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Interview with Jenny Cavanaugh

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Jennifer J. Cavanaugh, Dean of the Faculty and Winifred M. Warden Endowed Chair of Theatre & Dance (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

Oral History Interview with Jennifer Cavanaugh and Wenxian Zhang

Wednesday, February 16, 2022

WZ: Good morning!

JC: Good morning.

WZ: My name is Wenxian Zhang. I'm the head of Archives and Special Collections. With me is Dr. Jennifer Cavanaugh, dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Rollins for the last seventeen years. So Jenny, tell me about your family background. Where did you grow up?

JC: Sure! I was born in New York City, and I actually grew up on a school campus. My father was the headmaster of a private high school in New York City called Riverdale Country Day School. The headmaster's house was on the property of the school, so I like to joke that I grew up in a school, and I actually never left. But it was a wonderful opportunity, really, to just have the school as my playground.

I have a very vivid memory. They used to have a study hall—they no longer have this, obviously—a study hall where all the desks were bolted to the floor in rows, and there was a

podium up at the front. I remember going in there in the afternoons, when there was nobody there, and playing and pretending I was the teacher. I guess I sort of set the track for myself then.

But I had a great experience living in New York City; a rich cultural experience. My parents were always taking us to the theater, taking us to concerts and the ballet, so that's also fueled a lifetime interest in the arts.

WZ: So did you attend the school your father operated?

JC: I did, until his retirement. It had two campuses; it had an elementary school campus and a high school campus. I attended the elementary school, and then when I was in sixth grade, my father retired.

My parents were older. My mother was forty-five when I was born; my father was fifty. So the second half of my education was quite different. My family retired up to the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York. It's a very small town; no stoplights. One school, K-12, had about four hundred people in it, and that's where I did my high school, seventh grade through twelfth grade. So I had both this intensely urban experience and this intensely rural experience. I actually think that was a great benefit to me, to have both of those.

WZ: Sure, sounds great. So you mentioned you got your first taste of theater while living in New York City. But then, when you go to your undergraduate study in Dartmouth, I see you majored in policy studies.

JC: Right, exactly. So like, what happened (laughs)? Why didn't I major in theater? So let's step back for one second and then go to Dartmouth. When we did move from New York to this very rural town, the transition wasn't really easy for me. The person who really made a huge difference in my life was the English teacher in that school, who also was the drama teacher. She just kind of became my mentor. All of us probably have—at least, all of us in education have a teacher we can point to that we said, That person made a huge difference. That was the case for me with Judith Moore, who was this amazing woman. So theater became really important to me in high school; it's sort of where I found my feet and where I found my confidence.

But when I went to Dartmouth—I was the last of five children in my family. Two had become actors, one was a teacher, and one was in school development. This is not to make fun of my brothers and sisters at all, but I was the smartest. I mean, I was intellectually gifted in a way that they were not necessarily (laughs). My parents just expected, Okay, you're going to be the child who's going to go and make money. They were teachers; they had led life on a teacher's salary. They were sort of hoping that I would become a lawyer or something.

So I didn't major in theater, and I ended up majoring in something that I don't even know if they still have it anymore. It's called policy studies. The reason I majored in policy studies is that I wanted to major in education, but you couldn't major in education at Dartmouth at the time. But you could major in policy studies with a focus in education. So I did that, and it was sort of an interdisciplinary major: you took some economics, some computer science, some history, some philosophy, and then you focused in your own area. The area I focused in was education.

And my parents were just sort of despairing. They were like, We've sent you to this Ivy League school, you are really bright, why are you focusing on education? We want more for you. I remember really clearly at one point sitting down with them and saying, "Listen, I look at your lives, Parents. You dedicated your life to education, and it's a good life. I've seen the impact that you've had. I've seen the work that you do, and that's what I want to do. I want to teach."

I didn't want to be a performer like my brother and sister were. A professional life in the theater wasn't really of interest to me, but theater was fascinating to me. So I ended up when I graduated—I think my parents finally kind of accepted it, that I wasn't going to be a banker or wasn't going to be a lawyer. All through my college summers, I did paralegal work, and I just hated it. I just didn't want to do it. So finally, they said, Okay, you're going to do what you want to do.

