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Theatre, Gifted Teachers, and Lifelong Learning: An Interview with Susan Cox

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Transcript of Interview with Susan A. Cox
Friday, March 10, 2017

Rachel Polzer: Yes. I'm here this morning, March 10th, with Susan Cox. And we will be talking about her educational background and experiences. And just to verify with you, Susie, that this is going to be videoed and recorded for, um, to be put into the UD oral repository. [I] just want to make sure that's okay with you.

Susan Cox: It's very—yes, it's flattering to be in the company of people like Sherry Clodfelter—yeah, um—Cherie.

RP: Yes. Okay, um, so just to get started, when you were growing up where did you go to school? What was your school experience like?

SC: Um. I grew up in the army. So, I, kind of went to school—but my—I grew up in the army, so I started school in D.C. and then my parents moved to Dallas to retire and I went to Junior high and high school in Dallas.

RP: Okay. And did you go to public schools, private schools?

SC: Public schools.

RP: All the way?

SC: All the way.

RP: And what—

SC: I'm a huge supporter of public schools. Yeah. And I think it's a shame that they've fallen to such disarray. I had great teachers—great teachers—who really cared about all of us, and I felt like I mattered to them.

RP: And, in your experience in public school did you, um, did you experience a diversity of students?

SC: No, I'm old. [Laughs] I'm old. Um. No. No. Until I was a senior in high school. That was the first time there was a person of—that was odd. That's an odd thing. It was the first time there was a black student in my school. There had always been, um uh, Hispanic kids. Always. I just never thought about it. I never thought about them as people of color [laughter] or anything. But all through uh, all through junior high and high school I went to school with Hispanic kids.

RP: Mmhm. In the Dallas area, so that's why—

SC: Yeah. But it never ever occurred to me that it was diverse, it just—yeah.
RP: Mmhm. It's just how it was.

SC: And then when we had—so I graduated from high school in 1968. And I went to Woodrow Wilson in in Lakewood. And the, um, and that, and my senior year was the first year, there were two black students. They were very popular. It was kind of like getting a foreign exchange student.

[laughs]

RP: Woah.

SC: Yeah.

RP: And did you enjoy your experience at school? I know you said you had a lot of great teachers that you, that you felt really cared for you.

SC: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I had a great time. All through. I mean of course, junior high is not anybody's idea of a blast [laughs], but, um, but yes. Oh! And, I went to part of my elementary school in, at Lakewood Elementary. And in the fifth grade I had a teacher named Mrs. Robertson who changed everything. Really, truly. Um. It was the first time I thought of myself as a, as a person who understood things. She made me, she made me feel so special, and like I could do whatever I wanted to, and that it wasn't stupid for me—it was not stupid—but she made me feel like if I made less than a certain grade average that I was, I was failing myself. It was the very first time, really, I had never, uh, considered grades. I had never considered, really, even studying. I had always just kind of done what I felt like. [laughs] And done okay, you know. But, uh, Mrs. Robertson was—I learned to love reading, I learned to love investigation, I learned to love—fifth grade, it was huge, huge, and Mrs. Roberston was part of it. Was a huge part of it.

RP: What sort of books did she inspire you to read?

SC: Everything. Everything. That's the truth. If I had a question, she'd say, "Go read about it. Go find a book. Go find a way to find out about it." She was swell, she was terrific. Had a big, fat, hearty laugh, and she was—she was also the first person that said, "You're funny." I mean my family had always said "you're funny," but, yeah, well, she was something. She was really—And then I had a great seventh grade teacher, too. Mrs. West. She was, she was terrific. And I was—I'm very lucky, I really, really have always been lucky. I have had a great group of friends, starting in elementary school, and going all the way through high school, to whom I'm still very close. All of these, these people are still very close, and, um, and that helped, that helped hugely through all school.


SC: Yeah.

RP: That's really cool. Um, what—was there anything about school that didn't particularly excite you, or you didn't really enjoy that much?

