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

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Rachel Polzer
History of American Education
Dr. Newstreet
April 5, 2017

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

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

5
6 **Susan Cox:** It's very—yes, it's flattering to be in the company of people like Sherry Clodfelter—
7 yeah, um—Cherie.

8
9 **RP:** Yes. Okay, um, so just to get started, when you were growing up where did you go to school?
10 What was your school experience like?

11
12 **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
13 started school in D.C. and then my parents moved to Dallas to retire and I went to Junior high and
14 high school in Dallas.

15
16 **RP:** Okay. And did you go to public schools, private schools?

17
18 **SC:** Public schools.

19
20 **RP:** All the way?

21
22 **SC:** All the way.

23
24 **RP:** And what—

25
26 **SC:** I'm a huge supporter of public schools. Yeah. And I think it's a shame that they've fallen to such
27 disarray. I had great teachers—great teachers—who really cared about all of us, and I felt like I
28 mattered to them.

29
30 **RP:** And, in your experience in public school did you, um, did you experience a diversity of students

31
32 **SC:** No, I'm old. [Laughs] I'm old. Um. No. No. Until I was a senior in high school. That was the
33 first time there was a person of—that was odd. That's an odd thing. It was the first time there was a
34 black student in my school. There had always been, um uh, Hispanic kids. Always. I just never
35 thought about it. I never thought about them as people of color [laughter] or anything. But all
36 through uh, all through junior high and high school I went to school with Hispanic kids.

37
38 **RP:** Mhm. In the Dallas area, so that's why—

39
40 **SC:** Yeah. But it never ever occurred to me that it was diverse, it just—yeah.

41

42 **RP:** Mmhm. It's just how it was.

43

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

48

49 **RP:** Woah.

50

51 **SC:** Yeah.

52

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

55

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

67

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

69

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

78

79 **RP:** Wow. That's awesome.

80

81 **SC:** Yeah.

82

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

85

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

88

89 **RP:** And have you then, like, been able to take that and get yourself through that?

90
 91 **SC:** Yeah. Yeah. I'll never forget—I was, I was in my thirties in New York City. I was living in New
 92 York City, and one day I just sat up in bed and said, "I am illiterate." From a dead sleep. I, I must
 93 have been dreaming or something. And I started reading, um, things I had been forced to read,
 94 like—like Dickens, for instance, Jane Austen, for instance. Then I had just kind of, I had gotten
 95 through it, but they made me and so I resented it, and so I didn't love it. But, that changed. [Laughs]
 96 They made me. Yeah.

97
 98 **RP:** Oh, that's awesome. Um, so you mentioned that you went to university. Did you go right after
 99 high school?

100
 101 **SC:** Yeah.

102
 103 **RP:** Or—where did you go to—?

104
 105 **SC:** I went to Trinity University in San Antonio.

106
 107 **RP:** Okay. And what did you study there?

108
 109 **SC:** Drama.

110
 111 **RP:** Okay. Did you know that you wanted to go into costuming, eventually?

112
 113 **SC:** Oh no. No. I did not. [Laughs] My work study position was in the costume shop because I
 114 already could sew. But, um, and I, you know, I enjoyed it, and, and liked that, but it never occurred
 115 to me that that's what I would do. In fact, I remember saying to somebody "can you imagine?"
 116 [Laughs] No, no, I, no, it never occurred to me.

117
 118 **RP:** So what made you decide?

119
 120 **SC:** [Sighs] You know, all my life I've really been blessed by teachers. And I met a person of, uh—I,
 121 I finished undergraduate school and I went—in undergraduate school I met a woman named
 122 Jernine Wagner who was a professor at the university, and she had—was developing a program
 123 called Learning About Learning. It was a, um, essentially an alternative curriculum for at risk
 124 children. And, um, I had been told by people I admired that she was the best acting coach around.
 125 And so, I went and asked her for—if there was a way I could, um, I could work with her, and she
 126 said, "Yeah, you can work with me, but you have to work in children's theatre." And so [laughs] and
 127 so, and so Jernine was a huge influence on me. She didn't ever—she was never an acting coach to
 128 me, but I worked with Learning About Learning for um, uh, several years. I went to Cleveland and,
 129 uh, and started a program, with a social service agency in Cleveland. And, um, with Learning About
 130 Learning. Working with delinquent kids in, in, in Cleveland. But then I thought I was Sidney Poi—
 131 but anyway, where was I going with this? So, Jernine was huge, and when I came back from
 132 Cleveland to Dallas, I had a friend of mine who—an undergraduate school friend, uh, um, a painter
 133 named Yoichi Aoki—recommended me to my friend, who turned out to be one of my great
 134 mentors, Irene Corey, who was a costume designer, and I started working with Irene, and she ...
 135 that's that's how it happened. [Laughs]

136
 137 **RP:** This whole journey.