When I graduated, my first job was substitute teaching. I actually was hired at my father's old school on a one-year contract for someone who was on maternity leave. I ended up teaching fifth-grade math and science, which is hysterical to me, but that's what I taught. The following year, a position opened in the drama department, and they hired me to do that. So I taught there for a couple years. And then I moved to Brooklyn, to another school called Poly Prep—Polytechnic Preparatory School in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. I taught speech and theater there for five or six years.

While I was there that's when I decided, you know, I'm teaching speech and theater, but I never really got to study it, so I really want to study it. So while I was teaching, I did my MFA at Brooklyn College in dramaturgy, which basically meant reading hundreds and hundreds of plays and just really immersing myself in dramatic literature and theater history. But I never thought ahead, thinking that I want to get a PhD or I want to be a college professor. I just was enjoying teaching. That's what I did until I decided at a certain point, I think I really like this; I think I have a talent for writing, and I'd like to learn more. That's when I started applying to PhD programs.

WZ: I noticed that you earned your MFA in 1992 and your PhD in 1995. That's quite remarkable. In three years, you earned your PhD in theater history.

JC: Yeah (laughs)! I was fortunate in the University of Washington, which is where I did my PhD. You have to picture this: I had lived my whole life in New York, either the city or the state, and I was thirty, thirty-one when I started my PhD. I'd had a nice long stretch teaching. But I literally packed a suitcase and my cat, in a cat carrier, and flew to Seattle. I think I'd mailed, like, two or three boxes. I had nothing. I just sort of got as far away from where I had been as I could be in the United States, except for Hawaii, I guess, or Alaska. I just kind of started fresh and had a little one-room studio apartment, my cat, and my computer, which I had mailed out. Those were the ones—remember when the Mac computers were really little, and had that little (gestures to indicate a small screen)? Yeah, that's where I started.

I had no distractions, so I just put my head down, and I barreled through. I had great professors and was really fortunate to land in an excellent PhD program that really prepared me very, very well. Again, I wasn't married, I didn't have children. I could just focus completely on the PhD.

WZ: I see your dissertation title is “Staging the Offensive Female.” That's a fascinating topic. Tell me a little bit more about that.

JC: Sure. One of my favorite professors in my PhD program taught a course in nineteenth-century theater. What he wanted us to do was to pick a nineteenth-century profession and really research it, and then find out how was that profession reflected in the plays of the time. So my student colleagues were looking at things like watchmaker or factory person or banker. For some reason, I thought it would be fun to look at criminals; to think of “criminal” as a profession.

This started really what has been a long thread in my research life, which is looking at how do we look at crime, criminals, and true crime when it's turned into entertainment, and why do we do that? Why do we like it so much? Why are these perpetually the stories we turn to, and what kind of purpose do they serve? So it started out of that initial research into criminals and how they're portrayed on stage. And then of course I had a wonderful professor, Sarah Bryant-Bertail, who taught feminism. It may seem strange in today's day and age, but at age thirty-one, I suddenly discovered this thing called feminism and was fascinated by it. So, I thought, Okay, I want to look particularly at gender and women. So the play on the idea of female offender or offensive females, that was sort of how the title of the dissertation came about.

I looked at a number of true cases where women had killed somebody, starting in the sixteenth century and then up to the present, where those stories had been turned into a major film or play, something like that. I just really looked at how was the story told, towards what end, and discovered that many times these stories were used as cautionary tales for women at periods where women were gaining more rights in the culture. Suddenly, we would see this play about this unnatural woman who didn't put her husband and children first, and therefore these were kind of morality tales or cautionary tales.

So that's sort of how that dissertation came about. Eventually I transformed it into the book, which was renamed *Medea's Daughters*, because I always thought it was interesting— (Wenxian holds up a copy of the book). Yeah, there it is! Good for you.

I love that title, just because it's Medea's sons who are killed. The other thing about Medea which is so fascinating is—you think about Greek tragedy, and there are so many fathers and male characters who killed their children or their wife or somebody in horrible ways. And yet, we don't remember them. You will never see a headline saying “modern-day Agamemnon,” but you will see “modern-day Medea.” So why do these female characters have such cultural resonance? That is how that story came about.

In my teaching career, I've returned to—not that particular thread, but I've opened it up more broadly. I've taught courses on crimes of the century or Jack the Ripper, or different things where there are these stories that were “ripped” (gestures to indicate quotation marks) from the

headlines, so to speak. It's an interest of mine, one that I've kind of continued to pursue. I don't know why, I'm a very law-abiding person (both laugh).

