

Episode #017 (Transcript)

Charlie Sandlan (00:02): Every once in a while if you're lucky as a teacher, you come across a student who actually kicks your ass, who challenges you to think outside of the safe little box that you set up for yourself. And I know for me that little box is my studio, that desk, that chair where I am the final arbiter on what's good and what's not good, what's right, what's wrong. And sometimes you got to step back and say, "You know what, sometimes I don't know what the fuck I'm talking about." And it can be very humbling. And for me, that student was Jes Tom, the self described non-binary trans queer Asian American standup comedian who just back in June had a feature article in the New York Times Arts and Leisure section. They're with me today, and we get real personal. So put the phone back in your pocket. Creating Behavior starts now.

Charlie Sandlan (01:32):

Well, hello my fellow daydreamers. I wanted to start off today talking about the featured article in the September 6th New York Times Magazine. The title is called America At Hunger's Edge, and what it is is a photo essay primarily. These are photographs taken by a photographer named Brenda Ann Kenneally who spent three months during this pandemic traveling from New York all the way to California. She went across the Midwest, through Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, down through Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, all the way to California chronicling the food insecurity and that's what the experts call lack of food. The food insecurity in this country, I did not know this, one in eight people in this country don't have enough food to eat. And I think it's important to talk about. I think it's important, certainly for you as artists, to become aware empathically, and why I am talking about this is because the photographs are so powerful, they're so disturbing, they will not only spark your empathy and your sensitivity, but what I love about photography is it really allows you to really immerse yourself into the shoes of the subjects that you're looking at. And these photos are just heartbreaking.

Charlie Sandlan (03:15):

I'm looking at one photo now of this kid, he's on top of the kitchen counter and he's putting some food into this food processor. And you look at the apartment, you can certainly tell that it's rundown. And I look at all of the food that is in the house, and in all of these photos you see this, it's unhealthy food, it's cheap food, it's the only thing that people who are starving can afford. And I've never had to worry about food in my entire life, I shop at fucking Whole Foods. I eat organic, I can eat healthy, and most Americans cannot do that.

Charlie Sandlan (04:03):

I'm going to read to you the caption that is accompanying this photo that I just mentioned. "A week after New York's governor announced that schools would remain closed for the rest of the academic year, Lucas Manaseri, 12, was making apple bread using the chopped up fruit from a week's worth of school lunches. Every weekday throughout March, April and May, Lucas's father, John Manaseri visited Lucas's school to pick up the free lunches being made available to low income families. 'When everything first started, they weren't giving you the extra food stamps', says Manaseri, 39, who earns minimum wage working in a grocery store. Since then, an improvement in benefits has increased the grocery budget for the four member household to \$400 a month from \$300. 'I've got a little more wiggle room', Manaseri says, "if the kids want extra bananas or apples in the house, I can grab them." Well that's just one family's struggle to survive, to put food on the table. Please, check it out and take it in. You can go to newyorktimes.com/food-insecurity to take a look at the article.

Charlie Sandlan (05:27):

So, grew up in Cincinnati, very sheltered, I think my generation and generations before me have grown up in a very binary world, he, she, that's it. There's really no reason to think or to contemplate that there are other aspects to our collective humanity, and as a teacher, as an artist, over the last five years, I have been challenged to break out of that box. And teaching trans and non-binary students has accelerated my need to come

correct on my pronoun usage and it made me just so much more aware of how limited I am on so many things. An Jess was one of those students who really kind of threw cold water in my face and said, "Listen, you need to think a little more deeply and you need to consider more insight fully, not just how you deal with trans and non-binary students, but how you deal with minorities, with people of color." And I want to thank them for doing that. And this conversation, it gets personal, it gets uncomfortable for me, but it's really important, and I'm really glad to share it with you and thank you Jess for teaching me a few things. So here we go, this is Jess Tom. What would you live to talk about?

Jes Tom (07:11):

I am really interested, actually, in talking about my training and my time at Maggie and coming back. And I've been really interested in reconnecting with you about this now that I'm older and I have more distance from everything and I feel like I am just more grown up, to sort of revisit some of my time at Maggie with you. Because I feel like I, we'll see what you think about this but I feel like I kind of put you through the ringer as a student, a little.

Charlie Sandlan (07:48):

What do you mean by put through the ringer? I don't know if I would quantify it that way, but you challenged me.

