at me. In a place this big, my Tacoma is almost certainly different than your Tacoma. So what are the basics that tie us together as locals?

Knic:

Heck, what does it even mean to be a local? Are there things we're expected to know about, about the history, the geography, the art scene, the current political challenges, or which coffee roaster has the most robust blend? I've lived here nearly five years now. How long does it take to become a local anyway? Do you have to be born here? What happens if you leave and come back? Does being a local come with responsibilities to our neighbors, to the land, to the idea of the city itself? I have a lot of questions.

Knic:

Logically, it makes sense to me to start by asking the current locals. But without a way to first determine what a local even is, it's a conundrum. Of course, I could ask just all 217,000 folks that already live here. And my guess is I'll get about half that many answers, including plenty of, "Whatever man." I realize the answers to these questions aren't hard science. The answers, if there are any, are collectively revealed by the choices we make each day and the patterns and stories we choose to reinforce. And to me, that makes exploring the questions all the more interesting.

Knic:

And that brings us to the heart of this show. Wandering Locals began as a multi-genre art collective bringing the energy of city to city national tour to a local level, traveling neighborhood to neighborhood.

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Tacoma has a talented and diverse crew of artists and creatives of all kinds of expressions and genres. Of course, coronavirus prevented us from hosting any of the events we've planned this summer.

Knic:

So instead, we're using the power of these recorded live sounds to do two things: one, we'll wander through the wild breadth of artistry in Tacoma, highlighting diversity of both person and artistic expression, and two, over time, we'll try to find our way to a clearer idea of what it means to be a local. I hope you'll leave each episode uplifted, reconnected, and inspired by the artistry we'll experience from people that are no matter where you live your neighbors. And maybe along the way we'll figure out how to live together a little more intentionally.

Knic:

Come on out. Let's wander. We're featuring two artists today. Both of them were born here in Tacoma. They also both moved away for a while before returning to the city, and they now both live in West End. First up, from Power 2 The Poetry, Bethany Montgomery, also known as B.Lyte, also known as a piece of French Toast?

Music:

[For The Culture 00:05:20]

Bethany:

Oh man, I hate introductions. For me, I like people to make their assumptions after I speak. Literally, I always tell everybody, "You just say my name. I'm B.Lyte. I'm Bethany of Power 2 The Poetry." And that's it. And it's so funny because every event, all the performers and people before me have these long intros, like, "They performed here and they got to open for Beyonce," blah, blah, blah. Again, it's validation. I think people validation there. And I realize I'm validated for myself, so I don't need to be validated from anybody else.

Bethany:

And so then when it's my turn, they go, "Bethany, Power 2 The Poetry," and then people are waiting for more and then that's it. So then I start to walk on the stage, so then they slowly clap. And it's hilarious. This is not even trying to be hype or anything, but I swear to God, pretty much after every performance, I always leave with a standing ovation. And people are like, "Man, I left inspired," just how you were talking about. I feel like that's one of my gifts is inspiration.

Bethany:

You don't need to know my back story, because I'll probably express through how I perform and you'll feel that. You'll feel that energy, and you'll be like, "Yeah. That girl, she went through something." If you want to say that I'm a piece of French Toast, you can. I don't care because I know who I am for me. I define myself for myself. I look at myself at the end of the day in the mirror and I smile.

Knic:

Now you know. That song, BT dubs, is called For The Culture by Power 2 The Poetry. We've got two more songs from B.Lyte coming later. For now, here's what she's learning about feelings.

Bethany:

I was actually to my friend, I was like, "You know what? We're always going to have negative thoughts, but what we can do is be aware of them. And when those negative thoughts do start to cloud your brain and everything in your motions, you can have predetermined phrases to say." Literally, I was like, "Let's come up with our top three phrases to say." I was like, my three predetermined phrases to say to myself when I start thinking like a little beyotch. I put, one, I got this. I have what it takes. I am great.

Bethany:

Two, I'm enough. I am more than enough. I am amazing. Three, I am disciplined. I am determined. I will work hard. I will win.

Knic:

While Bethany is finding love for herself through predetermined phrases, our other locally born artist today is finding love for herself in 60 second interactions at Starbucks. Here's Angie Lynn.

