Summer at Zip Zap

By Brigitte Knight

While some of us entertain occasionally the idea of running away to join the circus, Natalie Smith did just that this past summer when she completed a three-month internship at the Zip Zap Circus in Cape Town, South Africa. Zip Zap, according to its website, is a school of circus art that “provides free circus and performing arts training for youth from all walks of life”; it is one of a growing number of social circuses around the world whose mission is to empower disadvantaged and at-risk children by training them for jobs in the circus or entertainment industry. The school’s main objective is to “equip [students] with the skills necessary to embark on a path of sustainable living.” Natalie adds that Zip Zap ensures that students remain in school, helps them obtain a driver’s license, and provides them with medical coverage as well as a monthly stipend for teaching. But most importantly, as Natalie points out, “Students are given a family. For some of these kids, if Zip Zap hadn’t helped them, they would be in jail or dead right now.”

Trained in trapeze, trampoline, floor and aerial acrobatics, and circus comedy routines, this dazzling troupe of young Zip Zap performers has entertained audiences in shows not only in Cape Town but also abroad in Europe, Australia, and the United States. Zip Zap is non-profit and is funded entirely by ticket sales, grants, fundraising, and donations. The money that is raised allows the students to attend the circus school for free. Zip Zap reports that students have gone on to join professional circuses in South Africa, Europe, and the U.S. And others have found employment in South Africa’s film and television industry. Some students have even learned carpentry and welding while at Zip Zap, which has landed them rigging jobs. Zip Zap’s efforts to equip students for a better future have not gone without recognition. Natalie reports that France recently bestowed upon Laurence Esteve, Zip Zap managing director and co-founder, the medal of Knight of the National Order of Merit for “her services to France through the good work of Zip Zap.” And Esteve’s husband, Zip Zap co-founder and artistic director Brent van Rensburg, spoke last June at a TEDx convention in South Africa.
The title of his presentation profoundly reflects Zip Zap’s mission: “Your Failures are My Superstars.”

Natalie is no stranger to performance art. She teaches dance at UNCP, has been training as an aerialist in Fayetteville for three years, and even performs with the local troupe Air Born Aerial Arts. Natalie stumbled upon the Zip Zap internship when she was looking online for a place to train as an aerialist for a planned trip to South Africa during summer break. After researching the internship, she realized that this was a great opportunity to learn more than just aerial skills and contribute her time to Zip Zap’s efforts to help marginalized children. As stated on its website, Zip Zap’s internship program offers instructors and professionals from all over the world opportunities both to teach the circus arts and to acquire “new skills and experience to further their personal and career goals” by collaborating with other circus professionals. And this is exactly what motivated Natalie to apply for the internship since she was interested in both teaching and learning more about the art and craft of circus performance. Zip Zap sponsored Natalie’s internship and provided her with housing, food, and local transportation.

As a Zip Zap intern, Natalie taught her students dance, aerial silks, costuming, and makeup. But she also trained in various performance acts, such as aerial silks, trampoline, juggling, flying trapeze, and hand and acrobatic balance. Natalie admits that she was a bit apprehensive initially about the internship since she was entering into another culture. However, her apprehension quickly disappeared when she walked into Zip Zap’s “massive tent” for the first time and all the sights and sounds of a working circus made her feel like a “kid in a candy store.” Natalie says that it was “mind blowing” and “amazing” to get a behind-the-scenes view of the circus. In particular, she noticed right away “how much blood, sweat, and tears” the students put into mastering their apparatus.

In addition to teaching and training, Natalie choreographed some of the circus acts as well as the opening number for Zip Zap’s annual show Art of Rock. She also worked with Adele Blank, a well-known and respected choreographer in South Africa, to choreograph the finale of the annual show. Natalie describes Art of Rock as an artistic collaboration between Zip Zap, the South African Afro-fusion band Freshlyground, and acclaimed South African painter Paul Du Toit. During the show, three performance acts converge simultaneously on stage when the Zip Zap aerialists and trapezists, performing to the live music of Freshlyground, inspire Du Toit to paint a large canvas in his signature primitive style of bold line drawings and vibrant colors. Natalie, unfortunately, had to return to the United States before she could see Art of Rock, but she did watch DVDs of past performances and says that it is “truly amazing.” Reviews of Art of Rock in a variety of Cape Town newspapers and fan pages describe the show as “spellbinding” and “mesmerizing.”

