

EXTRA TIME ON TESTS

A short play

Synopsis

A university student with a learning disability asks her department chair for extra time on tests. The chair doesn't believe that any student, disabled or not, should receive extra time on tests. The student thinks that with facts and logic she can change the chair's mind.

Characters

Professor Watson, about 50, a university professor (can be played by a man or a woman)
Kelly, about 20, a student (also can be played by a man or a woman)

Time and Setting

The present, afternoon. The office of Professor Watson.

At rise: PROF. WATSON is sitting at his desk happily reading a V. I. Warshawski paperback novel and sucking on an unlit pipe.

PROF. WATSON

Oh, V.I. Warshawski, you call yourself a private eye? Give it up, girlie. A Sam Spade you will never be.

(A knock is heard at the door)

PROF. WATSON

What is it?

(The door opens; KELLY carefully pokes her head in)

KELLY

Good afternoon, Professor Watson.

PROF. WATSON

It's you, is it, Miss. Kelly?

KELLY

Sorry to interrupt.

PROF. WATSON

Where is my secretary?

KELLY

She's not here.

PROF. WATSON

What have you done with her?

KELLY

I haven't done anything with her.

PROF. WATSON

Then where is she?

KELLY

Maybe she is in the lady's room.

PROF. WATSON

Maybe you stuffed her in the closet.

KELLY

Why would I do that?

PROF. WATSON

Yes, why would you? Oh, what do you want?

KELLY

A minute of your time.

PROF. WATSON

You need to make an appointment with my secretary. I don't want university students thinking they can barge into my office anytime they please. Shouldn't you be studying for a test or something?

KELLY

(Stepping through the doorway)

That has to do with why I'm here.

PROF. WATSON

Miss Kelly, if you are referring to your request for extra time on tests, we have discussed that subject. You know my position.

KELLY

You said you don't allow special treatment of students in your classroom, regardless if they have a disability or not. If one student gets extra time on tests, then all students should get it.

PROF. WATSON

Exactly. And I have not changed my mind. Good day, Miss Kelly.

(KELLY sets down her backpack and unzips it)

KELLY

See, the thing is, I happened to come across this study.

PROF. WATSON

Just what we all need – another silly study.

KELLY

(Removing a set of stapled papers from the backpack)

This study applies directly to my situation.

(KELLY places the papers on the desk in front of PROF. WATSON; he doesn't bother to pick it up)

KELLY

The study shows that students with learning disabilities make statistically significant gains in their test scores when provided with extra time on tests.

PROF. WATSON

I am sure they do.

KELLY

The study goes on to report that students *without* learning disabilities do not show statistically significant improvement in their test scores when provided with extra time on tests.

PROF. WATSON

So?

KELLY

The study proves that providing extra time on tests to students with learning disabilities allows them the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned rather than providing them an advantage over students *without* disabilities.

PROF. WATSON

Miss Kelly, it is my opinion that providing disabled students with accommodations such as extra time on tests is a numskull idea.

KELLY

Why is that, Professor Watson?

PROF. WATSON

Because the real world does not afford accommodations – to anyone.

KELLY

Are you serious?

PROF. WATSON

I am. Here's an example. Say you graduate from the university thanks to a bunch of accommodations you cry about and finally get. Then you leave here and decide to go into robbing banks for a living, because it has to be a more exciting than sitting around a boring office like this all damn day.

Say you join a gang and it comes time for your first bank job. The guy running the gang says you have to be in and out of the bank in six minutes. A minute more and the cops are pointing shotguns in your face. But you have a learning disability. You tell the gang boss that you need extra time in the bank. Now what do you think he will say?

KELLY

Sir, I want to be a scholar, not a bank robber!

PROF. WATSON

Miss Kelly, you claim you need extra time on tests.

KELLY

Yes.

PROF. WATSON

Tell me why.

KELLY

I have a processing disorder.

PROF. WATSON

Do you even know what that means – processing disorder?

KELLY

A processing disorder is a deficiency in a person's ability to effectively use the information his senses have gathered through hearing or reading.

PROF. WATSON

And what does that explain?

KELLY

It explains why a person with a processing disorder has trouble with learning and performance. And it further accounts for why the inability to process information efficiently can lead to frustration, low self-esteem and social withdrawal.

PROF. WATSON

Don't take this personally, but every slacker I've met had a good excuse for his – or her – poor performance.

KELLY

I am not a slacker, Professor Watson. I have to work twice as hard as other students just to keep up in a class.

PROF. WATSON

Is that what you are going to tell the IRS?

KELLY

What?

PROF. WATSON

That you have a processing disorder. Is that what you will say? Because if that is your plan, you will not be spared a long stretch in the joint.

KELLY

I am not following you.

