**What's OFF?**
**S1E3**
**Lynnette Taylor // Warrior Love**
**Transcript**

**Lynnette Taylor**
The dilemma is if you see this is not a political endeavor, then you're going to be in trouble. This is a political act. Interpreting for the theater is a political act. Sharing this space is a political act. And we need to be in this conversation about what politics are being made. It's not about money.

(MUSIC PLAYS)

**Nicky Maggio**
Welcome to What's off the podcasts where we shine the spotlight on off Broadway innovation. Each episode features interviews with trailblazing artists, administrators, service providers, and other theater workers in the Off and Off -Off Broadway community. I'm your host, Nicky Maggio, my pronouns are N, they and them. I'm trans and some would call me plus size but I like to say I'm plus fabulous,

**Ashley J. Hicks**
And I'm your other host, Ashley J. Hicks, aka Ash. I'm a Black woman with albinism who identifies as visually disabled. The clip at the beginning of this episode was of our guest, Lynnette Taylor, who didn't realize something was "off" until she was able to share a powerful theater experience with her mom through American Sign Language. I recently sat down with Lynnette to discuss her experience as an ASL interpreter, as well as her incredible personal account of the 504 Sit-in.

**Nicky Maggio**
For those of you unfamiliar with this historical event, the 504 Sit-in was a disability rights protest that began on April 5, 1977 in San Francisco, and it lasted for 26 days. Lynnette will talk about how she became involved with the protest, and how the experience continues to impact her work as an ASL interpreter for theatre. She talks about her collaborative work with DASLs. And if you haven't heard that term before, DASL: D-A-S L stands for Director of Artistic Sign Language. Lynnette also mentioned several other leading Disability Rights Advocates including Judy Heumann, Judy, unfortunately passed away after the recording of this interview. We are honored to dedicate this episode to Judy. So Ashley, is there anything else you'd like us to know about Lynnette before we begin?

**Ashley Hicks**
Well Lynnette is one of the leading theatrical ASL interpreters working today. She has interpreted over 100 Broadway and Off Broadway shows, as well as behind the scenes for film and TV. She is also a co-founder and co-instructor for the National Interpreting

for the Theater Seminar. And she's currently writing a book on interpreting for the theater with co-authors, Stephanie Feyne and Candace Broecker-Penn.

**Nicky Maggio**
So, let's do it. It's time to turn the spotlight on Lynnette. Be sure to stick around for a post interview discussion with Ashley and myself. Enjoy!

(MUSIC)

**Ashley Hicks**
Lynnette Taylor, welcome. And thank you for being here.

**Lynnette Taylor**
It's an honor to be here. Thank you for asking me and I hope I have something worthwhile to contribute today.

**Ashley Hicks**
I am so excited for everyone to hear this story about your experience with the 504 Sit-in. So to start off, can you start by sharing how you found out about this sit in and how you became involved?

**Lynnette Taylor**
You know, origin stories are very hard. Where do you start the origins? Right? I think I have to give a little background before I-I moved to San Francisco in 1976. So that got me to 504. But just before that I had I was raised in Kentucky by a deaf mother single mother and so I'm a CODA. And sign language is my first language. It's my home language. It's my heart language. And I grew up in a very robust Deaf community very, very collective oriented. Decisions were group made. My mother was a teacher at an art school. So I love the arts and I went to art school in San Francisco, I got a scholarship for the Academy of Art. At that time, 1976 there was no easy way to communicate deaf to hearing and when I went to college, what I didn't realize and no one told me is that I would be separated from a Deaf community, that I would be separated from my language, that I would be in an all hearing environment. So I go, okay, I get there and I go, Okay, well, I gotta find my people how, but I no longer part of this community. Now I have to come into a community and have something to offer. What do I have to offer? Well, I know sign language. I can kind of interpret. I grew up kind of interpreting. There were not many professional interpreters at that time, this was a nascent field. So I looked for the Deaf agencies, I started, you know, going around, where do-how do I find the deaf community? And what do I have to offer the deaf community that they would invite me in? I'm there in 1976, I have to call my mother. To call my mother I have to go to a deaf agency where there's a TTY, we had no easy access, right? This is pre-tech, this is pre pre fight, FaceTime, pre text, etc, etc. At any rate, so I'm in the Deaf agency. And there's a call that comes through and the man who was running the agency, Eddie Hurry, who's also deaf, who came into the building on and off, said they call looking for an interpreter to come down to a demonstration and help at the Health Education and Welfare building in San Francisco. And he said, Oh, well, guess what, I have an

interpreter here right now. And I'll just pass the phone over. So they pass the phone over. And Scott Luebking, who, who was making the call said, listen, we're in the middle of a demonstration, the interpreter who's here has to leave, could you come down and interpret and I go, Well, what kind of demonstration and he goes, the civil rights, a civil rights demonstration for disabled people. Civil rights for disabled people, just hearing that phrase was a reset on my whole life. In that instant, everything about my past, I understood in a completely different way. I understood that all of those moments when I couldn't share spaces with my mother wasn't because she was deaf, which is always what we go, well, you're deaf, you can't go to this, oh, you're deaf, you can't go see my high school play. Oh, you're deaf. We can't go to the movies together. That was just the given. It's a personal issue. And all of a sudden that framed it as a system social issue. I went, Oh, my God. And I went, Yes, I'll be there. Of course, I'll be there. So I went.

