

**[00:00:01.950] - Brian Shelton**

If you're interested in theater, you're going to love this episode. I'm Brian Shelton and you're listening to Harper Talks, a co-production of Harper College Alumni Relations and Harper Radio today on Harper Talks. I'm excited to speak with Laura Pulio-Cobert, Laura and I work together in the Communication Arts Department at Harper College, and she is always a bright spot in my day. Laura has a deep connection to Harper. She met her future husband here, graduated, left, and then came back to join the faculty.

**[00:00:35.400] - Brian Shelton**

She currently serves as director of theater. Laura joined me today for Harper Talks over Zoom.

**[00:00:41.300] - Brian Shelton**

Hey, Laura, thanks for being with me today. I appreciate you taking the time.

**[00:00:44.010] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

My pleasure, Brian.

**[00:00:45.060] - Brian Shelton**

How are you today?

**[00:00:46.290] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

I am fine, thanks very much. It's a little chilly, but the sun appears to be shining, so all is well.

**[00:00:52.830] - Brian Shelton**

Yeah. I'm looking forward to one day doing a Harper Talks podcast where someone says, my goodness, it's so hot outside. But so far,

**[00:00:59.450] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

We ain't there yet? Maybe not there yet.

**[00:01:03.840] - Brian Shelton**

My my family, as you know, lives in Kentucky. And they sent me pictures of about two inches of snow this morning. And I thought better you than me all.

**[00:01:12.540] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

They deserve it, Brian. That's right.

**[00:01:16.290] - Brian Shelton**

Especially after the winter we've had.

**[00:01:18.370] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

That's right.

**[00:01:19.800] - Brian Shelton**

So, Laura, I've always been interested. This happens every once in a while I meet someone who works at the college or whatever college you're working at, who went to school there. And I don't think that's is a common thing as some people might think that it is. I think it's pretty, pretty rare. But I wanted to go back to how you got to Harper College as a student. Obviously, you grew up in this area. So then and then you went to Harper College. But how did that come about? How did you become a Harper student?

**[00:01:47.190] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Well, I guess we have to start way back in the beginning. And it was quite a while ago. And, you know, Brian, I'm part of a generation of women that was not necessarily expected to educate themselves. To be perfectly honest with you. My older sisters got married and had babies. And when I went to Schaumburg High School and I grew up in Schaumburg, went K through 12. But when I went to Schaumburg High School, there was no one saying, Laura Pulio, where are you going to go to school? Laura Pulio, what are you going to study? Laura Pulio, where where are your passions? There was no one there saying that at that time.

**[00:02:26.450] - Brian Shelton**

Right.

**[00:02:27.210] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

I was always a performer. I always had a voice. I sang forever. And I started when I was I started very young, but really performing really performing around 12 or 13 is when that started and the vocals started around that same time. So I always was active at Schaumburg High School and I did all the shows and musicals and I was in all the choirs and the swing choirs and I loved it. But I couldn't I couldn't have cared less about most of the other subjects in school. I was a very unmotivated high school student. My grades were not great. I didn't know what my options were 40 years ago because no one laid them out for me.

But now I know what the options are and I know what the options are for this community. And I know the role that this college serves in terms of this community. I know the role that it served for me.

**[00:03:27.870] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

And I was able to accomplish some pretty remarkable things. And I doubt very much that anyone in Schaumburg High School would have seen that coming. But I met educators at Harper College who taught me to love learning. And that's what I learned at Harper, to love learning because I didn't know how to do that until I went to Harper. And Mary Jo Willis was my first acting teacher. And she helped me to see that I had potential and possibilities.

**[00:03:56.160] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

And so Harper, for me, was the place where I explored different subjects. My original major was music with the voice emphasis. And that's not where I went. That's not what happened with me. But that's what I like to tell my students. This is the place to explore. This is the place to try new things. This is the place to find your passion and then so many doors open for you. And so that's that's how I wound up at Harper.

**[00:04:26.190] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

I wound up there because there were not a lot of other options for me. But I learned to love learning at Harper and I'm proud to be able to pass that on to my students.

**[00:04:35.250] - Brian Shelton**

Yeah, I have that conversation with students all the time because and I've talked about this on this podcast before. My original major was not communication. I was majoring in environmental and hazardous materials management and spent two years studying that. And that was a very costly mistake at a very expensive private school. And, you know, a place like Harper College did not exist for me. I certainly didn't know about places like that when I was choosing where to go to school, and I think that our students in this community, people in this community have an opportunity to go to an educational institution that is an excellent place to go to school and to figure out what the heck it is you want to do with your life.