138

139 **SC:** Yeah. Then it was Jernine, my mentor, Irene, a live mentor as well as a professional mentor.

140

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

143

144 **SC:** We did street theatre.

145

146 **RP:** Okay

147

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

168

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

170

171 **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
172 couple of people, but ... I thought I was going to be Sidney Poitier, you know, in *To Sir, With Love*.
173 [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
174 was too—I was never scared, but I was ... I was just too shocked.

175

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

178

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

182

183 **RP:** Um, why ... To sort of segue, I suppose, why did you start teaching at the university? What
184 brought you here?

185

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

220
 221 **RP:** No, that's wonderful. That's, that's very cool. So did you not really envision yourself teaching?
 222

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

225
 226 **RP:** And did you—what did you teach there? The same?
 227

228 **SC:** Mm-hm.

229
 230 **RP:** And is that a large public—

231
 232 **SC:** Yes

233

234 **RP:** —university? Okay. Very different, then. [Laughs]
 235

236 **SC:** Yeah. And I think like many universities, especially at that time, maybe it's changed, but a lot of
 237 schools use theatre not as a learning thing but just to make shows. So I, I had, but I had kids who
 238 were illiterate. I had kids that—and I don't mean—I mean, couldn't read illiterate. Who had gotten
 239 through the system. And, uh, I began to think that we really were doing people a disservice. 'Cause
 240 when they finished with a degree, there was nothing for them to do. Here, theatre is used as a way to
 241 test many many things. To go through many things. And I don't think that people leave here
 242 unequipped, for the world. Not because of the theatre department, only, but because of the wildly
 243 successful education that happens on this, by very dedicated teachers. And very dedicated students.
 244

245 **RP:** Yeah. That's good to hear. [Laughs] Um. So, you—before, I guess, and after you taught at
 246 another university, you had experience in the real world of costumes and design and such. How has
 247 that real world experience informed your—the way you teach it to students?
 248

249 **SC:** Um. I don't know, maybe ... I don't ... well, because I know ... I don't know, how has that
 250 informed it? I know lots of different ways of doing the same thing. For one thing. And I know
 251 which is ... I know what it's like out there. For me, one of the things in most undergraduate schools,
 252 not just this one, there are very few students—like me—who are interested in being a technical
 253 artist in theatre. A technical artist or a designer. That usually happens later to people. For one reason
 254 or another, it's—most people come to a theatre program because they want to be actors. Some
 255 people want to be directors, but mostly people want to be actors. And, um, and I'm interested in
 256 educating a theatre person. I'm interested in the whole dang deal, in the whole thing. And, and how,
 257 for me how design helps tell a story, is a really important part of that. It's so different, it's just with
 258 pictures, with images, instead of words. And so, some ... that's, I guess that's how it's ... you know
 259 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
 260 seen ... I wish I could say I've seen a lot of good theatre, but I've seen good theatre. And it's
 261 important to me—that's an important experience to bring in. It's—until you've seen more, you don't
 262 know what's good or bad. I wish here, I wish that there was a way that we could take the senior class
 263 to a city, and go to, you know, a city that does support theatre. New York or Chicago or Seattle or,
 264 um, Los Angeles, to a certain extent. Um. And really take people to see excellence, to see, to see
 265 something where everybody is doing their job. Like, not just one actor, not just two actors, not just a
 266 designer and a director, but everybody is doing their job. So that you become lifted up. And, and,
 267 and entertai—you know, lifted up and and inserted into the story. That's what—that's when theatre
 268 is good. That's ... So, that's why I keep slogging away at people who aren't really interested in
 269 design. [Laughs] Because one day they'll go, "Oh!" [Laughs] "I get it."
 270

