

Episode #012 (Transcript)

Charlie Sandlan (00:02):

In September of 1998, I sat in a classroom for the first time at Rutgers University; Mason Gross School of the Arts, where I was pursuing my masters in acting. I remember vividly sitting in the front row and watching this woman walk into class. She was about 4'10. She seemed fragile, stylish, decked out in a nicely tailored Chanel suit with a pair of Valentino sandals. She walked into that room and across to her desk like she was royalty. You could tell within seconds that this was someone that was not to be fucked with. On that day, she began to change the entire course of my life. So, today, part one of my conversation with master teacher, my mentor, Maggie Flanigan. So, put the phone back in your pocket, Creating Behavior starts now.

Charlie Sandlan (01:08):

Music by Lawrence Trailer

Charlie Sandlan (01:10):

Hello, my fellow daydreamers. Happy mid-August. I hope that you are all safe and healthy and trying to figure out a way to be creative. Last week, there was this story. You might have saw it. It was a good laugh everybody. It was that story of the Austrian tourist who was in Italy and thought it would be a good idea to sit on a piece of art. In the process of doing that, snapped off her toes. This guy's in Italy in a museum, and there's this plaster cast statue of Pauline Bonaparte, who was the sister of Napoleon. Napoleon commissioned this really fantastic Italian artist, Antonio Canova, back in the early 1800s to chisel his sister.

Charlie Sandlan (02:32):

So now, this plaster cast is well over 200 years old. It has survived the bombings of World War I. It has been moved to secured locations during World War II. It has survived a great deal. This fucking guy is more concerned about getting a picture than he is about taking in the art. So, he plops his ass down on

that statue leans back in a reclining way, the way that Pauline Bonaparte is depicted there, and he snaps off her toes. Well, they finally figured out who it was, and he extends this apology.

Charlie Sandlan (03:10):

It just got me thinking about how we just take in art. We've got our cameras. You go to a museum now, and everybody wants a selfie. It's really more important now to get a picture of yourself in front of the Mona Lisa than actually taking it in and asking yourself, "Why is this a significant piece of art?" I guess out of that, I wanted to pass along just some advice. Next time, you find that we're all lucky enough to be in a museum, don't pull out your fucking phone. Just stand there and take in a piece of art. Take in.

Charlie Sandlan (03:49):

That's what you must always be doing as actors and as artists, taking in and pondering, allowing your primitive conscious to kind of get tapped and see what kind of associations come up to the surface when you're contemplating a significant piece of art. That's what you should be doing, not worried about what you're going to post on your IG or on your Facebook. So, if I have anything to say, it is this, do not take your camera out when you're in a museum and don't sit on a fucking piece of art, Jesus.

Charlie Sandlan (04:28):

So, before I turn over to our conversation, I wanted to say a few words about Maggie. I know I've mentioned her many times over these first dozen episodes. I do that because she... Outside of my family, my immediate family, and Trish certainly, is the most important relationship of my life. I would say outside of my parents, she has had the biggest impact on the man I am, the person that I become, the artist that I am. She has been a teacher. She has been a mentor. She has been tough on me when she needed to be tough on me. She has supported me. She's encouraged me. She has championed me.

Charlie Sandlan (05:21):

Beyond just teaching me what it means to be an actor, I have relied on her to show me what it means to be a real teacher and she is a fucking master. This is a woman with impeccable integrity. This is a woman whose character is second to none. When she walked into a classroom, you knew that this was somebody who knew exactly what the fuck she was talking about. She was not someone to be messed with. You didn't argue with her. You didn't try to debate her. She would eviscerate you. She would make it absolutely clear that you know nothing about acting.

Charlie Sandlan (06:08):

What I loved about her... Often times people will say, "She's a fucking bitch. She's tough. She's mean. She's cruel. She'll humiliate you. She'll embarrass you." Now that I'm a teacher, I sometimes get the same response from people. I always found that the students that felt that way about her were the ones that were unwilling to accept the fact that they were actually lazy and did not work hard and had skated by most of their life on their personality, their looks and their bullshit. And then you walked into this woman's class, and she called you on it.

Charlie Sandlan (06:47):

She challenged you to answer a couple of questions for yourself every single day. The first one was, "Why is your second best okay? Why do you look at the work that you are preparing for class and say to yourself, 'This will do'?" She made it really clear to all of us that the way you work in her classroom was the way you were going to work professionally. If you showed up late, if you didn't do work, if it was sloppy, if you just slapped the shit together, you were a hack. She forced you to reckon with that.

