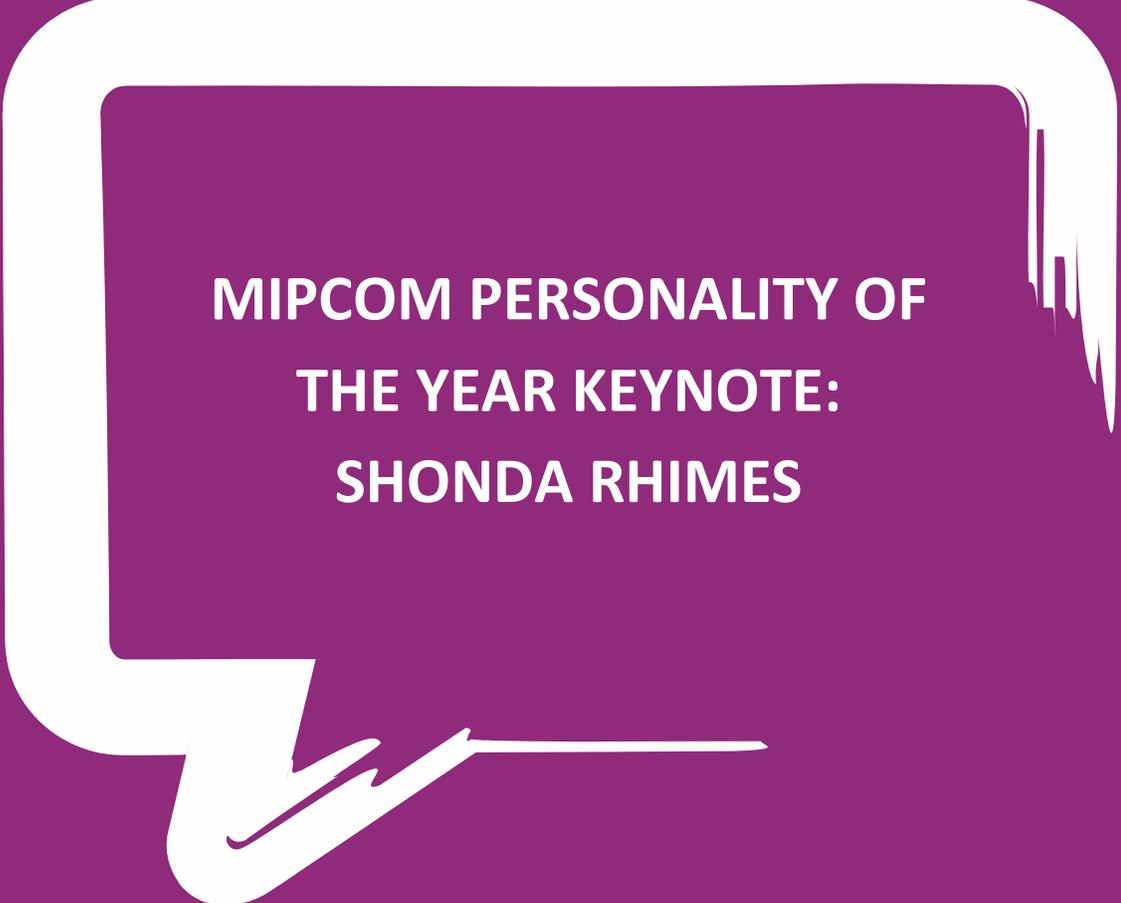


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**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Hello everybody, I bet you're as excited as I am to be here. Shonda, thank you. I grew up with my father, who was an artist, and the creative process to me is endlessly fascinating, so I thought maybe we could look into the creativity and, not that you will reveal any secret sources, but the toolbox that you use in giving us these kinds of moments. I wanted to start with at what age did you start telling stories, making up characters? Was that even before you could write?

**Shonda Rhimes**

Yes, I think I was always a storyteller. People always ask that question, "When did you know you were a writer?" I don't think that there was a time when I ever thought of myself as anything but. I really was making up stories into a tape recorder and trying to get my mum to type them up before I could write myself. That's sort of how we spent our time as kids, my sisters and I.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Right, and at what point did the idea of becoming a screenwriter enter your head?

