

JACKIE

Much has already been written questioning the importance of the arts as part of a student's curriculum. Yes, I sang with Sheryl Crow in college and, yes, her arts education at the University of Missouri has certainly served her well, and, yes, I can safely speculate that Sheryl makes more money than I do. With only a tiny fraction of the student population growing up to become a "Sheryl Crow," an incorrect assumption prevails that an arts education does not provide the same benefit as the "Three Rs"—reading, writing and arithmetic. However, I would love to compete in a Spelling Bee with the mental giant who first coined that unfortunate etymological phrase.

I'm more interested in the first grader who discovered an affinity for art and is now helping to *build* America as a successful architect. Or the classically trained ballerina inspired to *rebuild* lives through a career in physical therapy.

"There are many studies indicating that the study of music has a direct relationship to the development of critical thinking skills. Engaging in the daily study of music also correlates to an increased aptitude for mathematics," says Dr. Loan Lam, a respected Naples-area podiatrist who credits her adolescent study of music, including bassoon, saxophone, piano and violin, as, "instrumental" (*sorry—I couldn't resist*) in her ability to effectively pursue a career in medicine.

Here is my story...

(Insert Time Warp Sound EFX here)

In the Fall of 1977, my life would forever change. It was called High School.

Of the new crop entering Rock Bridge High School in Columbia, Missouri, the most notable addition, for me, was my drama teacher, Jackie. Although known as Mrs. Smith on the first day of class, Jackie would go through multiple surname changes over the next several years. In Susan Lucci terms, Jackie would eventually evolve to become Jackie Pettit Smith Bromstedt White. However, to me, she's simply Jackie, the woman and arts educator most profoundly responsible for the business professional I am today.

Jackie didn't just march to the beat of a different drummer—she was the drummer, the drum, the drum sticks and the band. Thankfully, for those of us in her drama classes, she was absolutely authentic to herself and honest to a fault with her students—especially to those of us who she felt needed it the most.

Jackie insisted upon a strict code of theatre etiquette. And as her gift was a combination of fear (none of us wanted to disappoint her) and encouragement (all of us required her approval), we lived and died by her rules and regulations. To this day, I insist that the very foundation of my business principals were learned in my

JACKIE &
MYRA

by Randy Jones



Jackie Smith

high school drama class.

My first audition at Rock Bridge was for the fall 1977 production of *Bye Bye Birdie*. And the day the cast list was posted, I cried—oh did I cry. All my sophomore contemporaries were cast but I was not. Even a deaf student named Buster was cast instead of me—in a musical no less. I was crestfallen.

In hindsight, I am sure my lack of *Birdie* success was Jackie's not-so-subtle way of telling me to keep my ego in check and, more importantly, prove to both of us how important the opportunity to perform meant to me. Though I'm not sure my ego settled down much, they rarely do in high school, Jackie did achieve part of her goal and I would go on to prove my desire and work harder—much harder—at *everything* I did. Truth be told, I wasn't the most talented student to ever step foot into Rock Bridge High School. But through hard work and perseverance, Jackie eventually rewarded me for my efforts many times over.

By the spring of 1978, I was actually cast in Rock Bridge's *Man of LaMancha* as a part of the rough and tough band of muleteers—typecasting, of course.

On opening night of *LaMancha*, I assumed my pre-show position alongside the other "prisoners," crouched tightly underneath the newly constructed thrust platform stage, only to discover that my costume pants had *completely ripped open* in the rear seam as I crawled into position.

Randy: (in a whisper) Rodney. Rodney. My pants just ripped open in the back. We don't leave the stage for the first 30 minutes of the show. What do I do?

Rodney Hill: Uh...don't turn around?

From my now literal prison under the platform in front of the gymnasium stage, I was unexpectedly redefining the entire concept of "opening night." I learned two extremely valuable lessons that night: 1) always cover your butt and; 2) never allow your mother to repurpose a McCall's pajama bottom pattern for a public event.

In the 90s, I worked for a man who consistently responded favorably to any resume wherein the candidate had participated in sports. "They understand teamwork," he would proclaim. I would

argue that sports didn't have the market cornered on the concept of collaboration. Teamwork is also seen every time a group of young people band together for a public performance.

Truth be told, I needed my fellow thespians as much as they needed me: Sarah Froese, Celenne Poulin, Sheri Hulett, Jim Chambers, Rodney Hill and Curtis Shaw. As a group, the theatre actually became our own adolescent version of "hide and go seek" but with scripts replacing spontaneity, costumes replacing crevices and characters replacing our somewhat awkward adolescent selves. Jackie gave us focus, drive, determination and a newfound comfort with audiences, both large and small. Most importantly, she set us on a path of learning to be comfortable with ourselves.

Unrelenting in her goal to also teach us lessons in rejection and humility, though sometimes painful for the teenage psyche, Jackie would eventually unleash a group of tough competitors to college campuses and beyond.

As a marketing professional, I make my living being both "creative" (drama) and "analytical" (music). I make presentations to groups both large and small. I have to visualize a concept and work with a team to bring my vision to life on the client's behalf (art).

I am drama, music and art. I *am* my arts education.

Moreover, I defy anyone to convince me that the ability to confidently and articulately present one's self in any sort of public forum isn't a tremendous advantage.

In the mid-80s, the world lost an amazing educator when Jackie Pettit White died from cancer well before her time. And in 2011, I finally have the forum to publicly thank her. And, of course, what Jackie did for Buster, the musical deaf student, and his sense of self is exactly what educators are supposed to do—use their power to help each student, every student, understand their full potential. So Jackie, on behalf of both Buster and me, I thank you with all of my heart.



