



A.R. Gurney: A Lifetime of Writing

interview by Molly Smith Metzler

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MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Congratulations on your Lifetime Achievement Award from the Dramatists Guild!

A.R. GURNEY: Thank you.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I want to start by asking a question on behalf of all the playwrights in the whole world. You are in your 80s, right?...

A.R. GURNEY: 84.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: 84. And you've written 50 works including 42 plays, or is it now 43 plays?

A.R. GURNEY: It depends how you count the long one-acts. I don't sit there and count.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: And you've been doing this since the late 60s.

A.R. GURNEY: Yes. Doing it all my life really. I had to support my family. So I became a teacher, like your husband. But I taught first at a private boys' private school called Belmont Hill School. Then I taught at MIT after.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Right. For 26 years, after which you turned full-time to playwriting. And now, at 84, you've got 50 plays under your belt.

A.R. GURNEY: That's it.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Okay, so my question is: *how can I be you when I grow up?*

A.R. GURNEY: (*Chuckling*). Well, you've got some of the same obstacles I had, because I also had children crawling on the floor when I was starting. I think everybody's different, so I don't like to give any particular rules. But for me it's the habit. And that habit carried over from teaching. I'd get up in the morning, have breakfast, and look over my notes for the text I was going to be teaching [that day].

In 1981, we came down to New York on sabbatical. And my wife said, "I don't really want to go back."

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: She liked the city.

A.R. GURNEY: Yes. She has always loved New York. So I called MIT and said, "Could you extend me for a year?" And they said, "Sure. We can without paying you." And we looked around and stayed.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: And you wrote *The Dining Room* in 1982.

A.R. GURNEY: 1982 that was.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: And that play is the one that opened huge doors for you, would you say?

A.R. GURNEY: It did. There were a couple of others that had gained some reputation. I wrote a play

called *Children* while I was teaching a course on John Cheever (and other contemporary writers) at MIT. We read Cheever's short story called *Goodbye, My Brother* and I made a play out of that. Nobody in the US would touch it but, ultimately, it went on at The Mermaid Theater in London and got very good reviews. And it was published. Then Lynne Meadow wanted to do it here. So that gave me some kind of a start.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: That's incredible. And so going back to when you taught at MIT, how did you have time to be writing plays as well?

A.R. GURNEY: I didn't write that many.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: You didn't?

A.R. GURNEY: I wrote a few. I wrote that one. But one of the reasons I wrote it, the students in my class said 'It's a terrible story. I don't think it goes anywhere.' I was trying to explain to them where it went and what it was about. I thought it would make a good play, so I wrote it ultimately to...

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: ...to prove the validity of Cheever's story.

A.R. GURNEY: That's right.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Wow. Did it work?

A.R. GURNEY: It did! It did. And it's been done fairly recently at Williamstown and at Westport.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: No, I meant did it convince your students.

A.R. GURNEY: No. It didn't. But they were eager to learn. And then I had my first play done in New York in, I think, 1969.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: *The David Show*.

A.R. GURNEY: Yeah. And I say that with a sigh.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Oh, don't say it with a sigh.

A.R. GURNEY: I had to commute while teaching and when [the play] was done, before I left, the students had brought in a bottle of white wine and paper cups and they toasted me. And [that show] lasted

just one night and got a brutal review. Have you ever read that review by Clive Barnes?

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I did read it. Because I read everything about you. And that review is so mean, but it gives me faith. My first big outing in New York was panned too.

A.R. GURNEY: That's one of the secrets of being a successful playwright, I think is to know how to deal with the reviews and not let them destroy you. Because we've known people, as I have, I suspect you have, who said "That's it. I'm not good for the stage. I'm not going write for the stage. It's too public and too painful." And that was very public and painful. When I went back to my class at MIT, they had another bottle of wine and paper cups to cheer me up.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: What a nice bunch of science students!

A.R. GURNEY: They were. They were good kids.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I think that one of the challenges of being a playwright, besides the technical part of it, is that it's such a public art that you end up living in fear of reviews. How have you been able to be so prolific and stay out of your own way? What's the secret?

