

08/21/2023

To the Department of Dance and Theatre at the University of North Texas,

My name is Catherine Clay. I graduated with a BA in Theatre Performance from UNT in the Spring of 2021. I am writing on behalf of Bob Hess. He was not only my professor, he was a mentor. I took several classes with Bob, including Realism and Acting for the Camera. He was also my director in the UNT production of Fugitive Songs and I served as Bob's teaching aide for Acting for the Camera. I was privileged to spend time working with and getting to know him in various roles (professor, director, and mentor) during my time at the university.

One thing that stands out to me about Bob is his kindness and compassion. In Realism, on one of the first days of class, a student shared with everyone that he had Aspergers and had other learning issues, making it hard for him to learn and adapt at the fast pace used in acting classes. Bob thanked him for being so open. Shortly thereafter, Bob came to class with a plan in place to adapt the course for that student so he felt safer when stepping out of his comfort zone in front of the entire class, and was always kind to him during exercises and patient when explaining techniques. Bob told me later he found books on how to teach students who struggle with learning the neuro-typical way and adjusted his teaching with those in mind. That has stuck with me all these years. To be so considerate as to change something you've done for years to help your students grow is exactly the type of person who should be teaching. And I don't want to speak for that student, but watching his growth and seeing his confidence soar throughout that year, I know he benefited greatly from working with Bob. In fact, he's now acting as an extra on TV shows and constantly performing in staged productions.

Learning from Bob helped me grow exponentially as an actor. Working through various exercises with Bob helped me trust myself to make choices that carried me through scenes, allowing me to fully step into the characters and see the world and choices through their eyes. I remember working on our final scene for Juries, a scene from An Intervention by Mike Bartlett. I was nervous because the scene was really tough, it was the final scene of the play where my character tries to kill herself. Bob worked with me and my scene partner to help us understand our characters and dive into their inner world. He taught me how to dip into my emotional reservoir and bring the character's feelings to the stage. Bob's belief in us always boosted our belief in ourselves. Without a doubt, he not only gave me the tools I needed to pass my jury but ones that I will use my whole career. His confidence and passion for teaching and acting is contagious.

In acting for the camera, both as student and teacher's aide, Bob taught me important life lessons. I was really nervous to be in front of the camera and was extremely self-conscious about the way I looked. Through the course of Bob's teaching, I came to understand we don't create art

for the sake of it being pretty or for us looking our best. We create art because it's important. And it's not always pretty or perfect, and that's what makes it special. I realized through working with Bob that I wanted to continue my education beyond my undergraduate degree and get my MFA. Bob was the first person I asked to write reference letters for me because I knew he had seen my growth over the years, and I was confident he could speak for where I could go and all the things I would do. Bob always helped me see myself as more than I thought I could be. He recognized my talent and made me see it as well. For that I will always be grateful.

Thank you,

Catherine Clay