

Episode 102: The Gettysburg Address with Leigh Wilson Smiley

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [00:00](#) Okay.

Speaker 2: [00:00](#) This is Sarah Pixley.

Bill Walton: [00:03](#) This is Sarah Pixley. Sarah Pixley lives in Cornetto, California right now, but she lived in DC for about 10 years, and Sarah's helping us with social media posts.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [00:15](#) Okay [crosstalk 00:00:15].

Bill Walton: [00:15](#) And Sarah is a photographer, but she wants to be a photographer and a filmmaker. Well, she is a photographer and she is a filmmaker, but like all of us, she wants to get it out to more people. It's that audience issue. She also wants to get paid for it. Anyway, she's been working with us for about seven, eight months.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [00:39](#) Oh, Sarah, I've heard about you. Bill raves about you.

Bill Walton: [00:43](#) Yeah, and she's very clever with the post and we have posts, which are generally from my point of view, but we try to make them funny and original and not just the usual. Nothing really terribly political I think we've done. So, that's the whole idea. So, Leigh, did you listen to our last show?

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [01:06](#) I did listen to your last show.

Bill Walton: [01:08](#) What did you think?

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [01:09](#) It's a nice intro. I mean, I think I was a little awkward, but I'm going to be more critical of myself then.

Bill Walton: [01:14](#) Well, this is an exploration, and I think this is going to be what it's going to be. I just think you and me, the two of us need to just sort of go where we go, and as I understand podcast, the podcasts that people really like are the ones that are a little conversational nonlinear people revealing of themselves people not being perfect, all the human stuff, which is why I think I like the podcasting better. We've been doing the TV thing and the TV thing just naturally gets you playing to a camera, and we're not doing that. We're just talking.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [02:10](#) Yeah. I liked that. I liked that a lot. So, how's your voice this week?

Bill Walton: [02:17](#) My voice is good. I think my voice is good. I went down to pick up some prescriptions and I was verbally-

Speaker 2: [02:25](#) [crosstalk 00:02:25] excellent.

Bill Walton: [02:25](#) It's excellent. Yeah. I was burbling in the car.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [02:32](#) Good.

Bill Walton: [02:33](#) So, we're recording this right now and we may use some of it. I'm not sure. We can't decide where we'll start it and where we'll not, but you and I talked last Friday about doing Gettysburg Address, [crosstalk 00:02:46]

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [02:46](#) Yeah, I'd like to do that. Yeah. I was rereading it this morning.

Bill Walton: [02:50](#) Okay.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [02:51](#) So, yeah. How would you like to do that? What would serve the purposes of the podcast for you? I mean, I learned some new things about it, rereading it this morning. Certainly all the rhetorical tools that you and I discuss all the time. That Shakespeare uses, that any great dramatist uses or any great speaker, Martin Luther King.

Bill Walton: [03:18](#) Let's go. Let's get started, because you're saying stuff we want to have in here anyway. Okay. So, I'm here today again with my great friend and muse, Leigh Wilson Smiley who just most recently was head of the theater and dance department at the university of Maryland. And now she's an independent voice and acting teacher and we've been exploring all aspects of that craft, and I've started out as a kid in my twenties doing a bit of that. So, this is a fun reuniting with that. So, Hey Leigh. How are you?

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [03:53](#) I'm great, Bill. How are you?

Bill Walton: [03:57](#) Last time we talked about the idea that we would go for our 30 minute segments from sort of a piece of writing or a speech or something. Each week dig into something, and you brought up the Gettysburg address. What are you-

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [04:12](#) Yeah.

Bill Walton: [04:12](#) Yeah.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [04:13](#) Wow. I love this. I love this right now, and I love it because it's not partisan. It's about... Was that mine? Sorry, somebody texted me. It's not partisan, but it's about, I think the love we have for our nation and the understanding of history and progress through our nation, and right now in this critical time, these words resonate deeply for me and for you, I think, and I'm wondering how your audience will feel about this. And what I've said to you before is I love rhetorical tools. Rhetoric is important. And some of the tools in here, which we can discuss after we hear you do it, we can play a little bit with those.

