

MEETINGS WITH REMARKABLE EDUCATORS

PODCAST TRANSCRIPTION OF

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with host

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Ba Luvmour: Welcome to ***Meetings With Remarkable Educators***. This podcast is brought to you in part by you, our friends and supporters at ***patreon.com/remarkableeducators***. Each podcast is a dialogue between me, Ba Luvmour, and an educator who sees the greatness in their students and touches the whole of their being. These educators defy generalizations. So here's a little bit about what they've done and how I know them.

Ba Luvmour: Today's guest is an old friend of mine, Fleurette Sweeney, and her story is one of the most interesting stories I know. You'll hear that she's 90 years old, that she's a nun, but a nun with a mission of being in the world and with people.

I came to know Fleurette through our connection at SelfDesign Graduate Institute, where we're both on the faculty, and actually she's one of the founding principles of SDGI. Her program, which I knew as *Sound to Symbol*, is one of the most innovative holistic approaches to music, and especially to language that I've ever come across, and you're going to hear her talk about that in great specifics as we go along.

Fleurette's warmth and generosity of spirit is evident in everything she says and does. Ninety years young now, Fleurette has traveled the country and the world in order to gain the understanding, insight, and experience that's allowed her to bring a program that not only works with children of all ages, but even with deaf children, in order to understand and participate in language, and music together. I'm so happy that Fleurette is joining us today.

Welcome, Fleurette, and thank you so much for being on Meetings with Remarkable Educators. I've been just inspired, and thrilled by our relationship over these past several years, and I'm very, very honored to have you as our podcast guest.

Fleurette Sweeney: Well, I sure appreciate having had the chance to get to know you and Josette, and your work [it's pretty unique] ... I'm just grateful. That's all.

Ba Luvmour: You've been guest at our house, and so you know my kids and grandkids, too, so.

Fleurette Sweeney: Yes.

Ba Luvmour: All of them send their very best regards to you.

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Fleurette Sweeney: Yes, and I tell you, Ba, I was ... The fact that you really seemed to understand the perspective that I brought into education, it's also made me comfortable, and I appreciate that because so many people, as soon as they hear music, the word *music or singing*, they'll say, "Oh, I can't carry a tune, or I can't sing," and then they automatically exclude everything else that goes, you know, as a result of what we do.

Ba Luvmour: I was struck and understood immediately. You know I hold that consciousness and awakening consciousness as the basis of all happiness, self-knowledge, and health in the world. I'm struck by your work at how many different parts of a child's consciousness this simple, profound program brings as well as teaching one of the most important cultural skills we have, in not only music, of course, and care for that, but more deeply in terms of our culture, the verbal linguistic skills. Maybe it's best if we jump into some of the specifics right away. Would that be okay with you?

Fleurette Sweeney: Oh, yes. I'd like to. Whatever you feel is good, I'm really happy to just see how things flow, because as I said, this is a brand-new adventure, and I'm excited to be trusted to be on it.

Ba Luvmour: Tell us then about *Sound to Symbol*. Tell us about some of the specifics of the program.

Fleurette Sweeney: Well, in order to answer that, or to respond to that, I have to go back to the core of the work that we started when I first heard about the work of Zoltán Kodály through the work of Mary Helen Richards, and she was the one Kodály's method, the music method. I was a music teacher, Ba. A piano teacher. That was what I was doing, and ...

Ba Luvmour: For our listeners, Fleurette, if you would, give us a date when this movement towards, when this change happened for you.

Fleurette Sweeney: Excuse me. Just say that one more time?

Ba Luvmour: In other words, how old were you and what year was it when you started?

Fleurette Sweeney: My first encounter was a trip to Hungary with Mary Helen Richards in 1967, and the purpose of that was for me, and I was a ... She had developed an adaptation of his program, of his music education program in Hungary, and Zoltán Kodály. His first degree was in linguistics. And because of his knowledge of the undergirding of oral language, the Hungarian oral language, that was the seed that

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made him stay in Hungary rather than move about, and look at the folk music, or the music of other languages.

When he, and Mary Helen, and she was the very first to admit that she didn't realize this when she adapted the program, the music education program, and adapted his sequence of music concepts, she adapted those, and applied them for teaching music. And, she missed the whole point of the connection between singing and speaking, which was Kodály's whole essential point.

Ba Luvmour: What is that point?