**[00:05:13.100] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Exactly. Yes. And my son is 18 years old and graduating from high school this year. And he'll be joining us at Harper starting this summer, actually is going to take his first year experience class. And I'm I'm proud of that. I'm really proud of it. And Tom's excited about it, too. I, it's interesting to come full circle this way and again, because this was never my intention. Teaching was not my intention. And certainly teaching at Harper was not my intention.

**[00:05:42.170] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

But it's interesting how life takes you. And that's the other thing I tell students all the time. Don't be afraid to change your mind. Don't be afraid to make a new choice. Your career is going to change at least 10 times in the course of your professional life. Get used to it and educate yourself because you're educating yourselves so that you can make ethical choices in a complicated world, not because you can necessarily get a job that has makes more money, although that's helpful as well.

**[00:06:11.600] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

But I wish kids would understand that. And that's that's where the disconnect is. I think sometimes. Yeah.

**[00:06:17.300] - Brian Shelton**

Education really in the last I really think the last 15 years has really been pushed as as a jobs program. And while that is very important, learning to be a person is a very big part of the educational process as well. And I think that's starting to get lost quite a bit in the last few years.

**[00:06:34.090] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Well, it gets lost, Brian, is the arts get lost because you see there is no college without art on a campus, whether it's music or the visual arts or the literary arts or theater, my art form, there is no heart without art. And you can turn us into a place where we where we we teach students how to work on a manufacturing line, which is great and helpful for some. But there's more to college than that. And I hope that we don't lose the original intention of the community college.

**[00:07:13.580] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

I was lucky. You know, I was I was a product of the community college generation, my mentors, people like John Muchmore and Mary Jo Willis and Marshall Litenta, you know, those people, they really brought community colleges to life for my generation. And I think that our country has moved in a different direction. And sometimes we focus a bit too much maybe on the jobs market and not as much on education for the purpose of developing a set of ethical standards that we live our lives by.

**[00:07:52.460] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

We've lost that. And I do wish that that we would get back to that sometimes.

**[00:07:58.130] - Brian Shelton**

Yeah, totally agree with you. So I know this is going to, you know, never ask a lady her age, so. But what year did you graduate from Harper College graduated.

**[00:08:08.150] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

And I don't mind telling you this, Brian, because I'm celebrating, well, I did celebrate my twenty fifth year full time last year, but I graduated in nineteen eighty three. So I came to I was at Harper from eighty one to eighty three. I finished my associate's degree and I transferred to my four year school with junior standing and all my academic requirements completed, which is another thing I try to explain to my students. Finishing that two year degree was of great benefit to me because it allowed me to finish my four year degree in another two years.

**[00:08:44.060] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

I'll just give you an example. My brother was in school a little before me and he went to Harper for one year and then transferred without the degree and he wound up in school for five years, a total of five years as a result of not getting that degree. So that's another reason why I try to get our students to understand the importance of that degree. You are going to transfer into whatever school you select in the state of Illinois. I know private schools are a little more complicated, but for me it was Illinois State University.

**[00:09:15.320] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

I transferred in junior standing, all my academic requirements completed. No English, no math, no science theater for two straight years. It was like a real conservatory environment as a result of that. So there's great benefit in getting the degree. You're going to save yourself money, obviously, but you're going to save yourself time too, my brother and I are great examples of one who gets the degree and one who doesn't and what that means at the end of the day.

**[00:09:42.590] - Brian Shelton**

Yeah, it certainly does make a difference. Now, I've only been at Harper for seven going on eight years now. And of course colleges evolve and change over time. And I was curious, what was Harper like in the eighties? Because, you know, the eighties themselves were interesting. What was Harper like in the early eighties?

**[00:09:57.230] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Much more. Much? More open, much more much more active, more student engagement. That's the biggest thing that I notice the difference with. We did shows and musicals and plays and things like that, and we had really large casts we never wanted for student involvement. That's another thing that's shifted over the years as the college has taken on more of a community position because we get, for example, actors from the community that come in and audition and things like that.

**[00:10:36.300] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

There's a difference. And it's a really fine line, though. It's it's tough because I'm trying to walk this line. I'm trying to fulfill the needs of our students, our traditional students who are coming from high school and trying to finish this up in two years and moving on and also the community who's coming back for enrichment and engagement. So, you know, it gets complicated. But back in the day when I was a student, there was more focus on that traditional student, Brian.

**[00:11:05.610] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

There was more focus on transfer programs. There was more focus on where you went after this, as opposed to seeing Harper as the end game, which I think the involvement of business in in our college has changed the way that we we approach it and what we offer our students and what we focus on. But back then, it was all about the transfer, I got to be honest with you. And it was very busy and active. Oh, my God, it was insane.

