

## All There Is with Anderson Cooper

OCT 19, 2022

Laurie Anderson: The Release Of Love

**Speakers**

Anderson Cooper, Wendy Goodman, Clip from Oh Superman, Clip from Walk on the Wild Side, Clip from Heart of a Dog, Laurie Anderson, Bob Thurman, Clip from Men of Good Fortune, Elizabeth Alexander

00:00:00

**Anderson Cooper**

I took a break this week from going through boxes of stuff from my mom's apartment. I've been feeling a little overwhelmed and was reminded what my mom's friend Wendy Goodman said to me in the first podcast about pacing myself and not feeling like I have to go through everything right away.

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**Wendy Goodman**

Gloria would have said, I mean, sure, she did say it to Anderson, let's go forward. Go forward. And you've done a job to honor her and you've done a job that she knew you could do and would do. So don't feel rushed. Don't feel pressured. Give yourself time with it all so that once this is done, you can think in a different way about all of these things.

00:00:38

**Anderson Cooper**

This grief stuff. It's it's hard. It sneaks up on you sometimes. It has for me this week, even when you know what you should do or feel, or what your loved one who's died would want you to be doing or feeling doesn't mean you can, does it? It doesn't work like that. I've been reading your DMS on Instagram and your notes have been incredibly moving, and I want to thank you for reaching out. There really is this deep ocean of grief out there and the currents are strong. At times I still feel like I'm on a little life raft alone. But doing these interviews and hearing your stories as well, talking about it, it helps. I've been wrestling with how much longer I should keep doing this podcast. A big part of me doesn't want to stop having these conversations. They feel really meaningful to me, but it's also painful at times. And yeah, overwhelming. That's the word I keep coming back to. I don't know. We'll see. But they'll definitely be at least two more episodes in this current series. So let's get started, because I really can't wait for you to meet Laurie Anderson. This is all there is.

00:01:51

**Anderson Cooper**

My mom first introduced me to Laurie Anderson's music when I was 15. Specifically, it was a record called Big Science that Laurie released in 1982. And there's a song on it called "Oh Superman" that I love.

00:02:02

**Clip from Oh Superman**

Oh, Superman. Oh judge. Mom and dad.....Mom and dad....ah ah ah aha ah.

00:02:21

**Anderson Cooper**

The song is more than 8 minutes long, so I recommend you listen to the whole thing online if you want to. Laurie Anderson is 75 now and seems like she's constantly in motion. Her work is- it's hard to describe. She's an artist, but she works in a lot of different ways. She's a composer who's won a Grammy for a chamber music album about Hurricane Sandy. She plays these strangely wonderful violins of her own design, and she tells stories in songs and words on stages and films, on canvases and in virtual reality. She just had a big exhibition at the Smithsonian's Hirschorn Museum in Washington, D.C. Laurie was partners with rock legend Lou Reed for 21 years, the last eight of them as husband and wife.

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**Clip from Walk on the Wild Side**

She says, Hey, babe, take a walk on the wild side. Said, Hey, honey, take a walk on the wild side.

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**Anderson Cooper**

Was just one of the many songs that Lou Reed rode in his long career. He was 71 when he died from liver disease in 2013. Laurie also experienced the death of her beloved dog, Lolabelle, and in 2015 made a moving and fascinating film about life and loss called "Heart of a Dog."

00:03:34

**Clip from Heart of a Dog**

But finally, I saw it, the connection between love and death, that the purpose of death is the release of love.

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**Anderson Cooper**

Laurie Anderson, thank you so much for being here.

00:03:56

**Laurie Anderson**

It's great to be here.

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**Anderson Cooper**

As you know, I- I love you. And I think you are-

00:04:01

**Laurie Anderson**

I love you, too. So here we are.

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**Anderson Cooper**

Your husband, Lou Reed, died in 2013.

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**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah, almost ten years ago.

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**Anderson Cooper**

And you live in the apartment that you still- that you shared together?

00:04:11

**Laurie Anderson**

Yes. I'm one of those people who isn't moving on because I- I just like it the way it is. So a lot of the stuff is kind of more or less where he put it. The concept of moving on feels like something on a refrigerator magnet, you know, it just doesn't make any sense to me. I like objects that have a presence, especially things like somebody's phone or things that he touched a lot. Lou had a lot of weapons. And so those are the things-

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**Anderson Cooper**

He was a martial artist.

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**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah.

00:04:42

**Anderson Cooper**

Not a gun hoarder

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**Laurie Anderson**

Not a gun nut, no.

