Interview of Gary K. Bates
UCLA Library, Center for Oral History Research, University of California, Los Angeles
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Transcript

Tape One, Side 1 (October 22, 1994)

KAUFMAN:

I wanted to just ask you the very beginning, when you were born and where you were born, and you can go into any detail you like about the environment and your family.

BATES:

I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, 1940, July 20, and I was an illegitimate child. My mother (Jean Gaulding Bates) I was an accident. (laughs) But I was the first thing-- My mother had been raised an orphan, and I was the first thing in her life that she had, sort of. Like, I got to be her thing. But the first four or five years I was shipped off to a lot of different places, raised by different families, because my mother couldn't work and keep me. So I had two or three-- I remember--some of my very earliest (memories), like two or three years old--saying good-bye to the family that I had. And I think that had a lot to do with a lot of stuff later in life that-- I'm not sure if it's abandonment, but that loss, and wanting. It had a lot to do with, as I grew older, how I have established groups of people, tried to create families, working families, in my obsession almost for making friendships and having friends. Because I think in that early period I-- That loss was there quite a bit. My mother married a man (William Bates Sr.), and they had a son (William Bates Jr.) , so I have a brother, who I am estranged from for over thirty years. I got to see him a few years ago (laughs), and he came, and he's six-foot-something, and he's very macho. He had come in overnight at my place, and we had dinner and we talked. We sort of sat across this table, sort of sideways from each other, and talked, you know. It was very funny, because I had not seen him for a long time, and he looks very different from me. He's dark, and I'm lighter and fairer, and he's big and he's grizzly and, you know, he's (in a macho voice) a man. And he said, "Wait a minute, I've got to go and get something out of the truck," and he came there and plopped this revolver down on the table. (laughs) But as I got to watch him, certain gestures--even though we had not been around each other for many, many years--certain attitudes, even certain inflections in the voice and certain looks of the face, I knew he was my brother. I knew he was my brother. It was so interesting how little of us gets separated, you

know, no matter what our environmental changes are. But there was enough there that this was my brother, that I could pick this person out from that person.

KAUFMAN:

When you were young, what was your relationship like with your brother?

BATES:

Probably antagonistic. We were so different. And most of-- Particularly with him-- I don't think-- I was the older brother, so really I didn't know whether I was the one doing this or initiating this or not. It seemed like my brother-- If I wanted to be blue, my brother wanted to be another color. You know? If I was going to be high, he was going to be low. If I was going be to the left, he was going to go to the right. (laughs) So from the very beginning it seems like we were going in opposite directions always.

KAUFMAN:

What did your mom do with all this?

BATES:

My mother was an interesting lady. My mother is an extremely bright woman with no education. She suffered through a family of fourteen, and the last eight of them were in an orphanage, and (there was) a lot of dissidence in their family. But she was very bright. She had a learning disability--she was dyslexic--and also had a hearing problem, so she had a very difficult time in school and thought she was stupid. Well, she did an enormous amount of work most of her life to try to compensate-- Most of this she did not know until she was fifty years old and back in school again. I can remember doing things like-- My mother used that difference with my brother and me as a whipping tool a lot times. So there was a cruel aspect of it. The other--the

wonderful--aspect of it, though, was that when we'd go see a movie, or when we finally got a television-- I was in my teens practically when we got a television, because television hadn't even come out yet hardly. We're in 1940. We would sit down and watch television, or we'd go to a movie, and she would say, "Now, what did you learn from that? And why did you think that person did what they did or this? Why do you think that happened? Why do you think they acted the way they did? Or why do you think these people reacted to what was going on?" So we were always challenged to look at different sides of issues and to look at what might be the reasons for something. She was constantly challenging me as a thinker; she was probably the first challenge I had. Always. She was always doing it. I mean, she was one of those people who wanted to be right. So in the sense of being right, if she looked at this and said, "Now, isn't this a pretty color of green?" and you said, "Mom, this is maroon," she would say, "I know, it's what we're talking about it. I know it's maroon." We were always like, "Are you paying attention?" (mutual laughter)

KAUFMAN:

I have a question about-- Did your mom ever talk about your father? Do you know anything about your father?

BATES:

Yeah. He was Norwegian, I think from Oslo, one of three sons. I was going to be named after my uncle. My father's name was Harald Bakke, and my uncle, his name was Graden (Bakke). So my mother was going to name me Graden Kent, and it would have been Bakke had my mother and he married, which-- The whole town took arms up for my mother and put him in jail and tried to get him to marry her. And by that time my mother said, "If he doesn't want to marry me, I don't want him." (laughs) "If he doesn't want to do this on his own, I don't want him." So it didn't matter whether he was ready to--

KAUFMAN:

So this was a big open affair, this whole--

BATES:

Well, no, the affair wasn't.

KAUFMAN:

But your birth--

BATES:

Yeah, my mom's pregnancy and me were a big affair in this town.

KAUFMAN:

How big was this town?

BATES:

It's a small town, very small town. That was the orphanage.

KAUFMAN:

One thousand people?

BATES:

Probably more than that. They had an orphanage that my mother had gone to which had about that many people in it, and then a college in the town. It was a town of maybe fifteen thousand people.

KAUFMAN:

Back to the father.

BATES:

His name was Harald Bakke. His brother's name was Graden. I was going to be named Graden Kent Bakke, and then I took my mother's name. It was going to be Graden Kent Gaulding. And I have a birth certificate, when she-- Then a few days before I was born she decided not to have anything to do with the Bakkes at all, so it was Gary Kent Gaulding, and when she gave the name when they went to register me, they thought she was abbreviating Kent, so they gave it to me as Gary Kenneth Gaulding. So that's how my name got to be Gary Kenneth Gaulding from Graden Kent. Then years later my stepfather adopted me, when I was about sixteen, just before he died, so I have two birth certificates, one with Gary Kenneth Gaulding and one with Gary Kenneth Bates.

KAUFMAN:

Why did you choose to keep Bates?

BATES:

I've always had the Bates name, and I always-- That's what I always was. From the time I was five years old, when I asked my mother "Can I call you 'Mother,' Jane?" And my stepfather that sort of-- (It was) what I knew from that point on.

KAUFMAN:

It seems like the feeling I'm getting is a sense of an orphanage or just not belonging.

BATES:

Well, what's interesting is that my brother is two and a half years younger than me, and what I got most of my life was that I was different. My mother said that to me all the time. My brother was named Bill, my father's name was Bill. So there was that leap there-- Usually the oldest son is the one named after the father. I wasn't quite understanding that. I used to spend a lot of my time as a child going through the closets trying to find out where I really came from.

KAUFMAN:

Hmm.

BATES:

(laughs) You know, I did. And I think as a result of that that's another point of my early life that I think helped create who this person is, in that I became much more interested in fantasy. I

became a loner and a dreamer. So my early life was spent (in) a lot of dreaming, designing, and-- I designed clothes, I drew, I played musical instruments, I sang in choirs, and I dreamed and I watched movies. You know, that had aspects of being something, like becoming a star. (laughs) And those were very important, you know. So I did a lot of that. So that idea of either the loss and abandonment which made me want to have a lot of friends, you know, wanted people to like me, and the fact that-- And my family told me that all the way up-- I didn't know about my stepfather, that my stepfather was my stepfather, until he died. And I was sixteen; that's when I found out the truth of that whole thing. My mother wanted to tell me from the very beginning, but it seemed like her family was--

KAUFMAN:

So you didn't know that he wasn't your father--

BATES:

Until I was sixteen. That's why I never changed. I thought about it. I thought about going to find-- My real father, I always wanted to sort of look him up. There were family friends who knew my real father, and the uncles and the cousins were up in the Dakotas. And I probably could have. I never did. I think the reason I never did was because I felt that if he really wanted to see me he could see me. He always knew how to get hold of me, and he kept in touch with people, I guess, and found out about me. But it seemed like I was always expected to be the one to initiate something, and, you know, that always sort of upset me. When I was a child my mother would say, "Well, talk to your father. You know, he just doesn't understand you. You make the approach."

KAUFMAN:

It's hard for a child.

BATES:

Yeah, I don't understand that. And I still don't understand that, you know. That's why I overcompensate sometimes by trying to-- I talk more, you know.

KAUFMAN:

So the early years with your brother, you were always different. As you were approaching adolescence, what was happening then in your family?

BATES:

My brother was a little prince. My brother, my stepfather's family loved him. My stepfather's family loved my stepfather. Bill Bates could walk on the earth and it would turn out gold for them. It didn't matter, they just absolutely adored him, and as a result of that they adored his son. So they would come by and give him presents and leave me out. I was called the "Little Polack" because I went to a Polish Catholic school. (laughs) There were a lot of things-- Some of this is coming up now in something else that I'm doing, and I'm realizing how hurtful it was. You know that there were some things that-- As much as I worked through a lot of it, there was some of it that was probably very damaging. My stepfather never tried to ease that. As a result of that I was always outside of the family. There was them and me. And my mother would say, "Well, you know, you're very different from the rest of us." Now, whether she meant that I was because I was precocious or bright or because I was-- I had the way in which I was born. (laughs) Because at that time, 1940, that was a big deal. It was a big deal to have a woman also do what she did, which is to be very out in the open about it and be very, very up front. She was very Hester Prynne. And she had a lot of the success that Hester Prynne had in The Scarlet Letter in that eventually she came out stronger and people came out in admiration of her at a time when (with) that kind of thing we all tried to hide it. And it all became this barnacle on our sides that nobody noticed. That kind of stuff, it didn't happen for my mother. My mother had a lot of respect and gained a lot of respect with a lot of people. So she's a risk taker. She did some women's rights things in the forties that other people were just able to do, to take that kind of risk, in the sixties and seventies. So I learned a lot from my mother. My mother is a mix of some very, very difficult juxtapositions: good and bad, very strong and very weak, or troublesome. But I've learned a great deal from the woman. She's always a surprise. Continues to be a surprise. (mutual laughter)

KAUFMAN:

What are some recent surprises?

BATES:

She's seventy-three (years old), and she was climbing-- She was out on the roof cleaning out her things about a year ago. (laughs) The ladder was balancing with some rocks underneath, and she fell and broke her foot. Six months later she broke the other foot. She came to visit me recently, and she was on crutches--on one of those walker things, you know--and I absolutely adored it, because there she was at seventy-three showing me how much easier it was to go up the stairs backwards, this long staircase by my house. So there she was-- (mutual laughter as Bates jumps up, grabs a chair, and demonstrates)

KAUFMAN:

Perhaps you got some of your physicality from her?

BATES:

No question. Absolutely no question. She played baseball until she was eight months pregnant, you know. She was a baseball player. She won all kinds of awards in high school for her athleticism herself and absolutely hated it because my brother and I weren't (athletes ourselves). Though-- She did not see me dance. She absolutely refused to even acknowledge my dancing for ten years after I started. Because it was just too difficult. She wanted me to be a lawyer, first of all, not to be a dancer. So going to college and becoming a dancer was just not what she had anticipated. A lawyer or a doctor would have been-- Anything, but not that. So I was wasting my time in college, because I was becoming a dancer. The other thing is that I should have been an athlete if I was going to do something physical. She loves my dancing today; today she's very proud of all of it. I remember the first time she saw me I was teaching at Florida State (University). She and her third husband (Tom) had come down to visit. And they just weren't quite sure they were going to come to the concert, because I was doing a concert that weekend.

Well, she walked in, and they were sitting down. There was all this hubbub, and my name was floating around the air. She was taking notice, she was listening. (laughs) And then this piece came on that Nancy Smith had choreographed for me, and (I) finished it, and there were a couple of men in front of my mother and Tom, and they said, "Wow, God, he was good. That was-- Did you like him?" (The other) said, "Yes, well, what did you like about it?" "Well, he was just so strong and blah blah blah--" My mother was having this little dialog with the people in front. And she said, "That's my son." And from that moment on there was that absolute switch. My mother was okay

KAUFMAN:

What allowed them to finally come see you?

BATES:

Just the proximity. She was there in Florida, there was nothing else to do in Tallahassee on Friday nights, so she came to the concert. And I think she also would not have not done it (except that) other people--like my boss, whom she had met, and other people--were going to be there, and she didn't want to be left out.

KAUFMAN:

Going back to your childhood--

BATES:

Childhood?

KAUFMAN:

This is wonderful, by the way. I'm just assuming the role of the director.

BATES:

Well, yeah, go ahead, please.

KAUFMAN:

Okay. I got the sense that there were a lot of chaos--

BATES:

I grew up poor. Both my father-- My stepfather-- (laughs) Interesting. He was a prince. His family-- He would go out and buy a car, wreck it, go out and buy another car. Somebody else would pay for the other one, you know? He'd go out and buy a suit of clothes, charge it to his sister or his aunt or his father, and they would pay for it. It wasn't that they had a lot of money; they didn't. They all worked for Swift and company, one of the major stockyards in National City, right outside of East St. Louis (Illinois) on the (Mississippi) River, which was the second largest stockyard in the country. All the major meat packing companies were there along this (river), all next to each other. And my grandfather was chief of police of National City, of the stockyards. My father worked in pork cutting. My aunt worked in sliced bacon. Another one ran the elevators, another one was the president of the union, three others were in various other aspects of it. So everybody worked there.

KAUFMAN:

Yet you grew up poor.

BATES:

There was money, but my father didn't know how to manage money at that time. My mother worked and my father worked. We were poor. We were not destitute, we were just poor. We were poor middle class. We never had a lot. We bought this old house out in the country, and we remodeled it, and we did a lot of that stuff. So I got to learn some things about-- I got to see things being created, you know, like this old shack turned into this house that we got to decorate and do things with and-- We didn't have a lot of things-- I was out in the country. We didn't see a lot, we didn't do-- But there was a richness, you know. I loved going in the woods. I spent a lot of time in the woods. We had grapevines, and we could swing over creeks and fall into creeks and we ran around. We had 150 acres of blackberries and raspberries out behind us, and I used to pick those. I loved picking blackberries. And I'd sell them to markets. In this day and age you can't do things like that. But you could sell-- I could take them up to the town and sell them to the markets, and they'd sell them to the people and family and such. I used to make a nice little bundle of money every summer selling berries--and mowing lawns and doing all those things.

KAUFMAN:

Where did your mom work?

BATES:

My mother worked at a ketchup factory, which is still there. I saw it last year when I went there.

KAUFMAN:

Heinz?

BATES:

Brooks. It's a Midwestern ketchup. She worked at Brooks ketchup, and then she worked for probably close to twenty years off and on at different places for the telephone company. And then at fifty she decided to go back to school and become a nurse. And that's where she found out about her dyslexia and her hearing problem, why she could never easily learn before. She (inaudible) and she would twist words, absolutely twist them. So I grew up with this person who was so right (laughs), and you were so sure she was; she was so sure she was right. With all these twisted words I would learn and then go back and find out that word wasn't that at all, it was this, you know. (laughs) And she would literally twist the word, because she couldn't hear it. So like things like Sepulveda, you know-- And it wasn't that she was-- She had no speech impediment. It wasn't like she couldn't pronounce the words, it's that she couldn't hear them, so that they would come out very different from what they were.

KAUFMAN:

So information came, really, from your main source in a very--

BATES:

Distorted fashion, uh-huh. And as I look back on that and see that, sometimes it's both amusing and interesting. It's amusing because so much of what I took so seriously was also quite wonderful in the bigger sense of it, because after a while I never was afraid of creating words or twisting words myself and making new words to fit the idea of something, so that it fit more solidly. I was always getting in trouble for it, but I did it.

KAUFMAN:

Was that because you went to school or--?

BATES:

I think it was because I suddenly realized-- Maybe it's the overcompensating for your mother. You know, sometimes if you have a mother you're having to overcompensate for you start seeing the quality of that rather than the bad thing of it. You're always embarrassed about the bad thing of it, too. I was certainly embarrassed by my mother, but the other side of the overcompensating part of it was that I found that-- "Well, why can't you make up your own words? Why can't it be that way, you know?" And you start doing it yourself just to prove that it's okay, you know? I don't know. I may have done that. But I think it was-- Say that I started learning something from that, that there was-- Oh, that word "advanced" doesn't just have to be that way. You can say "advanced-ed," you know, because it really does punch even more what you're trying to get to. So that's what I started doing, too. And it was another creative breakthrough. It was another way of-- "We don't have to take that. We don't have to do this pliÃ© this way only."

KAUFMAN:

So as an adult you can reflect back.

BATES:

And see that connection.

KAUFMAN:

As a child, though, how were you dealing with all this?

BATES:

Well, there were some other things that happened in my childhood that are real hard. I'm working through some of that right now, too. It's like-- When I was a kid, when I was a child child, I started out in a nursery in the kindergarten and the early grades in a Catholic environment. My mother was not Catholic. She had nothing to do with religion, but they were the better schools at that time, in that place, and they were close. So I didn't like the nursery, evidently. I can remember to this day running away from it. And I do remember some of the stories. My mother has some incredible stories about me, and on one side being precocious and the other side being an absolute brat. (laughs) And had my mother been a little less crazed herself, she probably could have enjoyed most of it, because she does enjoy it. Even a couple of years later she was able to tell the stories with a tremendous amount of humor and seeing this precocious person. (But at the time) she didn't know what to do with it, she didn't know how to handle it, and was always in the middle of trying to get someplace else. She would dress me up--she loved to dress me up--and I had these wonderful little outfits, these little suits at four or five years old. And they would be white suits. I would be wearing my little white suit, and I didn't want to go to the nursery, so I'd go out and sit in a puddle. (mutual laughter) There were times she would have to dress me at least three times before she got me to the nursery. And then eventually they would get a phone call that I had run away, and then they'd find me in the house. Now, how I got home from that place, which is like eight blocks away, at least eight blocks or ten blocks-- But I could do it just that way. I would disappear as-- You couldn't find me, and then they'd find me six blocks away visiting some black neighbors, you know, down by the train. They were interesting, and I wanted to meet them.

KAUFMAN:

So did you explore your neighborhood?

BATES:

Yes, I evidently did. I did so much that it bothered my mother. My mother purposely tied me up in a huge clothesline in my highchair one time. And she and my stepfather set out and watched just to see how long it would take me to get out of there and go. (mutual laughter) And I did.

KAUFMAN:

How long did it take you?

BATES:

Well, not very long, and I was out and I was gone. And by the time that they were laughing about seeing me get out of it they realized they had lost me, and I was already down the street. (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

How did you feel as a child when they did that to you?

BATES:

You know, some of those things, as a whole thing, I probably have some scars from. But there was a lot of laughter in my family too, so some of it doesn't have that kind of ring of being a bad thing, you know. That wasn't done in any kind of harshness. My family were poor, and my mother bought this new carpeting, the first time she had ever bought her own carpet, her own--You know, a brand new sofa, and it was these wonderful colors, this gray carpet--and I've forgotten what color the sofa was, but it was a matching color, a blending color--and a chair. First ones. I used to always get up early in the morning, and I ate like a pig. I mean, I could eat rashers of bacon, eggs, and toast and cereal, and I was two years old. Well, I would probably be about four or five when this happened. I'd always get up early, and my mother would panic. (laughs) She never knew what I was getting into. So I guess I was a little creative really from the very beginning. One morning I got up, and by the time she got up I'd eaten. We used to get the bacon in the solid blocks, and you'd slice it. I had eaten half of this bacon--

KAUFMAN:

Raw?

BATES:

Raw! (mutual laughter) And of course, all the grease. Another morning I discovered that if you take some ink and oatmeal you could make the most wonderful designs all over my mother's new carpet and furniture. Oatmeal and ink. (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

What happened to you after that?

BATES:

I was red, blistered, for days after, I'm sure. (laughs) I mean, it's funny, but it's also-- That's the kind of stuff she had to deal with. From the time I was two years old my mother had to deal with this person who, first of all, already had these ideas going, and two-- You know, I was already out there creating. The real truth of it is that that's what I was doing. She didn't understand it sometimes, and it wasn't the easiest to understand. It's one thing being creative, it's another thing being destructive.

KAUFMAN:

It's hard to tell the difference, though.

BATES:

Yeah, at that age it really is.

Tape One, Side 2 (October 22, 1994)

BATES:

Sad, funny, and horrible at the same time. I was probably-- Well, we had just moved into this same place-- I was at (the Samuel) Gompers (Housing Project of East St. Louis). It was one of those places that Samuel Gompers had sort of created to help the poor. And we lived in one of those brick buildings--two stories, you know--you see in a lot of different areas. You have them here, we have them out in the Midwest. They were all over. Right before the (Second World) War and right after the war they just built hundreds of them all over, in every major city, for the poor to have better housing. And we were in one. It was two-story, two bedrooms and a bath upstairs, and a living room and a kitchen downstairs. Very nice. So this is the house in which my mother had redone the living room. Well, she was painting my room-- I think it was my room. I was in a stolen-- I had to have been about four (years old), but she kept me sometimes in a playpen, in a-- What do you call those beds with the railings around them?

KAUFMAN:

A crib.

BATES:

A crib kind of thing, but bigger than the regular ones. And she was painting; she had painted my room. And I was so fascinated with paint, you know, the watching her paint that-- I in the meantime had pooped my pants, and I decided to take the poop and do exactly what she had done. And I had redone the wall. (laughs) And it was great; I was real excited with all of it. (laughs) So needless to say, I did get beat.

KAUFMAN:

You're just living alone with your mom, though, right? There's no stepdad or--?

BATES:

No, my brother was there and-- See, this was-- I was born in 1940, so my brother is two and a half years (younger than I). It was into '42, so we were in the war. My stepfather was off fighting the Second World War in Texas. (laughs) He was in the air force, and he never got to go to Europe or anyplace. He wound up staying in Texas and some other place, I think. Florida. He was down in Miami for a while, but he never quite got out of the United States. (laughs) So we didn't see him a lot of the time, because he was in the service. So an aunt of mine and my mother lived together. My mother worked at a couple of places. She was a cocktail waitress at the time, in my very early years, because she could make a lot of money. She made lots of money. The reason I had nice clothes and we had new things was because my mother could make $100 a night, sometimes $150, working at some of the places that she worked in.

KAUFMAN:

That's a tremendous amount of money for that time.

BATES:

Yeah. Yeah, I mean, she really did quite well. And then as soon as my stepfather came back, we all sort of-- It all went out. After the war all that went out. So the servicemen would come through town, and different people-- She said one night Helen Hayes was in this play, and she was in, and they left a $100 tip, you know. It was just the kind of thing that they did during the war. Everybody was sort of like-- It was all just being thrown out and spilled out like that all over the place. My aunt was a very important part of my life. Still is very important. She's eighty years old, almost eighty-one years old, and just terrific.

KAUFMAN:

What was her name?

BATES:

Her name was Blanche, Blanche Trustie. She was a blond bombshell--and still is. I mean, I went to see her in October expecting to see somebody I wouldn't recognize, you know, an eighty-year-old woman, what you would expect from an eighty-year-old woman, and the fact is she looked terrific. She still had her blond hair, she still wears her four-hundred-dollar outfits, you know, had to go out and get some that day when I was there--my mother and she went shopping, and she said,"Oh, look at this new outfit"--and wonderful colors and very stylish. And except for the fact that she has myasthenia gravis, which affects her limbs, so that her muscles-- She can't use them sometimes. Just sitting there she looked like a forty-five-year-old woman. There weren't any wrinkles in her skin, she still keeps her hair blond. She looked terrific. She looked frailer than she did when she really was forty-five. But there was still this very interesting woman. She read, she had library books, she had boyfriends and husbands. She lived in St. Louis, and we lived in the country. (laughs) She was sophisticated, she traveled, her boyfriends gave her all kind of presents, you know. She was exotic, she was interesting. And she looked more like me. (laughs) You know, it's funny. When we would go out, even from a very-- First of all, I lived with her and one of her husbands out in the country. So she was one those people I said good-bye to at one point in my very early years. And I was platinum, you know, very towheaded, up until I was in my twenties. My hair was very, very blond. And we were always mistaken for mother and son. My mother has dark hair and is freckled and small, and my aunt is just taller and blond and very fair. And because I'm half Norwegian, I had all that fairness too, so there was always this sense that Blanche and I were together. My mother and brother were together. So there was always that mistake in identity. To this day there is still a little bit of rivalry with my aunt and my mother about me, because they both were my mother and remained that for a long time.

KAUFMAN:

Can you go into some of the saying goodbye early on? You mentioned you were shipped off.

BATES:

Well, it's just that I would spend periods of time with families. A couple of them wanted to adopt me, and a couple of them I got very attached to, and they got very attached to me. And one of my earliest memories is waving good-bye to them as my mother would come pick me up one more time and take me home to reconnect with her, you know. But that was what happened with at least three families.

KAUFMAN:

This happened at like what age?

BATES:

Between zero and three.

KAUFMAN:

For financial reasons?

BATES:

Partly financial. My mother was-- Because she was single and because it was a difficult time. She had to make a living, and she couldn't make a living and have me there. So what happened is that there were friends. Some of them were from-- And I think that one probably-- I have never discussed this, and probably she would not have a clear idea as to this at this point, but she may

have even thought of adopting me out, you know, if this really worked over here. But then every time I would start to feel that I think she would pull me away. Because every time I started getting comfortable she started getting threatened. All the way through my life, with something else taking my attention I got pulled out of it. So I just made that connection. It's kind of interesting. But it's true, it's true. Even in my relationships, if it looked like I was going to spend more time being with them, then that person wasn't the right person for me--male or female. (laughs) And there were both. My mother has been very possessive of me, and in a funny way. And I just made that connection. It's so interesting, and it's really clear now. It permeated the whole relationship all the way through.

KAUFMAN:

Even now?

BATES:

Well, not so much now, because-- But yes. My mother and Blanche had a falling out about twenty years ago. My mother moved here with me; we were living in Venice. It was at the height of everything coming. Eyes Wide Open (Dance Theater) was beginning, and all this stuff was beginning to happen. And my mother was devastated, and it was the second or third time that she had had what I would consider a nervous breakdown. And she sat in my house for almost a year without being able to do anything. And my mother is a very active person. But she had expected some support from my aunt. It didn't come, and they stopped speaking to each other. And at that point, in order not to damage my mother any further, I decided to cut my relationship with Blanche for the time being. Well, over the years they became friends again, but it got very, very hard. It was very hard for me to go back, because-- I love my aunt. She is that one person that can do no wrong that we all have, usually from our childhood. And I didn't want to stop the relationship, but I did, and as a result of my stopping it and then not knowing how to pick it up again, it wasn't until about a year and a half ago that we did. When I went back there in October of last year to see my mom and to see her new house and to see my aunt, it was a very difficult-- The two of them together with me there was so difficult, so difficult. My mother would not let my aunt and me have five words together. My mother had to continually talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. And then when she left, when we left to go someplace, she said, "Did you see how Blanche tried to dominate the situation?" (laughs) "Did you notice how she was picking on me all the time because you were there?" And the fact is that my aunt didn't get a chance to do anything! My mother was so insecure and so frightened that I was not going to love her. It's interesting, because she always-- You know, that was one of the threads about me being different and also about our relationship, was that she would always say, "Well, you know,

I can't do this because I know you won't like me if I don't continue." If I don't continue to learn, if I don't continue to do this kind of thing-- I became her--in a funny way--whipping boy. For her to go on-- Her excuse: in fear of that I wouldn't like her. Now, that was not something I did, because I absolutely adored my mother. I want to kill her sometimes, but I adore her. But it was the fear, the paranoia that she had. So there were a lot of twisted things that-- You know, I'm fifty-four years old, and I'm just now beginning to untwist a little bit. I'm just now beginning to untwist a little bit. The thing I shared with you earlier about my brother being a prince and not knowing, not realizing-- I just discovered in the last few weeks this damage that my brother went through with the loss of his father--my stepfather--and the loss of that whole family unit that adored him and being taken away from all of that and thrown into something else was devastating to him at fourteen. And I'm the one that-- My mother wanted to move-- I'm the one that supported my mother--as a result of supporting my mother, and because it looked like I was getting things as a result of that. Like, I got to drive the car because I was eighteen. I got to go to college. We went to move to Arizona because my mother wanted me to have a college education and she couldn't afford it other places. There are all these reasons why I got to do things, and he was fourteen, fifteen. He was being left out for the first time, and he was being considered second for the first time. See, this never dawned on me about that stuff. That was the reason for this absolute estrangement that we've suffered since. Same with my mother. My mother, you know, I was her first thing. And she's never let go of that. So I have a feeling that every time I would get too comfortable, a family would get too loving, or there would be too much, you know, this would be harder to do, and she would pull me out of that. And that was a consistent theme. I would go to certain schools, and if-- Well, I went to the Catholic school. I loved it. Absolutely adored it, even though I didn't like one of my teachers, Sister Edwards. I still have her down on one of my lists here. (laughs) But because I wanted to become a priest, my mother just-- (makes swiping, snapping-up gesture) "Get out of there!" (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

At what age were you when you decided that you wanted to become a priest?

BATES:

Seven. And I really did. I absolutely adored my kindergarten teacher, whose name was Sister Mary Cadetta. I can still remember to this day. And Sister Edwards was also Sister Superior; she ran the grade school. And she was kind of mean. Well, she was just strict. It was a Polish Catholic school, and we learned Polish, you know. At that time they still spoke Latin and all that kind of stuff, but the various schools, particularly grade schools, would all be of a nationality. In other words, this order or this school would be Irish, and they would learn Gaelic. This one was

Polish; they would learn Polish. And this one was German and would learn German. So in the Gompers, where I lived, within that group there were four groups of us who were going to various Catholic schools and all of us learning a different language.

KAUFMAN:

Did you speak Polish?

BATES:

Uh-huh, for a while. Yeah, I can't now. But I had two years of it, almost three years of it there. We started it in the kindergarten, first grade.

KAUFMAN:

What was going to school like? Who were your friends?

BATES:

The one thing that dominates-- There are several things. Sister Mary Cadetta, absolutely to this day, her holy face. She was so loving and so giving, and I would have done anything in the world for her. I mean, that's how strong it was. I wasn't Catholic. My mother never let me forget that I wasn't Catholic. (laughs) My mother used to-- Another thing I love about my mother but that was hard at the time is that a lot of different religious people--you know, preachers in the neighborhood--would come and try to get us to join their church. And my mother would have-- I remember sitting up and listening for hours, arguments with my mother about religion, you know, because she was not a religious person in that sense, but she's very spiritual. So I grew up in that kind of atheistic environment of arguing about religions, (laughs) very early hearing these arguments and hearing this, "You know, there's no reason to go to church." And my mother was not averse to religions, but the men would come, a religious person would come, and tell her that

their religion was the right one, and that's the one she should belong to. Boy, she could scathe them on the other end and did. (mutual laughter) She's a real fighter, a real fighter. I mean, I've seen her knock six-foot-two-inch men across the room. And she's five-foot-one and weighed ninety-five pounds. She's a little like-- What's the little Japanese girl?

KAUFMAN:

Diane Takamine?

BATES:

Diane. And just a scrapper. Where were we on all that?

KAUFMAN:

Going to school and making friends.