Outside the big top, Zip Zap also provided Natalie with opportunities for professional growth. For example, she learned about the business side of a non-profit organization by helping with Once Upon a Circus, a commemorative book that Zip Zap released this past September to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the school. Natalie was responsible for all the graphics in the book, and she negotiated
with printers for prices and sponsorships. She also attended an annual conference in August hosted by Cirque Du Soleil that is aimed at helping social circus instructors improve the teaching of their craft to meet the needs of at-risk students. Natalie points out that Cirque Du Soleil in 1995 created Cirque Du Monde, a social circus similar to Zip Zap that also helps at-risk youths. Not surprisingly, Natalie admitted that she was kept so busy six days a week between teaching, training, learning, and collaborating that she had little time to sightsee and tour the region.

Although her schedule was grueling, Natalie says that teaching the students enrolled in Zip Zap was a worthwhile and “eye opening” endeavor. Despite often coming from abusive and impoverished homes, her students were always thrilled to train with her and other Zip Zap professionals. Her students were dedicated and motivated, “eagerly working six days a week” to hone their skills and “overcome adversity.” They clearly “yearned for knowledge” and were “like sponges” and “took everything in” during training. After working with these students, Natalie says that she has little patience for the “feeble excuses [Pembroke] students have when they don’t come to class” or when they complain “about how hard life is or how busy they are.”

Natalie says that the most rewarding experience of the Zip Zap internship was the relationships she established with her students. As Zip Zap teachers and students warmly welcomed her on her first day in the circus tent, she realized that she was entering into a “circus family.” Natalie says that many of these children “haven’t had the loving families a lot of us have had, so showing you care about them in and out of the ring means a lot to [them].” She became close to many of her students and even went beyond teaching and mentored some of them. Not only did her students share their lives with Natalie and seek her advice, but they also took a genuine interest in her life and American culture. When Natalie said her farewells to her Zip Zap family before returning to the United States, she knew with all the “hugs, thank-yous, and questions” about when she might return that she had touched her students’ lives and made a difference. And this was the most gratifying moment of her trip. Natalie reports that she continues to Skype Zip Zap regularly, and many of her students keep asking her when she will return. She enthusiastically says that she would “love to go back to Zip Zap” because she feels as though she has “another family halfway across the world.”

Upon reflection, Natalie comments that the Zip Zap internship turned out to be much more than she expected. She suggests that experiences that take us out of our comfort zone are good for us because “we tend to get stuck in our ways when we do the same thing day in and day out, and working in a different environment is very refreshing and allows [us] to open [our] minds to new ideas and new ways of thinking.” For instance, Natalie notes that living in a culture for three months where “friendship, family, hard work, teamwork, and commitment” are more valued than materialism was a “humbling” yet “refreshing” change of pace and helped her to experience “life for what it is.” She also

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**Spring 2013 Scholarships**

**English Education Internship Award**

This award was created by department faculty to honor Dr. Ginny Jones, Coordinator of Undergraduate English Education, on the occasion of her retirement in December 2012. The award will provide scholarship assistance to senior English Education majors completing their internships during their final semester. Two English Education majors were chosen as the first recipients of the award for their internships in Spring 2013:

Rachel Clark
Lucy Prevost

**Bookstore Award**

This award, given by the UNCP Bookstore to recognize departments that complete 100% of their book orders for each upcoming semester, benefited four English and English Education majors for Spring 2013:

Daria Bannerman
Paulette DeGrood
Savanna Fowler
Amelia Philbrook
points out that teaching at a social circus is extremely gratifying not only because she “loves to teach” but also because she could see that she was “truly giving back” as she worked with Zip Zap to transform the lives of students who without intervention might have never thrived or even survived as adults. Although Natalie “left many of her skills and ideas” with the Zip Zap students she trained and the professionals with whom she collaborated, she also returned home with new skills and ideas about performance art and teaching socially to make a difference that she certainly can share with her students and the UNCP community.