I have to say, I remember my work-study position at the University of Washington, when I was a graduate student. I was the academic advisor for the undergraduates. I had a little office in the basement and a bookshelf, and I had all my research books. They were things like *Women Who Kill; Up Against the Wall, Mother; Deviant Women*. I always wondered what students thought when they came and sat down at my desk and looked over my shoulder at those books (laughs).

WZ: That's truly fascinating. Thank you, Jenny.

So, after you earned your PhD, you began teaching, first at the University of Denver, then Louisiana. Tell me more about those years.

JC: Yeah! My first job was at the University of Denver, and I was very, very fortunate to get hired right out of my PhD program. It was a great department. I loved working there. In many ways like Rollins, a smaller liberal arts college. But it was on a quarter system, and if I'm remembering correctly, we taught, like, four courses a quarter. It was a brutal schedule, but that was where I first started my college teaching career.

I've always also directed. While I was teaching high school, I was directing employees in high school. Once I started teaching, my summers were spent in summer stock theater, directing. So I had been building up my directing credentials. At Denver, I directed plays there, and then I was usually hired to teach theater history and dramatic literature, so I did that. I was there for, like, four years.

I've always been incredibly fortunate in my professional life. I've never decided, Oh, I don't like it here; I'm going to look for another job. I've always gotten a phone call, or someone has approached me and said, Would you want to apply for this job? And that's what happened at University of Denver. I had been there about four years, and the chair of the theater department at LSU, Bill Harbin, a wonderful man, called me. He and I had worked together; I had submitted a chapter in a book that he was editing. He called and said, "Listen, we have a position here. Would you be interested in applying?" And I said, "Okay, sure, I'll go."

I ended up really enjoying it and the people there. It was a very different job. At Denver, I taught all undergraduates. At LSU, I did teach some undergraduates; I taught the theater history sequence to the majors. But mostly I was teaching graduate students. And LSU was a rich and wonderful culture for someone who had been mostly in the North, Northeast, or the Northwest. I was suddenly experiencing southern living, and I really enjoyed it. I love the culture, I love the music, I love the food. And I really did enjoy teaching graduate students. It was a lot of fun to do that work and directing dissertations.

That's actually, strangely enough, how I came to Rollins. One of my students was David Charles, who is a theatre professor at Rollins. He called me one day while I was at LSU and said, "Hey, we're looking for an endowed chair in theatre. Would you be interested in putting in your name?" So one thing led to another.

WZ: That's wonderful! But before we get to Rollins, I want to ask about your encounter with Greg.

JC: Oh, yeah (laughs)! So Greg and I met at Louisiana State. He was in the communications department as a graduate student—he was a PhD student. But he had a real interest in theater, so he was friends with a number of the students who were in the PhD program in theater. I would get my class roster at the beginning of the term, and I'd see this name, Greg Cavanaugh, on it, but then he wouldn't be there. In Greek and Roman Theater, his name was on there, but he wasn't there. I'd say, "Who's this Greg Cavanaugh, who keeps signing up for my classes and then not coming to them?" But finally, at one point, he did sign up for one of my classes, and that was Medieval Theater. He was a student of mine. I know that that's kind of crazy, but we certainly didn't start dating till long after that. But that's really how we met.

This is maybe a little personal, but I remember by then, I was in my mid- to late thirties. I had never been married. I remember at one Christmas talking to my cousin, and she was like, Is there anybody in your life? You know, I'd been dating, but I said, "I've never really met anybody." And then I said, "But there's this one guy at Louisiana State that I've met. And I can't really explain it, but his brain is so fascinating. His writing is just—I love reading it. And I know that's not what you're asking, but he's somebody who I think about." So we kind of connected intellectually, before anything else.

After he had finished his degree and was teaching there as an adjunct, we started dating. We actually—it's interesting. You remember, 9/11 happened, and we'd been dating probably for maybe six months at that point. And we were both so shaken by it. We just said, What are we waiting for? Let's move in together, and let's just do this. He moved in that day, and we were married a couple months later.

WZ: That's very touching. Greg's definitely a lucky guy.

JC: (Laughs) I'm a lucky girl.

WZ: Yeah, I've really enjoyed working with Greg through the faculty Common Vision initiative. He's so dedicated to the cause.

