Hello, and welcome. I am your host, Neil Ward, and I'm grateful that you are taking time out of your day to learn more about Design Educators' paths to Tenure. I truly appreciate it.

On this episode of Tell It To Neil, we're chatting with Steven McCarthy, Professor of Graphic Design at the University of Minnesota, St Paul. Let's listen in.

**Neil**: Hi Steven, how are you?

**Steven**: Hello Neil, thanks for inviting me.

**Neil**: Absolutely, thank you for spending time today on Tell It To Neil. I definitely appreciate your time.

**Steven**: This is the highlight of my day, you know, with the pandemic quarantine, this is it!

**Neil**: Good! And just for listeners of the podcast, this is being recorded at the end of June in 2020, so let's get started. So, how did you get into Graphic Design, or Design?

**Steven**: You know, as an undergraduate I actually majored in Sculpture and Drawing. And I took three undergraduate classes in Graphic Design but it just didn't appeal to me as a Major at the time. So I…you know, took my BFA in Sculpture and Drawing out into the work world and learned that you don't really find jobs called Sculptor: fifty thousand a year. Must know how to carve wood, stone, you know, cast metal and so on! So I got a job, I got a job at Solo Cup Company in Urbana, Illinois where my late wife was going to college to do her Bachelor's and I became a Production Artist. It was a pre-computer job, very technical, you know, working with ruling pins and photoset type and stat machines, all those sorts of things. So it paid minimum wage, which was about three-seventy-five at the time and I had to wear a shirt and tie to work every day. It was dreadful: I hated it.

**Neil**: Wow!

**Steven**: Yeah, yeah, so in the meantime, I took a…I'd already finished my Bachelor's at Bradley University in Peoria and I took a graduate class at the University of Illinois and the Professor also worked at the Krannert Art Museum as a preparator. And he had an opening for an assistant. I applied, I got it. So my pay doubled and I got to wear T-shirt and jeans to work.

**Neil**: So much better!

**Steven**: Yeah, exactly, exactly. So I did that for two years and then, and in that shop I was doing exhibition preparation, painting the gallery, doing lighting, you know, typesetting labels, designing some posters and I started getting interested in the idea of design regarding space and the communication of information and experiences in the museum environment and so I applied to graduate school to pursue an MFA in Design and got into the program at Stanford which leveraged Art and Engineering. And so I got to study with, you know, David Kelly and Bill Moggridge, a lot of the sort of all-stars of, you know, 1980s, 90s product design. You know, David Kelly designed the original Apple mouse. He worked for Steven Jobs closely and anyway, so design for me was kind of through the back door and I've always in my personal practice always had more in the Art oriented approach to design rather than like a scientific or a sort of social science approach like many people do. So anyway, there, you know, there are many paths into Design and that's my story, that's my path.

**Neil**: Oh my gosh, and what a dream MFA experience!

**Steven**: You know, it was, it was…like a feeding frenzy. I mean, intellectually to be, you know, in Silicon Valley in the mid 1980s with all the stuff going on and just the different vocabularies; I was influenced by a lot of the work of the California New Wave people like April Greimen and Michael Vanderbyl and you know, there were a number of Michaels out of the San Francisco design scene: Michael Schwab and Michael Mayberry and there was some great work going on, and also at the same time was when Émigré magazine was beginning in Berkeley, California and the Émigré founder was cranking up with its release of all these interesting type fonts. Kind of a new vocabulary for the new era and I very much embraced that.

*(05:02)*

**Neil**: Which, and it's so interesting that you're talking about this. You have a very wonderful scope of Graphic Design. So, doing it when you had to actually cut type out! All the way to now we have laptops that do all of that. I would love to be in one of your courses!

**Steven**: Well thanks, thanks. And you know, I do work kind of, I do a lot of work on the computer, obviously, we all do but I also, you know, I work in collage, I cut and paste things; I tear paper. I love the materiality of different materials, textures, processes, you know, so I think I'm lucky in that I'm comfortable and well-versed in things that are off the computer as well.

**Neil**: Absolutely. A handy, handy skill-set.

**Steven**: Thanks, thanks.

**Neil**: So then, how did you get to the University of Minnesota from there?

**Steven**: Well, I finished my MFA in 1985 and then I worked for, I guess about four years in the Bay area doing commercial Graphic Design. I also had a position at the Stanford Library designing exhibits and publications and I was doing freelance for Silicon Valley clients; I was designing books and posters and exhibits for the Stanford Library and then I began teaching a typography course at a local Community College and you know, I couldn't see myself doing the typical corporate work; it just didn't interest me. I didn't feel aligned with the mission of, you know, a lot of sort of the corporate sector. So I pursued an academic path and got a Tenure Track job at Northern Kentucky University, four miles across the Ohio River from Cincinnati. So my wife and I moved there and I thought I'd be there a couple of years, you know, kind of building my dossier and then moving on. I was there nine years, Neil.