Ginny Jones Retires

In August 2002, Dr. Virginia (Ginny) Pompei Jones joined the English and Theatre Department as Assistant Professor of English, assuming the important and demanding role of the coordination of UNCP’s Undergraduate English Education Program. Ten years and thirty-four student interns later, Ginny has announced her retirement at the end of the Fall 2012 semester, knowing that she will miss her interactions with university students who are preparing to teach language arts in the public schools but also looking forward to the new opportunities that retirement will provide.

Ginny, like many in the department, has devoted significant time each year to teaching courses in first-year composition and general-education literature. The heart of her work, though, has involved the time with our English Education students. Ginny says that the most satisfying part of her position has been watching in the English Education majors the transformative process of developing from students of English to beginning teachers of English. Her role has allowed her a close observation of these individuals’ changing perspectives as they learned more about their subject matter with their realization that they would soon be assuming the responsibility of teaching English to others.

One of Ginny’s most prominent memories goes back to one spring when a student intern was placed in a ninth-grade classroom in a nearby county. Ginny recalls this as an extremely difficult assignment, one that would probably be daunting for even a seasoned teacher. This student teacher had to become a real problem-solver, and Ginny was able to be on the sidelines to watch the student intern move her class from an undisciplined, problematic group to a very motivated, productive group. In particular, she noted the intern’s skilled use of pop music to nudge those students toward an appreciation and understanding of poetry. Ginny remarked that this intern “would succeed anywhere if she could turn this class around,” and Ginny remembers this as one moment when she experienced an astounding pride in one of our students.

Ginny has been no mere observer, however. She herself has worked carefully with every prospective English teacher to instill serious commitment and confidence before the student internship. She has worked with department faculty to make adjustments to program requirements to make our students even more prepared for teaching English. She has made sure that each student has been on track in a program that along the way has multiple prerequisites and teacher-education-specific requirements and deadlines. In other words, she has dedicated herself
both to a department program and to the individual students within it.

Part of that dedication was evident when Ginny gathered the materials and wrote the complex report that resulted in the English Education program’s successful accreditation by NCATE. Ginny recalls this as an arduous process, but a process that led to one of her greatest feelings of accomplishment during her time at UNCP. She says that while part of that feeling came from the completion of the product itself—a report that presented our English Education program accurately and positively—she also realized that in the process she had learned so much more about the workings of the department and the university; she saw how discrete elements of English Education and Teacher Education fit into the overall picture in ways that would probably not have occurred had it not been for the NCATE process.

In addition, during her time here at UNCP Ginny has achieved tenure and promotion to associate professor, has revised program checksheets for updating and clarity, has represented our program on the university-wide Teacher Education Committee, has worked with other coordinators of teacher-education programs to make changes and clarifications in policies, has followed carefully the changes in state teacher-education standards so that our program meets our students’ needs, has developed relationships with cooperating teachers in area public schools, has chaired the English Education Committee within the department, has managed a variety of changes that have occurred in interns’ final “portfolio” products over the years, and has done it all with a projected competence and calmness. In other words, she has made her job appear much easier than it actually is.

Dr. Denise Feikema, who joined our department in 2010, will assume the coordination of the Undergraduate English Education Program at the beginning of the Spring 2013 term. She has already taught the Literature and Reading for Adolescents course twice and will build on the foundations of a program that is in good health. She will teach the professional seminar and observe student interns next semester. As Denise begins this new work, she will bring new ideas and will find much support from other faculty in our department and in UNCP’s other teacher licensure programs.

In her retirement, Ginny has plans to help her husband with his African art business, enjoy more outdoor activities like fishing and gardening, and do some writing and publishing projects that are still important to her. She is looking forward to traveling to Germany this spring. Although we will feel her absence next semester, we will find the future path easier because we know that our department’s Undergraduate English Education Program—one which is important to our own students but is also ultimately important to public education in our service area—has been in good hands with Ginny Jones.

Changing Places, New Faces

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n July 2012, Melissa Schaub became interim Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Academic Support and Retention and moved to the Lowry Building, where most academic support offices are now located. The University Writing Center has also moved to Lowry, as has Teagan Decker, its Director.

Polina Chemishanova has succeeded Anita Guynn as Director of Composition.
This year, she and David Marquard will coordinate assessment of our first-year writing program: ENG 0104, 1050, and 1060.

