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reached out, and people suggested other books and articles. It seemed to really hit a nerve.

*R.R.: That was 10 years ago, and now the book has been reissued. Are we still facing the impossible in 2014?*

**P.L.:** It's hard to say, but in some ways, there's almost more political demoralization than even 10 years ago. I think some of it was that, for a lot of people, there was a lot of hope that they invested in Barack Obama in '08, and they had this image of "this would transform everything" if this president gets elected. You saw that quite literally [when] they adopted the brand of "Hope," like our brand is hope like Nike's is a swoosh. I'm not really condemning them for doing it, but it did have this very unfortunate consequence that once you put hope on any political figure, then if that figure turns out to be fallible, your hopes get dashed. Be that as it may, I think there is just a sense that the system is broken, and there's not much you can do about it, so you kind of go home and deal with your private life.

The other area that can undermine hope is climate change. In 10 years, there are a whole lot more renewables out there, and that's part of what the writers talk about. So we haven't completely blown it. But compared to the magnitude of the challenge, it's playing catch up. So people feel, I think, demoralized, a sort of paralysis sets in. In some ways it's at least as hard a time, and that was part of my hope was just to speak to that and say, "Yeah it's a hard time but: Is it harder to act in the United States in 2014 than it was challenging apartheid South Africa or the coming of dictatorships in Europe or the Argentinian dictatorships and death squads if you're the mothers of the Disappeared?" It's pretty clear that, as hard as it is, you're not going to get tossed in jail and tortured and thrown off a helicopter. It's easier.

*R.R.: There are 55 people you reference in this book. Do they have any qualities that are the same? Or are their qualities all unique?*

**P.L.:** I think a little bit of both. One of the things that definitely is a core theme is I had to stop (almost) every piece from quoting [playwright and first president of the Czech Republic] Vaclav Havel, because the thing he said is hope is not the same thing as optimism. It's a fundamental quality that's much larger, about the possibility of your actions mattering. We tend to use [the word "hope" a little bit sloppily: "Oh, that's a hopeful sign." Even in the absences of heartening developments, like solar (energy) or debating a \$15-an-hour minimum wage in Seattle, whatever it happens to be, there is this quality called hope that drives you forward. That's a theme that everybody shares: that you act. It's true whether you talk about Johnathan Kozol (National Book Award-winning author who writes about discrimination in public education) looking at these faces of these children and their own joy amidst the most terrible circumstances one could imagine, or Eduardo Galeano, the great writer from Uruguay, talking about people in jail finding ways to communicate. It weaves in and out of this sense that we can tap into something larger. And, again, it doesn't have to be expressed theologically.

The other element of hope, that (author and social justice activist) Howard Zinn certainly articulates, is "the optimism of uncertainty," that you never know when something's going to turn. There is a great story in the book of a friend, Mary Piper, who is a bestselling psychology writer. She has not particularly been a political organizer. She lives in Nebraska and was reading about climate change and just getting demoralized, and then realized the Keystone (XL) Pipeline was coming through not that far from where she lived.

She just felt completely overwhelmed and took this exceedingly radical step of holding a potluck. Three or four people come, and they don't have any magic solutions but they agree to meet again. This time it grows, and before long they're reaching out into small Nebraska towns. They get this wonderful guy who is this long-time veteran rancher, looks like John Wayne, political conservative, and he just says, "I will not be bullied. I'm not going to sell my land to these people." And they did these life-size cutouts saying, with a picture of him, "I stand with Randy. I will not be bullied." So this is one of the hopeful themes, when you have coalitions that extend past the usual suspects. We don't know what's going to happen with Keystone, but it's been four years that it's been delayed.

In the same vein, I talk with a young Egyptian woman about everything that led up to Tahrir Square [a communal gathering space in Cairo that served as a focal point for protests during the political upheaval called Arab Spring], to the point where people were willing to come forward. And as I'm putting this together along with another piece, last summer, and things are not really pretty in Egypt, I am just thinking "Is this even hopeful? Is this something that's going to lift people's spirits, or is it going to depress them?" And this young Egyptian woman, who lived in a city about 600,000, went down to [Tahrir Square], and she was just saying, "Well, yeah, there's more work to do. It hasn't turned out the way that we wanted, but millions of us learned our power and our strength. We've overthrown two dictators now (President Hosni Mubarak in 2011 and President Mohamed Morsi in 2013). If we have to overthrow a third, we'll do it."