SC: Well, you know, like anybody … [laughs] Studying for things I, I wasn't particularly interested in … I was—I was out of college before I got that everything is interesting.

RP: And have you then, like, been able to take that and get yourself through that?
SC: Yeah. Yeah. I'll never forget—I was, I was in my thirties in New York City. I was living in New York City, and one day I just sat up in bed and said, "I am illiterate." From a dead sleep. I, I must have been dreaming or something. And I started reading, um, things I had been forced to read, like—like Dickens, for instance, Jane Austen, for instance. Then I had just kind of, I had gotten through it, but they made me and so I resented it, and so I didn't love it. But, that changed. [Laughs] They made me. Yeah.

RP: Oh, that's awesome. Um, so you mentioned that you went to university. Did you go right after high school?

SC: Yeah.

RP: Or—where did you go to—?

SC: I went to Trinity University in San Antonio.

RP: Okay. And what did you study there?

SC: Drama.

RP: Okay. Did you know that you wanted to go into costuming, eventually?

SC: Oh no. No. I did not. [Laughs] My work study position was in the costume shop because I already could sew. But, um, and I, you know, I enjoyed it, and, and liked that, but it never occurred to me that that's what I would do. In fact, I remember saying to somebody "can you imagine?" [Laughs] No, no, I, no, it never occurred to me.

RP: So what made you decide?

SC: [Sighs] You know, all my life I've really been blessed by teachers. And I met a person of, uh—I, I finished undergraduate school and I went—in undergraduate school I met a woman named Jernine Wagner who was a professor at the university, and she had—was developing a program called Learning About Learning. It was a, um, essentially an alternative curriculum for at risk children. And, um, I had been told by people I admired that she was the best acting coach around. And so, I went and asked her for—if there was a way I could, um, I could work with her, and she said, "Yeah, you can work with me, but you have to work in children's theatre." And so [laughs] and so, and so Jernine was a huge influence on me. She didn't ever—she was never an acting coach to me, but I worked with Learning About Learning for um, uh, several years. I went to Cleveland and, uh, and started a program, with a social service agency in Cleveland. And, um, with Learning About Learning. Working with delinquent kids in, in, in Cleveland. But then I thought I was Sidney Poi—but anyway, where was I going with this? So, Jernine was huge, and when I came back from Cleveland to Dallas, I had a friend of mine who—an undergraduate school friend, uh, um, a painter named Yoichi Aoki—recommended me to my friend, who turned out to be one of my great mentors, Irene Corey, who was a costume designer, and I started working with Irene, and she … that's that's how it happened. [laughs]

RP: This whole journey.
SC: Yeah. Then it was Jernine, my mentor, Irene, a live mentor as well as a professional mentor.

RP: And with—so, Learning About Learning, working with delinquents, at risk kids, what sort of, like, what did you do—?

SC: We did street theatre.

RP: Okay

SC: [Laughs] And we did, we did summer programs in Learning About Learning. We got, we, we recruited children, uh, from all over the city, and, and did kind of day camps with this, uh, in Learning About Learning. This idea of—this idea of learning through your own environment, and in your own life experiences. And not somebody else's. It was kind of a beginning of … For me, at least, I don't know historically if it was a beginning. "Beginning" of anything. But, uh, for me, it was the beginning of my understanding that people are not all entitled, as I had always been, and all my friends had always been. And that their ideas and their way of expression was just as valuable as mine. And that, in fact, I was lucky. And, uh, it had nothing to do with anything I had done. I had just been born into luck. I had parents who cared about me. I had parents who cared about my education. I had loving friends. I had the clothes I wanted. I was never hungry. The kids I was working with—it was a huge lesson to me. It was a huge turning point in my life. These kids. These kids were—I, I worked with a group of kids the oldest of whom was eighteen, the youngest of whom was probably eight, maybe nine. And they all had criminal records. And most of them were addicted. But they weren't addicted to high-falutin drugs. They were huffing gasoline and glue. I didn't even know what that was. [Laughs] But, um, it was a, it was, it was important to me. And it still is. Changed the way I, I view the world. I think we all—those of us who, who look for joy, who look for pleasure in our work, that very thing is entitled. Do you know? Most people on the planet don't expect their work to be satisfying. Most people on the planet, at best, look for their work to provide them with the opportunity to have satisfaction outside of work. We are lucky, lucky creatures. [Laughs]

RP: Yeah. Wow. That's very—that seems like such a valuable experience.