JC: He really is. He's really a great, great man. His love is unconditional. His spirit is just very uplifting for me, and he loves teaching. He loves being a teacher, and I think we share that.



Prof. Greg Cavanaugh, 2014 (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

WZ: Yep, that's definitely very clear. So now, you arrive at Rollins as the Winifred Warden Endowed Chair of Theatre.

JC: Yes, I was very lucky.

WZ: Yeah. And, I see you were also teaching Theatre History, Script Analysis, and Dramatic Literature.

JC: Yeah, those were the main—Thomas Ouellette was chair when I was hired. He said, “You're going to teach about the life of the mind,” because a lot of the Theatre Department is very focused on studio and practical courses: acting, directing, design. He said, “Our students need to learn the literature and the history and all of those things as well.” I sort of pushed back on him a little bit. I said, “I'm not really a fan of separating those things. I think the mind is deeply engaged in creative work, and I think scholarly work needs creativity in it as well, particularly theater scholarly work.”

But I was very fortunate in that I got to teach theatre majors, mostly, and to teach them many times. The typical theatre major would have four classes with me. So it was a great opportunity to really have an impact, get to know them, and to sort of see their intellectual growth. I would usually have them as freshmen or sophomores in the Dramatic Literature class, as sophomores or juniors in the Theatre History classes, and as seniors in the Script Analysis class. It was great! I really, really enjoyed that. But it was a lot of grading, a lot of papers (laughs).



Prof. Jennifer Cavanaugh, 2006 (Photo: Rollins College Archives)

WZ: So what are some of your most favorite courses in your teaching career?

JC: Oh gosh! I always loved teaching Theatre History, and I've taught it for years. From the beginning of my teaching, that's been kind of my bread and butter. And I would change it a lot. Sometimes I would teach it going from the beginning to the end; sometimes I would teach it going backwards. Sometimes I would teach it by identifying twelve different years and saying, "We're going to look at, like, 1550, and we're going to look at it in China, and then we're going to look at it in Europe, and then we're going to look at it in—" you know, in different places. I kept trying to shake it up and change up how to do it. I think anyone who teaches a survey course goes through that question. You're never going to teach them everything, so how do you organize it in a way that—basically, in the end, I decided what I'm trying to do is teach them how to be historians. Like, what does a historian think? How do they approach work?

My favorite assignment that I used to do would be in my Theatre History classes. We called it the "Opening Night Project." What they had to do was to identify a pivotal production—it could be, say, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, or it could be *Waiting for Godot*, or it could be the musical *Hair*—some production that was enough to be noticed and noted by theater historians. Then they had to do the research to create all the information they could about what was the opening night performance of that like. Who was there? Who was involved? What, if anything, do you know about the designs? What was the weather like? Who was allowed to perform? They would have to kind of do this deep research, and sometimes what they would find is that they couldn't find the answer. So then you had to say, "Well, what does a historian do when they can't find the answer; when they don't know who was in the cast of that original *Hamlet*?" Well, what can you do? You can go and you can find—here's a list of some of the players that were in *The King's Men*; this is who I think might have played these roles. So you have to use both your scholarly imagination in concert with your archival research and your ability to find what you can. Part of

what I was trying to teach them is, you won't always be able to find everything you want to know. And then what do you do with that? So certainly, Theatre History is at the top.

My all-time favorite class that I taught here was a feminist theater class. It just was one of those kinds of magical moments where you just have the right combination of students and the right material. These students formed a Facebook group at the time we did that; I think it was my first year in the dean's office. They are still in touch. I mean, this is years and years later, but we still sort of communicate about ideas and things that happened in that class. So those have been fun.

A couple of times I've taught a class with [physics Professor] Chris Fuse on theater and physics, and I've really enjoyed that. We looked at different plays about physics and physicists, and that was a lot of fun. I love that interdisciplinary teaching.

WZ: That's what Rollins is about. Very innovative.

JC: Absolutely! It's just so great for the students, but also great for us. For me to sit and spend a whole semester with a physicist teaching physics and piquing my own interest about that, and then him having the opportunity to enter my world a little bit. It's great. I love that about Rollins. Literally, it was one of those things where I think we were both at the salad bar in the things [Skillman Dining Hall?], and Wouldn't it be interesting if we taught a class like this? And a year later, we're able to do it.