271 **RP:** Yeah.
 272

273 **SC:** Even as a, even if their career, even if they go to law school next.
 274

275 **RP:** Have you ever had students come back and, like, purs—who wanted to pursue something else,
 276 and then they come back and tell you "Well, I did what you—what you taught me. I went into
 277 design." Has anyone ... ? No?
 278

279 **SC:** Mm-mm. [Laughs]
 280

281 **RP:** Not yet. [Laughs]

282

283 **SC:** No. I'm—there are people—that's not, that's not true. Clare Kapusta is, is not designing, she's,
 284 but she's um, a wardrobe, she's working in film and television in Los Angeles. Um. I've set some
 285 people up with internships here and there. No, uh-uh. I think Clare is probably the only person
 286 who's making a living in costume. That I, that I can think of just off hand. Hannah Korman started
 287 on that path, and I'm not sure that path is finished. I just think that some things, life, interrupted.
 288 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
 289 not important to me. What's important to me is that people look. I'm not teaching in a, in a school
 290 that has a graduate program for a reason. [Laughs]

291

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

295

296 **SC:** Because of the wide range of education. Because of curiosity. Because of what you can do when
 297 you leave here. Because you—people are educated, not just, it's not just, it's not just, um, uh, you're
 298 just not trained to do a single thing, you have this huge cornucopia of possibilities when you finish.
 299 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
 300 I have some students who kind of understand how it works and if they want to, they have the tools
 301 to continue, right? To go to graduate school. I think undergraduate school should prepare you for
 302 the, should, should educate you. And then decide what you want to do and then go do that in a
 303 narrow way. I think that's one of the reasons why more and more law school—law schools are very
 304 interested in theatre majors. Because they have a broad education. In order to study a— theatre you
 305 have to know something about literature, you have to know something about history, you have to
 306 know something about—right? And you have to have the tools to investigate other people's lives.
 307 [Laughs]

308

309 **RP:** [Laughs] Yeah.

310

311 **SC:** Right?

312

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

318

319 **SC:** Well, it just makes everything a blast, doesn't it? 'Cause there's nothing—'cause there's never a,
 320 an end of it. It's fun. Do you know? There's always something new. Yesterday, James Mobus, one of
 321 my students, not one of my students: he's a staff member of the costume, and—and he's in Design
 322 class. He's a math major. And he was talking to me about binary codes and how they work, and the
 323 1 and the 0 factor, and, um ... it was so exciting! [Laughs] Do you know? That's—Where else is that
 324 gonna happen? Right? But it's, it's a blast, and for me to just encourage people to enjoy research, to
 325 enjoy the serendipity of what you might learn, to enjoy the delving into an unknown world. How
 326 much more—how how much better can it get, right? If somebody really, all of a sudden goes, "Oh, I
 327 s—Oh!" Do you know? Have you ever seen or felt it, that epiphany, like d—when you began to
 328 learn to read? And you, all of a sudden you realized what was happening? Do you remember that
 329 moment?

330
 331 **RP:** Not that one. But I remember similar ones.
 332
 333 **SC:** Like? What?
 334
 335 **RP:** Oh, gosh. Um. Like, for instance, I'm doing my senior novel this semester, and it's a similar
 336 process to junior poet last year, but this time I've realized the joy that I can get from reading
 337 criticism. And the reason that we read the criticism. Like, "Oh!"
 338
 339 **SC:** Oh!
 340
 341 **RP:** "This is important. And this is interesting!" So.
 342
 343 **SC:** Yeah.
 344
 345 **RP:** A smaller revelation.
 346
 347 **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
 348 people all the time, I know. But every once in a while you're a witness, and that's a—that's cool. And
 349 I'm always, always in the midst. I remember—I remember learning to read. I remember looking at
 350 the chart and going, understanding that the symbol made a sound and the sound was part of a word.
 351 And it, all of that, happened kind of instantaneously, and I, and it was like I heard the angels, the
 352 heavens crack open and the angels sing, "Ooooh!" And I, it was so cool, yeah. [Laughs] That little
 353 desk. [Laughs] Yeah, that happens. One time I was with a friend, we were touring a plantation and
 354 on the—we were taking the back river road from Baton Rouge down to New Orleans, and, uh, we
 355 were in this plantation house [Laughs] and the to—the docent, tour g—the docent who was leading
 356 the tour, was pointing at some molding on the wall and she said, "Look at that beautiful egg-and-
 357 dart molding." And I was looking at it, and [Laughs] suddenly I realized, "Oh! *Egg*. And *dart*." 'Cause
 358 all my life I'd heard that term, "egg-and-dart," I thought it was one word, like "roundyonvirgin," you
 359 know, Mother and Child?
 360
 361 **SC:** Uh-huh. [Laughs]
 362
 363 **RP:** [Laughs]
 364
 365 **SC:** Egg-and-dart. *Egg* and *dart*. Oh. [Laughs] Like that.
 366
 367 **RP:** Yeah.
 368
 369 **SC:** That's a mini revelation.
 370
 371 **RP:** Uh-huh. [Laughs]
 372
 373 **SC:** [Laughs]
 374
 375 **RP:** Um. So in that witnessing of those revelations, what other qualities do you think are important
 376 for not only yourself, but other teachers, professors ...?
 377