**Neil**: Oh wow!

**Steven**: And…and you know, and actually it was, you know, what I would call sort of a teaching college, you know. It didn't offer graduate degree, it was focused around undergraduate teaching. It had an open admissions policy so if you had a Diploma from the Kentucky High School you could get in so, but you know, I had some amazing students and they were very interested and they were very hungry and it was very rewarding, you know, the years I spent there. You know, some of my graduates have gone on to both academic careers and very successful professional careers and so it was almost like the expectations there were so low that I could make a big difference, and that's one thing that I miss and I feel sort of frustrated at the University of Minnesota because we're so big and fat here that we don't really need, you know, kind of the hunger, the curiosity, a lot of my current students are, you know, they're maybe second, third generation college students, they're very middle class so yeah, so I spent nine years in Kentucky. I got Tenure and Promotion to Associate Professor and then I could see that I was gonna outgrow the place after some time so the opportunity at Minnesota came, I came here as an Associate Professor; they asked me to go through a short Tenure Review cycle of a couple years and I've been here ever since. So I've been a full Professor now for…gosh, let's see, so…thirteen years I think, yeah, and I'm about to wind it down, Neil; I'm looking to retire in a year or so.

**Neil**: I don't blame you on that!

**Steven**: So if you want my job, look for the opening soon!

**Neil**: *(laughs)* So, you mentioned there was a couple of years when you arrived at the University in Minnesota that you were kind of on…

**Steven**: Yeah, Probationary Status.

**Neil**: Thank you! You just said the word! What did that…what did that consist of, or how did that get negotiated?

**Steven**: So, they were comfortable bringing me in at that rank, at Associate Professor rank, but because I had not contributed to a graduate program, and here, you know, we're an R1 School, we're one of the few programs that offers MA, MS, MFA and PhD in Design and so they really needed to make sure that I was comfortable in a research culture. And also I'd been in an Art Department for nine years where exhibition was the primary way that Faculty disseminated their work. And at Minnesota, I'm in a Department that has, oh, I think there are four or five MFAs but it's probably twenty-five PhDs and so I'm in a culture now where the peer reviewed journal article is the gold standard and writing books and book chapters and so on, so I had to prove that I could do that. And I did.

**Neil**: Yes, I've always been curious about the switch going from a teaching institution to an R1 institution and how…but how seamless that is, so that's why I asked the question.

*(10:05)*

**Steven**: Yeah, I mean, so there are a couple of things. Number one, it's a very different kind of culture. And practical things, like I went from teaching three courses per semester to teaching two, you know, so I was given more time to pursue my research at Minnesota. I was also given more support in terms of, you know, annual travel funds, you know, grants are pretty easy to get to support research and so, you know, the philosophy here is that you give Faculty the tools to succeed and then kind of step out of the way and let them pursue their search agendas, as long as you come back at the end of the year with a handful of national or internationally disseminated articles, conference presentations, you know, book chapters, exhibits. Exhibits still matter but I sometimes have to advocate for the, what the exhibition venues are like, the rigor of selectivity, impact and all those things.

**Neil**: All the requirements that go along with an R1 position!

**Steven**: Exactly!

**Neil**: In a good way, in a good way. Yeah. I hear that you have reviewed a substantial number of Tenure and Promotion packets for Design Professors going up for Tenure and Promotion and/or Promotion. How did you get into reviewing those packets?

**Steven**: Once I got to Minnesota I began to get asked by other institutions. And for this interview, I just counted and I've done thirty-six of these over the last twenty years.

**Neil**: Wow!

**Steven**: So typically I get asked by a Department Head or a Dean if I would review someone and I'm now kind of limiting them, just because I get asked a lot, and I'm limiting them to people going from Associate to full and also peer institutions. So, other R1 schools, you know. There are other good people out there that'd be best to look at Assistant to Associate, or people that are at you know, teaching schools or art academies or all different kinds of institutions. So…and when I get asked, I hope that the person asking is familiar with my, you know, not just my scholarship but my point of view. You know, when they invite me to review someone, they have to be accepting that I'm going to bring to it a certain set of priorities, a certain critical eye, certain values and so hopefully they're aware of that. I take it very seriously and I spend a lot of time reviewing the dossier and considering sort of national norms and so yeah, it's a form of judgment and it's someone's career in the balance, right?

**Neil**: Absolutely. Well, and for certain institutions, currently I'm at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa and last year I went up for Tenure and Promotion and I did earn Tenure and Promotion at once!

**Steve**: Congratulations! Congratulations!

**Neil**: Thank you!

**Steven**: Did they give you a sabbatical year?

**Neil**: I…I can choose when to take that.

**Steven**: OK.

**Neil**: I need to get a couple of things in order for that to happen but I have an idea of what I want to do. Throughout my process, we have to get external reviews from three Graphic Design Professors to add to our Tenure packet to then submit to the Department and then to the Dean and then to the Provost.

