

## **A TEI Project**

# **Interview of Margaret Graham Hills**

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## **1. Transcript**

### **1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (March 11, 1997)**

GUERARD

Well, Margaret, I think a good place to start would be where you were born and when you were born.

HILLS

Okay. As you can tell by my accent, I was born in England in a place called Melton Mowbray, which is in Leicestershire, on the east side about the middle of the way up from London, on July the 25th, 1928. I was my parents' first child and was an only child until my brother [John Hampson] was born when I was nine, so I had a long time of total immersion in parents without any opposition . We stayed in the first house until I was three and then we moved to another house in the same town when I was three. We stayed there till I

was five and a half, which helps me to pinpoint some times in my life. Because of that move, I remember one house and I remember another house and the journeys to dancing classes from those two houses. Then we moved town from the east side of England to a place called Shrewsbury, which is on the borders of Wales, about up the middle again, where we stayed until-- Well, my parents stayed there until they retired and I moved out when I went to London first. So again, I have places to remember events at, which I find quite helpful in remembering things .

GUERARD

Right .

HILLS

My parents were in their late twenties when I was born. My father [Ellis Hampson] was a company accountant and my mother [Ida Cockshott Hampson]-- Obviously in those days, parents didn't work. She was an artist [who] painted and--

GUERARD

Oh, she was!

HILLS

Yes. And her father [Thomas Alfred Cockshott] had been--well, still was--an artist at the same time, as was her half-brother [Frank Airey] . But my father had nothing artistic in his family at all. [laughs] [On] my mother's side of the family, there was a professional singer, also. So we just lived and, you know, I remember odd details of growing up. The reason I first went to a dancing class- - Well, there were two, if you were ready for me to go on to this .

GUERARD

I 'm ready!

HILLS

When I was, I think I must have been two and a half, we went to a Christmas show in the theater which was-- It's called a pantomime in England. It's very complicated, but it's part vaudeville and part transformation scenes and based on old fairy tales. This one was *Aladdin*. I can remember barely being able to

see over the balcony to the stage. [I] vividly remember a great deal of the show. The funny person in the shows is always a man dressed up as a woman and he/she was Widow Twankey. But the thing that really impressed me was the dancing and the transformation scene in Aladdin's cave.

GUERARD

Ah , ha !

HILLS

And where the lighting was such that what appeared to be jewels in the cave suddenly became dancers, and they danced and it was absolute magic!

GUERARD

Oh, how wonderful.

HILLS

Just something that [was] unbelievable to my little eyes and I must, I think, have pestered my parents to be allowed to learn how to do this magical thing because I remember one day, my mother was at the hairdresser's with me. I wasn't having my hair done. She was having hers done. There was a discussion that the hairdresser's daughter was going to a dancing class and I remember my mother writing down the address, and next thing I knew, why there I was in the dancing class with my mother's hairdresser's daughter. [laughs]

GUERARD

Was that shortly after you had seen the--?

HILLS

Yes . I know because we moved house when I was three and I know I went to dancing class from that house. I must have been two and three-quarters or something.

GUERARD

Oh, my goodness!

HILLS

And was put on pointe straight away.

GUERARD

Oh, you were?

HILLS

Yes. First lesson.

GUERARD

Well, that's not standard practice, is it?

HILLS

I think it probably was then. I didn't have any pointe shoes. They didn't make them that small, so I did it in bare feet.

GUERARD

Oh, my goodness!

HILLS

Didn't mind a bit.

GUERARD

And other students in the class were doing that, too?

HILLS

They were on pointe. Boys and girls, both. We all stood at the barre, which, of course, was above my head. I can remember raising my arms above my head to reach the barre, and, of course, when I went on my toes, the barre was easier to hold because I was that little bit higher. I can still vividly remember the room which, of course, to me feels enormous, but I can also see the teacher in it and realize that if I look at it from her eyes, it probably wasn't a very big room. There must have been ten or twelve of us, I should think.

GUERARD

This was in Melton Mowbray?

HILLS

In Melton Mowbray. The teacher, I now know-- I didn't sort of know that at the time, but her main school was in the big town, which was a few miles away, called Leicester. She visited Melton Mowbray, presumably, one afternoon a week. Our class was some time during the afternoon. I don't know when. Probably before school was out, because we were the little ones not at school yet.

GUERARD

Oh, you were so young.

HILLS

But this is drawing conclusions of the time. I don't know exactly. We all wore little summer dresses and the boys wore just their shorts.

GUERARD

Tights and--?

HILLS

No. Nothing like that. Just socks. When I say "bare feet," I mean pointe work in socks, not actually bare feet. I must have gone week after week to this class.

GUERARD

Do you think you took classes about once a week?

HILLS

Oh, I think it was just once a week because I imagine she would only have come to the town once a week.

GUERARD

Do you recall her name?

HILLS

Queenie Green.

GUERARD

Oh, my goodness!

HILLS

Miss Green. [laughs] I've later learned that she was quite a well-known teacher in Leicester and I met two others of her students when I first went to the Sadler's Wells School. There were then three of us ex-Queenie Green dancers at the Sadler's Wells School at the same time, which is really quite surprising, considering the number of schools there are in England.

GUERARD

Yes !

HILLS

So I think she must have actually been quite a good teacher, in spite of putting her children on pointe. But to go on pointe was what ballet was, you know. I think everybody did it.

GUERARD

So, so much for the theory about ruining your hips and your feet if you go on pointe too soon?

HILLS

Oh, I don't know. Maybe we were, most of us, ruined, and only the others survived. I have no cross-reference to be able to tell what happened to the others. Even when I moved and we went to another school, we were still all on pointe, so I think it was just common practice .

GUERARD

To get back to your family, just for a moment, it sounds as if your father not just tolerated it, but had an appreciation for the arts, and your mother was artistically involved.

HILLS

Yes. I don't know that either of them had any knowledge of dance at all. I just got bitten with this bug, being taken to this performance. A little later on, we went--I must have been a little bit older--to a movie where there was dancing in it. The dancer, the woman, was called Jessie Matthews, and she did stage dancing with a lot of high kicks and going down in the splits and sang, and I

thought that was wonderful too and immediately came home and swung my legs over my shoulder and went down into splits. [laughs] Wore the carpets out at home dancing around to every bit of music that existed. So, it was just there. Apart from saying I would like to learn it some time or another, I did it and loved it. But my father was the one who mostly took me to places where when later, I used to go and take classes and perform in other places, he was the one who took me, rather than my mother. My mother was exceedingly shy and very, very afraid of meeting people. That sort of person. She was the sixth of seven daughters. A very large family of women. Some of them died young and the one who was just next in line, older than my mother, died when my mother was two. I think every time my mother was sick, an awful lot of attention was paid to her because they were afraid she'd die, too. She was really somewhat of a hypochondriac, and played on feeling ill a lot. You know, the sort of person who was a little fragile all the time.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

Charming woman, but very, very, very, really self-centered and shy. But none the worse for it, you know, as far as I was concerned. She was always there. [laughs]

GUERARD

A good mom.

HILLS

Yes, a good mom. Rotten cook. [laughs] Even she admitted that. All her older sisters did everything. She never really learned how to cope in the house, really, until she got married. Until she was really on her own. And most of the time, we had maids and cooks and things like that. It was only when the Second World War came and we hadn't got any that we really found out that she really couldn't cook.

GUERARD

Ah! Then she had to learn.

HILLS

Then she had to learn. Right.

GUERARD

Did you take lessons from Queenie Green for several years?

HILLS

Until we moved to the other town, to Shrewsbury, when I was five and a half. I took lessons from her for [I] reckon about two and a half, two and three-quarter years, and performed quite a lot. I don't know how it was worked out at all, but by the time I was four, I was performing on the stage where I'd seen the original pantomime, and, of course, just thought that was absolutely wonderful! I can still picture myself-- I can see myself on the stage with taller dancers towering over me and the audience, such as you can see very little from the stage. And I can see the curtains and the wings and the lights and Queenie Green standing in the wings, no doubt directing us with her hands when we got lost and that sort of thing. [whispers] It was absolute bliss!

GUERARD

So you loved performing.

HILLS

Absolutely! As you can see-- You know, I can remember it so vividly. One of the older girls, who appeared to me enormous, of course, was dressed as a cockerel and we were all chickens. [laughter] There was another little folk dance that we did and I think if I heard the music, I'd probably recognize it even now. It was just gorgeous.

GUERARD

What music was it?

HILLS

I don't know. I know the music that the transformation scene was done to in the pantomime because I've heard that since. It was a popular song of the time. *When You Grow Too Old To Dream*. [laughs] It was a song that was danced to. We were, I think at that time, very fortunate, in thinking about

class musicians. And I can't say that I can remember the musician that we had for class. There must have been one. It was just at the time when silent movies had stopped and talkies had come in and all the pianists who played for silent movies were out of work. Of course, they were used to following the action of movement on the screen and playing things, so they were absolutely wonderful in playing for class.

GUERARD

Oh, so they didn't necessarily play classical music?

HILLS

No. Sometimes they did and sometimes they made things up, but it was just perfect. They knew exactly from the movement what they needed to do. They got the mood of the steps as well as the time signatures and the quality and the speed and everything. They were fabulous. And masses of them. They've died out now, of course, but for many years, they were all ex-movie theater musicians.

GUERARD

Oh, that's fascinating!

HILLS

Yes. They were a great loss when they died off.

GUERARD

Well then, who did you study with when you were the ripe old age of five and a half?

HILLS

Five and a half? [laughter] Well, in Shrewsbury, I studied at what was called the Betty Woodhouse School of Dancing. It wasn't the most prestigious school in the town, but that one was run by a lady called Irene Hammond. She only visited the town, like Queenie Green had visited Melton Mowbray, once a week. She had all the aristocratic children, who came with their nannies and their nannies sat 'round and then took them back in the Rolls [Royce] afterwards, you know, to the big country estate. The school I went to was the one for the upper middle-class children, but she [Betty Woodhouse] lived

there, so there were classes going on all the time. The children's classes were held in a big ballroom. Ballroom dancing, at that time, was exceedingly popular and no town was without two or three big ballrooms. Everybody who had a dancing school rented the ballrooms during the day for their ballet studios. They didn't have barres. We used the backs of chairs for a barre, but, of course, you could get a lot of children into a ballroom and, no doubt, made a lot of money that way. I remember rows and there were six of us, at least, across the ballroom in each row. The rows went back and back and back and back and back and you started at the back and as you got better, you were brought a row forward.

GUERARD

Were there mirrors?

HILLS

No. No mirrors. Didn't have a mirror in a studio that I-- Well, there was one in Melton Mowbray. There was a mirror in that one. But I didn't have a mirror again, apart from one that was at the back of the room, until I was about twelve. So I think it's probably much better not having a mirror. You have to feel it through your body and not see yourself doing things. So, no mirrors, no barres. Floor like glass. No rosin, no water on it. Just learned to stand up on the slippery floor, in your pointe shoes, you know?

GUERARD

Did you have real ballet shoes or real pointe shoes by then?

HILLS

Real pointe shoes for some of the class. We didn't have them on for the whole class. We had soft ballet shoes at the other school, and we did what was very usual at that time. You did your ballet exercises, but you also did jump rope. You danced with jump rope and the rope was always swung backwards and not forward, so that you kept your shoulders back, and not forward. As you learned your ballet steps, you learned to do them with a jump rope at the same time.

GUERARD

Oh, my goodness. I've never heard of this.

HILLS

So you did little pas de basques with jump rope and ballonnes with jump rope and little steps like Highland dancing with jump rope. This was absolutely common at the time, so the coordination was quite something.

GUERARD

Let's State what that time is. You're five and a half, so--

HILLS

I was five and a half, so it was 1933, and it was part of what everybody did in a dancing class. You didn't call it a ballet class. You went to dancing class. You had balls which were about, I suppose, six inches in diameter, which were covered in plush. Colored plush. I don't know what you call it, but, you know, like felty stuff on the outside. You danced with balls, also.

GUERARD

In your hands?

HILLS

Bouncing them and throwing them and catching them while you were doing your ballet steps with your feet. And you danced with chiffon scarves, which you twirled into and twirled out of and waved above your head and all those sort of things. You also sometimes had ribbons, about nine inches long, sewn onto an elastic, which you wore around your wrist and danced with those, also. All things, I think, to make you conscience of where your arms were, as well as what your feet were doing.

GUERARD

Right. And to really think and coordinate.

HILLS

Yes. Yes, that's right. I also learned from the same teacher [Betty Woodhouse]-- I didn't go to school till I was five and a half because we were moving. We knew we were moving when I was about five and my parents said, "Well, it's not worth sending you to school, you know, when we're just about ready to move. We'll wait till we get there." So I didn't go until I was five

and a half, and they started me off at a Roman Catholic convent. We weren't Catholic, but that was the only private school in the town at the time. My dancing teacher came to the convent to teach dancing every Tuesday afternoon, so I was learning Saturday mornings with her in the ballroom, and in the school [the convent] on Tuesday afternoons. During the early part of the afternoon, we were not allowed to drink any water because the nuns said [that] if we drank water before we danced we would rattle when we danced, and it was not polite to rattle when you dance, so we weren't allowed to drink any water. They were very, very strict. Exceedingly strict . The mother superior used to come into the class--not the dancing class, but ordinary class--and she would literally drop a pin to see if she could hear it drop as she walked in. We were caned if we did anything wrong. We learned to write, not on paper, but on slates. I was writing something. I don't know. I thought it was a word. I don't know if it was or not, and we were told to put the little chalky thing down. I wanted to finish my word so I didn't put mine down, and I was caned for not putting it down.

GUERARD

Oh, my gosh!

HILLS

I went home with some distress and told my father and he said, "It's all right, dear. I was caned a lot at school, and if you hold your hand out and bring it up towards the cane as the cane is coming down, it doesn't hurt half as much." And he was right. I mean, it worked. So it was very common, obviously.

GUERARD

I guess it was just accepted and that's the way things were .

HILLS

Yes. That's the way things were. I was there for only six months and then they took me away. They obviously thought this was not quite the thing. I and four other children shared a private governess from then [on] .

GUERARD

Oh. Rather than attending school?

HILLS

Rather than attending school. It wasn't at my house. The five of us went to the governess' house, but there we had incredible education. So from six till I was nearly eight-- By the time I was eight, I was reading *Alice Through the Looking Glass* without any problems and I knew my tables up to the twenty- five times and--

GUERARD

Fantastic.

HILLS

Just incredible. We learned how to do fractions by breaking up bars of chocolate, which I think is a wonderful, wonderful way of learning fractions. [laughs] She was a genius .

GUERARD

Did you go there every day just as you would--?

HILLS

Oh, yes! Just a normal school time. From 8:30 a.m. till 4:00 p.m. every day. We took our lunch in little, brown bags, you know.

GUERARD

Great!

HILLS

Yes, it was. It was wonderful.

GUERARD

I'm sure you learned a lot, quickly, that way, too .

HILLS

Yes, because I graduated from high school very early and I put it down to that early start in that situation. When I went to a proper school, I was way, way ahead. Three years ahead when I went to school.

GUERARD

You mean they actually put you ahead three grades?

HILLS

Yes. Yes .

GUERARD

When was that?

HILLS

When I was nearly eight. I went at Easter when I was seven and three-quarters, and the rest of the kids were nearly ten.

GUERARD

Where was that? Had you moved again? -

HILLS

No. We were then in Shrewsbury in this place on the borders of Wales. And it was-- I don't know what it was called. It wasn't a private school. It was the same as an ordinary-- You know, you don't pay to go to school, except that my parents were wealthy and they were required to pay a certain amount. It was a state school.

GUERARD

Well, how did you feel about being three years younger than your fellow students?

HILLS

Didn't worry me in the slightest. I was top of the class all the time, so who cared? The only time when it really bothered me, the school was going to take a trip to London and I was told I wasn't going to be able to go because I was too young. My father went-- Must have gone to see the head mistress, and said, "You know, this is awful for her to not go. Could you not break the rules in some way if I take out insurance?" or something to that effect, and they did take me. So I did go, but that was horrible [laughs] , to be the only one left behind. But still I went, so it was okay. And, of course, I was spoiled to death by everybody, you know, being this-- I was also very tiny for my age. I was a tiny little mite rushing around with all these big people. [laughs] It was fun.

GUERARD

And still the only child, so far.

HILLS

Yes. Still the only child so far. My mother, I now know, though I didn't really sort of think what was happening at the time, had a miscarriage when I was fiveish- -sometime around then- -and then another stillborn child when I was around seven. I knew about the stillborn child. I only now put two and two together and realized there was a miscarriage, also, when I was five. So she really wanted another child, but wasn't having any luck. But I had all the attention.

GUERARD

Yes. And were you thinking of yourself as a ballerina at this point?

HILLS

No.

GUERARD

Just enjoying your classes?

HILLS

I was loving the classes. Loving all the performances because by that time, the school I went to did a lot of performing. I mentioned that there were ballrooms everywhere and if there were ballrooms, of course, there are ballroom dances going on. What would occur would be that sometime during the evening of these balls, there would be entertainment, and we were the entertainment. Very common that the local dancing school put on a big show, which meant that almost every Friday and Saturday night, we performed.

GUERARD

Wow !

HILLS

Usually at around eleven o'clock at night. So, I would go to bed and have a rest in the afternoon and then get up and do the performance and go home and go

to bed again, which didn't worry me in the slightest because sleep was not something I ever needed. My mother used to say that I should have been a night nurse because if [there was] one person in this world who needed never to sleep, it was me. I must have driven her crazy being awake all night.  
[laughter]

GUERARD

Well, apparently, she supported the idea enough to--

HILLS

Yes! It really is surprising that a parent would allow a child to do that much performing. Maybe I gave her hell if she said no. I really don't know, but she never balked at it. [Guerard laughs]

HILLS

We had lovely costumes which were then made for us by dressmakers, of course. They were designed by the teacher. She had a wonderful sense of design for costumes that you could dance in well.

GUERARD

Oh, that you could really, actually move in?

HILLS

Yes. She just knew what would work for movement and what wouldn't. She had a collection of Edwardian costumes with bustles and parasols and all those sort of things. She collected them. That was her hobby, and [she] had some beauties. That's where, when I saw them, I learned how dressmaking ought to be. You know, they were exquisitely made. All hand-sewn and just gorgeous. But, as I say, her flair for costuming was wonderful.

GUERARD

Do you remember any of the dances that you did?

HILLS

Well, yes. Some of them-- I mean, on one occasion, I was a tape measure and a poppy and [Guerard laughs] another time, I was the garden rake that

somebody else was manipulating [laughs] and by the time I was seven, I was learning tap, as well. We did a lot of tap choruses.

GUERARD

The same teacher?

HILLS

Same teacher. Yes, and we did all nursery rhymes. When we were really little, we danced through the nursery rhymes and we did things like little children in their pajamas- -you can imagine- -with candles going to bed and waking up and dreaming all sorts of dreams and all these things. She was, I think probably, quite a remarkable choreographer considering the age range of children she had to cope with, because each of these dances I'm talking about were put together so that they became a whole ballet. I mean, if I was a tape measure, somebody else was a sewing machine or a pin, so that it was a ballet about sewing or a ballet about flowers or a ballet about making hay at hoedowns and things like that.

GUERARD

So [it was] all her original choreography?

HILLS

Yes. Yes, all of it. Absolutely! And I don't ever remember having any extra rehearsals other than class. So, somehow or other- -

GUERARD

It was incorporated--?

HILLS

It was incorporated into the class so that we knew it. At least, I knew it. Whether everybody else was copying me or not, I have no idea, but I never had any recollection of having to remember. It just seeped in from the music. And once it was in, it was there and turn on the music and I would do it, I guess. But it was great fun .

GUERARD

I think likely that's a facility that you have.

HILLS

I think it is because later on, I could watch a ballet and go away and teach it the next day. So it is a facility. There's no doubt about it.

GUERARD

You said something to the effect of the age range of the children she was dealing with. Was it a big range?

HILLS

Yes, it was, because she had older students who were going on to become either professional dancers or teachers as well as the little ones, and we were all incorporated into the performances, as I said, mostly in these, quote, "ballets" that she choreographed, putting all these dances together. But around [the] age of seven, another little girl came to the studio who was exactly my age, called Margaret, also. I had, at that time, what Americans call red hair, though in England it's called strawberry blonde. It's not red, red but the other red, and she had very dark hair. Gradually, we became an act together known as "The Two Margarets." [Guerard laughs]

HILLS

We did little duets all the time. This sort of thing that we must have looked exceedingly cute, I guess, because they all brought the house down and we got encores and we were especially requested to do this dance or that dance, you know, at various things.

GUERARD

Was this still in the ballroom?

HILLS

Still in the ballroom.

GUERARD

So the audience are people who have come all dressed up?

HILLS

They're all dressed up in evening dress. Yes, yes .

GUERARD

And paid to be able to waltz and whatever, in the ballroom?

HILLS

Yes. I don't know if they paid to go or whether they were parties run by other people. I have no idea. New Year's Eve, of course, we always danced at the-- It was always called the Caledonian Ball because the Scots celebrate New Year's Eve much more than the English do. For that, we always did Highland dancing, in kilts and--

GUERARD

Oh, you did! So you did ballet and you did tap--?

HILLS

Tap. And we did Highland dancing and fencing, [laughter] And then we did stage dance, which was-- What do they call it now? They've got a new word for it and I can't remember what it is, but just general sort of splits and high kicks and that sort of thing, and moving across the stage. Jazz wasn't invented then, as it's done now. It's called jazz now. That, we didn't do. And later on, of course, I learned ballroom dancing as well. That was just one of the required things to do when you were big enough to do that .

GUERARD

How old were you when you stopped dancing at the Betty Woodhouse [School of Dancing] and moved on?

HILLS

Oh, I stayed there until I went to London.

GUERARD

Which was when?

HILLS

Which was when I was fifteen.

GUERARD

So your family moved to London?

HILLS

No. I went on my own, at fifteen.

GUERARD

You went on your own !

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

Had you graduated from high school at fifteen?

HILLS

Yes. I'd been graduated just before my fifteenth birthday.

GUERARD

Oh, because you were three years ahead already.

HILLS

Yes, yes. And I went on being three years ahead. At school, it was an 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. day with-- By the time I graduated, we had four hours of homework every night. Always two hours [of homework], from the age of seven onwards. Because later on, I was certainly doing more than one Saturday morning and one Tuesday afternoon. I was going to class, to start with, two evenings a week after school, and then it built up to every afternoon after school, I would go to class.

GUERARD

Well then, were you staying up till midnight doing your homework?

HILLS

No. I learned to be shut into the classroom to do my homework, sitting under the desk.

GUERARD

I'm sorry?

HILLS

[laughs] Well, during lunch break-- We had lunch at school. [It was a] cooked lunch, and we ate lunch at school. Then we were allowed to go back to the classroom to get a book or whatever we wanted, but we had to play out of doors, and then the classrooms were locked up. But I found that if I went to the back of the room and hid under the desk at the back, I could have an uninterrupted hour to do homework. I wonder now if they knew that I did it. I have no idea. Maybe they did, but they never let on they knew that I did it if they did know. And, of course, [in] an absolutely quiet hour, you can get through a lot more homework than you can at home in two or three hours . So, it was fine, and I was [a] very quick study. I mean, I could read fast and assimilate all the stuff very fast, so it wasn't really a chore to read and learn. I just read and it went in. So, again, I was born very lucky. The written work took time, of course, because we had to write legibly, and nobody was ever allowed to type anything. In fact—

GUERARD

Oh, no!

HILLS

No. Nice girls did not learn to type.

GUERARD

Oh! Is that right?

HILLS

Absolutely, because if you learned to type, it meant that your prospects for life were that you were either: a) going to have to work at all, which was a little bit undignified, and if you did work, you were not going to be a typist. You were going to be something much better than that, so, much better [that] you never learned to type. So I didn't learn to type until a few years ago, when we bought our first computer. [laughter] Then I had to have a crash course. [laughs] So everything was handwritten and I could write fairly fast, but I could not spell. I mean, of all the things I could do, spelling I could absolutely not do. It was a terrible, terrible pain for me. Because I could write a word down five

different ways and they all seemed to me, right. So there was no way of guessing which one was the right one and I just used to write down something. So all my work came back covered in spelling mistakes, [laughter] Good material, but must learn to spell.

GUERARD

So you got all that done and then in the evenings, you could go to class.

HILLS

Yes, and the only way of actually getting to my school, and to class, was by bicycle. There was no bus route of any sort. You either walked or bicycled, so I bicycled everywhere. And in the depths of winter- -we had some very severe winters; much more severe than seems to be now- -I would go to school on my toboggan, because it was a switchback route to school (you know, hills and vales) , so I would pull the toboggan uphill and toboggan down .

GUERARD

And come back from school at night?

HILLS

Well, yes, dragging the toboggan behind me in the dark, you know. It was perfectly safe.

GUERARD

I guess so! [laughter]

HILLS

Or cycling home at about nine o'clock. I would get to my class about 4:30 p.m. and we'd go on till 9:00 p.m. It was just how life was. And, of course, then if I hadn't finished my homework, then I would finish it before I went to bed. Under the bedclothes, with a flashlight, if necessary. [laughs] It was reading. [!] always got the written stuff done first and the reading second so that that I could fit in somewhere.

GUERARD

What happened if you didn't get your homework done?

HILLS

Never happened. I always did.

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

I don't know what would have-- Well, I know what would have happened. You had something which is called an order mark, which went against you, personally. The school was divided into four, no, five sections, called houses. It wasn't anything to do with a house, but they were divided into houses, and the more order marks you got, it was detrimental to your house result in school. So you tried not to get order marks because it was bad for you and bad for your house, and your house didn't get shields and all those sort of things that they got if they were top, you know.

GUERARD

They made it a team effort.

HILLS

That's right. Exactly.

GUERARD

So you were responsible for your team.

HILLS

Yes. Yes. The school had three hundred and sixty students only, so it wasn't very big.

GUERARD

But it wouldn't have effected whether you had been allowed to go to ballet school or anything like that?

HILLS

No. I suppose if I hadn't been doing well at school, my parents might have put their feet down and said, "You can't go to dance class unless you improve."

And my father said that I was not going to go to London until I'd graduated, particularly since the war [World War II] was on at that time and London was being bombed to smithereens, anyway, which was another reason for him not wanting that to happen.

GUERARD

You know, I think we're getting close to the end of this side of the tape, and I think that would be a great topic to start with, so I think I'll stop this one here .

HILLS

Okay.

## **1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (March 11, 1997)**

GUERARD

Margaret, we're just about to the war years, and I know that you'll be moving to London and starting a new phase of your ballet career. Is there anything else about your earlier years that you'd like to remember before we go on?

HILLS

Yes, I think we should because we really jumped quite a bit in starting to talk about high school. I went on performing in these ballrooms continuously, and also at children's parties. People used to give huge children's parties and we did our little performances at those as well, but then in 1939, when the war started in Europe for us, people stopped going to balls and the performances stopped. We were filled with forces- -armed forces- -stationed in that area. Mostly air force. There were a lot of airports around there, and we put together what was called the Police and Civil Defense Concert Party, and this became a regular gig that we would take to the bases for the forces. Now, officially, to be able to go, one had to be a member of the police or the civil defense, and you weren't supposed to be a member of the civil defense until you were fourteen. But I wanted to dance in these shows and I was only thirteen, so they allowed me to become what was called a messenger, which meant that when the air raid sirens went, we messengers had to go to a depot and cycle around with messages, presuming the telephones had been bombed out. Now, you should realize that I was living in a small town, in the middle of

the country, miles away from anywhere except where the force's bases were, and, in fact, we didn't have a single bomb drop all through the war. We were in a very safe place, so the fact that I was this messenger really sounds great, but entailed absolutely nothing [laughs], except that I could go 'round to the air force bases, both American and English, and perform this concert party. Of course, we got [a] wonderful amount of exposure doing this to these thousands and thousands and thousands of members of the forces . We did cancons and tap solos and tap choruses and all sorts of things. We also had to sing in some of them. Now, I cannot sing, and so Margaret was asked to open and shut her mouth in time with the music and please not to let any sound out under any circumstances. [laughter] So I know the words to an awful lot of stuff, but I can't sing it. That was great because then we were performing all sorts of nights of the week. We were bussed to the bases and did our show, and then bussed back again. At that time, I was studying at school and also studying for my Intermediate Royal Academy [of Dancing] examinations and my Intermediate Cecchetti [Society] examinations and as it happened, the Intermediate RAD [The Royal Academy of Dancing] and the Intermediate Cecchetti examinations were in the same week, which was not funny. The styles are very different, and I had to try and get them sorted out. I managed it, but it was fairly horrendous .

GUERARD

Were these examinations that you took in order to be able to go on--?

HILLS

To go on to the next examination.

GUERARD

Still within the same school, or where did that take you?

HILLS

Yes. No. Same school. I did go to the Irene Hammond School [the Hammond School of Dancing] in Chester for coaching for the RAD examinations. Those were the classes that started at 10:00 a.m. and we broke at the end of the barre at 12:30 p.m. for lunch, [then] came back for center from one o'clock till 6:00 p.m. That was one class.

GUERARD

Oh, my goodness! And that was to prepare you for--?

HILLS

That was to prepare for the examinations. Yes. For the Cecchetti examinations, we had a lady come to visit called Moya Kennedy, who was a Cecchetti examiner and she coached us at our own school . The reason we did both methods was that the teacher, Betty Woodhouse, was Royal Academy of Dancing-trained and during the war, another teacher who had been a professional dancer, called Wendy Everest came, and she was Cecchetti-trained. And so from then on, we learned both methods at the same time, depending on which of them was teaching us.

GUERARD

How long was the preparation process for--?

HILLS

Well, as soon as you passed one examination, you started working for the next. You know, as a child, I didn't mention it, but I'd taken what were called the graded examinations. They start at primary through grade five- -or did- - and then you went on to elementary and then intermediate and then advanced. The idea was, you didn't move up in your school classes from one grade of class to the next until you'd passed your grade examination in whichever method you happened to be studying.

GUERARD

So it sounds like it [taking the examinations] didn't really necessarily mean that you wanted to become a professional dancer, it's just that you had to do these.

HILLS

Yes. Everybody does, and still does. That's how England works. They do the same thing with piano and the same thing with violin.

GUERARD

They want to assure that you're progressing.

HILLS

Yes. That's right. Yes. And, you know, people failed and nobody minded. You did it again, whereas in this country, when people fail in examination, as we found at Stanley's [Stanley Holden Dancer Center] years later, the parents just stop their children going or take them to another school. It's very sad. It's a different, different approach entirely. When it's accepted that you do fail, you do fail, you know. And it's the same--or was, and still is, I think, the same--in everything, because at the end of every term at school, you take a lot of examinations in every subject. That's what the last week of each term was, taking exams, which you did your best at .

GUERARD

Right. I guess what I was asking a little while ago was, how long did you have to take these classes from ten in the morning until--?

HILLS

Oh, we used to go on Saturdays. I don't know. It's hard to remember. I suppose about six weeks before the examination time, we would go every Saturday for these long classes. They were grueling. Sometimes you got so tired, you know, you'd go out and throw up and come back in again because you got so fatigued. But [it] built stamina [to] go on and on and on and on and on, which stands a performer in very good stead because, you know, you'd take class in the morning, you rehearse all afternoon and you'd do a warm-up before the performance, and the performance. So it's very good training to be doing that amount of work, and the barre was so long because every detail had to be right before you moved on to the next one. So you did it time and time and time and time again, and if somebody wasn't very good, you'd pray that they got better soon because we were all doing it time and time again until each person had got their fault right.

GUERARD

I had a question that popped up a little while ago. What sort of facilities did they have at the military--?

HILLS

Oh, they all had theaters.

GUERARD

Oh, did they?

HILLS

Yes. They had proper theaters. I don't know. I suppose they were in-- We used to call them Nissan huts in England. What are they called here? They're those big domed-- There was a name for them in the United States, too. [Quonset huts] They were exactly the same. You're too young to know.

GUERARD

I can picture them--

HILLS

Yes. And the stage was built with dressing rooms in the back and the seats and everything there.

GUERARD

Did you perform just to the men who were stationed there?

HILLS

Oh, men and women, of course. Both.

GUERARD

Oh, right! Of course, yes.

HILLS

Yes. And it was rather nice because they gave us dinner after the show. The food supply in Britain, during the war, was minimal, and the forces got a lot more food than we did. And so, we had wonderful dinners afterwards and [it was] just fabulous. During the war, we had one egg a week, two ounces of butter a week and four ounces of meat a week. Everything was rationed. I mean, canned beans were rationed. Everything. So to be able to sit down and look at some food that was not microscopic was incredible.

GUERARD

Was this situation even more so because you were not near the city?

HILLS

No. It was absolutely fair for everybody. You had a book- -a ration book- - where the coupons were cut out at the market, and that's what you got. That's all there was, so it was very, very carefully divided up to everybody. I was too old to be allowed an orange when they came, but my brother, who was nine years younger than I, John, when there was an occasional orange, he would get it because he was younger than I was. [laughs] Once, a sailor brought a banana and I hated bananas from early childhood. I couldn't stand them and so my brother saw his first banana when he was about four, I suppose. Four or five. Never seen one before. They don't grow in England. Everything was shipped in, you know, so to have real food was wonderful .

GUERARD

I bet!

HILLS

And rationing didn't finish completely until after my first child was born. No, after my second child was born, in 1960. There were still some things rationed in 1961, and the war finished in '45, so it took us a long, long time to get sorted out. We were underfed.

GUERARD

Well, good thing that you were a dancer, then, huh?

HILLS

Yes. [laughter]

GUERARD

Dancers like to be underfed.

HILLS

That's right. No question about it. [laughter]

GUERARD

So then, you were trained in Cecchetti technique?

HILLS

Yes. And The Royal Academy of Dancing technique. What I realize now--didn't realize it at the time, of course. One never does--that my teachers had an idea that I was quite good, because they would invite friends to come and stay in Shrewsbury, away from the bombing, but they also, when they came, gave me private lessons. I had private lessons from various people, including a woman called Mary Skeaping, who later became ballet mistress of The Royal Ballet and then ballet mistress of the Swedish National Ballet [Royal Swedish Ballet]. She was one of them. And, Lydia Kyasht, who is a Russian ballerina. She had me dance with her little company when I was about thirteen, I think, through one summer. She was just based in that area, so that was when I got to dance the lead in Les Sylphides and things like that, which was wonderful experience. She was a tiny, little, old lady who taught class, sitting right on the edge of the stage. One always felt she would tipple over backwards. She sat on a chair with a long pole. Beat time with this long pole, and would wave it at you if anything's wrong, you know. She was sweet. [She] gave me some nice opportunities. I danced Carnaval, which is another [Michel] Fokine ballet, for her. It was an exciting little summer interlude there.

GUERARD

That was her own company?

HILLS

Yes. She had a little company of her own, which had-- I don't know who the dancers were anymore. I just went in and did this and then went back to school when school started again. It was just a little six-week period. It was fun.

GUERARD

How old were you then?

HILLS

Thirteen.

GUERARD

Thirteen. Do you want to talk a little bit about Cecchetti and the Royal Academy--?

HILLS

The differences? Yeah!

GUERARD

Were they competing, or was it something that people felt you need to--?

HILLS

I think you need [to] know how they evolved. There was a Danish ballerina called Adeline Genée, who went--and this is all in the history books--to London, sometime in her career, on a one-season contract, to dance in a ballet which was in the middle of a vaudeville show, I think at the Lyceum Theatre in London, but I'm not absolutely sure. I'd have to look it up. And it was an enormous success. She stayed on year after year after year, and she wanted to have a company of dancers around her. She was appalled at the standard of ballet in England, and if my memory serves me from reading it, she decided that there ought to be a way of training teachers to teach the children better. She started what was called The Operatic Society. Now, operatic, you'd think, had to do with singing, but no. It was operatic dancing. That grew and sometime or other, I don't remember when, got a Royal Charter so that they could use the word royal and became The Royal Academy of Dancing. [The Royal Charter was awarded in 1920.] [Margaret Graham Hills added the above bracketed section during her review of the transcript.] Dancing, in that context, meant ballet only. It got an examining board of examiners who set up these graded exams for the children. That grew into this now worldwide and vast organization called The Royal Academy of Dancing, which has examiners going to-- I think it's sixty-four or sixty-five different countries in the world now, all the children taking the same examinations. On the other side, there was a famous teacher called Enrico Cecchetti, who had his own method of teaching. One of his students was a woman called Margaret Craske, and he and Margaret Craske got together to write out his method of teaching, which is called the Cecchetti Method. That was incorporated into another, in England, society, called the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing. Now, in that context, dancing didn't mean just ballet. It was principally for ballroom dancers and folk dancers. The Cecchetti branch of that society started the examinations in the Cecchetti Method, and his method was-- They were all arranged to make good dancers, but the Danish, which was what The Royal

Academy had come from, had a lot of different names for steps, different numbering of the arms and a different style. And so, doing the two side by side meant a little mental juggling, to remember that what was first position in The Royal Academy of Dancing was fifth en avant in the Cecchetti Method. And the way of using the head was different. And the way of executing an assemblé was different. And what in one method was called a sissonne ordinaire devant, was called something else- -and now I forget --in the other one.

GUERARD

That must have been really confusing!

HILLS

Yes, and in an examination, the examiner doesn't get up and demonstrate a step to you. You've learned a lot of them by rote, but they also each set unseen combinations, which they just say to you.

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

And you work out what they've said, and then you do it, so you did have to remember the terminology very carefully, and which was which, and not make a mistake.

GUERARD

Now I understand what you mean about the difficulty of taking the two exams within a week of each other.

HILLS

Yes, yes . It was a little bit of a pill. [pause] It was okay.

GUERARD

You said they wrote up the Cecchetti Method. Do you know how they wrote it up?

HILLS

Yes. They published a book. It's called The Manual of-- Everybody refers to it as The Bible, so I can't remember its proper name. They did one for the barre and adages and then another smaller one afterwards, for the allegro. Some committee, including Margaret Craske and some other people, divided that method up into a sequence of training, which you could take an examination at the end of shall we say a year, but it [was] building towards his total product at the end. And that still goes on. Of course, both The Royal Academy syllabus and the Cecchetti syllabus have been modernized. They're not now the same as they were, but in the days when I did them, they were very much what the original people had set up.

GUERARD

Did they describe the movements with words and pictures of bodies, or--?

HILLS

Words and drawings.

GUERARD

There wasn't any notation or anything like that?

HILLS

There wasn't. No. Notation hadn't been invented yet and we'll get to that, I think, later on. I don't want to jump the gun here and talk about it yet. But it was written in words, with the time signature and the steps and the arms in columns. You got very used to it, you know. When I first started to write a dance down with any thought, I used that method, and still would. To me, it's exceedingly clear and very easy.

GUERARD

And I think we should clarify that The Royal Academy of Dancing method does not mean The Royal Ballet.

HILLS

No. It doesn't. In England, there are lots of things called royal something. Because if - originally the king, and then when [Queen] Elizabeth came to the throne, the queen- -they approve of your request to use royal in your title (and they don't always. They sometimes say, "No, no, no!"), then you use

royal before your name . So there are royal all sorts of things. There's The Royal Academy of Art, which is painting. There's The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, which is acting training. There's The Royal Academy of Music. There's The Royal Academy of Dancing, which we've just been talking about, this examining body. And when what was the Sadler's Wells Ballet applied for a Royal Charter, they were granted it, and so they were known as The Royal Ballet. But it's absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with The Royal Academy of Dancing, other than most of the dancers in The Royal Ballet have taken The Royal Academy of Dancing examinations. So as part of their training, they have been trained in The Royal Academy of Dancing's method, in order that ultimately they become a member of The Royal Ballet, but there's no connection whatever.

GUERARD

No guarantee that by learning one that you go on to another?

HILLS

Oh, no! Absolutely none. No. They're quite separate organizations. They may have some people who are on the executive boards of both, but the right hand doesn't know what the left hand doeth.

GUERARD

At this time that you were taking the exams in the Cecchetti and The Royal Academy, did you have a vision of where you wanted to go from there?

HILLS

Oh, by then I knew I wanted to dance. I mean, I'd gone through as a tiny child wanting to own a candy store because I hated candy and I knew I'd make a lot of money because I would not eat it [pause] , which was my reason for having a candy store. Then I wanted to teach biology because I loved anatomy and physiology in school. Then, with a lot of persuasion-- The gymnastics teacher at high school wanted me to teach gymnastics, but you have to be able to teach games. You know, field hockey and all that sort of stuff, which I hated. And I thought, "There's no way I'm ever going to teach those because I loathe it, so she can go on at me all she likes, but I am not going to teach gymnastics." Then it really became no doubt at all in my mind that what I

wanted to do was to be a ballet-- Well, a dance performer, shall we say, to start with. And then I realized that I was actually much better at ballet than any of the other dancing things I was doing, so that whittled that down to ballet. You know, I did well in the ballet examinations, so it just sort of was bound to happen if I could get to London.

GUERARD

Ah, ha! If you could get to London.

HILLS

If I could get to London. And, of course, my parents were dead against it when bombs were dropping and all that sort of thing. It was when I took my- -it must have been my- - Intermediate Cecchetti exam that the examiner, called Peggy Van Praagh (it's V-A-N P-R-A-A-G- H) said to my teacher, "I think she should audition to go to Sadler's Wells." And she said, "I can fix it for this afternoon, if you like." So that afternoon, I went to the theater where, by chance, the Sadler's Wells was performing, and stood under the stage at the end of the matinee, hearing the second act of Giselle going on over my head. Between performances, I did an audition with the ballet mistress, called Joy Newton, and she said, "Yes. You should come." But I couldn't. I mean, not then. Not that minute.

GUERARD

This all happened in one day?!

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

Had you seen the Sadler's Wells Ballet perform?

HILLS

No. I didn't see a ballet performance until I was fourteen, I think. Well, apart from with Lydia Kyasht . I'd been in that, but not actually seen it. I saw a ballet company called the Anglo Poles [Anglo Polish Ballet] . I think they probably weren't very good, but I thought they were wonderful . And I saw the evening

performance after my audition of Giselle, but that was the first time I'd seen Sadler's Wells.

GUERARD

So you actually were becoming a dancer before you had a model in front of you.

HILLS

Absolutely! Yes. Yes, completely. I just loved doing it. I think that's all there was to it. Hyperactive child. I'd probably been given-- What's it, Ritalin they get? [laughter]

GUERARD

You had dance instead.

HILLS

That's right. And, of course, I couldn't go then, but when the war seemed to be running down a little bit, though there were still bombs dropping in London, my parents finally gave in and said, "Okay. Well [indicates hesitation in their voices], all right. You can go, as long as you don't live in London." Because the bombs mostly dropped at night and I lived outside of London and commuted on a train. They found a lady whose husband had been killed during the war and she wanted somebody to live in her house to keep her company, so I lived with her and commuted into London.

GUERARD

It wasn't family? It wasn't somebody they knew?

HILLS

No, no. It was somebody I'd never met, actually, until I got there.

GUERARD

And you were around fifteen or so at this time.

HILLS

Mm-hmm. Yes, and I commuted up to London. After a short time, they said, "Well, you know, you can walk on with the company. You're not in the

company, but you can walk on in a court lady's dress and be around." I learned, as I said, the choreography exceedingly quickly and so when somebody was sick or was off, they knew I knew it, so they put me on . I never really had a contract. I was at that stage when I did my knee injury, so my performing time with Sadler's Wells was very, very, very short .

GUERARD

Before we get to that, did you learn the ballets by seeing the performances?

HILLS

I watched every performance.

GUERARD

They didn't teach them in the classes, then?

HILLS

We did have-- Jean Bedells, who was an assistant ballet mistress came and taught us. I remember learning the second act of Swan Lake from her. Sylphides, I knew already, and we learned a little bit of the candy canes from Nutcracker [Casse Noisette] from her. Oh, and some solos. We learned some of the solo from Nutcracker and one or two other odd bits. I wrote those down as I learned them. In fact, she asked us to write them down. The second act of Swan Lake she said, "Write that out for me and I'll have a look at it."

GUERARD

Just in your own way of writing it?

HILLS

Yes. And so I did. I think she was quite impressed with the way I'd done mine and it was all correct. Other people's papers came back smothered in corrections, and mine didn't. You know, I went to every performance before I commuted back to my place out of London and just sort of absorbed the ballets, I suppose.

GUERARD

How was it, living with this woman, as a fifteen-year-old, going to somebody's house and living there?

HILLS

I don't know. She had a little girl who was adopted. She was a diabetic. I think it must have been more peculiar for her than for me, actually, to have suddenly some teenager living in your house, feeling, I dare say, some degree of responsibility for me. I have no idea. I just lived there and virtually only slept there, as a matter of fact. I wasn't there much.

GUERARD

And, weekends?

HILLS

Weekends I did my washing [laughs], darned my points shoes and sewed my ribbons on. And that was about it.

GUERARD

Then, when you came to the Sadler's Wells School, was it like learning a whole new technique?

HILLS

It was a little odd, because there, their technique wasn't pure Cecchetti and it wasn't pure RAD. It was a mixture, which is really what Ninette de Valois, when she finally wrote down her syllabus, wrote down. Those differences. So it was a little odd, but the reason for being there was to learn the-- How do you put it? To become "family stamped," so to speak. So that the head automatically went their way, that the height of the leg was the height they required, that you moved in their way of moving. That's why nobody ever went straight into the company, because you had to have this imprinting of their style, which didn't take long, but it was necessary since everybody came from different places into the school at that time.

GUERARD

Was that imprinting process laid out in a standard set of years or--?

HILLS

No. It wasn't written down. It wasn't written down at all, and the school was very small because they didn't take children. Their first class was for the later

teenagers, and it was at the theater--at the Sadler's Wells Theatre--that we had our classes. There were two rehearsal rooms there; one called the ballet room and one called the opera room. The opera rehearsed in one room and [the] ballet rehearsed in the other. All had classes. So the company was there and we were there, and we were able to watch all the company rehearsals as well as have our classes. So it was, you know, a place where you wanted to be all day, watching everything and seeing Margot Fonteyn and Robert Helpmann rehearsing and watching Frederic Ashton choreographing Symphonic Variations and-- Just a fabulous place to be.

GUERARD

Was Ashton the main choreographer at that time?

HILLS

Yes, he was, without a doubt.

GUERARD

The opera company, were those the performers, and you were the--?

