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An Interview with Susan Cowan

An Oral History Conducted by Andres Moses

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV

Living to Dance: Tapping in Las Vegas



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Preface

Susan Cowan grew up in Kansas City, Missouri, and enjoyed a loving childhood with her parents, older sister and grandparents, complete with family vacations to California and Mexico. Called to dancing ever since she can remember, this passion remained with her throughout her life.

By the time Susan graduated from high school, she had moved five different times. This nomadic nature continued once being married and having two children, eventually settling in Boulder, Colorado. It was here that Susan began working in higher education, as a secretary at the University of Colorado-Boulder, where she met her second husband.

During her 19 years at UC-Boulder, Susan advanced in her career, becoming the lead administrator for the Chemistry Department. It was also here that Susan took dance classes again, with some of the best in the field. Susan and her husband moved to Las Vegas after nearly 25 years in Boulder, where she quickly found a community to express herself in dance.

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January 31, 2006
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Andres Moses

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-- by discussing where you were born. And talk about your family a little bit.

I was born in Kansas City, Kansas. Shortly after I was born, my family moved to the Missouri side, which is just across the river. I lived there for 13 years.

I have one sister. She's four years older than me. No brothers.

My dad was a bakery salesperson. He was a sales manager of Wonder Bread and Hostess Cakes there for a while. And then he went with a friend of his who had a private bakery, you know, a small business of his own, and he became a sales manager there.

So you got to get all the goodies when you were a kid.

A lot of them. My mother called him her sweet cookie man.

I started dancing when I was just five because my sister had a birth injury. They didn't used to call it therapy, but that's what my mother saw that she needed. So she enrolled her in dancing school. You didn't have babysitters. I went along. Boy, I was jiggling away over there. I just couldn't hold still. The music was in me already.

My dad was a fabulous piano player. I was married and out of the house before I knew my mother also played the piano. She always let him be the big star, and he was. He was. He was a very good piano player, too good to become famous at anything because he read music, but he'd rather play by ear. He could play anything. He liked some of the classics, but he really liked rhythm music better. So that's what he did. Every Saturday night he played in a dance band. I remember that we went. I would be put to bed laying on a little bench there and wake up in the morning in my bed. Every Saturday night that's what we did.

At the club I guess he was playing?

They had what they used to call dance bands. It was during the Depression Era. He played for dance bands. They had what they call a dance barn. Friends of his owned it. That's what they played every Saturday night, just dance music. People would come. It cost almost nothing. That's what they did for fun.

So now, where were you parents from? Where did they come from?

My mother was born in Olathe, Kansas. My dad was born in -- I don't think it was Tipton, Missouri, but close around there.

The same area, though?

Yes, the same area in Missouri.

Now, tell me about your sister. She was four years older than you, correct?

Yes.

And what was her name?

Marilyn.

And did she dance as well?

She did. She danced. But due to a birth injury, she was pretty stiff on her right side. She was born paralyzed on her right side. But this helped her.

Did the therapy help?

Oh, yes. They didn't call it therapy. Oh, no. My mother just enrolled her in dancing class. I just couldn't wait to do it. I just knew I had to do it. I was doing it anyway. My mother said this kid's got to have lessons.

So you enjoyed dancing. That's great.

Oh, yes.

What kind of dancing was it? Was it tap?

It was tap and ballet.

So you've tapping and ballet since you were younger. Wow.

And some acrobatic, but not much. Our teacher didn't think it was real good for young children. So she did mostly ballet and tap.

What kind of schedule -- did you do it every day like after school or like just --

No. I hate to admit that I never practiced. I did not ever practice. It was always in my head and I was always thinking about it, but I didn't actually practice every day. We just went on Saturdays.

In fact, every Saturday when I was old enough to go by myself, which was probably at the age of eight -- you weren't afraid to let your kids go someplace by themselves at that time. Mother gave me a quarter. It cost me a nickel to get on the streetcar. I took the streetcar to just about a block from where our dancing school was. Then I got a transfer. I don't think you know about transfers. But anyway, you get --

Kind of like they have them today on the buses where --

I guess. You would get a little piece of paper and the bus driver punches it. It tells what time and where. So he'd give me a transfer. Then I'd go to this dancing school and we'd dance for over an hour, you know, whatever. We took tap and ballet all the same day. Then I'd walk two blocks to catch the other streetcar that went a different direction and go to another dancing school. And I would use my transfer.

This was all by yourself?

All by myself. I used the transfer to go down there, and stopped about two blocks short of the other dancing school. There was a White Castle hamburger place. I loved those things. I got two little White Castle hamburgers. They were a nickel apiece and a glass of milk, which was also a nickel. That was 15 cents. So that was 20 cents total. Then I had a nickel left to come home on the streetcar. Every Saturday I did this. I don't believe it now. You can't do anything with a quarter, but I did then.

Yes. That was nice. Not these days, certainly not.

No, not today.

So that was only on Saturdays. Every other day would you dance around the house or anything?

Yes, and at school. Every program they had us dancing. My best friend, Margie, lived the second door from me, and she took dancing at the same place I did. We went together. They always had us dance for every program at school. I'm sure the kids got sick of looking at us. We had the costumes and stuff. So we were in every show. It was a large school. There were over a thousand kids in our grade school, which was kind of unusual at the time.

What was Kansas City like? Or was this in Missouri?

This was on the Missouri side.

What was the feel there, that area? Was it very Midwest friendly as we all think of it? I mean during the time.

Just being a child, I knew my neighborhood very well and the downtown because we could go on the streetcar. 12th and Main was the downtown. You know the 12th Street Rag? That was from Kansas City's 12th Street.

Oh, was it?

It was. Because 12th Street went clear through the colored section. Those were the people who really did ragtime music a lot, you know. The 12th Street Rag was from that area.

That's an interesting fact to know. Wonderful.

So now, tell me about your social life in Kansas City. Was there anything else other than dancing? Like what would you do as a kid growing up for fun? Did you have any hobbies or interests?

Every summer my family took a trip.

Tell me about that.

My grandmother lived with us. She was the legal guardian of my uncle who was injured in World War I. He was in the veteran's hospital in Las Animas, Colorado. Since she lived with us, the government gave her money every year. She wanted to see him once a year, at least. So we just took a family vacation. From there we would travel around the West. We grew to love the West quite a lot.

Wonderful. Now, would you ever come to Las Vegas?

Oh, no. Well, Las Vegas was nothing. I was born in 1928. I had a friend who was older than us, and he said in 1928 they visited Las Vegas, and there were wooden sidewalks.

I'm sure there wasn't a lot around here.

There wasn't really much here.

Where would you guys visit, California?

We did go to California. One of my grandmother's sisters lived there. One year we went there. One year we went to Mexico for Christmas. I remember that trip very well.

What was Mexico like back then?

It could have been very dangerous. We drove in our car, of course. My dad had befriended a young Mexican man. He had a family in this tiny, little town. I cannot remember the name of it. I asked my sister recently, and she can't remember either. But it's close to Chihuahua City. We were going to go clear to Mexico City, but my dad was one of these people who was so interested in everything that we never got that far.

He liked to travel and explore.

Yes. In Chihuahua City, I remember that we spent two nights. The police were very interested in this. They couldn't believe that a visitor would spend two nights in their town. They called him into the police station to question him quite a lot.

