



## BEYOND THE BOOK MIAMI

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**KENNEALLY:** Thank you. Good morning and welcome to a special edition of a program we call Beyond the Book. We're very delighted to be here at the Miami Book Fair. On behalf of Copyright Clearance Center, I want to warmly welcome you to this very special program. My name is Christopher Kenneally. We have a terrific discussion ahead of us, I believe. We call it Family Secretes, Family Truths: American Immigrant Stories.

I want to start by reflecting for a moment on secrets. We love to have someone say to us tell me a secret, and I wondered briefly this morning about the power of secrets. The obvious one, of course, is that they can be juicy. There'll be a little tidbit of forbidden information, and those kind of secrets are really the fun ones. The ones that are the most powerful are the ones that have a power to disturb a balance that's been set up. When we uncover something that's been hidden for a long time, something perhaps even hidden in plain view, it disturbs the stories we've already told us, and we need to rearrange the way we see our lives.

And that is the subject, really, for each of the books that we're going to discuss today with their authors. What happens when you uncover the secret? I want us to think about it from their story viewpoint, but also what this means at various levels, at the national level, at the cultural level, at the business level. When secrets are uncovered, governments can fall, corporations will go into bankruptcy. But it's interesting to me that in families, sometimes the discovery of secrets can actually strengthen them. Again, welcome to this program for Beyond the Book.

I want to start with Maria Elena Salinas who is the author of *I Am My Father's Daughter: Living a Life Without Secrets*. She delivers the evening news to

millions of television viewers five nights a week on the Univision television network, the number one Spanish language network in the United States. She has been called by *The New York Times* the voice of Hispanic America and she is unquestionably the most recognized Hispanic female journalist in this country. Welcome, Maria Elena.

(applause)

SALINAS: Thank you so much.

KENNEALLY: It's appropriate for a discussion about family secrets that of course your book is subtitled *Living a Life Without Secrets*. In some ways, that's an ambition a lot of us share, but up to a point, and I guess I want to ask you about how you feel the secrets that your father kept throughout his life in your family affected you. I suppose you have to start by telling us what that secret was.

SALINAS: I have to give away my secret so early on ? Well, basically, the book – It's about a lot of different things. It's not only about family secrets, but I realized as time went on and as I learned more about my father's past that the book sort of had to revolve around my father's secret, because it had so much impact in my life, and upon finding out my father's secret, I learned not only about him and his past, but I learned a lot about myself.

When my father passed away in 1985, a friend of his came over to the station where I was working – Channel 34 in Los Angeles, which is the Univision affiliate there in LA – and told me that my father had given him a box of – not a box of secrets. I call it a box of secrets – a box of documents. It had books, it had letters, files, receipts, a lot of different things that according to my father's friend, my father had asked them just to save it for him, just to keep it in a safe place. Our birth certificates were there. A lot of things from my childhood were there.

When I took that home and started looking through each and every piece of paper that was there, I found a small pamphlet. In the pamphlet, it was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my uncle's priesthood. I knew that my uncle had been a priest, and I began to read it. And there was a part where it said, I am thankful for those who influenced my vocation as a priest, including my brother, Reverend Jose Luis Cordero Salinas. I said, Reverend Jose Luis Cordero Salinas ? That's my father. What does he mean by Reverend?

I ran to ask my mother who was crying because my father had just passed away a few days before, and she said, I don't know anything. The only thing I know is that when I met your father, he told me had been involved with the Church and had been very disappointed, had had a very disappointing experience that drew him away from the Church.

At that moment, her suffering was such that I didn't really want to dig more into the secret, but it really all of a sudden changed my whole perspective on what my life had been like.

I grew up in a bilingual, bicultural family in this type of environment, always thinking that my life was like a novella where the well-to-do man marries a very poor – beautiful but very poor, uneducated young woman and is disowned by the family, because we really didn't know my father's family. So finding this out made me realize that maybe the reason why we didn't know my father's family, were not close to my father's family, had more to do with the fact that he had been a priest than the fact that he had married someone who was not at his level. My father spoke six languages. My father had a doctorate degree in philosophy, and my mother had only a sixth grade grammar school education.

That was the first impact that it made in my life. Everything that I grew up thinking was not the way that I had envisioned it.

I think from that point on, my mother and I became so much closer. My mother began to tell me a lot about her past. I became her confidant. And I realized then that what my father's secret did was build sort of an invisible barrier that didn't allow us to be closer. It didn't allow the flow of communication between us so that we knew more about our history and we knew more about our past.

I think that that's one of the main ways that it impacted my life in looking at my entire life up to that point in a completely different light.

KENNEALLY: When you discovered the secret, did you resent that he had kept this information – how did you feel emotionally about it? Obviously, there was a curiosity about the details behind it all, but it had an emotional impact, I'm sure.

SALINAS: Being a reporter, of course I embarked in a journalistic investigation of my own past, definitely the toughest assignment that I ever had in my career. But I don't think that there was a resentment. Of course, I wish that he would have told us. I tried to understand why, but before that, I had to know the facts and I had to dig into the past and I had to try to find his family.

I met his family in the strangest way. Sometimes when I was on assignment, I met someone who happened to be a cousin of mine that I didn't even know existed, and I found out that not only did I not know they existed, they didn't know we existed, because when my father disappeared, he did not tell them that he was going off to get married.

KENNEALLY: There's a kind a duality to the secret. There was a secret on one side of the border – and this is fascinating to me. There was a secret on this side of the

border, and at the same time, there was a different secret on the other side, back in Mexico.

SALINAS: Yes, and those were really life-altering decisions that he made, and you have to respect the fact that he didn't want to share that information. And I think, because knowing that my father was so Catholic and so, so religious, and to him, it was so important for us to have a moral education and a Catholic upbringing, that it would have created, for little girls, a lot of confusion. It's a lot of confusion about family. How is it possible that if he had been a priest, that he was married? And he would have to explain to us why he had left the Church.

I didn't realize this until many years later, but – I still don't know for sure, but I don't think my parents ever got married by the Church. It's something that – It never occurred to me. Now that I think about it, I think, I don't remember seeing wedding pictures. But I never asked for them. I didn't realize that I hadn't seen them until I found out.

But I don't think that it was a resentment. I think I had just too much respect for my father as a person – He was a very decent person – to be angry at him for not telling us those secrets.

