

TERRENCE MCNALLY

Hi I'm Terry McNally and welcome to Free Forum...

Almost exactly 11 years ago, the first week of February 2014, I took a hiatus from this show after 17 years. I had some other projects going on and felt I didn't have the time it took to produce, host, and promote Free Forum. At the time I thought it might well be the end of the line, and before signing off, I turned to my longtime friend, journalist and best-selling author, Sara Davidson, to interview me.

3 years later, after Trump's first election, I felt I had to do something - and so returned to these conversations. Here we are - 11 years after my hiatus, 8 years after my return, and a few days after Trump's second inauguration. This might be an interesting time to recall how things looked then as I reflected both backward and forward.

Today I will be the guest and Sara Davidson will be interviewing me.

TM: Tell us what to expect in your upcoming book which will be coming out at the end of March, The December Project?

SD: A few years ago I got a call from a rabbi who lives where I do in Boulder Colorado, named Zolman Schacter Shalome, but he is beloved by hundreds of thousands of people as Reb Zalmon. He founded the Jewish Renewal movement; he's colorful, brilliant, and though he's an orthodox rabbi he's led a very unorthodox life. And he said to me, I want to have a series of talks with you about what I'm calling, The December Project. When you can feel in yourselves that you're coming to the end of your tour of duty, what is the spiritual work of this time and how do we prepare for the mystery? Well, I wasn't really thinking much about mortality but I jumped at the chance to spend time with him and for two years we met every Friday to talk about this and hundreds of other things, and the book is a memoir about those conversations, and interspersed with it are sketches from his extraordinary life.

SD: Now, Terrence, you've been doing this show for 17 years, talking about a World that Just Might Work. I don't get it! To me, the world is imperfect and always will be, that's its nature, life is imperfect. As JFK once said, "life is not fair". So what is a "world that works" and why do you qualify it with the words, "just might"?

TM: Well the "just might" part is really critical. You can imagine, when I say this to people, they say, "why not just a world that works"? Come on, go all the way! And my feeling is, that I somewhat hold to what you said in asking the question. That may not be possible. But the "just might", what it really is, it's an invitation and a challenge. In other words, it's probably not working so good right now, but it just might. And really it's just one thing I said one day when I was probably introducing the show or describing something and I sort of went, that's really how I feel. So the "just might" means, if - for those grammarians out there, it's the subjunctive, and the subjunctive has to do with wish and possibility and that sort of thing. And so it just might work if you do your part and if everyone else listening does their part and if things fall together, but at least it comes from the point of view of we've got a shot, but it's not going to happen passively and it's not going to happen if we're spectators and it's not going to happen if we're blaming and it's really about, as I say, an invitation to join me in pursuit of a world that just might work. And what do I mean by it? It has to do with justice,

and fairness and inclusion and possibility, a couple of things that we lose sight of really very often in this culture which is seeing the long-term view; seeing the relationships in which things happen; seeing beyond your family or your company or your neighborhood or your religion, your political party. And so it's, the world that I envision that just might work is one in which we see things differently and approach them with an eye to making it work.

SD: Okay, I sort of get it. I'm curious, when did you first feel a call to repair the world? How did that develop in you?

TM: Oh my God. I think it's been with me a long time. I assume it emerged in, probably strains were there before college but I would say definitely during college. When I say strains of it, I think I entered, I graduated high school and entered college in 1965, smack dab...

SD: Oh no, you hit the weak spot of the 60's cultural and political revolution. But before then, I want to go back a minute to before you got to college, which was Harvard. You grew up mostly in Florida, in a Catholic family of six children. You were number two, but you were the oldest boy. What was your role in the family?