**[00:11:38.040] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

You know, the people used to smoke on campus and.

**[00:11:42.600] - Brian Shelton**

Yeah, I mean, certainly a different place that I think that part of the reason with student engagement is that students have so much. They they both have so much more that they can do on their own now, but also so much less. And I see so many people who would just and this is me being old, but I see so many young people today who would just just happily sit at home and stare at their phone. Right. And do whatever it is that they do on their phone rather than go out and actually sit and have a conversation with someone or walk across the campus with them.

**[00:12:12.840] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Yes. And I'm so I'm so torn on when we say that stuff, because if we do some sound like, you know, we sound like the old people because we are the old people, because we don't understand. Well, you probably you're young, so you get it. But we don't understand the technology. So I try to avoid things like when I was young, you know, and why don't you and I have to do research papers with a card catalog, you know what I mean?

**[00:12:38.190] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

I mean, I try to avoid those kinds of conversations, but I understand exactly what you're saying. There is a difference. There's a big difference. We were engaged in a way that I am watching students now, and especially after the pandemic, Brian, they they almost expect that a college education is something you purchase, you don't earn. And that's an issue.

**[00:13:05.790] - Brian Shelton**

Yeah, that's been an ongoing conversation I've had with many educators is that college is about collecting a number of credits to get a degree, not about actually learning something or earning something. And I find that disturbing.

**[00:13:19.470] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Sad. It's sad because my mentors OK, it's 40 years later from the time that I started college and my mentors are still a part of my life. They've been there for the for my my marriages and for and for the birth of my children and all of my milestones on campus. And as a matter of fact, I've got, you know, Mary Jo and John and Marcia all coming back to work on a project this fall with us for the radio show project.

**[00:13:54.990] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

So there's a sense of connection and community that I think contemporary students are missing and I feel for them. And so I try to help my students find that experience through my discipline and the best way that I can. And by engaging and and doing projects that that are creative and and really pull students into this process.

**[00:14:26.700] - Brian Shelton**

Hey, speaking of husbands you met, what would be your now husband at Harper College? How'd that work out?

**[00:14:34.500] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

I did. I did. It's the best story. It's the best story. We played husband and wife in a production of Chapter Two by Neil Simon when we were 19 years old. And we were very good buddies, super good friends. We we were we he used to date my boyfriend's sister. So we double dated a lot when we were young. We we spent holidays with his family, with with the sister, me, with the boyfriend, he was a guest at my first wedding, he's in my first wedding video.

**[00:15:08.370] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

When I married the other guy, which is hilarious with his Harper girlfriend and all those other Harper people that I met when I was 19 years old. So, yes, Sean and I met at Harper. Now, what I did not know at the time was that he was secretly in love with me, which I kind of love. You know, it's sort of romantic now that I realized that, but I was too young and stupid to understand any of that.

**[00:15:32.850] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

So so 15 years after that, after my first marriage dissolved and I found myself back in Chicago after being in other places, Sean and I had dinner and I found myself falling in love with him over a Buffalo chicken sandwich at Max and Irma's and I'm not kidding it literally, Brian, it was like a light bulb, like I had the buffalo chicken sandwich in my mouth and a light bulb came over Sean's head at, like in front of me. And I went, wait a minute, I'm sitting here complaining about somebody I'm dating with this wonderful guy who's saying all the things that I ever wanted to hear. And and so there you go, full circle.

**[00:16:16.550] - Brian Shelton**

It's a great story. I mean, we read so many interesting people at work, and I know..

**[00:16:20.810] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

I love our story and I don't think many people are aware of it. And as a matter of fact, they asked us to do a little film for the awards banquet thing that's coming up. And so they asked those of us celebrating twenty five years to give our fondest memory. And so I did do a little something and talked about the fact that meeting my husband, how could you know? Sometimes I still wake up and think, how did I get here all these years later? But here we are. It's a beautiful story. And so Harper's, you know, I'm a product of the community, like I said, K through 12 and Schaumburg. This was my community. This was my place. And I met my partner and I found my passion and I'm able to continue my art. And I'm a lucky, lucky woman.

**[00:17:12.020] - Brian Shelton**

After Harper, you went to to ISU. And then what happened after that?

**[00:17:17.930] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Well, I went to ISU and I studied theater with an emphasis in acting and directing. And I was an actor. I trained as an actor and I intended to be an actor. When I finished up at ISU, I actually long story short, I wound up at the University of Minnesota. U of M, on the Minneapolis campus for a year after I was done at ISU and I was in their graduate actor training program and it really wasn't what I was looking for.

