# Audio file

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# Transcript

**Marlen Harrison**: Well, good morning Jay.

**Marlen Harrison**: I'm **Marlen Harrison**, founder and editor in chief of the auto ethnographer and we're so excited that you're here to talk with us today about your first published collection of poems titled *Shades*.

**Jacob “Jay” Meadows**: Hi, thank you, thank you.

**Marlen Harrison**: You're welcome, congratulations, so let's go ahead and share the screen. And we can show viewers how they can find out more about your book.

**Marlen Harrison**: So, the book is currently sold everywhere where books are sold and I'm just showing you Amazon here. So, there are a number of ways you can purchase Jays book. You can purchase it via original hardcover via paperback. It's also available on Kindle as an eBook, and I do believe an audiobook is available as well.

**Jacob “Jay” Meadows**: Yes it is.

**Marlen Harrison**: We can purchase here, and you can also look inside and get a quick glimpse of some of Jay's work, but in Full disclosure we should also tell you that Jay is an editor of our magazine, *The AutoEthnographer*, on the editorial board so we can also find out a little bit more about Jay on our about page. So, Jay here is our interview that our audience will be scrolling through to learn more about you, and I guess the 1st way to begin is simply to acknowledge that although the named method autoethnography is somewhat new to you, autoethnography in itself is not new to you, so can you tell us a little bit about how *Shades* came about for you as a writer, as a poet, as a person and why you see it as autoethnography.

**Jacob “Jay” Meadows**: Uhm, so I have been a long-time client with my therapist and we are about to hit four years. It was sometime in 2019 I think, my therapist looked at me and said, “OK. You're having a lot of feelings. Go write them down,” and I was like, “Oh, hey, cool.” She told me to journal before. I was never really good at journaling. And one day I just had this idea to just sit down and write. I don't even know what the first poem was. Uhm, it's written down in a notebook somewhere. My thoughts came out as a poem. It wasn't very good. It's not in the book, and I just kind of stared at it and I was like, “I just wrote a poem,” which is very unusual for me because I am not a poet. Actually, in college and and in high school I very I was very vocal about the fact that I did not write poetry. But I do enjoy poetry, especially American poetry.

**Marlen Harrison**: So why do you think your reflection on lived experience took the form of a poem rather than dear diary or a short story, or just like a personal, you know, personal essay.

**Jacob “Jay” Meadows**: Uhm, I think it took the form of a poem because I let myself write. I just wrote and instead of writing in verse, instead of having a specific meter in form, I just said this is where this line ends and the next one starts; not many of my poems rhyme and not many of them have a meter.

**Marlen Harrison**: But what you've described is a manipulation of form, a purposeful manipulation where you thought to yourself, “This is the feeling; this is the emotion. That's the experience and those are the words, and that's where they go and that's it.” So what changed for you? How did you become an autoethnographic poet, when you've already told us that you did not embrace poetry as an adolescent.

**Jacob “Jay” Meadows**: I fell in love with the process; every time I would sit it started very slowly. I would write one and then I would just look at it for a while and then I would have another feeling and I'd write another one and then I started to really fall in love with examining what I was feeling and putting that on paper. And figuring out: how does it feel to express anger or sadness, heartbreak, joy, anything that I was feeling at the moment, jealousy, anything. What does it feel like to put that on paper and just to write it down? And I always write in pencil because it never comes out right the first time. But it just became this really magical thing where I was like I can just play with words in a way that I've never been able to with prose .

**Marlen Harrison**: And I, I think there's something important, without getting overly philosophical about the mechanisms of poetry, but knowing what I know about you because I do know you fairly well over a number of years, dear audience. I imagine there must have been some sense of power in you being in control over not just the experience, but how that experience got expressed.

