



# Horizons

REFLECTIONS ON A  
CHANGING WORLD



— SUN VALLEY —  
WRITERS' CONFERENCE

## PROGRAM

Monday, July 19 – Tuesday, July 20, 2021

# Horizons

REFLECTIONS ON A CHANGING WORLD

*Day One*

## Continental Breakfast

8:30 – 9:30 AM | Beverage Tent

## Lawrence Wright

THE PLAGUE YEAR: AMERICA IN THE TIME OF COVID

9:30 – 10:30 AM | Pavilion & Lawn

Join **LAWRENCE WRIGHT**, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Looming Tower*, for an unprecedented, momentous account of COVID-19—its origins, its wide-ranging repercussions, and the ongoing global fight to contain it. From the fateful first moments of the outbreak in China to the extraordinary vaccine rollout, Wright will share the story of COVID-19 in authoritative, galvanizing detail and with the full drama of events on both a global and intimate scale, illuminating the medical, economic, political, and social ramifications of the pandemic.

## Meenakshi Ahamed

INDIA AND THE U.S.: THE FRAUGHT, FASCINATING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WORLD'S TWO LARGEST DEMOCRACIES

**11:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Breakout Session | Tent A**

With India much in the news in the last months, there is no better time to read **MEENAKSHI AHAMED's** new book, *A Matter of Trust*, a history of India-U.S. Relations from Truman to Trump. A journalist who was born in Calcutta and divides her time between the two countries, Ahamed draws on newly declassified documents, memoirs, and interviews with officials involved in the events to give us a compelling and detailed history, but also deft and humanizing portraits of the leaders and diplomats who managed the relationship. She will talk about the two countries she calls home, about the personalities and prejudices of people like Prime Minister Nehru and President Truman (the owner, she tells us, of 96 pairs of shoes, including 21 pairs of slippers), and why personal chemistry—or lack thereof—between leaders dictates history.

## Daniel James Brown & Tom Ikeda

FACING THE MOUNTAIN: JAPANESE AMERICAN HEROES OF WORLD WAR II

**11:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Breakout Session | Pavilion**

Of all the Americans stunned by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, none felt the shock more acutely than Japanese American men of draft age. Overwhelmed by a tsunami of prejudice, forced from their homes, incarcerated with their families in bleak concentration camps, they were initially prohibited from serving their country as other Americans were doing. Yet before the end of the war, thousands of them would emerge among the nation's most decorated heroes, both on battlefields and in courtrooms. Join **DANIEL JAMES BROWN**, author of the #1 *New York Times* best seller *The Boys in the Boat*, and **TOM IKEDA**, Executive Director of the Densho Project, for a lively discussion of the extraordinary accomplishments of these Nisei warriors. And an exploration of what their story tells us about an epidemic of anti-Asian prejudice in our country today.

## David Eagleman

LIVEWIRED: THE INSIDE STORY OF THE EVER-CHANGING BRAIN

**11:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Breakout Session | Tent B**

Few have done more to enlighten us about the capabilities and adaptability of our remarkable brains than **DAVID EAGLEMAN**, a Stanford University neuroscientist and the author of many books. His areas of research include time perception, vision, and sensory substitution, topics he brings to vivid life in accessible language. What does drug withdrawal have in common with a broken heart? Why is the world's best archer armless? Is your empathy less for people in your outgroups? Such fascinating questions are a mere sample of Eagleman's current obsessions—along with Neosensory, the company he founded, which, as he will explain, uses touch on the skin to pass information to the brain, helping people with hearing loss around the world.

## Julia Phillips

A THRILLING LITERARY DEBUT

**11:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Breakout Session | Tent C**

To call **JULIA PHILLIPS's** ambitious and globally praised debut novel, *Disappearing Earth*, a thriller is to capture its emotional, psychological, and political acuity. To call it thrilling is perhaps more apt. One August afternoon, on the shoreline of the Kamchatka Peninsula in northeastern Russia, two young sisters go missing. Their disappearance haunts the book and the women we meet in the ensuing chapters. The author gives us not just these characters' stories, but indeed the feel of living in an unstable post-Soviet Russia with all its secrets, suspicions, and prejudices. Phillips will tell us how she handled such a complex narrative, where she began, how much research she did, and how she knew what the ending would be—the one we readers tensely wait for with each turn of the page.