A.R. GURNEY: Well, again, let me say that we're all different. I got into the habit of doing it – writing. I'm sure you have friends who are runners. And you say, 'How can you do that?'

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I'm a runner.

A.R. GURNEY: So you know the first time you ran maybe you said, "Why am I doing this? This is awful."

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: "It's horrible! I'm freezing!" Yeah.

A.R. GURNEY: But suddenly you get into it and you feel bad if you're not doing it. You feel you're cheating yourself. I think writing is a little that way. Establish a place where you live with your computer or your notebook. For me, 8:30 in the morning

when I settle in front of the computer, my mind sort of clears up, veers in that direction and I can write.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: So what does it look like when you are at your desk inspired? Are you listening to music?

A.R. GURNEY: No. A little coffee. Not too much. Used to be cigarettes but I gave them up while I was writing long before I gave them up socially. I think it's the space. It could be just me but I think somehow your brain says, 'Oh, I get it! I get why you're bringing me in here. You want me to write something.' And half the stuff you write just 'cause you're sitting down isn't much good, but the other half might be. You might, in the process of sitting there, knowing that you're gonna try to write, out of this can come one scene, one speech, one moment which you then can build on the next time. I used to write in the morning, have lunch, then come back and write in the afternoon. I still do that a little. But most of the stuff in the afternoon is no good at all.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Has your process changed at all since you wrote that first play when you were teaching at MIT? Has this always been your process?

A.R. GURNEY: The process, yes. For a while it was all long-hand. Pencil. Then pen. And finally when I turned to the typewriter, I knew I was serious. But now the computer, it just – I'm a terrible – I mean I'm always making mistakes because I'm still a typist so I'm leaning on the keys too much. I'm always hitting escape with my sleeve.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Sending the wrong email.

A.R. GURNEY: Yeah, I do. But still, the computer has been very helpful in the long run. [When] I was still doing the old thing: pencil, pen, typewriter, my father-in-law said, "Why don't you get a computer?" A word processor we called it. He said, "I've got an old one from Radio Shack. Just use that." So I started playing with it and writing letters on it to friends. Look what I'm doing. This is a computer my father-in-law gave me. And I discovered, hey, I was

writing a story. I became a persona. And so I wrote *Love Letters* on the computer and the computer in a sense was reminding me, because I was working on that and thinking about where I type and how do I fix that, I was thinking about the world of letter writing that I was leaving behind. Right?

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Yes. Do you still write letters?

A.R. GURNEY: I do.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I do, too.

A.R. GURNEY: I write sympathy notes and congratulatory notes. But I don't write all the time.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: That was one thing I was struck by in *Love Letters*. That time when you were invited to dinner and you responded to an invitation to dinner in writing. You know it's so different now. You get an *Evite*.

A.R. GURNEY: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. And when we were young, I mean I think that you had to accept it in a certain – accept with pleasure the kind invitation. And I'm sure I was doing that by the time say I was seven or eight years old –

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Really?

A.R. GURNEY: – to do that. Yeah.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I had seen *Love Letters*, but I had not read it until last night, when I sat down and read it. And one of the things I was struck by is your terrific list at the beginning—the "dos and the don'ts of production." It's hilarious and so specific. I wondered if you always had a list like that in mind with your plays. When you're writing plays, do you see them vividly?

A.R. GURNEY: I do see it vividly but I don't always write that down.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: When you've seen the best productions of your work, why are they the best?

A.R. GURNEY: That's hard. It's so different. I mean sometimes the set is extremely exciting and absolutely right. Many times the performances are

amazing – how they find stuff that I didn’t know was there. But it’s the coming together of all those elements: the director, the actors, the set, the lighting, the sound, the nature of the theatre and the audience. When all those are in synch, and they are sometimes – I’m sure you’ve had that experience. There’s nothing better. Right?

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: How often would you say that happens? If you had to put a percentage on it?