378 **SC:** Curiosity. Curiosity and intere—just being interested. It's an—it's not enough to be interesting.
 379 You have to be interested. Truly interested.

380

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

383

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

388

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

390

391 **SC:** [Laughs] Huge.

392

393 **RP:** Yeah.

394

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

401

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

404

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

408

409 **RP:** Okay.

410

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

413

414 **RP:** [Laughs] Uh-huh.

415

416 **SC:** And, um. [Laughs] Well, across the hall was Mr. Siddel, and he was the arithmetic t—or, the
 417 math teacher, they called it, but it was arithmetic, anyway. Um. And Mrs. Robertson and Mr. Siddel
 418 were best friends. And they would laugh in the hall, and they would come back, and then they'd
 419 laugh, and I remember—and he later, he later became a good friend of my mother's. Mr. Siddel, and
 420 it, in kind of a different life time. But Mrs., Mrs. Roberston. Okay, so years later, I'm grown up, I'm
 421 living in New York, probably, and I had come back to Dallas to, um, to visit my family, and, uh, I
 422 met a person who is still one of my very closest friends on the planet. He's a, a lawyer, and, um, and
 423 I'm crazy about him. So, probably five years ago we were talking about elementary school, for
 424 whatever reason, and I said "Mrs. Roberston changed my life," and he said, "Mrs. Robertson? Do
 425 you mean at Lakewood Elementary School?" And I said, "Well, yeah." He said, "You know I went

426 to Lakewood for a couple of years before we"—his family moved to Commerce. "Mrs. Roberston
 427 changed *my* life." And I said, "Really? In what way?" And he said, "Well, she made me feel
 428 important. And smart." [Laughs] It wasn't just me! [Laughs] I think she was one of those teachers.

429
 430 **RP:** Wow. Have you—

431
 432 **SC:** He's seventy, now, and still talking about Mrs. Roberston. [Laughs] In the fifth grade. I'm sixty
 433 seven and still talking about Mrs. Roberston in the fifth grade.

434
 435 **RP:** Woah. Oh, that's awesome. And, so, like what do you remember, like, elements of her
 436 personality, or what—

437
 438 **SC:** Yeah

439
 440 **RP:** What about her?

441
 442 **SC:** She was *funny*. She was *funny*. And she made it all fun. She made it all lively. And she didn't—
 443 she, she wasn't indulgent in any way. She would just go, "Oh for God's—Oh for goodness sakes,
 444 that's not good enough. Do it again." Do you know? And she would really be disappointed if she
 445 saw that your effort wasn't there. But she made—at least me, and my friend Mike, feel *smart*. We, we
 446 felt empowered. For the fir—for the first time. It wasn't that we had been, uh, unim-, you know, we
 447 hadn't been downtrodden in any way, we just hadn't, it hadn't occurred to us until Mrs. Robertson.
 448 Now, maybe, it could have been Mrs. Ridell in the sixth grade, but I don't think so. [Laughs] Mrs.
 449 Ridell was a teacher who didn't think anything was fun.

450
 451 **RP:** Oh.

