

YOU AND ME BOTH WITH HILLARY CLINTON: BELIEVE IN YOURSELF WITH BRANDI CARLILE AND ANDRÉ De SHIELDS

You and Me Both is a production of iHeartRadio.

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I'm Hillary Clinton, and this is You and Me Both. “Believe in yourself.” You know, it's a piece of advice we hear a lot. But for many of us, it takes years, if not a lifetime, to actually get there. And then there are those rare folks, immensely talented and hardworking, who somehow always knew that they would be *somebody*. Today, I have the pleasure of speaking with two people who believed in themselves from the get go. Later, we'll hear from the incredibly talented actor, director and choreographer André de Shields. But first, I'm talking to multiple Grammy Award winning singer and songwriter Brandi Carlile.

I first discovered Brandi back in 2019 when she performed her song “The Joke” at the Grammy Awards. That year, she was nominated for six—yes, six—Grammys for her album, *By the Way I Forgive You*. I immediately tracked down as much of her music as I could. I've been a fan ever since. Brandi grew up in rural Washington state with very young parents who struggled to make a living and provide a stable home. But she was also surrounded by a lot of love and a lot of music. She's drawn on those roots to build a beautiful family of her own with her wife, Catherine, and their two daughters, Evangeline and Elijah. Brandi writes about all of this in her memoir titled *Broken Horses*, and that's where I wanted to start our conversation, by asking her what it was like to pull up those memories, the good, the bad, the wonderful, and write this incredibly open, revealing and compelling book.

BRANDI CARLILE: I had always kind of mined my past for experience and songwriting and things like that, but just in little random bursts without the detail, you know? But when I actually really sat down and kind of meditated on it, everything came back, smells and floral prints on couches and, you know, whatever vehicle we happened to have at that time, and just my childhood became really clear and really vivid, and it poured out of me. I didn't hesitate. I didn't worry about what I was saying about mom or dad or, you know, my brother and sister, or the way that we lived or what was going on in our lives at that time. I didn't think about embarrassment because I think in the back of my mind, I knew I could always go and take anything out. I could edit anything. And then I just didn't.

HRC: From what I read, not only about your parents, but your grandparents, aunts, uncles-

CARLILE: Yeah.

HRC: There was a lot of love. There was a lot of fun. And there was a lot of unpredictability, instability and chaos.

CARLILE: Yeah, that's true. [laughs]

HRC: How would you describe your mom and your dad? You emphasize how young they were.

CARLILE: Yeah, they were, and in some ways, and I mean, this is a compliment, are very young. And there's an energy about them and the endless opportunities for adventure and fun and honestly, mostly chaos.

HRC: Mm-Hmm.

CARLILE: There was always this kind of undercurrent of like, Well, we're different and we don't have to do things the way other people do them. And it was like a little bit like that film, you know, Captain Fantastic. There was a lot of late night discussion and I was privy to a lot of things that I don't know if I needed to be privy to. But I was also given great wisdom and insight at a really young age. And for some reason, I just feel like I knew what to do with it. And that kind of narrative of like, we're different, we lived different, was what made not being at the same schools or having a lot of different houses or a little bit of upheaval not just okay, but what I thought would be a preferable way to grow up.

HRC: Right, right

CARLILE: And looking back on it, I don't know that I don't feel that way now. I feel a pull all the time to raise my kids eccentrically with a little bit of chaos, a little bit of spontaneity, a little bit of "we don't know what's going to happen." And my wife makes me resistant. [laughs]

HRC: [laughs] But I don't want to leave your childhood yet because you also describe the very serious illness you had as what, a four year old?

CARLILE: Yeah.

HRC: Can you talk about that?