SC: It was. Yeah. But I, I, I was completely ineffective. I'm s—I'm sure of it. I'm sure I touched a couple of people, but … I thought I was going to be Sidney Poitier, you know, in To Sir, With Love. [Laughs] And it's just not, it's just not true. It just wasn't true. I was too shocked. I was too young, I was too—I was never scared, but I was … I was just too shocked.

RP: Yeah. Have you carried that—I guess, the philosophies, of Learning About Learning, with you as now you're in a completely different sort of educational setting?

SC: Probably. Yeah. Yeah. For sure. I don't think that what I say is right. I think that what I say is my viewpoint. And what I hope to do is encourage people to find their viewpoint. And sometimes certain steps will take you closer to discovering your process. But it isn't mine. Yours isn't mine.

RP: Um, why … To sort of segue, I suppose, why did you start teaching at the university? What brought you here?
SC: Oh! [Laughs] I—well. I, um, let's see. Shall I give you a fictional account? [Laughs] Um. Let's see. Well, I had been—I had—I've had a kind of varied career, and I've been lucky lucky lucky lucky lucky. I've had a great life. And I was, at the time that I was … I, was in Los Angeles working for Jim Henson, um, at the Creature Shop in Los Angeles. And we were—I can't remember what project … I was home for Christmas, and I said, oh, a couple of weeks before I got this phone call, I said to somebody, "I'm ready—I think I'm ready to come home." I had just turned 55. My insurance had tripled. [Laughs] Because I was a freelance artist, so I was paying for my own health insurance. And, um, on the day after my fifty-fifth birthday, I got this note from … [Laughs] And I, and I also … Los Angeles is an odd place. There's a lot of agism. And I was beginning to feel more and more invisible, and I was kind of—and I said, you know, I told this friend. So I was driving around in Dallas. Driving my car in Dallas, and I was lost. I was someplace in South Oak Cliff. And I couldn't—I just couldn't get my bearings. And the phone rang. And it was Pat Kelly on the phone. [Laughs] "Can you help me? Do you—" He said, "What are your cross roads?" And I told him he said, "Oh, okay, then behind you is north." And that's all, that's really all I needed. So I pulled over and I talked to him and he just—" He said, "What are your cross roads?" And I told him and he said, "Oh, okay, then behind you is north." And that's all, that's really all I needed. So I pulled over and I talked to him and he just—I'd heard about the Kellys. I hadn't lived in Dallas for, for a while, and he asked if I would be interested, and I said, "No, I don't think so. I don't think I'm interested in teaching. But I'd love to meet you all." So we set up a date to meet. And I came over here, thinking that I was going to go to lunch with them and meet them. And it turned out that it was an interview. I, I guess I was carrying—" I had brought my portfolio. And, um [Laughs] And I—the, the, the truth of it is that I spent a couple of hours with students, um, and, Sherry, Cherie Clodfelter was on the search committee, and she and Rich Olenick, and we were sitting over in the library, in the Education Department, at that little table. She was showing me books. And she looked at me [Laughs] Who else was at that table? Rich Olenick, Rick Olenick, um, Sherry, Cherie, Judy was there, Judy Kelly … I can't remember who else was at the table. And she was telling me, Cherie was telling me about how she had met Dr. Olenick. And then she looked at me and she said, "I never say things like this, but you belong here … I have this feeling you belong here and you shouldn't dismiss us just yet. You belong here. You will be happy and you belong here." And I though, well that is something. [Laughs] And then I went over and spent a couple of hours with students. In the then costume shop in the Haggar. And I fell in love with the students. That's the God's truth. This is a wildly different group of people on this campus than, than many other places. It took me a couple of months to decide, but, then, there you go. So that's, that was, that's a long answer to a very short question. Sorry to have run on so.