Bill Walton: [05:11](#) Okay, well let's go at it. I spent a little time on my favorite encyclopedia Wikipedia, and I won't get into everything I learned, but what I did learn is that, and I agree, Lincoln did not like to speak extemporaneously. He wrote everything out. This went through several drafts before he gave this one. And then after it was done, he actually kept polishing the finished version for a bit. And so, what we've got today is the address as what he felt like was what he really wanted to say. So, that's a tremendous starting point. The other thing is when he showed up in Gettysburg, he was sick and everybody thought he looked just ghastly, And now they think he may have had some sort of minor version of smallpox. And consequently, when he gave the speech, he was sad and he was slow, but then this is sort of a sad, slow speech anyway. So, as usual with this stuff, I've read this a couple of times, but I haven't done any real work on it because I wanted to start out, read what I read, and then you and I will figure out what's here and how we can explore it some more.

So, let me go after you-

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [06:42](#) [crosstalk 00:06:42] breath at the moment.

Bill Walton: [06:43](#) Take a breath. Okay

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [06:45](#) Take a moment, and when you're ready, start.

Bill Walton: [06:54](#) Fourscore and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth, on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting-place for those

who here gave their lives, that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion. That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [09:00](#) Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So, Bill, when you say this as a sad piece, [crosstalk 00:09:11].
- Bill Walton: [09:10](#) Oh, I do see this as a sad piece right now. Yeah.
- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [09:15](#) Well, I think it's helpful. I think it's hopeful that we get up, we breathe, we use our voices and we say, "Let's work towards something better. Let's not let this great nation perish from the earth." So, it's hope. I think it's hope. And it's a fierce, determined hope. And it's a humble hope also. So, one of the things I think about with this piece is the rhythm of it. I think it grows. I think it grows in rhythm, and part of it is the repetition that he uses, part of it is the antithesis that he's written. So, for instance, it begins at the beginning with "Fourscore and seven years ago" and it goes, the next sentence starts with "Now." So, we're going from history to now, and you as a speaker, want to bring people's imagination from back then when this nation was started to right now, and truthfully, we are engaged in a great civil war right now. That's the truth. It's not a great civil war. It's a terrible civil war, but it is. Right now we're in a place where our nation is very divided.
- There's many antithesis. "We have gathered." "We have come to dedicate those who gave their lives." Okay, halfway down, "This world will little note nor long remember what we, what we say here, but we can never forget what they did here." And again, it's about really imaging those two connected thoughts.

Bill Walton: [11:30](#) Well, he saw this, as I understand it, he saw the civil war as hitting a restart button for the country. And the original sin of slavery was something that was much on everybody's mind, and one of things that I've learned a bit is when the constitution was being written, it called to mind the whole slavery question and the founding fathers, many of them had a real realization about how wrong it was and it changed their views, the 10 years or however long it took to draft that. A lot of them gave up their slaves after that whole constitutional convention, and this was much on Lincoln's mind, I think, when he said this, because he saw the civil war as giving a fresh start from that start.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [12:26](#) Right. So, called it [crosstalk 00:12:27].

Bill Walton: [12:26](#) So, the then, and the now, and the we, and the they, yeah.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [12:31](#) [crosstalk 00:12:33].

Bill Walton: [12:35](#) Go ahead.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [12:36](#) I think that the rhythm at the end, you have to ride the horse of the piece.

Bill Walton: [12:45](#) I will highly resolve that the dead, blah, blah. Now thing that's interesting about this is reading it, and performing it is that Lincoln didn't really perform it. I mean, Lincoln was doing lousy at a very high pitch voice. The guy who came before him, Edward Everett, spoke for two hours and by the time Lincoln came out, most people didn't know that he'd even started when he was finished and there was no applause. And so, he didn't really give a performance, and yet, somebody like me and you, as we read this, we need to make those words come alive.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [13:22](#) Right. Yeah. It's-

Bill Walton: [13:25](#) I'm going to draw up what he was and think about what we are.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [13:27](#) Yeah, I think so. I think so. I mean, as if, and the magic as if of acting, as if you were able to say these words, not then, but now, and have them land, because I think there is so much truth in this now for us.

