



Insights into Ed Boone by Stuart Laing UK Tour 2015

As an actor I like to be hit emotionally by things and this play is dripping in that but without any kind of sentimentality. The story is told very truthfully and people relate to that; it's about these big universal themes of love and loss and guilt and redemption and overcoming adversity. Fundamentally it's about wanting to protect the people that you love.

All the characters are very flawed, very human: Ed makes terrible decisions but we all make catastrophic decisions when we're in a negative state. At the beginning of the play Ed has had a big fall out with Mrs Shears and this has brought up the previous trauma of Judy leaving him so we first meet him when he's in quite a traumatic place.

Ed is a working guy; he's out every day lifting, fixing and mending. He lives in his body not in his head and his job is a good distraction for him. That's when he's got an easy, practical, calm, sustained physical tempo to him; he's got weight but then he's gone through these traumas and he's tired all the time - he's exhausted, so I try and work on those physical qualities as a starting point.

Ed and Judy were very much in love; they were a working class couple who met when they were very young and then they had Christopher. They both worship him but the lack of help in the early years and lack of understanding about Christopher's condition and behaviour puts a great strain on their relationship. Ultimately when Judy leaves, Ed feels very betrayed; it shows his passion for her and for their family unit. He feels terrified and exposed in terms of bringing up Christopher on his own.

"He...started making some phone calls. I did not hear what he said. Then he came up to my room and said he had to go out for a while..."

In rehearsals we did quite a bit of improvisation to get the through-line of the psychology of the characters: we thought that after Ed talks on the phone to Judy he goes to meet her and we set up a scene in a cafe. Judy tells him she can't cope and the conversation intensifies, he asks if there's someone else; when Mr Shears is mentioned, he jumps on this as the reason for the rejection of him and Christopher - of course there's a lot more to it than that. But in the improvisation, it ended with Ed imploring her not to go and her agreeing to think about it as a way of appeasing him - it is just after this that Ed tells Christopher Judy is in hospital.

"I'm afraid you won't be seeing your mother for a while....She has a problem - a problem with her heart."

Judy takes some time to think things over and then of course she finally gives him the decision that she is moving away and so when he tells Christopher she's dead it's perhaps only a couple of hours and a few drinks after this - it's a kind of immediate response to a bereavement.

He knows it's damaging to Christopher to say this but the lying comes from a mixture of things: There's an initial desolation and anger at being left by Judy, but also he doesn't know how to emotionally express himself; he doesn't know how to explain to Christopher the reality of the situation and so he kicks it in the long grass for a bit and hopes it will get better and of course it doesn't - it gets worse.

For the 18-months that Judy is gone he knows he's done a terrible thing - he doesn't sleep at night, it eats away at him. When Christopher has the fit, Ed has a speech that shows a character full of remorse. It's a heart-breaking moment; he's laying all his cards on the table. He's saying he's sorry and it's with a genuine desire to save this desperate situation and that makes me feel a lot of empathy towards Ed - we see his vulnerability, his humanity and sensitivity.

"When your mum left...Mrs Shears... was very good to me. She helped me through a very difficult time. And I'm not sure I would have made it without her."

He's never said these things before - although amazingly during the course of the play he says lots of emotional things I don't think he's said this kind of thing in the past, and how many of us do actually tell the people that we love that we do love them; it can be embarrassing if you're part of a family who doesn't say this kind of thing.

So when Ed tells Christopher about the dog:

"I am going to tell the truth from now on. About everything. Because...if you don't tell the truth now, then later on it hurts even more."

The biggest lie he has told is about Judy and the second biggest is about the dog and he makes the decision at that split second, thinking that 'if he finds out about the dog he'll never believe me about anything'.

It's a shocking moment, it's great as an actor to know that you have that reveal coming but I didn't want to give anything away beforehand. When I first started in this role, in the scene when Ed and Christopher are at the Police Station, I had a very subtle reaction (like an inner flinch) to the information but now I try to show nothing because dramatically - for that



half of the audience who perhaps don't know that's the truth – it's genuinely shocking and I don't want to reveal that. I also don't want it to be a distraction about who's really guilty – it would take away from the dramatic impact.