BATES:

One of the things that I remember about the Catholic school is I still remember the peas and carrots in the nursery. (laughs) You know how certain foods-- For me, I can still recall a name or somebody-- Like a song will come up from the fifties, and I can smell and taste and feel certain images. That's how clear-- And to this day-- I mean, mashed potatoes will come into my mind, and certain cases, like marshmallow sundaes, you know. (laughs) Or smells. The whole smell and everything will come back just like that. But Sister Edwards-- We had first and second grade in the chairs. One group was doing this while the other one was up in little green chairs, and little red chairs in the front doing their lessons. And she would be called out all the time, because she had to take care of the business of the school, and then she would come back. Inevitably the class would be talking, because what do first and second graders do but talk and mess and throw and-- ? (laughs) Well, we had to always say ten Hail Marys or fourteen Our Fathers, you know, if we

were bad. So I learned-- "I'm not going to do that. I won't talk." And I would sit there-- (Bates demonstrates a stiff, upright, determined pose) And she would come in and she would say, "Okay, you've all got to do ten Hail Marys and fifteen Our Fathers." And I wouldn't do them. She said, "You've got to do them. You were part of this." So I learned very early to be very stubborn. (laughs) I would be sent out in the hall, down the hall, more times than not in those first two years. And Sister Mary would come and talk to her and get me back into class. MARIONNE KIRK: But you had been good, actually, while she was gone.

BATES:

So I learned very early about corporal punishment, about punishment for the whole group, you know, that individuals don't count. And it started a campaign for me for individuality. (mutual laughter) It did. Not conscious, but a stubborn kind of resistance to group thinking, group-- That kind of groupiness. Now, the other side of me made groups all the time. But I was one of those people who could make groups and then step out of them and be on the periphery of my own group. And I did that for a lot of years, including Eyes Wide Open. You know, I was in the center of it and the outside of it at the same time. So that was what I remember. The other thing I remember is that my mother and I fought because-- We always wore hand-me-downs. I always wore hand-me-downs, and I would wear her rain jacket, which was always too big, and I wore Levi's or jeans at that time. And they were all wearing knickers, grey knickers, and little shirts, and that's what they wanted me to wear. And I wanted to wear them too, because I wanted to be like everybody else. And my mother said, "No, we can't afford them, and you're not going to get them." So to this day I still want a pair of knickers. (laughs) I would have the knickers and the socks up to here. I absolutely was obsessed with knickers for years because I couldn't wear them. So there's that feeling of being involved and not being a part of. There is another place that happened for me, because my mother would go up there and argue with them: "I'm not going to dress him like the rest of them. He's not a Catholic, he's not," you know, blah, blah, even though I was going to the school and the church.

KAUFMAN:

So it's more than money. It was a way for your mother to keep--

BATES:

And to also separate from something, you know. She was, and still is to this day, very much an individual. It's very precious to her, and she probably instilled that deeply in both my brother and me, the individual in me. So I have that.

KAUFMAN:

Yeah, that's very clear. And I'm just curious, with all that individuality--

BATES:

And my mother talked. KIRK: You didn't get any of that, did you! (mutual laughter)

BATES:

No! Well, I didn't-- You know, I was in my mid- to late twenties before I started talking. I was probably in my late twenties before I really started talking. No, I was very shy up until then. I didn't talk much at all. Because my mother and my brother dominated; they were both the talkers.

KAUFMAN:

I was curious if you had many childhood friends at all.

BATES:

Yes, and David (Channiel, now Stone) was one of them, the one in the photograph you saw. David and I connected in the fourth grade, fifth grade. Fifth grade, so--what?--I was nine--? And we've been friends ever since. I'm fifty-four now, so we've been friends for--what?--forty-five years? (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

Where does he live now?

BATES:

He lives in Houston. And very creative and very-- And I would say he was probably-- He was the first--and for a long time the only--male friend I had. I've had very few male role models. My stepfather was not a role model for me, although I tried to adopt some things that I liked about him. I loved his quietness, his ease. The very thing that I suffered from, which was his inability to confront people and say "don't," you know-- My mother was always about ready to leave him, and my aunt was always screaming for her to leave him. Because they wanted (inaudible) to themselves. So there were always these battles that he would sort of laugh off. So at some point, when I got older, I realized that he-- You know, he had a kind of ease about him that-- Of course, he died at forty-six of cancer. So it may not have been as easy as it looked. (laughs) So David was probably the only one. I didn't have a lot of friends. I had a lot of girlfriends, because there were more girls in the neighborhood.

KAUFMAN:

Did you ever go over to people's houses? Or did they come to yours?

BATES:

Oh, when I lived at Gompers there was a whole group of us. I think I was a nerd. I look back on

there, and I can remember the names of people even to this day from that early, early, early period in the Gompers. I moved there at four years old, and I was there until I was nine. So that was about a five- or six-year period that I lived there, and I can still remember the various people there. Most of them I've never seen since.

KAUFMAN:

What do you mean by nerd? Can you explain? It's very loaded.

BATES:

Yeah, it is loaded, and it's a funny term. But, you know, I really think I was in a funny way. I didn't fit in. I didn't feel like I fit in, and I didn't fit in. I didn't know how to relate to men even at a very early age. Although I had friends. I probably had a whole network of friends there. My mother would have said I had all kinds of friends. I was very sociable. I didn't quite fit in. I always had these little connections, a connection with all these individuals, and (inaudible) it all very different. I was probably, from that very early place-- I was a center and at the same time on the periphery of things. I don't know if that makes any sense.

KAUFMAN:

It does.

BATES:

My first real friendship, I feel, was David. And that lasted for many years. It also got me in trouble and got him in trouble. (laughs) We had an argument. We came out together.

KAUFMAN:

How old were you?

BATES:

Fifteen. And my Baptist church choir director brought us out.

KAUFMAN:

Oh, really?

BATES:

Yeah, and-- At sixteen, when we were juniors in high school-- We had had a falling out that summer before we went to school our junior year. This is 1956, '56-'57. I guess it was the year my father--my stepfather--died. We had a falling out that summer and went back to school and weren't speaking to each other. And the entire school took sides. And when it came time to choose the homecoming queen, David and I got the two top scores. They had to do it over again. I mean, in '56 or '57 they certainly were not ready to have David or myself become, you know, go around the school as the homecoming queens. (laughs) Goldie Glitters could do it in 1975 at Santa Monica (College).

KAUFMAN:

But the students were ready to do that?

BATES:

The students did it! The students did it. Tongue in cheek, making fun of-- You know, some of it very sarcastic and very nasty, and some of it very tongue in cheek, and some of them just taking sides. Some of them liked David and some of them liked me, and they decided that was the way they were going to deal with it. David remembers it vaguely, but he still doesn't remember the fact that he won. (laughs) And they had to absolutely do it over again. They had to do it over again. They couldn't even talk about it on the intercom. (laughs) "The election has been--" Whatever. "The election has been defrauded" or something. "We're going to have to do it over."

KAUFMAN:

And then it still came out, but he--

BATES:

They didn't tell us why they had defrauded it.

KAUFMAN:

Right. But when they did it again he won?

BATES:

No, the first time he won.

KAUFMAN:

Oh, so then they--

BATES:

I came in second. (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

So when they did it again the girls got it.

BATES:

A girl won. (mutual laughter) In 1956. Isn't that amazing? But see, that's already the ferment of the fifties into the sixties. The sixties, you know-- I was the generation of kids who started the sixties, and that group is already a little bit, you know, twisting and things. And I came out knowing about gay life, not just those little secret things that boys and sometimes girls do that we don't talk about and we think we're ashamed of. I came out-- I mean, I knew about gay life. I saw gay bars (when) I was fifteen years old.

KAUFMAN:

Did David have something to do with your claiming that part of your sexuality?

BATES:

David-- It's amazing. David was even poorer than I was. He now lives in this grand townhouse in Houston and is an interior designer. He has done, financially and otherwise, something that I never did. You know, I was one who dreamt about having six homes; he's the one who created them. David had a very, very difficult family and a very difficult family life, and-- Not a very pretty picture. And we became very close. We just got very close and ran around together and shared with each other and talked about the things that hurt us and confused us, and we became comrades in arms. We could fight the world together, you know, and it was the first time I ever had somebody like that that I could share with. And when I moved away he moved away. And then when he moved over here, then I moved over there. You know, it was all those kinds of things. We kind of like piggybacked each other over to Hollywood, to Los Angeles, where he got to discover some things and I got to do some things, and we became who we are. And he changed his name from David Channiel to David Stone, and he's been living by David Stone since he was twenty years old.

KAUFMAN:

When you were young, how did you realize that you were gay? In terms of each other, I mean.

BATES:

We connected. I think we knew we were different. We would giggle and talk and different things like that, and-- So it was a natural process, in a way, because-- We were both interested in art. He wanted to paint and draw, and he also wanted to be an actor. And he was very confrontive and very open about everything. And I was one of the first people to start to learn how to do social dances in the fifth or sixth grade, so by the time I was in the sixth grade they were already throwing coins at me because I knew every dance from the 1920s to 1955, you know. And David was always flamboyant. Not flamboyant in a Nellie way but in a kind of outrageous way. And we both were outrageous. We both were outrageous in a funny, strange way. Although I was quieter and "nice"--nicer in terms of the etiquette of social things. David was kind of get-in-your-face. It always looked like David was the instigator of things, and probably most the time it was not the truth. We were always getting in trouble, but he was always getting blamed for it. (laughs)

Tape Two, Side One (October 29, 1994)

BATES:

We were talking last week about my childhood, and I remember that I-- I would like to talk a little bit about role models. Most of my role models throughout my life have been women, and most of the people that I've worked with have been women. And most of my (inaudible) for some reason have been women. And it wasn't until I was in my mid-twenties (when) I started at school at UCLA--I was a junior, and I met John Martin--that I think I really had my first male role model. When we talked a little earlier about friends, I had my friend David (Stone, formerly Channiel), whom you saw the pictures of. We've been friends for forty-six years now. He was probably my first male friend, and we continue to be friends. And he was my only male friend for a long time, until I had male lovers. But they weren't friends oftentimes; we'd become friends after the fact. I'm still in contact with three people that I had relationships with over the last thirty years and two or three of the women friends I had over the last thirty years. So I do want to talk about that, because I think it was a very significant-- I didn't like men. The kinds of men that I saw were lower-class working men. They were the kind of pinch-them-on-the-butt and slap-them-on-the-(butt) thing and talk about you-know-you-know and "keep 'em barefoot and pregnant." And there really was something about it that would seem--unsightly. (laughs) I mean, the whole concept of men just-- I never could get it. And I really liked-- I didn't want to be one. I didn't want to be like them, and I didn't want to be one. And for years part of the confusion for me was that if I didn't want to be a man, does that mean that I'm trying to be a woman? And that was real confusing for me. I didn't know for a long time: Does that mean that I want to play a woman? Do I want to be a woman? And I thought for a while that was what it was, and then when I came out I realized it didn't have to be that, that it really wasn't about that. It was about finding my place among other men. It has taken a long, long time for that to happen. It wasn't until I realized twelve years ago or so, for the first time, that I was an alcoholic that I started having different relationships with men. And straight men. And that in certain situations they were able to help me love myself. Until I could let-- You know, they could love me until I could love myself. And they really did give me insight and caring that allowed me to begin to have a different kind of relationship with men. And I've since carried that into learning how to live and be with gay men. Interesting that it was a reversal process for me. The kind of men I grew up around were working-class men. They were just regular guys, you know, and most people loved them. I can tell you that part of my fantasy, and part of the problem that I had throughout the years growing up and as an adult in bringing those two parts of myself together, was that I have always been attracted to working-class, macho, redneck, prejudiced, sexist men, the kind that I absolutely had hated and detested. That's the kind I was attracted to. See, there was a part of me that still wanted their approval. It's taken me a long time to work that one out and figure that one out, because I couldn't stand to be around them, to talk to them. I couldn't stand to hear what they had to say. (laughs) But there was that attraction. There was that attraction that kept me kind of a prisoner of it, and for a long time. And that part of my-- Like, you know, I had my life, and a lot of my life as a gay man was very open and very active, and for rights and things, and very

considerate of other people. But there was a homophobia there (in myself) that I couldn't penetrate. And then later in life, between twelve and four o'clock in the morning, I'd go searching for these men, that particular kind of man that I hated. I hated everything they stood for. I had been abused by the very nature of their prejudices. It was everything I fought against, it was everything I stood against, and there I was between twelve and four o'clock in the morning looking for them.

KIRK:

Did you notice the paradox at that point?

BATES:

At some point I did, and at some point, you know-- I obviously couldn't stop it. And there's my own addiction. That all became more or less part of-- It probably was part of the addiction. Part of the addiction was that I couldn't tolerate what I was doing, and the only way I could do it-- Until the addiction took over and it became primary, you know. But there were two addictions going on, a drug and alcohol addiction and a sexual one. You know, that became part of a pattern for a long time.

KAUFMAN:

I would like to go back into the addictions, but I want to go back a little bit into more of the role models that--

BATES:

Okay. David was my first role model in a sense, because he was free, he was lively, he was able to say what he felt. He was able to tell people to stay away from him if he didn't like them. He seemed to have something that I didn't have. Now, (there were) a whole lot of things that I had

that he didn't have. He was very poor, he had a very difficult family life. There was a lot of abuse and suffering that he went through. But he had-- You know, he was-- I guess he had what I considered a masculine take on life. You know, he could get up in your face if he needed to. Nobody messed with him. He could tell you exactly what he thought. I respected that honesty, and I felt like I never had it. And it's very clear that I didn't have it. It's very clear that I couldn't tell you what I thought, how I felt. Because either I would fear that you were going to reject me or that you were going to hurt me or fear that I was going to hurt you. When I was five years old I saw my stepfather (William Bates Sr.)--who had come into our lives (again), because he'd been in the service--and my mother (Jane Gaulding Bates) arguing, and at one point in the argument my father slapped or hit my mother, and that devastated me. I know I made-- I didn't know what they were at that time, but I made a conscious effort to be a passivist. I would never hit anybody. I would never hurt anybody. You know, I followed my father down to the store, and we talked, and I said "Why did you do that?" and I didn't get a satisfactory answer. But I know that in my own heart I vowed that I would never hurt anybody or hit anybody. So a part of me was caught up in my own belief system. You know, I'd already established a belief system that I couldn't live up to. So when it came to telling you that you have a loud mouth and I don't like the way you talk to me, I couldn't do it. Or you're hurting me, or I don't like what you're doing, or--

KIRK:

But David could do this.

BATES:

And David just had this great, tough-guy attitude. He wasn't a tough guy, but he had a great tough-guy attitude. So we made a great pair. And he found me somebody who was sympathetic to him, and we could talk. He was a first male person that I got to sit down and really talk to. Again, (I was) way into my adulthood before I realized that not only did I not have any male role models-- And I didn't really want to be a male, but I didn't want to-- You know, I knew I wasn't a female. To know what a man was-- You know, I didn't know what a man was. What do they do? What signifies them? What makes them interesting, you know? When I got with David, we could talk in a way that I didn't talk with women. And I've been very intimate with women. You know, there's almost not anything I can't share with a woman, but I've also realized recently that there are some male things, male bonding, that is very special--that has nothing to do with sex. I think a lot of times as gay men, because we haven't had that bonding early along, we look for it as sexual things rather than as the other. I began to find it in Florida with the straight men that I was working with when I was in recovery. And then I began to find it in some other areas. And then I began to develop it with my dear friends. So the bonding aspect was real important. David

became a significant person in my life. There was a short period of time for a few years that we were not, because he was living in Houston and had his own life, and I had my own life. We sort of separated, but we were still connected. And then there was a period where we were-- There was some anger, and some stuff that came up that caused us to separate for a few years. Like we did in high school. (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

When you first met him, how old were you?

BATES:

Nine. We were in fourth or fifth grade.

KAUFMAN:

Right. So that's where we are kind of chronology-wise.

BATES:

It wasn't until John Martin came, (when I was) in my mid-twenties and I was at UCLA, that I had another male that I really began to bond with and for the first time had an older father/grandfather figure that I could absolutely want to be exactly like him. (laughs) You know, I was mesmerized by this man, this gentle, bright man, and he gave me the clue. I was twenty-six and twenty-seven and twenty-eight years old before I got a clue of what I'd like to be just as a man, and that I could be that: I could be gentle, I could be bright, I could be sophisticated. You know, I could do these things. I could have different kinds of friends, I could make choices. I could actually have the kind life that I thought I had to hide. And it had nothing to do with my sexuality. It had nothing to do with where I came from. It had nothing to do with whom I knew. It had all to do with, at some level, what I wanted to-- What I wanted. I'm just now getting there.

One of the great things that's happened to me in just this past year, for the very first time, is that I'm beginning to get there. I'm beginning to be comfortable with my own gentleness. And that has nothing to do with being gay. With my own sensitivity, (which) has nothing to do with being gay or straight. You know, my own masculinity, (which) had nothing to do with being macho. My brightness, my cleverness, my individuality, my eccentricity. I'm more and more comfortable with all those things about myself that make me who I am. And that makes me a part of this other-- Which allows me then to be clearer with other people--it allows me to be clearer--and more honest and more direct in a way that I never knew possible. I mean, my mother was very direct, my mother was a rage-a-holic. She was very direct: (makes the sound of a ferocious roar, then laughs) But I didn't want to be like that either. So I got caught in this kind of netherworld for a long, long time. And that netherworld became a fantasy world. But not a fantasy where I daydreamed. Strangely enough, I think I gave up daydreaming very early. It was (a fantasy world) where I sought to take action. When I was twenty years old and moved to California, I was scared to death. And I came to live with my cousin, with David. By that time we were calling each other cousins so that other people wouldn't get confused about what our relationship was. (laughs) I was a hayseed. I was very naive, I was very wide-eyed, I-- I was scared to death. And David was doing all these wonderful things and had all these-- Oh, my God, he had clothes that nobody else wore, and he really helped set styles of clothes and things. He was the first person I knew-- And there were some coming up, but they were starting to wear no pockets in pants, and tight, and-- You know, that whole look of the early sixties. He was having his clothes made, and it was just very exciting and-- And I would try them on in the closet. (laughs) I remember he gave me this gorgeous pair of green and white-- They were actually lounging shorts. I thought they were a swimsuit, and I wore them out into the water, and of course they just shredded. (laughs) They were to be looked at but not to be-- He also had velvet shorts, and things like that, which you did not wear in the water. You know, I was a real, naive hayseed. My fantasies were personal, my ideas were personal, my-- Everything was just so wonderful and-- Looking at it, you know-- But I guess I just didn't have a real clear outer contact with the world. (mutual laughter) I'm fifty-four years old, and I still am sometimes just waking up and realizing that that world is running out there in a very different way than I'm perceiving it. (laughs) And that's okay, you know. Even that is okay, because that's part of who I am, and it's part of what has made me who I am, and I get to be comfortable with that.

KAUFMAN:

I wanted to get a little sense of location. You mentioned Florida a few times--

BATES:

I grew up in and around St. Louis, Missouri. For the first nine or ten years I lived in East St. Louis (Illinois), and then when I was about nine or ten we moved out into a little bit of the country. It's still not a suburb of anything; it's its own little town, as they are in that area. But it was pretty much out in the country. But a lot of city people in the late forties, after the Second World War, had started young families like my own, got their little head start, and got to move out and start buying-- That's how the suburbs became, actually. And this was not a suburb; it was even further out than that. But we could have a couple acres of land and have a garden, and we had our own home, and we got to fix it up. And we got to be out there with a whole lot of other kids and families of the same sort who were beginning to move up, you know, become a little bit upwardly mobile. Both my stepfather and my mother, neither one finished high school, and I'm still part of a generation of young men and women who got to do that and go on to college for the first time.

KAUFMAN:

So after living there-- How long did you live in that little town?

BATES:

I lived there from the time I was about nine--that's where I met David--until I graduated from high school. My stepfather died when I was sixteen, and my mother decided to send my brother (William Bates Jr.)--because he was going to be a freshman in high school--to a military school. And she called me while she was there and asked me if I would like to go, and I wound up going. I really wanted to go. I was the one who wanted to go. My brother didn't.

KIRK:

To a military school?

BATES:

Strange enough. And I did my best of any time. Absolutely, I graduated from military school.

KAUFMAN:

Where was--?

BATES:

Kemper Military School (and College) in Booneville, Missouri. Daniel Booneville, Missouri. (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

Was it a two-year program?

BATES:

It was seventh and eighth grade, four years of high school, and two years of college. And I did my senior year there, so--

KIRK:

Just one year.

BATES:

Just one year. I was invited back. I could have gotten back as a scholarship student. I was going to become cadet chaplain. I was very well liked there. I was in two honor societies, academic in general and-- I was very well liked, and I took to it like a duck in water. Everybody had bets--all over town, all through my family--that I wasn't going to last a week.

KIRK:

And why did it work? What worked there for you?

BATES:

I got to be a part of something-- They didn't know who I was. I mean, when you had just come out from the year before being elected second runner-up for homecoming queen in your high school-- (mutual laughter)

KAUFMAN:

They didn't have that image--

BATES:

When your family had called you "Gertrude," you know, and things of that sort. (tape recorder off) I got a chance to try some things. One of my fantasies growing up in high school was to go to a military school. And it wasn't because I was attracted to boys and wanted to have sex with

boys and do that whole thing. I wanted to find out something. I wanted to put myself up against (something), I wanted a chance to pit myself against something, and I never felt like I could do that wherever I was. You know, one of the things that happened that became part of me and became really characteristic is the waiting game. Throughout my teenage years I waited until I could grow up and leave home. I waited to get out of that town. I waited to get to a better school. I waited for things to get over so that I could start my life.

KIRK:

You waited a long time.

BATES:

Now, one of the other problems was that that became a characteristic. I would have a lot of fantasies and dreams and ideas and things, as you all know listening to me at times, but I was never able to-- I was not a good initiator. I 'm a great brainstormer. I'm the best person in the world you could find if you ever needed to talk to somebody about an idea or a project or where you want to go, because I can just (snaps his fingers a few times). You know, my mind goes like that in those kinds of things. But I always needed somebody else to help me start something. And it's still been-- It's been a plague, almost, haunting me at times in my own career. Because generally if it starts getting tough or if it starts getting awkward, what I tend to do is step back and wait rather than to push forward. Now, that was not true when I got to California when I was twenty and I saw all these clothes, I saw all these possibilities, and it was there. And they used to kid me about being the hayseed and all. They'd wonder where my piece of hay was, that I hadn't-- (laughs) Theyâ€™d kid me about that. But I started taking risks, kinds of risks that I hadn't thought I could ever take. I started wearing shorts publicly. And I had gotten a scholarship-- I had moved to Phoenix, Arizona, in 1958. My mother wanted to move there so my brother and I would have more opportunity, and I started at college at Arizona State (Teacher's College). It was "college" then, not Arizona State University; it became Arizona State University the following year. And I flunked out two semesters. I flunked out the first semester going in there with A's, and I couldn't take the finals. I would freak out on the finals, and then I would flunk out, and then I would skip a semester. Because, you know, if you flunk you don't go back. And then I went back the following year and I flunked out, did exactly the same thing. Then I came over here in 1960 on scholarship with Eugene Loring and the Dance Players, and--

KAUFMAN:

How did you get involved in dance at all? We really haven't--

BATES:

We really haven't talked about dance, have we?

KIRK:

No, we haven't.

BATES:

I wish I had my yearbooks--because they're really fun--from high school, because they always talked about me becoming a dancer. Now, I don't know why-- Well, I do know why. David and I used to go and have our-- Like a lot of us in the grade school that we went to, we would skip the grade school meals. And we didn't want to bring our lunches, so we would go over and have sloppy joes at this little confectioner store. It was run by two old ladies that looked sort of like Halloween witches. They really did. They had kind of moles on their face, they wore these kind of funny old pants, and probably were two wonderful little old lesbians who had been together for thirty years and were really sweet. And they really were. (laughs) But there was something kind of peculiar about them. And we all would look and watch them in grade school; you know how grade school kids are. But I fell in love with them in a way, because they started teaching me all the old dances, like the cha-cha and the-- (gets up to demonstrate a step he has forgotten the name of)

KAUFMAN:

Oh, the Charleston.

BATES:

The Charleston, all those things. The black bottom. And I just learned all these dances. And I learned how to cha-cha and tango and merengue and waltz and oompah-pah and polka and everything. David and I would just eat them up. We would just learn them, and we would go to the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) hall and dance every Friday and Saturday night, and then teen club. And when I got into high school they were throwing pennies and nickels and dimes at me--and David sometimes--because we would dance there every afternoon. We would go there for our lunch and then learn how to dance. So I learned how to social dance there. And then when I got into high school we had a very progressive high school music choir director. I had been in the band in grade school.

KAUFMAN:

Which instrument?

BATES:

Drums. It's so funny, (laughs) because I was a drummer in grade school. I was also in the drum and bugle corps at military school. Along with a group of others in a timpani contest-- We all went to state (and won) first for the state of Missouri. I was the tenor drummer. And we would swing bom-pa-da-dom-ta. And you know, I still till this day don't know how to drum. (mutual laughter) So I got to-- But I was a good-- I could keep time. So I got to be a tenor drummer and a bass drummer. I don't know how I won in this quintet--I mean how I got in. I have this first medal from the state of Missouri for a timpani quintet. Anyway, the haunting part about that is--the funny part of that, too-- And this is threads going into latter years. My whole early career as a teacher, I could not count. I had the hardest time keeping the rhythms and finding out what the rhythms were, where they were and what they were and all of that kind of stuff. Now, I had been in choirs, I read music, I had been a drummer, and when it came time-- That first two or three years of teaching were awful, were just awful. (laughs) "One, two, threeeee--four, five, six--seven, eight, nine (mutual laughter as Bates demonstrates his counting while physically

representing its lopsidedness). And it was because I would get so excited that I would loose all sense of what I was after. You know? I couldn't get it, and-- It was all coming at the same time, and I couldn't get it out of my mouth fast enough. So it would just be a mess, and the musicians would sit there and cringe, and the students would go, "When is he going to get it together?" And Ellen Sinatra helped me. She said, "Well, if you can't tell me what the tempo is, then sing it." (snaps and counts in rhythm) "Yamm-bah-dee-dah, bah-tee-yah-dah dil-dah-tah-dah." And that's how I learned to count again. So I had gone through this complete reversal from not being able to do it, after having done it throughout my whole life with knowing how to read music and all that kind of stuff, to having to sing it out until I could get it again. And I became very strong in that area and also very strong in terms of rhythmic structures and such. I still don't know how to do it on that regular, clear, traditional basis. Like Fred Strickler and Linda Sohl-Donnell and Lynn Daly can just spit out rhythms in a very different way, (rhythms) that have musical structure to them. Mine don't have the traditional musical structure, but I do have the rhythmic and musical structure. So I sort of can zeitgeist my way through in my own way of doing it, and it comes out pretty strong. Most musicians loved to work with me. They really did enjoy working with me as a dance teacher. Because I was one of the few who was being very sensitive to their stuff. I would draw from them as well as from myself, them from me, and all that kind of stuff. And we had great times. And I really loved it. There were some-- You (indicating the interviewers) had some musicians-- Sometimes it could be real boring at Santa Monica College. But when we got together, I mean, some beautiful music came out of those people.

Tape Two, Side Two (October 29, 1994)

KAUFMAN:

About the choir director, who was progressive.

BATES:

Okay. The choir director in high school was progressive. What she would do is she had us-- Because we lived near St. Louis-- I don't know if you ever heard of the (St. Louis) Muni(icipal) Opera, but the St. Louis Muni Opera was there, and there was an outdoor summer theater. And it was one of the kind where they would do the big musicals and often times would have major stars come in and do a particular musical. So it was something very, very close to us. And what she would have us do is we would set up committees at the beginning of the year, and we would write a script, and we would choose the music. And we would have a choreographer make dances. And we would do a show; we would do a musical show. And my freshman year it was Do The Continental. And the music of Do The Continental was part of it. It was about a twenties

kind of flapper girl who came in-- You know, it was right out of the movies. It was right out of-- You know, whatever her name is and 42nd Street and all that kind of stuff. (laughs) But it was fun, and we got to do it. You know, over the four years that you would get there, you would get to progress from maybe just being in it, in the chorus, to being maybe the lead, to being a director, or being-- You got to do some things, to be a dancer, you know. So my first year I sang and danced and did all those things, my second year I sang and danced and did all those things, and my third year I got to be the choreographer. By the fourth year I would have probably become the director, but I-- Maybe not. But I was going to be the choreographer, and we were going to do the show to end all shows. And it was-- (laughs) Mind you, I had never taken a (formal) dance lesson in my life, but I was already dancing and choreographing. And I loved it, absolutely adored it. I loved the whole show biz thing. You know, I went to see things. The first dancer I ever saw was Carmen Amaya, who was a Gypsy. Absolutely adored it. And the reason we saw Carmen Amaya was because we decided we were going to do a Gypsy show about this group of Gypsies who came into town and these other people who got involved with them, and one them fell in love with one of the Gypsies. I forget if whether it was a male-- The Gypsy was a female, and the male was the good, regular city guy. And they were going to get involved, and nobody was going to want them to get in, you know, do it, and they did it anyway. (laughs) And I got to do all these Gypsy dances.

KAUFMAN:

How did you make them up?

BATES:

From nowhere. (laughs) And I had some enthusiastic kids who had danced, so I could get in there and try this and try that. I was already choreographing, and they were the ones who had had ten years of dancing. Well, my teacher had a heart attack, and we had to cancel the show. So it was real sad that I got to start (and couldn't finish it). So what we did, we were going to have a concert anyway, because somebody else took over, and she was just going to do a fairly straight concert. They knew how disappointed I was, so they offered me a chance to choreograph something for that show, so I did. I did an apache dance with this young woman. One woman who later became a runner-up for Miss Illinois and then a couple of years later became runner-up for Miss Missouri (laughs), Craig Younger, she was just this really outrageous, wonderful lady. She sang "St. Louis Blues." And Judy Tresnick and I danced it. And we did this apache number, you know: smoking cigarettes, and the turtle neck, and throwing her around and picking her up. (laughs) And I loved it, you know, and they loved it, and they were very sweet. Never had taken dance yet. So, yes, that's how I started. I knew I wanted to do something like that. I didn't think I

was going to get to do it. And when I was graduated from high school, from military school, and went on to Arizona-- Wonderful stories. One of my favorite stories-- At that time they did the enrolling to get you classes and everything all at once in the big gymnasium. They had the long tables and the little signs up. And generally they would start with the freshman year, you know, and you'd go in and each class would go in for two days and do their registration and all that kind of stuff. Actually they started with the seniors, as always, and worked down to the freshmen. And this year they decided to go from Z to A, so not only was I one of the last to get there as a freshman, but I was also one of the last to get there being a "B." (mutual laughter) Well, this room was enormous. This gymnasium floor was enormous, and there were just these rows of tables and teachers sitting there. I don't know how, but I walked in finally, got in thinking I was not going to get anything. And the only thing I saw was dance. So I just marched right up to that table and looked at this woman. I said, "What kind of dance is this? Is it anything like they do on television?" (laughs) And she said, "No. Why don't you come and take a class and see?" So I did--and got bit. It was modern dance, and my teacher was Margaret Gisolo. We had a great time, and I choreographed in the two semesters that I kept failing in. (laughs) I danced in a whole lot of productions and a whole lot of works, and I got to choreograph six works. You know, in basically only two semesters of work I got to choreograph six works that got seen. It got to be actually seen.

KAUFMAN:

When did all of this happen?

BATES:

Eighteen.

KAUFMAN:

Eighteen?