The department also welcomed five new faculty members at the start of the fall 2012 semester:

**Kathryn Allen** comes to us from a previous position at NC Wesleyan in Rocky Mount. She holds an M.A. from East Carolina University. Kathryn is a Lecturer in the College Opportunity Program (COP), with an office in Lowry 125.

**Michael Berntsen**, from rural New Jersey, earned his Ph.D. at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette, and is a Lecturer in English. His office is in Dial 133.

**Thomas Heffernan**, a Massachusetts native, holds degrees including an M.A. from Manchester University, UK, and a Ph.D. from Sophia University in Tokyo. Previously at St Andrews University, NC, he is a Lecturer in English; his office is in Dial 139.

**Dennis McGlothlin**, an Ohio native, holds an M.A. from the University of Dayton, and is a doctoral candidate at the University of Tennessee. He is a Lecturer in English. His office is in Dial 239C.

**Jessica Pitchford**, Assistant Professor and Editor of Pembroke Magazine, comes to us from a two-year appointment in the mid-West. She earned her M.F.A. at McNeese State University and her Ph.D. at Florida State. A native Arkansan, she is “glad to be back in the South.” Her office is in Dial 102.

**English Faculty Activities**

**Mark Canada**, since becoming permanent dean of the College of Arts and Sciences in the spring, has renewed his office’s Go-to Faculty initiative, hired a new Hawk Assistant for Student Success, collaborated with campus colleagues to stage Rush Your Major 2012, and collaborated with his colleagues on the Implementation Team to draft a mission statement and other materials for the launch of the new Southeast American Indian Studies program. This semester, he was collaborating with senior English major Savanna Fowler to transcribe some of Thomas Wolfe’s unpublished notes for a projected scholarly monograph. His article “Stories of Today: Rebecca Harding Davis’s Investigative Fiction” appeared in the summer 2012 issue of *Journalism History*. In September, he collaborated with librarian Michael Alewine to present “Active Information Literacy in College Composition” at the Georgia International Conference on Information Literacy in Savannah. In May, he presented “Thomas Wolfe, ‘Return,’ and the *Asheville Citizen*” and participated in a readers theater production of Wolfe’s play *The Mountains* at the 34th Annual Meeting of the Thomas Wolfe Society in Asheville, North Carolina. He recently accepted an invitation to become a consulting editor of *The Thomas Wolfe Review*.

**Polina Chemishanova, Cynthia Miecznikowski, and Charles Tita** presented papers at the Ninth Biennial Thomas R. Watson Conference in Rhetoric and Composition held at the University of Louisville on 18-20 October 2012. This year’s theme—“Economies of Writing”—inspired their panel on *Online Writing Instruction, FYC, and Economies of Literacy*. Their individual presentations, titled “(Mis)Perceptions of Literacies and Quality in OWI” (Dr. Tita), “Dual and Dueling
Literacies: Negotiating the Difference and Distance in OWI" (Dr. Miecznikowski), and “E/Merging Literacies: Adult Learners and the Challenges of OWI" (Dr. Chemishanov), developed from their shared experiences teaching the first fully online writing course for Distance Education students at UNCP and their collaborations on the design and assessment of the course.

Michele Fazio’s Spring 2012 ENG 1060 students presented their service-learning project conducting work histories of Lumbee Elders at the American Indian Women of Proud Nation’s conference held at UNCP in September. The students and Elders spoke about how service-learning has strengthened ties between the campus and community and raised awareness of economic and social issues. She also presented “Remembering Rosie: Gender and Family Dynamics in Woody Guthrie’s Ballads of Sacco and Vanzetti” at the Woody at 100: Woody’s Legacy to Working Men & Women conference at Pennsylvania State University in September 2012.

Denise K. Feikema spoke about her research on African American literature and education from 1901-2005 following a performance of Marilynn Barner Anselmi’s new play You Wouldn’t Expect on October 7 at the Booker T. Theater in Rocky Mount. The play had been given a staged reading in August during UNCP’s Social Justice Symposium, which was supported in part through efforts by several E&T faculty. The UNCP students who joined Dr. Feikema for the field trip to Rocky Mount all agreed that seeing the staged performance of a script they had read for class or had heard during the Social Justice Symposium brought them to a new level of understanding of the play’s important social justice issues. You Wouldn’t Expect, which is set in a rural area of eastern North Carolina during the mid-twentieth century, reimagines the lives of the people involved with our state’s Eugenics Board, which ordered the sterilization of nearly 7,600 people between 1933 and 1973. Anselmi’s script offered a nuanced consideration of both the victims and the enforcers of this state-sanctioned eugenics movement.

