

SMFA Summit Interview with Deb Snyder, premiering 22 May 2021, 5pm PDT

Bonnie Gillespie

Everyone, I'm so excited to present to you one of my very favorite people on the planet. It's Deb Snyder. Hi, Deb.

Deb Snyder

Hello!

Bonnie Gillespie

Thank you for joining me for this talk. I am so thrilled to get to chat with you because you are someone who inspires in so many ways. And I remember when we had you in at our Day 50 call of our latest round... of a live round of Get in Gear for the Next Tier, because I wanted to bring in people who'd been with the program for a little while to chat about tier jumps, and the work. You know, because here we've got a group of people who are just at the 50-day point in their journey, and you've been with me for years now, and I wanted a little bit of a, "Here, here's someone from your future, maybe letting you know, the work is enoughness. The work is self-care. The work is the work." And you kicked us off in such a beautiful way that I knew I wanted to talk with you about Creating the Hollywood We Want, and staying in the game, and resilience, and having fun and having fun along the way, for crying out loud, you know?

Deb Snyder

Yeah, well, I mean, I have so much time invested in life and in this journey that I get to look back and say, "Oh yeah." I was just thinking today, it was so funny. It's like, "No, I've been around the world twice. I've SCUBA-dived in Australia. I've worked with Ang Lee. I walked across the set with Sydney Pollack. You know," there's moments in the woods, it's my new... I've been listening to Broadway on Sirius XM. And, you know, it's just, I had this realization that sometimes a career is a collection of moments. That's my new thing for this week. And I was collecting those moments because I, I grew up... as we deconstruct some of the things we've grown up with... I'm going to jump all over the place, Bonnie.

Bonnie Gillespie

Jump.

Deb Snyder

And one of those, one of the things I'm deconstructing for myself and I started just recently because I had filmed on "Big Little Lies" -- I'd had this amazing experience filming; I was a guest star. I was, I was allowed to improv in front of Reese Witherspoon and Adam Scott and Andrea Arnold, and I got my hand shaken by the cameraman. And the first AD was coming over to tell me how much they loved me. I was getting all this great love. And then the whole scene was cut. And I went and I didn't know until we watched, because sometimes that's what happens but, but because I had been studying with you, and because my enoughness was so into place, I

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can say, "I did the work. I had the experience. I gave myself the award, because that was a magical experience."

And that's how you begin to build your enoughness. You take those experiences, whether they show or not, whether there's three people in the audience, or you're getting to sing for thousands of people on a stage, you take what you get, and you build it, step by step, that enoughness. So, when you have to confront all the things we have to confront as actors which is rejection after rejection after rejection. And it's not really rejection of you it's just somebody else was more right the part. That's Spencer. He agrees with me.

Bonnie Gillespie

Absolutely. He's preachin'! Yup!

Deb Snyder

He likes to preach. Preach! And it just empowered me so much. I was thrilled, and went on to book something even bigger. So, you know, which is "Mixed-ish" and I'm a recurring guest star in that and I got eight scenes, not one scene, as a guest star and the tag. So!

Now, I'm over 50, so I'm putting out there my friends. I have been on this journey a very long time. I've been in LA since I was in my 40s. I came to LA late, I'm not one of those spring chickens who comes here, and I came with a huge debt, and \$1 to my name, and my husband was with me. I've been married for... way too many years, 40-some years.

Bonnie Gillespie

Wow.

Deb Snyder

We're best friends, we survived the pandemic together, and we're getting through it all, so, I'm, I've had that experience. I've had that joyful ride with all the ups and downs relationships give us. And the journeys, I like calling them adventures with all the adventures.

Bonnie Gillespie

Ooh, yeah.

Deb Snyder

And you collect these life things, and all of a sudden you begin to realize, "Oh, that just snuck into that part and oh, that I can use that here." And it's such a wealth. Living gives you more power in your creativity in your ability to tell more stories.

Bonnie Gillespie

Gosh, that's good.

Deb Snyder

That's what I'm and and, oh I know I was trying to the thing I'm dismantling with this ownership and this enoughness, and this, "I did the work," celebration for myself, I don't need to do with anybody else. I do it with Bonnie because she understands it and ninjas understand it so I can do it with you and say "I did the work." Because most people are gonna say to you, "What did you do? What was your last job?" You know what, I have a current job right now. I get to revel in that moment, but between this job and "Big Little Lies" was a year for me. I did some commercials in there so that was fun. And, but there's always space between work. There just seems to be...

Bonnie Gillespie

Well even a series regular is out of work half the year.