BATES:

Uh-huh. I took the choreography class with Margaret, and it was the year that Doris Humphrey died, and we were using her book, The Art of Making Dances. I got to meet some dancers from New York who came into town because they were passing through or something, and they knew Margaret, and they'd stop in and maybe give a master class and--

KAUFMAN:

What's Margaret's last name?

BATES:

Margaret Gisolo. She was kind of the founder, the creator, of what is now Arizona State University's dance department. At that time it was just classes-- We couldn't major in it. I think you could minor in it (within the) physical education (major). You couldn't major in it. It now has an MFA (Master of Fine Arts) program.

KAUFMAN:

What sort of style of modern dance was there?

BATES:

And we had Orchesis. You had the dance classes, and then you had the special group who got to do the concert, and that was called Orchesis. A lot of them throughout the country were called that. A lot of modern dance groups were called Orchesis. So I'm part of that. I'm part of that old, traditional history.

KAUFMAN:

What style of dance where you learning there?

BATES:

Basically she was a Humphrey person, so we were learning (JosÃ©) LimÃ³n technique and also some (Martha) Graham. It was really a hodgepodge. It probably wasn't a very sound class. But, boy, we were in there hurting and trying to sweat and make those bodies changeso I could do those dances, you know. (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

Were you seeing any dance aside--? I mean, like--

BATES:

Not much. There wasn't much coming to Arizona, to Phoenix, and by that time-- And I had seen a lot of movies, because that was the heyday. I maybe even came to California in the hopes of doing musicals, but by the time I got to here in 1960 there were none anymore. It was all dead. Broadway shows weren't happening in the same way that they had happened all the way up until then. And movies: Bobby Van had come in to sort of replace Donald O'Connor as the leading second character. He had this brilliant career possible, and there was nothing to do. So, I mean, he was the last of-- You probably haven't even heard of Bobby Van, but he was another Donald O'Connor. And what's his name who did Tom Thumb, a real cute little curly-haired young kid who just was-- Russ Tamblyn was around. He was a child coming up, and Bobby Van had been a child coming up, and they both were brilliant dancers and all-around musical comedy character types that could have done all the Donald O'Connor roles or some of the other things that (had) happened before, and there was nothing. Their careers were over before they even got started. So it was really kind of awkward walking into that. But at this point--1958 to '60--modern dance

was reaching just this-- It was just there. It was it. By this time Doris and Martha had really done it, but also so had (Alvin) Ailey, and Paul Taylor was coming up, and Merce Cunningham and (Alwin) Nikolais. All were doing their things, and they all were extremely popular, and it was just the thing to do. In 1958 into the early sixties, probably the only techniques that you would have seen at any college would have been Humphrey/LimÃ³n and if they were lucky some Graham. By the mid-sixties practically, it was a very clear split: almost no Humphrey, and Graham and almost only Nikolais, and it was either only Nikolais stuff or they studied Cunningham stuff. Some of the older, less connected schools were still doing Humphrey-LimÃ³n maybe--bad Humphrey-LimÃ³n. But by the early sixties there was a split, and you either got them-- But it had gone from the Humphrey-LimÃ³n stuff with a little bit of Graham-- Because, see, all these teachers-- First of all, they were probably not dancers; they were gym teachers, and some of them were then dancers a little bit. But, you know, it was a very strange kind of mix of people who were teaching this stuff. And they would go every summer to Connecticut College or Bennington College or wherever it was--now it's North Carolina or places like Idyllwild (Arts)-- and they would go for that three weeks or that six weeks and study and gather up all the information. They would write down all these things and try to get as much information (as they could) and try to remember those steps exactly the way they were done, and they would go back and teach all year from that summer workshop. They literally did that. Now, if they got enough experience they would have an accumulation of things that they knew from the years before and maybe get some refinements on that stuff as they got better at it, but basically that's how they got it. And they would just take that material, and that would be the material that the advanced group, at least, would work on for the next year.

KIRK:

That's what my mom did. That's exactly my--

BATES:

Yeah, go to Idyllwild or go to those places, and that's what they-- We did that, you know. And most people went because Connecticut College-- (The center of modern dance education) was Bennington and then moved to Connecticut, which is where Hanya Holm and Doris and Martha all taught for years. So that was the best place; that was the source material. But in the mid-fifties the three renegades came up. Paul Taylor, Merce, and Nikolais started doing these outrageous, weird things. And they had developed techniques and developed-- At least Cunningham did. Paul never taught technique; he didn't like it. He never did, and a lot of his people don't either. But the other two-- Nikolais created a school, and Cunningham created a school, and they created techniques. By the mid-sixties, ten years after they had started, they had permeated the

universities. And by the mid-sixties there were only a few schools that had dance departments: Ohio State, UCLA, Sarah Lawrence (College).

KAUFMAN:

So you mentioned that you came out to California. Can you talk about that, what that experience was like coming out here? Maybe going to UCLA?

KIRK:

Wait. Can I just back up? You flunked out two years in a row, except you were choreographing all these dances.

BATES:

I was dancing and choreographing all these years--(dancing) as in dancing other people's (choreography)--and I was working sixty hours a week.

KAUFMAN:

Doing what?

BATES:

And going full time to school. There was a place called Greer's Big G on Indian School Road in Phoenix. That was probably the very first taco stand. (laughs) And I was the night manager after

a while. I worked there for two years. I made beans, refried beans, and taco meat, and I made burritos and tacos and cheese tortillas and hamburgers. I was the fry cook. Moved up to night manager of the place, and I worked from forty to sixty hours a week. And then the summers I worked for a couple of years doing that at night and during the day working with a medical group, bookkeeping. This was a medical collection agency; we collected the things that medical groups were not getting. So I worked there during the day and made money.

KAUFMAN:

But then you went on to California.

BATES:

Then I came to California. What I did is, my second year I got the scholarship from Arizona State to go to a summer workshop. And they let me go ahead and keep-- No, they didn't let me keep it; they offered me a chance to do something. And a bunch of my friends were going to be coming out to do Idyllwild (School of Music and the Arts, now Idyllwild Arts) in 1960, so I came out here with them. This is where, see-- When I came out here it was a real break. I was so naive about so many things that I didn't know what was going on. When I got a chance to get the scholarship I didn't know that people hitchhiked across country and slept in barns and-- And just did it. I mean, it just didn't-- Had I known that, I would have gone, because I had a chance to go to Connecticut College in 1960 and get to be there with all those people, and it would have been-- It would have been a whole different story. You know? But I just didn't--couldn't--fathom that, and I didn't have the wherewithal to know how to do that. I just didn't know. I mean, I would encourage anybody to do it today. It was just like it was incomprehensible.

KAUFMAN:

Incomprehensible to get from A to B?

BATES:

Yeah. It was incomprehensible to me how to do that. As bright as I am, there are whole areas of my life where there were just like-- You know, Dullsville. (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

And then what happened? You ended up going--?

BATES:

So I ended up not going to Connecticut College but, when my friends decided to come over here, to come over here to Idyllwild with them. It happened to be the year that John Butler was there, and he did a work for Bella Lewitzky; and Carmen De Lavallade and Carl Radcliff and Bruce Hoy, who was Eugene Loring's leading dancer; and Eugene Loring was there with his Dance Players. So we were there this big weekend. I could fathom that. I got to do a big weekend in Idyllwild and take a master class from Bella and a master class from Eugene Loring and a master class from a couple of other people. And I got to see this concert where Gene Loring had done a work, and all the Dance Players--and these were all kids a little bit younger than me, most of them younger than me. And then Bella had come out of retirement. She had been in retirement for about ten years at that point. She had just had her baby, and Nora (E. Reynolds) was born, and Nora was now seven or eight years old. She maybe was eight years in retirement and had left Lester Horton at that point, in '52. So it was like '52 to '60 she had been retired, raising her child and being a mother and a wife. That was the first opportunity, other than films like "A Dancerâ€™s World" and a couple of other things, to really see-- I was twenty years old, and to see that powerful body of Bella's just-- I mean, she didn't just go places, she (makes a loud, sudden, startling smack of his hands as he leaps out of his chair to another spot in the room) landed. I mean, literally she would just glom onto these bodies, and she would just go from here to there. (claps his hands again) And it would be just as dynamic as that. Just as dynamic. (makes a noise like a whistling, sucking wind) It was just like she was going to eat the space up and eat everything else up. I mean, it was just (makes the sound of a ferocious roar) "Give it to me!" you know. And it was exciting. And Carmen, who was just the opposite. She was luscious, gorgeous, exotic, beautiful, you know, this fair black woman. And she would languidly-- (demonstrates movements) and walk and-- You know, gorgeous. And Bella was (hisses) attack!

KIRK:

And you saw both together at the same stage!

BATES:

Yes. And this John Butler piece, it was so erotic and exotic in itself and just full of all that stuff. It was all the gorgeous-- I mean, it was all the silly stuff of movies but with a vitality and a cleverness and an interest, because it was somebody who knew how to choreograph and could lead you there, and you were just taken to these places. You know, you got to go with them on that journey physically. To this day when I'm comfortable and I'm watching somebody I'm comfortable with my body still wants to move with them. I mean, it's not because I'm trying to move with them; my body will just pick up in the movement (demonstrates, his torso swaying) and be carried-- I will catch myself going like that (as he veers off in a diagonal), you know, because I'm following them, and they're taking me. And he did that, and they did that. And I got to sit there and talk with Bella, or a bunch of us sat around afterwards, after the master class the next day with Bella. And I couldn't do any of it. I mean, God, at the ballet class I was (pants as though exhausted). The modern class-- (demonstrates his awkward attempts at doing movement and laughs.) I mean, I was never a technician. At that point I just couldn't understand technique. I didn't like technique that much. I did it because I wanted to dance, and the rest of the time I just danced. And I was a choreographer and a dancer before I ever even had a clue what technique was. (laughs) And Bella was talking about being retired and "Yes, I'm really being a mother now. I had done a lot of dancing for a lot of years, and I don't need to do that anymore, and I' m not going to be like Martha Graham." And Martha Graham had said "I'm not going to be like Ruth St. Denis." (laughs) Bella 's still choreographing, and if she could she would still be dancing. Martha danced until the absolute bitter end, when she couldn't absolutely get off the floor anymore, and still choreographed until she was ninety-six (years old). She died on that stage, and that's exactly where she needed to be. And Bella is doing exactly what she needs to do. She came out of retirement at fifty and started a company (the Lewitzky Dance Company). And now-- what?--twenty-six, twenty-eight years later she's one of the most important people and, thank heavens, has carried on and really introduced and got and has made people aware that the Horton technique was not trivial-- What's the word I want? When you steal something from somebody else-- It wasn't trivial remnants.

KAUFMAN:

Derived.

BATES:

It wasn't trivial remnants derived from other people's techniques. That this was a technique of its own with its own characteristics and its own stuff. And thank heavens, because Bella, in developing that and taking it on from Lester, ensured that place. Because up until that time most people thought and just assumed it was trivial remnants of somebody else's technique--probably Graham, you know, and a little bit of this and a little bit of that-- and it had nothing to do with any of them. He didn't develop them out of that; he didn't know their technique and had really done this work with them and on them. So I got to see them. Right then and there I sat and talked to-- Everyplace anybody went I was there, you know, listening.

KAUFMAN:

With your mouth open.

BATES:

Uh-huh, and my eyes about as big as Tweety Bird's. (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

So what happened after that weekend?

BATES:

Well, what did happen was that Eugene Loring told me and others about his audition that he had

every year. It was going to be happening in a couple of weeks at his studio, where he would audition people and they could get scholarships and whatever. Well, that was it. I made arrangements to go down the hill--the other way, (laughs) not back to Phoenix--and I took the risk. I just made the arrangement. I called up my friend: " I'm going to be gone," you know, "I'm going to stay here until I go to this audition." And I stayed with my friend David, who had moved here by then. And I was off and running. And then I went back after the audition and went back to my job at the bookkeeping and the Greer's Big G and waited for them to call me to see if I had made it. And I did. (laughs) This was at the end of July, so it was somewhere in the middle of August-- It was only probably a couple of weeks, but, you know-- And I got a scholarship. I got half scholarship, and I had to pay the rest of it. And I came back here in September and started. I was one of three men who started on scholarship that year--

KAUFMAN:

At UCLA?

BATES:

No, this was at Eugene Loring's.

KAUFMAN:

At his school.

BATES:

And I became a Dance Player at the American School of Dance on Hollywood Boulevard at the old Garden Court Motor Hotel, which is across the street from the Hollywood Roosevelt (Hotel). (Frank) Veloz and Yolanda (Veloz) still had classes; they were still teaching in a studio up there across the street. They were big movie people. They were the secondary Fred Astaire and Ginger

Rogers. The Garden Court Motor Hotel is where the (General Cinema Hollywood) Galaxy (Six) theater is now on Hollywood Boulevard, that new set of things. There used to be this wonderful old hotel where people like Una Merkel and other older actors and actresses used to live in these kind of wonderful hotel apartments. And downstairs in the basement were these studios where Eugene Loring's American School of Dance was. A lot of people went through there. I was a scholarship student there and taking classes there between '60 and '62. I was taking classes with Jane Fonda, George Chakiris, Richard Chamberlain, Yvette Mimieux. People like the Andrews Sisters would come and rehearse as well as Juliet Prowse and-- You know, the whole group. Everybody was taking classes there.

KAUFMAN:

What was the day-to-day life like at that point?

BATES:

I was taking three classes a day

KAUFMAN:

When did you get up--?

BATES:

Well, it was really strange.

KAUFMAN:

Describe the day.

BATES:

Well, I can tell you about that-- I'm not even sure that I could describe a day. It was all so new and crazy, and I was living from this house to that place and to that. I can tell you that I went from a strapping 150 pounds to 120 pounds. I got to a place where I was eating one bowl of oatmeal every other day, because I wanted to dance, and nobody knew I didn't have any money. And I couldn't get jobs; for some reason there was just nothing available. It's the only time in my life where I haven't had at least three jobs. Maybe after that is why I did that. I was never without work after that. It was a very difficult time. It was major transition, because I was discovering all this stuff. I was rediscovering gay life at a whole other scale, because David was very active in all that stuff. I didn't drink, I didn't smoke, I didn't cuss, I didn't-- You know, I was such a goody. For years people would accuse me of being Mormon. (laughs) It's true, you know. I was just this good little Mormon boy. (laughs). And I was taking three classes a day and working with Eugene Loring. I had a friend (Cy Jones), who became a sponsor, and he was really important-- He died a few years later of a heart attack, severe stroke, whatever, just brain burst. He worked for (KTTV) channel 11 news. He was an art director there, you know, did sets and-- He was a painter, did all kinds of wonderful-- He was a Virgo. He maybe was also a mentor, too, although I tended not to watch him. I tended to gather from him from the side, you know what I mean? He was one of those people who was very dear to me--still is to this day. But what I learned from him really came in this way (gestures from side) rather than this way (gestures from front). I didn't watch it directly, but I know that he has affected my life to this day, because he was one of those people who wrote-- Well, he was a typical Virgo. Everything was an avocation. (laughs) And he did these-- You know, as long as they were avocations he could do them and do them very directly and very clearly. You know, his job was his job and he did that full out, but his avocations-- His painting was an avocation, his writing was an avocation, his picture-taking was an avocation. There are a bunch of portraits of me around this city that he had done that I had sat for, and they were his interpretations of the gods. He did another whole section with the female about the goddesses. And my aunt has one still hanging in her living room, this big (portrait). It's of Morpheus, and all it is is this sort of blue wash that goes into this kind of gold in the center. But as you look at it-- I looked at it for weeks. I had seen this painting-- You know, he had painted it with me there. I didn't get it, that there was me in there sleeping (lies down to demonstrate the pose) inside of this painting. So it was really one of those things-- And then when you see it you can move back and forth between the totally abstract, just this blue wash, and then all of a sudden there's this figure sleeping in there. He sat me down, because he thought-- He's the first person who sat down and said, "Now, if you really want this career you've got to do this and this and this and this." And he sat me down and he said, "You've got to have these pictures, and you've got to get this--" And that's where some of those pictures I showed you of me at twenty-- Did I show them to you? In sweaters and--?

KAUFMAN:

No, you didn't. We haven't seen them.

BATES:

Well, I'll show it to you later. I did all these pictures. I hated it, and I had such bad teeth. Again, I had bad teeth. I had teeth that were coming up like this (indicates a stray tooth growing at a strange angle) and broken and-- My teeth have never worked. (laughs)

Tape Three, Side One (October 29, 1994)

BATES:

A typical day, I'd be getting out-- I had classes, sometimes not till late afternoon. I would usually do late afternoon classes to evening. I would usually do no less than two a day and sometimes three. Gene (Eugene Loring)'s classes consisted of freestyle or modern dance-- Now, as I talk about this, this is the Irvine school (American School of Dance), see, because Gene Loring created the Irvine school, and then his people carried it on. But this is the same premise as the Irvine school, basically. We had classes in freestyle and ballet, in jazz--all levels of all three. Freestyle was modern dance. We had character classes, pas de deux classes, we had choreography classes. We had classes in etiquette--you know, how to act as a dancer and how to attend auditions. We had kind of dance perspective things, a little bit of history and talking of different things. We had special master classes at times. And then various kinds of folk or ethnic dance classes, depending on what was happening; I had Afro-Cuban. And we did some character dance stuff--you know, folk dance stuff so that we would fit to the ballet stuff, because he really thought that if you can't do character work in ballet, if you don't know what the basic polka is or the basic mazurka-- They really did stand me in good stead later, because I got to dance Les Sylphides one time. So we got all these classes. On Saturday we would have rehearsals for anything that we were going to be doing as the Dance Players. The year '60 to '61 we got to go to Catalina (Island) for an arts festival, for which we did our Dance Players thing. He was very clever. We would do these lecture-dem(onstration)s around town, and we would have maybe two towels each. And depending on how we wrapped the towel or did the towel or put the towel, you know, we could then do freestyle or ballet or-- You know. And we did these little clever things

using these towels in different ways,and representing different things. We didn't have costumes; we would have very plain leotards and tights and then do something very clever with the color and the use of the towels. Could we turn this off a minute? (tape recorder off) This was written on September 15, a year ago, and I'm reading some of my own (unfinished) memoirs. "The '60-'61 season, as I recall, was a particularly busy year for Gene Loring. There was a Civic Light Opera (of South Bay Cities) show to choreograph, and I believe somewhere in there was the remake of State Fair." He did the choreography for State Fair with what's-her-face, the actress--Ann-Margret--a new starlet, Ann-Margret. "Along with classes, often three or four a day, there would be rehearsal on weekends for the Dance Players. There were the lecture demonstrations to learn and remake, there were special choreographies demonstrating various styles, and later in the spring the show we were scheduled to do in Dubuque, Iowa. This year it was Oklahoma! "The lecture-demos were done periodically throughout Southern California to stimulate interest in dance and the school. I remember them being very clever in that we had towels that could serve as a number of costume changes. They also reflected the different kinds of technique. I'm still not sure how many people understood how deeply interested and devoted Loring was to education in and about dance. He was the first and for a while the only one, for instance, who would demonstrate stylistic differences in the ballet technique. He would talk about the various kinds, for instance, in an attitude, whether the knee was down, middle, or up." In particular schools I couldn't tell you which one for which. But in London they had the knee one way, and the Bolshoi (Theatre ballet company), they had it another way. And in other places they had it straight across-- That was probably (George) Balanchine (laughs), and probably also Loring. So he would talk about those differences. And we still hear this today: "There's only one ballet technique. Ballet is ballet. There's only one way to do it." Don't you? I mean, you still hear that today to a large extent, and yet there are so many different ways in which the ballet-- And at that time it was just very important to hear that. It was very important for me to see that "Oh! There wasn't a set pliÃ©, there wasn't a set something. That maybe this stuff that we're learning, this technique that I was learning, was different than I had imagined it to be," and it was very good to suddenly realize that. (makes speed-reading sounds as he scans his manuscript) "--from the various schools around the world. The mystique was and sometimes still is that there is only one ballet technique, which invariably means everyone but your school is doing the wrong one." (laughs) Anyway, I won't go on anymore with that. But he was a wonderful teacher and educator, and I think it was overlooked at times because he was so Napoleonic--the other side. He was a tiny little man, and he ordered and ruled and castrated and all this kind stuff, and ruled with an iron fist and was not always very pleasant. He created a very big and a very important school here in Southern California that was the only school outside of New York of any importance--at that level, you know. And he tried very clearly to give these various-- At a time still when there wasn't as much-- A (Martha) Graham dancer did not study ballet. A ballet dancer did not study Graham. You know, you just didn't. And if you did you didn't tell anybody. I mean, seriously, even in the 1960s you didn't tell anybody that you were taking those other classes. (laughs) Most schools-- We didn't have ballet yet at UCLA at that time. We didn't get ballet until later, almost 1970. We didn't have jazz classes. He was teaching jazz and Afro-Cuban, ethnic dances and character dances and all kinds of things, and had been doing it for years. And people came to study with him and study at that school, because we had some of the finest teachers there. Jimmy (James) Penrod, who is now the head of the department there, was one of my first teachers at that school. We're just a few years apart in age, but he had already had training and things, and we became fast friends. Our birthdays are also just a day or so apart, and we became good friends.

KIRK:

Nina (Kaufman) had a good question. Here you were, you didn't have real formal dance training, and all of a sudden now you're in these technique classes.

BATES:

Right.

KIRK:

And at first you felt--

BATES:

Well, I had the two years of training with Margaret Gisolo, who was really absolutely important to me, because she really let me explore, and at the same time I did learn. I mean, I talked earlier about the fact that they weren't important technique classes, but they were. They introduced me to things like the small of the back in terms of the contraction, or Graham. They introduced me to the concepts of fall and recovery, of (JosÃ©) LimÃ³n and (Doris) Humphrey. They taught me how to point and flex my foot and start things, you know-- But in 1960, when I went to that workshop at Idyllwild (School of Music and the Arts), I mean, I couldn't pliÃ©. When I was at American School of Dance and I got the scholarship, I was in pre-ballet for a year. I couldn't even get out of pre-ballet. I was in their pre-ballet classes for a year because I couldn't do those things. And yet within the first month I was moved up to Modern 2 and then 3, and I was in Jazz 3. You know, I could do the other stuff.

KIRK:

So the technique itself was not a sticking point. I mean, you could do the stuff--

BATES:

I could if it was physical. For a long time ballet classes were taught so rigidly-- "Point, flex, dah, tah, dee, dah, tah, pliÃ©, dah, dah," you know. I just couldn't do it. I couldn't get that coordination. I couldn't stand on that foot long enough to swing back and forth or to do a ronde jambe or to point it four times to the front, four times to the side, do those dÃ©gagÃ©s four points to the back. I just couldn't get it, and it all seemed like, you know, this strange encounter.

KAUFMAN:

But the really complicated jazz routines you could just do?

BATES:

I did them. I mean, within the first couple of months I was in the highest jazz class. Within a few months I was in the highest modern class. And I was still in pre-ballet. (laughs) You know, it was awful. It was humiliating. It wasn't until I got into Carmelita's classes in the early sixties-- Carmelita Maracci--that I began to understand that ballet wasn't just a rigid technique of things that made you stiff, that it could be expressive. You know, she would talk about, "Oh, you just can't do--"You know, we were going to do pliÃ©s. We would all get ready to do our pliÃ©s, and we would be very stiff and ready to go (assumes a rigidly eager posture), and she would say, "That has nothing to do with a pliÃ©. That arm, you know-- As you're going down, the elbow's got to move. The arms have got to express openness and love or sadness or death." (lets his arms drop in a thump) (mutual laughter) "A pliÃ© can express sadness and love and--" (laughs) I mean, she just opened up the world for me in that way. And she would get upset-- And she could hardly waddle. She had broken her back. She looked like somebody's great aunt who was like eighty five years old who should be smoking corn cob pipes and lived back in the Ozarks and sat on a porch. I mean, I had aunts that looked like her, you know, who were eighty-five years old who sat on a porch, and they were umpteen big, and they had these little buns in their hair, and a

little grey hair was tied under in this severe bun, and they walked like this (demonstrates a side to side waddle) when they walked. And that's the way Carmelita walked; she walked like this (demonstrates bowlegged walk). But she would get up (transforms from this rounded, dumpy, waddling old lady and straightens, opens his chest and his shoulder joint, and expands up and out, breathing), and all of a sudden you saw something that was just-- (in a hushed voice) You didn't know what had happened. (laughs) And all of a sudden I didn't worry about technique anymore, and I just did these things, and I was there going (gasps and makes wide eyes). (mutual laughter) And it was probably all very too much, you know, but she freed me. She freed me and allowed my body to begin to find the ballet technique. And that was a great moment.

KAUFMAN:

So it sounded like you really did take off within a certain technique--

BATES:

Yeah.

KAUFMAN:

It wasn't that difficult for you as it is for some of us.

BATES:

Oh, because of the jazz, because I had all that early training from grade school doing all those stylistic social dances. And I knew the rhythms. See, I wasn't concentrating on getting the rhythm right. I mean, I went in there, and they put on that music, and I was ready to go down this street. So my feet could coordinate, and I could-- I had trouble sometimes if they got too fancy with the arms. I never was very good at that stuff. I could create my own. But yeah. And the modern dance, my first teacher there was Jimmy Penrod in modern. And I had Carmen De

Lavallade's sister, Yvonne De Lavallade, who had been with Lester Horton. And Carl Radcliff was still teaching. Carl went on to become the head of Atlanta's modern dance company (Carl Radcliff Dance Theatre) and was Bella Lewitzky's partner. There's a film of "Beloved" of Bella and I think Carl dancing together. But they were my first two teachers, and it was Horton technique. And basically from 1960 on my entire training in modern was Horton. I had Carol Scothorn, and I had other people, and I had glimpses of other techniques, but basically the thread continued to be-- Because even when I was at UCLA I was studying with Aida Baroda already at that time, with other people.

KAUFMAN:

So you went to the Eugene Loring school, and then you got into UCLA. How did that happen?

BATES:

I went to Eugene Loring's from 1960 to 1961 into '62. But I got so sick I had to go to work. I wasn't making any money, and I lost weight, and I was eating one bowl of oatmeal every other day, and I was trying to dance. And Gene was getting mad at me, and I was having-- And my friend, the person who was helping me-- That was the artist, the Virgo, who had gotten my teeth fixed-- I was getting my teeth fixed, and then right in the middle of our rehearsals for Oklahoma!-- One day I was late to rehearsals, and instead of getting to do the Jud character in the ballet I was reduced back to the chorus, because-- I was studying that one, and he was choreographing on me, and he got mad at me because I was-- I had told him before that I was going to be late, that I had these teeth operations that I was going through. He knew it, and then-- But he was being very Broadway show and movie musical choreographer. "You're late twice, you're out." And he did it--and devastated me. I remember one time I was rehearsing, and I had a temporary plate in before I got my permanent things in--these (permanent ones) don't move at all--and I was dancing across the room (demonstrates his violent movements), and all of a sudden, whack! (smacks his hands together) Somebody got hit by a flying group of teeth. (laughs) Because they just flew right out of my mouth. And they were not soft, and I-- Because I was going with such velocity, they just flew. In my group then was Linda Palmer, who later became Leland Palmer and went on to do Broadway, was one of the leading dancers with Bob Fosse for many years and did a number of his shows. And in the movie that Bob did, the one on his death and the operation and everything else (All That Jazz), the woman who played his wife was Leland Palmer, blond. She and I danced together. In fact, we were alternately Gene's whipping persons. In one week he was screaming and hollering that we couldn't do anything right, and it would be Leland running into the kitchen and screaming and laughing and crying and all this, and we'd all be in there trying to help her. And the next week it would be me.

(laughs) And then it would be Linda again, and then it would be me. So Linda went on to do Broadway shows and become a leading Fosse dancer. Another one was Melanie Alexander, who was just the sweetest woman. She was redheaded. I knew her family; I used to have dinner with them. She was only fifteen or sixteen when I met her up at Idyllwild in '60, and then we became good friends. She stayed here. She danced with Peter Gennaro and Tom Hanson and Ernie Flatt, to name just a few. She did all the Andy Williams shows with Peter Gennaro. She did all of the Red Skelton shows with Tom Hanson. She got to be their leading character. I mean, when Red Skelton needed another dancer to work with him, it was her. She got to dance with him and Marcel Marceau. The three of them got to dance together. She was a leading dancer in several Academy Awards (presentation shows). She was gorgeous and moved like quick lightning. She could do anything. Leland could do anything. So they were two of the dancers that I got to dance with and were two of my friends at one point. The other two men who came into to the company at the same time, in 1960, were Charles Edmonson and Donald Bradburn. We're all three just a few months apart; we are all three the same age. Charles was born in April I think, Donald is in June, and I'm in July. So we were all just twenty years old. Charles was an absolutely gorgeous mover, just had this beautiful body, porcelain-like. He looked like one of those porcelain dolls. You know, he just had that perfect shape and perfect look. And he was a perfect traditional ballet dancer, just could do that stuff beautifully. Donald came from the farms. He was a UCLA student at the time, but his family were migrant farm workers. He was kind of this nice guy. (laughs) Donald later became a dance photographer; he wrote for Dance Magazine. He was a choreographer for a lot of (Las) Vegas shows and teaches at (University of California) Irvine, you know, part of that whole structure there. Charles has had his classes for the last thirty years, practically, teaching privately. Charles and I are still friends, although we haven't seen each other in a while. (We've) talked with each other.

KAUFMAN:

You also danced in Bella's company together.

BATES:

Bellanice Alexander and (Donald) came into Bella's company after I did, and so did-- Charles, he came in before I did. So, yeah, we had that connection again later in the sixties. There were about five men, and then the three of us, so (then) there were about eight men and about eight women who were in the Dance Players. We learned everything, and there were all levels of technique and technical ability. We learned from each other, and we worked together, and we-- That's where I really learned about a family kind of unit, how dancers work. I mean, we got together and we were in each other's armpits and crotches, you know, twenty-four hours a day,

practically, you know, moving. We got familiar, and we got intimate, and we got close, and we'd watch each other, and, oh, we'd really egg each other on in classes. There was never a competitive "Let's put some glass in her shoes so she can't walk ever again" type of competitiveness. There was always the egging on. "Oh, come on, you can do it better than that. Come on, I'll try it with you. Let's try it together. And we're all going to get better together." And there was this group that we got to work with. When we went to Dubuque we really kind of meshed there. We got to fly away and do an out-of-town gig. Loring set this thing up so perfectly for us to go through all these various stages of what might become our dance careers--and still be high school kids, or barely high school kids, still just wet behind the ears. We got a chance to do some very exciting stuff. We did Oklahoma! in Dubuque, Iowa, for a men's college, a men's Catholic college. And there was always one afternoon matinee--we did eight or nine shows there--that was all nuns and priests. I looked out on that audience that day. It was filled with penguins, because at that time they were still wearing habits, you know. And they were such a wonderful audience. It was at that moment that I got to recognize--I was twenty years old--that audiences are different, that audiences change the way I'm going to feel about doing it or how I'm going to do it, that they changed the whole thing--that one audience and another audience are not the same audiences. They're not going to react the same. We can't expect the same thing from them. Little things that you learn along the way that you get-- "Oh, wow." You know, it's so interesting, and it creates a different dynamic, so that when you get on that stage you work a little differently. Not so much that I was trying to work differently, but I could feel them differently. I began to discover that an audience made a difference, and it was from that point on that I never wanted to work on movies. Up until that time I wanted to be a movie dancer or a television dancer. Movies had ended by then; I think we still had three more. A lot of these kids were auditioning for West Side Story at the time, which was why George Chakiris and all those people were taking classes with us. KIRK: Was Russ Tamblyn a Player?