Thomas Heffernan read “Silverback,” a haibun previously published in the magazine Contemporary Haibun and on the website Contemporary Haibun Online, during a Writers Forum at St Andrews University, Laurinburg, in October. His “Soon It Will Be Ten Years: Lines Written on Sept. 4, 2011” appears in the current Pembroke Magazine. The poem appeared initially on the NC Arts Council website as one of a number of poems commemorating the 9/11 tragedy. Also, the current Modern Haiku magazine includes his work. Dr. Heffernan attended the Fall meeting of the NC Poetry Society at Weymouth in Southern Pines in September.

Bun Hee Jeon’s article “Oral Reading Fluency in Second Language Reading” appeared this fall in the journal Reading in a Foreign Language. She also organized a colloquium, “Component-Skills Approach to L2 Reading: Findings, Challenges, and Innovations,” at the annual conference of the American Association for Applied Linguistics (Boston) in March 2012. The participants included leading scholars in the field such as Bill Grabe, Charles Alderson, and Junko Yamashita.

Ginny Jones and Patricia Robert-Miller co-authored a chapter, “Imagining Reasons: The Role of the Imagination in
**Roger Ladd** presented the paper “Dour Gower? Humor, Satire, and Hope in Gower” in May 2012 at the 47th International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan. This past spring he published a couple of encyclopedia articles in the *Encyclopedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles*, outlining the textile history connections of John Gower and William Langland. This summer, he published a series of short articles in *Calliope* magazine for children (ages 9-14). The July/August issue was focused on the King Arthur story, and Dr. Ladd contributed the articles “The Round Table,” “Who’s Who at the Table,” “Eager for Adventure: Just Dare Me!” and “Face Off.”

**Cynthia Miecznikowski** recently won IRB approval for the project “Reading Into Writing: Student Writers Reading in Secondary, Two-Year College, and First-Year Composition Classrooms,” a collaborative project with alumni/ae, former instructors, and colleagues at Purnell Swett High School, Robeson Community College, and UNCP’s School of Education. Dr. Miecznikowski is the Principal Investigator in the project; Dr. Angela Rogers (SOE) is the Project Coordinator. Kelly Fox and Alicia Mansfield at Purnell Swett and Daniela Newland at RCC are fellow teacher-researchers. The team is scheduled to report on their research at the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in Las Vegas in March 2013. Dr. Miecznikowski also contributed again to the annual review of CCCC, which convened in March 2012 in St. Louis. In addition to her participation on a panel presentation on First-Year Composition (see spring *Beacon*), she reviewed a Saturday morning session titled “Writing Beyond Publics,” presented by three doctoral students. The 2012 *CCCC Review* is published in the fall 2012 issue of the online journal *Kairos*.

**Wendy Miller** presented a paper entitled “From ‘feeling unsafe inside’ to ‘lift[ing] and bow[ing] in harmony’: *Seraph on the Suwanee* as Undercover and Under-the-cover Relationship Manual” at the Southern Women Writers Conference in Rome, Georgia in September; she moderated a panel, “New Readings on Evelyn Scott and Carson McCullers” at that same conference. Her essay, “‘[R]eaching into the lumber room’ and Finding Julia Peterkin: Faulkner’s Lena Grove and Peterkin’s ‘Over the River’” was published in *ANQ: A Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews*.

**Catherine Parisian**’s book *Frances Burney’s Cecilia: A Publishing History* was published on 18 October. In her role as Affiliate Society Coordinator for the American Society of Eighteenth-Century Studies, she visited two affiliate meetings this fall: the Midwestern American Society of Eighteenth-Century Studies (MWASECS) in Madison, Wisconsin, and the Early Caribbean Society in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She chaired two sessions related to the novel at the MWASECS meeting.

**Melissa Schaub** presented a paper titled “Mental Landmarks and the Performance of Identity in Elizabeth Gaskell’s Short Fiction” at the 18th- and 19th-Century British Women Writers Conference in Boulder, Colorado, in June 2012.
2012-2013 University Theatre Productions

All University Theatre productions are held on the main stage of the Givens Performing Arts Center. Admission is free for UNCP students, faculty, and staff; $3.00 for other students; and $5.00 for general admission.