Deb Snyder

Half the year. In fact, I heard an insane stat today. I was watching a Viola Davis moment on... somebody had shared it on their Instagram where she was saying... under... what is it 2% or 5% of actors make \$50,000 or less. So, I mean, LA is an expensive town most of us have to carry a second job. I still carry a second job but I have a job that lets me have the flexibility to audition, and leave to go do roles. So, thank you universe for providing me. I've learned with Bonnie, with you -- I'm talking to them with you -- I've learned to accept that job as a gift. As opposed to, I would love, there are people who can give it up and do that, but I've done the starving and, you know, living paycheck to paycheck. I've been through those years, honestly. I'm not there anymore it's not where I'm personally comfortable anymore.

So, I give myself the grace to know, I've got a great job. I've got a great job going concurrently on TV on Hulu, and it's a really kind of a fabulous place. And I'm dismantling these thoughts in my head that I've carried for years, "You're only as good as your last job. Those who can't act teach." Ha! If that didn't wipe me out of a lot of things. I love to teach kids improv, one of my favorite things to do, and that stopped me a little bit, you know? I had some work to do on my enoughness.

Bonnie Gillespie

What happens when you identify those, those loops, those, those rules, that when you actually step back and look at it you go, "That's not even mine. I don't even believe that, yet I was making decisions in my life and judging myself around that as if it's true."

Deb Snyder

I very quickly now, because I've, I've built the muscle, recognize it. And I think I've told you this before. I have a little crab that runs around, I'm, my birthday's in July so, I celebrate with Bonnie. Two different days but we're little Cancer kids!

Bonnie Gillespie

That's right!

Deb Snyder

We're little moon children. And I have this little crab that runs around with sage. And when I see that little connective tissue thought I just burn it. I burn it and I put it out there and let it go and I don't even have to forgive myself, because that means there's another level of blame I've done to myself and I don't want to do that to myself. So, I just burn it out and sometimes it hurts, it's funny, it's an imaginary thing in my head, and usually when I'm meditating, I can do it now when I walk around the world and go, "Oh I don't like that thought. Go away," but it that's the muscle. And I've found if I just accept it, and I just inhale the new thought, and I give myself space and grace, it becomes a part of me. And I get happier.

Bonnie Gillespie

I think the replacement thought is so important, because it's like habits, you can't just eliminate a bad habit you actually have to replace it with a good habit, or else that space will just bring the bad habit back.

Deb Snyder

You, you made a big... it took a long time for this thought to get through to me. With Bonnie's work, I will say, I did the 100 days, I didn't get through every day, but what I did is I woke up, I, my non-negotiable is I was learning Bonnie's language and how to do this, my non-negotiable, was that I would get up every day, I would play the song as I made my coffee, and I would read the opening, I would read the opening email. I don't even know if I read the content; I read the email that that you sent. And I listened to the song and I'd go read the lyrics and I'd inhale that that that was my non-negotiable. And then I'd go back and do the work, as I could do it.

And eventually you unders... I understand... I've recognized when I understand words. It's like when we learn a part, we read the words, we go, "Oh, I understand. 'I hate you.' I understand that. I know what that means. I can say those words, I know what every word means." But I don't really know what it means in this context. And I began to learn, just like a script because the script as we all know gets deeper and deeper and deeper for us, the more we just give ourselves time to walk around the house and say it to this window and that piece of furniture and run our line learner as we get ready for our self-tapes again. We know if we give ourselves grace and time, the words come to us. That's what the process is working for you. Each year I did that 100 days, and I, my non-negotiable was always listening to the song and reading it, all of a sudden I found I was doing the work. Next year. I was doing the work, and I always do. Oh, even now, I always do the 11-day free training at the end of the year. 'Cause why not.

Bonnie Gillespie

Right? I mean.

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Bonnie Gillespie

Deb Snyder

A gift from Bonnie.

Bonnie Gillespie

Every year since 2014, I got a gift for you the last days of December, right?

Deb Snyder

And who... you know, who knows? Bonnie's evolving, things are changing. It's getting exciting. It's like, "Grab it while you can, because once you've had it once, it's gonna follow you along the whole year, you're gonna think about it, you're going to look at your resume differently, you may..." and, oh perfection, Bonnie.

Bonnie Gillespie

Oh, let's talk about that.

Deb Snyder

I had to get rid of that. Even now I had to write a letter because I'm looking to submit and and discover new things for myself. Let me put it out generically like that. And I felt myself stop the writing, and I went, "Oh, what's going on. Oh, I'm scared it's not going to be right enough. Forget it, just put down all your thoughts go ahead. Oh, that's a good bad thought! Oh, that's a horrible sentence! Oh, look, you spelled that wrong, isn't that awesome! If I can feel..." you've taught us: if I can feel bad about it, I can feel good about it.