KENNEALLY: You already mentioned it, but your career as a journalist has been about informing people, working hard at being fair and balanced in the presentation of a story, and I wonder how difficult it was for you as the writer of this memoir, to be fair about your own life, to be honest about your own life.

SALINAS: Truly fair and balanced that's (inaudible).

KENNEALLY: I heard that phrase (inaudible).

SALINAS: Truly fair and balanced, and that one's not a cliché.

KENNEALLY: That's been co-opted, I suppose.

SALINAS: Yes, it has been.

KENNEALLY: Which is unfortunate, but I think you know what I'm trying to say. The book has its journalistic elements, but it's still a memoir, and I want you to tell us how it was to sit down and write it entirely as a personal narrative rather than as one that was entirely a public one.

SALINAS: The first thing that you think about is not only yourself and your own life and the things that you want to share about your life. This is not a confession. It's not a deposition where you have to tell every single fact about your life, everything

that you have felt, everything that you have ever thought. It's about what you think, what part of your life you think is a story that's worth telling.

I think the difficult part was telling someone else's secrets without them being there to authorize it or to approve it and to say it's OK. Not only my father wasn't around, but my mother also passed way nine years ago – eight years ago, and even when she was alive, she really couldn't make that decision because she had suffered a stroke several years before and was not able, really, to – was not all there mentally because of her stroke. I think one of the things that delayed the process of writing my book was the fact that I just was not 100% convinced that I had the right to tell my father's secret and to tell my mother's secret.

Then I guess with time, I realized that that story would help, in one way or another, the reader to understand just how much these secrets affect the family. Because I truly believe – I truly believe, and I'm sure that the other authors that are here today believe – that there's no one that doesn't have a secret in their past. Everyone has some kind of secret, whether it's your own secret, your grandparents' secret, your mother's secret, your father's secret, someone in your family. And it really can change a family life, and why should the person that is holding that secret be carrying that burden with them for the rest of their life when they can share it with their own family members who understand, who care about you, and who will help you carry that burden.

What I felt when you asked me before about whether or not I had resentment toward my father, actually I have a lot of – more compassion toward him after finding out his secret, realizing how much he must have suffered carrying that secret and not being able to share that with us.

**KENNEALLY:** That's a good point. The notion of sharing secrets, particularly within the family, is a constructive activity. As I was saying at the opening, that often secrets can really disturb the balance in a structure, whether it's a family or a government or a business, but you're arguing that by sharing secrets in the family, it makes the family stronger.

**SALINAS:** I definitely think it does. I'm sure that there's people that might think differently, but I have to tell you that since my book has been out, I have received calls, letters, e-mails, comments from people that have had certain family secrets that because they read it in my book, decided that maybe it was time either for them to try to ask their parents about things that they doubted, or share with their children or share with the rest of their family secrets that they held. It's a release.

I have to be honest with you. After writing this book, I felt like I just got a big load off my shoulders. I felt that it was something that I needed to do. It's almost therapy. It's almost therapeutic to be able to tell the story.

And the part of the book, or the part of the title, which is the second title, *Living a Life Without Secrets*, is more the way that I want to live my life with my children. It doesn't mean that I want to be an open book to society. What do people care about my life? My life is important to me and my kids, but everybody's life is important to them as individuals. This is something that I wanted to do for my children, because when it's age appropriate, I think we should share things with them, and I wanted them to know about their background.

KENNEALLY: At the same time, though, you're a public figure seen nightly on the news and people identify you with a particular kind of immigrant story, if I can say that, a success story, really. I wonder at the same time whether, as we tell ourselves those kind of classic immigrant success stories in this country, whether that requires – whether you think it requires hiding things. Is it necessary for – whatever the community is – to put something behind it in order to move forward?

SALINAS: I don't think it's necessary, but I know a lot of people make that choice. A lot of people decide that they want to move from one country to another and they just want to leave their life behind and start a brand new life. I don't think it's necessary for you to share that with society. I do think that you should consider sharing it with your family members, but I don't think it's necessary to share it with society. I don't have anything to hide. I don't have anything in my past, my parents' past, that I am ashamed of or I don't believe that I have anything to hide, so I have no problem with sharing this story.

Besides, I think that there's an element to my life that I think a lot of immigrants will identify with. I am the daughter of Mexican immigrants. My parents arrived here in the '40s. My father lived most of his life without documents, without legal documents, and I knew that because I knew that eventually my sisters and I, as American citizens – we were born in this country – did do all the legal process so that my father could have his green card and eventually go back to Mexico and be able to see his family. That was later in his life. He once told us, please help me with this because I want to see my family before I die. He was already ill at that time.

But what I found out is the reason why my father was living without documents. It has a lot to do with the fact that when he arrived here in the '40s, he was immediately, the moment he came in and registered in the city of Los Angeles as a resident there, and he had a visa to be able to come to live in this country, he was recruited because we were in the middle of a war. And my father did not want to go to war. He said, I am a man of peace.

I understand in his writings, which are in the book, his very long explanation, his long letters to the Department of War at the time, and later to the Department of State, explaining the reasons why he didn't believe that he should, the moral

reasons, the legal reasons why he should not go. So there was another life-altering decision that he had to make. I mean I understand.

It took me a long time to write my book, and one of the reasons was because I didn't want this to be a book that would put my father in the light of someone who was a draft dodger and an undocumented immigrant, especially in the environment that we have been living in in the last few years, because that's not – My father's life was a lot more meaningful than that.

I think by sharing this, it's an example of how every immigrant, whether they have legal documents or not, has a story behind them, a very individual story, a very personal story. And you can't just lump them all together. You have to look at each person as an individual and understand what the circumstances in their life were that led them to become undocumented, and I think that by sharing that part of the story, it's something that would help those who want to know more about immigrants understand us a little bit better, and those who are immigrants, to be able to identify.

KENNEALLY: And not only that, but to be able to recover their past and maintain their identity. You don't have to give up your identity. Crossing the border isn't an experience that makes you lose something. In fact, you should gain and so should the country, in a fashion. Rather than having to erase that past, you take it back. You control it. Does that seem reasonable to you?

SALINAS: Yeah, but again, I think that it's each person's very personal decision whether or not they want to share their entire past and their entire life with society, but I think that they bring their life's experiences, which is something very valuable, into the society, into their family life, into their community, and that can have really a lot of value, whether it's good or bad, because we learn from our good experiences and we learn from our bad experiences. We learn from the bad decisions that we make in life and from the good ones.