452
 453 **SC:** Incl—Including what her—I don't know, she was just very dry. Very very dry. And, uh. That
 454 was sixth grade.

455
 456 **RP:** So. Do you remember—was there—Obviously there would have been a change between Mrs.
 457 Robertson and Mrs. Ridell, do you think having had Mrs. Robertson before Mrs. Ridell benefitted
 458 you?

459
 460 **SC:** It got me through Mrs. Ridell. [Laughs] With hope.

461
 462 **RP:** Yep.

463
 464 **SC:** Yeah. And then I Ms. West. Who was the *coolest*. She was, you know, a young ... girl about
 465 town. Her—her, uh, father was the, was the archbishop of the Episcopal diocese, I learned that
 466 sometime during the seventh grade. I thought, "Wow, that's so cool!" [Laughs] No, she was great.
 467 She was really great. I had great teachers. In my public school education.

468
 469 **RP:** That's awesome.

470
 471 **SC:** I had terrible teachers in my public school education, too. But not mean. Mr. Brown was a
 472 *terrible* teacher. He was a football coach and he taught algebra. And I *still* don't get it. And hope to
 473 take an algebra class here. At some point.

474
475 **RP:** Oh! That's awesome. Yeah. Um, so—

476
477 **SC:** He was *really* nice, but he was a terrible teacher. But I got geometry, because Mrs. Evans was a
478 *great* teacher. [Laughs] I got geometry, like, instantly. But because sh—partly because of who I am, I
479 could look at it, I could see it. It was visual. And I understood it. And she—But she was a guide. Do
480 you know? I've never thought of myself as a, as a person talented at mathematics, until Mrs. Evans.

481
482 **RP:** Yeah.

483
484 **SC:** I had a great chemistry teacher. I had great English teachers. Who we still call on occasionally.
485 And all these pals of mine, from, from, uh, from high school, they are so diverse, and we get
486 together at least once a year and then we visit individually, but the whole group of us gets together
487 once a year. From all over the country [Laughs] There's an art historian; a Ph.D nurse; a—a guy who
488 restores antique sailing vessels; a maritime lawyer; a newspaper guy, who writes for, um, Bryan
489 Garner, he's a lawyer, who writes for Bryan Garner, in, uh in the English language, about the
490 English language. And, uh, he's an interesting guy. And he has a newspaper in East Texas. There's a
491 computer guy, my ex-boyfriend is a computer guy in New York City; um, two librarians. [Laughs]

492
493 **RP:** Wow [Laughs] That is diverse. What, what led you to theatre?

494
495 **SC:** Oh, gosh. I've been doing theatre since ... I've been doing, I've been making plays since I was
496 little. And then in the seventh grade I was, we wrote a school play together, all of us, it was called
497 *Aunt Unibell Rides Again*. And I was Aunt Unibell. [Laughs] And then I went to— my mother, my
498 parents sent me to the theatre center to take classes. And I got to, uh, spend ti— another teacher,
499 with with, uh, Paul Baker. Who, at the time, ran the program at, um, Trinity.

500
501 **RP:** Okay.

502
503 **SC:** There was a—a—the graduate school—there, there was a connection between Trinity
504 University and the Dallas Theater Center, an educational connection. So Mr. Baker was the Artistic
505 Director of the Dallas Theater Center, he's also the founding director of, uh, the Dallas Theater
506 Center, and he also taught at Trinity. Then, there was a graduate program where people were
507 exchanged back and forth. So the graduate students were at the Dallas Theater Center, but then they
508 would travel to teach classes at the uni—and I'm still friends with a lot of those guys. [Laughs] In
509 fact, one of my closest friends from undergraduate school is coming today to visit.

510
511 **RP:** Woah! [Laughs]

512
513 **SC:** [Laughs] Yeah. Anyway, so Mr. Baker was hugely influential. And it was Mr.—Mr. Baker's
514 influence that—and to a large extent—that informed, um, Learning About Learning. And, as it turns
515 out—see how these, all these, are connected. Um, Irene Corey, my, one of my most important
516 mentors, went to undergraduate school at Baylor University, where Mr. Baker was *her* teacher.

517 [Laughs]

518
519 **RP:** Oh my goodness. [Laughs] Woah. That's awesome. What about Irene Corey makes her such an
520 important mentor to you?