HILLS

Yes. We shared the dressing rooms and we shared the theater because there would be alternate nights--opera and ballet. The theater actually went-- I'm jumping a little bit because when we first got there, the theater auditorium had a bomb through it, and so that was closed. I really have no idea where the opera was performing. They rehearsed at the theater. I have no idea where they performed. I wasn't really keen on opera. We were performing at the New Theatre in London, although we were rehearsing at the Sadler's Wells Theatre. Covent Garden was still converted to a great, big ballroom, where people used to go and ballroom dance at night. It wasn't a theater at all.

GUERARD

Was the new theater the Covent Gardens?

HILLS

No. It was a theater called the New Theatre. [laughs] It was very old. [laughs] It was known as the New Theatre. And it was in the theater district of London. Quite tiny. I didn't know her at the time, but my husband's aunt [Doris Napier]

was one of the office workers there. [laughs] I met her much later. She was the personal assistant to a man called Bronson Albery, who was a big cheese at the New Theatre. I suppose I saw her around, but didn't know who she was.

GUERARD

No. You couldn't have then.

HILLS

Very small world. And it was while we were still at the New [Theatre] that I did my knee injury and then I started teaching after that .

GUERARD

How did the knee injury happen?

HILLS

The knee injury happened in class and-- You will understand, but the people listening to the tape won't, but I was doing a grand ronde de jambe sauté into a renversé en dehors, and as I landed from the jump, my right knee fell inwards. I wasn't controlling it well enough, and I tore the cruciate ligaments in the back of it. I mean, you could hear them, miles off. It didn't hurt, actually, and I went on dancing. It was only that night it swelled up to the size of a normal-- I mean, really, a normal balloon. And then I was off, of course, for a while, until the swelling went down and they could find out what was wrong with it. They said, "Well, there's no surgery we can do. We can take out cartilage when the swelling's down," which was done not for another nine months, actually, after that. They took the cartilage out. And they said, "The only thing we can do is to make your knee permanently straight. You'll never be able to bend it again. It's the only surgery we can do, if we do anything." And I said, "No way." And they said, "Well, your career's over. Forget it."

GUERARD

And this was a month or so after--?

HILLS

Yes. I was about sixteen. Something like that. And I thought, "Well, okay. I don't think it's over. I'm going to get lots of physical therapy." And this is when I met the physical therapist called Celia Sparger who's written a lot of books

on dancer's injuries. [I] worked with her extensively, and she taught me how to overcome the fact that I didn't have any ligaments in the back of the knee and how to use the muscles instead. The Sadler's Wells organization, Ninette de Valois, particularly, were wonderful, because they said, "Well, you know, you can always teach and we want you to teach for us. We want you to start by teaching repertoire to the older students and we want you to start the junior associate group of the school." And so, we auditioned ten-year-olds for the first time. They came to the theater after school and danced in what was the upstairs foyer of the theater, which had some barres concealed behind curtains [laughs], which the audience didn't see. I started those children's classes at that time.

GUERARD

So that was a first for them?

HILLS

That was a first for them. They hadn't taught children up till then. I went to class. I got back into shape except that I couldn't do a full plie anymore, and I haven't ever since. I've never been able to get down into full plie because if I go down I can't get up, because the tendons that enable you to do that aren't there. But it didn't matter. I was able to manage without.

GUERARD

You've been fooling me for all these years. [laughter]

HILLS

Now, I could jump. The only thing I couldn't do at all was kneel down because in doing the surgery to get the cartilage out, they'd cut the surface nerves in my-- Well at that time, I had no feeling in the skin from the mid-shin to the mid-thigh. They said, "Oh, the nerves will grow together. Will grow about half an inch a year." And in fact, they did. I now have just a circle on the kneecap about four inches in diameter which has no feeling in it. But, of course, so many ballets require you to kneel down.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

In the corps de ballet, particularly. And if you can't feel when you're down, you go on pushing, trying to find the floor, and get covered in bruises because you don't know you're there. And, of course, the knee was unreliable. It did go out. The thigh bone slides forward over the lower leg bone sometimes, and then I'm incapacitated till somebody puts it back for me. So, I couldn't perform with a knee that did that, but I really found I absolutely adored teaching.

GUERARD

Was that hard for you to accept, or, had you had your heart set--?

HILLS

You know, I make a fuss about how hard it was, but [voice drops to a whisper] in fact, it wasn't. If I'm absolutely truthful, I enjoyed teaching so much that [pause]-- You know, I wasn't suicidal as one might think one should have been, and I think that Ninette de Valois was really, really great in giving me a new career. Without her, I probably might have felt much, much worse about it, but to be starting this junior school for Sadler's Wells at this early age, was really exciting. She'd seen me doing some teaching because-- I suppose I 'm an instinctive teacher. When I was still a student and then doing the walking on with the ballets and that sort of thing, if somebody couldn't get a step, I couldn't help but take them on one side at the back and show them how to do it, so she'd probably seen me doing this and realized I could do it. Otherwise, I'm sure, out of the blue she wouldn't have said, "Start my junior school."

GUERARD

Yes! Well, it sounds like you were really fortunate in that people recognized particular talents that you had in many areas .

HILLS

Yes, which I didn't really even know I had, myself, I think. I was incredibly lucky. You don't know how much-- You know, I might never have gone-- All these things. So much in one's life is just being at the right place at the right time. There are so many other people that you see walking down the street who've never had that luck and what a difference it makes to your life! You see it in your own children later. You try and encourage them to take hold of

opportunities and not let them slide by, if you possibly can. One's good fortune is unbelievable [pause] and I just loved teaching. I was a little surprised, sometimes, when I was teaching repertoire class that I got some sideways looks from some of the students who-- It was only afterwards I realized, as usual, that they were a lot older than I was. [laughs] I'm surprised that some of the parents of the children didn't look sideways at somebody as young as me teaching their children at this prestigious place where they'd had to audition to go, there was this kid teaching them. Maybe I looked, old. I don't know.

GUERARD

Well, it is an interesting phenomenon in the world of dance, and especially in ballet, that you have to become this polished, finished professional- -

HILLS

Very young.

GUERARD

At such an early age.

HILLS

You do, and people are always saying, "Didn't you miss your childhood?" Who gives a-- Sorry. We're taping. Childhood was this joy of doing what I wanted to do. What I could do. I didn't care about playing silly games and giggling with other girls, you know? [The] last thing on my mind was wanting to do that sort of-- I didn't miss anything. I had a lot more than they had, so it's not a deprivation of any sort. And one learned this wonderful discipline, of having your life completely to be organized by yourself. I mean, you were going to a performance and in later times, one made one's own costumes, you made sure they were clean, you pressed them, you mended them, you packed them. You took everything with you to the show, you packed it again afterwards and you brought it home. You looked after it and you prepared it and got it ready for the next show. That sort of degree of discipline lasts you through life. I mean, my closets at home are-- Here are all the sweaters in color order, here are all the shirts in color order, you know. And before I go to bed at night, the table is laid for breakfast, and my clothes are all laid out for the next morning.

I couldn't live in any other way, because it started off [during] really early childhood, doing that.

GUERARD

A lot of young people during the war had to sort of grow up fast--

HILLS

Oh, very fast. Yes.

GUERARD

And have jobs, anyway, but you were doing what you loved.

HILLS

Yes. Yes. They didn't have jobs, actually. Girls didn't, because girls were called up into the force, also, so the girls older than me really didn't think about a job because they knew they had to do their military service first. I was right on the brink. I registered for service, but I was never called because they stopped calling girls up. They went on calling people up into forces after the war was over. I don't know if they felt something else might break out. I really don't know why they did, but they did. Stanley Holden, who is exactly my age-- Well, he's six months older, but virtually the same age. He was called up after the war and he did serve two years in the forces. But they didn't call the girls up, so I missed it. And, you know, you went on planning your life up to graduation from high school, presumably, into what you were going to do . I know that there were girls at school who were planning to be doctors and that sort of thing, and they went through school planning to be doctors . Presumably, they were called up and then went and did their doctor's training afterwards. I don't know because I didn't keep in touch with any of them.

GUERARD

Did you have the sense at all, during the war, that it made the world of dance--  
- That there were more opportunities in dance or less opportunities?

HILLS

Well, Sadler's Wells Ballet toured a lot during the war and they took ballet to small theater in towns where people would never have seen it before, so there were a lot of new audiences being built. Our shows [were] taken to the

forces, also, and other people were doing the same thing. It wasn't just us. Ballet Rambert did the same thing. She had a very small ballet group, which toured, and she did shows in workers' cafeterias and things like that, during their lunch hours, to bring ballet to them. Because it was not terribly safe to be in London, the dancers moved out and took their performances all over the place. Anywhere where there was a stage, people would perform. And so once the war was over, there were vast audiences who'd seen ballet and were thrilled by it. I think because it was so absolutely different from war, that it was an escape sort of art. Probably it was something that they loved because it was so different from the noise and the deprivations and everything else. We had wonderful audiences and I don't know if I was aware of the opportunities that might or might not be available. I don't think anybody who wants to be a dancer really considers whether they'll ever get a job or not, you know .

GUERARD

Yes. [laughter] They have to go on anyway.

HILLS

They go on and they go on and the few of us are lucky, and the others go on and do other things, I guess.

GUERARD

We're almost to the end of this tape.

HILLS

Are we? Do you think this is a good moment to stop?

GUERARD

Yes. Is it okay for you?

HILLS

Yes. Fine.

### **1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (March 21, 1997)**

GUERARD

Margaret, we left off at pretty much a turning point in the world as well as in your life, in your career in ballet. The World War [II] has come to an end and you sustained an injury, but have gone on to a wonderful life of dance and have begun to teach for [the] Sadler's Wells Ballet . MARGARET: That's right. At that time, the ballet school was actually in the Sadler's Wells Theatre, in Islington, in London. The theater was built on top of a well which was owned, originally, by Mr. Sadler. There was supposed to be therapeutic water in this well and long before the theater was built--I think in the time of the late 1800's, when [Joseph] Grimaldi was a clown and those sort of things were going on--he had gardens there where people went to [a] park sort of place, where they went and drank the water out of the well. And, it was known, of course, as Mr. Sadler's Wells.

GUERARD

Oh, my goodness! So, it wasn't a theater at all . It was- -

HILLS

No, it wasn't. It was a sort of therapy place, where people went to get cured of whatever they had by drinking this probably horrible water. The theater was built in about 1921, I think. No, it must have been later than that. Must have been '31. Just when the Sadler's Wells Ballet started, the theater was new. They're about to pull it down, replace it with something else now but for it's day, it was a very modern theater. The outside looks very modern. In the back of the orchestra, there is a trap door which leads down to the well and we used to occasionally sort of be treated to somebody backstage start lifting the lid of the well for us to peer down into absolute blackness. You couldn't see what was there at all [laughter], but it was there.

GUERARD

The mystery of the well.

HILLS

Yes. That's right.

GUERARD

So they built the theater on top of the well, then?

## HILLS

On top of it. Yes. I think probably somebody decided the waters really weren't doing anybody any good at all, but left them marginally available if somebody really insisted on having some. I guess they're still there. So that's the reason it was called Sadler's Wells. It was a nice theater. It's hard to remember how big the stage was, but it was built so that the rehearsal rooms--there were two rehearsal rooms; one for the ballet and one for the opera--were the same size as the stage, which is a very great advantage when you're rehearsing. You've got the space that you're going to dance in and you don't have to think, "We've got more space or we've got less space on the stage," which is really rather nice. The ballet studio had a floor which was-- I was told it was resinated cork. It was strange to dance on at first, but once you got used to it, it was fabulous. You could see the little grains of cork in it and, presumably, the other part was the resin. [I've] never seen a floor like it, before or since, but it was really quite good to dance on.

## GUERARD

Then did it give a little bit?

## HILLS

Gave a little bit. Of course, not like the sprung floors we're used to now, but it did give a little bit. Sometimes, if you-- We used to have to darn the ends of our pointe shoes in order that the shoes would retain the rosin. People look at darning on old pictures of pointe shoes and think [that] they were darned so they didn't wear out. It wasn't so. It was to make a bed for the rosin to go into. And if you happened to have done your darning with rather course thread, [you] tended, in a pirouette, to make a little circle in the cork, which was frowned upon. [laughter] It was a nice room. When the opera were there, they were rehearsing in the opera room. When they weren't there, we were allowed to use the opera room for classes and rehearsals as well, but that was a moving feast. So the whole schedule of the school and the company were intertwined. School classes happened when the company weren't having company class and rehearsals and things, so you weren't ever quite sure which room you'd be in. It wasn't that you knew you'd be in this room at a certain time. You might be-- As I said before, last time, you might be in the foyer of the theater, which could be converted to a classroom space. It was really

rather exciting to have all the artists there, running around backstage, either rehearsing or going to class, and looking in at company classes. And for the students to look in at company classes, they learned a tremendous amount by watching.

GUERARD

Oh, I'm sure.

HILLS

It was very exciting. When a big new ballet was being choreographed- -for instance, when Frederick Ashton was choreographing Symphonic Variations-- they covered the windows of the door so that you couldn't look through. But, of course, somebody managed to make a little hole in the curtain so that one could peer in. I looked in quite a lot. I was more allowed to look than the other people, you know, being faculty. It was wonderful to see him [Ashton] working with those six dancers- -absolutely fascinating- -to the Cesar Franck music. But it got somewhat tedious and people started to make songs to it. You know [sings to the tune of the music] , "Get your hair cut! Get your hair cut!" in one place, and, "Did it hurt ya? Did it hurt ya? Of course it did! Of course it did!" [laughter] Very stupid, silly things, but you'd get so bored with the music after a while.

GUERARD

Right, but the repetition is important for perfection.

HILLS

Oh, absolutely! Absolutely. Alec [Alexander] Grant, who was-- I think he was in it originally, he sang the choreography for every ballet he was ever in. It helped. It was his way of remembering it. Where the actual names of the steps didn't fit, he'd put in adjectives to describe them at the same time, so could sing the whole thing. It was quite clever and funny, of course, in some places. But I think he still rehearses people in some of the ballets he was in and he can still sing all the choreography.

GUERARD

I guess that's his own form of notation.

HILLS

Yes, I think so. Yes. You know [sings], "Little balance, little balance." [laughter]  
They'd laugh and he'd sing. Great character!

GUERARD

I think people are interested in knowing how dancers learn choreography, how they keep it in their head, and I imagine there are many different ways.

HILLS

I think we're all individual. When you're learning new choreography from somebody who's actually choreographing at that time, they change their mind a lot, so you have to decide-- Well, at least some of them change their minds a lot. Kenneth MacMillan didn't. He just came and had it all fixed in his mind. He knew exactly what he wanted. But other people play with the dances and say, "Try this. Try that. Try the other." And in doing that, you have to partly find out what is the most flowing and-- One uses the word comfortable, but it's not the right word for the non-dancer to understand, but where the movement flowed well from one step to the next, that's the one you would generally finish up with. And at that stage, if you thought the choreographer had made a serious mistake in making the choreography flow, you'd pretend you'd forgotten it and say, "No, no. I think you said this!" to make it easier on the body. Easier on the flow of movement. And sometimes you could get away with it and sometimes not, of course. And in that circumstance, you really wait until it's definitely set before you put it into long-term memory. You sort of have a short-term memory and then a long-term memory. With established choreography, I think it's probably really triggered by the music. It is for me because I can hear ballet music on my car radio and my body responds so that I have to turn it off because I can't drive. It's just in the whole nervous - muscular system of the body. The body knows. I mean, I may not even recognize which ballet it is, but my body knows the choreography. And then I have to try and think, "What was I wearing?" And then I can think which ballet it is, so it's definitely the music-muscular relationship, as far as I'm concerned. But other people, I don't know how they work it. And of course, now there's the notation- -the Laban Notation and Benesh Choreology- -that means that it is written down, and how people work when they've been taught something from that, whether they see the notation in their minds and translate that into

movement, I have no idea. I didn't learn that. I was partially responsible for bringing Benesh Notation into the company, but I never learned it.

GUERARD

Then, how did you bring it--?

HILLS

Well, this is jumping years ahead, but Joan Benesh was married to Rudolf Benesh and together they worked out this system of notation. She was a student in the school and knew all the ballets, and nobody could quite understand how. And then she went into the company and she could do all the ballets. And only when the ballet mistress, Mary Skeaping, said, "You know, you're incredible. How do you know all these?" She said, "Well, my husband and I have written them all down in notation."

GUERARD

But she had to then translate it from that notation to her body.

HILLS

Well, she'd done it the other way around in her case, because she'd seen it and gone home and written it down. When you read back from choreology, then you have to do it the other way. And, I was then senior ballet mistress of the school and said, "You know, this is a great idea. I think the students ought to learn how to do this."

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

So then it was brought into the curriculum of the school . That was in 1956 and we're back in '45, so we have jumped ahead a little bit here, but one can't help it when it comes up.

GUERARD

Right, right. Well, I think that you mentioned that you had your own way of remembering ballets at that time .

HILLS

Yes, I did. I could just see them and remember them, but I had my own way of writing them down, which I did when I had to teach them and I had to teach them to other teachers from other countries at times. And I wanted to be absolutely sure that I didn't get anything wrong and that I didn't say one thing in the morning and another thing in the afternoon, so I just wrote them out in longhand in a way that has become accepted, I think, because I did so many different things. It's become an accepted way of writing things down in longhand for people who don't understand the other notation. That was in 1947 when we first started what was called a summer school for-- Wait, I should wait till we've got to the building where that happened. I think this is a little too soon.

GUERARD

Yes. Well, we were at 1946, I believe.

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

And you were beginning to teach the junior company and--

HILLS

Not the junior company. It was the juniors in school who came to the theater after they'd finished their ordinary education. And what you should realize is that Ninette de Valois was planning to open a big school with education and everything else and she was wanting to get a nucleus of young dancers to be in that school when it opened. And so we had what were called junior associates and they came, depending on the level they were at- -from complete beginners at age 10 through teenagers- -into three different classes. I really don't remember at this time. Some of them came twice a week, some three times and some came five times to class, after school. And some of them, many of them, indeed did go on when we opened the big school . They formed a nice nucleus and I was the teacher of that group.

GUERARD

So, it started with ten-year-olds.

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

That's quite a few years before they're ready to complete high school and dance full time.

HILLS

Oh, yes! Oh, yes! Yes, they came after school from their day school and danced for an hour or an hour and a half and then went home. And they did quite long journeys, but in those days it was perfectly safe for young children to go on buses and on the underground by themselves. At ten it didn't worry anybody. It was absolutely safe. When I was little and I would go into town on the bus when I was seven by myself [I'd] go to a cafe and have tea by myself. Things have changed so much as far as child safety is concerned. It's really hard to comprehend that it was okay for those children to be there without their parents. It 's a very different situation. I taught them and as I said, I taught repertoire and one or two other things to the older people. But Ninette de Valois, again, planning her school, wanted to have a school syllabus worked out before we opened and she wanted it to be a mixture of the Danish and the French and the Italian and the Russian. She wanted to take what she felt was best of those methods to be used to produce an English school [pause], an English method, an English-- Well, she called it an English school, the school being in quotes, I would say. And she brought together dancers from those different disciplines and asked them to say what they thought was best about their method and then they would all argue and she, being the great dictator that she was, is, decided what we would teach in the school, and she asked me to be her [pause] secretary, I suppose, to write up the conclusions of these meetings.

GUERARD

Oh goodness. This was back in '46?

HILLS

'46, yes. I was just coming up-- It was early '46 so I was seventeen. So I was in this incredibly privileged position of hearing great dancers expressing their opinions about their training, about what they felt was essential in the method they'd been taught in and hearing people talking about the classes they'd been to with [Enrico] Cecchetti, who was a famous teacher of the Diaghilev ballet [Ballets Russes] . And they would say, "No, no, no. Cecchetti always said to me, 'such and such.'" And the other one would say, "No, no, no. Cecchetti always said to me--. You're quite wrong. He always said to me, 'so and so.'" And I would sit back and think, "He must have been a very good teacher because he was saying different things to different bodies." And I would look at these middle-aged ladies and think, "But you see, I can understand. You're a different shape from this one and so the correction he gave to you would necessarily be different." He must have been a very, very good teacher. Of course, they were famous dancers and so he would have spent special attention on them, no doubt, rather than on-- People who had been in the corps de ballet probably didn't get as much attention. But, it was really most illuminating because I wasn't part of the argument.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

I was going to write down what they finally decided was going to be taught in the school. And again, I used my method of writing things out, dance out. And again, that got established because that was printed.

GUERARD

Oh it was?

HILLS

Yes. To be given to the teachers in the school. And also to any visiting teachers from other countries. They got a copy. You've never been able to buy it anywhere. It's sort of the sacred bible of The Royal Ballet now. [laughs]

GUERARD

Yes. So, what a privileged position to be in as a-- You were teaching the young students and at the same time getting insight as a teacher.

HILLS

Yes. Absolutely. And applying each day what had been decided, teaching it on the children, seeing if it worked and occasionally, if it didn't seem to be being productive, going back to the meeting and saying, "Could we go back over this decision we made because I tried it out on the children and it doesn't seem to work?" So, that was a fascinating thing to be doing, too.

GUERARD

Yes. Were these teachers who gathered together living in England at the time or were they from other countries?

HILLS

Yes. They weren't all there at the same time, but there were-- There was Tamara Karsavina and Lydia Lopokova, Mary Skeaping, a man called Harold Turner, another one called Claude Newman, Vera Volkova from Russia who'd studied with [Agrippina] Vaganova, Ursula Moreton who'd been in the Diaghilev ballet as a character dancer and learned with Cecchetti. There were Peggy Van Praagh, who was a Cecchetti-trained dancer though she hadn't been in the Diaghilev ballet company. All-- Oh, Ailne Phillips was another one. They were teachers of the company. I can't think of anybody else now. There must have been others, but those come to mind. Very famous lot of people .

GUERARD

And were they also teaching at that same time?

HILLS

Vera Volkova was teaching at that time and so was Ailne Phillips, teaching company class and the seniors in the school. And as far as I remember, those were the only ones who were teaching regularly. We'd have Jean Bedells come from the company also to teach repertoire. She taught it before I took it over. And Ursula Moreton would come and teach ballet pantomime. And Harold Turner. He was still in [the] forces, but when he was on leave, he'd come teach pas de deux. So, it was a floating population of teachers as well as the nucleus of myself and Ailne Phillips and Vera Volkova.

GUERARD

Did you feel that all of the teachers were working toward building an English form of dance?

HILLS

No, they didn't want to be. They were doing it as, I suppose, a favor to Ninette de Valois because she'd asked them to, but I don't think they personally had any intention of following her curriculum when it was worked out .

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

And they didn't. I think they were old enough to have established their own feeling of the way they liked to teach and so would not be likely to change. Ailne Phillips did because she'd been trained by Ninette de Valois in the first place from her youth. She was one of the original people who'd been in Ninette de Valois' school before it became part of the Old Vic [Theatre] and then Sadler's Wells [Ballet], so she was a follower of Ninette de Valois, in any case.

GUERARD

So, was she one of the younger ones of the group, then?

HILLS

Yes, yes. To me she looked old, of course. [laughter] In retrospect, she would now be about-- If she were still alive, I presume she'd be about eighty-eight or something like that now. So [at] that time, fifty years ago, [she would have been in her] thirties. She looked old to me at seventeen, as everybody did, needless to say. [laughs]

GUERARD

Other than your ten-year-old students.

HILLS

Yes. To them, I must have looked old.

GUERARD

At that time, were you teaching the younger students the repertoire of the company?

HILLS

Oh, no. The young ones just did ballet classes. They were learning the steps. If one goes through the level system of the school at that time, there were the three classes of junior associates who were all under sixteen; ten to sixteen. And then there were two classes above that of sixteen- to eighteen-year-olds, I think. Class B and Class A, Senior School. So, there were five levels going on at that time. The older ones met during the day and the children [met] after school. And I was teaching repertoire to the-- Mostly to the B class. I was teaching corps de ballet and an artist from the company would come in and teach the variations to the A class. And of course, I was still taking class myself, either in company class or in A class, which ever fitted in with my schedule best.

GUERARD

Were you taking classes daily?

HILLS

Oh, yes. Every day. Yes.

GUERARD

And was part of your training also-- Did it also include how to teach the classes?

HILLS

No. It was left really to me.

GUERARD

Was it really?

HILLS

Yes, it was. Nobody gave me any advice of any sort. Just threw me in there and sort of, "Get on with on it." Except, of course, that I was going to all these meetings and that was probably my training. But they didn't tell me how to-- You know, they'd said, "Teach demi-plies now," and so on, but they didn't

teach me how to teach demi-plies, so to speak. That, I evolved for myself. I really enjoyed it very much, I must say. I loved it. I got a tremendous joy from enabling other people to do it. Something I had no idea I would enjoy at all when I couldn't really perform anymore. It wouldn't have entered my head that I would enjoy it as I did. It's wonderful .

GUERARD

Sometimes fine things come out of accidents.

HILLS

Yes! Yes. It was great. At the same time- -you know, I was telling you Ninette de Valois was building up towards opening the school --she was also preparing the company which had been performing at Sadler's Wells [Theatre] to move to The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, in February, 1946.

GUERARD

Now, how did that come about? Did the Sadler's Wells just get too small or what happened?

HILLS

Well, it was too small for her- -for Ninette de Valois '--big ideas. [laughs] But, I mean, she was an incredible woman. In these two years between 1945 and 1947, she arranged for the school to move to new premises, the day school as well as the dancing school, so they had all their education there as well. She moved the company from Sadler's Wells Theatre to The Royal Opera House Covent Garden, and formed another company to stay at the Sadler's Wells Theatre.

GUERARD

And what was that company?

HILLS

That was called the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet.

GUERARD

And did some of the originals from Sadler's Wells stay there to teach there?

HILLS

A few, but most of them moved to The Royal Opera House. A few stayed as a nucleus for the company and, of course, masses more dancers who had never been in the school at all, were brought in from all over the place because it had to be a big company. [The] Sleeping Beauty was the first performance, which was on February 20, 1946.

GUERARD

I'm sorry. The Sleeping Beauty was the first performance of--?

HILLS

At Covent Garden.

GUERARD

At Covent Garden, not for Sadler's Wells Theatre.

HILLS

No, Sadler's Wells Theatre didn't open until-- I think it was '47, so there was a little gap between when there wasn't a company at Sadler's Wells but there was one at Covent Garden.

GUERARD

Okay. Maybe we can come back to them again.

HILLS

Yes. And at that time, for the opening night, I was to have been just walking on as one of the court ladies. The court ladies were all students and I was to have walked on with them as their sort of chaperone, pusher-about or making sure they were all on and that sort of thing. And in fact, I was actually going to have knee surgery the day after the opening. And so, I was in the wings. I wasn't actually on the stage, but it counted when it came back to going to the gala, fifty years later, having been on the stage--even on the side--at that time. So, that was a very, very exciting time and the company was increased-- I really don't know the numbers. I can't remember. But in that program which you have there--and you can do some homework for me on that--it has the artists of the companies in 1946, but it's got the old program in there, I think.

To have that, suddenly, that enormous number of dancers-- I worked it out. There must have been, I think, forty students on, as well as the company .

GUERARD

Oh my goodness!

HILLS

It was huge. And there were wonderful new sets designed by Oliver Messel and the costumes were made of nylon, which was an absolutely new fabric which nobody had ever made costumes of before.

GUERARD

Right after the war.

HILLS

Yes. And the colors, of course, that nylon dyed to- -exquisite colors that one hadn't been able to get before. And they were light. They weren't heavy. The court ladies' costumes, being made with this much lighter fabric, were wonderful to wear. [The] only trouble was that nylon does retain odor.  
[laughs]

GUERARD

Yes, it doesn't breathe very well.

HILLS

No. And that, of course, people didn't know when the costumes were first designed. It wasn't pleasant. [laughter]

HILLS

But the designs were beautiful. Absolutely gorgeous. And the sets were beautiful. I regret their passing. The company, many years later, sold the designs to the National Ballet of Canada and they've had other designs since. And I hate the present ones with a vengeance. [I] really dislike them intensely. What was beautiful is, to my eyes, now ugly.

HILLS

You know, these things-- Everything changes.

GUERARD

Yes. But, getting back to the move to Covent Garden- -

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

Then, the company was expanded in number because of the--?

HILLS

The bigger stage. The stage is twice the size or probably four times the size of Sadler's Wells stage, so you need many more dancers on it for it to look dressed with people.

GUERARD

Right. And did that also attract more students to the school?

HILLS

Yes. The school actually moved to-- It was a church hall, a big church hall, in Hampstead, in London. And we had all our classes there, which meant we were not in conflict for space with the company. The company still began rehearsing at Sadler's Wells Theatre because there wasn't a rehearsal room at that time at The Royal Opera House. And they also, the company, rented space in a-- I don't know what it was called. It was a place where the military had practiced marching and things like that. And they took a floor; a wooden floor that had been the ballroom floor when Covent Garden was a ballroom. They took that and put it down in this military establishment and rehearsed there. A place in London called Mornington Crescent, which only a very few underground trains stopped at, so you had to make sure you got on one that actually stopped there, otherwise it went past it and came back and still went past it and you tried again [laughter] until you got on one that actually stopped there.

GUERARD

Sort of like the express.

HILLS

Yes, exactly. Yes, yes. So, we were then, at that moment, scattered in various places all over London till we sort of came together again. So it meant a lot of commuting, since I taught the seniors at the place in Hampstead and the juniors were still at Sadler's Wells Theatre in the evening. I had to to-and-fro from one to the other quite a lot .

GUERARD

So now you're teaching both age groups.

HILLS

Yes. Well, I did teach the older ones, you know, sometimes. I wasn't their regular teacher, but I seemed to do quite a lot with them one way or another, either repertoire or the character dance teacher didn't show up so I would go and teach them character. I was the general dog's body, I think. [laughs] If somebody couldn't be there, send Margaret, you know [laughter], which was a tremendous advantage, really, to learn on the spot how to do all those sort of things.

GUERARD

Yes!

HILLS

Because I'd learned character in a hurry because the school I'd been at before I went-- As a short time student at Sadler's Wells, I had done no character dancing at all.

GUERARD

And you learned character dancing at Sadler's Wells?

HILLS

Yes. At Sadler's Wells, in sort of three weeks flat, you know. [laughs]

GUERARD

Was that a special set of courses?

HILLS

Yes. You do a special barre in character shoes and you learn how to mazurka. You learn how to do a czardas. You learn how to do the character cabrioles and character bourrées and character retirés. They're all different. And the men, of course, have a much tougher time because they do those things going right down on their knees and coming up with the high kicks up. You know, those things. Girls don't do that so it's not quite as hard to teach a girl's character classes as a man's character classes. I enjoyed doing that! It was fun. Quite different.

GUERARD

Were there a lot of ballets included in the repertoire of the Sadler's Wells that were character dances?

HILLS

Well, all the [Marius] Petipa ballets- -Sleeping Beauty and Swan Lake- -all have character dances in them. They have czardas and mazurkas. And Coppélia, which is not a Petipa ballet, but that also has, you know [sings], Ya ta da bum ba da dum, ba dum ba dum. That's a character number in the mazurka from Coppélia. Everybody knows that music. I can't sing so forgive me, tape. [laughter] You might have a rough idea of what I'm talking about. So, it was a necessary part of training to be able to do that .

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

The rhythms are so different.

GUERARD

Was there a difference in the types of ballets that were done at the Sadler's Wells Ballet and the Sadler's Wells Ballet Theatre?

HILLS

Yes, very different. Once the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet was started, they had special choreography by young, new choreographers. They did a lot of new ballets, some of which survived, some didn't. That was where John Cranko, the famous choreographer, started doing choreography. He

choreographed for them. Now, the woman called Andree--and I stress woman because you wouldn't know by her name, Andrée Howard- -she had been a dancer with Marie Rambert, her little company, and she did some choreography. Ninette de Valois did some choreography, herself. A man called Alfred Rodriguez did some. Gradually, they built up a big repertoire of ballets which required smaller space and fewer people. And the ones that would translate to the bigger stage were taken to Covent Garden. At that time, I don't think many ballets were duplicated in the two companies, apart from, perhaps, Coppélia. That was probably done by both.

GUERARD

But did it have something to do with-- You said they were young, new choreographers. Did it have something to do with the more modern type of choreography as opposed to the more classical?

HILLS

Not what you call modern choreography now. No, they were all classical ballets, classically using ballet steps with no-- The modern dance was going on in Germany, a bit. Nothing of that sort was going on in England whatsoever. [They] hadn't seen any of it or anything, so there were no barefoot ballets or anything like that at all. Things changed a lot after a while. Even a ballet called Khadra, which was, I think was based on-- It was a sort of cross between Japanese and Egyptian. It's rather odd, but that was done on pointe, too. It's what people expected to see. Now they might think it was strange, but then, it was perfectly acceptable. I don't really know the origins of that, but they wore slightly Japanese- looking costumes but in other places looked like some of the Egyptian paintings on monuments and things in Egypt. So it was a hodgepodge, perhaps. It was pretty.

GUERARD

It sounds like it's very pretty.

HILLS

Yes, it was. So, we got to '47 and the second company was started. Lots of dancers came from South Africa and Rhodesia.

GUERARD

Why is that?

HILLS

Well, there had been some very good schools in South Africa and Rhodesia and Australia. You see, those countries hadn't been affected by the Second World War at all. They'd been well-fed, as we had not [pause] and well-trained. There were some very good teachers there. And they wanted the opportunity to dance in a famous place. And so they came to the school, stayed, just as I had, just long enough to have the style imprinted on them, and then they went into one or other of the companies. Most of them went into the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet to start with, but a few went straight to Covent Garden. The ones who went straight to Covent Garden were Rowena Jackson from New Zealand, Dorothea Zaymes from South Africa, Nadia Nerina--who became a very, very famous ballerina--from South Africa. She went straight into the first company and in fact she, in fact, had the part of the nurse in the prologue, which I should have been doing, had I not been going to hospital the next day. [laughs]

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

So, her first appearance was just as a nurse in that company. She'd only just got into the company. So, we were talking about it when we met again a few-- Eighteen months ago.

GUERARD

Did this create any kind of an exchange between-- Were there students from Sadler's Wells who then became interested in going to Rhodesia or--?

HILLS

No, because there weren't any ballet companies there. They trained dancers and they had a lot of competitions and it was much more like gymnastics competition or a skating competition, as far as I-- I never went, so I don't know, but the way they talked made it sound as though it was a very competitive, but not a performing art that they studied.

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

And they came to England to be performers. Later on, Australia had its own ballet company and Canada had its own ballet company, but as far as I know, Rhodesia and South Africa still don't. I've never heard of one. Maybe I'm quite wrong and somebody will answer this, listening to this tape, and say, "Yes they do!" Forgive me if that's so. [laughter] I don't know of them. No, they were very good dancers. And we had a boy from Spain who'd been all tied up during the Spanish Civil War or born during the Spanish Civil War- -he came to the school- -called Pirmin Aldabaldatrecu .

GUERARD

Oh, my goodness!

HILLS

And we used to call him "half a pound of treacle," [British term for molasses.] which was the nearest thing we could get to Aldabaldatrecu. [Guerard laughs] I gave him private lessons to start with and he was a very, very quick learner. And within six months he was in the company, from knowing nothing. He'd done Basque dancing and Spanish dancing, but not ballet. In the programs, you will see him. He cut his last name down to Trecu. Pirmin Trecu was the name he used. He became a very well known dancer . And another person who came about the same time and shared Pirmin 's private lessons, a man- -a boy- -called David Gill. And he went into the company for a little while, decided it wasn't, ultimately, for him, and he is now a very famous restorer of ancient movies. You sometimes see a reconstruction of an ancient silent movie and you'll see in the credits David Gill and Kevin Brownlow.

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

And he is one of my original students. And, he is also now a great friend of somebody you know, Julie May, who takes class. Her husband is in that field

and I met David again at their house here in Los Angeles, having not seen him for years and years and years and years and years. So, it's a very, very small world.

GUERARD

It sure is! I guess there are a few dancers who do go on to do other things in their lives.

HILLS

Oh, yes! Sometimes in a related field. There is a dancer called Margaret Dale who was a soloist in the Sadler's Wells company- -the part that moved to Covent Garden- -and she became a television producer and director mostly working with dance. She was brilliant at shooting things from the right angle for the television audience to see it because, of course, she knew exactly what people wanted to see, what should be seen at various times.

GUERARD

Yes. It 's very difficult.

HILLS

Yes. She was really very good.

GUERARD

People are working very diligently right now on trying to learn how to effectively videotape dance, as well .

HILLS

Yes! Yes. Yes, because it can be a mess, particularly if they start trying for color effects on things. It can become a work of art in itself, but as a viewer's view of dance on the stage, it's often very distorted. But if you think of it as an entirely different art form, then you add the two together and it makes a different thing.

GUERARD

Yes, and decisions have to made as to whether you ' re taping something in order to hand the choreography down, as you would [with] notation, or whether it is a work of art...

## HILLS

Yes. The two things are quite different. Another person who was--this is a switch back--in the school at that time, was John Cranko, who came from South Africa and was actually not a very good dancer, but very, very much wanted to be a choreographer, to the extent that when Massine (Léonide Massine, who was a choreographer from [Serge] Diaghilev's time) came to mount [La] Boutique Fantasque and The Three-Cornered Hat on the company-- Massine was doing a ballet to Haydn's Clock Symphony, a new one, and John Cranko desperately wanted to be in it so that he could see Massine actually choreographing. And he really, technically, wasn't good enough and nobody who was not in the ballet was allowed to watch rehearsals. But Massine was very, very kind to John. He said, "I will find you a part which will be okay. Your legs can be the pendulum inside the clock as the clock ticks. That way, there is no reason you can't be in watching my rehearsals." [Guerard laughs]

## GUERARD

From inside the clock.

## HILLS

From inside the clock. So poor John Cranko was there for all the rehearsals, learned how Massine choreographed and never saw the ballet from the front because his legs swung from side to side each time the clock ticks in the Haydn symphony, but his face and body were behind the clock face. So he couldn't actually see the performance, poor man. But, you know, he was so absolutely bent on becoming a choreographer. Like me wanting to learn from teachers, he wanted to learn from Massine. It obviously served him very well. He became a very famous choreographer. At that time, we would not have known, really, that Kenneth MacMillan was going to turn into a choreographer. We had a little choreographic group--this was in 1945--and everybody messed around with trying to do a little bit of choreography, MacMillan amongst them. But, nothing came of it. We didn't do any performances or anything. And then sometime later, suddenly MacMillan turned into this incredible choreographer. But he was a brilliant dancer. Absolutely brilliant. Gorgeous legs and feet. One of the few really great choreographers who was also a great dancer, himself. So he got his performing career in first before he started choreographing, in earnest. Where

do we go? To the school, I think probably, and how it finally moved. I wasn't involved in looking for the premises for the school .

GUERARD

No .

HILLS

But suddenly, we were told that they had bought a building in Baron's Court in London. This building [was] a big, big, red brick building, which I would guess was built in the early 1800' s and it had been used during the war as a furniture repository. Now that may sound odd, but people who evacuated themselves had nowhere to put their-- It's like a rent space for storing stuff, a self- storage space. It had been used for storing furniture for people who left London and closed their homes down. It must have looked very weird, but, of course, it had a lot of very big rooms in it. I don't know what it had been built for originally. [It's] very hard to say because it had huge rooms that we used for studios. One had a stage at one end and two of them had balconies up above. So, whether they had been for military things or-- I have no idea. Only at this moment has it occurred to me to wonder what it was built for originally. I have no idea. [The structure was originally built for the Froebel Educational Institute, functioning as its teacher-training facility.] [Margaret Graham Hills added the above bracketed section during her review of the transcript.]

#### **1.4. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side Two (March 21, 1997)**

GUERARD

Margaret, when the tape ended on the other side, you were saying [that] you weren't quite sure what it was originally built for--?

HILLS

Oh, I don't suppose it matters to anybody anymore. Anyway, the company bought this big building. And it had two big studios with balconies, and another smaller studio and a playground area for the children to play in and lots of rooms for schoolrooms. And we auditioned children. Not too many showed up. I think the word hadn't got around sufficiently, and so we took

some children whom we regretted later. Even Arnold Haskell, in one of his books, says that with hindsight, it would probably have been better to start off with fewer and more talented rather than trying to fill it up. But, of course, you know, they needed the money from people. It was quite necessary.

GUERARD

Now, excuse me, this was the beginning of the time when children would come full-time?

HILLS

Full-time.

GUERARD

And they would get their regular school training there and their dancing?

HILLS

Yes. They came at 9:00 and school finished, I think, 4:00 or 4:30. During the course of the day, they would have-- I suppose where you would have p.e. or games and stuff in ordinary school, they'd have their dancing classes. And the rest of the day, they were studying biology and English and French and all the other normal stuff .

GUERARD

But they lived at home?

HILLS

They lived at home at this time. Yes. One day, they hoped to open a boarding school, but these children lived at home. And they came quite long distances by train. They had a school uniform which was designed by a lady called Matilda Etches, which was a green skirt with a bib front. Darkish green skirt with a bib front and a sort of aqua shirt underneath, a green overcoat and a green-- It's not exactly a beret, it's more like a sailor hat. It was a sort of a cross between a sailor hat and a beret, in green, which they perched on top of their heads and, of course, walked with very long necks everywhere that they were going. We could pick them out a mile away. And the education head teacher at that time--she didn't survive with us very long--insisted that wherever these children met the faculty, they had to curtsy.

GUERARD

Oh, my!

HILLS

And you'd be walking along the underground train platform and suddenly this little apparition in green would bob a curtsy at you as you walked by and you'd wished the floor would open and swallow you up because you really didn't want to see this happen, you know. That was abolished very quickly. We really didn't like it, but she thought it was wonderful. Unfortunately, she turned out - And I needn't mention names, but she turned out to be a real ballet groupie. She was a well-educated woman and had all the qualifications for being a head teacher, but she would go off into the gallery at Covent Garden and scream her head off in delight at some of the performances, which, you know, if you're part of the organization, you don't do that. [laughter] And so, after a while, she was replaced by somebody else who was already on the faculty as a biology teacher. [Leila McCutcheon] She was great. [She] had her head screwed on the right way and had no sort of visions of screaming and clapping and yelling and getting autographs at the stage door [laughs] , which the first one had, so things changed a little bit quite quickly after that. And there was a lady who was employed as bursar of the school and she had to furnish it with rosin and plates and desks and all the other things. She had been recruited because she had done a very similar job at a big boys' school called St. Paul's School, which is right across the street from where the Sadler's Wells was. And she'd been doing it during wartime, filling the job for a man who was in the forces . So, of course, when the war was over, he came back and she didn't have a job, and it was perfect for her. Also, it turned out to be perfect for me because she turned out later to become my mother-in-law. [laughs]

GUERARD

Oh my goodness!

HILLS

Her name was Kathleen Hills and her husband, Frederick Hills, had been a mathematics master at the school and Kathleen was his second wife. My husband's mother had died when he was four. Kathleen had brought him up from the age of seven. And through her inviting me, very shortly after we

opened the school, to go watch a television show of Les Sylphides-- Very few people had televisions at that time. They had theirs in 1937, when television first started in England. It started there a lot earlier than it started here . There had been no television shows from 1939 to '45 but, of course, they came on again in 1945 and they had their television set from 1937. And so, I had this wonderful, rare opportunity of going to her apartment and watching ballet on television for the-- Got to see, really, television, in my case, for the very first time.

GUERARD

Who was dancing?

HILLS

Oh, I don't remember. Haven't the faintest idea! [laughs] I was just so thrilled to see these people on this little box, you know. And their son, Brian, came down from Manchester to visit that weekend and it's been a long story since that week. We married in 1951, and we still are.

GUERARD

Oh my goodness!

HILLS

So it's very momentous for me.

GUERARD

Yes!

HILLS

But she had no idea. She'd never seen a ballet in her life, either. Probably the first one she saw was that [which] ran on television that night and she couldn't even-- She was a musician, had been originally a pianist and had understood that rosin came in [a] very small box which you rubbed up and down a violin string or a violin bow. And being asked to buy fifty pounds of rosin came as somewhat a surprise to her. [laughter] She couldn't imagine what we would do with fifty pounds of rosin. Everything was difficult to get. She talked to me a lot about it afterwards. I didn't know at the time, she had to go hunting for plates and getting food. You had to have permits to get food for the children

for lunch. All sorts of things. She had to find staff to cook and staff to clean and a janitor who had a small apartment in the building to live in with his wife. There was a tremendous amount of stuff going on. And they had to appoint a director. Ninette de Valois, of course, was director of the ballet, but they wanted a director of the whole thing. And there was a famous writer [and] ballet critic, called Arnold Haskell, who'd written many books about ballet and he was appointed director and was a very, very good one. He was excellent because he knew everybody. He had, in Paris, taken very few ballet classes himself, so knew enough to know what it was about .

GUERARD

Now, how many students, about, were there in a class?

HILLS

I'm trying to think. There were five education levels which were divided into three different ballet levels and there were about twenty-five in each class, so I would say as a guess, sixty. No boys at that time, because we didn't have a boys' teacher.

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

Boys came three or four months later. We opened in September and boys came in January. It was just a time lag, but a short time.

GUERARD

Remind me of the year there.

HILLS

1947.

GUERARD

Okay .

HILLS

Yes, it was in September '47, so the boys came [in] January '48. And, of course, there were the education teachers. Because normally in England-- The names are different so it's a little hard to sort it out, but if one imagines that junior high starts at eleven, most of the children were eleven up. But we chose to take them at ten, so they had to have an elementary school teacher for that little group, of ten- to eleven-year-olds. And they were separate and very special and thought themselves super to be there at ten when everybody else was eleven. So, that's a nice little nucleus of ten-year-olds. Some of them had never done any dancing at all before.

GUERARD

Oh, really?

HILLS

They were auditioned by their shape and not by their dancing ability.

GUERARD

How was that done?

HILLS

You'd just look at a child. I mean, I still see children walking along the street and think, "Ah, I wish I could get hold of that one and teach it." And some of them were ones that I'd had as junior associates at the Sadler's Wells Theatre, so they'd done some. Then most of them went into the second class. Even though they were only ten, they danced with the eleven- and twelve-year-olds. There were some very good children amongst all of them and some whose parents were wealthy and had a little clout, you know. These things happen when something starts anew. We had the daughter of the Queen's surgeon, who was [a] tubby, sweet little girl, but not a dancer. And another one whose mother was-- I can't remember her first name. Liza Danielli, I think it was, an opera singer in the opera company whose father was a very big cheese with Lucien LeLong perfume.

GUERARD

Who was that?

HILLS

His name was Johnson. I can't remember the little girl's first name, [Susan][Margaret Graham Hills added the above bracketed section during her review of the transcript.] but his name was Johnson. And I remember it so well because the first Christmas he gave me- -or the little girl ostensibly gave me- - a box of all the different Lucien LeLong perfumes. Not eau de toilette, not toilet water, real perfume. It was wonderful [laughs] to have this little girl who, unfortunately, wasn't talented. And another talented little girl we had became very well known; Juliette Mills, the actress.