Bill Walton: [13:53](#) So, what's the phrase "as if" so I'm bringing to this [crosstalk 00:13:56].

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [13:56](#) So, this is the magic "as if" in acting. As if you are speaking this to our nation right now, and they could hear it. And again, with

as much humility as Lincoln had in the sense of maybe they'll listen. Well, he says, no one's going to remember these words, and of course we do. We remember these words more than we remember a lot of the dead, I would say at this point in history. So, we don't think about that slaughter because it's not in front of us every day.

Bill Walton: [14:35](#)

So, should I try some text?

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [14:37](#)

I think you should try some text and-

Bill Walton: [14:39](#)

What do we want to do here?

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [14:42](#)

Strike up the antithesis a little bit more, and really strike up some of the repetition. So, the word "dead" and "died" is really repeated quite a lot. And that last, they haven't used a lot of the ladder of, there's comments in there, but the energy needs to build after each comma.

Bill Walton: [15:09](#)

So, do you want to begin at the beginning? Or where do you want to attack this?

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [15:12](#)

Yeah, but let me just look at this. Let's start at the end. "It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task." Again, he means that when he says "great task", like it's a great civil war. "Remaining before us, that from these honored dead, we take increased devotion for which..." Again, the repetition of devotion, "That we were highly resolved that these dead shall not have died." Use all those sounds in those words.

Bill Walton: [15:45](#)

So, vowels, or consonants, or both?

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [15:48](#)

Mainly continents, I think. Let's focus on that this time, but that last line is "That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that the government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." To allow each of those thoughts to build into a really strong, last thought of "shall not perish from the earth." And you can do that with really standing out each of those words.

Bill Walton: [16:24](#)

Okay.

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honor dead, we take increased devotion to that cause for which they hear gave the last full measure of devotion. That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain. That this nation, under

God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [17:11](#) Yes. Good, Bill. Really good. I want you to do it again. So, "this nation under God shall have new birth of freedom and..." So, you're building that [inaudible 00:17:23] that government of the people and building by the people. For the people, blah, blah. I want super, super focused on the D's and the T's, but I love what you were doing with repetition and the antithesis with all of that. It was really great.
- Bill Walton: [17:40](#) So, work on the contenance.
- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [17:43](#) Yes. For the first "dedicated." "Dedicated" "Ded" and "Ac." All that.
- Bill Walton: [17:52](#) All right. Let me. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us. That from these honored dead, we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion. That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain. That this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.
- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [18:33](#) Just take that shall not perish from the earth again, and really hit the T.
- Bill Walton: [18:36](#) Hit the T. Shall not.
- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [18:39](#) Yes.
- Bill Walton: [18:40](#) Okay. Shall not perish from the earth.
- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [18:46](#) Yes.
- Bill Walton: [18:47](#) I'm struggling a bit with earth. Earth's a big word.
- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [18:52](#) It is. It is, but it doesn't sound like you're struggling, Bill. I mean, "earth."
- Bill Walton: [19:00](#) Earth.
- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [19:00](#) No, it's not...
- Bill Walton: [19:02](#) Shall not perish from the earth. Earth. Earth.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [19:05](#) Yeah. I mean, think of the word "earth" versus the word "world", which he also uses.

Bill Walton: [19:12](#) You and I have been doing a lot of Shakespeare, which has been a real adventure for me. And one of the things that I've learned about Shakespeare is the time T-I-M-E is at least two syllables, maybe three. And what Shakespeare, the good actors do is they take these simple words, like time, or time, and they bring it out so much to really-

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [19:41](#) There would have been a time for such a [crosstalk 00:19:43] .

Bill Walton: [19:42](#) The word "time" yeah. So, earth. Earth. Earth, we ought to have two or three syllables in there.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [19:52](#) I would try that. Yeah.

Bill Walton: [19:54](#) Okay.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [19:55](#) Let's start with the beginning again, hitting all those continents. They're really important. Particularly the T's and the D's, and continuing the work that you're doing with antithesis and repetition.