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**Anderson Cooper**

He was a martial artist.

00:04:45

**Laurie Anderson**

It's swords and spears and jaggedy things. So I imagine that your mother has left some of those things.

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**Anderson Cooper**

Oh, tons of those-.

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**Laurie Anderson**

All over the place.

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**Anderson Cooper**

All over the place. Drawers full of just things, but everything my mom had. It's not that it was incredibly valuable, and I'm sure some of the things were- have value, but they were all things that had history with her, that had been with her for, you know, the 95 years of her life, had been with her for decades and decades.

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**Laurie Anderson**

There's nothing more valuable than that history.

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**Anderson Cooper**

I find all these objects are infused with so many memories. And because all of the family that I grew up in, the little family of my father, my brother and my mom, I'm the last person who knows the memories of all these objects. So in throwing them away or giving them away or whatever, it's like extinguishing that memory.

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**Laurie Anderson**

Well, yeah. You are last man standing here.

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**Anderson Cooper**

Yeah, exactly.

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**Laurie Anderson**

It's true. But it could be really interesting. Instead of feeling the heaviness of that is I found that it helped me a lot to give things away. And for a while, I gave. I gave away a lot of Lou's leather jackets. And then I'd see them walking around on the street. And my friends, I was like, Give me that jacket back. Wait a second. I just- that was that was just a loan, really.

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**Anderson Cooper**

Wait a minute. I remember recently you emailed me and you were giving away a lot of your books.

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**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah, it was the same thing. I did get rid of a lot of books and I think it helps to let them float off and have another life.

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**Anderson Cooper**

I do like that idea of these things having a new life that my tendency is to like hoard everything in boxes, even if I'm not using it. But then I think, well, that's ridiculous. My brother and I used to play Dungeons and Dragons as kids. We were very nerdy and the notes he kept for that game. I don't know what to do with them.

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**Laurie Anderson**

Well, I think rituals were made for stuff like this, you know, when Lou died, as a Buddhist I'm, and he was as well, it was really important to me to do this 49 day period of the bardo. In this bardo is this period of time when supposedly, according to Tibetans, the consciousness, let's say, they don't use words like soul or whatever, the consciousness shifts into another form. And so it's a period of kind of great confusion. So the idea is to focus on that person in the time, not in yourself, and put all of your energy into thinking of that person who's trying to make that transition. Because it's, according to the Tibetans, confusing all your memories from all your whole life are like swirling around it. It's like everything breaks and you see sort of pure energy. So it's like supposedly exhilarating and also very confusing. There's one guy who is my teacher at the time named Bob Thurman, and he talks about that transition. So I just want to play you one little section of Bob Thurman's and it's called Liberation upon hearing in the between.

00:08:04

**Bob Thurman**

Okay. Here we are in the between, in the between dealing with the so-called Book of the Dead. First thing about it, of course, is that the title, The Book of the Dead is totally wrong because the great insight of the Book of the Dead is that there are no dead. Nobody's dead, and there are no dead people. There's no such thing. It's like, who's in the door? Nobody's in the door. You're either in this room or in that room. The door is just is like a line, you know. It has no width, so nobody can ever be in it.

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**Laurie Anderson**

I love his- 'I'm going to tell you, the title is crazy because there are no dead people. No dead people. No dead people at all.' What? So that that woke me right up and I was like, what did he mean by that? What does that mean? I actually feel that I feel I-

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**Anderson Cooper**

You do feel that.

00:09:09  
**Laurie Anderson** Oh, yes, I feel that that line is not doesn't not exist. I mean, it exists as a line. As an abstraction-

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**Anderson Cooper** So do you- do you feel Lou Reed is dead?

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**Laurie Anderson** I feel those kinds of definitions are no longer so clear for me, you know, dead not dead. One of the things that this teaching is about is like that we are in a kind of dream state now that we're trying to wake up from. That rings a bell for me because some of the happiest, craziest moments of my life, I realize, are sort of outside of time. And and I feel connected to things and people dead and alive, you know, plants, fish, whatever, you know.

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**Anderson Cooper** That sounds like- it sounds confusing, but it also sounds wonderful.

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**Laurie Anderson** Well, it's kind of hard to describe this, but I for the last especially ten years I-

00:10:05  
**Anderson Cooper** Since Lou died.

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**Laurie Anderson** Yeah, since. So for me, that was the first really intimate death because my parents had died. But it was different, you know, it was like your partner dying, it was a whole new thing for me.