Jes Tom (07:54):

I do think a asked a lot of you. I don't think I asked too much, I think that I asked just enough.

Charlie Sandlan (07:59):

I don't think you asked too much at all. You challenged me to just think a little bit more, to consider a little bit more what I might be asking you to do. And I think about, in particular, that Spoon River work.

Jes Tom (08:12):

Yes, I think about the Spoon River all the time.

Charlie Sandlan (08:15):

I do too, and I think about teaching you through that and trying to consider and ponder if I would do it differently, or if I did it right. So

you were working on the Spoon River, it's a collection of poems by Edgar Lee Masters, you were doing Walter Simmons.

Jes Tom (08:39):

I was. Water Simmons, who's a child prodigy who doesn't amount to anything.

Charlie Sandlan (08:39):

Yeah, and at the end he realizes he doesn't have the brains. And you were working on it and then we started to get into the character, and I said, "Well, I think you should find a Chinese accent."

Jes Tom (08:49):

It was specifically, to your credit, and I want to specify this to your credit, it wasn't just a Chinese accent, the full character was 1900s Chinese immigrant in San Francisco.

Charlie Sandlan (09:00):

That's right, and you got upset with me and I think you were offended.

Jes Tom (09:07):

At first I said no. At first I said no I won't do it. And then maybe by the end of class I thought about it, or maybe in the next class, I was like, "Okay, I'll do it." But at first I flat out said no.

Charlie Sandlan (09:17):

And why did you say no?

Jes Tom (09:18):

In that moment I think that I said no because, well it's very fraught to ask an Asian actor to do any "asian" accent, at least somebody who doesn't speak with one naturally. It's fraught because people get asked to do that all the time in the industry and because there's this perpetual foreigner idea about us, that the industry can only see us as foreign and as different and that Asian American people don't really exist, it's not really a think.

Charlie Sandlan (09:55):

Well you're typecast. You're the geeks, you're the tech nerds, you're the prostitutes, you're the massage therapists.

Jes Tom (10:01):

Right, or at least that's how it has been for a long time.

Charlie Sandlan (10:06):

And I remember saying to you that I really wanted you to try to do justice to someone that would have arrived in this country at that time and to try to do justice to their humanity. And to your credit, you came back and you did it, and it was actually really lovely, it was one of the more interesting Spoon River interpretations that I've ever had from a student.

Jes Tom (10:32):

Thank you. It's hard because I do think it was original and I do think that was a moment that was only made possible because you had me specifically. Because there are a few layers going on there. It was that I learned a dialect, it was that I figured out the wardrobe and everything. And I really struggled with this because I spent a lot of money on that, I spent maybe \$150 on just that Spoon River. I have to hold myself to a high standard, because if I don't, if I fail, and this of course is true of the actual literal acting itself, I was like, "If I fail this is racist." And that was what was so hard for me about it.

Charlie Sandlan (11:17):

Or stereotypical.

Jes Tom (11:18):

Right, because the precedent that has been set by the industry is people doing bad or racist or un-researched accents. Like you were talking about Margaret Cho's All American Girl, one of the things about All American Girl was that they hired of course a bunch of Asian actors to play her family, and then they had them all do this sort of generic Asian accent. They're not doing a Korean accent, Margaret Cho is Korean. It's one thing when one thing is doing the character of her mother, and she's doing a Korean accent to emulate her mother, because it's true to her experience and true to her life. It's totally different to get a bunch of Asian actors of a lot of Asian ethnicities and do, "Just do some kind of accent", and that is the precedent. And I was like, "I don't ever want to do that. So that means it has to be so well researched and so well done."

Charlie Sandlan (12:13):

So where did you go for the accent?

Jes Tom (12:15):

You gave me two options that day, actually. One was 1900s Chinese immigrant San Francisco. And the other one was authoritarian North Korea and I was going to be executed and it was my last speech before I was going to be executed. The one that picked, because I am Chinese American from San Francisco, and I was like, "Okay, there's something I can draw from that." Whereas I feel like if I had picked the North Korea one, I was like, "This I am going to pull completely out of my ass." I think that someone could be taught to do that, I think that I could potentially be taught to do that and do a good-ish job, but I didn't think that I on my own doing my work was going to do that justice. I just don't think that I am prepared to do it on my own. I went to a Cantonese accent for that because I now, again, because I consider it a part of my history, it was mostly Cantonese speaking Chinese people who were in San Francisco at that time. And this sort of spoke to, you and I had a big confrontation.