What?

Yes. They thought he was some kind of a criminal who was going to rob a bank or something, just because we were there for two days.

Usually people are there for just one?

Just overnight if they get stuck there. I remember I loved that. We went through the market. Every town has a market. It was just so interesting. I bought a little doll. I had saved up my money, of course. I was ten this year. I don't know where she is. I've lost her somehow over the years. She had Oxaca beaded on the dress. Oxaca is a very strange spelling, but that's the way you pronounce it. It's O-X-A-C-A. ...

We did visit this young man whom my dad had been friends with. We did finally find his family. That was quite an experience. They lived in a tiny, little town. There must have been 50 little huts with dirt floors, very clean. They had an oven outside where they baked their bread. Each one of them had a fighting rooster. They did that. They were very poor. He had a little sister at home and her name was -- I guess it was Niña. I don't know. We didn't speak Spanish. My dad did.

Niña? That is girl in Spanish.

Yes, it is. My sister had just received a set of anagrams. You know what that is? It was a game, kind of. But it had little block letters about the size of dominos.

Different shapes?

No. You spell with it. They were letters. Anagrams, yes. I spelled my name and Marilyn spelled her name. She'd try to pronounce it, and we giggled a lot. Then she put Niña. I don't know whether that was her name or -- yeah, she thought that was her name. Maybe they just said, hey, girl, you know.

That's quite possible because in that culture sometimes they do refer to a daughter as la niña.

That's right. I remember two other things about that trip. Families built their homes out of adobe of some kind, and then cover it with mud. On the inside there was an altar. Of course, they were very Catholic. They had pieces of broken glass that were colored glass. Just anything that they thought was pretty was on this altar.

Was it like a special part of the house?

Oh, yes. It was in a corner in a little built-in shelf. They had a cross there, and then anything that they considered very pretty.

And they insisted that we take the only thing of value that they had which was a zarape.

What is that?

It's a rug. It was a rug. A beautiful, beautiful rug. That was their prized possession. They were so honored that we came to visit them that they insisted that we take it.

They're very hospitable.

Oh, very. Yes. I always felt so bad because they were so poor.

That's very interesting. Now, when you went there was this primitive compared to --

Extremely. Yeah.

-- what we have?

Oh, extremely primitive. In fact, to get there, there were several tracks. My dad found somebody going. Actually, he had a little donkey cart.

There weren't many vehicles?

No. They thought we were very rich because we had an automobile. We had an old Dodge. We weren't rich. But they thought we were. Oh, another thing. The car quit running. It just got -- what do you call it? -- vapor-locked or something.

Overheated.

Yes, something like that because it was hot. There was only one man in town who had ever seen an automobile.

Really? So did they all crowd around like --

They all crowded around. He and my dad tried to do something about it. He was the one who made the carts and stuff like that. So he was the mechanic. He had seen an automobile.

So that made him eligible.

Yes. When we were all standing around, there was an old lady who had kind of a glass case on a single stick. That's what it sat on. She had sweets in there, dulces. My dad bought every one of them and gave them to everybody around. Oh, they just knew we were rich. I mean it was just --

Do you remember how much they charged for that?

I have no idea. Almost nothing. But he bought them all and gave them to the people around, lots of old ladies with no teeth. I remember that. They thought he was great.

Now, we talked about your father. What about your mother?

My mom, she was a very pretty little redheaded lady. She was real cute. But she never gave my sister or me her red hair. We didn't get it. She was a very busy house mom, very active in school activities and things like that.

So she was an involved parent.

Oh, very involved. My sister and I both played in a band in grade school and high school. She was a band mother. We had a car, and a lot of people didn't. Remember, these were hard times. She would always take a car full wherever she went. If the weather was so bad we couldn't go on the streetcar to dancing, she took Margie, Marilyn and I to dancing, and Margie's mother too, if she wanted to go.

That is a full-time job there. So now --

And busy in church, too.

Well, tell us about that.

One of my dad's relative -- I think it was a great-grandfather -- was a Baptist minister. So we were Baptists. Oh, yeah.

You went to church every Sunday morning.

Oh, you bet. Sunday school and church; we couldn't miss that.

Did you get involved in the church activities as well?

Oh, yes. He was one of the leaders in starting a men's Bible class. It got to be quite a large class. That was pretty significant in his life.

Now, with the musical background of your parents, were they in the church choir too? Did they participate?

Not when I was younger, not in the music department. No. Mother felt she was too busy to sing in the choir, and my dad couldn't stand it if he couldn't play. They already had organist. He was busy too.

So, did you stay in Missouri for high school or did you --

No. I went to five high schools.

Wow. Moving around a lot then?

Yes. My parents kept the house in Kansas City. But the war was coming on. My dad was too young for World War I, and too old for to be in the service in World War II. He just had to do something patriotic. So he built army camps. He became a carpenter. He was already a carpenter. He built stuff all the time. Carpenters have a toolbox that they take. He battered his up so it looked like he had a lot of experience. He went and worked on army camps. The first one, I think, was Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. That was pretty close. And then -- no. I think the first one was in Colorado Springs. What's the name of that one? Camp Carson, they called it. Then fort something else. I don't remember. He worked on Camp Carson for one summer when I was 13. And then we moved back home.

Right away he decided he would quit the bakery business because it wasn't patriotic. Besides, he wasn't sure it was going to last because the man he worked for was having trouble getting sugar and all that stuff, even commercially. So he started being a carpenter, and he did work on Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Then he went to Camp Hale, Colorado.

So that brought you to Colorado.

Yes.

Now, each time would he move the whole family? Would the whole family go with him?

We all spent the summer in Colorado Springs that summer. But then, no. My sister was in college. He took a year off and he was going to -- I don't know what his idea was then. They didn't confide in me a whole lot about that. But for one year he leased a little place on Highway 40 close to Marshall, Missouri. It was a filling station, five cabins, and a little restaurant. Mother was the cook and he'd pump gas, and they'd clean the cabins and stuff. Then the war really came along with gas rationing. So he did not renew that. That was too bad because he enjoyed it.

He had such an imagination. He was kind of an artistic fellow, too. He made little signs that said, "The mayor says." He also had this little cartoon character that was called the mayor of Pipertown. A man named Mr. Piper owned it. He was leasing it out because he was too old to run it anymore. So my dad said he was the mayor of Pipertown, population 11. The signs up and down the highway said, "The mayor says hot apple pie and coffee at Pipertown," so many miles. You know, you've seen them like that.

That is funny.

Yeah. He was very imaginative.

Now, during this time, what were your impressions of what was going on in the world, with the war, with your father quitting the bakery and everything?

We always liked to go places, like to Colorado Springs, and live there for the summer. I loved it. I rode horses every day. We were not very far from a stable and I got to ride every day. I loved that. But it was unsettling for me because I was just about to go into high school.

This is how I went to five high schools. My father had leased out our house to some other people. I mean, we couldn't throw them out. So my mother and I took an apartment. My sister was in college. My dad would come home on weekends, work at Fort Leonard Wood during the week, and come back and forth every weekend. That was kind of a tough thing.

So it was just you and your mom?

And my grandmother. By that time she was very forgetful. I was kind of her care-keeper. I took care of her a lot. But when I was in school, mother was at work. Mother got a job. Everybody had a job, had to get a job. The war was on.