Little Shop of Horrors
Book and Lyrics by Howard Ashman
Music by Alan Menken
Directed by Hal Davis
7-10 November 2012

Buried Child
By Sam Shepard
Directed by Holden Hansen
20-23 February 2013

All in the Timing—Six Comedies
By David Ives
Directed by Chet Jordan
17-20 April 2013

Holden Hansen: Professor, Director, Actor—With a New Role in 42

When 42: The Jackie Robinson Story hits theaters on 12 April 2013, UNCP’s drama professor Holden Hansen will again be seen on the big screen. Last time, he played a heart attack victim in a film that required Colin Firth to give his character mouth-to-mouth resuscitation during 20 or 21 takes for a scene. This time, in 42, Holden’s character is an angry man yelling out gross indecencies. During the film shoot, Holden was instructed by top director Brian Helgeland (LA Confidential and Mystic River) to ad-lib, trying it different ways. Holden’s ad-libbing worked so well that Helgeland after a couple of hours told Holden to tone it down because “we have to keep this a PG rating.”

During our conversation this past October, Holden recalled he “got the bug” for theater in high school, maintained focus in college, and left Iowa for St. Louis to audition for a chance to try out for over 50 grad school Master of Fine Arts acting programs from across the country (two of three judges said nix). He returned to Iowa and worked in a local community theater—in time becoming a successful drama teacher/coach and, in the last several months, as an actor, in mid-career, being cast in two important A-list films.

Last spring Holden directed a student production of The Crucible at UNCP’s GPAC theater. When I ask about it—I’d seen and admired it—I learn something of his evolving understanding about how acting and other elements of a production work together, expertise that is product-and-process of his 20 or so years and more than 30 shows directed, all the while influenced by perennial theater traditions.

Holden mentions the re-emergence in 1960s New York of ritual theater (“to get back to the ritual origins of theater”) and environmental theater (“set up in found places; say, in between tenements, [to] get the audience to be as participant as much as the actors are”). His Crucible seated the audience in a found space behind GPAC’s main stage, close up to actors and set, actors and audience participating in virtually the same space.

“I’m attracted to non-illusion, non-representational forms of theater, like Shakespeare’s and the Greeks’: few or no props, quasi-thrust or open stage—conceptual vs. realistic stage—that go with the idea of asking the audience to use their imaginations,” he says. “I’ll use production values like WS’s and the Greeks’ when our students perform Buried Child, Sam Shepard’s play, this coming spring.”

Not only are styles used by the great Shakespeare manifest in Holden’s directing, but also in the text used for a forthcoming production. Many versions of Shakespeare’s plays exist, from contemporary Quarto and Folio printed versions to ones later altered by centuries of editors’ and actors’ emendations. In this respect, Holden’s role as professor-director comes into play: “performance as scholarship” applies, for instance, in his choice of the First Folio version of the play planned for the Fall 2013 student production, Romeo and Juliet, which is almost always played from earlier Quarto editions. Rarely performed, the First Folio version (of 1623) combines passages from earlier quartos to provide the play’s most complete state.

I ask what benefit a student might obtain studying theatre either as a major or
minor, since few make a living by it. “What I’ve learned in my acting and class—it’s a Gen. Ed. class, it’s popular, it’s always full—people from all walks of life come to this class…. I think that they learn how to be more comfortable in their skins—that’s the biggest thing—which allows them then to do the interpersonal work you have to do to get by in this world. I think that’s the main thing,” says Holden. “What is acting showing me? I was too much in my head. I’m learning how to be less cerebral and more intuitive. Not just as an actor, it’s helping me as a teacher.”

As an actor, Holden is on a roll (pun, but appropriate), the most recent his part in 42: The Jackie Robinson Story. As to his part in Arthur Newman: Golf Pro, he remembers how focused Colin Firth was during the many takes for their scene: “He got better and better, he got more nuanced. And was a real gentleman.” I am emboldened to ask, “Did he breathe artistic greatness into your lungs?” Holden laughs. “No, but I did offer him a breath mint, which he accepted.”