



[Holland Taylor on Ann Richards, Part 1](#)

By [Michael Barnes](#) | Monday, September 21, 2009, 10:13 AM

Emmy Award-winning actress **Holland Taylor** has been soaking up **Ann Richards** for more than a year now.

Taylor, regularly seen on “Two and a Half Men,” has been researching the late governor for a one-woman show, which she hopes will see first light in spring 2010.

Visiting Austin last week for an Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders fundraiser, Taylor took time out for a soft drink and unhurried ruminations about Richards inside the Hotel St. Cecilia courtyard.

“I started writing with a vengeance last March,” Holland says of the stage script. “It wasn’t that I felt ready. I’d been fitting the research into a fairly busy life already, and a job, and I’m not a kid. I could have gone on and on with the research, but I thought, with my years left, I better get this done. I’m going to be too old to remember anything.”

A classy, lively 66, Holland jokes about old age and end-of-life legacies. It’s hard to believe she’s serious. After all, she’s taking on an artistic challenge that would daunt the most eager, earnest greenhorn.

“It demands absolutely everything I’ve got,” she says. “Early on, I had an idea for the mis en scene (stage setting). I told it to a few people with real acumen. ‘That’s good,’ they said, ‘but don’t tell anybody.’ I kept it pretty close to my vest. Told a few of the Ann Richards bigwig people, who love the idea. I’m confident in it.”

A workshop production without full scenery or projections will be announced before Christmas, when the script is expected to be completed. If all goes well, a commercial production would follow. After all that study and writing, she’ll take weeks to memorize virtually every line (there are some offstage voices).

“It’s very exciting,” she says, “but then at moments I think: ‘What in the world have I done?’”



Holland Taylor on Ann Richards, Part 2

By Michael Barnes |

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Along with endless days in the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, mining banker-box files from the Richards archives that would fill four football fields, the project has placed her in a circle of Richards' former intimates.

"A lot of the people that I've interviewed, I've gotten to know. And I count them — and I think they count me — among their friends," she says. "These are her oldest friends, who were, often, also staff members: **Mary Beth Rogers**, who was her chief of staff, for instance, and **Jane Hickie**, her benign **Karl Rove**."

Years ago, Texas-born gossip columnist **Liz Smith** had introduced Taylor to Richards at a New York fundraiser. Yet the actress wasn't aware of the famed speaker's private life. Long conversations with family and friends have altered that.

"I came to know her as a living breathing person who was a mother and a wife, then a divorced wife and a boss and a fun friend," Taylor says. "I had no idea, for instance, how difficult she was, and what a temper she had. Every person I interviewed started out with some terrible story about some unbelievably difficult moment or some terrible time when they got dressed down, when they ran from her bawling and hid in a broom closet. Whenever they were telling this story about how she was mean as a snake to them, their faces beamed with beautiful smiles and their eyes were full of tears.

Because they
just loved her so much."

Taylor believes Richards could depend on personal loyalty in part because of her essential decency.

"She drove everyone, but they all knew she was working harder," Taylor says. "They also knew that her core values were so central, her core sense of fair play. Her lifelong dream was of a fair and just society. When she was a young woman, she and her husband were just impassioned about civil rights. It was the cause of their life. To right the great wrong."

More to come ...

[Holland Taylor on Ann Richards, Part 3](#)

By [Michael Barnes](#) | Monday, September 21, 2009, 02:36 PM

Holland Taylor has grieved a bit about how much of Richards' story won't make it into the play.

"I came into the room where I mostly work, which was the guest room; now it's Ann's room," she says. "All of her (stuff) is in there. Stacks and stacks and stacks of DVDs, papers, files, notes, reprints, references, books. I came in one night and I had just sent off a big chunk of the play out to my agent. Tears started to well in my eyes, and I became so sad. I realized: All the things I know. I know so many wonderful details. And God is in the details. I can't put them in the play! I can't get them in! It's 100 minutes.



"Then I calmed down because I realized: 'You had to get all those things in you. So you know her, so that what you do put in, is true.' It's not only true, it's well chosen, in that I'm putting in things that don't need some outside standard. It's not a narrative or history. It's a play. She's there. The things that I have her talk about are often homely details, the things that really interested me. If this is really interesting to me, the audience will be interested."

A 100-minute play about Richards is not a comprehensive biography, which, after all, journalist **Jan Reid** is already writing.

"If I had to write a biography of her I'd be in the home by now," Holland quips. "The scope is just too great. What amuses me, is in the play. What interests me, is in the play. And what adds up to a coherent impression."

Taylor believes she has tapped into something bedrock about the late politician.

"I think of her so often," she says. "I don't have a profound belief in the spirit world or our connections after life. I think I'm sort of like Ann in that way. She was generally practical and so am I. But every so often, I've felt her presence. She has really altered my life, lifted me up to a more meaningful plane."

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