KENNEALLY: Thank you very much. Maria Elena Salinas, thank you.

I want to turn now to Michael Patrick MacDonald. He's the author of the new book just published called *Easter Rising: An Irish American Coming Up from Under*, as well as the bestselling *All Souls: A Family Story from Southie*. Michael is currently writing the screenplay for *All Souls* under an option agreement with Crossroads Entertainment with Ron Shelton scheduled to direct the movie. I want to welcome from New York Michael Patrick MacDonald.

(applause)

MACDONALD: Thanks. From Boston.

KENNEALLY: And from Boston.

MACDONALD: Living in New York.

KENNEALLY: Living in New York, but always from Boston. I'm from Boston, too. It's hard to tell, but I am.

Michael, your books are a fascinating account of your life, and the kinds of things that happen in your book, *All Souls*, at least, are so gut-wrenching they seem to be almost out of Hollywood, so it's not surprising you're writing the screenplay. It must have been a tremendous struggle to tell that story. Can you talk to us about the struggle as an author to really honestly recount your family's life?

MACDONALD: With *All Souls*, it was just between me and the material that I was writing. I didn't – In that period, I didn't think any more than just my friends were going to read that book. I didn't think that it was going to grow as much as it did, so I wasn't writing it thinking of how many people would read it, which was really helpful, so I was just able to bear witness to the things that happened, not only in my family, but in the neighborhood of South Boston growing up throughout the '70s and '80s in what was the highest concentration of white poverty in America, in South Boston's lower end in the housing projects, all Irish housing projects, and all the deaths that were a result of organized crime, which is really –

Any of the secrets and the hidden truths that I was bringing out were really around some of the communal code of silence stuff, some of the – all the deaths that happened over the years that we didn't talk about within the community, and also the bigger world beyond Southie didn't know about or acknowledge or whatever.

KENNEALLY: For those who aren't familiar with the book and don't recognize immediately that phrase, code of silence, tell us about that. What did that mean in South Boston?

MACDONALD: In my neighborhood growing up, there were a number of code of silences, and I think that that's one of the themes we're talking about here today really. But within the community, there were a lot of – Well, there was the poverty rate and it was a community of housing projects and single-parent, female-headed households, in the lower end of South Boston, anyway.

The poverty rate wasn't something that people even acknowledged. Part of that has to do with it being a white poor neighborhood. People would just want to kind of go with the white thing and not mention any of that bad stuff that's perceived as oppressed and an other, a group that's not part of the mainstream, in a way.

There was all the code of silence around that, around the poverty and around the violence that happened, but the neighborhood was controlled by the Irish mafia, organized crime, and Whitey Bulger, who was the neighborhood drug lord, basically, that flooded the streets throughout the '70s and '80s with everything from angel dust to cocaine, that controlled all the illegitimate aspects of the neighborhood while politicians that he was very closely connected to – and in some cases related to – controlled all the legitimate aspects of the neighborhood.

So there were codes of silence around violence that happened, the amount of crime that a lot of young people were being recruited into, and basically, the drugs in the streets. So every time people died, it was just kind of like nobody really talked about how they died, and they didn't really get mentioned much again.

My own family, growing up here, I lost three siblings violently, but two of them were to the streets, and each time any of those things happened, you just were kind of expected to kind of keep it quiet, go on with your life, and never talk about this stuff.

And years later, as an adult, when I became a community organizer, I had to work on these issues. I had to work on violence and crime and young deaths in poor neighborhoods. All the issues that affected my life, I had to work on, but in order to work on that, I had to go to black and Latino neighborhoods across the city, because it's only in black and Latino neighborhoods in Boston that people were talking about these issues, that were admitting oppression and poverty and violence and drugs. So I had to go over there, to other parts of the city of Boston to work with other survivors of crime and the drug trade, because in South Boston, we pretended this stuff doesn't happen here. This stuff happens over there.

Eventually, I brought it back home, but in the beginning, that was where I learned all of my activism and community organizing work.

KENNEALLY: If I may say, as a Kenneally to a MacDonald, there's something Irish about that, too.

MACDONALD: Yeah. There's the code of silence that's maintained by organized crime, but there's also a willingness to abide by it that really is among a lot of ethnic groups, but the Irish are known for not wanting to air dirty laundry, basically.

KENNEALLY: There's a line from a Seamus Heaney poem, "Whatever you say, say nothing," and that reflects, I think, that power of that code of silence.

MACDONALD: That's something that exists in Ireland, but it even exists even more powerfully in this country because of the immigrant experience, so I think a lot of ethnic groups, a lot of immigrant groups can relate to that as well, because in this country, it is kind of about forgetting about where you come from, erasing all of that oppression and all that history of colonization and otherness and just trying to slip into the mainstream here.

KENNEALLY: Tell us about the relationship between the two books and how they, I believe, interlock, where *All Souls* leaves off and how it was written and how *Easter Rising* kind of takes up the story, and also amplifies your piece of it.

MACDONALD: The two books aren't really sequential. *All Souls* is more a bearing witness to all of the tragedies that happens, all the young deaths that happened in my own family and in the community, so it's a real straightforward bearing witness to all that stuff, and the tragedies, all of the young deaths and the crime and violence.

There's one chapter where my sister's in a coma after she was pushed off the roof in a fight over pills, and while she was in a coma, I'm writing about all the people that were coming to visit her, and writing the book, I realized all these people are dead too, so I was able to also flash forward to how these people eventually found their demise. It's through the process of writing the book that I really realized the level of atrocity that happened in the neighborhood, and the atrocities are really at the forefront in this book, in *All Souls*, and I'm kind of recessed and a kid that's really the eyes watching all of this and bearing witness to it.

Whereas, *Easter Rising*, I'm in the foreground as a teenager that's coming into my own, and the tragedies are in the background. So all the tragedies that happened in *All Souls* are happening in *Easter Rising*, but they're in the background. In *Easter Rising*, I'm more in the round, a fully developed character. Part of it's because it's more about my teenage years, which were years of rebellion and finding your identity and kind of coming into adulthood.

KENNEALLY: What's fascinating, because in *Easter Rising* it does concentrate – not entirely, but concentrates – on your life from 13 to 18, and as you say, that's a period of rebellion, classically. But you were rebelling against something in a very unusual way. Your sense of normal, or the normal that surrounded you, was so dysfunctional. You went from that to something else. Tell us about that.