Charlie Sandlan (07:24):

How hard are you willing to work? How serious are you if this is really something you say you want to be doing for the rest of your life? She had a bullshit detector that just was an inviolate sense of truth. I will remember the tough things she said to me in that

classroom. I'll remember the compliments she paid me in that classroom for the rest of my life. I could quote you verbatim some of the things that she said to me. It meant so much. I'm just privileged here to let you in on some of our conversation. I was up at her house with her husband, Richard, Trish and I, for my 50th birthday back in July. We recorded a couple of hours. So, let's just get to it. Here's part one of my talk with Maggie.

Charlie Sandlan (08:28):

Well, Maggie, hello, how are you?

Maggie Flanigan (08:30):

Good. How are you doing?

Charlie Sandlan (08:33):

I'm good. I'm in your house. I mean, it's always a beautiful place to be-

Maggie Flanigan (08:37):

Oh, thank you.

Charlie Sandlan (08:38):

... up here in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts with the chickens.

We might hear chickens-

Maggie Flanigan (08:44):

Sound, yeah.

Charlie Sandlan (08:45):

... crowing.

Maggie Flanigan (08:45):

Then you'll be talking and crowing out of key.

Charlie Sandlan (08:48):

Yeah, because you have chickens. You've got two dogs.

Maggie Flanigan (08:53):

And a husband.

Charlie Sandlan (08:53):

And a husband, that's right, Richard. It's beautiful up here and we're up here for the 4th of July. So, this is the perfect time to have a conversation with you.

Maggie Flanigan (09:04):

Yeah, yeah. I'm very talkative, right? I give you a one-word answer.

Charlie Sandlan (09:09):

No, this is just perfect. Well, I guess, first off, I'll just say that you are one of the most important people in my life. You've certainly had a hand in shaping me as a man, as an artist, and as a human being, and as a teacher. I pretty much owe my entire artistic life to your generosity.

Maggie Flanigan (09:34):

Well, you worked very hard, and you were very open and still are. I appreciate that. It was a joy to work with you and still is.

Charlie Sandlan (09:46):

So, I'm curious about finding out more about you here. You were born in Columbia, South Carolina.

Maggie Flanigan (09:53):

No, I was born in Chamblee, Georgia.

Charlie Sandlan (09:57):

You moved to South Carolina?

Maggie Flanigan (09:58):

Yeah. When I was probably two or three, my parents moved to Columbia, South Carolina.

Charlie Sandlan (10:05):

You lived there your whole childhood?

Maggie Flanigan (10:07):

I grew up there and left when I was going to college.

Charlie Sandlan (10:15):

What was it like growing up in South Carolina in the '50s and '60s?

Maggie Flanigan (10:23):

It was okay.

Charlie Sandlan (10:24):

It was okay. You wanted to get out?

Maggie Flanigan (10:26):

Yeah. So, as I got older, given what I wanted to do and to grow as a person. Although I don't think I thought of I'm going to grow as a person, but I knew I had to get out because I was an only child. I wanted things. Although it was scary going to college.

Charlie Sandlan (10:49):

What did you want?

Maggie Flanigan (10:51):

I wanted to be an actor. I really wanted to be an actress. I did a few things in high school, but I just knew I wanted to be an actress. When I was a freshman, I got the lead in... Oh God, what's the name of it? The Good Woman of Szechwan. I played two parts, Shen Te and Shui Ta. I did very well in it. I got a standing ovation, which I did not go out and accept, because I didn't think I was good enough.

Charlie Sandlan (11:31):

Too humble.

Maggie Flanigan (11:33):

Right. When I first got the part, I went up to the director and said, "Now, what method are we using? I mean, is it Stanislavski?" It's like, "Wow, he must thought I with a pretentious little girl."

Charlie Sandlan (11:49):

When did you know that you wanted to be an actor? What drew you-

Maggie Flanigan (11:52):

Very young, around five, six, seven. And then when I got older, I would watch soap operas sometimes. I thought, "Well, I can do that."

Charlie Sandlan (12:07):

Were you going to the movies as a kid?

Maggie Flanigan (12:08):

Well, it depended on whether my mother would take me.

Sometimes I'd sneak out to see a movie with a friend in the neighborhood. I mean, I was severely punished for not asking if I could do it.

Charlie Sandlan (12:29):

So, you had a strict mother.

Maggie Flanigan (12:30):

Very strict, very, very strict, very protective. There was reasons to be concerned about me.

Charlie Sandlan (12:42):

What were those reasons?

Maggie Flanigan (12:46):

One, primarily, I was epileptic. I developed epilepsy, which I only had at night and when I was sleeping or waking up in the morning. She was very protective.