Fleurette Sweeney: The point of the fact that in speaking...anyone who speaks, anyone who speaks is using oral sound, the elements of oral sound, that when we sing ... If I say hello, and speak it, and I look at the analysis of that on the acoustic analysis program, and you look at it from the point of view of duration, the long sounds and the short sounds. Or you look at it from the point of view of the overtone series. Where is the pillar of overtone, the clearest? It's on this long syllable, a long vowel in hello, on the low, and the hel is reduced.

So, it has to do with duration. It has to do with the dynamics of loudness and softness. And so the only difference, when I sing hello, hello, the only difference to that is the presence of breath energy. There, everything in my speaking right now is present if I sang, everything in my speaking right now is present, any tune at all. The only difference is breath energy. To me, physically, and so that when I look at what that involves, for example ... Is that's clear? That much.

Ba Luvmour: That much is clear.

Fleurette Sweeney: Okay.

Ba Luvmour: Take us to the actuality of the program.

Fleurette Sweeney: Okay. Then, so in order to find songs, he told Mary Helen, Kodály told Mary Helen, you have to find songs that you have to deal with what he ... The *anacrusis*. Now, the anacrusis in speaking. The unaccented the, The articles or prepositional phrases. To the store. The "to" and the "the" are prepositional phrase. And the store, so to the store. Hungarian language does not have those unaccented syllables. They don't have propositional phrases, and they don't have articles in their speaking.

Hungarian, and Finnish, and Estonian. Those languages are totally, totally different from the Germanic languages that were prevalent

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in the Austro-Hungarian Empire when Kodály was living. And so, what that did to the program, was he told her, "You've got to find a way of dealing with the anacrusis. With these unaccented syllables."

And so, we had to find songs that had this ... So, if you take, "the farmer in the dell, the farmer in the dell, hi-ho the derry-o, the farmer in the dell." The farmer, where's the farmer? In the dell. If I speak it, and if I sing it, the farmer in the dell. So, the "in" and then the "the", they're less accented. Totally, totally foreign gathering of sounds to Hungarian.

So, that has been the core of getting songs that will allow us to highlight the characteristics of spoken English.

Ba Luvmour: I see. So, we're going to use these, we might say, common or ordinary songs. But, the ones that allow us to participate in it from the English language, in order to learn more about or to participate in where the emphasis are, the syllables. Is that a fair paraphrase?

Fleurette Sweeney: Yes. Yes. And now, you have to be careful about the English because, in Canada if you go to Newfoundland, they speak English totally differently from the way they do in Vancouver, for example. It's the same down in Texas. If I went to Texas, they speak English quite different from the way you and I are speaking right now. The one thing, the English language that the people of Canada hear everywhere, is on the CBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

And, the language that you and I are speaking right now, it would fit just fine in the public radio in the states. That is pretty universal in the states, that kind of English. And in Canada, I say jokingly, I say, "We can CBC English, but it's not that." It's just a way for people to realize we're not looking at the acoustic idioms of different areas. We're just looking at something that is common for us at least to hear.

Ba Luvmour: Take us into the actual program. So, you come there and there's a group of first graders, third graders, fifth graders?

Fleurette Sweeney: Or, as I'm working right now, with a group of adults.

Ba Luvmour: A group of adults. And what do you do? What specifically are you doing?

Fleurette Sweeney: The absolutely fundamental core, are what we call folk song games. And I have to clarify the word folk, because it's not folk from a national musical logical perspective. By that I mean, the songs that

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are particular of folk, a group of people a particular area of the country sang from generation to generation.

But what it is, the word folk is a description of the type of community that knows one another. They share a common space, they share common activities. They have things in common. And they create ... So, it's that social awareness of one another. That we call ... They're folksy. That's what the folk means.

Ba Luvmour: Okay.

Fleurette Sweeney: And now the song, I say it's a song game, and the song, and I put a hyphen, this is my own concoction, the way to write this folk song game. And that is the core. We have about 150 of them. And they're played. Whether you're an adult or child, you play these games to start with.

Ba Luvmour: And what exactly is the game?

Fleurette Sweeney: Okay. The easiest way to talk is to talk one specifically. And so for example, just what I with the early childhood. We have an early childhood training education program in Vancouver. And I teach it. We have a class every Monday, and I'm teaching them on ZOOM [online platform] from here.