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**Anderson Cooper** You said of of Lou's death, I've never seen the expression as full of wonder, as Lou's as he died, his hands were doing the water flowing 21 form of taichi. His eyes were wide open. I was holding in my arms the person I love the most in the world, and talking to him as he died, his heart stopped. He wasn't afraid. I'd gotten to walk with him to the end of the world. Life so beautiful, painful and dazzling does not get better than that. And death. I believe that the purpose of death is the release of love."

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**Laurie Anderson** I do kind of remember writing that. I do remember feeling it.

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**Anderson Cooper** What does that mean? That the purpose of death is the release of love? Because you said that also in your film about your dog, Loabelle, who died, you said death is so often about regret or guilt.

00:11:08  
**Clip from Heart of a Dog** Or guilt. Why didn't I call her? Why didn't I say that? Or it's more about you than the person who died. But finally I saw it. The connection between love and death. And that's the purpose of death is the release of love.

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**Laurie Anderson** Yeah, I guess that I wasn't following any kind of script about what grief was supposed to mean or death was supposed to mean. When Lolabelle died and I know it's really dopey to talk about your dog's death, but, you know, unless you have a dog, you know, if you have a dog-

00:11:55  
**Anderson Cooper** -You get it.

00:11:56  
**Laurie Anderson** Otherwise you're like, Oh, get over it. Like when my cat died, I was like, it was fine. You know. You know so Lolabelle, her death was a- I felt an unexpected happiness and I expected to feel like, Oh, my God, she's dead. It isn't my pain, I'm done. But no, I- I tried to feel what I was really feeling as opposed to what, you know, grief was supposed to mean.

00:12:30  
**Anderson Cooper** And happiness is the feeling that came to you.

00:12:32  
**Laurie Anderson** It was almost unbearable happiness.

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**Anderson Cooper** Happiness. I mean-

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**Laurie Anderson** Freedom. Freedom. Like. Whoa.

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**Anderson Cooper** You mean that she was out of pain?

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**Laurie Anderson**

I don't know. I don't know. Out of pain. But just. It was a delirious sense of freedom, I guess. As if something exploded. Same with Lou.

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**Anderson Cooper**

Freedom for her. For Lolabelle

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**Laurie Anderson**

For everyone. Just for just freedom. Pure freedom. Like the way you see a movie about love and your. It's not the person you love in the film. You're also in love too with that you know. And you just-

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**Anderson Cooper**

It ignites a feeling within you.

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**Laurie Anderson**

The idea that the whole of the whole thing is like you get confused with the main character. You think, Oh, you know, it's just like waking up from a film and you've been sort of like paralyzed, but you've lost yourself. You're looking for your coat, you're going, Where's my coat? What's my name? I don't even know where I am because the film took you somewhere and you were that character and you were that person in love. So we're capable of jumping into other creatures pretty easily and kind of doing that. And I did feel that and it was a really it was really a shock to me. I was like, why do I feel a burst of energy and happiness and when I'm supposed to be crying?

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**Anderson Cooper**

You have a Tibetan Buddhist teacher?

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**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah. Chogyi Nyima Rinpoche.

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**Anderson Cooper**

And he said to you, you need to try to master the ability to feel sad without actually being sad.

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**Laurie Anderson**

That's my mantra.

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**Anderson Cooper**

You told me this. I'd met you doing an interview with you on 60 Minutes, and that's something you said. And I've thought about it ever since. And when you first said it, the ability to feel sad without actually being sad, I was like, What does that mean? I this is this is confusing to me. And I've been like, I really have been thinking about it a lot. And I think it's kind of an amazing idea.

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**Laurie Anderson**

Yes.

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**Anderson Cooper**

Yeah. And I've been sort of trying to figure out how to practice it or just let it come to me.

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**Laurie Anderson**

I think you know how to do that, it seems to me, because you're very engaged in the world without being defeated by it, and you are looking at it. And that's that's the whole point of what he said is, you know, if you push away things that are sad or tragic or horrible, you're kind of an idiot because they're all there.

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**Anderson Cooper**

It doesn't go away. No, you can't push it away.

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**Laurie Anderson**

And and also-

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**Anderson Cooper**

I've tried to push away for a long time or push it down, I guess.