BATES:

No. And "Seventy-six Trombones," Melanie Alexander got to dance in that, was one of the leading dancers. What was the name of that--? KIRK: The Music Man.

BATES:

The Music Man. Those were about the only two left that eventually happened. But I had made a decision at that point that I loved the live theater, and I wanted to be on stage. But there was no place to go. Broadway was dead at that point, particularly with the musical. I mean, what was there was not very interesting. Well, eventually, in the next few years, they would be moving into things like the nude one-- KIRK: Hair?

BATES:

Before Hair, that is still playing-- KIRK: Oh! Calcutta!?

BATES:

Oh! Calcutta! And that started a whole new trend. But again, those were dances and shows that-- Although I loved the music and they were sensational and revolutionary things, they didn't do what I wanted to do. They didn't dance. They didn't full-out do all that stuff that you see in the old musicals. That's what I wanted to do. (laughs) So I got more and more, in my heart, wanting to do live theater, and I really wanted to modern dance. And it's at that time I was offered a chance to go with one of the blond bombshells at the time, Mamie Van Doren, who was going to do a tour, a kind of Vegas-like show, a theater tour. She needed two boys, and they were rehearsing in the studios, and I was watching one day when one of them quit or had to leave. And she invited me to come and do it. It was a $1,000 a week, and we were going to South America. And I looked at her-- I said, "No, I can't do it. I don't know enough." (laughs) And I'm okay with that. I mean, just three years before I was choreographing dances for stage. But I was already clear at that point that I didn't know anything, you know, and I really wanted to know more. I really wanted to study more, and I really wanted to stay there and work even though I didn't have any money. You know, that was at a time when I was eating one bowl of oatmeal every other day. And probably part of me was scared, and I would say that was a part of it. But the other part of it was that I saw that I really didn't know anything. Yes, I had a lot of friends who were doing things all the time. But when they were in class they couldn't do anything. Technically they couldn't do anything, and I was that kind of dancer. But I could go on stage and look great; you know, I could fake things. I had a lot of friends who were doing that and making lots of money and going all over the place and getting shows and things, and somehow I did not want to do that anymore. I wanted to stay and learn. I stayed with Eugene Loring for a year, a little over a year, and then I quit because it got really too difficult, and I needed to get a job. And then I did. I stopped dancing. I stopped dancing for a couple of years. Then in '63 I met a Latvian man and his wife and their son, Yuri Smaltzoff. J. Erglis Smaltzoff's studio is still on Sunset Boulevard at La Brea (Avenue), and his son now runs it. His wife played the piano, and the father, "And a (makes incomprehensible counting noises)." He spoke only Russian. They had just come from South America, where they had a school and a television show and the whole bit, and here he was in this little class with these little idiots who-- None of them danced! (laughs) And teaching these classes. And the wife, whose father was the prime minister of the Ukraine at one point, you know, and Yuri, who was their son and protÃ©gÃ© and everything else. Yuri still teaches the classes. I studied dance with them. I studied ballet. I started back to school at Los Angeles City College. I flunked out twice at Arizona State (University), so in '63 I started back

to school. I decided I was going to be a history teacher, (laughs) which has been my goal all along through here. You know, all through grade school, high school, into college, that was my goal, to be a history teacher. The Smaltzoffs did lots of-- I mean, it was really fun. Their dance technique was very full and open and big, and I liked it, and I enjoyed them. And they did also lecture- dem(onstration)s, because they were trying to make something happen. So we had a little collection of people who did Russian and Ukrainian folk dancing, and we would go to the temples and various Ukrainian centers and Russian centers, and we would dance for them. That 's where I got to learn to do all those tricks--you know, the circles and the jumps and-- (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

Barrel turns.

BATES:

Yeah, the barrel turns, all of that stuff. I got to do all of that stuff with them. I did it, and I did it very well. I almost got fired when I was in Dubuque, Iowa, with Eugene Loring in 1961. He got mad at me-- One more time I was one of the whipping boys. Linda and I were alternating between running into the lobby of the thing while we were rehearsing: "Waah! Waah! We're never going to make it!" (laughs) At this one point I wasn't paying attention to something, and Eugene snapped-- He gets nervous. He used to get real nervous and just tongue-lash people. And he snapped, "Get out! I never want to see you-- Get out! I don't want you to be here! Get on a plane and get out of my sight! I don't want to see you ever again!" (laughs) "Get out of here!" "Awww! Waah!" (laughs) And Jimmy Penrod came out in the lobby. They had been trying to get some of this-- There was a thing he wanted to happen in this particular piece. It was basically he had some flips and things, and nobody would try them. And I was standing there just dying to do them, but I was too scared to tell him I could do them, because I knew he wouldn't want me to do them. I said, "Jimmy, I can do that stuff. I know I can do that stuff." He said, "Well, why don't you go and show him?" So I went over there. And this one thing had to do with-- You had fallen down face forward, and then you would simply do a flip over. Just (makes a thwack sound as his hand shows the flip). I was so excited I just flipped way up in the air and came straight down. (laughs) But he loved it, you know, and I got back into the piece. I would do some of the pratfalls and things, and I learned to be a pratfall artist, sort of, from that kind of stuff. And then I learned all that great Russian-- You know, those circles you do and the jumps and all those, and I got to learn all of those from the Smaltzoffs. So I had all these little pieces of very strange but fun physical stuff. That eventually shows up, not directly in my choreography, but--

Tape Four, Side One (November 12, 1994)

KIRK:

We're going to backtrack a bit and talk about what it was like coming out in the Midwest in the early sixties, late fifties?

BATES:

Mid-fifties.

KIRK:

Mid-fifties, okay.

BATES:

I was sixteen, as I said earlier, in 1956. So I had already come out the summer of-- I turned sixteen that summer, and I came out just before that, where I had found out about gay life as such. I grew up in a small town outside of St. Louis, Collinsville, Illinois. Caseyville was a little subtown of that, and then up on this little hill we called Hollywood Heights, where I lived, were the real poor people from East St. Louis. I grew up in Hollywood Heights. (laughs) Anyway, in 1955-- Itâ€™s interesting. We were talking last time a little bit about learning how to dance and that I had learned how to dance from these two women--not dancing dancing but--

KIRK:

Social dancing.

BATES:

--but social dancing. I learned all the social dances, so that by the time I got to high school my friend David (Channiel, now Stone)--whose picture is over there--and I were really good dancers. We used to have people clear the floor at times and throw pennies--you know how they do sometimes, facetiously and sometimes jealously and sometimes out of deep admiration and fondness. So there's a whole mix of that. David and I came out by the same person. In fact, there were about four or five of us in this very small town who came out at the same time by the same person, who happened to be my Baptist choir director. (mutual laughter)

KIRK:

I see, okay.

BATES:

Baptist choir director. What was interesting about it is-- The year after my father (William Bates Sr.) died-- I was seventeen, 1957. Well, actually he had died that year. I went back to California. My aunt (Blanche Trustie), my mother (Jane Gaulding Bates)'s sister, had come and picked us up, and we went to California and spent a month in San Diego. And in 1956, '57, is when they came out with calypso pants for men and calypso shirts and thongs and such. And I brought all of those kind of things back with me and wore them on the streets of my town, where people absolutely stopped speaking to me. My good friend and I had an argument our junior year in high school--right before that, the summer before that--and everybody in the school took sides. And as a game and as a way of making a joke out of the whole thing they put us up as homecoming queens. (laughs) Now, this is 1957. You know, this year somebody could get nominated for homecoming queen and win and get to do it. It was not about to be that way then. They had to stop the election and redo the whole election. Because we won. (mutual laughter)

KIRK:

But what did it mean? In other words, your family knew you were gay--

BATES:

Well, they sort of did. Yeah, I guess they did. Because I really didn't hide. I never have tried to hide anything; I guess I couldn't hide anything. David's family-- It was one of those situations where they blamed the other one. His family sort of blamed me, and my family sort of blamed him for (our) doing all these weird, outrageous things. Because we would go out on Friday night and go down to East St. Louis and dance in the black bars, because they had the best music. You know, it was live combos and it was great jazz--jazz slash rock. I mean, not rock but rock and roll kinds of things. Yeah, the Bill Haley stuff and really good-- And it was wonderful. You know, we would in the jitterbug. We would do it until two o'clock in the morning. (laughs) And we weren't doing anything bad; in fact, most of it was extremely innocent. When I look at today and realize what we do and can do and have done, what young people do today, most of what we did was very innocent. We just really wanted to dance. We really wanted to be out there and see what was going on. But we were out in gay bars and things at sixteen. I had very few friends. I had probably at that point started having more women friends. David was my lifelong friend; we are still friends forty-six years later. And he probably is one of the few male friends that I've had on a consistent basis. That's changing again, and it has changed a couple of times. But basically, where most men, whether they're heterosexual or homosexual, have men friends, most of my friends have been women. Most of my long-term relationships have been women. There have been a few exceptions. Fred Strickler is one. And I had another friend, Ed Dietrich, who's another. And John Martin was another one, you know. So I have had them, but they have been fewer, much fewer than the kind of men friends that most people make. The example of my high school, before I went to military school, is that I wore Bermuda shorts one time to an evening function, and they wouldn't let me on campus. And my friends wouldn't speak to me.

KIRK:

Really?

BATES:

Because first of all you just did not wear that kind of clothing around publicly. It represented to them that I was flaunting my homosexuality, and I was flouting-- You know, I was breaking tradition, in a sense. Men don't do those kinds of things, and I was laughing at them. I suspected that's what they were thinking. I was wearing them because they were the latest fashion, and I was in the Midwest, and I wanted to wear something that they were wearing on the West Coast. And that's really all I did it for. When I came out here and saw those clothes I didn't think of them as gay clothes versus straight clothes. I really didn't think of that. I saw everybody wearing them, and I wanted to go back and wear them too. I had a sexual life, I had a regular life, I had my art life, and my education life, you know? I never thought of myself having to wear a flag all the time and declaring myself. But I was never quiet about it. You know, that kind of sounds like a dichotomy, but it isn't. My homosexuality has nothing to do with my art, my thinking, or any of those things as far as I'm concerned. Now, it affects some of those things sometimes. And I suppose it obviously affected how other people perceived me.

KIRK:

But it doesn't sound extraordinarily traumatic or like there was a huge amount of real animosity.

BATES:

I never liked the Midwest, and I hated men to begin with. Most of the men I was around were beer-drinking, potbellied, balding, "pinch 'em on the butt," "keep 'em pregnant" kind of men. And they weren't particularly my cup of tea. I never fit in. I never fit in. So when I came out I discovered that there were people that I could talk to on a different level, and when I came out to the West I began to find a whole other thing. I began to find education, I began to find art in a different way. So my life really ended in the Midwest, before I even graduated from high school.

KIRK:

Because you had that taste of California.

BATES:

Not only that, but then I went to (Kemper) Military School and graduated and actually graduated high school from a military school and got away from my hometown and the smallness of all of that. So before I even got out of high school I had already disassociated myself from that whole thing. Even at sixteen I had started going to St. Louis and had seen what was going on in St. Louis, so I was already disassociating myself from Illinois and small towns. So I really did that, I really did that, and I did that so completely-- And I really am very much a product of my times, because many, many, many of us did the same thing. And we either wound up in south Florida or we wound up in New York or we wound up in Chicago, we wound up in Los Angeles, or we wound up in San Francisco. You know, we went someplace else to start living our lives. And my life came about as a result of moving out of all of that. It was hard, you know. But David and I-- Thank heavens I had somebody like David to do it with. We were so curious. And we didn't take any of it seriously. I remember one time running into this drag queen who was just a crazy number, kind of pretty, very attractive, but he was not very well liked. You know, the kinds of things that went on in small towns, where I grew up, is that there were a couple of homosexuals who lived in town. Everybody knew them. Everybody knew who they were, and everybody left them alone. And they used to see a number of married men. They had a clientele of a number of the married men in town. (laughs)

KIRK:

Did people know about that, too?

BATES:

Probably. You know, it was just one of those things. Is it the homosexual who lived over here on the corner, like the old lady over here, or this--? Each had their little-- And there was this little thing that went on that nobody talked about, and I didn't see myself as doing that. I couldnâ€™t see myself as living a life that was absolutely shadowed in that way that everybody knew, everybody pointed, everybody stayed away from during the day. Because I did have that. I had sex with a number of my classmates who didn't speak to me during the day.

KIRK:

Oh?

BATES:

So I had enough of that as a child. I did not want more of it as an adult. I wanted to be someplace where what I did and who I was had nothing to do necessarily with what my sexual preference was. So I came out quite early. I got some of that stuff. I was very naive--I remained naive, I think, all the way through my life--about a whole lot of stuff that's coming up now, and I'm looking at it, and I say, "How come I missed that?" (laughs) "How did I miss it?" "That isn't what I think. Everybody else is thinking this way." I didn't think that way at all. And that's okay, and I'm realizing that it is okay, that it is part of who I am. And I really did-- I really was naive about a whole lot of stuff. I did a whole lot of stuff and remained pretty naive about even some of that that I thought I had some experience in.

KIRK:

You were just living--

BATES:

Right, I was just living. It was hard. It was bitter. There was a lot of-- People tended to walk away. I didn't have a lot of those experiences, but I had some of them. I know my family was a little-- Probably my family was the worst with it. I think I told you this: when I was thirteen or fourteen my mother found out I had been playing with some of the neighbor kids, and she was so furious and so frightened of the idea that she had my entire family, particularly my stepfather's family, and the peers, my cousins, call me Gertrude for one period of time. And that was very painful. And they all knew why. So it was like all along the line here, see-- I was thirteen years old, so I hadn't even come out yet, but already I was being pointed out to be different from the rest of them. So I had to get away from that. That was more painful than friends or other people or no friends, you know. And I had a couple of teachers who were just wonderful, who kind of without saying anything and without doing anything literally just kind of like watched over me in a funny way and became friendly and supportive--and obviously knew what was going on before

I did. One of them was a painting teacher, but she also taught history. Oh! And I was sort of a mediocre student until I got into her class, and she did this-- The first thing she did in the world history class was to go through the entire book and look at all the pictures-- We looked at all the pictures, and she told us little anecdotes about what we were going to study by looking at the pictures. She just went through the pictures for the whole week. And then she gave us a quiz. She gave us ten questions from that week on the things that we had looked at. And I flunked; I got four out of ten of them right. She had a big red "F" up there, and all she put in there was "Gary, I'm disappointed. I expected better of you." Well, I got "A++" from then on. (laughs)

KIRK:

Wow.

BATES:

I had the highest grades in all three of her classes. In fact, I had the highest grades that year of all of the history classes. Because I would get all these extra points, and I would get practically perfect scores on my tests--

KIRK:

But you felt like she was--

BATES:

She did something-- And this has happened several times in my life. She did something, she said to me something in such a way that it got my attention. It wasn't putting me down. It wasn't making mockery of me. She simply said, "I'm disappointed. I expected better," like there was something better to get. I didn't know I could do better. And then I fell in love with history. I always loved history anyway, and by that time I had already known all the kings and queens of

England and half the kings of France and most of the czars of Russia. Fantasy, you know. (laughs)

KIRK:

Yeah, I know.

BATES:

And I already could quote them and recite when they existed and all that. I didn't like much about American history, although when I was in military school I had a wonderfully crazy man who taught American history, and I also did extremely well in that class. And I still wasn't terribly interested in American history until I met John Martin. And he's the one who really turned me on to being an American. And not just being an "American" but realizing that this was an extraordinarily rich country with an extraordinarily rich past that could be drawn upon and was who I was. You see, I didn't have an idea of who I was. And he introduced me to this concept of being part of a tradition, part of the past, that made me connect in a way that I had never connected before. And then I started studying the Shakers, I started studying the Shaker house, you know, the salt-- What do you call them?

KIRK:

Saltbox?

BATES:

Saltbox. I started studying architecture. I started looking at all of these things, the way in which our country is put together, how we saw it and whatever. Then I started looking at the Constitution and the people who helped create the Constitution, the fear that they had of the arts and culture, that they wanted to keep them as "applied arts." You know, they didn't want them to

become "fine arts" because they were very suspicious of fine arts because it was related to aristocracy. That's where our whole battle comes from. And you will see it in the Constitution, you will see it in letters of John Adams. None of them wanted anything that even resembled the old country.

KIRK:

What about Jefferson?

BATES:

Jefferson, of course-- Look at his house. (laughs)

KIRK:

Right, that's what I mean.

BATES:

He was the one who kind of like battled them during that whole thing. And there was a big battle, it was a big battle in those early years, of how we were and what we were going to support. And there's still a battle. That war is still being waged today with Jesse Helms and others. It is not new. This is from the very beginning of our country, the existence of being afraid of the arts, partly because they were attached to aristocracy. And we have a history in this country, that goes back to the very beginning, of being anti-fine art.

KIRK:

You think it's mostly that? Or do you think there's other--?

BATES:

Well, I think there are other things that continue to-- But it's very much that old thinking.

KIRK:

When John Martin first sort of alerted you to this idea of really placing yourself in American history, where did you place yourself? Or how did you think of yourself as fitting into the history of this country?

BATES:

Well, what's interesting-- One of the things that I did in that placing is realize that I had come to the West Coast and started my education here, and that's where things happened, and that I wanted to stay here. So back in 1967, '68, I made a conscious decision that I wanted to remain in Los Angeles and help create something here. I had seen something happening here. Something had happened here on three levels just before I got here. One was the motion picture level, with great artists and great choreographers and dancers being a part of that. When I moved here in the sixties the movie had already gone by that time. But what hadn't gone yet was the television shows. There were some great people on television both as dancers and as choreographers. And there wasn't a day that there wasn't some kind of musical entertainment that had a lot of dancing and first-class choreographers and first-class dancers. In fact, a number of my friends were dancing in those shows.

KIRK:

Now, who where these choreographers? Hermes Pan and people like that?

BATES:

Hermes Pan did a few things when we were just-- When Fred Astaire and when some of the people would do specials, he would do them. But these were regulars. Like Tom Hanson was the regular person on The Red Skelton Show; they always had a dance company, a small dance group, and they were there year after year after year. So Tom Hanson with The Red Skelton Show. Tony Charmalie with what's-his-face (Andy Williams), whose wife (Claudine Longet) killed somebody (Spider Sabich) at the ski resort (Aspen, Colorado). Do you know who I'm talking about? Anyway, Tony Charmalie had a weekly show, did very outrageous kinds of things. People hanging and very-- He did a lot of stuff with television, the actual use of television, but also with how bodies were seen, where they were seen. So there was a lot of nondancing stuff that he was drawing from the fifties and sixties in New York, hanging people and doing things, you know, having them float, and all kinds of wonderful-- And tumbling and-- You know. The dancing wasn't just soft shoe or tap and all that kind of stuff, but they were doing very unusual kinds of things. Ernie Flatt, The Carol Burnett Show. Peter Gennaro, the Perry Como show. And I had a friend (Melanie Alexander) who did three of those shows and sometimes did two of them at the same time, and she was just wonderful. The Texaco show (Texaco Star Theatre) had dancers on it. Your Hit Parade had-- Who was it? I can't think of who choreographed for him, but he had been a New York person. So there were all these people: Tony Charmalie, Ernie Flatt, Peter Gennaro, Tom Hanson, and several others. And they all had very different styles, very different production values. Very exciting. If you ever get a chance to see anything that Peter Gennaro--

KIRK:

I'm really curious.

BATES:

Oh! He's wonderful! And he was one of my heroes. Wonderful dancer. And these were on every (night), one every night.

KIRK:

Oh, every night?

BATES:

Yeah, one of these shows was on every night of the week. So you had five or six a week that you were watching that had this wonderful dancing on it. And you know, people like Ed Sullivan, who in the fifties was showing Maria Callas on the same show that you saw Joe Blow with his dancing dogs. You saw it all. You saw (Rudolph) Nureyev, you saw Elvis Presley, you saw the gamut of the culture, not one dimension of a culture. You know, when I used to go into record stores--they don't have record stores today--but when I would go to record stores, you could go in and look at the classical section and the jazz section, and you would find in the classical section seven different interpretations of Beethoven sonatas. You know, we're lucky to see Beethoven sonatas in there (at all) today. The jazz artists that were so incredible; you hardly ever see jazz artists. You know, it's coming back a little bit, but the kind of incredible range and diversity of what we were doing-- And that's not happening today. You know, if it's not on MTV (Music Television cable network), if you can't sell it at Crown Books (stores) on the best seller list, "We don't have it." So there is a richness of diversity that we're losing. It's become one-dimensionalized. There's one kind of dancing for most people, you know. And whether it's Janet Jackson this year and what's-her-name the next year or vice versa, it's still pretty much one dimension. Most kids growing up today are absolutely deprived. They're deprived of that, of that exciting sense of things that I grew up with, almost not even knowing it. It's only been recently, in the last four or five years, that I've begun to realize how really rich that was for us. You know, by the time that the mid-sixties came along, the end of the sixties came along, most of that had disappeared. The movies before that-- By the early sixties and by the beginning of the seventies it had been pulled out of television. But that's what I came here seeing, that richness of the movie history and the richness of the television programming. And I got to meet some of the artists that were here. You know, I never got to meet Lester Horton, but I got to meet a lot of the dancers who had studied with Lester, and I had been taking classes with them from '60 on, anyway. So I had been taking classes in the Horton tradition.

KIRK:

Let's go back. We were at one point talking about the American players, and we had just finished, really, talking about how you eventually left there.

BATES:

The American School of Dance.

KIRK:

Right. And you were working for a while-- I think that's sort of where we left off at one point.

BATES:

Yeah. In 1960 I got the scholarship to go into the American School of Dance with Eugene Loring, and I danced with the Dance Players from '60 to '61. Then I left and took classes for a while, until about '62. And then I got involved with my first lover (Jim), and we moved to Rosemead Boulevard near Pasadena.

KIRK:

Really?

BATES:

Yeah. I used to live right off of (East) Duarte (Road) and Rosemead.

KIRK:

I know exactly where that is.

BATES:

It was a fabulous place. This woman had lived there for years. She had built this house, this adobe place way in the back, as her art studio. She had come from Chicago and had been a teacher there for years and then built this place so she could work. And there was this old, adobe, little-- Like a little ranchero place, you know, with the brick front and the whole bit. It looked like one of those old-- Just really like an old hacienda kind of thing. Hers was real adobe, but it was that walled look; it was kind of a fortress. This woman had the thatch Shaker roof and the brick front and had-- We put in French doors where the windows were. But they were the long windows, so we just put in French doors so that the whole thing kind of opened up to every room. And we had bamboo, huge bamboo around us. So it was really wonderful. And it was a long drive back with lots of trees. Well, it's now all--

KIRK:

Minimalls, probably.

BATES:

Those and those awful-- One hundred fifty apartments.

KIRK:

Right, right, right.

BATES:

That kind of stuff there. Anyway, we lived back there. We were both thinking about becoming real estate (agents). We both started working at banking. That's when I started working at banking. I worked in banking for six years. I was working at--it's not even there anymore; I don't think we even have it--one of the savings and loans, Pacific Savings and Loan. I worked down in Monterey Park at the time, and he worked up in Sierra Madre at a-- I think it was Security (Pacific Bank). We were thinking about-- We started to do real estate classes, and we were going to have a house, and we were going to become-- Not even to be an artist. I never thought I could be an artist; I never thought I was talented enough to be an artist. But really what I wanted was a salon. From my early years, from probably my teenage years, I wanted to reinvent, recreate, the old salon. And when I came to California I saw the chance, and my friend, who played the piano and was actually much more talented and brighter than I was, I thought-- We're still in contact; we still are friends today. I wanted to create a salon. I wanted to have enough money that I could meet the right people and create an environment where people would want to come and talk and create. And that's all I wanted. That's all I wanted. And Jim-- It didn't work out with Jim and me. We were together a little over two years, and he was more homophobic than my friends in the Midwest were. When I started wanting to dance again, he panicked. He didn't want me to be in Hollywood. And I started wearing white Levis, and he was-- He was freaked out that I was being too obvious, you know, and I just couldn't handle that kind of-- I couldn't live in that kind of environment. Not here.

KIRK:

Right. You come all the way to California, and now you wanted to wear white Levis-- (laughs)

BATES:

I mean, if I wanted to wear white Levis, it had nothing to do with me being gay. I have never ever associated any part of my life as being significant to being gay. If I went out and said, "I want to fight for gay rights," I will fight for gay rights through this, not through what I wear.

What I wear or what I do or where I teach or where I live has nothing to do with who I am in that sense. That's been a given for me. It's probably why I've remained in some ways detached from a lot of the other stuff. And I never liked living in ghettos unless they weren't my own. I've always lived in a ghetto, but it's never been my ghetto. (laughs) I mean, I wouldn't mind living in the Jewish ghetto. I wouldn't mind living in, you know, Fairfax--and I have. You know, I've lived in several Chicano ghettos, areas where they're exclusively Chicano. It doesn't bother me at all. I couldn't stand living in West Hollywood. I tried doing that for a short time. (laughs) It was obnoxious, probably in the same way that it would have been obnoxious for anybody trying to break away from their own ghetto to live in their ghetto.

KIRK:

So what happened after the split-up?

BATES:

We split up, and I came back to here, Los Angeles.

KIRK:

What year are we talking about?

BATES:

It was '63. I came back to Hollywood and started school at Los Angeles City College (LACC), where I met some friends who had known me from the American School of Dance days. And they said, "Oh, you've got to study with this new person. He's just in town, they're Russian, and they've just been living in South America, and they're really wonderful. It's a father and a wife and a son, and they all are involved." And it was the Smaltzoffs (J. Erglis Smaltzoff and Yuri Smaltzoff). So I said, "Oh, well, I'll go and see." And I got started taking dance classes with

them. They taught ballet, but really big ballet (gestures largely) stuff, you know, and it was fun. And they had a Ukrainian and Russian folk group, too, that a group of us would do. So I started dancing with them and their Russian and Ukrainian folk dance and learned all of the turns and all the lifts and jumps and all those kinds of things that the Russians and Ukrainians do, and I had a great time. We danced in places, and people would come up to me and (speaks Russian-sounding gibberish). Most people, in fact-- When I went to work at Gibraltar Savings (and Loan) in Beverly Hills, people avoided me for a long time because they didn't think I spoke English. I don't know what about me made people think that I was very, very-- A European of some sort. (laughs) People I worked with would-- "Well, do you speak--?" "Have you been here long?" I mean, there was no reason I would give them for thinking that I was a European. But they would come up to me. Six months after I started working there they would say, "Well, where are you really from?" Because they'd think I was either German or-- I loved it. It was very funny.

KIRK:

So you're still working in banking and dancing with the Smaltzoffs.

BATES:

Dancing with the Smaltzoffs. I had moved to Gibraltar Savings by that time. And I was finishing up at LACC. I got ill with hepatitis in '65. In '65 I ran into another person who told me about this, that they were looking for a dancer-- Actually I met this young man cruising I think is what it was. And he said he was doing this dance thing. We didn't have a thing; we just started talking. He was a dancer and I was a dancer. He was doing this master's thesis at UCLA, and he's looking for some men, and would I be interested in doing this? And I said, "Yeah, I could go along and see." They were doing it up in the canyon, up where the cave is, Bronson Canyon, where a lot of movies have been made. So we went up there and met them and met all these young people, and we were all-- What do they call them, people from the dead--?

KIRK:

Ghosts?

BATES:

Sort of. But he was doing a dance version of Orpheus and Eurydice, and we were-- Shades is what I was trying to think of. So I got to play a shade, and in that kind of thing where we did all these kind of strange things. I thought it was kind of fun. The other dancers liked me, and they were all from UCLA. And Vic Paddock, who was the person doing this, said, "You ought to come to UCLA. They have a dance department." And I said, "Oh, no, I want to be a history teacher." You know, by then I didn't want to do this again. Come and check it out, they had a-- For undergraduates they were starting a new award. They have a Laban Award. You know, if you go in you might be able to get your tuition paid for and get a scholarship and things like that. So I went and applied. I went and did this, and I got it! I was supposed to be finishing up in the spring of '65 at LACC, and that's when I got sick with hepatitis and wound up having to be out for six months, which meant that all my stuff from there had to wait until I could get done. And I didn't get to go into UCLA until the spring of '66. At that point--I came in in my junior year, part of my junior year--I got the half the scholarship. They gave (the other half) to somebody else who could come in in '65. So then I got it again, half of it, the following year, because the two of us got it again. And that's where my whole dance world shifted one more time. It shifted with Eugene Loring, because he introduced me to the whole gamut of the range of dance and we studied all kinds of dance there. And we got to meet a lot of professionals who danced in this and danced in that, you know--they were doing television, or they had just done three movies, or they had just been with the Bolshoi (Theatre ballet company), or this one had just been dancing with the New York City Ballet or something like that. So it really was quite exciting to be there and to see the range. And everybody busy and doing and going and-- It was always like that. They're going, "Well, I can't talk to you right now, I've to go to a show, I've got do an (inaudible--sounds like industrial), I've got to do this movie-- Well, see you next week." (laughs) And it was just busy, busy, busy. To the Smaltzoffs, which was just a whole other sensibility--a family thing. They had the big stuff--the South American-- The mother was the pianist, and her father had been the prime minister of the Ukraine. (laughs) So, I mean, her whole world was very different. To then going into UCLA, where it was very different. It was very different. And there were a lot of other kinds of ethnic dancers there, real ethnic dancers. (laughs) I mean real, real exotic stuff, at least for me at that time, and very wonderful.

KIRK:

So what did you do your first semester at UCLA? (tape recorder off) So you were at UCLA--

BATES:

In 1966 I got to dance in the UCLA Dance Company concert, which was its first year. I got to dance in two pieces of the four that Carol Scothorn had choreographed that year. She did the whole evening. And that started a collaboration with Carol Scothorn that probably went on into the mid-late seventies as an undergraduate, as a graduate, as a faculty member. And I danced in a number of her works over the years. I think I danced in eight UCLA Dance Company concerts between 1966 and 1977, culminating after I left in coming back as a guest artist and performing at Pauley Pavilion. There I got to meet composers, choreographers, thinkers, all kinds of people--peers as well as faculty--and guests that came in. I got to meet (Alwin) Nikolais there and Murray Louis and Martha Graham several times. I got to meet John Martin, who introduced me to a whole lot of other people. So I got to work with John during that period at UCLA, from--

KIRK:

Right from the start?

BATES:

Yes, actually, because-- I came in in the spring. It was semesters there at that time. That was the last year of semesters. So he had come back-- This was his second spring. He'd been there the spring before, and Alma (M. Hawkins) had invited him back for that spring, so I got to go in and do his class called Dance Perspectives. So that was where I got to meet him. It was out of that class that, at the end of that spring, we really connected. I was like this, hanging onto every word and saying, "Well, what about this? And how about that? And what happened there? Or didn't this happen?" And he got excited (because) he had somebody that he could speak to. He was so wonderful. He would come into class basically with nothing and just-- He had these wonderful clothes that he had all made, and his clothes were made for him. He had white hair and white bushy eyebrows and was like six-foot-something and very thin. And he had been a redhead. So the clothes he wore-- He wore lots of beautiful greens, woven greens, colors Alexander Julian would have envied, beautiful fabrics that he would find in different places in Scotland and then have them made here or in England. Or these real rich rust colors. They would just be beautiful, with little sparks of red and blue in them, and, they just zipped out at you. (laughs) He was just very elegant, you know, and very easy. And he loved to talk. He would come in just wearing his clothes, and he would pull out this envelope, this large envelope, and sit down at the table, and he would just start talking about whatever he was going to talk about that day--Graham or this

particular moment in history or the-- You know, whatever. And then he'd go "Oh," and pull out and open the envelope, and all these scraps of paper would fall out on the table. And there would be part of an envelope, the lip of an envelope, or there would be a torn piece from the cleaners, where he would have had this idea, and it was sort of like the culmination of this thought. And he'd written down the culmination, and he'd say, "Ah, yes" and "blah blah blah." (laughs)

KIRK:

So he would have all these little reminder things, right?