RP: No, that's wonderful. That's, that's very cool. So did you not really envision yourself teaching?

SC: Not again. I had taught for—I was tenured at, uh, the University of New Mexico. And had gone out on sabbatical and never went back. [Laughs] Yeah.

RP: And did you—what did you teach there? The same?

SC: Mm-hm.

RP: And is that a large public—

SC: Yes
RP: —university? Okay. Very different, then. [Laughs]

SC: Yeah. And I think like many universities, especially at that time, maybe it's changed, but a lot of schools use theatre not as a learning thing but just to make shows. So I, I had, but I had kids who were illiterate. I had kids that—and I don’t mean—I mean, couldn't read illiterate. Who had gotten through the system. And, uh, I began to think that we really were doing people a disservice. 'Cause when they finished with a degree, there was nothing for them to do. Here, theatre is used as a way to test many many things. To go through many things. And I don't think that people leave here unequipped, for the world. Not because of the theatre department, only, but because of the wildly successful education that happens on this, by very dedicated teachers. And very dedicated students.

RP: Yeah. That's good to hear. [Laughs] Um. So, you—before, I guess, and after you taught at another university, you had experience in the real world of costumes and design and such. How has that real world experience informed your—the way you teach it to students?

SC: Um. I don't know, maybe … I don't … well, because I know … I don't know, how has that informed it? I know lots of different ways of doing the same thing. For one thing. And I know which is … I know what it's like out there. For me, one of the things in most undergraduate schools, not just this one, there are very few students—like me—who are interested in being a technical artist in theatre. A technical artist or a designer. That usually happens later to people. For one reason or another, it's—most people come to a theatre program because they want to be actors. Some people want to be directors, but mostly people want to be actors. And, um, and I'm interested in educating a theatre person. I'm interested in the whole dang deal, in the whole thing. And, and how, for me how design helps tell a story, is a really important part of that. It's so different, it's just with pictures, with images, instead of words. And so, some … that's, I guess that's how it's … you know what else is, is—I've seen a lot of theatre. I've seen a lot of bad theatre. And [Laughs] A lot. And I've seen … I wish I could say I've seen a lot of good theatre, but I've seen good theatre. And it's important to me—that's an important experience to bring in. It's—until you've seen more, you don't know what's good or bad. I wish here, I wish that there was a way that we could take the senior class to a city, and go to, you know, a city that does support theatre. New York or Chicago or Seattle or, um, Los Angeles, to a certain extent. Um. And really take people to see excellence, to see, to see something where everybody is doing their job. Like, not just one actor, not just two actors, not just a designer and a director, but everybody is doing their job. So that you become lifted up. And, and, and entertain—you know, lifted up and and inserted into the story. That's what—that's when theatre is good. That's … So, that's why I keep slogging away at people who aren't really interested in design. [Laughs] Because one day they'll go, "Oh!" [Laughs] "I get it."

RP: Yeah.

SC: Even as a, even if their career, even if they go to law school next.

RP: Have you ever had students come back and, like, purs—who wanted to pursue something else, and then they come back and tell you "Well, I did what you—what you taught me. I went into design." Has anyone … ? No?

SC: Mm-mm. [Laughs]

RP: Not yet. [Laughs]
SC: No. I'm—there are people—that's not, that's not true. Clare Kapusta is, is not designing, she's, but she's um, a wardrobe, she's working in film and television in Los Angeles. Um. I've set some people up with internships here and there. No, uh-uh. I think Clare is probably the only person who's making a living in costume. That I, that I can think of just off hand. Hannah Korman started on that path, and I'm not sure that path is finished. I just think that some things, life, interrupted. So, there, she might, she might be on her road. It's, it's—this is kind of odd, maybe, to you, but it's not important to me. What's important to me is that people look. I'm not teaching in a, in a school that has a graduate program for a reason. [Laughs]

RP: Okay. … So, why. You not teaching in a school that has a graduate program for a reason, in theatre, I'm assuming you mean, why, then, is it valuable for students to come here for their education? In theatre, in anything?