Charlie Sandlan (13:14):

Yeah, in class.

Jes Tom (13:15):

In class. It lasted like 20 minutes, I had snot coming down my face confrontation, as I was working on this. And something I was trying to communicate to you at the time, which I'm not sure I came through, was just that it wasn't that I didn't want to do it, it was that the amount of work that I had to do was much greater than the amount of work that a lot of the other students, a lot of the white students I should say specifically, were going to have to do. Because to me, I was like if you give somebody RP, German accent, French accent, whatever, they can go to the language coach and somebody can help them with that. There are resources to help them. For me, I was like there are no resources really. There was a language coach who could help me with something, but I was like, "What help really is a white person going to give me to learn a Cantonese accent?"

Charlie Sandlan (14:14):

Did you feel I was being unfair?

Jes Tom (14:17):

I didn't feel it was unfair. I felt that you didn't understand the scope of the work you were asking me to do.

Charlie Sandlan (14:22):

That's probably true. I didn't even probably consider that, I know I didn't. I just thought, "This is the work, so go do it", without understanding, "Well, fuck, man, this is a Cantonese accent that you're asking me to do and where the fuck am I supposed to go do that?"

Jes Tom (14:37):

Right. And so much of it was drawn from just my own personal knowledge and me reaching out to my own resources. I did not have a language coach or anything like that, I reached out to multiple friends who are native Cantonese speakers being like, "I need your help." And it was hard, it was hard to even ask for that because it's fraught to ask people, specifically Chinese people in America, the idea of a "Chinese accent" is very fraught. People work really hard to unlearn that shit because they want to assimilate, they want to be seen as legitimate in American society, American culture. And in the White supremacist American culture, that means you try to not have an accent, it doesn't look good, it doesn't sound good. So people thought I was asking them to do something racist, it felt racist to even emulate an accent at all, which was what I was really pushing back against when at first I told you I didn't want to do it.

Charlie Sandlan (15:39):

I think you even said that to me, I think you said, "You're being racist and this is racist and I don't want to do it."

Jes Tom (15:45):

I would say that now as somebody with a little more perspective, I think that I am glad that I undertook that project and I am proud of what I did with it. What I think is racist about it is that, and I just want you to know when I am using the term racist that I mean that in the sense that I think everything is racist and I don't mean it in a way that indicts you personally, I mean all of it.

Charlie Sandlan (16:12):

I have been indicting myself for weeks now as I have really come to accept my own white progressive liberal racist mentality, and that's a whole nother subject we could get into.

Jes Tom (16:26):

I am proud of that work. The thing that I think was racist about the whole thing was it wasn't just that you had assigned this Chinese immigrant character to me, it was just that in the class there was me and Shi-ann, who was also Asian American, and the character that you had given her was geisha. And so it wasn't just me, it was all of it together. And it was the idea that you had looked at us and had cast us this way in this perpetually foreign sort of way.

Charlie Sandlan (17:07):

That's very valid. I forgot about asking Shi-ann to do that. You know what I think it is, is I don't have very often a broad swath of Asian American actors, and so all of a sudden my imagination starts to go and it goes to, I don't want to say they're cliches, but I just think, "Oh, this would be really interesting to delve into."

Jes Tom (17:34):

Well there are things that you as a teacher feel like you don't have the possibility, like you couldn't do that if you had an all white class. You couldn't assign geisha, you couldn't assign Chinese immigrant, you couldn't assign North Korea. But for us, it's basically a white person looking at us and being like, "That's a foreigner." And for me, with the particular, I think that we're all very lucky that you almost by accident assigned me something that I actually personally connected, and I do think that that's why I did a good job. But you didn't know you were doing that, you did that by accident.

Charlie Sandlan (18:11):

Yeah, I just gave you two options.

Jes Tom (18:14):

Right, and one of them happened to really deeply resonate with me. Whereas you could have given me some other Asian options that don't resonate with me at all. And I do think I remember

Chyan struggling with that one because I don't think that it had anything to do with her.

