

Patricia Woodbridge  
Art Director  
Ricki and the Flash

TriStar Productions

November 6, 2014

I was blessed to go to The School of Rose Valley. My mother died giving birth to me, and my father and I lived with his sister's family. After my father remarried, I had a harsh stepmother and, rapidly, five younger siblings. Rose Valley was my sanctuary, and the oldest group teacher, Peg Nowell, a caring, guiding adult who encouraged my creativity and showed me how to direct it.

I particularly loved costumes, scenery, and pretend for the plays we wrote and produced about historical periods. I loved woodshop with Mr. Freeman, where he helped me build a bureau with doors that slid open and big round wood knobs. He taught me to use hand tools, to measure carefully and allow for the depth of the material. As a student in the oldest group and with Peg's guidance, I planned each week's work. I might spend an entire day on a large painting, and then the next two days work on my math or writing. Learning to manage my time while doing a creative project was an important skill I've used all my life.

After 5<sup>th</sup> grade my parents moved to the Main Line. It was a shock to attend public school, to wear a dress each day, to walk slowly in lines down the hall. I didn't learn much of anything until my senior year when I had Mr. Mimm's terrific creative writing class and a daily art class with classical instruction: huge white plaster hands and eyeballs lit from different sides that you copied using black charcoal and white chalk on pale brown or blue pastel paper.

All the while I missed Rose Valley, and with a scholarship to Bennington College, I returned to progressive, creative education. Rose Valley had taught me that it was a pleasure to learn new things and I took varied courses that interested me, studying sculpture with Anthony Caro and Isaac Whitman, English with the poet laureate Howard Nemerov, drawing with Pat Adams. I studied German, modern dance, literature, ethics, ceramics, graphics, drawing, history, tried acting, and joined the Bennington Ensemble Theater. Since I was shy, and a little lonely, the

theatre group offered me a family. Through my long career in theatre, then film, I have found that the entertainment world created many families as individual artists joined together to make a production.

My third year at Bennington, Judy Davis Raphael, who had worked as a costume designer with the San Francisco Mime Troop, joined the drama department, teaching costume and scenery design. She was a charismatic teacher, and scene design encompassed my wide interests: art, sculpture, history, writing and drama. Judy was also an accomplished glass blower, and with her Tiffany grant we built a glass-blowing studio in a basement of the college.

After graduating, I drove to NYC with a green suitcase, a trunk full of hand-blown blue glass, and no money. I worked as an office temp during the day and set and costume designed in hole-in-the-wall theatres at night. Realizing I lacked technical skills, specifically scenic drafting and pattern construction, I applied and received a scholarship to New York University School of the Arts, a three-year graduate design program. My final year, my teacher, the great set designer Ming Cho Lee, asked me if I would like to apprentice in his studio. I worked for him for about four years for \$75 per week and lunch. I had a foam mattress on the floor of a single room, my green suitcase, and a drafting table I'd stolen from graduate school. I couldn't have been happier.

For Ming I built scaled, painted miniatures and learned to draw the scenic construction drafting needed to build the sets. We worked in regional theatres, including the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles and the Arena Stage in Washington D.C. Every summer Ming designed Shakespeare in the Park, and I happily painted scenery in the sunshine. I assisted him on two operas for the Met: *Boris Godunov* and *Idomeneo*. I was interested in macramé, and we created a famous twisted-rope set for the great choreographer Martha Graham's *Myth of a Voyage*, the story of Penelope, who, waiting for her husband Ulysses, keeps her suitors at bay by unraveling her weaving each night. Ming let me work directly with Martha and gave me associate design credit.

After I left the "Mingerie," as it was called, I started designing my own theatre scenery, for small NYC stages such as the Manhattan Theatre club, and in regional theatres around the country, including Arena Stage and the Cincinnati Playhouse,

small Opera Companies like June Opera of New Jersey or Tri-Cities Opera in Binghamton. I always worked freelance, and money was tight, so in addition to my own set design, I assisted other set designers on Broadway shows by doing design drafting. For fourteen years I also taught introductory set design and scenic drafting at New York University Tisch School of the Arts. Realizing there wasn't a good scenic design textbook, I wrote one; in 2000 Focal Press published "Designer Drafting for the Entertainment World," which became the basic graduate level textbook for set design in the United States. The second edition was published in 2013 and is available on Amazon.

Although I never became a great Broadway set designer, I was able to create visual worlds for many important new plays that spoke to the times: For *How I Got That Story*, about a young reporter's confusion in Vietnam, I designed the set like a moving box of Oriental parts; for *The Runner Stumbles*, the bleak story of a 1911 devout priest who falls in love with a nun, my set was a large raked slab of weathered gray wood with a wrap-a-round back drop of a grey Michigan sky, small bits of beautiful antique furniture clustered in the void; for *Blood Knot*, the story of two South African brothers who share a shack, we rented a truck and scavenged discarded rusted metal, wood and cardboard, then built the set from what we found.

In 1984, in addition to my theatre design and teaching, I spent a year as an assistant art director on *Saturday Night Live*, a great, funny year with Martin Short and Billy Crystal.

Good friends had migrated to film, and in 1985 I got a call on a Saturday and started work on Monday in a movie art department at the huge De Laurentiis Studio in North Carolina on *Year of the Dragon*, working as an assistant art director, designing and drafting sets for the film. Returning to New York City, I had another job offer on *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, a dark, 1960s period film. We created a huge back lot using abandoned factories, and an empty sugar-processing plant on the Red Hook docks of Brooklyn, and built a scenery diner and union meeting hall on empty lots.

I production designed a small indy film, *Johnny Suede*, with a young Brad Pitt and Catherine Keener, but found I wasn't that great at the social, political part of being a production designer. I had worked for Jane Musky as an assistant art director and draftsman on several movies, and she asked me to art direct a film she'd just

gotten, *Object of my Affection*, a small film starring Jennifer Aniston directed by Nicholas Hytner in 1989. The art director works on a movie directly under the production designer, and it's a large job that includes hiring and overseeing the design team, estimating the cost of scenery and seeing it comes in on budget, overseeing and scheduling the construction, painting, installation, and decorating of sets, and coordinating work with other departments on the film.

Since then I've art directed many movies, including *Hitch*, *Mr. Popper's Penguins*, *Maid in Manhattan*, and *I Am Legend*, which at the time was the largest movie shot in NYC. My film resume is on IMBD the Internet Movie Data Base.

I've had a fabulous career, working with talented and interesting people creating dream worlds for stories. I am happily married but have no children. I spend a week each summer at a yearly family reunion at an ancestral farm in the hills of Vermont. In the barn loft is a large marionette theatre with lights where the children and I write and produce plays. We have a small wood shop with low tables and hand tools. I teach the children how to use hand tools to build things: to have an idea, sketch it out, measure carefully and allow for the depth of the material.

In a way, it's like I'm with them back at Rose Valley, everything moving in grand circles.

The Internet Movie Database:

[http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0940167/?ref=fn\\_al\\_nm\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0940167/?ref=fn_al_nm_1)

Amazon:

[http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=nb\\_sb\\_ss\\_i\\_1\\_11?url=search-alias=stripbooks&field-keywords=designer+drafting+and+visualizing+for+the+entertainment+world&prefix=designer](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_i_1_11?url=search-alias=stripbooks&field-keywords=designer+drafting+and+visualizing+for+the+entertainment+world&prefix=designer)