GUERARD

Oh, yes!

HILLS

She was one of our early ones and I had a tremendous crush on her father, who was an actor called John Mills. When I actually got to shake his hand, I didn't want to wash that hand for ages and ages, [laughter] Very star struck as far as he was concerned.

GUERARD

Yes .

HILLS

It was fun. Years later, I met her. I was waiting for my husband to come off an aircraft from London and saw Juliette Mills standing there and sort of walked towards her, and she said, "Don't I know from you from somewhere?" And, I said, "Yes you do." She was waiting for her sister, Hayley [Mills] , to come off the plane. My husband came off and he started to say, "Do you know who I sat next to?" And I said, "Do you know who I just met? Meet Juliette Mills." He said, "[You] steal my thunder all the time. I sat next to Jack Palance on the plane going back." [laughter] So we were name-dropping to each other there for a bit. Really, the school went very, very well. We had two teachers who were sort of on approval, so to speak. We didn't know a great deal about either of their teaching abilities. One was Vera Savina, who had been Leonide Massine's-- One of Leonide Massine's wives. I don't know which or in what sequence. And another lady whose stage name had been [pause] Vera Fredova . And she had danced with [Anna] Pavlova's company and had come

to United States in about 1918, I think, as a very young member of Pavlova's company, and had actually stayed in the United States and taught in Los Angeles for many, many years with a man she danced with, called Theodore Kosloff. And they'd had a school in Los Angeles and she had stayed in Los Angeles from, I suppose about 1920 to [1936] , when she had to go back to England because her father died. She had to deal with his estate. And she hadn't danced at all for a long time. You'll see why this is pertinent in a while. She had joined the Red Cross during the Second World War and been a nurse in the Red Cross. And then she'd also then spent some time writing up the notes of a man who studied bugs, all over England. And then when the war finished, she decided she really should get back into shape and learn to get back to teaching. And she decided--I think she was fifty--to take her Royal Academy of Dancing examinations so she could have the qualifications to teach in England. And she did. And she, I believe, took her Advanced RAD [Royal Academy of Dancing examination] on her fifty-second birthday or something like this.

GUERARD

Wow !

HILLS

And she was the other teacher who was on approval, so to speak, whether it would be Vera Savina or the lady who we then started to call Winifred Edwards. She changed her English name to Vera Fredova to be in Pavlova's company, but she decide to switch back to her English name, which was much easier for us. And Winifred Edwards, who's the one who was kept on, was an incredible technician. Right on until in her eighties, she could still dance beautifully. By then, we were living in Los Angeles, where she'd come from and she wrote to me when she was ninety and said-- She used to do her barre every morning. She said, "I find ronds de jambe á terre a little difficult because I now have a slight bow in my left leg and so I'm a little shorter on one side than the other. Ronds de jambe á terre are very difficult, dear."

GUERARD

Oh my goodness!

HILLS

Can you imagine?

GUERARD

She just did barre by herself to the music in her home?

HILLS

Yes. I don't even know if she had a record of music or whether she just sang to herself because I never saw her do it. She just would tell me she did. She was obviously in beautiful shape.

GUERARD

Wow! Good for her.

HILLS

In 1989--in February, 1989- -Kathleen Hills, who was my husband's stepmother and my mother-in-law died, and we had to go back to England for her funeral . And the day of her funeral we opened the paper and found that Winifred Edwards had died the same day.

GUERARD

Oh my!

HILLS

These two people who'd been there together- - Actually, I think Winifred Edwards died the day afterwards, but they hadn't got on at all well. They really didn't care for each other very much. And this day that should have been desperately sad for me- -you know, losing both of these people at the same time- -I suddenly couldn't help laughing, because I thought, "These two ladies, arriving at the pearly gates," [laughter] you know, "having died together and being destined to sort of walk through the gates together, chasing each other's tail--" you know. [laughs] And my husband said, "What are you laughing about? This is not the day you laugh." [laughter]

HILLS

A very macabre sense of humor, to see them together. I don't really believe in that sort of thing but, you know, it was too funny to pass up.

GUERARD

That's a great image.

HILLS

Yes. But she was a brilliant teacher. She was really the first person who had given me any advice on how to teach.

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

After several years of being experimental-- She was very kind, because she said, "You know, I think if you did, said, showed, so on and so forth, you'd probably cut corners, and get your results faster." And that was an enormous help. She was very sweet. So she really became my mentor, and I kept in touch with her. And, of course, when we came to the United States and she was still in England, she was thrilled to find we were in Los Angeles and she wrote and said that she remembered when the road from Los Angeles to San Diego was a dirt track.

GUERARD

Wow! [laughs]

HILLS

Isn't that amazing?

GUERARD

That is amazing!

HILLS

So she'd lived in an apartment. I think it probably [was in] the Griffith Park sort of area. And she said, "Do they still have all those ants?"

GUERARD

All those ants?

HILLS

I said, "Yes, we still have ants everywhere." [laughs] She obviously had a terrible problem with ants in her house or apartment or whatever it was. I never could locate where the studio [was] that they had. She couldn't remember the address and I don't know where it was, but she was here for many years. She taught Agnes de Mille.

GUERARD

She did?

HILLS

She taught Agnes de Mille when Agnes de Mille first started learning to dance in Los Angeles. When Agnes de Mille came to London, she always would stay with Winifred Edwards, not in a hotel. They were very great friends. She had very important connections to Los Angeles. And again, you feel how tiny the world of whatever your particular field is, you know. Everybody knows everybody else by one step.

GUERARD

Yes, well, and especially when you think about the big cities of the world. They have a real direct connection.

HILLS

They do. Absolutely.

GUERARD

I was thinking, as you were talking about the fact that she was the only one who gave you real hands-on instruction in instructing, being part of the syllabus development, did you see that as kind of a training in teaching, also?

HILLS

It was training in what to teach but not how to teach it.

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

That was the difference. Although the syllabus was- -the nucleus of the syllabus- -done before we opened, we went on working with it for years.

GUERARD

Did it have a name after it was--?

HILLS

Sadler's Wells School Syllabus. I have a copy of it at home, of course, but there are very few copies left, I think they have one in the archives at The Royal Ballet School, and I have one. I don't know how many more there are. Some people must have them somewhere tucked away, I'm sure. We did all the barres first. So we had an elementary barre and an intermediate barre and an advanced barre, but no center, which was, perhaps, a logical way to do it. It seemed odd at the time. And before we actually had opened the school at Covent Gardens, we had what was called an International Summer School for Teachers. And teachers came from all over the world to learn the Sadler's Wells syllabus, but we only had the barres- -elementary barre, intermediate barre, and advanced barre- -and I think they must have felt cheated. Nobody complained and they all seemed thrilled to be in that ambience. You know, we taught them dances from the ballets and we taught them the choreography for Les Sylphides- -at least I did- -and wrote it all out and drew diagrams of where all the patterns of everything went. And we taught them the Fiancee's dance from Sleeping Beauty and some of the solos from Coppélia and Red Riding Hood from Sleeping Beauty, with some of the people from the company demonstrating. We had Annette Page doing elementary barre, David Blair doing the intermediate barre and Anne Heaton doing the advanced barre. Just the three of them. And then Celia Sparger, of whom more anon, talked to them about dancers' injuries and how to prevent them. And Ninette de Valois, herself, talked about teaching, which is the first time I'd ever heard her talk about it. When she taught, her classes were so fast, nobody had the time to breathe, let alone think. But, when she talked about teaching, she was very interesting, but she didn't actually teach that way. You either did it or you didn't do it as far as she was concerned, and if you couldn't keep up, too bad. Her classes-- Some people think I set fast combinations in class. I don't. They're very slow when compared to Ninette's. [laughs] Weight changes. Really, really-- She ran on a different time scale from everybody else's. I know,

as I mentioned the other day, she just buzzed. We had about sixty teachers from the United States and France and everywhere. What was productive from that, I think, was that we got then, three, four months later, students from all over the world. And maybe that, although I didn't think about it at the time, was one of the reasons for having the summer school, so that teachers would know where they were sending their students. And I taught the class; that class of foreigners, about twenty-five of them, all speaking different languages. I had quite a task to try and gel all their different styles together and make them look homogeneous and to have them even understand what I was saying.

GUERARD

Yes, you'd have to say more than just the--

HILLS

You had to demonstrate a great deal, and be prepared to demonstrate what was wrong without hurting yourself and this is a little difficult. You really have to be very careful because you can injure yourself showing somebody how they may injure themselves if they do it wrong, you know, if you don't have all the language. I remember this girl who came, who became a dancer and an actress--she was in the movie Can-Can--called Tiena Elg. I can't remember whether she was Norwegian, Scandinavian, anyway. I don't really remember which country, but she spoke not a word of English and then one day, we heard her reading from a big poster that was up from the street, saying, "My goodness! My Guinness." [laughter] A poster for Guinness beer, which was-- They were very attractive posters and she was reading it off very carefully, "My goodness! My Guinness." Her first English words. She was in-- I've seen her since in one of Angela Lansbury's Murder She Wrote. She crops up occasionally. She was a very nice girl. I don't know what happened to most of the others. There was another one called Joan Beard, who turned up at Stanley Holden Dance Center, years later, having married and insisted on taking class [laughs] and we went out to lunch. [laughs] I've kept vaguely in touch with her since . And another girl called Claire Griswald, whose father was head of the American forces in Europe, was also a student. And she turned up at Stanley Holden Dance Center to bring her little daughter to class many years later. So, again, one meets people from a long time ago. Life went

on from there with the education and my mother-in-law producing food for everybody and classes going on.

GUERARD

Let me take you back just a little bit before we go on too far because you had mentioned that you were about to have surgery- -

HILLS

Oh, yes.

GUERARD

When Covent Garden opened. After that surgery, were you able to demonstrate better and--?

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

Were you able to perform at all?

HILLS

No. I couldn't perform because they couldn't repair those nerves that had gone, but they went in and cleaned it up a bit more. They still couldn't repair the ligaments or anything like that, but I think they did a better job so that when it went out it didn't lock with cartilage stuck underneath.

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

So, I was in much better shape afterwards. It was not enjoyable.

GUERARD

No. No, I'm sure not. I feel silly asking you if that helped you to demonstrate things better because, from my point of view, you demonstrate everything .

HILLS

Yeah. There was a time when-- You know, I had a lot more physical therapy after that. I had more connection with Celia Sparger, who was the physical therapist. She was engaged as physical therapist for the school .

GUERARD

Oh, when the new school opened?

HILLS

When the new school opened. And again, doing all the jobs that everybody did, I was to write her notes up for her- -her medical notes- -when students came to her with injuries. And when we had auditions, she came to the auditions and would look at the kids and say, "You know, she may appear to have talent, but she has one leg half an inch longer than the other one and you're probably better off not taking her because she'll always be lopsided," which sometimes our eye didn't see. But in being with her all that time, a lot of her knowledge just rubbed off. And she would say, "Look, Margaret. Can't you see?" Then [she] showed me how the pelvis would be slightly crooked or the rib cage slightly caved in if it was a spinal curvature and that sort of thing. So I learned my kinesiology from her, by writing up her notes and being there when she was doing this.

GUERARD

So, is that what you meant when you were talking about choosing [or] selecting students based on their bodies?

HILLS

On their shape, yes. Yes.

GUERARD

On their shape. Uh-huh.

HILLS

You would ask them, you know, to lift their leg up and see how high it would go, and ask them to point a toe, just as you might in a first lesson with somebody, and see what their insteps were like, and ask them to go up on to the half -toe and ask them to bend their knees. And she had a way of assessing turn out. You lie somebody on their back. You don't have them turn out both

legs. You have one bent up straight and you see how far one will turn out and that tells you how much turnout. If you do both, it doesn't show it for some reason I don't understand. You can tell with one, so she could see if they had the ability to be able to turn out. That sort of thing .

GUERARD

You had mentioned last time that you were very interested in biology when you were--.

HILLS

I was, yes.

GUERARD

This must have been fascinating.

HILLS

Yes, it was. It brought my biology/anatomy work from high school into-- I'd taken it in high school because I knew it physically would somehow make things clearer for me, for dancing, but I didn't know that I would ever use it, and learn, you know, know the names of the muscles she was talking about and the bones she was talking about and that sort of thing. It was helpful to have done that in school, definitely. She was a very interesting woman, too. And again, you know, people shared their knowledge with me. I can't imagine why. [Guerard laughs] Just incredibly fortunate!

GUERARD

[Perhaps because you] showed an interest in what they had to offer?

HILLS

I must have done, I suppose. You know, you don't think about it at the time. It's only when you look back that you just realize how fortunate you've been and how much time people have spent on you. It's very, very lucky.

GUERARD

Well, can I draw you back to the new school?

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

Around 1947, 1948, my notes tell me that shortly thereafter, you did some mime performance?

HILLS

Yes, I did. This was at the lecture that Ursula Moreton-- Well, I should backtrack. I mentioned earlier that I had learned ballet pantomime from Ursula Moreton. She had learned it from a woman called Madame [Francesca] Zanfretta and I've looked her up since and all I can find is that she was a dancer on the stage in London who did the leading role in a ballet called The Newspaper. I know no more about her than that. But she must have learned ballet pantomime from somebody. I don't know who. And she had taught it to Ursula Moreton. Again, I don't know why. And Ursula Moreton had refined it into a technique of how to walk in various costumes and made the gestures clear enough to be taught well. And she did it beautifully and taught wonderfully. She had been a character dancer in Diaghilev's company and whether she had needed to be able to do pantomime for those and whether Diaghilev had sent her to this woman, I really don't know. She's dead now and I can't ask her. You know, these things-- The opportunities to learn things and questions that you don't ask that you should have done that you don't know the answers to. You find you want to go back and ask them and you can't. And so, I'd learned to do the pantomime from her and she used to do lecturing about ballet pantomime and I was one of her demonstrators, with the David Gill who now does the old movies. He and I did them together for her. And so, I learned all the ballet pantomime scenes to do that. I was also walking on and doing some of the ballet pantomime myself with the company, because although I couldn't dance, I could do those sort of things. It was nice just to keep being in the company part-time for things like that. And I did, occasionally dance, because there was a girl in the company called Lorna Mossford and she and I looked very, very alike. And Lorna Mossford was a soloist and didn't like to be in the corps de ballet. Where she was on in the corps de ballet, she'd sometimes call me up and say, "Would you like to go on as me tonight?" And so, without anybody knowing officially, I would be Lorna Mossford, occasionally, dancing in the corps de ballet, as long as it was a ballet

I didn't have to kneel down. So I did some unpaid, elicit performances [laughter] that nobody knew about. We were the same size, you know. It didn't make any difference and she knew that I knew every ballet inside out and every place in every ballet because I was teaching it at the school. So whatever it was, she knew I could do it; would know it and not make a mistake.

GUERARD

Now, did you tell me that you learned the ballets by going to the performances and simply watching them?

HILLS

Watching them, mm-hmm. Watching rehearsals and just-- I don't know how. It's the same way, I'm sure, that I know people's names, you know.

GUERARD

That's an amazing facility!

HILLS

My daughter has it, too. She can just look at a class of how ever many hundreds she has and she knows them all by the end of the first lecture, which is more than I could do. I mean, I can do twenty- five.

GUERARD

It's way more than I can do.

HILLS

And it stays with you. People can come in, you know, twenty years later, and their names just come into my head. I don't have to think. They're just there. And it's the same with ballets. I have no idea what brain connections there are or what causes that to be possible.

GUERARD

I mean, did you know other ballet dancers who could learn that way or did you--?

HILLS

I never asked them. I don't know. No idea. I think it's perhaps unusual, because people would remark on it.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And one knows there are dancers who struggle and struggle and struggle to remember, so they obviously don't have that facility. Whether it's because my mother was an artist and I'd grown up seeing things from a painter's point of view, I really don't know.

GUERARD

You mean, like having a visual memory?

HILLS

Yes. Yes. I just don't know at all, but I know I have, even for tiny details. As I told you, when I was a child-- I have memory of those, too. So it's some strange quirk, which I've used to good advantage, I guess.

GUERARD

Good quirk.

HILLS

It's very useful.

GUERARD

I'm sorry, have I gotten you off the track from ballet pantomime?

HILLS

Oh, ballet pantomime. Yes, there we were. Ursula Moreton didn't really-- She got bored with teaching her mime classes, I think, and having trained me, she used to call up and say, "Margaret, dear, I'm really terribly sick. Could you teach my mime class for me?" And I'd find that, ultimately, I was teaching all the mime classes in the school. I'd heard her lectures and found them, in some respects, unsatisfactory, so I did a lot more research myself and I now give mime lectures, but they're more comprehensive than hers were. That's not

bragging. I mean, she possibly didn't have the facilities for research as I've had- -the UCLA library and things like that- -so I had that advantage. And I really enjoy doing it, but, of course, not many people enjoy learning it. So, if you're not going to use it, it can be quite boring and not many ballets use it anymore. It's not being-- No new ballets have ballet pantomime in them. It used to be the part of the ballet where, rather than having program notes, the story of the ballet was told in the pantomime.

GUERARD

Oh, sort of like a narrator.

HILLS

Yes, exactly. Pantomime sounds like, you know, the Marcel Marceau things you see, but ballet pantomime is quite different. It's just sentences. Your arms make gestures meaning words but you don't emote them in any way. So, you know, the lilac fairy in *The Sleeping Beauty* mimes to the wicked fairy, "I love that child. Why are you going to make her die?" And Carabosse says, you know, "Nobody invited me to the christening, so I'm furious and she's going to prick her finger and die." And the lilac fairy says, "No, she's not. She's going to sleep for a hundred years and the handsome prince will come and wake her up." This is all in mime scene and presumably, years ago, the audiences knew enough to understand it.

GUERARD

Well, I was just going to ask you if the audiences needed to be mime literate.

HILLS

Yes, they did [pause] and now I'm sure they're not. They just see the dancers standing around waving their arms about a bit.

GUERARD

So this is a dying art?

HILLS

Yes, it is. I went back to London in 1982 and they videotaped me doing all the pantomime so that it's preserved on videotape in their archives.

GUERARD

Neat!

HILLS

Which is nice. It's preserved somewhere, which Ursula Moreton would be pleased about because, although I do it and now I'm getting credit for it, it was her refinement of the technique which made it possible. So maybe someday it'll come back and somebody'll find the tape and recreate it again.

GUERARD

They very well could. . .

HILLS

They could. So, that was my pantomime bit. [laughter] Again, teaching it by default of somebody not showing up to teach and, you know, I did it. And went on doing it and enjoyed it. Ninette de Valois, at the same sort of time-- I realize now that she must have seen somewhere, sometime before the Second World War, some modern dance in Europe. There's a modern dance choreographer called Doris Humphries or Humphrey or Humphries. I don't know which it is. And Ninette de Valois said, "There are some movements which will help some of the ballets. We're going to call it plastique composition." Now I know that some of those exercises are actually Doris Humphrey technique. Now, since I've seen it taught at UCLA. At that time, I thought Ninette de Valois had made it up herself. She didn't give anybody any credit for it and I went to classes and learned that. And, of course, who taught it later? Me, which was an advantage, having got that background. When I was asked to teach at UCLA, I knew a little bit about modern dance technique, which otherwise, I wouldn't have done. When I stopped teaching it, I think they stopped doing it. As far as I know, nobody carried it on. There wasn't much of it but it was based on, you know, straight lines and curved lines and body weight and the things that modern dance does.

GUERARD

Was this at all similar to the kinds of things that you did when you were very young with balls and ribbons?

HILLS

No, not at all. No, no. It was quite, quite different. Again, it took a feeling through the body of understanding how a line looks straight to the audience if you have your hands straight up [demonstrating hands position], like that. Even though there are actually curves in the body, you can convince the audience it is actually absolutely straight. And you have a position like that [demonstrating arm position] , you know, where it has to be at [an] absolute right angle to, I'd say, the shoulder and the arm, and the elbow are [the] opposite way so that you've sort of got a letter "s" with right angle curves across the body. Those sort of things.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

It was very interesting to study and feel those different lines through the body, but it wasn't pretty, [laughter]

GUERARD

Necessary for theater performance, though.

HILLS

Yes, yes. And there were some things-- There's a movement in Les Sylphides by [Michel] Fokine, which dancers- -ballet dancers- -found very difficult. You sort of put your head into the middle of your arms, which are in a circle. One of the exercises helped that and made it much easier to teach people the Fokine choreography if they learned the other thing first. So, one or two places where it was useful . So by then, I was teaching ballet classes and pantomime and repertoire and character and plastique composition, being fairly busy.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

But young .

GUERARD

And how old are you now?

HILLS

Eighteen. [laughter] Eighteen or nineteen. In England, at that time, all school children were forced to drink a third of a pint of milk at school every day.

GUERARD

Ooh !

HILLS

And I had suffered from this for a very long time since I'm allergic to milk and had to sort of try and pass mine to somebody else and not drink it. But since I was only eighteen when the school first opened, Arnold Haskell, who was the director, used to introduce me as his faculty member who'd only just got over the third of a pint milk requirement. [laughter]

GUERARD

Were you the youngest faculty member?

HILLS

Yes, and now, apart from Ninette de Valois, who is in her late nineties and is still alive, she and I are the only two living members of the faculty at that time.

GUERARD

Oh, really?

HILLS

Mm Hmm. So, when I go back to the reunion this July--fifty year reunion--I'm going as guest speaker and [pause] big cheese [laughter], which will be fun. Really not very much changed, apart from getting dance uniforms sorted out. When we started, all the children came in black leotards and black tights and the little ones looked a little dreary in that, you know. And it was Winifred Edwards who decided that they should wear white .

GUERARD

[gesturing to Ms. Graham Hills to indicate that time is running out on the tape]  
It's-- No, I'm sorry. It's okay. We're getting close to the end of the tape.

HILLS

Uh-huh. The children should wear white with colored bands around their hair and colored belts and she organized the dressmakers to make those. And she had the little ones wear socks and not tights, which does look much nicer.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And got them all tidied up and looking good because the dressmakers made the tunics for them and they looked very pretty. And then, when they started getting a little bulgy as teenagers, they went into gray. When they got bigger still and older still they went into black. But each class had its own class color, so when they were walking by, you could tell which class they were in. And they looked lovely when they were all dressed the same, you know. And no leg warmers and no sweaters. Nothing. [Guerard laughs]

HILLS

Finally, when we had one very cold winter, they were allowed to wear white crossover cardigans, but that was a concession for the cold winter days.

GUERARD

Because they didn't want any extra layers of--?

HILLS

No layers and teachers had to be able to see every muscle. And I must say, it really is very helpful if people don't cover themselves up. There are people who have taken my class here, you know, for twenty years and I have no idea what shape their legs are. Don't know they have legs inside. [laughs] There was one girl who took-- She doesn't take anymore, but she took for a long, long time with big, baggy sweatpants on. And I once went to a restaurant and she was the hostess, you know, that seats you at your table, and I suddenly saw her legs for the very first time. [laughs] I was quite glad I hadn't seen them before. [laughter]

GUERARD

You know Margaret, I think we're going to have to stop here.

HILLS

We haven't done a great deal today. I've been talking far too much.

GUERARD

No! You've been talking just perfectly. We'll pick up next time.

HILLS

Okay.

### **1.5. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (March 31, 1997)**

GUERARD

Margaret, I know that in 1947, Ninette de Valois was invited by the Turkish government to go over there and study the possibility of setting up a school of ballet and I'm really looking forward to hearing about your involvement with that great adventure, but before we go on, I thought I would like to pick up on a couple of points that were touched on last time.

HILLS

Mm hmm.

GUERARD

Regarding the desire of Ninette de Valois to set up what she thought was an English method of dance, I know that Ninette de Valois was not her real name. It was Edris--?

HILLS

Edris Stannus .

GUERARD

Thank you for pronouncing that.

HILLS

She was born in Ireland. And when she was quite a small child, she started to dance professionally on, as she says, "on the ends of piers in the summer." [de

Valois, Ninette, Come Dance With Me: A Memoir 1898-1956. Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1957.] And I can't remember why she said she changed her name. Presumably because nobody could pronounce the other one. Anyway, then she changed it to Ninette de Valois and kept that, even when she went to the Russian ballet [Ballet Russes] with [Serge] Diaghilev. She was known by that name, already.

GUERARD

When she joined them?

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

And also, another person you mentioned, Vera Fredova, her real name was Winifred Edwards.

HILLS

Winifred Edwards.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

And I might have even slipped in occasionally calling her Freda, which was another name that I knew her by. She was English and had been in [Anna] Pavlova's company and from Freda- -from Winifred Freda- -she got Fredova .

GUERARD

Ah , ha !

HILLS

And that's how that Russian name evolved.

GUERARD

And, were there many at the time that you became part of Sadler's Wells [Ballet] who had adopted Russian names or was that starting--?

HILLS

No, they were very few. There were not many English dancers who actually were with Diaghilev. There was a few. There was one called-- Her real name was Hilda Munnings and, she was called-- Her last name was [Lydia] Sokolova. I can't remember what her first name, what first name she took.

GUERARD

But at that time, then, the Russian ideal had lessened, had less of an influence, or was it ever--?

HILLS

It was one of the influences. See, Diaghilev hadn't been around terribly long. And although he'd taken his company to England and some English girls had taken classes with [Enrico] Cecchetti and some English girls went into the Diaghilev Ballet [Ballets Russes] , it was one of the influences. The other was the Danish influence through Adeline Genée . And, I think she possibly had a greater influence than the Russians. GUERARD Oh, really?

HILLS

Because she had set up the operatic association [the Operatic Society], which we talked about, for teaching teachers to produce better dancers, her influence on teaching in the country was greater than Diaghilev' s was. But I expect that some Russian teachers did set up school in London, but by the time I was around, I didn't know of any. Cecchetti wasn't there and he was the ballet master of the Diaghilev company. And he was Italian.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

But I think a lot-- When Diaghilev died, a lot of his dancers came to the United States and Pavlova had already been to the United States and brought dancers. So I think the Russian influence in the United States was far stronger than it was in Britain, as it still is, I think. Probably.

GUERARD

Yes. Yes, that's interesting.

HILLS

And even now, when the Russians-- I don't mean the stars. The stars that defected from Soviet Russia went to England and all over the place. But now just the run of the mill people are leaving Russia because they can and a lot of them are coming to the United States and not getting work as dancers, but setting up schools. There are a lot of Russians starting schools in the United States, not in England. Whether they would be allowed to teach in England, I doubt, because they wouldn't have the British teaching credentials.

GUERARD

Yes. It ' s a lot easier in the United States.

HILLS

So it may well be that they can't in England and they can here. That's a guess. I'm not quite positive, but I think that's probably so.

GUERARD

It's interesting. One other thing that I wanted to get back to-- When we ended the tape last time, it ended rather abruptly and we were talking about uniforms and also the way ballet dancers have, especially in the United States, of wearing lots of layers of leg warmers and sweaters and things like this. I know this is a pet peeve of yours.

HILLS

Yes, it is.

GUERARD

For a very good reason, and I wondered if you wanted to-- If you had any more to say about that.

HILLS

Well, just a little bit. We did, in very cold weather, wear very close-fitting knitted tights which we knitted ourselves. They were not just leg warmers, but they came up to the waist and had no feet and we wore socks underneath.

And that was when it was bitterly cold because there was a winter in 1946, '47, where we had, still left over from the war, no fuel and no heating.

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

At all. And it happened to be a very bitter winter, so we did wear more that winter, but only things that were tight- fitting . [We] never wore anything baggy.

GUERARD

And it was an even layer of bulk.

HILLS

Yes! That's right. Even on both legs, top to bottom, with no crinkles in it.

HILLS

And the first time we saw anybody in leg warmers separated from, you know, that would just fall down over the ankle rather than staying up firmly, was when [Galina] Ulanova came with the Russian company in 1956.

GUERARD

Excuse me, Margaret. I'm going to have to stop here for a second because of this noise. [tape recorder off]

HILLS

In 1956, we all went to watch the rehearsals and there was Ulanova, this wonderful ballerina we'd all heard so much about, rehearsing Giselle in baggy, baggy leg warmers under a chiffon skirt, and we were all absolutely horrified. But, of course, you know, suddenly it became the thing to do. Because Ulanova was wearing them, everybody thought, "[gasp] This is wonderful! You don't have to have a hot body, you can just have hot legs without them attached to the top half." [laughs] And they became the sort of thing to have for a little bit. But, of course, students weren't allowed to wear them. The company started to wear them, but students didn't. And, I think students-- Well, I'm sure, at The Royal Ballet and for The Royal Academy [of Dancing] and

I'm sure Cecchetti schools, they are still absolutely not allowed to wear anything that's, as you said, "not symmetrically fitting." And nothing that's loose, partly because the asymmetry of the padding makes the alignment of the body go out and the teacher can't see the muscles and so you can't correct somebody. You can't-- You often don't know something is going wrong if you can't see it.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And so, it's very hard to teach people who are covered up. And one, as a teacher, if somebody comes to class like that, you assume that they are shy about some part of their anatomy and don't actually want to be corrected.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And so you leave them alone. You take it as a sign that they're there because they like to be there and like to do a workout but not because they want to improve.

GUERARD

Hm! That's pretty unfortunate for them because they may just be following a fashion and not realize that--

HILLS

Yes. Yes. Just to digress slightly since we're on to talking about what people wear-- As everybody knows, the height of the leg of the leotard, like swimsuits, rises and falls with fashion. And when the leg space starts at the hipbone, at least the top of the pelvis, as they do at the present time, people no longer know where their legs begin [Guerard laughs] and they think their legs begin at the top of the hipbone instead of at the top of the leg. Whereas, when the fashion is for the leg to finish at-- The leg of the leotard to circle the top of the leg, people know where their legs begin and it's much easier to teach them to move the leg correctly than when the fashions are high.

GUERARD

You mean the dancers in your class--?

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

Move their legs differently?

HILLS

Yes. Differently. Completely differently. And, to be slightly vulgar, when butts are in fashion, people stick them out at the back and it's very hard to make them keep the front line of the pelvis vertical, when to be fashionable, they should be sticking them out at the back.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

So all these things of fashion make a tremendous difference to how you teach.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And people's comprehension of their own bodies. It's very strange. [laughter]

GUERARD

Well, there's probably a lot to be said about fashion and trends and-- Oh, also the whole idea of super stars in dance, and I hope that we can get into that at some point.

HILLS

Yes, yes .

GUERARD

A little bit, too. I think it's really interesting .

HILLS

It really is. I remember walking with my tail tucked right underneath when, in 1948, Christian Dior decided that all ladies should have long skirts. We'd had very short ones up to that point . And they should droop slightly at the back. And in order for the dress to droop slightly in the back, you tucked your pelvis right underneath and leaned slightly backwards. His dresses sort of flowed with movement that way, very nicely, but I remember being screamed at not to tuck my tail under so far when I was in class because we were all following fashion .

GUERARD

Yes .

HILLS

And it does make you aware of fashion in relationship to movement- -not just ballet, but movement itself- -as you see fashions change and come and go over a long lifetime like mine. [Guerard laughs]

GUERARD

Not that long.

HILLS

Yes it is! [laughs]

GUERARD

Well, shall we jump back, then, to around 1947 and I don't know if there's anything else that you wanted to talk about before we went on to Turkey?

HILLS

Personally, I was just-- At The Royal Ballet [Sadler's Wells] School, it was just going on much as before. Greater numbers and we were more choosy at our auditions. We were no longer desperate to have enough children to be a viable situation. We were also being prepared for--

GUERARD

I'll stop again for just a minute. [tape recorder off] The trash cans are done now.

HILLS

Well I was just saying, we were working towards accredit-- I can never remember the word correctly. I think it's accreditation, isn't it?

GUERARD

Mm hmm.

HILLS

By the local education authority, so that we could be-- The education part of the school could be a normal school, where the children didn't have to pay for that part. They would still have to pay for the dancing part, but once we were accredited, they wouldn't have to pay for the education part. That would be reimbursed from the country.

GUERARD

Oh, so that part of it would be like a public school--?

HILLS

That's exactly right.

GUERARD

And then the dance would be private?

HILLS

Yes. Yes, yes. And that was on-going and, I can't remember which year it happened, to be honest, but, sometime along those few years, we got, I suppose, provisional accreditation. And, it was finalized, I think I seem to remember, in 1950, but during that time, we were vetted occasionally and that sort of thing. And we were talking about the children being auditioned. As word got around that you could go to the Sadler's Wells School, particularly schools within travelling distance, if they were a small school and they had a really talented student, they would send that student for audition to come to us because obviously, if the school was attached to a company, this talented child was going to have a much better chance of getting into the company

from the school . So we didn't have auditions as often as we did later, but I suppose about five times a year, we spent Saturdays seeing children aged ten, four at a time, some having done some dancing, some not at all. We got better at choosing than we were originally, because none of us had really done that before. Ninette de Valois had auditioned older girls ready to go into the company, but we didn't all have a perfect eye as to what sort of-- how a child of ten would grow, and we got more experienced as time went on.

GUERARD

We being the--?

HILLS

The faculty. All the faculty would be at these audition Saturdays and I was the one who set the steps or showed them what to do if they'd done nothing before. And that was quite fascinating, you know, to-- I could then touch the bodies and feel them and feel their elasticity. Not pulling them, of course, but just seeing if you got hold of a foot if it would lift higher or if the instep could point more if you showed it how and that sort of thing. It was really rather the fun. And Celia Sparger, whom I mentioned earlier, after we had passed them or not, they went down to her and she would look at them from the really clinical point of view and see if they had anything that was detrimental. You know, her eye could immediately see whether a child had one leg slightly longer than the other that might effect her .

GUERARD

Did you find that your opinions coincided?

HILLS

Pretty much. There were odd occasions when she would come and say, "Look, this girl appears to you to have a wonderfully straight back, but in actual fact, she has a slight scoliosis and may have a problem later when she gets bigger." And other times, we would look at the parents. In those days, very few children only had one parent or a stepparent or whatever. They were mostly two parents and mostly, because it was Saturday, both parents came with the child. And so, you could look at them if you were in any doubt as to whether they were going to get very, very tall. There were occasions where you'd see a

long, gangly ten-year-old and how tall was she going to grow? Well, she couldn't get too tall and if both parents were terribly tall, you probably didn't take the gamble. But also, if they were very, very short, you wouldn't take the gamble. If it was one of each, you had to gamble because you couldn't tell which one she was going to take after.

GUERARD

Right. So and at this point, you were able to choose based on the dancers, and you didn't have to rely on the income from wealthy parents.

HILLS

No. Not so much. And, of course, if we had an absolutely brilliant- -and we did have one or two- -children whose parents couldn't pay, we found the money from somewhere .

GUERARD

Right. Great.

HILLS

You're not going to turn down a future [Margot] Fonteyn, you know, just because they can't pay. And I really, truly don't remember which ones were in that category, but I know there were some. It was nice to be able to do that. And they also were given uniforms, as well, if they were really poor. So there was some fund of some sort. I don't know. I didn't run it, so I don't know. Later on, we had auditions many more times a year and finished up, years later, seeing at least a thousand children a year, of which we took twenty-five.

GUERARD

Oh, my gosh!

HILLS

And now, the examiners, so to speak, actually have audition centers in different parts of the United Kingdom to audition children. Instead of the children having to come to London, they go, which is probably better. But in those days, everybody had to come to London for the audition. Tremendously traumatic for them. Of course, they also had to take a written paper for school

.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And they also had to draw. We had a wonderful art teacher who was related to a famous jeweler, Nigretti and Zambra, and she was called Molly Zambra and was, in some way, related to them. Wonderful artist! And she had them draw and she felt she could assess some of their spatial ability by their drawings and she had a wonderful eye. She was very good. She wouldn't ever have had the chance to say, "No, this is not the person you want to take." But on the other hand, if we were just doubtful and she said, you know, "Look at this drawing. This person has no feeling of shape at all," that might just tip the balance if we were undecided.

GUERARD

I wanted to ask you about this also because I believe I read in the-- Is it Naomi Capon?

HILLS

Capon, she pronounced it.

GUERARD

I think I read in her book something about testing for intelligence.

HILLS

Yes, they did.

GUERARD

They had to be at--

HILLS

They had to be bright. It's no use having a dancer who is very dull. We had one who was not terribly bright but was absolutely brilliant and has gone on being brilliant and I'm not going to mention any names, obviously, but on her intelligence test, she wouldn't have got in, but she had wonderful artistry that

took her way up. [She] never did very well in school. There were a lot of D's, I'm afraid, but ballets, A plus's all the way along the line.

GUERARD

Right. But that being the exception, I think that speaks highly for dancers .

HILLS

Yes. It does. They need an intelligence. You know, the intelligence tests and all those sort of things test one sort of intelligence, but I think with all those tests, there ought to be common sense IQs and artistic IQs and all sorts of other things because to be a whole, productive human being, it's no use just having a one- track IQ.

GUERARD

That's right.

HILLS

There's a lot to be learned yet about how to test all those other things, I think.

GUERARD

I think so, too. Yes.

HILLS

And the school went on, you know, much the same, really, through those years. I was still performing mime parts with the company as well as teaching in the school. And, as you mentioned in the beginning, in 1947, the Turkish government asked Ninette de Valois if she would start a ballet something in Turkey. They didn't quite know what they wanted. And at this time, I had nothing to do with it whatsoever. Two women, Joy Newton, who had been ballet mistress of the Sadler's Wells company, and a girl from The Royal Academy Teacher's Training Course, called Audrey Knight, they went out to Turkey to start a school in Istanbul, which was just a dance school in Istanbul, which the government paid for. And they were there-- Actually didn't go until '48. They were in Istanbul for two years and then the government in Turkey said, "Well, Istanbul is all very well, but [the] university is in Ankara. We want you to go to Ankara." And very few of the children who had been in the school for two years wanted to go to live in Ankara, because all their parents lived in

Istanbul. It's a long way away. So in 1950, the school moved to Ankara and had to really start all over again from scratch. Joy Newton went to Ankara, but Audrey Knight didn't want to. And so she stopped. She didn't go. She left Turkey and went back to England. And I didn't know what was going on. I hadn't really taken any notice of it at all. I was still teaching in the school. And one day, I got a call to say, "Madame," as we all called Dame Ninette de Valois, "wants to see you in her office at Covent Garden." And I thought, "Ah no, I'm going to be fired." You know, "What is all this? What have I done?" I was going through my conscience, trying to think what had happened, what I'd done wrong. Shaking in my shoes, because we were all terrified of her, I went to Covent Garden and, knees shaking, I went up to her little-- She had a tiny little office; minute in the big opera house, and [I] knocked on the door, and she said, "Come in, child. Come in, child," which is the way she spoke. And I went in and she said, "Want to send you to Turkey, dear." That's not what I'd expected to hear and I had to sort of shake my brains back into place and thought, "Why does she want to send me to Turkey?" She said, "You know we've got the school, dear, in Istanbul. It's moving to Ankara. Audrey doesn't want to stay there. [I] think it would be a great idea if you went to Turkey and Audrey took your job for a year, here."

GUERARD

Just like that.

HILLS

And she said, "I need to know now, dear. Will you go?"

GUERARD

Just at that moment?

HILLS

Just at that moment. And I thought, "Well, it's probably a great opportunity. I'll never get to Turkey any other way and if I don't go, will she fire me from the school?" So I said, "Yes, I'll go." [laughter] So just within sort of five minutes, my life was turned around completely and I was supposed to be going off to-- I can't really remember. I remember the dress I was wearing and it was a summer dress. It was a gray one with white curlicues on it. It was a

vivid memory of my day that day. So, it must have been summertime. And I was to go in September. And I was twenty. And I thought, "What do I have to do now?" You know, "What do I have to do to prepare myself to go?" She said, "Oh, Joy is coming back soon. I'll get Joy to talk to you and she'll tell you all you have to do." Because Joy was coming back for--it must have been, I suppose, August--the summer vacation. So I went away and at the call box in the street, I called up my boyfriend [Brian Hills] and said, "I'm going to Turkey." He said, "No, no. You can't go to Turkey! No, no, no! No!" And was absolutely-- He hadn't, I mean, we were only just going out together. We weren't engaged or anything. He was terribly upset. And I thought, "Now, I don't really want to leave him but on the other hand, he hasn't made his intentions very clear, so I'll go to Turkey." And he was very upset. And I called my parents [Ida Cockshott Hampson and Ellis Hampson] and they were upset. [They said], "No, no. You can't go to Turkey. An English girl can't go to Turkey. It's a terrible place, dear. You can't go." But I was nearly twenty-one and I said, "I'm going to go." And then when Joy Newton came, a few weeks later I suppose, I said, "You know, I'm going to be coming with you." And she said, "Yes, I know. It's wonderful. I'm thrilled to pieces. I auditioned you in Birmingham before you went to the school and I've been interested in you all the time and you've had this knee thing and really want to have you with me." So I told her, "Well, that's good and we'll have an apartment together." And she said, "You'll have to get a visa and a passport." [I] had to get a visa from the Turkish Embassy and a passport- -a British passport .

GUERARD

And a work permit?

HILLS

No.

GUERARD

No?

HILLS

No, the visa to go to Turkey was what I needed. And I couldn't get a visa to go to Turkey until I got a British passport and when I went to the passport office

they said, "Where do you want to go with your British passport?" I said, "I want to go to Turkey." And they said, "But you're not twenty-one. You can't go to Turkey." And I said, "Well, I've got a job to go to." And they said, "No. No, no way. You can't go." And they said, "If you only wanted to go to Istanbul, which is in Europe, we could give you a passport to go to Istanbul. We can't give you one to go to Ankara because that's in Asia. "

GUERARD

Ah !

HILLS

And so, I had to wait till after I was twenty-one which was in-- Oh, then it must have been early summer because I was twenty-one in July. No, I wasn't.

GUERARD

No, you must have been twenty in--

HILLS

I was twenty in 1950. [During her review of the transcript, Margaret Graham Hills realized that she was twenty years old in 1948 rather than in 1950, and that the regulations which prohibited her from acquiring governmental permission to enter Turkey must have been related to qualifying factors other than that of the age requirement, but she was not able to recall specifically what that restraint was.] No, so that's why I couldn't get one. That's right. And I-- Yes, that's it. I moved heaven and earth. I got signatures from Ninette de Valois. I got a letter from the- -the contract from the- -Turkish government, which I had to sign, send back to them, they had to send back to me. And now it was September, when I was supposed to be there, and it wasn't until November that I got it all sorted out to go before I was twenty-one. So I arrived very late.

GUERARD

And Joy Newton had already gone ahead?

HILLS

She'd already gone and I was thinking, "I'm never going to get there." Also, Audrey Knight was back and she'd got my job.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And I wasn't making any money. And my parents were saying, "You know, you've got to go get another job somewhere because we can't keep you all this long time."

GUERARD

And they didn't really want you to go to Turkey.

HILLS

No, they didn't really want me to go anyway, but they did finally lend me enough money to live on till I got it all sorted out and went.

GUERARD

So then when you did go, you had to go all by yourself?

HILLS

Yeah. Oh, I went by myself. Yes. And I had nowhere to live because I'd given up my lodgings.

GUERARD

Oh, my goodness!

HILLS

And I was living with odd people all over the place for two months. [laughter] Living out of a suitcase, trying to get myself ready to go. I had to get shots of various sorts for going, you know, cholera and all the other things that you have to get. [I] also found that I had never been vaccinated against smallpox as a child because my mother didn't believe in it. So I had to get a smallpox vaccination which made me terribly ill, at that age. And again, I was being terribly ill in somebody else's house, you know. [laughs] Temperature of a hundred and three and feeling absolutely dreadful.

GUERARD

The cholera [inoculation] does that, too.

HILLS

Yes, it does. And I had a tetanus shot, which made my arm swell up to three times its size and I had to have an anti-tetanus shot to bring that down. It was horrible! It was absolutely horrible. I thought, "Why ever did I do this?" And my boyfriend was absolutely, you know, very supportive while I was still there, but not wanting me to go.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

But during all this mess, his firm said, "We want you to go to Canada for six months."

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

So he felt free to go to Canada because I was going somewhere else. So then it all calmed down. It was much, much better. He was going to install some equipment- -telephone equipment- -in Canada that his firm had built. So he went to a place near Quebec called Rimouski . He went in the January after I'd gone to Turkey in November. And--

GUERARD

Were you staying with friends from the ballet school or--?

HILLS

Anybody who had a spare bed, you know. I'd move from place to place. They were very sweet. Everybody was very helpful. And even the night that I was-- The day that I was supposed to fly away, we got in the plane and I was sitting next to two Lebanese gentlemen. And they were charming, excessively charming, and I thought, "I've got this awful journey sitting next to these two men." And we sat in the plane and we sat in the plane and it didn't take off and it didn't take off, and it didn't take off.

GUERARD

Oh , no !

HILLS

We were sent back home. Not get put in a hotel, but sent back home. And I thought, "I don't have a home to go to."

GUERARD

Oh, no!

HILLS

So, I had to call up, again, another friend and say, "I didn't go. Can I come and stay with you for one more night?" [laughs] It was awful! Finally, we took off. Pan Am, we went on. And as I told you, food was still very scarce in England. And we came down. We went from London to Brussels, which isn't really very far, but they had to refuel constantly, these big planes--or big by those days-- and we were taken into a restaurant in Brussels airport and for the first time for, since 1939, I saw a large pork chop, which I had-- I mean, it was two weeks ration and I couldn't believe it. It tasted so good. It was wonderful. And I can still see it sitting on the plate, you know, these vivid memories of things that you haven't had for so long. After we'd refueled, we took off again and we had to come down in Frankfurt, was the next place. And that airport was terribly bombed. It still had an awful lot of bomb damage around it. Then we took off and came down in Istanbul, where I was met by somebody who put me in a hotel and left me by myself in Istanbul because I had to fly to Ankara the next day. And I ' d no idea, you know, how to order anything in the restaurant of the hotel. I tried to learn Turkish before I went and I couldn't even find a book, not a Hugo, nothing. So, I knew not a thing. [!] went down to the restaurant and gestured that I wanted something to eat. I pointed to my mouth--you know, not a word--and found my way back to the hotel room. And I was scared to death. You know, how do you lock the door? Which is the ladies room? Which is the gentleman's toilet? You know, that sort of thing.

GUERARD

Yes! Oh, my gosh!

HILLS

I sort of sat with my legs crossed, not knowing which one to go into. I was so scared. It was really frightening.

GUERARD

Well, not only a different-- It was not only a different language, but such a different culture!