CARLILE: Yeah. When I was four years old, I contracted meningococcal meningitis and presented as really, really sick. But my mother was really young, I want to say like 20 at the time, and knew right away that something was wrong, but she was the kind of mom where she thought something was wrong all the time, you know, she had the speed dial, if they even had that, you know, in 1980, what would this have been 1985, 2-4-Nurse. And she told my dad that something was really wrong and, you know, he didn't believe her. And my mom was on the phone with 2-4-Nurse and 2-4-Nurse asked my mom to have me touch my chin to my chest,

which I guess is like the telltale sign that somebody could have meningitis. And it made me pass out. And I just remember waking up in the backseat of the car on my way to the emergency room and wound up being in the hospital in a coma for quite some time before I came to, and didn't get out of there till after my fifth birthday. And there's still a bit of trauma, I think, for both my parents, but mostly, I think, my mother about thinking that I wasn't going to pull through that and it gave me a sense of specialness. You know, I was the first grandchild on both sides of the family and everybody had this kind of "Brandi's got a mission" thing and it gave me a quite inflated sense of self-importance. [laughs]

HRC: [laughs] What was your earliest memory of making or listening to music? Because the other part of the book, which I love, is that you had a somewhat musical family and I see pictures in the book of you as a really little kid, all dressed up, you're on stage, you're singing. What are your earliest memories?

CARLILE: There's music on both sides of my family. Country music and bluegrass, mostly. My dad's father played dobro and followed bluegrass bands around in his RV, and I didn't get to spend much time with him musically, he was a quiet guy that, you know, but on my mom's side of the family, her dad was a cigar salesman and a country music singer and yodeler. And he was a very outward personality, big influence that I think about here in my head all the time to this day. But he died really young of ALS, which is the worst disease in the world. And when he died, kind of the last thing he did, whether he knew it or not, was light a fire in my mother to continue on the music. And she did. She took all that grief and that little bit of money and got a P.A. system. And put together a band and started singing and thought to include me and my brother. And so I was like seven or eight years old the first time I got on stage and sang a Rosanne Cash song, "Tennessee Flat Top Box," at this place called the Northwest Grand Ole Opry. And I just wanted to be a cowgirl.

HRC: I love it. Well, I also really love your mother's gutsiness that she got that P.A. system and put herself up there that is really making yourself vulnerable. And I think it's another real tribute to her as a mom that she knew to include you.

CARLILE: Yeah, and she was really good. She looked great, huge hair. You know, she'd fix my hair and put our clothes together and everything. And she just, yeah, she would always tell me she'd be sitting in the front row just going, Move Brandi! Move your body. Stop wrapping the mic cord around your hand.

HRC: We're taking a quick break. Stay with us.

The other thing about your upbringing is that, you know, you grew up in a religious family, in a religious community. And I really like the way that faith and spirituality run through your story.

CARLILE: Like yours.

HRC: Yeah, like mine, exactly, and how it evolves. And it was so touching to me and heartbreaking to read your description about a pastor refusing to baptize you, I guess, because he knew you were gay.

CARLILE: Yeah.

HRC: And insisted that you renounce, literally, renounce yourself in order to be baptized. And you rightly refused to do that. Can you tell that story?

CARLILE: Yeah, he *really* knew I was gay. Like, that's really one of the hardest nuances about that story is that he really knew I was gay. Like, I was totally unapologetic about it. I presented that way. I brought my little girlfriend to church. For some reason I don't know why I didn't expect that. It was in the sermons. It was in the subtext. You know, I did have a sense of audacity that I can't- I would love to reconnect with, actually. But yeah, he did. And there was like a well, the Baptists are very big, by the way, on public declarations.

HRC: Oh yes, right?

CARLILE: Converting to possible public humiliation. And I already liked being on stage. So, you know, I went up to the front of the church and on one Sunday and said I'd like to be baptized and was applauded and hugged and given a schedule of, you know, going to lunch with the pastor and learning the things I needed to learn in the scriptures and understanding what was going to take place, inviting people and then got to the church that day to be baptized and our town, and our family, and our friends kind of filled the church. And the pastor at the last minute asked me, which was, I thought was really strange, asked me if I quote unquote "practiced homosexuality."

HRC: Hmm.