*R.R.: I saw an HBO Film version of the play "The Normal Heart. It's about Larry Kramer and the AIDS crisis, and how he became this vocal, angry activist who pushed Mayor Ed Koch in New York City and [President] Ronald Reagan to address the AIDS pandemic in the gay male community. I want to talk about being a reluctant activist, about feeling as if you don't have the ability or the power to address some big crisis or issue before you.*

**P.L.:** In "Soul of the Citizen" I talk about the "perfect standard," which is the notion that you have to have everything absolutely, immaculately perfect before you begin and be certain that it's the right time and place and that you'll win: a standard that no one will ever meet. You see it repeated in the book again and again, that everyone has trepidations. Everyone's uncertain: "Will this really work? Should we really try it? Can it make a difference?" Everyone faces those same kinds of things, so to me, it's part of the game. Then you learn as you go, and you get more confident and there may be parts of the task that are always difficult, but at least you are more familiar with that.

*R.R.: Earlier on, you mentioned the push for \$15-an-hour minimum wage. How would you sum that up on the scale of impossible? (Editor's note: At the time of this interview, the Seattle City Council had not voted on the measure. On June 2, the measure passed unanimously.)*

**P.L.:** It's interesting because anything that's won usually seems impossible before it's won. Any victory. Granted, Seattle is a healthier economy than some places. Might be tougher to do it in Detroit or something like that. But the fundamental issue [is] that people who work are getting paid so little: What allows that to be raised, I think, is people raising the issue. Here's an example.

The Occupy [Movement]: It failed in the sense that it didn't sustain its momentum, but nonetheless put a bunch of issues on the agenda — so maybe you call it a partially failed movement — issues that everyone knew were real in their hearts. I

think that was valuable: Somebody willing to dramatize it, people willing to take some risks and then organizing. We don't know where exactly it's going to end, but you sort of see an interesting dynamic where, if you're pushing maybe for something, a compromise occurs. Like, you really want to give some leeway for small businesses and starving nonprofits because they just don't have what McDonald's does or a Gap or a Starbucks. (Seattle companies will phase in the \$15-an-hour wage between three and seven years, depending on the company's size and whether employees receive tips and benefits.) So sometimes the compromises are for good reasons, or sometimes they're what you can achieve politically. I look back at the sprawling mess of the Affordable Care Act, and I would argue that it's a step forward, and had people been pushing more strongly, you would have had a better bill.

*R.R.: You have a section in this book — it's one of my favorite titles — called "Rebellious Imagination."*

**P.L.:** It's everything, from a wonderful Pablo Neruda story [where he writes about lessons he learned as a child exchanging gifts] and [his] sense of connection to other human beings, to [civil rights activist and U.S. Representative from Georgia] John Lewis talking about this tiny house that was going to blow off its moorings in a storm. His aunt had the children, who were all terrified, walk from side to side, where the combined weight of their bodies could hold it down.

There's a theologian named Walter Wink who does this brilliant look at classical stories from the New Testament and how they've been misinterpreted. He talks about the "turn the other cheek" image. People think, "Oh, that just means being meek." But he said this is very sophisticated nonviolent resistance.

*R.R.: Is there anyone who's not in this book who inspires you?*

**P.L.:** I think they've all kind of inspired me, to be honest. I personally got active before I was reading authors of this level because I was still in high school. So I think my original activism preceded these wonderful writers. But I would say Nelson Mandela's autobiography: It is stunning because it is about how to maintain dignity in the harshest situation. You're forbidden newspapers, and you're told you're going to die (in prison). So a guard has a sandwich wrapped in a newspaper and somebody retrieves (the newspaper) from the garbage can and copies it in code on toilet paper. How can you not be inspired by something like that? The interesting thing is, Nelson Mandela uses the phrase "multiplication of courage," where one person's courage inspires another. So to me the stories are transferrable.

That's so important because you can take the situation from somebody working in one particular context and historical period in time, and you can apply it to a wholly different situation. So if we're working on climate change, we can draw on the Arab Spring or the Civil Rights Movement. We're working on homelessness, we can draw on the Keystone folks or [Stranger Editorial Director] Dan Savage, who has this wonderful piece where he's reflecting on this fundamental rise in human dignity, where 30 or 40 years ago, gay people were living in fear — then you end up with a U.S. Supreme Court Justice [Ruth Bader Ginsburg] conducting a gay marriage in Washington, D.C. It's just unthinkable. It's not to say it's wholly universal everywhere in this country, but it's a measure of progress in a way that the people who drove that progress 30 or 40 years ago, I think, would find just astounding.

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## Autumn

by Susan Kristjansen

I love the fall because it  
leads us to winter  
And  
Winter is my favorite season  
The coolness of fall  
Directs me to winter's freezing cold  
When icicles grow  
and fall  
Only to disappear in the snow below  
Then I make an angel  
Then I disappear  
There I feel at peace  
with myself, and, finally,  
with the world  
There I feel no pain  
and there I shall remain  
until the snow melts away  
Then, and only then  
will you finally see me  
and know that you were loved  
So hurry autumn and bring  
winter to me,  
when icicles grow, so I can  
finally disappear and  
hold you one more time