HILLS

Different culture, yes. Fortunately, on the plane, I hadn't been set next to the Lebanese the next day, so I was rather relieved about that. [Guerard laughs] Finally, I had to go across the Bosphorus on a ferry. Somebody 'd picked me up the next day. A Turkish gentleman who spoke English. I had to sail across the Bosphorus to 165 get to the airport on the other side, then flew to Ankara. By then, of course, I was a day late and there was nobody to meet me at the airport in Ankara.

GUERARD

Oh, no!

HILLS

Because, I found out later, Joy Newton was teaching and couldn't meet me and nobody else met me. So I had to get myself on a bus from the airport to the city. And we'd had a terrible flight over the mountains, which was buffeting and bouncing about in a tiny little aircraft, so I was somewhat shaky, and finally got myself-- I used a little French because I realized some people spoke French and by speaking French, I organized my luggage and me onto the bus to get into Ankara. And the pilot was on the bus and he was an enormous Turk. Every finger was covered in several rings and he carried a cane with a jeweled handle. And I thought, "This was flying the plane I was in?" [laughs] I'm sure he was a great pilot, but seeing him covered in jewels was something. I really didn't know where I'd landed, you know. It was hysterical in retrospect, but frightening at the time. But I got into Ankara and there, at the bus stop, was Joy Newton, whom I knew and sort of big smile and she took me in a taxi back to the apartment that she had and I calmed down and all was okay.

GUERARD

You must have had a lot of luggage with you. I mean, moving your--

HILLS

A year's luggage.

GUERARD

Moving your entire life there for a year.

HILLS

That's right. And the number of things she told me that I needed to bring for the year-- I don't know who ever is going to listen to this tape, but in Turkey, you couldn't buy Tampax, so I had to take a year's supply.

GUERARD

Oh, my gosh! Oh, my gosh! Yes!

HILLS

Things like that, you know. And she'd asked me to bring out Angostura Bitters because you couldn't buy them there and I didn't drink, but she did and she wanted the Angostura Bitters. And, what else? Suntan lotion, you couldn't buy. I can't remember what else now, but there were one or two other things that, you know, for other people I'd been asked to bring out.

GUERARD

Yes!

HILLS

So I had a lot of luggage.

GUERARD

I imagine if you were going to do your own cooking and that would be so different than the normal diet in Turkey.

HILLS

Well, no. We had a maid who did the cooking. So that was all right. We didn't have to cook, so I wasn't asked to bring anything back from that point of view, apart from the Angostura Bitters. There were Aspirin and things like that, that you don't know if you're going to be able to get and I can't really remember if

we were able to get them or not. Probably were, but I don't remember now. She'd chosen for us a very nice apartment. You know, I began to feel settled and we had, at that time, a nice Turkish maid who did speak a little English. She'd been cooking for the diplomatic corps there for a long time and so, that was fine. And the next day, I was taken to the school [Turkish Ballet School] and started to teach straight away. It was part of the, it was called the Devlet Konservatuvari- - I don't remember anymore how you say, "of Turkey," but, Türk.

GUERARD

It was the national conservatory.

HILLS

National conservatory. And they had actors and musicians and I think they had some painters and a national dance department and our little ballet department . Joy had been trying to get some students to start over again, you know, and finally, we got them- -some of them- -from orphanages, because when we set up an audition, the fathers brought their fattest daughters because in Turkey, to be fat is to be beautiful.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And so, to bring their most beautiful daughters to us, they brought the fat ones, not the thin ones. But the orphanages had thin ones and we got some boys from there, too. And so, we had a nucleus of-- It's hard to remember exactly. I would think about twenty children. And they were the only twenty children there because the others were all in their late teens.

GUERARD

Now, had some of these come from Istanbul?

HILLS

Two or three. Only two or three. And two or three teenagers had come from Istanbul.

GUERARD

So they ranged in age from ten on?

HILLS

Ten to sixteen, I suppose. And the rest of the students were all over sixteen and they were thrilled to have these little toddlers coming in. You know, they had a lovely system of looking after these little ones, which was quite delightful. But we felt very responsible for them. You know, they were there with all these possibly corrupting influences you know. [laughs]

GUERARD

Well, my goodness, tampons and losing weight and all that. It must have been just such a shock. [laughs]

HILLS

It was. It was a definite culture shock, added to which, the two of us could not eat out.

GUERARD

I don't imagine you were allowed to go out very much at all then, huh?

HILLS

No. [Kemal] Atatürk who, at the end of the Turkish independence war, had changed the culture from Middle Eastern towards European so that women were allowed to go not covered- -not with their heads covered- -and that sort of thing. They could wear European clothes, though a lot of the older people didn't. And we were allowed to go on buses and all that sort of thing. That was okay.

GUERARD

During the day, right?

HILLS

No, it was quite safe at night.

GUERARD

Was it really?

HILLS

Surprisingly, absolutely safe. I found afterwards, it was, I think, one of the safest countries you could possibly have lived in because men knew that you didn't approach people, particularly not Europeans. I mean, we got looked at and being blond, as I was, I got looked at very much. But it was definitely a definite feeling of segregation. They wouldn't come near you. On the other hand, if you tried to go even to get a-- If you were hot and had been walking, you wanted to go and get a glass of lemonade, nobody would serve you.

GUERARD

Oh! So you were allowed to be out, but you weren't allowed to--?

HILLS

Weren't allowed to be--

GUERARD

Mingle?

HILLS

Mingle. No, you couldn't sit at a sidewalk cafe and be served. If we'd sat there, we'd just have sat there, but nobody would have come and served us. We had to find somebody from the embassy or something like that if we wanted to go to eat out or some male to take us, which was a very strange feeling.

GUERARD

And then if a male would take you, could--?

HILLS

Then we could go.

GUERARD

Could you eat in the public places?

HILLS

Oh, yes! Yes, yes. As long as we were accompanied by a man. One each. It wasn't any use one man with two women. Had to be two men, two women.

GUERARD

And when you did this, were there also Turkish women eating out with Turkish men?

HILLS

Oh, yes! Yes.

GUERARD

Was that okay?

HILLS

Oh, that was okay. Yes. But not on your own. We found that we did, ultimately, get invited to what are called tea parties. And Turkish women get together in vast numbers at parties in the afternoon where they sit and drink little glasses of tea and eat enormous quantities of very sticky cakes. Sweetest sweet, sweet, sweet things. Nothing other than cake. And they chatter away, who knows what about, you know. But we got invited to a few of those, which was quite fun and becoming part of the culture.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

The other shock we had was that-- I told you I arrived not knowing a word of Turkish and not having been able to learn it. We found we weren't going to be paid until we had taught a demonstration class in Turkish.

GUERARD

Oh my goodness!

HILLS

And so, we got a teacher and I learned Turkish in two weeks flat. Joy learned a little because she'd been there for two years, but she'd always had an interpreter with her when she was teaching, up to that point. And although

there was an interpreter there, she didn't take part in the teaching at all. So in two weeks, I was learning to do all the part of teaching that I do in English, in Turkish.

GUERARD

Oh my goodness.

HILLS

With, of course, the French terminology mixed in.

GUERARD

Yes. [laughs] Oh my gosh!

HILLS

It was very pedestrian Turkish, but it was enough for the heads of the conservatory to say, "Okay, we'll pay you." But it's an incentive to learn a language, honestly.

GUERARD

Yes .

HILLS

Still talking about money, they had quite a good system of payment there. You got exactly two-thirds - - Everybody in the entire country got two-thirds of their salary. The other third went straight to taxes. You never saw it and so you didn't have to worry at the end of the year whether you owed or whether you'd get anything back or all these sort of things. One-third just went and that was the entire taxes. There weren't any others. And it's a very good idea. But, of course, a third of very little is a lot more than a third of quite a lot. And we were quite well paid, I must say. We weren't allowed to go beyond the ten mile limit of Ankara. Because we were aliens, we had to stay within ten miles of Ankara. And in April, our contracts came up for renewal and they had to be signed by every member of the government .

GUERARD

Every member of the government?

HILLS

Every member of the government. Now, every member of the government is very seldom-- This was because we were aliens, not-- This didn't happen to everybody. Every member of the government is seldom in Turkey together and for two months, we weren't paid at all. And so, we became distressed British citizens, which meant that the British Embassy paid us until we could pay them back. [laughs]

GUERARD

Oh. Thank goodness.

HILLS

Yes, I know. By then, we knew the ambassador quite well, so it was okay. But, you know, you do feel somewhat, I don't know, frightened, being in a foreign country in that-- Vulnerable is the word I was after.

GUERARD

Extremely vulnerable.

HILLS

Yes. Really, we were scared. We did have fun. I'm not talking about teaching at all, am I? This is dreadful .

GUERARD

No, this is really fascinating.

HILLS

We had great fun, though, as two unmarried, unattached English girls. Every time that there was a big banquet at the British Embassy where visiting men came, to make the table right, you know, you have to have man, woman, man, woman, man, woman, all around a banqueting table .

GUERARD

Oh, you do?

HILLS

You do. And Joy and I were often invited to these gorgeous banquets because they needed two odd women [pause] or more. You know, they'd get any English woman. There were two others who were teaching at the school for English children in Ankara, so they were there, too. Wonderful food. Of course, we put on weight like you wouldn't believe.

GUERARD

Well--

HILLS

Because we were living at nine thousand feet and you can't burn up the energy that you otherwise would if you were living at-- Your metabolism is quite different at nine thousand feet from sea level .

GUERARD

Oh, I didn't realize that.

HILLS

You can't dance for anything like long enough. We had visiting dancers come out from England to do performances and they had to have oxygen in the wings .

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

It took me about three weeks to get acclimated.

GUERARD

I experienced that in Mexico City, also.

HILLS

Yes, you would. Yes.

GUERARD

Margaret, we're almost to the end of this side.

HILLS

I thought we might be.

GUERARD

Let's end it here and pick it up again.

HILLS

Okay.

### **1.6. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side Two (March 31, 1997)**

HILLS

Well, I digressed enough about the fun of being there and I should talk about the school. As I said, we had at least twenty children. We divided them into two classes and then there was a teenage class . And we met every day. First class, I think, was at nine o'clock and we used to go to work by taxi . A taxi came to pick us up and brought us back, but there were times when I chose to walk. It was a long walk but it was a very, as I said, a very safe place. It was okay to walk. We actually made the clothes for the children to dance in, in class.

GUERARD

You did?

HILLS

Yes. We had a sewing machine in the apartment and there was no way of buying anything. There weren't any little tunics or leotards or anything like that, so we made the costumes. The tunics we made for them and little knickers to wear underneath.

GUERARD

Oh .

HILLS

The boys were okay. They could buy a tee shirt and little black knickery things. They were used to wearing uniform because they wore at school, all Turkish

children, a black overall thing with a white collar. Boys and girls, the same. A pleated smock, I suppose it was, did up down the back and they all looked identical. Very charming children, beautifully mannered. If they did something wrong and you told them that you know what they'd done was not really quite the right thing, they had a way of crying without creasing up their faces or making any noise.

GUERARD

Oh my gosh !

HILLS

Tears just run down their faces.

GUERARD

For giving them normal corrections?

HILLS

It breaks your heart. Yes. And they make a sort of praying gesture with their hands not quite closed but with the fingertips touching on their forehead and bent forward a little. And it's their way of saying, "I'm really deeply sorry." But you can't be angry with them when this happens. I mean, big, big tears coming out of enormous brown eyes, you know. [laughs] They're so sad. But absolutely charming. Perfect manners, saying, in Turkish, when you come into the studio in the morning, a little bow and "Good morning." And as you go out, a bow and, "Good morning." And absolutely just so good mannered. It was wonderful . Never ran anywhere. They always walked.

GUERARD

[laughs] Not like American children.

HILLS

No! Not like any children anywhere else. And, of course, it was aggravating that they could all speak perfect, perfect Turkish and I was struggling, you know. Nothing makes you feel inadequate more than a child who can speak the language and you can't. But they were very helpful . I was trying to teach battement frappe. For those who know what a battement frappe is, you'll understand the story. If you don't, then it won't. But I was trying to describe

how the toes brush across the floor and one of the little boys put up his hand and said, in Turkish, "Like matches . "

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

And, I thought, "That's absolutely right. That's what you do with a match across the box when you want to strike the match." And, so he said, "Kibrit, Miss Cream!" which is the nearest they could get to Miss Graham. They tried to say, "Miss Graham" and they couldn't. It was just something their tongues couldn't get 'round and I was known as Miss Cream. [Guerard laughs] It was really rather nice. [laughs]

GUERARD

Yes, I like that!

HILLS

Kibrit is the Turkish for matches. And it just described the movement so perfectly. It was nice to know that in spite of my difficulty with the language, they could understand really pretty well what I was trying to say to them.

GUERARD

Yes. That must have been so gratifying.

HILLS

It was. It was really nice. But trying to say, you know, "Point your toe to the side," teaching a pas de bourree for instance, "Put it behind the other one, step to the side and then close it in front," with all the nuances of the language, was really quite hard. And the language is a little like German in that the verb comes at the end and all the qualifying things of the verb come at the end of that. So that you don't know if it's positive or negative or whether it's a question or not until you get to the end of the verb at the end of the sentence. And you're trying to construct this in your head, translating out of-- You know, I wasn't thinking in Turkish. And when you're trying to listen to what people are asking you or telling you, you're listening all the time to what's going to come at the end of this. You recognize the verb. Finally, you've got to the verb

and are they asking a question or are they telling you something? And you don't know till you get to the end of it. So it 's nerve-wracking, really, trying to function and work with that foreign language. But, fortunately, [Kemal] Atatürk had changed the writing and so that the writing was in letters that we understood, though some of them had different values. A C with a cedilla is a "che" and a C without is a "J." And the "ke" sound is a K, always. So once you understood that, it was completely phonetic, which was helpful.

GUERARD

Then you just had to translate the--?

HILLS

Yes, what you'd read phonetically into English back in your head.

GUERARD

And did any of these children have any French or English?

HILLS

No.

GUERARD

No.

HILLS

They were learning English, but-- And I think learning French, but they didn't have it when we were there. But they were so bright. It was really lovely. They really wanted their eye-- They have a way of their eyes just sparkling with interest at what you're trying to teach them. So it was exciting to have that rapport, visually from them, if not from their words. It was really nice.

GUERARD

Now, I'm assuming that this was their very first introduction to ballet.

HILLS

Absolutely. And they'd never seen any.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And not only had they never seen any, but there were no films, no videotape, nothing for them to see. And so, we organized that some dancers should come out from England to do a small performance. Moira Shearer came and Michael Somes and-- Do you know, I've forgotten who else. Some corps de ballet members came out and did a little performance for them. And, of course, they were the ones who had to have the oxygen in the wings because they couldn't survive through a performance at that altitude. But it did help them after that because they had some picture of what they were trying to do. And, of course, we demonstrated as much as we could to show them and Joy and I-- We were both quite young. We actually made ourselves [Les] Sylphides costumes and danced some of the Sylphides solos for them at a recital, which just, again, gave them a little picture of what they were trying to do. And we had them do little dances for each other and did a little performance. And the president of Turkey [Celal Bayar] heard about this and he sort of clapped his hands and said, "Bring on the dancing girls!" you know [laughs] for King Abdullah [ibn Husayn] of Jordan, when he was on a state visit to Turkey. We went to the president's palace with the children to do a performance and he had some of the opera stars there, as well. And, these little tots-- It was very, very late at night and we were in, as a dressing room, the room next to the big dining hall and the food was brought through our dressing room. And all of it was on pure gold plates.

GUERARD

Oh my gosh!

HILLS

And decorated-- You know, you sometimes see pictures of decorated food like you think, "It's never been done." It was! I mean, swans with the necks on-- And all made out of food. And fish, all decorated on these gold plates, carried through. Plate after plate after plate, all sorts of different things. It went on and on and on and we weren't going to dance till after the dinner was over.

GUERARD

Oh my gosh. How could you?

HILLS

And finally at midnight, we did our show. And when the show was over, we were all taken into another anteroom of the palace, where the table was laid with gold knives and forks . And gold platters for the ordinary plate to be put on top of. And it really was-- I mean it was literally gold. It wasn't, you know, just brass or something like that. And the handles of the gold knives had jewels set in them. And these little toddlers-- I mean [not] toddlers [but] ten-year-olds were sat down at this table.

GUERARD

Who had come from the orphanage.

HILLS

Who had come from the orphanage

GUERARD

Ah !

HILLS

And were given-- Presumably, it was the leftover food, you know, the stuff that hadn't all been eaten. But it was all nicely arranged on an individual plate for them. Center of the table was huge baskets of fruit and they asked if they could take some of the fruit back to the dormitories for their friends. So they stuffed all [their] bags with all the fruit. They took it all. The waiters with their gloves on and everything were charming and brought them doggy bags, as we call them here, to take the food back to their friends. They finally got back at four o'clock in the morning.

GUERARD

Oh my gosh!

HILLS

And we were planning-- We said to the person in charge, we said, "Well, you know, they should be allowed to sleep in, in the morning. We won't come and teach them." They said, "Oh, no, no, no. You can't do that. It would set a--

They can't stay in the dormitory asleep when everybody-- Oh, no, no. They must have their classes." So, we had to get up, too, and teach them. We were very gentle with them the next day and they were very tired little kids but so excited. A wonderful , wonderful opportunity for them. But to go to the teaching point of view, they all have very, very long Achilles tendons.

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

And the reason-- Well, I don't know which is the chicken and the egg, but if you tell a Turkish child to take, to sit down and rest, they don't sit with their buttocks on the ground because that's not considered clean. And so, they crouch onto their heels and both heels are on the floor when they're in full plie, so to speak. So when we were teaching them plies, we had to teach them to lift their heels slightly so that they would look the same as other people. They had incredibly long Achilles tendons! Now, whether they crouch because they, hereditarily, have long Achilles tendons or whether the tendons have elongated over generations because they don't sit right down, there's no way to tell. But they had enormous elevation. Because of this, you know, they bounded so high. It's wonderful!

GUERARD

[laughs] Yeah!

HILLS

And had nice-- Most of them had very nice insteps. Rather short legs and, of course, they're short. As a people they're short, so we didn't have many tall ones. Mostly short and very bouncy. The authorities wanted to cover the studio floor with a wall-to-wall, virtually wall-to-wall, Turkish carpet.

GUERARD

Why?

HILLS

Because every floor is covered with Turkish carpet.

GUERARD

Uh-huh. They just didn't realize that ballet is done on a wood floor?

HILLS

No. They thought we were very Spartan and very peculiar, not wanting-- I mean, carpet. If we could have said, "Yes, we'll have it" and rolled it up and brought it home, we could have made a fortune. [Guerard laughs] They were gorgeous, absolutely gorgeous. You think what a small Turkish rug costs.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And they wanted to give us one eighty by eighty.

GUERARD

Oh .

HILLS

Feet. And thought we were very odd. We never did get rosin. [We] couldn't find out how to get it, so we didn't have rosin, but it was a new floor. They built the building for us, so it didn't get slippery, fortunately.

GUERARD

Now, that just reminds me, did you have to bring the shoes for them?

HILLS

We wrote to England and they sent them.

GUERARD

Oh, I see.

HILLS

They didn't have them there. By the time we'd been there a year, we were getting some shoemakers who were trying out how to do it. We didn't find

any successful ones in the year we were there, but they were making an effort. They even tried to do pointe shoes.

GUERARD

They did?

HILLS

Yeah. We gave them some and they took them apart to see if they could do them. They were getting there, but it wasn't yet success. I'm sure they do now, but they didn't then. So we imported those, which was difficult and very expensive. The duty on incoming things was astronomical . A friend of mine, at Christmas, sent me just a powder puff in the Christmas card and I went-- They didn't deliver it to the apartment because it had something inside. I had to go to the customs place and they wanted to charge me an astronomical amount for it. And I said, "No. Give me the letter and keep the powder puff," you know.

GUERARD

Right .

HILLS

Is this a moment to stop again?

GUERARD

I think I'll stop just while this trash pick-up goes by. [tape recorder off]

HILLS

I think it was the language thing which made us unable to get rosin. We couldn't find a translation and presumably, the violinists had it for their bows and things, but we were never able to get any. The other language problem we had, also-- You know because you've been in class, how one has to talk about the tail bone and the pelvis and where to put it and that sort of thing. And nobody, but nobody, would tell us the name for that part of the anatomy. They must have a name for it, but it's one of those things you don't talk about

GUERARD

Well, they must have been very brave to even show--

HILLS

Uncover it.

GUERARD

Uncover it, right.

HILLS

Yes, yes exactly.

GUERARD

And talk about where to place it.

HILLS

Yes, and we just had to do it by feel, you know, and try and get them to stand correctly by putting your hands on them, which is not what you should do. When you're teaching ballet, you shouldn't really touch students. You should demonstrate and talk but you're not supposed to touch a student, really. In desperation, one does sometimes, but it's not good practice. But we had to there. And, I still--

GUERARD

But it does help a person to understand how it feels to be in a certain position.

HILLS

Yes. That's right. But, really and truly, the teaching of ballet is no hands on. The rules say you don't touch. You can run a finger up somebody's back, perhaps, or just point to a muscle, but you don't get hold of a leg and move it because you can injure somebody. By the time you've pushed a leg up and they've yelled, the injury is already there, so you don't do it. But we did there. And I still don't know what it would have been called. [laughs] Even-- We got to know a dentist very well. Extremely well. And in my spare time, I taught his little boy English. But he wouldn't tell us. He said [gesturing], "No." [He] just shook his head and-- A very funny thing in Turkey, if you want to say, by gesture with your head, "No," you nod your head.

GUERARD

Oh, how confusing.

HILLS

Yes, very confusing. So, it's more a toss backwards. Up and down with a sharp inflection upwards but even so, it's odd. It's not your natural instinct.

GUERARD

Yes. [laughs]

HILLS

And he made that gesture when we asked him if he would tell us what that was called. He just wouldn't.

GUERARD

Just forbidden.

HILLS

Absolutely. Yeah. It's not something you say. I don't know what they do in medical school. They must break down the barriers somewhere. [laughter] The children had-- I'm hopping about between one thing and the other. They had quite nice extensions of their legs. They went up quite well. They were fairly loose. A pliable body in a way, tending to slightly bow legs. Short legs and longish body. That's the same with Greeks, I've noticed when we've been to Greece. You know, my eye looks at shapes of people walking along and wonders if they could dance, you know, and you wouldn't chose a Turkish body as the ideal for dancing. I'm sure they found some but probably the audiences wouldn't like what we like, particularly the long, thin Balanchine girl, you know, with very long legs and short body. They probably wouldn't- -

GUERARD

The Turkish audience, you mean?

HILLS

A Turkish audience wouldn't enjoy watching that sort of shape, I don't think. It's not their ideal look.

GUERARD

Were some of these children chosen to go to the ballet school because they had done other kinds of dance?

HILLS

No, they were taught other sorts of-- They were taught national dance, national dance of Turkey when they were there, but I don't think any of them had done any. I don't think they'd done anything. One or two of the teenagers who'd come from Istanbul had learned with a teacher, a Russian in Istanbul, I think the only ballet school in Istanbul. [She was] a very old lady and I don't remember her name because I never met her, but they'd learned a little from her. We had to reteach them a little bit. I don't know how much of a dancer she'd been, whether she was just a very lowly member of the corps de ballet or not, but she hadn't taught them very well. But they knew something. They knew what it was about. We were sponsored in to be there by what was called the Ingilis Kultur Haiti (British Council) and they sponsored quite a lot of visiting musicians and that sort of thing. And they were very helpful if we got into difficulties of any sort. We were also taken under the wing of the president, President [Ismet] Inönü and he allowed us to use his state presidential box at the opera house if we wanted to go to the theater, which was also very special. He wasn't the president who asked us to go and dance for King Abdullah. There 'd been a shift, a change of government, in the meantime, so President Inönü had been-- I think he was called Celal Bayar or something like that, the one who took over. He was the one whom we were introduced to King Abdullah through. King Abdullah was assassinated shortly afterwards. It was one of those, again, exciting moments, you know, where you meet somebody very famous quite unexpectedly. It was fun.

GUERARD

Yes. Was there a nice theater there?

HILLS

Yes, a beautiful theater called The Big Theatre. It was very new. All Ankara was very new. It was still being built. And the big Atatürk Mausoleum and Parliament buildings were being built when we were there and I read recently that they are having to pull some of it down and refurbish it. You know, it wasn't finished when we were there. It makes me feel terribly old when those

sort of things happen. I understand Ankara is now a huge city and it was quite small then. There was an old town, which was just a lot of shanties up a hillside. And, I never went into it, but I understand to get to the house above you, you actually went through the house below.

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

So I was told. Whether it's true or not, I have no idea, but the only way to the top house was through all the ones below it. Maybe there were staircases on the side, but they wouldn't be much use in winter. Winter is very cold there. Summer, very hot. The year I was there, we didn't have any snow, but normally they have very, very thick snow. But we didn't. GUEFIARD: Were you there for just one year, then?

HILLS

Just for one year, mm hmm. Did a lot in that year, but [laughs]-- We had to write out a syllabus for the school because it's very bureaucratic. You couldn't just go in and teach and leave. They had--

GUERARD

Did you have to write it out in Turkish?

HILLS

No. We wrote it in English and it was translated. We also wrote the history of ballet for their national encyclopedia .

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

And that was translated for us. I've got a copy that they sent me in Turkish afterwards.

GUERARD

Oh, how wonderful.

HILLS

Yeah. Joy and I did that between us, mostly from our own memory and writing to England to say, "Would you look up so and so and let us know, " and so forth, which is another thing we had to do. We also made all the costumes for the recitals.

GUERARD

Now, did you have access to the same kinds of fabrics that you were used to in England?

HILLS

Yes, actually they had wonderful fabrics, much better than in England. Everybody makes their own clothes there. You couldn't just go into a shop and buy clothes. There weren't any shops of that sort. You could buy stockings, you could buy underwear, but no outer garments. So there were fabric shops. Every other shop was a fabric shop. Of course, no nylon because it hadn't got there yet, but cotton and pure silk and satins and a lot of it very gaudy by our standards. Linen, beautiful silk, gorgeous silk in, of course, what was beautiful colors, dyed exquisitely.

GUERARD

I bet.

HILLS

And so, we were able to have enormous choice of fabrics .

GUERARD

And you had a budget for costumes?

HILLS

Yes. Well, we just bought it and handed the bill in, were given the money back. So I guess we didn't ever go above what they thought was rational, because we never had anything queried from that point of view.

GUERARD

Had you learned how to sew costumes back--?

HILLS

Oh, yes. I'd learned that when I was a child. I made a lot of my own costumes . My mother was no good at sewing. And in England then, when I was a child, again, you didn't buy clothes in shops. I mean, poor people did, but if you weren't poor, you always had a dressmaker make all your clothes. And so, I was very used to standing, as a child, for hours, with costumes being fitted on me. I'd also done modeling as a child.

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

And so, again, you had the clothes changed to fit you. And so, your eye-- You learned how to sew just by seeing the dressmaker do it. And when we didn't have dressmakers to make costumes for shows and things, I easily made my own. It was just-- I didn't even have to think about it, you know. I learned sewing at school, also. You know, you make pillowcases and underwear and embroider them and all those sort of things. You made everything by hand. You weren't allowed to use a machine at school. But at home, I used a machine. It just seeped in by osmosis, I think.

GUERARD

It's part of growing up. It's not that way anymore .

HILLS

No, it's not. But I can still do it easily.

GUERARD

That's fabulous. You must have had a ball making costumes.

HILLS

Oh, it was enormous fun. The kids were very wriggly when you wanted to fit them, of course. [laughter] It was great fun. You know, you'd draw the costume first and then decide what fabric you were going to make it of and then buy the stuff and go home and make it in the evenings.

GUERARD

I'm sorry. Just one more time. [tape recorder off] Sorry for that interruption.

HILLS

I was talking about the children doing recitals and making the costumes for them. There was a surprising amount of cultural life in Ankara, which we became part of by being invited to things. The Germans would get together a lot and sing German lieder to each other and have piano concerts in their houses or wherever they were renting, you know, the part of the German ambassadorial staff. And so, I became much more aware of that sort of music, which is something I knew nothing about until then. And the British Council brought out George Weldon to conduct the Turkish Orchestra with the pianist, Moura Lympany, who is still performing. A wonderful musician! And we watched a recording that they did for the Turkish- - For sale in Turkey, I presume. And a concert that they did at The Big Theatre, that we were talking about before. And, strangely, we take now, in the United States, a magazine which sends us a CD every month and in it, it said- -there was a little tiny two-line advertisement- -" If anybody knows anything about George Weldon, we are very interested to hear from you."

GUERARD

Oh, really?

HILLS

And so, I sent them a photograph of George Weldon and Moura Lympany in Turkey and they wrote back and said they were so thrilled and the only people they'd heard from were me, from Los Angeles, and somebody else from San Francisco, in the entire world that this magazine goes to. [laughter] George Weldon is English. So, they said, "We are just two ladies who were very great fans of George Weldon years ago."

GUERARD

Wow .

HILLS

So strange after all those years, you know, to have this photograph to send them. The other person I met, whom I regret not having kept in touch with, was an archaeologist called Seaton Lloyd. He was digging in Turkey and came

to the embassy and at one of these banquets, I met him and his wife. And he was talking about what he was doing and at that time, I wasn't terribly interested in archaeology. I became incredibly more interested later and one of my children is an historian and did do some archaeology. And my son-in-law [Jerry Podany] arranged for us, last summer, to be taken all over the Parthenon by the modern architect who is restoring the Parthenon. But if I'd only had my interest at that time when I was living in Turkey, I could have gone to all these places and seen them. While we were in Turkey this summer--we went back--we went to a tour of Ephesus and the guide said, "Can you say, 'Kusadasi?'" And, you know, when you've spoken a language for a year, you can speak it and I could by the end, so I said it right and all the other people on the bus said it wrong. And the guide looked at me and then without even thinking when we got off the bus I said to the driver, "Tesekkurederus, " which is, "Thank you very much on our behalf, my husband and me." And then the guide said, "You speak Turkish." And, I said, "Well I did, you know, fifty years ago." And he wanted to know how and where I'd lived and he said, "Do you know [Rudolf] Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn?" And he turned out to be the biggest ballet fan on the face of the earth. And so, he took my name and address and where I lived and he said, "Next time there is something that the Turkish National Ballet is doing, I will write and let you know." [laughter] So after all those years, this little guy who is a great ballet fan in Turkey, said the ballet is doing very well in Turkey and it's quite famous in Turkey and tours in Turkey. But, they--

GUERARD

So the ballet that was set up by yourself and Joy Newton at the time has continued.

HILLS

It continued. We both came back to England to get married because while I was there, Brian [Hills], who had been so upset about my going, finally wrote and proposed. He'd intended to telephone because he was putting this telephone equipment into Canada and he'd meant to telephone from Canada to Turkey to inaugurate the line that he just put in. But it didn't extend as far as Turkey, so he couldn't. So he wrote a proposal. And I cabled back, "Yes,

please." [laughter] So I went back to get married and Joy had actually, was already married, and her husband had been posted to Ghana in Africa.

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

Or was it the Gambia? The Gambia, it was called in those days. I don't know what it's called now. And so, she went to join him when that year was over. And the school went on and the company was gradually built first by another English girl called Beatrice Appleyard, who'd been in The Royal Ballet or Sadler's Wells Ballet. And then she married the director of the Conservatoire, in Turkey, and remained in Turkey, but both he and she were fired because he'd married an alien.

GUERARD

Oh my goodness.

HILLS

And so they had to find other- -

GUERARD

They had to find somebody else?

HILLS

Other work. And then they found somebody else and they got a married couple called Molly Lake and Travis Kemp, who were Cecchetti-trained and they went and stayed for a long, long time. They only very, very recently came back. [They] must be very old by now. But they really built it and carried it on to its full fruition. And anything that's there now is really totally their company rather than ours, but it was fun to be there, ostensibly starting it, at any rate.

GUERARD

Right. So did they carry on from the Sadler's Wells syllabus or--?

HILLS

I don't really know. In fact, I don't know at all. They were very much Cecchetti-trained and I think it would have swung more towards Cecchetti's training than what we had started.

GUERARD

You know, I should have asked you, when you were there and you were teaching them, were you able to really stick with the Sadler's Wells syllabus or did you have to adapt a little bit?

HILLS

We had to adapt it. There's no doubt about that. And the progress was much slower. They had a facility but it was a different facility. And yes, we did adapt it. We wrote down in the syllabus the names of the steps but were rather cautious about what we said each year should be doing. We did it in elementary, intermediate and advanced so that people weren't hog-tied to get through a certain amount in one year because we were so new and the bodies were so really rather different, that we didn't want anybody to be so tied down. So even if Molly Lake and Travis Kemp did do Cecchetti rather than what we were doing, the words were the same. So they probably didn't have to change, bureaucratically, what was set down to be done. And, of course nobody would know anyway. [laughs]

GUERARD

Right. [laughs] Who would know?

HILLS

All these lists of French words, you know. They wouldn't have the faintest idea what it meant. And I'm still not quite sure-- Well, I think President Inönü was very much Europeanized and he wanted ballet as the next step to making Turkey part of Europe, rather than part of Asia. I think it was a big cultural thing that he wanted to have happen.

GUERARD

Right. That by adapting ballet, it would show that they were--?

HILLS

Yes, they were part of Europe.

GUERARD

They were European.

HILLS

Yes. They did an enormous change in a very short time. There's a wonderful story by a woman called Ann Bridge, who walked across a lot of Turkey during the time when it was changing. It's part of her autobiography. Fascinating book. And she talks there about somebody I met when I was there . She was the mother of a man I met who was to do with statistics for the United Nations. It was rather fascinating to read that, you know, they'd met each other, too.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

I love to read things like that, that fill in the culture of somewhere you've been or something you've done.

GUERARD

Yes .

HILLS

The school really did very nicely. I think, although I said the progress was slow, you began-- At the end of the year, we began to get the feeling of a nice foundation having been put down, you know. We didn't go away-- Both of us [went home] ; she to join her husband and me to get married. I didn't go away with the feeling that we'd gone and it was going to collapse.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

I went away with the feeling that we'd gone and it was ready to expand and go on. It felt safe to leave it. Do you know what I mean?

GUERARD

Yes. Yes. I have read that the goal there was to teach in a certain way so that eventually, the staff would be Turkish and that the choreographers would be Turkish, rather than just becoming English or American.

HILLS

Yes, that's right. And they have because in one of the pictures in one of the books you had, there's a photograph of me with a little girl called Oya Deliktas [Gurelli] and years later, at The Royal Ballet School, I went back one day, by chance--It was after I'd left--and there was a short, little woman who rushed up to me and said, "Hello, Miss Cream!"

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

And it was Oya, who was, by then, ballet mistress of The National Ballet of Turkey.

GUERARD

Oh, she did go on!

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

Oh, that's great!

HILLS

She was a tiny, little creature and she was still very short and plump. But it was such a joy to meet her again, you know.

GUERARD

I'll bet.

HILLS

And it was entirely by chance that I'd gone that day. One of those things that just happens, you know. A good thing in life. You're directed somehow to that situation and there she was.

GUERARD

It ' s a wonderful photograph and even though I just saw it in black and white, I really got the feeling from it that you were sort of a big sister to her.

HILLS

Yes, yes. Well, I think I was doing up her hair band or something in the photograph. Yes.

GUERARD

Yeah .

HILLS

So, she was charming.

GUERARD

So, you did go back to England to get married and--?

HILLS

And got my job back at Sadler's Wells, thank goodness. [laughs] I went back in July and we got married in August and I was teaching again in September. And had made enough money, fortunately, in Turkey, to pay back my parents, who'd subsidized me from June to November .

GUERARD

Isn't that nice?

HILLS

Yes, or whenever it was. August to November. We were allowed to bring money back from Turkey which we'd saved, so I felt better about that.

GUERARD

Oh, you must have been so proud. That's wonderful !

HILLS

Yeah, I was pleased to be able to do it because I'm sure my father thought he'd never see it again and he was fairly wealthy, but in his diary when he died, it was carried on year after year, a small sum that my brother [John Hampson] had owed him from some time or another [laughs] , so I ' m very glad that mine wasn't there, too. My brother was furious when he read it.  
[laughter]

GUERARD

I guess he can't pay it back now.

HILLS

No. No. He was very upset that my father had gone on. He never asked for it, John said, but he just carried it on, hoped John would someday pay up. And Audrey Knight stayed on. She was the one who'd been in Turkey and whom I'd replaced. She had been successful teaching, so she stayed on at Sadler's Wells School. And, in fact, she got married the week before I did.

GUERARD

Oh my goodness!

HILLS

She'd gone back a year before to get ready to get married and I'd gone back a month before, and we got married a week apart. And we still keep in touch. It's nice. We later did quite a lot of stuff together. And the Sadler's Wells School got its education accreditation, actually while I was in Turkey. She was there then, when they had the big deal about everybody, you know, being looked at and all the classes being vetted by inspectors and that sort of thing. So I missed that. It was rather nice to have missed it, I think. But from then on, the children didn't have to pay for their education. They still had to pay for the ballet, but, of course, it was very much better. And they were starting, then, to think about having a boarding school for the children .

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

It took a while, but they really wanted to have the children so that they could have them from all parts of the country and not have them living with aunts and uncles in London, you know, away from their parents. They wanted them to be full-time. And they were looking for premises to do that and didn't find some for a while- -and we'll get to that later- -but there was this thought going on that it would be great if the children didn't have to do these vast journeys every day by train and bus and everything else.

GUERARD

Right. It would also afford them a broader selection.

HILLS

Oh, absolutely. Yes. Yes. Because there were some children who were talented and just couldn't come to London. We still had-- Remember way back I said I started these children in the theater who came after school in the evenings?

GUERARD

Mm hmm .

HILLS

We still had those. They were still called junior associates and for reasons best known to the parents, they wanted them at schools of their choice. Maybe they wanted them at religious schools, who knows. That could have been part of-- That didn't occur to me until this minute. And that is still going on. They still have junior associates who go to other schools in the daytime and come after school for dancing, in the evening. And that is now run by a girl called Jocelyn Mather, who was one of my early junior associates.

GUERARD

Huh !

HILLS

So, again, you've got the school building its own faculty coming up, just like the Turkish ones did. In fact, most of the faculty have done that. And when I go back- -or did go back- -to The Royal Ballet for many years after I'd left

there, I'd taught the entire company at some time or other during their training.

GUERARD

Oh, my gosh.

HILLS

So, it's--

GUERARD

How wonderful!

HILLS

To feel that that is going on, you know, and now Anthony Dowell, Sir Anthony Dowell, is director of the company and I taught him when he was little and Dame Antoinette Sibley is president of The Royal Academy and I taught her when she was little. These were enormous talents, of course. Just really wonderful.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

You mentioned Naomi Capon a little while ago, and she did a television documentary of the school.

GUERARD

When was that?

HILLS

I'm trying to think which year it was. My instinctive memory said it was 1954 [February 18, 1955] [Margaret Graham Hills added the above bracketed date correction during her review of the transcript.] and yet, I would have thought it was earlier, so I'm not absolutely sure. I can look it up. This was for a two-hour long- -I think it was two- hour- -documentary about the school on British television. And Naomi Capon spent a year visiting the school, writing the script. And I had, at that time, no idea how much research and preparation

went into what really is quite a short show on television. I'm sure she was doing other things, as well, but she got to know us all. She lived the life of the school. She mingled with the children, talked to them and really got right into the skin of it. She did, I think, a great job. In those days in television, some was actually done live. In the [television] studio were reconstructions of the [dance] studio. And some of it was filmed at the school, itself. And I was in charge of being at the television studios, making sure that people got into their costumes in time and were in the right place and that sort of thing. But I'd also been in the film part. But as a result, because I was at this television studio when it was going out on the air, I never saw the program.

GUERARD

Oh !

HILLS

Never saw the film part or anything. But a few years ago on television, here in Los Angeles, they did a program- -which, I think, was made in Europe. I don't think it was made in England, though the commentary was in English- -about dance. And I was in the kitchen and my husband said, "Come, quick! You're on television." And they showed a tiny clip of this television show that we'd done with me on it, fixing a little girl's leg or something and then they showed a picture of Cecchetti fixing [Anna] Pavlova in exactly the same way.

GUERARD

Oh, my gosh!

HILLS

And the next shot was Stanley Holden doing the clog dance from [La] Fille Mai Gardee. And it was just so bizarre, after all these years, to see this little bit of it, you know? Anyway, they repeated the program, so we videotaped it and so now I have a little tiny video of that show, a tiny little bit of it.

GUERARD

Great.

HILLS

So, it's fun to have it. But that took a lot of preparation. And we were not-- When we were filmed doing teaching and that sort of thing for it, we weren't allowed to speak because we weren't part of the right union.

GUERARD

Oh, yes.

HILLS

And any of the speaking parts had to be taken by actresses. So where they wanted the head mistress, say, to talk to somebody else, that part was played not by the head mistress but by an actress, which was very sad.

GUERARD

There are rules about words.

HILLS

Yes. And the live part, there were not words. It was dancing only in the live part.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

It felt very strange. Scissors and paste sort of job of odd people doing this, that and the other. But it was very successful and everybody, you know, had rave notices and so forth. And we had more children coming to audition afterwards.

GUERARD

Oh, you did?

HILLS

Yes, it was good publicity.

GUERARD

Good publicity.

HILLS

Yes, it was. And by that time, we were getting to the massive numbers and auditioning many Saturdays in the year. So that was a shame because we lost some of our Saturdays which we might have had off, otherwise, [laughter]

GUERARD

Well, Margaret I think we're going to have to pick up next time.

HILLS

Okay, well this is a good place to stop.

GUERARD

A good place? Uh-huh.

HILLS

Yes. Yeah, we said we'd cover Turkey today and we more or less did, I think.

GUERARD

It's wonderful. What a wonderful experience!

HILLS

It was. I wouldn't have done without that for anything. It was absolutely fabulous. Such a different life.

GUERARD

Yeah.

### **1.7. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side One (April 11, 1997)**

GUERARD

Well, Margaret, we've got you back in England after Turkey, and the Sadler's Wells [School] is beginning to grow rapidly.

HILLS

'Tis, indeed. Yes. Not a great deal happened. I mean, one looks for incident to try and pin down this year from that year from the next year, but from 1951

until about 1954 --apart from just some slight changes in faculty and the standard of the students we were choosing going up- -not a lot of moment happened. My life went on very much the same, apart from having to cook for a husband and run a house, which was a little more difficult. And we moved and lived further out of London than where I'd lived before, halfway between his job and mine. It was a fairly stable time. We were still doing summer schools for teachers from all over the world every summer, which was a lovely challenge, actually. It happened at the end of the school year. The school year in England ends about the last week in July, and we had the [International] Summer School for Teachers following immediately after that. And, because the demonstrations for those teachers were done by the students in the school, there was a lot of competition amongst the students to be good enough to be chosen as demonstrators, and I think that was an enormous incentive for them.

GUERARD

I bet.

HILLS

In each class, as we took two or three from each class to demonstrate the various technical things.

GUERARD

Oh, what an opportunity to be seen by these teachers from all over!

HILLS

Exactly. And, of course, the ones that were chosen got a lot of extra coaching in the [Sadler's Wells School] Syllabus so that they would perform it perfectly. And they were going to be performing in front of teachers from all over the world, the entire faculty of the school. Dame Ninette de Valois, herself --she wasn't Dame then, but she became one sometime around about that time- - and soloists from the company who would drop by to watch. So they felt themselves under an enormous pressure. And of course, we as the faculty did, because we wanted them to be very good too, you know.

GUERARD

Sure!

HILLS

So we rehearsed them like anything. I also, each year, did a dissection of the corps de ballet work and some solos from various ballets, which I had to write out and get printed up with all the floor patterns and everything else so the teachers could understand them and rehearse. In the case of Swan Lake, I did a small version. The company uses thirty-two dancers and I did a version with eighteen, because we didn't think most schools would have thirty-two students good enough to put on a Swan Lake or anything like it. And I did [Les] Sylphides and we did solos from Coppélia and we did the Dance of the Hours from Coppélia. That took a long time, for the teachers to write it all down. They'd say, "What do you do with your left arm on measure seven in so and so?" And I had to have it all clearly in my mind. We didn't write it-- We wrote out the patterns for them, but we didn't write out the steps for them because everybody has their own terminology and their own way of understanding, and we didn't think they'd probably understand, necessarily correctly, what we wrote down. I had it written down for me so that I knew, but they wrote it in their own words. And, of course, you always get somebody who is very slow at picking it up and yet very picky about getting it right.

GUERARD

Well, they were leaving- -

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

So they wouldn't have had the opportunity to ask you again.

HILLS

Never an opp [ortunity] - - No. And, of course, this in the days before videotape, before Benesh Notation was known to anybody and most people didn't know Labanotation, either. So they did need to know. We understood this. But, you can get tired. [laughs] Very tired. I'd look at the poor students and say, "Do sit down while they're writing." They'd be standing there with their arms crossed for hours. Then I got wise to it and had two or three of

them standing in the position while the others sat down and alternated them a little bit. But, you know, you actually get very fatigued standing in a position for a long time. It's like being a model for a painter. You can only do it for so long. But they were very rewarding. The teachers were so receptive and so excited about being there, you know. Those were our highlights of the year. And the other highlight of work hard time was when the students had to take their RAD [Royal Academy of Dancing] examinations, which I'd trained them for, also. Everybody had to take one each year. And that's hard, because it was just-- It was different from our method. Different enough to be awkward. And the RAD, at that time, was also very picky about things-- Well, they still are, pretty much, [about] having it exactly their way. So if our dancers instinctively put a head on one side, they had to remember that for the RAD exam, it absolutely had to go the other way.

GUERARD

Yes!

HILLS

And in a way, it was hard for them because I was teaching them both. If you have somebody who's only teaching one method, the sight of that person will sort of trigger the right reaction.

GUERARD

Yes!

HILLS

But if you forget who Miss Graham or what method Miss Graham is teaching today, you can make mistakes unnecessarily. It was hard for them.

GUERARD

So, first of all, you had to take your exams within a week of each other and then you had to teach both methods at the same time.

HILLS

Well, I didn't teach-- My exams were in RAD and Cecchetti. I didn't teach Cecchetti at The Royal Ballet School .

GUERARD

Right. Oh, that's right.

HILLS

I did teach the RAD and I did teach The Royal Ballet School's own method. It got much more similar because in 1955, I think, Dame Adeline Genée asked three of us from the faculty at Sadler's Wells School if we would compile a syllabus for the more talented students of The Royal Academy method. And it wasn't, at that time, supposed to be part of the examination syllabus. It was so that teachers who taught the RAD method and had a star pupil who might go on to be professional, the Royal Academy, or Dame Adeline Genée recognized that their training was for all children and not for the future professional.