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**Laurie Anderson**

But but to actually let yourself allow yourself to feel that as intensely as you can. And that's really difficult, I think, to feel suffering of other people, to walk by someone and and see him lying in the gutter. And just kind of go, what would that feel like to be there in that body right now? That's empathy. What would it feel like to be running away from a tsunami? And put yourself in that, really let yourself feel it, not like it's some kind of thing that's happening to someone else, but something that's happening to you. But the most important part of this teaching is its second part, which is do not become sad yourself. This is what I love about Tibetans. You know, it's like they have chosen that and we have that choice, too. So, I mean, I'm an optimist only because I've chosen that we don't know what's coming up. We just do not know, you know, so this gloomy sort of, you know, apocalyptic pornography in a way that's, you know, everybody's going, oh, this this is really going down. This this ship is sinking. This is it. Okay? It's bad. It's not looking good. But I have chosen to be optimistic for one reason. And that's not based on reality at all. It's based on you'll have a happier life if you're an optimist, period.

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**Anderson Cooper**

That's definitely true.

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**Laurie Anderson**

Full stop. You know, so choose that it's your choice, you really don't have to be pulled the other way. So I highly recommend that, you know, because it's just more fun.

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**Anderson Cooper**

It is the one thing I've- I think I've learned by years of traveling and traveling in places that were- horrible things were happening. And I mean, it sounds weird to even talk about out loud, but it's like you are exploding into all that is around you. Yeah. You feel the the horror of it and you're bearing witness to it. And yet you're also working and documenting it and so you're able to function. It does not destroy you. You feel the sadness of everything. But it- it you're also able to operate and work in it.

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**Laurie Anderson**

And articulate it and witness it.

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**Anderson Cooper**

Yes. Witness it.

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**Laurie Anderson**

And I think of you as a as a painter, you know, that you're showing these enormous scenes. I mean, they're really very big and very complex and, and you're affected by it, but you are able to describe it really well. So to put yourself in that position of seeing that much suffering and be able to give an account of it is is pretty awesome, you know. So I mean, I am imagine that in your personal life, you know, that kind of skill could come in kind of handy.

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**Anderson Cooper**

It does, yeah. Yeah, definitely.

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**Anderson Cooper**

After the break, more of my conversation with Laurie Anderson.

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**Laurie Anderson**

So what are you going to do with these things, do you think, of your mother's?

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**Anderson Cooper**

So I'm not exactly sure. First of all, I'm interested in just going through them and kind of discovering all these things about my mom. Like all the things- I mean, I knew my mom extraordinarily well. But to actually see the mountain of, you know, my mom did not have much of a concept of money and saving. And when she had money, she spent it. And when she didn't have it, she spent it. And and so I found decades of bills, and I've thought of almost papering the walls with them in some strange way.

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**Laurie Anderson**

That would be nice. I love a room papered with bills. That's a really great.

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**Anderson Cooper**

Like old Christian Dior bills from the 1950s.

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**Laurie Anderson**

That would be a fantastic room. I do like the idea of shrines, you know, and we do have a lot of shrines in this country. It's just a nice thing to do for somebody that you love to make a place where, where their sort of spirit is.

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**Anderson Cooper**

Well, that's one of the things that you are doing. Obviously, it's a different way, but you have created with the university in Australia an AI program an artificial intelligence program, you give them everything you've ever said or sung or written, and also everything that Lou Reed ever said, sung or written. And they put it into a supercomputer and you now can open up your laptop and write a question to Lou Reed or-

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**Laurie Anderson**

I'm not under the illusion that I'm collaborating with my dead husband. This is not a Ouija board, the supercomputer. This is, this is style. This is like Lou had a certain style of writing. And now with A.I., you can you can use their vocabulary, their images, and you can have the algorithms that make these associations for you. You can also collaborate with yourself. Just think of just your email were put into a supercomputer and and you would have a fairly good picture of how you react to certain things, what your thoughts are, what your associations are, what- how you compare things, how you analyze them, how you feel about them. So if you have that in a giant database of all of the ways that you react, then it wouldn't- you, when you write something, it wouldn't just be on that certain day. You would be collaborating with your whole self of bad days, good days, great days, sad days, you know, and it could be very interesting. It's a big expanded mind.

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**Anderson Cooper**

When we did this for 60 minutes, I gave you a photo of my son Sebastian, who had just been born and you put it into the program. And immediately out came a poem, an A.I. Lou Reed poem, essentially, of the photo.

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**Laurie Anderson**

Exactly. Yeah.

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**Anderson Cooper**

And I, I just found it extraordinary, and it made me suddenly think, well, my God, people could do that with their dead father and brother or mother and have a dialog such as it is with the the A.I. version of their loved one. After I interviewed you a couple of months later, I talked to a guy who runs a very serious A.I. Organization. He was like, Oh, we've, you know, we've done this with people. And in many cases it took them to a very dark place because it was people who were grieving and so missing the person that-

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**Laurie Anderson**

I see, yeah.