MACDONALD: After *All Souls*, when people would read all the tragedies that existed in the neighborhood and all the ways that young people died, the main question I received from people was how did you get out? How are you alive? How did you survive? How do you continue to survive? What is it that – the whole resiliency factor.

I wanted to answer that as honestly as I could and for the most part, I would get the question from educators and guidance counselors who really wanted me to list an academic career that got me up and out of the neighborhood. And it really wasn't. It really started with – At the age of 13, I was really fortunate to stumble upon the whole underground music scene in Boston, the whole rebellious punk rock scene of the late '70s and early '80s, and that really saved my life at that point of my life, because it was a world.

That subculture, at the time, back then, before it became a kind of genre and another thing to conform to, that subculture, like all subcultures that have happened since World War II, like the hippies and everything else, was a subculture that encouraged individualization and self-determination, and for me, finding that world was a blessing because it was a world where you were allowed to reinvent who you might become, to re-imagine who you might become, and to reinvent yourself.

And with that came a rejection of all that I came from, everything that I came from, the neighborhood that I came from, all of the crime, the violence, the bigotry that existed in the neighborhood. There was a lot of racism in the years after bussing in Boston. And the kind of closed-mindedness of the neighborhood. It was a very closed, closed place at this time. So I rejected all of that.

In the whole punk rock music scene, you were rejecting whatever you considered normal. Normal was bad. To me, where I was coming from, normal meant doing coke and engaging in racist conversation and fear of the outside world and a very kind of closed-mindedness toward all people who were different. There was a conformity to the neighborhood. It was a poor neighborhood and it was housing project, but there was a conformity in terms of the way you dressed, the ideas you talked about, and nobody would want to step outside of those boundaries and question any of the conversation that was happening.

But often, it was promoted by the gangster ascendancy and the political ascendancy in the neighborhood that promoted the idea that the outside world is a big scary place, that black people are scary, that Latinos are scary, that all that stuff is – We want to keep all of that world out. And as a result, young people in the neighborhood died in numbers higher than any other neighborhood.

KENNEALLY: In droves, nearly. There's an appearance several times in *Easter Rising* by one of the great nonconformists. I just want to bring him up and maybe you can tell briefly about Johnny Rotten. Johnny Rotten is somebody you sort of idolized, I would say. Is that right?

MACDONALD: Yeah. When I was 14, when he first came to town, to Boston, I was hooking school to find him and his new band, Public Image, Ltd.

KENNEALLY: And interestingly, he changed his name at that point to Johnny Lydon, which is another Irish name.

MACDONALD: Yeah, back to his original name. I was really focused on this music scene that was happening in London and finding out everything I could about all these people that were at the center of it, and I would often kind of – You would get hints that a lot of these people were actually – in London, that were creating this new musical scene – were all the children of immigrants in London, whether they were of Somali background or Irish. Most of them were Irish background. They were immigrants often living in housing projects and housing estates in London, and you would get hints of that.

But they were also re-inventing themselves, so we were more focused on their whole reinventive person, and that's what I was engaged in doing too, so I didn't pay much attention to that Irish stuff. Part of what I was rejecting, in rejecting everything about where I come from, in rejecting everything about South Boston, I was also rejecting all of the heritage stuff, all of the celebrations of Irishness in the neighborhood. It's where the St. Patrick's Day parade happens, in South Boston, so all the kind of green plastic shamrocks and leprechauns and happy-go-lucky songs, I wanted nothing to do with any of that.

And this coming from a family that was – I'm the next generation. It's my grandparents that all came from Ireland, and my mother's a traditional Irish musician on the accordion, so it was a very Irish household, and I was rejecting all of it, because to me, it all represented this kind of closedness that I wanted nothing to do with, this kind of closed identification. I wanted to be part of the bigger world. It represented a lot of the bigotry that I knew in the neighborhood, and just a lot of the kind of silly ersatz celebrations of being Irish, and I just rejected every little bit of it and wanted to kind of determine who I might be in the world.

KENNEALLY: And yet, interestingly, the *Easter Rising* narrative goes from Boston to New York, and then ultimately to Ireland.

MACDONALD: Yeah, the last place in the world I thought I'd be.

KENNEALLY: Right, the last place in the world you thought you would be, and yet it's there that you make this really important discover. Tell us about that.

MACDONALD: I had rejected all things Irish. By the time I was 19 – I tell the story in *Easter Rising* of going to Europe after saving money washing dishes. I bought a plane ticket. Back then, the plane tickets to London were \$250 round trip, and I saved enough money to take a flight and also I saved \$400 for spending, and this was for a six-week trip. So I went to Europe on \$400. And actually this is mid-'80s, and that did actually last four weeks.

But I'd run out of money. At one point, I had to call home. My mother had no money. We were on welfare in the housing projects, and I called my grandfather who was from Ireland and asked him if I could borrow \$200. I'd been to every single European country except for Ireland, and I didn't even think of going. I wanted nothing to do with that place. I figured it was everything that I had ever rejected in my life and wanted nothing to do with it, that it was probably just one big Southie and that it was probably as closed as Southie, so I wanted nothing to do with Ireland.

But my grandfather said he would lend me \$200, but only if I'd go to Ireland. I was in London at the time, and London was my mecca, and this for an Irish American kid, culturally, that's just – Don't mention that stuff at home. But that's where the music was happening from. And Paris was another mecca of mine. Ireland was not my mecca.

It became my mecca when I went there, because when I went to Ireland – I figured I'd go for a day and get back out and just tell him I went and get the \$200. So I went there, and from the start, it just – I sensed that – It all started to make sense. Everything that I'd ever experienced in my life, everything about my family, the community I come from, about myself, started to kind of click.

It began with just seeing the familiar faces walking down the street. You see your grandmother walking by, or your grandmother selling fruit and your grandmother buying fruit, and your grandmother's head on a guy driving by on a tractor. That immediate identification was just kind of mind-blowing. And then the conversations with people and starting to learn more about the history of the place and the consciousness of the place and how it's all shaped by the experience of colonization, and that really helped me.

That eventually became the context from which I understand everything about my family, about my neighborhood and about myself. The whole history of Ireland, the history, culture and politics of Ireland to this day really shape – It's the kind of a lens through which I see the world, and it's a history of colonization. And that's another – It's not a secret, but it's something we kind of buried. It's a hidden truth. The Irish are the only white people who were colonized, and they were the first British colony, and they're the only colony that hasn't been let go of.