SC: Because of the wide range of education. Because of curiosity. Because of what you can do when you leave here. Because you—people are educated, not just, it's not just, it's not just, um, uh, you're just not trained to do a single thing, you have this huge cornucopia of possibilities when you finish. You may not be rea—you may not be, uh, I don't have a student who's ready to go be a draper, but I have some students who kind of understand how it works and if they want to, they have the tools to continue, right? To go to graduate school. I think undergraduate school should prepare you for the, should, should educate you. And then decide what you want to do and then go do that in a narrow way. I think that's one of the reasons why more and more law school—law schools are very interested in theatre majors. Because they have a broad education. In order to study a— theatre you have to know something about literature, you have to know something about history, you have to know something about—right? And you have to have the tools to investigate other people's lives. [Laughs]

RP: [Laughs] Yeah.

SC: Right?

RP: Uh. So one thing that I learned when I designed props last year was how much of the work that goes into design is rooted in this research, in this knowledge of history and literature and everything. So, how—how has that, the continued exploration that you have to do because of that, because of your job, by virtue of that, how has that influenced you, um, as both a learner of your own, and as an educator?

SC: Well, it just makes everything a blast, doesn't it? 'Cause there's nothing—'cause there's never a, an end of it. It's fun. Do you know? There's always something new. Yesterday, James Mobus, one of my students, not one of my students: he's a staff member of the costume, and—and he's in Design class. He's a math major. And he was talking to me about binary codes and how they work, and the 1 and the 0 factor, and, um … it was so exciting! [Laughs] Do you know? That's—Where else is that gonna happen? Right? But it's, it's a blast, and for me to just encourage people to enjoy research, to enjoy the serendipity of what you might learn, to enjoy the delving into an unknown world. How much more—how much better can it get, right? If somebody really, all of a sudden goes, "Oh, I s—Oh!" Do you know? Have you ever seen or felt it, that epiphany, like d—when you began to learn to read? And you, all of a sudden you realized what was happening? Do you remember that moment?
RP: Not that one. But I remember similar ones.

SC: Like? What?

RP: Oh, gosh. Um. Like, for instance, I'm doing my senior novel this semester, and it's a similar process to junior poet last year, but this time I've realized the joy that I can get from reading criticism. And the reason that we read the criticism. Like, "Oh!"

SC: Oh!

RP: "This is important. And this is interesting!" So.

SC: Yeah.

RP: A smaller revelation.

SC: Yeah. It's—if I can see that once a year, my life is, my life is [Laughs] is good. And it happens to people all the time, I know. But every once in a while you're a witness, and that's a—that's cool. And I'm always, always in the midst. I remember—I remember learning to read. I remember looking at the chart and going, understanding that the symbol made a sound and the sound was part of a word. And it, all of that, happened kind of instantaneously, and I, and it was like I heard the angels, the heavens crack open and the angels sing, "Ooooh!" And I, it was so cool, yeah. [Laughs] That little desk. [Laughs] Yeah, that happens. One time I was with a friend, we were touring a plantation and on the—we were taking the back river road from Baton Rouge down to New Orleans, and, uh, we were in this plantation house [Laughs] and the tour, the docent—she was the docent who was leading the tour, was pointing at some molding on the wall and she said, "Look at that beautiful egg-and-dart molding." And I was looking at it, and [Laughs] suddenly I realized, "Oh! Egg. And dart." 'Cause all my life I'd heard that term, "egg-and-dart," I thought it was one word, like "roundyoonvirgin," you know, Mother and Child?

SC: Uh-huh. [Laughs]

RP: [Laughs]


RP: Yeah.