He sometimes justifies his decisions but deep down he's a good man; when you've got a dark secret as a good person it eats you up. When he tells Christopher what he's done, he's full of remorse and guilt and begging for forgiveness. That final first-half scene between the two of them, we see him reduced to a broken man, a desolate human being who just wants his son to reach out to him and tell him it'll all be alright but knowing that won't happen; he has to pick himself up and be a dad and try and be strong again, Ed has to constantly just get on with things.

“Get some sleep and we'll talk in the morning. It's going to be alright. Trust me.”

The first half feels very dark for me: There's not a huge amount of respite but there's a moment when we see a different side to Ed; we see a connection in his relationship with his son. Christopher's talking about his day at school and its outrageous – there's a boy who's been eating his own poo - Ed finds it hysterically funny and Christopher is enjoying making his dad laugh.

There's a real moment there - it's lovely. In a play you only need to see that kind of thing once or twice to know that it's a part of the relationship. Ed is often imposing rules on Christopher; telling him what to do, but that's a unique moment where you see Ed enjoying Christopher – them having a laugh together.

It only lasts a few seconds and then it shifts to something completely different; to a sense of wonder. The way Christopher can look at rain and see it as something so poetic and lyrical – he thinks it's beautiful and wants to tell his son how brilliant he is; instead he just says he can be contacted on his phone.

“The rain looks like white sparks”

A lot of people really respond to that moment because you expect Ed to say 'Christopher I love you' and he doesn't but we know what he's feeling.

I like the contradictions; for example when he goes to see Mrs Gascoyne, he speaks with a sense of purpose but she's probably more educated than him and he's in a place where he feels a bit uncomfortable. So you get a nice tension and as an actor this gives you inner conflict that is good to be able to show. Even though the scenes are very short, the characters all have a lot of obstacles to

overcome from an acting perspective; Mrs Gascoyne blocking me is something that I need to overcome but also my inner guilt and sense of shame at not being able to tell Christopher the truth are inner obstacles that I need to be able to find a way to portray.

“When the red mist comes down...Christ you know what I'm talking about. I mean we're not that different me and you.”

That line shows that he's got a temper, a lightning reaction, even though he's described elsewhere as very patient, but then I think he's saying to his son, 'we're blood, we're family, I know you in a hundred different ways, we're from the same genes', and that's really profound and important.

I think Ed's anger comes from a mix of things; exasperation with his teenage son who's constantly challenging his dad as the main authority in his life. Ed can't talk to him about the problems he's got. He's doing his best and he's doing pretty well but he feels really lonely so he's got into the habit of coming home, pouring himself a few scotches, glazing over in front of the telly, probably thinking about whether he'll ever meet anyone again - so he's not always in the same place emotionally, he's on his nerve endings; he's such a swirling mess of rejection and anger and loss and then there's this deep guilt about the truth about Judy and Christopher is irritating him and winding him up...

“You knew exactly what you were bloody doing. I've read the book remember. What else did I say Christopher?”

When Judy comes back, we didn't want it to feel like happy families but there's a sort of truce. When Ed's asking about the exam, Judy sticks up for him, there's small olive branches being offered and they both see that; they're never going to get back together or at least in the scale of this story, but he knows that Christopher needs his mum and Judy knows that he needs his dad. That's a huge testimony to their characters; some people can spend their whole lives coming to terms with those kinds of things. Ed and Judy come to an understanding; we don't see that scene but it's important that comes across. They've resolved their anger but if everything was resolved we just wouldn't believe it.

It ends with a sense of hope otherwise it could actually be a very depressing story and that's clever. It's an uplifting piece of theatre to be involved in; I've found it an emotional play to do but not depressing – it's cathartic.

*Interview conducted by Melanie Whitehead
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