TM: I was going to get to that actually, because my role in the family was, I was, there's no black sheep in our family, but I was the rebel, I was the questioner, I was the pain in the butt to my parents for sure. I will give myself this context, is that my mother and father were typical of a lot of people married just before he went overseas for WWII. She was 18 and he was 20 – Marcella and Edward. And when he came back, he had been attending Suffolk, he dropped out of Suffolk, a small college in Boston, went into the service, when he came back the GI Bill and good work on his part got him into Harvard. He attended Harvard also, on the GI Bill. Now the thing that was interesting was, he dropped out a couple of times to take care of the family and he ended up graduating at the age of 29 with three kids already. So what I saw in him was the weight of all of that and the inability to take risks and just that position. Now, my mother, was again, as so many women of that era, a mother of three at that point and then three more. As they were Catholics and you know what they call couples who practice the rhythm method, parents, well, in our case it was six times over. And I just know that they were under enormous stress. And the way that they chose to handle that stress I think was to, in this world they couldn't control, economically and all of these things, they wanted to control the family so there were lots of rules. So I could see then and I think even I would see now, a lot of unreasonable rules, and that didn't work for little Terry (when he was in trouble it was little Terrence). So I was the one that said, "wait a minute, it's not really raining, why can't I go out?" That's not really happening, why can't I? So that was the role in the family and it's interesting, the last three came through a different family I think when my mom went to work as the latter children got to be one and two my grandmother moved in with us, after her husband passed away and she would take care of the kids, my mom went to work, and she became much less authoritarian at home when she had the world to deal with. But in those early years, my sister was quiet; my younger brother; sister two years older, brother two years younger; he was let's make things all work out, and I was, the challenger. So what I see actually is that is a piece that has carried with me throughout, that I challenge and that I sort of see the authority figures as making no sense. And the authority figures have lived up to that, so it's been easy to keep that going.

SD: You went to Catholic schools and then public high school in Cokehill, Florida. And then you went to Harvard. How did you get in? Today it's like winning the lottery, getting into

Harvard.

TM: My stepson went through this whole process. He's a sophomore at Oberland. But he went through this whole process two years ago. And it was, I got into it more deeply than I had in a few years of course, and it is ridiculous, I would not get in today. I think I can tell you a couple of things. One was, although my father ended up not being a big contributor I think the legacy makes a little piece of it; I did great on test scores, national merit and SAT's and that sort of thing; I did quite well in school. But I did not have that exceptional something: the violinist who wins the contest; the athlete; the scientist who comes up with, you know, all those things that we see TED talks about nowadays. I was better than average, but I will tell you this little story. My best friend in high school and I, he had also moved to Cocoa from, he'd moved from Miami, New York via Miami, and it was that period where Cocoa was right adjacent to Cape Canaveral, so that's why people were moving there, it was the fastest growing area in the country.

SD: Which we should tell younger people it's now Cape Kennedy or has it gone back to Cape Canaveral?

TM: I think the city has gone back to Cape Canaveral but the base is still Cape Kennedy, but people know that's where the space program was happening when I moved there in 1963-65, it was right in the middle, remember we put the man on the moon in 1969. So my buddy Johnny Waxman and I, we applied to Harvard, Yale and Princeton, and we took our local interviews around local folks in the Cocoa and Orlando area, because that's what you did. So I never visited the college or anything. So we went to them.

SD: Nobody did in those days.

TM: Right. We went together. Well the Harvard interview, he goes in first, I go in second, we get in our car, we're driving back home, and he says, "so what kind of questions did they ask you?" and I said "what do you mean?" and he said, "well he asked me about Winston Churchill's role in WWII and he asked me what my favorite play was?" And I said, "you know what? Mostly he talked about how his preppy roommates set the curtains on fire." And I'm telling you this as the truth. He asked me no substantive questions but he had a good time. And I learned at that moment, 'cause when we were freshmen at Harvard, we'd go, "why did you get in?" I'd go, "I think it's the interview". So its' funny that on that side of the interview I thought it was what got me in here, and now I am doing interviews every week on the radio!

SD: I think having fun is critical. And makes a lasting impression. So you arrive at Harvard in 1965. Can you describe what it was like then? And by the way, that's when I arrived in Boston. I'm a few years older than you and it was my first job as a reporter for the Boston Globe.

TM: I didn't even realize that we shared that. So you'd been at Berkeley then you'd been at Columbia journalism and the job was in Boston.

SD: The job was in Boston in 1965. So what was Harvard like then?

TM: So I'll tell you the contrast between what Harvard was like and also what I was like. I arrived at Harvard with a flat top and the clothing at my high school which I think was pretty normal everywhere was like Oxford shirts and khaki slacks and regionals if you could get

