



The
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Anna Deavere Smith on *Let Me Down Easy*

Interview by Catherine Sheehy
Philadelphia Theatre Company, March 27, 2011

Photo by Joan Marcus



Interview of ANNA DEVEARE SMITH
following her performance of *Let Me Down Easy*

(photo by Joan Marcus)

Conducted by Catherine Sheehy
on the stage of the Suzanne Roberts Theatre
Philadelphia Theatre Company
March 27, 2011

SARA GARONZIK [Producing Artistic Director]: Hello, everyone. Thank you for coming to the show today, and thank you for staying on for this interview between Catherine Sheehy and Anna Devere Smith. This is part of our ongoing series called *American Playwrights in Context*, which is an opportunity for all of you to meet important creators of theater and to learn more about their work beyond the immediate production at hand.

Before we begin, we would like to give our warmest thanks to Fran Kumin and to the—
[applause] Yes, appropriate. And to The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage through the Philadelphia Theatre Initiative for their generous assistance in making today's conversation happen.

Let me just introduce the person who is not Anna Devere Smith. That would be Catherine Sheehy on my furthest left. Catherine Sheehy is resident dramaturg of the Yale

Repertory Theatre and the Chair of Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism at Yale School of Drama. In addition to her work at Yale, Ms. Sheehy has worked at the O'Neill Playwrights Conference and in New York and Ireland with the late Joseph Chaikin; at the Signature Theatre, at Baltimore Center Stage, and for four seasons as festival dramaturg at Shakespeare Santa Cruz in California.

She is a former associate editor of *American Theatre* and a former managing editor of *Theater* magazine. Her critical writing has also appeared in *Theatre 3*, *The Village Voice*, and *Parnassus Poetry in Review*, as well as in programs and production guides for commercial and regional theaters. Her adaptations include *King Stag*, which has been co-adapted with Evan and Mike Yionoulis; *Pride and Prejudice*, and something that I think is written in Middle English, and I'm not sure if I'm reading this correctly, but I believe it's *Everybody: A Morality Play*. You can correct me later.

She teaches seminars in 20th-century American comedy, British restoration and 18th-century theater, comic theory and satire. She received her doctorate from Yale in 1999 for her dissertation,—if you care to blast for it, “Excavating the Lost Comic Masterpieces of the American Canon.” Catherine, thank you so much for coming down today.

And I will now leave the reins in her capable hands, and she will introduce to you someone who clearly needs no introduction and whom it's our privilege to have on our stage, Anna Deavere Smith. Thank you, ladies. [applause]

CATHERINE SHEEHY: Never was it more true to say, “But enough about me.”

Anyone who's asked to introduce Anna Deavere Smith knows how Charlie Manuel feels as he's making out the lineup card for the National League All-Star team. At first you think, “My God, where do I start?” And then you realize that it sort of doesn't matter because you've got so much depth at every position. You're in great hands.

It's nearly impossible to do justice to any description of Anna Deavere Smith without reference to a team sport because there is no one in the American theater, and in fact maybe no one in American arts and letters, whose passions, whose gifts, and whose competencies are more legion. In the performing arts, Anna Deavere Smith is a playwright, an actor, a director, a filmmaker, though perhaps most widely recognizable to the wider public as the deliciously curmudgeonly Gloria Akalitus of *Nurse Jackie*, season three starting tomorrow night on Showtime. I love it. And as the no-nonsense national security advisor Nancy McNally on *The West Wing*. [applause] Give it up.

It is her virtuoso work and these one-woman pieces she has created for her ongoing project, "On the Road: A Search for American Character," that may be her lasting legacy. "On the Road" includes *Let Me Down Easy* that you've seen this evening, as well as *Fires in the Mirror*, her piece about the Crown Heights riots in Brooklyn in 1991; *Twilight: Los Angeles*, an examination of the conflagration that followed the Rodney King verdict in 1992; *House Arrest*, which was 2000's meditation on the American Presidency; and *Him*, a collaboration with the extraordinary dancer and choreographer Judith Jamison.