What did she do?

She worked at JC Penney in Kansas City, Kansas, and she sold hats. She was not prepared to do anything else.

Then when my dad went to Colorado, while my sister was still in college.

Where did you sister go to college?

Missouri Valley in Marshall, Missouri. That's where I went later. Daddy went to Leadville -- well, Camp Hale. They were building it. It's 20 miles from Leadville, Colorado, if you know where that is.

I'm not familiar with Leadville, Colorado. Is that in Eastern Colorado?

Ooh, it's very high in the mountains. No, western, the way western slope. That's how we went through Vail to get to Leadville.

My grandmother had to be put in a nursing home. She just was -- I couldn't be there. Mother couldn't be there. And she really was not able to take care of herself. So, regretfully, that's what we had to do. But she didn't know the difference. She just didn't know. Didn't know us. Didn't know anyone. It was pretty sad.

Did she have Alzheimer's?

I don't know. Nobody mentioned Alzheimer's then. They didn't know what it was, of course. Senile dementia is what they called it. It was pretty sad. It was hard.

Now, was that your mother's mother?

My mother's mother. So mother and I stayed with my dad's mother, who lived in Kansas City, Kansas. My granddad was a barber and she had a boarding house. He helped cook when he'd come home. They ran it for years. We thought it was just a huge house. It was a three-story house. I've been back there lately. It wasn't so big. It just seemed like it.

That happens when we're younger. Yes, I remember that.

But mother and I stayed there. Then at Christmastime -- and I don't remember which year this was. It may have been '43. It may have been '42. I bet it was '42, maybe even '41 -- I can't remember. Oh, it had to have been '41. It was. She went to Colorado at Christmastime to visit him. She was lonesome for him, and he couldn't leave his job. He was building Camp Hale. In order for her to be there and stay in the camp that they were building, she had to have a job. So she got a job. They were tickled to death to have her. She just started doing office work. At that particular time, President Roosevelt froze everybody on their government jobs.

This was in '41?

Yeah. I think it was '41. It might have been '42.

Towards the end of his term.

Yes. She got stuck there. I was staying with my grandmother. It was bad. It was just disaster for me. After my dad left Pipertown, mother didn't know where we were going to be. Until she got the apartment in Kansas City, Kansas, I had to live at the college girls' dormitory. She made arrangements for me to live there. My sister was a freshman at that college and I was a freshman in high school, but just for one semester. That's where I started high school.

Was your sister aware of what' was going on?

No. She didn't care. She was on the first floor and she had a roommate and everything. I was on the third floor, and had my own room. I had to obey all the rules, which was fine with me. After one semester, I went to Kansas City, Kansas. Mother and I had an apartment there with my grandmother. I stayed there for until March of the next year. It was that Christmas just before then that mother had gone to visit him. So, there we were.

She finally rented a house. She found a house to rent in Leadville. They were very scarce at that time because it's an old, old mining town. She found a pretty nice house. We rented the house and then she sent for me. I finished the semester in high school. I started it the next year. They had finished the civilian housing in Camp Hale, so then we moved to the camp.

With your father?

Yes. My sister had put her college education on hold because there were jobs to be had and she was working there, too. So my mom, dad, sister and I all lived in Camp Hale, Colorado. At any given time, there were about 16 or 17 high school-aged kids there.

There were plenty of grade school kids living there with their families. So they had a grade school, but they didn't have a high school. So we went to a county high school in Gypsum. Every Sunday night we got on the train and went 40 or 45 miles to Gypsum, Colorado, and boarded with a lady named Mrs. Rubadeax all week, and came home on Friday night. We spent the weekends at home.

All week you'd be gone from your family?

That's right. All week.

And now, there were only about 16 of you, you said, that would go.

Uh-huh.

Wow. You did not like that?

Well, everybody was upset because there was a war going on. And everybody was moving around all the time. So we just accepted that that was the way things were. I roomed with three other girls in the same house. We lost each other for a while, but then we had a little reunion. One of them has passed way now, but the other two -- one lives in Oregon and one lives in Idaho. And I see them every now and then. And we talk often.

That's wonderful.

Yes. After all these years.

So you have some stories to tell there.

For my senior year in high school, I started in Gypsum. Then they closed Camp Hale and we moved back to Kansas City, into our old house. I finished high school there with the kids that I had started in kindergarten with.

So you had to go away and then you're back to finish high school.

That's right. My five high schools were Marshall High School; Kansas City, Kansas, which was called Wyandotte County High School -- it was just a new one; it was a very nice school -- Leadville High School; Gypsum High School; and East High School in Kansas City.

That is excellent. Wow. I know people who have gone to one high school and forget the name of it.

Well, I couldn't forget that.

During the whole moving back and forth, was it hard to maintain friends or maintain a life, so to speak, with the dancing and everything?

Actually, the dancing was good because every place I went people said "she can dance good." We'll use her doing this and that. I was a twirler and all that stuff in high school, majorette. I didn't have any trouble getting friends. I hated leaving them always. That was hard. It was real good when I got to graduate with my friends, so many of them. So many of them were still there.

In fact, a lot of them are still there. We had our 50th high school reunion some years ago, and there were 137 out of the 300-and-some class there. A lot of them never moved away. I couldn't believe it. I just thought it was so strange. Do you know every second Tuesday of the month they have lunch together?

These are people you went to kindergarten with. That is remarkable.

Yes. Out of that big graduating class -- well, not all of them started in kindergarten. But out of that class, I guess there's about 30 left that still meet every second Tuesday.

That is wonderful. That is really amazing.

I go with them every time we're there, which isn't often anymore. It's so fun.

(End Tape 1, Side A.)

I went to Missouri Valley College. There was a boy there that I had met and dated a couple of times in Marshall. He had been in the service, gotten out and went down to Marshall to visit his friends. Meanwhile, his family had moved to Kansas City. But he kept going down there to visit his friends. We were in a kind of a soda shop. He came over and said do you remember me? And I did. So he kept coming down there and we started dating. He asked me to marry him.

And you were 18 at the time?

I was 17. I graduated high school when I was 16. My birthday is in August. In grade school, we just had kindergarten and seven grades. There was no eighth grade. It was an experimental study and they kept records on it. In fact, the records are in the archives in Washington, D.C.

Was it just your area school?

It was about ten years worth of grade-school kids. They kept records on that ten-year period to see. We did learn more in a shorter time. But it cost too much because it was a platoon system for grade school. Like, we had a room for art. We had a room for music. We had a room for geography. We had a library, of course. We had a boys' gym and a girls' gym. It was a really fantastic program, and we learned an awful lot.

But did they just go through the material quickly or --

Yes. There were at least 40 kids in a class. Nobody got out of their seat, and nobody whispered. Nobody did any of that stuff. They were really very strict. But we learned so many things because we had this platoon system. We'd go around to the different rooms for that subject. They didn't do that normally in school.

Not in grade school.

No. We had a homeroom and then all this other stuff. There was no eighth grade. So I graduated when I was 16 and went to college when I was 17. I went one year, and I was getting ready to go to the next year.

So did you end up marrying?

I overheard my dad say why are we going to send her to college? She's just going to get married anyway. He said that to my mother. I thought, well, okay, that's what I'll do then. I've regretted it ever since. I was married to the wrong guy. Yes, I was. I got married that fall.