BATES:

Yeah. So it always looked like he was just saying this stuff off the top of his head, but of course you can't have a top of your head unless you have a deep bottom. I mean, you don't pour from the top of the pitcher without the whole thing being full. And when I got to live with him, I got to realize how much he worked. You know, even though he had lived in all this history, he had been central to and in that history, he would spent four or five hours a day every day in research and study and rereading, even his own books. "What is that exactly? How did I exactly say that? And I do I really still feel that way? I don't think I do." Or "Yes, this is exactly the way I think even though that was written in '35."

KIRK:

That must have been--

BATES:

He would read, and he would study, he would get this down. Every semester he did the same thing, and every semester he would go back over this material and reglean it and cull it so that he would have that information both accurately and easily, so that when he came into the classroom

(he would) look as if he was talking off the top of his head. Well, I learned an enormous lesson from that, because I was not one of those people--when I started teaching dance history--who could do it by my lecture notes. They would absolutely throw me off. So I could never lecture. What I did was-- I could lecture, but I would study the thoughts and the ideas and do exactly what John-- I wound up doing exactly what John did, so that when I came into the classroom I could give an hour lecture right off the top of my head easily with all these notes and all these thoughts. And if I needed to remember something, I would sometimes have certain dates or certain bits of information written about that big (indicates) on the page. I would have lots of notes often times. But they would be just big scribbles that would give me-- Like "1917, don't forget to mention that." Things that I thought maybe I might not remember.

KIRK:

When you first started at UCLA, did you only take dance classes? Or did you take history? Did you get to other things there?

BATES:

When I was at LACC I got to get into anthropology and philosophy and all that, so when I came to UCLA I continued to do more anthropology and philosophy classes. In fact, when I was at LACC my anthropology teachers wanted me to go into anthropology. And they introduced me to some of the teachers at UCLA, so I already got to know some of them. I was really very excited about their anthropology department and program. So there was a part of me that wanted to double major-- They didn't have double majors, and I still don't think they do. They didn't really even have minors. But what happened was I think I had enough courses in both anthropology and philosophy that at least I felt good about it. Because I was taking them all the way up to-- Even in graduate school.

KIRK:

So you had a real home there beyond the dance department.

BATES:

Yeah. I got to know other departments. But then I also was taking classes on the outside too. I was taking dance classes on the outside so that most of my dancing didn't happen-- My dancing happened at UCLA, but my dance classes were happening with Carmelita Maracci, Bella Lewitzky, Mia Slavenska on the outside. I was studying on the outside.

KIRK:

And how did you run into these outside teachers?

BATES:

In 1960 I had gone to Idyllwild (School of Music and the Arts, now Idyllwild Arts) and met Bella. And then Bella was getting back into watching and seeing things, so she would see me dance. At UCLA in '66 I re-met her, and in '68 I joined her company. I asked her if I could come and join the company, and she said yes. (laughs) I was very bold: "Bella, I like your work. Can I come and join? I want to dance." She said okay.

KIRK:

That's probably exactly what you did, eh? (mutual laughter)

BATES:

Uh-huh. I ran into her outside of a concert one day at UCLA at Schoenberg (Hall), and I said, "Bella, I want to dance with you. Can I do that?" She laughed and she said, "Sure." I was very

much that way I guess all the way through. I didn't see any thought about pussyfooting around trying to find a way to-- I just did. I did things or I didn't do them.

Tape Four, Side 2 (November 12, 1994)

BATES:

It was in '60, when I came out here to start dance with Eugene Loring, and my cousin David (friend David Channiel, later Stone) was living here, one of his friends said, "What is Gary doing?" and he said, "Oh, he's dancing. He's studying dances." "Oh, I can just see it, one grand jetÃ©, two (inaudible) jetÃ©s, landing in the pit and never be seen again." (laughs) So that was sort of the way people laughed at me and saw me as a sort of clumsy and awkward and ditzy person. And I realized at that point that it wasn't going to happen if I didn't do something. And that's when I started wearing outrageous clothes to get used to-- Because I was very shy. You know, wearing those clothes that I wore in 1956 in my hometown was a bold statement. It was about me being bold; it wasn't about me being gay. It was about me wanting to reach out and do something. And the same thing happened here. I realized that I couldn't continue to be a Midwestern flower, whatever they call those people that seem--

KIRK:

Wallflower.

BATES:

--wallflower, in a city that was just very-- So David had all these fabulous, outrageous clothes, and I started wearing them. I started wearing pink, short--short, short, short--velvet shorts. (mutual laughter) From (the) Melrose (Avenue district), where we lived, to Hollywood, to the studio, there I was, and people thought I was outrageous. And I was outrageous, not because I was outrageous but because I just decided that I was not going to be this wallflower anymore. And I just put on these clothes. And I wasn't out there; I wasn't cruising, and I wasn't trying to make a statement. I really was doing it to break through my own shyness and my own fear of things. And I did outrageous things like that while I lived with him. And then that carried on up until 1968, when I sort of walked up to Bella and I said, "I want to work with you." First of all,

she was the only person in town doing anything, and she had just started her company a year or so before, so I'm going to ask. There's no harm in asking, you know. Same way with Carmelita. I went up and said, "I want to study with you." She said she never had scholarships, but she did, and I was one of them. For a number of--

KIRK:

And she taught ballet?

BATES:

She taught ballet. She was incredible. Incredible dancer. I never got to see her dance; I got to see a little bit of film of her once and hear people talk about her. She was evidently just incredible--powerful, high tension, tiny little thing, a wisp of a thing, that played castanets and (did) point work and did things on Goya and-- (laughs) Deep, deep, rich. She was an anarchist and talked about that in the classes. Carmelita's where I developed my concept of teaching dance while teaching philosophy and aesthetics while you were teaching technique. (mutual laughter) They were all part of the same thing. We would talk about anarchy, we would talk about revolution, we would read the book on the days of revolution in Russia. We would talk about all these things while we were doing the pliÃ©s. And it's in that idea of that that we found the passion and the reason for doing pliÃ©s. So we were talking about art and beauty and nature and revolution and communism and fascism and being angry and dynamic while we were doing pliÃ©, tendu, and it was fabulous. And she would fire the pianist right in the middle and tell people to get out, and other people would come in. And you were scared to death that you were going to offend her in anything, by what you said, because it would be silly and it would be irrelevant. Because everything that she said had absolute authority, and it was not irrelevant, and we were just "panty-waist, dilettante, irrelevant people," and if we wanted to continue to be that way, "PliÃ©, two, three, four--" (mutual laughter) And that's exactly the way it was, every class. You never knew what to expect. Or if this was going to be your last one, and whether she was going to like you today because of the way you smiled or didn't smile--

KIRK:

You must have loved going there.

BATES:

I loved her-- (laughs) I absolutely adored her because she was so bright. She just forced us to continue to think. She forced us to continue to look at our lives, because they were so petty. (mutual laughter) They were just so petty, and we were so caught up in them that she just did everything to destroy that and break it up. My technique classes and my choreography classes were always like that. I got that from her, and I never let go of it. I found that you don't walk into technique classes and just do that. You had to understand. And I started talking philosophically. I started reaching into the grab bag of ideas, getting people to think. Whether it worked or not I don't know, but I did. I would talk about modernism, I would talk about the Armory (Center for the Arts) show (in Pasadena), I would talk about everything. I would talk about painting and film and sculpture and architecture, and I would bring these ideas and these thoughts in. I would talk about existentialism and different things of that sort. Because like me, I knew that most of my students, particularly the last twenty-five years, were all a product of existentialism, and they didn't even know what the word was. And yet here they are, all products of it, of an existentialist point of view, way of being. They were living examples of it, but they didn't know it. (laughs) So it was really important to (mimics sound of cracking a whip) needle them and push them and prod them into those kinds of things. So when I danced and taught dance classes, I always taught philosophy and aesthetics and all of that kind of stuff. And when I taught philosophy classes, I always moved. (laughs) And they would always laugh at me. My students got used to it. But it was part of that passion, it was part of instilling the passion. When I was teaching at Scripps (College), I was chair of the dance department there for three years, and during that time I got to teach in the humanities program--Contemporary World Issues.

KIRK:

Wow.

BATES:

And the woman I worked with (Lois L--), who was a psychologist-- And I chose nine books. Nine books. We chose Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own. We chose Ursula (K.) Le Guin's The Left Hand of Darkness because it had to do with sexual identity. We chose (Lewis) Mumford's Technics and Civilization because we wanted that thing. Freud's-- The small primer.

(Arnold J.) Toynbee's Change and Habit. What else did we do? Well, there were books like that. They had to read one a week or so, and then we would discuss the attitudes and thoughts about that. I gave my class an assignment one day out of the blue. It happened to be an assignment from Lawrence Halprin's book (The Sketchbooks of Lawrence Halprin), where four or five little designs, just four or five little pencil drawing things-- I put it on the board. I said, "Okay, I want you to make something out of this over the weekend." "What do you mean â€˜make something out of itâ€™?" I said, "Well, this is a score. You can write a script based on these four little designs. Or you can make a dance. Or you could create a piece of music. I don't care what you do. I want you to make something out of that. This is the format, a map. This is a plan, this is a score, this is a composition. You've got to find out what the composition holds." Well, they were just absolutely furious with me and came back to Lois and said, "Oh, Lois, what is he doing to us? Psychologically we can't deal with this," blah blah blah blah blah." Well, they came back and did some very exciting stuff, including the manifestos. There were a couple of people who just refused to do this assignment, wrote these incredible manifestos of why they shouldn't. (mutual laughter) Which is perfect, you know!

KIRK:

Right, right.

BATES:

And Lois said, "Oh, I think that was too much for them. We shouldn't do that kind of thing." So the next year we did it again. And she did it her way. She explained it to them, she worked it out, she let them have their own ideas. And they came back the next week with the little matchsticks put together and pasted (inaudible) on and this simple (inaudible) the world, and if you turned it this way, it does this. (Kirk makes a snoring sound) You know, they had absolutely not done anything. And she saw--immediately--the difference. And it was very interesting.. She came from the psychological point of view: marvelous teacher, but typical of the thinking of teaching is that it's nonpassionate, it is nonconfrontive, it is reflective. It is all of those old things that we always thought about school. It is the ivory tower where you go and you are pulled away from the experience of life so you can study it. You cannot be caught up in it, because then you are--

KIRK:

Not objective.

BATES:

Not objective, and you've been-- What do you call that word when you get--?

KIRK:

Tainted and touched.

BATES:

Yeah. You've been tainted by experience. It was at that point that I realized what an uphill battle, what a difficult and maybe totally stupid thing it is to try to teach any art in an academic setting where that kind of thinking and feeling absolutely prevails, and particularly the kind of art form that we're teaching. It's okay to teach music, because music has been there since medieval times. And music, because of its relationship to mathematics, has always been the highest art form in Western civilization. It has always been the highest art form since the medieval period. And if you look at the medieval hierarchy of education, the quadrivium and the trivium, one of the four tops is music. So, I mean, it's a natural flow of events in history to realize that the reason that we still think of music as the ultimate art form is because of that long history, of being both in academia and being part of historical thinking.

KIRK:

Plus, I think it's a religious--

BATES:

Well, it's also tied to religion on top of it. But it was all because of that whole medieval structure that it became and remained on top and it continues to remain on top. There are still people who think that if you don't study Bach you haven't studied life, you know, that kind of stuff. (laughs)

KIRK:

Which might be true, actually, but-- Yeah.

BATES:

Well, I'm not knocking that at all. You know, there are so many things-- But to find it from our bodies is almost heretical. And to certainly think that anything done in passion--because, you know, that's next to our genitals that we're doing it--it can't even be thought of let alone talked about. So that passion, that idea of passion that we're studying a hundred years later-- Because you don't want to study anything too close to our own civilization in time because you might get excited about it. So we had to study things a hundred years or more away from us so that we cannot have any passion about it. It's the whole concept of hierarchical thinking. That's why it's a hard battle. The idea of our bodies being okay and that we learn from our bodies and that we learn to know and see and feel from the whole body and not just from the top of our heads is a recent concept. Even the Renaissance people were still battling all the medieval thinking and were continuing to battle Augustine as their primary target.

KIRK:

And that's re-emerged in the form of Jesse Helms.

BATES:

Well, but it's all been part of that idea that certain things are just not healthy things. So it's an uphill battle, continues to be an uphill battle. Our recent election is one more example of that upward battle. (laughs) And we're going to see lots of backlash from it. But that assignment, and watching-- You know, I was always iconoclastic and didn't mean to be. I didn't mean to be. I didn't mean to be at fifteen or sixteen when I wore calypso pants and shirts and thongs. And they had never even seen thongs. They thought I was wearing women's clothes, and they didn't know what those things were on my feet. (laughs) From that point all the way through I have done these kind of like what appeared to be iconoclastic things, and they weren't at all. I mean, they were the kind of things that I thought, "This is the only way we can do them. We've got to try this or--" You know. And having the kinds of teachers that I had along the way, which I haven't even talked about, how they absolutely shifted my consciousness, absolutely turned it around and faced me another way throughout my life. And all of them did that that had import. Carol Scothorn, who could look at forty dances one after another, little studies, little piddly studies that we would do, and could tell you about each one of them. Absolutely directly and pointedly-- I couldn't believe that she could do that. "How could she see all those dances and see all that in one sitting? She can't do that." And I learned to do that. I learned to see movement in the way that Mia and Bella taught it and got to it, and that is the inch and a half extra motion between the joints. Because that's where they worked from. It's from joints that we started working, not from the outward aspect of it. But we started opening those joints, and we started shifting those joints. And it was out of that that the extra stuff came, and it revolutionized my whole idea of technique, my own body-- It changed my body. And it opened my whole idea of how technique could be, how valuable it could be, studying it. Carmelita, because of the passion and taking that passion into my history classes or my philosophy classes when I taught at UCLA or Scripps or whatever, and getting it validated-- Although I didn't trust it sometimes. By the example of Lois L--, having to do it one way one year and then do it the other way. It was just like we were all bored, you know, and Lois looked at me, and without saying a word she understood that there was something that had happened the year before. Whether they liked it or not, whether they felt comfortable about it-- It really wasn't maybe about people being comfortable. That the whole idea of an art, first of all, is that it's immediate, not reflective. Now, the experience with the art is reflective, but not the making. I have to be immediately in the passion of it. That doesn't mean that I don't get reflective in it. It doesn't mean that there aren't moments of doubt and questions and "Where am I starting from? What does all this mean?" But there is a kind of immediateness. If I don't feel something about this concept, this idea, this shape, this form, this motion, chances are I'm not going to make anything out of it. So it has to be immediate. And it has to be passionate. You know, it's just the opposite of academia, which is reflective and objective. And you can't turn those things on and off. You know, it is absolutely incredibly difficult to have a group of students, no matter how bright and brilliant and creative they are, to walk in after having three hours of objective, nonpassionate (coursework) and to try to get them to be--and have them feel comfortable being--passionate and immediate and to have nonphysical and then to suddenly become physical. Those seem like silly and "Oh, that's easy." It is not easy; it is very, very difficult. And it goes against everything that we do the other twenty-three hours a day. So that we get any success out of it is amazing.

KIRK:

And it just goes against everything you've learned growing up that has to do with behaving.

BATES:

It goes against everything we do. Everything we do is about behaving, see, because we're taught to behave, first of all. We're taught to not let our self be seen. We can't be seen perspiring. We can't be seen being involved. We have to sit back, and we have to-- You know, like the lawyers. We have to sit back and look like none of this means anything and figure it all out from our heads and never give out a signal. Because everything that we do is a signal. And I was a walking, blazing neon sign, which is why-- You know, that's the other side of my life that has been the enigma. I've been a blazing neon sign. I realized that if I didn't find out how everything felt--(laughs) felt not just inside me but outside of me-- In other words, if I felt rejected I had to find out where their rejection went (physically), and I had to take on that shape. If I wanted something I had to reach out for it physically--with my head, with my parts of my body. That's where I learned about my technique, that's where I learned about my ideas, as physical objectives. And I did that. I spent my time talking in big Italian neon, (laughs) because I wanted to find out how all of that stuff that I was thinking and feeling came out as physical stuff. Because that was my color, that was my palette, that was the line I was going to draw. What kind of line was it? I wanted to know where that line was, and I wanted to know what color it was. (moves and dances as he speaks) I wanted to know how it came out of me. And I spent the next twenty-some years being a neon sign. Now, the problem with being a neon sign is that people either want to turn it off or they read it and they react. So my personal life became a lot of reactions. As a matter of fact, it's still with me today. I was in the kitchen helping my roommate the other day-- He was fixing this wonderful dinner, a formal sit-down dinner and the whole bit. You know, I had done a half dozen of those in my life; I just avoided them like the plague. But it was wonderful. I came in, and I was helping him. And I am always a fast reactor. I'm sensing people wherever they are. So he would reach over-- I was doing dishes or I was skinning the potatoes, and he was cooking here, and he would reach over here, and I'd move over there. (laughs) And he said, "Every time I move someplace you jump. Do I scare you that much?" I said, "No." I said, "I have learned to overreact." Now, it's overreaction-- To find out physically, it was information for me. But for normal people I must have been a crazy man. I would be in the middle of a restaurant in Westwood, and somebody would say, "Well, how did your class go today?" "Well, let me show you." (mutual laughter as he rises to enthusiastically demonstrate) "Let me show you this step I (inaudible) with them." I would go out and play with my dog, and I would be jumping around with him, and that would be the next week's stuff that I would do. Because I would suddenly discover something. I was fascinated with skateboarding. I never

skateboarded in my life, and I did this whole dance based on some aspects of skateboarding and a whole semester of material based on the ideas of skateboarding, which had to do with the ideas of balance. And I had people come up to me years later and say, "Are you still skateboarding?" And I'd say, "I've never skateboarded in my life." And they were absolutely humiliated by that. They thought that I had been doing all these classes with it, and I had never done it. But, see, it didn't matter whether you were doing it; it mattered that there was something from that that I was interested in. And that's exactly those same four little squares that I gleaned something from. And that is the creative nature, that is the nature of a thinking, creative, seeing, feeling human being that the artist is involved with--and that we as academics are also involved with as long as they're dead and have already done it.

KIRK:

We can't smell them anymore so we can study them now.

BATES:

(laughs) Right, so we don't get too emotional about this. Anyway, all those kinds of things shaped my teaching. They shaped my being. And it's because of all that stuff that I never fit in most of my life. It's like I had blinders on to the rest of the world. And I suppose it probably looked to some people like I was being insensitive--and I probably was--and to some other people that I was being rude or that I was an idiot, others that I was a flake, because I didn't study this the natural way and I didn't find it the natural way.

KIRK:

Or the expected way, anyway.

BATES:

And a lot of what I tried to find out about and a lot of what my dances were about were reflected in this thing. John said something, that technique is simply the ability to do what is required. So all of the ballet technique in the world-- You could be the best ballet dancer in the world, and if you need to do something that has to do with (makes a tortured gutteral sound as he goes into a contorted contraction), that ballet technique is not going to get you there. That technique isn't going to help you find that thing that's turned in, pulled in, and rounded. There's nothing there that's going to tell you about that in this other technique. Therefore we need to-- You know, each generation needs to reinvent almost, in a sense, the technique to find ways to do that--which is what we do. Which is why the old sort of either gets absorbed into the high technique, as we call the ballet-- Most of modern dance now is absorbed in many ways into it. And ballet has expanded. Ballet is not what it used to be. When I started teaching some classes in Florida fifteen years ago, most of them had never seen much modern dance, even then. And I was starting to work on flat back, round and arch stuff of the Lewitzky-Horton technique, and they thought I was crazy. They had been taught a particular kind of jazz (dance) that was nonconscious, so that was their fun class, because they didn't want to think. So jazz represented nonthinking. That tells you something, doesn't it?

KIRK:

It still does.

BATES:

Yeah, and the ballet was the important stuff. But you didn't fall on the floor, you didn't hurt your knees, and you didn't reach over out here in flat back and stick your butt out. All those things--even though you did stick your butt out this way (indicates)--all those things were so foreign to them they thought I was an absolute weirdo. I had two people in my classes. It reduced down to that. And I was teaching for the school, and they kept allowing the students not to take classes with me until the only people who were taking were outside people. I got at one point down to two people in one class. But, you know, it's again where they want you there but they don't want to have any problems. And they don't ask me to leave; they just keep letting the classes dwindle down till there's nothing left. Again, dance is-- It's very strange.

Tape Five, Side One (November 21, 1994)

KAUFMAN:

(addressing students gathered to hear Bates lecture) This is Gary Bates, who has pretty much introduced himself already (laughs), talking to you guys. I just wrote a little something, and I'll share it with you guys. The best way to describe Gary Bates's contribution to the dance world is to say he has been a major shaper of dance in this city for the past twenty-five years. Gary has performed, choreographed, produced, cofounded, directed, chaired on grant committees, earned distinction in grants, and has headed and taught in the dance departments of many well-known universities. In addition to all this, the thing that I feel is so wonderful about Gary is the passion and generosity that well up out of him, that have fueled his presence in the most difficult of the arts. He has been a part of the foundation, the mainstay, of dance in Los Angeles, choosing to be here rather than in New York and choosing to shape and inspire many a person in dance to continue to trust and to believe that anything is possible. I just want to just give a few highlights from his career. As a performer and a codirector, he was from 1968 to '73 a member of the Bella Lewitzky company (Lewitzky Dance Company). In 1974 he cofounded and until '79 codirected his own dance theater, Eyes Wide Open. From 1974 to '79 he was a guest artist with Lynn Daly and the dancers of Dance/LA. He was also a guest artist with the UCLA dance company and UC (University of California) Irvine dance company. In 1974 he made his own solo debut at the Bing Theater (at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art) for the Monday evening new music concert series, which is still going on in this city. He has done some work in San Francisco, where he co-wrote Cinderella at Midnight, a three-act play, for the Cockettes, which was a pretty outrageous group of actors, he explained to me, much like the (Andy) Warhol group in New York, if people are familiar with that. In 1986 he codirected and co-chaired the last (Dance) Kaleidoscope series of concerts that the Los Angeles Area Dance Alliance produced. And in 1979 he choreographed one of his latest works, "Beneath the Tears."

BATES:

That was 1986.

KAUFMAN:

Oh, 1986 was it?

BATES:

Actually '88.

KAUFMAN:

Okay. I'm still trying to get the dates right. As a university teacher he taught from 1968 to 1992, basically. He taught at Florida State University, he's taught at UCLA, he's taught at Scripps College, and was also the chair of that department. He was a guest artist at Loyola (Marymount University) and also permanent person at Loyola, and a guest artist at Cal(ifornia Institute of the) Arts. He also taught at Santa Monica College, which is where I met him, towards the end of his teaching career. As a member of the community he has sat on many grant selection committees, such as the Brodie Arts Foundation, the L.A. Cultural Affairs Department, and the National State County Partnership. As for awards, he's earned a 1979 National Endowment for the Arts grant for choreography, and in 1981 he won the Vanguard Award for solo choreography. And just this year he won the Lester Horton Award (given by the Dance Resource Center of Greater Los Angeles) for outstanding and sustained contribution in teaching. So there are quite a few things. He's contributed very much here and has had just an extremely rich career, from what I gather.

BATES:

Can I read this, please? (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

Yeah, right here. (laughs) Teaching has been close to the heart of Gary and has afforded him a chance to pass on some of his experiences. And since we're all seniors in the dance department and we're moving on outside of an academic environment, we thought it would be most interesting for Gary to kind of talk about the inspirational points of his career, especially when he was young and seeking like us. And then we'll move on to some of his more current experiences--being retired, negotiating his role in dance right now, and living with AIDS. Okay? Finally, I'll ask you questions.

BATES:

Thank you, Nina.

KAUFMAN:

Yeah. Just for a tiny bit of background information, I wanted to ask when and where you were born, and just talk a little bit about that experience.

BATES:

Okay. I'm fifty-four years old. I was born in 1940 in St. Louis, Missouri. I was an illegitimate child. My mother kept me, and that was a difficult time in 1940. My mother was sort of the Hester Prynne of her time. You know who Hester Prynne is? Good, good. Oh, you are a literate group, too. Oh, wonderful! (laughs) You know, it's important that you know the other arts. No art lives in a vacuum. And if you're not studying all the other arts, which I think is one of the reasons why this is one of the most extraordinary of times for you, that you get to-- I told Judy (Mitoma), I wish I, oh, hell, were going to live another twenty-five or thirty years--I don't know that at this point--because I would love to be a part of this, of what's happening here. Because it gets to touch on art, it gets to touch on the experience of arting, making. And it has nothing to do with whether it's a movement or whether it's a color or whether it's a fabric. It's all that. It's all the same, you know. It really is all the same. I grew up on the other side of the Mississippi River in Illinois and basically was a country bumpkin--lower middle class. Both my parents worked. My mother (Jean Gaulding Bates) married a man (William Bates Sr.), and they had another child (William Bates Jr.). I grew up sort of out in the woods. I picked blackberries and sold them to the markets when you could do that. You can't do things like that anymore. You know, I mowed lawns, I worked in a place that was the local hangout for all the businessmen in the town that I lived in, and also sold Trailways and Greyhound bus tickets, andthings like that. (laughs) Then my father died, my stepfather died, and I had a chance to go on to military school. My brother was being sent there, and my mom asked me if I'd like to go. So I graduated from a military school in Booneville, Missouri--Daniel Booneville. Daniel Boone. The school was called Kemper Military School. Ironically, when I was a student here years later, the president of the UC system (Charles J. Hitch) was the son of one of the presidents of Kemper Military School (Colonel A. M. Hitch), and I knew his mother (Bertha Johnston Hitch). His mother still lived

next door in the old house at Kemper, so I got to know his mother. I love the chain of reactions and events in life, and I'm not going to talk linear, as you well know, as you all can see already. The interaction and the chain of reactions that go on in life are so fascinating that even if you didn't do anything else but watch what was going on and how it loops and runs and travels and unravels and ravels back into and around your own life, it's an extraordinary and fascinating event in itself. I grew up poor and really not aware of anything, really not aware of anything. I was a dreamer. I spent a lot of times in the woods swinging on grapevines and communing with trees. I loved trees; I still do to this day. We had a great big maple in our yard, and I used to get up in the very top when storms would come so I could blow (makes a wild sweeping gesture and the class laughs) And then I'd be scared to death to get down. (laughs) I always loved climbing up, but I could never get back down. But I could stay in there until practically the storm was over. And we had tornados and things like that. But it was really a thrill for me. When I got to Kemper and I discovered another whole something in life--I don't know what--it was just amazing. I'll tell this terrible story. To you kids-- You don't know-- I mean, you know everything is very different (now). When I was growing up-- I came out when I was fifteen or sixteen in-- Well, everybody's coming out these days. I came out. I actually, literally, knew about gay life at fifteen in this small town. My best friend (David Channiel, later Stone) and I came out together through another friend, through another person. This was 1956. David and I had an argument before school started our junior year, and as a result everybody in school took sides. And for the homecoming event they voted for the two of us for homecoming queen. (the students laugh) They had to redo the elections, of course, because we did not have Goldie Glitters at Santa Monica College, who got to be homecoming queen at Santa Monica College, and places like that. Goldie Glitters and I did a show together up in San Francisco called Cinderella at Midnight. She was our Cinderella. (laughs) So that was, I think, my first real statement about the conflict in terms of personal life and public life. I did have to share that story because it's so outrageous. And at this time of day it doesn't have any meaning, but then it was absolutely a statement. The administration hated it, didn't like the idea at all. The kids absolutely adored the whole breakthrough of it. And it was a breakthrough kind of statement, because we-- You know, I was right on the edge of the sixties. I graduated in 1958, so right into the sixties and the whole other revolution: the sexual revolution, the drug revolution, marijuana, things of that sort, most of which I did not participate in until I was in my late twenties. But that's neither here nor there. So basically I was a poor, middle-class country boy without much awareness about anything. My mother moved us to Arizona when I was eighteen so that I could go to college, because somebody told her that she could live cheaper there and we could have a better life and I could go to college less expensively. At that time Arizona State was (Teachers) College and not University. It became a university that year. Grady Gamage was the president, and he was (closely associated with) Taliesin and was close friends with Frank Lloyd Wright. And Frank Lloyd Wright offered to give him a huge new auditorium for free. He did; he offered to give the whole state of Arizona a new capital building for free if they would move the capital (building) someplace else. (laughs) And it was actually right outside of town at the time. And they refused it. But he did build a beautiful auditorium for Arizona State University, which I got to perform in with the Bella Lewitzky company some years later. At that time, 1958, we were very different from here--a cow town, cow palace, cow school. You know, they had the huge gymnasium, and the seniors walked in first, the juniors got in second, the sophomores, and the freshmen. This particular year they went from Z to A, and my name is Bates, so I was one of the last of the last of the last to get in to register for classes. Well, I had never done anything like this in my life--it

looked like craziness; there were people around the block of this building--and I didn't know what was going on. I had gotten poison ivy before I left Missouri, which I did every year, so I was broken out into these terrible things, and it's 120 degrees in Phoenix. (laughs) I was not a happy camper. I was not well pleased with anything at all. But we got into line, I got there, and the first thing I saw across just thousands of people, with these little wooden plaques, with these white plaques that said "History," "Medieval Studies," whatever-- And there was this one way over there someplace that said "Dance," and it's the first one I went to. And I got to meet Margaret Gisolo; she was studying there. And I said, "What kind of dance is this?" And she said, "Well, this is modern dance." "Is that anything like they do on television?" Now, that doesn't mean much to you, but in my day, in 1958, '59, '60, there were wonderful shows: Carol Burnett, Andy Williams, Perry Como, Your Show of Shows, all kinds of things. Every one of them had their own choreographer, and every one of them had their own dance company that they kept years and years and years and year after year. So I got to see a lot of dance on television, a lot of very different kinds of dancing. They weren't all the same. It wasn't all MTV (Music Television cable network), you know, it wasn't who was the latest Paula Abdul or whatever. And I'm not knocking any of that. I really am not knocking any of that. It's wonderful. But the fact is that there was a variety of events happening, a variety of ways in which people saw and perceived movement and dancing, to the same kind of music even, and it was startling. You know, it was something we almost took for granted because it was just there all the time. Now, right after that, it all disappeared. We suddenly no longer had musicals, we no longer had show kinds of things that we had then. So we lost a lot of that. I find that your generation is much more deprived than mine was. (laughs) So I walked over, and she said, "No, this is not that kind of dancing. Why don't you take a class and come and see?" Well, that started my entire life. That was absolutely a shift of my life that I have never regretted one second of. Because I came in wanting to be a history teacher and having-- I had already figured it out: I was going to have glasses, and I was going to have a Dalmatian, and I was going to be in a small country town and live a small country town life and be very happy. (laughs) It didn't happen. It didn't turn out that way. Is that enough? (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

That's great, thanks. You had mentioned earlier, when we were talking in other interviews, that there was a period in your life in your mid-twenties when you studying simultaneously with four very important teachers. I'd like you to talk a little bit about your experiences with these people.