Charlie Sandlan (13:03):

Would you wake up to a seizure?

Maggie Flanigan (13:04):

Sometimes, yeah or coming out of a seizure, so.

Charlie Sandlan (13:10):

So, she was worried about you.

Maggie Flanigan (13:12):

Oh, goodness. She moved into my bedroom and slept in the same bed with me. And then I would have a seizure, and she wouldn't wake up, so.

Charlie Sandlan (13:23):

Did they have medicine and things then?

Maggie Flanigan (13:26):

Yeah, I took Phenobarbital and Dilantin for it, and then I took it for quite a while. And then when I was in high school, they began to remove it. What happened? I can't remember what happened to me physically. I must have had withdrawal in high school and didn't really understand it or felt that something was wrong with me. I got addicted. When they took it away from me in late high school, I was kind of having withdrawal. I wasn't hallucinating, but it was very hard to sleep.

Charlie Sandlan (14:13):

So that was a challenging childhood because you have scoliosis. You were born with-

Maggie Flanigan (14:16):

Right, with scoliosis. I was born with not a clubfoot, but a difficult foot that could drag a little bit. I don't think people would see that now, but-

Charlie Sandlan (14:31):

Did it feel big to you, like Laura Wingfield?

Maggie Flanigan (14:37):

Didn't feel big. It just was ugly. And then when I was a kid, with other kids around because I didn't feel in the foot, I would stick pins in it and show them, not very far, but when I would show them I couldn't feel.

Charlie Sandlan (14:56):

Because you have no feeling in your right foot.

Maggie Flanigan (14:59):

Yeah, I don't. No, some on the top of my foot but not on the bottom. Yeah. I took ballet for a number of years as a kid. There would be two people that they would put in the front to help other kids know what to do, and I was one of them. And then they put the girls on point, and I couldn't do it. They wouldn't let me do it because they were afraid I'd hurt myself. That was a very smart thing, but I was very disappointed and became very not responsive. My mother said I didn't practice, but I was young.

Maggie Flanigan (15:58):

I would get together with a cousin and someone else. When they come over, I would choreograph dances and that's what we did. We danced and I choreographed it as well as be part of it. I wanted to go back to ballet when I was in high school, and my mother wouldn't pay for it. And then when I went to college, I worked very hard in a ballet class. Mavis Ray was the teacher. She had retired down in Greenville, North Carolina. She had been Agnes de Mille's assistant in Oklahoma in a number of Broadway musicals. I worked very hard with her. She said, "You'd be a

dancer if you had a right foot just like your left foot." Well, that was kind of comforting, but I always dance.

Maggie Flanigan (17:04):

When I was a sophomore, I moved to East Carolina University, because supposedly, they had a very good theater department there. I got cast a lot. I didn't know what I was doing, but I did get cast a lot and did well. She said, "Boy, you've really got something," I thought, "Oh, good." Well, we had the head of the department, and the head of acting was abusive. He had come from The Actors Studio. He and his wife came from The Actors Studio, and this man was really abusive. He would scream at you and you're like 20. To have someone scream at you and not know what you're doing or how to correct it was scary.

Maggie Flanigan (18:08):

Eventually, after I was there in my junior year, I changed majors to philosophy and English because I just couldn't tolerate that kind of abuse. What he was teaching from Strasburg did not make sense to me, and I thought I was untalented. But if you tried to take the work to text, I don't know how you take it, given song and dance. That I could do, song and dance. I didn't like sense memory. Sense memory is okay, but emotional memory, I didn't like that.

Charlie Sandlan (18:54):

When did you first hear of Meisner? When did you first hear about Meisner? When you moved to New York?

Maggie Flanigan (18:58):

There was an actor that would come down for summer theater named Greg Zittel who was a really talented actor. He worked with Sandy Meisner. I want to be an actor. He said, "Well, you're too quiet to be an actor," but I was determined. I wasn't going to have someone tell me I was too quiet, because I knew that inside, I wasn't.

Charlie Sandlan (19:23):

You mean because you were shy as a person.

Maggie Flanigan (19:24):

I'm a very shy person-

Charlie Sandlan (19:26):

You are.

Maggie Flanigan (19:26):

... and very sensitive. Because your voice isn't loud enough, you'll never be able to speak on stage, but that was-

Charlie Sandlan (19:37):

How did you respond when you heard criticism like that? Fuck you?

Maggie Flanigan (19:42):

Well, I developed fuck you as I went on, but it wasn't fuck you. It was like, "Well, I know I can do this. I know it. I was not going to be told that I couldn't do it." I fought for myself internally. That is how I dealt with.

Charlie Sandlan (20:02):

What's that mean to fight with yourself?