CARLILE: And I just remember this furrowed brow looking at him, I said, "You know, I'm gay. I've come to church with my girlfriend, you know, and we go we go into Pizza Hut yesterday like, you know," you know, and chose that moment to tell me that he wasn't going to baptize me. And I had to kind of run out the church in front of everyone, and it's probably one of the biggest humiliations in my life. Without trying to wrap it up into an attractive box and say that everything's fine now, without that experience, I wouldn't have known how much support I actually had. How upset the people that came to see that happen for me were, how upset my dad

was. And I always felt I was kind of “gay nineties” accepted, you know, kind of like, “we accept this, but don't put it in our face” kind of thing-

HRC: Right, right

CARLILE: Until that day and everybody becoming so upset. I felt more seen in that way than I ever had before. Also more rejected than I ever had before, but it pushed me into another life.

HRC: Yeah.

CARLILE: That I needed to be pushed into.

HRC: But also from that time forward, you really threw yourself into your music. And thinking back to being put on the stage as this, you know, little girl, three decades of performing and of writing, how has your relationship to music evolved over that period of time?

CARLILE: Well, I don't know. I mean, I think that's the moment that music became mine. And I just, I had to really separate my soul from some things, you know, and so I started getting interested in getting on an airplane. I started getting interested in going to a big city, meeting different kinds of people, and less and less interested in country music. I remember the night of my “botched baptism” I call it [HRC laughs], putting my little CD player Jeff Buckley's *Grace* on repeat on “Hallelujah” just over and over and over and over again and it occurring to me like I want to leave.

HRC: Yeah.

CARLILE: And I want to write. I want to write a song like this. I don't care if it's a 12 minute song.

HRC: [laughs] A longer song for a longer story! But I also love the way that you found some extraordinary music icons that became mentors. I mean, the kind of relationship that you describe with Elton John from a far, far distance. There you are in Washington State, Elton's, you know, in England or Atlanta or wherever he might be. And you are discovering this extraordinary human being to say nothing of his, you know, almost cosmic talent.

CARLILE: I fell in love with Elton John over sixth, fifth-sixth grade book report about Ryan White never hearing a note. I loved him because of his contribution to this boy's life who died, I think it was in 1991? It's in the 90s. He died of AIDS. He had hemophilia. He contracted AIDS through a blood transfusion. I did a book report on him in school. I chose the book myself.

HRC: You didn't even know what the book was about, you just saw his picture.

CARLILE: No, I just saw a cute boy book [laughs] and I picked it up in the school library and I did a book report. And in the end of the book, he befriends this British gay rock star. He's being politicized. He's being asked to become the poster child for the church as a person affected by, you know, sin in the world created by homosexual men. And this was a subtext that I had been taught in church and was thinking about this and talking about this a lot in my own home. And here's this new perspective in a book, thank God. And in the end, he meets this rock star and this rock star's got a couple of songs that are mentioned in the book, and he sings a song at the kid's funeral called Skyline Pigeon. And I went to the King County Library and checked out the CD *Here and Now* Elton John CD, a couple other Elton John CDs and a book by Philip Norman, *Elton John, Elton John* and I dove into this rock star and before I ever heard him sing I was already obsessed with him. And then I heard "Skyline Pigeon," and then I heard "Funeral for a Friend" and "Bennie and the Jets." And I just, I went in to everything Elton John. By the time I was like 14, there wasn't a square inch of my bedroom walls that weren't covered with Elton John memorabilia. I made homemade Elton John jewelry, and I began playing piano. My parents got me an \$80 Toys R US Casio keyboard and it totally changed my life. And yeah, now he's like, He's my friend.

HRC: He is your friend. Well, Ryan White died in 1990, and he had such an amazing effect on so many people. There eventually was a piece of legislation, The Ryan White Act, to provide more support and resources for people living with HIV/AIDS. And Elton just connected so immediately with this, you know, young boy from Indiana. But neither Ryan nor his mother ever allowed people, if they could stop it, using them in a negative way. I mean, they were big hearted, they were open minded. And I want to just make one other point. You got that book about Ryan White in your school library.

CARLILE: Mm-Hmm.