So that history has shaped everything about the people. All the best and worst aspects of the neighborhood that I grew up in really come from that history, I believe. So my goal then, from the age of 18, was to find out more about it. Not only to find out more about my family and all the things that led to the tragedies in the neighborhood and in my family, but to find out about my bigger family, about the Irish, because it's not as simple as just being white, and I wanted to go beyond that.

KENNEALLY: As a last question, I want to ask you about New York. Your career has been as a memoirist, so therefore, your subject is memory. Many of these memories must be very painful. Do you ever wish sometimes that you could get those memories erased or anything like that? Do you ever want them gone?

MACDONALD: No, I never really wanted to erase anything. I just wanted – Anytime I started to delve into the story, I wanted to go deeper and deeper into it. And it is painful, but I also know from my first experiences with storytelling from the family that there's an incredible liberation that comes from it, and there's an incredible peace that comes with it.

I first started getting involved in telling the stories from my family and from my neighborhood as an activist. I would be part of a city-wide coalition of survivors of murder, of the drug trade throughout the neighborhoods of Boston, a lot of parents of murdered children. People would hold press conferences. I was one of the organizers of all this stuff when we would do gun buy-back programs.

You would have the survivors, a lot of the mothers of murdered children, get up and speak and tell the stories of their children and about the loss of their child, and you saw the transformation that happened in these people when they told their story and the empowerment that came with it, and you just saw it in their faces. You saw that transformation happen, and I was really interested in that and how that happens.

I initially started to – At first, I was organizing all these other people telling the truth and telling about what happened in their families and in their communities and I was the one calling them up and making sure they were going to be at the press conference and to do a gun buy-back program or something. And then, for once, I got up and started to tell little bits of my own family story and my own experience with crime and violence and poverty in Southie, and I started to feel that transformation myself. And every time I would tell the story, I would go deeper and deeper.

And really, with *All Souls* and then *Easter Rising*, these are just attempts to go a little bit deeper. *All Souls* was an attempt to go deeper into this truth-telling, and then *Easter Rising* was an attempt to go even deeper than *All Souls*.

KENNEALLY: Michael Patrick MacDonald, thank you very much.

MACDONALD: Thanks.

(applause)

KENNEALLY: Finally, on the panel, I want to turn to Sasha Su-Ling Welland, who is an assistant professor of anthropology and women's studies at the University of Washington. Welcome, Sasha. Her memoir, the critically acclaimed *A Thousand Miles of Dreams*, recounts what we think of as an evocative and intimate tale of two Chinese sisters who took very different paths in their quest to be independent women, and one of those sisters was your grandmother, who just recently passed away at 102, in fact, a week ago.

Remarkably, her life spanned the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and as you tell her story and her sister's story, it's a way in in so many ways. It's a way into Chinese history, their own personal histories, her life as a child in pre-revolutionary China, her life as a grandmother recounting her roots story to you as a young student who did not even speak Chinese at that point. Peel that onion back for us and sketch for us what were the critical moments in her life and for you as you came across them.

WELLAND: My grandmother and her sister, my great aunt, lived quite long lives. Her sister lived to 90 and she lived to 102, so part of me trying to figure out who they were really required me to get a new education in 20<sup>th</sup>-century history, because they had lived through incredible amount, both in China and then through immigration, my grandmother ended up in the United States, and her sister much later. My grandmother left in the '20s and came to the US at that point. Her sister left in the late '40s for England.

There are so many different people in so many different parts of their lives, so some of the stories are really emblematic to me about my grandmother. As a young child, she was the youngest of many, many siblings. It's not even entirely clear to me how many children were in the family. She was probably somewhere between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> child in the family.

Also it's not clear how many sons were in the family. I think there were very few if any that survived, so as the youngest daughter, I think her father at that time had given up on having an illustrious line of sons and so his youngest daughters, my grandmother and her sister, he sort of invested in their education somewhat the way he might have if he'd had a son.

My grandmother, she was very rebellious. The way she tells her stories of herself is she's always sort of this rebellious, mischievous hero of them. As a young child, she claims to have always dressed as a boy, and this is what allowed her to take trips with her father, ride a horse, ride a bicycle, play basketball, play tennis, all of these things that you don't really associate with a woman from a relatively traditional family at the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in China.

This led into her – It was all a part of a moment of sort of social unrest at that time. Both of the sisters were part of what I like to call the early women's movement in China in the '20s and '30s. When I tell anyone in the – a lot of

people in the United States that there was a women's movement in the teens and the '20s, in China, they're sort of flabbergasted by that.

So my grandmother, this sort of rebelliousness as a young child of wearing boys' clothes and riding horses, fed into her deep desire at that time to become a doctor. And this was also part of a larger national rhetoric at the time. It was also a place that had been colonized in the process that's often referred to as semi-colonization, because there were many different countries that had treaty ports up and down the east coast of China at that time, different Western powers. The Japanese were also encroaching at that time. So part of the dialogue at that time is, what's going to save the nation, how are we going to be able to recover the nation?

And one of the stories that was really, I think, quite inspiring to many young people at that time was you will save the nation, literally, by improving people's health, so she wanted to become a doctor.

There was a story of – this was in the early '20s. The thing that was amazing when I went and did the research is that there were Chinese women doctors studying in the United States in the late 1800s, so there were role models for her already. There's this woman, Dr. Ding, who had gone to the University of Michigan, gotten a medical degree and come back to China. She opened a women's clinic, and I actually just got an e-mail from her great-niece who read my book and told me more of the story about Dr. Ding, was that she actually went back, opened this clinic for rich women and then was using that to fund a clinic for poor women.

So this was my grandmother's role model of her quest to become a doctor, which is how she ended up getting one of these national scholarships at that time. The year that she came, 1925, there were only five of them for women, so she came on a boat with many other students, most of them men, and ended up in Cleveland. I guess peeling back more of the onion is –

**KENNEALLY:** It goes on and on. But there's one critical moment in that onion-peeling that happens when you trace back to your great-aunt's life and what you discover was kept from the family in America about her. Tell us about that.