# Lunch

12:00 – 1:30 PM | LUNCH VILLAGE

## Firoozeh Dumas

HOW TO WRITE A MEMOIR

12:30 – 1:15 PM | Tent B

Join the wonderful, funny, gifted **FIROOZEH DUMAS** for a spirited session on how to write that memoir you have been trying to get down on paper—or on the laptop. Dumas is the author of *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America*, *Laughing Without an Accent: Adventures of a Global Citizen*, and the semi-autobiographical novel *It Ain't So Awful, Falafel*. Everyone has a story. Come learn how to tell yours.



# Monday Overview

TIME	EVENT	LOCATION
8:30 – 9:30 AM	Breakfast	Beverage Tent
9:30 – 10:30 AM	Lawrence Wright	Pavilion & Lawn
11:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Meenakshi Ahamed Daniel James Brown & Tom Ikeda David Eagleman Julia Phillips	Tent A Pavilion Tent B Tent C
12:00 – 1:30 PM	Lunch	Lunch Village
12:30 – 1:15 PM	Firoozeh Dumas	Tent B
1:30 – 2:30 PM	Ayad Akhtar Sarah Broom Lea Carpenter George Packer	Tent A Tent B Tent C Pavilion
2:30 – 6:30 PM	No-Host Bar	Beverage Tent
3:00 – 4:00 PM	Tayari Jones	Pavilion & Lawn
4:30 – 5:30 PM	Noah Feldman	Pavilion & Lawn
5:45 – 6:30 PM	Horizon: A Tribute to Barry Lopez	Pavilion & Lawn

# Tuesday Overview

TIME	EVENT	LOCATION
8:30 – 9:30 AM	Breakfast	Beverage Tent
9:30 – 10:30 AM	David Wallace-Wells	Pavilion & Lawn
11:00 Am – 12:00 PM	Isabel Allende Richard Blanco Larry Diamond Catherine Grace Katz	Tent B Tent C Pavilion Tent A
12:00 – 2:00 PM	Lunch	Lunch Village
2:00 – 3:00 PM	Sheri Fink Delia Owens Laura Secor Sarah Sentilles	Tent A Pavilion Tent B Tent C
2:30 – 6:30 PM	No-Host Bar	Beverage Tent
4:00 – 5:00 PM	Elliot Ackerman & Admiral James Stavridis	Pavilion & Lawn
5:30 – 6:30 PM	John Lithgow	Pavilion & Lawn

## Ayad Akhtar

HOMELAND ELEGIES

**1:30 PM – 2:30 PM | Breakout Session | Tent A**

**AYAD AKHTAR** is an artist who wears many hats: Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright; novelist, screenwriter, actor; President of PEN America. His novel *Homeland Elegies* was one of the most critically acclaimed books of the past year—a deeply personal work about hope and identity in a nation coming apart at the seams, blending fact and fiction to tell an epic story of belonging and dispossession in the world that 9/11 made. For the first time, here at the Writers' Conference, Akhtar will perform a dramatic monologue from his novel: part family drama, part social essay, part adventure. At its heart, this is the story of a father, a son, and the country they both call home.

## Sarah Broom

THE HOUSE: A LOVE STORY OR THE LANDSCAPE OF LONGING

**1:30 PM – 2:30 PM | Breakout Session | Tent B**

Even after her childhood home in New Orleans was destroyed in Hurricane Katrina, author and journalist **SARAH BROOM** found herself drawn to it with every nerve-ending. In her evocative and moving memoir, *The Yellow House*—winner of the 2019 National Book Award for Nonfiction—she reconstructs from memory the shotgun house her mother Ivory Mae bought in 1961 where she raised Sarah and 11 other children. Join Broom on a literal and emotional tour—not just of the house and its large family but also of the city of New Orleans itself, with all the myths surrounding it and with all its racial and economic inequalities. She will contemplate the questions at the heart of her memoir: Who possesses the rights to the story of a place? Is geography destiny? How can a house continue to haunt you even after it has disappeared from the earth? After her talk, Broom will be joined by SVWC Board Director **MITCHELL KAPLAN**.

## Lea Carpenter

ARISTOTLE IN THE COURTROOM

**1:30 PM – 2:30 PM | Breakout Session | Tent C**

Join novelist and screenwriter **LEA CARPENTER** for a talk that has grown out of the class she teaches at Columbia Law School about trying to bring the power of traditional Aristotelian principles of drama to that more practical, worldly, and yet urgent endeavor: the practice of law. Carpenter urges students to learn and lean into tools of traditional narrative structure when it comes to the writing of essential legal documents—those usually dry opening statements, sentencing memos, closing arguments, etc. Calling on material as diverse as Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, Nic Pizzolatto's *True Detective*, Aaron Sorkin's *The Social Network* and even a poem by Billy Collins, and incorporating theories of story from Malcolm Gladwell, Ava DuVernay, and Erroll Morris, Carpenter offers a unique and truly new way to tell legal stories that call on the very oldest way to tell any story: dramatically.