Charlie Sandlan (18:29):

It didn't. It was just, "Oh, I think this might be interesting, why don't you explore it", and not realizing that that's racist. And certainly coming from a white guy, I look back now and I think, "Yeah, that probably was just my own ignorance." I have begun to just see how stupid I really am about so many things in the last probably five months than I have in most of my adult life. And it's been eye opening, in particular when it comes to pronoun usage and being able to talk to someone the way that they want to be talked to. I have a non-binary student right now in my class.

Jes Tom (19:14):

I was literally going to ask you have you had other trans and non-binary students since me?

Charlie Sandlan (19:20):

Yes, and I have one right now in my summer session. And I'll throw in a he every once in a while, and I'm like, "Fuck. God dammit." And it's embarrassing, to just go my whole life thinking that there's just two options and then in the last year or two really for me, it's been a lot longer for everyone else, I haven't really ever had to consider. I've never really had to challenge myself to think in a different way and I consider myself progressive and liberal and open minded.

Jes Tom (19:54):

Totally. Well that's the trap, isn't it.

Charlie Sandlan (19:57):

That's what's upsetting. Same when it comes to Black Lives Matter and just my own indoctrinated racism.

Jes Tom (20:07):

I am going to, while we're still on Walter Simmons, I'm going to bust your balls about one more thing.

Charlie Sandlan (20:12):

Please.

Jes Tom (20:13):

But then I do want to talk about the gender stuff. Was that you actually told me, when we were having our big confrontation, you told me very directly that, "if I wanted to work in this country, I was going to have to learn how to do this accent."

Charlie Sandlan (20:33):

I remember saying that to you, I remember. I said, "Listen, they're going to ask this of you at some point. And wouldn't you like to have this under your belt." That's how I rationalized it. "Wouldn't you just like to work on it now so you can have it?"

Jes Tom (20:44):

Totally. I totally understand that you were trying to do a tough love actor thing, and I do think that in a certain era and for some other people that that is true. But it was wrong to say to me, you shouldn't have said that to me as a student. And fortunately I knew at the time that that was wrong, and just not to internalize it because I was like, "I just don't think that's true." And also to be really real with you, in my five years of auditioning since I graduated the program, that has never been true for me. It's specifically particularly not true for me because I don't [inaudible 00:21:26] that way, I just don't read that way to people. I'm a fifth generation American, I think that also being queer and being gender nonconforming makes people read me as a modern American, which that is it's only complicated set of things. But yeah, it's not true for a lot of us at all anymore. And even if it were true, it shouldn't be true, and ownership should be more on the industry to change that than it should be on us to be like, "Well, I guess I better fit this racist stereotype better."

Charlie Sandlan (21:58):

I'm sorry that I said that to you.

Jes Tom (22:00):

I forgive you. But really, what you're trying to do, is to get us to fit better into a white world.

Charlie Sandlan (22:10):

White world, right. Yeah, and what's embarrassing is that this doesn't reveal itself to me until I hit 50.

Jes Tom (22:20):

I'm not going to blow too much smoke up your ass because that's not my style, but unfortunately that's actually very good.

Unfortunately that's actually doing very well for somebody of your demographic, is to be 50 and to be like, "Hmm, maybe I should think about this", that's actually very, very good and much better than I would say a lot of people expect.

Charlie Sandlan (22:41):

It's go to start with people like me changing.

Jes Tom (22:42):

It does. Good, I'm glad you know that because it does. The rest of us, we don't have the power to do anything, so you have to do it.

Charlie Sandlan (22:53):

Right, it's on people like me. [inaudible 00:22:57] came on few weeks ago.

Jes Tom (22:58):

Yes, I started listening, I didn't listen to the whole episode but I was listening to it before this. And I was actually like, "Oh, cool, Charlie's having another conversation with a queer Asian American, that's nice."

Charlie Sandlan (23:10):

Yeah, I'll check that off my list. But we were talking about the whole idea of whitewashing, and I started thinking back to all the films that I grew up watching. I just remember Mickey Rooney in Breakfast at Tiffany's.

Jes Tom (23:22):

Oh, totally.

Charlie Sandlan (23:23):

It's one of the most horrific, awful, disgusting white washing roles ever, and that's just one of many. And I mentioned this in the podcast with her, I saw this t-shirt that had Scarlett, Matt, Tilda, and Emma on it, and I'm thinking to myself, "Oh, she likes those actors." And then you realize, "Oh no, this is it. These are the so called open minded artists that take these roles that they have no business taking." And I know you did that PSA, that Ghost in the Shell PSA, great.