**[00:17:52.460] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

So while I was at the University of Minnesota, I came upon the National Theater Conservatory and wound up wound up auditioning for the conservatory the next year. And then eventually I left Minneapolis and I went to the National Theater Conservatory, which was one of the premier actor training programs in the country. I studied, eventually went to the National Theater Conservatory, where I got my my master of Fine Arts degree with an emphasis on acting.

**[00:18:23.330] - Brian Shelton**



And then how did that lead back to Harper? How'd you get back here?

**[00:18:26.210] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

You know, I found myself working. One of the things that happened at the conservatory is that the company it was the Denver Center Theater Company, the conservatory was the educational component of that professional theater company. So the company had the option of picking you up when you were done as an actor, which they did. So I wound up getting my equity card as soon as I graduated and was hired by the company immediately.

**[00:18:52.280] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

It went right into working as an actor and I did that in a number of places around the country and across the world. I got to study in Moscow at the Moscow Art Theater when I was a student at the conservatory.

**[00:19:08.090] - Brian Shelton**

What was what was that like? What was that like studying in Moscow? And living there?

**[00:19:10.640] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Literally it was amazing. I mean, if you see this right here up on the wall, if I scan it up a little bit, you'll see April 10 through twenty nineteen eighty nine. And so I was there the year that communism fell, but before the end. So Gorbachev was in power, glasnost, perestroika. We were one of the first groups of students that was allowed to travel to the Soviet Union.

**[00:19:42.820] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

And now everything opened up dramatically in November of that year when communism fell. But I saw the last May Day parade on Red Square. I stood there and watched it in that May 1st of nineteen eighty nine. So. It was a fascinating, the most amazing experience and to study with some of the artists that I studied with this long, convoluted story, but I was there with the entire third year of the Juilliard School. So were two students from the conservatory, two from UCSD, two from UCLA and the entire third year of the Juilliard School, which included Laura Linney, Tim Blake Nelson, all that one who is in Big Love, Jeannie, Jeanne Tripplehorn.

**[00:20:32.040] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

I mean, it was it was a remarkable group of folks to be studying with. And we were all young. We were we were very young people. But and we one of our teachers was the great grandson of Constantine Stanislavski. So it was extremely exciting. And at the time, I had an acting teacher, my lovely Tatiana Bellona, Tanya Beloff, who teaches acting at North Carolina School for the Performing Arts now, but she was there with us as well.

**[00:21:06.840] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

So I was there with my student or my teacher who had defected, you know, a la Baryshnikov, you know what I'm saying? I mean, back in the day when it was difficult to get out, and so we went back with her. So it was just remarkable. It's an amazing experience. I remember watching an entire production of Uncle Vanya in Russian, which I didn't speak, and I was at the Mahad at the Moscow Art Theater. And I was I was so mesmerized.

**[00:21:37.020] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

It was like I understood every single word, you know, to see Russians doing Chekhov. I could never wrap my head around Chekhov because it's so culturally specific. OK, and what I realized, what I learned when I was in Russia was that our cultural heritage and background obviously impacts us and helps us to understand and wrap our head around things. I'll give you an example. When I was there, I watched the Russian students do a production of The Crucible by Arthur Miller.

**[00:22:14.440] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Now, Arthur Miller for us is like breathing. We understand what was happening when Miller wrote the piece. We know why Miller wrote the piece. We know about the the Red Scare. We know about McCarthy. We know about everything that comes into play. Well, when you're in Soviet Russia, they don't necessarily know that information. So they're playing the crucible with a cultural perspective that they can't even begin to wrap their heads around in the same way that I'm playing Chekhov and trying to understand a Russian family drama, trying to understand the makeup, the relationships, the nature of the family itself.

**[00:22:58.540] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

So I always struggle with Chekhov. And then when I got there, I saw them trying to do Miller. I went, oh, OK, I get it now. It's ingrained. It's inside of us. It's our DNA. You know, it's why my African-American students have have a connection in a way to the to say, for example, August Wilson's work that I can never wrap my head around fully. I'm a product of this culture. But but fully wrap your head around.

**[00:23:32.020] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

There's something in the DNA. So that's that was interesting to me to to see Russian drama done properly, then to understand how to interpret that and attempt to do it as an American actor. Fascinating. The other thing, Brian, that was really interesting is that, you know, American actors, what I learned was that American actors had really bastardized the Stanislavski system. You know, even, you know, Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler. And I love them.