**Shonda Rhimes**

In a weird way, that was kind of out of necessity. I thought I was going to be a novelist. I really had these big plans to be Toni Morrison, and Toni already had that job, so you can't really get that job. I got out of college and I didn't know what to do with my life and my parents are professors and very much wanted me to go to grad school, and they did not want me to be a writer because writers did not make a living - they didn't want me to starve - and I read an article that said it was harder to get into USC Film School than it was to get into Harvard Law School. That sounded to me like my parents couldn't say there was a problem with that because it was harder than Harvard Law School, and I told them that I could teach if I went to film school and I could go into the writing programme and that sounded great to me. I applied and I got in and so I went, and it wasn't until I was there that I really seriously thought, "Oh wait, I really like this." I was mostly just trying to find a way to stop working, honestly, and go back to school.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Now, your first screenplay was for film, though, right? You didn't start in television right away, is that correct?

**Shonda Rhimes**

No, I thought I was going to write film and back then, I got out of film school in '90 something and, at that point in time, film really was what was happening. Television wasn't as big at the time. Sitcoms were big - it was sort of the Seinfeld era - but dramas weren't as big at the time, and so movies really did feel like where it was at. Independent film was really big and I thought I would write movies at the time, so I started out doing that.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

And you did, right?

**Shonda Rhimes**

Yes, I sold spec scripts and things, but my first produced project was Introducing Dorothy Dandridge, which starred Halle Berry for HBO.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Fantastic. All right, so from that how did Grey's Anatomy come about?

**Shonda Rhimes**

After that I started writing I like to call them teen girl movies. I wrote Crossroads and I wrote Princess Diaries 2 and I enjoyed it and it was a living and it was great, but there wasn't a lot of character development going on in those movies. These were more blockbustery kind of films. But then I had a baby. I adopted a baby and I was at home a lot and what you realise when you're home that much is there's a lot of television to be watched and I started really watching television, and I watched I think it was the television show 24. I watched an entire season of 24 in 24 hours and I loved it. I thought, "Wow, this is where all the character development's happening. This is really interesting." I watched, I think, three seasons of Buffy in four days, and babies never sleep and so you're always awake and you're watching, and it was genius to me because that's where you could really develop characters. I remember calling my agent and saying, "I want to do TV," and he sent me over to ABC Studios, which then was called Touchstone. I had a meeting and they said, "You want to write TV, that sounds great, let's try it out," and we tried it out and Grey's Anatomy was the result. Yes, the first year I wrote a pilot about war correspondents, for which I wrote the script and I was really proud of it and it was a really great experience. It didn't get made because it was about war correspondents and they were having a lot of fun drinking and being very competitive and having a lot of sex while covering war and we were at war, so that did not

feel very appropriate. The next year, I remember asking very clearly, “What does Bob Iger want to see?” They said, “Bob Iger wants a medical show,” and I love to watch surgeries, I used to love to watch all those surgeries on the Surgery Channel, I'd been a candy stripper, I thought it was very interesting and so I wrote a medical show about people who are very competitive and had a lot of sex and really enjoyed being competitive and doing these things while doing surgery, and that was Grey's Anatomy.

### **Anna Carugati-Guise**

What did you learn after that first season? What were the lessons?

### **Shonda Rhimes**

What did I learn after that first season? Oh my gosh! It's a really interesting job because you go from being a movie writer, where you're at home in your pyjamas by yourself and you type one script a year – literally, I would spend 300 days doing nothing, 40 days thinking and 15 days writing and one day celebrating the fact that I'd written something - to suddenly you have to churn out a script every eight to nine days, you have 300 people working for you and you have to run a writer's room and you have to know what you're doing. So it was zero to 3,000 in an instant, and if you're a very introverted person, if you've never held any other job before but possibly being an assistant, it was pretty intense, so I learned a lot. I learned pretty much everything you could possibly learn as fast as possible.

