

#### **THEATRE SUPPORT WORDS from Emmanuel**

Growing up in Rhode Island, I was extraordinarily lucky to have access to high-quality theater at Trinity Repertory Company. The Boston or New York equivalent would have been massively more expensive and far more remote, but in Providence it was a 15m drive to a place with ample street parking and what I now understand was a shockingly affordable ticket.

Imagine being a child who watches skilled adults at the top of their craft play dress-up and act out stories about love, treachery, grief, humor, magic, and honor. Imagine being able to do that on a regular basis, growing up steeped in it.



My experience as an audience member (and one-time extra! ) at Trinity, alongside 10 years as a performer at All Children's Theater directed by the incredible Wrenn Goodrum taught me so much. It taught me how to empathize, by stepping into the shoes of characters so different from myself and speaking for them. It taught me how to stand and speak before hundreds of people. It taught me how to work as a team with others, and how to be sensitive to the ways their moods and energies could affect the work we set out to do together. It taught me how to read a room, and to think on my feet in response to the unspoken signals coming at me from so many people at once. It taught me how to use those signals in myself, communicating with every part of my body to add more information and strength to my voice - to send messages without needing to say them, and to bring the hearts others with me.

I use those skills every day, as a public speaker, a teacher, a team member and a manager. Whatever STEM skills I have merely gave me access to the rooms I inhabit these days - it's what I learned from theater and debate that helps me shine once I'm there.

**Jo-án Belanger Peralta** (*Soldier*) is a founding member of Providence's Wilbury Theatre Group. Jo-án has appeared as an actor at Trinity Repertory Company, The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre, and the Perishable Theatre. A graduate of the theatre performance program at Marymount Manhattan College, NY, Jo-án would like to thank Wrenn Goodrum for her constant support and her endless wisdom. "She opened my eyes to the world of theatre, and I will forever be eternally grateful" (*He started in our Outreach Program in the Projects and stayed with us till he graduated. I organized a fundraiser to help with his college expenses at Marymount Manhattan College*)

Hi Wrenn!

I know we haven't spoken in awhile, but I wanted to reach out and thank you for writing my recommendation letter last year. I hope you're doing well! I continue to follow your Facebook journeys and see that you're still very much into theater and putting on productions. Which makes me extremely happy. Those actors have no idea how lucky they are to have you.

The reason I am writing this email is to thank you for teaching me all those years (as well as writing my recommendation letter to get in). I had to do the most daunting job of being a director FOUR different times. And one of those times I had an entire crew and actors (my classmates in these roles) on a soundstage with only 3 hours to film a three minute short. Although directing isn't my strong suit, I just remembered how you managed to get your students to understand character making and get really great performances. All the methods of acting, what goes into making characters, or even down to the blocking and reblocking of a scene rushed back to me. And the ability to do all of this under a short amount of time with kindness even if it isn't reciprocated. Your lessons in leadership and standing up for what you believe in continue to weigh in on me outside of my creative life.

But most importantly, I just wanted to ramble about how thankful I was to have had you as a teacher. And how your lessons still have an impact on my life!

Thank you!


Morgan Rucker

Emerson Adams played Fern in *Charlotte's Web*.

Emerson's last director was disrespectful toward the actors and yelled a lot. In Emerson's mind, theater as you get older began to equate to a nasty, cold environment, even though comments were not directed at her. She became scared to express herself for fear of doing something wrong.

She had loved acting before that show but said she didn't want to act anymore. So I let the passion go for a while... Then I saw that you were directing CW and encouraged her to audition. Word on the street, just so you know, is that Wrenn is amazing with kids!! The best!! You know how grateful we are for the opportunity.

After your email about the ensemble and Emerson yesterday, I wanted to reiterate that your leadership and spirit is a gift to these kids. It's what I wanted her to experience in a director, that it can be different and so fun and great... so thank you for being YOU and guiding her. You've already instilled that passion again! Jennifer Adams

Wren,  
Thank you so much for coming and sharing your passion with us. I can assure you we all had a blast and learned a lot from you. You made people step out of their comfort zone and let us express ourselves in any way. Again, Thank you so much for coming.   
Love,

Dear Wren, 3/6/20  
Thank you for coming and teaching our class about Shakespeare. It was very fun to think of "Shakespeare outside the box." I enjoyed opening the class by insulting our fellow classmates. your way of teaching us was very engaging, therefore making it fun for the whole class. You did a great job of getting everyone in the class to participate and step outside their comfort zone.