**WELLAND:** I was lucky as a college student to – Well, first I was sort of lost. I had grown up mixed race, Chinese American in Missouri and ended up going to college in California where there was a much greater awareness of Asian American politics and discussion at that time. So I had done this long oral history with my grandmother at that time, sort of shocked that her stories of being involved in student protests, demanding an education, helping her classmates unbind their feet. This was sort of – It didn't gibe with the stories that I had

gotten about Asian American passive women in need of rescue, which is sort of the Hollywood story.

So I had done this long oral history to try to figure out who was this woman that doesn't match all of the stereotypes that I'd grown up with. As part of that, I ended up going to England to meet her sister's daughter, and at that time, I was given a book by my great-aunt's daughter, and she gave it to me. It was a memoir written in English by her mother, and she gave this book to me and said, don't ever tell your grandmother I gave you this. We'd never hear the end of it.

It turned out that my great-aunt was actually, also as part of this early women's movement, was one of the early women in China to be writing. She was a short story writer and was a published writer.

KENNEALLY: And a very well-received one, actually.

WELLAND: Yeah. There was this whole generation of young women who really burst onto the literary scene in the '20s, many of them writing highly – semi-autobiographical stories to try to make sense of this moment of transition between tradition and modernity.

The shock of it was that my grandmother had edited her family so that – She had a nuclear family in China, was what I knew of her family tree. She had one father and one mother and three sisters, maybe a brother, an indeterminate number of cousins. Her sister's book, which –

KENNEALLY: And it's written in English, which is important to you.

WELLAND: It's written in English, because I couldn't read Chinese at that point. It was something she had written trying to survive in England once she arrived there and continue her story, continue her career as a writer.

And her family tree in the beginning of this memoir has six mothers, one father, and somewhere between 12 and 14 children. So it turned out that – It's not clear to me how many wives or concubines their father had had, probably in an attempt to have a son. The reason it's not clear to me how many there were is because my grandmother had edited it down to one mother because that is what I think she believed would be acceptable in the United States and she wouldn't be judged as coming from sort of some backward place, but her sister might have actually exaggerated the number of mothers that were in the family, because she was a fiction writer and part of her trajectory as a fiction writer was writing a kind of fiction to expose the difficult things that had gone on for women under this type of marriage system.

Her memoir later – It took me years. I learned Chinese so I could go back and read her stories that she had written in Chinese. Many of the chapters in the memoir are actually direct translations from Chinese into English, from third person into first person, from fiction into nonfiction. So it's her short stories that were once published as fiction, several of them that end up as chapters in her memoir. So, she may have, for dramatic effects, exaggerated the number of wives or concubines that were in the family.

KENNEALLY: In that process, as you said, of your grandmother editing her life and remaking her identity, she remade her sister's identity so that her sister was identified to your family as an artist, and there was no information about her career, her long career, as a writer.

WELLAND: Yeah, I always grew up thinking she was a painter, and she did paint, but she was really known as a writer and I think my grandmother just didn't like what she wrote. And I think they were also very competitive. They were the two youngest daughters who were sort of striving to make themselves into modern women in this divide of what's going to save the nation. The debate, was it science or was it culture and literature, so they kind of straddled this divide and that's the direction that her sister went in, and I think she was jealous, also, that her sister had had this kind of fame as a very young woman in her 20s in China.

KENNEALLY: As you worked on the book, which took you something like 15 years, you told me how you would uncover a new piece of information, a new secret, if you will, and that meant you had to reevaluate everything you had already learned. Maria Elena Salinas mentioned the same kind of thing happening to her. What was that like? It must have been frustrating and at the same time really exciting.

WELLAND: Yeah. There were sort of multiple secrets. One is the Asian American story secret that everybody knows that it's not true, but there's these persistent stereotypes that Asian American women are passive and weak and all of this. So that was the first exciting discovery that in fact my grandmother and her sister were nothing like these stereotypes. That was what really drove me then to uncover more.

And then I found out that the two sisters have incredibly different versions of the past. I don't know which of the two are true. And then I felt a little bit – I felt both confused and sort of betrayed and didn't know if they had both just been great storytellers and made up everything, so wanted to go further and further into figuring out the truth of the editing. What they did is they edited themselves according to who they wanted to be at that time, and also the constraints of what society was putting on them in order for them to push those stories further.

I guess one of the biggest pieces of information that unsettled everything and took me years and years and years how to figure out how to write about is that I

discovered a big family secret was that my great-aunt, who was married at the time, was living – It was during the War and so they had fled to Han in the southwest of the country, but she was next-door-neighbors at that time at a university, of Wuhan University to a man named Julian Bell, who was Virginia Woolf's nephew, who had not lived up to the Bloomsbury group and had gone to teach English in China, and my great-aunt had had apparently a very scandalous affair with him at the time, which in some ways, explained how she ended up publishing that memoir in England many years later because of the connections through the Bloomsbury group to the Hogarth Press.

That was something, for a Chinese woman at that time to have had an affair with a British man at this time of trying to free the nation of colonialism, let alone the fact that she was married and had a child at the time, was really something that had to be kept a big secret. But it's there in letters and archives and things that you can't quite make sense of the story of how she ended up having these connections to the Bloomsbury group without that.

I did all of this sort of sand kicking and I wrote this chapter that made no sense whatsoever, and then I just left it there and thought I wasn't going to write about that. Then there was actually a Chinese writer who wrote a novel, a fictionalized version of the affair that was very thinly disguised and ended up being a court case in China of defamation, so she had gone overboard so much with making up all sorts of details that were –

KENNEALLY: Salacious details.

WELLAND: – that were worse than probably what really happened, that then if I could tell a truer version, that that was actually going to redeem my family in some ways.

KENNEALLY: Just to conclude, you were able before she died to show your grandmother the book, and you told a wonderful story about her reaction to that.

WELLAND: Yeah. It was very typically her. She had claimed to be writing her own version, so I never showed her mine because she wouldn't show me her version of the book. But I don't know if she believed me after all of the years it took me to write it that I was actually going to finish it, because in many ways, it really is her book, and so I feel incredibly blessed that I was able to give it to her just a few weeks before she passed away. She said, I knew you could do it, and now you have time to have children, where are my great grand children?

KENNEALLY: Thank you Sasha Su-Ling Welland.

I want to give everybody in the audience now an opportunity to –

F: Hello, Michael.

MACDONALD: Hi.

F: I wanted to ask you, have you seen the movie *The Departed*?