**[00:24:03.400] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

And I did all the I've done all the emotional memories and the recalls and I get all of that. But I think in a sense, American actors have didn't fully understand what Stanislavski was trying to say when he said, we inhabit the character. Yes, we have to obviously have an a thorough understanding of the background of the character in order to address it. But sometimes, Brian, acting is really not particularly complicated. OK, there's certain roles that fit you like a glove.

**[00:24:39.970] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

And so you don't have to do much but breathes truth into them. And I think that we work too hard. I think that American actors tend to want to make something right. And in that desire to want to make something right, you make it wrong. You know, it's about listening, responding organically and truthfully. 95 percent of what we do is based on realism. But there is another five percent where we need that training. We need to understand how to use our bodies and our voices to get to those other places.

**[00:25:16.840] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

But acting is very easy. Once you make that discovery. It's shocking what you can do. It's shocking. I don't think a lot of young actors realize that. And I don't think a lot of I don't think a lot of acting teachers realize that. I think that we should be bringing our students toward organic truth and simplicity. And sometimes I think we complicate it. That's what I learned in Russia. Stop complicating it.

**[00:25:47.770] - Brian Shelton**

Don't don't make it so darn difficult. Right? Yeah. I have to tell you that as a as a former filmmaker and someone who's been exposed to quite a lot of theater doing tech and things like that, that one of my absolute favorite things is watching rehearsal. I love going to. And when I have the opportunity to sit for a week and watch the rehearsal of a stage play and see the actors doing their thing and seeing them grow into that role, I mean, and for you as a professional, that just must be and that as a director, it must be so very rewarding, especially when you get to performance night.

**[00:26:21.100] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

It is. And and, you know, the other thing it's so funny, you know, going back to that idea that our careers change, you know, there was a time that I could never imagine not acting. I could never imagine. I always tell my students I never needed a shrink until I stopped acting because I always had an outlet for all of those emotions and feelings that are part of what makes us human. And when I stop. Acting full time, I never I didn't have that outlet anymore, so it did become more complicated to to carry those burdens that I was able to release in performance.

**[00:26:57.590] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

But I've got to tell you, the thought of performing now is, I mean, it literally makes me makes my heart pound. I don't want to do it. The only the old and especially alone. I love singing with the Chicago artist, Corral. I do that still and I love doing choral work. And I will sing any day of the week. But don't ask me to solo. And you're talking you know, the other day I was sitting with my husband going over. He was like, sing me this song, see me that song, sing me the song, you know, pieces that I did when I was young, roles that I played that I sort of forgot that I played. And Brian, I swear to God, some of these songs were 10 frickin minutes long. I mean, you know, Mr. Snow from Carousel, it's like a 20 minute song. And I was thinking to myself, how did I do this?

**[00:27:50.480] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

How did I do this? Because the commitment physically was just mind blowing to me. So it's funny because my husband still enjoys acting and I don't not at all. So, you know, I'm always looking for the excuse as to why I don't have to do it. Like, for example, in the fall, I will direct the project. And as the director of the project, I will be very busy. So I I'm always looking for an excuse.

**[00:28:21.080] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

And it's not that I won't, you know, I mean, I you know, I did the voiceover work on that Zynga game. I mean, I, I enjoy doing things like that, but I just don't I don't want to be on stage.

**[00:28:33.350] - Brian Shelton**

It's so funny to hear you say that because I have a lot of former students are like, well, you're not a filmmaker anymore. And I'm like, no, I don't, I don't do any of that anymore. I, I take I no longer take any joy in the process of putting something like that together. Like I enjoy teaching other people about it. I enjoy showing things to other people so that they can understand it. But I just don't want to do that anymore.

**[00:28:57.080] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

That's exactly right. That's exactly how I feel. And I don't think a lot of artists get it because I realize that a lot of artists want to continue to do their thing, their thing, what they defined as their thing. But my thing is different now. I like the visual picture I am able to create. I don't I don't think of it as me. I think of it is how can I create a visual through sound and light and movement that moves an audience that that makes an audience feel?

**[00:29:31.820] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

That is the challenge for me. That is that is the challenge. And that is how. How. How I work with students and I have such admiration for their bravery, you know, I guess when you're young, you're just.

**[00:29:50.960] - Brian Shelton**

Brave or stupid, you know, one of the two.

**[00:29:55.340] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Or stupid, I don't know, I don't feel is brave anymore, right? I don't feel if I had to do it, yeah, I do it. But I think about even you know, the other day Mary Jo said, well, are you going to sing something? You know, you can sing something. No, I don't want to sing something. Don't make me sing something. You know, I'll sing with a group. But no. Yeah.