Hey wrenn,

I just wanted to thank you for everything. You did such an amazing job with this show. I'm so lucky to of been able to work under you as an actor. Just by watching you direct the show I was able to learn so many things. The way you showed symbolism and emotion was amazing. You were really able to help me develop my character. Although my part was not big I was still able to learn and develop character in an amazing way. Being able to watch you direct is something I will never forget. This year was truly amazing and I am so glad I decided to switch to your program. Over the past year you've helped me grow so much and I am forever thankful. You helped me explore my possibilities as a writer and learn how to develop Scripts. Even more so you taught me so much as an actor. From character development to improv I have grown so much this year all due to you. I love how you allowed us to explore and express opinions on socially relevant topics. Thank you for treating us as actors instead of mere children. I hope you are able to see how much each of us care for you and how high we hold you. I know you have always talked about having a theater troupe that toured and after speaking to many of your actors I wanted to let you know that if you want to do it you have an entire group of young actors who would love to take part. I can't wait to work with you again soon.

Thank you for everything,

Katelyn Burns (Student at Matthews Playhouse)

**Words of Support from the Cast of  
'OUR LIFE STORIES' (Seniors aged 65-84)**

Friend Wrenn,

What a joy to have worked with you! As I said before, the course exceeded my expectations. Thank you for sharing...

- your expertise and experience,
- your willingness to risk working with "old folks",
- your contagious enthusiasm and energy,
- your patience,
- your ability to challenge and yet support us,
- your ability to mold our diverse group into a bonded team
- your ability to treat everyone equally though there was a significant difference in ability and experience,
- your sensitivity and constant encouragement,
- your tireless work ethic,
- your creativity,
- your ESP is selecting the 9-11 piece in light of the unfolding news of last night,
- your thoughtfulness and generosity, like bringing food and an autographed fan (my very first in 77 years!!!)
- in explaining over and over needed changes and ideas,
- your kindness; never in the 12 weeks did you show disappointment in anyone and certainly not put down anyone, always lifting and encouraging,
- your ability to say the right words at the right time, one of the best examples, telling Ted to have fun, he did, and it made a world of difference.
- your willingness to accept suggestions from the group and to tolerate the wanna-be directors,
- the way you were able to move-on when things you had no control over there in the facility didn't fit your expectations.

Good luck with all your projects. I hope our paths cross again. Alert us to your future performances with different groups.

YOU ARE A REAL PRO IN EVERY WAY!

Thank you and thank you, don bynum

Wrenn,

You are such a talented, wonderful, motivator, and Director we will all be in your debt...forever. Thank you so much for allowing me to be a part of your production.

Barbara Johnson

Hi Wrenn,

First I want to give you my personal "Thank You" for making this experience one of the best things I have ever done! Thank you...thank you... thank you!!!

Carolyn Taylor

Wrenn there are not enough words to thank you for encouraging me to complete my acting debut. The experience was so emotionally fulfilling I am interested in all future endeavors.

Sandy Hirsch

Dear Wrenn, I am sending the LAST blog of The Memory Chair. It has been an honor to share (in partnership with you) the weekly journals of this class. You have been a superlative nucleus to the whole group. I've achieved much more than I ever dreamed; I don't need to list them, I've done so many times, already.

I hope in some small way, my blogs have added a delight in its viewpoint from a participant, and that I've been a credible voice for my classmates.

Your friend,  
Elizabeth (Willie)

Having never taken such a class I didn't really know what to expect. What I found were great people and in the process of writing my life stories, reliving happy memories that nourished my soul. Every senior needs to do this! Dave

"I had no preconceptions about the class. It just sounded interesting and I always challenge myself to do something out of my comfort level. I have found that our class has amazing comradely with each other. I hope to gain insight into what it takes to be a good actor."

Carolyn Taylor

This wonderful group provides an outlet for memories that can be shared. Even though we all have different memories, we can relate to each other's past. The laughter yoga is cathartic as well as aerobic and fun .

Sandy Hirsch

Expectations set aside, I came with open heart and found like kind. Starting my third level (72-92 years), I glean from the past and seek new materials for this present and my future. Open, playful, serious, safe, our director/teacher is skilled and makes it seem seamless. Parts of myself, glimpses of others, listening better, deeper and becoming less invisible myself.

Lynnsy Logue

Wrenn,

YOU are the reason the individuals in our group, and our group as a whole, have expressed wonderful personality and spontaneity. You began our first class with wide-open enthusiasm and joy. How could we not do the same/!