**Steven**: Uh-huh, OK, OK.

**Neil**: So I got to choose two and then I sent a list to my Department Chair and then the Department chose the other one, yeah, for those reviews and it was really, it's interesting that you say when people ask you to review their work that they need to be aware of your perspective on it because that is really important!

**Steven**: Absolutely, it is, yep, but just to say that at Minnesota, the candidate puts together a list of ten potential reviewers and the Department then picks five. And once in a while, maybe six letters will come in or only four but it tends to be five letters per candidate.

**Nei**l: So this is where it pays to network when you're at those international conferences!

**Steven**: You know, it does, but it's also important not to have too close relationship, you know, so certain conflicts, like the reviewer can't have been your former graduate advisor, or they can't be someone you co-publish with a lot or they can't be, you know, there can't be any conflict of interests around the neutrality and objectivity with reviewing your dossier.

**Neil**: Yes, thank you for bringing those points up.

**Steven**: Sure, sure.

*(15:00)*

**Neil**: It was such a fine balance to select colleagues that are close, that would know what you're doing, but not close enough that they've, like you said, have been working in publishing with you.

**Steven**: Right, right.

**Neil**: Definitely a fine line there. So can you walk us through the process of reviewing a Tenure and Promotion packet? Well actually, yeah, Tenure and Promotion packet from beginning to end. I'm super-curious about this.

**Steven**: Yeah, so it starts with that letter from the Department Head or Dean and if I accept it, they tend to send a dossier or these days they put the dossier up on Google Drive or something, and it consists of, you know, the candidate's CV and typically statements around their research, creative production, service, teaching, outreach and so on and then examples. So there might be a visual portfolio of works; there might be academic papers they've published; there might be examples of student work. Some even include things like course evaluation scores or some sort of narrative statements by students about their teaching. So I look at all that and…oh, here's an important thing that not all institutions send, which is their own internal Tenure and Promotion document. Because that's the yardstick that gets used within the institution and so they need to state what their standards are, their values, you know, how they count or measure certain things. So if they don't send that to me then I can sort of use the University of Minnesota document or I can use my sense of sort of national norms, I would call them, but I do encourage institutions to send out their own internal Tenure and Promotion document to the outside reviewers. It's very important. So I write a letter that's typically two or three pages in length, single space where I make recommendations; I…you know, compliment as appropriate and I criticize as appropriate. Often the question they ask is, would this candidate receive Tenure and Promotion at your institution. And that's a bit tough because you know…

**Neil**: Oooh!

**Steven**: I'm in a Design Department, not an Art Department and again, as I mentioned earlier, I'm in with a bunch of, I mean, my Department has sort of artistically inclined Designers like myself, but most of my colleagues are Social Scientists, Engineers, Humanists, I would call them, you know, they…and some of them are even more in, you know, kind of I don't want to say the hard sciences, although we do have a couple of like, got a PhD in Engineering from MIT, it was very much like, does NASA research on wearable technology and, you know, so…

**Neil**: Oh, fun!

**Steven**: Yeah, so that's kind of a hard question to answer when they ask, you know, would the candidate receive Tenure at your institution, that I've got to sort of do some explaining. I mean, the answer might be yes, but I've gotta kind of give context.

**Neil**: Yeah!

**Steven**: So I send my letter off and that's usually all I hear. I might be thanked but sometimes I'll go back on that institution's website the following year, just to see whether or not the person got Tenure. And I've gotta say that most of the letters I write are positive. I have written some that are…that are critical and I recommend denial of Tenure, but most of the ones I write are positive. Most people have earned it and they deserve it.

**Neil**: Do you think that a person knows if they're going to earn Tenure and Promotion or not? Like, before I was Tenured and Promoted, we had yearly check-ins with the Department about, you know, how's your Teaching, Research and Service going, and there were recommendations at each year so by about year three or four, I had a really strong idea of if I'm on the right track or I'm not on the right track, so I don't know, I would find that if there were other people that went through that same process, that they would have a feeling whether or not they would actually get through the Tenure and Promotion process.

**Steven**: Yes.

**Neil**: Does that make sense?

**Steven**: Yes, that's come up a number of times. Yes, it does. In fact if a candidate gets annually reviewed in a positive way where they're told, you know, you're doing fine, you're on track and then the Tenure vote comes up and they do not get Tenure, that actually reflects badly on the institution itself and it's disingenuous of colleagues to keep, you know, promoting someone along and then deny them tenure, because the feedback should reflect the reality of how they're doing at the time.