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**Anderson Cooper**

They ended up sort of staying at home a lot just-

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**Laurie Anderson**

I can see that

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**Anderson Cooper**

Communing with this traces of, you know.

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**Laurie Anderson**

What should I do now?

00:22:01

**Anderson Cooper**

Yeah.

00:22:02

**Laurie Anderson**

You know, I miss you so much. And it-staying at home, first of all, is is a mistake. You know, it's it's why so many of these songs, love songs are like twang, twang, twang I'm sitting in a room machine. I wish I could find someone to love me Well, put your guitar down and walk out the door. Stop writing songs about that, you know? And I'm not saying, like, you shouldn't cry. I mean, what? Who am I to say that everyone has? We're all so different if every single person's death is is different.

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**Anderson Cooper**

But do you I mean, do you cry about-

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**Laurie Anderson**

I cry when I see something really beautiful. When was the last time I cried? Just a couple of days ago, when I saw something. Oh, no, it was. It's funny. It was. I cried when I heard a song that Lou wrote that we're just putting out again. It's sung in the voice of a little girl.

00:23:01

**Clip from Men of Good Fortune**

An old maid. An old maid. An old maid I'd be.

00:23:07

**Laurie Anderson**

And this is Lou singing as a little girl and singing also about I don't want to be somebody's widow. And I'm like, Oh, who is this? What is he singing about? Where did this come from? What kind of ghost wrote this? We're all ghosts of our later selves, you know, as you kind of suddenly see when you look back at your own self from many, many years ago, who is that person? We get a chance to see that and sort of celebrate that in this particular record, which was it's one of the craziest things I've ever heard. But one thing I would say, like for people who have a lot of stuff from dead relatives, is to not let it fall on top of you as a mountain, but just to see it as a lot of treasures that you can wander in and look at once in a while and not feel the obligation to go-

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**Anderson Cooper**

It does feel to me like a mountain.

00:24:01

**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's just overwhelming.

00:24:04

**Anderson Cooper**

Like, I could end up one of those people who ends up, like, crushed by all the newspapers that have fallen on them in their horded apartment and are found six months- if you didn't hear from me for like six months, I'm probably in the basement under a crush of newspapers from 19-

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**Laurie Anderson**

Or you make a little pets through the house with the stacked up papers?

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**Anderson Cooper**

Yeah, exactly.

00:24:21

**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah. No, don't do that. You wouldn't want to do that to somebody else. Have them go through your stuff endlessly, right?

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**Anderson Cooper**

I mean, talking about stuff I read somewhere, you said that among Lou's archives, among all the things he left behind, there's nothing about his study of meditation. There's no physical trace of that in his archives. And you said that idea that there's no physical trace of this thing that was such an important part of his life. You said that's kind of thrilling to me, that so much of life can't be captured, it can't live anywhere. It just lives in your mind and dies with it. And it's inspiring that you can't hold on to a lot of things. You can't hold on to the most important things. And when I read that, I sort of gasped. I was like wow.

00:25:05

**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah, yeah. That's definitely how I feel. Because right now there's a big exhibition of of Lou's things. Walking through this show is extremely difficult for me because now it's very, very public, and everybody kind of goes, Oh yeah, now I really know Lou Reed. And you're like, Oh, boy, because I don't- I see his work in there, but I don't see him. And so I, in a weird way, just it's awkward for me, you know, I'm very happy that it's there. And some of those objects still have that strange resonance.

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**Anderson Cooper**

It's true, though. I wonder if over time for me if if the objects. Will lose the-

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**Laurie Anderson**

The charge.

00:25:52

**Anderson Cooper**

The charge and the weight of them.

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**Laurie Anderson**

They do. They go back to being regular phones. They go back to being a regular notebook with some writing on it. And it's still very interesting. And it's still made by somebody we love, but it's not like, well. And I suppose that's a good thing, because otherwise we'd live in such a highly charged world of everyone who's ever lived here. It would be unbearable. Yeah, exactly. So you have to just let it go off on a breeze.

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**Anderson Cooper**

You know, my latest thought is maybe I'll just sort of photograph all these things, these piles of bills and put them into a book or something. That's for me. And, you know, the people who are still alive, who knew my mom and loved her.