Julia

We made such an impression on each other that we quickly became an extended family. Hess Wertz

I took this class to do something different, meet new people and maybe have some fun while doing it. Since enrolling in the class I have been forced to take a step back and remember some parts of my life that I had stored in my memory bank. However, as I reflect on the good times and the bad, I realize that all of my life experiences have made me the person I am today and I am so thankful for the journey.

Betty Cunningham

Can Seniors have fun??? We are!!

I registered for this course to have fun, to meet like minded peers, and write and hear Life Stories. The classes have exceeded my expectations in every way.

Everybody has a story! We have shared the funny, the sad the shocking, the embarrassing, the truth and maybe a little enhanced part-truths, all this in different ways (or methods of presentation)

65 to 75 year olds having fun – exercises to get to know each other, sharing life stories, writing, recording, singing, and maybe a little acting! But one thing for sure, there is a lot of energy and we are all having fun!!

Don Bynum

I have always heard how all of us have a story to tell. The older we are the longer and more involved the story is. This class has showed me how compelling and heartfelt most of these stories are. I look forward to each class.

Ted Shonts

Why I wanted to take Life Stories Class

I hoped to get back into writing, to jump start my creative forays and I thought the best way to do that was to surround myself with people –I've found a well-spring of possibilities!

Willie Towles

### **Words of Support from 'Short Attention Span' Students Davidson Community Players**

Not only can you let your "silly" side come out to play -- you get applauded for it!

The older you get the more you realize that life does have an expiration date -- you can either sit home in the rocking chair or decide to come out and enjoy what is left!!! What a great way to enjoy your "second" childhood -- we have all been too serious for too long!!! It has been proven that laughter is the best medicine and being able to laugh at yourself, not caring what anyone thinks, is the best of all.

At this stage of life, we all need to chase more lightning bugs!!

This experience proves that you can teach "old" dogs new tricks!

If I had known you could have this much fun making a fool out of yourself, I would have started years ago!

Did you know the people who laugh the most not only live longer, but enjoy it more!

Barbra Halling

The class has been a journey with ups and downs but the best part has been laughter, laughter, ..... and more laughter! What more could a person want at any age!!!!

Sally Nardone

I had forgotten how much fun acting can be. Becoming another character even for a few minutes enlightens the soul. Learning to improvise keeps your mind and limbs limber and active. Meeting new friends and laughing keeps the heart light. A truly rewarding experience.

Loretta Banner

I have developed a real appreciation for actors since I took this class. It never occurred to me the how creative one can be, and it has enabled me to admire the talents of the performer more than I ever did before.....Fran Andrich

It's just so much more than a "class"; it's family --one for all and all for one.

Barbara Parry

After discovering Senior Theatre some five years ago, I was hooked. Performing and writing has become a new love for me. Almost three years ago we started our SISC Readers Theatre and our group has performed for many seniors throughout Iredell County. Most recently I was happy to learn of the acting classes offered at Armour Street Theatre under the direction of Dr. Wrenn Goodrum. Under Wrenn's leadership I've been exposed to "Improvisation", or thinking on your feet and the importance of timing. Improvisation is not easy and timing is critical to comedy but we learned the more that you do it, the more confident one becomes.

Rodney Nall

**FOREVER YOUNG PLAYERS**

June 27, 2011

Dear Wrenn:

It was my great pleasure to attend the performance of "Our Life Stories" by Matthews Playhouse on Tuesday, June 21. My first impression was the size of the turnout by Willow Grove residents, surely the largest I have ever observed for any event. All of us were clearly intrigued by the nature of your dramatic offering before the first word was spoken. And we were not disappointed. The first "Life Story" captivated our attention. The interest, enjoyment and involvement just grew with each successive recitation. I, personally had the pleasure of dining with one of the actors beforehand. I knew from our lively discussion that we were in for a treat, but the reality exceeded the expectation. Yes, there were a very few walk-outs during the performance. But that is not unusual from an audience made up of people mostly in their eighties and beyond who are often napping at the time of your actors' performance.

The honesty, the emotions, the courage of the story tellers was totally captivating and welcomed by the great majority of the audience. As you observed, one of our residents was so caught up that she wanted to tell a story of her own. And your actors earned everyone's great admiration when they invited her onto the stage to do just that. There is a strong suggestion here that a dramatic workshop of some sort would be a very welcome and popular addition to the Willow Grove activities calendar. If this idea interests you, I hope you will follow up with our Activities Director, Nikki Haywood, to explore the possibilities. Many thanks to you and your performers for an exhilarating experience.

John V. Doyle  
Resident  
Willow Grove