Maggie Flanigan (20:03):

Well, I fought against them internally by saying to myself, "I can do this. I may not be able to do it now, but I do have a strong voice." That's how I said it to myself.

Charlie Sandlan (20:19):

When did you move to New York?

Maggie Flanigan (20:21):

1972.

Charlie Sandlan (20:23):

Was that right out of undergrad?

Maggie Flanigan (20:25):

Yup, yup.

Charlie Sandlan (20:27):

Did you know all along that that's what you were going to do, or how did you get to that place where like, "I'm going to move to New York"?

Maggie Flanigan (20:35):

I wanted to be an actress. I knew that I had to train in New York because certainly I didn't get trained in my school where I graduated.

Charlie Sandlan (20:45):

I mean, most people when they get out of undergrad, they think oh, "I'm trained," and they never study again.

Maggie Flanigan (20:51):

No, I didn't feel trained, because I didn't know what I was doing.

Charlie Sandlan (20:59):

I mean, when you get a script, you're like, "I don't know what the fuck I'm doing here."

Maggie Flanigan (21:02):

No, I didn't. I knew that I could have conversational reality, which I didn't of course know that term, but I knew I had reality. I wasn't somebody acting or pushing. I remember one time there was this big actor on campus, and I was doing a scene with him in a play called USA. He was doing so much acting, and I'm kind of standing there looking going "Jesus Christ..." Well, I didn't say, "What the fuck," but "... what's he doing?" I almost started laughing, but I was out of character then.

Maggie Flanigan (21:46):

I played Janie Williams and I played Isadora Duncan. You have a huge monologue that goes on for pages. I didn't quite know what to do with it. I didn't know what actions were. He didn't teach that, and then would yell at you if you weren't doing it. It was just an awful experience. How do I know what to do if I'm not trained what to do?

Charlie Sandlan (22:19):

So, when you came to New York in '72, did you know anybody? Did you move with anybody?

Maggie Flanigan (22:25):

No.

Charlie Sandlan (22:25):

Were you completely by yourself?

Maggie Flanigan (22:28):

I came on a bus, a Greyhound bus. My parents were of course really scared for me, and rightly so because I was going up alone. I was going to stay with a friend of mine's friend. I'd gone to New York once before for the summer, and spent the summer there, went to Broadway shows and everything, and knew my way around, walked everywhere. I would walk from 110th straight down to the village and go see plays. I could tell what was good and wasn't. I didn't know why, but I could tell when somebody was indicating and somebody else had nice reality.

Charlie Sandlan (23:15):

Did you have survival jobs?

Maggie Flanigan (23:18):

I did.

Charlie Sandlan (23:18):

Did you wait tables?

Maggie Flanigan (23:21):

Oh no, I was a terrible waitress. I went to something called a Riverboat, which I think became The Pyramid Club. I'm not quite sure about that. I only lasted one night, because I thought I could get out of day jobs and make money like other actors. I didn't know anything about drinks, and there were very few people in the bar. I would go to the couple. They would say, "Dewar's on the rocks," and I go, "Oh, how do you do that phonetically?" I lasted to the end of the evening, and the guy said, "Don't come back."

Charlie Sandlan (24:03):

Well, so how did you survive? How did you pay your bills?

Maggie Flanigan (24:05):

I worked in an office, which I hated, really hated and would read with papers over it. So, I looked like I was working. I read a lot, so that's what I do. I get fired. I go to the next job, and same thing would happen.

Charlie Sandlan (24:30):

So how did you find Bill Esper? How did you end up training with him?

Maggie Flanigan (24:32):

Well, when I met Greg Zittel, he was studying with Sandy Meisner. He talked about the Neighborhood Playhouse. He didn't work at the Neighborhood Playhouse. Sandy did but not Greg. I went to New York to study with Sandy. I looked much younger than I was. Sandy said, "How old are you? Are you 12?" I said, "No, Mr. Meisner, I'm 21." He said, "You're too young. You're too inexperienced," because most of the students there are working on Broadway or doing a lot of film.

Maggie Flanigan (25:20):

And then somebody in the class said, "Well, you know who the best teacher is? That's Bill Esper." He's supposedly the best teacher even better than Meisner, so then I sought him out. He accepted me in class. I was very scared because it was New York City and you're scared, you won't do well. But I did it and I stayed in there and I was very shy with the repetition. But after a while, it really opened me up.