**Laurie Anderson** 00:26:29  
And I think it's really worth doing those kinds of things. That's not going to capture the whole person, but nothing can. So that's okay. I made a violin out of my dog's ashes, you know.

**Anderson Cooper** 00:26:40  
Wait, what?

**Laurie Anderson** 00:26:41  
Yeah. It was not a playable violin, but it's a clay violin and made of her ashes and clay.

**Anderson Cooper** 00:26:47  
I love that because, again, with ashes too, it's, it's. What do you do?

**Laurie Anderson** 00:26:51  
What do you do with those things?

**Anderson Cooper** 00:26:52  
Yeah, I love that.

**Laurie Anderson** 00:26:53  
I think people turn into other things. They turn into music sometimes they turn into sometimes a hobby. I think I was mentioning once when I was coming into Prague that I saw, oh, Vaclav Havel International Airport, and Havel was a friend of ours. And I thought, how did he turn into an airport? Well, people do. They turn into other things. They turn into ideas. You know, sometimes their idea is the name of a whole philosophy. They turn into love, you know, of like, wow, I loved my grandma, and so much, she was so sweet. And then that love is inside you. So that that's it. That's the monument of that person. That just-

**Anderson Cooper** 00:27:35  
And that's enough.

**Laurie Anderson** 00:27:36  
That's a lot.

**Anderson Cooper** 00:27:38  
Well, one of the things and you said that that really struck me and again, I've also been thinking about a lot. You said that when you tell a story too many times, every time you tell it, you forget it more. Yeah. And some of the other folks we've talked to talk about the stories that we tell ourselves and that. You can actually change the story. You tell yourself you don't have to get stuck in the narrative that you have been telling yourself. I feel like I have been telling myself this narrative of my life and the death of my dad early on and my brother and what that means to me. And I realize I can change that story. And as I grow in age, I can view the story differently. And there's a real power in that.

**Laurie Anderson** 00:28:19  
Yeah, it is very important to realize that you can get stuck in what I was referring to as your script. I am the person who does that, and that gets reinforced sometimes by other people who go, You're the person who does that sort of thing. We're much more free than that. So I think to free yourself from your own stories is exhilarating. Okay, let's say I have no story, you know, or I'm just bored with repeating the same dreary thing about who I think I am or who other people say I am. You know.

**Anderson Cooper** 00:28:50  
I wonder if one can do that with loss and grief.

**Laurie Anderson** 00:28:52  
You can definitely change it. But I think more important than that is to see how you really feel. You know, forget the story and the narrative. Go. Go farther back into yourself and go. How do I actually feel about this? And then out of that will probably come another story. Or maybe not. Or maybe you think, maybe I won't articulate this into some prefab story. I'll just try to feel it.

**Anderson Cooper** 00:29:18  
Well, it's like when you were saying when when your dog Lolabelle died, realizing you felt this happiness.

**Laurie Anderson** 00:29:24  
Yeah. I didn't expect to feel happy. Everyone's going, Oh, you're going to be crying. You're going to like you'll never want another dog. It wasn't like that at all.

**Anderson Cooper** 00:29:34  
So you got another dog?

00:29:36

**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah, I did get another dog. And my first worry was that I was not feeling it enough, that I was heartless, that it was just pushing it away and that that. No, I feel really happy about this. I feel like. Just everything I see is so resonant and beautiful. It was a kind of euphoric situation. It was weird, you know? I was walking in a love cloud for five years and now I can invoke that again. I can find how things are luminous and they're not what I think they are.

00:30:10

**Anderson Cooper**

Five years was the time.

00:30:12

**Laurie Anderson**

My first five years of being a widow and grieving, and I got to do all of these things for Lou and like celebrate his life. And at the same time, his death was partly mine as it is when a loved one dies, part of you dies with that person. That little child dies. That little child your mother loved is dead. And so you go like, Whoa, where did that little boy go? No one remembers him that way anymore. So he dies.

00:30:43

**Anderson Cooper**

Hmm I hadn't thought of that.

00:30:43

**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah. So, I mean, love becomes a thing that floats around. It's all shifting around, and you realize it's not all me. It was your mother's love for you that was just between the two of you. And. And now her feeling for that has shifted.

00:31:04

**Anderson Cooper**

That's really interesting what you just said. I haven't been articulating that way, but that's absolutely what I feel. Like that little boy who my dad knew and my mom knew and my brother knew.

00:31:17

**Laurie Anderson**

He's dead.

00:31:19

**Anderson Cooper**

Yeah. that-that no one else knows that boy.