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

And so Pamela May, Audrey Knight and I were asked to go meet Dame Adeline Genée to discuss this new method of teaching for these talented students. And Dame Adeline Genée was then in her nineties, I'm sure--she died very shortly afterwards--and we were all scared to death of going to meet her.

GUERARD

Why?

HILLS

Because she was so famous. And she had never been seen for years without her leather gloves on.

GUERARD

Really?

HILLS

She always dressed immaculately in very, very expensive, fine leather gloves. This was, you know, one of those things. She had examined me in my Elementary and Advanced [RAD examinations], so I had seen her and been

intimidated then. But we were-- Even Pamela May, who was a ballerina with the company, you know, and teaching in the school also, she was somewhat intimidated. And it was an incredible honor to be asked by Dame Adeline to go and do this, you know. And she said, "Would we do it?" and of course we agreed. We weren't paid or anything like that, and it didn't occur to us to ask for payment. [laughter] And we used to-- The three of us would meet twice a week and we worked out the six years of training for the talented student.

GUERARD

So then, would the talented student have completely different classes than the others?

HILLS

No, they would still take their RAD exams but these would be supplementary classes that the teachers would learn how to teach these special people. In fact, of course, it didn't really work out like that.

GUERARD

No?

HILLS

What we worked out became the RAD's new syllabus. It became their new examination syllabus. [doorbell rings]

GUERARD

Excuse me. [tape recorder off] Sorry about that.

HILLS

Anyway, as it happened, while we were working on this syllabus that became The Royal Academy's new examination syllabus, all three of us became pregnant.

GUERARD

Oh, my gosh!

HILLS

So this was-- By the time we were getting towards printing, it was 1956 and Pamela had her daughter, Caroline, first. And then Audrey had a son and I had a daughter [Sarah Hills Larson]. So the maternity clothes were passed down very carefully from one to the other, which was very useful. And the first three years of this six-year syllabus, the first one was in pink, for Pamela's daughter.

GUERARD

Oh, my gosh!

HILLS

The next one was in blue, for Audrey's son. And by the time we'd finished the third one, Sarah hadn't been born yet, so that was white because we didn't know which one it was going to be. And then they went on to other colors afterwards, but that's the reason, on the original printing, those were in pink and blue and white [laughter], which I don't suppose many people will remember nowadays.

GUERARD

No, and they're appropriate ballet colors, anyway .

HILLS

Yes, they are. That took two years, so it was quite a long spell. We were doing that absolutely free and gratis. We didn't get a penny for it.

GUERARD

And twice a week?

HILLS

Twice a week.

GUERARD

Wow!

HILLS

Writing it all up and getting it ready for printing and usual stuff. I seem to have done a lot of syllabi already. [laughs] Oh, there are more to come, but that was the next one.

GUERARD

You know, what you're talking about reminds me that I believe I read in one of the books about the Sadler's Wells School that there was a conscious effort made not to treat any of the pupils differently than others. Did you find that true?

HILLS

Oh, of course. Absolutely!

GUERARD

So that if there was a star- -somebody who really stood out in the class- -were they let know that they were special?

HILLS

No! There's a book that Antoinette Sibley and Anthony Dowell wrote together- -mostly photographs with a little text--and in it, Anthony talks about meeting me here in Hollywood, and I mentioned to him that we had been at great pains not to let him and Antoinette know how good they were. And he said, "Well, you succeeded. We had absolutely no idea." So, it's there. Actually, really is in black and white, his acknowledgement that we didn't let them know. And when we did the television show we talked about on the previous tape, there was no doubt that Antoinette Sibley shone in that tape. And we were all told not to release her name to the press under any circumstances.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

In case we were asked who this very super child was. So, yes, that was absolutely the policy that nobody was to know.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

And they didn't. I mean, we obviously succeeded. They had no idea they were better than the other people. And strangely, they didn't do terribly well in their RAD exams. I mean, you can blame me--my teaching--if you like, not doing it well enough. But The Royal Academy was so, at that time, so absolutely high bound about how everything had to be, that if you had any degree of artistry and broke out of the mold even slightly, they took marks off. So, Antoinette Sibley, who is now Dame Antoinette Sibley and president of The Royal Academy of Dancing, really didn't do terribly well in her Intermediate RAD examination. She passed, but not with the flying colors she should have done, had the examiner had any eye for real talent. She was marked down for breaking the rules a little bit in her port de bras and head, which is tragic.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

They're different now, but that's how they were then. And it was a short period, because when I'd taken my RAD Advanced, they weren't anything like as particular. I said I had Madame Genée and I had Tamara Karsavina--real dancers--examining me. And although I didn't do everything full out because I'd had the knee injury, I still was the only one in the world to get honors at that session .

GUERARD

Because you did them exactly right?

HILLS

No, because then they were prepared to accept some artistry.

GUERARD

Oh, I see!

HILLS

But then, when the second generation of examiners came up who were not all, by any means, performing dancers--they were teaching dancers--they didn't accept the artistry.

GUERARD

They were just looking at technique?

HILLS

They were just technicians. And it went through a bad patch, as far as seeing true dancers, real dancers. And then I think it's come around full circle again. I think it's fine now. But just between my taking my Advanced and-- The whole examining body changed. The old examiners retired and the new ones came in and they didn't have that eye for seeing a real dancer, which is a shame.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And unless you've been in that atmosphere of professional dancers, I think it's probably very hard to see that it's okay, if you're good enough, to have some individuality. It's so essential.

GUERARD

Well, that's an interesting point about performing dance, is that there really is - There's so much technique that's required and expected of a really good dancer in order to perform, but if they don't have that personality, whatever that is, then they won't be very popular on stage.

HILLS

No. There's an added dimension of-- It's just sheer talent, star quality, whatever it happens to be, that people call it, that some people have and some people haven't. And it's hard to restrict to just technique, those people who have it. Really hard. We mentioned, I think earlier sometime, that there's a Dame Marie Rambert, who had a ballet company. She was one of the people who would actually take dancers that The Royal Ballet didn't take because their technique was good but they were not necessarily the perfect shape, but had artistry. And she would take them into her smaller company, where the shape perhaps didn't matter quite so much, and she brought out talents in people that we had missed, I must confess. And amongst them was Lucette Aldus, who became-- She returned to The Royal Ballet as a soloist and then

became ballerina in Australia. And another dancer called Brenda Last, who had a wonderful jump but her legs were a bit heavy. And she went to Rambert. And then later, she went to Norway and was ballet mistress for the Norwegian Ballet. And she also went into The Royal Ballet, too, after leaving Rambert, but Rambert brought out something in them that we had not been able to bring out. She had that genius because she brought out the choreography in [Frederick] Ashton and in Anthony Tudor. Both are great choreographers that she encouraged, though they were, neither of them, great dancers. She had a flair which was quite unusual. So there were some of our dancers going and, of course, we had at least twenty-five out of the graduating class each year and there were not twenty-five places, even though there were two ballet companies and an opera ballet at Covent Garden and an opera ballet at Sadler's Wells. So there were four groups of dancers to take them all into. There weren't places for them all and a lot of them would turn up in other ballet companies in England. You'd turn on your television and there would be students that I'd taught, you know, appearing in shows and I would often sort of walk out of the kitchen and look at the television and say, "Oh, that's so and so that had been in my class years before."

GUERARD

That's fun.

HILLS

It is fun. It still happens here occasionally, you know, [you] see people that have been in class and [they're] doing something entirely different. It's very rewarding. But if they're in a commercial, you never know what the commercial is that they're-- whatever they're selling, because you're so focused on, "I know who that is!" [laughs] And then you go to tell them later that you've seen them in a commercial and you don't remember what they were selling and that sounds bad, too. Very awkward. [laughter] Anyway, back at Sadler's Wells [School], we had a lot of really good talent in those few years. Ninette de Valois always used to say that every five years there is a supreme talent that arrives. The four years in between are good but nothing like the years when three or four people are really, really talented. And I don't know why it should be, but it does seem to be so. Must be something they put in the water every five years, [laughter] And it's so lovely when you get a year like

that where the front row in class is unbelievable. You know, you don't really have to teach them. They can do it. You show them and they can do it. And then, they add something of themselves to it. It's a joy to teach those sort of classes. Absolutely wonderful! And I still feel incredibly privileged that I was there and part of it. For a total of eleven years.

GUERARD

Wow!

HILLS

It's phenomenal. Of course, all of those kids did have temperaments. You know?

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And they had this-- Of course, nowadays I don't know how they would do it because they had incredible insecurity. You would have thought really just talking about it, that having got into Sadler's Wells/Royal Ballet School, they would have felt very secure that they were so good, that they were there.

GUERARD

Yes. But?

HILLS

But for the first two years, they were on probation.

GUERARD

Oh, so they really had to prove themselves.

HILLS

They had to prove themselves. And if, you know, it was our mistake that they were there or their mistake that they didn't work hard enough, at thirteen, they were asked to leave. After that, if they were kept on, they were kept on till they were sixteen because it didn't seem right to interrupt their education and send them to another school.

GUERARD

I'm sorry, I'm not quite clear. They were asked to leave at thirteen if they didn't meet the standards?

HILLS

Yes, if they hadn't passed their probation for two years.

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

Then after thirteen, they would still be told they weren't doing well enough, but they were allowed to stay at the school. It's as--

GUERARD

I understand.

HILLS

You see, as though thirteen was like going to intermediate high-- From intermediate high to high school. It didn't seem right to break that continuity of education and send them into something that they had not been brought up in. You know, they wouldn't know how to play hockey and all those sorts of things that other kids would be able to do.

GUERARD

But if they weren't cutting it, then they would--?

HILLS

They were warned. They were told, but they were allowed to stay. Some chose to stay, some left. But that was their option.

GUERARD

Oh. That would be really difficult to stay, knowing that you weren't quite making it, wouldn't it?

HILLS

Yes. I think when the parents were understanding of the child's lack of ability, they would take them away. If they had what would be known as a "ballet mother," who was perhaps a frustrated dancer herself, she might force the child to stay on.

GUERARD

Ooh!

HILLS

And we had some unhappy children as a result of that. But even then, the competition for getting into the company, itself, was so great. You know, if there were twenty-five dancers and maybe only five places one year, however good you are, you know, you may know all this time that you're not going to get into one of the royal companies.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

Very, very tough. But they, you know, they were survivors. They wanted it. The usual question everybody asks was, always is, "But you gave up so much for your career, so young." And what people really don't understand is that you don't feel you're giving up anything. Your one desire is to be a ballerina or a male principal, if you're a boy. The worst thing would be to have to give up the dancing. That would be the deprivation, but it's very hard to make non-dancers understand that. They think, "But, you know, you didn't go out to play with friends. You didn't date. You didn't do this, you didn't do that, you didn't do the other." Didn't want to!

GUERARD

No, it's a real track. Real focus.

HILLS

Absolutely. Yes.

GUERARD

Attitude.

HILLS

Completely.

GUERARD

What would really be difficult, though, is when, for those who are on the edge--

HILLS

To make that transition. Yes.

GUERARD

To want to be the dancer and then to not be able to have that life.

HILLS

That's right. The Royal Academy of Dancing and another school called the Arts Educational School in England actually did something to fill that gap, which was wonderful . They opened teachers' training courses where these people who'd been well-trained--and not just from The Royal, but from other schools in the country--and were not quite the right shape for performance. You know, at the age of twelve they suddenly blew up, grew up, got broad hips, broad shoulders. And when they were seventeen, they were able to go, again, by audition. They had to audition and take written examinations in school subjects. They were accepted, if good enough, into The Royal Academy of Dancing Teachers' Training Course or into the Arts Educational Teachers' Training Course. And that training then continued on, on how to teach. And those are still in operation and still excellent . And they learn anatomy, they learn music. They actually go to a school of medicine to study anatomy. It's not just somebody who goes there. They go and look at the cadavers and that sort of thing. And they learn how to design costumes and how to make them.

GUERARD

How wonderful!

HILLS

They take examinations in history of dance and they learn French and all those good things that a good teacher should be able to do. And when I was-- It was

actually before I went to Turkey that that had started. I was asked to go and live in the boarding house of the student teachers of The Royal Academy as somebody who was a role model . I was already teaching and doing it, but I was their age. And so--

GUERARD

I keep forgetting you're so much younger than everybody else! [laughter]

HILLS

Because I started when I was sixteen and they were seventeen, you know, but I think I was about eighteen when they asked me if I would be willing to have a private room. Not one of the dorms there, but just to show them, you know, how I got-- Just by living it, how I got my clothing prepared for class each day and how I prepared my classes and all those sort of things, so that I was in amongst them, writing some syllabus up and those sort of things. And I suppose it was quite a good idea.

GUERARD

Sure!

HILLS

For them. And it was fine for me, because I didn't have to pay rent. [laughter] It was a good thing. So, again, I was rubbing some of me off onto other people who later became teachers and examiners for The Royal Academy.

GUERARD

That's great.

HILLS

It was nice. And a very cheap way of living. And it was within walking distance of The Royal Ballet School, so I didn't even have bus fare [laughs] because I was very badly paid, as everybody is in dance. It was great.

GUERARD

And you were very young to be completely on your own.

HILLS

Oh, I'd been on my own for so long, it didn't worry me in the slightest. I suppose my parents [Ida Cockshott Hampson and Ellis Hampson] must have been very broad-minded or trusting or-- I cannot-- I really, still, I can't understand how they let me. Still, they did, and I survived.

GUERARD

They must have known you.

HILLS

Yeah, must have. Anyway, I've gone back a year or two there, so I must go forward again.

GUERARD

Well, you were having your first child.

HILLS

Oh, yes, but that was later. That was in 195-- She wasn't born till 1957. So, about 1954, when we were starting working on this syllabus for The Royal Academy, Ninette de Valois was saying, you know, "All our students to the school travel such vast distances, we really should have a boarding school so that we can get children from other parts of the country, not just those who were in travelling distance of London, because we're missing a lot of talent." And I wasn't part of it, but the executive committee or whoever they were--a lot of rich people with famous names--started looking around for premises for a boarding school which had places for dormitories, classrooms and ballet studios, because they wanted to take the young ones away from seniors, to separate the two. And in 19-- I don't know exactly when they found it, but-- I can't remember. It was probably late 1954. They found, in the middle of a park in Richmond, which is-- I think I mentioned this. I've said this on the tape already. This is repetition, no?

GUERARD

No.

HILLS

They found a house where Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret had grown up during the war [World War II], called White Lodge, in Richmond

Park. Now, parks in this country tend to be small, but if you can picture a park which is very much bigger than Central Park in New York with a very, very, large, elegant mansion in the middle of it, that mansion is called White Lodge. Richmond Park is in lovely park lands with its own grounds around it. And somehow or other, and I've no idea how, they found enough money to buy this house.

GUERARD

Wow!

HILLS

Which had a ballroom in it big enough for a studio. It had a swimming pool which was big enough to be closed over and made into another studio--not kept as a swimming pool--and other big rooms, and rooms for dormitories and rooms for school rooms and big park lands around it. It needed a lot of repairing because it had been left without being looked after for a long time. And it also needed altering; floors putting down, barres putting in. But they bought it and arranged that in September, 1955, it would be open, which was fine, except that it wasn't ready in 1955. It was ready enough to be slept in, but not for classes to be held in. So what they had to do was to bus the children from Richmond back to London, daily, and--

GUERARD

So they slept there and then went to London to take their--?

HILLS

They slept there and went to London on the bus. But by then, they had too many senior students, because they'd increased the size of the senior school, to accommodate all of them into the building we had had. So they had to rent the building next door which, fortunately, had great big studios in it. It had been the School for Psychic Research. And it was a wonderful old building with fantastic mahogany staircases and a beautiful building and two big studios in it, with floors that were marginally springy enough to dance on.

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

And they got some barres hastily put 'round them and they rented that for a year. And had to build a canvas-covered passageway between the two buildings so the kids wouldn't get wet as they went from one building to the other. [laughter] It was very, very makeshift. And that was the time when I was appointed senior ballet mistress.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And so, I was responsible for arranging where they would hang their hats and coats up and where they-- Who would be in which class and all that sort of thing, as well. And at this time-- How old was I in '55? I don't know. Twenty-something.

GUERARD

Right. Twenty- two?

HILLS

No, older than that. '55 and my birthday--

GUERARD

Oh, '55. You were twenty-seven?

HILLS

Twenty-seven. That's right. Twenty-seven, with this enormous responsibility of having them in one place and sleeping in another and goodness only knows what. But it all worked out. It was fine. But it was for a year before the building was ready. And in September, 1956, then we started having school and lessons in Richmond Park, which was great, except that I had to commute, because I was still teaching in the senior school as well as senior ballet mistress at the junior school. I had to commute between London and Richmond Park.

GUERARD

And teach in both--?

HILLS

And teach in both places and I didn't drive. And the only way to get into Richmond Park was to take a bus to the outside of the park, telephone to White Lodge and have them send the school bus to pick you up. So I was-- I spent a lot of time standing in bitter cold waiting for buses to take me to and from. And I was pregnant by then. And feeling sick. [laughs] Utterly miserable. Wishing I hadn't got pregnant at that moment. [laughter] But surviving, nevertheless. And in December of 1956, I thought, "This is enough. With three months more to go of pregnancy, I must take leave." And I took what was going to be six months leave of absence. I was due to go back-- Well, it would have been more than six months, because six months took it to the end of the school year. Then there were summer holidays, so I would have gone back in September of 1957, my daughter [Sarah Hills Larson] having been born somewhat late, at the end of March of '57. And actually, when the time came, sort of the end of July, I thought, "I can't do that." I cannot give my child over to somebody else to bring up because it meant leaving the house at half past seven in the morning and not getting back till about seven o'clock at night. And I realized that it wasn't going to be on for me. I couldn't do it, so I told them that I was going to stop.

GUERARD

Oh. That must have been a really difficult decision.

HILLS

It was a difficult decision, but I just found that I adored being a mom, you know, and--

GUERARD

Yes, yes.

HILLS

So for three years, I did nothing.

GUERARD

Hm. Well, you didn't do nothing. [laughs]

HILLS

Well, I didn't do-- I meant dancing wise, I didn't do anything. [laughs] Didn't even do an exercise. Didn't do a plié, nothing. And enjoyed bringing up Sarah and trying to have another child and having a miscarriage and then finally having Amanda [Hills Podany] three years later.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

She was born in June of 1960. And Sarah was then three and had a lot of friends from pre-school and so forth. And the moms were saying, "You know, we want to send our children to learn dancing. Where shall we send them?"

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And, I thought, "This is a bit silly. Why don't I teach these three-year-olds?" So I rented a hall in the little town where we lived.

GUERARD

Which was what?

HILLS

It was a town called Shortlands, which is about a twenty- five-minute train journey out south of London.

GUERARD

Oh, so you were already commuting just to get to the first school in London and then you were having to commute out to White Lodge?

HILLS

Yes. Then commuting to Richmond, which was even further.

GUERARD

Oh, yes!

HILLS

I mean, it was just-- It was terrible. All at rush hours, of course. So--

GUERARD

So you decided to start a ballet school for little children!

HILLS

Yes, I did. Yes. And, first of all, just had the one class, you know, of three-year-olds. And I had about thirty of them.

GUERARD

Now, you had never taught little little ones like that before, had you?

HILLS

Not since-- When I was a student, myself, I used to assist my teacher in teaching her little ones' class. As a ten, eleven, twelve-year-old, I would go in and hold their hands and teach the ones who couldn't get it, how to do a polka or a skip or whatever it was. But, of course, I didn't have those children to support me. So I was teaching my thirty children by myself and with a friend, who was a pianist, whose little girl was in the class, who had never played for a class at all, but she was absolutely fabulous. And she still-- I don't know if she does it now, since she's older. But she went on playing the classes after I'd quit and come to the United States. She went on playing for classes for years. She just was wonderful. Just had exactly the right idea of what to play for little ones. I was just so fortunate that she happened to live on the same street, you know. And we just walked down together and I taught the class. And, of course, as years went on, my three-year-olds grew bigger and got better and more advanced and we didn't do recitals. We just did classes. And I went on renting this-- It was a church hall, for all those years. And then-- I'm going to say this. Are we near the end of the tape or are we okay?

GUERARD

No, no, we're fine.

HILLS

In the second--no, the baby level--class, I'd had a very nice girl called Rowena Seaton-Brown, and her family left and they sold their house to a mixed-race family. The father was Black and the mother was White. And they brought their little girl to my class. And, of course, I accepted her. She was the only-- One doesn't say African-American in England. You said Black, you know. And now they call them-- I think it's Jamaican, African-Jamaican or something, in England. Something like that, to be politically correct and right and all those sort of things. But she was a Black little girl and my entire class left.

GUERARD

No!

HILLS

Every single one of them, because I had accepted a Black child.

GUERARD

Oh, my God.

HILLS

The other classes stayed but I was left, out of thirty children, with one. And I was not going to be upset by this. All the others had paid-- In England, you pay for the whole semester. You don't pay by the class. And I thought, "Well, if they chose not to come, I've got their money. I'm not going to refund it. I'm going to teach this one child." And I did, for the whole semester.

GUERARD

Oh, good for you.

HILLS

I was not going to be, you know, put off by this. But the church refused to rent me the studio after that.

GUERARD

Oh, wow!

HILLS

This is a church?! I mean, I was just so completely taken aback by this whole attitude.

GUERARD

But --

HILLS

Because one half-Black family had moved into the neighborhood.

GUERARD

This is astounding.

HILLS

Isn't it?

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

I mean, it sounds so bizarre. And, you know, after that, I quit. I couldn't go on there.

GUERARD

So, it was the mothers of these children, who were playing with your children, who pulled them out of the school because--?

HILLS

Yes, yes. The pianist went on coming because she thought it was absolutely dreadful, too, fortunately. And she went on going to the church. We didn't go to the church, but she did. And she went on going, but she felt very upset about the whole thing. In fact, in the year before this happened, we had, in fact, moved from a rather gorgeous apartment and bought a house. And we bought the house further out of London still at a place called-- A tiny village called Knockholt. And so, I'd been-- I'd learned to drive in the meantime. I had been driving in and so I then decided, "Okay, well, I won't go on there. I won't try and get another place in Shortlands. I'll start over again in our own village,

in Knockholt." And rented not a church hall but a village hall, there, and immediately got a big school going there.

GUERARD

Great.

HILLS

And I also was then invited to teach at day schools, private day schools, in the neighborhood. And so, two or three afternoons a week, I would drive to-- The town was in the neighborhood and [I would] teach at private schools. And that was very lucrative. That was really great because that brought in a lot of money.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And somewhere along the line, in 1964, I had another child--my son, Julian [Hills]--and he came, very fortunately, right at the end of June. So I was able to just take the summer vacation off to have him, and didn't miss a beat.  
[laughter]

GUERARD

How convenient!

HILLS

I was teaching. He was born on Sunday night and I taught on the Saturday morning beforehand, and then sent everybody on their summer vacation and came back in September.

GUERARD

Without your tummy.

HILLS

Without my tummy. Very fortunately, with all three, I didn't put on any weight and got my figure back immediately. So, it was no sign. But, I pooped in the meantime, or popped in the meantime. [laughter] And I did, with my son,

have a lovely woman who lived across the street from us to look after him when I was teaching.

GUERARD

Were these racial attitudes carried out in the new village?

HILLS

No, there weren't any Blacks there for it to be-- It was just this first arrival of this mixed-race family, which obviously threw the whole town into haywire. I mean, I absolutely could not understand it, and cannot to this day, that there could be that degree of intolerance in a church group.

GUERARD

Yes. Especially in a church group.

HILLS

Yes. Absolutely unbelievable.

GUERARD

Do you think there was more tolerance in London because it was a bigger-- The city, or--?

HILLS

It was the only time I ever came across overt intolerance ever in my life. Because, as you know, England didn't have slavery, didn't have segregation, anywhere, ever. From, through the whole of my life. So it was just so bizarre. It was-- I just couldn't understand it and cannot to this day. England, I've always felt, is completely tolerant of everybody. Even the-- They're tolerant of the Irish, who let bombs off all over the place. You know, you don't take it out on the Irish who are not setting off the bombs.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

So I just couldn't understand it. I suppose there may have been two people who set a seed of some sort of dissension or--I really don't know, but I was glad to be out of it. It was horrible.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And, there were-- In the times where I went to the private schools, there were quite a lot of mixed-race or different-race children of all sorts. And I didn't see any bad vibes about them at all. So I think I might have been in the middle of a bad situation without knowing it.

GUERARD

Well, good for you for standing your ground.

HILLS

Mm! Absolutely. Until the ground was taken from underneath me, and then I couldn't. But I would have gone on teaching that-- Oh, she was so sweet! She was called Sarah Gebedemah. I remember her so well. She was absolutely charming. Delightful family. I met her father in the train one day, coming back from London, just by chance, and chatted to him all the way home. We didn't mention the situation at all. [laughs] He was a very nice man. So that was quite a milestone, because I started my school over again, completely. You know, I lost all the ten-, twelve-year-olds that I'd had. Began with little ones again and built up. So, it was nice. And it was a delightful village. And it had, you know, the village school that my children went to and they all came over for a class all together one afternoon a week as part of their curriculum, to village hall. And, oh I must tell you, I had the most wonderful experience. It just makes some things in life fantastic. There was a baby who'd been born and had meningitis when he was tiny and was completely deaf afterwards. And when he was three, his mother said, "You know, I'd love him to come to your dancing class. I think he'll be able to follow." And, of course, he never said anything, and he followed and managed very nicely. The mothers used to sit and watch the class because their children were so little. And, one day Jonathan-- His mother had put his little truck up on the mantle shelf, toy truck,

and he walked over to it- -and in England a truck, in those days, was called a lorry--and said, "lorry."

GUERARD

Just like that?

HILLS

First word he'd ever spoken.

GUERARD

Oh, my gosh!

HILLS

I mean, we were all in tears.

GUERARD

Oh, yes.

HILLS

It was absolutely incredible that he'd had some hearing coming back and nobody had known. And he knew he wanted that toy off that mantle shelf where he couldn't reach it and the only way he could get it was by saying this word. It didn't come out as clearly as that, but, I mean, oh, it was just wonderful!

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

The mother was in tears. All the other mothers were in tears. I was in tears. Just so exciting. Great.

GUERARD

We're coming toward the end of the tape.

HILLS

Okay, that sounds a good moment to stop this one, then.

GUERARD

Yes, but I wonder--maybe you could talk about this on the next time--if his ability to express himself had something to do with the dance?

HILLS

Who knows? I just don't know. One would love to think that he got something through the music or the rhythms or--

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

We'll never know, but it was wonderful.

GUERARD

Feeling of freedom or feeling of--?

HILLS

Yes. Maybe the freedom of the space, even. That he could hear echoes in there that he couldn't hear in smaller spaces. I don't know. But oh, it was wonderful. He was just the same age as my son, and he was in the class, too. He doesn't remember it, but I do, of course.

GUERARD

Oh, that's great.

### **1.8. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side Two (April 11, 1997)**

GUERARD

So, Margaret, you were talking about taking your summer vacation to have Julian [Hills].

HILLS

To have Julian. [laughs] Before that, in fact, a woman who had her own dancing school in Sevenoaks, which is the nearest town to Knockholt, had asked me if I would run the school for her as well as my own school while she

had the baby. I think she was having a bad pregnancy or something, and I agreed to do that. That was in a hall in Sevenoaks. And some of the children there, three of them, were daughters of the Sackville-Wests. Their aunt was Vita Sackville-West, who is a very famous author. And they lived in an incredible mansion in Sevenoaks called Knole House, which is historically very famous. Henry VIII lived there, and so it was rather fun to have the Sackville-West children in my classes. [laughter] Just a little snob value. [laughter] They were nice kids. Not talented, but very nice and I did that for a year while she was having her baby. And taught in Sevenoaks and another town called Tonbridge, which was further away, while Julian was being--after he was--born, and looked after by his delightful nanny from across the street. It was nice for him because he had two older sisters, and Mrs. Dayman, the lady who looked after him, had three older boys. And so Julian had some role models of boys. And I will jump years ahead at this moment because one of Mrs. Dayman's sons lives in Los Angeles and when Mrs. Dayman comes to visit him, Julian gets to see his former nanny whom he always called Mummy Dayman.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And we see Andy and Andy has a little son the same age as Julian's daughter. So, you know, it's a very small world, really.

GUERARD

Yes. Well, it's sort of like--

HILLS

It gets these surprises.

GUERARD

Like when children have cousins who are always there and help bringing them up or--?

HILLS

That's right. Yes. And Julian had these boys, which was great for him.

GUERARD

I bet!

HILLS

Yeah. His older sisters--You know, it's not terribly good for boys to be youngest and have one much older sister and one--They were very close, the two girls. They were sweet to Julian. They never fought or anything like that, any of them. But, he-- It gave him an identity to aspire for [laughter], which was good. My own school went on. We did do recital things at that school. Being a village, you know, when they put on little shows in the village, I was asked could my dancers take part in these little shows. You know, it was like Topanga [Canyon] is here; a lot of community effort going on of one sort or another. My husband would produce amateur plays there and we put on a Christmas show of various sorts, you know. So my dancers appeared in those, which was great fun. But, all this took quite a-- Earlier, we were talking together, not on the tape, about a change of perspective in my teaching, and it was a very different perspective--

GUERARD

Yes, completely different.

HILLS

Of teaching little children in a very, very amateur environment. There was no professional there, you know. I did have one child who went to The Royal Ballet School. She was talented. But, it was very different. And, to go back even further, when I stopped teaching at The, (then) Royal Ballet School-- And I have to go back on that because we didn't do the Royal Charter either, did we?

GUERARD

No.

HILLS

No. I have to go back to that in a minute, too. I had been famous, you know, really, in the dance world, and had to such an extent-- And it sounds so awful, but one tried not to meet fans, ballet fans. You tried to not get involved with

people who were crazy about the ballet because they'd ask you questions that were so silly, you couldn't answer them, you know. And suddenly, when I went to walk my daughter to, you know, the baby clinic and all that sort of thing, I had to try and learn how to approach people, which is something I'd never had to do before. I'd always had people who wanted to know me and I had to do a really sort of change of character to talk to people before they spoke to me.

GUERARD

Ah!

HILLS

You know, to ask about their children. And, it sounds so awful to have to say this, but it was quite a while before I learned how to do it. I must have seemed very stand-offish and nasty until I learned the technique of getting to know people. I did it by inviting people home to tea and, you know, that sort of thing, and it was a real learning process for me. Strange.

GUERARD

It sounds very much like ballerinas and ballet dancers were looked upon like Hollywood movie stars.

HILLS

Exactly the same. Exactly the same. And you tried to avoid the general public. And then suddenly, there I was, one of the general public. It was really odd. But, you know, I did it. It was okay. I sorted it out. And then, the next thing came when I was starting to teach the tinys to, again--

GUERARD

I'm glad you mention that because I don't think people in the United States realize how being a ballerina really is being a superstar, in England.

HILLS

No, I don't-- Well, I don't-- They do, because they understand that [Mikhail] Baryshnikov and [Natalia] Makarova are superstars. You know, the names that are famous here, where the other names were equally famous there. And even though I wasn't a ballerina, as a teacher, I was famous because of where

I taught. And because everybody was learning my syllabus at The Royal Academy, wherever I went, you know, because I'd done it, again, I was looked up to rather than-- And this all at age twenty-eight. It seems so odd now, all those years ago. So much has happened since. We should just go back to that Royal Charter, when Sadler's Wells became The Royal Ballet School.

GUERARD

I didn't want to interrupt your, the train of--

HILLS

I know.

GUERARD

Of schools, because I think it's really an-- It was an interesting transition. On the one hand, you were very lucky to have been able to incorporate having children with dance, which you had done all your life, because so many women have to completely end their careers when they have children.

HILLS

They do.

GUERARD

On the other hand, you were teaching in a whole different way--

HILLS

Entirely different.

GUERARD

Than you had been before.

HILLS

Yes. And feeling, in those days, a little guilty about it because in those days, women did not go out to work. I didn't know any other mother who went to work in any way. Women stayed at home once they'd children and did not go out to work. And there were articles in the paper about, you know, the ten women who were actually going to work, you know, in London, after they'd had children. And, this was bad and you shouldn't do it and it was terribly bad

for the children and so on and so on and so on. And I think guilt came in spades, you know, but I knew that I was quite objectionable in the three years when I wasn't doing anything. I was very moody and, you know, longing to be doing-- Although I had chosen it. It was my own fault. I'd chosen not to go back. I really got so fed up with just being at home.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

With nobody to talk to about dance or not to talk to about anything except my husband who was, of course, out at work all day. And came home tired and didn't really want to know anything about anything but just don't talk to me about work and I don't want to know about yours, you know. [laughs] No, he wasn't like that, but you long to be somebody other than a mother.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

You long to find out who you still are inside and there's no way of finding out.

GUERARD

Absolutely!

HILLS

None. You're a mother morning, noon, and night. And I must have really liked it because I wouldn't have had two more kids, otherwise. [laughter]

GUERARD

So true.

HILLS

One is ambivalent, in many respects, about this.

GUERARD

Right. Well, you also had a long-lasting love affair with dance.

HILLS

I did, and did get back to it in this small way of teaching the children and it was rewarding. I've always somehow managed to find what I was doing was the best thing in the world. [laughter] And enjoyed it a lot. Because children are absolutely sweet.

GUERARD

Yes, they are.

HILLS

They're just wonderful.

GUERARD

And they love to learn.

HILLS

They do.

GUERARD

They are so responsive.

HILLS

And they love movement and to be allowed to move in big spaces. To be required to move in big spaces. [laughter] It's quite surprising because most schoolrooms are small and, you know, they don't have a lot of space to dash around in when they're little, and they long to. It was great. And my school continued very well and made enough money for me to have a bank account separate from my husband's, which is always nice.

GUERARD

Oh, yes.

HILLS

The worst thing in the world is to say, "Dear, can I have some money to buy you a birthday present?" You know. [laughs]

GUERARD

I know. [laughs]

HILLS

So, that was pleasant and to buy my own cars and things like that, which I enjoyed. I finally decided to learn to drive when I was pregnant with my middle daughter, Amanda, and my husband parked his car by the station when he went to work. He didn't drive all the way. And I walked past that car four times one day, parked near the station, as I was going shopping and that sort of thing. And I thought, "This is absolutely crazy. The car is sitting there. If I had it, I could drive here and there." So as soon as Amanda was born, I took driving lessons and learned to drive and bought myself a car and was then mobile for the rest of my life [laughter], and not confined to buses and trains and things.

GUERARD

Good.

HILLS

But a lot of people in England don't drive because the transportation system is so good. You don't need to. Like New York. You don't need to drive in New York and you don't need to drive anywhere in England, really. There's always transportation.

GUERARD

Well, you were a jump start ahead when you came here and you already knew how to drive.

HILLS

Ah, but on the other side of the road! [laughter] That took a little getting used to. But, yes, it would have been much harder to learn to drive here, I think, if I hadn't driven there first.

GUERARD

Well, Margaret, let's backtrack a little bit because, as you said, the Royal Charter was a very important event.

HILLS

It was an enormously important event.

GUERARD

And this happened just about a year before you moved out of London?

HILLS

Yes. Well, before I left what was then The Royal Ballet School, and I don't quite, you know, I was nothing to do with getting the Royal Charter. I didn't even know we were up for it, applied for it, or whatever you do to get it. I have no idea. But in the summer of 1956, the director of the school was called Arnold Haskell, who has written a lot of books about ballet. He was the director. [He] asked me if I would meet with some men from America who were planning something called the Lincoln Center [for the Performing Arts] .

GUERARD

Oh.

HILLS

And we were going to have lunch in the back of the Royal Box at [The Royal Opera House] Covent Garden and then we were going to take them to the senior school to look at the floors and the level and the height of the barres and then we were going to take them to White Lodge to look at the facilities there, for dance. And so I thought, "Okay, what can I wear?" [laughter] And she [Arnold Haskell's secretary, Paulette Nixon] [Margaret Graham Hills added The above bracketed section during her review of the transcript.] said, you know, "Probably a hat would be a good idea. "Now, I've never worn hats. I just don't-- I look terrible in hats. And I thought, "What can I do?" And I bought a tiny, tiny, little piece of velvet with wire around the edge that just sat on top of my head [Guerard laughs] so that nobody could really tell it was a hat at all, but it was, ostensibly, a hat. And I went to Covent Garden and was taken up into the-- Through the royal entrance, there's a special entrance to the Royal Box from the street. You don't go through the main foyer or anything. And [I was taken] up into these royal quarters, where we had the most sumptuous lunch on gorgeous plates. And I don't remember the names of two of the men, but one of them was one of the Rockefellers.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

But I don't know which one! [laughter] But one of them. And Arnold Haskell and these three men and just me were talking about the Lincoln Center plans and all this sort of stuff. And way over my head. I mean, I'd no idea what the Lincoln Center was planned to be, going to be, or anything about it. I didn't even know it was in New York, you know. And then we drove in a huge, absolutely huge, chauffeur-driven Daimler car, like the sort the queen has. And we went around and finally we took them to White Lodge, where we had tea, and then I was driven back to the station in this huge Daimler. And it was during the lunch that Arnold Haskell told these men, in absolute strictest confidence, that the ballet school was going to be given the Royal Charter. And so, I was one of the very first people to know that we were going to become The Royal Ballet and not-- It wasn't just the school. It was the company, as well. They were going to be known as The Royal Ballet from a few weeks after that.

GUERARD

That's how you learned about it?

HILLS

That's how I learned about it. In front of these Americans.

GUERARD

Wow.

HILLS

It was a very, very important milestone. But since then, of course, like I'm doing here, where the transition comes, you talk about Sadler's Wells Ballet before that and Royal Ballet afterwards. And from then on, we were, in the minds of people in the United States at any rate, confused, totally and utterly and completely, with The Royal Academy of Dancing. And when anyone opens one's mouth to talk about the royal anything you have to differentiate and try and make people understand that The Royal Ballet and The Royal Ballet School are one entity and The Royal Academy of Dancing is another, completely and utterly, separate unit. And it's hard to get that message across, that they are

different because people assume that if you're from The Royal Ballet, you're automatically going to teach The Royal Academy of Dancing method. And no, you're not. It's different. But even people I've said this to many, many times over and different ways of putting it, they still don't really understand. And I don't know how else to say it. You know, I've run out of descriptions of the difference so I just hope that it doesn't matter. I don't know if I've made it clear on the tape in any way or not.

GUERARD

Well, to me you have.

HILLS

Well, I hope it comes across, but it is a natural, perfectly natural confusion.

GUERARD

Mm hmm. We Americans aren't used to so many different things called royal.

HILLS

No, of course not! No! There's The Royal Academy which is the art place, which has nothing to do with The Royal Academy of Dancing. It's The Royal Academy of Art. Anything that has a Royal Charter gets the word royal in front of it and a coat of arms. But there's so many-- The Royal Shakespeare Company has nothing to do with The Royal Academy or The Royal Ballet, you know.

GUERARD

Can you explain what getting a Royal Charter means for a company or an organization?

HILLS

It's really just like getting a presidential medal .

GUERARD

Mm hmm. It's the blessing of the--?

HILLS

It's the blessing. It's the acknowledgement that you are an institution of repute. Other things get allowed to use the Royal Seal. If the queen buys Seagram's gin, they are allowed to put the Royal Seal on their bottles. If she buys anything, they can apply to be allowed to use the Royal Seal. They're not called Royal Seagram's. That's different.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

But just to be allowed to use the Royal Crest on your product means that you are really quite something in English eyes or in United Kingdom eyes, so it matters a lot there. It doesn't matter much anywhere else.

GUERARD

Well, it still tells the rest of the world that it's an institution of--

HILLS

It sounds good. [laughs]

GUERARD

Repute.

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

Were there any special performances or anything like that?

HILLS

No.

GUERARD

Built around the Royal Charter?

HILLS

No. I don't think so. Not that I remember, anyway. No, I really don't think so. It was just, you know, everything suddenly appeared with a coat of arms and a Royal Seal on it. [laughter] And I actually just got a magazine on Wednesday. The Royal Academy of Dancing puts out a quarterly magazine and mine arrived on Wednesday. And in the picture, there was the fact that they have just been given a new Royal Seal. I don't know why. I haven't read it yet. But there was the picture of the proclamation with the new Royal Seal at the bottom of it. So what they've done to get a different one, or-- I have yet to read. I don't know. [Guerard laughs] You can obviously get a second royal something, which I don't know anything about, either. But just obviously, they were very proud of it because it was there on the page.

GUERARD

Yes! Yes. The Royal Royal Academy. [laughs]

HILLS

Yes. The twice blessed. [laughter] But there wasn't much, apart from-- We just felt good. It was a real feel-good factor.

GUERARD

Yes. Well, it really was an honor.

HILLS

Yes. And a great cause of confusion. [laughter]

GUERARD

Well--

HILLS

So from now on, we call-- I shall not refer to Sadler's Wells. I shall refer to Royal Ballet, and--

GUERARD

Okay.

HILLS

Here we go.

GUERARD

And we'll try to keep it straight.

HILLS

[laughs] So back to my own school, which was just going on, going on. You know, both my daughters learned from me and my son, also. He wouldn't like to admit it now, but he did. And they were-- They danced quite nicely, but were not particularly talented and my one dread was that one of them would want to be a ballerina. And I suppose I gave them no clue as to whether they were good or bad in my usual sort of way I was brought up not to let people know. But had they shown any desire, I would have squashed it.

GUERARD

Really?!

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

Why?

HILLS

Because they were not going to be good enough.

GUERARD

Oh. You could see that?

HILLS

I could see that. And they were brilliant at school and I wouldn't have wanted them to waste other talents in order to pursue something that was not going to happen. So, they were-- They just needed to use their brains and artistic talents in another field, other than dance, though they enjoyed it for a while. Sarah went on until she was fifteen, and Amanda stopped when she was about twelve, I think. Julian switched to tap when we came to the United States since he wasn't going to do ballet. [laughter] Then he did that for about a year and then stopped and hasn't done a thing since. And strangely, none of

the three of them is interested in any sort of physical activity, whatsoever. They really aren't. I think one member of the family doing it is quite enough for the entire family. [laughs]

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

It's not surprising, I suppose.

GUERARD

Well, there is a big difference between being interested in a physical activity and being interested in dance.

HILLS

I think so, yes.

GUERARD

I mean, for some people-- some people who dance-- it probably really is sort of a physical high, and that's important.

HILLS

Oh it is.

GUERARD

But that's not it.

HILLS

No. But the physical high, I think, people get from jogging and doing that sort of thing, as well. What are they? The endorphins in the brain. And when one is teaching, one is aware that you have to get dancers to that level, otherwise the class is not a success.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

You just have to push people and to get them enjoying what they're doing to get that trigger. And then they feel that it's been worthwhile. And this is true of professionals and the rankest beginner. You have to get them to that place where that brain thing clicks in. And then you've got them hooked. I mean, they say it 's a morphine replacement and it is as addictive. It's what addicts people to drugs, addicts people to exercise. It's exactly the same thing.

GUERARD

I believe that.

HILLS

Totally. And if you want-- If commercially, if you want them to go on coming, you have to get them addicted. Which is appalling, but it's a good addiction and not a bad addiction, so it's okay. [laughs]

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

Even with children, you-- It's not quite the same, but to them, it's a joy. It's not that same addiction, but the love of movement to music is definitely something that they really just do love, the majority.

GUERARD

They do, and they're not quite as inhibited as adults about it, either.

HILLS

No, no. They-- Except for my granddaughter, who could care less. [laughs] She's seven and she did dance for one season when she was six, but she much, much prefers baseball. That's fine. She went to a baseball match in Mayor [Richard J.] Riordan's box last week, because her, quote, "boyfriend," his mother is one of the vice-mayors of L.A. I can't remember her last name, but they went to Mayor Riordan's box and oh, wasn't Emily happy! [laughs] It was wonderful.

GUERARD

That's great!

HILLS

So I guess I have one family member who is keen on exercise of one sort or another. [laughter]

GUERARD

One healthy one.

HILLS

Yes! [laughs]

GUERARD

Well, Margaret are we getting close to the time in your life where you made the big move?

HILLS

Yes, we are. 19-- It started in 1969 and my husband saw an advertisement in the London paper for a position at Mattel [Inc.] Toys in California. And we giggled about it a bit, you know, and he said, "Well, it would be fun to go, wouldn't it?" And I said, "Sure, it'd be fun to go. Why don't you apply?" So he did! And some months later-- The kids were screaming in the garden. There was an awful noise going on. I mean, they were having fun and the telephone rang and my husband picked it up and he said-- Put his hand over it and he said, "Tell them to be quiet. It's a call from California." And I took them all out in the garden, right at the far end, and he was interviewed on the telephone by Mattel, from California, for an hour and a half. An hour and a half telephone conversation! And I kept thinking, "Is he still at it? What's going on?" And he came off the phone and he said, "Well, it sounds as though I may have got that job in California. They're going to send somebody over to interview me and talk to me." So one of the personnel from Mattel came over and interviewed Brian in London and this was still 1969; the end of 1969. And he came home and he said, "Well, I've got the job if we can get a visa to go." Now we were going to be immigrants and to come into the United States legally is an enormously long and difficult process. And we went to-- I forget where, but some, probably the embassy, American Embassy in London, and they said, "Oh, you don't have a chance of going."

GUERARD

Even with having a job lined up?

HILLS

No. Not a chance. He said, "Only firms who cannot find anybody in the United States to fulfill a position can employ somebody from overseas." He said, "If you were a doctor, you would expect to wait twenty-five years. There isn't the remotest chance, unless the firm that you're going to can prove to us that they have done a huge search in the United States and can't find anybody." Well, in fact, they had done a big, big search, because Brian's a designer of a specific sort and they wanted his specific design ability.

GUERARD

What does he specifically design?

HILLS

At that time, he had specifically designed electrical appliances, and had some theatrical background. And they wanted those two things.

GUERARD

You had mentioned that he designed some of the--

HILLS

We didn't know they wanted the theatrical bit at all. We had no idea. They really wanted-- What they said to him, they wanted somebody to design parts of Barbie dolls. The recording equipment that made the voices work and all that sort of stuff.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

But they convinced the American government that only Brian could do it. And so they said, "Okay, well, we want your birth certificates, your marriage certificates. We need to know every address you've ever lived in your lives." The two of us! "The address where your parents were born and their occupations, the addresses where your grandparents were born and their occupations."

GUERARD

Oh, my gosh!