SC: That's a mini revelation.

RP: Uh-huh. [Laughs]

SC: [Laughs]

RP: Um. So in that witnessing of those revelations, what other qualities do you think are important for not only yourself, but other teachers, professors …?
SC: Curiosity. Curiosity and intere—just being interested. It's an—it's not enough to be interesting.
You have to be interested. Truly interested.

RP: Mm-hm. And, so, do you find yourself, then, using your own interest in your work and your
students' work to then help them in their own growing as learners?

SC: I hope so. I hope so. I think that—I don't know if this is true for—I think some people are
gifted teachers, and I'm not sure that I'm one. I do know that I am good for some people. I'm a
good teacher for some people. And my goal is, kind of, to be at least adequate for all. [Laughs] But.
But I think gifted teachers are probably inspirational for the majority.

RP: That's a—that's a tall order. [Laughs]


RP: Yeah.

SC: It's huge. And—There's, the personalities have a lot to do with it. Who, who you kind of get in
any classroom situation. It's like making friends. If you're in a room of twenty people, right, don't
you pretty quickly find the ones who are gonna speak to you, really. And those become your friends.
But you can't afford that in a classroom. Right? You can't—But it still happens. Even though it's
secret. [Laughs] You know what I mean? It's just the way it works, I think, or at least for me, and
maybe that's why I'm not as good as I wish I were, at that part of it.

RP: Um. So. You mentioned Mrs. Robertson and another teacher, earlier, would you consider those
to be gifted teachers?

SC: Yes, I do. Yeah. Mrs. Robertson: now, this is an interesting story. Mrs. Robertson was best
friends—in the fifth grade, you moved upstairs, like all the—and so, and and in the fifth grade you
w—they—we began to change classrooms.

RP: Okay.

SC: Like, until that, everything had happened in one room. In fifth grade you went across the hall to
math, and you went down the hall to science, right? To prepare you. For big school. [Laughs]

RP: [Laughs] Uh-huh.

SC: And, um. [Laughs] Well, across the hall was Mr. Siddel, and he was the arithmetic t—or, the
math teacher, they called it, but it was arithmetic, anyway. Um. And Mrs. Robertson and Mr. Siddel
were best friends. And they would laugh in the hall, and they would come back, and then they'd
laugh, and I remember—and he later, he later became a good friend of my mother's. Mr. Siddel, and
it, in kind of a different life time. But Mrs., Mrs. Robertson. Okay, so years later, I'm grown up, I'm
living in New York, probably, and I had come back to Dallas to, um, to visit my family, and, uh, I
met a person who is still one of my very closest friends on the planet. He's a, a lawyer, and, um, and
I'm crazy about him. So, probably five years ago we were talking about elementary school, for
whatever reason, and I said "Mrs. Robertson changed my life," and he said, "Mrs. Robertson? Do
you mean at Lakewood Elementary School?" And I said, "Well, yeah." He said, "You know I went
to Lakewood for a couple of years before we"—his family moved to Commerce. "Mrs. Roberston changed my life." And I said, "Really? In what way?" And he said, "Well, she made me feel important. And smart." [Laughs] It wasn't just me! [Laughs] I think she was one of those teachers.

RP: Wow. Have you—

SC: He's seventy, now, and still talking about Mrs. Roberston. [Laughs] In the fifth grade. I'm sixty seven and still talking about Mrs. Roberston in the fifth grade.

RP: Woah. Oh, that's awesome. And, so, like what do you remember, like, elements of her personality, or what—

SC: Yeah

RP: What about her?

SC: She was funny. She was funny. And she made it all fun. She made it all lively. And she didn't—she, she wasn't indulgent in any way. She would just go, "Oh for God's—Oh for goodness sakes, that's not good enough. Do it again." Do you know? And she would really be disappointed if she saw that your effort wasn't there. But she made—at least me, and my friend Mike, feel smart. We, we felt empowered. For the first time. It wasn't that we had been, uh, unim-, you know, we hadn't been downtrodden in any way, we just hadn't, it hadn't occurred to us until Mrs. Robertson. Now, maybe, it could have been Mrs. Ridell in the sixth grade, but I don't think so. [Laughs] Mrs. Ridell was a teacher who didn't think anything was fun.