MACDONALD: Yeah.

F: Do you think that was really Whitey Bulger leaving the movie in San Diego?

MACDONALD: Oh, I don't know. The movie *The Departed* depicts organized crime in Boston, mainly in South Boston. It deals with all the stuff I wrote about in *All Souls* and *Easter Rising*, except it focuses on the halls of power, the relationship between Whitey Bulger, the head of organized crime in Southie, head of the Irish mafia and a drug lord and murderer, his relationship with agents in the FBI. Because in recent years, it came out that all the years that he was controlling the neighborhood and maintaining a code of silence, he was in fact an informant with the FBI. He was actually protected by agents of the FBI and was allowed to do as he liked in our neighborhood in exchange for being an informant.

The movie *The Departed*, Scorsese's new movie, takes place in that whole culture. The actual story is based on a Japanese film that I forget the name of, but he set it in the culture of South Boston and in Boston. I don't know. I never pay attention to the whole Whitey Bulger, like Where's Whitey kind of debate, because it's like Elvis sightings at this point. And it's also –

The more I was able to get into this whole truth-telling process, the less significant he's become to me. A lot of people really focus on kind of the titillating gangster story aspects of this stuff, and I've moved so far away from all of that, those aspects of it, because for me it's more about how do kids grow up in this culture? How do kids in general grow up, and not just South Boston, but in a culture of lies and of hidden truths, however you want to put it. So that's been my focus.

Whatever happens to Whitey – I don't know if he's even alive. Who knows. But that's not really as important to me as the whole question of how do we raise kids in a culture that's more truthful.

KENNEALLY: What I find fascinating about that comment, Michael, is that the process of uncovering these secrets and being more truthful disempowers a character like a Whitey, as you just said. He recedes in that story.

MACDONALD: Right. And it's the same thing with any perpetrator, really. It's important for there to be justice and for the law enforcement and the courts to prosecute, but for the mental health and the emotional health of victims of crime

and violence, it's much bigger than anything that the courts and law enforcement can do. It's really there's much more healing to be had in the truth-telling aspects.

KENNEALLY: Thank you. There was another question, I think, right there.

M: Michael, also. Just a quick comment first. I think it's interesting in your story of Southie, and for other people to realize as well, but not only was the society closed and socially isolated, but that's really reinforced by the fact that it's geographically isolated, even within Boston. I don't know if people realize it's a little peninsula that you can't get to unless you know how to get to it, quite frankly. It's not downtown Boston. It's not five blocks down the road and two blocks left. It's its own little physical enclave as well as being a social enclave.

MACDONALD: And Boston neighborhoods in general are set up like that too, around the center, rather than being on a grid. They're kind of all kind of – But Southie would be the most inaccessible, in every way, and the only way in and out was over these bridges. And a lot of *Easter Rising* is about crossing that bridge when people just wouldn't cross that bridge.

M: So what kind of response did you get back home when you were going over to Dorchester to relate experiences and help people who accepted the fact that ghettos and poverty bred violence and oppression, something that was never admitted in your own neighborhood? You said you had to reach out to neighborhoods of other cultures to even interact with people who had similar experiences. How was it when – Going to Dorchester just wasn't something a kid from Southie did, unless it was to raise hell.

MACDONALD: I was in the local press a lot around the work that I was doing, the anti-violence work I was doing in the city, and it was all well and good when I was working with other people's tragedies and other people's violence and crime, but then when I started to tell my story and the fact that this stuff happened in Southie, and not just to my family, to so many neighbors. In this period, we lost so many young people throughout the '70s and '80s. And then in the '90s, there was a huge heroin and suicide epidemic, which I think is connected to the earlier period, the earlier gangster period and the code of silence.

So when I started to tell my story, people were uneasy with it and I didn't get any kind of response. When I started bringing the activism home to South Boston and bringing survivors of homicide and the drug trade from throughout the city, bringing them to South Boston to help organize like a vigil – We did a vigil on All Soul's Day – That's why the first book's called *All Souls* – to remember all those who died too young. And we kept it innocuous like that, just to remember all those who died too young. And we know how young people died. They died from things that nobody in Southie wanted to talk about. Or in the general

culture. People have a hard time talking about a lot of those issues, and there's a stigma associated with all of that, whether it's murder, suicide, drugs.

So when we first did this vigil, I figured about 10 people would come, but the place was mobbed. People were just waiting for someone to tell the truth and then they all came out. Everybody named their child who had been killed in the neighborhood or who had overdosed in the neighborhood. All it took was just a few people willing to get up there and say the names of their loved ones who died too young, and it brought – The lines were around the block.

SALINAS: I want to say something and I also want to ask you something. When I hear you describe all these things, it brings back some of the hate mail I get with my columns – because I'm also a columnist – when I talk about the Hispanic community and they say, why do you have to be Hispanic Americans? Why do they have to be hyphenated Americans? Why can't everybody be American?

One thing I see and that you described is that – with African Americans and Hispanic Americans, there is a lot of pride in their cultural heritage, so much so that we have national organizations that are always either doing research or looking for ways to identify the problems that they have in their communities.

It seems like in your neighborhood, as an Irish American community, they were in denial. They wanted to not have anything to do with their cultural heritage and were trying to adapt.

Is there a contradiction in this country about people wanting to all be Americans and denying their cultural heritage? And isn't that something that can hurt you? Is there a way to reconcile being Chinese American, Irish American, in my case, Mexican American or Hispanic American, and want to be part of mainstream? After all, this is a country of immigrants. Can I get your comments on that, both of you?

MACDONALD: You mentioned earlier, in your introduction, he referred to you as an immigrant success story. And that's the history of – That's America. The history of America is an immigrant success story.

KENNEALLY: That's the story we're allowed to tell, I think.

SALINAS: But what we do – At least I know that when people ask me about giving advice, which happens a lot of times, what advice do you give to the Hispanic community and people? One of my main things is be proud of who you are, be proud of your cultural heritage. I think one thing that happens with Hispanic Americans is that geographically, they're just south of the border and all the countries that they come from whether it be South America or Central America or the Caribbean, and they're very close to there so they continue to hold onto their

language and their traditions and their cultural heritage and they're very proud of them.