### **Anna Carugati-Guise**

So a baptism by fire. Let's stick with Grey's just for a second. Last TV season, 2015/2016, Grey's, in its 12th season if the data I saw is correct, was the third highest rated network drama in the 18 to 49 demographic, so the question is how do you approach the show each season in order to keep it fresh and interesting for the viewers?

### **Shonda Rhimes**

I always try to think of the fact that Meredith Grey has been on a journey now for 13 seasons. It's not the same show every year and, even though there is a procedural element, every week there are medical stories and every week there are medical cases and you're watching her solve them and you're watching how doctors do things, it is a character journey. I feel like I've been writing a novel for 13 years and Ellen Pompeo, who plays Meredith Grey, and I have been locked together in this very interesting journey for a very long time and because she is fearless - show me without

my makeup, go ahead and cut back to me 12 years ago, watch this journey happen, watch me age on screen, all of these wonderful things - we get to really watch somebody evolve on camera. Every season what I try to do is look at each season as if it's a completely different show, not as if we're going to tell the same story we told last season, or we're going to try to repeat the feeling we got the last season, but where is Meredith now? How do we make that story feel interesting and how are we going to tell it?

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

You told me in a previous interview that, at the beginning of the season, you know what the last episode will be and you work towards that. Is that how you approach planning out the season?

**Shonda Rhimes**

That's how I approach Grey's, yes. On Grey's, I know how it's going to end and we start with that last episode in mind and go and try to get there, basically.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

After Grey's came Private Practice. What is it about the medical profession that fascinates you? You've written so many medical procedures, would you feel able to perform any now?

**Shonda Rhimes**

If anybody here wants to give birth, I could perform a C-section, I'm very sure of it. If you need an appendectomy, I know that I could do that from beginning to end. Don't fall and hit your head, because I will do all kinds of procedures to your brain. I think I know how to do them backwards, forwards and sideways. I'm probably very dangerous because I know just enough to be scary, but not enough to actually save anybody's life. But what's great is that you get excited about this stuff. What I love is that profession is filled with life and death experiences. On a bad day, you actually kill someone, that is the point of the job; and on a good day, you save someone's life. When you have a creative thought in that job, you are inventing a new medical procedure that's going to change the way someone lives or dies or breathes or moves. In our job, when I have a creative thought, it just changes a story, so there's something really visceral about that job that I love. I also loved, especially in the beginning, the cutthroat nature of it for women. There really were about six women out of 20 for every medical class, which is what they say in the pilot. That was interesting to me, to be in a place where you were so overwhelmed by the men in the programme and thought to be less than. That's no longer true. There are a lot more women who are surgeons

now, but at the time that felt like a fascinating world to enter. Private Practice came along, though, because the president of the network at the time, Steve McPherson, said, "I want a spin off," and I'm nothing if not obliging, I'm a very straight A student and I thought, "Well, ok, let's make a spin off," and really started thinking about it and I really loved the character of Addison, who had come on to be just a guest star and ended up staying. There was something about that character and who she was and what she could be that felt interesting to me and I thought, "How can we make that a show?" What was great about Private Practice was it was very different to Grey's. Grey's was about the surgeons and how they felt about their patients. Private Practice was about the moral and ethical dilemmas of medicine, which was very different.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Right, absolutely. Then we were blessed with Scandal. That's a whole different kind of show.

**Shonda Rhimes**

Completely different world, yes.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

How did that one come about?

**Shonda Rhimes**

I had two shows going at the time. I was exhausted and Betsy Beers kept saying, "There's this woman that I really think you should meet. Her name is Judy Smith. She is a Washington fixer," and I kept saying, "That's great, but I'm not writing any more shows. I don't have time to meet anybody," and she said, "Well, just meet her. We have to meet her because I set up this meeting," so I said, "Ok, we'll give her 15 minutes." So Judy Smith came in and she had done everything from representing Monica Lewinsky to getting Clarence Thomas through his hearings. She'd done a ton of things and she came in, she sat down, we started to talk and I think it was about four hours later I looked up and thought, "I'm hungry." That's the only reason why I looked up and I realised that there was a show in there. There were hundreds of episodes in what this woman did for a living. It was fascinating and I was stuck. I was stuck because now there were all these stories in my head and that was a show. It took about a year for me to write that show. I kept thinking, "I'll put it over there," and then I went away for, I think, maybe four or five days and I wrote the script and came back and turned it in and said, "Ok, this will be a show." But it's been a lot of fun.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Oh yes. How often have you and your writers come up with events that then actually played out in real life? What do you do in those situations?