HRC: There are people right now-

CARLILE: Yeah,

HRC: Who want to take a book like that out of public school libraries. You know, "impressionable children shouldn't be learning about Ryan White." You know, it's just another perfect example among countless examples of why, you know, we have to stand up for the right of kids to, you know, seek out and find information. And obviously, a school library is one of the best ways to do that. When and how did you finally meet Elton in person?

CARLILE: First of all, that's a really, really good point. And books like that that I had access to in my school sculpted a lot of things about my life, and that's just one of the many that gave me, you know, the worldview that propelled me forward in really, really big ways. So I love that you made that point. What was the second question?

HRC: Oh yeah. When and where did you meet Elton?

CARLILE: OK, so I met Elton, just like you'd hope I would, in a Las Vegas casino basement recording studio [both laugh]. He called me like 10 years prior to that, or maybe five years prior to that, when I put out the story. But I hadn't met him yet, and I'd always wanted to meet him. I wrote him a letter when I made my album, *Give Up the Ghost*, and asked him to play piano in one of my songs and he just, he called me up and said, "Yeah, can you get to Vegas?" So I did. And I'll just never forget it because I remember coming down this corridor and I could hear him talking, and I had all of the every live VHS tape that he had ever recorded, every interview. And I'm like, Oh my God, that's Elton John, I'm gonna walk around the corner and I'm gonna see Elton John sitting there. And I did. And he was sitting there in a tracksuit, and he just gave me an enormous hug and then stayed with me all day for four hours. Just talk to me about music just gave me everything that I could have ever hoped to be given by meeting my very worthy hero. By the time I got home, he'd set me a hundred CDs with sticky notes.

HRC: Oh oh. Talk about the day that you found out you were the most nominated woman at the 2019 Grammys. Describe that, because to me, it just blended so much about what your life is like right now.

CARLILE: I mean, it was the middle of the night because we're on the West Coast and I just got the phone call that from relative obscurity, in terms of the Grammys. I had been nominated for six of them. And I was just in total disbelief. I knew it was going to be a watershed moment and it was going to change my life. And it really did. I remember my, my publicist and friend Asha. She's just like, "they just kept saying your name," you know. I wasn't even awake. It was pitch dark and I woke up everybody in my house. And but, you know, I mean, you know, because you're a Grammy winner, right?

HRC: Yeah, that's right. For the spoken word. That's true, for the spoken word.

CARLILE: Where's your Grammy? I'm looking for it in the background, I don't see it.

HRC: I have it in our- our library. It's part of history.

CARLILE: OK.

HRC: Well, before we go, I have to ask you: I know you love fishing and you know, you write in the book, “nothing's really ever got a hold of me the way fishing and music have.” OK. What is the biggest fish you've ever caught? And was it the same feeling you had when you got all those Grammys?

CARLILE: It was the same feeling. I mean, nearly identical because, as I said in the book, fishing is merely an attempt to connect to something that you know is there but, but can't see. A perpetual series of occasions for hope. The biggest fish I ever caught was in Alaska on the Kenai River. It's a 43 pound king salmon.

HRC: That's one big fish.

CARLILE: Mm-Hmm.

HRC: You know, I've actually fished for salmon in Alaska, and those fish are big. They are big.

CARLILE: That's right.

HRC: And they're delicious, too. Did they pack your fish and prepare it so that you could go and eat it later?

CARLILE: I prepared it.

HRC: You prepared it! Go, girl. [laughs]

CARLILE: But you know something about that, huh?

HRC: Oh yeah. Oh my gosh. I also, I mean, your definition of fishing is almost like a perfect definition of faith. I'm going to, I'm going to remember that.

CARLILE: That's exactly what I parallel it with.

HRC: Well, Brandi Carlile, I cannot thank you enough. This was such a true delight. Do you have any parting words, or any singing words, or anything you want to leave us with?

CARLILE: I cannot tell you how much talking to you today has meant to me, and I almost can't do anything else for the rest of the day now. I just, I think that you are such a special person, you're such a gift to the world, you've been a gift in my life. You know, the song we keep skimming over, “The Joke,” that I sang at the Grammys. I wrote that first line in the second verse about you.

HRC: Oh.