**Neil**: I was just curious!

**Steven**: Yeah, and you now, when you asked that question, Neil, I thought you were referring to the sort of confidentiality of the reviewer with the external review process and at Minnesota, we actually have the right to read the reviewers' letters as they come in, and if a candidate feels that a reviewer is not accurately reflecting their work, they can write a rebuttal to it. It doesn't go back to the reviewer, it just stays internally in their dossier.

*(20:17)*

**Neil**: Yeah.

**Steven**: But I must say, most institutions I write letters for state that my confidentiality is preserved unless it gets like a court case or something.

**Neil**: Interesting!

**Steven**: Yeah, yeah, but at Minnesota, it's a very transparent process. But I think it's a unique process. Most institutions do not have that level of transparency.

**Neil**: I'm gonna have to continue to ask that question in further interviews!

**Steven**: Yeah, it is worth asking.

**Neil**: When you're reviewing the Tenure and Promotion packets, have you ever ran across self-publishing, the candidate trying to make a case that that is Research and Scholarship?

**Steven**: Well yes, absolutely. And if you know my work at all going back twenty-five years or so, design authorship has been a key part of my practice and research. And so self-publishing is a part of that. But it shouldn't just be sort of vanity publishing. It should be that the self-published work still goes out into the world and goes under some sort of peer review or jury or you know, editorial process where someone else is still involved with ascertaining, is this thing valuable, is it good, is it relevant, does it add new knowledge to the field? Because if it's just sort of self-publishing for the sake of it, that's like what's the sound of one hand clapping?

**Neil**: Well no, it's so funny you mention that, because I've been putting articles up on Medium.com and on there, they have claps! If you like the article, you just clap…yeah.

**Steven**: Yeah, or just the clap emoji!

**Neil**: It is the emoji! Especially recently in the past decade, the platforms for self-publishing have just exploded, especially like Blurb.com for that. I would think, and you can comment on this if you like, I would think that if you sell a certain number of books on there that that could be a metric for the peer review of it?

**Steven**: Yeah, yeah. I mean, dissemination through sales is a legitimate way of disseminating something. If the thing you self-publish is, you know, like whatever the content is, I would look at that too, like, not just sales but is the content of the Blurb book, I don't know, Instagram pictures of your dog, you know, that you've made a book out of? OK, fine. But you know, or is it something…is it something with a little more critical content, you know, that addresses social, political, economic issues? Is it about something a little meatier than just, you know, your own production?

**Neil**: Thank you for that!

**Steven**: Yeah, sure. And there are, I mean, I've made Artist books for years and some of the Artist books are very limited edition kind of hand-made, you know, slower production processes and so on, but some have been either offset printed or on demand printed, like through Blurb or Lulu and there are venues for distributing and selling these too. There's a store/gallery in New York called Printed Matter that sells Artist books and other sort of Artist ephemera that's printed.

**Neil**: I love that store!

**Steven**: Sure, yeah, so everything is contextual, Neil. I look at like, does this thing have impact? Where did it go? Who's looking at it, you know, if a lot of the sales are like to your mom, cousins, friends, your students are forced to buy it, that's not the same as something that goes out into the world, you know, that goes into more of a critical context where people can respond to it, collect it, judge it: yeah, that's how we create new knowledge.

**Neil**: The hook there would be to get another university to adopt the book, instead of just your students!

**Steven**: Oh absolutely, yes, absolutely, yep, yep. Yeah, I mean I've published one mass market book, *The Designer As…*it's published by BIS Publishing in Amsterdam and my most recent book I have not found a publisher, so I wrote a history of the Design Program at Stanford and I've had a lot of publishers reject and some publishers didn't even have the good manners to reject it, they just stopped responding to my third or fourth email. So I self-published it through Blurb and it sold a few dozen copies but what I'm doing now is I'm mining the book for academic papers, so I'm going back into the text and extracting passages, re-writing them with a little more rigor and citation and those are going into journal articles. I published one, I've got one that's under review right now; I've got a third manuscript in my laptop ready to send out in a few weeks. So that's how that book will go under peer review because under Blurb it's just an artifact that's for sale.

*(25:28)*

**Neil**: Right.

**Steven**: It was also…it was internationally juried exhibition, an exhibited, I think it was Florida Atlantic University, Florida International University. I should know this and will edit it right for the published version of the podcast!

**Neil**: Yes!

**Steven**: It was a show called *Looking Good* that a Faculty member, I believe her name was Stephanie Cunningham curated and so the book was in that show as a designed object. Not so much for its narrative text. But that's still a dissemination.

**Neil**: And for all those that are listening, the book title is, *Designer At Stanford: A Visual History of Thinking And Doing*, in case you want to hop on Blurb and purchase it.

**Steven**: Yes, I printed a boutique edition of sixty-five hard-bound books that my University gave me five thousand dollars to produce, and those were sent out as like proof of concept pitches to publishers. Like, here's what I have in mind, the entire book. Two hundred and fifty-six pages, full color, with the jacket and all that and so those sixty-five are, that's like a closed edition, it's done. So the version on Blurb is paperback.