**Ashley Hicks**
Wow. So it was almost as if this found you. You didn't go searching for it, it kind of- I don't want to simplify it by saying it fell into your lap. But it found you

**Lynnette Taylor**
it was a karmic moment. I was meant to be I mean, if you want to really, I don't think that there's any other way. It's sort of recognize, you know, I think the universe sends blessings and messages all the time, right. And if you can read the message, then you know, right. And so the message came, you're here for this reason, this is why you're here. And, and that that was what I Yeah.

**Ashley Hicks**
Wow. Okay, so, I mean, this is a good transition into my next question. What was the day to day like for you? Or when you first got there? What was that experience like?

**Lynnette Taylor**
Unbelievable, transformative, it was a moment where you recognize that coming together in a protest is generative. And it was all about the thinking in the building and the process in the building and the collective work in the building was all about being generative. You started to realize on a day to day basis, that minds and bodies travel through space in different ways. And that we limit our thinking about what the universe can be by being constrained to one definition of moving through space time in the mind right? And that's what this coming together just it was like you know taking acid. Oh my god, the possibilities were you know, were just endless infinite. So I get there. They say maybe two hours. We're out there demonstrating Judy Heumann rolls over and she pulls my arm and she's coming over and I leaned down and she says, are you going in the building? We're going to take over the building. Oh, can you come in because we don't have an interpreter. And I went, huh… No classes tomorrow, got nothing better to do. Sure, I'm coming in. We thought it'd be a day. it ended up being 26 days and it's the longest occupied sit in in history. And it was done by disabled people. And the one that was successful and change the world which none of us in the building at the time understood, you know that it would extend that far.

**Ashley Hicks**
Are there any moments that are memorable for you of those days? Like it went from you thinking that, Oh, we're gonna be here maybe a day and it extended that long.

**Lynnette Taylor**
Oh, all of it. It was interpreting 24/7. We rarely slept. There were two of us JD Mirello and myself, who were the primary, we couldn't leave the building, once you occupied the building, if you left the guard would not let you back in. There were provisions. I mean, see, this was the creative part about a disability takeover. Well, we have to have attendants come in, well, we have to have X come in. So they started to bend the rules for letting people come in. And because we could, so many of us could sign. We would stand out in front of the glass doors and sign across and tell people what to bring, we need this we need that. So the next so the next set of attendants who would come in would bring toothpaste, you know, bring this, bring that etc. I had life changing relationships there that the I still- we're still in touch. Hale Zukas, who just passed away was one of the main you know, main leaders in the building and he communicated with the communication board and had his you know, his PhD in mathematics. Brilliant, brilliant. And because I was in college and not taking classes, he helped tutor me in math and just kept on the board. He goes, You don't know this exclamation! Exclamation! I got no no, I never learned that. He'd go, where did you go to school?

**Ashley Hicks**
(LAUGHTER)

**Lynnette Taylor**
I love Kentucky but Kentucky. And then he'd laugh. He's laughing to shake his head and he'd go let's start over and anyway. So Olin Fortney, Dale Dahl and Steve McClelland were the three deaf people who were who stayed the whole time in the building. Dale Doll was a paraplegic who was also very active in grassroots community building. And Olin was the one who dragged me in music. I mean, he loved music, and he really loved the punk scene. So he would say, Lynnette Come on, come on, after we left the building, come on, come on. You gotta, I gotta, I gotta go. You have to interpret this for me. You have to interpret this for me. There were bomb scares, there was GLIDE Memorial, there were dog searches. There were so many conversations about how we were going to make this space work. We set up a mini city. I mean, where were people going to have sex? People had relationships. You know, somebody set up a tent in the hallway, charging 25 cents an hour. So you have a little privacy. I mean, there were-the other thing that was so fascinating. I mean, I was so out of my element. I was 18. I thought you got off the bus and you would be in the city. I was living in an SRO in the Tenderloin. I was so unworldly and provincial. These people were brilliant. They were culture. They were from the world. They they all had PhDs Master's. I mean, I was it was like, Oh my gosh, there's a whole world out here that I had no idea existed and they showed me that it existed. The organizers were all women. Mary Lou Breslin, Kitty Cone, Judy Heumann. And, you know, for this time, you know, I mean, we were we were N.O.W was just getting established. You know, you had this backdrop of feminist conversations going on and to see women in such power and facing congressional. I