WZ: Wonderful. I also noticed that you served as the artistic director of the Annie Russell Theatre. Is there any play you directed or were involved in that left you some impression that you remember clearly?

JC: Oh, so many. I mean, obviously when you work with students in production, it's a whole other kind of teaching and intensity. It's a great experience. But, let's see. How do I pick? I don't know. I would say there were a couple of productions that were really highlights for me.

Probably at the top would have to be a production that I did with Jamey Ray in the Music Department called *Hello, Dolly!*. It was jointly produced by the Theatre Department and the Music Department, and we had such talent from both departments. I just love working with Jamey Ray. He's a graduate of Rollins, but he's also now a faculty member and just a phenomenally talented man. So that production was an awful lot of fun to work on.



The Annie Russell Theatre's production of *Hello, Dolly!*, 2016 (Photo: Rollins College Archives)

There was one production that was very close to my heart, that I loved. I don't think it was very popular with audiences; *Hello, Dolly!* was very popular. But I did a play here called *Playhouse Creatures*. It's by a playwright named April DeAngelis, and it was a play about the first actresses in the Restoration. It's a beautiful play, and it has wonderful roles for women, and I think we did a really beautiful production of it. I think it was a little bit too esoteric, maybe, or too much history for some people. But as a historian, it was one of my favorite productions to do.

WZ: That's great. So, besides being busy teaching and directing, you also were actively pursuing research scholarship. I remember clearly seeing your faculty-student collaborative research; maybe the one on the Annie Russell and Faith Baldwin correspondence.

JC: Yes. The Archives here played a huge part in that research, and that goes back to what I was saying about the opening night project: what do you do when you don't have all the information?

I'm going to dial this back just a little bit. When I first came here, to Rollins, I came into this department and there was a theater named the Annie Russell Theatre. I'm like, Hmm, I'm pretty much a specialist in feminist theater history, and I'm pretty well versed in the nineteenth-century theater. Why don't I know who Annie Russell is? So one of the first things I wanted to do was to really dig into that and to find out who she was.



The Annie Russell Theatre (Photo: Rollins College Archives)



Annie Russell, stage actress and the first director of the Annie Russell Theatre
(Photo: Rollins College Archives)

I was very fortunate to work with a student named Joseph Bromfield. I had gone to the New York Public Library, to the archives there of Annie Russell's correspondence, just to get a sense of who she was. There were these amazing letters from George Bernard Shaw and lots of luminaries of the theater. She had three boxes of correspondence, and almost an entire box was with this woman named Faith Baldwin. And I'm like, Who is that?

We were able to get copies of those letters. Then Joseph and I spent a summer trying to decode the letters and then working with what was in our own [Rollins] Archives—which was quite substantial—trying to decode what this was.



Author Faith Baldwin, circa 1913 (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)

We uncovered what felt like a really important relationship that was certainly not in the history books in any meaningful way—or at all, really. Faith, it turned out, had been what they called a “fan girl,” who went to the theater a lot; a young woman from New York who was fairly privileged. She had first seen Annie when Annie Russell played Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and they had met backstage and started a correspondence. We didn't have a lot of Annie's letters, but we had almost all of Faith's letters. And you see this young girl grow up over time. They corresponded for twenty years: through World War I, through Annie's divorce, through all sorts of major life events.

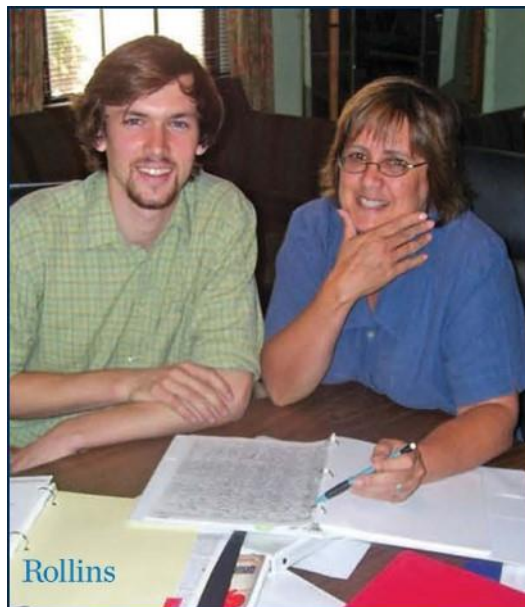
We decided we wanted to write an article about this relationship, but then we also decided—and this goes back to what I said a long time ago when talking about [how] the life of the mind is not separate from the creative life—we wanted to acknowledge that theater history ought to be theatrical. There's sort of no excuse for a dry theater history paper, because we're theater people (laughs). We should be fascinating!