RP: Oh.

SC: Incl—Including what her—I don't know, she was just very dry. Very very dry. And, uh. That was sixth grade.

RP: So. Do you remember—was there—Obviously there would have been a change between Mrs. Robertson and Mrs. Ridell, do you think having had Mrs. Robertson before Mrs. Ridell benefitted you?

SC: It got me through Mrs. Ridell. [Laughs] With hope.

RP: Yep.

SC: Yeah. And then I Ms. West. Who was the coolest. She was, you know, a young ... girl about town. Her—her, uh, father was the, was the archbishop of the Episcopal diocese, I learned that sometime during the seventh grade. I thought, "Wow, that's so cool!" [Laughs] No, she was great. She was really great. I had great teachers. In my public school education.

RP: That's awesome.

SC: I had terrible teachers in my public school education, too. But not mean. Mr. Brown was a terrible teacher. He was a football coach and he taught algebra. And I still don't get it. And hope to take an algebra class here. At some point.
RP: Oh! That's awesome. Yeah. Um, so—

SC: He was really nice, but he was a terrible teacher. But I got geometry, because Mrs. Evans was a great teacher. [Laughs] I got geometry, like, instantly. But because sh—partly because of who I am, I could look at it, I could see it. It was visual. And I understood it. And she—But she was a guide. Do you know? I've never thought of myself as a, as a person talented at mathematics, until Mrs. Evans.

RP: Yeah.

SC: I had a great chemistry teacher. I had great English teachers. Who we still call on occasionally. And all these pals of mine, from, from, uh, from high school, they are so diverse, and we get together at least once a year and then we visit individually, but the whole group of us gets together once a year. From all over the country [Laughs] There's an art historian; a Ph.D nurse; a—a guy who restores antique sailing vessels; a maritime lawyer; a newspaper guy, who writes for, um, Bryan Garner, he's a lawyer, who writes for Bryan Garner, in, uh in the English language, about the English language. And, uh, he's an interesting guy. And he has a newspaper in East Texas. There's a computer guy, my ex-boyfriend is a computer guy in New York City; um, two librarians. [Laughs]

RP: Wow [Laughs] That is diverse. What, what led you to theatre?

SC: Oh, gosh. I've been doing theatre since … I've been doing, I've been making plays since I was little. And then in the seventh grade I was, we wrote a school play together, all of us, it was called Aunt Unibell Rides Again. And I was Aunt Unibell. [Laughs] And then I went to— my mother, my parents sent me to the theatre center to take classes. And I got to, uh, spend ti— another teacher, with with, uh, Paul Baker. Who, at the time, ran the program at, um, Trinity.

RP: Okay.

SC: There was a—a—the graduate school—there, there was a connection between Trinity University and the Dallas Theater Center, an educational connection. So Mr. Baker was the Artistic Director of the Dallas Theater Center, he's also the founding director of, uh, the Dallas Theater Center, and he also taught at Trinity. Then, there was a graduate program where people were exchanged back and forth. So the graduate students were at the Dallas Theater Center, but then they would travel to teach classes at the uni—and I'm still friends with a lot of those guys. [Laughs] In fact, one of my closest friends from undergraduate school is coming today to visit.