Jes Tom (24:04):

I did do that, thank you. Yeah, that was very fun. I think that it's complicated, particularly with Asian and East Asian characters, which we're talking about right now. Like Mickey Rooney, I don't consider that to be "whitewashing", I consider that more just yellow face, just straight up yellow face. White washing I would consider to be more when a character was originally conceived of as Asian and then gets played by a white person. And then there's also something that I feel like is very insidious about the industry right now is because it's very en vogue, because it's stylish to have diverse casts, that now I find that people are casting "diverse or marginalized actors" but everybody who wrote the show is white, or everybody who directed or produces it is white. So it's not actually an accurate or a truthful or meaningful representation of people of color or et cetera.

Charlie Sandlan (25:12):

The studios are white, the networks are white, the board rooms are white, the writing rooms are white.

Jes Tom (25:18):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), and it comes through. I just got my first T.V. credit ever.

Charlie Sandlan (25:25):

Congratulations.

Jes Tom (25:26):

Thank you. It's Love Life with Anna Kendrick on HBO Max. And I have a really, really small, small part in it. But it was my first ever, it was very fun. And I do think it's interesting, so the episode is a lesbian bachelorette party, and I play one of the guests, they cast a lot of my friends actually, a lot of stand up comics, Julia Shiplett, Rachel Pubrim, Taylor Ortega, they cast a really diverse party of people. The two brides to be who are getting married are a black woman and a half white half Asian woman. I'm at the party, there's Rachel Pubrim, who plays a black woman's sister, she's also a black woman. You could tell that the people who wrote and created the show are white because there are these little mistakes. It's a bachelorette party, so we have boob balloons around, which first of all I don't know that a lesbian bachelorette

party would have boob balloons, maybe, but in my experience, not really a think. It's a black woman's party, it's weird, it's weird mistakes like that. Or we're at this white strip club, the implication of the whole thing is that it's this black woman's bachelorette party organized by her sister who's also a black woman. And I'm like, "It just wouldn't happen this way." People make mistakes, because they didn't think about.

Charlie Sandlan (26:55):

You had this quote in a paper mag interview, you said, "I'll never get cast as a lesbian because I look like a dyke. They only want femmes. They want a beautiful woman to kiss another beautiful woman."

Jes Tom (27:08):

And Sydney Washington also added, Sydney who's an amazing stand up comic, femme, queer, black woman, she also doesn't get those roles because she's a real lesbian. And that is interesting, I really consider myself to be just starting out as an actor really. I mean I've been auditioning since I graduated from the studio, but of course in actor years, five years of auditioning is not actually that long.

Charlie Sandlan (27:39):

It's not.

Jes Tom (27:40):

Figuring out how to navigate it as me, as not only an Asian person but as someone who reads differently gendered depending on what context you put me in. Yeah, there's so little gender diversity in the media as far as lesbians I go I guess. Which I guess I read as a lesbian, mostly, all of this stuff gets really complicated.

Charlie Sandlan (28:10):

What kind of roles do you go out for? What do they call you in for?

Jes Tom (28:11):

I go out for a lot of stuff. Something that's been really irking me lately, actually, is that I feel like the trend right now is for white writers to write characters that have no race, or whatever. I'm saying that I think white writers write straight white characters and then they hand it over to casting, and then whoever, the next work

is like, "Oh, but maybe let's see some diverse faces for this." And then they send the audition out to all these queer people of color, and we look at that shit and we're like, "This is stupid. I would never say this." You know what I mean? To me it feels very insidious because it feels very like they want us to add a flavor and color to the show. But it's not about us, it's not about our experiences. I audition for a lot of parts that were written for women, cis women, but their casting will say, "but we're open to a non-binary actor, so don't feel pressured play it as straight." So I'm like, "Okay, I can approach this as myself. But I would never have this conversation. I would not be friends with these people." It doesn't make any sense. Once you put me in there, it doesn't make any sense anymore.

Charlie Sandlan (29:32):

But then you've got to go in and do it because that's the audition.

Jes Tom (29:35):

Absolutely, and you've got to dream that you get to play that stupid part.