She's the author of numerous books and essays including *Letters to a Young Artist: Straight-up Advice on Making a Life in the Arts for Actors, Performers, Writers and Artists of Every Kind*. And, *Talk to Me: Listening Between the Lines*. She's founder/director of the Institute on Arts and Civic Dialogue and currently Anna Deavere Smith Works. She's always been committed to finding a place where artistic excellence and social change can come together.

She's a master teacher who, after a decade at Stanford University, is currently a distinguished professor at New York University. She's a Pulitzer Finalist for *Fires in the Mirror*. She's received numerous awards, accolades, and honorary degrees, none more prestigious, probably, than the MacArthur, colloquially known as the "genius award." The citation for the MacArthur may actually have captured her gift best when it described

her work as “a blend of theatrical art, social commentary, journalism, and intimate reverie.” I think that’s a beautiful description of what we’ve all just seen. And if I don’t stop there, we’ll have no time to talk to her. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the American polymath, Anna Deavere Smith. [applause]

Is there anything I left out of that introduction that you’d like people to know about? Baker extraordinaire? Actress, director, playwright, essayist, teacher, public intellectual. That’s quite a hat collection. Is there any one of those designations that’s more important to you than another?

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: Good question. No, probably not.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: No? They all intertwine, essentially, in the way that you go about your work?

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: Yeah, they do.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: Certainly in your TV work, you might reach more people in a single evening than you might with an entire run of a show like this. Could you talk about the rewards of live performance that might make the calculus bearable?

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: Yeah, that’s interesting, because you can hear even with the marvelous *Nurse Jackie* that I’m on right now that I love so much, that people still applaud *The West Wing*, which I’ve been off of for a long time. [applause]

You know, I think that the question really has to do less with me, more about with the theater. I think the theater offers us right now two things that become increasingly important to me. I believe that theater is really a place where we can, together, seek meaning, and even if you’re not talking to the person sitting next to you, you may be aware that they’re crying when you’re laughing. And I feel in our country right now, in

such a fractious society where you could live very well with the people who laugh when you laugh and cry when you cry, that it's really important to know about that stranger sitting next to you.

And also, that we have such available civic space that we're not using, and we allow politics and the media to have on our behalf some of the most important conversations that we need to have, and we're not having them. So, for example, I think two explosive parts of Americans' ideas in American society are—questions in American society right now have to do with what happens before we are born and when are we born, the beginning of life and the end of life. Almost taboo topics. We rarely have those conversations. We leave it over to be explosive, to determine when people get voted in or out of office, and so forth.

The reason they're explosive: because they're important. We need to be talking about it. My only wish would be that my virtuosity would get good enough that it would outweigh what people perceive as my political leaning. And I would be blessed if I could attract people from both sides of the aisle to my theater so that that would really happen.
[applause]

CATHERINE SHEEHY: I think a lot of the times in the arts, we have that feeling, a little bit, of preaching to the choir, that the kind of work that we're doing tends to attract the kind of people who agree with us or who might be our constituency. And I actually think taking on a topic like *Let Me Down Easy* does, something that's so—what I think is very interesting about *Let Me Down Easy* [is] it started to be very specifically about the healthcare debate, and it feels like it has moved from that laser-like focus on a policy issue to—in your program, you all have a beautiful note by Lisa Solomon on the notion of grace. And maybe you could talk a little bit about how the piece has moved from that?

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: Why don't you say, because you told me backstage, which just blows my mind, you were there at grand rounds, so when I first did this at Yale. And you're smarter than me, you're a dramaturg.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: That's patently false, Anna.

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: So what do you think has happened to this show?

CATHERINE SHEEHY: I think the way that it—and I really wish I'd seen it at Long Wharf—but I think that the development of the piece has become much more about the human than about the system, and to me, the way that the interaction—the fascinating interaction in the space of rounding it out, when you sort of take it out of the specific, the medical school atmosphere and you bring it into this area, it becomes, I hope—and I felt—very much more personalized for members of the audience. And I find that there's—I think of the bronco rider, someone with whom I would never have any kind of connection. And the deep connection I feel with someone whom, just as a knee-jerk reaction, I would feel I have absolutely nothing politically in common with this person from—

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: You don't. Not wrong. But when he says, "If doctors weren't so high paid, we'd really get some good doctors," and then the \$1,200 flat rate. We need a deal like that. If we could make everybody recognize that to say we need a deal like that is to actually make a policy statement themselves, and I think that's where the piece—the piece has become so insidiously personal, and I think that that's sort of almost subversively personal in a really good way.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: IMHO, as the kids say: in my humble opinion. There's probably no more appropriate artist, actually, for American Playwrights in Context than you because through the "On the Road" project, you've spent more time in American voices, bodies, and souls, probably, than any other playwright that is working today.