RP: Woah! [Laughs]

SC: [Laughs] Yeah. Anyway, so Mr. Baker was hugely influential. And it was Mr.—Mr. Baker's influence that—and to a large extent—that informed, um, Learning About Learning. And, as it turns out—see how these, all these, are connected. Um, Irene Corey, my, one of my most important mentors, went to undergraduate school at Baylor University, where Mr. Baker was her teacher. [Laughs]

RP: Oh my goodness. [Laughs] Woah. That's awesome. What about Irene Corey makes her such an important mentor to you?
SC: Oh my gosh, well, she ... She ... I'm looking at one of her books right behind your shoulder. *The Face is a Canvas.* She, um ... I don't even know how to describe it. She ... She, she was a costume designer, and pretty famous back then. And she had written a book called *The Mask of Reality* that we all, all just drooled over. It was this terrific thing. And, and like I said, I'd come back from Cleveland. My friend Yoichi sent me over to—he called me over and said, "There's this project going on at Peter Wolf's" which was a scenic house at the time "and a woman named Irene Corey is working there and I think you ought to try to work with her. She's really something." And so I went over and she hired me and we were just simpatico. But, I had worked there for a week, and was—

SC: with Irene at Peter Wolf, which is an old Dallas institution—and I had come back and was talking to friends one night, we were all hanging out. And I said this woman is just crazy, incredible, and I started describing her and some of the things she was doing, and my friend Terry, who's coming tonight, Terry Clotiaux, uh, looked at me and he said, "Irene Corey?" He said, "Susie. The book. The book. The magic book. Have you been acting crazy around Irene Corey?" [Laughs] I was so—I—The next, the next day, the next work day, I said, "Irene, dammit, you didn't even tell me who you were." She said, "Well, I was kind of waiting for you to figure it out." [Laughs] Anyway, so we got to—We, uh, she was, she just became part of my family. She was ... She was, we were together for the rest of her life.

RP: Wow. It sounds like you have had a lot of people who have touched your life so specially.

SC: I'm a lucky duck. I am a lucky duck. I'm lucky by birth, I've been so lucky to meet the people I have, to have teachers that I have. And I do believe, and say it a lot, that when you're ready for a teacher, that they will come. [Laughs] And if you look for a path, you will find it.

RP: Who—Who else has been a teacher in your life? In a nontraditional sense, I guess?

SC: You mean, besides my mother? [Laughs]

RP: Sure. [Laughs]

SC: My mother is, of course, has, was a huge teacher. She was a whack job, man. She was funny and smart and odd. I was lucky. Lucky, lucky. I've had so many lucky—My friend Giva is a teacher to me. I had the great fortune of working with Fred Nihda in New York. I had the great good fortune of working on and off with Jim Henson and that company, even after—after he was—before he died and after. And I've had many teachers at Henson. Um, there's a guy named Steve Smith, who was the director of Clown College for Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus. And he was a huge influence in my life when I worked with Ringling for many years. Jim Glavan, he teaches at the University of Texas at Austin, has been a great teacher. My friend Mark Zeszotek, now gone, has been a teacher. Rauhman Browning was a huge teacher to me. He taught me about prejudice. I've been lucky. [Laughs] I've been lucky. And I'm leaving people out. My sister. My gosh, she teaches me everyday still. [Laughs] And the—You know the—the—the ... The students here are teachers to me. I learn something new every single day. Either about myself, about them, about the world, about history, about life, about ... You p—you, you people. [Laughs] You guys are really something. I have friends who come in here. Like Mary, and my friend Giva, and I have never had a single guest artist walk out of here without saying, "Wow. This is like a different planet." [Laughs] Yeah. I'm lucky. This has been—This is, this is lucky. You see? [Laughs] Yeah. And literally, this is, being here, is lucky. I'm grateful.
RP: I'm glad you're here. [Laughs]


RP: Um.

SC: I'm glad you've been here.

RP: Thank you. Do you have anything else you would like to add, or anything that I forgot to ask?

SC: [Laughs]

RP: [Laughs] That you think is important?

SC: No. No, just have some fun. Go out and have fun. I don't mean to say that all life is fun, but if you can figure a way to make it at least 60 percent fun, I think it's, it's a happier way of life. [Laughs]

RP: [Laughs] Yeah.

SC: Yeah.

RP: Okay. Well, thank you, Susie.

SC: Sure.

RP: Thank you so much.

SC: Thank you. It was really nice.

RP: Yeah. This is great.