521

522 **SC:** Oh my gosh, well, she ... She ... I'm looking at one of her books right behind your shoulder.
 523 *The Face is a Canvas*. She, um ... I don't even know how to describe it. She ... She, she was a costume
 524 designer, and pretty famous back then. And she had written a book called *The Mask of Reality* that we
 525 all, all just drooled over. It was this terrific thing. And, and like I said, I'd come back from
 526 Cleveland. My friend Yoichisent me over to—he called me over and said, "There's this project going
 527 on at Peter Wolf's" which was a scenic house at the time "and a woman named Irene Corey is
 528 working there and I think you ought to try to work with her. She's really something." And so I went
 529 over and she hired me and we were just simpatico. But, I had worked there for a week, and was—
 530 with Irene at Peter Wolf, which is an old Dallas institution—and I had come back and was talking to
 531 friends one night, we were all hanging out. And I said this woman is just crazy, incredible, and I
 532 started describing her and some of the things she was doing, and my friend Terry, who's coming
 533 tonight, Terry Clotiaux, uh, looked at me and he said, "Irene Corey?" He said, "Susie. The book. The
 534 book. The magic book. Have you been acting crazy around Irene Corey?" [Laughs] I was so—I—
 535 The next, the next day, the next work day, I said, "Irene, dammit, you didn't even tell me who you
 536 were." She said, "Well, I was kind of waiting for you to figure it out." [Laughs] Anyway, so we got
 537 to—We, uh, she was, she just became part of my family. She was ... She was, we were together for
 538 the rest of her life.

539
 540 **RP:** Wow. It sounds like you have had a lot of people who have touched your life so specially.

541
 542 **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
 543 have, to have teachers that I have. And I do believe, and say it a lot, that when you're ready for a
 544 teacher, that they will come. [Laughs] And if you look for a path, you will find it.

545
 546 **RP:** Who—Who else has been a teacher in your life? In a—in a nontraditional sense, I guess?

547
 548 **SC:** You mean, besides my mother? [Laughs]

549
 550 **RP:** Sure. [Laughs]

551
 552 **SC:** My mother is, of course, has, was a huge teacher. She was a whack job, man. She was funny and
 553 smart and odd. I was lucky. Lucky, lucky. I've had so many lucky—My friend Giva is a teacher to
 554 me. I had the great fortune of working with Fred Nihda in New York. I had the *great* good fortune
 555 of working on and off with Jim Henson and that company, even after—after he was—before he
 556 died and after. And I've had many teachers at Henson. Um, there's a guy named Steve Smith, who
 557 was the director of Clown College for Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus. And he was a
 558 huge influence in my life when I worked with Ringling for many years. Jim Glavan, he teaches at the
 559 University of Texas at Austin, has been a great teacher. My friend Mark Zeszotek, now gone, has
 560 been a teacher. Rauhman Browning was a huge teacher to me. He taught me about prejudice. I've
 561 been lucky. [Laughs] I've been lucky. And I'm leaving people out. My sister. My gosh, she teaches
 562 me everyday still. [Laughs] And the—You know the—the—the ... The students here are teachers to
 563 me. I learn something new every single day. Either about myself, about them, about the world, about
 564 history, about life, about ... You p—You, you people. [Laughs] You guys are really something. I
 565 have friends who come in here. Like Mary, and my friend Giva, and I have never had a single guest
 566 artist walk out of here without saying, "Wow. This is like a different planet." [Laughs] Yeah. I'm
 567 lucky. This has been—This is, this is lucky. You see? [Laughs] Yeah. And literally, this is, being here,
 568 is lucky. I'm grateful.

569

570 **RP:** I'm glad you're here. [Laughs]

571

572 **SC:** [Laughs] Me too.

573

574 **RP:** Um.

575

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

577

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

579

580 **SC:** [Laughs]

581

582 **RP:** [Laughs] That you think is important?

583

584 **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
585 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]

586

587 **RP:** [Laughs] Yeah.

588

589 **SC:** Yeah.

590

591 **RP:** Okay. Well, thank you, Susie.

592

593 **SC:** Sure.

594

595 **RP:** Thank you so much.

596

597 **SC:** Thank you. It was really nice.

598

599 **RP:** Yeah. This is great.