Maggie Flanigan (25:57):

I did very well in first year and in second year, because of my talent. I'm not bragging about it, excuse me, but the work is so good. It's so elemental for actors. He just teaches in a very logical way, but it's not logical in the head. It's logical in the heart and in the soul, into your actor's way of thinking, not the normal person... I hate to say normal, but not the everyday person who thinks logically or however they think. You can't do that when you're acting. You got to think from your heart and your guts.

Charlie Sandlan (26:46):

Did you struggle? I mean, the struggle is real. Did you ever feel like you wanted to quit?

Maggie Flanigan (26:54):

I had the hardest time but no, I never did ever I was going to do it. Even though I may feel really bad about it or bad about the work,

never would I have quit ever. I worked very hard. I began to open up with the independent activity, because it made so much sense. That's how I began to open up, and I did a lot of very good activities. The door work was hard for me, but from working in the independent activity, I was able to open up at the door. But that was the hardest because you had nothing to do but just be really open.

Charlie Sandlan (27:37):

So, you did the two years with Bill?

Maggie Flanigan (27:39):

Yup.

Charlie Sandlan (27:40):

At his studio, not at Neighborhood Playhouse.

Maggie Flanigan (27:41):

No, I worked at his studio because I didn't have the money to go to Neighborhood Playhouse. I'm glad I went to and studied with Bill.

Charlie Sandlan (27:53):

What was Bill like as a teacher?

Maggie Flanigan (27:55):

He was funny. He could be strong and difficult with you. He got a temper, but I learned from him. I certainly learned more from him than I did with the other teacher. I was only there for a couple of months, and then I went to Bill's studio. He got me, and I grew tremendously there.

Maggie Flanigan (28:22):

And then in second year, I understood character work intuitively. He gave me at the end of first year a character scene. I understood it, because the girl was like the movie *The Bad Seed*. I thought, "Well, I understand that. That's who I am or was as a kid." So, I was able to catch it without knowing how I did it. That was an honor that he gave me a character scene and expected me to do it in first year, and then I did it, not knowing how I did it.

Charlie Sandlan (29:04):

So, then you get out of school and did you just start auditioning and trying to...

Maggie Flanigan (29:09):

Well after second year, which I did do very well in, and then I started auditioning.

Charlie Sandlan (29:18):

What was that like?

Maggie Flanigan (29:21):

I thought I did well, and I think I did. I didn't always get cast, but I knew how to do monologues. I knew how to cold read, although there was no cold read teaching, but you learned how to implant meanings. So, I knew how to work it out. I did pretty well.

Charlie Sandlan (29:44):

Well, when did you start to follow Bill as a teacher and how did you get to that point in your life where you thought, "You know what? I think I like teaching and want to teach the work."

Maggie Flanigan (29:54):

Well, I was very interested in the Meisner work. I saw how brilliant it was and saw how the inevitable logic of it was, not intellectual logic, but visceral logic. I was interested in the form of it and would take notes on it. If you looked at my notes, now you'd go, "That doesn't make sense," but I was interested in the form and the development of it and how it opened up an actor and how it taught you to craft. I think it's like brilliant in terms of the development of it for actors.

Maggie Flanigan (30:40):

And then Bill said that I would work as an ingenue and then I wouldn't work for a long time. And then when I'm older, I would work but more like when I was in my 60s and 70s, you'll be a crotchety old. He thought that's when I would work as an ingenue and not for a long time. I didn't know I was comedic, but I did have a feeling for certain comedic parts.

Charlie Sandlan (31:17):

I mean, you didn't come to New York thinking you were going to be a teacher?

Maggie Flanigan (31:19):

No, no, no, I wasn't working as an actress for a number of years. So, I thought I would be a good teacher.

Charlie Sandlan (31:31):

Why do you think that?

Maggie Flanigan (31:33):

Because I thought I understood the technique, not to teach. I knew I would have to train. So, I approached Bill about teaching, and he said, "Oh, no, no, no, your voice isn't loud enough," same thing. He said, "No, you couldn't command a room," and I said, "Yes, I can. I was a manager of an art gallery. I can do that." He said, "Well, I'll think about it." I kept calling him, I wasn't going to take a no for an answer. I just wasn't-

Charlie Sandlan (32:12):

So, he said no, first.

Maggie Flanigan (32:13):

He said, "I'll think about it," thought I was too shy to do it or be able, as I said, to command a class, to command a room. I said, "Yes, I can, and I will. I'm not going to take no for an answer."

Charlie Sandlan (32:32):

Did you keep hounding him?

Maggie Flanigan (32:34):

Yeah. Yes, I did. "Have you made a decision, Bill? You haven't. Well, I'll call you in another month?" I did and he took me in.

Charlie Sandlan (32:44):

So, you started watching his class.