Angie:

Whew, man. I don't know. I feel like I'm just kind of relearning myself in general. I think that I am essentially just relearning to love myself in general, which is weird. Yeah, it's weird for me to say that because I feel like for the last couple of years as an artist, as a performer, I've been very sure of myself and very confident and really had plenty of self-esteem. And now I'm just like... It's not that that's gone, but it's definitely in the background right now. It's just a different kind of life for me. Now that I'm kind of thinking about it, I am really...

Angie:

This whole pandemic and this journey that I've personally been on during this time, for me specifically, it kind of triggered and jump started a lot of things for me. The mental health journey made me really want to focus in on my work and give me a brand new passion and drive there. That has been really fun to explore and learning how to be stronger in my job and stronger in growing and just learning new things. I mean, I work at Starbucks. I know it's a big corporate beast, but it's really... They've been so great, and I just love my job.

Angie:

I love getting to see people every day. We've just been this wonderful place that people can come that's still pretty normal. People can still come and interact with people who are happy to be at their jobs and happy to serve and make other people happy. I guess I would say I love that about me. I relearned to love that. I love my job and love the aspect and that I get to make a small dent in people's day that is positive, like you were saying.

Angie:

I know that I'll have so much more to give and more to contribute to the bigger picture and to the community and to, I mean, the world really once I have more solid footing. The silly small way that I'm doing that right now is at work I get to be one-on-one with people for 60 seconds at a time.

Music:

[Future Self 00:14:44]

Knic:

That was Future Self by Angie Lynn. We've heard from both artists on how they're finding love for themselves, which can be a challenge for many of us anytime, but perhaps especially so in a socially distant pandemic. Personally, I appreciate the reminders here, to pay attention to my thoughts and to notice the small things that do uplift me on a daily basis. Next, we're going to hear from both of them on how their own art is changing their lives. Let's swing back to French Toast, I mean, Bethany, who actually claims to be a local in two places.

Bethany:

I claim 253 and I claim 509 until the day die. I swear to God. I was born and raised in Tacoma. I stayed in Tacoma from age 0 to age 18. Then I got to go to college and I feel like that's when I truly was able to come into my own because I have my own identity. Nobody knows me here. I get to be whoever I want. Since the beginning, I never really had my own identity. I've banked off the identity of my family. I've had to represent my family. It wasn't like Bethany. No. It's like, yo, you're a Montgomery so you got to be held to the highest standard.

Bethany:

Your grandpa is an important person, so you can't embarrass him. It was like that. Then I get to Spokane. Nobody knows who I am. I was a hooper. And unfortunately, I didn't make a name for myself basketball wise because as soon as I got here, I had heart problems and ended up having to get a heart surgery and had to retire. Nobody knew me as a hooper or anything. And then I found poetry. That was my new way to express myself, because it was always basketball. I truly really was able to come into my own here in Spokane.

Bethany:

One, I was supposed to be a basketball superstar who was supposed to be a professional basketball player. So that didn't happen. I failed there. Okay. Two, I got my MBA, I got my master's degree. So I'm supposed to be this super boss businesswoman with either her own business making millions of dollars a year or working for a big corporation like Amazon and having a senior level management title already. I don't have that. Two, well, damn, I'm a struggling poet and now I say I want to be a rapper. I'm a fucking loser.

Knic:

Don't sugarcoat it though. Tell us how it really is.

Bethany:

Yeah. That's what I thought. And then I thought about it and I was like no. I freaking am debt-free and have a master's degree and I got it at the age of 22. I decided I didn't want to be a robot and a slave to a corporate job, so I decided to start my own business and pursue my passion of poetry. I go to schools and I inspire the youth to truly be themselves and not be afraid to truly embrace who they are and don't care about if anybody judges them.

Bethany:

I go and I perform in front of communities and at community events and promote why equity is important and why Black Lives Matter and combating racism and raising awareness for so many

important issues and speak my mind and speak my truth. And then also, I believe in creative and artistic expression. I am creating music that I believe in, that I want to build a platform for. Yeah, I only have 500 followers on my Facebook and 10 followers on my SoundCloud, but I don't care. I'm following my dreams. That says a lot.

Bethany:

When I thought of it like that, I was like, you know what? I'm fucking dope. It is what it is.

Music:

[Yoga 00:24:20]

Knic:

That was Yoga by Power 2 The Poetry. While Bethany looked into her own art and found a connection to her identity, Angie, on the other hand, looked into her own art and found advice she'd written that she only just realized was meant for herself.