them. And that was Madras shirts. And that's what I arrived wearing. I will tell you that I think the first day I got there, I walked to my dorm and my dorm was a very small old creaky dorm in the yard, and they had entryways, so you'd have six suites around a set of stairs on one side; six suites around a set of stairs on the other side; that was our whole dorm. And so I arrive and I meet the guys who sit, who live in the suite below me on the first floor, and they include: Al Gore and Tommy Lee Jones. And that's like one of my first five minutes of walking towards my room, that's who I meet. So it was like, whoa, I knew one of them was the son of a senator and Tommy Lee Jones was as intimidating as a freshman at Harvard as ever. He had a charisma, a sort of a dark charisma about him that was true from the moment you met him. His dad worked on oil rigs in West Texas, he was a character. But the other thing I would say is within a short time I saw a sign on a tree, tacked to a tree that said, Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert, who had recently I think not the year before but fairly recently been fired by Harvard for their experiments with LSD were going to speak. It wasn't a university event but there was the sign. And so four days after I get there, I go to Philips Brooks house and I climb upstairs to this room and it's like I walked into the 60's. In other words, the accolades to Leary and Halpert are sitting there already; they look different; their hair is different; the room is different; what they're talking about is different. And I always think, not that that moment changed my life but it just captures so well the contrast between me and Harvard. But I will say one other thing. Harvard evolved a great deal in the four years I was there as well, in other words I was not a typical my freshman year. What I saw around Harvard in '65, the biggest impression that was made on me was by the preppies. At that point, there was still a high percentage who were from Andover and Exeter and Riverdale, and I just remembered going, "who are these pasty faced, unhealthy"? I don't think I knew the word entitled, but they're so confident, who are they? And I had a very tough time my first semester. I think I made mostly C's and it was absolutely a struggle. And my second semester I kind of hit my stride. And the roommate my freshman year was my bunkmate, we were in bunk beds, was a kid from Towsome. If he's listening Steve McDaniel, you were a great kid, but he within five minutes of meeting him I knew he had three 800's on his SAT's and he almost flunked out freshman year. I mean it was a brutal thing. The basic point is, I think it upset everyone, no one could live up to their own expectations, but I slowly and surely kind of figured out what was going on, and then Harvard's changes matched my own and so by the end of my time there I was taking independent studies and tutorials and starting a school and doing basically, creating my own curriculum and doing very well.

SD: And were you radicalized in terms of politics? What were your politics when you arrived and what were they when you graduated?

TM: Interesting. I will tell you another story just to set what my politics were. The summer between my junior and senior in high school I went to Boise State. I don't think that gets nearly the press that it does now, but if people can remember when Bill Clinton was elected they showed a picture of him shaking Kennedy's hand when he was 16. Bill Clinton had gone to Boise State Arkansas and then the very best of Boise State went to Boise Nation and that's when he met Kennedy. But Boise State was a thing where they chose in Florida was 540 of the best boys in school for whatever, however they chose them, and they go to the capital of the state and they do a mock government. First you run for City Council and then you run for County and then you run for State and finally the last day or so we elect a governor and it's a big deal. And I got there and I just, I kind of looked around and I don't know what happened but an early YIPPIE thing hit me. And when you came into Boise State you got either a yellow card that said you were a NAT (nationalist) or a green card that said you were a FED

(federalist) and I went and got one of each, cut them down the middle.

SD: Did you purposely do that?

TM: Yes. And I put them on and I combined them. So that my party was the NAD's. Now this is juniors in high school. You can imagine that when it came to cheering for my party, Go Nads...

SD: A cheering squad of one?

TM: No, no, believe me, you start cheering "gonads" and juniors get excited. So I would, before assemblies, people would get up and then go, "yay federalists, yay nationalists" and then I'd get up and I'd go, "gonads" and people would scream. So the point I'm making is that I wasn't conventionally either, but the darker point is that it wasn't until years later that I realized, I don't know if it was one year or two years, but I realized there wasn't a single African-American in those 540. I was wise enough to know this Boise State, which was basically run by the American Legion and pumping up the Vietnam War at the time, it was... I made fun of it and I could see through that, but I couldn't see the next level down which was that it was racist and I was part of that. So that may give you a sense. Now I had also, I'd been very influenced by the Making of the President 1960 by Theodore H. White, and that book really got me, and so I was at that point really a Kennedy type democrat. As a matter of fact, I was involved in the Young Dems my first year. My second year people wanted me to run for president. The president my freshman year was a Roosevelt, if you can imagine. This is at Harvard. And my sophomore year instead of running, I managed my roommate's campaign and he won. And so after that I left the Young Dems and went further left. I didn't ever actually, I don't think you had to join SDS, you know, I don't think there was a joining. But I certainly moved in that direction.

SD: So you were radicalized, you moved to the left from the Young Democrats would you say?

TM: Yeah.

SD: And the whole school did?