So, the week before last, we did a game, it was called "Bluebird". And, they make a circle, and we have ... And then I'll sing. *Bluebird, bluebird through my window, bluebird, bluebird, through my window. Bluebird, bluebird, through my window. Oh, bluebird aren't you tried.*

Now, the song tells everything about what the duration. What the timing of things. As soon as the song begins the windows are the spaces between the people in the circle. And so, the windows go up. And, whoever's the bluebird goes in and out the window. It's starts flying through the window and it keeps coming in and out, and in and out through the windows until the song ends. And when the song ends, the windows close and the bluebird is in front of one of the people.

And, then asks that person, "Would you like to be the bluebird? The next bluebird?" And that person will say, "Yes please." Or, "No, thank you." And so, let's pretend they say yes please. So, they change places, and as soon as the song starts the windows go up, and the little bird goes flying in and out, and in and out, and in and out. Now, that's a very, very simple example of a folk song game.

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Ba Luvmour: Okay. Then what happens?

Fleurette Sweeney: Then what happens ... I mean, that is the game. And so, when I'm talking with the students, adult students, so that they can understand. I have an icon, if we were on a computer I could show you my icon that I use. And it's a star. And one of them, we looked at what's **sensory motor engagement**? Does that little game, what does it engage ... How are the children, the players. No matter if they're children or adults, what's sensory motor? That's an example of ... What sense tells them to ... directly connects with the movement.

And so, obviously, right away. Their hearing. The sense of hearing, tells the windows when to go up. And, if they stay up, how long? It tells the duration. So, that's just one example of it. Is there any visual that governs the movement and the spaces between? And that's a real learning for people to be able to go in and out, and in and out without banging one another.

So, you look at the different senses. The only two senses that are not involved are smell and taste.

Ba Luvmour: Okay.

Fleurette Sweeney: And then, another point of the star is called **social-emotional engagement**. Now what social engagement goes on here? And so, for example, just carrying on a conversation. "Would you like to be the next bluebird?" And then the response, "Yes please." Or, "No, thank you." That would be an example of experiencing how to carry on a conversation. And that's just one example.

And we'll go through ... And then, another point on the star is, what **cognitive engagement** is there? And so, we look at sequencing for example. This is a real learning strategy. I mean, a real learning for little children, the preschool children, to go in one window and back out the next one, and in. So that they're ... the space. Learning that sequence, they learn ... And then, I might say, "How many bluebirds had a turn today? We played for 20 minutes. How many bluebirds had a turn today?" And then we remember, so that we're looking back and counting the people who were the bluebirds. That's just a simple example.

And then, what music? Well, the music is the singing. We don't go into it with little tiny ones. We're not going to go, "So me, so me, so la so me." Right away. But, they are learning the structure of that music structure. They're learning how to listen to the beginning and

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the end, and all of the duration things connected with the music, and the singing.

Again, the game does not include the writing. And there's a whole system of song study techniques.

Ba Luvmour:

It's teaching story time.

Briefly, teaching stories invite us to see the world with a new perspective, often featuring a wise person, a wise fool, or a trickster animal. It can be humorous, and often have many shades of meaning shining throughout the story. I have told teaching stories for the past 40 years, and I love them, and I have to tell you, each time I tell one, I learn much more in myself.

This story is called, “Changing Our Vision.”

There was a very wealthy man who was bothered by severe eye pain. He consulted many physicians and was being treated by several. He did not stop consulting a galaxy of medical experts. He consumed heavy loads of drugs, and underwent hundreds of injections. But, the ache in his eyes persisted with more vigor than ever before.

At last, a monk, who was supposed to be an expert in teaching such patients, was called for by the suffering man. The monk understood his problem and said that for some time he should concentrate only on green colors, and not to let his eye fall on any other colors.

It was a strange prescription, but he was desperate and decided to try it. The millionaire got together a group of painters and purchased barrels of green paint, and directed that every object his eye was likely to fall upon be painted green, just as the monk had directed.

When the monk came to visit him after a few days, the millionaire's servants ran with buckets of green paint and poured it on him, since he was in a red dress, lest their master see any other color and his eye ache would come back. Hearing this, the monk laughed and said, "If only you had purchased a pair of green spectacles worth just a few dollars, you could have saved these walls, and trees, and pots, and all the other articles, and also could have saved a huge share of your fortune. You cannot paint the world green.