And did you start a family immediately or did you work?

I worked with the telephone company, AT&T. I had been married for three years when I had my first child, Bobby. Before that, I had a dancing school.

Tell me. You owned the dancing school?

I called it a dancing school. I was 18. I was teaching about 25 little kids every Saturday morning. I did that, and my husband was in school. We lived in Sunflower Village, Kansas. He was going to University of Kansas.

Was this a small town or was it --

Actually, it was a housing area for Sunflower Ordnance Plant that was close-by. The war was over by that time and they weren't making ordnance anymore. The housing was still there, and so it became university married-student housing. I became pregnant and had a little trouble.

Doing the dancing classes?

The dancing wasn't a problem. I don't know what was wrong. I had some condition where I was swelling terribly all over. I was about five-foot-two in every direction. It was bad. My husband said you can't work. You can't do anything like that. And then I had my first child Robert. My husband had finished school. He got a job with Utah Pipeline, and we moved to Rangely, Colorado. Bobby was about ten months old.

That must have been tough moving with a child and everything.

Yes. My husband, Bob, had to go first to find housing. It was just like an oil boomtown and there was very little housing. Finally, he found a place for us to live, a nice duplex, and Bobby and I went. We lived there until -- he was an engineer. The company's policy was that employees work in the field first. As soon as there was an opening in their Salt Lake City office, he'd move there. We were not in Rangely too long until we got sent to Salt Lake City. We lived in Murray, a little suburb for a while. Then I became pregnant again.

Number two.

Number two. I had already started another dancing class, and had about 30 kids there. I thought, I know what this means; I better quit teaching. But it was okay. We moved into the city, Salt Lake City, a couple blocks from Liberty Park, which is a place well-known. That's where we had Ken, Kenneth.

Another boy.

Yes, another boy. Bob decided that he wasn't getting anywhere in that job, and we'd go back to Kansas City, to start all over again.

Your parents, were they still in Colorado or were there in Missouri now?

No. My parents had moved back to Kansas City. His parents lived in Kansas City. My parents lived close to North Kansas City. My dad had built a motel.

A new project. Okay.

Oh, yes. I told you he was quite a character.

He sounds like a very interesting man.

Oh, he was. He was a charmer. He was really cute. I'll show you pictures of him. He had built this motel. He and mother ran it. She also worked now. Girls were out of the house, why not? She did the books for a dress shop in Liberty, Missouri. They both played for church now. Mother was the organist. Daddy played the piano. They played together.

I saw that coming.

Yes. Claycomo Baptist Church. They were involved in the church activities there.

Did you also attend that church when you went there to see them?

Yes. We stayed with them in their motel just for a little bit until -- Bob was looking for another job. He worked in Kansas City for a little bit. He got a temporary job there. He knew going in and they knew. It was okay because we had a place to stay. Mother loved having the children there.

The grandkids.

Yes. Then he got a job with -- I can't remember the name of the company -- in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and we moved to Tulsa. The youngest boy was just a year old. He had had his first birthday just before we moved. We lived in Tulsa for seven years.

What kind of job did he get in Tulsa?

Engineering. I can't remember the name of the company. Camel maybe. It doesn't matter. We lived in a little house there. Then we built another house there. Then he started working for an airline -- Douglas Aircraft; not an airline, an aircraft company.

The engineering of the aircraft.

Yes, engineering. Douglas Aircraft. We had quite a circle of friends there, and they all went to our church. We'd joined the Methodist Church there. I was the organist and choir director.

So the transition was pretty smooth from Kansas City to Oklahoma. Did you enjoy living in Oklahoma at that time?

Yes, although my kids were really sick for a little bit.

What was wrong with them?

They kept getting a strep infection. They'd pass it back and forth. Bobby had to miss a year of school because of it. He would get well and go back to school, and get sick again. We got his tonsils out finally. Then they got well.

In grade school?

Yes. In this one year they had mumps, they had measles, they had chicken pox and they had numerous strep infections, both of them. They kept giving it to each other. I was really worried about him. But when he finally got his tonsils out and he was okay. His teacher was so sweet. She said I just love this kid and I'd love to have him back in my class, but I'm going to recommend that you don't bring him back to school. He's missed so much he'll never catch up. He was young anyway for that class. He was the youngest kid in the class. She said let's start him again in first grade again, but with a different teacher so he won't think he's failed. So we did that, and that put them two years apart anyway.

And he didn't understand what was going on or --

No. He was too sick most of the time. School was out and it was okay. He went to school the next year, but he had a different teacher. He knew that he had not learned a lot. He's a smart guy. He was smart then.

So did he start -- so he was in the same class as brother?

No. They were two years apart. Bob's birthday was October 24th. October 31st is where they cut it off. Ken's was November 3rd. Their birthdays were ten days apart. So when he started in, they were just two years apart again. It was good. It was good for both of them I think to do that.

So now, did you get a job in Tulsa or were you too busy with the kids?

No. I was the mom, and I was a Cub Scout den mother, for three years. Oh, boy.

Did you start another dancing class?

No, I did not.

Did you do any performances or anything on the side?

No. I was kind of busy with church and the choir, and busy with Junior League.

Tell us about that, Junior League.

Yes. A ladies organization.

What did they do?

The part that I did I was modeling. They'd have fashion shows and I modeled clothes.

It was just a group of women, like a club?

Yes. We were a very small part of it. We got into it through our garden club. Our neighborhood ladies formed a little garden club. We thought that would be fun. They

had a Men's Rose Association. I don't know. The men decided that they'd do the garden club thing with roses. They wanted these little neighborhood groups to come and send women to be hostesses for all these big things. That's how we did that. Junior League got involved in it just before we moved away. So I really didn't get involved in the league much except for modeling when they had their fashion shows. It was kind of fun.

This was in the 1950s, correct, or the 60s?

It was in the 50s.

What was the community like in the 50s? Did it sort of remind you of the same thing in Kansas City, Missouri-type, or was it a little different?

It was a neighborhood sort of thing because most of our friends had come from Tulsa. They came from the same church and the same neighborhood. That's how we knew them. They worked at Douglas Aircraft. Then Douglas lost contracts, and laid off most everybody. Out of the division that my husband was in, there were only two left and he was one of them. Those guys all came to Boulder, Colorado, to work for Ball Brothers, who were just starting up. They were doing the -- it was a satellite. Oh, what was the name of that thing? Orbiting Solar Observatory, O-S-O. He thought, I see the writing on the wall here; they're going to let me go next or somebody. He said I want to go with my friends. So he quit there, and also went to Ball Brothers.

You moved the whole family to Boulder?

Yes. We sure did.

By this time were you tired of moving, or it's been awhile, seven years, time to go?

It was seven years. It was okay. It was okay because all our friends were leaving anyway, the ones that we were closest to. It was kind of an adventure to move the whole family.

The children were still young enough to --

That's right. They didn't care. In fact, they thought it was kind of fun. There was never any snow in Tulsa. Or, if there was, it was just a little, tiny bit, and it'd go away in a day or two. So they liked that.

Boulder, Colorado now, another change of venue. Tell us about that. How did that work out? Everybody is excited to move. That's a plus. Where did you guys choose to stay? Did you live in the same community as everybody?