BATES:

The two years that I went to Arizona State I flunked out both my fall semesters. At that time I

was dancing all the time. I mean, I was dancing in everything. In that two years that I went there, two semesters of two years I went there, I choreographed six pieces and was dancing everybody else's. So between 1958 and 1960 I lived in Arizona, I danced there, I was working forty to sixty hours a week in a taco stand so I could make money to live and go to school, and then during the summers I would work as an accounts receivable person in a doctor's office. My second year in school I got a scholarship, and it was a scholarship to-- Mostly they went to Connecticut College to study. Connecticut College was the place to go. Everybody was there, and you got a chance to see all the New York companies and have all the New York teachers. And I couldn't go. I didn't have money to go. I didn't know how. I didn't know how to do that. I realize how naive I was. I walked into things, and they were there, and I sort of did them (wildly crunches paper in front of him), and I'd run around and move around and do things, and then I'd figure it out later. (laughs) And you know, I think my life is still like that. At fifty-four (years old), with all the things that are going on in my life, it is still absolutely the same. It doesn't change that way. I jump in, and then we swim around a little bit, you learn how to move around the things, and then you go on and you figure it out later. And I say that because I really want you to have that courage to do that, because most of it looks terribly frightening. Most of it looks like-- There's no job, there's no certainty, there's no career, there's no security, there's no love interest, there's no chance that I'm going to stay pretty and young, and all those things. We may not get the best food. You know, I may not meet him or her or him and him or her and her. (laughs) I may not get all of those things, so why am I doing this? You know? That's something I hope that you have figured out already, that you're doing this because you have some deep interest and love and craziness about you. Honor the craziness. Honor the absolute insanity of it, because it's that that's going to save you. And I really mean that. It's going to save you. Honor the insanity of the entire trip. Because if you're reaching for normalcy, you're in the wrong place. It hasn't changed, and it doesn't change. It's about discovery. It's about opening up, it's about letting go, it's about all the things that the rest of our society tells us that we can't show. We can't show the sweat under our armpits, and this is all about the sweat under our armpits. Did I answer that question? No, I didn't even get to that question! (laughs) As you can also see, I'm not linear. (laughs) I mean, if we look at our lives, when you go from birth to death, in that period there's all these steps where we seem to go this way in. (draws a straight line on the table with his finger) But if you look at your life it's constantly moving around and under, and you're going forward in this moment while at the same time underneath there are all these other things that are going on with you. And all of you have these little minds that just are going (makes a crunching sound and gnarls his hands together), you know, while we're all smiling and trying to get our A's and do those pliÃ©s right-- while in here it's going like this, and then all of a sudden that takes off and we're out there like that while something else is going over here. And it's all going this way, too. (traces invisible directions in the air) I got a chance to go to Idyllwild (School of Music and the Arts, now Idyllwild Arts) in 1960 instead of going to Connecticut College, and at that time I got to meet Eugene Loring. Does anybody know who Eugene Loring is? Eugene Loring had one of the most important schools in this city. He left (George) Balanchine and that whole group of people, Ballet Caravan (later the New York City Ballet) and all those wonderful new American choreographers of the late thirties in New York, and came west and started the American School of Dance here in Los Angeles, which was kind of a take-off from the School (of American Ballet) in New York, which Balanchine ran for many, many years. And here in that school everybody--I mean all of the teachers that he could possibly muster and bring in and all of the students who became all the dancers all over the place-- And they did. It was an extraordinary

training ground. Most of the people were young people in high school, from Hollywood High (School) and places like that. They were already seasoned actors, a lot of them, seasoned players. They would study what he called freestyle, which is modern dance to us-- freestyle, ballet, jazz, Afro-Cuban, character dance, partnering, and every semester we had a different kind of what he called ethnic dance. So we were studying these incredible classes. He was the choreographer of Billy the Kid. You probably know that piece; it's a famous piece in American ballet history. So he had formed this school, and he had this group called the Dance Players. He told me about it. He was there teaching that weekend along with Bella Lewitzky, and Carmen De Lavallade was there as a guest with Bella to do a new piece for another choreographer. So I got to see all these people. And Gene told all of us about his new school and about the-- Every year he had this audition. So I stayed in town. I came into Los Angeles and took the audition and got it and became a Dance Player in 1960, and that's how I got here. But that was also my first introduction to all of these people, some of the big players, some of the big, major players. And it was exciting. My classmates were people like Jane Fonda, Yvette Mimieux, George Chakiris, Richard Chamberlain. They were all there studying. They were all there doing their pliÃ©s and sweating and letting their armpits reveal the sweat. (laughs) We were all there, you know. Jane Fonda was just starting Tall Story, which was her first film. It was an exciting place to be. Everybody studied there who was anybody, because it was the best place in town to study. And then other people came in and rehearsed there and auditioned there. I got a chance to work with one of the major blond bombshells of the time. She was doing a show. She was doing a touring thing of South America, and it was like a thousand dollars a week in 1960. It's like an enormous amount of money for a poor dancer. I looked at her, and she asked me if I would like to do this show with two men and herself. Jayne-- Not Jayne Mansfield but the other one--

KIRK:

Married to Steve Allen?

BATES:

No. She (Mamie Van Doren) was going with Don Drysdale at the time, because I got to meet those people, too. All the baseball people would come in with their dancer girls. (laughs) It doesn't change, see. It doesn't change at all. Anyway, I turned her down because I wasn't ready yet. There's the story of my life. (laughs) That was a signal. I actually turned them down because I wasn't ready to dance yet publicly, because I had discovered this new thing called art. (laughs) Okay. And that started my career. I quit after a year or so and went back to school, back to be a history teacher. At that time I met another friend of mine that I had studied with at the American School, and she was now studying with this other person, J. Erglis Smaltzoff, who had a studio

on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood. His son (Yuri Smaltzoff) now has it. I started learning Ukrainian and Russian folk dance and studying ballet again in 1963 to 1965. I was working as a banker by this time. I was banking. I did six years of banking. I met somebody who was a master in film here at UCLA. His master's thesis was in film, and he was doing a dance film, and he was looking for shades, because he was doing the Orpheus and Eurydice story. He already had got most of his dancers, but he was looking for a couple of males, because they just never did have males around here. Has that changed much?

CLASS:

No!

BATES:

(laughs) No. They never had males around. So he was looking for a male. And I had told him that I had-- We had been talking about my dancing and things. So he invited me over to work in his piece. I did. He told me about a new scholarship and a new event--I was also at Los Angeles City College at that time finishing up my freshman and sophomore stuff--and he said, "Why don't you apply for this scholarship?" There was a Laban scholarship available. I went and applied, I did all the processing, and I got the scholarship. I got into UCLA and became a student here in 1966 and graduated with my bachelor's in 1968--the fall of 1968, not the spring. I didn't do it the right way. We didn't do it on time. (laughs) Then I just started working here, teaching some classes here, and started out my master's in 1969. I left for a while, and then I got a job at Florida State, and I taught at Florida State from '70 to '72. In 1968 I joined Bella Lewitszky's company, and that was another whole breakthrough for me. UCLA was a breakthrough as an undergraduate, because I discovered things like improvisation. That was just so extraordinary. I discovered friendships. We fought all the time, we argued, we didn't agree on anything, and I learned how to disagree. I learned how to stand my ground and have my own thoughts and still go on. We all did different kinds of dances and different kinds of things, and we were kind of curious about what we were doing, how's that going on there, what's happening here. (moves around, peeking over imaginary walls and around imaginary corners) And we had a great time with that. We fought and screamed and hollered, but we had a great time with that. It was at that time I was studying with Carmelita Maracci. Do any of you know her? Absolutely extraordinary woman. Carmelita Maracci. I was studying with Bella Lewitzky, I was studying with Carol Scothorn-- Do you know Carol Scothorn? Sort of? She was the chair of this department for a number of years, and she was also the major player at that time. She taught the junior class and the graduate class, choreography and dance. I need to break for a minute.

KAUFMAN:

Yeah. That's fine. (tape recorder off) Okay. Again, about your mid-twenties there were four teachers that you had mentioned to us. We would like to hear more about what you got from them.

BATES:

They actually were my mid-thirties

KAUFMAN:

Mid-thirties?

BATES:

But who's counting? (laughs) Well, I graduated in 1968 from UCLA as an undergraduate--I was twenty-eight already--and then I went on to teach at Florida State, and then I came back here to do my master's again. I looked at probably some other places, but I realized-- I was down teaching at Florida State in 1970 to '72. I was dancing with Bella Lewitzky at the time, and we were all over the place. I was in and out of the airport at Tallahassee twenty-five times in one year alone because of traveling, because at that time Bella was one of three companies in the country to be doing the Artists in the Schools Program. We were one of three pilot companies, so we were getting gigs all over this country--Hawaii and everyplace. We would be there for sometimes two weeks at a time, where we would be teaching in the grade schools with grade school students, doing wonderful things--doing lecture-dem(onstration)s, going all over the city, and then doing concerts at the end of that two weeks. So we had a whole package. And Bella-- I don't know if any of you have ever studied with Bella or seen her work, but she's an extraordinary teacher. And she had a package that was unbelievable in terms of its content and how it-- What's the word I want? How it just simply revealed the whole creative process of a

dancer and a choreographer and what went on. Extraordinary development. And grade school teachers who were being forced--this thing was being forced on them--were just looking at us skeptically: "All right, see if you can teach this class anything." And they would walk out and go "Oh, my God!" because we were teaching science, we were teaching mathematics, we were teaching spelling, and we were using movement to do that. These teachers who were having these terrible classes and things like this would go, "How did you just do that? I just saw something I couldn't believe, I did not believe could happen." When they were busy doing matchstick art and their father's cigarette packages and turning them into cute little houses, we were suddenly having kind of some profound effect on these kids, and the teachers would be absolutely in amazement. I taught a class in Hawaii. This teacher did not want us there. She did not want anything to do with this. And guess who got her? (laughs) And we had a group of about thirty-five or forty students, and probably not three of them spoke the same language. A lot of Samoans, a lot of other nationalities, totally of other cultures in this situation. Probably three people spoke English, three of these students. They were fourth graders. They were studying how nature kind of moves itself into transitions and changes and things, and I did this kind of crazy thing with them where they got to be water, and then they got to be earth, they got be hard earth, they got to split up, and then they got to be animals or reptiles. And they started moving. They made cracks in the earth and things. And they had such a great time. By the time this was over, this woman was so amazed that we, one, communicated at all, and, two, that they actually did stuff and that they were ready to move all over the place. And they were absolutely concentrated on what we were doing. So that was absolutely the gift of Bella Lewitzky on that level. Amazing. We got to watch people, boys, sixth grade boys--I can't do that stuff--start jumping and running and doing and having the most wonderful time and girls who are saying (in a mincing voice) "I can't do that stuff either because I'm a ballerina" suddenly getting down and rolling around and having a great time and discovering that movement is the basis of this thing, not technique classes, not some artificial way in which we determine the body to move. That the realm of motion, of movement, is what we're playing with. And all of it is fair game. All of it is fair game. All of it teaches us something. So that was my first teacher. Bella taught me about balance, regardless of our Morton short toes (Morton's neuroma). Have all of you had trouble balancing because you discovered in kinese (kinesiology class) that you no longer have the right toes to dance with? (laughs) I think every student, about your junior year-- You take kinese in you junior year, and they suddenly say, "Teacher, I can't balance. I know now why. I have Morton short toe." (laughs) Have any of you said that? Yes. (mutual laughter) There's always some. That's not the truth. I discovered something about technique with Bella that was just incredible. She had such an extraordinary eye about seeing, seeing movement. And at the same time I was dancing with Bella I started studying with Mia Slavenska and Carmelita Maracci--at different points, because they didn't speak to each other. They were both ballet teachers. Mia taught here for a while. Carmelita was one of the most extraordinary dancers of her time. She broke her back and couldn't dance for a long time. But she was half Spanish and half Italian, or half South American and half Italian. She was nothing but fire. She played the castanets and did Spanish dance and danced about (Frederico Garcia) Lorca and about Goya and danced only in serious things and was about this big (indicates about five feet) and looked about eight feet tall. When I got to know her as a teacher, she-- She taught many of the great ballerinas. And when she would teach a class she never taught a dance class. She taught a literature class, and she taught a philosophy class, and she talked about (Jean) Genet, and if you didn't know of those things and didn't want to hear them she'd ask you to leave. But we were there studying, and she

would stand up-- And she could hardly walk at this point. She looked like somebody's grandmother on some farm. She should have a corncob pipe, and she had her hair in a severe gray bun, and she was about this big around (indicates a wide girth), and she walked like this (demonstrates a lopsided, heavy, and slow waddle). But she would stand up, and she would reach out, and she would start the pliÃ© (demonstrates a transformation from old woman to a graceful, light, lovely being doing the pliÃ©), and I-- It changed my life. It changed my life. It changed the entire thing. My whole career in dance has been about a series of absolute mind-boggling, mind-blowing moments where my entire life was changed. (laughs) She was extraordinary. She talked about this thing called pliÃ© that we'd all been doing. And all of us were there doing those pliÃ©s like we'd always done them. (tenses his body, sets his jaw, and mechanically and forcefully pliÃ©s.) "Iâ€™m going to get that pliÃ© if it kills me." And she would go, "No! Stop it! I can't stand to watch that anymore!" She said, "The pliÃ© has to do with the arm, has to with the whole body, has to do with the stretch. It has to do with your life experience." And I went, "Whaaa?" It had nothing to do with bending the knees and swooping down and picking up violets, you know. It had an enormous amount to do with touching our hearts and touching somebody else's heart. It was not a technical gesture. It was an event. It was a life. It was an experience. Well, I had never heard that before. I mean, God, you've got to do those pliÃ©s and do those backbends and do those curves, and you just keep doing them, and hopefully someday it all changes and you get to be a dancer. And that wasn't the way it was at all with her. It wasn't that way at all with her. Everything we did, every motion we did, we had to be accountable for. We had to have something inside of that movement that projected it outside of ourselves. Well, I've been doing it all wrong. I've been doing it all wrong. And it changed my whole thing. I studied with Mia Slavenska after that. Mia Slavenska was a scientist. She had us hanging with brooms on our backs. We were barefoot, and we were constantly in flexed position. Well, of course, any ballerina knows that that's not ballet. And that's what they all told us, that you couldn't learn ballet doing flexed feet, barefoot, and with brooms on our backs. (laughs) But she taught us something about the connections, this whole thing about lengthening, this whole thing about the motion, that wonderful motion, which is the whole essence of ballet, which is the series of arcs. Because none of this is straight lines; it's all about arcs. It's all about arcs. So that the whole idea of this was that we were on this rotated spinal thing that allowed us to move. So we had to get up off of it, couldn't be down in it. We had to get out of it. And then we had to find out how it operated, and we had to find out how all of those things manifested individually. Well, it changed my life. (mutual laughter) Because suddenly here I am, having been here with all this stuff about (demonstrates dramatic seriousness and a furrowed brow) from Carmelita. Now I've got to be a scientist and I've got to figure out how all these arcs and curves and spinal rotations work. It was amazing. But you know, they both were connected. They weren't so completely opposite of each other even though they seemed to be polar (opposites), light years apart. They had a connection. And then Bella, who also talked about the joints and about the inch and a half between here and here (makes a space of one inch between his thumb and forefinger and places it right where the humerus ball meets the socket of the shoulder in front)-- That is where things sort of connect and bring us together so we don't fall apart walking down the road. We don't leave an arm over here and a leg over there (the class laughs) and forget our heads like we always feel like we've done when we left the apartment before we get here to school. We talked about those two inches of motion that happen here (in the joints). So we spent years just lengthening through here, those places--not the regular places. We weren't trying to get that leg up and do all that stuff. We were trying to lengthen this leg from right here (at the joint) out. And

it would go there then. (indicates extreme extension) Well, it changed my life. (the class laughs) And then I had Jack Cole. Jack Cole came and taught here for a couple of years right before he died of cancer. He was very ill. He taught a two-hour class three days a week. He taught six exercises. Six exercises. (gets out of his chair to demonstrate an exercise) We stood in this position for about a half an hour. We would go (exhales sharply and grunts and strains), and then we would do the plow for another twenty-five minutes. The plow was the roll over the back and then to come up and try to split. And, "No, no, that's not the right way to do it. No, no, you've got to do it-- Now watch this." And you know, it was also all about these two inches of space here. We did five exercises, two hours, three days a week, for two years. Not for fifteen minutes and then we'd go on because you got bored, because you don't want to do that anymore, because you got it, but because by going through this stuff over and over and over and over and over again-- Five exercises. One of them was going up against the wall, standing on our hands, and doing pushups on our hands against the wall--women and men. It was about noticing. It was about taking responsibility for our own bodies. It was about paying attention to what was happening. Because you know how you all are. You get bored after ten minutes. "I want to get on to the real stuff. Let's get on to the real stuff. I want to show you how wonderfully I can do all of that stuff." (dances around violently) "I don't want to learn it. I just want to know what it's about, and then I want to get up there and I want to show you how wonderful I am." He absolutely stripped us of that over and over and over. And I watched these little tight bodies and resistant bodies start opening and changing before my very eyes, before my very eyes. They absolutely changed. They opened up. They revealed. I taught the sophomore class for a number of years in this city. One particular year I had fifty students. There were fifty sophomores, and I was teaching all of them. It was probably the most extraordinarily beautiful class I've ever seen. One male and forty-nine females. (laughs) This particular crop, there wasn't a normally nice looking woman, they were all gorgeous. They were beautiful to look at. They were out to here (indicates large breasts). They were stacked, they were everything. They were beautiful. I know you're not supposed to talk about that; it's not PC (politically correct) in this day. But you know, the fact is that these were gorgeous, healthy females in this class. I couldn't believe it. I mean, I walked in and they just knocked me over. And every one of them stood like this (collapses his chest) as if they didn't have breasts. Well, I was teaching for two weeks. I finally looked at them, and I said, "You know, I've got to quit. Every one of you, when you go out there and want to look for a man and wear those sweaters you're going to be like this (puffs out his chest), but in this class for two hours we're defeating ourselves. There's not one place we can go if I can continue to walk around like this (demonstrates concave and collapsed chest)" I learned in that class and from that class that much of what we do as teachers, as dancers, is unlearning, psychologically, a lot of messages for all of us--cultural imprints, social imprints, environmental imprints, station imprints, city imprints, parts of the culture-- and that we spend much of our time undoing those, undoing all of that. Because it's all registered. (points to a different part of his body and contorts with each statement) It's all registered. It's all registered. It's all registered in our bodies. We are imprints of how we have reacted, felt, touched, experienced, been, and been done to. I spent the rest of my career trying to find a way to get through some of that so that we could move again, which is exactly what Jack Cole did, which is exactly what Mia Slavenska did, which is exactly what Carmelita did, which is exactly what Bella did--taken what they had learned and reshaped--

Tape Five, Side Two (November 21, 1994)

KAUFMAN:

In the interest of time, I guess we'll go to the last part of the interview--

DAVID H. GERE:

To put everyone at ease-- We are flexible in the second hour, so we don't have to end on time. We're going to allow this to go on a little bit longer--

BATES:

We had a miscommunication. I thought this was going to be two hours, so I've been just sort of playing around here and didn't realize until just recently that it wasn't. So I'm taking more time in talking about things. She (Kaufman) wants me to talk about my AIDS.

KAUFMAN:

Yeah, your transition--

BATES:

I just went to see a friend of mine last night at the Carl Bean Hospice who just went into a coma. He's probably got one day or so left. I just lost two other friends this week. And I now have thirty-eight T cells. I don't know if you know about T cells, but they're-- Most of you are between eight hundred and twelve hundred, and if you're dancers you're probably at fourteen hundred. And I was at one time, too. I'm down now to thirty-eight. I've had no opportunistic

diseases so far. I have been diagnosed with dementia and with chronic fatigue (syndrome), and both of those things you hit sometimes. The dementia is in the form of-- When I get really tired I cry a lot. I never did that much before, but I start crying, and I start losing my ability to rationally figure things out, and I sort of like fall apart into a heap. I probably have had AIDS or the HIV virus for at least ten years. I suppose I am one of the longer-term survivors, because so many people die and die such difficult deaths. My friend Art Lester, who's in a coma right now, has been wasting away over a period of months now. It's been really kind of difficult to watch. I've had other friends die like that (snaps fingers), and I've had some who just-- I mean, you just don't recognize them anymore. You can almost not recognize them. Have any of you had friends that--? (the class nods yes) It is not one of the nicer diseases. What it does is in some cases--in most cases--it accelerates the entire aging process to where you get to a place where then all kinds of opportunistic diseases, not just Kaposi's Sarcoma-- I have a twenty-nine-year-old friend who's dealing with that right now and pneumocystis, both of which used to kill us very quickly. They're not killing us now, but there are other diseases, MAI (mycobacterium avium-intracellularae) and certain bacteria and such that are also doing something. Two years ago I was diagnosed with AIDS, so I've been living with that, with that imprint, for the last two years. And I had to change my life. I either had to die or had to change my life. I finally realized I wasn't ready to die and that my, my life, the position of my being, was about living. God, your higher power, or whatever that is up there that floats around for you, you know, it's their business to take me when theyâ€™re ready. But my business was to live, and that's what I had done most of my life. I had been a very, very active liver--and a couple of kidneys. (the class laughs) I had lived very fully most of my life. The idea of retiring from dance and leaving something I loved very much and not having anything to do was terrifying, was terrifying to me. It was a moment of clarity for me that I was not my job, that I was not my career, I was not what I did. I was not who I was, just who-- You know, my friends or other people. I had to find out who I was. And the last few years that's what I've been doing. The last few years have been a real wonderful and extraordinary search and development of getting to be Gary Bates. Not Gary Bates the dancer, the choreographer, the leprechaun--people have called me that--not being those other things that I thought were so important and I attached to so completely, but just to be Gary Bates, human being, person living with AIDS, person who has friends, curious, and allow the curiosity, as my energy starts depleting more and more-- I'm just a shadow of what I used to be like in a classroom, (laughs) a shadow of what I used to be like in a classroom. I mean, I'd be all over the floor, I'd jump on the table, I'd be all over the place. So to learn to live with the diminishing energy, the diminishing abilities-- You know, I spend a lot of time in bed now resting. I mean, I never did that in my life. I always had two or three things going on at the same time. There was a point at which, when I was teaching and chairing the department at Scripps-- Eyes Wide Open had a studio down in Venice called Pacific Motion (Dance Studios). I was teaching there, we were rehearsing concerts, and I was also dancing as a guest artist in another thing, and I was teaching at Irvine. So I was doing a loop that was from Venice to Pomona to Irvine and back again all the time. That was not an atypical day for me. Performing, choreographing, dancing, teaching, or running off and being on this committee or that committee or this grant thing or that something was my life for twenty-five years, was my life for twenty-five years. When I was a undergraduate student here at UCLA I danced in eighteen master's theses in two years and did eight UCLA Dance Company concerts over a period of time and danced in several other companies at the same time. But I also knew that if I wanted to do this I had to do that. You know, I had to jump in and say yes sometimes. I have worked with over fifty choreographers in

my life. That's a lot of choreographers and a lot of choreography. And I got to learn something about choreography. I got to learn something about making dances. I am so grateful for the bad choreographer, for the mediocre choreographer, and for the great choreographers that I've gotten to work with, because they all taught me something about movement. How many of you have worked with a dancer--? You know, one of your friends is going (speaks in an intense whisper) "It needs to be this way. It needs to be this-- Can't you do it this way? Why are you waiting around doing it that way for?" (laughs) You know, "It's got to be this way." All of that was shaping me. All that was shaping my perception. All of that, whether or not she listened to me or he listened to me or whether they liked it or didn't like it or whether I liked it or didn't like it, it didn't matter. It was all shaping that thing that we call aesthetic, telling me what I liked and what I didn't like and why I liked it and why I didn't like it. And I got a chance in a hands-on, experiential way not to ignore it, not to walk away from it, not to have so many points of view and attitudes about it that I couldn't do it at all, but to be inside of it constantly whether I liked it or not, whether it was great or not, whether it was where I wanted to be or not, and learn. Because it's all been about learning. And unlearning--unlearning who I thought I was and relearning something new, unlearning what I thought was right and relearning a bigger right, unlearning what I thought was the truth and relearning a bigger truth, unlearning the fact about my own opinions and realizing that my opinions were okay at the same time. But unlearning them. Unlearning the rights and wrongs and then relearning them in a bigger way. Because it really isn't about-- For a long time I thought my opinion was important, and then I realized it wasn't anything. And then it got to be important to me again. It got to be important to me again. I got to have a right to it.

KAUFMAN:

Do we have time to open it up for questions? Okay, if anybody feels theyâ€™d like to ask, please go ahead.

GERE:

How about if we just take a break now? Does that feel--?

KAUFMAN:

Yeah.

GERE:

Why don't we? Let's take a five-minute break. (tape recorder off)

BATES:

(Nina) and Marionne (Kirk), who is sitting over here next to David, and I had been doing this for the last few weeks. I question why I would want to talk about-- I'm not afraid to tell you anything about who I am or about what I've done. It's all my life, you know. And I had to, all the way through periodically, embrace my entire life, or I got lost. And I think it's true of all of us. And I'm not here to talk about gay life or being a person with AIDS or any of that stuff except as it is my life. It's not a statement of saying, "Rah-rah, let's become part of this thing" or that thing or whatever. It really is simply an encouragement to all of you to embrace the allness of you. The allness of you is also where you are in time and space right now and with the other "all of yous" and how that interaction and that coming together-- Because my life has been a series of surprising comings together--you know, meeting somebody in one time, and then suddenly they become this important figure of mine in another time, and then resweeping that, and then having another whole group. The core group, though, that I stayed with for many, many years in and out and over and around was the core group that I met here as an undergraduate and a graduate student. They became very central to me. Out of that group came Eyes Wide Open, a wonderful company for five years that was-- It was an extraordinarily successful, artistic, crazy group of people. All of them continue to be, to go on: Fred Strickler, who is an international choreographer and tap dancer now, a choreographer and performer; Lynn Daly, who with Fred started Jazz Tap Ensemble-- Jazz Tap is either performing here or going to be performing here.

STUDENT:

They're going to be here next week.

BATES:

Lynn and I-- When she had her modern (dance) company I got to be a performer, was a guest artist in her company. So these are people I got to be a part of. It wasn't the people that I tried to ignore; it was the people that I had to get close to. When I taught the philosophy class back in the 1970s here at UCLA, one of the experiences that I had that was not one of my happier moments was to realize-- See, you cannot create, and you cannot reveal yourself, you cannot let the flaws and the hairs hang out from your nose, if you're worried about who these people are and what they think of you. If that is happening, you can't create. Because creating is about exposing ourselves. Creating is about revealing our stupidity and our ignorance and our naÃ¯vetÃ© as well as our brilliance and our deeper aesthetic sensitivity. It's about all of us. It's about all of us participating in this event. One year that I taught, it was-- We happened to have a very split group. We had the group who had been transitioners, who came in in their junior year, and the group who had been there since they'd been freshmen. And at the end of the senior year they (still) weren't speaking to each other. Some of them didn't even know each other's names, and they'd been working together at least two years. Now, that's sad. At that level nothing can happen. At that level nothing can happen. Let people know you. Get to know them. Because out of that will come something beyond your wildest dreams. It won't be something that you can predict. My entire life, I don't think, has been anything I could have predicted. Go for it. Just go for it. And enjoy each other.

KAUFMAN:

Go ahead, Vernon.

VERNON:

Yes. I have a friend that just died of AIDS, and I hadn't seen him for like three years. I was asking some other people, "Well, what happened? How was it? Did he suffer?" And come to find out the family from Virginia wrote a letter out here to all of his friends informing us that he died of a liver problem. But the reality in essence was that he died of AIDS. And my question to you is, what type of discrimination have you been up against, if any?

BATES:

Actually, I have-- You know, I have been blessed. I have been blessed in my life. I chose a career that I didn't want to choose, and it turned out to be one of the most exciting events of my life. Because I got to understand the human condition through the world of art and dance, through dance. You know, it is human, because this is the body. I have not had much of that kind of discrimination. I've had other friends whose families left them, wouldn't talk to them, other people who couldn't share. There are people in the dance world, famous people, who died with "liver conditions," who died of AIDS, actually, but we can't talk about it. It's very sad that the whole idea of AIDS feels like and seems to be such an ugly thing. And certainly the way in which people die often is not very pretty. It comes out of a revolution that everybody participated in, in the sixties, of sexual freedom, and a revolution that had nothing to do with being bad people, being this or that or the other thing. It just simply was our time. Your time is what you're making of it, What you're creating. It's also been what you've inherited, which is AIDS. It's one of the elements of what you've inherited and what that says to you as young people. When I grew up, the revolution was about exploring; it was about investigating, it was about freedom from a time when we were all not very free in that way. So one of the outcomes of that has been this thing called AIDS. I have a cousin I grew up with that I was very close to for years and then not, and he wrote me a letter recently, talked about being saved and that I needed to be saved. But I had to be open to all that-- I'm also a recovering alcoholic and drug addict. Later in my life I discovered the world of drugs. And as certain other things in my life did not look real great-- It's a difficult struggle in this city to make art. This is not a city about art; it is a city about entertainment. And it's ruled by the movie industry. Whether you like it or not, it's truth. In the early 1970s there was an enormous group of us who decided we were going to change that. And we almost did, just as Lester Horton almost did in the thirties and Bella in the fifties and then Eyes Wide Open and Dance/LA. and Lynn Daly and any number-- There must have been thirty new companies springing up during the seventies. It was a heyday. There was excitement. And we did just like the ballet people and the modern people in the twenties, didn't speak to each other and walk on the same side of the street. Our companies didn't walk on the same side of the street as another company. And we had our ideas about this, and they had their ideas. But out of that stuff came some very good materials, and good dances, and some solid dancers, and some very important choreographers. I mean, it came out of that stuff, willing to do that. I am so saddened-- I had to discover-- (It took) getting out of dance and being out of those people that I had associated with to realize that most of the country doesn't have our experience, doesn't have our experience of being in each other's crotches and under each other's armpits and having the intimacy that we have that is absolutely necessary for us to have to do what we're doing. You know, to be sleeping next to each other, seeing each other nude, and-- Because we're having to rush in and do this change and that change and all this stuff that we do which we take for granted as so normal. You know, people don't touch each other, people don't reach out for each other. They don't have that experience of crying with each other and laughing with each other that we do. Just being a part of something like this is an extraordinary gift. And it's all of that stuff that just seems so dangerous to reveal. You know, we still have a mission as dancers. This art form along with motion pictures were the art forms of the twentieth century because they were both about motion. And this was in a time, at the turn of the century, when everything was shifting. Consciousness was shifting, bodies were shifting, and groups of cultures were shifting and

interacting. So this had been one of the major art forms to express that shifting consciousness. It was also a time when anthropology, sociology, and psychology formed, in the late 1800s--1880, 1890--which caused a new awakening. We became interested in the human being again for the first time in many, many, many moons. So that shift in consciousness made us aware of ourselves and each other in extraordinary ways. Now, that's a given. That's something you just inherited. It doesn't mean anything to you except that it's recent and it's new, and we're still trying to figure it out. And you're still the future leaders of our understanding it, grasping and grappling with it. Because it's an awkward thing, that human body. You know? It tells everything. It reveals everything. Did I answer that question?

