In improvisational theatre, it’s crucial that the players “make offers” (present ideas to the other players) and “accept offers” (add something to the offers to further the scene’s action). It’s a “Yes, and....” approach to the work that makes it succeed. I had a teacher who personified this principle in and beyond the theatre classroom.

I entered college focused on a precise career path: to be a theatre teacher. In my junior year at The Catholic University of America, I took Dr. John C. (“Jack”) Carr’s course: The Teaching of Theatre. Everything he offered in that class about being a teacher was something that I believed at my core; he gave it the words and the ways.

One day he kept me after class and offered me a position in the university’s Summer High School Drama Institute, a program that he directed. I was stunned. I hadn’t completed student teaching and he had never seen me work with students. “I’d love to, but I don’t know if I’m ready,” I said. “Nonsense. Of course you are,” he replied.

If he thought I was ready, then maybe I was. I accepted his offer. I worked and learned and grew because of it, unaware that this was the first in what would become a pattern of offers from the teacher to the student.

I graduated from college, but Jack never stopped being my teacher. He offered to be my Master’s degree advisor. He offered to serve on my dissertation committee, editing all 290 pages of that document. I accepted his offers.

But they didn’t end there. Over the years, my telephone would ring and there would be Jack on the other end with more offers:

“Rosalind, I need someone to teach my course while I am a guest professor in Finland. I told the university that you should do it.”

“I can no longer do the Creative Connections program in Germany and the DoDDS school system agrees with me that you should be my replacement.”

“While I’m away giving lectures on cruise ships, I recommended that the Annapolis Capital Gazette hire you to fill in as the theatre critic.”

“Rosalind, I am going to retire next year. I told Catholic University that you are the best choice for taking over my courses.”

Each offer would catch me by surprise, but if I ever expressed concern about being prepared for the opportunity, he’d always repeat what he said back in 1977:
“Nonsense, of course you are.”

I hope I’ve played my part and embodied the “Yes, and....” approach to his offers, adding to them and making new offers to my own students.

I still photocopy and distribute a course handout that Jack created on his typewriter over 40 years ago. It includes this statement:

“You must think more broadly than ‘What do I teach tomorrow?’ If you believe that what you teach is important, then it should extend beyond the classroom.”

Jack’s teaching still extends far beyond his classroom and into many a tomorrow.