**Neil**: Well, you know, maybe it's just not the right time yet for that? Give it like another five years, I think people will be all over it!

**Steven**: Well you know, with the whole interest in Design thinking, I mean, Design thinking as it's currently packaged originated at Stanford, so the D School and David Kelly's firm, IDEO, that found a way to package Design thinking and sell it to corporate America, the roots go back, I mean Stanford's Design Program was founded in 1958, the year I was born, so it's got roots that go back well before the D School which began in 2005, and so I talk about the Faculty, the facilities, the curriculum, the resources, there were some amazing people and things that happened that are the foundations to current, you know, our current interest in design thinking. So that's a story I told.

**Neil**: Which is so fascinating. Now, were there any, I'm not great with my history here. Were there any Masters from the Bauhaus that made their way to Stanford?

**Steven**: No, but there was someone who went to Cranbrook. Professor Matt Kahn was at Cranbrook in the 1940s, you know, I mean he was around Charles and Ray Eames. He was around Henry Bertoia; he was around Eliel and Eero Saarinen; Marianne Strengell…Francis Knoll, I mean he was around sort of the mid-century all-stars of American design at Cranbrook. Stanford hired him at age twenty-one without even finishing his Bachelor's degree at Cranbrook, and he taught at Stanford for sixty solid years. He became Stanford's senior-most Professor.

**Neil**: Wow!

**Steven**: Yeah, yeah. His name was Matt Kahn. Google him; you'll be blown away. And he was David Kelly's primary mentor and…you know, sort of inspiration.

**Neil**: Oh my goodness! You've set my brain just on fire talking about all of those people! They're my favorite people on the planet!

**Steven**: Yeah, I'll send you a copy of the book, Neil.

**Neil**: Oh, that would be amazing!

**Steven**: Yeah, sure, sure.

**Neil**: So, over the years, over those thirty-six packets, I imagine that you've reviewed packets from an R1 institution, packets from a teaching institution. What were the main differences there that you saw? I don't know if you ever reviewed any from a Community College? I'm not a hundred per cent sure on how that Tenure process works?

**Steven**: Typically, the Community Colleges don't seek external reviewers. In fact, a lot of the smaller Teaching Colleges don't seek them either, so it tends to be, you know, Comprehensive Universities, Universities with graduate programs that ask for the and I'm looking at my CV now and I've done reviews, you know, I'll just read backwards from this year.

**Neil**: OK.

**Steven**: Boston University, University of Washington, University Notre Dame, University of South Australia; North Carolina State University; Virginian Commonwealth University, Qatar Campus; Oklahoma State; University of Michigan; Temple University; University of Florida, University of North Texas…on and on and on. So…they tend to be these bigger schools.

*(30:00)*

**Neil**: Wow! And international!

**Steven**: Yeah, yeah, I've done a couple, let's seen. Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Yeah, the University of South Australia, those maybe the two international ones.

**Neil**: Now, have there been differences between all of those, or have they kinda been similar?

**Steven**: They tend to use the, I mean it's the American model that would be sort of…you know, presumptuous of me to call it that, because I don't know what other models look like in terms of international universities, but you know, the idea that the candidate must have effectiveness in teaching, demonstrate a record of scholarship, you know, service to the Department and to the University and so on, so I don't know, you know, how they found me or how they've thought I might fit as a proper reviewer to their candidate but, you know, I've got a website and it's not too difficult to find me.

**Neil**: Well, are there any specific things that you look for when you're reviewing those packets, or does it pretty much go by, you know, whatever the requirements are for the specific institution, if they send it?

**Steven**: Yeah. I probably use the CV as the, you know, the main record of what they've done, you know. In Latin, curriculum vitae means list of life and so everything that the candidate has done, you know, ever send grad school or beginning their academic career is going to be in there. And I must say, I've come across a number of CVs that are not as tight as they should be, you know, they're a little, like they might have a list of things but they don't have dates. Or they don't say if the thing was juried, reviewed, invited, you know what I mean? Like I look for some pretty descriptive language around, you know, it should be retrievable. So when someone puts something in that they've done, I should be able to go online and say, oh I'm interested in that article, I want to find out more about it or whatever, or that exhibit was, you know, at that museum three years ago: is there a catalog or a website that documents the work? So the CV should be the both the list of what they've done but also the jump-off point to making the work tangible and retrievable, which I'm quoting language from the University of Minnesota's Tenure document. Tangible and Retrievable.

**Neil**: I like those words!

**Steven**: Yeah, yeah.

**Neil**: Well, it's interesting, because I've never thought to put down juried, reviewed, invited next to, like an exhibition or anything like that. Hm, there are things I've just never thought of.