Bill Walton: [20:16](#) Okay.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [20:18](#) There's a lovely thing that's happening, Bill, is that you're not pushing your voice in any way. There's actually a lot of your thought and feeling, being revealed in your voice, which is what you and I have talked a lot about, about transparency of really feeling you. Being able to sense the nuances of your thought and nuances of your feeling. So, I'm hearing that, and I love whatever that is that you're doing good.

Bill Walton: [20:49](#) Okay. As if. Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that, that nation might live. It is all together fitting and proper that we should do this, but in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate. We cannot consecrate. We cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract the world will little note nor long remember

what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work, which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.

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- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [23:21](#) Yeah. Yeah, Bill, that's nice. That's really nice. I think, yeah. I mean, one of the things that I heard this time that I hadn't been hearing was the honoring the dead and the noble men.
- Bill Walton: [23:42](#) Well we go through this with these pieces, we've done a lot, and what happens is I go through it a couple of times and I don't want to bore our audience with doing this 93 times, but what happens is the more you do it, the more the words sort of start working on you, and the thing about Lincoln is Lincoln took a lot of what his rhythms are from the King James Bible. And so, I think the two greatest documents ever are the King James Bible, the language and Shakespeare, all of Shakespeare. And you and I have talked about the fact that if you just go with the sounds, the sounds of the words, the meaning emerges. And so, what happens is I keep going through this, the sounds start working on me more than trying to intellectualize what I'm saying.
- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [24:44](#) Right. [crosstalk 00:24:46] you might want to share, Bill, with the audience, the fact that vibration actually moves through the body and it [crosstalk 00:24:54].
- Bill Walton: [24:53](#) Explain that. What do you mean?
- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [24:57](#) So, the great resonator in your body is your bones, and if your muscles are not super tight, if you're not unnecessarily tense, then the sound of your voice moves through the bones of your body and as you become more aware of your voice as an instrument, per se, you begin to feel it's through your body. So, there's the actual physical vibration moving you and these continents and these vowels, vowels are very direct from the belly to the lungs, through the channel of your throat. But the consonants begin to really vibrate your body. So, yes, as you repeat these words, and as you become more aware of the sounds in the words, it moves your body, not just because there

is emotional imagery in this text, but also because it's physically moving you. And that's what audiences feel to. Anyone in your audience can remember a moment when somebody said something and they felt moved, they felt plucked, like they were a Stradivarius violin.

- Bill Walton: [26:05](#) So, didn't you tell me the story about an actress who was either an English speaker, I think it was an English speaker and she went to do a performance in India.
- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [26:17](#) Yeah. That was Tina packer.
- Bill Walton: [26:22](#) Tell that story again. That's interesting.
- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [26:24](#) So, Tina packer had a grant and I can't remember it was a Guggenheim or what it was, and this was very early in her career after she'd worked with the Royal Shakespeare company and John Barton, and she was doing a research and they invited her to do a monologue in a huge stadium. I think she said 10,000 people were there. And so, of course she spoke English and she said she didn't think many people in the audience spoke English, but she did, I can't remember if she did Juliette or Hermione from Winter's Tale, and she said at the end of it, I think she did Hermione when Harmine is pleading for her life in front of her husband Leontes, And it said at the end of it, she just stopped and there was not one sound from those 10,000 people. They were collectively holding that breath. You could hear a pin drop. They understood from her voice and the feeling and specific sounds in the words, what she had just said. That somebody was pleading for their life. It's phenomenal what we know from the voice.
- Bill Walton: [27:48](#) Wow. I had a similar experience with doing this show. We've had a fellow on who was a Chinese dissident, and I think he's probably recognizable to most people. He was the one who was blind and wore sunglasses, obviously, for his eyes, and he'd escaped from China and come here. Now lives in the Washington area. I think he's teaching at Catholic, but he's very dedicated to a freedom in China, religious freedom in particular, and I had him on the show. Of course, you've got somebody who's blind on a TV show and who doesn't speak English, or so he claimed. And so, I had an interpreter in from voice of America and he sat at the table with us and our dissonant started talking and he would talk and then the interpreter would interpret and he'd talk, but he was so passionate about his subject that after about 10 minutes of talking with him, I no longer felt like I needed the interpreter, and you could just listen to what he was saying.