00:31:20

**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah, no one does.

00:31:21

**Anderson Cooper**

Yeah. There's not anyone around from that time who knows him.

00:31:24

**Laurie Anderson**

So you experience your own death in that way. Because we've changed so many times in our lives, you know, that we we have to kind of remember that that's a really important emotional part of really experiencing that. And so maybe something that that would celebrate that part that's gone would be a thing to do.

00:32:02

**Anderson Cooper**

For you, being awake, being aware. That seems to be the- it's the most important.

00:32:08

**Laurie Anderson**

It is. It is. It is absolutely.

00:32:10

**Anderson Cooper**

Awake being aware.

00:32:11

**Laurie Anderson**

Absolutely. Yeah. I had a really interesting couple of years over the pandemic, working with a couple of Tibetan translators on a something called The Root versus of the Bardo. And we tried to put the Tibetan language into colloquial English. It took us ten years to do like maybe 30 lines. No, maybe not even that. Wow. But it really helped me a lot. But it it really does involve death. So it, you know, it's instructions in everyday English about what to do when you die. Because I think grief is also really very much about your own death and what and what is that going to be and how is it going to work? Because, listen, now, when you see the death can come at any time. Don't be lazy. There's no time to lose. Learn, reflect and meditate without distraction. You'll see that everything is the Buddha now at last you're a human being, don't get lost.

00:33:12

**Anderson Cooper**

That's the sort of colloquial translation of Tibetan.

00:33:16

**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah. And by saying like, recognize that you're the Buddha is kind of essential to this. You're the one in charge of all of this. It's you, you know, you're not reporting to some Mr. Big up there who's just calculating what you did good and what you did bad and kind of your punishment or your reward. There is nobody there doing that, according to the Buddhists. It is your consciousness that this is about.

00:33:50

**Anderson Cooper**

You were you were in a plane crash.

00:33:52

**Laurie Anderson**

Yes.

00:33:53

**Anderson Cooper**

And I mean a plane crash where people died.

00:33:56

**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah. It was a twin engine plane and it was like a commuter plane, like 40 people. So several people died. The pilot died. I had nothing wrong with me. I was- I- we walked away, so we joined a crash club. So we talk about your crash endlessly, and you become an expert on different planes, different airlines, their safety records, different pilots. You get, like, really down into it and- and you tell your story until you can't tell it anymore. You just, it's just like, okay, I've finished telling this story. So and you sit around where other people tell their stories until you- until it loses its power.

00:34:37

**Anderson Cooper**

And did that change you in some way?

00:34:41

**Laurie Anderson**

What happened to me was sleep came in and I had every flight that I took for maybe three years. After that, I would put a note in my pocket and it would say, Please wake me up when we get there because when I get on the flight and I had to get on a flight the next day after that crash, I would barely stay awake.

00:35:04

**Anderson Cooper**

To get to the seat.

00:35:05

**Laurie Anderson**

To get to the seat. I would just fall asleep before you even got the seat belt on. I would just. My mind goes. You're not here. You're not seeing this. You're safe. Don't worry. You know it's not happening. You're safe asleep. So it was the overpowering need to sleep that saved me.

00:35:27

**Anderson Cooper**

You should do one of those calm apps to have put people asleep. I want to sleep right now and told me story and I'd love you to just tell because it to me the thing that stuck in my mind from this story is how words that one person says to another can change everything. Can you just tell the story of, of your brothers when you were little?

00:35:52

**Laurie Anderson**

Oh, yeah. Okay, so a second of eight kids. My job is to take care of the little ones. And I especially love taking care of my twins.

00:36:01

**Anderson Cooper**

Your twin brothers?

00:36:01

**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah. And they- they had their own language. They were their special little.

00:36:05

**Anderson Cooper**

They had their own language?

00:36:06

**Laurie Anderson**

They did. Yeah. And they didn't speak English until they were, you know, five or something. I mean-

00:36:13

**Anderson Cooper**

They communicate with each other in their own language.

00:36:14

**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah. And songs.

00:36:14

**Anderson Cooper**

I find that fascinating. Do you remember what it sounded like?

00:36:17

**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah, it sounded like biblical names. Like they would have songs like be get out of bed, go. They were talking about (sings) "Me Shack Get You Out to Bed Na Go." What is that song about? The guys in the fiery furnace. Anyway, they picked up some stuff from church and they owned it together into their own language. And. And, oh, my mother was terrified. She thought, I have these- they flunked kindergarten. So she was like, I have morons. You know, she took it really personally. And in fact, you know, they were they were playing chess. They were check mating each other, they're MENSA members. So, you know, they just lived in their own world. Anyway, I took them to see a movie when they were little, like a couple of years old, two, in their snowsuit. It was really cold. We saw the movie and I was taking them home.