So we did our own research into creative nonfiction, and we knew we weren't quite doing that. We ended up writing an essay that was sort of a mixture of the two. It had the sense of our process, and how do we tell this story when there are missing pieces, like all the letters back

from Annie. A few of the letters we had, but mostly all the letters back from Annie. And things that we didn't know, right? We knew that Faith had married and had children, but then also was in a long-term relationship with a woman. There were indications that Annie may have had romantic feelings towards a woman as well, but also had been married—actually had been married twice.

So we ended up writing a story that was interspersed with the historians talking about how they dealt with the material that they could find, and then writing these creative—almost like a little short story—these little breaks of things we supposed. We called it “the historiographic imagination”: using your imagination, but based in deep historical research. So in these stories that we would write that were interspersed in the article, we would use sentences and words from the letters: things that they had said and published, or that Annie had been on record as saying, and we incorporated those into the article.

We ended up presenting it at a theater history conference. I won't say it was revolutionary—it certainly wasn't that big—but it was a pretty big deal: this idea that you were saying, and on the scholarly stage, that it is okay to use your imagination as you are crafting this historical narrative. Because actually, we've always done that; we just haven't been open about it or intentional about it. We've always made suppositions and assumptions. So it was a lot of fun.



Joseph Bromfield '09 and Prof. Jennifer Cavanaugh, 2008
(Photo: Rollins College Archives)

Then we decided we weren't done yet. We still wanted to do more with this. That's when we did our second collaborative scholarship, and we wrote a play. We took it to the logical next step and wrote the play *Stage Fright*. Joseph ended up directing it in the Fred Stone Theatre. We got the McKean Grant to do that. It was a deep, rich vein of material. I probably could dive right back into it and do more. But I was very grateful for the help in the Archives. Was it Trudy [Laframboise, former archival specialist]?

WZ: Yes.

JC: Yeah, Trudy was incredibly helpful, as were you. It was fun, it was really fun. I remember during the time we were doing that, they placed a stone in the [Rollins] Walk of Fame for Annie Russell. We had the young woman, who's now an employee at Rollins—Chelsea Swearingen, who played Annie Russell in the play *Stage Fright*, which we had written. She came in costume to the stonelaying and read some of Annie's words, which was great.

WZ: That's wonderful. Thank you for sharing that experience.

Another notable research project that I have a deeper impression of here is your presentation, "The Ziegfeld Follies," which is years before the #MeToo movement. Maybe you can tell me a little bit more about that research project.

JC: Sure! That was a great summer research project that we did with two students, Katie Palomino and Katie Jones. We were really interested in the Ziegfeld Follies, which for those who don't know, was sort of from the turn of the century through about 1917; there were some that happened afterwards. Ziegfeld was a major producer, and the Follies were very well known for lavish chorus women in amazing costumes and big spectacle sets and such. Then he would have headliners like Will Rogers or Fanny Brice. We were really interested in the Ziegfeld Follies—what they would call a "Follies girl," and trying again to do this research into the individual lives of women who had been thought of as a collective group, if that makes sense. The chorus woman is this sort of "type" of woman, but we wanted to find who were the actual women.

It was a fascinating project. We tried to generate lists of names. We had some sources. There was a woman—I know her first name was Doris, I'm trying to remember her last name—she published her experiences as a Ziegfeld Follies girl. We read that, and we just kept following the bread crumbs. You would read something that mentioned somebody else, so you go find their biography for their letters, and you keep digging.



Doris Eaton Travis (left) and her sister, Mary Eaton (right). Both appeared in the Ziegfeld Follies. (Photos: *Wikimedia Commons*)

We had a theory that the Ziegfeld Follies girls were exploited, to a certain extent. (A): that they were younger than they should have been. There were laws about not having performers on the stage who were under sixteen years old, and it was very clear that some of them were fifteen, possibly even fourteen. We also were believing that they were being utilized by Ziegfeld to entice male investors in his show.