Boulder was such a small town at that time that it was -- yes, we were fairly close. Three of the couples that had moved from Tulsa lived very close to us in our neighborhood. That was nice. It was such a small town that the other two didn't live that far away.

Did you immediately get involved in church, community, get the kids involved in things?

Yes. In Tulsa, we had started -- we got tired of this garden club business where they all wanted us to go down and spend all our time. We had little kids at home. So we took the money that we were going to pay our dues to the garden club and bought bridge lessons. So we had a little bridge club. When we moved to Boulder, we still were in the same neighborhood and still played bridge. It was fun. It was nice. We already had a readymade group there. So that was good.

Did you enjoy bridge more than the garden club?

Yes, we did.

Was the dancing just a weekend thing? Would you go out and -- like what would you do for fun now?

In Boulder? Just about every weekend we went to the mountains, climbed around and hiked, and had picnics and stuff with some of our friends.

A lot of outdoor activities?

Yes. A lot of that. In Boulder, I did start dancing again because one of these friends got us interested in Boulder Civic Opera. They did musicals. Well, of course, I just loved it and I got into that. Pretty soon I became the choreographer for some of that stuff, and did a little dancing.

Were these big productions or small?

Oh, they were pretty small. They were in a high school auditorium. It was a fun thing to do, and it was a well-established thing already. It was fun to be in that group.

I imagine. So how many shows did you guys produce or did you choreograph?

Oh, gee. There were a lot. Let me see. There was *Girl Crazy*. There was *South Pacific*. There was -- oh, I can't remember all of them -- *The Music Man*. Oh, the Shakespeare one, *Kiss Me Kate*. That was great. We had some good dancing in there.

Now, who were the dancers? Was it high school students or --

No. Just housewives like me, and guys who liked to sing and who were talented and liked to do it.

So it wasn't just anybody. It was actually pretty professionally done and everything?

Oh, yes. You had to audition.

Did you want to do the choreographing?

Oh, I did, and dance too.

You did both.

Oh, yes. I did a lot of stabs. The first one we were in this friend of mine talked me into doing props with her. And so we did props. I thought right away, well, heck, I can sing. So we started singing in the chorus. Whenever there was dancing, I did dancing.

By this time was your dad still doing the hotel?

My dad? Oh, yes, still in motels.

And was that successful?

Oh, yes, very successful. In fact, it was successful until the highway came along and took part of his land.

Ooh. Eminent domain?

Yes. And he had land behind that quite a bit. He built some apartments there. That was okay, too. The apartments are still there. But he was wanting to retire. He had bought an old house in Roseport, Missouri, where my sister lives now. She lives in that house because she and her husband bought it from their estate.

What was your sister doing by this time? Was she married?

She married a farmer, and she was a farm wife. They had four children. She was a very busy lady.

Would you visit her often?

As often as I could. But I was busy, too, and it was quite a ways.

Holidays and stuff, Christmas?

Yes. But my husband couldn't travel much. He was -- I don't know. He had problems.

He didn't like to travel a lot? He worked a lot?

Well, he had a lot of problems. He could not leave home much. He'd go to work and that was it. It began to cause a lot of problems.

How long did you spend in Boulder, Colorado?

Thirty-something years. We moved there in 1960 and we just left six years ago.

The children grew up all there and went through the high schools and --

Junior high and high school.

Do you look back on those 30 years and say it went like that or, I mean, did you enjoy them?

It's hard to say because I divorced my husband in 1970. I had started working at the university. I just was terribly unhappy.

In Colorado?

Yes. Things were not good. He was, I think, almost mentally ill and enjoyed it. Yes. Very difficult.

Working at the university, tell me how you got that job.

I started doing that because I couldn't stand being at home when my kids were in college. They were in high school. They didn't want mom doing a lot of stuff with them. So I just got a job. This same friend who got me into the civic opera said I'm getting a job at the university, why don't you? Have a little pin money. So I got a job as a secretary. I had been a good typist before. I took their test and got a job. I was secretary, just part time at first, to the chairman of the Linguistics Committee. He was an Italian man.

Was this like the foreign language department?

Department of Italian. It's part of the College of Arts and Sciences. He was a pretty funny guy. He got that job by default. The one that I had worked for first had a terrible accident in his car and was killed. So Mr. Luigi Romeo fell heir to the job of being chairman. He had been on the committee before, but now he was chairman of the Linguistics Committee. He decided he'd make it a Linguistics Department. He and I wrote up the proposal. I typed the darn thing. My gosh, it was really something. It was long. He was very verbose. It went on and on, but we got it. We were awarded this department. He did it very well.

He went to Italy one summer, and he left me in charge. I'm a secretary. I don't have any authority. I was busy shuffling papers and trying to get him to sign things. He'd send them back, and then they were always late. It was just a mess. When he got back from Italy, I said I'm going to look for another job. It was just he and I in that office running a department.

Were they paying you well for what you were doing?

Oh, no. I was low on the totem pole somehow because secretaries were at that time. So I interviewed in the Chemistry Department. I got that job and it was full-time.

As a secretary as well?

Yes, I was secretary, just for a year. The departmental secretary they had -- they were not pleased with her. So one day the chairman called me in and said, well, I want you to be department secretary. I said, I don't know how to do this job. He said what do you mean? You've been doing it. She wasn't and you were. I said, well, okay, if you think so, but I really don't feel qualified. He said, well, let's just give it a try. So we did for 19 years. Then I retired.

So you enjoyed it?

Yes.

What did you enjoy about the job? Was it being in the university setting and everything?

Yes, I liked that.

It wasn't terribly hard?

It was hard. It was hard because we had a revolving chairman. When I first got there, the chairman was -- his term of office was two years. And the dean finally said, "Look, you guys, in two years you've just begun to learn the job. Would you please make it at least three?" So, they made it a three-year term. One year we had -- or one election -- we had some guy come there, whose name I will not mention. He wanted to be a chairman, but he hadn't been there long enough. He said, a professor has three jobs: chairman, research and teaching. Let's have three guys and we'll rotate. So they did that. The dean let them get away with that. I don't know why.

If you were a chairperson, you were only a chairperson. If you were a professor, you were only a professor? I mean you couldn't do all of them?

He said it's too much for one person because you have to do all three things, so let's have three guys. They got the worst three guys in the world to do it. This was chemistry, biochemistry, physical chemistry, organic chemistry and analytical chemistry. Science people are not good administrators. They're not trained in that. They're trained in science, and they don't think like administrators. So it was kind of funny. I sort of ran the department. I was the continuity, because I was there.

That is amazing. Did you pick up any science knowledge?

Oh my goodness, yes. I can show you books that I typed. At that time, they were typing books, textbooks. We didn't have computers. We had a typewriter.

Word processors?

No. Actually, they had just started with an MTST, which was the forerunner of a computer. It was Magnetic Tape Selectric Typewriter. It was just terrible. It was endless tape, that just went on and on. If you made a mistake, you couldn't go in the middle. It didn't move it down. It was really not a good system, but it was better than just the plain typewriter. They had Selectric typewriters right after I first started, which was nice because those were better. I typed over a hundred words a minute. I was fast.

Wow. That is fast.

Yes, I was fast.

What were your duties there, typing textbooks, just administrative things?