00:37:04

**Anderson Cooper**

And you're eight years old?

00:37:06

**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah, I was eight.

00:37:07

**Anderson Cooper**

And you took two year olds to see a movie?

00:37:08

**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah. And parked them. And it was a different world. It was a safer, sweeter world in the Midwest. And you could just roll your little brothers around. And we lived next to a lake. So it was it was frozen. It was winter. I was taking them across the lake. I thought, I'm going to take them to this island so they can see the moon because this moon is so beautiful. So I was pushing the stroller to the island. I almost got there and then I heard the ice cracked, the whole piece of ice cracked and the stroller sunk into the water. Their little bowls on top of their hats disappeared. I was like, like, woo! My very first thought was, Mom's going to kill me. So I took my jacket off, I dove down, I pulled Craig out, and I threw him on the ice.

00:37:54

**Anderson Cooper**

You're in the the water. Under the ice?

00:37:55

**Laurie Anderson**

Yeah. Yeah.

00:37:56

**Anderson Cooper**

Just trying to search on the water.

00:37:58

**Laurie Anderson**

And then I- okay, that's one. I got to get the other one. I drove down and I couldn't find a stroller and I was really panicking because Phil was there and I tried again and I found him much farther down. I was able to get him unstrapped from the stroller and pull him up. He was screaming and I- Craig was just blue. So they were both like, whoa. And so we lived next to the lake. So it wasn't that far, which is about three blocks where I'm running over the ice and then into the door. I put these guys down. My mother looked at them and I told her what had happened. And I'm waiting for this. Like you almost killed your brother. Just like.

00:38:40

**Anderson Cooper**

I would have expected her to be screaming.

00:38:42

**Laurie Anderson**

Out of your mind, you know, you don't like it's so dangerous there. And instead, she said. You know, I didn't know you were such a great swimmer and such a good diver. And I was like, I kind of froze because of all the things that she could have said. It literally changed my life. To be thanked for something like that. I mean, I did do my best and she saw that actually.

00:39:15

**Anderson Cooper**

Her,her asking you the hero of the story changed your life.

00:39:19

**Laurie Anderson**

It did. It did. I thought I- I can do things. Somebody just recognized that I can do things. And this person. Gave me this the benefit of the doubt, you know, and it gave me so much in that one sentence. Much later, really thought if I could ever do that for someone, I will.

00:39:43

**Anderson Cooper**

Laurie Anderson, thank you so much.

00:39:44

**Laurie Anderson**

It's always fun.

00:39:51

**Anderson Cooper**

Next week, I speak with poet, writer, mother of two, Elizabeth Alexander, about the sudden death of her husband Ficare ten years ago. She talks about raising kids without him and her experience holding her husband at the end.

00:40:05

**Elizabeth Alexander**

And it took me powerfully by surprise to be having this profoundly spiritual experience where I knew when his soul was there, and I knew when his soul was gone and it was palpable.

00:40:22

**Anderson Cooper**

One more thing I mentioned at the start of the podcast that I've received a lot of really poignant and powerful messages from many of you on Instagram. I'd love to try and incorporate some of your thoughts about loss and grief into one of the next two podcasts. My producers have set up a voicemail box where you can leave a brief message. Perhaps there's something that you've learned or something that's been helpful to you in dealing with loss that you think would help others if they heard it. I can't promise you that it'll make it into a podcast, but if you'd like to try, you can call and leave your message at (631) 657-8379. That's (631) 657-8379. Again, I can't promise that it's going to get in the podcast, but I'd love to hear your thoughts and anything you think might help others.

00:41:11

**Anderson Cooper**

"All There Is with Anderson Cooper" is a production of CNN audio. Our producers are Lori Galarreta and Rachel Cohn. Sonia Htoon, Audrey Horwitz and Charis Satchell are our associate producers. Felicia Patinkin is the Supervising Producer and showrunner. Our Technical Director is Dan Dzula. Artwork designed by Nichole Pesaru and Jamus Andrest. With support from Charlie Moore, Jessica Ciancimino, Chip Grabow, Steve Kiehl, Anissa Gray, Francisco Monroy, Tamika Ballance-Kolasny, Lindsay Abrams, Megan Marcus, Alex McCall and Lisa Namerow.