HILLS

Now that took a lot of time to get.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And we were now into mid-1970 and doing all of this and trying to get it together. Anyway, to cut a long, long, long story short, we finally got Brian's papers together to come in June, 1971 and he'd spent a whole day at the American Embassy getting all the paperwork done and getting the green card. We hadn't got ours yet. And after-- He came in June, and between June and September, when we got ours, I spent one entire day with three children at the American Embassy getting everything done and getting our green cards and all that sort of stuff, before we were finally allowed to come. And so, you can imagine how we feel about people being accepted. Oh well, they came in illegally, but, you know, they're nice people. We're not going to throw them out. It cost us a fortune to get all the information. We went to Somerset, this place in-- You know how the Mormon Temple here does family tree stuff. There's a place in London called Somerset House, and we spent an entire day there researching where our parents and grandparents were from.

GUERARD

You couldn't get the information from your parents?

HILLS

No! They didn't know. They didn't know where their parents had been born.

GUERARD

Oh.

HILLS

They had no idea. It turned out that my grand-- One of my grandmothers had been born in Ireland. We had no idea. [laughter] And we drove around trying to find addresses where we'd lived. You know, we'd drive to the place and find out where it was and then write the address down. And, you know, I'd been to Turkey and all that sort of stuff and Brian had lived in Canada and he-- To get to Canada, he had to become an immigrant to Canada and he had never relinquished that, and that was an obstacle of some sort. So we had to get over all this stuff. It was just dreadful. But, you know, we wanted to come! And the job was for a year.

GUERARD

Only for one year?!

HILLS

One year. And we thought, "Well, Brian will go for three months and if he likes it, then we'd like to move house when we come back anyway, so we'll sell the house." And we invented the garage sale in England. [Guerard laughs] Nobody had ever had a garage sale in England till we invented it to sell all our furniture that wasn't coming. Mattel was going to pay for a lot of it to be brought out, but there's, you know, a whole lot of stuff you don't want to take. And so, we invented the garage sale. [Guerard laughs] That was very funny because the children and I had gone up to London to buy some new china and crystal to bring to the United States and when we got back, there was a line outside our house of people wanting to buy our stuff. And Sarah, when we got home, had a temperature of 102 from her smallpox injection, which we'd had to have to come here. And she wanted to go to bed and people were buying beds from underneath her.

GUERARD

Oh, my gosh!

HILLS

And we kept moving her from bed to bed. [laughter] It was terrible.

GUERARD

So, had you advertised?

HILLS

Yes, we put up a notice in the post office. You know, just a card saying we're moving and we would like to sell some of our stuff and we'll be there most afternoons from four o'clock till six. Everything had gone by six o'clock that afternoon that we weren't bringing with us.

GUERARD

Wow!

HILLS

So we slept, that night, on sleeping bags which we borrowed from the next door neighbor. It was-- We made a lot of money. It was great, but it was, surprisingly. [laughs] Anyway, Brian came and he enjoyed it and so he said, "Well, I've bought a house and you can come and we'll live in this house for a year." We said a year because we didn't know if Mattel would take him on afterwards, and we didn't know if we wanted to stay. Even with all this trouble we'd gone to get there, we didn't know if we'd like California or not. There was no way to tell. And, of course, after we'd been here about six months, we had no intention of going back. [laughs]

GUERARD

Yeah!

HILLS

And they did keep him on. What they actually had wanted him for was that, as well as to design, literally, to design things for Barbies, they had planned to open theme parks. Mattel were going to open theme parks of their own and they wanted him to do something to do with that.

GUERARD

Oh, I see.

HILLS

And, in fact, the whole thing fell through. They were going to be with [Ringling Brothers] Barnum and Bailey Circus and theme parks with Barnum and Bailey, and the whole thing collapsed. But Brian had invented quite a lot of things for

the Barbies and then finally it was too confining to be just dealing with Barbies, so he opened his own business as a designer.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And, we stayed. He did that for the rest of the time. First of all, he worked for one or two other people and then opened his own business. And for the first six months we were here--or roughly six months--I didn't do anything because I didn't dare drive on the wrong side of the road. But we got some friends down the street-- Cris Hurley she was called. She said, "Look, you buy a car and I'll come and sit in with you and drive with you." And she helped me enormously by telling me, "Just keep your passenger in the ditch and then you're on the correct side of the road." That worked and I could do it after that. And we found that Stanley Holden, whom I'd known all my life because he'd been in The Royal Ballet too, in a different part. We hadn't ever been close because he'd been in different parts of the organization from me, though we had started at the school around about the same time.

GUERARD

Well, he was in the [Sadler's Wells] Theater Ballet?

HILLS

He was in the Theatre Ballet and then he was in the forces and then he was in the main company long after I was nothing to do with that company but was teaching in the school. So we really hadn't known each other well. We'd known of each other. We'd met and I taught his wife [Stella Farrance Waller], whom he'd divorced before he came to the United States. And at one time, my children had gone to his wife's school for a little bit. It was in the transition time when Shortlands had closed and before I'd opened Knockholt. They'd gone to her school. And my pianist played for her, also. But, you know, again, I hadn't met him. I'd met his wife. When I found he had the school here, I contacted him and said, "You know, if ever you want anybody to substitute teach I'd be happy to fill in." And, that's how I got to know him and started teaching just part-time with him. And my husband had driven around the local

neighborhood in Rolling Hills before we got here and he said, "I drove past one ballet school that had the right sort of noises coming out of it. I drove past several [where] the noises coming out were not authentic, but this one was okay." And it was run by a woman called Alice LaMar and I wrote to her and I said, you know, I'd like to take her out for coffee or something just to introduce myself. And she needed somebody to teach for her, which was just a short distance from home, where I could walk to start with and drive to later, and so I started teaching for her in the evenings, several evenings a week. And, felt very pleased when I made enough money to pay for the groceries for the first time, here. [laughs]

GUERARD

Yes!

HILLS

And the children started school and were-- Sarah was one year ahead of her age group in high school, Amanda was two years ahead of her age group in intermediate high, and Julian, age seven, was just in his normal age group. And they seemed to-- They appeared to fit in very well. Since, they've told me that they had a hell of a time to start with, you know, feeling very strange. But Amanda was very happy at her intermediate school because she'd been there one day when she was asked to go to the principal's office and he said, "We have another little English girl who's coming today, who's new, and we thought the two of you would like to go together." And when Amanda walked into the room where she was, they embraced. They'd been at the same school in England.

GUERARD

Oh, how wonderful!

HILLS

She was called Louise Rose and her parents had spent six months in Canada in between and we didn't know they lived down the street. They went to the same school.

GUERARD

Amazing!

HILLS

Absolutely incredible. And, of course, they were--The Roses only stayed for about two years and then they went back to England, but it was nice for the two little girls to be together for that period. Again, such--So many strange coincidences in the world.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

He was to do with theater lighting. He worked for one of the big theater lighting companies. I can't remember what it was called now. And I think he was something to do with putting the lighting into the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. I think. I may have got it wrong, but I think so. And then when that was over, they went back to England.

GUERARD

So both your husband and he came out here kind of because of their theatrical backgrounds.

HILLS

Sort of, though I think Brian's was minimal, really, on the theatrical background. It was mainly the designer stuff. He designed a lot of-- He worked for a big design electrical appliance company in England and Mattel saw something in it that they needed, anyway. But it wasn't a particularly pleasant place to work, I think. It had been. At the time when we came, it had been very much burgeoning. I mean, became a very big firm and then shortly afterwards it went-- Lost popularity a little bit. I think the Barbies were overdone or something, and the Hot Wheels, and they were laying people off. Brian wasn't laid off, but was made to feel very uncomfortable because he was-- As the newcomer, he was still there, and some of the people who had been there a long time were not. And it wasn't a very particularly happy situation and he was glad to be out of it, I think. [pause] The foreigner and all that stuff, too, you know. [laughs]

GUERARD

Yes. Yes. Well, so then your children gradually became accustomed to American life and--?

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

You were--

HILLS

And I was starting to teach and enjoying that again. It was really nice because after a short time, Stanley Holden said, "You know, I'd like to have you not just substituting when somebody's sick, but doing it regularly." And within a very short time, I was teaching for Alice LaMar in Palos Verdes in the evening. I was teaching [at] Stanley [Holden Dance Center] on the other evenings, the children's classes. And, I was teaching a 9:30 ballet class in the morning. I was ballet mistress to the Steven Peck Jazz Company, mid-morning. I was teaching for Irena Kosmovska, on Wilshire Boulevard, early afternoon. And suddenly found I was very much a full-time employee of a lot of different schools. Some evenings, I taught for Tania Lichine [Lichine Ballet School] . Who else? I taught for George Zoritch [Classical Ballet Studio], Roland Duprée [Duprée Dance Academy] at a different time. That's a little later. All over the place.

GUERARD

Were you teaching various levels and ages?

HILLS

Yes, from fairly young children--children about ten onwards--at Palos Verdes and at Stanley Holden's, intermediate ballet at 9:30 at Holden's, experienced and quite talented jazz dancers at Steven Peck's, company class for the Los Angeles-- You know, Johnny [John] Clifford's Los Angeles Ballet company.

GUERARD

Uh-huh. Right.

HILLS

And the senior students at Irena Kosmovska's. I was actually part of the audition process for the Los Angeles Ballet, Johnny Clifford's, when it first started.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

I didn't really like his choreography. They were very much Balanchine technique and I didn't really fit in and I left there, by my own volition, fairly soon. It wasn't what I really wanted to be doing. I didn't want to teach that way, yet trying to teach my way to them, although it was very similar to the way Stanley Williams teaches in New York for [George] Balanchine, people here were not accepting of that other style. Balanchine's own dancers did both quite happily, but the Balanchine dancers in Los Angeles didn't really want to do other than Balanchine. So there was a degree of tension there, which I didn't think was worth putting up with and trying to rise above or anything and I didn't really need to be doing it, so I stopped.

GUERARD

So, that was an instance where it was very- -it was a very professional level, but there was a conflict because of--?

HILLS

Yes, that's right.

GUERARD

The type of technique?

HILLS

Yes, that's right. And then I started teaching pro [fessional] class at Stanley's, alternate days with Stanley. And, of course that, in those days, the professional class was very professional.

GUERARD

And was this very much like going back to the Sadler's Wells?

HILLS

Yes it was, because then, in those days, Stanley had a very structured class-level of people. Although anybody could come to the beginning levels, until their names were put up on the board, they weren't allowed to progress to the next level. There was a definite grading system, in a way. And the same with the children. They weren't moved up just because their friend happened to move up. Unless they were good enough, they weren't moved up. And everybody had to wear uniform. Even the pro class had to wear black tunics, black leotards and tights and were not allowed to sort of cover themselves in stuff. Things have changed a great deal in twenty- six years. [laughs] One awful day some years after we opened, one lady came and bought five classes. And before people had really noticed what was happening, she thought that would take her to pro class.

GUERARD

Oh, she did? [laughs]

HILLS

She took level one, one day, level two, level three, level four and level five. She took-- Day five she took pro class, you know. And then Stanley sort of looked at her and said, "What are you doing here?" [laughter] And she never came back. She thought five classes and five grades was one a day. [Guerard laughs] But now people could almost do that and get away with it, unfortunately, because you no longer can tell people that they're not good enough to do anything.

GUERARD

Yes, but--

HILLS

You can make a gentle suggestion nowadays that they might hurt themselves and you really don't want to be responsible for them hurting themselves and you would prefer that they took a lower level, but you can't make them. And if they chose to go on coming, you have to put up with it, which is, I find, quite appalling.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

Nobody must ever fail or be shown to fail at doing anything. And it's one of the reasons, I think, why ballet is less popular than it was, because everybody thinks they can do it, too, and it's really quite easy stuff. And they no longer have any regard for the ability of the talented person to do it properly. I'm not speaking about everybody but in general, anybody can do it. If I wish hard enough and pay a little bit, I can do it, too. And it's very sad.

GUERARD

It's not that way, though.

HILLS

No. Twenty-six years, things have changed incredibly.

GUERARD

Hm.

HILLS

On the other hand, by sticking out for some time to levels and standards, the improvement, in general, over the United States, of teaching, has improved enormously. When we first opened at Stanley's, the level of people coming, thinking they were good, was absolutely appalling. They would come in points shoes with the bows done up in front, go up on their toes and stay up there through full plies and never coming down. I mean, they thought that was just fine. I've had some serious thoughts because ballet, in the United States, was principally taught by beautiful dancers from Russia. This was between the wars and shortly after the Second World War. And the Russians are now beginning to come back again into the United States--

### **1.9. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side One (April 25, 1997)**

GUERARD

Margaret, end of last session, I'm afraid I let the tape run out, for which I apologize, but you had said then that rather than pick up your thought

immediately on a new tape, you preferred to gather your thoughts on that topic and bring it to this session.

HILLS

Mm hmm.

GUERARD

To review briefly, you were talking about the atmosphere and the level of professionalism in schools--in dance studios--and how currently, it's difficult to give criticism to dancers on a professional level. I believe your concern was the lack of structure in terms of having the dancers achieve a certain mastery of each level before going on?

HILLS

That's right.

GUERARD

And you were beginning to discuss the influence of the Russian ballet teachers in America.

HILLS

Yes. Really, I felt when I first came, since I was going 'round to quite a lot of schools guest teaching, that I was getting quite a good overview of the results of the teaching over the past few years before we arrived in 1971, and my feeling was that the students had been taught quite well when they were talented and very much, apparently, ignored if they were not talented. And I felt very sorry that people who should have enjoyed more facility than they showed were not really dancing to their full potential, even though not obviously going to be professionals. And I started to wonder why this would be and going from my own-- Finding that I had to change my method of teaching when I opened my own school and had every sort of body to teach, I wondered whether the predominance of the Russian school in the United States had anything to do with the fact that the Russian dancers--professional dancers--who'd opened schools in the United States, had relied only on their own teaching; the way they had been taught, because, like The Royal Ballet, they had been selected out of masses and masses of children because they were talented bodies to be trained. And when you have a really talented body,

you, to some extent, at ten years old, you do need to force some things, like turnout--as long as it's taught from the right place, from the top of the legs and not from the feet--and the extension of the legs, because you want to get those established before growth finishes. So, you really want to have the high legs and the good turnout well established before they're thirteen. And if you've been trained only in that way, as those Russians had, it takes a good deal of thought and anatomical knowledge to be able to adapt that teaching for people who start late and for those who don't have the physical ability ever to get their legs high and ever to achieve a really perfect turnout. Because what I saw was that the talented people danced beautifully and the non-talented people danced abysmally. The difference was incredible and yet in hearing them talk, you would find they had been trained at the same school.

GUERARD

Do you think it was completely different than the Sadler's Wells [School] 's attitude of treating everybody in the same way, or do you think--?

HILLS

No, I think it was that they-- What the Russians appeared not to have done was to adapt their method of teaching to suit the non-professional dancer.

GUERARD

Ah! Uh-huh.

HILLS

They treated everybody in the same way. I assume, because I didn't see it. I'm only assuming from what I saw as a result of the training they'd had that everybody turned their feet out at 180 degrees, whereas their knees might be facing straight forward. And the hips were distorted beyond belief to get the legs up high. And one can only assume that they'd been yelled at, "Get your legs up, turn your feet out. Get your legs up, turn your feet out," with no description of how they should physically try to do that without hurting themselves.

GUERARD

They weren't taught about placement of--?

HILLS

No, not at all.

GUERARD

The hips or where the impetus came from?

HILLS

Not at all. No. And, of course, if you've got a very loose-limbed child who is going to be very good, it will survive. Their bodies will get the legs up without distortion because they can. And so, those people looked great. And many of them were second generation from the original teachers and maybe had been taught by another lot of teachers in between the original émigrés. And that, I don't know. And any fault then would be doubly wrong.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

Because they would have even less appreciation of what was wrong or what was right. And it took some time after Stanley Holden and I were teaching here in our way of structuring the classes for the shape of the people in there and our demands in that way. Also, we never put children with adults, in the same class, and it was obvious that many of the people who came to us to start with had been taught children and adults mixed up.

GUERARD

Oh! That's an interesting difference.

HILLS

Yes. And, of course, you teach children very differently than the way you teach adult beginners. Financially, I can see why it probably had to happen. If you have a small school that you're paying rent and you're paying a pianist, and you don't have enough people to make up two classes, one for adults and one for children, you do, financially, have to put them together, but it's really to the detriment of both.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And I think that may be another cause of some of the bad technique- -really bad technique- -that we saw. It took a long time to break some of that down and to make people realize that they had a lot of reworking to do. And reworking is harder than starting correctly from scratch, because the brain has made those connections that this is how it ought to feel and so you have to actually break down the brain's brain-nerve-muscle connections and build them up again, which is really hard. A lot of people took a couple of classes from us and didn't come back. We did try and be as nice as we could about it, you know. And others who really wanted to improve and if they stuck it out for a few weeks found that they did actually improve. Their balance was better. They could land from a jump with security instead of falling into the next step. Then they began to understand that what we were saying was right and that they could get better.

GUERARD

Do you suppose then that maybe in Russia if you weren't that person with a natural turnout you just weren't a dancer?

HILLS

No, you didn't do it.

GUERARD

So they didn't have to adapt there and then when they came to the United States, they just didn't change their, adapt their teaching methods.

HILLS

That's right. I'm sure that's right. I'm sure there are schools in Russia all over the place, but as far as I know, I've never heard of an examining body of teachers and children in Russia for the non-professional, whereas we've been talking before about The Royal Academy of Dancing--and there was also the Cecchetti Society--who did have a syllabus for the non-professional child. And so, Stanley and I, as children, had been in schools that did The Royal Academy examinations at that time, and so we had been in classes ourselves with the

talented and the non-talented and our teachers had known how to teach us that way.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

We'd got the other, the total immersion, when we went to Sadler's Wells. But until then, we came from other schools. So, we did have to have, perhaps, a better grounding for teaching non-professional dancers. On the other hand, the people who had been really badly trained, I thought, had no idea that they weren't any good. They had no idea they weren't professional material because when, say, the Harkness Ballet or some of the other ballet companies had auditions in Los Angeles, all those people went to the auditions. And were devastated when they weren't accepted. People who were in their late thirties and early- forties went for the audition and really didn't understand why they didn't get in. They were completely unaware of their limitations, which is really an eye-opener because you saw the people in class and you thought they were doing it for pleasure. In fact, they were doing it-- They hoped to become professionals. So--

GUERARD

Well, was there a difference between the way that ballet dancers were taught back East?

HILLS

I don't know because I never was back East. I really couldn't tell you. I'm only talking about Los Angeles. It's all I know. As I said before, I taught at Tania Lichine's studio [Lichine Ballet School], for instance, and there, I think the standard was considerably better than some of the people from other schools whose names I don't know, who turned up at Stanley Holden's [Stanley Holden Dance Center]. She seemed to have a very-- What's the word I'm after? Very professional attitude towards all of the dancers . She knew enough about how to teach the non-professional.

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

And they were very rewarding to teach. Very nice people, very well-trained. And she's still doing it. You know, she has a great reputation, still. But some of the others, that came from who knows where, were not very good. I taught, also, near my home, at a school in Palos Verdes, which is now closed down, run by a woman called Alice LaMar. And she sent-- She was very good. She knew that when her dancers got to a certain stage, they needed to go into a bigger environment. And she would send her more talented youngsters, when they were about fourteen or fifteen, to Stanley Holden's, which meant a sacrifice for her because she lost the money of those students. And that showed great integrity to do that.

GUERARD

Mm hmm. Yes.

HILLS

I didn't all together agree with the way she taught children. She did push them. And some of the non- talented ones, I felt, were not given enough care. So when they came to my class, I tried to give them the care that Alice didn't give. But with the talented ones, she got very good results. They were excellent, and a lot of her dancers did go on to professional standard, which was very nice. That was the studio that my husband [Brian Hills] had driven by when he came here and we hadn't arrived yet. When we came he said, "There was one studio I drove by with the right noises coming out."

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And that was Alice LaMar's studio, where I finished up doing some teaching.

GUERARD

The reason that I thought to ask you about if there was a difference between the dancers back East is because I know that more recently, when professional dancers from other companies back East are in town, they tend to take their classes at your-- at Stanley Holden's studio.

HILLS

They do. Yes. Well, I think that came about, to some extent-- We had, originally, a lot of very talented teenagers and there was a time when there were twelve Stanley Holden dancers in ABT [American Ballet Theatre].

GUERARD

There were?!

HILLS

Yes. So--

GUERARD

Wow!

HILLS

So we had quite a good reputation for getting people into ABT. And because of that, they tended to come-- When they came back to L.A. to dance, they would come to their "home studio," so to speak, and bring other company members with them. Added to that, Anthony Dowell was guest artist with ABT for a long time; a former student of mine, of course, from The Royal [Ballet School]. And so, when he came to L.A., he came to take class with us. And Georgina Parkinson, who is ballet mistress of ABT, was one of my original Royal Ballet School students.

GUERARD

Oh, was she?

HILLS

So, the give and take between the ten or eight ABT and Holden's is very strong. Not many New York City Ballet people come, or came, because the Balanchine style is so different. I...

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

Peter Martins used to come because he was, when he first came to this country, entirely Danish-trained, which was not Balanchine at all. But he stopped coming after a while as he got more and more indoctrinated with the Balanchine technique.

GUERARD

Oh, interesting!

HILLS

And now he's director of New York City Ballet since [George] Balanchine died.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

But there is now, I think, in New York City Ballet, a difference from what Balanchine insisted on. There is a Danish influence in there, which mitigates some of the excesses of Balanchine technique, which I don't like, but you know, he needed to have that technique to do his choreography.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

Just like Martha Graham technique. You need for Martha Graham, modern dance.

GUERARD

Oh, of course!

HILLS

You need Horton technique for [Lester] Horton choreography. So you need Balanchine technique for Balanchine choreography. Whereas I feel, at any rate, with The Royal Ballet technique and The Royal Academy technique, you can get into ballet companies almost anywhere in the world, apart from a Balanchine company, because that technique gives you the ability to do almost everything everybody else, but Balanchine, does. So you don't have to

go and learn Canadian--National Ballet of Canada--technique or you don't have to learn Stuttgart technique or Australian Ballet technique or South African Ballet technique because it's all the same. Balanchine is the one sore thumb which is entirely different.

GUERARD

The one that's quite different, huh?

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

Well, I know that [Mikhail] Baryshnikov took classes there for years. He may still. I don't know.

HILLS

Yes, when he came back when he was doing his show in Los Angeles a couple of weeks ago, he still came back to take class.

GUERARD

So, I'm not sure what that says about his training and how it fits into--

HILLS

Well, it fits in because the Russian training and the English training is not that different. It's Balanchine. It's not Russian technique. Balanchine is Balanchine. He took his Russian training and altered it to fit the choreography he wanted to do. So, he is a sport. Just something, you know, quite, quite different and very special. There's no doubt about that. If you like what he does, and his dancers do it beautifully, but it's not Russian technique or anything else. It's Balanchine technique. And that, I think one has to understand that it is quite different from Russian.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

He brainwashed. And that is right because what I was saying about the brain-nerve-muscle reflexes, he had to change-- With each dancer that he took, he had to change those reflexes to do his technique.

GUERARD

Oh. So this is on a much different scale than having to learn the RAD [The Royal Academy of Dancing] technique as opposed to The Royal Ballet.

HILLS

Oh, absolutely!

GUERARD

We're talking about having to switch your whole center of balance and everything.

HILLS

Absolutely. And speed of movement. You see, he liked dancers--and they were beautiful--with very narrow bone physique, very short bodies, extremely long legs, small heads. Now, if you've got very long legs and a very short body and are required to do very, very fast movement, you have to cut some corners. And so, the Balanchine class work technique is very fast and you don't put your heels down in the same way. You are allowed to bend your knees in different places from other techniques. And it's necessary, if you're going to put Balanchine technique onto the Balanchine-shaped dancer. You can't do it. You can't do the speed of his technique with our training. You have to change. You have to be willing to make that vast change. So, when a child's parents chose a school, they are really choosing what future it's going to have in the professional world, if it's going to go that far. So if you start off in Balanchine technique, you're going to stick with it.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

It is possible to start with the other technique, if you're really adaptable, and go to the Balanchine technique. It's virtually impossible to go from Balanchine

to the other. From my experience, I dare say, they'll prove to me that there are dancers who've done that, but it's very hard.

GUERARD

Mm hmm. I think that's a very good way of explaining that.

HILLS

I think I should continue on this theme, although it's leaping ahead some years. Once the Berlin Wall came down and Communism ceased to be in Russia and many, many more Russian dancers started to come to this country again, I have a great fear--and it's beginning to show a little bit--that the Russians that are new to the United States now, are going to fall into exactly the same mess that their predecessors did.

GUERARD

Oh, really?

HILLS

Yeah. I've seen people now who've been trained by some Russians who've come over fairly recently, quite young ones, who are distorting their bodies just like the old ones used to do. And it's sad because I-- You know, "Russians are coming. Let's go to the Russians' classes and let's screw our feet 'round to 180 degrees and never mind what our hips do, you know. Margaret and Stanley are not here to tell us we're doing this wrong. And look, my leg will go up here behind my ears, but where's my placement and am I going to hurt myself? Is my body going to die, you know, before I do?"

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

And so, I sincerely hope it doesn't happen, but it seems to be tending that way and it worries me greatly. Particularly as Stanley and I are now older and one just hopes that there are students we've had who will carry on what we have tried to build up. But whether it will happen or not, I have no idea. I have a feeling that we're really coming to an end to one era and going into another.

GUERARD

Right. Well, I hope it's a healthy era.

HILLS

I hope it is, too.

GUERARD

Healthy for dancers and--

HILLS

Anyway, we'll get to that much later on, but I just feel that I needed to breach that gap and to show what I fear for the future. [tape recorder off]

GUERARD

Margaret, last time you gave us sort of a brief run-through of several different studios where you were teaching when you first came to the United States. I was thinking that when you were teaching in England, you were teaching for one ballet company and one ballet school [and] pretty much one--not pretty much, very much one-- sort of technique. And now that you're in the United States, you're teaching for several different studios and even for different kinds of dance companies; not all ballet.

HILLS

That's right!

GUERARD

You mentioned a jazz company.

HILLS

Yes. Mm hmm.

GUERARD

Would you like to talk a little bit more about this?

HILLS

Yes. Perhaps if I talked about my day, would perhaps be a good start. Traffic wasn't anything like it is now in Los Angeles in 1971, '72, '73. I would take my son [Julian Hills], who was seven, eight, nine, to school, and drop him off at about quarter of nine. And then I would drive to Stanley Holden's to teach at 9:30. That's a twenty-two mile drive, which you couldn't do in that time nowadays, but you could easily, then. And I would teach at Holden's from 9:30 to 11, an intermediate/advanced ballet class. And then I would leave and go over to the Steven Peck [Jazz Company] studio--this is a jazz dance company at his studio on Robertson, which is quite a short trip across--and start ballet class there at 11:30. They were very receptive to total, perfectly normal ballet technique, although they were completely died-in-the-wool jazz dancers and doing wonderful things with Steven Peck's choreography. He had a very cohesive jazz company and I was appointed his ballet mistress to his jazz company.

GUERARD

Oh, great!

HILLS

Very nice people. Some of them are still very well known. Dennon Rawles and his wife, Sayhber [Rawles] . They weren't married then. They were just teenagers and they've been teaching jazz in Los Angeles ever since and still are and have children of their own now, who are rising teenagers. I enjoyed being with them very much because they were fresher. Very open and chatty and fun. Steven Peck ruled them with a rod of iron and chose really weird names for them. They didn't use their own names. There was-- I never really knew their proper names. Sayhber, I don't know if that's her real name or not. She stuck with it. And Dennon, I think that's his real name. But there was one girl who was called Shiverie Puddingstone, which wasn't her name at all. [laughter] And you remember Edwin Milam, who was a pianist at Stanley Holden's. He married one of Steven Peck's dancers. And Steven Peck called her Sec Onay, from the fact that she kept on saying she'd only be a second before she did so- and-so. He called her Sec Onay. Her real name is Rebecca LaBranche.

GUERARD

Oh, my gosh!

HILLS

So, he had a very twisted sense of humor.

GUERARD

I'll say!

HILLS

But it didn't seem to worry them very much, fortunately. They survived the strange names and were really nice people and I enjoyed teaching them enormously. On Friday afternoons, I used to go over to his other studio in Fullerton and teach them over there, because they did performances. He had a theater on Harbor Boulevard in Fullerton and they had the class before the performance on Friday afternoon. So I used to go over there then, but the Robertson studio for the rest of the time. Just for one class. And I can't now remember if it was every day or just two or three times a week. I suspect it was two or three times a week. And then from there, I would go over to [Irena] Kosmovska's studio, which was on the corner of, I think, Wilshire and Robertson. It was upstairs. One of those big rooms which I imagine had been a ballroom or a the dance place in the '20s and '30s. It was a big upstairs room and some of the rooms on the corridors were owned or rented--I don't know which--by a school for children wanting to get into movies. You know, that sort of thing. And Kosmovska had a-- It was a lovely room. It had some pillars in the middle which were a bit of a nuisance, but it was a nice, nice dance space. I enjoyed being there. But she was one of the people who had been trained by Balanchine and so they were entirely Balanchine technique and I didn't stay very long. Johnny [John] Clifford was just about to start his first effort at a Los Angeles Ballet and--

GUERARD

About what year was this?

HILLS

I can't-- You know, it's awfully hard to remember. It might have been 1975, but I'm really not sure. Time goes away and you-- I don't have anything to differentiate the dates with. I could look it up. I have, obviously, some

programs and things at home. I could check it, but I don't really remember off hand. I can give you an addendum for all this later on [laughter] with dates and times and so forth.

GUERARD

Right. Just an approximation is fine.

HILLS

Yes. And I helped him with the auditions for the company, but I really didn't fit in. I was trying to make them do the things that I felt they should do and I hadn't appreciated, then, the difference between the Balanchine technique and mine. It was only when I'd been battling for a little while, I thought, "This is ridiculous. I'm in entirely the wrong place. I must stop." And so I said, you know, I'd appreciated being there, but didn't think anybody was gaining anything by my being there and I left. And no acrimony at all. It was just [that] I began to realize the differences.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

Then, that would be from what, shall we say, 2:00 till 3:30. And then I would drive back to Holden's to teach the teenage classes in the evenings from four-thirty to six. And then an adult advanced class from six to seven-thirty.

GUERARD

Now, somewhere in between there, your son has--?

HILLS

Come home from school.

HILLS

My husband, at that time, was working out of our home.

GUERARD

Oh, perfect.

HILLS

And so, he was there. He had-- As I told you, he came to work for Mattel, Inc. and had found that the project that they had been really employing him for was not going to follow through and so he decided to open his own design business and was, before he got premises, working out of our home. So he was home most of the time. And I also had a very, very sweet neighbor who was definitely at home all the time and whose little boy was a great buddy of my son. And so, I had an arrangement with her that if ever Brian was out, Julian would go to Cris Hurley's house and she would look after them. So, we had a nice arrangement because when they wanted to go on vacation, Willie [Hurley] would stay at our house, you know, because he had a lot of older brothers and sisters and he was the baby. So, it all worked out beautifully. And my two older daughter [s] -- Sarah [Hills Larson] had left home by 1973 and gone to Eugene--well, first to San Luis Obispo and then to Eugene--to become an architect. So she wasn't at home. But Amanda [Hills Podany] was still at school until [pause] 1976, she graduated. I think. Yes! The year of '76. Of course, yes. She was a 1976 centennial year-graduate, so she was home, and older.

GUERARD

I see. I didn't mean to interrupt your schedule.

HILLS

No, that's right--

GUERARD

I remembered that you had started--

HILLS

Had a little boy, yes. [laughter]

GUERARD

At school in the morning.

HILLS

Yes, and what happened to this poor little boy, right? There was one horrible occasion when they called me from the school to say that please would I come because Julian had fallen and broken both his arms. [Guerard gasps] He'd cracked his cheekbone the day before, riding a bicycle down the hill and the little boy next door--not Cris Hurley's son, but another little boy--had rolled a football out and Julian had fallen over the handlebars, having hit the football, and cracked his cheekbone on a rock. And had a great big black eye. You can't do anything about a cheekbone. It's cracked and it's still cracked. You know, you can't put a cast on a cheekbone. And he'd insisted on going to school the next day. Said he couldn't possibly not go because he had a test. And his eye was closed up so he had monocular vision and, silly little boy, decided that he would swing from the gutter over the open corridor; jumped up to reach the gutter and, of course, couldn't see. Had no binocular vision, so fell and broke both his arms. Had them both in a cast for six weeks. [laughs]

GUERARD

Oh, how horrible!

HILLS

Poor child. [laughs] It was absolutely awful. I had to cut all his shirts in half and velcro them down the shoulder and sleeve seam and put one half on and then the other half on and clip them together with velcro. [laughs]

GUERARD

Oh! Oh, so sad!

HILLS

Just ghastly, poor little boy! He survived. Ran for seventh-grade president or whatever he was--sixth grade, I think--and won. I mean, it was a sympathy vote for him at that time. [laughter]

GUERARD

He was a hero to have survived that.

HILLS

Absolutely, yes! [laughs] So, one does have minor catastrophes when you're at work, but we survived. It was all right. So, my day was quite long.

GUERARD

Yes!

HILLS

And partly, you know, Brian was setting up his own business and we didn't have much money. Sarah was at university and we were paying for her. It was fine while she was in San Luis Obispo. That was California. But when she decided that that training wasn't good enough for an architect--she needed to go to Eugene--that was out of state, so it was very expensive. But, I mean, I'm thrilled we did it. It was worth all the extra work one had to put in because she's done exceedingly well. But it was expensive. And knowing that Amanda was coming on soon, too, to go into school--

GUERARD

Yes!

HILLS

So, I really was working many hours of many days. I didn't do the teenage class at Holden's every day. I did Tuesday and Thursday. And Monday, Wednesday and Friday, I taught teenagers at the Alice LaMar studio near home. So, on those days, I was able to dash into the house and have a quick bite to eat before going up there. And then, of course, once that was over, it was a very short getting home. It was just a mile and a half away from our house, so that was nice. In those days, Stanley Holden's didn't have classes on Friday nights. He had found that nobody came on Friday nights. And we had no classes on Saturday morning.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

None of-- In those days, on Sunday, of course not. And I wanted to make some more money, so I said to him, you know, "Could we have class on Saturdays? You don't have to come in." He didn't want to. He was newly married and wanted some time at home with his new wife [Judy Holden] and stepdaughter [Mimi Keith] and he said, "Well, I don't think anybody will come [but] you

know, you can if you like." And so I taught Saturday mornings. Nobody else did. For many, or several years, I did a 9:30 class, advanced. I did professional class at eleven and a 12:30 class afterwards.

GUERARD

Great!

HILLS

Yeah, it was! It was good because, you know, I was making all that money which I needed desperately.

GUERARD

Well, and probably bringing in more interest to the studio.

HILLS

Yes. A lot of people-- It was about that time when people suddenly sort of thought that they could go to ballet classes after work and on the weekends. And we were helped because the fitness thing was taking root.

GUERARD

Uh-huh!

HILLS

And so, many more people who didn't really care for jogging down concrete streets and didn't want to be out in the sun and still wanted to exercise. And it was before the arrival of all the gymnasiums that there are now you know with all the machines. There were no machines. So, to dance was a good way of getting your exercise, enjoyably, and feeling good about yourself.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And so we were very fortunate that that happened all at the same time. I don't think it was a conscious thing on my part. I just-- I wanted some more money.

GUERARD

Uh-huh! [laughter] Very practical.

HILLS

And that just happened to be at the time when people wanted exercise, and so those Saturday morning classes were huge, which was very nice. We were also helped by the arrival of Baryshnikov from Russia, who elected to take class at Stanley Holden's. And there was one occasion when Baryshnikov was taking class and Stanley was teaching it that day and I can't remember the exact numbers, but I think there was something like seventy people in Studio One [Guerard laughs], to say they had been in class with Baryshnikov. And I had an intermediate class at the same time in Studio Two which is, as you know, not very big. And I had fifty- four [Guerard gasps] in that class, because they wanted to say they'd been in the same building with Baryshnikov.

GUERARD

Oh, my God!

HILLS

And there were people sitting on the sofas in the lobby in hysterics because they weren't allowed to go and watch Baryshnikov in class, because they weren't students. I mean, people came off the street when they saw him come into the building, with piles of ballet books, waiting for him to sign them.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And we wouldn't let them. You know, he came there to take his class. He didn't come there to be a performer in classes. This is one of the things about professionals in class. They don't want to be watched.

GUERARD

No.

HILLS

One of the rules which Stanley very sensibly put in when he opened was that you can only observe classes by the discretion of the teacher or the director. And there are still times when I won't have people watching because I know there are movie stars in class who have no wish to be seen. They're doing dance for pleasure. They're not particularly good, so why should they be viewed by strangers who just come to gawk?

GUERARD

Well, whatever their reason for taking the class, it's for personal improvement.

HILLS

Exactly. Exactly. And you don't want to have people putting their faces right in the door and saying, "Hey look, that's so and so." So, we've been very careful about that.

GUERARD

But how could you even breathe, let alone take a--?

HILLS

You couldn't.

GUERARD

Move, with seventy people in that room?

HILLS

You couldn't. You absolutely couldn't. It was-- One couldn't teach. It was just crowd management. You could give a class divided into, you know, several groups. At the barre everybody-- You couldn't set a port de bras forward and back, for instance, because nobody had room to bend. And everybody had to face out for the grand battement and all-- It was absolutely horrible.

GUERARD

Hm. Did you find a way to cut down on the numbers of people in the class?

HILLS

Well, when Baryshnikov wasn't there, then not so many people came. But, from the financial point of view, because he had been, even when he wasn't there, it did a tremendous amount to boost the reputation of the studio. And people-- Mothers sent their young children to it for the same reason; that if Baryshnikov was prepared to take class at that studio, it had to be good. And it was. And, it was right. He chose the right studio, in my opinion, to come to.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And the follow on was right. It helped us enormously, and I think we trained them well. And we still were strict, at that time, about-- particularly with the juniors--who was in which level. You couldn't just chose your own level.

GUERARD

So, you couldn't just switch levels in order to take class with Baryshnikov.

HILLS

No. No. There were seventy professional dancers in there. Because, you know, Los Angeles, at that time, had a lot of shows with dancers in [them]. It had a lot of television shows which were made here with dancers in [them].

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

A lot of movies that had dancers in [them]. It was right around the time of *Turning Point*, also. And the dancers in *Turning Point* used to come to Holden's for class. It was shot at Twentieth Century-Fox [Film Corporation studios], so it was only just down the street. So those dancers would come and take class, also. Leslie Browne was there and the boy [Phillip Saunders] who was in it. And also, Tom Skerritt. He won't mind me saying this because he was wonderful. He'd never danced a step in his life and he was supposed to be the ballet teacher in *Turning Point*. And he came to pre-beginning ballet classes for months and really, really tried. The trouble was that he had very short arms and quite a big head and he couldn't get his arms into a fifth position over his

head; you know, the crown of the arms over the head, in the fifth position. And they wouldn't meet. And I felt very sorry for him because he worked exceedingly hard to be able to do enough to look as though he was teaching a class. And everything was cut out of the movie. He was acting. He did the father thing and he did the administration in the school sort of part, but he never was shown teaching a class. And it was very sad because he'd worked so hard. He was a charming man. Very, very nice. And I would love him to have just some little bit that he did in that movie. It was very sad. So, he deserved more for that.

GUERARD

This brings to mind, too, were there professional dancers, then, in your professional-level class at Stanley Holden's who were not necessarily professional ballet dancers?

HILLS

Oh, yes! There were.

GUERARD

Because of the Hollywood influence or environment?

HILLS

Yes, absolutely. And provided that they were, you know, could get the combinations right, and knew enough, if they were professionals, that was okay. There were professional jazz dancers and the jazz dancers from Steven Peck's, on the days that I wasn't giving them a ballet class, would sometimes come and take pro class at Holden's. And, at that time, Stanley and I taught it alternate days. And so, you know, they would either take from him or me, as the case may be. And I really enjoyed teaching that professional-level class. It was very nice. That had to stop when I started teaching at UCLA in 1984, because I couldn't do it anymore. I was at UCLA much more time. And so, I stopped doing pro class then and I haven't taught it since, which is a regret of mine. I would have liked to have got it back again when I stopped at UCLA, but it didn't happen. One of the regrets of one's life. You know, there are a few, obviously. [laughs]

GUERARD

Yes. Well, you can't do everything. [laughs]

HILLS

No, you can't.

GUERARD

But you'd like to.

HILLS

Yes. One would. To go back to my sort of daily schedule, when I stopped teaching for Kosmovska, Roland Duprée studios [Duprée Dance Academy] asked me if I could teach a two o'clock class in the afternoon, there. And so, I filled that gap by teaching an advanced ballet class for Roland Dupree. And during his summer schools, I taught repertoire and things like that, which was great fun. Very different situation because at Stanley Holden's, at that time, we did have a jazz teacher. Patrick Adiarte taught jazz and your friend, Ellé Johnson, also taught other than ballet there.

GUERARD

It was Afro-Caribbean.

HILLS

Yes. She was a great lady. Very nice. I liked her very, very much. So, we had-- They were the sort of odd people with most of the people there being ballet, whereas at Steven Peck's and at Roland Dupree's, they were principally jazz dancers and I was the odd person who came in to teach ballet. So I had an empathy with the jazz teachers at Holden's, which I might otherwise not have had, because I know how odd they felt.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

To be the stranger in the midst, so to speak. And yet, I really enjoyed teaching the jazz dancers. The approach was different. They wanted fast movement and to get on with it and rather more jazzy music for class. And the pianists

were very good. They managed to find a compromise between the totally balletic sort of music and the more upbeat stuff for the jazz dancers.

GUERARD

So, that presented a whole new teaching challenge, didn't it?

HILLS

It did! Yes. Yes. One had to be a little careful not to over correct the tail sticking out of the back for a jazz dancer, you know. You couldn't make them look entirely balletic.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

Because they needed the other muscles for the jazz. Just as one has to approach somebody who's principally a singer slightly differently and ask them if their singing training has them breathing out through the ribs of the back or through the belly. As I understand it, there are two different methods of training for singing. And if you over straighten the spine or over pull in the abdomens, according to the singing training, you can be detrimental to the singing.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And so, if they're learning to dance as a secondary strain to their singing, you don't want to interfere and make them change their physique entirely. So one has to be a little careful when you go to correct somebody who's got developed muscles where you don't expect to see them. You want to find out why those muscles are like that. There was one girl who came and took the intermediate class with what looked like an enormous belly, and I went over to just touch it, to teach her how to pull it in, and found it was hard as a rock. This was a bulging belly of muscles. And I asked her, I said, you know, "What do you do to get those muscles so big that they stick out?" And she said, "Oh, I've got the president's medal for doing the most sit-ups."

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And she'd been doing them by building muscle in her abdomen to such an extent that she-- I mean, her body was distorted. It was very sad. She'd done whatever numbers it was to get the president's medal for sit-ups, but she should never been allowed to do them the way she had. It was very sad. I never was able to break that muscle down. Try as we would, it was there. I don't know whatever happened to her. If she had children later, it would have been horrendous I think, poor thing. And so, one just does have to be-- To watch; not just watch your teaching, but what the other part of people's lives are about.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And the jazz dancers were my first introduction into this. There will be others as we go on, as you'll see. But just not to overstress the relaxing of some of the muscles that they need for other things. But to keep the joys that they get from dance into the ballet, you know. Not to have them think, "Oh we've got to do this ballet because we're told to."

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

But to enjoy it just as much as their chosen field and one they were best at, which was the jazz. So, it was fun! I really enjoyed it. The Dupree jazz dancers were different from the Steven Peck jazz dancers. Their approach was different. I don't know enough about jazz to know how it was different, but the bodies were a different shape. They moved differently.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

It was rather fun. And I stuck with Dupree for two or three years, I think. And then, he was selling up his studio, and so I stopped.

GUERARD

Margaret, I'm sorry. We're coming almost to the end of this tape.

HILLS

Oh, okay.

GUERARD

So let's pick up right away at the next one.

HILLS

All right. Good!

#### **1.10. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side Two (April 25, 1997)**

GUERARD

Margaret, I'm struck with, now, not only realizing the difference in teaching technique and techniques that you're doing in the United States as compared to in England, but also with the joy that you bring to teaching these different-- Teaching people with different viewpoints. And I can see that you're really enjoying it.

HILLS

I love a challenge. That's the thing, I think. I suppose-- We talked about the luck I had all my life. I think the luck to be asked to do this sort of thing keeps life so alive. If one just went on teaching the same lot of pliés to the same lot of people every day, ad infinitum, [it] would be deadly.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

I think one needs to be challenged and to have to rethink your-- The things you have had as your creed, so to speak, and to see how you can change it without compromising your integrity.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And those are challenges which are fun. And I also found I got an enormous amount of pleasure in allowing people to find they could do things that they had no concept that they could do. And this was something that I found surprising to myself when I started teaching older beginners. I don't mean elderly, but I mean not children. After the movie *Turning Point* came out, a lot of people suddenly wanted to learn ballet who'd never done it or had done it as children and stopped once they started to grow, and now they were in their twenties and they wanted to start coming back and do it again. And I started teaching some of those people. And to see them blossom into almost different people, was wonderful! Some of them had been very bad at p . e . at school, you know, and they'd come and say, "Really, you know, I've got two left feet. I really don't think I'm going to be able to do this at all, but I just-- It looked so nice, I really want to try." And to have them prove to themselves and to find within themselves that they could do it and that they could get an enormous amount of pleasure in doing it, was incredibly rewarding. I didn't expect to find that. To find that I found it rewarding was a big surprise to me because I thought I would hate it, when I started it. You know, I looked at them and thought, "Oh, gosh! What am I going to do?" You know, "These people can never be any good." And then suddenly from them, I got this joy, and it was wonderful!

GUERARD

I guess there has to be a certain willingness on the part of the teacher to let go certain standards, even though you hold them to be important, in order for a creative kind of teaching to happen.

HILLS

Yes. I would argue with you a tiny little bit about let go standards because the basic kinesiological standards are maintained, or should be maintained.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

What one lets go, of course, is the degree of turnout, the degree of elasticity in the limbs because, of course, once the bones have finished growing, there's not a lot you can do about that elasticity. But within that concept, to keep the placement right. Certainly, you don't expect them to get their legs way, way up and that sort of thing. You can encourage them to get them as high as they can. But one doesn't want the standard to slip. One wants to keep the standard within the physical capability of the person. And that, I think, is just subtly different than the other phrase.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And one does have to assume that sometimes those people who have started late may ultimately teach other people .