## George Packer

LAST BEST HOPE: AMERICA IN CRISIS AND RENEWAL

David Halberstam Memorial Lecture

**1:30 PM – 2:30 PM | Breakout Session | Pavilion**

We have been living through tumultuous, divisive, and heartbreaking days. The past year, 2020, seemed to bring the country to its knees, exposing all the racial, economic, and ideological fault lines. In writing his new book, **GEORGE PACKER**, one of our foremost thinkers about the state of America, set out to answer two fundamental questions: How did we get here, and how do we find our way back? He wanted to explore what he calls our common American identity and enduring passion for equality. Join Packer for a discussion of what he found on his journey, what surprised him, what made him despair, and, finally, what gives him hope for this country that he so clearly loves.

## No-Host Bar

2:30 – 6:30 PM | Beverage Tent

## Tayari Jones

AN AMERICAN MARRIAGE: A STORY OF LOVE AND INJUSTICE

3:00 – 4:00 PM | Pavilion & Lawn

People and their problems, not problems and their people—this is the challenge at the core of **TAYARI JONES**'s moving novel, *An American Marriage*. What happens when a social justice issue collides with the lives of a newlywed couple? And how does a writer balance the urgency of the issue with the urgency of a love story? The book has received much attention, including winning the prestigious Women's Prize for Fiction, but Tayari Jones has not been an overnight success. *An American Marriage* is the result of a two-decades-long career. The author of three previous novels, she will share her journey—the uphill struggles and the surprising interventions. This is a story about finding your voice and staying true to it. After her remarks, Jones will be in conversation with interviewer and WNYC radio host **ALISON STEWART**.

## Noah Feldman

LINCOLN AND THE BROKEN CONSTITUTION

4:30 – 5:30 PM | Pavilion & Lawn

Join **NOAH FELDMAN**, one of America's most renowned Constitutional scholars, in a groundbreaking discussion of how President Abraham Lincoln broke decisively with major constitutional precedents during the Civil War, effectively rewriting the Constitution's place in the American system. Before the Civil War, the Constitution was best understood as a compromise pact—a rough and ready deal between states that allowed the Union to form and function, and that protected slavery notwithstanding its immorality. After Lincoln, the Constitution came to be seen as a sacred text—a transcendent statement of the nation's highest ideals. Feldman will illuminate Lincoln's constitutional choices and how he made them—and place Lincoln in the rich context of thinking of the time, from African American abolitionists to Lincoln's Republican rivals and Secessionist ideologues.

## Horizon: A Tribute to Barry Lopez

5:45 – 6:30 PM | Pavilion & Lawn

On Christmas morning 2020, the writer **BARRY LOPEZ** died in Eugene, Oregon, surrounded by his family, after a long battle with cancer. He was widely honored as one of our greatest writers about the natural world in nonfiction classics such as *Of Wolves and Men*, *Arctic Dreams*, and *Horizon*. For half a century Lopez traveled the globe—High Arctic to Antarctica, Oregon to Kenya—bringing back stories etched in luminous prose that explored our profound connections to the diverse, fragile planet we inhabit. Two weeks before his death, Barry received the inaugural Sun Valley Writers' Conference **Writer in the World Prize**. This prize is awarded to a writer whose work expresses that rare combination of literary talent and moral imagination, helping us to better understand the world and our place in it. Join us for a short film about this remarkable human being and writer and a brief tribute to the profound legacy of his work.

# Horizons

REFLECTIONS ON A CHANGING WORLD

*Day Two*

## Continental Breakfast

**8:30 – 9:30 AM | Beverage Tent**

## David Wallace-Wells

THE UNINHABITABLE EARTH: LIFE AFTER WARMING

**9:30 – 10:30 AM | Pavilion & Lawn**

Writing about climate change can be challenging, especially if the desire is to raise serious alarm but offer some solutions and hope. No one has done that better than **DAVID WALLACE-WELLS**, whose recent book, *The Uninhabitable Earth*, has been called “this generation’s Silent Spring.” He alerts us to the human effects on our planet, the ways that environmental damage is transforming nature, influencing global politics, threatening capitalism and, indeed, human progress. But—as the author will explain—his book is also an impassioned call to action. For just as the world was brought to the brink of catastrophe within the span of a lifetime, the responsibility to avoid it now belongs to a single generation—today’s. Guiding us forward, Wallace-Wells will also lay out some of the dramatic actions we could take to build a livable, prosperous world in the age of global warming.