**Jacob “Jay” Meadows**: Yes, uhm. *Those* poems exist and they are not in the book. That does not mean that readers won't see them at some point. But after I sent in the manuscript to my publisher I never stopped writing, because this was never to write a book; I never set out to write a collection of poetry. I was just writing and just seeing how it felt and after I submitted the poems and I was like I'm about to share this with the world, I wrote another poem where I called my pencil a Howitzer and not to say it's a cocky poem but it's just about the feeling of sheer power and the harm that that power can cause and the great good that I can do with those words and that power. And it it's a really magical, very dangerous game that I've discovered, and I quite enjoy.

**Marlen Harrison**: In your dedication to your book, Jay, you dedicated it to the beautiful, the broken and the beautifully broken. And after reading your collection, it seems that beautifully broken would also have made a very fitting title for this collection. Could you tell us a little bit more about this? This idea of being beautifully broken and how it relates to your poetic reflections on lived experience?

**Jacob “Jay” Meadows**: So, I have for a very long time struggled with traumas from my past. I've been in therapy for four years. I have covered all manner of things. I'm quite vocal, I'm not quiet at all about the fact that I was in conversion therapy as a teenager. I was a victim of sexual assault and many, many, many traumas throughout my life and on one hand, I feel broken because of these things; there are fractures inside of my identity, but there's also beauty in that. Had I not gone through these things, I wouldn't be able to say the words, I wouldn't be able to write the words that I put on paper. I wouldn't be able to put these words into a book. I wouldn't be able to help my students. I wouldn't be able to share what I have because I wouldn't be me. And so, I find beauty in that brokenness. So, I think of myself as beautifully broken, and I think everyone is in some way broken, and that brokenness makes them beautiful. Everybody has trauma and everyone has little fractures here and there, and that's what makes them “them”.

**Marlen Harrison**: There's a wonderful concept in Japanese culture, *sabi sabi*, and it's this idea that items of great meaning or value can often be from things that are broken or imperfect. And *kintsugi* is when you take a broken piece of pottery and you realize that in putting it back together and in making sure that it is reusable, it is a thing of beauty. I kept thinking of wabi sabi and kintsugi with your beautifully broken and putting it all back together metaphors. And there's beauty when we put things back together and find that there's form and function. Also, in many ways, this collection feels a little bit like a hero's journey. We can talk about Carl Jung’s archetypes and Joseph Campbell's monomyth, and this idea of this kind of hero archetype, kind of taking that risk. The leap of faith and going on this journey, and in many ways, I feel the writer, Jay, of this book and Jay Meadows as we know him have both gone on this heroic journey in this in this process of both writing these poems over time, but also putting together this book and publishing it and sharing it with the world. So, could you tell us a little bit about your poetic process?

I think after my many years of working with writers and readers there is a good number of people who are not poets. They don't believe that they can write or that they're good at writing poetry, or that they want to read it or write it. And then there's another group who is like, “Oh yeah, absolutely, there's so much power in reflection and manipulation, and sometimes there's no power at all because it speaks through me.” So, I guess I'm wondering - for those people who have heard you say you were not a poet and you didn't embrace poetry but that something shifted within you - where you began to appreciate the power and the manipulation of the experience and the words. What is your process like now? How do you write poems as a poet who wasn’t once a poet.

**Jacob “Jay” Meadows**: So, I don't think you will be shocked by me bringing a certain author into this discussion, but the audience may not know this. I am mildly…obsessed is the correct word, with Margaret Atwood. And I finished collecting her novels. I have not read them all, but I have finished collecting them as of about two years ago. And my boyfriend started getting all of her poetry and giving it to me as Christmas gifts and birthday gifts and just a random like here you go every now and then. My students actually got me a signed copy of her newest edition of poetry called *Dearly*. And if you haven't read it, please do because it's amazing. And I just started reading more poetry and I was like, OK, I can, kind of I like this. It's Margaret Atwood. I can get into this. And so, I then began to branch out from Atwood, 'cause her poetry is incredibly difficult to find. And so, I I've started reading other poets. And so that is when I left the camp of “I am not a poet”, that first group that you described; I was definitely in there. I hated reading poetry. I hated analyzing poetry. I hated writing it when I had to. And then suddenly I like I, I just kind of like dropped myself into this other group that appreciated poetry and then started creating it. Like I said it just…one day I had a feeling and it appeared on paper as a poem and I was shocked. It’s generally I feel a feeling. I sit down to write. And then there's a poem, and almost always at the end of the poem I'm like, “OK, that was, uh, I didn't know that I felt that way. We didn’t know that.” I never go on a power trip while I'm writing. It's never an “Oh how shocked can I make the audience be by my thought process?” It's just, “How do I feel?” And the words appear on paper. I wish it was something grander, but I really just have a feeling and that's part of why it's so autoethnographic. Because it is just about how I'm feeling in that moment.