TM: Yeah, '69 my senior year was the year of the takeover of University Hall and the strike at the university and I was actually teaching that day, at the high school that I had helped start, and when I came back to campus the building had already been taken over. I went inside and was in the building when the mass police arrived at about five in the morning the next morning. So again I wasn't one who took the building but I was in the building. I will confess, there were two main entries to University Hall and they, I was lined up so that I was in the front of this crowd; we had hands held and hair tied back and that sort of thing ready for them to come in and they tried my side first with their battering ram and it didn't break our chains and they went around to the other door first, came in the opposite side; I turned around when they came in; they didn't say anything, they just started hitting people with their Billy clubs; and me and a friend who is still one of my best friends to this day both looked at each other and jumped out the window.

SD: Well I can relate to that. And I think people who are listening to this maybe don't understand, that was a time when there were takeovers of buildings at all the major universities. It started at Berkeley with the Free Speech movement, where I went to college,

where they sat down and took over the administration building; they even sat down around a police car so the police car was immobilized. This was the primary way that students expressed their grievances and their demands for change. And it happened at Columbia University.

TM: Cornell was big.

SD: And many other colleges. And I also, when I was participating, I also declined to get arrested.

TM: Had they come in that front door, maybe the story would be different, but they came in the other door, I took my option.

SD: So tell me about your graduation from Harvard? Your family came from Cocoa Florida?

TM: That's right, they drove up. They also had relatives in New Bedford where I'd been born, so they made a trip of it. They brought me up to college as a freshman, my mom and dad and I, and then for my graduation then. And at least one of my brothers and sisters, I don't think they brought the youngest. Well I was not the only one but a number of us walked out of the commencement speech at one point. I don't know, 100, I guess the class was probably 1000. I would think 100, 150 or something like that, just got up en masse, walked out of the graduation ceremony and went across the street, and my dad and my younger brother, my mother stayed in the audience but my dad and younger brother followed and said, "how are you doing? Why did you do that?"

SD: Why did the group do that?

TM: The strike had been settled or we wouldn't be holding commencement but it was still a statement, it was still a protest statement against the war, against the university's complicity with the war in Vietnam, and we had Ratsi on campus, by the way Ratsi has returned to Harvard in the last year or two for the first time since then as a result of our protest, Harvard pulled out of the ROTC program, the Reserve Officer Training Corps, which is where people go to college while they're also training for the service and so on. And we, one of our big points was that that shouldn't happen. So there were still things going on there. I remember by the way, that same year, the commencement speech at Wellesley was given by Hillary Clinton and it was very much an anti-war speech and my girlfriend at the time...

SD: She was giving the valedictory address.

TM: Her speech was a very strong anti-war speech that same week.

SD: So you were talking about it being a protest and it going on all across the country. But today I think people would think, you got into Harvard, you graduated and you walked out of your graduation? Young people just would find that inexplicable.

TM: I'll question that. My guess is that we might not get, obviously we'd had wars going on, and I don't think we've had, we haven't had the kinds of protest that we'd had. But I do think that you'd get a certain number who would act that way. I think that, a great deal has changed about college and about the prospects that students face coming out of college. We

talked about how it's harder to get in, so they're already on some sort of crazy competitive track before they get in, but because of the student loans and that situation, I mean basically my feeling is we're creating through that student loan system a population of young serfs, who graduate with these degrees they've been working for since they were 12 and loans that are in the 50, 100, \$120,000 and they can't take the risk, they can't buck the system, they can't explore. And yet there's a lot of them that do and will, but it's a much tougher stream they're swimming against. Also, the middle class, as you and I know, was never stronger than right at that period. We were protesting, it was in some sense a luxury. We've talked about this many times on this program. The middle-class, helped by the GI Bill, the housing loans, the powerful unions in the country, the middle-class was at its absolute best. Most of us will chart the beginning of the end of the middle-class or the starvation of the middle-class to the mid-70's, the Lewis Powell memo and those sorts of things. But this moment, from 65-69 was when middle-class people could do well; students could assume they would have a chance to travel, experiment and still do well; and I was lucky enough to be one of those.

SD: Yes, and you also from your beginning of your time at Harvard, you were part of some social and educational experiments. Could you talk briefly about that?