**Shonda Rhimes**

A lot of times we write things that end up being disturbingly real. It started with Thorngate. We came up with this concept of Thorngate - your phones can listen to what you're saying or doing, anybody can tap into your phone and pay attention to you, your computers can be switched on to watch you – and we made all this stuff up and we thought it was really funny and we thought it was really awesome and then three months later we found out it was real, there were all these articles about it. We thought that was interesting. Then it just kept happening in these ways. We'd make things up and think we were being really cute and smart and fun and then it would keep going. Somebody in the room was like, "I think we're witches or something." I said, "We're not witches, it's just weird." By the time we got to Hollis Doyle, our outspoken, crazy Republican guy running for President, who said really appalling things... I don't know. I really don't know what's happened.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Let's leave it at that. Now, the Scandal cast seems particularly closeknit and tight. What are the advantages as the showrunner of having that kind of atmosphere on your set?

**Shonda Rhimes**

It's a really good thing to foster, to have a group of people be that close to one another. They're a really closeknit group of friends and part of what I've learned is that it makes sense to just try to create an environment in which everybody wants to be together in a non-competitive world in which everybody really feels like they are a family. What makes it wonderful is this is a group of people who would show up and rehearse on their lunch breaks because they wanted to rehearse because they thought it would be fun. They spend time together outside of work. We get together on Sunday nights to watch the show so that everybody's ready to live tweet together. There's just a sense of family there. They're very bonded. A lot of creative things happen, a lot of fun things happen just because everybody is so close and hangs out together in their free time, in their extra time. That's just how it goes.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Whose idea was it to start the live tweeting?

**Shonda Rhimes**

We got everybody on Twitter. Kerry came to me and said, "You're on Twitter, I'm on Twitter, we both know what Twitter's like, we should get everybody on," so we got everybody on Twitter. I was already live tweeting things and so we got everybody live tweeting. Kerry and I got everybody live tweeting almost immediately, and what was great was it wasn't just the cast. The cast was live tweeting, the crew was live tweeting, the directors were live tweeting and then other writers were live tweeting, my researcher was live tweeting. Then fans were live tweeting and then journalists were live tweeting along with us. After a while, it felt like you have this lovely community online of people who are all doing it together. I remember our ratings were ok the first season, and then somewhere in the middle of second season Oprah started live tweeting along with us, and that changed everything.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

That's right. For the benefit of the people in the audience who are not from the United States, the showrunner is a very American figure. It doesn't really exist to the extent that it does in the US in other countries. Can you give a brief definition of the span of responsibility?

**Shonda Rhimes**

Yes. In American television a showrunner is - and it's kind of an odd word because it doesn't truly, I don't think, accurately cover it, the job is very different for everybody - the head writer on a show who both runs the writers' room and runs the production of the show. You can't just be the person who runs the writers' room and you can't be just the person who runs the production of the show, you have to do both. You are in charge of what's happening on the set in a lot of ways and you're in charge of what's happening in the room. You're in charge of the creative vision of the show overall. That goes to budget and it goes to keeping the actors happy and healthy and taken care of and it goes to keeping the stories happening and the trains running on time, as I like to say, which means scripts coming in on time and things happening when they're supposed to.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Right. Now, at Shondaland, your company, there are shows that are produced for which you are not the showrunner, so what is your relationship on those shows, which are How to Get Away with

Murder; The Catch and the new one that we'll talk about in a minute?