PROF. WATSON

Say you graduate from the university thanks to a bunch of accommodations you cry about and finally get. Then you leave here and decide you want to go into – whatever. Like everyone else you get fed up with the intrusions of big government in your life and you start cheating on your income tax. Then one day the IRS decides to audit your tax returns. Significant irregularities are found. What will be your excuse? It's not my fault; I have a processing disorder.

KELLY

I would never cheat on my income taxes.

PROF. WATSON

Bully for you, Miss Goody Two Shoes. What other accommodations do you think you are entitled to in addition to extra time on tests? Books on tapes?

KELLY

I don't have a visual impairment.

PROF. WATSON

A sign-language interpreter in your classrooms?

KELLY

My hearing is fine.

PROF. WATSON

An accessible classroom chair?

KELLY

I don't suffer from arthritis.

PROF. WATSON

A note-taker?

KELLY

I have complete motor control of my arms and hands.

PROF. WATSON

A computer with assistive software?

KELLY

With my type of learning disability, I do struggle with reading and math but I can manage without assistive technology.

PROF. WATSON

How about a distraction free room to take your tests in?

KELLY

Actually, yes.

PROF. WATSON

I knew there would be more.

KELLY

My medical documentation attests to my need for certain accommodations and the university's Office for Disabled Student Services has agreed to provide them.

PROF. WATSON

The Office for Disabled Student Services may have agreed, but I run this department and I haven't agreed to anything.

KELLY

I was a Special Education student in high school.

PROF. WATSON

Congratulations. Your parents must have been proud.

KELLY

Professor Watson, why don't you just proclaim to the world that learning disabilities don't exist?

PROF. WATSON

I wouldn't say that.

KELLY

Then you believe that every person suffers from some degree of one disability or another.

PROF. WATSON

I wouldn't say that either.

KELLY

What would you say?

PROF. WATSON

I've already said it: accommodations are a hindrance, not an aid, to success in the real world.

KELLY

What if you needed accommodations?

PROF. WATSON

Well, I don't.

KELLY

Say you were fired from your teaching job for being an idiot. You grin because you wonder why it took the university so long to realize your incompetency. To celebrate, you buy a new sports car, which you pay for with the money you gained by cheating on your income tax.

You jump in the sports car, push the gas pedal to the floor and go screaming down the highway. You laugh your narcissistic head off as you honk at cars to get out of your way. The radio is turned up full blast, playing your favorite kind of music, punk polka. You are in your glory.

You round a curve going 40 miles over the speed limit. Suddenly, a piece of junk appears on the highway. You over-swerve to miss it. You lose control and your new sports car goes flying off the pavement and slams into a tree. And because sports cars are so lightweight and small, they fare far worse in the same accident than would a standard size vehicle, which means you fare very badly in your accident.

You wake up from a 10-day coma and the doctor informs you that you are paralyzed from the waist down for the rest of your life.

PROF. WATSON

And what does that have to do with all the tea in China?

KELLY

If you were paralyzed, you would have to use a wheelchair, you would be disabled. You would need accommodations.

PROF. WATSON

What accommodations?

KELLY

A permit to park in the disabled parking spaces in the university lot. Curb cuts so you can wheel yourself across the street to this side of the campus. A ramp to bypass the steps into this building. And, since the building doesn't have an elevator, an office on the first floor rather than on the second floor where your office is now.

PROF. WATSON

Anything else?

KELLY

The first floor restroom would have to be renovated. The entrance is too narrow to allow your wheelchair to pass through, so it would have to be widened. One of the toilet stalls would need to be enlarged to accommodate your wheelchair. The toilet seat would need to be raised and grab bars would have to be installed.

PROF. WATSON

What about the restroom sinks?

KELLY

One sink would need to be re-fitted with accessible faucet handles. The soap and paper towel dispensers would have to be lowered, as would the wall mirror.

PROF. WATSON

Nice try, Miss Kelly. But you're wrong. I wouldn't need any of those accommodations.

KELLY

Why is that?

PROF. WATSON

Because I don't work at the university. I was sacked. Remember?

KELLY

Prof. Watson, there are students at this university who require accommodations, be it because they are wheelchair riders and need accessible restrooms or because they have a learning disability and need extra time on tests.

PROF. WATSON

That's none of my concern. I'm driving down the highway in my new sports car, laughing like a crazy person.

KELLY

(Standing)

I tried to work this out with you. It hasn't worked. Now I am filing a discrimination complaint with the U.S. Department of Education!

(KELLY exits in anger. PROF. WATSON picks up his paperback book and starts reading again. Beat. He puts down the book, thinks. He picks up his cellphone, goes to the Notes icon)

PROF. WATSON

Note to myself: never buy a small sports car.

(He puts down the cellphone, picks up the book and his pipe and starts reading again, happily so)

END