And I'm sure that in the Irish community and the Chinese community, they just want to just leave everything behind, start new, and say, OK. I'm just plain American. But the reality is that no one really is just plain American. You can be proud of your flag, an American flag and your American past when you are an American, but the minute that you start denying your cultural heritage or wanting to stay away from it, you have problems like you have in your area and that you had as a teenager where you didn't want to have anything to do with Ireland.

MACDONALD: And that loss of identity is dangerous, I think.

SALINAS: It is, isn't it? I think it's better if we all in this country just celebrate our heritage, our cultural heritage.

WELLAND: I think that it's really difficult, when and where. I learned that sort of historical circumstances, even geographic circumstance in the United States within Asian American communities have really strong impacts. For example, my grandmother tried really really very hard her whole life to assimilate to the point that one of the things that was very hard for me to write in the book is she also assimilated a kind of white racism towards other immigrant groups, even though she herself had experienced this kind of discrimination, because she was trying so hard to fit in.

It took me to go back through the archives of newspapers to figure out that actually the moment that she arrived in Cleveland as, in her story, one of the only Chinese in the city, that actually it was at a moment in American history of incredible police antagonism towards Chinese American communities because they were seen – were claiming that there was a kind of clannish Tong wars that were going on. There had been, months before she arrived, a huge crackdown in Boston on the Chinese community where they arrested and deported hundreds, and then again in New York.

Then, actually, I think it was just a week or two weeks after she arrived in Cleveland, 600 Chinese were arrested, men, women, children, and their community was razed because there was a murder that had happened and it was claimed that the whole community was to blame. So that really told me why, at that moment of her very arrival, why she tried to hide to assimilate.

Then they were one of two Chinese families in Indianapolis, in the Midwest, and there was very little community to support them. That was World War II. People thought they were Japanese. So I can really in that – I really began to appreciate. I was very sad about – My mother didn't grow up speaking Chinese. I didn't. It

wasn't this kind of community, but the reasons why they had tried so hard really hit me in a whole new way.

KENNEALLY: Do we have another question from the audience? We have probably time for one or two more. Cheryl.

CHERYL: I wanted to say first that I really, really enjoyed all three stories and I was really touched by all of them. I wanted to ask Michael, do you think that your activism in some way has changed South Boston in your area?

MACDONALD: In the beginning, when we first started doing these vigils and people were coming out and telling the truth, there was this opportunity for the neighborhood to transform and to be a healthy community made up of the people that were from there as well as some of the new people that were moving into the neighborhood, and a culturally diverse neighborhood. There was a lot of integration happening in the housing developments there, and right at the same time that there was a lot of hope for real change for the better.

The neighborhood began the process of gentrification and with that, a kind of new erasure of its history and of the people that lived there before. The neighborhood's really unaffordable now. It's really gentrified, really trendy, real estate hot spot, and it's unaffordable. I couldn't afford to live there.

F: (inaudible)?

MACDONALD: No, no. It's real estate agents. Real estate agents don't like anything that I do, so. I wrote a piece, actually, in praise of the *The Departed*, the movie *The Departed*, because I thought Scorsese got it right by creating in the theater the suffocation that I felt as a kid growing up under that type of tyranny of organized crime and law enforcement working together, and real estate agents came out with letters to the editor and just were attacking me for – And they didn't identify themselves as real estate agents, but they didn't like that image of the neighborhood. This is a great place to move and to raise children.

And it is. I never said that it was a bad place, but we need to tell the whole truth. The neighborhood's transformed, but more just through gentrification, it's being completely erased. All the best and worst aspects of the community are being erased at this time.

One of the stories I tell in *Easter Rising* is when I first went to Ireland in the mid-'80s at a time when Ireland was really an economically deprived place and one of the poorest economies in Europe and very different from now. The first question that I received from people was is it true that you're all racist? In other words, Irish Americans. Irish people wanted to know, is it true what we hear about Irish American racism? That just floored me, because I figured – I wanted nothing to

do with Irish people in general and I thought they were all racist, so I was blown away that people in Ireland were deeply ashamed of what they had heard about Irish American conflicts with African Americans in places, in Boston, in New York, and so forth. I was blown away by that, that they were aware of that and that they were ashamed by it.

The reason for that is because they were so in touch with their history at that point and they were still engaged in struggle. This was relatives close to the border on the north, where as Catholics, as descendents of the indigenous colonized population, they identified more with the African American struggle than with the Irish American struggle. They identified more with the African American struggle than what they had heard about the Irish American struggle. All of the civil rights movement in the north of Ireland was based on the African American civil rights movement here, and that all blew me away to start to learn that history.

But in recent years now with what's called Celtic Tiger and Ireland's economic boom, there's been, for the first time, immigration to Ireland, and with that has come shopping addictions like you've never seen and erasing of their history and forgetting that they were once not white, not considered white. With that you get a lot of racist attacks against new groups coming in.

Now, you'll get it more in the south where people aren't engaged in the struggle that people in the north are still engaged in, being the north, they're still a British colony and Catholics are second class citizens in the north. The descendents of the indigenous people are second class citizens, so they're much more aware up there of their history, because they're living it.

In the south, where there's economic prosperity, people are forgetting their history and as a result, Nigerians will get stabbed in Dublin.

KENNEALLY: Sasha, just let me ask you, in China – and we'll wrap up with this question – there's this tremendous economic boom as well, and it's bringing internal immigration. Is there anything there that your own story and these stories we've heard might apply to the Chinese experience right now?

WELLAND: To back up a little bit to the gentleman's question, I think just to add to what others have said is that history really matters, that these movements of people, whether they're internal or transnational, have deep historical roots of colonialism, of different political moments, and what's happening in China now is the sort of – The miracle of capitalism hitting China is actually leading to incredible economic stratification, which is really quite severe when you look at the difference.

What we see on the news is often of the urban centers and the kind of poverty that is persistent and getting worse, arguably, because of the kind of toxic dumping

and the factories that produce all of the goods that we make that are being done in the countryside. It is a continuation of the process, I think, that is a part of capitalism that is hidden, often, from our stories of the Chinese economy right now as a roaring success.

**KENNEALLY:** It's been a terrific discussion. I appreciate the attention in the audience. Thank you Maria Elena Salinas, Michael Patrick MacDonald, Sasha Su-Ling Welland. Thank you for coming. I want to thank the organizers of the Miami Book Fair for inviting us to be here. My name is Chris Kenneally. For more information about what we do, go to [www.beyondthebook.com](http://www.beyondthebook.com). Thank you again.

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