Maggie Flanigan (32:46):

I started watching the class as a soon to be teacher and took very clear notes and would go home.

Charlie Sandlan (32:57):

Your notebooks are incredible. I mean, how many notebooks you think have?

Maggie Flanigan (33:01):

About 20-

Charlie Sandlan (33:02):

Twenty.

Maggie Flanigan (33:02):

... books.

Charlie Sandlan (33:03):

Single spaced, typed.

Maggie Flanigan (33:04):

Single space, front and back, typed, but I took very good notes. And then I would go home at night and type everything up. I did that for four or five years.

Charlie Sandlan (33:20):

Of watching him in his class first year, second year.

Maggie Flanigan (33:22):

And coaching. He would have me coach first and second year, but a teacher there quit and opened her own studio.

Charlie Sandlan (33:37):

Is that Kathryn Gately?

Maggie Flanigan (33:38):

Yeah, Kathryn Gately. Bill needed a teacher for first year. So, having only started, I started teaching first year really in like September and October of my first year watching, I had just started. He also had me do second year as well. So, I was teaching first and second year by September and October of my first year watching Bill.

Charlie Sandlan (34:10):

Where do you think your work ethic comes from? Because you work harder and have a higher bar for work and for self-discipline than anyone I know. So, where did that come from?

Maggie Flanigan (34:20):

It came from my parents. My mother, she said, "You're not that bright. You'll have to work harder than anyone else in order to get somewhere." I did. I worked very hard in school. I worked very

hard in acting class and in teaching. I sat as everyone had to do and watch him teach. I would sit back there and begin to internally respond to what was going on and then check to see what he said. That's how I began to learn, was to see what my response was and what his response was. That's how I learned, where I was awful, where I was right.

Charlie Sandlan (35:17):

So, you would kind of teach internally while you were sitting there watching.

Maggie Flanigan (35:20):

Yes, yes, I did and took a lot of notes that other teachers who were sitting there didn't take as much notes. Doesn't mean they didn't absorb it, they did. But I did it through that. I would write in my notes when I was teaching, "Oh, no, I said this, I thought this. He said that" and wouldn't make it my own over a number of years and clarify it. That's what I began to do in maybe the second year watching and teaching was clarifying, clarifying what he was saying, so that it was clear to the students.

Charlie Sandlan (36:05):

Why did you think that he wasn't as clear as he could've been?

Maggie Flanigan (36:07):

Well, I think there was more confusion than needed to be, but that was his way of teaching. There's nothing wrong with that, but I wanted to be clear for myself and clear for students because if students aren't clear, how are they going to grow?

Charlie Sandlan (36:26):

So, what was it like to start to walk into a classroom being told that you're too shy and you don't have a voice?

Maggie Flanigan (36:32):

Oh, no, I was very prepared that I was with him only for two months before I started teaching. I prepared fully so that I knew what I would say, and I did. I just improvised often and would go home and then figure out what I could have done better. And then

I'd go back in the next class and work off them better, be more clear, and go back home and evaluate what I did.

Charlie Sandlan (37:11):

Well how did it feel leading a class? How did that compare to being in rehearsal or being on stage and working as an actor? How did you find yourself satiated creatively as a teacher?

Maggie Flanigan (37:24):

Oh god. You have what? Twenty actors in a classroom first year, second year. You want to help them. You want to be as clear as possible, be supportive as possible. Although some actors would say I wasn't supportive, but it was important for me to have discipline and teach them discipline, because some actors are just not disciplined, many of them are.

Charlie Sandlan (37:59):

Lazy, lazy.

Maggie Flanigan (37:59):

They're lazy, but they've not been taught how hard it is and how they must work and the clarity that a teacher must offer to students. If they're not clear, then the students will be unclear.

They can't be clearer than the teacher who's teaching.

Charlie Sandlan (38:21):

So, you ended up working for Bill and teaching for him for almost 20 years.

Maggie Flanigan (38:26):

Yeah, I think it's 19.

Charlie Sandlan (38:28):

Nineteen years at his studio in New York City, William Esper Studio.

Maggie Flanigan (38:31):

And at Rutgers University.

Charlie Sandlan (38:32):

And at the MFA program in Rutgers where I met you and that's where I trained with you in 1988.

Maggie Flanigan (38:40):

I did that in the spring of 1983. I came in to teach. I came in to study as a teacher in '82, which he had me teach. And then in '83, I was still teaching at the studio, and he brought me into Rutgers. So, I started teaching at Rutgers in my first year watching him.

Charlie Sandlan (39:01):

Right. So, you were going back and forth between the city and New Brunswick. I mean, basically-

Maggie Flanigan (39:07):

And home.