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And that, one has always at the back of one's mind, to say, "Am I giving them enough grounding that they know what is right, even though they're not able to do it themselves?" One would prefer, of course, that they didn't teach. But they have paid for their lessons and they've gone on and done quite well. They know quite a lot. By the time they've gone from pre-beginning to an advanced class, they know a lot and there's nothing in this country to stop them putting up their shingle and opening a dance school. And so, one is always conscious that you have to make them very much aware of the principles of what they're doing.

GUERARD

Yes. You wanted to be responsible in case they would go on to teach somebody--?

HILLS

Exactly.

GUERARD

That they wouldn't be hurting them.

HILLS

If they opened a school and a talented body came to them, one wants to be sure that they wouldn't lose that talent, that they wouldn't mistrain it, and that they would bring out the right thing. And there is one person, and I don't know if one should mention names or not, but she's called Heather Benes, and she sometimes takes my class at Holden's, still. And she took my classes at UCLA. And I think her degree, I'm practically certain, is in kinesiology, not in dance. She has opened her school in-- Somewhere in the desert. I'm not quite sure where it is. And she has since brought her students to Holden's on odd occasions and they are exquisitely taught. She's not a great technician, herself. She does very well, but she's-- You know, she started late. She knows she started late, but her teaching is superb. She's got the kinesiology background, of course, which is a great asset. But she's brought in two boys who are beautiful and two or three girls who are excellent, talented. So there's a case where I'm happy that what ballet technique I've given her is being used to great advantage. She'll never be a performer herself, but that is very nice to see happen.

GUERARD

Yeah!

HILLS

And these rewards that you get from what your students have done is lovely. One of the teachers from-- She teaches Renaissance dance and Baroque dance at one of the universities, who takes class at Stanley's, Linda Tomko. She said to me one day, "Don't you get frustrated teaching non-professional people?"

She said, "What have you got to look forward to?" And I said, "Well, I have to think what I have to look back on." Because my students are now in places of great importance all over the world. And Sir Anthony Dowell is director of The Royal Ballet, Dame Merle Park is director of The Royal Ballet School, Georgina Parkinson is ballet mistress of American Ballet Theatre, Dame Antoinette Sibley is president of The Royal Academy of Dancing. All four of them, ex-students of mine. Ballerina Marcia Haydée was director of the Stuttgart Ballet after John Cranko, who was also a student of mine, died. He was a choreographer. So I have all those people, whom I was partially responsible for their training, in enormously prestigious positions in the world of ballet. And now I have other students who are, like Heather, teaching future dancers. So, really, what have I got to grumble about? [Guerard laughs] You know? It's exceedingly rewarding to have this feedback from the younger people. It's marvelous! You feel there has been purpose in your life, you know, which is a great position to be in.

GUERARD

Yes, it is.

HILLS

It happens, I think, to very few people. And I feel enormously honored that I've been able to do that. It's just fabulous.

GUERARD

What about the kinds of students that you had at Santa Monica College and at UCLA? Was that a different kind of atmosphere because of the fact that they were colleges?

HILLS

Yes. I should tell you my history of getting to UCLA, where I went in 1984. I had, for years, had people from UCLA coming to take my advanced class [at Stanley Holden Dance Center] and I'm afraid I'd had to tell them that they were not ready for my advanced class and had to go to a lower level. And they were very upset. They didn't like this. And, in my opinion- -and in this case, I am not going to mention any names. People can do some research if they want to, but--the level of training of ballet at UCLA was abysmal. The

placement was exceedingly bad. They twisted their hips all over the place and I had criticized it, openly. And one day, up on the board at Holden's was one of those letters they send out from universities saying they're doing a job search for, in this case, a ballet professor.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

At UCLA. And I knew that the dancing there was terrible and I didn't want to go. And so, I didn't even think of applying. Didn't cross my mind. And then one morning, I had a telephone call from UCLA saying why hadn't I applied? [Guerard laughs] And I said, "I don't want to come!" And they put the receiver down and then two days later, I had another telephone call from somebody else at UCLA saying, "We really would like you to come. We know you've criticized us and we feel that now [that] you're being given the chance to do something about it, you should take it."

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And so I said, "Okay. What do you want me to do?" And they said, "Well, what we'll do is to send some faculty members from UCLA to watch your class at Holden's." And on three separate occasions, three people came to watch class. And I knew why they were there, but some of the students didn't know why they were there and I found afterwards that some of those students had applied to the job for teaching at UCLA and thought these UCLA faculty were coming to watch them in class. And, in fact, they were coming to watch me teaching. So there was this strange atmosphere in class, which I didn't understand at the time. And after the third class, they all took me out to breakfast, all three of them, and said, "We are the search committee and we want you to come." And so then I went and saw the chair of the Department [of Dance], Carol Scothorn, and we discussed my salary and all that sort of thing. And, blow me, I was in. And I hadn't written a single thing on a piece of

paper, which people normally do to get a job in a university. I'd sent no resume, nothing.

GUERARD

Wow!

HILLS

Which was, I'm sure, not what they were supposed to have done. [laughs]

GUERARD

Did you feel differently, at that point about--?

HILLS

Well, I felt--

GUERARD

The prospect of teaching there?

HILLS

I felt here was another challenge that had really-- I mean they'd really thrown the glove down at me.

GUERARD

Yes!

HILLS

And I had felt bound to pick it up. It was not a full-time position. It was a forty-five-- A seventy-five percent-time of time position, which meant that I was called a visiting lecturer. And I taught all the ballet classes at UCLA. I was to teach the first two levels, the freshmen and sophomores, who had two classes a week every day for two years. [pause] No, I'm sorry. Twice a week for two years. And an intermediate class which was open to anybody in the university, not just the dance majors, which also met on two afternoons a week. And the advanced, which was also open to the entire university, three times a week. And that seemed, you know, okay, but I would have to drop some other things.

GUERARD

Yes! I was just going to say that.

HILLS

Alice LaMar, at Palos Verdes, dropped me because she had also applied for the job [laughter], which I didn't know about.

GUERARD

Ouch.

HILLS

So that was a real ouch. And it took a long time before she spoke to me again. And I had to drop the professional class at Holden's because most of the classes at UCLA were at 11:00 in the morning. So I didn't-- Oh, at least, 11:30. I got them to change the schedule slightly so that I didn't have to drop my 9:30 class; that I could go on with that. So, I started at UCLA at 11:30, so I had to dash from Holden's in half an hour and park and get going and then get into class, which I did.

GUERARD

[laughs] You're a dancer, You can do that.

HILLS

Yes, Of course! Used to quick changes and so on. So on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I would start at Holden's at 9:30 and take my half hour to get to UCLA and teach three classes there and finish at six. So that was a long day. And after a while, I persuaded them to change, and now I can't really remember which days we changed, but the intermediate class was put on another day so that I only did two classes after, on Tuesdays and Thursdays and two classes on Monday and Wednesday, and one, the advanced, on Friday. So, it was slightly less arduous, from my point of view. Because teaching at a university is different. You have to do more homework. You have to mark homework, also.

GUERARD

Oh, yeah! [laughs]

HILLS

And you were asking, originally, when I went into how I got there, what the difference was. And it was very different. It was as different as teaching the jazz dancers. But when I got there, I found that, with the faculty and with the students, ballet was a dirty word. They really loathed it. They had loathed the ballet training they had had up to that point. And I was in a difficult position because in replacing the former teacher, at the moment of replacing her with me, they had found that if she was given another year to teach there, she would get a pension. And if she didn't, she would not get a pension. So there was a year, the first year I was there, where she was teaching an advanced class in one room at the same time that I was teaching an advanced class in another studio. She had very, very few people going to her. Just a few whom she-- who'd loved her when she was there and went on and finished while she was there. But, you know, she would go up one staircase and I would go up another because there was no way the two of us could meet.

GUERARD

So there was terrible tension.

HILLS

Very strong tension. And my main aim, feeling this tension when I first got there, and the loathing for ballet, which was over the entire department-- It's a modern dance department, exclusively. And ballet was something they were told they had to do in order to improve their modern dance technique. Which was right. It was a good premise to be going from. But it didn't make them like it, because they'd all gone into modern dance because they didn't want to do ballet.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And my main aim was to make them like it, to start with.

GUERARD

Good goal! [laughter]

HILLS

Yes. It was not so difficult with the freshmen because they hadn't been indoctrinated with the hate yet. The next-- The other layers were harder. Particularly the sophomores, who'd had one year of being told to hate it, you know. They were tough, very tough. The intermediate class, which was open, and the advanced class which was open to the entire university, including the dance department, though it wasn't required of them, some of them chose to do it. First year, very few of the dance department chose to do it. By the second year, more and more were coming in because word had got around that this wasn't such a bad thing, after all. So the first year was very difficult. I had, in the intermediate and advanced class, however, some really good dancers. Not from the dance department, but from the rest of the university. And they were what, now? Twenty-year-olds, I suppose, if they were in their junior year, who had been well-trained as kids in various schools from all over the country, not just L.A., because UCLA gets students from all over, who had grown to be slightly the wrong shape to become professional dancers. And their parents had obviously said to them, "You've got to stop this and go to university." So I had some really good dancers, particularly in the advanced class, which I did by audition. I auditioned the-- Because we were limited in space for the number we could take in. And normally, I would have sixty students arrive for a class that was closed at twenty-five. So I had a big selection to do, you know. Some were very upset when I weeded them out. You know, I said, "This class is too big." They'd say, "Well, we were first on the list." And I'd have to explain to them that because of the level of the class, they could stay if they wanted to, but they were probably not going to get a very good grade. And, therefore, their GPA would go down and it was up to them to decide. But I would strongly advise them not to take it. Because it said "Permission of instructor," so I was covered a little bit, you know, in the catalog. And most-- I think, without exception, they took themselves out if I'd advised them. So, those classes were really quite fun.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And they became more difficult the more dance department people came into them because they had definite priority. They were not-- I was not able to advise them out. They had to take it if they chose to take it. And as time went on, there were fewer people from the rest of the university and more from the dance department. And they weren't as good because they had all started late.

GUERARD

Oh, I see.

HILLS

And they didn't audition for the dance department. If you applied to come into the dance department at UCLA, on your application, if you were accepted by UCLA, you were accepted by the dance department automatically. There was no audition process. And so there were some very strange-shaped people. Really strange. That was very difficult because there were people who had not the remotest chance of being even a modern dancer, let alone a ballet dancer.

GUERARD

They were accepted because of their academic--?

HILLS

GPA. Yes.

GUERARD

Background had nothing to do with dance.

HILLS

That's right. And what we got-- Later on, we did audition them, though they've stopped auditioning again, now. But we did get auditions later, after I'd been there about three or four years. But at that time, a lot of the [pause] oh, intelligent but Beverly Hills 9027 whatever it is types would elect to go into dance because they thought it would be an easy major.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And were very disillusioned very quickly because, of course, in dance, there's a lot of overtime you have to put in for performances and rehearsals and all that sort of thing. But the freshmen in that class, were-- Really, had to be seen to be believed. [laughs] They would come to class dripping in gold and diamonds, you know, from ears and wrists. [laughter] And not prepared to make any effort whatsoever. Of course, they failed and had to go on to something different. So it was a bad idea because we lost a lot of students in the department and, therefore, the department lost money because, of course, you know, the department runs on the number of students it has. And so, the sophomore year tended to have not many students. Then in the junior year, we would get transfer students from other two-year universities. We'd get transfers from Santa Monica and all the others from all over the country who'd come into junior year and have had two years training. Some of them had had good ballet training and some of them had had bad. But by then, they weren't required to do any ballet.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And so, you got, in the junior and senior level, some people who clearly had not had a good ballet background and you'd have UCLA students who'd gone through freshman and sophomore at UCLA, but were quite a small number by the time they dropped out. And in order to stop this drop-out thing happening, we arranged after a few years to have auditions for freshmen. So the auditions were huge, of people who would like to be in the dance department. But at least from then on, the students we chose were much, much better.

GUERARD

Oh, I'm sure!

HILLS

So, it was a really tough process. From my own point of view, I was there as a visiting lecturer, first of all on a one-year basis of renewal of contract. And

you're allowed to do that for three years and then after three years if they-- Or at the end of the third year, if they accept you to go on, you can have three more. Not one at the time, but as three years.

GUERARD

A three-year contract?

HILLS

And, I got that by, you know, peer review and student review and all that sort of thing. And then, after six years--this was in 1990--I was officially not allowed to be at UCLA anymore because visiting lecturers cannot go on after the three single years and the three years. You have to then become an assistant professor, not a visiting lecturer, and that is a very bureaucratic process that you have to go through, and with visiting the dean and all this sort of thing. And with the chair of the department. Ron Brown, who taught modern at UCLA, and I were in the same position. We'd both gone through this together. And we went to see the dean and he said to Ron Brown, "Well I don't think you will have any problem. You know, you do a lot of performances and your reviews have been good and you will go on doing performances, won't you, and it'll be okay." And then he said to me, "I'm sure your background in performing will be okay." And I said, "Look, I think I should tell you my background in performing is minimal. I am, let's face it, a well-known, well-renowned teacher." And the dean said, "A teacher? Oh dear! I don't know how we're going to get around that!"

GUERARD

But it's so odd that you would have to get around being a teacher in order to become a teacher!

HILLS

Yes. Yes. [Guerard laughs] Exactly. And I wished I'd had a tape recorder because he went stone cold and really, really worried. And he said, "Well, we'll really have to do the review process in very, very great detail. I mean this is-- This-- I don't think we're going to be able to do this. It's going to be very, very tough. You're going to have to get us forty letters of recommendations, or forty people we can apply to for letters of recommendation for you from

Europe and another forty from the United States and let's say, can you give me the names and addresses of a hundred students who might write you letters of recommendation?" And so, I went home and I said, "Brian, I don't know how we're going to do this, but I've got so far with changing UCLA, I've got to get this, somehow."

GUERARD

Excuse me, did those numbers, the forty letters and the hundred, come from rules that he had in front of him or was this his assessment?

HILLS

No. I think this was his way of getting 'round the fact that I was a teacher and not a performer. I think he was trying to make the obstacle so huge that I wouldn't be able to even begin to overcome it. And he said, "You'll have to do all the normal c.v. [curriculum vitae] things, which means that you've got-- You'll have to have proof of everything you say you've done. Any performing you've done, we want the programs. Anything else that you've done, we want. You know, if you've done a videotape, we want the videotape." Well, fortunately, I had quite a lot of stuff from England that my mother [Ida Cockshott Hampson] had kept and fortunately, thank goodness, my father still had. And so-- No, my brother [John Hampson] had. And so, I wrote to my brother and said, "Send me everything you've got." And I finished up with a c.v. which was pages long and boxes and boxes and boxes of things where I'd got magazines where I'd been mentioned in reviews and articles that I'd written for magazines and my Emmy that I'd got from a show we did from Holden's. It was a series called In Rap with Dance, which Jackie Landrum and her-- Bill. I forget his name, her husband. Oh, he's Landrum, also. They'd done a series for Westinghouse Cable called In Rap with Dance, and they'd done one segment of it about the scholarship teenage program at Stanley Holden's and it had won an Emmy .

GUERARD

Wonderful!

HILLS

And so, I had my Emmy certificate. The producer got the little statuette but we all got a certificate, so that went in. And the ballet records I'd made with Michael Roberts, those went in. All those sort of things. And I started this process in February of 1990 and-- No, no. I'm sorry. November, 1989, in prospect of the 1990 date. And I finally handed it all in, in March of 1990. It took me all that time. I mean, I had papers all over the house. I did get eighty total addresses of professionals and a hundred students. And the letters started to come in. And the chair of [the] department said, "I wish we hadn't asked you for so many. The letters are coming in and coming in and coming in." And of all those people, only two people didn't reply.

GUERARD

Oh, my gosh!

HILLS

As I learned afterwards. I didn't know at the time. And one or two people who were close friends sent me copies of the letters, so I knew some people had, but I didn't know anything like how many. And I put all my boxes of stuff in and I waited and I waited and I waited. And then, part of the process is that everybody on the [pause] some committee at UCLA, has to look through all of this. So it's a tedious process for them, poor things.

GUERARD

Yes!

HILLS

Then I had the chance to refute any of the allegations about me which might have come in all these letters of recommendation. And so I had the interview with the chair of the department, Carol Scothorn, to go over this. And she kept turning them and turning them and turning them and saying, "Oh, here's one who says that this lady felt that she perhaps didn't give her quite enough corrections in class. Do you want to say anything about that?" And I said, "Well I don't know who she is, but you know there are some people you give up on giving corrections to because they're never going to get any better. Perhaps that was one of those." And the only person that-- I found out afterwards, Baryshnikov didn't reply, and I found out since, he never does

letters of recommendation for anybody. And one other person, and I don't know who that was. But they had all these letters which they had to read and they were all apparently good. [laughter] One day, at nearly the end of the year--it was June the something and the quarter finishes in the middle of June--there was a notice; big, big notice on the board outside my office saying, "Congratulations. You have been appointed full professor." Not assistant. Not associate. Full professor. [laughter] Adjunct professor, because I was still only seventy-five percent of time. I was not full-time. But I had skipped all that. So it was worth all the effort. In retrospect, it was very funny, but at the time, it was horrendous. Absolutely horrendous.

GUERARD

But your determination drove you on.

HILLS

Yes. Well, I wasn't going to give up on them at that stage because, you know, we'd started, now, the auditions and everything was coming together. We had an MFA in dance now and the MFA students were going to have to be able to do the advanced ballet class, and do it properly, which was something I'd stuck out for. We had faculty meetings every Friday the whole time I was there. They were hoping to get a doctorate in dance, which actually they didn't get, but they were hoping to get that. But this was this wonderful thing, that I was going to have some really good students in the department. I was also given a class of teaching ballet pedagogy. [pause] How to teach ballet.

GUERARD

Oh, thank you!

HILLS

To the MA and MFA students, which was something I'd been dying to have. Because all the way through, the students kept saying, "I've got a chance of a job. I want to make some money teaching ballet." Never teaching modern. It was always they were going to be teaching ballet. What could I do for them? How were they going to do it? What music should they use? How much should they be paid? And so, I put together a curriculum for this class and said, "This is what you've got to have." Because all these kids were getting jobs teaching

ballet and they don't know how to do it. And that was great. I enjoyed doing that class immensely.

GUERARD

Oh, so wonderful for them!

HILLS

And that went on. You know, I-- Obviously, this has gone a long way from our original question of how I had to adapt my teaching to modern dancers.

GUERARD

Oh, yes.

HILLS

And one did have to adapt enormously. Much more than for the jazz dancers, because modern requires, as I-- I don't know a great deal about it, even in spite of spending so long there, but it requires some movements to be controlled in off-balance positions. And in order to do that, they build up very big muscles in the legs and the buttocks and the big muscle down the spine. And I liken them to a tree that's growing on the side of a cliff. It has a very big root system because it's growing off gravity. And modern dancers tend to have big muscles where ballet dancers don't have them because they spend so long in positions off gravity. And it's very hard to build a body that looks like a ballet dancer on that. You actually can't. And since the major was in modern dance, I had to be adaptable and try not to be upset by the look that I was getting on my ballet students. The other thing that drove me crazy was that when they came for the first six weeks as freshmen, they listened to the music and danced to the music. After six weeks, in their modern classes, they'd been indoctrinated to the metronome count which modern dancers have to have in their heads so that they can dance regardless of what music is played.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And once they got that in their heads, they couldn't dance to the music ever again.

GUERARD

[laughs] Huh!

HILLS

Never. It was absolutely out of the question. And that is devastating, of course.

GUERARD

Yes . In ballet, the movement is so much a part of the--

HILLS

You dance with, absolutely, with the music.

GUERARD

Mm hmm .

HILLS

The faculty at UCLA called dancing to the music, "Mickey Mousing the music."

GUERARD

Hm!

HILLS

And it's something that is not done. If you dance with the music, if you do a big movement on a crescendo in the music, it's not done. GUERARD Oh.

HILLS

And it took me a long time to understand this, to accept it, because as a faculty member, I had to judge some of the choreography of the students. Every student was required to choreograph. Whether they liked doing choreography or not, they were required to choreograph and as faculty, we had to judge it. And my jaw dropped the first time I heard one of the faculty say, "I don't like the music you've chosen to dance with. Please change it. I like the choreography. The choreography is great. Change the music." And I mean, to a ballet dancer, that is out of the question.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

You could not do that! But modern dancers can because they have this pulse in their-- I think that's what they call it, the pulse, in the head. They can do their stuff regardless of what is played, or to silence. It makes no difference to them.

GUERARD

Right. Well, it's a statement about the dance being the stronger element, I suppose.

HILLS

Yes, yeah. So that was something I never got used to and never liked. To have music going on that has no relationship to what the dancers are doing, to me, is wrong. I heard a quote the other day and I can't remember who it's from, but, "Ballet is the drawing together of the three arts of decoration, music and movement." And I think that is just [a] perfect description of what ballet is. Of what modern dance is not.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

Jazz is. Jazz dancers dance with the music. That was no problem. They were very musical. But modern dancers are music-blind. By requirement.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

So, that was a difficult thing to cope with. To try and keep them-- At least to listen to the music, because they cut it out. They don't listen. That, I find, is very difficult. I had a wonderful musician, Michael Liotweizen, at UCLA. Big man, whom I later found had been an infant prodigy on the piano and won all sorts of prizes in France, and never did find out, really, what caused him to become a ballet pianist. Some tragedy in his life.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

He later committed suicide after he'd retired from UCLA. So there must have been some big problem, but I don't know what it was. But he was brilliant, absolutely brilliant, as a class musician for ballet. Never had a piece of music in front of him. Improvised everything. He was of, I think he said, Hungarian background. He was born in San Francisco but he was of Hungarian parents. And there was a Hungarian life in that man. He was huge-- six feet seven- -and hundreds and hundreds of pounds. And apparently, he played before I got there and he used to, at one time, to smoke all the way through classes.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And I had-- Obviously, my reputation had gone ahead of me that one did not smoke in my classes, because he didn't. But he used to go out on the balcony every time I stopped and have a quick drag and then come back, you know. The other thing that was a joy about teaching at UCLA, quite apart from the horrors of some other things, was that they came every day. They had to try. They had to get a grade at the end. And so, one was able to build, like with professional children that are going on to be professionals, at least a continuity of syllabus that you were going to get through in each quarter. And, that was a joy. And you could set them written work to make sure that they understood the terminology and the steps and the history of-- History of dance was taught quite separately, but I would make them read some ballet stuff which was very applicable to what we were doing at any time and ask them to write about that. To go to ballet performances and write critiques.

GUERARD

Oh, great!

HILLS

Which is, you know, it was-- And they, the joy of UCLA students are by definition, they're very bright. They wouldn't be there if they weren't very intelligent.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And to be taught in high school how to use that intelligence. And so, they sparked on all cylinders. And did all the tests and really tried hard at them. And most of them did very well. And that was new to me, to be marking papers and that sort of thing, which I had never done before.

GUERARD

Right. Were you actually required to give them written assignments and papers?

HILLS

I think it would have been very awkward not to. Didn't occur to me not to, so I really don't know. The written work was twenty- five percent of their grade. You know, you have to say how you grade them on a sheet you give them at the beginning of the quarter. And most of it was improvement on technique. I couldn't say they had to achieve so-and-so but that each one was graded individually on their progress from when they'd started to when they finished, because I had to take the bodies into consideration, knowing that they weren't auditioned or anything like that.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

If they had completely flat feet, it was how they learned to work them that counted. So, you know, there were occasions when people who were really already quite good but made no progress got worse grades than somebody who started off doing really abysmally but had made tremendous progress. By working them entirely individually on that, it gave quite a different feeling in my mind to what I was marking them on.

GUERARD

Mm hmm. Yes! Well, I can see how you would get a sense of satisfaction from that kind of situation as opposed to in a professional studio, somebody might study with you for five years or a year or, you just don't know.

HILLS

No, and you don't know how often they're coming. In a commercial studio, you can't build from lesson to lesson.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

Because, you know, some people come on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Some people come Monday, Wednesday, Friday. Some people take the whole lot and some people only come once a week. So one tends to be very repetitive about what you say in a commercial class. And you tend to feel rather embarrassed about the repetition for the people who come often. And I often feel very sorry for the pianists who hear the same jokes year after year, you know. [laughter] But when you find some little word that you use triggers the right reaction in people, you're obviously going to use it again.

GUERARD

Yes!

HILLS

Some people at Holden's have been taking my class day in and day out for years and years and years and years and years, and I do feel sorry for them. You know, you tell them the same joke and you just hope that your anecdote hasn't "improved" with the years. You know, that it is still true, because it could happen very easily and one wouldn't be aware of it. [laughter]

GUERARD

Maybe you could ask the pianist for some feedback as to which version works better. [laughter]

HILLS

I think ballet pianists are a race apart. They really are. It can't be a very fulfilling job. They're playing for-- Just churning out music in eight bar phrases year in and year out, to the same sort of steps, you know. It must be very difficult to keep it fresh.

GUERARD

Yes!

HILLS

And it's not very well paid. But at least it's a job, I suppose. Some of them do it so wonderfully well. And others are not so good. They've obviously just got bored with it.

GUERARD

There must be a certain enjoyment to creating music for people to move to, or--?

HILLS

Yes, I would think so, if you are on the creative side, like Michael Liotweizen was. And he seemed to get enormous joy from it. And we certainly got joy from his music. There's no doubt about that. But there are others who get-- You know, you say the name of the step and you're pretty sure you're going to get the same tune. Or you know you're going to get Mimifrom La Bohème either for pliés or for port de bras somewhere during the class, you know.

GUERARD

Uh-huh.

HILLS

And they're the ones who are really dead, as far as helping the class along is concerned. But then you get somebody like Helen Dillon, who is going to be, I believe, ninety this year, who still plays for classes every day in different studios all over Los Angeles. She plays from music, doesn't improvise. And she plays classical music. But I think she has a sequence that lasts about two or three weeks and then she changes entirely.

GUERARD

Really?

HILLS

And she's been doing it forever. And she's fresh and absolutely professional. Wonderful. Keeps perfect tempo all the time. Never, never varies.

GUERARD

Hm.

HILLS

Which is another thing that musicians can do. Some slow down, some speed up. And sometimes one has to teach differently with them, knowing their idiosyncrasies of speeding up. But Helen is marvelous. Just great.

GUERARD

What a gift!

HILLS

Yes, it is. Yes. And she tells me she did dance at one time. So that obviously helps.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

A long way from the days when we used to have the retired musicians, as I mentioned earlier, from the old movies. Now they're-- Helen might have done that for all I know. I doubt it, though she's presumably old enough to have. But the young ones coming up are a different breed. They sometimes do wonderful compositions for you. I wish sometimes that they would have a little tape recorder beside the piano because when they come up with something really wonderful, they don't always remember it. And it works so well with some steps. They don't-- Michael Roberts did when he was playing for us. And he brought out his four or five ballet records which are used by so many people for classes. Of course, now the CDs are coming out. The new

players are much easier to use than having to rush over to a record player when you don't have a musician. Just stand with the thing in your hand. First time I tried to use it, instead of pointing to the CD player, I pointed to the student I was talking to. [laughter] Didn't do any good at all. Remotes don't work when pointed at students, [laughter]

GUERARD

Margaret, I'm going to have to bring this to an end, on that note.

HILLS

Right.

GUERARD

And we'll pick up on another tape.

HILLS

Okay, good.

### **1.11. TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side One (April 30, 1997)**

GUERARD

Margaret, last time we were talking about your teaching years at UCLA--

HILLS

Mm hmm!

GUERARD

And I'm wondering why and when that came to an end.

HILLS

Well, I was-- As you know, I'd been made a full professor--adjunct, certainly, at seventy-five percent of time--and was really enjoying being there very much. And the whole university went through a process of wanting to economize. And they were offering early retirement packages to people who had worked for certain lengths of time so that they could employ people who cost them less because, of course, the longer you'd been there, the more you earn because it builds up year by year.

GUERARD

Can you just remind us what year that is?

HILLS

This was '93. I'd been there seven years. And I looked into how it would affect me and they were offering five years for five years; an extra five years onto the time you'd already been there, in monetary value, so to speak. If you'd been there for twenty years and you got five years more, it didn't make a lot of difference, but I'd been there for seven years at seventy-five percent of time, which in time terms meant that I'd been there for five years. And so, being offered another five year increment on top meant that my retirement benefits doubled.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

It didn't mean they were very much, even then, but doubled. Whereas, if I'd stayed on for another year or two or whatever, I might lose that and finish up with only, what, six years' money instead of ten years' money.

GUERARD

Oh. Oh , I see.

HILLS

And to turn that down seemed to be crazy because I was then, you know, sixty-five and thinking that possibly I was getting a little old to be teaching so many classes a day and perhaps the students might begin to feel that I was getting a little old for it, you know, because one had-- Teaching beginners, one had to demonstrate everything.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

You know, if I scratched my head, they scratched theirs. [laughter] When complete beginners, that's what they do. And I wasn't really feeling that that was a terribly good idea. And, as I say, the benefits were incredible because they, in the retirement package from UCLA, continue paying for your medical insurance, which is [an] enormous amount.

GUERARD

Yes!

HILLS

And well worth having. The money from the retirement benefit can be taken such that by taking a very small amount less per year, it can be carried on to the surviving spouse. Now, my husband [Brian Hills] having been self-employed, didn't have any retirement apart from social security, and so, it, again, seemed a thing that would be crazy to turn down. . . We went to a lot of meetings, you know, of faculty at UCLA where it was all described to us and the benefits and the pros and cons of doing it or not doing it. But to get double the amount I might get, was something that I decided I absolutely had to do . I was sorry to think of leaving, but decided I must. And then, again, bureaucracy is absolutely crazy. The contract retirement time was to happen on October the 31st, which was right in the middle of the quarter. And some people taking that early retirement just up and left in the middle of the quarter. My musician, Michael Liotweizen, chose to retire at the same time, and he did. He left in the middle of the quarter.

GUERARD

Oh, what a mess!

HILLS

It would have been a terrible mess and I didn't feel that I could do that to the students at all. And so, I went to the chair of the department and I said, "I am willing to teach for the rest of the quarter without being paid, as long as you'll pay my parking." And I understand that this was discussed at a faculty meeting and some people who didn't like me much said, "Well, she's only doing this so we'll ask her back as professor emeritus. She just wants to be asked to do that and that's why she's doing it." And other people said, "Nonsense, nonsense.

She really believes in the students." This is all hearsay. I wasn't at that meeting. But my offer was accepted.

GUERARD

Great.

HILLS

And so, I did teach through to the middle of December, for nothing. And the students were most appreciative, I must say. They were wonderful. And, of course, they were then trying to decide who would replace me for the following quarter and the following two quarters. And they chose to ask George de la Peña to do it. And he was able to do through the intermediate level and not the advanced level, for commitments of his own, I presume. And so, they asked me if I would, being paid to go back as professor emeritus, to teach the advanced class for two more quarters.

GUERARD

Oh, wonderful!

HILLS

So, that was great. One is limited by the contract of retirement to the amount you're allowed to be paid by the UC system.

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

You're only allowed to be paid a small portion of your other salary. And so, even if they'd wanted to ask me back to do the whole lot, they couldn't have because they couldn't have paid me. Yet they were allowed to pay me the amount for the advanced classes. And so, I sort of went into retirement, partially. [laughs]

GUERARD

Right. It was a real easing into it.

HILLS

It was. George de la Peña turned out not to be a great success, from the point of view of teaching ballet. He really didn't teach ballet. He is a good ballet dancer, but has some ideas of his own and he really taught them how to pass an audition for a stage show. Taught them tumbling and cartwheels and all sorts of other things, which upset me. And so, in the brochure for the catalog for the last quarter, they wrote down-- Mine was called classical ballet and his was called ballet, just to make the distinction, because I was very upset.

GUERARD

Right. Mm hmm.

HILLS

They didn't, in fact, keep him on when I did finally stop. They got Rebecca Wright, who had been teaching in Long Beach, who was an ex-ABT [American Ballet Theatre] dancer.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

Actually, George de la Peña's wife, but she--

GUERARD

Oh! [laughs]

HILLS

Teaches ballet quite, quite beautifully. And so, I was very happy that she then took the whole thing over.

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

And is doing a great job. But, I think, as I understand it, some of the ballet classes have been undermined by not being compulsory anymore. So, I'm sure she's regretful, also, that it's no longer the Department of Dance by itself, but is combined with World Arts and Cultures.

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

So, as a dance department, it has ceased to be an entity of its own. The chair person, Judy Mitoma, of what was World Arts and Cultures, was a dancer and she became chair of the combined department and I'm sure it seemed logical but-- I think UCLA is not quite as in favor of fine arts as a discipline. The school-- What was the College of Fine Arts became known as the School of Fine Arts. They were whittling it down all the time to give it less money and give it less prestige. It's a shame. Charles Young, who is the chancellor, is leaving this year and whoever comes in after him--they have appointed him but I can't remember who it is--may change things again. I don't know. But Young was really very much in favor of letters and science and sport because that brought in a lot of endowment money. And nobody endows things to the fine arts, so--

GUERARD

No. And there are budget and economy problems as well, and arts, in general, are the first to be cut out .

HILLS

Yes. Always. It started off in elementary school and worked its way up. I'm not sure that I don't agree with them. [laughter]

GUERARD

Really?!

HILLS

Not as far as children are concerned. I think they should have their art and their music, but as far as dance is concerned--and I was going to say this later but I think it comes in better now--if you're not a performing dancer by the time you're eighteen, you're never going to be a great performing dancer. And if you're eighteen and going to college for another four years, or six if you're going to get a master's [degree], your body is past it and you're not going to get a job as a professional dancer.

GUERARD

Right. So this raises the whole question of whether dance belongs in universities or not.

HILLS

Yes. I don't think it does. I've benefited from it being there, as far as having, you know, an academic side to my life which I wouldn't have had otherwise. But I don't think it's very good because the people who they employ-- I mean I didn't have a master's degree or any degree in dance, as far the university is concerned, and was employed because I was a known teacher, artist, and we went over that before. But nowadays, any advertisement for teaching in a university, a master's degree is required. And so, you don't get professional dancers teaching in universities. It's almost self-perpetuating less than adequate performers. It seems one of-- And this is why I don't think it should happen.

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

I don't know enough about the music but, again, I feel that children learn music and particularly at violin, one knows unless you're virtuoso or future virtuoso by the time you're seven, you're not going to be a soloist. And though the universities may be producing run of the mill musicians, I don't think they're probably going to find their soloists. And again, is it a good idea? My son's [Julian Hills] life is in art. He's the-- Produces all the posters for Universal Studios, through computers. And he never took an art class or a computer class in university. His degree is in English. Certainly, my architect daughter [Sarah Hills Larson] did study architecture at university and got her degree in that. And my historian daughter [Amanda Hills Podany] got her degree from UCLA; got her doctorate in history from there. So those two needed it, but Julian and I certainly did not.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

So, I think probably it is a bad idea. I don't know about the artists, whether they go on to become great artists or not, but I know that you can be a great artist without going to university.

GUERARD

Yes. Yes, you can. It's interesting because all along, you've talked about the positive aspects of the structure that existed within the Sadler's Wells [Ballet] and The Royal Ballet, so it is helpful to have that so that artists have goals to reach and reach a certain point of mastery. But I think what you're saying is it just doesn't work within the academic system.

HILLS

No, to start at eighteen--

GUERARD

Yes, it's too late.

HILLS

Your body is already formed. When your body is your instrument, you have to form that instrument from early childhood. And, you know, UCLA teaches a lot of ethnic dance and I'm sure particularly much more so now as World Arts and Cultures. But you think of the things on television you've seen about the training of the Balinese dancers where they start as very young children to get their hands turned right back and all the discipline that they have to go through from a very early age, and yet UCLA teaches Balinese dance to older people whose bodies have changed. And it seems to me obvious that just as in ballet, they cannot, however hard they try, do it correctly.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

They can do an approximation. But then do they go and teach it to somebody else in another university because they happen to have got on their transcript a degree that includes Balinese dance or includes ballet dance? And yes, I'm afraid they do!

GUERARD

Right. So, it sort of becomes like a--

HILLS

It's self-perpetuating mediocrity.

GUERARD

Becomes like a-- Yes, thank you. You said it. You said it. I was thinking that, "Where is [there] an institution that strikes a balance?" And maybe it has more to do with schools like [The] Julliard [School] --

HILLS

Yes, of course!

GUERARD

Or places like that. But then, of course, that limits art to the elite, doesn't it?

HILLS

Yes, it does. If you're saying, you know, it's good for these people to learn how to do it, yes, it is, as long as the general public isn't given the impression that they are doing it professionally.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And they do go on and teach it. And that worries me.

GUERARD

I see. Yes.

HILLS

Very, very much. Because if they have been taking-- Talking about my own discipline of ballet, a girl comes to UCLA or another university, age eighteen, having done no ballet before with a body that is already mature, that cannot really be altered to any great extent. She takes, perhaps, ballet for four years,

twice a week. If she gets to advanced, three times a week, and only in the times that the university is in session. So that's ten weeks, three times a year. Thirty weeks of the year, three lessons. So, in a year, she has ninety lessons. In four years--four times ninety--360 lessons. She has, then, a bachelor's degree, which includes ballet.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

She takes another two years, so she gets another 180 classes in ballet and she now has a master's degree, which enables her to go and teach ballet at another university. Now, somebody who is a professional dancer has been taking five classes a week for-- From the age of eleven to seventeen. Do your arithmetic. [Guerard laughs] And in the last four years of that, they've been taking many more than five classes a week. Sometimes up to five classes a day. And you've got, then, a professional person who knows pretty much all there is to know about ballet, who is capable of teaching well but has no master's degree and, therefore, can't go to a university to teach. If they go to a university, they have to go as a freshman, when they retire from a ballet company when they're forty, and learn how badly it's done in a university. [Guerard laughs] It just is nonsense.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

So, it-- All the time I was there, I was putting blinkers on myself and not saying all this because if it was going to be taught, I wanted it to be taught as well as possible and I did feel I could do that.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

But every time somebody said they were going to teach ballet and all they'd learned was from me in that situation, my blood ran cold. And that's why I

fought for the ballet pedagogy class. Because at least then I could teach them how to teach it.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And they appreciated it a lot. I have it on sound tape. And I have the notes for that. But, you know, it's gone. The few people who were there, I hope remember it.

GUERARD

And, of course, you were sort of bridging two worlds at that time, too. You were coming from a professional environment, but you had all this experience as a teacher.

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

George de la Peña was a great, is a great dancer, but that doesn't automatically give him the talent to teach.

HILLS

No. And he'd been a dilettante in other art-- theater forms, also. I mean, he'd been a dancer, but he'd been a dancer in *Cats*, the lead. He did [Mr.] Mistoffelees wonderfully. Wonderfully! And he played Nijinsky in the movie about Nijinsky [Nijinsky], beautifully! But he had commercial ideas for-- And this may have been his compromise. He may have looked at those students and thought, "I can't teach them ballet. If they want to get into a professional job, I'll teach them how to pass an audition."

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

And maybe there's something to be said for that, as long as you don't call it ballet.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

If it's done as ballet on the transcript from a university, people assume that you know how to do it. And, you don't. There's quite a lot to be said for his philosophy, if that's what it was.

GUERARD

Right. I understand. And sometimes teachers come to the university having a mission about teaching about the real world because sometimes there isn't enough practical knowledge passed on.

HILLS

Oh, there isn't. It's absolutely true. Absolutely true. I can only talk about my own discipline. My daughter, who is an architect, went to San Luis Obispo first to the architecture school [California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo] there, and found that it wasn't suiting her needs for future life. And so, she moved to Eugene in Oregon, which suited the sort of architecture she wanted to do, which was houses, and got her degree there. So she made a change because she wasn't satisfied with what she was getting at one place, for reasons I don't know because I don't know how to train an architect. But she moved. Whereas Amanda, who is a historian, found that UCLA was perfect for her. She went and got a second master's degree in London before she came back to UCLA to get her doctorate. But the curriculum there was perfect. Her discipline is in ancient Middle Eastern history. And it was perfect for her. She now teaches at Cal Poly [California State Polytechnic University], Pomona.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

Her husband lives here and she lives here, and that's fine. [laughter]

GUERARD

Great. Well, so getting back to UCLA--

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

Then you were saying that you were easing out, then?

HILLS

Yes. It was a gentle easing out.

GUERARD

It was a gentle closure.

HILLS

In June of '94, when I'd been there all together for ten years. And, of course, all this time I'd been teaching at Stanley Holden's [Dance Center] every morning.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And my 9:30 class had gone on and my Saturday morning classes had gone [on] all through this period. And so, I resumed, or continued, doing those. Also, a lot of people had heard me talk about the ballet pantomime, which I had done off and on. And, usually on St. Valentine's Day, I would, as port de bras in class, teach them how to say, "I love you. Do you love me?" in ballet pantomime, just--

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

Just to whet the appetite, you know. And, one or two other occasions, I would use some pantomime in class. And I'd been badgered to do a series of these classes [laughter] and finally, I thought, "Well, perhaps I should." And so, in May and June of that year, I think it was, I did several Sunday afternoons of teaching a course in ballet pantomime. And I had quite a good number of people. I think there were thirty people signed up for it. I charged a set fee and my husband came and videotaped the whole thing.

GUERARD

Oh, wonderful!

HILLS

And so, we have it on videotape, which we sold. You know, we sold them the videotapes afterwards if they wanted to buy them. And, I had-- I gave them a lecture on the history of pantomime first and then we worked our way through all the gestures and finished up doing the Lilac Fairy pantomime from [The] Sleeping Beauty and the second act pantomime from Swan Lake. And they really did-- I was quite surprised. They did remarkably well. This was the first time since I'd been at Sadler's Wells [School] that I had taught a course of any length. There, we used to have it every week. It was part of the curriculum. So there was a slow build-up of getting the technique of the gestures. And, of course, in a short-- I think we did four or five two-hour sessions in this particular seminar. So they didn't get particularly good at it, but they got a good idea of how to do it.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

Up to then, I'd only done single master classes. Some of them at Santa Monica College.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

Which were only an hour. And in that hour, I wanted them just to get the feel of how to do it and show them how to do the Lilac Fairy mime scene. Even though they did it not at all well, they enjoyed just trying. And I'd done a lecture to the Friends of The Joffrey Ballet one evening. And I saw some of the husbands who'd been brought along nodding off in the front row. [laughs] So I said, "Now, stand up and we'll do this." [laughter] You know what husbands are like. Their wives want to see it and they don't.

GUERARD

Uh-huh.

HILLS

There were one or two heads nodding quite firmly and I just had to get them on their feet. And they started to enjoy it better after that.

GUERARD

Right. But very exciting for a dancer who has just an idea that it existed historically, and to have an opportunity to learn about it and see it in real life, is great .

HILLS

Yes, that's right. And there aren't many of the mime scenes left in many of the ballets now because people just don't understand it. But when it started, it was based on the Commedia dell 'arte mime, pantomime. And then, people did understand. You didn't put a synopsis in the program. You told the story in pantomime gesture, part way through the ballet. So, things have changed a lot. [laughs]

GUERARD

Yes. [laughs]

HILLS

But doing those master classes at Santa Monica, I got to know some of the faculty at Santa Monica as I was doing that, which was nice.

GUERARD

And you did those master classes earlier?

HILLS

Yes. I can't remember when I did the first one, but way before I started at UCLA, even.

GUERARD

Oh. Uh-huh.

HILLS

And, I'd done some ballet master classes at Santa Monica College, too. It began to feel almost like going home, you know. I went there to do another master class and got to know my way around campus and where the studios were and so forth and-- Very charming people there. Really nice students. Very, very receptive. There seemed to be a very nice atmosphere at Santa Monica College, which I enjoyed.

GUERARD

Great.

HILLS

And when I'd been away from UCLA from June 1994, Linda Gold, who runs the dance section of-- It's theatre arts. Dance is in part of the [Department of] Theatre Arts at Santa Monica College. Linda Gold said would I consider going to teach an intermediate class at Santa Monica College every week? And, I thought, you know, "That would be rather nice" because I'd really enjoyed being there. And I was already missing having students on a regular basis [laughs] rather than just popping in and out. And I said, "Yes, I'd really love to do it." And it was just for one semester and-- The intermediate level, because that's where they wanted the teacher. And I went to the office and did all the paperwork and filled out various forms about, you know, what I'd done and so forth and since I didn't even have a bachelor's degree in dance, let alone a master's degree or a doctorate, I went in, and still am at the absolute bottom, rock bottom, pay scale.

GUERARD

Hm. So, being senior ballet mistress doesn't--?

HILLS

None. I mean, they looked at my c.v. and the fact that I was professor emeritus from UCLA made no difference whatsoever because it's absolutely bureaucratic and you-- The union insists that you are paid by the degree that you have. And the fact that there wasn't any dance in any university at the time I could have gone, if I had of, makes no difference, whatsoever. But it's really rather nice being there and having the students . They run on a semester basis, which means that you have the students for sixteen weeks.

GUERARD

That's right.

HILLS

Twice a week. And I find that's much better. Of course, only two semesters and not three quarters, so probably the overall length of time is about the same. But you get in a greater continuity in sixteen weeks than you do in ten. Ten is a very short time.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

While I was at UCLA, there was some question that the whole university would switch to a semester system. Because UCLA law school is on semesters.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

And the rest of it isn't. But, it didn't happen. I don't know why. I'm sure people were sent out questionnaires and ballots and all sorts of things, but it didn't happen. But I think it would be better.

GUERARD

I think a lot of the students would think so, too .

HILLS

I think so.

GUERARD

And professors .

HILLS

Yes. Ten weeks is-- You know, you've got ten weeks, divided. You've got to have a mid-term section after five weeks. And then the last week is finals. There's no time whatsoever to do anything. You barely get to know the names of the students, you know. And I have a good memory for names [Guerard laughs], but even so. It's tough.

GUERARD

Uh-huh. Well, how does the-- Santa Monica is like a junior college--?

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

Although I know it's giving bachelor's degrees in certain areas.

HILLS

I think so. I'm not-- Even though I've now been there for nearly two years, I'm not sure how it works. I've gone and taught my students, but I know that some of the students in my class have just signed up for the one class. They don't have to sort of join and take all the other requirements of a full-time student. But some do. And I don't know which they are. There's no way that I can find out, short of asking them.

GUERARD

So, do you find, then, that the students, in general, at Santa Monica College have a different sort of attitude about ballet than you found at UCLA?