Administrative things. The other secretaries in the department answered to me.

You were like the head secretary.

Yes. Actually, I was the administrative assistant. The state came in, and we were not working for the state at first when I first started there. We were working for the university. The state took the university kicking and screaming, and nails dug in. It turned out to be the best thing for the people to ever happen, working for the state, because you had better benefits and everything else, and you got more money. So that was so much better.

What were the children doing? Were they already in high school? Well, I'm sure during the 19 years they were --

Yes. When they went to college, Bob went to -- he didn't want to go to college. He just didn't want to. He was into cars. He really wanted to be an automotive representative for Ford Motor Company. He went to Weber State in Utah because they had an automotive

degree program. It was an associate degree, but it was in automotive program. There you go, your cars, and you're going to college. So that's where he went. Two years later, Ken started college. He didn't know what he wanted to be except he thought he might like to be a forest ranger. Oh, yes. My kids love the mountains. They just love -- they both live in Montana now. The more snow, the better.

Outdoors, great. Did he go to school in Colorado, Kenneth?

Kenneth first went to Durango. He just went one year. Then a friend of his, a very close friend, killed himself. That was bad. He didn't go to school the next year. He started again, and went to CU [Colorado University] and got a business degree. His first job was with the railroad. Yes. It was with Burlington Northern Railroad, which seems strange. But anyway --

From the forest industry to the railroad.

That's right. He changed the whole thing. And now he's an attorney.

That is very good.

I know. It's really strange.

Interesting way of getting there.

Well, by the time he was an attorney, he had a wife and three kids.

Did you keep dancing because there was a passion obviously, a hobby in your life?

When I lived in Boulder, I started -- I had foot surgery. My foot was bad. I thought, gee whiz, I'll probably never be able to dance again. I thought, well, I will go to the Rec Department, and I will start a class and see if I can do it. I did, and it was okay. So I started dancing.

(End Tape 1, Side B.)

I think you know more about this than I do. So I really, really want you in the class. Maybe together we can do something. So I did. I started teaching then at the Rec Department in Boulder. She was the director of the dance program at the Rec Department, but she was more ambitious than that. She quit that job and went to Longmont, because it was only like 15 miles away, and opened a studio there. She wouldn't be taking students away from the Rec Department. She felt that was not a fair thing to do. Some other gal came in and was the director of the Dance Department. It was okay. It was fun. But Louise and I were good friend. She said would you think about coming to work with me? So, okay. So then I taught in Longmont. I really taught a lot there.

Did you do tap dancing?

Yes. Just tap now. I'm a little old for ballet. I hadn't done it for years. During that time when I was still teaching there and working at the university, they had Colorado Dance Festival at the university. They had all these wonderful old tap dancers. They were just wonderful. I got this whole list. I crossed off this one guy because he wasn't so wonderful and he wasn't famous. But these names -- these people are the world's best dancers. I was in the right place at the right time. I got a chance to take class from them.

Which one of these was the one that stood out the most?

I'd have to say Honey Coles.

What about him? He was first on the list here.

Yes. He was just an elegant man. He was so wonderful. Most of these people are black. I think some of the world's best dancers just happen to be black. Fred Astaire, of course, was not. Steve Condos was not. But some of these other guys were just --

Sammy Davis, Jr.

Yes, Sammy Davis, Jr. He didn't come. He wasn't there for that. No. Gregory Hines came to one of our -- well, the very first one. He performed.

Did you have Bill Waddington on there?

No. He was dead by then.

(Recording has interference.)

They were there at one time. They did the Cotton Club. Steve Condos, he was a white guy. Eddie Brown. Buster Brown. LaVaughn Robinson, who's teaching in Philadelphia, he's younger than the others. Arthur Duncan. I took class from all these people. Brenda Bufalino, very famous woman dancer. Sam Weber, excellent. Lynn Dally, she is too. Dianne Walker. Chuck Green, oh, bless his heart, he was not well when he taught there. He had hypoglycemia very badly. The altitude was not good for him. The class was right after lunch. One day he went to sleep in class. He'd show us a step, and then he'd sit there and have us do it for him. Then he went to sleep. We felt so bad for him we didn't know what to do. Henry Le Tang, who lives here in Las Vegas and is still teaching in his kitchen, he's in his nineties. He's wonderful. Savion Glover came to Denver and gave a workshop. I took from him. Tony Wogg, he's a young fellow. The Tap Dogs from Australia. Now Lindell Blake, who is wonderful. Lindell's the one we take from here.

Is it Lindell White or Lindell Blake?

Blake.

What attracted all these large performers to come to Colorado?

It was a Colorado tap festival. They didn't all come the same year, of course. They had it several years. They don't have tap in the Colorado Dance Festival anymore because they said that it was too expensive. But, boy, they're missing a bet.

Did you have to pay to get lessons from them?

Oh, yes.

Was it hard to get into the classes?

No, it wasn't really. I just paid my money and went. But there were different levels. I went to the master classes.

That is amazing that --

It is. All of these people, these are very famous people.

Absolutely. Yes. To be able to get each and every one of them one on one for a class is just remarkable.

It was marvelous. It was just wonderful.

It must have helped you a lot in your steps.

It really did. I was so lucky.

Would you consider -- what's his name here? -- Honey Coles, would he be the best out of all of them?

I don't know. It's hard to say which one's the best. The best is Lindell, this young guy we're taking from now.

Yes. We will talk about him.

I think he's the best tapper I ever saw in my life. I'm serious. I've seen all these and taken class, but it's different with him.

Talk about that. What about Lindell makes him unique? We've interviewed now a lot of the other ladies who think so highly of him. He's unique. He's special. He has a thing for knowing the beat.

He's a natural entertainer. You put him in front of a crowd, even a small crowd, and he just comes to life. He just sparkles. He really wants people to enjoy what he's showing them. That's just his personality. That's his persona. What he does that is so wonderful is he taught himself to dance. So he doesn't know the names of the steps. We're teaching him to teach, actually, because he had never really taught before. So he'd do part of a step. It didn't complete a phrase. Now he knows how important that is for the rhythm. He was zeroing in on steps instead of the whole phrase. Now he sees. He just told me the other day, he said, he was really proud. I taught him to finish a phrase because that makes sense. Rhythmic makes sense.

It's just the ta-ta, ta-ta.

Yes. Which is okay. If you don't finish the phrase, then you don't get the rhythm. He's just such a natural dancer. He's so innovative. He makes up steps that people have never thought of before. He is just an artist at his craft. He practices hours a day, still. I guess he always will. And there's no ego there.

He's a very nice man, too.

He is. He really, really truly is.

Before we get talking about the whole dancing, what brought you to Las Vegas?

Had you ever visited here before or --

Yes. I had a cousin who lived here. I left out the part where I divorced my husband and married John. For three years I wasn't married. John worked at the university, too. That's where I met him. I worked there for a year before I knew who he was. He was in our department. He was the electronics engineer. He assisted in research. You know, when these guys needed an instrument or dreamed up a piece of equipment that they needed, he would fabricate it. Well, he'd design it first, and then fabricate it for them so they could do an experiment of some sort. That's what he did. Well, I kept seeing, you know, the roster. I didn't know who this guy was. He worked in a different building and I didn't know him. Finally, I met him one day. That was funny. It was just funny to think he'd been there for a year and I hadn't even met him. By this time I was already divorced. So we just --

He just swooped you off your feet?