Charlie Sandlan (39:08):

Yeah, two full-time jobs for-

Maggie Flanigan (39:10):

Yes.

Charlie Sandlan (39:10):

... 19 years.

Maggie Flanigan (39:12):

Yes, that's right.

Charlie Sandlan (39:13):

What was the difference between teaching at Rutgers at an MFA program and teaching in the city? Is there a big difference?

Maggie Flanigan (39:22):

At Rutgers, the students have been vetted, because they had to audition. They had to go through interviews. Bill's studio, you went through interviews, and you were trying to fill your class. So, you would try to be as selective as possible and sometimes you couldn't be so selective.

Charlie Sandlan (39:42):

But not as selective as it is for the MFA program.

Maggie Flanigan (39:45):

Yes, and then in MFA program, there are grades. You're evaluated every semester. So, it's a tough program. It was a very, very good professional training program for actors. That's what Bill really created that you can't quite do in the city, but he had very good students in the city. I think there were some very talented,

successful actors that were trained well, and then went out in the business and worked.

Charlie Sandlan (40:20):

So, 19 years, you get to 2000, 2001. You left Rutgers in '99, but you were still teaching for Bill at his studio in New York City.

Maggie Flanigan (40:32):

Right, right.

Charlie Sandlan (40:32):

Well, talk to me about how you started to think about "I want my own studio. I want my name on the wall. I want to do things the way I want to."

Maggie Flanigan (40:40):

I didn't think about my name on the wall. I thought that I had been with Bill for a long time and had been a good support for him, as well as a good teacher. I thought I was a good teacher. I just felt that I needed to grow more, because after a while, you kind of...

Charlie Sandlan (41:05):

Did you feel stagnant?

Maggie Flanigan (41:06):

I was beginning to feel after about 19 years that I wanted to have my own studio. In fact, what it was is to go on my own and see how I would do because it was frightening.

Charlie Sandlan (41:23):

That's scary.

Maggie Flanigan (41:24):

It's very scary. You may not get any students, you may be badmouthed.

Charlie Sandlan (41:27):

Well, also, you knew that Bill was not going to take kindly to you leaving him and opening up...

Maggie Flanigan (41:35):

Yeah, and he didn't, but on some level, I think he's proud of me. I really do.

Charlie Sandlan (41:40):

Well, so what was that like to... I mean, you get to walk into his office and say, "Listen, I'm leaving you and I'm going to open up my own studio"?

Maggie Flanigan (41:49):

Well, I did. I asked to meet with him. He was getting ready to go in class, which was not a great time to tell him. He was very angry and upset, and then he had to go in and teach. But Eric [Austro 00:42:09], who was also a Rutgers graduate, he helped me find a space and get everything set up. And then I opened it and it was terrifying, terrifying because you're there by yourself, you're standing on your own. If it fails, you failed. That was just terrifying. I did everything I could to get students.

Charlie Sandlan (42:39):

You also opened in September of 2001. So, September 11th happened.

Maggie Flanigan (42:44):

Well, I taught a summer intensive of 2001. I had a small summer intensive. It'd be about 14 people, which is pretty good. And then I opened in the fall. I had like 20 people.

Charlie Sandlan (43:03):

It's amazing. And then 9/11 happened that fall too.

Maggie Flanigan (43:08):

Not even before I started teaching, it happened. I was driving into the city when the first plane hit. I somehow got to the studio, had interviews, but only one person showed off. I told this person to go home and take care of themselves.

Charlie Sandlan (43:36):

It's a huge trauma too-

Maggie Flanigan (43:37):

Yes, it was. It was.

Charlie Sandlan (43:39):

... deal with opening a studio like that, but you made it work. I mean, you opened your studio in 2001. I mean, it's still going today almost 20 years later.

Maggie Flanigan (43:53):

Thanks to you. You bought the studio and have grown it in a very good way.

Charlie Sandlan (44:00):

Yeah, I think it's as close to what a conservatory program can be, an MFA program-

Maggie Flanigan (44:06):

Yeah, in New York City.

Charlie Sandlan (44:07):

... in New York.

Maggie Flanigan (44:08):

That's what I wanted. I wanted a studio that I could get as close to the training program at Rutgers because it was an excellent program. It's harder in Europe, because they've got to make a living, which people had to do that at Rutgers, but they had to do all kinds of classes that you can't quite get everything, and I tried. I tried to get the teachers and they did come along.

Charlie Sandlan (44:40):

Yeah, they did. You ran that studio and it kept growing. I did, I bought the studio in 2012, and then you ended up starting to think about retirement. I know that was difficult for you. What was it like to start to contemplate not teaching anymore?