VERNON:

So you haven't had any discrimination except your uncle--

BATES:

My cousin trying to save me and feeling like I had been a sinner and that I really needed to get-- You know, he doesn't realize that I have been saved.

VERNON:

You haven't lost friends?

BATES:

Yeah, I've lost over a hundred to AIDS.

VERNON:

I mean discriminating against you.

BATES:

You know, I have had a couple of friends, maybe, who are not speaking to me because they don't know how to deal with it. I have watched that happen even among very close people, where suddenly you start changing, you start physically deteriorating, and it's hard to watch. It's hard to keep going. It's hard to keep being a friend to somebody who before your very eyes is like a fast-forward movie, you know, going from this healthy person to this-- And I have men and women friends who have AIDS who are going into this twisted, ugly, distorted demented caricature of who they were. Trying to do that with some dignity, trying to die inch by inch with a little bit of dignity is a major event. And if we can help each other do that, that's extraordinary. You know, I really do encourage all of you to reach out to those friends. Because sometimes we think we have more time than we do, and they're gone. You know, to reach out and touch them, reach out and remain friends with them. It is not fun to watch. We're not used to watching people die. We're used to shipping them off when they get to be fifty or sixty and let somebody else take care of them. And we've got to get back to that. We've got to get back to that. I mean, this whole disease has forced us to look at the idea of dying in a very different way than we've been used to, particularly over the last thirty or forty years.

KAUFMAN:

Go ahead, Tanya, with your question.

TANYA:

I just feel like you still have held on to a lot of your idealism and that same kind of optimistic point of view, which is very encouraging to me. But I do feel like our generation-- I want a sexual revolution. (laughs) I want freedom. And I do feel like we've inherited a lot of that. We've just all put up our boundaries.

BATES:

Fear. You've inherited fear.

TANYA:

We've inherited fear. And because I feel you're still so optimistic, I was wondering what you were thinking, what your thoughts are, as far as us maybe having a little bit more fun. (laughs)

BATES:

And it's very difficult in this particular profession where you're so much around each other, on each other, and all those lines are so blurred. All those lines are just totally blurred here because of the way we interact and we operate. And we're that way twelve hours a day. I mean, my life was twelve and fifteen hours a day--isn't yours?--with all this stuff that we're doing. And if you want to do it, you jump into it and do it. You know, I'm still naive about sexuality. I didn't get that. That was another thing I discovered. I got to a certain point and had done all these things and-- I was very naive. I was very naive about all of it, naive about doing it. I was naive. I mean, I did it on billboards in the middle of the day in San Francisco. (laughs) So, I mean, I wasn't shockingly naive and quiet about how I did these things. I never did anything in my life quietly and demurely. (laughs) And I had to own that. There was a point in my life I had to own that. Because there was a point in my life that I thought I had been a failure, that I had done all the wrong things, and that I had really the-f-word my life up, and that I really wasn't anything, and I really was a bad person. And you know, that disease sort of carries that with it sometimes. I had to go into it and do a lot of work of cleaning out that kind of thought process. When I won the award for my teaching this year, the Lester Horton Award for distinguished teaching, I did not want to take it. I did not want to do that, because I felt like I had done something terrible to the teaching profession. But that's what we go through on some of those things. I had to really do a lot of work in trying to accept myself again. So I haven't always been an idealist. I got to be a cynic, and then I got to be really down on life, experience, and things. I don't know how to answer your question except that you need to take responsibility for it.

TANYA:

Well, I'm trying--

BATES:

Yeah, you know, and to do it with that sense. Because for a period of time we abandoned ourselves.

TANYA:

See, that's what I feel is lacking, that sense of-- Even for a moment to laugh out loud seems like a sin these days.

BATES:

Then find a way, yeah. Find a way to do that. Find a way to do that. Make that a part of your mission in life, that you get to abandon yourself in other (ways) and find clever and interesting and fascinating and buoyant ways to abandon yourself without--

TANYA:

Getting hurt.

BATES:

--without getting that disease. Because there have got to be ways to do that, laugh and cry. You know, in this moment in our history, where this disease has been such a focus, we're also seeing more nudity on stage, (laughs) more people dressing in revealing ways to taunt and tease each other. So it's amazing how that all works.

GERE:

Related to that, I wanted to ask you-- It was over the last ten years, I think, that we first recognized AIDS as a disease and had a name for it.

BATES:

Thirteen years ago, actually.

GERE:

First it was GRID (Gay-Related Immunodeficiency), and then it was AIDS, I guess by 1984 or so. But in any case, I was wondering if, as you've watched choreography, especially modern dance choreography, over that period time--since modern dance choreography so often does respond to what's happening in the world--have you seen a change? And in what particular ways?

BATES:

Yeah. It's been really interesting, because I've gotten to see it change several times. One of the big changes was in the modern dance field in the sixties, when I got to see the great architectural and architectonic dances of (JosÃ©) LimÃ³n and (Martha) Graham, where these were dances about this strong ideal of the human character being whittled down to playfulness and

ordinariness and human everydayness. So that was whittled down very quickly with Yvonne Rainer and David (Gordon), you know, that whole group from (the) Judson (Dance Theater), not to mention the abstractionism of (Alwin) Nikolais, Paul Taylor, and Merce Cunningham. So there was that. We moved away from the great archetypes to the human being in an everyday kind of being. And now the concept of outing ourselves, of talking about things like queer nation and all those other things, is very much a part of people's direction. It's a much more personal choreography today. Today choreography is about a personal statement. It doesn't have the archetypical largeness, largesse, of a Graham and a LimÃ³n. How many of you have seen Misa Brevis? Ah! Gigantic in its sense of who the human being is. And the human being isn't about this one person, it is about this larger-than-life humanity. Same with many of Graham's works and how they relate to women, not to personal Martha Graham, who was also a little bit alcoholic and a little bit nasty and a little bit pretentious and all kinds of other human things about her. We spent all our lives, that ninety-some years that she was alive, seeing Woman and What Woman Could Be in a great Greek tragedy sort of way, not little Martha Graham who had enormous trouble getting off the stage and letting go of being a performer. Of a woman who was tragic in many ways in her own life. That's what you see today. The choreography that you see today, much of it is about the tragedy and the comedy and the sense of being who I am and being who you are and finding out what that is and even confronting the world with that. "This is who I am! Youâ€™d better like it! If you don't, I don't care, because I don't like you either!" Some of it has that kind of edge to it. Some of it has just the idea of revealing a personal statement. Certainly you're going to see two or three of them in the coming months here on your performing arts list. Does that answer your question, David? We have one back here.

DEIDRE SKLAR:

Actually, I'm not part of this class--

GERE:

Can I just introduce you? Because I want to thank you for coming. This is our guest for the second half--

BATES:

Oh! (laughs) And I'm taking up all of your time!

GERE:

Actually, she came purposely realizing that it was going to be a flexible format. She's my colleague here in the department. This is Deidre Sklar. She's teaching in the dance ethnology program. She's just started here, interesting background, all the way from--

DEIDRE:

Jeff Friedman's Legacy project?

BATES:

No, no.

DEIDRE:

Jeff Friedman. As long as David has given me this formal introduction-- I was just going to sort of say it in passing, and I don't need to talk-- I really wanted to ask you a question, but it's in relation to the Legacy Oral History Project run by Jeff Friedman in San Francisco. Legacy is an oral history project that preserves the artistic legacies of San Francisco Bay Area dance community members who are at risk, elders and those with life- threatening illnesses, with a special interest in those challenging ARC (AIDS-related complex) and AIDS. So this is an oral history project that's happening in San Francisco, and I was invited to be the evaluator of this project for a grant that he was applying for. And I would venture only that Jeff's vision of this project is that it serve the future in the sense of documentation for people who are interested in dance history and at the same time that it serve the people who were being interviewed, in a way that it be an opportunity for people to speak their bodies, speak their minds, and be a kind of

almost nest to hold people and support them through being for people who are at risk. What I noticed in reviewing the projects--and it's related to your story about your cousin--is that there seems to be the very opposite of the traditional notion of the sickness of AIDS and the sort of shamefulness of dying.

BATES:

With a scarlet letter.

DEIDRE:

With a scarlet letter. The opposite is that in actuality what seems to be happening is this number of people in a community that is mutually supporting and asking themselves the big questions about life and death seems to have created a community that is pulling the rest of us along in terms of spiritual consciousness. And the particular irony, or the wonderfulness of it, is that it's spiritual consciousness directly in relation to bodily experience because of so many of the community that are dancers.

BATES:

Do you know Irene Bourger?

DEIDRE:

Oh, yeah.

BATES:

She was one of my students here, actually, at one time.

DEIDRE:

She's one my good friends.

BATES:

She's wonderful.

SKLAR:

My question to you-- Okay, I'm going to introduce it with one more little comment about Jeff's Legacy project, which is a wonderful project. I wanted to say how delightful it was for me to listen to the way that you weave stories, the way that you start somewhere with a life experience and pull in all these realizations about things that have happened to you, understandings-- That just was a special treat, your articulateness. The last question that Jeff asks-- At this point he would ask in an interview, "Is there anything that you want to say that you haven't said?" So I ask you that. But I also want to ask you something else. I want to connect the story you began with about swinging in the trees with what you keep saying about the joy of movement and that you in your life have learned something about movement. And from the standing place of somebody who had known so deeply through the body, I would like to ask you what you know.

BATES:

Good question.

DEIDRE:

And I hope I didn't--

BATES:

I didn't say anything-- I skipped so many wonderful, really better stories, probably, than the ones I told you. And one of them was that I-- John Martin was my mentor. Do any of you know who John Martin is? No. John Martin was a dance critic for thirty-five years on the New York Times. He was the first full-time and legitimate dance critic in this country. He started with the New York Times in 1927 as a part-time, six-month job and wound up being there for thirty-five years and becoming the dean of dance critics in this country. He also--what most people don't realize--was an aesthetician and an extraordinary thinker. I got to live with him, and he was my mentor. I did my master's thesis on him rather than dance. Because I was already dealing with so much dancing that I really wanted to find out more about this man, and I got to do that. One of the things he told me early along and told the class early along in the late sixties was that dance was probably going to become more important, not less important, in the world. Because as we got further and further removed from ourselves through things like the computers and other life experiences as they're moving, cars, everything that alienates us from ourselves and from each other, becomes another part of the machinery, the machinations that keep us from knowing about ourselves. Well, I thought that was sort of a little bit far-fetched until life went on into the nineties and I realized he absolutely was making a prediction that probably was as important as Nostradamus and Edgar Cayce and that it was true, that dance can be and will be that source of information. So that's one of the things that I do know. I do know today very clearly that not dance in terms of those statements but that the experience that we get in this thing, in investigating all aspects of it, that we are learning something about the human condition that we're getting further away from again. The human condition and all of its bodily functions, that is something about the human being that we constantly try to move away from.

DEIDRE:

I guess I wanted to ask that a little bit more personally.

BATES:

Oh. Personally I developed a technique of choreography from that for myself. Personally it was coming back to that and looking at that and realizing that I could own who I was, all of it. I didn't have to hide parts of me. I never hid in anything. And as I said, I mean, I've had sex on a billboard off the San Francisco freeway in the middle of San Francisco at one point. You know, I've never been somebody-- I used to get drunk and then get arrested with no clothes on. (laughs) There is a whole lot about that stuff that I really-- I guess that as the AIDS became more prevalent and I became more aware that it was my life now that I wanted either to disown or felt-- I went back to my old Midwestern, Baptist kind of upbringing, and I wanted to blame myself, I wanted to beat myself. Because I could still have a career, I could still be functioning, I could still be a contributing member of society. Well, I had to rethink all of my ideas about what a contributing member is--what I am, who I am, and all that kind of stuff. And it was the whole movement experience that began to lead me back to a wholeness with myself so that I could function. Otherwise I was going to wait to die.

DEIDRE:

Experienced in the body as a person who moves.

BATES:

Oh, it is always the beginning and ending source for me. It is always the source. And when I come back to that and realize that that was a gift that I got to explore on so many different levels (of) life and that I did it with a tremendous amount of adoration of life, not of death-- This wasn't about me dying; this was about me living. And that's what I had to come back to. You know? And I can live today. I do have my idealism back. And it's not just an idealism. It's not just a pretty thing I've just wished, that life was really going to be this way. It doesn't have that Pollyanna (quality) that I might have had when I was younger. It has a seriousness and an excitement about what life offers. Because I am a living human being. And my livingness has nothing to do with my mind; it has to do with my entire body. My mind has been created by my entire body and by the entire numbers of experiences that I've had. And I was fortunate to have a whole lot of them in a short time.

DEIDRE:

And then I want to ask, is there anything in particular you haven't said that you would really like to say?

BATES:

I encourage you to find all of those ways, as human beings, to be the fullest human being. John Martin had an article way early back in his Sunday articles. If you ever have a chance, go look at the New York Times, in the Sunday articles, particularly between 1927 and, say, 1940, when the emerging modern dance was shaping itself. Because he did Sunday articles, and those Sunday articles are extraordinary in their content. And one of them was he reviewed a book on the ballet, and he talked about this ballet book that ballet was the center of all dance. All dance? And that it's where everything-- Even if you were whatever kind of dancer that when you got to ballet, then you got to the real dance. So he was talking about that and saying how artificial dance was and ballet was, and that there were modern dancers who were walking on one side of the street, and the ballet dancers were walking on the other side of the street. He said, "I hope they continue to do this for a very long time and not reach a conclusion," he said, "because as long as they can hold those battle lines a great art might emerge." Well, a great art did emerge. A great art did emerge. And it was because strong individuals dared to believe something. And if you look back on this century, that period of time, there were a lot of great individuals in all of the arts. It was an extraordinary time of events with great egos. Don't forget our humanity and who we are with each other. But the other side of that is if you don't strive for something there won't be anything. When you look around at my time in life or at seventy or at eighty and don't see anything it's because you didn't dare to dream. If you don't see anything it's because you didn't dare to dream and didn't dare to work for it. Because a dream is only as important as the work you're willing to put into it.

KAUFMAN:

Well, thank you so much, Gary. (class applauds)

Tape Six, Side One (August 2, 1995)

BATES:

In '65 or '66, Bella Lewitzky started teaching and performing-- I mean, she started a small company again (the Lewitzky Dance Company). And I had seen it--John Martin and I had gone to see it--and I decided she was the only thing in town that I sort of felt like anything was happening with. So I thought it would be great to study with her and also to work with her. So in 1967, I believe it was, or early '68--it was in that '67-68 year--she had seen me perform, and I had run into her at a concert. She complimented me on my performance, and I walked right up to her and said, "Can I join your company?" (laughs) And then I went to see her in Idyllwild (School of Music and the Arts, now Idyllwild Arts) in '67 again, '68, and then I joined the company the fall of '68. That was a propitious time for me. It was full of excitement and hope and new things. I was twenty-eight years old. I was on the verge of completing my B.A. degree at UCLA, which I wasn't sure I was going to be able to do. It took me until the fall quarter to do that, but I did it. So I graduated in December of '68. I joined Bella's company September of '68. And I had lived with John Martin for a year, working for him, and he had really become my mentor. So I was learning--everything! It was like for the first time all the doors seemed to be open. And my doors seemed to be open as well as the outside doors, and I was just receiving and taking in so much at that point, and it all looked possible. So it was very exciting. At that time I met Fred Strickler, I met Rebecca Bobele-- No, I hadn't. When I came into the company I sort of-- Like I tend to do anyway, bring everything with me. So when I saw Rebecca I said, "Oh, you should come." I was dating a woman at the time; I said, "You should come." I saw Sean (Greene), I said "We need Sean" and invited him to come over and take classes. So I was inviting everybody to come in, because I thought, "This is great, and we all should be a part of this." (laughs) And I had seen Sean dance but some time before, and I thought he needed Bella and the whole bit. It was very funny when I think about it, because some of the people worked out and some of people didn't work out. And some of them Bella liked and some of them Bella didn't like, too, you know, and she made her own choices. I had nothing to do with them being in the company, but I did have something to do with inviting them into-- Connecting, you know. And I just-- "Oh, come on over, come on over!" (laughs) It was very funny. That was a very exciting time, being in Bella's company at that moment. The new company was a year and a half old. She was very unsure of herself, because she had not done a lot of choreography, didn't think of herself as a choreographer, and was in fact still dancing. She had been teaching, she had been retired to raise Nora (E. Reynolds) for a number of years and during that time had gotten involved with Nora's grade school, which I pass every day, and now I can't remember what the name of it is. But it was a very progressive grade school in Hollywood. And what they did is that they brought in a lot of different people or allowed a lot of experimentation to go on, and one of them was Bella. She learned an enormous amount working through movement, working with children, and working with, and finding, exploring, and doing some things that probably, as much as her experience with Lester Horton and all the other stuff that she had done, was a founding part of her education. When we got into the company it was new. Most of the people in the company were not kids, they were adults. I was twenty-eight years old, Fred was twenty-five years old, Jan (Day) was-- We won't talk about how old she was-- She was older. She had

already had an experience with East Coast dance with (Helen) Tamiris and with other people. She had worked with a lot of other people and had been teaching for quite a while. And June Morris had been teaching for quite a while. Charles Edmonson and I were just a few months apart in age, and he was working with her, so he was in his late twenties. It was a formidable group--creative, anxious, full of it, young but not babies, curious, willing. We all wanted to be a part of it all, you know. So she would be rehearsing with us, and we'd get excited, and she'd get excited, and it kind of whipped us into new things and new situations. And that was very exciting, a wonderful experience. Melanie Alexander had come into the company shortly after me, and Melanie and I had been part of the Eugene Loring Dance Players back in the early sixties when she was a teenager, and now she had been a part of television dance. She had been on an Academy Awards (presentation show) already as a soloist, she had worked with Peter Gennaro on the Perry Como show for two or three years, she had been a regular with Tom Hansen and the Red Skeleton Show for years. So she had done a lot of stuff--plus had done several movies--and was very experienced. She came into the company and brought another whole kind of energy and tension. Fred was there, Rebecca was there, Sean came in later, Charles Edmonson was there. Who else? Jan and June. When she started choreographing, we would rehearse two days a week-- I mean she would teach two days a week, and then sometimes on Saturdays we would be able to rehearse and-- So we were getting training. She was beginning to shape us into what choreographically the techniques and needs were for her work. And she was discovering her choreography at the time. I remember, particularly with a piece called (Kinaesonata) that she did to the (Alberto) Ginastera music, where she choreographed on us. Melanie Alexander and I were the only two who could sort of be there on a regular basis, so she choreographed all the lifts on the two of us, and then-- We were both daredevils, so we would try anything. We would, "Oh, why don't we try this--?" and we would be this thing that would go flopping around. And Bella would say, "Oh, that's a good idea, but let's try it this way." You know? And Four Purses--I mean, she choreographed on purses and whatever she had available to her, because you could move the purses around or position the purses and then have us move around. And there was a lot of that kind of action in the Ginastera piece, where some groups are stationary and other groups are moving through them, and then they shift. You know, it was fun. It was exciting to see her take the technical elements of her choreography into the choreography and what she was looking for and how she was working. So I learned an enormous amount about choreography from Bella. I learned an enormous amount about technique from Bella, because we were all so diverse, and some of us had better things than others, and others had better things than that, although we all came with holes, and none of us came with the understanding of her technique or the Horton technique necessarily. So it was constantly shaping us. And constantly she'd get us to be better dancers and push us further. The Lewitzky dancers who were part of that time still talk about the fact that she used to teach-- She would be standing on half-toe on one leg, in a pliÃ© on half-toe, with the other leg out to her side, and would stand there and talk--about this entire shaping and what you needed to hold it together--for ten minutes and still be in that position and never move. And we would all be going (looks aghast), wouldn't hear a thing she was saying, we were so amazed that there she was in this position that was impossible to begin with, let alone stand there being in it for ten minutes. But she had this enormous strength.

KAUFMAN:

I wanted to ask you to go into a little more detail about what you learned from her choreographically. You said that you learned from her-- Do you mean how she employed the technique of choreography?

BATES:

Not so much the technique of choreography but the technique in the choreography. In other words, the elements that she was interested in as a technician became many of the elements that she used in the choreography--the shapings, the thrusts became parts of what the choreography began to dictate. I learned a lot about discovering the choreography through the mechanism of the technique. Does that make sense?

KAUFMAN:

Okay. Yeah.

BATES:

As she was trying to help us develop those strengths that she exhibited absolutely flawlessly, she would just keep honing down in the technique. And for a while we just did nothing but things like lifting through the rib cage, underneath the rib cage, so we weren't up into our shoulders and neck, to get that thrust. So eventually we could take that into a jump, we could take it into a spin, a curve. We could take it into the floor, we could take it into a lift--you know, using somebody else underneath to lift us in the air. So already technically the elements of the choreography-- It was at that point, as I began to discover it in my own body and then began to be able to do her choreography, that I began to see it. Then I began to understand why it was so different to work with (Merce) Cunningham or (Martha) Graham or the Graham technique or the Cunningham technique or any of these others, or the (Alwin) Nikolais technique. Because inherent in the discipline of the technique was also their work. And it made sense. I knew then that no matter how good I got at Graham, for instance, I probably would not be able to do Lewitzky. It was at that point that I realized that there was no such thing as a generic technique, and that we could

teach generic technique but we weren't teaching necessarily anything. Then I looked at ballet and saw that ballet was doing the same thing, that ballet-- If you were in London doing the Royal Ballet (Covent Garden) stuff, it wasn't going to-- It would give you some information, of course. All dancing gives you information to other dance--or at least to Western dance; it doesn't give you any information to Eastern dance. (laughs) It would clue you in. But the other side of it is that there are certain elements of that-- The initiation of movement, where it came from, where it went, what it was going to do ultimately, was peculiar to that group and all of those sensibilities, those tiny little, minute sensibilities. Where you stand on your feet is going to tell you something about where you're going. Now, that's the beginning of it. (deftly slides out of his chair to demonstrate) How you start that initiation, where it comes from, where it's moving, tells you something about it. And Bella's was fascinating to me. It was so shape oriented. Out of that I became clearer and clearer about form. She's not so much a formal person; her work is formal. It's architectural, it's about mountains. As much as she would like to say it's also about the space, it really is about the shape of things. And it's just honed, almost as if she were a Michelangelo carving out of stone. That's how her work works. It is carved and shaped and picked piece by piece, and it reveals as it comes through, sort of like Michelangelo's-- What do they call them, the slaves coming out of the rock, the ones that are unfinished? Her work had that quality of-- The struggle is in the coming out. The struggle was in the absolute shaping and throwing of the body into places. Added to that was the rhythms--not so much because they were so complex, but because the rhythmic aspect of getting across the floor, flitting and scooting and skirting and tossing, she would listen to as a rhythm and play against those. They weren't necessarily complex oftentimes. But because she was fascinated with moving across the floor as an element and that each of those-- Every movement across the floor had a different sound to it or different rhythm. Dah-dahm as opposed to dah-delee-dahm. Dah-dah-dadilee-dum would become a measured element. Dah-tee-dahm-tee-dahm, you know, all of those sounds were not just sounds or rhythms out there, they were the things that we did getting across the floor. So she made use out of that, and that revealed more stuff. So all of that began to reveal to me the choreographic elements. And because she at that time had for the most part abandoned story choreography--she had been doing some of those--and began to move more into abstraction, it was very exciting. My work had nothing to do with abstraction most of the time, except it was very abstract. But it was all about human beings and emotions and feelings and all those things. But the abstraction of it came from that work with Bella.

KAUFMAN:

Yeah, I can see that.

BATES:

Yeah, where I was really trying to get at that impulse to cry, to scream, you know, to vomit. I was trying to get at that impulse. She led me to those physical impulses that had to do with why we move, those elemental, physical impulses, and showed me how they could be manipulated and dealt with into choreography. So that's how she helped me learn about choreography. And then the sheer excitement of learning that stuff and then being able to do it was amazing for me. It was for the others too, you know, but it was amazing for me, because I learned how to do things. I was on some levels a very good example of her technique, and I could-- I was a daredevil. So she would say "Jump over there three feet," and I'd try to go four feet using that technique, and as I got stronger in that technique I found more stuff to do. So it was a great revelation. The five years that I was with her were extraordinary times, '68 to '73. They were also difficult times. I was real lucky to be in her sanctum. Bella at the time was-- We were all very connected to her. She was so involved with each one of us. For me, because I was so much on the surface, I think-- You know, I would let people know where I was (makes a great gasp of dismay) falling apart or I was out there, and then she tended to want to take more control of me. I was also one of the older people. I was there between 28 and 33 in my life, and I was a kid. There were obviously certain things that I didn't know. And she is a very caring person. But she's also a very controlling person. She demanded that we stay together. She held us in as a company. We did everything together. And I tended at times to pull away, so I made it uncomfortable for her. I remember when I was-- I had a job at Florida (State University). We worked the first two years, we worked twenty hours a week--I mean, close to twenty hours a week between classes and rehearsals and things--and we made $25 dollars our first year, we made $25 dollars our second year, and both of those because we did the Idyllwild workshops and concerts and Bella was able to pay us $25 dollars. So those first two years in that company we had to do it out of love and out of the fact that we were gaining so much from this woman. And during those first few years she started getting more dates, solo dates, like to go teach workshops across the country or to go do a piece of hers. Then in 1970 I got a job at Florida State and wanted to drive my car across, and she was so concerned about me doing that that she wasn't going let me do it. We had a date in Kansas, and she wanted me to go to Kansas, come back here, and then drive. And I said no, you know, "I don't have that much time." The date in Kansas was in early August, and I had to be there by mid- to late August. I said, "I need to get there. So I'm going to drive my car to Kansas." And then I could go from Kansas down to Florida, where I was going to be teaching at Tallahassee. So she made me call every night, every day. (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

Really?

BATES:

Because she didn't know if I was going to have an accident or I was going to blow it or I wasn't going to show up. And the truth of it is that I showed up to every concert that we did except for one that I didn't have to go to. And I only missed one concert, and that was when I broke my toe in Hawaii that time. I even showed up my last date before I quit, (when) I showed up with a 103-degree temperature and got there and performed and learned a new dance. I learned an old dance--but new to me; I had never learned it before--in two hours and performed it with a 103-degree temperature, having been up all night traveling. So as flaky as I think some people thought I was, I really wasn't a flake. But I painted that picture probably too often for my own sanity and for other people's sanity. (laughs) Eventually I parted psychologically from Bella. And eventually Bella had to have other kinds of dancers. We were exciting, we were all creative people, we were all busy people, we were already creating our own careers. We came into Bella's life at that time when she needed that other energy, that creative energy around her. And we all came in with jobs. We all came in with teaching jobs, where we would be building our own careers. When she established herself and established herself with us, that first company, except for a couple of them, really didn't need to be there anymore. She needed new racehorses. She needed people who were coming in that were even better technicians, that could even do more of what she wanted. And that's what she got. She got them right out of the colleges and the high schools and was able to mold them more quickly and more easily and get more out of them and go further with her--because her vision was already reaching out there. Her vision was always ahead of what she could do naturally. And as she discovered more things and got people to do more and better, get better at it, more things were already revealing themselves. Directions were already occurring. So she needed different kinds of people.

KAUFMAN:

But you parted from her psychologically. Could you go into that?

BATES:

Yeah-- (sighs) You know, I'm not sure that I can go into it right now, but let me think about that, because that's all shifted. There were times when I thought that the parting had to do with one thing, and now I'm beginning to realize that it may have had to do more with some other things. I did depart. I started separating at some point, not because I wasn't getting anything out of the work but because I wanted to do my own work. I didn't know how to say that sometimes. The other part I was parting from is that I am such a people pleaser. I would have stayed with her and been devoted to her probably the rest of my life. I wanted nothing more than to make her happy.

But I also didn't know how to do anything but play the fool. So there were a lot of my own personality problems or inabilities to cope that started getting in the way, and I think I sort of (started) feeling like the only way that I could handle that was to leave. I had not really planned to do that up until the last six months. But I had already started teaching at Florida State. I'd been there for two years. I'd been traveling back and forth all the time, because we were still here. And I was beginning to get a sense of my own self. I'm such a late bloomer. I mean, most people learn this at twenty-three, and I was learning it at thirty-three. Because I had completed my degree, I had been teaching two years now at a major university, they liked what I was doing, I liked what I was doing, and I didn't know whether I wanted to come back here. So within those two years, between '70 and '72, I had started getting some independence and some self-confidence, some self- esteem. In '72 I came back to do my master's degree at UCLA. I got a scholarship and was teaching. And at that point Bella's company was taking off. We were doing a lot of things. The Artists in the Schools (Program) had just started, and we were one of the three dance companies who were pilot companies. Bella's work in that field was absolutely superb. And because it was so superb and the whole company was involved and we had such a clear outline of how to do that, we were getting gigs all over the place. I mean, it was just popping open. Which meant that I had to make some decisions I didn't know how to make. I was getting caught between "You belong here at UCLA" and Bella saying "You belong here in the company." At that point it was very scary for me, because part of my worth had to do with my ability to be teaching, which meant being able to give back. If I wasn't teaching or doing something grounded, just dancing wasn't enough. And I think that partly comes from my background. It comes from that Midwestern background where you had to be doing something solid. And I didn't know how to cope with that, and I didn't even know what it was until much later. So I was being forced on both ends to make decisions, and I was trying to please both people, both groups. And I was getting real confused. I should have possibly let go of UCLA for a couple of more years and just devoted myself to the dancing and gone with Bella. I would not have missed a trip to Europe, (laughs) several trips to Europe. I might have gotten a different kind of grounding. I would probably have been able to focus in a different way than I've ever been able to focus. I wouldn't have looked so flaky, because I was trying to do two things, and sometimes it would get unwieldy. And I wouldn't have stayed split. Because that split was with me the rest of the time--I didn't stay in one basket or the other, because immediately after I quit Bella in '73, that summer I started another company, Eyes Wide Open (Dance Theater). So that was a situation that never got resolved. So when I say that I started moving away from Bella, my feeling about it was one thing, but as I look back and can see my part in all of this, I realize that it came from a whole lot of other things and may not have had a lot to with Bella to begin with at all. Bella was pushy, and Bella wanted to have control, and I felt tightened by that. But looking back on it now, where I am today, I realize that it was probably my excuse, not the reason. I loved Bella's work. It was very difficult for me. On one side I was a natural Bella body and dancer. On the other side it was so difficult, what it did to my body, until I learned to work with it. I had to get away from Bella for three or four years and start working through her technique to find out how to work with it.