mean, in fighting, not bowing down, fighting Judy Heumann. Why are you-what are you crying about? What are you shaking your head about? You don't understand where we're coming from. Don't pretend to and just calling it. No dancing around the conversation. This is what's real. This is what we need. We're staying until we get it. Kitty Cone is the organizer. She was the one who really brought in everybody. Brought in the Black Panthers, GLIDE Church. There were so many other the Automotive IAM the automotive machinist's union. She was a great strategist. She was working as an editor for the Black Panthers in in Berkeley at the time and so, and Brad Lomax who was also in the building who was uh, I think he, he was in the building, he was on the Black Panthers. So they reached out to ask for support. Black Panthers organized ways to bring in food, GLIDE Church organized ways to bring in food. It was I think we were all just, Brett I mean, we we were incredulous. The idea that we could be forming coalitions across, across so many sectors of life. And also, just in awe that we had support from the Black Panthers. We were all starstruck, oh my gosh. I mean, everyone's like Black Panthers? The Black Panthers?! Really? Supporting us?! I mean, it was really quite, it was an honor. And a moment of recognizing solidarity. And if we don't do this together, none of us are going to make it. But Brad later, I mean, if you look online, he and he wrote a an interesting article about his experience in the building and then talked about that there wasn't enough representation and the racism that was still there. I mean, you know, I think, of course, we all I mean, Avenue Q says it: Everybody a little bit racist, right. So we all have our work to do. And we even though we're striving to do better, we still have a lot of we still, we still create harm. And that harm has to be looked at, and then you know, navigated, so it doesn't perpetuate.

**Ashley Hicks**
Right, right. I want to go back because you mentioned this in some of the memorable moments. And in our research, we heard about this unused elevator that became a favorite spot for intimate encounters. But you also mentioned there was a tent

**Lynnette Taylor**
The elevator shaft was for the VIPs. Just saying! Just saying! There was I mean, it was really I mean, it's funny how hierarchy exists or it manifests even within 26 days, people sort of understood. Oh, yeah, that's for the big maca macas over there. So we're gonna make our 25 cent tent. So the other thing about living together for 26 days is you get to know each other pretty intimately. We all stank. I mean, I think you see that in the literature. I mean, we had no showers. Finally, they brought in, you know, a way for us to clean the the, there wasn't a lot of privacy. So you did get to know each other's bodies in very, you know, ways that were not typical. So you also got to know, ways that oh, gosh, I never thought about having sex that way that. I mean, it opened up every possibility. That's what I'm talking about. There's something about this idea of boundaries, yet stripping away, opening up intimacy to include to include all kinds of ways of being intimate. That is, it's very powerful, Anyway, Okay. I mean, you know, I don't think you want me getting more graphic. No.

**Ashley Hicks**

I think what you just said speaks to, like the bonding that happened, you know, over the course of the 26 days, just by nature of you all being in the same space and occupying the same space, which that is a great result of this sit in is that the you know, the bonding that took place. And, of course, you're going to get closer, because you're all stuck in one location. So that definitely makes sense.

**Lynnette Taylor**
Which is what the world should be.

**Ashley Hicks**
You know, you'd think.

**Lynnette Taylor**
No, I mean, the world should be that 26 days sit in, because that's what you learn. I mean, and that's what non disabled people learned everyday when they came into the building. At first, it was just sheer hostility, and this, like, look at these bodies. Look at these people. I mean, the disdain was just dripping. And we were sitting on their desks, we were under their desks, we were in Califano's office, we took it over, that's where the food was served. I mean, all of a sudden, their like comfort zone is getting challenged. And they're having to deal with, look at and reckon with architectural barriers, communication barriers, systems that were not working, that were literally designed to exclude and not include, and now it's in their face, it's not at a remove. And over the course of a week and two weeks, you start seeing the change in attitude. You start seeing this, oh, I never thought about the fact that you could fall down the stairs because there's nothing there to mark the fact that a stare is about to begin for someone blind. Or the fact that oh, you need an interpreter, of course. Oh, I can't just yell loudly at you and you'll suddenly hear me? All of a sudden, all those, you know, all those little moments of like, oh, I have to do something a little differently. They're adapting. They're shifting, right? So think about what would happen if we weren't living in a society that is so segregated, those natural interactions would just lead us to a different place.

**Ashley Hicks**
So what were your takeaways from this experience? You know, how did it impact your work as an interpreter?

**Lynnette Taylor**
I left art school, I realized, I guess for me, it was that moment of what is it that I really have to offer humanity. And the and this is kind of sad. And I think it might have been a mistaken notion, the idea that for me to pursue my art would be selfish. And I think that that was probably you can pursue your art and it not be selfish. It can be very generative as well just like to sit in. I don't think I knew how to balance that yet, at that time. And so I left art school and I started interpreting. And interpreting…Oh my gosh! I mean, I'm so grateful for that opportunity and path. I would never have met as many

people as I've met brilliant, brilliant beings in my life and learned so much.  It is what has taught me.

**Ashley Hicks**
So kind of widening the scope a little bit. In what ways do you think this event shifted the landscape of Disability Justice efforts?

**Lynnette Taylor**
I think it moved it from as Kitty Cone identified, it moved it from this problem is my problem to this is a civil rights issue. This is a societal issue. And it's a rights based issue and rights can't be parsed out.  Rights are here for everyone. And it also challenged the idea of who's deciding what these rights are defined as, what these rights look like, what these rights live like and where they're housed. And I think that's, those are issues that we're still dealing with. And you know, because it's still, this, these decisions are still being made, not from community driven conversations, or they're really still being made by those in power. And equal is getting defined as same. And when you define equal as same, then you have to go well, what are you comparing yourself to? And you're comparing yourself to the white straight male paradigm, which is something I never want to no aspiration of becoming. Excuse me, I don't mean to insult any white straight males out there. But that's not my aspiration. So then if you're offering me access that looks like or equality that looks like becoming another, the dominant other in order to be equal? Well, it just doesn't make sense. And it's just perpetuating the same old harm, you're just inversing a power. The problem is the definition of what the power is, right? And what that is getting defined.