Let's have some fun interpreting this teaching story. Become a Patreon supporter at patreon.com/remarkableeducators, and you have access to our detailed comments on how this story

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applies to education and parenting. Of course, that's just our perspective. The fun comes with community dialogue as the many shades of the teaching story come alive.
See you there.

Ba Luvmour: When you came to Summa, we did song maps.

Fleurette Sweeney: That's right. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ba Luvmour: Song maps, as I recall, first you did bluebird with dots, kind of, at each syllable, was it?

Fleurette Sweeney: No, those are the song ... That is the ... You've moved into the points of the study of the song. And so, there's oral study, which we've done just verbally here. And then we do ... I'll make a map. Let's pretend that you're just feeling the song. We're not playing the game, and you can take your hand, whatever hand you want, pretend you're directing the orchestra, or pretend you're just feeling the song with your hand.

And so, when the starts... you're ready? and you got your hand up, and it moves. Bluebird, bluebird through my window. And it keeps moving and feeling with the bluebird, sing, and flying in the air. Now, bring your finger down to the paper on the floor.

Ba Luvmour: Ah, yes.

Fleurette Sweeney: And now, feel the song. And your pen doesn't get off the paper. It just feels the song. And you do exactly ... So, you transfer from the outside movement, and then you move it down to the paper, and you feel it, and look at that. Now, you better find out where ... And it so depends on the children, that's why you do this type of thing over and over again. And I'll ask the children, "Do you know where you started?" Because some will make circle after circle after circle and get it all.... "Can you find the place where you started? And just put a little X there to remind you." And so, they put an X there.

"Now, let's see if you can read your map again as you sing the song." And so, they'll find out that sometimes when they're reading the map, because the pressure on the paper is different, they often times say... Did you stop at the end? I'll say, "I noticed that someone kept on going after the song. But, when you were making it, it just fit the song. So, let's try again to see if it can still fit." And then, if they want to do it again.

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"Now, let's just turn the paper over and make another map."
Because, they'll see it's easier to keep the lines separate.

Ba Luvmour: I see. So, when you did it with us though, there was this emphasis on syllables.

Fleurette Sweeney: Yup. Okay. Now, that's the ... One of the, if I'm right, mentioned the mapping, one of the things that over the years we learned, I learned, was ... See, when we first started this, I thought as did Mary Helen, I thought that the phrases of the song were the first thing that the children perceived. But, over experimenting we found really, that they felt the whole song first. And that's when mapping came into being.

We started first with phrases, thinking that that's what they heard or perceived first. That would be, "bluebird, bluebird through my window. Bluebird, bluebird through my window. Bluebird, bluebird through my window. Oh, bluebird aren't you tired." So, it's a short, short, long. There are structures of many, many, many of our songs that are similar. Like, "the farmer in the dell, the farmer in the dell. Hi-ho the derry-o the farmer in the dell. That's a short, short, long."

So, now when we move to the whole ... That's where the mapping came into being. Now, can you pretend you don't know the words of bluebird?

Ba Luvmour: Sure.

Fleurette Sweeney: Let's pretend. And so, we're going to just sing it like this, "Da da da da da da da da." Ready? And then we'll do it. And we ... Did you notice that your tongue moved every single time you were singing a syllable? Da da da da da da da. And they'll notice that their tongue was tapping in their mouth.

Now, can you make your finger tap with your tongue? Da da da da da da da da. And then, now let's try it ... What if you take a pen, and make the pen ... What's going to happen when you use a pen and you leave dots?

Ba Luvmour: That's great. That's great. We had so much fun doing that. And I'm talking about the staff as well as the students. Yes.

Fleurette Sweeney: Yes.

Ba Luvmour: Just so much fun making song maps and trying to figure it out.

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Fleurette Sweeney: And one of the things that happens ... Now how many times do we sing bluebird in this song? And so, we'll sing it. How many times did we sing the word bluebird? How many parts does bluebird, how many times does your tongue do? Da da. Two. And so, they figure out. So, here we're going around the star again looking at the cognitive, counting. One to one relationship, fundamental one to one relationship.

And then, let's put a circle. Can you find ... So we have bluebird, bluebird, that's two, and then four, and then six, and so on. Oh, bluebird, can you ... get the seven. Now, can you find all the bluebirds and put the bluebirds in the circle? Make a little nest and put them in?

And so, they'll go through their dots and put the ... And if they're little children, they don't know how to read the words, but you can print the word bluebird, and put a dot underneath the blue and a dot underneath the bird.