TM: I don't do briefly real well. I will have more sympathy on my guests from now on. When I'm sitting here rolling my eyes and going, when does this answer stop? Again, I was very lucky while I was in college. I resigned scholarship and I was working. And my work my sophomore year was as an assistant to a teacher at a little private school for problem kids, that is kids who either have learning problems or emotional problems in Cambridge and I used to walk down there in the mornings and teach, assist the teacher two or three days a week. At the end of that year, the administrator of the school asked me if I wanted to replace that teacher. So this is crazy, I'm a sophomore going into my junior year and he asked me if I want to teach full-time next year while I'm going to Harvard, or maybe take a year off. And I debated for a little while, and I decide that I will continue in school, I was afraid if I dropped out I might not go back, it was that kind of times where I'd take a road and end up a long distance away. So my junior year I taught full-time at this school for kids with various kinds of problems from 8-2 and then took a full load of classes – either by having them as afternoon classes or tutorials or independent studies, and my senior year, the summer after that year, my junior year, I found a bunch of people who were running a camp for chronic schizophrenics out on Camp Cod and we took 43 patients out of Boston State Hospital with an average stay of 12 years and put them one on one with college students in an abandoned farm on Cape Cod. I was the program director of that. What a phenomenal experience for a kid. That year, I was a junior in college; I taught full-time and dealt with these kids' work as well as their lives; and then that summer dealt with these mental patients. It was a phenomenal opportunity to learn a lot and grow up. My senior year I was going to do a thesis and I got as my tutor John Holt, who had written *How Children Learn* and *How Children Fail* and was one of the leaders of the new education movement at the time. He was doing a year at Harvard, I got him as my tutor; he heard my proposal and read it; he said that's very nice but wouldn't you rather do something? I said, what do you mean? He said, well I've met these 29 kids who've been suspended from this new supposedly alternative private school and I think you should meet with them, and I met with them and their parents and we ended up starting our own school which only lasted four years, but that first year we were creating it; the second year, the first year after my graduation I was the director of that school. I obviously had some entrepreneurial sense and I was willing to take on risks but the opportunities were phenomenal.

SD: And what would you say was the most important thing you took away from those experiences, both starting and working in schools, and with the mentally ill?

TM: Wow! I think probably it was the sense of listening to people and realizing that we're not all that different. I remember my experiences with these chronic schizophrenics with years of being locked up and getting massive amounts of thiorazine and that sort of thing. And as people know mental hospitals, if they've seen "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest", that's kind of what it was like. I would say to them, oh come on, I'm crazy too but I'm just not going to let them lock them up. And it was pretty much my attitude was that given what society's norms was, I was crazy. Or considered certainly not the norm. And with the students I found that if you could really get sort of a little bit more, I noticed that my classes were a little more emotional than the other classes, I don't think my discipline was as strong. I was 19, some of the kids were 18, that's no, you know. But they did very well, their test scores all went up. And I think there was something about, I found that...

SD: They were listened to.

TM: And dealing with the whole person, not just, this is who you are. I think those things have stuck with me for ever, and I will say that one of the ways I describe what I do on this show, is that I teach through learning, or I learn through teaching, I'm not sure what it is, but when I'm interviewing on this show I'm still in somewhat that same old role of teaching and learning at the same time which is what I did then, and I think, I tried in my first few shows here, I inherited this show from a stand-up and he would just pick a subject and kind of riff on it, and I tried to do his format and I couldn't do it. And that's when I learned that it had to be interesting to me, I think for it to sound interesting to anyone else, and the way that I did that was to pick things I wanted to learn about.

SD: Great. So then, in your life you've made a lot of abrupt turns. And all of this teaching and working with the mentally ill and I know you lived communally for a while with people and experimented that way, and then you went out to California to become an actor. What caused that turn?

TM: Well I didn't come out here to become an actor, actually. I came out here, first time I was here in '72 when I worked for McGovern.

SD: McGovern was running for president.

TM: And I was given the job of running as assembly district in Los Angeles and it was the most conservative democratic assembly district, that is not the most conservative but the most conservative democratic one. It was, for people who live in L.A., it was Bell Gardens, Cudahy, Maywood, Huntington Park, Lynwood, Downey. It was working-class, it was white, just beginning to go Latino and a lot of that part of the county has become Latino over the years. But the union folks who would have been the strong democratic backers, couldn't stand McGovern because he'd beaten Hubert Humphrey, who was their hero, and so it was really a tough thing. But I did that, and then I said, when we lost 49-1, if people don't remember Nixon beat McGovern 49-1 and me and my workers...

SD: 49 states to 1?

TM: We sat in our office where we were watching the returns and just cried. And then I said, oh well, I guess politics doesn't work, and I went back to Cambridge actually and learned video documentary. And portapacks had just come out, that is portable video machines had just come out within six months. And I got one of those and I decided I would make video documentaries, and the first gig I got was to come back to L.A. and make one about Buckminster Fuller.

SD: What was he about?