**Ashley Hicks**
So how did theatre jump back into your journey and you know, bringing in interpretive theater? How did that come about for you?

**Lynnette Taylor**
I saw National Theatre for the Deaf for the first time when I was probably around 13 years old. There was a bus load from the Kentucky school for the deaf that went to see National Theatre for the Deaf. My mother and I went, a couple of things happened. It's sort of like the Civil Rights moment with Scott Lube King. This moment, also reset my whole understanding of my language, American Sign Language, and art, the power of art. It was the first time that I could share a theater experience with my mother, right? So think about that, that integration happened from the other side, not from the hearing world not but from the deaf world, the deaf world invited everybody. And so for the first time, I'm seeing theater with my mother, and my in the language that I love and treasure. My mother was poet too. She's just a beautiful, beautiful. Yeah, she's beautiful signer. At any rate, I saw Bernard Bragg perform and it was William Blake's Tiger, Tiger. And in that moment, for the first time, I understood that American Sign Language was a language that could express art. There were so many attitudes about what sign language was. Within the Deaf community, it was always a treasured language, it was THE lang- I mean, you know, you would see people in the deaf community, I would be deaf for the language because that was the treasure. Everyone loved it, but the outside

messaging on sign language was that it was an impoverished language, that it was broken English, that it was not capable of expressing scientific thought, abstract artistic thought that it you know, these assumptions, wrong assumptions about the language. paucity of the language, which you know, as we know, is not true.

**Ashley Hicks**
Right.

**Lynnette Taylor**
But those attitudes and feelings were prevalent in the community. It's a form of audism, linguistism, that then creates a layer of shame. So there was this moment there for me and no, no one knew that. I mean, yes, the research had begun on sign language being, you know, a legitimate language, etc. But the community had not embraced that idea yet. It was still in the ivory tower, and there was actually some incredulity. Is it really a language? You guys are just making this up, you're just over there trying to get a job, you know. So, seeing him on the stage and National Theatre for the death, a woken me an understanding and a pride in my language. And my mother and I shared that moment together, which is just like, whoa!

**Ashley Hicks**
Oh wow. That is so beautiful. I love that and to be able to experience that with your mom. It seems like once again, it found you. It wasn't something that you were, you know, actively looking for.

**Lynnette Taylor**
Karma karma.

**Ashley Hicks**
So I want to pivot a little bit and talk to you about your, your process today and the work that you do today with DASLs and if you could share what DASLs are and how you collaborate with them.

**Lynnette Taylor**
Sure, I mean, sticking with my mother, this seems to be maternal thing here.

**Ashley Hicks**
I love it! I love it!

**Lynnette Taylor**
My mother was my first DASL. And this is before we, you know, officially defined DASLing. It was sort of interpreting for the theatre came out of natural interactions. You know, deaf friends, I was in San Francisco at the time you had a lot of artists there a lot of deaf artists there who were involved in UC Celebration of Deaf Arts who were involved in Deaf Media's filming of Rainbow's End ,which was a Deaf Sesame Street version. Right? Super sign. So there were there was a lot of desire to see art and deaf people going, come on, let's go to the theater, let's go and we would, you know, sit

together and interpret. No standing in front of the stage, nothing formal. And so it was sort of a mutual co construction of meaning. Like I wouldn't know what the hell that meant. And I'd fingerspell and they go Oh, yeah. And they'd sign it to me. Oh, yeah. That's how you express it. That's okay. Oh, good. Good. Good. So you know, it was very much a mutual conversation about what interpreting looks like. The process of translation was very collaborative. Going back to my third eye and National Theatre for the Deaf and Bernard Bragg and, and Tiger Tiger Burning Bright. It was the first time that my mother and I could work from prose and text together, right? So in the kitchen every night I'd be signing over and over Tiger Tiger burning bright and she would be making corrections. No, no, that's the wrong inflection. No, it was this translation. And so for the first time, we were sharing literature in our language together, right? In ASL not in English, not in written English. So this was a you know, it was very formative. When we began interpreting theatre, we drew from all of those natural interactions, right, working with DASLs, so let's create meaning together; what's clear, what's not clear? What needs to be made explicit? When do we need to focus to the stage? What, you know, what is too performative, what performative information is necessary? And so that work with the DASLs and I must say, you know, Hands On has been the one who is really, really supported this endeavor. And, and Thomas Eddie is actually one of the best DASLs I've worked with over the years, other than my mother, of course. So it's, it's a beautiful exchange between cultures, languages and forms. What makes Sign Language Interpreting different is that I mean, then other translation processes, is that it's visual and performative, right? So we have to then honor the visual to visual agreements that are happening on stage and in our translation, as well as the performative and expressive. If our expressions are matching the expressions on the stage, then there's a little bit of a disconnect, but we also have to adhere to the principles of the language, right?

**Ashley Hicks**
You mentioned Hands On, which you do a lot of work with as well and our A.R.T./New York community is familiar with them. How did that that relationship form?