Bonnie Gillespie

You bet!

Deb Snyder

It's Keith's story, which I've heard several times and it's in my head now. I even say it to my husband once in a while. What beautiful mistake am I going to make today?

Bonnie Gillespie

Yes. How are we going to mess this up? I can't wait to find out. Yes.

Deb Snyder

Can't wait to find out and that even follows me into my job because it's been a year for mistakes, let me tell you. And that, that that allowing that perfection to leave me knowing that like that line I, I'm going to say I love you now. So, the line is now I love you, and it's getting deeper and it's changing, and I understand the context and the context is going to change for me tomorrow. I already know that something's gonna shift tomorrow. And it's exciting to me it's something it, it keeps me empowered. It keeps me in joy and it keeps me in hope. My level as I've said to my... our vibrational level or our, our love, our emotional level, whatever word works for

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Bonnie Gillespie

everybody out there, whatever you need to call it, which is graciously loving by Bonnie... she gives us the freedom to sometimes make up our own language.

Bonnie Gillespie

Always. I celebrate making up your own language.

Deb Snyder

I'm grateful for that. I'm known for twisting my words, some days. But I know, and I have said this before and I will say it again, because I put the work in, gave myself space, gave myself breathing, allowed myself to learn when I wanted to learn and when I was aligned to learning... as is the phrase we like to use here. And I found that, I said this the other day I said, even when I hit my low, when I'm not as happy as I was yesterday, I didn't have an audition, I didn't hear about a callback... it's not that it's devastating, but we mark it. We clock it. We're actors. We clock. We go we look at our stats. You know, this is how we do it, this is part of our CEO job. We have to put on our hats and go, "Oh, okay. Three auditions. No callbacks. But I know I did a good job so I'm gonna let it go. Done. Okay, clocked, done."

But I'm not as... these highs. "Whoa, I got called back or, whoa I booked it, whoa they pinned me. Whoa, I'm on an avail," you know. I mean there's different levels of high, but even in life when nothing is going on, there's different levels of feeling of joy, or flight. My lows are higher than my highs used to be. And I know that. Like now I've had six months of silence, people. I booked "Mixed-ish" in November.

Bonnie Gillespie

Wow.

Deb Snyder

Well, I'm just gonna open that up, out there so everybody hears it. Now I have a couple more episodes coming up which I'm grateful for. I've had a few auditions, I know it's pandemic time and it's also I think we're in pilot season, and I tend to do more in episodics and commercials than pilot season, but you better watch out, I'm coming. I haven't stopped you never know what's up for Miss Deb, here. But it's just fun to know that I am more powerful, more in my skin, happier. And I believe, on Day 50 -- if I can just keep rambling -- what I spoke about was being a star. And I used to have such back-off of that word, let me tell you. In fact, I think, can I say naughty word? The rebel is asking to say a naughty word.

Bonnie Gillespie

I love this. I'm like, when have you ever asked for permission to say...

Deb Snyder

I know! Can you believe it? It's like, well I don't know how PC this conversation is I don't know.

Bonnie Gillespie

Bring it.

Deb Snyder

But anyway, whenever somebody used to say, "Oh, you're a star," I used to go, "Twinkle fucking twinkle," you know what I mean? I had kind of a sour, I made people laugh, but it was kind of a twisted thing. I didn't feel comfortable. What that meant was, I wasn't comfortable with them telling... I didn't bask.

Bonnie Gillespie

It was a way to refuse ownership of something you weren't ready to embody.

Deb Snyder

And I wasn't sure they were being truthful.

Bonnie Gillespie

Ooh, that part.

Deb Snyder

It was one of those... "Is it me? Is it them? I don't know but we... I lost, I don't feel good here."

Bonnie Gillespie

Yeah.

Deb Snyder

What have I learned this year? Okay, I got to it this year. And it was even after I watched the Tina Turner documentary, which I didn't realize she didn't really hit her, her power stage time until she was 50. So, understand that this huge mega talent didn't even begin to hit what she wanted to hit until she was 50.

Bonnie Gillespie

Legend, yeah.

Deb Snyder

And I went, you know what, she has to retire at some time. And when Tina Turner retires, do you think she gives up the fact that she's a star? No, she's a star when she goes on a picnic. She is a star when she gets in her car. She's a star when she's in her bathrobe and brushing her teeth. And the realization hit me, "I can't be a star only when I'm working, I have to be a star now, all the time," the way I said it before I saw the Tina Turner documentary was, "I'm a star when I vacuum my floor." Because someday I'm going to do that in a movie. I'm going to be the the maid walking down the hallway vacuuming who runs into the star and trips them and catches the killer. I'm going to be that person.