**[00:30:13.250] - Brian Shelton**

You know, a couple of years ago, they asked me to host the Ted X Expo at the Harper College. And I walked out onto the stage to speak for the first time. And I thought I was going to just lose my lunch on the podium. And it's like here you stand in front of people all day long, every day of the week, speaking to them and teaching and demonstrating. And then you walk out onto a stage and all of a sudden, like all of this wave of terror comes over you, you know. So, yeah.

**[00:30:37.640] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Well, it's the first moment, which is also. And that never went away, Brian. You know, I mean, I do remember I do recall like that first moment of getting on stage. And I always tell my actors, you know, I heard someone say this once and I can't remember the name of the actor, but he said the hardest part about doing a show was walking from your dressing room and getting on stage waiting for the curtain to rise. Because once the curtain rises and you begin, if you're a good artist and you're a good actor, you're there, you're just present and you live truthfully in the moment, whatever that moment is.

**[00:31:14.600] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

And so you're good. You forget about everything else. That's easy to do when you're an equity actor and you're doing 90 performances of Henry, the eight parts, one and two. You know what I mean? It's an easy thing to do to get on stage day after day after day and give those performances. It's complicated, Brian, when we don't do it as often and you and I don't do it as often. So, yeah. Can I stand up in front of a roomful of people and be charming and say everything that I need to say to make everyone have the best freakin experience ever? You bet your sweet Bippie I can. But it's not easy. It's it's not easy. It's a it's something that's that's difficult. It's it's it's a gift. And I'm glad that I can do it, but I don't think everyone understands how difficult it is.

**[00:32:06.950] - Brian Shelton**

Yeah. I've met so many people over the years who are professional speakers or work in a role that requires them to be a professional speaker. And if you really get to know them and really get the sit down

and talk to them, they're terrified of it. They hate it. They had every minute of what they do. And I always talk to my speech students back when I talk speech about that, that, you know, it's just something that you do. You have to harness that power within you and make it happen.

**[00:32:33.420] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Yes. And most of it is about it's about talking yourself into it. And as I say to my speech, students never let them see you sweat. I don't care if you're nervous. I don't care if you're scared. I feel for you. I empathize because I've been there. But don't tell me about it. Don't tell them about it. Don't walk up to that podium like you're afraid. Walk up like you own it, own it, fake it, fake it till you make it.

**[00:33:01.730] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

As I tell my students, fake it. And you know, Brian as well as I do that in time with insight into who we are. And as we become more secure with ourselves, this process gets a little bit easier for us. So now I can have this conversation with you easily where when I was a young person, I might have had to think, you know, time heals all fear in that regard.

**[00:33:28.780] - Brian Shelton**

I love what you're saying about faking it till you make it, because we say that all the time. And, you know, I advise the campus radio station. I have students who are coming there and they're terrified. And I'm like, you know, this is college radio. It is the safest place in the world to make a mistake like that. That is what we are all about. Go ahead. Go on there. Screw it up. I don't care.

**[00:33:45.590] - Brian Shelton**

I mean, try your best. Right.

**[00:33:47.450] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

And that's and that is the most important thing that I communicate to actors as well. You are so worried about doing it wrong that you making zero choices, you'll never get the job, make a mistake or mess it up. I can't tell you how many actors I've cast whose auditions were not super. They weren't. But it wasn't necessarily about the audition. It was about the energy or the nature of the person that drew me to them. But listen, it's like Michael Short leaves audition book.

**[00:34:23.990] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

One of the one of the twelve guideposts is game playing and role playing. Game playing. OK, as an actor, you better enjoy the audition process. Otherwise don't be an actor. Don't tell me I hate auditioning. Don't walk in the door like you're petrified. If that's how you feel, you're in the wrong business and there's nothing that I can do to change that for you. OK, rejection is part of the game.

**[00:34:49.610] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

It's part of. Again, gosh darn it, I love going into a room full of chicks that look like me when I was a young actor, I loved it. Come on, bring it up. Let's go. It doesn't mean that. I mean, or or cocky or overconfident. None of that. I know who I am. I know what my strengths are. Gosh darn it. And I know what my weaknesses are, too.

**[00:35:12.110] - Brian Shelton**

And I like what you say about making a mistake because it's something that I always address to students as well. Is that swing and miss. But swing, I mean, swing like you're going to hit it right out of the park, you know, and if you miss. But you took the swing.