Maggie Flanigan (45:05):

Well, I was contemplating. I just knew that I couldn't continue teaching a full-time job at Rutgers during the day and a full-time teaching schedule at night. When I first started doing it and even later on, I had a lot of energy and loved it. But as time went on, right before I sold it to you, it was hard. I was exhausted. I'd get up at 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning, drive into the city, and be there prepared, ready to teach to coaching before the class began, and then teach three first year classes in a day.

Charlie Sandlan (45:54):

Yeah, you had nine hours of teaching in a day.

Maggie Flanigan (45:57):

Yeah, and the next day, nine hours of second year. And then you're running the studio at the same time, which was after 2001, coming into 2010, 2009, it was back breaking. I didn't think I was teaching as well. I was teaching. I was good, but I was tired. I would get irritated with students. Some would say I would get angry, which I did.

Charlie Sandlan (46:33):

You? Oh, my goodness. Of course. Well, it was funny you say that, because for someone who is shy and quiet, you command a room in a way that I've never seen anybody do it.

Maggie Flanigan (46:43):

Really?

Charlie Sandlan (46:44):

Yes.

Maggie Flanigan (46:45):

Yeah, I wouldn't know that.

Charlie Sandlan (46:47):

Really? You don't know when you walk in, you have this presence and this command.

Maggie Flanigan (46:54):

Yeah, I know that I go and fully prepared and fully open and making clear to them that I'm not playing around with it. I'm the real deal and what I'm going to teach is the real deal. They better work their ass off, or they'll have a very hard time with me.

Charlie Sandlan (47:14):

Yeah, that's right. I mean, one thing you can't tolerate is laziness.

Maggie Flanigan (47:18):

I can't, I can't or people who argue back and they're going to defend themselves about what I just said.

Charlie Sandlan (47:30):

Did you always have that kind of toughness even when you were younger, or did you develop that?

Maggie Flanigan (47:37):

No, because I think inside, I made it tough for myself, so that I would be good. I kept myself to a certain standard. As a teacher, it was always about being the best teacher, the clearest teacher that I could possibly be, because if the teacher is not clear, it's very hard for students to fully get the work.

Charlie Sandlan (48:08):

So, what's it like now to be not be teaching every day and to have this beautiful home up here and do you miss it? Do you miss being in a classroom?

Maggie Flanigan (48:18):

Yeah, that's why I began the masterclass because it was a way of teaching that was not the rigorous teaching and the two-year program. I loved working with people who already knew how to work. Although sometimes masterclass, if you're not working with people you trained, it may be more difficult; or if another good teacher trained, then it's more difficult. But I struggle to teach with people who were not trained well or were lazy. I try unless somebody was really lazy and that gives them a hard time.

Charlie Sandlan (49:04):

What do you love about acting?

Maggie Flanigan (49:08):

About acting?

Charlie Sandlan (49:09):

Yeah.

Maggie Flanigan (49:13):

Well, I just love the possibility of creating a part from yourself. Even though the character may not be like you in every aspect, a really talented actor can find a way into it. It was just wonderful when I was acting to create a character. I mean, I'm a character actress. I'm not a leading lady, I'm a character actress. I just thought that was the most wonderful thing in the world is to find your way into a character partly from yourself and a lot from your imagination.

Maggie Flanigan (50:05):

When I'd work on a part, I would keep a notebook by my bed. When I was going to sleep, I would daydream, really be open and daydream. Things came to me that were very specific to the character. I would have a notebook by the bed and would write down what was coming to me from my imagination. It was oftentimes things you'd never have thought with with your head. The character acting is just to find a part in you, to bring yourself to a part, live and breathe a part. To breathe life into the part I thought was wonderful and just to create a character from yourself that's different than you.

Charlie Sandlan (51:03):

Well, my fellow daydreamers, she's quite a special person. I want to thank you for sticking around and keeping your phone in your pocket. Please follow, subscribe to the show wherever you get your podcasts. You can go to our website, <https://www.creatingbehaviorpodcast.com>. I use SpeakPipe, so all you got to do is press a button. Leave me a message, ask me a question. Leave a comment. Let me hear an opinion or two that you have to share. You can follow us on IG @creatingbehavior. You can follow the Maggie Flanigan Studio as well @maggieflaniganstudio.

Charlie Sandlan (51:38):

Lawrence Trailer, thank you for the music as always. My friends, be disruptive, play full out with yourself, and don't ever settle for your second best. My name is Charlie Sandlan. Peace.

Charlie Sandlan (52:09):

(song Not Enough by Lawrence Trailer)