CARLILE: I'm getting over a cold, so I'm gonna do my best. [singing] "You get discouraged, don't you girl? It's your brother's world for a little while longer."

HRC: A little while longer.

CARLILE: Just a little while longer (laughs), not too much.

HRC: Thank you.

CARLILE: Thank you.

HRC: Brandi Carlile's memoir is *Broken Horses*.

One of my favorite shows on Broadway in recent years is the Tony Award-winning Best Musical *Hadestown*. In this modern retelling of Orpheus and Eurydice, the character of Hermes, Messenger to the Gods, carries us through the entire show. And who better to play a god than the larger than life personality André De Shields. Following the shutdown during the pandemic, *Hadestown* is up and running again with André at the helm. But this is just the latest chapter in his long and glorious history. At age 76, André has been performing in the theater for over 50 years, starting with his professional debut in the hit rock musical *Hair* back in 1969. And I hate to tell you that I actually saw it way back then. But since then he's appeared on film and TV and in more musicals, like *The Wiz* and *Ain't Misbehavin*. Three Tony Award nominations and one win later, he's truly a living legend of the stage.

André was born in the 1940s and grew up in Baltimore as the ninth of 11 siblings. His mother was a domestic worker. His father was a tailor. The stories he tells of how we got from there to here, always believing in himself along the way, are an inspiration to anyone with a dream of making it, of making something that you really can be proud of. I was so delighted to speak with him.

ANDRÉ De SHIELDS: Good morning!

HRC: Oh, good morning! I love your red background. Wow.

De SHIELDS: We may not know this. It's my aura.

HRC: I can understand that, my friend. You know, I was privileged, as you know, to see you in “Hadestown,” for which you won a Tony in 2019-

De SHIELDS: Yes.

HRC: As you marked your 50th anniversary of working on the stage. And I want to go back to the beginning because I want our listeners to have a little idea of where you know you come from, what your roots are. I think it's really a great American story, but it's more a tribute to your energy, and your resilience, and your determination, and your aura. So what type of kid were you, André? Were you shy? Were you somebody who liked attention? I know you were one of 11 kids.

De SHIELDS: My roots are in Baltimore, Maryland, and I would not describe myself as shy. I would describe myself as secretly ambitious.

HRC: Mm-Hmm.

De SHIELDS: I come from meager beginnings. And that was my impetus to achieve. There were very few of us who lived in the innermost of the inner cities in Baltimore who dared to dream. We were not encouraged to dream. We were not encouraged to be ambitious. We were not encouraged to think that we could have a slice of the vaunted American Pie. But that was my first conscious thought. I want my slice of the American Pie.

HRC: Did anyone in your family know about your dream? Encourage your dream?

De SHIELDS: Yes. Everyone knew about my dream. I shared it with everyone: I wanted to be Sammy Davis Jr., [HRC laughs] who arguably is the greatest entertainer of the 20th century.

HRC: So incredible.

De SHIELDS: However, the response was, “Oh, you must be out of your mind.” So when I didn't get the visceral support, I thought, “Well, let me put this in my vest, close to my heart. Let me keep it there, so it wouldn't be sullied.”

HRC: So, André, tell us about your parents. They clearly had some kind of influence on you, as all parents do one way or the other and tell us about that.

De SHIELDS: When I was old enough to have an adult conversation with my mother and father, my mother shared with me that her life's dream was to be a chorus girl. And I thought “what?” she said, “yes.” She didn't use the term “dancer”, she said, “chorus girl,” my parents having been

born around the turn of the 20th century. And I said, "So what happened?" Well, her response was her father said to her, "No decent colored daughter of mine is going to shuffle her way through life. We've hardly shuffled our way off the plantation." Now, that is very meaningful for me because my maternal grandfather was the son of his master. So I decided with that information, I should ask my father. Amazingly, but in retrospect, not amazingly at all. His response was- his life's dream was he wanted to be a singer. He had a beautiful tenor voice and he sang in church and he had a club that he sang with. And I said, "Well, what happened to that dream?" He said his father, my paternal grandfather, said, "How do you expect to be a responsible husband and father with such an irresponsible career?" I tell that story because what happened is that both my parents deferred their dreams. I believe that I am the manifestation of those deferred dreams, because from the morning on a cold January day that I was evicted from my mother's womb, that was imprinted on my spirit. "You are the manifestation of the deferred dreams of your parents". I never had a question about my path in life.