You didn't understand things exactly what he's saying, but you knew what he was feeling, and you knew what it meant for the Chinese people. It got to one point where another person to table, I was motioned to her to speak, and the interpreter said, "Well, don't you want to hear the interpretation of..." Oh yeah, yeah. Better interpret it so we know what it is, but yeah, that was the experience and it was quite real. Now it later turned out that he did speak English pretty well, but he wanted to do the show in Chinese because he wanted, because this is on YouTube, he wanted to be able to speak directly to the Chinese people what he was saying. And so, he spoke over the English audience, but the people paying emotional attention could really get it. So, coming back, we've got just a couple of minutes. It seems like the imageries in this are birth, life and death.

- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [29:54](#) And sacrifice. Yeah, he does what every great writer does, which is he brings images that we all share that actually go straight to the heart, into our imagination, rather than to our intellectual brain. So, honored dead, we're on this great battlefield. So, we begin to picture that battle. That consecration is a Latin word that wants to go to the brain, but it somehow goes into our heart.
- Bill Walton: [30:35](#) Yeah, it does. It does. It does.
- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [30:35](#) And that repetition, the we, and we cannot, we, we cannot convey. So, we're getting pictures in our minds, and certainly as long as the speaker is seeing what he is saying, the audience will get pictures as well.
- Bill Walton: [30:54](#) I want to close. I'd love to have you do some of this. Maybe the last piece. It is rather for us, if you could do that, but what I want to make a contemporary reference to this. We talk about this as if it's the greatest piece of writing ever, and everybody knew it at the time. Well, they didn't know it at the time, and evidently, this was attacked by his political enemies and then also attacked by some people in Europe for not being whatever. So, even something like this, and for those of us who want to be able to feel better about the toxic nature of political discourse, even the Gettysburg address was attacked by Lincoln's political enemies.
- Leigh Wilson Sm...: [31:41](#) I'm sure. I'm sure.
- Bill Walton: [31:42](#) So, I guess the lesson is persevere.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [31:46](#) Exactly. There is hope.

Bill Walton: [31:48](#) There is hope. You and I both think that. We don't agree about everything political, but we do agree there's hope. So, would you do the last, would you close us out with the... Would you do this? "It's rather for us to be" could you do that?

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [32:00](#) Why not?

Bill Walton: [32:00](#) Okay.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [32:06](#) It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead, we take increased devotion to the cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion. That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain. That this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom and that the government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from this earth.

Bill Walton: [32:53](#) Beautiful. You're getting a lot of yeses and raise fists here in the studio. They loved it.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [33:01](#) It's Henry the fifth. Don't you think it's we [crosstalk 00:33:06].

Bill Walton: [33:04](#) I do. We-

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [33:08](#) Yeah, yeah, it is. It's a Henry the fifth speech, and it's I don't know. I love it.

Bill Walton: [33:15](#) Well, I love you doing it. I love the work we're doing together. So, thanks again, Leigh, and between now and then we'll figure out what the next piece of text is, but thank you. This was a revelation. Thanks.

Leigh Wilson Sm...: [33:30](#) All right. Thank you. Bye-bye.

Bill Walton: [33:30](#) Okay. Talk soon.

Speaker 2: [33:31](#) She disappear again?

Bill Walton: [33:38](#) She hung up. Yeah.

Speaker 2: [33:38](#) She doesn't [inaudible 00:33:41].

Bill Walton: [33:41](#) She likes to do that.

Speaker 2: [33:42](#) She was very good.

Bill Walton: [33:44](#) So, what do you think?

Speaker 2: [33:46](#) It was good.

Bill Walton: [33:46](#) Do you think we got to show?

Speaker 2: [33:48](#) Sure.

Bill Walton: [33:48](#) Do you think people would be interested in this?

Speaker 2: [33:52](#) Always.

Bill Walton: [33:55](#) I mean-