And, they get to see how the syllables work.

Ba Luvmour: Well, and then at the end ... I mean after. The exercises were fun, the dancing was fun.

Fleurette Sweeney: Yes.

Ba Luvmour: We laughed a lot. And then, you had us roll out newsprint, and all of us made one big song map for the whole class together. And, then I watched the one you did with the students of various ages. And again, they just, at that point they felt, I guess the only word I have is empowered. And, connecting music and language. And it was just ... you could feel it in the environment too. It had a different feel, that there was a comfort with language.

Fleurette Sweeney: Yes. See now, that's what, what you're describing, is what I have tried ... I've tried to express that in the sixth point of the star. It's called the ***aesthetic experience***. I really do believe, the language you just used, there's a feeling, it's an overall feeling that I really do believe it corresponds to that lovely feeling that we get when we see a beautiful picture, a beautiful painting. Or, this morning our sunrise was absolutely unbelievable.

Ba Luvmour: Well, and what we've done then, is we've bypassed all the tension about learning language. And, can you spell? All of that. And we have found, and I noticed it again and again, we found in ourselves the very structure and the way we speak not only connects us to music, but it's implicit. That is all we have to do it find it where

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we're already at. It's not some external learning about something, but actually participating and then the knowledge, if you will, or the connection, I guess, to the language as well as to the music, just seems natural and appears.

Fleurette Sweeney: Yes. And, to one another.

Ba Luvmour: And to one another. Yes.

Fleurette Sweeney: Yes. I would say that's what, to me, it's the social. The building up of that sense of there's no, "Don't look at my work."

Ba Luvmour: Yes. And I watched all these grown ups, and it would seem like, well there were these really simple little dances. And I know you have how many songs in your repertoire? Hundreds right?

Fleurette Sweeney: It's over 100.

Ba Luvmour: And then, each one has its own movements to it.

Fleurette Sweeney: That's right.

Ba Luvmour: And I know we almost fell over laughing when we were doing "London Bridges." That was just a riot.

Fleurette Sweeney: And then, there's another thing that I know that we ... It's either connecting. There's another thing that's connected with ... Did I tell you about the deaf?

Ba Luvmour: About what? About-

Fleurette Sweeney: About the work with the deaf?

Ba Luvmour: Oh, the deaf. No, uh-uh.

Fleurette Sweeney: Oh, my goodness. Ba, this was ... It's different. Merriam Allen was a teacher of the deaf in San Mateo County, again, in California in the early 70s. And her degree was a Master's from Stanford in speech pathology. She was a speech pathologist. But, she didn't want to teach the deaf how to form the words, you know, how to do that.

Ba Luvmour: Right. I understand.

Fleurette Sweeney: She wanted to teach them school. So, she had a class, they would have been 9, 10, 11, 12, that age, of deaf children. And she used the song games. Now, they never learned a thing, and so this is such a significant insight that has just revolutionized the way teachers also

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have engaged with the song games. That's why it's really quite important. But one day, one of our songs, “Punchinella”, I play it?

Ba Luvmour: Yes. I know it. Sure, I remember it.

Fleurette Sweeney: Okay. And so, I'll just sing the song. “Oh, look who's here, punchinella, punchinella. Look who's here, punchinella from the zoo.” And there are four verses. What can you do? And who do you choose? We can do it too. And who do you choose? And so on.

So, it's kind of like folk, but puncianella's in the center of the circle. And the deaf children had enhanced hearing and she had enhanced speaking. But, they never learned to sing. And she heard the speech pathologist in the back of the classroom teaching them how to count out loud. And they were in the 20s. And, this stroke of genius on her part. She's since died. But now she ... What she heard in the 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30. She heard Punchinella.

Ba Luvmour: Oh my gosh.

Fleurette Sweeney: In 27. Four syllables. Da da da da. And the long syllable is the third one. Punchinella, four syllables. And the long syllable is the third one. Isn't that an amazing connection?

Ba Luvmour: Yes. Yes it is. And it speaks to what, to me, the most impressive thing about this whole impressive approach is how it touches us in our wholeness. How it touches us in so many places. And while I'm delighted to hear what you're having to say about the deaf, I'm not surprised in the sense that this approach touches us in our wholeness. And so, we're going to find some way to connect.