Could you talk a little about—you know, people like Governor Ann Richards saying, “I don’t think there’s a Republican on my [medical] team,” and a Buddhist monk and a young rodeo rider who’s so tough he doesn’t want anesthesia with his stitches? Is there an enduring and underlying American-ness that you found in this prismatic exploration you’ve been doing?

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: No. And I think, you know, starting out with that idea when I was 27 or something amazing like that, I even knew—I mean, it’s kind of with a grin, isn’t it? I knew I would never find it. “On the Road: A Search for American Character.” I knew I would never find it. But it’s connected to something I tell my students all the time now, which is, Don’t expect to get answers out of this experience. Expect to find your real question, because that will be your quest. That will be what keeps you going.

So, first of all, I don’t think I ever expected to find this underlying American-ness. Two, I’m so much more interested in difference than I am in sameness. And so, I probably don’t really look for the things that tie us together. I might just trust that they’re there, kind of like harmonies. I do think that the bull rider says it best, though, and really my associate Kimber Riddle was with me when we went out to spend a bunch of days with him, it’s a show in Idaho, and going to rodeos and stuff. And I spent a lot of time with him. But the moment I knew he must be in my work, in many of my works, is when he started to talk in a different way about determination and about optimism. And I realized that he sounds exactly—he’s talking about the same thing Cornel West is talking about to me in my play *Twilight*. Cornel West defines hope in this way. He says—I’m not going to mimic him right now, but he says hope and optimism are different. [begins to mimic] “Optimism tends to be based on the notion that there’s enough evidence out there that allows us to believe things are going to be better, much more rational, deeply secular. Whereas hope looks at the evidence and says it doesn’t look good at all. Doesn’t look good at all. We’re going to go beyond evidence to attempt to create new possibilities based on visions, become contagious to allow people to engage in heroic actions always

against odds, no guarantee whatsoever, that's hope. I'm a prisoner of hope, though. I'm going to die a prisoner of hope. Never believe that misery and despair have the last word." [end of mimicry] Okay, so that's Cornel West. [applause]

CATHERINE SHEEHY: Roughly speaking, yeah. [laughter]

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: So that's Cornel West. So I'm sitting in this Mexican restaurant, dark, with [rodeo rider] Brent Williams. And he starts talking about—I asked him about—I was getting ready to go to Carnegie Hall, and I was very nervous, and I knew I was going to include him. The audience will have to excuse this language. But I said, "How do you have the nerve? How do you have the nerve?" He goes, "Fuck the form, get the horn." And I said, "Tell me about your confidence, how you become so confident." "I'd rather have determination than confidence. Confidence is kind of like you been on that bull before, you know you can ride it. Confidence kind of like being like cocky, but in a good way. But determination is like, 'Fuck the form, get the horn.' It's like Tuff Hedeman, my wife's uncle, told me: 'Kid, you got more'—gave me my first cotton flank of rope and said, 'Kid, you got more try than anybody I ever known.' Try and determination is the same thing. Determination is you're going to hang on that bull if you're riding upside down. Determination is you're going to ride until your head hits the back of the dirt."

And so I thought that idea is America, especially if I put it—you know, with Cornel West, this idea, whether we call it optimism or whether we call it hope, people come to this country and live through different stages of its history because we keep believing that we can hang on the bull. [applause]

CATHERINE SHEEHY: That's great. I think that the idea of the American character—I know it's obviously a myth, but the idea that optimism and hope and the idea to root for the other guy, I think there are things that can tie—if there's anything that

can tie someone like Brent Williams and Cornel West together, there's obviously some sort of—

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: Listen, I gave—he's in a tiny film that I made where I've gathered together a lot of the characters and had a dinner party and filmed it. And although she's not a character, who is Brent dancing cheek-to-cheek with in my house at 3 a.m., but Patricia Williams, critical race theorist and progressive lawyer at Columbia, “Diary of the Mad Law Professor” in the *Nation* magazine. [laughter]

CATHERINE SHEEHY: Which he has never picked up.