Angie:

Yeah, so that's kind of where I'm struggling. I'm thinking how vulnerable do I want to be and how is this podcast and this project going to help me while also hopefully speaking to other people who are going to be listening. We've talked a little bit about I've just been going through my own kind of mental health journey during this pandemic. That was kind of spurred on by all kinds of other things that have happened.

Angie:

Really it's about time, but going back through the catalog of songs that I've written and it's so interesting how you find new meaning in art, depending on what you are going through and what you are learning. Songs that I've written years ago that I saw, "Oh, I wrote this about this instance, or oh, I wrote this for this person," and you think, well, I actually wrote this for myself right now. This is what I need right now. It's really interesting how art does that. It's done that to me all my life. I'm not exempt in what I've created for art to touch me that way.

Angie:

Gosh, I haven't really gotten anything new out in a really long time, but just this project and forcing myself to look through and play and revisit some things has been really interesting and kind of healing, because it's me telling myself I'm going to be okay. It's really cool. The interesting part is that I wrote that song four or five years ago, so I already had that answer for myself, but I had to find it again.

Angie:

Even though I've been singing this song to so many people and giving this piece of advice to people, it took me really just this project looking back into my songs to say like, "Oh my God, I gave myself this advice and I'm only just now realizing it." My father killed himself when I was 19 after just years and years of struggling. And it was a silent struggle. It wasn't something that was anything I knew about. After he passed, I had my own struggle of like, well, why did this happen? And realizing that just resources were not made available to him because of multiple reasons.

Angie:

One of the biggest ones being that it was just kind of this secret struggle. In writing the song, I just wrote about a man who just feels like he has nothing and is essentially ready to make a proverbial jump or a real jump. There's a line in the song where I sing like, "He waited through the night, waited for the breaking of the sun, and every breath in his lungs was another victory won." Oh, have I related to that line this year. The whole song is just about realizing that people are around you ready to help you and that everybody has parts of them that are broken.

Angie:

And that that's okay because we are all broken together. And we maybe broken in different ways, but we all have dramas. We all have things that we are trying to get over. It wasn't that I wrote it from a place of feeling above that, but I thought that my biggest brokenness parts were behind me, I guess, which is stupid. It's so stupid to think that we can be a human living the human experience and not continue to be broken and continue to find new things to fix and repair and make stronger. I mean, that has been my journey this summer, this fall, this pandemic.

Angie:

And it's a journey that I think I delayed a long time. And once the pandemic made me kind of sit with myself, I was like, okay, it's time. I can't function anymore. I said at the beginning of this, I was like, I don't know how vulnerable I'm going to be, but I'm like, hey, Tacoma, here I am.

Knic:

And I respect that. I mean, I advise sensation is that we are all on our own rides of healing, of overcoming, of finding a path towards thriving, towards the full life we want to live. It's helpful for me to hear the realities of the things that other people are... The ways other people are moving through the world is it gives me new things to notice about myself. I think that this thing that you're noticing that you... You're calling yourself out a little bit I feel like on it being... You said the word stupid, which I would maybe push back against a little bit.

Knic:

Reframe perhaps to just say it's cyclical I think where there's this notion that we've overcome something in particular, and then we find ourselves in a position where there's another new thing to learn there. That is the journey. Everything is a cycle. You're now in a new phase of that cyclical journey, and you'll get through this one and then get to learn it again I'm sure in another few years.

Angie:

Yeah, I know. I know. It's life.

Knic:

It's something to lean into I think. A teaching someone gave me recently about is like the quality of the journey has to be what matters, because there's literally no time in the human life where you get to sit back and everything is solved.

Angie:

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Yeah. Man, have I been feeling... I have definitely been feeling that. I'm just taking everything day by day and thinking like I know I've got more work to do tomorrow.

Knic:

Yeah.

Angie:

This is a song I wrote called Ten. I wrote it, how many years ago, on the anniversary of my dad's death, the 10 year anniversary. I've written many songs before and since. I say many like I have this huge catalog of songs about my dad. I have a few songs about my dad and what that has meant to me and what his life and death has meant to me after that and growing into my own self with my own demons and my own struggles. It's been interesting. It's a really hard road when you have no answers and you have to say, well, I guess I just will never know that.

Angie:

Learning how to be okay with that has been really interesting, and some days I'm better at it than others. Anyway, this is called Ten.