Charlie Sandlan (29:39):

That must suck, I mean it does suck to go into an audition and you know, "This isn't right for me, it's not written for me", but you've got to go do it and you've got to do good work.

Jes Tom (29:49):

The way that I approach it is that I'm like, "If they fall in love with you, they will change everything to keep you." And that does happen for people. Off the top of my head I think of Lena Waithe of Aziz Ansari's *Master of None*. A lot of people who have since fallen from grace, however, I read an article that said that when they were writing the show they were like, "Okay, and the group has a friend who's a girl, who's a woman." And they wrote it just being like, "Yeah, she's just a generic woman." And then Lena Waithe walked into the room and just did it as Lena Waithe, Lena Waithe of course being a queer masculine of center black woman, and they loved her so much that they were like, "Scrap that, we'll just have Lena in and we'll have Lena's point of view." And it ended up being really good because Lena ended up really

enriching that show, and doing things like helping create the Thanksgiving episode which was so groundbreaking at the time. And that of course would never have happened if they didn't have Lena Waithe in the room.

Jes Tom (30:50):

So I'm just waiting for my Lena Waithe thing to pop off, where I get called in for something that's totally wrong for me and I just do it as myself and they go, "Well we love Jes." And that kind of brings it back around to what I was saying about how I do think that's is easier to have an acting career as a stand up comic than as an actor. Acting itself and navigating acting and auditioning as an actor I feel has an anonymity to it.

Charlie Sandlan (31:19):

I mean really, your stand up comedy is what's opening the doors of your career. It's giving you the platform to be able to walk into a room when you have an audition and do a good piece of acting.

Jes Tom (31:30):

To have it be meaningful for people to be like, "Let's have Jes Tom on the show", instead of seeing me and seeing a gender nonconforming non-binary Asian American person, and being like, "That actually seems hard to work with. That actually seems like not what we're looking for", which is how I would feel like it would be if I was trying to pursue this just as an actor.

Charlie Sandlan (31:53):

I'm curious, I struggle with my pronouns but I'm highly sensitive and aware and it fucking grates on me every single time it doesn't come out right, but how many people do you deal with during the day that just don't give a fuck? Or where you're walking through a room and it's not even a consideration? How do people deal with that?

Jes Tom (32:12):

Oh, most of the time it's probably just that they don't know my pronouns are whatever.

Charlie Sandlan (32:16):

Do you correct people in the moment are do you just go like, "Fuck this, it's not even worth it, call me whatever you want"?

Jes Tom (32:22):

It depends. Actually a younger non-binary comic and actor was asking me about this recently like, "How I deal with being mis-gendered on set?", which first of all, I've only been on one T.V. set and then a lot of small sets, but only one T.V. set, so I was like, "First of all, I don't really know anything. Second of all, a set has so many moving parts and so many people that nobody is going to know anything about you, let alone your pronouns."

Charlie Sandlan (32:56):

They don't care, either.

Jes Tom (32:56):

No, it doesn't matter. They're just trying to get you from A to B and keep everything on schedule. And I told this person, I was like, "I just have to not care about it, otherwise I'll go crazy. If I get hurt by it every time, that will really hurt me, so I have to pick and choose my battles." So for things like, for example, when I was in class with you, I didn't tell you until my second year. I didn't say, "These are my pronouns." And they always were, they always were, through first year too, and for years and years before that. It wasn't like I discovered something about myself in the middle, it was that I was taking that first year to decide if it was going to be worth it to open that conversation with you and then open that conversation with the rest of the class.

Charlie Sandlan (33:41):

Because you thought that it wouldn't be received the way you wanted to be received? Or that it would just be shrugged off?

Jes Tom (33:48):

Yeah, and if you were going to push back on it, I wasn't going to be able to learn from you. Because how can you really ask me or anybody to do my most truthful work if I couldn't be true to who I am? Or if I didn't feel like I could be safe to be vulnerable around you.

Charlie Sandlan (34:09):

So all that first year you didn't think, "I need to stop this", or, "I need to correct him"?

Jes Tom (34:21):

Well that's the thing Charlie, is that that's the life. That's my whole life. Not right now, because we're in quarantine, but I still work a day job, a service day job where I was on a staff with 300 people and I was like, "I'm not going to get 300 people to learn my pronouns. That sounds really annoying to me and it sounds not worth it." So that is a compromise that I make in my life at every single level to just be okay with it sometimes and to decide when it's really, really important to me to be able to be my most truthful self and have people acknowledge me as my most truthful self.