**Steven**: Well I'm going to see you a document that a couple of colleagues and I produced. It's called The Design Scholarship Matrix and you'll see five columns and it's kind of a road-map to how Scholarship is both created, disseminated, reviewed, you know, what sort of impact it has, so I'm in kind of a diverse department with lots of different scholarly activity. One of my colleagues is a part Design Professor, designed kind of a machine for Oreo cookies to split the cookies and melt the icing layer in the middle and then squirt it into his mouth and the number of YouTube, the number of YouTube hits on the video of this thing exceeded a million. So even though it wasn't a typical work of scholarship, was not a journal article or whatever, it still had impact. If you can get a million people to look at anything you've done, that's amazing.

**Neil**: Oh my gosh! And they have a sense of humor too!

**Steven**: Oh totally, yeah, yeah, and in fact this particular Professor, his scholarly focus is in using humor in design, using humor as a methodology for creating, he did a PhD at MIT and did a dissertation on using humor as part of the problem-solving process. So, one of my philosophies, Neil, is to, I think we should have an expansive view of what merits, you know, appropriate scholarship and dissemination in our field. I'm really interested in things that are, you know, expansive by definition, so they've reached new audiences or they stake out a new point of view, new territory and I delight in finding things that are not just the standard, oh, you know, she got an article in Visible Language, or he had his poster in Graphis Magazine or whatever. I'm interested in things that are like new, different, but also that have rigor and merit.

**Neil**: And that is where the Tenure narrative comes in, is explaining all of that, succinctly, without being too long-winded.

**Steven**: Absolutely. That's why each candidate's statement is critical too, because that's a candidate's chance to tell their story, you know, how they've grown, how they've developed, why they think it's important, what contributions they're making, so those are really valuable to the process too.

*(35:16)*

**Neil**: Absolutely. And it makes me so interested to see how else Design can get into places. This past Spring, I downloaded one of my favorite comedian's voice file for Waze in the car so every time I get in the car and punch in an address, I get to hear them direct me to where I'm going and it makes me laugh every time!

**Steven**: Wow, wow!

**Neil**: So, what are some pointers you would give for Educators assembling their dossiers for review?

**Steven**: I would review it four or five times before you turn it in. Have a friend or colleague review it, you know, drum out all the typos and all the wonky punctuation and, you know, so it should be clear, it should be well organized and frankly, if it's coming from a Graphic Design Professor, it should be typographically high quality, you know, if it's a publication it should be well designed. The reproductions, the work should be clear and well-cropped and well-lit, you know what I mean? I can't help it, I look for those things.

**Neil**: Well, we can't help not to, as Designers!

**Steven**: Yeah, yeah, but there again, so…formally it should be nice and tight. The content should be rich, clear, again, enough detail so that I can tell, oh was that work invited into a show by some friends he or she went to grad school with, or did that work go to an independent jury, national scale exhibition? It was one of ten per cent juried in, you know what I mean, so I look for things like that, that are indications of selectivity, excellence, yeah.

**Neil**: So what do you do when you ask for those metrics when you submit something for publishing and the organization just says, well we don't really have that!

**Steven**: Which is unfortunate and I think a lot of organizations ought to have it. Some don't, you know, count or care enough to track it but I'll often ask. I'll follow up, even if I don't get in, I'm just curious, you know, but yeah, you know, I can guarantee that in the Sciences and in the Social Sciences and Engineering and so on, they can tell you what their numbers are. And it kind of makes us look a little bit sloppy or a little bit too fuzzy to not know that.

**Neil**: I'm with you on that!

**Steven**: It makes a difference if your work is one of ten juried in, that makes it more impressive than if it's eight out of ten.

**Neil**: So for those of you that are listening, if you're ever on a review panel for papers and whatnot for an organization, definitely bring that point up and see if you can advocate for those numbers or those metrics to be published.

**Steven**: Absolutely, yep.

**Neil**: How do you think that Covid will impact the Tenure and Promotion process, because I know now like it's nearly impossible to travel anywhere to go to a conference and without…without paying registration fees to go to a conference, a conference can't really put something on to pay people to come to it and Keynote speak and…

**Steven**: Sure, sure.

**Neil**: How do you think this will impact the Tenure and Promotion process?

**Steven**: I imagine that we're going to have a year of almost like a time-out or a…a year where we're going to have to say as a field, we recognize that people have not had the opportunities, that have not had the, you know, the invitations or venues and we just need to, you know, consider a global pause. I mean, maybe for some candidates that means adding another year; instead of five years you get reviewed after six years. Maybe for some candidates it means, well, if we'd hoped to, you know, see I don't know, twenty-five disseminations over five or six years, we're going to be happy with eighteen, you know, I think we have to make accommodations. We have to be kind and understanding and supportive. But you know at the same time, Neil, the pandemic creates an opportunity too and so we're stuck inside a lot and I've been trying to find ways to make things and…a current creative project I'm working on, I just bought four used billboards from a company in St Paul the traffics and billboards have been up on the side of the highway and they're, you know, graphics and type printed on vinyl, so bought four of these and I'm cutting them up and rearranging them into, you know, sort of large-scale collages using industrial strength adhesives, rivets. Fortunately vinyl cuts easily with scissors or X-Acto knife but it's just like I'm stuck at home here, I've got to find something I can do in my basement and my garage, you know, so I urge Faculty everywhere to use the Covid pandemic, use the quarantine time to make something. Challenge yourself. Oh, I painted a mural in my basement too. I painted a mural that literally says, Shelter In Place. I'll send you a picture of it.