HRC: That's a great manifestation.

De SHIELDS: I knew that in order to overcome these invisible, but seemingly insurmountable walls that we build around ourselves when we are constantly told that we cannot achieve, and that there is a demarcation in the society that says, "You stay where you are. There is no mobility." Right?

HRC: Yeah, yeah, right. And you know, sadly, it is, as you just said, sometimes from the people that you're living with, people who love you, who are afraid for you.

De SHIELDS: And they want to protect you.

HRC: They want to protect you. And they unfortunately often evidence that in a way that, you know, kind of tries to pull you down or push you back so that you don't get out into that world where you will get hurt. And then, of course, on the receiving end, you've got people who are, you know, not expecting much or who are outright, you know, prejudiced and biased against you and your dream.

De SHIELDS: I want to say something about protecting people. I know it is meant for good, but you cannot protect an individual from himself. You cannot protect an individual from his ambition. You cannot protect an individual from his destiny. You have to encourage an individual, especially when he's young. You must say, go forth and be the most authentic individual that you can.

HRC: Mm hmm. I want to ask one last, one last question about this. So when was the first time you performed in public and you knew that the dream was not just a dream you kept close to your heart, it could be your reality?

De SHIELDS: After the dream that I was protecting, I had the epiphany. And that was seeing the film *Cabin in the Sky*. John “Bubbles” Sublett, when I saw his performance in *Cabin in the Sky*, the quiet voice that lives in the core of our souls and speaks to us only the truth said to me, “André, that's what you're going to do.”

HRC: Because all of a sudden you had an epiphany because, you know, there's that old saying, you can't be what you can't see.

De SHIELDS: Exactly.

HRC: And you saw it

De SHIELDS: I saw it. So as a young, precocious Negro boy in Baltimore, you know about the Society of Friends?

HRC: Yes, I do.

De SHIELDS: They came to me through the Central Scholarship Bureau and said, You're a young man with potential. We would like to offer you a scholarship to go to college. The condition is that you must attend the college of our choice.

HRC: Hmm.

De SHIELDS: I jumped at the opportunity—the first child in the family to go to college. Wilmington College in Wilmington, Ohio. A pristine, intimate Quaker school. And when I was going to college, and I know you remember this, it was *de rigueur* to do your junior year abroad.

HRC: Mm hmm.

De SHIELDS: I did my junior year in Denmark.

HRC: OK.

De SHIELDS: And when I arrived in Denmark, I was received as the very opposite to the way I had been treated in Baltimore. In Baltimore, in many ways, I was the scum of the Earth and I'm

not exaggerating. In Denmark, I was royalty. “Can I touch your skin? Can I touch your hair?” I’m not kidding. That was in 1967.

HRC: Right?

De SHIELDS: It blew my mind! It opened my eyes to not only the place in which I had arrived, but the place from where I had come. And at that time all the major cities were experiencing their urban insurrections, and I thought to myself, that’s where I come from. So when I return, I have to leave that pristine Quaker environment and go to where the veil was being ripped from the eyes of political America. So I ended up at the University of Wisconsin, one of the hotbeds of political change.

HRC: [Laughs] You really did, you jumped right into it!

De SHIELDS: Right?

HRC: But what an incredible realization that you had about yourself and your life as a relatively young person. I mean, you’re still, what, 19, 20 years old when you decide-

De SHIELDS: exactly 19, 20.

HRC: I’ve got to get out into this world that’s waiting for me. I’ve got an idea now where I came from and where I want to go. You graduated from Wisconsin-

De SHIELDS: University of Wisconsin.

HRC: in Madison, in, I think, 1970, right?

De SHIELDS: And the month I graduated, I won a position in Tom O’Horgan’s *Hair*.