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MYRA



I finished this article several days go. After all, I am 48 years old and I have seen it all, don't you know. I delight in the opportunity to share my (albeit sometimes embarrassing) stories of personal and professional development in hopes of inspiring someone else – or, at a minimum, beginning a meaningful dialogue. Confident that I was preparing to deliver an outstanding piece of professional prose to *Business Currents*, I shared my final draft with my friend, the ubiquitous Rhona Saunders. “Randy, you can't really write an article on the importance of arts education, in Naples no less, without speaking to Myra Daniels.”



Marketing guru confesses: “I am my arts education.”

What happened next upended both my article's content, and my views of my own education and expertise.

Myra's name is not unfamiliar to those in my new hometown of Naples, Florida. One has to just google her name and witness their browser window fill up with pages of content. Yes, her late husband, legendary ad exec and Marlboro Man creator Draper Daniels, was the inspiration for Jon Hamm's Don Draper character on TV's *Mad Men*. Yes, she was the first woman to head up a national advertising agency and the youngest woman to win the National Advertising Federation “Advertising Woman of the Year” award. And yes, she spearheaded a public relations and fundraising movement to create what has become the world-renowned Philharmonic Center for the Arts in Naples.

Countless articles have already been written on her life and accomplishments. This is not that article.

With an overwhelming sense of both excitement and apprehension, a feeling probably quite similar to that of Dorothy Gale and friends as they prepared for an audience with the wonderful Wizard of Oz, my sidekick, photographer Peter Berec, and I entered Mrs. Daniels's office. After all, as an advertising exec myself, I was excited to actually meet Mrs. Daniels, the icon. Mrs. Daniels, the overachiever. Mrs. Daniels, the force of nature.

But the woman sitting before me was

Myra, the person, the philanthropist, the teacher and yes, thankfully, the force of nature.

As she spoke, in passionate detail, of the various programs offered to students through The Phil, I couldn't help but detect a warm glow in her eyes every time she talked about children. I was certainly not aware that The Phil spends almost 1 million dollars annually on programs for kids and a staggering 45,000 students visit the Philharmonic Center each year.

“In my house, the arts were more important than food. Which is good because my mother couldn't cook,” Myra recalled with a playful smile.

Being relatively new to Naples myself, Myra's pro-child reputation had certainly reached my ears before. However, it has her unexpected segue into the importance of stimulating adult brain power that provided the greatest surprise. “No matter what I have done, I have always considered myself to be a teacher—and a student.” Through the Lifelong Learning Program at The Phil, adults can take classes from nationally renowned university scholars and experts in a variety of fields including theatre, dance, art, film history and music.

Myra continued, “Have you read my book?”

“Uh...no...I just discovered you had written a book yesterday,” I responded as my unfortunate unpreparedness forced

me to sink a bit further into my chair.

Myra produced a copy, autographed it, and handed to me. The title: *Secrets of a Rutbuster, Breaking Rules and Selling Dreams*.

(Sound EFX: A ton of bricks hitting me)

Did I move to Naples to break out of my own personal and professional rut? Yes. Have I done everything I need to do to positively transform my life? No. Did I still have much to learn? *Oh my yes*. Was meeting Myra Daniels the single most perfectly timed “education” I could ask for? *Absolutely*.

Furthermore, here I was, writing an article to provide a long overdue tribute to a great teacher from my past, assuming the role of omniscient educator to *Business Currents* readers, only to discover that the sum total of my experience and accomplishments wouldn't fill up the pencil holder on Myra Daniels's desk.

In response to her fervent discourse on adult education through the arts, I shared that most of my relatives had lived well into their 80s and 90s and that my paternal grandmother lived to be 100 years old. Myra dropped yet another brick on me, “Well then, you're just getting started. You better get busy.”

Immediately after our 75-minute meeting, time that arguably could have been put to better use by Myra, I recall leaning over and whispering to

JACKIE'S LESSONS THEN & NOW:

1977: Be on time.

2011: No explanation required here.

1977: Be prepared.

2011: Gain intimate knowledge of all aspects of any given project in order to provide greater value to the team as a whole.

1977: Do not alter your appearance.

2011: In the boardroom, with the possible exception of Disney, no one would care if I cut my hair but everyone would care if I showed up at a new job only to be different from the way I presented myself.

1977: Listen carefully to all rehearsal and performance notes.

2011: Learn from each comment made whether or not it was specifically directed to you.


1977: Never miss an entrance.

2011: Take ownership for your actions.

photographer/sidekick Peter, “I just want to go back in there, hug her, sneak her out to my car and just take her home and keep her.”

Upon returning home, alas without Myra, I subsequently tore through every page of her extraordinary book whereupon I was pummeled by the final brick: the source of that special light I saw radiate so often in Myra’s eyes. Shining through Myra was her family, her joyful exposure to the arts as a child and, most importantly,

the spirit of her beloved and influential grandmother, Sophie Jancowitz, who lives today through Myra’s every word, action and deed.

Just like Jackie, Myra, a percussionist herself, marches to the beat of a different drummer—she is the drummer, the drum, the drum sticks and the band. And through her lifelong commitment to Arts Education, she has actually accomplished much more: Heart Education. 

Randy Jones is President and Creative Director of MindZoo, a target marketing agency now headquartered in Marco Island, Florida. He can be reached at Randy@mindzoo.com, at 239-389-0014, on Facebook, or through the web at mindzoo.com. He will also be appearing on stage in Dirty Rotten Scoundels at the Sugden Theatre in Naples this March.

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