Yes, kind of. No. It was just a mutual attraction I think. Got to know each other.

So then you remarried and then you moved out here or did you stay in Colorado?

No. We remarried there in Boulder. We built a house there and lived in it for 25 years. We built it with our own two hands.

How long did that take?

About a year and a half.

He was good at building things, right?

Yes. Let me show you a picture of that house.

Oh, wow. Look at this. That's a beautiful house. We'll definitely have to --

I designed it.

Oh, you designed it.

I did.

Wonderful. You did the architecture and drew it up, the blueprints and everything?

I sketched out the house. We took it to Diamond Homes, which they usually make log homes, you know, from kits and stuff like that. You buy their kit. They furnish the materials and come out and do the framing. Then we finished the rest of it. There's just five things we did not do. We did not pour the foundation in the basement. We had that done. We did not do the countertops. We did not lay the carpet. Let me think. We did not -- oh, I can't remember. Anyway, we did everything. We did the plumbing, painting, wiring, all of that. We did the roof. That was the first thing we did. And let me tell you, that's scary.

What are these here on top? Are these just windows?

That's solar. We had a hot tub in our -- see, the upper part of the house, that's the loft and it was our bedroom suite. We had a hot tub in there. The solar heated the hot tub. Oh, it was a wonderful house.

How long did you live here for, for 20 years?

For 25 years.

Wow. So you finally sold it. And?

We sold it and moved out here. I have a cousin who lives here and he kept telling us how wonderful it is. In Boulder, housing was getting so expensive and we knew it was worth a lot more than we put into it. We thought, well, it's got stairs and we were getting older. We decided we didn't want all these stairs anymore. You notice this house is one level. Well, after we built the house, then we converted a bus to a motor home. It's that bus out there in the driveway. It was a Greyhound bus. When we bought it, it had the seats and the luggage racks and the smelly potty in the back and all that stuff. We converted the bus.

Wow. Your husband did this?

My husband and I did it. Yes. I designed that, too. We were going to travel around for a couple of years at least, maybe longer and find the house that we wanted, in the area that we wanted. We came out here. Ralph wanted us to come out, my cousin. And we did. And I just fell in love with this house right away. So --

You came out here and moved here. What did you think of Las Vegas? Did you come here to visit, gamble and tourist things?

We liked the climate for one thing. You don't have to shovel sunshine.

You don't miss the snow.

Don't miss that a bit, not really. We like to ski, but we'll never do that again. My knees won't let me do that. No more skiing, I guess.

So the climate was a definite attraction when you got here. How long had you been here until you got involved with the dancing?

I think I was only here about six months before I ran into a lady. I saw her standing down there by the Santa Fe. She was doing some steps and I said, ooh, it looks to me like you're tapping. Are you tapping? And she said yes. I said, oh, where do you tap? She told me, and so I got involved with tapping again.

Where did you go? Where was the first place you went in Las Vegas?

Let me think. The very first place. I think Patty Smith was teaching a class at one of the recreation centers. I can't remember which one it was. She was teaching a class there,

and she was getting a little show ready to do one of the nursing homes or retirement homes. So I did that. Oh, she liked the way I danced. Then we met somebody else and they did too. So I went to another class. Then Carolyn, you know, Carolyn Freedman, was teaching a class at the West Arts. I started in that class. She's the one who found Lindell. We started taking it from Lindell. There was another guy, Chaz Young. Chaz taught at -- I didn't put his name down. I should've. He's pretty well-known, too. He taught at the arts center and we took his class. Then he went off to Sweden or someplace where he goes every summer. By the time he came back, we had Lindell. It's already four days a week. I just don't think we can do another one.

The other ladies in the group -- Toby, Marjorie, and Liz and Theresa -- how did they come together?

In the class. I met Liz and Theresa, consequently, through Patty Smith, and a girl named Sheila who was in one of the classes. She was in Patty's class and then Carolyn's. Sheila introduced me to Liz after one of Liz's show. Sheila took me to the show. Liz is just a wonderful dancer. She's just a great lady. I really like her so much. I like them all. You know, they're just -- we're like a little family.

This group is so unique. What do you think?

I think we are.

What is it that makes you guys different than --

We all are dancers.

And you guys are good, too.

That's just it. I'm not trying to be arrogant, but I think we are good. I think we dance very well. Most older ladies who are here in Las Vegas think, oh, I want to be a showgirl. They try and dance. If they haven't had it to start with, they're not going to get it now. We all have had it, and we still have it and we can still do it. I was never professionally on the stage.

As some of the others.

Yes, some of the others. Carolyn and Liz and Toby. Oh, gosh, Toby. Have you interviewed her yet?

Yes, we did.

Did you see all her pictures?

Yes. They're amazing.

Aren't they wonderful?

She was showing us her videos of her dancing in Cuba and stuff. It was amazing. She was just wonderful. She's still the cutest little thing. She is.

I was interviewing Carolyn yesterday and she started talking about tap shoes. She told me I had to ask you about the shoes. There's a story, I guess.

It's an awful story, terrible. She bought a pair of tap shoes in London when she was there. She just saw them in a window, went in, tried them on, they fit her feet and she bought them. She brought them home. They're such good tap shoes. They are just wonderful. They're Capezio's. Wouldn't you think since Capezio's a big name in this country and all over the world that you'd be able to get them here? Well, you can't.

I called around. I looked on the Internet. I called all over the place. It seems that those particular shoes are made in England and sold in England only. So I called All About Dance, an outfit I learned about on the Internet. She said, well, I can see if this

buyer can get you a pair from London. I said okay, that would be very good. And I had to keep calling her because I knew she --

It took awhile.

Yes. It took a long time. I started maybe as soon as Carolyn got back from London, which was early on. She finally said that the buyer could get me those particular shoes. She didn't know the number of them or anything, but did I? I looked on the Internet, and they have the same picture of several different numbers of shoes and the same description. I said, okay, I think I've found the picture and the description. She said they will cost 17 English pounds or 33 American dollars. I said, okay, that sounds really good. But the shipping will be from \$20 to \$50. I said, even if it's as much as \$50 and \$33, it is still only \$83. So okay, let's go for that. She did. She sent me -- or called me again and said, now, exactly what is the number and what size? I told her what size American, my size, and the number that I thought -- I mean you could have picked out any number because the picture was the same. I said, okay, that's what they are. So she ordered them and she found out that the shipping -- oh, she already ordered them without telling me this. The shipping was \$133.

Just the shipping by itself?

The shipping.

For a pair of shoes?

For a pair of shoes that presumably were going to come from England. It turns out when the shoes came -- oh, not only that, but then after that, after she charged me for that and I had already given her my credit card number, she came back and said, well, the shoes were 47.50 or \$47.45 I guess instead of \$33. I said, now, just wait a minute. Let's just find out. How come they're \$133 and now they're \$47.45 for the shoes? She said, well, that's what they are and I can't help it. It's a special order and that's what they are. She sent them to me. I said, but you told me it wouldn't be over \$50 for shipping. Well, I can't help it. They came from Holland. I said, What? You told me they came from England. Well, that's what it is. So I looked in the shoe and they're made in Brazil. They were made in Brazil, warehoused in Holland, and they aren't the shoes that I ordered at all. They're not the shoes, not anywhere near. Plus, the sizing in South America is different from the sizing here. They were too long. They're too big.