HRC: [Laughs] That’s so great!

De SHIELDS: That was my first professional performance. Now that’s the equation I want to share with anybody who’s curious about ambition, accomplishment, destiny, any of those *huge* ideas. First, you must have the dream. Second, you must have the epiphany. The third part of the equation is once on that Thursday, when someone comes to you and puts a check in your hand and pays you for the dream that has now become the work, that’s the equation. From there, your destiny will rise up, shake your hand and say, “Welcome, I’ve been waiting for you all this time.”

HRC: But the epiphany and the opportunity also requires work. Once you are offered that position, you know, in *Hair*, you had to put in the work, didn't you?

De SHIELDS: That is correct. But the work starts long before the paycheck arrives.

HRC: You know, it strikes me that it was in *The Wiz* that you had your incredible breakout national moment and how appropriate it is that a musical retelling of *The Wizard of Oz* through Black culture and music would be the groundbreaking success it was. And also your opportunity to manifest that dream. How did you end up in *The Wiz*?

De SHIELDS: So I got my first professional gig in Chicago. We're in the early 70s now and we are creating an off loop theatrical experience, which is tantamount to what we call Off-Broadway.

HRC: Mm-Hmm.

De SHIELDS: And a group of us from the University of Wisconsin founded the Organic Theater Company and created a show called *Warp*, W-A-R-P. It's a science fiction show. Producers saw it and thought, "Wow, this would go well in New York." He brought us to New York in 1973. We were summarily dismissed by the New York critics, and the consensus was, "Listen, you dirty foot hippies, go back to Chicago." [HRC laughs.] Now, when the company returned to Chicago, I said, "Guys, I love you all. You've been my family for four years. But now that I'm in New York, I'm going to take my chances here." And by the grace of four women friends of mine who were in New York working, and these four women would allow me to couch surf—take care of my cat and you can sleep on my couch, wash my dishes and you can sleep on my couch and that sort of thing. As my mother would say, I didn't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of. [HRC laughs.] But I was—right?—but I was in the Camelot. All I had to do was to discover my coat of arms, if you will. Ken Harper, the producer of *The Wiz*, cast his net. We are looking for the actress who would essay these roles. I got an audition. I was cut for the Scarecrow. I was cut for the Lion. I was cut for the Tin Man. Didn't matter to me, because I wanted to be the Wizard.

HRC: Aha.

De SHIELDS: But I had to beg for it. And Ken Harper said to me, "alright." I think he thought he was getting rid of me, "we'll allow you to audition for *The Wiz*." Now, when I got the call back I had pulled my hair out to its Jimi Hendrix length [HRC laughs], I was wearing my five inch silver studded platforms. I was wearing my hot pants. I was wearing my halter that had love embroidered all over it. I was wearing my mysite earrings. I was glorious! [Both laugh.] And I went in and I sang (and I think this is part of your growing up too) "Midnight Hour."

HRC: Oh, perfect.

De SHIELDS: Right? [singing] “I’m gonna wait till the midnight hour.” So I get to the end of the song and Charlie Smalls, who was the composer for *The Wiz*, stands up and shouts, “That’s my Wiz!”

HRC: Hallelujah!

De SHIELDS: Hallelujah! That’s what I’m talking about. When you do the proper preparation, the destiny unfolds in one golden step after the next. Not immediately; it takes time.

HRC: Mm-hmm.

De SHIELDS: But if you continue to apply yourself, if you continue to cultivate patience, if you continue to know yourself and be yourself and understand that authenticity is *everything*, you will receive the blessing that has your name written on it.

HRC: I love that! You know, you know, so much of what happens in live theater is ephemeral. But *The Wiz* was one of those moments where it was just like a great earthquake came down from on high and shook the foundation of American musical theater. In fact, I think your costume is now in the Smithsonian-

De SHIELDS: That is correct.

HRC: National Museum of African-American History and Culture. Did you know when you were in *The Wiz* it was literally a moment of destiny for the culture?

De SHIELDS: Yes, we all knew as a community that we were part of a tectonic change in a paradigm because prior to *The Wiz*, the only impact that black culture had on Broadway had come many years earlier, with Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*.