### **Shonda Rhimes**

Yes. On How to Get Away with Murder and The Catch, my job, especially when we're not in the first season of a show -in the first season it's different - and I haven't created the show and I'm not running the show, my job is really just dragon in a cage, I like to say. I'm the dragon that Pete can release out of a cage for How to Get Away with Murder when he feels like he needs some extra power behind him to talk to the studio or the network about something. I'm the dragon he can release from the cage when he has some creative issues that he needs help with. We joke about that because in first season of Grey's, I used to call Mark Gordon, who was our non-writing executive producer on Grey's Anatomy, my dragon because he was the most powerful person on our show and I would say, "I'm going to go release Mark Gordon from his cage," when we needed him and so I will say to Pete, "I'm your dragon," so I'm Pete's dragon. The same thing for Allan Heinberg at this point on The Catch, I try to do that for him as well. Creatively I'm there if he needs me, but generally these are people who really know what they're doing, so they'll pitch me their seasons, we'll talk about them, I'm always making sure I'm on board, but there hasn't been a time when I haven't been on board yet, so we're doing really well in that sense.

### **Anna Carugati-Guise**

Now, for a script that you write, you come up with the storyline, you create the character. How do you then work with an actor, and choose any example you want, because you write the words, but the actor brings that person to life, but that must be a collaborative process, isn't it? How together do you bring a character to life that we then see on screen?

### **Shonda Rhimes**

I do, and I do really think it's a collaborative process. I think it's very important to look at it that way. I don't think a character is a character until an actor is inhabiting that role. It's always been that way in my mind. You can think of the character as being one way, but until an actor's been cast, that character has not fully had life breathed into it. For instance, Dr Bailey, played by Chandra Wilson. Dr Bailey was first imagined as being a short, adorable, blond-haired, blue-eyed sweet faced woman. She was the only person in the script for whom there was a physical description written, literally. Chandra Wilson came in and read the part and Dr Bailey became a short, adorable black woman in a completely different way who had a very different attitude, who wasn't sweet and wasn't warm and cuddly in that sense. She was just a very different, more no-

nonsense hardworking woman. What was great about that was her interpretation of the character just made the character different and that became who Dr Bailey was for me completely without question, which was wonderful. What happens a lot is my contract with all of the actors is you will say all the words as they are written. We're not going to discuss the text of the words. The words are text, that's just the way they are. However, while I'm not going to change the words, I'm also not going to go down to the stage and tell you how to say them or how to interpret them in any way, shape or form.

What I love about that is that you then get these performances back that inform whatever's going to happen next. Cyrus Beene on Scandal, for instance, there was something about his explanation about why he would never be President and his rage about that, and there was the way he was playing it that said to me he has these things, he's a Republican, he's smart, he's strong, he's this, he's that and I said, "He has a husband. He has a husband that he's been protecting in this whole different way," and I ran up to the writers' room and I said, "Cyrus Beene is gay and he has this husband and we need to introduce him so that we can play out the fact that he has somebody that he loves." It just worked really beautifully, to have his anger and his secrets and his destructive powerful nature play out against the backdrop of a marriage with a wonderful man who is just waiting for him to be better than he could ever be, and then to have that man, I don't know, spoiler alert, die. But it was really great to watch how that performance was shaped by that and then to continue to watch. As the show plays out, the performances change the writing and the writing changes the performances.

### **Anna Carugati-Guise**

Fantastic. I know that Peter Nowak is the showrunner for How to Get Away with Murder, but if we can spend a moment on Viola Davis, who is a force of nature. How is that relationship? Is that different from the one you have with your actors?

### **Shonda Rhimes**

Yes, and I do think that each one of us works differently. Pete works very differently. Pete and Viola have an amazing relationship which I love and Viola's extraordinary, I mean truly extraordinary. I honestly think that you could take pages from the phone book and give them to her and she could stand up on the stage and you guys would be weeping, that's how good she is. But Pete's relationship with Viola is there's a writer in her soul; there's a producer part of her, but there's a part of her that is a writer, so Viola will come and she'll pitch scenes. When we talked to

her for the very first time about playing the part of Annalise Keating, she's the one who said, "I want to play a scene where I take off my wig and I take off my makeup and you see who I truly am." That was her pitch, that was her story pitch and it is the best thing that happens in that show, it's amazing. She also often pitches storylines for herself. She pitched Cicily Tyson being her mother, not the actress, but the idea of seeing her mother and who she was and where she came from. She pitches really interesting, lovely stuff and she and Pete are very collaborative in that way. They discuss storylines, they debate about the, they have these great talks, and for Pete it's really valuable, he loves it and it works for him. It would make my hair stand on end just because of the way my brain takes in story. However, Kerry and I have lots of long discussions about things that are going to happen way in the future because she has such a great head for politics as well and those things often end up feeding into the story too, but it's just different. We have different styles.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Tell us about the new show that is coming up mid season, correct?