**Lynnette Taylor**
I moved to New York in 1987. I heard about this organization Hands On. I was interpreting in San Francisco just prior to that. The first interpreted show we did there was Children of a Lesser God with the National Touring Company. And that's was the impetus for all of this actually, I mean, to formally begin interpreting theater. Deaf community wanted to see the deaf stars on stage. And of course, this is a story about their community. So A.C.T. out of San Francisco American Conservatory Theatre, arranged the first interpreted show there and the process was beautiful. They did it just like we do now. But they auditioned. They brought in deaf artists to audition and screen the interpreters. I was chosen. I was not first choice. I was second choice. I'll just admit that right now. But I got to do it anyway. The process was brilliant. It was very community involved, deaf community involved, and. But the product was odd. They built two platforms on either side of the proscenium and placed one interpreter on one side who was a male and he was going to interpret all the male lines; me on the other side, and I was going to interpret all the female lines, except when they were signing on the

stage and then we would focus to the stage. Well, I mean, think about that tennis racket eye gaze. Right, exactly. There's no coherence in the visual conversation. Process was fabulous. Product…we didn't know what this looked like yet, right? Hands On had been doing a lot more here with DTW (Dance Theatre Workshop) They had already begun. So when I moved here in 1987, I auditioned for Hands On. I did George Benson's On Broadway, I think that was my audition piece. I used the song, right. And I just kept thinking, I'm going to do this, I'm gonna do this, right. They screened my work, they liked my work. I mean, yeah, clearly because they asked me back.

**Ashley Hicks**
They liked you!

**Lynnette Taylor**
And I did Shakespeare in the park. One of the Henry's. I don't remember which one but I think that was my first Hands On, you know, and a long relationship now for many, many years with Hands On: Beth Prevor. Candace Broecker Penn, and now Dylan Geil. Yeah.

**Ashley Hicks**
Wow. So what kind of work do you contribute now, currently.

**Lynnette Taylor**
I interpret a lot of shows. I mean, I do whatever is needed to be done, you know? I'm the shoulder, I'm the ear, work to get workshops together. We need a lot more training. There aren't a lot of opportunities for training. I think in the past, it was much easier because we didn't have…it's interesting. This propulsion for demand for interpreters in the theater has pushed us to accelerate in a way that we weren't ready for. That's on us. We should have been ready for this, right? We should have been extensively doing trainings. But we didn't and so now we're finding ourselves in a in a crux a bit, you know, having to train people very quickly to get up to speed. And what I mean by train is we came from a deaf centric place, and then it has sort of moved more market centric. And this is now what I'm seeing as the trend. It's becoming a little bit more transactional and there's a real deep ethos and belief. This a service, this is not a business, This is not a gig, where you're going to make a lot of money. This is a job you do because you believe in the power of art to change lives. And you believe that this hub where people gather is political real estate that needs to be capitalized, which means bring all bodies together to see all stories. And then if that happens, you know, we have a we have the potential to change the world.

**Ashley Hicks**
Yeah, I think one of the few upsides of the pandemic was that when we were all stuck in our homes and having access to theater in a way that we hadn't before, one of my one of my hopes was that, oh, wow, we have the services that, you know, there are performances that are being interpreted and captioned and, you know, audio description and all of that. And my fear was that once you know, obviously, we're still in the pandemic, but one of my fears was that all of that work would be forgotten about and

that we would go back to doing what we did before in terms of not everyone having access to theatre. And I think one of the results of what you what you were just saying is that the demand is so high, but the training and the representation and other challenges…It's almost as if it's become like a commodity. And it's like, wait a minute, this is something that should have been around way before the pandemic, and we're glad you're paying attention to it. But you have to, there needs to be a little bit more intentionality and more conversation around how do we supply the demand for these art service or excuse me, the service workers who are providing this access to the disabled community. And you spoke a little bit about it in your last answer with some of the challenges with training. Are there any other challenges currently that you have experienced? Or that you've noticed in terms of with interpreting theater?

**Lynnette Taylor**
Well, I think you hit a lot of the points. Thank you. I think, No, it's true. I think I think that we're in a funny place. I think we're in a funny place. Look, historically, we've been segregated. Historically, we, you know, we were racist. The field of interpreting is primarily white. And, and that's on us. That's totally on us. We're trying to, we're trying to repair harms that are historic harms that have been going on for centuries in a very short span of time. That's fine. I mean, yeah, let's turn it up. Let's do it. We can't lose ground, though. I mean, and I my concern is, my concern is, we're moving without deep listening. And we need places to come together to have deep listening, because this needs to be community driven. Otherwise, it becomes a commodity-like you said, a commodity. It becomes virtue signaling. It becomes the checkbox on the access. The theater looks good, but you're not really providing the community what it what it needs. And you're also I would say, what I'm experiencing on the service end, as an interpreter is people making decisions about my work for me, who have nothing to do with fields of deafness, or interpreting but they're woke. So they're going to tell me all about how I should be doing my work. And you're kind of going, Whoa, this is exactly what we don't need to repeat. We don't need to be repeating. We don't. It's not an act of benevolence. It's a right and don't start changing- don't start calling me an access worker. Did you ask me what my job is? Why am I an-I'm a sign language interpreter. And then you have to go, why are you needing to change the language that is my profession? Are you uncomfortable? Or do you need to own it? Is it a form of appropriation? Oh, everybody does the same thing? Well, that's a little bit demeaning. No, you can respect all the differences in what we do but it doesn't mean that you have to, like scale us down to all being the same.