## Isabel Allende

THE SOUL OF A WOMAN

**11:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Breakout Session | Tent B**

**ISABEL ALLENDE's** vibrant and original voice has been an essential part of the literary landscape since the 1982 publication of her first novel, *The House of the Spirits*. More than 25 acclaimed books have followed, bringing her to this most recent, *The Soul of a Woman*, a wise and witty memoir/manifesto for our time. “When I say that I was a feminist in kindergarten, I am not exaggerating,” she begins the book, writing about her lifelong determination to be liberated in all ways, personal and professional. In a wide-ranging conversation with the PBS *NewsHour's* **JEFFREY BROWN**, Allende will talk about the soul of a woman, about her work, her marriages, and about how to live a passionate life.

## Richard Blanco

HOW TO LOVE A COUNTRY: POEMS

**11:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Breakout Session | Tent C**

At the second inauguration of President Obama on January 21, 2013, **RICHARD BLANCO** stirred the country with his words as he spoke of our shared narratives and dreams. He was the fifth Presidential Inaugural Poet in U.S. history—the first Latino, immigrant, and gay person to serve in such a role. The poem he recited on that day, as well as those included in his latest stunning collection, *How to Love a Country*, speak to the heart of what it means to be part of the American story—one he reminds us is full of terrible pain and prejudice as well as progress and hope. Blanco's new poems about the Pulse nightclub massacre, about a lynching, about the pull on an immigrant's heart, are full of a luminous melancholy. “Like thirst, like hunger, we ache with the need to save ourselves, and our country from itself,” he writes in “Como Tu/Like You/Like Me.” Come hear him read and talk about the art and calling of the poet in today's world.

## Larry Diamond

THE GLOBAL WAVE OF AUTHORITARIANISM AND HOW TO COUNTER IT

**11:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Breakout Session | Pavilion**

In a trend both alarming and saddening, we have been witnessing an erosion of freedom around the world in recent years. From Poland to Turkey, from the Philippines to Hungary, the despots have been emboldened to jail their enemies, restrict free speech, and shackle the media just as Russia and China have become more assertive and repressive. No one has written and spoken about this dark turn with more informed passion than **LARRY DIAMOND**, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and one of the country's leading scholars of democracy. As he does in his compelling book *Ill Winds*, Diamond is always wrestling with the hard questions: How do we confront Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping? How can we support activists, dissidents, and independent media struggling for freedom? What steps can we take to make the internet safe for liberal democracy? Diamond will share his answers with us and explain why he believes American leadership is required more than ever to stem the tide of tyranny.

## Catherine Grace Katz

THE DAUGHTERS OF YALTA

**11:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Breakout Session | Tent A**

Tensions during the Yalta Conference in February 1945 threatened to tear apart the wartime alliance among Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin just as victory was close at hand. Join author **CATHERINE GRACE KATZ** for the dramatic story of the three young women—Anna Roosevelt, Sarah Churchill, and Kathleen Harriman—who were chosen by their fathers to travel with them to Yalta, each bound by fierce family loyalty, political savvy, and intertwined romances that powerfully colored these crucial days. (Kathleen was the daughter of Averell Harriman, the U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union and the original developer of Sun Valley.) Situated in the political maelstrom that marked the transition to a post-war world, this is a remarkable account of fathers and daughters whose relationships were tested and strengthened by the history they witnessed and the future they crafted together.

## Lunch

12:00 – 2:00 PM | LUNCH VILLAGE

## Sheri Fink

WHAT I SAW: STORIES FROM INSIDE THE PANDEMIC

2:00 – 3:00 PM | Breakout Session | Tent A

As is her wont, *New York Times* reporter **SHERI FINK** went directly to the heart of the coronavirus story, chronicling the deadly virus that has ravaged lives and economies around the world. Her reporting from West Africa during the Ebola crisis (for which she and her *New York Times* colleagues won the 2015 Pulitzer Prize) and her extraordinary book, *Five Days at Memorial*, about a hospital in post-Katrina New Orleans, remind us why the best kind of firsthand reporting is truly an essential public service. Over the past year, as COVID-19 swept the globe, Fink reported from more than two dozen hospitals around the country and outside of it, highlighting the impacted families—their lives, their losses, and the unequal effect of the pandemic. Currently at work on a book called *Surge*, she will share with us what she saw, how you earn people's trust, and what it takes to be a reporter on the front lines of a global epidemic.