*(40:52)*

**Neil**: Please do!

**Steven**: Yeah.

**Neil**: So how are you going to get the billboards out of your house?

**Steven**: Well, they're definitely cut into much smaller pieces and so I'm rearranging…rearranging them, you know, but still they're, you know, some of the bigger pieces are, you know, five, six feet in size and I'm kinda working to attach them and overlay them and…but to open the full billboard, I do it in my driveway. My neighbors are going by like, what's he up to? *(laughs)*

**Neil**: Come on by: add your mark!

**Steven**: Yeah, yeah and part of what I want to do is I foresee these things being posted publicly. The nice thing about the billboard vinyl is it's impervious to rain and snow and sleet and all that, you know, I can put them outside, you know. Unlike graffiti or other forms that might be perceived as vandalism or crimes, you can post a vinyl thing and people can take it down if they don't like it.

**Neil**: Well, and it's so interesting talking about that. One of my most prized possessions that I have, you might get a kick out of this, is…it's a green Freitag bag and during my graduate degree, we learned about the Freitag bags and there were these two…are you familiar with this at all?

**Steven**: No; Freitag, I'm not sure what that is.

**Neil**: So there were two Graphic Designers and this was in Zurich. They were looking for a functional, water-repellant and a decent bag to hold their creative work and they couldn't find one, they couldn't buy one, so they were inspired by the…

**Steven**: I see, I'm online now, I can see it.

**Neil**: Yeah, by the traffic in Zurich and they wound up getting the truck wraps which is that heavy vinyl and then they cut 'em down, or they laundered them to clean 'em up, and then they cut 'em up and they used bicycle inner tubes and seat belts to make these bags and they are FANTASTIC bags!

**Steven**: Yeah, wow! Right here online here, yeah, they look really great. In fact the company that sold me the billboards said, most of how they're used is by companies making bags like this and…

**Neil**: Really?

**Steven**: Mostly they're used sort of for their material qualities, you know, the vinyl's super-strong and I was asking, I want to look at them graphically to see what images or type but they're all folded up in this warehouse, they said, you have to buy 'em kind of sight unseen. So it's kind of a crap…but still I'm finding lots of good stuff to harvest out of them.

**Neil**: Well yeah, that will have been a surprise. That sounds really exciting!

**Steven**: Yeah, yeah, and Freitag by the way means Friday in German.

**Neil**: That I did not know!

**Steven**: Yeah. Nice, nice. Yeah, I've lived in Germany for many years, so…

**Neil**: Interesting…what were you doing there?

**Steven**: I was there because my father was employed by the Department of Defense as a School Principal on American Military base, so I was actually born in France and we lived a number of places in Germany and two years in East Africa. I finished high school at Stuttgart American High School in Germany and then came back…came back to my own country at age eighteen as sort of a foreigner, in a way, because I hadn't grown up here. I only lived here three years from zero to eighteen and so even though I spoke fluent English and I played baseball and you know, watched Hollywood movies and so on, I didn't grow up with American TV and so I had lots of these holes in my cultural understanding that I had to learn. Well, I was like, yeah, sorry, I never watched *Leave It To Beaver.* My parents made me go to the Louvre instead!

*(45:00)*

**Neil**: I was going to say, you were probably better off!

**Steven**: Yeah, yeah. Although my girlfriend and I play the New York Times crossword puzzle; she always nails the answers that have to do with, like American pop culture and you know, TV shows and references to certain, I don't know, consumer goods out of the sixties and seventies and I'm better at the things like geography and you know, culture and stuff like that, so it's fun.

**Neil**: Great. You guys make a great pair to do those crosswords!

**Steven**: Yep, yep.

**Neil**: Well, if an institution doesn't require outside reviewers for T&P, or Tenure and Promotion, what would you recommend an Educator do, especially if they are the only Design Educator in their department, and I've had to answer this question a lot actually, which is why I'm doing the podcast, it's to kinda help because this isn't a topic that's widely talked about publicly. It's definitely talked about like person to person but not publicly, but what would you recommend an Educator do if they were in that situation?