Bonnie Gillespie

Of course you are.

Deb Snyder

But it's just... It was such a realization because we're all going to retire at some time. And if not, we're going to go down to Clara... I'm still a... gang, I'm still headed for Clara "where's the beef", you know. 85 and still working, you know what I'm saying?

Bonnie Gillespie

May we all be Betty White, like seriously.

Deb Snyder

Betty White.

Bonnie Gillespie

Yeah.

Deb Snyder

Those are my peeps. But, um, so it made it exciting. It made it fresh. You have opened up my mind and I have allowed you in, because part of it is allowing yourself to hear something new. And and I come from a very... I've been, a very dominated school of thought. In other words, I always needed somebody to give me approval. And it wasn't in my relationship because I have a very, very even relationship with my husband because we don't stop each other from growin'. So, I'm not in a relationship that's in any way suppressive. He's come with me; I've come with him. We've allowed each other our journeys, and it's been a very successful combination 'cause that's a place you tend to look for: Is it working or is... am I am I adjusting? Because the first place we adjust is in a relationship. you have to give and take in a relationship.

Bonnie Gillespie

Yep! Of course.

Deb Snyder

You just have to, and, well, at least I do.

Bonnie Gillespie

I think there has to be... I mean, it's a dance.

Deb Snyder

It is.

Bonnie Gillespie

Which means there's always motion, there's always fluidity, and there's responsiveness to what the other body is doing. Like that's that's what partnership entails.

Deb Snyder

Beautifully said, thank you. And, and now we've hit this place where both of us are dancing. We're both just, you know, sometimes he's Ginger Rogers going backwards in heels and sometimes I am. So, and she's amazing, you really got to watch those old movies and watch her acting. I mean, her acting and her dancing are phenomenal. Anyway, that was a little side note. But anyway, I'm having fun, I'm having fun, I'm having fun growing, and I can... I plan on doing it for a long time.

Bonnie Gillespie

Amen. Tell me, tell me how you see the the Hollywood we, you know, we talk about #CreatingTheHollywoodWeWant. How do you see things shifting and our role in it as leaders? Because everyone who's chosen a storytelling career is a leader, by default. You've chosen a very brave, courageous, small niche role in life.

Deb Snyder

Well, my niche is definitely in the over-50 category, and embracing everybody. Because there's a huge range of people. We're, we're changing in diversity, in... we're we're learning new language. Remember I had a lot of new language to learn, and I give myself a lot of grace on that because there is a lot to learn, and I'm darn well going to learn it and embrace it. And I realized for me, it's about training myself to see things in a new way. Because I have to learn. Because if I continue to watch the same stories I've watched for the past 50 years, I'm not inhaling the new. I'm not inhaling the new Hollywood. And I have watched a lot of diverse shows, but not a huge... what's my comfort, what's my go to, you know what I mean? I want to watch those new shows. I want to open myself to those exciting shows. I want to see all kinds of flavors and stories and including everything: disabled, different races, everything. I want the stories to be broken open, because we're out there in melting pots, you know what I mean? I've been in all these different relationships. They exist. So, we've got to bring them and we've got to be willing to watch them.

Bonnie Gillespie

Put them on screen and keep them programmed and we keep them programmed by showing up to watch them.

Deb Snyder

Yeah, and I started to think about all the, I don't know anything about this but I started to think about all these Nielsen ratings. Because you know I'm in a show and I know I've started to learn to watch it. Whose households are they in?

Bonnie Gillespie

Yeah.

Deb Snyder

How do we know? Is it a diverse selection of people? Are we being fair to all the shows out there, you know? So, it's interesting because I think we have to be careful how we start to quantify what a successful show is.

Bonnie Gillespie

Absolutely. Because where are we measuring whether something's a success or not, and then the advertising dollars that flow after that, which is what keeps something on the air, and where are we actually measuring. Yeah, the the conversations need to expand beyond just, "What stories are we telling?" It's also, "And for whom?" And, "How are we calculating what is a win at a network. What's what's profit? What's loss?" Like, I think all of it needs to be re-examined.

Deb Snyder

A lot to learn, I know. A lot to a lot to change. A lot to shift, but we can now. We've also got the smaller units of technology. We've got connectivity and ability to do things like we've never had before. I'm coming from the '80s, where we didn't have internet. We were just building internet. We were just, in fact, I was a little bit of part of that which is kind of fascinating. I was in Singapore, teaching Johnson & Johnson people how to upload their little medical images up to the web. Now let me tell you, yhis web, which is just a computer in somebody's barn, let's be honest there, that connects to a satellite and comes back down.