Fleurette Sweeney: And that Christmas, the deaf, the Christmas present for their families was to say Merry Christmas. You see, that's a 27. That's a da da da da. Merry Christmas. And one day, I went to her classroom and the two little guys they were having a competition. How many phrases could ... Each of them had, underneath them, they had chalkboards in those days, and underneath them there was the rolled out paper. And each of them had their paper stuck up with masking tape, and they were writing the phrases that they had.

Mrs. Allen is a 27. That was her name, Mrs. Allen. And they were seeing who could find the most 27s. And, Mrs. Allen...and, there was a singer, I forget his name. But, “put your coat on. Take your seats, now. Have your breakfast, eat your breakfast.” How many things could they find that were 27s? Isn't that wonderful?

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Ba Luvmour: It is, it is. And, I'm sure there are many examples. But, I know a little bit about your personal story Fleurette, and I think I'd be very inspiring for the ... It inspired me so obviously I think it will inspire the rest of your listening. But, let me ask some questions here.

Fleurette Sweeney: Yes.

Ba Luvmour: So, one of them is, I know that when you went to Hungary in 1967 to learn about this, that you had to go undercover. Is that correct?

Fleurette Sweeney: I had to take my habit off. I flew to New York and took my habit ... At that time I was in the full religious habit, and I was one of the very first ones, it was just after Vatican II, and I was one of the very first ones to take off her habit and go to Hungary.

Ba Luvmour: I see. And, tell us the order that you're part of.

Fleurette Sweeney: It's the *Sister of Charity of Halifax*.

Ba Luvmour: The Sisters of Charity of Halifax.

Fleurette Sweeney: Yeah.

Ba Luvmour: And so, you couldn't go into Hungary, at that time, behind the iron curtain because...

Fleurette Sweeney: That's right.

Ba Luvmour: You couldn't go in habit.

Fleurette Sweeney: We had no diplomatic relationship with them.

Ba Luvmour: So, then did you travel as an ordinary citizen? Or did you have to do more cloak and dagger?

Fleurette Sweeney: I traveled as an ordinary ... See, Mary Helen, we were Kodály's guests. And he died the month before. But we were still considered his guests. There were six music teachers in the states that the publisher, they paid for them, the publishers paid for them. And my congregation paid for me. I was the only independently paid person because I wasn't there being trained to be a sales person.

Ba Luvmour: Okay. And how long were you in Hungary at that time?

Fleurette Sweeney: We were there for about a month.

Ba Luvmour: You were there for a month. And that's when all this...

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Fleurette Sweeney: And Hungary is a core Catholic country. And so they had this ... And Kodály, there's an enormous contribution that he made to the country during the takeover, of the communist takeover, and the revolution. The revolution was in '56. And they went into the hills. And, his songs and his influence was enormous.

And so, what they had one of the weeks, that month that I was there with Mary Helen and the other teachers, it was called, *a month's mind*. And, it was like a crash course in ... And, we were provided with interpreters for every lecture. And, I went to so many classrooms. And, we went to the List academy, and we saw, and we heard lecture after lecture. But, on the streets we couldn't speak English openly. I was there for May first, the May first parade of the communist party.

Ba Luvmour: Wow. That's so rich. Now, when you came back, is that the last time? Were you now done with the habit entirely? When did the...

Fleurette Sweeney: No, no. I had sent my habit to Rome, so that when we came out of Hungary, Mary Helen, her youngest daughter, Robin and I. We went to Rome, and her husband Ricky. The four of us went to Rome. My habit was there, and I put my habit on there.

Ba Luvmour: Okay. But, now though, when did your order decide to let the habit go entirely?

Fleurette Sweeney: Oh, I was ... That's so funny. Then we had what was called a modified habit, after the big heavy black one, the black serge one. That June we came back, and that June, there's such huge a convoluted story about me. But, I was hunting for a university to finish my undergraduate degree. I had done the music stuff with Toronto, but ... And, so I was hunting for a university. So, I asked Mary Helen if she was going to be teaching anywhere. And so, when we came back from Hungary she was going to teach at NYU in June, in New York. Greenwich Village, New York.

Ba Luvmour: I know it well.

Fleurette Sweeney: And, she was doing a course. But because I didn't have my undergraduate college degree at the time, I had only the associate degree from Toronto. And I had only one year formal undergraduate college at the time. They wouldn't let me take her course. So, I was hired by them as her assistant because I'd been in Hungary. And so, we taught together at NYU in June, 1967.