A.R. GURNEY: I haven’t tried to get a percentage. It happens – let’s put it this way. It happens often enough that at the age of 84 I’m still trying to write plays. And I’m happiest when I’m doing it. And I don’t mean just the process of writing. After I leave here, we’re doing *What I Did Last Summer* at the Signature and we’re having callbacks for the casting. In this particular case it’s another generation, ‘cause the leading actor is supposed be fourteen. So you’ll see another generation coming in, dealing with your lines, maybe finding a different rhythm even though the play is set in the same place. I didn’t bring it up to date. And with this old play I really haven’t heard in 30 years – I haven’t heard actors speak those lines – that’s so exciting to me. I hope that happens to you.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Wow. Well, I feel like this is maybe a silly question, but when you hear a play again for the first time in 30 years, are you tempted to rewrite it?

A.R. GURNEY: Never.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Never?

A.R. GURNEY: I mean I’m tempted. And I’m sure many of your colleagues have tried to do that. Maybe they succeeded. But your head is in a different place, you know. And while you think you’ve solved a problem or written a line, which is perfect for that spot, it’ll probably stand out. Just a little bit wrong, you know. I’d say don’t rewrite unless you have a whole new way of doing something which didn’t work. Now this play, *What I Did Last Summer*, got rather lousy reviews. We had to fire the leading lady ‘cause she wouldn’t learn her lines. And her re-

placement did what she could, but she was not right.

When we opened at the Circle Rep (which was a theater run primarily by Lanford Wilson and Marshall W. Mason the director), a man sitting in the audience – right about ten minutes in – had, if not a heart attack, some kind of a seizure. So we called the ambulance. They came. They hauled the man away. And then we said, “Well, we’re gonna start again.” And we started again. Oh, by the way, we opened without a director. Once we’d fired the leading lady, the actors (and they’re all good actors) said, “We don’t like that director. We can’t work with her.” And so a friend of mine named David Trainer who had directed *The Dining Room*, said, “I’ll direct it, but it’s not my cast. I won’t put my name [on it].” So we opened without a director. Then this man falling in the audience. And right in the middle of the second act there was a strange odor. Turned out the toilets in the men’s room had backed up. So the reviews –

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: This is the worst thing I’ve ever heard.

A.R. GURNEY: We all have horrible experiences in the theatre. Maybe you never have, but –

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I have not had a toilet blow up. No.

A.R. GURNEY: So the reviews were very dismissive. So when the Signature said we want to do a couple of your plays, this was one. The other, *The Wayside Motor Inn*, originally got no reviews at all that were any good in New York. Did you see it?

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I did. And it got good reviews. Is there any part of you that found the experience at Signature a little scary?

A.R. GURNEY: It was. I said, “Don’t do that *Wayside* thing. You’re gonna get killed.” And then they assigned a director who backed out. I said, “See, the director doesn’t want to do it.” Jim Houghton said, “Well, I’ll introduce you to Lila Neugenbauer.” So we met and I said, “I’m not sure it’s that great a play.” But she did something very different with it. She didn’t make it individual scenes and the

other scenes were sort of darkened out. She kept this wonderful constant lighting so we could watch whatever we wanted to.

Then Jim said, "What would you like to do?" I said, "I have this play called *What I Did Last Summer*. I've never seen it really done well. I have a kind of fondness for it. But I warn you, the play is jinxed."

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: You go into rehearsal at the end of March, and then comes *Love and Money*, which is a brand new play. I asked if I could read and I was told "not yet."

A.R. GURNEY: Not yet. I'm still ticking with it. I asked if we could have a reading at Signature so I could hear how it sounded. Don't you like that?

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Yes.

A.R. GURNEY: And don't you then make changes?—

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Yes, I change a lot after a first read-through. I'm sure every play is different, but generally, how long does it take you to write a first draft?

A.R. GURNEY: It depends on the play. I've worked with Mark Lamos, who's directing *Love and Money*, a number of times. I showed him an early draft and he liked the idea and made some suggestions. But I still have been tinkering. I think I've got it right now. You know that feeling.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: So when you write "The End," or "End of Play," who is the first person who reads a new Gurney play? —

A.R. GURNEY: It used to be my agent, Gilbert Parker, who's now retired. He usually gave me a very good angle on it. I could tell whether he liked it or not. If he didn't say "Can we have lunch?" I knew I had more work to do.