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: Never.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: One of the amazing things to me about your work, and you can hear it today, and I'd love for you to talk about how it happens differently in different performances, is how very important humor is as the engine of the piece. In all the work that I've seen you do, you've managed to find in even the gravest subject matters the very importance of humor. And maybe you could talk a little bit about your experience from this side listening to us. Because even having seen it last weekend and this weekend, the laughs were in completely different places. But maybe if you could talk a little bit about why you—if you consider humor to be that important and how it feels to experience it so differently?

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: So humor is essential, and that would be something I would like to have a longer conversation with you, given what your dissertation was on. Even the title is funny. You know, I think there's some surefire things that people laugh at in this show, and I think they are the things that are the things that touch the closest to what the underlying themes are. You know, when Ann Richards says, “I can't talk to you right now, you're using up my chi,” people laugh. The three jokes that Joel Siegel has,

even though he's in a horrific—the late Joel Siegel has his struggle, and he's not going to live. I think he lived maybe a whole other year or more.

But, you know, I think it takes me back to high school when I first learned to laugh across cultural boundaries, having gone to a very segregated junior high, being among the first Negroes to go. I mean, really the whites and the blacks didn't talk. But in high school, a women's school in Baltimore, Western High School, we found our way. And I'll never forget, one of my classmates in German class writing on the board, "Laughter is the best medicine. It cost the least and does the most." And so I think that in a show of this nature, you have to have humor, and I'm sure that people in the audience have many, many humorous stories to tell about the darkest hours.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: Could you talk about—has there ever been a laugh that has surprised you? I mean, in any of the pieces that you've done?

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: Yeah. I'll tell you that I was performing this play in Washington right after the shootings—during the time of the shootings in Arizona. And I was very nervous about Elizabeth Streb's line, "I think I'd like to know what it feels like to be shot." I was very surprised that just at that time, people still laughed at that line because I thought it would actually seem to be wildly inappropriate.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: It's amazing the life that the piece has outside of itself. Maybe you could also talk—the music in the piece is beautiful, but the music of the piece, the music of putting these interviews together, the music of the language of each of these people. You obviously have a very keen sense of music. Maybe you could talk a little bit about how you work with the composer to do the music of the piece, how you choose the music of the piece and then how that relates to the language of the piece?

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: I believe language, the language I'm interested in, is singing, is when people are singing. So, I interviewed 320 people, or something like that,

on three continents and a lot of material. So all 20 of these people are singing different kinds of songs. And Bess Lomax Hawes, who is the daughter of John Lomax, a great American musicologist, and the brother of Alan Lomax, a famous musicologist, and I both got honorary degrees at the same time and managed to have, when all the names are being called out, a really interesting conversation. In her case, she's a folklorist and musicologist collecting songs. She said to me that she knows she's working well when she's sitting on a front porch with somebody and she doesn't have to say, "Sing this song." You know, that they just start singing.

And when I was at Yale getting ready for grand rounds, what interested me about this territory at all was that I only had to turn on my tape recorder and ask one question: "What happened to you?" One man brought in his granddaughter who read from her diary about how awful it was when Grandpop was waiting for a heart transplant. People sang. One woman, I said, "Do you pray?" [mimicking shouted prayer] "Father, here I am again!" I mean, just this range of expression. And so the fact that I didn't have to push it or ask for it—that people come into this very idiosyncratic way of talking that's closer to their heart than their mind and therefore their singing. So probably there was a lot of singing in Trudy Howell, the South African woman at the end. That could be a song, just wouldn't take too much, really.

