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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.

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185

**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?

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 Haggar. 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.