TM: Buckminster Fuller was certainly a genius, a misfit, an inventor, a philosopher. He predated the environmental movement by years, but he was the one who said, there's enough to go around, if we weren't hamstrung by politics and economics, if we really were trying to spread the wealth to all; he also said that information is the only thing that when you add to it, you don't subtract, that no one loses when we add to the information. He was way ahead of his time.

SD: So you made a documentary?

TM: And then I made two or three more. But there was one night – at that point I was living in my van. I often say that, today I would be described as homeless, I just thought I was free. I was living in my van and Psy-Arc, the Southern California Institute of Architecture which was a very radically new institution allowed me to park my van outside and use their kitchen and bathroom and stuff because the public access project at the cable station was there. So I would work during the day at the cable public access helping people do public access shows and then at night I'd edit my documentaries and one night I just realized I was incredibly lonely, and I said this is crazy, I'm not making any friends. And I said when did I have the most fun in college? And I decided, I realized the time I'd had the most fun was when I was acting in plays, hanging out with theater people, funny sort of improv kind of folks and I decided before I left L.A. which was basically my feeling at that point, I would just give the entertainment industry a stab. And one other thing that happened was I was watching a video that I'd shot of this workshop with Buckminster Fuller and his ideas and stuff, and at a couple of points I was in the shot, I was in the discussion rather than shooting, and I thought, you know, I look fine there. I've got a pretty good energy, I could maybe be an actor.

SD: A lot of your listeners probably don't know what you look like. You have always been exceptionally attractive; you looked like you then and still now you were distinctively attractive. You looked at the time I met you, which was in the 70's, like you could be a movie star. And you have that charisma, that energy as well.

TM: Yeah, so I figured, you know, give it a shot. And I didn't know that normally people took one acting class and they had their teacher, you know. So I immediately enrolled in three different acting classes. So I was still editing my videos but I was going to three acting classes and rehearsing and I just jumped into it with both feet, and someone that I was working with in one of my classes said, have you ever heard of the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco? I'm going to go there for their summer program. Check it out. So I did, I auditioned, I got in, I got a scholarship. So I went and I did a year at ACT, and then came back to L.A. and I was an actor. And this is the strange part: I chose it because I was lonely, but then I stuck to it because at age 26 I said, I've done teaching; I've done politics; I've done

mental health; I've done documentaries; all those things, I haven't stuck to anything, I'd better stick to something. And IU decided I would stick to what I was doing now which was acting. I don't think that was a smart choice necessarily. Because...

SD: It's incredibly tough.

TM: Looking back I didn't make what I wanted to make of my acting career. And the other piece of it was that it is such a passive thing. You do your best and hope they pick you.

SD: I was going to say, an actor – 'cause I was in the TV business for 25 years writing and producing drama shows – and I saw that an actor eats rejection for breakfast, lunch and dinner. You audition and if you don't have the exact look they want you don't even have a chance, and you're constantly being told no, no, no. How did you handle that?

TM: Well, I think I handled it pretty well. And I'm not sure why. But I'm not sure that handling it that well bodes well after you stop acting, because I think to some extent you get inured to rejection. I don't know, there are some parts where I still think I'm, like I'm doing this radio show waiting to be discovered after 17 years, that may not be such a smart strategy, which is one reason I'm taking the hiatus. But I think I dealt with it fairly well. In other words, an awful lot of people who are actors are actors from ten years old, twelve years old, you know, they played the lead part in the school play. And I had lived. I didn't decide to act until I was 26, which isn't old, but I'd had a lot of ambition, a lot of accomplishment, a lot of adventures, a lot of testing prior to becoming an actor and so I think I knew I was okay even when I was rejected. Now that didn't pay the bills and that didn't make me – one of the reasons I got into acting in addition to just I'm going to stick with the thing I'm doing was I saw the platform that it could have and I think my goal was as much to be a great actor as to get the kind of platform that a popular actor can use, the way, whether it's Ted Danson or George Clooney. A lot of them use it as a bully pulpit to do a lot of good and I think that was part of the attraction for me.

SD: In addition to working as an actor you also wrote a screenplay, you produced records, books, music. What was the high point of working in what in L.A. we call "the biz", the entertainment business, for you?