That is a terrible story.

It's just awful. The total charge was \$180.40, which she charged against my Visa account. Well, I didn't know what to do. So I called Visa and the guy I talked to said send them back. So I did. When they got back, this girl I had been dealing with -- Theresa's the only name I know --

Is she a girl here in town?

No. She's in Pennsylvania someplace at All About Dance. She was being married that day and she'd be gone on her honeymoon for I don't know how long. So I talked to somebody else. She said, gee, I don't know anything about it. Nobody here knows anything about it. So we can't help you. I'm sorry. I said, well, these shoes were just not what I ordered, not what I thought I was ordering and they're way too much money and they're way too big. What am I going to do? She said I understand. I said I'm going to dispute this. And she said, well, I understand why you feel that way. But that's all she could say because she didn't know anything about it. So Theresa gets back from her honeymoon and sends the shoes back to me.

The same ones?

Yeah, the same thing. She said we can't do anything with them. It's a special order. We can't take them back. So I just got in touch with Visa again. I said there's something wrong here. I just cannot do this. They sent me forms and I filled them out and told them on the phone and everything.

By this time I'm with my sister in Missouri. I wasn't even here. The shoes were sent back and my lady who was looking after the house told me they were here. So I not only filled out the forms again and faxed them because my sister has a fax machine -- they don't have Internet there, but she has a fax machine. Her son sent it to her when he lived in Japan because it's the only way he could back and forth to her. Anyway, so we faxed this report. Then somebody else called me on the phone. I told them the same story. So she said, okay, you'll hear from us. We never heard from them.

In the meanwhile, I called this Theresa. I said, Theresa, I can't accept this, this is not right. She got really, really upset -- really, really bad. And she said, I've got better things to do than spend time with you on the phone. It's just he said-she said; that's all it is. I said, yes, but you changed your story. And she did. She told me I didn't tell you it would only cost \$50 for shipping. But she had told me that. She had.

It was \$33 for the shoes, too.

Yes. She changed her story. She was just trying to cover herself. I mean I don't wish her any ill will.

So finally after this long ordeal --

The first thing I know Visa has erased the 180.45. They didn't notify me they were going to do it, but it's gone. Oh, yes, I feel so relieved.

That's one good thing about putting something on a credit card. At least you didn't send a check or anything for that.

Yes, if you ever have to buy things sight unseen, do it with a credit card.

What shoes did you end up getting? Did you end up going for another pair?

I don't have any other shoes. I have tried to get another pair and they're Capezio's, but they're made in this country. They are called Capezio Extremes. They didn't fit. I know Capezio in this country runs small. Since I had this foot injury, I've been putting a pad on the bottom of my foot, a little gel pad. So I wanted it big. I have that pair and I was going to order a half-size bigger. She said -- get this -- they're backordered. She said it'll take two to six weeks to get those. So I'm still waiting for another pair of shoes. She said you have 30 days to send these back. I said, I'll make a note on my calendar and I did. I will call them and see if they're going to come. And if they're not, I'll send them back anyway because I think they're a little too tight. I've got this foot injury and I've got to make it be better.

I gave Toby the shoes. They fit her beautifully. Because there was nothing I could do with them. And so I gave them to Toby and she's thrilled. Now she's having trouble getting taps to fit them because the toes are so pointed and the heels are a different size.

She did mention that.**Have you thought about just taking a trip to London?**

Yes, I have.

I'm sure you have thought about it.

Actually, I have. We enjoyed London. We've been there before and we liked it a lot. I might just do that.

It might take that. It would have been a lot easier it sounds.
I'm thinking.

Maybe something to look forward to in the future here.

Did you know that May 25th was recognized as National Tap Day?

Yes, I do.

Did you?

I knew that. You know why? Because it's Bill "Bojangles" Robinson's birthday. That's why it's May 25th.

How do you celebrate that? Do you do an extra step, then?

Well, since I've been here, I haven't done much. I know they have a big tap line and everything. But you have to belong to it.

Here in Las Vegas?

Yes.

What do they have?

Oh, they want to have the longest tap line in the world, kick line.

That's right. Wasn't Toby a part of that?

Liz was. Maybe Toby was too. I don't know. But, see, she does it through Summerlin where she teaches.

I had a friend in Colorado who used to be a printer. She had a printing business. She would always send us something every National Tap Day. Like one year, it was a puzzle of Fred Astaire and somebody. I don't know. She was very clever. She did that, but she's retired from that now. I've lost track of her, actually. I've tried to contact her and she's gone someplace. I can't reach her anymore. Oh, yeah, we celebrated that.

Some of the other ladies didn't know that.

They didn't know that it's his birthday?

No. That May 25th was the tap day.

Oh, yes. I know that.

A couple more questions here and we'll finish up. What do you think of Las Vegas these days here? Do you enjoy living in Las Vegas?

I do, very much.

Compare it to the other places you've been. You talked about the weather. You enjoy that. But Las Vegas is a very unique city and more unique than anywhere in the country. What do you enjoy about it? Do you enjoy the bright lights and all that?

I do on occasion. But we're just in a little neighborhood here. Some good friends of ours live a block away. We moved here at the same time. She came from California. We came from Colorado. My cousin lives about three miles away. So, yeah, I've met a wonderful group of dancers here, these dance ladies. This is a big draw for me. I really enjoy them.

That's great.

Since my kids aren't here and they're grown and gone, that was always part of my social life before.

The dancing.

And their friends and their family. But now they're not here. So now I'm back to more dancing than I was before.

That's good. It keeps you busy and in shape. Now, how do you stay in shape? Is it difficult or --

No. Just dancing. We used to hike a lot and ride our bikes. But John developed a blood clot from a fall that he had when we were on vacation one time in Texas. He fell in a cave on his sister's ranch.

Did that slow him down?

Yes, it did. He developed a blood clot from that. So now he can't ride bikes anymore because if he should have an accident even if it's not his fault, he could bleed to death internally before we knew what happened.

Oh, be careful with that.

So we got bikes and we don't ride them. We used to do a lot.

That is horrible.

I know.

Did you watch the accident?

Yes. We had a terrible time getting him out of that cave. It was Christmas Day.

Oh, that makes it worse.

I know.

Susie, I'm all out of questions. Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview?

No. Just that I'm happy with my retirement and being here and able to dance. This is just great. I love it so much. There's no place else that I've ever lived where I could get dancing like this.

With the instruction of Lindell?

That's right. This is the best for me. I don't care about performing. I've been there and done that. I performed a lot when I was younger. It was all amateur stuff or -- oh, when I was a kid, we used to go to the Tower Theater in Kansas City. It was downtown. It was the only theater that still had some vaudeville. They had a movie, and news and all that, but they also had a live vaudeville act. And they had six grown girls, six dancers, Adorables. Every week they had a talent contest. They'd call us sometimes and say come on down, we need some acts to fill out. We'd go down and dance. Sometimes we won. If you won, you danced for a week.

That is wonderful, Susie. I thank you very much for this opportunity to let us interview.

Thank you.

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Boulder Spring Dance Concert – 1990



I Ain't Got Nobody.



Flying Down to Rio.