HILLS

Yes, I do and I put it down entirely to the enthusiasm for ballet for the modern dance faculty. Linda Gold and Judy Douglas and Renée Hawley, who all are on the faculty there, all have taken my ballet classes pretty regularly over the last twenty years. And so, they are definitely ballet oriented. They want their

students to do ballet. Both Judy Douglas and Linda Gold teach ballet, also. Renee Hawley teaches only ballet and not modern. Patrick Adiarte, who teaches jazz there, is also good at ballet.

GUERARD

Oh.

HILLS

Kai Ganado teaches modern. He's not a ballet dancer, but was a colleague of mine at UCLA. Did the same thing that I've done. He started at UCLA and has gone, now, to Santa Monica. There's another lady called Marie Bender who teaches modern but is obviously, by the way one sees her movement, happy to have ballet in the background of her dancers. So the atmosphere there is supportive of ballet rather than, "Well, ballet's required of you," or you know, "You've got to do it, but, don't let yourself be seen doing anything balletic in modern class." They're quite different. So the atmosphere is great, from my point of view. The students are very enthusiastic, until it comes to written work. And tell them they're going to have a test and half the class doesn't show up.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

They'd rather not be put to the challenge of writing, which is quite different from UCLA. They-- Obviously, the caliber of student is different.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

Mentally. But from the point of view of technique and coming, is great. And of course, Santa Monica has a system whereby fifty percent of your grade is just being there, twenty-five percent is written work and twenty-five percent is progress. And so, they know they're only going to lose twenty-five percent of their grade if they don't put a pen to paper the entire semester, which I don't

think is a very good idea. And it almost means that nobody fails as long as they show up for every class.

GUERARD

Yes, but you can't really excel if you lose twenty- five percent of your grade, either.

HILLS

No. They don't seem to worry very much about getting A's. Not like UCLA did. Their grade point average mattered so much to them.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

It mattered for getting scholarships and all the other things, as well. They'd come and sort of throw themselves at your feet at UCLA and say, "What can I do to make up such and such and such?" you know, and you'd try to find some way that they could make it up. And at Santa Monica, I've never had anybody ask me how they could make up anything. So the attitude, from that point of view, is quite, quite different.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

They're much more similar to high school students than university students. The discipline is quite different. But, they are enthused, so that's great.

GUERARD

So, I mean, perhaps their aspirations are not in academic achievement.

HILLS

No.

GUERARD

Maybe they care more about performance.

HILLS

Yes, and they do do a lot of performing. At the end of every semester, we do a works in progress, where each class puts on a two-and-a-half-minute something using what they've learned.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And that's rather fun. It's difficult, again, because ballet is such a structured thing. This semester, I'm getting them to choreograph their own two-and-a-half-minute waltz thing, so that they can use their own skills to put it together.

GUERARD

Oh, great!

HILLS

And, that will be good. We did pantomime one semester. Last semester we were off campus because there was asbestos floating around in the air, so we had to rent studios off campus. So we didn't do a performance then. But, you know, they really enter into it with great joy, again. So, it's really nice. I'm supposed to teach kinesiology, which is not my specialty at all, but I do it by relating it to the ballet, rather than making them learn the names of the bones and the-- Because some of them are taking kinesiology classes from qualified kinesiologists. So I don't want to be in competition with them.

GUERARD

No!

HILLS

I don't enjoy the thought of keeping one class ahead of the class by reading a book. I found a nice book that's called *Inside Classical Ballet Technique*, [Inside Ballet Technique: Separating Anatomical Fact from Fiction in the Ballet Class by Valerie Grieg; illustrations by Naomi Rosenblatt].

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And that is written by a dancer who has taken kinesiology since. And it's very clear and very helpful. So we use that book and relate it to ballet movement. It's a great book to have.

GUERARD

Great.

HILLS

We use another technique book which is quite an expensive one and they don't all buy it because they can't afford it, which is called Classical Ballet Technique by Gretchen Ward Warren. And it's the best ballet technique book I have ever come across. I tried to write-- I've tried to write several, with no success at all.

GUERARD

Have you really?

HILLS

I'm too-- I diverge away from my subject too much. One day, when I really am finally retired, I'll look at it all again and do it from the teaching perspective, which hasn't been done, I don't think. But this, for learning your technique is just beautiful.

GUERARD

Hm. Yeah, I would think you would, after writing all those syllabi-- [laughter]

HILLS

Yes!

GUERARD

You might have the ability to write a really good book.

HILLS

I think I probably can if I give my mind to it for-- And using the tapes and the pedagogy lectures that I gave. I think if I can get that together. But I was doing the technique one when this new book by Gretchen Ward Warren came out. And I thought, "I can't compete with that. That is perfect!" [laughs] So, what's the point? You know, you don't need another one with that one. It's so good.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

And, there's also a videotape of classical ballet technique which was done by Georgina Parkinson, the ABT [American Ballet Theatre] ballet mistress. And that is also excellent. It's boring. Absolutely boring. It's an encyclopedia of all the steps there are, on video, with all the terminology that's ever been used for any one step. And you see it in real time, slow motion and then real time again. Each step beautifully done, but not with a sense of humor anywhere, you know. [Guerard laughs] As it shouldn't have, in a way, but you long for something to lighten it. And it doesn't, or hadn't when I got it, have a bibliography or, "Such and such a step is at such and such a place on which tape." So you have to hunt about a lot to find what you're looking for.

GUERARD

It would really help.

HILLS

It needs somebody to do an index. A good one. I did it for UCLA, for their copy. But, of course, on different machines, it comes up at a different number on the reader on the video machines. It doesn't always come up at the same place.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

So it was fine for the one machine I did it for, but not for all of them. You can get a rough idea where it is from that, but not a definite spot. So it needs some-- You can now index things.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

With the remote, and that would probably be the ideal thing.

GUERARD

Yeah. That would be perfect. I've heard that-- I know in Steven Spielberg's Holocaust project [Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation], that there is a way to do that.

HILLS

Oh, is there?

GUERARD

To--

HILLS

That's what they're--

GUERARD

Immediately access a certain point.

HILLS

Yes. That's what this needs. [Guerard laughs] And maybe it's been done by now. I just-- It isn't on mine, but it could be done. And that would be a great asset.

GUERARD

Of course, you've been very busy teaching in classes, so-- [laughs]

HILLS

Yes, there hasn't been a lot of time in between to really do things. Again, I could do that, I suppose, for myself, which would be useful. I think I should-- I only just thought of it. [laughter]

GUERARD

Put that on your list.

HILLS

Yes, yes I should do that. It would be very helpful. That tape is excellent. And there were only two steps that I could think of which they'd forgotten or missed out. Now I don't remember what they were, but I was searching my mind to try to better them, as one does, and I could only think of two. And, it's a very-- The book--actually the two books, the kinesiology one and the technique one--and that videotape, are extremely useful tools for anybody who is studying dance; ballet technique. You couldn't learn how to do it from that because you need instruction, but to look along with your training is an excellent thing to do. And I think every school should have them for their students to look at at off times. A lot of students think it'd be good if they were videotaped, and I don't think so.

GUERARD

You think that they think they could learn about their dancing--?

HILLS

Learn by seeing themselves. And I think, with the majority of people, they would stop because they don't realize how bad they look--

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

For a long time. It's better that they don't see until they get good enough, and then when they're good enough, they don't need to see.

GUERARD

Mm hmm. Hm. I think they use that in professional sports and--

HILLS

They do, to analyze movement. And maybe that's a good thing, but they are generally older when they're learning their professional sport. I think a child and its parents looking at a video-- Well, the parents always think their

children are beautiful, anyway. [Guerard laughs] My grandmother used to say, "Every mother's duck is a swan." [laughs]

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And that was before I learned a step of dancing at all. [laughter]

HILLS

But she was quite right. One can look at one's children and think they're perfect, which is just as well, but a person looking at themselves can see the flaws. But a beginner doesn't know how to put them right and I think they would quit very quickly.

GUERARD

Hmm. It would be too discouraging.

HILLS

It would be too discouraging. Absolutely. Particularly for a late beginner.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

You want to feel that at least you're beginning to look like you think you look. And there's the mirror there, of course, to see and even with the mirror, I don't think people really see. They see what they want to see.

GUERARD

Right. Right. Well, it 's a complicated process when you're looking in the mirror but also thinking about the movement.

HILLS

Yes. Yes.

GUERARD

And the music and the timing and everything else.

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

So you don't see with open eyes.

HILLS

No. No. And, I must say, I see myself in the mirror all day every day and I try not to see myself. It would be awful if one was concentrating on yourself in the mirror. I use the mirror to see the students behind me-- to see what they're doing. And they're marking something behind me so that I can see if somebody's got it totally wrong. It's like the professor with the mirror at the side of the glasses as she's writing on the board, you know. [laughs] See what the class is up to behind them.

GUERARD

Yes. Well, it's-- I don't know what people think who watch dancers taking a class looking at themselves in the mirror, but it's not like looking at yourself in the mirror when you're getting dressed or something.

HILLS

No, not at all. No. It's absolutely not.

GUERARD

The dancers may be looking at just a certain part of themselves.

HILLS

That's right and sometimes they're looking at somebody else in the mirror to see if they're doing the same as they are, to see if they've got it right.

GUERARD

Yes. Yes. [laughs]

HILLS

Instead of looking directly at the person, they're-- And that causes a cross in the brain which is very odd.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

When I'm directing my husband when he's driving, he'll sometimes say-- When I say, "Turn right," he says, "Are you facing the class or have you got your back to it?" [laughter]

GUERARD

Margaret, we're almost to the end of this side.

HILLS

Okay.

GUERARD

This would be a good point to take a rest.

### **1.12. TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side Two (April 30, 1997)**

GUERARD

Margaret, I know that we're to the point in your life now where you're teaching at Santa Monica College and also at Stanley Holden's [Stanley Holden Dance Center].

HILLS

That's right.

GUERARD

And I want to pick up on this point, but before I go on, I'm very curious about something. We've spent a lot of time talking about your life in England and now you've been in the United States for a very long time.

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

I'm curious to know which country you feel is home.

HILLS

That's a very hard question. My family and our house is here. I think probably when you change countries when you're close to forty, you are a citizen of neither country, in your heart. And I think my husband and I knew this years ago, when he'd spent his year in Canada and I'd spent my year in Turkey. He was then asked if he wanted to stay on in Canada and decided not to. And at that time, we said to each other, "If you move from one country to another, you're probably a citizen of the world, but never one of one particular place." And I think it's true. When we'd been here for five years, we felt we knew less about the place than we did when we first came because we realized all the things we didn't know, by five years time.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

Five years is the time when you can apply to become a citizen of the United States, when you've come here legally. You have to be here five years before you can become a citizen. And at that time, we definitely did not feel we were ready to become citizens. There were so many things that we didn't know. We were only just beginning to start to understand how The Constitution worked, how people interrelated with one another, and definitely ruled out giving up our British citizenship at that time. We still felt more British than we felt American.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

Things happened as time went on. Young Ron [Ronald] Reagan [Jr.] came to Stanley Holden's to train to be a ballet dancer and got into the younger Joffrey Ballet Company after a few years.

GUERARD

Yes, I remember that!

HILLS

And, when his father was nominated to be president, we were invited to the inauguration. And we felt a little guilty because not only had we not voted for Ronald Reagan, we were not allowed to vote for Ronald Reagan because when you're not a citizen you cannot vote. But we went because it was such a wonderful experience to be that special, you know, to be invited by the president to go to his inauguration.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And, we were actually included in the list which was known as Friends of the President's Family.

GUERARD

Oh, how wonderful!

HILLS

So we were treated very specially. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience. I would not have missed that in a million years; to be there sitting in front of the Capitol building, you know, in the cold, in a borrowed fur coat. [laughs] My husband had borrowed a cashmere overcoat from Warner Brothers [Pictures], through various friends, you know. And I needed a fur coat. And Juliet Prowse had been taking my classes. So I said, "Juliet, do you have a fur coat I could borrow?" She said, "Yes, most certainly. You could borrow this one." She's taller than I am, so it was long on me, but it was wonderfully warm. And she said, "This is the second inauguration that this fur coat has been to."

GUERARD

Are you serious? [laughter]

HILLS

Truly! And I said, "How come?" And she had been Frank Sinatra's girlfriend at the time of JFK [John F. Kennedy] 's inauguration. And she had gone to that

inauguration in the fur coat and I went to Reagan's. So not only it had been to two inaugurations, [but] one [had been] Democrat and one Republican. So I hoped it was totally appreciative of its experience.

GUERARD

Yes. [laughter] A very American fur coat.

HILLS

Yes, a very American fur coat. Now poor Juliet has died, which is very sad. She had cancer and died last year. She was a delightful person. A great friend. We really had a wonderful, wonderful time. It was just terrific.

GUERARD

Yes. And was that your first visit to Washington, [D.C.]?

HILLS

First visit and only visit to Washington, as a matter of fact. We should go and do the museums. They were all closed because each state had taken over a museum for its state party. And so, we didn't get to see anything but just the-- You know, Pennsylvania Avenue and the White House. It was very, very cold but not very deep snow that year, fortunately. Four years later, we were invited again. As I mentioned, I think, on the tape, UCLA had frowned on giving me time off to go and [it was] probably better if I didn't mention that I'd been invited, even, because it was Republican and not Democrat.

GUERARD

Mm hmm. [laughs]

HILLS

And so, we didn't go. It was just as well because that winter was incredibly cold and the ceremony was held indoors. And so, most people who got their seats to sit out of doors didn't actually see the ceremony, which is a shame. So, we actually had a better time seeing that one on television and imagining, you know, what it was like.

GUERARD

Yes. Wow! Had the Reagan's ever come to watch his son dance?

HILLS

Yes! Yes, they did! They both came on one occasion to watch Ron in class. And Ronald Reagan had a wonderful eye for the best dancers in the class.

GUERARD

You mean senior Ronald Reagan?

HILLS

Senior Ronald Reagan. Yes, I'm sorry. He asked about the best dancers. His wife [Nancy Reagan] didn't say a great deal. We met her again at-- There was a gala performance of The Royal Ballet at the Shrine [Auditorium] and she was there for that and was like any-- Oh, it's very sweet, really. Like any mother whose son is learning something that they don't know a great deal about, she was asking me how young Ron was doing in class and that sort of thing, you know. [laughter] This is actually before she became the First Lady. This is earlier, when he was still governor of California, I think. But she was very worried about whether he was going to make it or not, you know. [laughs]

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

Those deep, deep, intense eyes and-- She was absolutely charming. Both of them. And a delightful couple. Just very, very nice. So, it was a pleasant experience. Again, we-- You know, by the second inauguration, we still weren't citizens. The thought of renouncing one's roots is tough.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

If you come to a country as a refugee from a country that's turned sour on you, I'm sure that you really do want to become part of that country. When you come because somebody has asked you to come to work, it's very, very, very different.

GUERARD

Yes. You haven't left under any duress.

HILLS

No, none at all! And you still have family back there, you know. And you send-- We still do. We send a hundred Christmas cards back to England to friends every year. So our ties are very strong. But, of course, you don't vote in either country and you begin to feel a little left out. And what really actually tipped the scales for us was the Americans really turning against immigrants, legal or otherwise. And since all our money is in this country, we began to worry, even though we were definitely legal immigrants with green cards. We have every right to be here. We began to wonder that it was really only a stroke of the pen could take our social security away from us.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

It would be very easy. They were already saying that, you know, you couldn't have welfare, even if you were a legal immigrant.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

So, how soon was it going to be before we became non-citizen enough? And we would like to vote. And we were getting very much involved in, you know, the next election and that sort of thing. And so, we thought, "This is the moment."

GUERARD

And when did this moment happen?

HILLS

Well, it took a long time. It started off with the fact that you had to pay seventy-five dollars to have a new green card. And, we went into the process of doing that and that took six months. And during that process, we thought, "You know, this is crazy. We really should become citizens." And so, we set

that process in motion before we had actually got the other new green cards. And it took a year.

GUERARD

Oh, it did?

HILLS

Yes. They're saying it's going to take a year now because they're being much more thorough in their FBI investigations of people. But this is now two years-- nearly two years ago. It took a year before we got our interview and answered our questions about The Constitution, and all that sort of thing. And then another few months before we were sworn in, which must have been in-- I think it was April. No. No, no, no. No, September. September of '96. And we'd started the process of the replacement green cards eighteen months before that, so bureaucracy does take a long time. Our daughter, Sarah, became a citizen some time ago, but the other two [Amanda Hills Podany and Julian Hills] still haven't.

GUERARD

Oh! Huh!

HILLS

We thought it would enable them to make a decision, but so far, they haven't done anything. They're married and they have--both have--children who are American citizens.

GUERARD

Yes, because they were born here.

HILLS

Because they were born here. And both are married to Americans, but they haven't done anything about it. So it's up to them now.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

And it's-- You feel more legitimate, being a citizen. But, of course, we still feel very tied to England. You know, we go back there for vacations and shall do. And who knows what happens in one's old age, where you finish up, you know. [laughs]

GUERARD

Right, right. Well--

HILLS

Life is always an adventure, whatever happens.

GUERARD

You have good ties in both places.

HILLS

We do! Yes. Yeah. But now, if people say, "Are you an American citizen?" we can say, "Yes we are." It's easier. But before that, people would ask us, "Why hadn't you become an American citizen?" And we've said, "Well, how many American citizens living in Britain have become British? Would you not think it odd to ask an American living in London why he isn't British?" And, you know, when you put it that way, they began to understand that it's quite a big step to take.

GUERARD

Yes, it is.

HILLS

The inauguration ceremony was horrible. We expected it to be, you know, exciting and gorgeous and uplifting and everybody was all in their best clothes. And it was just a zoo. There were five thousand people.

GUERARD

Oh, my goodness!

HILLS

And Brian was called to the morning session and I was called to the afternoon session and you're not allowed to sit together. And you're just treated like

cattle. It was horrible! It should be gorgeous and it really isn't. Sarah said hers was delightful because she was in Minnesota and there were about-- I think she said fifty of them, only.

GUERARD

Oh. Maybe because this is Los Angeles.

HILLS

Yes. Yes. And there are so many immigrants in California. But it was a disappointing day. It should have been a day of elation and it really wasn't. It's a shame.

GUERARD

Oh, I'm sorry.

HILLS

Yeah. [laughter] But, you know, we've read since that they were grinding people through as fast as they could.

GUERARD

Right. Right. I'm sure they are.

HILLS

So, if you're dealing with twenty-five thousand people in a weekend, you know, what can you do? It's bound to be like that, but I wish it had been pleasanter, that's all.

GUERARD

Hm. You know, this brings to mind, I know that you've gone-- I know that you go to England all the time, but I've heard a couple of times you've gone back for various fiftieth anniversaries.

HILLS

Yes, I have.

GUERARD

Of the Sadler's Wells [Ballet].

HILLS

One has been done and one is coming up. February of 1996 was the fiftieth anniversary of the reopening of The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. And they wanted to put on a gala including those who were still living who had been on stage on that opening night. And I had been and Stanley Holden had been. And so, we were one of--two of, the two of us--twenty-nine people who had been on stage on February the 20th, 1946. And they made a very special event for us. The ballet that had opened then was *The Sleeping Beauty*, and they put on another performance of *The Sleeping Beauty* in the presence of the queen [Queen Elizabeth II] and her niece, [Lady] Sarah Armstrong-Jones. And the twenty-nine of us, in the fourth act, were introduced to the audience individually. We walked out-- There's a big sort of sunburst in the back of the stage and we all entered, one at a time, down some steps, and Sir Anthony Dowell, who is my former student and is now director of The Royal Ballet, introduced each of us to the audience separately. And we walked, for our last time, you know, down on that stage and were presented with a bouquet and sat at the side.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

We had a coffee morning and a rehearsal. You know, it was lovely to be back in the rehearsal call at ten o'clock, you know.

GUERARD

Yes! [laughter]

HILLS

And they had two dancers standing on the steps-- pages, to help us down. And we ladies, ex-ballerinas, were not going to be helped down these steps. [Guerard laughs] And so, we all walked down and we realized that we were all looking at our feet very carefully and haltingly coming down these steps. So we had a little talk and said to Anthony, "Could we rehearse that again? We think we will use the pages' arms." [laughter] So we kept our heads up and

held on as we walked down the stairs, and looked a lot better than we otherwise would have .

GUERARD

Right!

HILLS

And then at the end, we were all walked back up the steps to stand on the raised platform and the entire company knelt, facing us.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And, of course, it brought the house down, and then they brought on a huge birthday cake and Ninette de Valois, the founder of the company, was there. She was then ninety-eight.

GUERARD

Wow!

HILLS

And she stood through the whole ceremony. She's stone deaf, so one can't speak to her. But she looked wonderful. And it was just a fabulous night. And then this year, in July, they're having the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the then Sadler's Wells School, the big day school which opened in 1947. And I'm invited back to that since I'm now the-- Ninette de Valois, who is still alive, and I are the only two surviving dance faculty members.

GUERARD

Oh, is that right?

HILLS

That's right. All the others have gone.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

Some of the education staff-- One of the men who taught the boys education is still alive and he and I are going to give a talk before a performance that the students are putting on in The Margot Fonteyn Theatre. This at White Lodge in Richmond Park. That's being in July. The school actually didn't open until September, but they want to do the gala anniversary thing at the end of the school year rather than at the beginning of the next school year, which is reasonable.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

And everybody who has ever been a student at the school is invited.

GUERARD

Oh, how wonderful!

HILLS

I don't know how many people they'll get, but I've been writing to everybody I know who's living in the United States now who was there. And quite a lot of people are going, so it should be a wonderful reunion.

GUERARD

It really should be!

HILLS

Yeah. So, I'm really looking forward to that. I'm not going for any length of vacation--just for a long weekend just to do it in, but I think it's going to be fun.

GUERARD

[laughs] Yes!

HILLS

So, this has been quite a busy two years, as far as fiftieth anniversaries are concerned. And when you begin your first ballet class when you're three, you don't really think about going back to fiftieth anniversaries of things that happened in your teens. [laughs]

GUERARD

No!

HILLS

It's quite surprising. And [to] still be doing it.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

You sort of think, "Well, a dancer's life finishes at forty," you know. Here I am, still at it at sixty- eight.

GUERARD

And people dream about having a life of dance, but it's very, very difficult to carry out.

HILLS

It is! And without all the luck which we mentioned before that I've had, I could have just been a housewife somewhere after the age of-- Well, who knows what.

GUERARD

Yes, but I must say that you have had great luck--

HILLS

I have.

GUERARD

And you've talked about your luck, but one does make one's own luck and you've had a lot of determination.

HILLS

Well, I think you grasp your own opportunities.

GUERARD

Mm hmm.

HILLS

I'm sure there are some people to whom opportunities don't happen. But if you dare to grasp them, I think probably there are moments when you can swing fate in your favor a little bit. And I have been very lucky. Let's hope it continues because Stanley Holden's is about to close down.

GUERARD

Oh, my goodness!

HILLS

The-- After twenty-six years he's been there, the lease in the building is running out. He's been on a five-year lease, renewable every five years, all this time. And the landlord who is now, has his monthly income from the studio divided between four other family members and himself, and so doesn't get a great deal of money of the vast rent that Stanley pays individually. That doesn't sound like a lot of money. And he wants to sell the building.

GUERARD

Oh, he does?

HILLS

He really wants to sell it. And so they argue all the time, this family, about who gets how much and that sort of thing. It's very difficult. And they would all like to have a proportion of the \$1,300,000 that they're asking for the building. And, of course, dancers can't possibly afford that sort of money. And if he leases it, he's putting the rent up yet again to a sum which, as a dance school, you could not make. Dancing is space- expensive. The footage profit is very small.

GUERARD

Yes. You need a lot of space to move!

HILLS

You do. You need a lot of space and those three studios are, do use up a lot of space. When ballet was very popular, when all three studios were in use all day, there was a profit. Now that ballet is nothing like as popular, they're not in use all day and the organization is not making a profit anymore. And so, Stanley just felt this is the time he has to stop.

GUERARD

Oh.

HILLS

He would like, of course, as I would, for somebody to buy the building and get it, use it for dance studios in some way and for them to employ us, so that we don't have any of the paperwork to do and just to be able to go on teaching, either there or in a space elsewhere.

GUERARD

Stanley would like to go on teaching as well?

HILLS

He'd like to go on teaching without any of the hassle of administration. And I would like to go on teaching, as I shall at Santa Monica College, which is nice for me. I have that now, more or less as long as Santa Monica has money I shall go on doing that.

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

But, I would also like to have the other. I like the students I have. I would like to go on working with them, either in that space or another space. But I've looked into the thought of renting space and running the class myself, but the cost of renting space and the cost of a musician and the fact that one cannot get any insurance whatsoever to cover any accidents that students may have, make it absolutely out of the question. It's no use, for this purpose, saying

what the amount is because in twenty years' time, the amount of rental and the amount you pay to a musician won't make sense. But it means that if ever a class met with fewer than ten students, one would make absolutely zero. And there are times, you know, in flood or earthquake or whatever, when that doesn't apply. You don't get ten students and you're still having to pay the rent.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

So it's out of the question. If somebody else is paying rent for a building and they want to employ you to teach a class, they make quite a bit of money if ten people come.

GUERARD

Yes .

HILLS

Because their overhead is there anyway. So that would be the ideal, if it could happen.

GUERARD

Yes .

HILLS

So we'll see.

GUERARD

Well, I hope that will happen.

HILLS

I hope so. So, my life has now come to a sort of moment of change and I look at it to see will luck still hold out? [laughter] And will somebody buy the building and convert it and allow us to go on teaching there or will I be teaching somewhere else? So, by the time you've listened to this tape, you may know the answer to that question that I don't know right now. [laughter]

GUERARD

And, are you optimistic?

HILLS

Yes, of course. Yes. Yeah. And if I don't go on teaching, then time for my book.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

So there are all sorts of things still one can do.

GUERARD

[laughs] I've found your response to this challenge to be a running theme throughout this entire interview. I think you're incredibly inspiring as a teacher, but also as a model of a person who has just continuously responded to the challenges of life with determination and a real joy for life in whatever it offers. And I think that the people who listen to this tape or read the transcription will feel that-- come away feeling that way, too.

HILLS

Well, thank you! It's certainly how I like to feel I feel about life. If it comes across that way, that's a bonus. Thank you.

GUERARD

Well, thank you. This has just been a privilege and a joy.

HILLS

Thank you very much.

### **1.13. TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side One (November 18, 1998)**

GUERARD

Well, Margaret, here we are a year and a half later, and some significant events have taken place since that time, and so we thought we would come back and recap a little bit.

HILLS

Yes. We stopped at just the moment when the Stanley Holden Dance Center lost its lease and was closing down. And that was the moment when Stanley went to another studio in Culver City, which I didn't feel was the right place for me. It was going to be an enormous barn of a studio and I didn't really want to go. And one of my students said, "Well, there's a studio in Santa Monica, in the Christian Science building. I'm going to go and see if they would like you." And she did. And I had an interview with the director of the studio, Frank Bourman, and we came to a nice financial arrangement and I moved in-- We finished at Stanley Holden's on May the 31st, I think it was (either May 31st or 30th, whichever was the Friday) , and on the Saturday morning, we opened up at the other studio. There were forty people in the last class of mine at Stanley Holden's and thirty-five of them showed up at eight o'clock the following Saturday morning. [laughs]

GUERARD

That's tremendous!

HILLS

It was really very exciting! They haven't all continued to come, but that was a tremendously supportive moment, which was--

GUERARD

Yes!

HILLS

It was very nice.

GUERARD

Absolutely!

HILLS

It was. And I've stayed there ever since, teaching, now at nine o'clock in the morning instead of nine- thirty because they have-- They are a non-profit organization. It's called the American Academy of Dance and Kindred Arts, and they bus school children in- -public school children--for ballet classes in the

mornings, starting at quarter to eleven. So I finish at half past ten and then these bus loads of children come in and they have their ballet class and they're bussed back to school, which they do on a voluntary basis.

GUERARD

Wow! So it's a course that they take.

HILLS

Yes. I think they're third-graders, probably. They look about third-graders.

GUERARD

That's wonderful.

HILLS

And they do wonderful work with them. It's just amazing. And Frank Bourman, who does all the teaching of those children, I don't know how he does it. I couldn't. I couldn't teach children like that at all. But they adore him. They do exactly what he wants them to. They stand in lines, they take their shoes off and do all the right things and if it was me, they'd be dashing about all over the place, going absolutely crazy. He's quite a large man and he really has control over them beautifully. And I've gone on going to Santa Monica College, as well. And for the last year and a half, that's been what I've been doing. The classes- -the nine o'clock classes- -have got considerably smaller. I'm lucky now if I get fifteen, which barely pays the pianist and me, you know, so they're not making any money on the classes, really, which is sad. And, obviously, the interest in ballet is waning very considerably [pause] all over the world, actually.

GUERARD

Well, I was going to ask, because we had talked about trends before, of interest in ballet. And I was wondering what you thought about that, if this is limited to Los Angeles or--?

HILLS

No, it's not, because all through these tapes, I've been talking about my roots being with The Royal Ballet and now they are without a theater in London.

GUERARD

They are?

HILLS

They closed The Royal Opera House Covent Garden for two years' refurbishing. And the company was going to go here and was going to go there. And then the government suddenly pulled the ground out from underneath the refurbishing of the theater. The government changed from being a Conservative one to a Labour one, and they don't want to support the arts.

GUERARD

Oh.

HILLS

And any support they do give, they say that the theater has to have a percentage of seats which are very cheap so that people don't feel it's elitist. But, as somebody else has pointed out, it is elitist to go to the opera and ballet and the other people, even if the seats are cheap, won't go. They don't like it.

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

They would rather stay home and watch their MTV and their football and all that sort of thing. And so, there's a tremendous row going on in England and The Royal Ballet has temporarily moved back to the Sadler's Wells Theatre, which has just finished being refurbished. Whether they'll ever go back to Royal Opera House Covent Garden, I really don't know. At the end of last month, they had to sign a contract which cut them down by £5 thousand a year less than they were getting. They've also got to guarantee that they will-- this is dancers mind you--work an eight-hour day. Regardless of rehearsals, class time, they will work an eight-hour day.

GUERARD

But they probably work than more than eight hours a day, anyway.

HILLS

They do work more than eight hours a day, sometimes. But sometimes, of course, they don't. And if they're not in the ballet that's being rehearsed, they get a day off.

GUERARD

As they should.

HILLS

As they should. But I think there's something to do with that wasn't going to include class time, because that's not working. [Guerard laughs]

GUERARD

What is it doing?

HILLS

I don't know. And they were no longer going to be provided with tights or jockstraps for the men or the number of shoes they were going to get was going to be cut down. All this because of the government taking part in the thing. You know, instead of just saying, "Here's some money. Get on with it."

GUERARD

Well, that must be so disillusioning for the dancers and--

HILLS

Oh, devastating! I think so awful for Dame Ninette de Valois, who celebrated her hundredth birthday last May.

GUERARD

Yikes!

HILLS

And she's still alive and still aware. And to see the thing that has been her child since 1931 suddenly disintegrating, must be devastating.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

You know, it's bad for the people who are still trying to being employed in it, but for her it must be just, just awful.

GUERARD

Yes. Yes! I mean, she worked so hard for so many years.

HILLS

Yes, she did.

GUERARD

And saw it blossom and grow. And to have a pin put in the balloon--

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

It's terrible! [tape recorder off]

GUERARD

Sorry for that interruption! [Hills laughs]

HILLS

The trouble there is the same, I think, worldwide, American Ballet Theatre isn't working full time. I don't know how long their contract is, but it's possibly forty weeks or something. And there really seems to be just no interest in ballet. Children are not going to ballet classes like they did sort of almost automatically years and years ago. I suspect it's to do with women's lib, if you really get down to where it started from. When the little girls now want to do what the boys do, you know, they're on the baseball teams and doing all those sort of things rather than dancing.

GUERARD

Hm!

HILLS

They're tougher. People like to see rather muscular bodies moving. All the advertisements, now, are showing very muscular women, which is what ballet is not about. And I think the whole culture has changed tremendously. The clothes people wear are no longer what you might call, in quotes, "pretty." People wear things that are comfortable to move in, but not pretty.

GUERARD

Right, right.

HILLS

And ballet is, generally speaking, pretty. And so, why do you want to go and see something [that] looks pretty, because it's not what you're used to seeing.

GUERARD

That's really an interesting insight.

HILLS

And I think that's why it's losing-- Well, has lost its popularity. I shouldn't say "losing." It's lost it. And that shows in the way people dance in ballet now. They look depressed when they're doing it. If you go to see a performance, they don't look joyful when they're dancing. They look as though they're going through the motions, which is sad because I-- You know, I'm just as bad as everybody else. I'm not going to see ballet performances. I'm not enthused by them.

GUERARD

Oh. Yes.

HILLS

And, if I'm not, then who is, you know?

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

I ought to be going to support them, but it's very expensive.

GUERARD

You know, that was one of the questions I was going to ask you, if you think it has to do with the expense?

HILLS

I don't, really, because you think the men who are determined to get tickets for a World Series will spend hundreds of dollars to get there because they're enthusiastic. So seventy-five dollars for a ticket is expensive, but it's not as expensive as they will pay for something they really want to see. So I think they really don't want to see it.

GUERARD

Right. Well, you know, it's interesting because I've been looking at Ballet Annuals from the late forties and early fifties and, you know, of course we're in such a different time frame now with the different styles and all of that, but one of the things that really has struck me as I'm looking at these photos, is that the ballet dancers seem to go beyond the costume and the make-up and all of that and they are, in fact, very muscular. They're in very good shape, but the sort of grace and involvement in the character that they're dancing kind of supersedes all of this.

HILLS

Yes. And the ballet training, although it does make a dancer muscular, the actual movement, when you see it, doesn't look like muscular movements.

GUERARD

Right. Exactly.

HILLS

The training transcends the fact that the muscles are doing it and to give a feeling of being ethereal. And, of course, nowadays, if you're working on machines to build up your muscles, you want to show off the muscles. And the people want to see you showing off your muscles. So again, it's quite, quite, quite different. You know, people have been going crazy about Riverdance, the Irish tap dancing, you know, which is very, very physical. And they love it.

It's percussive, that noise, noise, noise of the taps, and they're filling houses with that.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

And it's utterly different.

GUERARD

It is, quite different.

HILLS

I don't like it, personally, and I don't mind people knowing I don't like it, but a lot of people just love it. And the-- What's that other group. Smash, is it, where they beat dustbin lids together and things like that? Again, it's noisy, it's brash, and it's harsh and people love it.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

I suppose we've all got inured to the noise that's on television; the cops and robbers and the cars crashing into each other and that 's become the norm, what we wait for. I say "we," but not me. I don't go for that. [laughs]

GUERARD

Yes. Well, I hope it's a trend that will change.

HILLS

I think it will, because ballet has been down in the dumps before.

GUERARD

It has.

HILLS

In the 1840' s, when *Coppélia* was first choreographed, there were no men available to be in it. All the parts were played by women. And so, you know, that meant that ballet was pretty much in the doldrums. until the Romantic Era started, just shortly after that. And then, people loved the *Giselles* and all those sort of ballets, which were very different from the showmanship of the story ballets before. So it'll get revived, as long as somebody keeps teaching it and polishing it, you know.

GUERARD

Right. Well, I've been reading about organizations like the Balanchine Foundation and others of modern dancers, to revive some of the old choreography, and I hope they'll be able to do that.

HILLS

Well, I think we stand a better chance now because before this slump, most of the ballets and modern dance pieces, for that matter, are now on videotape. A lot of them are written down either in Laban Notation or choreology, so there is a resource for people to find out what it was like. In the past, there was nothing but word of mouth and some photographs. So, the library for revival is there, which is great.

GUERARD

The difference is that maybe the teachers were those who had performed and they were actually there to--

HILLS

Oh, they were. That is absolutely true. And so, it'll go-- If it does come back, it'll probably go through a time of being rather academic until those people who have danced the academic stuff have thought, "I want to put more into this." And they will sort of start doing that and then they will teach and they will bring out the good stuff again. It's bound to happen, just as the countries where ballet has been centered has changed from Denmark, Russia, France, Italy, England, America. It's gone circle, circle, circle, so it may not be in England. It may not be America. It may be somewhere else. [pause] But I think it will be revived. Probably not in my lifetime, maybe in yours. So, I'm not hopeless about it.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

I'm sure it'll come back. Something that's survived for four hundred years can't just be eclipsed.

GUERARD

No.

HILLS

Opera and ballet and painting are the longest-- And of course, just music is really long-lasting.

GUERARD

Well, I'm glad that you can see that--

HILLS

The hope for the future.

GUERARD

See the hope for the future. But how does that effect you, right now?

HILLS

Well, me personally, I went through a few months of feeling very depressed about the whole thing and thinking, "Why am I doing this?" You know, "I just want to stop." And now I'm sort of resigned to the fact that my classes are getting and will get smaller because there's nobody taking lower level classes to come up.

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

And so, it will just peter out and I shall just bow out gracefully when there are so few people taking class that it isn't paying anymore. It's nice to be doing it

to be making a little pocket money and keeping some people interested and willing to try and do it right. But, of course, the people taking my class are not, the majority of them, ever going to get a job. Even one of the girls who is really very good, is depressed, because nobody is asking her to go and be a soloist in *Nutcracker* this year because they are all using their own students from their own schools, and they're not paying soloists to come in and do it. And so, she is now thinking, "Well, maybe I should go to Santa Monica College and learn how to do math and start to get a degree in something else."

GUERARD

Oh, sure.

HILLS

When there are a lot of dancers out of work who have been in the big ballet companies, there's obviously no hope for people who haven't or who have only just been in small ones.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

It's bound to happen. What all the dancers will do-- They can't all teach, because nobody's learning. [laughs] So I don't know what they'll do. It's sad for them.

GUERARD

It is. Well, people aren't just going to stop loving dancing.

HILLS

No. No. They'll all be feeding on each other and giving each other classes for a while. [laughs] But it is sad at this present moment. And this sounds like going out on this tape on a very low note, but I don't want to do that because the resources are there for revival.

GUERARD

Yes, uh-huh!

HILLS

Which is something that's never happened before. We can see Margot Fonteyn. We can see [Natalia] Makarova . We can see [Mikhail] Baryshnikov after he's dead. We can see [Rudolf] Nureyev, who is dead. We can-- You know, it's there.

GUERARD

Yes.

HILLS

Which is fabulous.

GUERARD

Well, and so hopefully, the spark will come around full circle.

HILLS

Oh, I think it will. It's bound to.

GUERARD

So, in thinking back, one of the things that I definitely wanted to ask you about was your trip back to England. When was this, a year or so ago?

HILLS

Oh, this was summer of '97. I went in July for the fifty-year anniversary of the opening of The Royal Ballet School. And in a way, that was another closure for me, because it was badly organized. They had asked all the people who had ever been in the school if they would like to go back, you know, and charged them for a dinner.

GUERARD

So, it would be all the performers of The Royal Ballet or the Sadler's Wells [Ballet]?

HILLS

You would have thought. But the company didn't go.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

They'd stayed away, en masse. I don't know why.

GUERARD

You mean, those who were in the company when you were at the school?

HILLS

Yes! I think the trouble was, from what I heard afterwards, that all the people who'd been in the company felt they should have been invited to go back and not asked to pay to go back.

GUERARD

Oh!

HILLS

And so, they didn't go. Likewise with the people who had taught in the school . They thought they should be invited. Well, of course, if you invite that many people and you've got to give them dinner and arrange it all, it wouldn't pay.

GUERARD

Right.

HILLS

And the other thing that was so wrong was that a lot of the former students did show up for this evening event, but what I'd forgotten is that English people do not like having name tags. [Guerard laughs] And so, there were all these grown up people, nobody wearing a name tag, nobody knowing who anybody was, and I was walking around up to people--and I'd put my own name tag on--and said, "I am Margaret Graham. Should I know you?" I actually managed to meet fifty former students that way.

GUERARD

Very good!

HILLS

But if I hadn't, they couldn't have found me, because I don't look the same.

GUERARD

Well, nobody does, fifty years later.

HILLS

No! And last time I saw them, they were between ten and fifteen and, of course, they looked entirely different. And so, we did chat a little bit to those people. But I didn't sit with them at dinner. The table-- We were assigned places for dinner and I sat with my former colleagues who-- The older ones had shown up, Barbara Fewster and Alex [Alexander] Grant and a girl called Pauline Wadsworth and David Gill and a whole lot of people who were my contemporaries. We were all stuck at this table. We had a great time, but it wasn't what we were supposed to be doing; meeting the former students.

GUERARD

Yes. And had you been in touch with some of those people, anyway?

HILLS

Oh, yes! The people that I was sitting at the table with, I send Christmas cards to every year, you know. [laughs] So it was just reviewing. Just, "What have you been doing this year?" more or less. So, that was actually a disaster, I think.

GUERARD

Oh, too bad.

HILLS

It was not really what one had hoped. And there were several girls who are American and like me, took the trip over, and they were very disappointed, too. They'd gone to all this long trip and were not welcomed, not celebrated, just left to fend for themselves. It's the English way. They don't ask you how you are. They don't ask you questions about yourself. They're very, very, self-contained and I'd forgotten. I'd really forgotten how to be English.

GUERARD

Hmm. [laughter] I don't know whether to say, "Well, good for you," or not!  
[laughter]

HILLS

Well, I don't know, but it was very strange. It would be very hard to go back to it. Very hard. So I guess we're right to be American now.

GUERARD

Good. Were any of the-- Was Dame Ninette de Valois there, or were any of the other main administrators?

HILLS

She wasn't there. The week before, they'd had a performance at the Royal Opera House, a student performance, and she had gone to that and got very tired. And so, she didn't come to the dinner. I think, possibly, that performance at The Royal Opera House was the event, but in the blurb they sent us by mail, it sounded as though that-- And it was a week apart, and I chose to go to what I thought would be the big event. And I think if I had gone the week earlier, it would have probably been better. But how can one tell, you know? They don't tell you. I thought, you know, "I'm really connected with the school and not so much with the theater, now." I think I chose the wrong event to go to. However, it was an experience. I wouldn't have missed it. But, it became a closure. I don't want to go back to the school again.

GUERARD

I see.

HILLS

And I can't go back to the company again because it's not at The Royal Opera House anymore. And so, this is, I think, probably why I got a little miserable, because I saw everything that I had built really closing. And, you know, the people that I taught who've now got the high executive positions, they'll be retiring soon. The Royal Ballet School principal, Dame Merle Park, has now retired. And her job is being taken by a girl from Australia, whom I'd never heard of. You know, so going back is-- They say you can never go back, so I suppose that's how it is.

GUERARD

Well, it's a whole generation that's passed by.

HILLS

Yes.

GUERARD

Also, it must be a very strange feeling that it's the house you grew up in and the house isn't there anymore.

HILLS

Yes! No, exactly. And, of course, Stanley Holden's studio closing down was quite a trauma, even though I am still teaching some of the same people. All in one year, there was a lot of stuff that finished.

GUERARD

Yes. And Stanley was somebody who came from England.

HILLS

Yes. We had known each other since we were sixteen, you know.

GUERARD

Right. And you were there for how many years?

HILLS

The studio on Pico? From January '72 until May '97. So, twenty-five years. That's a long time.

GUERARD

It is. [laughs]

HILLS

But he says the same thing; that his classes, in the studio he's taken, are smaller. Where he used to have a lot of professional dancers who were dancing in shows in Los Angeles would come to his class, they don't come anymore because they take their company class, which is free, and they can't

afford to take other classes. And so, he says his classes, also, are getting smaller and smaller. And he has an enormous rent to pay, which I don't. I'm on a salary, which is really why I wanted to go somewhere other than paying rent for the studio. Because if you're paying, you know, seventy- five dollars rent for an hour and a half, plus thirty dollars for a pianist, and people are paying ten dollars a class and grumbling about it, you've got to have a lot of people in that class before you make a cent.

GUERARD

Oh, you have to. It's a tremendous burden.

HILLS

And then you've got insurance and all the other things, you know.

GUERARD

Mm hmm.

HILLS

Awful. So, I wouldn't recommend anybody became a ballet teacher, either.  
[laughter]

GUERARD

It's not an easy path, is it?

HILLS

It's not. No, it never has paid well, but now, it's really right at rock bottom. But it will revive, Genie! [laughs]

GUERARD

It will. It will. It will. [pause] I'm just wondering if you might look forward to doing some other things.

HILLS

Everybody says this. They say, you know, "If you stop, what are you going to do?" And I think I'd probably like to find out what it's like to be all the other women in the world who don't go out to work, who do stay at home and

garden and cook and all those sort of things. I'd probably hate it after a month, but I would like to give it a try. Because I never have not worked.

GUERARD

That's true. It's true. From-- How old were you when--?

HILLS

Four. [laughter]

HILLS

It's been a long time. And I may--probably would--hate the way the other people live, but I'd like to give it a little try. And maybe I'll do volunteering in something or other. Who knows what.

GUERARD

Well, I know you won't stop. You won't just stop working. You'll be working, somehow.

HILLS

Everybody says this. [laughs] We'll see. A little "r and r" might be quite nice.

GUERARD

I think so. Yes.

HILLS

But when, who knows? A year, two years, next week? I haven't the faintest idea.

GUERARD

Well, you've hit sort of a landmark in your life.

HILLS

Well, I guess. I had that wonderful birthday party they gave me when I was seventy, which was just so exciting. And a lot of people came back for that who don't dance anymore, you know. And it was very flattering. I had a lovely time.

GUERARD

Probably a lot of people much younger than seventy who don't dance anymore.

HILLS

Yes, I think I was probably close to the oldest there. [laughs]

GUERARD

And Still dancing and still teaching.

HILLS

Yes, yes. [pause] So, we shall just see. And this tape would not know. But you can write it in one day.

GUERARD

Yes. [laughter] Well, you know, it's getting to be sort of like old times, sitting in these chairs, so you never know when we might be here again.

HILLS

Mm hmm. But you'll have to get this done, Genie. I mean, one day it's going to finish.

GUERARD

Yes, it is. It is, soon. And on that note, I really have to thank you, once again, for sharing all your experiences and your thoughts with me and also with those people who are going to be reading this oral history.

HILLS

But I have to thank you, because if you hadn't suggested it, I wouldn't have done it. I'm a very lazy person as far as getting myself to do things and I have you to thank for getting me in there and doing it. Thank you very much, Genie.

GUERARD

Oh, well, you're welcome. So, are there any other thoughts that you've been having or anything you would like to add to this?

HILLS

No, I've been sitting in the car these last few weeks thinking what do I need to round off and I can't think of anything else. That's it.

GUERARD

Okay. Well, thank you, once again, for this wonderfully rich experience.

HILLS

Thank you.

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