Music:

[Ten 00:34:35]

Knic:

I'm not sure if we'll keep this back and forth format for every episode, but one thing it highlights to me is how we are all on such a different ride. While Angie is in a period of cocooning, working through emotions from an old wound and learning to love herself again, Bethany is in a period of blossoming. Without the benefit of regular social interaction, it's been hard for me to remember that we're all experiencing this time so differently. Here's Bethany on what's going well, how she got there, and her advice for anyone searching for a cure.

Bethany:

Just kind of trying to switch up the scenery, because I was kind of hella depressed. But finally, I just worked my way out of it. I am in such a good space right now. My whole takeaway from it is doing nothing doesn't help and doing something helps.

Knic:

Wow.

Bethany:

Yeah.

Knic:

You make it sound so simple.

Bethany:

I honestly do believe it's that simple, but I think about... I talk to my mom and I'm like, dang, I was literally hella depressed three, four months ago and now I literally have never felt better. What has been the difference is I wanted to be in the depression just to know how it felt. I feel like I chose to be in the depression. And I know for some people they don't believe they choose that, but I feel like it was just my choice and it kind of felt like I deserved it.

Bethany:

And then I just was in it and I was realizing, well, doing nothing, laying in the bed all day being sad and depressed and watching Netflix is not making me feel any better. One, I got in therapy, and then two, I just started doing stuff. I've been doing a gratitude journal every day. Today is day 34. I've been doing it 34 days straight. Every morning I write, "I love myself. I am kind. I am happy. I am positive. I have purpose. Today I am grateful for," and I write three things. And then I write my goals for today are, I write three things.

Bethany:

And then because of you, I write, "My goals are met with small daily choices. I got this." Literally when I talked to you and you did your little saying, "The small is the big, the small makes..." I don't know how it goes. You can say it.

Knic:

Adrienne Maree Brown's quote. "The small is good, small is all (the large is a reflection of the small.)"

Bethany:

Exactly. Ever since you said that to me, I just been thinking about that all the time. Literally every day I write, "My goals are met with small daily choices. I got this." And then I've been going on a walk for at least 20 minutes every day. I've been doing a little aerobic workout circuit. I've been reading. And then at the end of the day, I finish my day with I write three things I was grateful for from the day and then I write three things I intend to dream about.

Bethany:

To finish it off, I write, "Today I was great. Tomorrow I will be greater. I love my life. I am full of gratitude. I can do all things through the power of my subconscious. I will dream big. I got this." And then yesterday, I wrote, and I think I'm going to continue to write this, I wrote, "Remember, be kind to myself. I love you. I love me." Just my whole mindset and mentality was changing. I mean, I've been super productive. I've been making music. I've been shooting music videos.

Bethany:

I've been doing tons of stuff at work, teaching workshops over Zoom, and just helping people start their business. I literally feel great. This is one of the best spaces I've ever been in my entire life. The new song that I got, Searching For, is really relevant, and I wrote it when I was in my depression. I really feel like we're all just searching for a cure. We're all searching for a cure, but I feel like what we don't realize is that, one, there's no cure, and two, there's nothing to search for because you're you. You're anchored in you.

Bethany:



My thing is if you don't like your life and you don't like who you are, you can change it. You can change who you want to become by taking on new habits, because my goals are met with small daily choices. I got this.

Music:

[Searching For 00:43:34]

Knic:

That was Searching For by Power 2 The Poetry. I love this takeaway from the practice that Bethany describes. When it comes to finding moments of joy in the darkness, doing something works. For Angie, finding moments of joy is about being at work and holding her new snuggle buddy in her arms. Here's Angie.

Angie:

When I'm at work, find the moments with customers and with the people that I work with too because we all genuinely really like being there together. It's been crazy. Don't get me wrong. It has been bonkers crazy, and there are stores that are shutdown right now because of COVID. And so we get all this extra business because we're the one that's open. It is stressful. But even in that stressful time, to be able to chat with somebody that you wouldn't have been able to otherwise is super rewarding. And I get a lot of joy from that.

Angie:

And then I get to come home after that stressful and joyous day at work and I get to come home and I get to get instant snuggles from my boy. I mean, he's sleeping on the bed next to me right now because we did our walk and he's just snoozing.

Knic:

Can we clarify? You have a puppy.