**Steven**: Well, so Art Departments have a culture, and that culture privileges sculpture, photography, painting, mixed media, installation art, on and on. In their world, the exhibition, especially the solo exhibition or maybe two-person exhibition reigns supreme. But in Graphic Design, you don't have a whole lot of one-person exhibition opportunities. You know, for one thing our work tends to be smaller, it tends to be, you know, hand-held or environmental, you know, it just doesn't translate to the gallery context as well and so we often have to educate our peers, especially in Art Departments as to the value of what we do, why we do it and you know, fortunately there are more and more venues that are popping up that acknowledge, you know, what Graphic Designers do, how it's different, how it has its own sort of cultural standards, so you know, again I was in an Art Department for nine years; I had to teach them about other venues for Graphic Design. Now I'm in a Design Department but I'm still exhibiting, have to teach my PhD colleagues about the value of the curated exhibition, so it's always like opportunities to educate our peers and to prove our rigor, our relevancy. If you can keep showing that it goes under jury or peer review, there are others out there that think your work is meritorious.

**Neil**: Well said. Thank you for that.

**Steven**: Thank you, thank you! Edit as you please, Neil. There are probably a lot of words in here that could be chopped out!

**Neil**: Yes, oh, don't worry, I spend quite a large amount of time editing out all of my "Sos" and everything else, little pauses and whatnot. I've tried to get better at this and I'm like, I'm just gonna have to leave that to editing afterwards!

**Steven**: Sure, sure.

**Neil**: Would you recommend that those Educators ask for external letters if they're not required?

**Steven**: Sure. I've been asked to write some that were not required. Like the candidate has approached me as opposed to their Chair or Dean. And they said, you know, my Department doesn't require it but would you mind writing a letter of support, and so I've done that a number of times. About three or four times.

**Neil**: That seems to be more popular now is having a lot of Adjuncts in a Department and only maybe one or two Tenure Track Faculty.

**Steven**: That's because it's cheaper for the university to have the Adjuncts and that way they can pay their administrators more money. Yeah. Don't get me started!

**Neil**: *(laughs)* I feel like that's another interview!

**Steven**: Exactly, yeah, yeah.

**Neil**: I should do like a…I should do like a dark web interview about all the underlying currents at institutions. Everyone's anonymous and I can like, warp voices but just to get these like stories and opinions without actually harming anybody!

**Steven**: Exactly, and then you know how like in your iTunes where it has your playlist and it has like the explicit tag for songs. Have explicit tags on those!

**Neil**: Love it! Well, we're nearing the end of our interview. Are there any parting thoughts or any upcoming projects you would like to talk about that you haven't yet?

*(49:56)*

**Steven**: Yeah, you know, I've been at this stuff for thirty-one years and it's been rewarding and you know, it's morphing continuously. You know yes, I sort of see my role as you know, kind of a, you know, a senior member of the Faculty who…I'd like be a resource for people, you know, to mentor people, to…you know, this kind of podcast's exactly the kind of thing I enjoy doing because I get to share the stories and you know, my own travels and experiences and seeing the field evolve over a few decades. One thing I'm really pleased to have done recently was, do you know the group Design Incubation out of New York?

**Neil**: I do. Yes.

**Steven**: Well, I helped them found a Design Educators Communication Design Educators' Award, because most other fields out there: Product Design, Interior Design, Apparel Design, Architecture; they all have awards for Educators and Graphic Design did not have any and I approach the AIGA with this initially and they thought about it and eventually didn't buy it. So I approached Design Incubation and met with sort of the enthusiastic and supportive environment there and this is now the fifth year of the Award and we provide awards in scholarship, both published research and creative production in Teaching and in Service, and so something like your podcast would sort of like fit into that kind of Service category where you're doing a service to the profession by having these interviews and you know, it's not explicitly teaching, it's not explicitly research, but still it's service, so those awards are to help people find a forum or a venue to put their work in. So that's, you know part of the legacy I'm leaving.

**Neil**: And thank you so much for that legacy as well.

**Steven**: Well thank you, thank you. And good luck taking it forward.

**Neil**: Thank you. I enjoy interviewing and I enjoy getting stories, so I don't think I'll stop any time soon!

**Steven**: No, I think it's great. I think it's great, Neil. Keep doing what you're doing and you know, as you expand your roster of people you interview, you know, I'm happy to give you names of people that might add other insights.

**Neil**: Oh, that would be great, thank you.

**Steven**: Sure, sure.

**Neil**: Thank you for your time today, too.

**Steven**: Well thank you for inviting me and enjoy the rest of the summer.

**Neil**: I certainly will. You as well.

This concludes Season Two, Episode Ten of Tell It To Neil. If any of the facts or information included in this Episode are incorrect, please feel free to get in touch through our email, hello@tellittoneil.com

If you would like to get in touch with Steven, please contact him through email at smccarthy@umn.edu

*(end of recording 53:12)*

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