So when I was looking for a composer, I went to Josh Redman who did the music for the road version of *Twilight Los Angeles*. He's a saxophonist. I like the saxophone because it's a very close instrument to the human voice. And I sent him the script. He said he cried when he read it on the plane. And I said, "You know, the piece of music that's so important to me, and I don't know yet how to get it into the play, because you know, directors, they control that, is Schubert's Quintet." So he wrote the music as a response to Schubert's Quintet.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: I'm sure that that has to do with how beautifully it integrates with the entire—not only thematically, but piece to piece. It really pulls everything

together, it keeps it moving so very beautifully. And it's something that you as an audience member, sometimes you're not actually aware of how the music moves you through a piece and how it has to both complement and play with the music of the voice that you're bringing in, and the music of the pieces as they're strung together: the fast, the slow, the funny, the more serious.

You referred to the 320 interviews that you did for this piece. How do you know when you've got enough? And how do you cut them?

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: Well, that's hard, I don't have an answer. Alisa's probably better because she's been around, Alisa Solomon, has been around this project since one of its early workshops at the Long Wharf. You know, there's a part of time when I write a new play every night. I like people in the room. I don't like to argue with the director. I like to have a lot of people there. They argue, I listen while they argue. It doesn't help me to argue because I'm not—my show isn't an argument, do you know what I mean? I want the audience to argue, I'm not arguing. So, I put a lot of people around. They argue, I listen. I go home, I write a new play.

So then that happens, and then I've been lucky enough to have different productions, and really blessed that even in a time of financial strife, a variety of theaters really supported me working through the mess, all of those 320 interviews, until I came to New York. And then I set it. But there's no way out of actually going through the material, getting up on my feet, trying to perform and working very, very hard.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: Can you remember, perhaps, the most difficult one that you cut, the one that you really wish went in the piece but just couldn't make it in?

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: Actually, I would like to have included two people who were not really gathered for this play, but for a special occasion who were E. O. Wilson, the great giant of science, biologist at Harvard; and James Watson. And the way they

talked about life and death was very interesting, and I would have liked to have been able to include that. And I'm very sad to have been unable to ultimately include all the material that I gathered in Rwanda, which was very, very powerful and beautiful.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: When you do these interviews and things, do they ever find their way into—do you have an archive, first of all? I mean, have you got this stuff someplace where it will be accessed, or can be accessed?

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: No. Somebody has asked me, but I haven't worked it out. But it's all in high-priced storage in New York. So maybe I better find some place so I can stop paying that rent.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: There's no other thing than high-priced storage. I think the papers could be very interesting and important for the whole record at one point. Do you make video of the people? The interesting thing to me also is not only the lyrical music, but the physical music of your embodiment of these people.

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: Well, this is the first show out of 18 or 20, or something, where I used video. And it's simply a technological reality that cameras have gotten so small that I don't need a whole crew to take in a machine. It's the smallest ever, so for this show, it's the first show where I was able to use video.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: And did you find that made a—is that a big difference in terms—does it have a downside, too, that it's not about the recall of when you're watching the real estate agent of *Fires in the Mirror*, that you have to sort of remember what was foremost, the gestures that this woman presents when she's singing to you. Is it a little bit of a tyranny as well?

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: I don't know, I have to work that out because this is, again, the first time I've had that with me. So I don't know. I would like to think that it

will lead me to yet another place that's not in here yet. I don't think the audience cares whether I, with Lance Armstrong, whether I do this [gestures] at the moment that he says, "Dad's here, Dad's not"—I don't think they care whether I do that. And I labor for an unbelievably long time to get it right.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: I don't know if they care about that, but I think when he scratches his leg, it's very important. I think that makes a big difference. I think it's very telling, particularly for Armstrong. And I think the other thing that's very interesting is when the piece includes people that the audience has themselves had access to, video and audio and that kind of thing, that it is harder to divorce that, sort of have a second sight of a famous person as opposed to lots of the accomplished people whom we all know but don't have any kind of video memory of. So I think it does matter when he scratches his leg, which I think is in exactly the right place.

I'm going to do one more, I think we need to let you go. I'd love to hear you talk a little bit whether it's imitation, embodiment, mimicry, what word you use for when you do people, when you present them and what kind of responsibility you feel to putting someone to the purposes of your art.