**[00:35:27.320] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

So swing. Brian, a great story I tell my students about swing and miss. Right. I when I was young actor, I was auditioning for a production of nonsense and I had my song ready in my monologue, ready. And I knew there was a dance audition. I was always a pretty good dancer, but I never studied tap, OK, so I was not a tapper. So I went to the audition and I noticed all these other chicks had their tap shoes with them and I thought, Oh, did I miss something? Is this a tap audition? Because it's going to be an issue. And I mean, they were like stretching. They were ready to tap, you know, so we get in line. There's there's a there's a stage full of people. Generally, directors create rows. Right. And I position myself in the back row because I figure I'll have more time. They keep moving the rows forward in the front row, goes to the back and you keep moving forward.

**[00:36:21.860] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

So I position myself in the back row. There's probably five or six rows ahead of me that are moving up as we're learning this piece and as I'm getting closer to the front where they're going to really see me, I'm thinking to myself, I can't do this. I, I, I can't do this. This is not going to be good. This is going to be very, very bad. I'm going to look very, very bad.

**[00:36:41.780] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

So at the very last moment I said, OK, if I'm going to look bad, I'm going to look so freaking bad that no one's going to look at anyone else. And so I put on a dog and pony show that was horrifying. It was the worst dancing that you could ever possibly imagine. And I got the role. So don't don't don't make assumptions about what what people are looking for and understand that sometimes being brave enough to make a mistake or to do something wrong is the most exciting thing on stage.

**[00:37:24.620] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

It's called truth. That's why it's fascinating. That's why we can't take our eyes off of it, because it is simply truth. That's it. And that's why you let go into rehearsals, Brian, because you're watching truth and you're seeing actors who understand the character. But every single time they open their mouth in the scene, Brian, it's a new day. It's a new exchange. So there's the potential for a completely different exchange. And that's what we have to remember.

**[00:38:00.290] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

That's the best thing, the best advice I can give to young actors. Yes. Do I need to memorize the piece? Yes. Do I need to memorize where I'm moving? Yes. There are things you need to memorize, but every moment on stage has the potential for new truths, new truth. And when you find new truth on stage, oh, there's nothing like it's fantastic. It's so it's so it's so engaging. It is so thorough and complete. It's catharsis. And that's theater.

**[00:38:38.650] - Brian Shelton**

Yeah, I almost think we should sell tickets to rehearsals and skip performance, that's kind of ...

**[00:38:42.790] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Rehearsals are such a gas. They are just rehearsals aren't absolute gas. And after rehearsals, when I get in the car at 11 o'clock at night to drive home from Harper College, I remind myself, you know, yes, you're tired. Yes, it was a long day. And yes, you are one lucky lady to be able to do this, to be able to share what you love passionately with young people and old people and everyone in between. There are so few people that get the chance to have, to do a job that they really love and that's what I've the gift that I've been granted and it is a gift.

**[00:39:22.870] - Brian Shelton**

So you've been at Harper for twenty five years. That's a long and distinguished career at an institution, you know. Are you thinking about retirement or are you thinking about doing something different for you?

**[00:39:35.200] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Oh, baby doll, you know what? I'm I came to motherhood later in life than many. And so I've got a 16 year old and an 18 year old and my son's about. So there will be no retirement. So much for retirement. Right. So I've got to get my kids through college, Brian. And and then maybe but at the same time, I don't know. I don't think I can ever really stop working totally. Because what do you do? It just seems like a boring life. So I don't want to stop. And, you know, I thought about I have thought about being a little more active in terms of performance, mostly voice over and voice work, though I would like to transition into voice work. You know, I've got a lot of chops for that, so that may be something. So there may be a new career once this is done, we'll see.



**[00:40:29.770] - Brian Shelton**

Earlier you mentioned that you have a show coming up in the fall winter, a radio show. You would talk to us about that real quick.

**[00:40:37.750] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Yes, as a matter of fact.

**[00:40:40.210] - Brian Shelton**

Digging up the script in case. Sure.

**[00:40:42.910] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Yes, I have information. I just want to make sure I give you all of the correct information. So we are in the process of planning next year's season. And this year was tough because of the pandemic. You know, administration came to us last spring and said, what do what you can do? And so, you know, we we found a way to keep our program alive through virtual means and different mediums of of generating communication, which has been great.

**[00:41:13.990] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Next year, the fall will look somewhat the same in that the college is not opening up completely until, I think the spring of twenty twenty two. So next year, season in the fall, I'll be directing radio play of It's a Wonderful Life, which will be tremendously fun and will feature Harper College faculty and staff. Oh my gosh. I've had know not just the department, but I've had our dean say she's interested and I've had friends like Thom Lange say, please count me in.