HRC: Mm hmm.

De SHIELDS: It was time that the traditionally inhospitable terrain of the Great White Way underwent the conditioning for what we now call diversity, equity and inclusion. We didn’t use those terms in the early 70s. But we knew that we were setting the stage for a change. And here’s the miracle of *The Wiz*. Stephanie Mills played the role of Dorothy. Once you see Dorothy as a young girl of color, that is what universalizes the message of *The Wiz*, which is, “There’s no place like home.” That’s a great lesson to learn, that’s one of the greatest lessons to learn in someone’s life.

HRC: It is, it is.

De SHIELDS: We go searching for our purpose *everywhere*. And then at some point we learn, “Oh, there's no place like home.” As long as that was the exclusive domain of a young, although brilliant, white girl, it didn't resonate for the majority of young people. Once Dorothy has melanin in her skin, then that message of “there’s no place like home” becomes universal.

HRC: Becomes a message for everybody.

De SHIELDS: Everybody!

HRC: We'll be right back.

Well, you know, the other thing that, of course, I love is in *Hadestown*, where you are again starring, which I also think of as a groundbreaking musical.

De SHIELDS: Yes, yes.

HRC: You're playing a Greek god-

De SHIELDS: Yes.

HRC: Hermes, and and you are omniscient. You are someone who is like leading the whole audience and all of us through the story. I loved your performance.

De SHIELDS: Thank you. Thank you.

HRC: I absolutely just was knocked out. When I think about it, though, you are now again, because after the pandemic, *Hadestown* reopened, so you're back on the stage. You are, I think, still doing eight shows a week.

De SHIELDS: Eight shows.

HRC: Look, that's not an easy schedule at any age.

De SHIELDS: At any age, yes.

HRC: And when you accepted your Tony Award, I'll never forget this, in 2019, you shared with the audience your three cardinal rules for sustainability and longevity. And although you put it in

the context of the arts, I would say I think these are pretty good rules for anybody. Could you share them with our listeners on this podcast?

De SHIELDS: I'd be happy to. The context in which I learned it was the arts. Anything you want to do, anything that you want to master, will be enhanced if the arts are part of your preparation. You don't have to become an actor. You don't have to dance. You don't have to sing. You just have to bevel the hard edges by saying, or understanding, that you are an artist. You are a good mother; you have cultivated the art of parenthood. You are a good construction worker; you've mastered the art of building things. You are a good street cleaner, garbage collector; you've mastered the art of sanitation. Cultivate the artistry of whatever it is you do, and then you can apply these three cardinal rules. Cardinal rule number one: Surround yourself with people whose eyes light up when they see you coming. Cardinal rule number two: Slowly is the fastest way to get to where you want to be. Cardinal rule number three: The top of one mountain is the bottom of the next, so keep climbing.

HRC: Hm. I really appreciate the way that you took those cardinal rules and expanded them to what we do in our everyday lives, making it clear everybody can be an artist.

De SHIELDS: Yes,

HRC: In his or her own way.

De SHIELDS: Yes. Do what you can do. It's a potluck supper; bring your best dish.

HRC: [laughs] Yeah, literally I could, I could talk to you all day, my friend. I just wish you all of the blessings of this extraordinary life that you're leading. May it continue with joy and gratitude, and you continue to find ways to share it with us. It really means the world to me personally.

De SHIELDS: Thank you. May I have the last word?

HRC: Yes, you may.

De SHIELDS: Hillary Rodham Clinton, Madam President, thank you for allowing me to have this conversation with you. I'm taking it to everyone whose eyes light up when they see me come.

HRC: You and Me Both is brought to you by iHeartRadio. We're produced by Julie Subrin, Kathleen Russo and Rob Russo with help from Huma Abedin, Oscar Flores, Lindsay Hoffman, Brianna Johnson, Nick Merrill, Lona Valmoro and Benita Zaman. Our engineer is Zach McNees, and original music is by Forrest Gray. If you like You and Me Both, tell someone else about it.

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