TM: That was my salvation really. I had the seven years where I was only acting: I did plays on a regular basis and I took classes and I auditioned and I made a living, which as some people will say if you make a living for 15-20 years as an actor people don't know what a great achievement that is, but it's not necessarily fulfilling. But I was taking improv classes and met another improv, in my improv class a woman named Julie Brown who was doing stand-up at the time, and we started dating, and we started writing along with her writing partner, Charlie Koffee. She said, I think I'm going to put music in my act – that was when Valley Girl was popular. That was Zappa's song which was really kind of, I think nowadays would be called a rap, but it was basically she was talking about what it was like to be a Valley Girl. And so Julie was a valley girl as well and she said, I think I'm going to put music in my act, and I was making enough money as an actor that I actually had a little bit to spend just in the insanity of it all. My biggest source of income back then in that moment was that I was the spokesman for Bacardi Rum in Mexico. I neither drink nor speak Spanish, but for five years I was the television image of Bacardi in Mexico, and if anybody saw the movie, Lost in Translation with Bill Murray, basically what he was in Japan, I was in Mexico. But I had enough

money that I said, okay, I want to produce this stuff. And I really, we had a vision. And it was, if we can produce songs that are really good. This is '82, '83, this is just the birth of MTV, and we can make videos that are really good, then we can probably make movies. And so it was now, from both of us, it was her part, for her to become a star I think it was her path to that, and for me it was my path to become a director. And so we did produce and write, she and I and Charlie – records that we did an EP, five song EP that was the most fun. The most fun was producing records and music videos. Partially it was the closest I came to being the director. The producer of a record is the director and I was the director of the music videos, and that was just, it was such a high. And then it led to *Earth Girls are Easy*, the movie, which included the songs and was meant to be the first of several musicals. But by the time the movie premiered we had separated and that writing and producing partnership was long gone.

SD: So what was your next focus? Because you did decided to leave acting and the entertainment industry.

TM: Right. Over the next few years after that, I never, I couldn't get arrested with my own screenplays. They'd go, but where's the cookie, valley thing, you know? And I'd go, well, this is a script I like. And you know, I did nothing. Had I found a writing partner at that point, that fork in the road might have been different. But I continued to act and make a living. But I realized this was not the vision that I had hoped for. And in 1989, the, my 20th Harvard reunion, I went back there and *Earth Girls are Easy* was playing at the Harvard Square Theater that week. It only played for a week but it was there, and I was a regular that year on Knott's Landing. So it was like, wow, I'd made it. And I asked the union folks, what were we going to do to commemorate our earlier ideals and so on, and I said well nothing, really. And they said, do you want to make a speech? And I said sure. And I made a speech in which I questioned, how were we living up to our ideals. And I basically, if you go back and read that speech, it basically sets up this radio show; it sets up everything I've been doing, because it said that, we face a lot of crises, and the environmental ones seem to be the biggest but the environmental area that most needs change is not the water or the air, it's our minds, and that we've got to change our consciousness to look at the big picture and all that stuff I said at the start of the show. And when I came back, I don't know whether it changed anyone else's life, but that speech changed mine, and I sought out some non-profit groups in Hollywood; got involved with an environmental organization, an educational organization and then found that what I'd been so good at as a young person – working with those mental patients, working with those students and so on, was I could understand and almost restate what people wanted and was thinking better than they could. And so I offered myself as someone who would facilitate board retreats of non-profits, strategic planning processes. And I did that for a few years and kind of began to build up a career in that vein as my Hollywood career was dying down. And then saw that if, to really make a go of it on that, as a consultant to non profits and foundations, I decide I would focus on communication, where I could use everything I'd learned in the entertainment industry. So my work primarily over the last five years is working with organizations on storytelling and narrative, so it really does use everything that I used as a teacher; as a writer; as a director; as a producer; as an actor; all of that, what you realize everything in entertainment is based on story.

SD: I believe that people learn more through story than they do by reading philosophical and political texts.

TM: Or data. Yes, it's absolutely true. Compare the two of them. The people who are great

speakers for instance and great writers in terms of getting their point across, usually pair the story and the lesson.

SD: The lesson comes through the story, that's how you hook people.

TM: Exactly. Although, you know, this American Life Story, every one of them, then this happened, then this happened, this is what it means.

SD: Let's talk about your radio show. You've been doing it for quite a while now. I want to ask you, what was the most memorable person you interviewed? I know there were many but what is the first one that just pops in your mind?