I took the girls to New York City, and we went to the New York Public Library of Performing Arts, and we were going through letters and stuff. I remember Katie finding this piece of paper which had been put up backstage that said, “Girls required to go to this party.” The more we dug into this, the more we realized that a lot of the women had kind of tragic stories after having been in the Follies. After we had generated these lists of as many names of them as we could, we started looking for their obituaries. What we found was that many of them died young—a lot of them died never having had any children. One of the things that we found, again in our archival dig, was information about a doctor in Greenwich Village who would “help” the girls, and I think this was probably abortion. Not knowing what kind of damage that may have done—again, there was a lot of supposition about why many of these women either died with alcohol or drug addictions, or childless.

It became really a very rich and sad area for us to research. We ended up writing an article together about it. We had a wonderful opportunity to go over to England, and the girls were able to present their research at a major international conference.

Yeah; fascinating story. I want to write a book on the evolution of the chorus woman and their stories, and that would be a big piece of it.

WZ: That's great, Jenny, thank you. Now let's shift the gear and focus on your administrative career. So you first start as the chair of the Theatre Department, then associate dean of Arts & Sciences, then later dean of the faculty of the CLA [College of Liberal Arts]. What made you decide to switch to what other faculty call "the dark side"?

JC: (Laughs) I know, right? Well, I think of myself as an accidental administrator. I really did think it was going to be about a year or so. I thought I was stepping out of my chair position for a year to be an interim associate dean. I wasn't envisioning it as, I'm leaving this to go over here.

Bob Smither [former dean of the College of Arts & Sciences] asked me. Bob and I didn't really know each other that well; we had served on a committee together. I don't really know why he asked me, but I'm glad that he did. We had a wonderful working relationship. Maybe it was that we just sort of balanced each other out.

I thought I would do it for about a year, and I ended up liking it. I enjoyed the work, although I always taught. I never stopped teaching because that, I think, would have felt like I'd gone to the "dark side" somehow; like I had given something up that was precious to me. So every semester I taught at least one class.

When you go to other conferences of deans and administrators, they talk about the tendency, sometimes, to try to straddle both worlds; that you try to keep your feet in both, and then that ultimately, you won't be able to do that. I don't agree. I feel like I wasn't straddling both worlds, but both worlds were holding me up; both worlds were supporting me. It's kind of like going back to that binary of "life of the mind/creative life." I'm not a big binary thinker. I don't think administrative work and faculty work are these diametrically opposed things. Good administrative work is upholding and supporting the faculty to do the work of the college, and the faculty are upholding the mission of the college, which is supporting the administrative work. So I kind of reject the binary.

That being said, I do think one of the reasons that I have enjoyed this work is that I've always felt really supported by the faculty. I've felt that very rarely will faculty kind of write me off because I'm an administrator. There's been this connection that they see that I respect their work; that I come from that work. So I've felt I've had the benefit of the doubt, because I came from the faculty. When you come into a new position and you're not coming out of the faculty it's probably harder, but I think I've really benefitted from that. It's allowed me to do this work with—for the most part, I think—the trust of the faculty.

WZ: Yeah, I can imagine the demands, the commitment, the time you had to put in. Also, the years you served as associate dean, and later on as dean, were also a challenging time for some of modern Rollins history. Maybe you could talk some about the challenges you encountered while serving as dean of the CLA.

JC: First of all, I think it would be remiss to think that the dean operates in any way on their own. There's a deep team in the dean's office that includes not only associate deans—I had Gabriel Barreneche and Emily Russell at first, and now Amy Armenia and Ashley Kistler are serving as associate deans. Also Janette Smith, who does tremendous work coordinating

academic support; Tiffany Griffin as well. Karla Knight, who does all of our operations and does the budget work. We're very much a team, and it's not like one person does all this work. I'll just make sure I get that out there.

I think things that were challenging—certainly, the A & S/CPS [Arts & Sciences/College of Professional Studies] split and then the rebuilding of that. That was so time consuming. Even if you take the emotions out of it and everything that everybody was feeling about this, and you just think of the paperwork. You just think of every form, every reference to A & S and CPS that had to be changed. First it was A & S; that had to be split and changed to A & S and CPS; then had to be changed back to CLA; those references. That in and of itself was just sort of mind boggling.