**Shonda Rhimes**

Yes. We have a new show which is created by Heather Mitchell, who is another long time Shondaland writer. She wrote on Grey's Anatomy, she wrote on Scandal and now she's got this new show. It currently does not have a title. We're calling it the Untitled Shondaland project at the moment. All of our shows were called Untitled something at first. It's sort of a sequel to Romeo and Juliette, it's what happens after Romeo and Juliette die. We jokingly call it Romeo and Juliette Are Dead Right Now, but it's really the story of what happens to the families, the Montagues and the Capulets who've been left behind and how they're going to cope and what happens to the town of Verona and the struggles that go on with who's going to take the throne and how it's going to work and all of the politics that come with that.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Cool. You mentioned that you had people who started for you as writers and who are now showrunners. Has that been important to you to have people in your company, see them grow and allow them to grow?

**Shonda Rhimes**

It's really been probably the best and most exciting thing about getting to have this company, to

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bring in/find talent and watch them grow and bring them up through the ranks. Stacy McKee, who was an assistant on the pilot of Grey's Anatomy, is now the head writer on Grey's Anatomy. It's wonderful to have people that have been here and you bring them up and give them these opportunities, but it's also just at this point how we work it. The writers who learn how to tell story the way Shondaland tells story, which is really through character and about character. I always say story is best told by saying what's the worst possible thing that could happen in this moment to the character and then make that happen and then get them out of it. That sort of storytelling, you learn really well while working in Shondaland. We hire our assistants and we know that they have potential to be writers and from there on up, that's how we promote our writers, that's how we train them and so they come through there; and then we find people who are interesting and they're great and they've been working at our company in other capacities, and we think, "Wow, we should give them more responsibility," if it's post production, if it's production, if it's anything. We really want to keep people and we want them to stay. We have people who have been with us for 13 years or more, just because we like our people to stay.

### **Anna Carugati-Guise**

As you have evolved from writer to showrunner to the head of a company that employs several hundred people, I imagine, what has your learning curve been? What new skills have you had to acquire?

### **Shonda Rhimes**

I think I've learned a lot, really going from being somebody who all I had to do was think about writing and the story to thinking about managing and leading a lot of people. It's going from thinking about just you to thinking about a couple of thousand people. Five shows is a couple of thousand or, I don't know, some thousand people or so, plus the people who work at the company, plus all the fans who are watching, plus all the people who work at the studio and the network who are the satellite people who are working with you on your shows that are your partners. You become responsible to your partners and then for all the people who work for you. Part of that is trying really hard, and this has been something that I just really am starting to feel like I'm getting a handle on, to make sure that people feel valued when they come to work, not feel like they are working, but feel like they are coming to work and feeling valued there so that they're enjoying themselves at work. I always say that work should be fun and if work isn't fun, then maybe we're doing it wrong, because it is a creative endeavour and it should be for everybody who's doing it, so that's really the goal at this point.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Of all the things you have to do, is writing still what you consider your most important thing or your favourite?

**Shonda Rhimes**

It is now. I think there was a period in this journey of learning how to manage all of the things that I do, which is a lot of things, where I've felt like there are so many things I have to do, it's just a piece of it and I wasn't as happy. I was doing publicity and I was doing business and I was doing all of these things and I realised that is not, frankly, what ABC Studios is paying me for and that is not what I came to do this job for and that is not what I love. What I love is storytelling and so my job, really, as a manager and a leader was to find ways to make it possible to have other people do the other things as much as possible, to make room for myself to be more of a storyteller most of the time.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

So to delegate?