Angie:

I got a puppy. He is currently six months old. Yeah, he just got to six months a few days ago. He's darling and spunky and just loves me so much and I love him. He has calmed me and helped me. Definitely his momma. I love having him around, even when he's really annoying. Maybe I'll be ready for kids someday. Who knows? Now taking applications, right? Oh man.

Knic:

Are you taking applications? I mean, my understanding is that you're available.

Angie:

Sure. Yeah. It's an interesting scenario though because how do you date in a pandemic? It's like I'm just terrified. I'm terrified to even try. If we weren't in a pandemic, I wouldn't want to do any kind of online dating app anyway because I've tried them and they're just so dismal. But when you're in a pandemic and that's your only option, do you choose that option, or do you just keep sitting at home in your hermit house and play Zelda and watch Dawson's Creek with your dog? I think that's my answer right now.

Angie:

If you want to play Zelda and watch Dawson's Creek with me and my dog, then by all means, guys, hit me up, because clearly you're my kind of person if that's what you want to do.

Music:

[Arms That Hold You 00:49:05]

Knic:

That's the Arms That Hold You by Angie Lynn. And that's our pilot episode. I hope you found some inspiration or at least feel a bit more connected to the locals around you. We are just getting started here. There's a lot more to discover about being a local in Tacoma, Washington, and I'm eager to start asking that question explicitly. For now, I'm grateful for these two locally born humans for sharing a bit of their stories and learnings with us. Thanks to Angie, I'll be revisiting some of my own art to find advice to myself.

Knic:

Thanks to Bethany, I'll be thinking of some predetermined phrases for when my brain is being a little "boyotch" ... I don't think that's a word. Anyway, stick around for a serendipity shout out. On the next episode, we'll hear from Austin Scheen and Lester Pogue and we'll talk about feelings and kick drums, working towards liberation and the purpose of Q-tips. A lot of other gratitude to spread around right now. For organizing a lot of this, Zach White. Shout out to him. Our audio engineer is Austin Scheen. In case you don't know, I'm your host, Knic Pfost.

Knic:

Also, I just want to say as a project exploring present day Tacoma, especially one that purports to address what it means to be a local, I think it's important to gratefully the first people of the land that we create this project on, the Puyallup Tribe and the Coastal Salish peoples. No matter how we end up defining a local, you can't get anymore local than that. Thanks to our artists, French Toast Bethany Montgomery and Angie Lynn. Links to their things. They got a lot of things. There's websites and Instagrams and all the things. All those links are in the show notes.

Knic:

And thanks to the wanderers and the Wandering Locals Collective for listening to me prattle a lot about some of this stuff and reviewing some of these pieces. Thanks also to our patrons. The Tacoma Arts Commission was a funder of this particular episode and the next three. And also you have that opportunity if you are interested in supporting the work and the show. [Anchor.fm/wanderinglocals](https://anchor.fm/wanderinglocals), there's a support button. There's also a button there to message us and have your voice included on a future episode. If you've got some thoughts to share, I would love to hear it.

Knic:

Here is a serendipity shout out from Angie Lynn. The idea here is maybe you're an artist, maybe you listen to shows made by other artists, maybe you get to the end of this show and you happen to hear a little shout out from a fellow artist. I'll let Angie close us out. Until next time, thank you for listening local.

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Angie:

I had a Gina Belliveau song stuck in my head the other day. She doesn't even live in Tacoma anymore, but she performs so much in and around Tacoma. I miss her face. I miss her music. She's so funny and talented. I also really miss... Let's see. Let's just think of the list here, right? There's so many. There's so many people. Gina was the first one that came to my mind.

Knic:

If Gina's listening right now, I mean, what do you want to tell her?

Angie:

I don't know. I just miss you. I have to put Spotify on the other day because I had one of her songs stuck in my head, a really beautiful song called Birdseed. If anybody listening wants to check out something beautiful, Gina Belliveau on Spotify, Birdseed. It's so charming and lovely.

Knic:

The Wandering Locals Podcast is a production of Wandering Locals, with financial support for our first three episodes from the Tacoma Arts Commission. Support further productions via our website at [wanderinglocals.com](http://wanderinglocals.com). Thank you for choosing to listen local. Until next time, wander on.

Bethany:

Dude, please introduce me as French Toast. Please.

Knic:

It's going to happen.

Bethany:

I will be offended if you don't introduce me as French Toast.