**Ashley Hicks**
Exactly.

**Lynnette Taylor**
And that's what happens. Disabled people are the same. Black people all the same. Y'all all the same, all the same, all the same, because your IQ can only digest point 0.2 difference. I mean, it's bad. I'm sorry. Okay.

**Ashley Hicks**

Yes, I agree with you completely.

**Lynnette Taylor**
So the dilemma is, I guess this is my point, the dilemma is if you see this is not a political endeavor, then you're gonna- we're going to be in trouble. This is a political act, interpreting for the theater is a political act, sharing this space is a political act. And we need to be in this conversation about what politics are being made. It's not about money.

**Ashley Hicks**
Right, right.

**Lynnette Taylor**
I mean, it needs we have economic justice that needs to be addressed. I'm not saying we do this for free. There has to be support but there also has to be a shared ethos and philosophy about the approach to work.

**Ashley Hicks**
Yes

**Lynnette Taylor**
That's what gets lost in the transactional market centric model of just providing services.

**Ashley Hicks**
There needs to be conversation around how do we make this work? And you mentioned earlier of like, how do we pay people to do the work that they do, and if it's not included in the budget, if it's not mindfully thought about, then it gets forgotten. And then when something happens, it's like, oh, we have to fix this now. It's very reactionary. And it seems like the tide is kind of turning where it's more proactive, which is really interesting to watch various organizations and theatre companies go through that journey.

**Lynnette Taylor**
Only thanks to you. No, no, I'm serious. I really am serious. A.R.T./ New York's collaborative efforts and outreach and providing space for these conversations, pushing these conversations, not being afraid to leap in and open up Pandora's box. Really you guys have been here the whole time pushing and pushing. And so… and offering and offering and celebrating and celebrating and you know, I just have to say, you know, thank you. Because if we're not doing this work together, it won't work.  We keep seeing this over and over. Can't be a silo effort.

**Ashley Hicks**
Exactly. Exactly. Can you talk about your work with deaf artists and some of the challenges that they face or some of the wins that have happened? Because I've been seeing a lot of, of deaf artists on stage in a way that I hadn't been in the past, what, two years, which is really interesting to see. But you know, how, how is your work with deaf artists been?

**Lynnette Taylor**
I mean, yes, we're seeing a sort of a rennet. Would it be a renaissance since I mean, or maybe it's the first time?

**Ashley Hicks**
Right. Exactly.

**Lynnette Taylor**
I mean, we've had yes, we're, it's beautiful, what we're seeing now there, there is definitely a lot of media attention and stage attention to deaf artists, and both in front of and behind the scenes now. I think that's what's really that's the shift. I, I think, you know, for me, I think when I had a personal experience of realizing that 504 sit in, and the requirement of interpreter you know, the legal, the legal provision of interpreters mandate for interpreters really hit home for me was when I interpreted for Millicent Simmonds in Wonder Struck, she was 12 years old, a 12 year old Deaf actress, and I'm interpreting and I go, this is why we do what we do. This is why we did this. And this is why we had the sit-in and so you a young emerging actress, can go out and, you know, change the world. And so yeah, I think interpreting for the theatre has a place here as well. It is also an opportunity for young deaf artists children to come and see art and you know, and give them the inspiration to become an artist. And when the interpreting team has DASLs, has Deaf Interpreters involved, that kind of representation, there also is a strong model for a young deaf children to go, oh, I can do this? I can be a part of the arts? And I think we have to look for ways wherever we are to open doors to make those connections so that, you know, the network just extends. It doesn't, it doesn't shrink it extends.

**Ashley Hicks**
Yeah,I love that. Like being able to, you know, I know, when I was a kid and seeing representation of people who were disabled, and with any disability was so important. And now being an adult and seeing little kids have that representation. And notice that the tide is turning, it is slow, but it is turning and I'm like, Oh, wow. Okay, we are making some improvement, that the needle is moving. And I think that is so valuable, as a child to be able to see yourself or you know, a piece of yourself being represented in the arts, that that is so important. For anyone who is unfamiliar with Hands On, with interpretive theatre, with your work, what would you think, is one thing that they should know? And I know this is a very big question.

**Lynnette Taylor**
I think Hands On is really an organization unlike any other. It's very community bound. It's committed to the arts. Beth Prevor has been running this organization for decades, pretty much on her own, I mean, along with Candace Broecker Penn and a few other people. But I mean, it's really been a commitment to the arts and the love of the arts and including the deaf community at every step of the way. And I think, with A.R.T./New York's support and Hands On support, which is always to have conversations with audiences, welcome audiences in design, design places that will be barrier free as both

attitudinally and architecturally I think that those efforts, we're seeing a huge change. The audience is growing a lot for interpreted theater. Our interpreters are growing a lot. I mean, it's beautiful to see it's a moment to celebrate. And yes, we can lose this moment. I don't want to just like lalalalala Right, right. I mean, we're seeing the push, we're seeing the tide go back. I think we- I think it's what we can't get lost in is the narrative of despair and what we can't get lost in is living a past narrative. That past can inform us but it can't trap us right, so I think we need to celebrate, we do. I mean as we move forward and know that we got to fight with fierce love. It's got to be fierce Warrior Love. It can't be this sweet little love ya. I'll put an interpreter there for you. It's going to be-

**Ashley Hicks**
A little bit more aggressive

**Lynnette Taylor**
A little bit more. Yeah.

(MUSIC)

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**Nicky Maggio**
Ashley Ashley Ashley, what a dynamic interview.