Charlie Sandlan (35:07):

So the New York Times article, Five Non-Binary Comics On This Moment; I'm Not Some New Buzz Word. Congratulations on that.

Jes Tom (35:15):

Thank you. Thank you. Yes, that was very, very cool. I'm having a cool little moment right now, Charlie, in quarantine where actually my entertainment career is progressing.

Charlie Sandlan (35:27):

It is.

Jes Tom (35:27):

While having not left my home since the middle of March.

Charlie Sandlan (35:31):

So what's it done for you? It certainly gives you exposure, New York Times pub is-

Jes Tom (35:36):

It's big. And actually things have been really kicking off for me since then. Actually, can I have a moment to brag?

Charlie Sandlan (35:43):

I would love for you to brag.

Jes Tom (35:44):

Because this just happened this past week. I signed with CAA.

Charlie Sandlan (35:48):

Are you fucking kidding me? Congratulations.

Jes Tom (35:57):

Thank you.

Charlie Sandlan (35:57):

That's no joke.

Jes Tom (35:57):

No, I know.

Charlie Sandlan (35:57):

You're going to end up with your own show before you know it.

Jes Tom (36:04):

Something's going to happen. I feel very strongly that something is about to happen for me and I don't know exactly what it is yet, but I'm excited to find out.

Charlie Sandlan (36:11):

CAA does not sign you if they do not 100% believe that they're going to make a lot of money off of you. Did they reach out to you after the article came out?

Jes Tom (36:20):

Yeah.

Charlie Sandlan (36:21):

That is amazing. Unbelievable.

Jes Tom (36:25):

It's dope. It's very cool. So they've been sending me on auditions lately also.

Charlie Sandlan (36:32):

Plus they have their whole production side as well, right? So they'll develop something for you

Jes Tom (36:37):

With me in particular as whatever, a marginalized actor, that's kind of the way I'm going to have to find myself into the industry is for people to fall in love with my specifically.

Charlie Sandlan (36:50):

I'm just really excited for you and I'm proud of you and I want to thank you also for challenging me to think and challenging me to be better, just not as a person but a man and as a teacher. I appreciate that.

Jes Tom (37:08):

I'm glad, not that I had to play any part of it, I am glad that I played a part in making you continue to think about this stuff. Just because I know, I think teaching is really important, I think being a teacher is a really important job, I think you have a huge amount

of influence over a ton of people, right? That's what teaching is. And so I think that if you can continue to progress and improve as a teacher, that's the most important thing, because it's not just you. You know what I mean? If it was just you in your own life, I probably wouldn't care.

Charlie Sandlan (37:49):

I have people that come to me and look to me.

Jes Tom (37:50):

You're helping shape people's careers and you're helping, the dream is that you give the tools to students including marginalized people such as myself, to be able to go out into the industry and work and succeed. And so to me it's really important that you do right by us so that we can benefit, so that we can go out and work because it's hard. And I think that I have talked to you about this before, and I was hearing also in your interview with Cee, that she had also received training from school that wasn't good. And I also, I was a theater major at a liberalized program that was not good and I don't feel that I benefited from it and I feel like it was kind of a waste of my money and time to get basically told that there was no place for me in this work. And I think that you're in a unique position to look at your students, not regardless of who they are but for who they are and for how different they are and be like, "This is how you can exist in this space. This is how there are possibilities for you."

Charlie Sandlan (39:08):

Well, my fellow day dreamers, thank you for sticking around and keeping your phone in your pocket. I hope you came away from that just a little bit more enlightened, I know that I was. Jess, thank you very much, it meant a hell of a lot to me personally. Please follow this show wherever you get your podcasts, review it on iTunes, it would be really helpful. Go to my website, <https://www.creatingbehaviorpodcast.com>. I use SpeakPipe, press the button, leave me a message, ask me a question, give me your thoughts. You can follow me on Instagram @creatingbehavior, you can follow my studio @maggieflaniganstudio, Lawrence Trailer, thank you for the music as always. My friends, keep

challenging yourself. Push yourself to grow, to educate yourself, operate outside your comfort zone when you can, and don't ever settle for your second best. My name is Charlie Sandlan, peace.