## Delia Owens

WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING

2:00 – 3:00 PM | Breakout Session | Pavilion

Call it a global haunting what **DELIA OWENS**'s novel, *Where the Crawdads Sing*, has done to millions of readers. Deeply felt and beautifully written, it is the story of Kya, an abandoned girl who survives on her own in the wild marshlands of coastal North Carolina, her loneliness as palpable as her resilience and her affinity for the natural world. And oh that world Owens conjures—the gulls and egrets, the grasses and waterways, the squalls and sunsets. Finally drawn out of her solitude by the prospect of human connection, Kya becomes part of a murder mystery and a love story. Owens, a wildlife scientist and award-winning nature writer, will talk about her inspiration for the book and the issues it raises about male violence and female survival, the beauty and fragility of the earth, and the marshlands her heroine so loves. She will also share her thoughts and excitement about the upcoming major motion picture.

## Laura Secor

PAWNS: THE PEOPLE CAUGHT BETWEEN IRAN AND THE UNITED STATES

2:00 – 3:00 PM | Breakout Session | Tent B

Since 1979, tensions between the United States and Iran have passed through the lives of individuals, leaving wreckage in their wake. Journalist and editor **LAURA SECOR**, author of the highly regarded book, *Children of Paradise: The Struggle for The Soul of Iran*, will talk about the many dimensions of this problem, from Iran's propensity for taking and leveraging hostages and the U.S. dilemma in negotiating for them, to the tendency in the United States to use strong-arm tactics to coerce visiting Iranians into becoming intelligence assets. She will recount a troubling story that unfolds in this netherspace of tension and show how a conflict between nations has been visited on those least invested in its continuance.

## Sarah Sentilles

STRANGER CARE: LOVING WHAT ISN'T OURS

2:00 – 3:00 PM | Breakout Session | Tent C

After their decision not to have a biological child, author **SARAH SENTILLES** and her husband Eric decided to adopt via the foster care system. Despite knowing that the system's goal is the child's reunification with the birth family, they opened their home to a flurry of social workers who questioned them, evaluated them, and ultimately prepared them to welcome a child into their lives—even if it meant, most likely, having to give the child back. After years of starts and stops, and endless navigation of the complexities and injustices of the foster care system, Sarah and Eric finally brought home a three-day-old baby girl named Coco. Join Sentilles to hear the deeply moving story of what one woman learned from fostering a newborn—about injustice, about making mistakes, about how to better love and protect people beyond our immediate kin.

## No-Host Bar

2:30 – 6:30 PM | BEVERAGE TENT

## Elliot Ackerman & Admiral James Stavridis

THE NEXT WORLD WAR AND AMERICA'S GEOPOLITICAL FUTURE:  
FACT AND FICTION

4:00 – 5:00 PM | PAVILION & LAWN

Two former military officers and award-winning authors, **ELLIOT ACKERMAN** and **ADMIRAL JAMES STAVRIDIS**, have together written *2034: A Novel of the Next World War*. It is a chillingly authentic geopolitical thriller that imagines a naval clash between the United States and China in the South China Sea in 2034—and the path from there to a nightmarish global conflagration. They will be in conversation with former CBS News Vice President and Washington Bureau Chief **CHRISTOPHER ISHAM** about fact and fiction, war and peace, nationalism, leadership, and much else.

## John Lithgow

MASTER CLASS WITH JOHN LITHGOW

5:30 – 6:30 PM | PAVILION & LAWN

Over his long career, **JOHN LITHGOW** has given us indelible performances in films and television and on the stage, an acting arc that has taken him from Shakespeare to sitcoms to serial killers. His range has been stunning—from the goofy Dick Solomon in *3rd Rock From the Sun* to his unforgettable and moving portrayal of Winston Churchill in *The Crown*, with a raging, heartbreaking King Lear on the Delacorte Stage in Central Park in between. The author of the acclaimed memoir, *Drama: An Actor's Education*, Lithgow will talk with his friend, the PBS *NewsHour*'s **JEFFREY BROWN**, about his acting life, about how he prepares to play a historical figure, and about the similarities and differences between drama and comedy. Prepare to laugh and marvel.

## SUN VALLEY WRITERS' CONFERENCE

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