**[00:41:50.050] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

So I've got to find some place for all of these people which I will find. And the nice thing about this radio play is that it offers you the opportunity to use as many actors as you need to. So that will happen December 12th and that will be a virtual presentation so people can be in the comfort of their own homes and flip on the computer and and watch the gig that way. And then my colleague Kevin Long will be directing Sense and Sensibility by Paul Gordon, which is based off of Jane Austen's emotional and beloved novels.

**[00:42:30.220] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

And so he'll be tackling that in, I believe, March 11th through 20th of 2022. And then I will be directing August Wilson's Fences. I'm so excited about this, Brian. I have tried for the last ten years to get any Wilson piece and I've kept running into issues and I thought, what's going on? So finally I reached out and

said, help. And they said, you know, the problem is it's a geographical hole because of our proximity to Chicago.

**[00:43:01.540] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

There's a lot of professional productions of Wilson's work that happens in the city. And because of our location, we're getting stuck in this geographical hold. So I begged and I told them, we're a community college. We have a unique situation. It's only six performances and they granted us permission. So I am so pleased and so proud. I've been teaching this piece the last 15, 20 years, this piece in particular, and working with Wilson with my intro to theater students, so I'm thrilled about it.

**[00:43:36.260] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

And Fences is, you know, for those of you who don't know, August Wilson is probably the most important African-American writer of the 20th century. He wrote a cycle of 10 plays. Each play represented a different decade in the century, and Fences is often viewed by some as his most realistic work, his most accessible work. I think it's easy for people to wrap their heads around that show because of the struggle between fathers and sons. And but I'm just thrilled.

**[00:44:12.990] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

And on top of everything else, we'll be performing that outdoors in the outdoor pavilion, which was built a few years ago for the purpose of performance, I might add. That was one of the reasons it was built. And this will be the first production that we that we we have outside.

**[00:44:33.350] - Brian Shelton**

So I'm really excited about that. And it's going to be really neat. Yeah, it's going to be fantastic.

**[00:44:38.030] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

And Fences is an outdoor play, too, so it's just perfect. It's a perfect setup. So, yes, next season promises to be different with with our pandemic winding down, hopefully fingers crossed this year, but then we'll we'll get back to it in the spring.

**[00:44:55.410] - Brian Shelton**

Well, the good thing is, is that we have had to, for better or for worse, adapt to so many different things during the pandemic that you can use all the lessons learned from that going forward and into shows and doing some some other stuff.

**[00:45:07.680] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

So that's been and that's been good for me, too. You know, I kid all the time about, you know, my simplicity when it comes to anything having to do with technology. And this has forced me to to attempt to use mediums of communication that I'm not as comfortable with. And there's nothing wrong with that.

**[00:45:29.780] - Brian Shelton**

So you've given a lot of really good advice over the course of this talk. But is there any one piece of advice that you'd have for potential students coming to Harper College?

**[00:45:39.980] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

I would say what I say to all of my students, please just take advantage of this place and please know that the people that you meet today and tomorrow, they will be a part of your lives. They will be a part of your future. You are creating your ethos. This is the chance for you to change mistakes you may have made in the past. Start fresh and new. Do it. Take responsibility for your life. Take responsibility for your education.

**[00:46:14.630] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Own it, earn it, enjoy it. Those are all the things that Harper can do for you. And I hope that our students will take advantage of every opportunity they have on campus, both academically and in terms of extracurricular activities. You know, like you said, you know, your radio students that come in and are actively engaged in campus life, these things matter, too, and these things future employers are interested in. So I want all of our students to understand that it's not just about what happens inside the classroom, but but what you do with that and how you apply that in a more practical way.

**[00:47:03.150] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

So just take advantage and enjoy and learn. And I hope that oh, and know that you will have some of the finest educators and teachers that you ever have and in your whole journey right here at Harper College. And you'll thank God for them years from now when they're writing you letters of recommendation to get you those jobs you so desperately want.

**[00:47:21.710] - Brian Shelton**

Thanks so much for being here, Laura. I appreciate it.

**[00:47:24.020] - Laura Pulio-Colbert**

Any time, sweetheart.

**[00:47:25.160] - Brian Shelton**

Laura Pulio is a professor of theater and Harper College alumni. If you're enjoying Harper talks, please subscribe. And while you're at it, rate and review us so that others might find us. Harper Talks is a co-production of Harper College Alumni Relations and Harper Radio. Our show is produced by Shannon Hynes. Our technical producers are Eric Bonilla Sanchez and Mary Renner. Our theme music was created by Aidan Cashman. I'm Brian Shelton. Thanks for listening.