And then, kind of all of the emotions that went with that. Ultimately, I think we are at our best as a faculty when we see the best in each other, and there was a while when I think we were sort of pitted against each other in ways that were not productive for the college and were hurtful to people on all sides.

It was interesting, because for a while I was in A & S, and Greg was in CPS. We sort of had this rule in our household that we weren't going to talk about work, but every now and then we would. I remember one morning we were having breakfast and just getting into this really big argument about something—I don't even remember what it was, but it had to do with how the A & S people treat people in CPS and how the CPS people have benefits that A & S people don't. I said, "Oh my God, if this is getting to our family, imagine what this doing writ large."

I think that surviving that storm and coming out the other side—there are still remnants of that hurt, but we've done a lot of healing. That's baked into—I feel like it was trauma to the institution, and I think that trauma lives on in the institution, although we've certainly made a lot of progress. So I would certainly say that that part was difficult.

There were certain things that were difficult, but enjoyable. I think launching a new general education program, that was very difficult, with a lot of great work by [Professor] Claire Strom and [Professor] Mark Anderson, and a number of people who were working on the implementation and creation of the new Foundations Curriculum. That took years and years of work and continues to be a work in progress.

One of the courses that I taught pretty regularly was a 300-level course I co-taught with Meredith Hein, who's an amazing member of our staff who works in community engagement. We taught a Practicing Social Justice class. We probably taught it seven or eight times; a Foundations 300 class. It was great to see juniors and seniors at the end of the general education program, just to see how effective it actually was; to really see how much they were able to do that integrative learning that we were hoping they would be able to do by the time they got to their last general education class.

I would say those were probably the big ones. There's a tremendous amount of joy as well and wonderfulness, but those were probably the big struggles.

WZ: Sure. I do remember myself; it was a very stressful time for everyone. I really want to thank you for your steady leadership and the support for all the faculty members. So now, looking back, Jenny, how would you view your Rollins career for the last seventeen years?

JC: That's amazing. I think about the fact that my son was two years old when we came here and now is a strapping nineteen-year-old. It's as long as I've ever worked anywhere. If you look back on the story I told you, I was at Denver for about four years and then got this call and said, "Okay, I'll go to Louisiana." Then I was at Louisiana enough to get tenure, and then just after that, I got this call from Rollins and said, "Okay, I'll do that." I thought I must be on a seven-year cycle. When I think about it, I went from faculty to administration, I think, in my seventh year. The result is I've never had a sabbatical (laughs). I keep leaving places right as my sabbatical is coming through, so that is one of the benefits of academic life I will probably not experience.

I feel really proud of my time here. I feel like I was a good teacher; I am a good teacher. I feel like when I was teaching full time, I was doing good work. We prepared a lot of students. I'm amazed at how many of my students from that time are theater teachers themselves now. I think that's always an a tribute when your students become teachers; I think that's kind of a wonderful feeling.

I feel that I've done my work in administration with a lot of integrity and compassion. I've made mistakes, plenty of mistakes, but I've always tried to own up to them and tried to fix what I can. I've always believed really deeply in the mission of this college, and I have a lot of love for it.

And I'm in awe of this faculty. I think that time and again they prove that they will go to the ends of the earth for their students. They may be prickly with administrators, and that's fine; that's to be expected. But when it comes down to doing what's right for the students, they will do that, and they will do it passionately. So it's been a real honor to be in this role. I will have a lot of fondness for the people that I've worked with here.

WZ: That's great. We are reaching the end of our conversation. Before I close, is there anything else you would like to add? Any special events, people, students, faculty, or any other thing you want to share with me?

JC: Gosh, it's so—how do you pick, right? There have been so many incredible moments. I think certainly I want to pay homage to those who I've taught with. I've already mentioned Chris Fuse and Meredith Hein. Team teaching has certainly been an honor. A lot of homage to the associate deans who supported me: Emily Russell and Gabriel, who's now gone on to become a dean at Berry College; Ashley Kistler and Amy, doing that work now. I just have such admiration and such respect for everybody here. I will miss this place, and I will miss the people very, very much. I just want to thank everyone for the faith they've put in me. It's been an honor to serve as the dean.

WZ: Well, thank you so much, Jenny. I just wanted to personally thank you for all your support to me over the years. I really appreciate your leadership and wish you and Greg the best in the next chapter of your life and career. Thank you.

JC: Thank you, Wenxian. Thank you so much.