TM: Well I, the one that I often say and it, was Fayal Ganoon, the Google exec who started the Facebook page, We are all Khalid, that had a great deal to do with the Tahrir Square uprisings. And not because, just because the fact that he was live here, I'm sitting in studio in Los Angeles talking to someone who a year before hadn't even dreamed of what he would do, who then took one hesitant action after another and ended up creating this amazing shift which hasn't turned out perfectly by any means but just unraveling that story I remember, it just felt like what a gift to be able to be part of that. I will say this. A few weeks ago, a couple of months ago, I interviewed the three filmmakers, three of the filmmakers of The Square, the documentary, if anyone hasn't seen it, make sure you see it and hopefully it wins the Academy Award although there are other great documentaries up this year. But I had the director, the producer and one of the participants in here, the three of them, and that was a magical interview. It's going to be at AlterNet soon but the three of them said after that interview they learned things about each other that they didn't know. So something about being that close to events that change history I think is what makes it seem. Now I've had wonderful interviews with other people but there's something about being right on the edge of world-changing events that just was incredibly exciting for me.

SD: I want to ask you the question that you ask many of your guests. If you could stand in the future, say 30 years from now, did humanity turn things around, or did we continue raping and pillaging the earth? And if the world is better then, 30 years from now, how did we do it?

TM: Well. When I first came up with that question, and any time I ask it, I always think that it basically goes this way: if you answer no, then you've got to live with that; if you answer yes then you've got to tell me how you think it happened. I can't answer no. There's something in my make-up that just doesn't do that. I don't know whether it's actually what we would call optimism but I do, I am a glass half-full person. See to me, actually, they're both fine: empty, half full, they're the same. I do just feel like okay, today we do this, tomorrow we do, you know, it's like, let's go with it. I do believe, I do have to say we will turn it around although I'd say it's probably 51/49. Now if I have to answer how, again I go back to what I said in 1989 in that speech. I think it's going to happen in our consciousness, although I think that for us to turn things around is going to take technology as well. In other words, I think, this is not one – see, to change civil rights for instance or justice, you have to change the way people think and the way they behave. But to deal with climate change and some of the other things that we've set in motion here, we're going to have to get lucky technologically as well. But I think the big change will be, again I tell people, now you're standing in the future, you're telling us how it happened. And I guess if I had to do that, I would say that the internet probably had a hand in it. That as young people especially grew up feeling more connected to the rest of the

globe. Even if we look at them and see them just sitting on their screen and wonder why they're not even connected with people in the room. I do think this sense of being connected to the rest of the world; of information being at your fingertips, which means that if someone tells you one thing you can find out the different point of view, you know, no matter where you are; and the sharing economy which is beginning to happen, where young people are not as anxious, it's driving some in the CEO offices crazy, but they're not as interested in buying cars or houses, they're not as interested in owning things as they are having experiences and sharing. In other words, if I can get a car now and then that's all I need. I think these kinds of shifts in the developed world are going to make a difference. And I think in the developing world I think they're going to leapfrog us in ways that they will never have to go through some of the phases we went through because technology will arrive there cleaner, smaller, faster.

SD: What's next for you? You say hiatus, that implies a break, not leaving.

TM: If I can find a way, what happened that made this hiatus imminent was a situation that's always been true which is that I do this show pro bono as do most of the folks on KPFF and Pacifica. It takes about two days a week in terms of booking and hosting and researching and promoting and all of that. To do that, you've got to have a margin, and my margin has been through my work with non profits and foundations for the last few years. I suffered a staph infection in my knee this summer. I couldn't work or do anything basically for about three months and my margin was eaten up. And I just thought, wait a minute, I'm not as young as I used to be. I'm 65, I've got five years for sure where hopefully I'll be setting myself up for the rest of my life. But the staph infection says you are vulnerable, anything could happen. I had a cardiac episode in the middle of that where I almost died on the table, we don't know why it happened, but boy, that suddenly is not just I'm vulnerable but I could be gone in a moment. And I just realized that as much as I love this show – I really love it, I hope it's valuable, I hope it has impact – I can't afford to do it, I don't have those two days margin. So I've got to take the time out to establish a new model, whether it's, my goal, my hope would be, 'cause I love this work, that I can find a way to support this and do whatever work I've got to do, or, you know, as my cleaning lady says, "thanks God" someone comes along and I find a source of support that means I could do radio or television interviewing full time, I would love that. But at this moment I've got to focus, I can't afford to put the time in putting on the show each week, I've got to focus on how I'm going to make the best of my life for the next few years.

SD: Well I'm going to stand for the possibility in fact the reality that that is going to happen. Thank you, I've learned more about you in this hour than in the 30 plus years I've known you.

TM: That's a good thing I think because then so have other people. Thank you, so much, Sara. When I thought about doing this show I thought immediately of asking you to do it, and it's been wonderful and I really appreciate it.

SD: It's an honor.