**Shonda Rhimes**

Yes, and that's the other thing. If you're a control freak, it's very difficult to learn how to delegate, and so I spent some time really working on learning how to delegate so that those other jobs could be entrusted to people who obviously know what they're doing so that I could spend time doing the thing that I know how to do.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Now, when you write, does your job require that you be able to write anywhere? Or do you have favourite places?

**Shonda Rhimes**

I can write anywhere and I've trained myself that way simply because, when you have small children and when you travel and when there's so many shows at so many different locations, you really have to figure out a way to write anywhere. Basically, my Pavlovian reflex is as long as I have headphones on my head and music in my ears, I can write wherever I am, it doesn't matter. I don't have to be in a specific place. The headphones are the thing that transport me.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

I've spoken to showrunners and writers who actually dread sitting down and the writing process, but they're happy when they have the finished script. Do you enjoy writing? Does it take you to a zone? Tell us a little bit about what you experience.

**Shonda Rhimes**

I do enjoy writing. I think there was a time when I didn't, where I dreaded the getting there, the forcing myself to access the place where the writing could happen, but I really enjoy the writing process now. I think that because it's been such a habit and because I have to do so much of it, and because there's not a lot of time to think about how much I don't want to do it, there's just not, there are too many scripts to be written. I really enjoy it. I enjoy getting to go sit in the world of the hospital. I enjoy getting to be Meredith Grey for a while. I enjoy getting to be Fritz, or getting to be Liv, or getting to be any of those characters. It's fun. My assistants will tell you, bless their hearts - I'm glad none of them have recorded this – that I say all the dialogue aloud while I'm writing, very passionately, and I act it all out and it's embarrassing. I don't hear it because I'm wearing headphones and there's music playing, but I do, and apparently Betsy makes fun of me. Betsy Beers, who's my producing partner, makes a lot of fun of me because she's in the office across the way, but it's very important to me to make sure that it feels all right and everything acts out well, and I think that it's a little bit of play action. It's a lot of fun for me. When I was a kid, I used to hang out in the pantry of my kitchen and play with the cans in there and it's a little bit of still hanging out in the pantry playing with cans and pretending that they're doing things. I enjoy it a great deal.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Do you tap into the characters when you have to sit down and write and put in the headsets? Or could you be driving or doing something and you'll hear Meredith say something or Olivia Pope say something?

**Shonda Rhimes**

No, that does not happen for me. Look, I'm not a person who I'm doing something else and suddenly the characters are speaking to me. I've heard of that, but that's not me. It feels very magical, it doesn't happen.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

You have all the scripts to write, you have all the work you do, and there's little time to do everything and yet you found time to write a book that quickly became a bestseller, and by the way it's great. I'm not just saying that. How did this come about? Why was it important for you to write this and find even more time in your day to write?

**Shonda Rhimes**

I honestly don't know. My agent will tell you that I said, "Oh, I want to write a book," and I feel like he very kindly didn't say, "You do not have to write a book." He said, "Sure," and made a book deal. It was supposed to be about motherhood, and then I realised I didn't want to write a book about motherhood, so a year went by and I hadn't written my book and time was running out. I had been doing this sort of weird year of yes thing where I had been trying to make my life less workaholic-like, which is really what it started at. I had become a workaholic and that was all that I was doing and I wasn't enjoying writing as much and I'd really been trying to find a way around that. That became what the book was and, in writing about doing it, it made it even better. I was able to examine why I was doing it and why I had been such a workaholic and, in a lot of ways, that helped make the change. So it was really a matter of the same way I like to write anything and the same way writing doesn't ever feel like work. That did not feel like work. The writing part never feels like work.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Now, I imagine that you care deeply about all your characters, obviously. Are there any with whom you've felt particularly attached or you've felt that you worked some issues of your own out through them?

**Shonda Rhimes**

All of them. It's interesting - I know that everybody wants me to say Cristina Yang, because that's what I wrote about in the book, but that was because Sandra was leaving that year and I feel like I was grieving the loss of Cristina Yang at that particular point in time. But the reality of it is it's all the characters. Every last character is somebody that you're working something out through or you're feeling particularly attached to. You're a storyteller, you're telling stories, all of your characters should matter. If they don't matter to you, then you shouldn't be telling stories about them, I think.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Are there any that you feel we as viewers perhaps misunderstand? Cyrus? Rowan?