I like being friends with the director. Mark Lamos and John Tillinger and I have worked together a lot of times. It depends on the play. If I see Jack [O'Brien] as a possible director, as I did with *The Cocktail Hour*, I give him an early draft and we have a reading of it, see how it works.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: So you don't have actors over to your living room?

A.R. GURNEY: Yes. Many [times] they've come over to [read in] our living room.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Does your wife read your plays early on?

A.R. GURNEY: She used to. And won't now. She feels I put too much pressure on her. Does your husband feel the same way?

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Well, it is a thing about being married to a writer. There's nothing you can say that's gonna be positive enough, right?

A.R. GURNEY: That's right.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: And then you have to eat dinner together.

A.R. GURNEY: That's right. So my wife's a very loyal supporter. But I don't lay the first draft on her. When we're in production or even if it's a dress rehearsal she's very good at saying, "What if you did this? That costume doesn't look quite right." Or whatever it is. So she's very helpful on that.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Well, that's good. She must have a good eye after all these years.

A.R. GURNEY: She does. A good eye for the look of things.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: And you have four children and eight grandchildren?

A.R. GURNEY: Exactly.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Are any of them in theatre?

A.R. GURNEY: No.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Are you so excited about that?

A.R. GURNEY: They all go! And they all like it. But none of them writes plays.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: That's kind of a relief, no?

A.R. GURNEY: It is. But plays were part of the culture when I was growing up. It's not so much that

for you, is it?

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Maybe not like it was for you. I read that you grew up in Buffalo, where the theatre was really the center of culture.

A.R. GURNEY: Oh, yeah.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Do you think that's changed? There's so much doom and gloom about theatre now.

A.R. GURNEY: I know. When I was growing up in Buffalo we had a school play every year. Everybody wanted to be in it. And then we had a professional house theater, where all the big Broadway plays came through with the Lunts and Helen Hayes. Katharine Cornell of course was born there, so she'd open her plays there. And then there was community theater.

But your generation and people younger and people older than you grew up watching television, watching people perform roles. So I'm amazed by adept quality of the actors auditioning for *What I Did Last Summer*. They're at home with the acting process. And I think maybe that your generation is. You understand acting 'cause you watched it. I understand dialogue 'cause I listened to the radio. I know how words can work. But I would imagine my own actors delivering them. But now you, your generation, I don't think you – like Pinter, for example: you don't listen to the echoes of the words so much, but you know what's good acting and what isn't. And so there's so many good actors around.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I'm so glad you think so. I do, too. So when you listened to the radio, how did you even decide to put dialogue down on paper? Was there someone who suggested you try this? Was there a teacher?

A.R. GURNEY: There were teachers all along who said, "Oh, you gotta be a playwright." We'd have to write compositions. And I'd say, "Can I write a play?" And why did I want to write play? Cause I wanted to see if I could get some yuks out of the class. I wanted to read one part myself or even the whole thing so I could become a popular kid, the

class would laugh and the teacher would let me do it, 'cause that took care of one class.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: It worked. Worked well.

A.R. GURNEY: I can remember in first grade, my parents were beginning to tell me about plays. They'd come down to New York to see plays. "Where'd you go?" "We went to New York. We saw this wonderful play." I remember wanting to write a play, to appeal to my parents in the first grade! I remember just wanting to do it. It was about a page and a half. So the desire was there always.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I was curious, having read *The Cocktail Hour*, if the young playwright (John) in that play was an autobiographical character? He describes his first playwriting attempts, as a very young child...

A.R. GURNEY: Well, the idea of taking the net down from the ping pong table and turning that wobbly table into a stage and getting my brother and sister to be in it [was true]. And then putting this thing on for my parents. They went along with it. I wouldn't say they were encouraging.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I hope they were more encouraging than the parents in *The Cocktail Hour*.

A.R. GURNEY: I don't think they were.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Oh no!

A.R. GURNEY: They didn't like the idea. Even though they loved the theatre, they did not like the idea. And when I told my – I went into the Navy when I graduated. I wrote a couple shows at Williams. Sondheim graduated a year before me. And so he left the student musical wide open. I could no more compete with – but I knew how to write a skit. So I did revues for a couple years with friends of mine. That's as close as we came. But anyway, my parents, I said, "Come on down. There's some good laughs in this play, this revue." They didn't bother to come and see it.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Really?