And I was never so hot in my life, because I had that big black habit on. And then, I finally was able ... We started a degree at College of

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the Holy Names in California. A master's degree and it was called Kodály Richards. And, I went to California and I lived with Mary Helen and her family in Corte Madera School. And, I did my masters there. I'm one of, I think of four, or at most five people, who have a Master's from the College of the Holy Names in Kodály Richards.

And so, a lot of this initial work that was done, I was doing it at Corte Madera school where Mary Helen developed the threshold to music, which was the adaptations.

Ba Luvmour: What I'm interested here though Fleurette, is I met you at SelfDesign Graduate Institute. And, that is not a religious place. And it's a place dedicated to consciousness, to emergence, and to a way of participating in the universe, or participating in life I guess I should say, that isn't pro or against religion at all. And yet, you fit right in there. And, you have a wonderful openness to, what we might say, postmodern and even integral understanding that allows this emergence, and this awakening of knowledge and holistic understanding.

So, how did you get from, "I'm in this black serge habit in Corte Madera California to there?" And I'm not so much interested here in, "I went to this place or that place." But, I'm more interested in the journey in your consciousness that allowed this to happen.

Fleurette Sweeney: That's a tough question because it ... I just, I don't know. I really don't know.

Ba Luvmour: Oh, that's a great answer.

Fleurette Sweeney: I mean, it's just ... I am incredibly ... One of the things I know I am, is a learner.

Ba Luvmour: Oh, you are. You are absolutely.

Fleurette Sweeney: I mean, to me that's the one adjective. And the other thing, that I give myself as I've recognized, [is that] I am an observer. Because, I know people have told me. And I really do, I see. I've got a gift. It's a gift of being able to see things that others don't see.

I mean, one of our apprentices, Mary Helen and I used to travel around with our apprentices back and forth across the continent. Well, Peggy Bennet has come to the residency. She's retired now from Oberlin Conservatory. And Peggy was one of our first apprentices. And she said, "I never saw trees until I traveled across the country with you."

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Ba Luvmour: So, it seems though that some of this thought, and what we might call traditional Catholic thought, don't go together. Have you ever felt a conflict around any of that?

Fleurette Sweeney: Well, do you know anything about Vatican II?

Ba Luvmour: Not enough to want to talk about it publicly.

Fleurette Sweeney: Well, you see Vatican II was really, it was the most fundamental Reformation within the church itself, I mean there's been nothing like it since the Reformation that caused a big split. And, Vatican II, religious congregations of women... especially women, we were challenged to go back to our original roots.

And by that ... and, our particular ... and this, to me, is a very significant challenge to us, was to go back to our original roots. So, what were our original roots? And, back in the 1600s, Vincent de Paul was a priest, and he had grown up poor, poor, poor. But, he had become a priest and he was the head of the Navy, the highest position. And he also was someone who was a confessor to the queen and all of the aristocratic women.

And he had ... I don't want to go into the details, but you might call it a conversion, in that he wanted to go and work for the sick, poor in the streets of Paris. And, his friend Francis de Sales, they used to talk about it. They wanted to get to do that. And so, Francis de Sales wrote to Rome to get permission to start a group.

Because at that time, women religious were all cloister. There was nobody...

Ba Luvmour: Right. Right.

Fleurette Sweeney: And so...

Ba Luvmour: Oh, I see. So, it was to get the women out on the street.

Fleurette Sweeney: And so they...

Ba Luvmour: And more involved with the community.

Fleurette Sweeney: Yes. And so, Francis de Sales got permission, but the nuns had to stay in their own property. So, what Vincent did was change the fundamental rules of the way you take your vows. And, for 10 years they functioned, but they weren't religious...they weren't...according to canon law.

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He didn't ask permission, he changed it. And so, the peasant women ... and so this is what we were. He said, "The city streets are your convent. And the parish church is your chapel."

Ba Luvmour: So, then you were able them to go back to your roots in this way.

Fleurette Sweeney: Go back to those roots. Which were to...

Ba Luvmour: Go back to those roots and just step out right into the world as you found it...

Fleurette Sweeney: Yes. Yes.

Ba Luvmour: And then just bring forth the deep profound spirituality that was in your heart. Is that a fair way to say that?

Fleurette Sweeney: Inside...Yes. I think so.

Ba Luvmour: All right. Well, Fleurette, thank you very, very much.

Fleurette Sweeney: And thank you Ba.

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