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: Well, tell me first, because this word "responsibility" has just emerged, I would say, in the past four years that I'm hearing it a lot from students at "smart schools," in quotations. So, tell me where you're coming from with it. I mean, obviously in the '90s, all my friends who were anthropologists talked about it. But now I'm hearing it from theater students, other kinds of students. When you use that word, tell me what you mean?

CATHERINE SHEEHY: Well, I think that it's—

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: Feels informed, sure.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: I think it absolutely comes from the bleed between anthropology, sociology and theoretical and performing arts. And I think that the idea of responsibility is a kind of representation that while you may have a particular arc that you're interested in that allows that person their say, because you could certainly—the way that you edit something, we all know history is written by the victors and things like that. And so someone entrusts you with their persona, in a way, and the way that it's put forward. I just wonder if there is any kind of—if you feel that person watching you while they're—I guess do you feel that person watching you while you're doing it? And is there a way in which you, when people do come and see you—when I was here, Ruth Katz was here last week. If there's a different sense that you have when people are watching you do them, how you feel about that?

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: Well, Ruth now has seen it so many times, and she is the person who's still been in every version starting from grand rounds, and the only character who has—

CATHERINE SHEEHY: That's a great story.

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: —that claim. And she'd seen it, and I ran into her in Aspen, and she told me pretty much point-blank that she doesn't have a Long Island accent, she has a South Jersey accent. And she knows that a South Jersey—

CATHERINE SHEEHY: That was your responsibility to Ruth Katz.

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: She knows that the South Jersey accent is very hard, but nonetheless.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: You should tell her to try and be from Durbin, South Africa for a while.

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: I will. So it's probably more than we have time for. But at this point in my work, what I'm looking for is people who want to be portrayed and that really, again, started at Yale. Because when I did grand rounds, which was a part of my being invited to Yale to interview doctors and patients, grand rounds, as you know, is a very fancy event: eight in the morning, all the doctors, furious that they have to turn off their pagers, usually a lecturer, not a fool or a clown like me.

And I called up Yale when it was close to the time, and I said, "Well, are you going to invite the patients?" And they said, "Well, we hadn't really thought about that." It was just going to be the doctors examining the patients in another format, and some doctors. And I said, "Well, I think you should." So they invited the patients. And afterwards, what I experienced from those patients wasn't like, "Oh, it was so great" or "It was so bad"—it was just like this look. This look in their eye that we have been through something together. And then I was invited to come back to Yale again in another circumstance to perform, and some of the patients were there again with that same look. And I thought to myself, "Why in the world do you want to come and hear again a story about a time in your life when you were so compromised?" And I thought, "This is a really rich relationship." To have that feeling with someone that I've portrayed, that we've been through something together.

And I think because I've been in search of strangers in a long journey, supposedly about America trying to defy the segregated environment which formed me, looking for the other, it comes and reflects to me these are very, ultimately, intimate relationships that call up even very profound images. That Camus quote that I never get right: "A man's work is little more than a journey through his life, through the detours of art, to rediscover the few and simple images that first found access to his heart." So all 20 of the people, whether I like it or not, are also taking me there. That I'm looking for people who want to be portrayed, who have a large story that they would go, "I just happened to be there," they would go to the mountain and scream it, right?

And so there's therefore something else going on. Ann Richards saw me perform her many times. Not this piece, she didn't live to see it, but she knew very well what she was doing, to sit with me in Houston, Texas, down the street from M. D. Anderson Hospital where she was having proton therapy in May; she died in September. She knew what she was doing.

And so these are the people I'm looking for now. Most of the people in this show have seen it, and I feel that that's outside—not outside of the realm of responsibility, but outside of the realm of how do I look on each side. Does that make any sense?

CATHERINE SHEEHY: Absolutely. I think that's actually the most profound answer to the responsibility that you feel to these people, is the personal connection that you have. You give them the voice that they allowed you to give them.

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: And by the way, the reason they're here is because they can say it a lot better than me.

CATHERINE SHEEHY: And you say it very beautifully for them, with them, after them, and I think that the journey that we have been through, I feel very privileged to have been on this extra, a little extra journey, after the beautiful performance of *Let Me Down Easy*. So thank you so much. Everybody, Anna Deavere Smith. [applause]

END