A.R. GURNEY: After the Navy, I wanted to go to

the Yale School of Drama. I even put on a couple of plays in the Navy. I had the GI Bill so I could pay for it a little bit, and I got into the Yale School of Drama. My father said, "I'm not gonna give you a nickel to go to that place." And he wouldn't – he particularly would not like to come and see my plays. He didn't like it. The first play that he came to, I got him the best seats. Sitting right next to Clive Barnes. And all he did during the play, because my mother told me, he'd nudge Clive Barnes and say, "Do you think this is any good? Why are they laughing? That's not funny." And so at intermission, I was in the bar, and my agent ran out to get rid of my father.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: He didn't know who he was talking to, did he?

A.R. GURNEY: No, he thought he was talking to a fellow audience [member].

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: A civilian.

A.R. GURNEY: Yes. A civilian who was trapped in this horrible play.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Well, shame on him. I can't imagine not having the approval of my parents. It's meant so much to me that they're rooting for me. But how about other memorable responses to your work over the years? Do you have any fan letters framed in your apartment?

A.R. GURNEY: Oh, yeah. Not framed. But somewhere there. There were people that – and I hope that happens to you – there are always people that help you out. For instance, even though my first play got really creamed by Clive Barnes, Edith Oliver who wrote for *The New Yorker* gave it a great review. We had closed by then, because we closed the first night. But she wrote a wonderful article saying this guy has got talent. And Jerry Tallmer [of the *Village Voice*] who just died who said the same thing. So there always have been in the media for me those critics, writers that give you a lift. Now I'm not sure for your generation – I mean *The New Yorker* just doesn't really care, do they?

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Does anyone care?

A.R. GURNEY: Who is – do you have a good critic in mind for when you've had a play done? Is there some critic you've turned to for good reviews?

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I mean I've only had one show in New York and my experience was so heart-wrenchingly awful that I have to kind of forget the critics exist or I won't write anymore.

A.R. GURNEY: That sounds healthy to me.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: And you know what else I try to do? I try not to read anyone else's reviews either. I try to go see a play and decide for myself.

A.R. GURNEY: Well, *The New Yorker* was such a friend of mine for many years. David Remnick took it over. I watched the theatre page in the front of it diminish and diminish.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Do you always read your reviews?

A.R. GURNEY: I try not to. I normally read the beginning and the end.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: That makes sense. What are you reading? What's on your bedside table?

A.R. GURNEY: I just finished a huge book on Napoleon.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Oh. Are you gonna write about Napoleon?

A.R. GURNEY: No. I don't always write about what I read about. Reading is a nice excursion away from the writing. I just finished a really excellent book. I guess it won the National Book Award last year called *Redeployment*.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I was going to tell you how I first was introduced to your work.

A.R. GURNEY: All right. I'd like to hear.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Well, I was a student at Boston University and I started writing a scene with nine characters in it. And said, "Well, obviously I can't have nine characters, so I'm not gonna write this play." And my teacher at the time said, "Well, there's this thing called double casting."

I said, "What's that?" And she said, "Go read *The Dining Room*" which has 57 characters played by six actors. Were you the first playwright to do double-casting? Was it your idea?

A.R. GURNEY: I think so. I saw no reason why not to do it and I thought I'd try it. And my agent, Gilbert Parker, whom I am very fond of, said, 'I just don't know how to deal with this. I haven't seen this done.' So he wasn't very enthusiastic about it. And I took it to André Bishop. He was just starting off [at Playwright Horizons]. And He said, "You have that scene where you have these children sitting around the birthday table." And he said, "You're gonna have all these little kids and I'm gonna have to deal with their mothers off stage." And I said, "No." I said, "The actors play those kids too." He said, "You can't get American actors to play seven and eight year olds." I said, "I think you can."

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Now there are entire plays written around that notion.

A.R. GURNEY: I know.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Where did you learn it? How did you know?