**Ashley Hicks**
Yes, it was

**Nicky Maggio**
Wow. I mean, working with Lynnette for the past year and the entire Hands On team from Beth Prevor and Candace Broecker Penn. You know, I was very fortunate to see firsthand or I should say Hands On. Hahaha. I know I'm so punny. Their incredible work with interpretive theatre, especially at you know, I sat in on one of their trainings training workshop last October that A.R.T./ New York hosted but this interview was a really special treat, especially to hear the beginnings of such a like a profound human being. I was really moved simply by Lynnette's language like when she said, "Origin stories are hard. Where do you start the origins?" End quote. Like yes, Lynnette, give me that language. So what was your takeaway about hearing about her origins about her beginnings?

**Ashley Hicks**
That quote was so powerful, first of all. When it comes to origin stories, what I appreciated about hers was how it found her, she didn't go looking for it. Or to be more specific, it wasn't like, it was something that she was actively going towards. It didn't exactly fall into her lap. But I loved how she mentioned that, you know, there wasn't a coincidence. Like, it wasn't by accident, you know, and I thought that was she just happened to be at the right place at the right time. And all of the things were lined up for

her to take part in this historical event. And it just reminded me, I think, how in life when it comes to what your calling is, or what your purpose is, sometimes it finds you. You don't find it. So I thought that was really cool.

**Nicky Maggio**
I love that she used the word Karmic.

**Ashley Hicks**
Yeah. I love that. And I was like, wow, you know, this thing. You got to be a part of this thing. And you were just going to, you know, do something for your mom, I think. And I'm like, Oh, okay, cool. Cool. And she said YES, And that's the thing: is that when it finds you, you have the opportunity to say yes or no. And she said, Yes. And kept saying yes. And it led to, to more a fuller experience and meeting all these new people. And then it started to inform her work. And I thought that that was that was really neat.

**Nicky Maggio**
It, like, threw her on the right life path that she was gonna be doing

**Ashley Hicks**
Yeah!

**Nicky Maggio**
So listeners are kind of getting a little behind the scenes information. So Lynnette followed up, followed up with us after that recording. And I'm going to read a little bit from the email she sent to us. And she writes, quote, **"I did, of course, walk away with many things I wish I had said, one was about the importance of Black Lives Matter. And we see white American theater and the push for change. That is one of the reasons we are seeing the demand for access services, visibility and more awareness that representation matters in interpreting just as it does everywhere else. This accelerated push in the demand for BIPOC interpreters has shown the fissure and reveal to the historic segregation of our communities. Interpreting has been a white hearing dominated field, so we have a lot of work to do: reparative, restorative and generative as we move forward to rectify the past harmful practices. I just wanted to note that I think with all of the Black Lives Matter protests, many of the same community practices sprang up as they did when I was in San Francisco. Interpreters just showed up and were there to support the community. I just wanted to acknowledge those who are carrying on the practices today. It's still alive and well."** That's Lynnette Taylor. And so reading her response now. I know! She's so like, how she writes, it's just like, how she speaks she writes, it's just… Lynnette we love you. So reading this, the response now it really for me, it really shines light on something she said about her interview, about even like within the goods of a civil rights movement, there is growth and radical change that is needed to fight systematic oppression, racism, even internally of these practices, and Lynnette really takes ownership and accountability by saying, you know, it's on us, we need to do better. So I would love to hear actually what you think about this, like what

are the intersectionalities that needs to be addressed when looking at anti ageless work disability equity work, looking at anti racism and anti oppression practices.

**Ashley Hicks**
Yeah, I mean, I appreciated that. Lynnette mentioned that with everything that's going on with our industry currently, that we're being shown a lot of progress. It's it's kind of at a snail's pace. I think like, oh my gosh, it's 2023 and we have not fixed this yet? Are you serious? But I think it's important to know that we can still acknowledge how far we've come and still be like, we still have far to go. And being that when it comes to being anti ableist, anti racist, and other anti oppression issues, I think it's one of-all of that is connected, and so you can't be one without being the other. You can't say, I'm anti ablest and be racist. You can't be a you know, you can't say I'm I'm anti racist, and be ableist. Yeah, all connected. And if you're not looking at one, if you're not looking at all of that, and really holding yourself and these organizations and these institutions within the theater field accountable for those things, then it makes the work that still needs to be done harder.

**Nicky Maggio**
Yeah. It's more than just intentions, you have to hold, you have to hold us accountable. You have to hold systems accountable.