**Marlen Harrison**: So then, you have two MA degrees in English, and English and Creative Writing, and so you have years of being a literary critic and scholar, being an academic researcher, and more recently you've taken a turn towards the social sciences and the intersections with literary studies. So how is writing a poem as an autoethnographer, different from what maybe many new autoethnographers are introduced to, this kind of, the first baby steps of understanding autoethnography as a form of qualitative research that seeks to explore culture via reflections on lived experience. Having written a major scholarly work that is soon to be published, alongside a group of poems, both of which are autoethnographic, can you reflect a little bit on these writing identities that are emerging? Or maybe have always been there but just now have names?

**Jacob “Jay” Meadows**: Uhm, it's definitely something that's always been there. And now I have a name for it. My academic work, especially with my masters thesis, which was my first soiree into autoethnography…that I knew. I just wrote; I had the idea to write about *The Handmaid's Tale* and how a handmaid’s experience is very similar to what I went through in conversion therapy. You were my mentor during that process, and you just kept pushing me and pushing me and saying, “OK, now take a step further; put yourself inside the book.” And so I did, and it was moderately terrifying and wholly illuminating. And when I got to actually writing it, I wrote the 1st 2 pages of my thesis in about an hour and it was very heart wrenching not to mention tear wrenching. It's very hard, like my heart hurt because I couldn't keep writing because I needed to get that approved. I needed someone to say, “You're doing it right,” because I'd never done it before. And then once you said yes and I had peer mentors say yes, I dove in and I started writing. I wrote my almost 30 page thesis in about 3 days. If I remember correctly my classmates were moderately angry. But I similarly wrote my poems and they just pour out when I start writing. The major difference, though the writing processes are similar, but the major difference is that there's no theory. There's no lens, there is no “you must talk about it with this.” I don't have to talk about a theorist. I don't have to talk about this study over here. It's all about me and it's like I was led to the edge of some woods just to stay with them, the ideas of the books, and I was told, “You can stay in here and you can keep writing and you can write the way that you want to write. You can write autoethnography inside of these woods or you can step out into like pure joy and sunlight. And justice, right?” And I'm taking a couple of years off between my masters degree and my doctoral program. And I had no idea that I was going to write a book of poetry in that time, but I'm in that sunlight. I'm in that just pure joy and I'm just writing. There is no theory. There's no theoretical lens; it's just my feelings on paper. And it's me dancing in a meadow as happily as possible or as angrily as possible, and it's it's beautiful. I'm very lucky.

**Marlen Harrison**: That's great! Well, thank you so much, Jay, and congratulations again on your publication. And people that are watching the video should be sure to attend the International Association of Autoethnography and Narrative Inquiry Conference (IAANI.org). It's the first week of January. And Jay will be presenting his masters thesis at that conference, which is an autoethnographic textual intervention where Jay explores *The Handmaid's Tale* and issues of power, identity and sexuality.

**Jacob “Jay” Meadows**: Yes, yes.

**Marlen Harrison**: So we have have some announcements on our website about the upcoming conference with links, but that link is IAANI.org, the International Association for Autoethnography and Narrative Inquiry. So again, J. Thank you so much! Again, viewers can buy Jay’s book at Amazon. It's called Shades and it's linked in this article. Jay have a happy, happy holidays and we look forward to a lot more of your work and success.

**Jacob “Jay” Meadows**: Thank you; you too.