A.R. GURNEY: I don't know. I was desperate to be produced, frankly. I was desperate to write a play. I was desperate to talk about the nature of the culture of habits of the world I grew up in. Sitting around a dining room. I thought how can I do it as simply as possible? And I said, "Well, why not?" – and originally I cast eight. I showed it to David Trainer. He said, "No, that's great. Let's see if we can do it with six and boil it down even more." And so, but the audience immediately picked up on it and went for it. So it worked.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I should say so. They went for it. Did you want to tell us about your influences writer-wise? I bet Ibsen's in there.

A.R. GURNEY: Very much. Because he knows so much how to keep things moving along.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Move it along.

A.R. GURNEY: Yeah. Move it along. And everything

has to count. And in *Enemy of the People* he says, he's talking to the maid and he tells the maid to turn down that light and he says to – this is probably wrong. He says, "What is your name again?" Here we have this play about love of humanity. But the hero, Dr. Stockmann, doesn't even know the name of the maid that's working for him, you know. So I love those details in Ibsen, which thicken the stew of it. Thornton Wilder, I love the way he plays with the audience and makes the audience a part of the play. There are many writers who have influenced me. But as far as playwrights are concerned: I think Pinter to some degree.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Maybe the minimalism?

A.R. GURNEY: Yeah. The minimalism. The sense of – the dialogue in and of itself.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I read somewhere that you think that *cutting* is – "the key" to playwrighting. Do you think that's the hardest part about the actual writing of a play? Knowing what and when to cut?

A.R. GURNEY: Yes, it is. But actors will help you. "I don't need to say this, Pete. I don't need to say it. You said that." When you've [written] enough plays, you begin to hear the actors say that before you give it to them. I just think drama should be spare in terms of what they say. There are great monologues in plays, O'Neill is a master at that, for example. O'Neill's another influence. I like so much his experimental quality. But I just think there's such a difference between writing for actors and, say, writing essays or novels, which I've tried to do. Actors (the good ones) add so much to a line because the feelings are there. [Sometimes] you don't need what you thought you needed in order for it to work.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Mm-hm. That must just be a muscle that gets stronger and stronger the more you write plays. The ability to hear it.

A.R. GURNEY: I think it does. But who knows.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Well, when I saw *Love Letters*, I was thinking how Mia Farrow had exactly what she needed to play that role. You know?

There's nothing extra. It was a beautiful performance.

A.R. GURNEY: Oh, it was gorgeous. I agree.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: How were *you* as Andy?

A.R. GURNEY: Terrible. I've played it about three times. I did it once in Boston with Julie Harris.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: It's like playing tennis with Andre Agassi, right?

A.R. GURNEY: Yes! That's what *I* said. Martina Navratilova. I said, "My gosh, she's serious. She's saying it as if she meant it. Now what am I gonna do?"

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Okay, great. What would you like as your final question, Pete? A silly question or a serious question? I'll tell you what, I'll ask them both and you can answer the one you want. My silly question is: what is your spirit animal? Is it a dog?

A.R. GURNEY: You're right. But I never thought of it quite that way. But yes, a dog.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: I knew it! All your characters love dogs. And then you wrote a dog as a character. Well, my spirit animal is a dog, too. A golden retriever.

A.R. GURNEY: Is that right?


MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Mm-hm. Yeah, I think so. My serious question is: why do you think people go to the theater?

A.R. GURNEY: For the same reason I think that we write plays. That we – to write plays these days is a communal experience. Nobody when they're writing a play these days, or I think ever, said, "Okay, that's it. Goodbye. Call me tomorrow." You work with the director. You work with the actors. You create the community on stage. And then ideally it builds so that that community then creates a community in the audience. And that sense of community, a sense of we're all in this thing together, is the heart of the matter. And not many other arts do that. You know. That's why I think despite all the

setbacks and problems of the theatre today and the limitations, the aesthetic limitations of the theatre compared to say what you can do in television or the movie, but it's worth it because you get that communal kick.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: Well, you've had this community a long time. I hope you have it a lot longer too.

A.R. GURNEY: Thank you.

MOLLY SMITH METZLER: It's been so nice to chat with you. 

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