Bonnie Gillespie

That's it!

Deb Snyder

Your cloud is still metal.

Bonnie Gillespie

The cloud is some dude's computer that's not in your house. That's all that is.

Deb Snyder

Let me tell you, we were not connected well back then. It was CRASH CRASH CRASH CRASH CRASH. I mean, I was on Photoshop when it was MacDraw or something like that.

Bonnie Gillespie

Oh my God.

Deb Snyder

My husband wrote the first book, you know, "How to..."

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Bonnie Gillespie

Bonnie Gillespie

Like HyperCard and MacPaint and all the... yeah.

Deb Snyder

So, the beauty is, now we have phones. We have Zoom. We have, we have the ability. We have TikTok, I don't even know TikTok. I know you're doing a lot on TikTok. I go and I'm learning it but it's fabulous because you have the gift to tell your story. Even if it's just a little bitty bitty, little bitty story. Just a five-second story. You can start to tell your story, and I encourage you to tell your story.

Bonnie Gillespie

So, let's let's end on that. How do you encourage someone who might be nervous about growth and change and may come at it with, "I'm too old to even start learning a new thing, it's just, it's all too much"? Where is the ability for us to tap into feeling courageous enough to, to grow, to learn?

Deb Snyder

Well, I, that's a great question, and it's funny but I'm actually studying analytics with a friend of mine who's very smart about this stuff, and I'm just doing it on Instagram. I'm just doing it with pictures and then I'm moving to reels, and I'm just doing it very slowly. I'm trying this kind of a picture, I'm doing a picture from my past, when I was... if I have pictures from my past acting. Let me tell you it's hard to find some of those.

Bonnie Gillespie

Why didn't we take more pictures? Oh right, because we didn't have something on our bodies at all times that was. Yeah, got it.

Deb Snyder

Or a saying that you really appreciate and even the basic way to start is, if you see something that you agree with and I have erred in this and I'm forgiving myself and going to move forward on it, because I just learned how to do it. You learn, so there's no blame. There should be no blame as you're learning. Just allow yourself to learn. You see somebody posts something that you really like, share it. That's just a way to start, and then to tell your story, find out something that interests you and share it. Like, I crocheted a hat once. Crochet has been in my house, my, my family for years. I crocheted a hat. First one in 50 years and I stuck it on my head and took a picture. It got more likes than anything because it was just this outrageous share of, "Look what I did. My family members do it better than I, but I did one, one in my entire life."

So, so whatever suits your personality. Some people are funny, some people are a little more serious and that's fine. What book did you read that you'd like take a picture. That "Self-Management for Actors"? Take a picture. #SMFAninjas. And you'll have thousands of people

see it. You know, it's whatever interests you, you're going to find that there are thousands of people who are interested in it and we don't just connect here in California. We connect across the country and around the world. So, we have a great we have billions of people who want to connect. If you connect with a few thousand, yay for you. Tell a small story and you know what it is going to change. It's going to change.

Bonnie Gillespie

One of the most beautiful things that you said is that you, you show up the same way, whether it's an audience of 3 or an audience of 3 thousand or 3 million, that it doesn't change the joy of giving the performance. Of offering the share. And I think that is some of the courage that's required to get going is the stakes are never lower than they are right now, the audience is never smaller than it is right now. Good, then there's nothing stopping you.

Deb Snyder

You've said that and that is true, it's true.

Bonnie Gillespie

Do the damn thing.

Deb Snyder

Do it, just do it. That's JFDI.

Bonnie Gillespie

That's right, just fuckin' do it.

Deb Snyder

Yeah.

Bonnie Gillespie

Deb, please let everyone know where they can find you, find your photos of crocheted hats, your great laugh. Where can we connect?

Deb Snyder

Well, I have a website, Debsnyder.me because I couldn't get dot com so dot me. I have Instagram @theDebSnyder, I have Facebook: TheDebSnyder. And I'm floating around Twitter and LinkedIn too happens to be one of my biggest places. It's all the entertainment attorneys, so like them over there because when you need an entertainment attorney, LinkedIn is a great place to find 'em, so.

Bonnie Gillespie

That's a hot tip. I love it and I love you.

Deb Snyder

I love you.

Bonnie Gillespie

Deb, thank you so much for being here and sharing this time with us.

Deb Snyder

Thank you so much. It's my pleasure. Go out there and get 'em folks, tell your stories, we need 'em.