**Shonda Rhimes**

Yes, actually. We have big arguments about this in my writers' room at Scandal. My writers are constantly telling me that Cyrus is a terrible person or that Rowan is a terrible person, and I'm really offended by that because Cyrus is a patriot. He really does feel like he is doing what is best for his country. He might go about it the wrong way, but in his mind the ways that he is going about it are completely incorrect. Rowan is just a dad trying to take care of his kid. There might be a lot of murder going on, but he is still just a dad trying to take care of his kid the best way he knows how and, to me, I truly look at it from that perspective and I don't understand how you could think that he was a terrible person if you go from his reality and the way his world works.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Now, you write for Broadcast Networks, which in the United States has to comply with more standards and practices than cable or HBO Showtime. Have you ever been in a situation where you butted heads with somebody and it was hard for you to follow the vision that you wanted for a particular episode? Hmm, silence.

**Shonda Rhimes**

I'm trying to figure out how to answer this without getting in trouble. Yes. But what's interesting is now, because honestly it's been 13 years of broadcast standards and practices, there's no way to do 13 years of broadcast standards and practices and not butt heads with Broadcast Standards and Practices. There are a lot of broadcast standards and practices. However, what's interesting is that over the years, stuff has changed and it's evolved. I think before I started working in television, the standards were really loose, oddly, and then they got tighter again - I think there was an NYPD Blue era, as I like to call it, where it was really loose - and then everything got tighter again and then things have reached a nice place where it really does feel like it's realistic. A lot of it is really about how, frankly, America has changed. Really, the standards have changed to match the American people, the same way gay marriage is now legal in every state in the nation, you can now show a gay couple kissing on television and it's not a big deal. I remember in season two or three of Grey's, when Cali was dating somebody and she was going to run her hand up a woman's thigh or something, it was a big deal, I had to fight for it. I had to threaten to call Glad or something ridiculous like that. That seems really silly now and almost puritanical, but

at the time it was a huge moment. Now, none of those things are such a big deal. Feminist moments aren't as big a deal. Olivia Pope has an abortion because Olivia Pope has an abortion and it's not a Broadcast Standards and Practices moment in that same way.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Right. Well, our time is coming to an end but I want to sneak in a couple of comments because I would like to speak on behalf, I'm sure, of the audience and the viewers at home and say thank you, because you don't only provide us with great entertainment, but I have found in my life that you have provided usable moments, and I'll give you a couple of examples. When my teenage daughter became overly infatuated with a boy, as females of all ages tend to do, and she was starting to think that her self-worth was in the boy's being and not in her own being, I sat her down to one of the many scenes between Cristina and Meredith when they said, "You're the son. He's not the son, you're the son," and is your daughter almost a teenager now, the eldest?

**Shonda Rhimes**

I have a 14 year old

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Are you beginning to see how she doesn't pay as much attention to you as she used to?

**Shonda Rhimes**

My daughter thinks my shows suck.

**Anna Carugati-Guise**

Ok, all right. So if I had told her, "Be your own son," she would have checked out. The fact that it was coming from you, thank you very much, because she started to see the world a little differently. When my son came out a year ago in his 20s, later compared to other people, he was concerned about how to have certain conversations with prospective partners and I pointed him to Connor and Oliver in *How to Get Away with Murder* and that nailed it, so thank you very much. In your book - working moms out there, you've got to read it - there's this thing in the United States where parents of young school age children have to bake things and bring them to school and the stay-at-home moms, and I don't mean to imply they don't work, ok, it's just that there are certain moms who bake through the ceiling and some of us can't and don't have the time and you made me feel less badly about store-bought cupcakes, when I would come in with store-bought

cupcakes and they'd look at me as if I were the devil incarnate, so thank you for making me feel better about myself; and please, all of you, join me in thanking Shonda. Thank you for the gift of entertainment you give us.

**Shonda Rhimes**

Thank you everybody. Thank you.