**Ashley Hicks**
Exactly. Exactly. I think it's it's also one of those things where, in noting how much work, we still have to do, that we don't necessarily want to roll the waters back, you can still have acknowledgement of the work that needs to be done. And be like, Yeah, we still have further to do. But it's it's I think it's both multiple things can be true at once. And when you start getting into well, well, we've come this far, like why are we still talking about this? Progress **has** been made, and not pay attention to what's actively happen happening now. Or if you go in the reverse and be like, Well, we still have work to do. And this isn't changing. You're not acknowledging the work that has been done. Both can live at the same time.

**Nicky Maggio**
Challenges and also celebrations. And speaking of hierarchies, I just loved the I mean, just the fun line of the 25 cent tent. When you asked her about about the elevator, and she said, Well, those are for the VIPs. And so like even in something

**Ashley Hicks**
I forgot about that. I was like, there was a hierarchy system?

**Nicky Maggio**
There was a hierarchy system, you know, just some were intimate moments happened, you know, but I think what will stick with me for this entire interview you did with her was how young at a young impressionable age Lynnette was, these life altering experiences affected her work decades on as you said earlier today, and how she is so community driven, and her work is so generative after having just a lot of life lessons she learned in

her time there. So reflecting on your interview, final question! What are some moments that are going to stay with you? What's a moment of this interview that has haunted you?

**Ashley Hicks**
Ah, there are so many and why- I have to pick one? This one actually, I was gonna go with the elevator hierarchy system. But actually, this one just came to me. It was, at some point in the interview, she mentioned how she had felt bad about being an artist, that to do this work and try to do her art at the same time. It was like she stopped doing that for a while and felt guilty because this is almost like this work was more important. And I think as artists, as administrators, whatever your role is in theater, once again, multiple things can be true at one time, and you can still do this work and be able to do the things that you are passionate about. It doesn't have to be an either or, and I really connected with that. Because I felt that at moments in the beginning of my career as an artist, like, oh, there are all these things that I care about, especially as a person who identifies as disabled. How can I marry these two things? Because I'm going to get on my soapbox, but how is that going to interfere with my art like… am I going to be the one who is thought of as the contrarian because I'm always bringing up these things, these issues, these oppressions, these systems, these practices? Can I do both? And I found it really interesting that that, oh wow Lynnette's felt that too. So we're not alone, not alone. I'm like, I'm not the first person to feel this way. And I won't be the last person to feel this way. I think that was that was a big thing that will stay with me.

**Nicky Maggio**
Thank you. Thank you for that answer.

**Ashley Hicks**
Thank you.

**Nicky Maggio**
I would love to highlight this incredible organization that we've mentioned a few times now that Lynnette is a big part of and that is Hands On. And for folks who don't know Hands On as intimately as we do at A.R.T/ New York, Hands On's mission is to provide access to arts and cultural programs for the Deaf and hard of hearing communities. Hands On is one of the only organizations of its kind, offering sign interpretive performances for non for profit theatrical arena, along with information on deafness and the arts across New York City and the country. It was founded in 1982 by the incredible Beth Prevor. They began with six interpretive performances but now averaged around 20 to 30 interpreted Broadway and off Broadway productions a year. Wow, that's, that's a big growth. Yeah, since its inception, Hands On has provided over 500 interpretive performances. And if you're interested in learning more about Hands On visit Hands On.org That's h a n d s o n.org. I would also love to share the that Lynnette acknowledges the many women organizers of the 504 sit in, including Mary Lou Breslin, Kitty Cone, Judy Heumann and Pat Wright. And that unfortunately, there is only one surviving deaf member of the sit-in Steve McClelland. And last but not least, we have an update to our story. This is exciting. Lynnette did go back to college attending New York

University Tisch School of the Arts studying film, and she writes that it took decades to pay off her student loans. Right, that just hurts my heart because like I will always be paying off my student loans. When we feel you Lynnette, and congratulations for actually paying them off.

**Ashley Hicks**
Right! That's huge!

**Nicky Maggio**
Ashley, thank you so much for this lovely episode. Do you have any final thoughts for our listeners?

**Ashley Hicks**
I had a blast. Lynnette was great. And if you have the opportunity to see her interpret or hear or speak or hear her teach a training, you're in for a treat.

**Nicky Maggio**
Yeah, check them out. Check them out, folks. Well listeners do hope you enjoyed this episode. If you have, remember to subscribe wherever you get your podcast and visit art-new york.org to learn more about the many programs and offerings including our very own *What's Off?* podcast. until next time.

**Nicky Maggio**
For decades, A.R.T./New York has supported our city's resilient theatre makers during unprecedented times. The aftermath of 9/11, economic downturns, the COVID-19 pandemic - each of these challenges ultimately paved the way for brilliant theatrical innovation. When YOU give to A.R.T./New York, you're helping us to sustain our members, no matter what the future brings. Visit our website at " a-r-t dash new york dot org slash donate" to contribute. Together, we can uplift the most vibrant artists working today, and the cutting edge innovators of tomorrow!

**Ashley Hicks**
*What's Off?* is a production of A.R.T/New York. Executive Producer: David E. Shane, Associate Producer: Erica Wray Barnes, Line Producers: Ashley J. Hicks and Nicky Maggio, with audio engineering by Catalin Media.

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