Tape Six, Side 2 (August 2, 1995)

BATES:

--and within that confine, I had to break through it. And that whole thing that I eventually got to with the floor stuff (referring to some classes two years previously in which Kaufman had been involved) allowed me to help you feel the releases, so that as we got tenser we were working only with that tension, and then we could release it again. I didn't know how to do that, and I would be in her classes and in the work like this, like a sprung rod. So that was probably another reason, that I realized that I was different as a dancer here than I was here. When I was at Florida State I was different, dancing, because I was doing my own stuff. Interesting thing about that too is that-- Because, see, I never stopped working in things. And that's something that I've learned to appreciate about myself. (laughs) I may leave you, but I never stop working within what you've taught me. Bella was the first person who really gave me-- Bella, and I was also working with Carmelita (Maracci) at the time. That combination was so extraordinary, because they had such commitment to movement and to life and to ideas. And an idea was not separate from a movement. It isn't separate from a movement. The impulse to argue, to tense, to fight, to retreat because of an idea is absolutely integral to us as human beings. I had both of them from totally different kinds of approaches, but they both were so deeply ingrained in that and fought and argued and were political that I learned-- Dancing isn't just about kicking your legs up. It isn't about that show business stuff. I mean, there's something important here. (laughs) There is something real important here. So they gave that to me. Absolutely it blew my mind and opened my mind and things like that. When I went to Florida-- And then I had already had a couple of years with Bella, and then I was travelling back and forth. There was one year I was in the Atlanta airport twenty-two or twenty-three times flying back and forth to meet Bella at different places. Well, I'll tell you, in 1970, after that Kansas thing, I drove down to-- I stopped in St. Louis because my mother (Jane Gaulding Bates) was there. And on my way there I was seeing my girlfriend, took her down to Louisville. I got so upset-- I know that part of this accident, part of this-- I got drunk one night on the trip and fell out of a tree twenty-two feet from the (ground). I grabbed hold of a branch. It broke, and I fell, and I broke my arm in four places. So I went to my first teaching job with bones sticking out. (laughs) And I laugh about it now because I think, you know, "What's that all about?" Well, the girl I was seeing at the time and I were not having an easy time of it. But I also can tell you probably now, in hindsight, it was also-- I was still in that absolutely torn place between wanting to only dance and having to satisfy this Midwestern thing that I grew up with--you know, "Dancing is for people who have leisure time." And I had to make a living, and I had to do something worthwhile. And I know that going to Florida and breaking my arm, starting my new job with a broken arm and a cast up to here, a lot of that was psychological. Because I really wanted to be with Bella. I was learning too much. I did not want to be separate, but I also needed to work. I couldn't live on twenty-five dollars a year. (laughs) You know, I needed to do something that would allow me to do that. While I was at Florida State it was fabulous. I learned to grow up a little bit. Nancy Smith (Fichter) was just the best chair. I got a great deal from her. She gave me a lot of leeway. She was somebody I could talk to, that when I came up against things I could ask-- And she was a little bit older, and she was just more grounded. (laughs) So what I was able to do with a cast on my arm-- To teach classes and to fall and toss and throw and do all these kinds of things with a cast on my arm, that absolutely astounded my students. But I got their attention right away. (laughs) "If he can do it, maybe I can do it." And I started breaking down Bella's technique for myself, because I had now suddenly to

teach it. Because I understood that this is-- It wasn't that I thought that this was the only technique, but it was the technique I knew to some degree. And it wasn't about just teaching pliÃ©s anymore and how to get your leg up in the air. There was something I was after in teaching, and I started developing that eye. There was something that I was after, and it was in how we even start to do the pliÃ©. It was fascinating to me to see some dancers, some companies, some teachers, talk about the pliÃ© as something that goes out and comes back. (stands up to demonstrate the lateral motion of the widening of the legs in a pliÃ©) The Nikolais (or) Murray Louis school says it's something that goes down and goes back up. Now, already it's a very different sense. Am I just going down and coming back up? Or am I going out and coming through? Now, Bella talked about it as an opening--you know, when you open something it doesn't collapse--so seeing that opening, making a 360-degree circle out of it. It was an expansion. So that's different from going out, and it's different from going down. It's an expansion.

KAUFMAN:

Yeah, it's like three-dimensional.

BATES:

Yeah. And a lot of her work had to do with that three-dimensionality of a carving of the space, of not just seeing it in one place but seeing it from the opposite place, as a matter of fact.

KAUFMAN:

And working in the joints.

BATES:

Now, we didn't make it a curve from here (indicates), we made the curve from here (indicates).

And we were able to express it through here. But here's what was supporting it and where it was coming from. So I had ideas about movement as a result of Bella's work and Carmelita's work, and I had ideas about it connecting to something. But I had those two years. Even though I was bouncing back and forth working with Bella, I had those two years to start finding out where it was for me. So by the end of those two years I found that I was in about the same place as they were, interestingly enough. I mean, there were still those people that had better technique, who were still better, and there were people who had better rhythm and were still better at rhythms or had more flexibility, but I wasn't behind them because I hadn't been studying with Bella for two years. I wasn't far behind them; I was right up there with them. I hadn't lost something. Because that was always the fear, and that was always something that people-- "Well, you're going to lose your technique. You're going to be teaching, and you're not going to be able to do anything. And you're not going to be able to be with us." And that wasn't necessarily true in my case. Well, that's not flakiness. Only in the sense that I-- I probably didn't own it enough. Now, the fact is that I was able to do that by taking that technique apart and wanting to know it and wanting to discover the elements of it and wanting to do it better. Every time I went to perform with them-- And listening deeper when I did go, because I only had those few master classes when we would be performing. They were just regular company classes, (but) they were master classes to me. I had to listen more carefully. And by the time I'd get to the next one, which would be maybe a month later, I had already worked with that, and I'd then come and listen a little bit more carefully to the next thing. So I was growing as the company was growing and expanding as the company was expanding in different ways. And that was exciting. See, I learned a whole lot from that experience. I learned a lot from working with her for those first few years. And then those next few years of having to step away from it and take it and rework it over and over and over again for myself while I was teaching it to students-- Several people wound up in that company from my Florida State experience. Larry Attaway was my musician. Larry was a flautist, a very accomplished flautist on his way to becoming successful.

KAUFMAN:

Yeah, I know his name.

BATES:

And he's now at Cal(ifornia Institute of the) Arts. He was my musician. He was a student there and a musician. He wanted to get better at being-- Because piano was his second instrument, and he wasn't real comfortable with it. I got Cara-- Cara (Bradbury) Rhodes was Bella's musician and accompanist at the time. I got some tapes of hers, asked her for some tapes of her accompaniment, and he listened to those and practiced those. And when Bella's company came

out there for two weeks or a three-week workshop we did in the summer, we were all doing our class with Bella. The piano was back here (indicates the piano being behind the dancers), and we were doing it. And Cara had been playing; we knew Cara was playing. At one point we whipped around and turned, and Larry was playing. And there was not a seam or a difference. Now, he was incredible in that way. He eventually came and worked with us after he graduated and then became Bella's musician, has done numbers of works for her. He was head of the department at CalArts for a while. (laughs) He's done an enormous, just an enormous job from that little bit of exposure at that one moment. Bella's leading seamstress for a number of years was from Florida State and one of my students. For a while a lighting designer came from there. But that was the excitement that Bella projected and the commitment that Bella projected and then demanded from us, which I think at a time when things were sort of easygoing-- This was the late sixties, early seventies; you know, everybody was kind of laid back and just-- Life was going to happen. To have somebody around you that was that committed to an idea and demanding your commitment to that idea-- The people who were looking for a commitment were really attracted to her, and she was a real light in a time that was sort of gray--or pink or rose-colored. (laughs) The other side of it was rose-colored, because, you know, "Wow, marijuana's going to give me creativity" and "Oh, marijuana really makes me write better, paint better-- Gee whiz, I think I'll just step out and--" (laughs) To have somebody demand something like that, she was a real signal and a beacon to a lot of people. What else--?

KAUFMAN:

Let's see. Florida State, you were there for two years--

BATES:

I was there for two years, '70 to '72.

KAUFMAN:

Teaching pretty much technique. But were you also teaching some humanity things?

BATES:

I taught the history (of dance) course, I taught movement for actors, I taught production, I taught choreography, I taught technique at all levels.

KAUFMAN:

How was it different teaching movement for actors versus choreography? I'm curious--

BATES:

Well, first of all you have people who are not necessarily dancers--and sometimes not even in their bodies. (laughs) And right away-- Well, I had a little bit of leeway, so I tried some things. I mean, I was very new at this and very unsure of myself, but I just tried some things. And I think that on a lot of levels I was right on. I wasn't quite sure enough, nor I was connected with somebody else who I could have gotten some information from, to say, "Where am I going with this? What is it doing?" Sometimes the stuff was way ahead of me. But I would try things. I would experiment. I was lucky about that, because when I got to UCLA in '66 I discovered that movement was more than just the leg going (gestures) and the right arm positions and (discovered) that it was experimental and improvisational. We did a lot of that at UCLA. So I can't fault UCLA for training. What I didn't get necessarily in terms of committed technique, which I did get there, is that I got that whole nurturing, creative, try and play and stuff that was so wonderful then, really wonderful and rich. We all were doing all kinds of things. Every chance we got we got together--you know, as groups of students--and just would try things. Because it all was wide open. So that was wonderful. Because of that I could take some of those elements with me into the movement for actors class. I had them doing funny things--sitting on furniture and doing things and talking to each other as animals, you know--and not just-- I mean, after a while, when they got past (makes growling sounds and monkey noises) and they began to sense something in there and they began to sense a communication and such that they would try-- It would get beyond that. One of the people who came out there and became-- Well, he remodeled and was the director of the Pasadena Playhouse for a while. He remodeled a number of other places in the country and was director of several of them. He said that was a breakthrough time for him, that my class in movement allowed him to see something more than just words as part of the expression. That's basically all I wanted to do. I wasn't going to try to teach them to dance. In fact, I thought all that dancing stuff was sort of stupid; to go in there and teach them how to do a pliÃ© had nothing to do necessarily with what they really were after,

which is "How do I move across the floor?" We had done a play, Julius Caesar. Caesar was standing there giving one of his important speeches, and he was so unaware of his body that he was on half-toe, standing like this, and trying to be solid, (demonstrates the tentative balance and straining this student displayed) not even realizing that in order to feel solid you have to be in the ground. Now, things like that I was interested in, and I would do little exercises to show them the difference, and then we'd play things. But to get them to try things, to get them to see motion and then emotion and connections and struggle-- And they were real messy little playgrounds, but they were having to learn how to be kids again. I don't know about you, but when you're in college that's not what you want to be. (laughs) You want to get down to the serious business of education--even if you don't want to listen. (laughs) Even if you think you already know what the teacher should be teaching you.

KAUFMAN:

The reason I asked this is because of the experiences at Santa Monica College, being your student and having a lot of nondancers in your class.

BATES:

Well, by that time-- See, the focus at Santa Monica was a little bit different. At least it was a dance class, therefore I figure they want to know something. But if they're a nondance class, then my approach and my focus are going to be something different. This is also something I learned from Bella, working with her with the Artists in the Schools (Program), when we worked with K (kindergarten) through 6 (sixth grade), that she went in with a focus, and as long as we were clear about the focus, enormous stuff could happen. Because it was all brand-new to them. We all always walked into the school with half the teachers and most of the students thinking, "What can they teach us?" and "What does movement have to do with learning, with real education?" And by the time we got through they were going, "Oh, my God!" So I knew that it worked. I knew that being clear and objective, with an objective and focus-- See, now, that's a catchy thing, too. There is an objective you're going after--maybe a small one, but it is an objective. However, it isn't, again, a generic objective like we learned to do in college, where you learned to put a syllabus together, and you had these objectives you want to get to. In this case you had to be willing to suspend the usual objective and find an underneath something and take the experience that you have and maybe even turn it upside down--or not even present it at all.

KAUFMAN:

And on the last tape it sounded like that caused problems for so many people in academia.

BATES:

I think sometimes it does. See, and I think that that is a need, like in theater. I did it for a year, and I wasn't asked to come and do it again, because they got a mime person, first of all. That was it. And then they got somebody who could teach them steps for their next musical, and that was it. And then they weren't sure what it was, you know. And what it is is that these kids need to have movement experience. If they are going to do a musical every year, then they need to be learning how to dance. But if they're just being actors, then they need to know how to use their bodies, which is not necessarily going to happen to them. See, we have this attitude in this country that all the little girls should go take dancing classes because it' s good for their posture and it's good for their etiquette. I mean, what do they call that thing that a girl is supposed to have?

KAUFMAN:

I forget what it's called.

BATES:

Right. (laughs) Thank you. But we all want to send our daughters to dancing so they look good, you know? And that's not what it's about at all. And we take that into college, and those professors take it right into their classrooms--you know, teach them how to look good. And ballet is what makes them look good. Well, first of all, they look that good because they've been doing it for ten years. Don't watch them dance, because they probably still can't dance. (laughs) So breaking down all of our myths-- In 1995 you can still walk into academic sessions-- My friend Chris Burnside, who has been the chair at (Virginia) Commonwealth University, is going through the same thing in 1995 as I've gone through at other times and other friends of mine have gone through. They don't have a clue what dance is doing in academic life. And they're always so amazed not only that we can talk-- Well, first of all that we can talk, but secondly that

we can make any sense. They just are dumbfounded. They still, even in the other arts-- An art historian can talk about Brecht, can talk about Picasso, can talk about Stravinsky, but they have no clue how to talk about dance, as if that's a foreign subject, another language, nothing to do with their language. They all can talk about each other's-- And when you come to talk about ours they go "Well, I've never understood it. What are you doing?" As if it's another-- I mean, you might as well be talking Chinese to a group of Americans. That's how foreign it is, even within the arts. In theater they don't understand dance, so they carry with them the myths. The myth that ballet will give you good posture and make you look nice and teach you how to sit down and stand up without showing your underlegs. And that's going to make it a difference. Because they still see it as secondary, as nonconnected, as nonessential. We still tend to look at it as a divertissement and not very meaningful--meaningful in the sense that there is something structural in there that keeps this building together and makes it function the way it does--and until they do they keep having the same problems. Now, there are schools like the Stanislavski school, the method school up in New York (the Actors Studio Drama School, New School University), that deal constantly with motion and movement. You know much of what they're doing all the time has to do with movement. They understand. They understand the need for the improvisation. They understand the need for the constant working of both the instruments, the voice instrument and the body instrument. That's why so many good people have come out of there, who look so good on stage. They look natural. And, you know, everybody, every college, wants to do a musical. That's part of their theater experience. They usually want to do one musical every year. And they don't want to have to fuss with it. They want it to fit into the same schedule as as their little Six Characters in Search of an Author fit. And that isn't what a musical is about. A musical has a lot of stuff, a lot of elements--songs, music, dancing--and they've got to be able to do these things. I did a musical play at Scripps (College) one year, and I took a little bit of time. I also happened to have in this one trio three accomplished dancers, and I was giving them a lot of business while they were singing. And the singing director said, "You can't give them that much. They can't sing and dance at the same time." I said, "They do it on Broadway all the time. Theyâ€™d better learn. And if we're not teaching them, if we're keeping them from the real experience, then what are we doing here? We're just giving them a nice time?" Because, see, in that kind of situation all we're doing is-- Well, I don't know what we're doing. We're faking. We're lying to them. You know? "Well, they can't do it." They were seniors. They had many years of experience in both dancing and singing, you know? Sure they can! Sure they're going to get out of breath. That's what they had to learn to do is not get out of breath while they're singing and dancing, where can they cheat a little bit or not cheat but just give in a little bit and where can they project a little bit. They've got to learn these things. If we're not teaching them that, why are we doing a musical?

KAUFMAN:

Right. So as a teacher it seems that you have pretty much--

BATES:

All dance teachers have had to work against all kinds of obstacles and continue in 1995 to work against the same obstacles.

KAUFMAN:

Yeah, I see that, having been in the (American) College Dance Festival. The kind of work that was there really shocked me and disappointed me in that it seems-- What values are we teaching people about movement?

BATES:

Well, see, it's not important to teach them values, because that means that you are assuming that their values or somebody else's values-- See, I might embarrass Joe here if I teach you both the same values, because Joe may not have the same values. And that's ridiculous. I had to meet Bella on her terms, otherwise nothing would have happened. Sometimes my students have to meet me on my terms or nothing's going to happen. I was in that position with Bella because she knew something I didn't. I either was going to have to do that, you know, give into her so that I could learn, or I wasn't going to get it.

KAUFMAN:

Right. And today it sounds like students aren't willing to do that.

BATES:

Well, sometimes. But I think sometimes they don't know, you know? I think that I have never-- Well, that's not true. Probably the worst teaching and the worst experience I had with teaching was at Loyola Marymount (University). And that was because of my own personal problems and because I was at an age and a difference and a lot of other things. It had a lot less to with the students. Almost every teaching position that I've taken I have been able to get the majority of the students-- not all of them but the majority of the students--to make a commitment during that period of time.

KAUFMAN:

That's the difference.

BATES:

Because I'm willing to put myself out there in the commitment, and they see results. And I got that from people like Carmelita and Bella.

KAUFMAN:

It's that passion you were talking about.

BATES:

And the commitment. You know, the passion to believe in something and then to have the skills to teach it.

KAUFMAN:

Skills, yeah.

BATES:

Because the passion without the skill or the information is just passion. The heat of the night stuff. It's the stuff where we wake up in the morning and wonder who we slept with. (laughs) Or why! It's true. It's related. It's that deeply related. It's that simple.

KAUFMAN:

And you got your skills basically from Bella and Carmelita and these teachers--

BATES:

You know, I have been very, very fortunate. I got it from Carol Scothorn, I got it later from my peers-- You know, when Eyes Wide Open came together, half of us were from Bella-- No, two of us were from Bella, eventually three or four, and then three or four were from my friends from UCLA. We taught each other. Every summer we taught classes to each other. And we'd get it. It would be my turn to do the experimental stuff or play, and then it was somebody else's turn, and we had to do those. So we were constantly problem solving, we were constantly testing out ideas about motion, we were choreographing on each other, and all of that stuff forced us to-- I mean, we fought like cats and dogs, but we were willing to stick it out at least for five years, and we learned a lot. By the time that was over Fred was throwing himself around the floor. He would never have done that before Eyes Wide Open. He couldn't, wouldn't do it with Bella. Before that was over I was learning about holding movement back, shaping it a little bit more consciously and carefully. So I was getting elements of Fred while Fred was getting elements of me. We were both getting elements of Melanie, which had to do with a kind of theatricalism, a kind of stuff that we both liked but we were both sometimes afraid to do because it smacked of something else, you know. And with Kathe (Howard Copperman)-- We all learned a little from Kathe in terms of not being satisfied. Fred and I were real good at throwing something together and just doing it. A lot of his solos during that time-- He was so busy that a lot of his solos

happened overnight, the night before. He performed them the next day. And he was good at it, because he had a real--

Tape Seven, Side One (August 8, 1995)

KAUFMAN:

When you started Eyes Wide Open (Dance Theater)--

BATES:

Okay. Let me go back a little bit. In 1968-70, with Bella (Lewitzky)'s company, (Lewitzky Dance Company), we performed twice, and each time we made $25 dollars for each performance up in Idyllwild (School of Music and the Arts, now Idyllwild Arts). And then between '70 and '72 I moved to Florida and taught at Florida State University while I was still dancing with Bella, moving back and forth at that point because of the Artists in the Schools (Program) and because Bella was gaining in recognition and popularity. We were a very busy company. And for the next three years we toured a lot over different places and got the chance to stay-- You know, we were in Hawaii for a month and we were in New York for two or three weeks. We had our two New York seasons, which I got to perform in. So we were quite busy. At the end of 1972 I had left Florida State and stayed with Bella for that one period of time, that six months, and worked with her exclusively. And then in January '73 I was back into UCLA doing my master's (degree) while I was still dancing with Bella. It got to be real hairy for Bella, and in March or April we had a parting of the ways, and I left the company while they were in Williamstown, Massachusetts. We had an altercation. I didn't say anything actually, but I got screamed at for two hours about not being there. And the fact is I was there. Fred and I were supposed to come in and meet the company. Fred didn't show up--he missed the plane or thought it was the next day--so I got there and I got yelled at. And it offended me. It offended me because I was yelled at about somebody else's business. That had happened before, and I'd asked Bella not to do that publicly, and she had a tendency to like to do things publicly. So I wrote a letter to the company thanking them for five wonderful years and without a penny in my pocket hitchhiked down to New York and went to John Martin's and then got a plane trip back to L.A. By midsummer I had gone back to Saratoga, where John was living, to do some research on the thesis I was going to be doing on John and spent three or four weeks there. It was really wonderful. But I was absolutely in a total depression, because I just thought I had really messed it up. I was not going to have a career ever again. I was going to wind up just not even getting a job in dance. Nobody wanted me, and I was thirty-three years old, and I was already a has-been. (laughs) So I was going through all of that, and we do go through that sometimes. Whenever that change is occurring in our life, it's major.

And Bella had been one of the most exciting events in my life to that point. You know, this was a professional company. So by the summer it really had taken its toll on me, thinking that I was never going to have anything to do again. Well, I came back, in this depression, back to L.A. and back to school. And I got a phone call from Pia Gilbert. Pia had said that there is this premier piece that's going to be happening for them, an evening concert series, and would I be interested in doing the choreography for it--it's a solo--and I said yes without thinking. That was going to be in April of the following year, '74. Then another friend came up to me and said she he/she wanted to do a show in San Francisco with the Cockettes. Another friend of mine and I started talking about it and got kind of excited about it, and we decided to go ahead and do it. That was in October, supposed to be done over the Halloween weekend. So Patrick Scott, aka Patrick Marca Registrada, and I decided to do Cinderella up in San Francisco with the Cockettes. It was the last official show the Cockettes did. The Cockettes were gender benders. They had done a number of movies, and they had become very popular in San Francisco. Tricia's Wedding was one of the movies and a couple of others. They were really quite a cult group. They were the West Coast equivalent of Andy Warhol's group. They were quite crazy. One of the things that happened in their shows was that they would all get drunk or loaded before the show, and the audience came just to see how many were going to be standing--or if anybody was going to be standing--before the show was over. In other words, the show went on until everybody fell over, (laughs) and then it closed, and everybody loved it.

KAUFMAN:

Was this in a cabaret setting?

BATES:

They did different things in different places. It was the late sixties and seventies, and they were absolutely a wonderfully talented, absolutely crazy-- Divine was sort of on the fringe of that; Goldie Glitters, who did the show for us; Paula Pucker; Scrumbly; John Flowers, who was just terrifically talented; Pristine Condition, another very talented person.

KAUFMAN:

These are all men?

BATES:

Men and one woman. A couple of others were Dolores Delux, who later went on to do other things too, and Sylvester. He was a singer and a rock star for a number of years before he died, very popular, but he was also a part of that whole scene. So it was really quite a talented group of people. Very, very drug oriented and alcohol oriented and quite crazy.

KAUFMAN:

These were all San Francisco, right?

BATES:

Yes. So there I was teaching at UCLA and flying up every other day to San Francisco to do this show and then flying back and teaching and doing my classes and going back up there. I did that for a month. It was absolutely crazy. Alma Hawkins (chair of the UCLA Department of Dance) was not real pleased about it, particularly when she found out what kind of show it was. They really didn't know what to do with me, I think, at that point. But we did the show. It went on. It was called Cinderella at Midnight. Patrick and I wrote the scripts. We did a lot of research on various different Cinderellas throughout history, and we settled on one, wrote the script of it, and figured out who the characters were. I directed it and choreographed it and stage-managed it and lit it. We were at the Palace Theatre, which is an old movie house that used to be, I think, a theater. We did it two or three nights, and a number of people saw it. Lynn Daly was one who saw it, because she'd heard that a friend of hers, Fred Strickler, had done this show. It was really a challenge for both Patrick and me. Patrick did some of the most incredibly beautiful costumes and sets. It was a three-act dance drama, and we used both live and recorded music. We'd done this march and everything, and there was this activity going on on the stage, and then the light comes onto Cinderella, and she looks up, and she yawns from her ironing board, and she sings, "I got forty-four pairs of socks hangin' on the line-- 'Cause I'm a wo-man. W-O-M-A-N." --an old Peggy Lee song ("I'm a Woman")--and things like that. When the stepsisters come out and onto the show and they scream, "Cinderella! Cinderella!" And she says, "Yes, sisters, dear." They say, "Yakety Yak, don't talk back" and broke out into that song ("Yakety Yak"). And then when the shoe fits Cinderella, and the stepsisters didn't get it, she breaks out into another old fifties song ("This Ole House")-- "Ain't a-gonna need this house no longer. Ain't a-gonna need this house no

more. Ain't got time to fix the shingles. Ain't got time to fix the floor." So, I mean, we really chose some very funny connecting pieces to this, and we did some very clever stuff. We tried to pull in some of the ideas of the times, and actually that became a kind of signature for later, for Eyes Wide Open. I'm citing all this because it's prelude to Eyes Wide Open. So Patrick and I had had this success. It was a dubious success in the sense that most people, legitimate people, didn't quite understand why we were doing this, and it was more indication that Patrick and I were very strange.

KAUFMAN:

Who's Patrick? What was his last name?

BATES:

Patrick Scott, or aka at the time Patrick Marca Registrada. "Registered trademark" is what that means; he took it from that.

KAUFMAN:

Where did you meet him?

BATES:

Patrick was a student at (University of California,) Irvine in the late sixties, early seventies. No, in the middle sixties. He was a friend of Fred Strickler's. He lives in Riverside, and he was at Irvine as a dance major and design major. He'd done some wonderful sets and costumes for people at Irvine and was interested in dance. He looked like kind of a Greek god; he had this blond curly hair and was statuesque--and quite in charge. In '73, when I came back and got to do this, we decided to collaborate. We wanted to get to know each other a little bit better and decided to collaborate. And we had a great deal of fun and craziness and everything else. My

friend Charlotte Adair was his costume person, helped him make the costumes and get them on. And the show was very successful. It was very successful on our side because we did something quite unique. We put a bunch of-- We tried some ideas out and they seemed to be successful. One of the ideas was that the fairy godmother was also the stepmother. Instead of being the usual, the regular mother, it was the stepmother. The reason it was the stepmother was because Cinderella, who is this very loving person, doesn't want anything to be bad, so in her dreams she turns everything bad into good. And the rats and the lizards and the dog--Ashes, her dog--are all these animals that she takes care of, and they become the coachmen and all that kind of stuff. There were a lot of these kind of clever ways. When they were at the ball, the men all danced with cardboard women, so they had to flutter them. That thought was--You know, particularly in courts and in higher-up (places)--even in our "courts"--the women are often just an extension of the men. So these men were in these kind of cartoon costumes, actually in canvas costumes that had been painted and sprayed on--kind of storybook looking--and the women were in these elaborate gowns but all on cardboard-- Elaborate gowns, elaborate hairdos, elaborate jewelry, and they were simply carried around by their men; these were just an extension of the men. So there were some interesting little plays in the play that were important. I would have loved to have done it again. In fact, I rewrote another couple of scripts for some other shows and never got to do those again. Then, after we did that show in October, that other job was coming up. It was called Vesalii icones, the icons of Vesalius, and the music and the piece was created by Peter Maxwell Davies for his Fires of London, and it had had a London debut and a New York debut--not a very successful one. When I decided to do it, I wanted to do it again with Patrick, and Patrick and I came up with an elaborate scheme, one more time, of visuals and other kinds of stuff. This was going to be the last concert (of the season) for the Monday Evening Concerts series at the (Leo S.) Bing (Theater), which Stravinsky and Schoenberg had started and is still going on to this day. We were the last piece-- It's a forty-five minute solo. We did it in April of '74. It was quite a sensation. There were people who left in the middle of it, but more importantly most people stayed, and we got almost a twenty-minute standing ovation. It was quite a sensation. Martin Bernheimer reviewed it. I got a front-page Calendar (magazine of the Los Angeles Times) photograph. That marked my solo debut. It marked my solo debut as a choreographer and as a dancer.

KAUFMAN:

So you danced it and choreographed it.

BATES:

Right. And in a sense it set me-- Having done the Bella stuff and having taught for a while, now I

had sort of placed myself in the forefront-- Not the forefront, but at least in the pot of choreographers and dancers in this city. For that concert I shaved my head and my eyebrows. And as I was going in to meet my class-- It was Monday evening. I was teaching the sophomore class at UCLA at the time. Actually I was going to go in and excuse them and tell them to work on something. I was going to leave again, because I wanted to get home and rest. I had shaved my eyebrows and my hair, and I was running around the corner upstairs, and I ran into Dr. Hawkins. And Dr. Hawkins looked at me and she said, "Gary, you've gone too far this time. We can't have this in front of the students."

KAUFMAN:

Oh, no!

BATES:

And she almost fired me right on the spot. But she didn't. I told her what I was doing, and a couple of other faculty friends of mine-- Kathe Howard (Copperman) was there, and we had become friends. She taught the freshmen and I taught the sophomores, so we were always discussing the needs and the problems and all that. She saw me, and she said, "I've got to go to this thing!" And then Melanie Snyder, who also was at UCLA and was doing something, I think, at that time--I'm not sure where she was--found out about it, and she came. And Fred Strickler came. And his boss came. And everybody was quite amazed. It really was quite an interesting piece. And again, it had some of the earmarks of the Cinderella, not necessarily in what we were doing but in how we put it together. The visual aspects, the kind of twists of things that we were doing, gave it a real look, gave it a real stamp. Patrick and I had an incredibly good--difficult but good--outcome with our work. I mean, we really did some major things in that way. And we didn't always get along and agree. He was very needling, and I was very--like these tapes--all over the place and did not quite ever seem to-- I never seem to be clear about my ideas. So I'd usually drive him up the wall. But we'd get someplace. We'd find things, and we sparked each other, and we got the best out of each other. I really do believe that today. So we did this piece. Kathe and Melanie and Fred and a couple of other people came backstage afterwards. And they looked at us. We all looked at each other. We had been talking about-- "Well, we should get together sometime and do something." And they all looked at me and each other, and they said, "We've got to do this this summer." So we got together in the summer of '74 basically because of this piece. I said, "Well, let's do it this summer, and do it." And they said, "Okay." I immediately had a job in Idyllwild, because I had been teaching up there, so I was teaching for a few weeks of the summer. And then I came back, and they had already started working. And we started playing with projects. Fred gave an assignment to us all about creating a little phrase not more

than a minute long, and then we had to teach it to each other. And then we had to put all those phrases together, and we made a dance called "Phrasing," which was really quite delightful; it was a really lovely piece. Then there was another piece called "Trellis" that we all grouply choreographed together. We were working for about a month, and were just trying out ideas and just having fun. We had no idea of even ever going beyond that summer of playing. We all needed something, and we were all kind of in a middle ground at that point. And it was just a perfect way to get together with people that you admired--we all admired each other's work--and get to play together. We used the UCLA dance department, and we'd spend hours trying out things and learning from each other. Well, about a month into this there was a new program starting at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion called the Rug Concert series.

KAUFMAN:

The rug?

BATES:

The Rug Concerts. They started in '74, and they lasted until '79 or 80. And when some of the people who were starting these concerts-- What they did was, they put a big platform out on the mezzanine floor, I believe it was, at the Dorothy Chandler--you know, where the mirrored staircase is? They had this on the mezzanine. They put this big floor in, and we had Sunday afternoon dance concerts. Usually they invited two dance companies per afternoon, and they did a concert, and a month later or three weeks later or a couple of weeks later they'd have another one. They did this whole series, and it lasted five or six years, and it was really quite popular. It so happened that they heard about us and came right down and sight unseen but because of who we were said, "You're going to be on this program. We hear you're starting a company." And we said, "No, we're just working together. We're not starting a company. What do we name ourselves?" (laughs) Well, Fred had done a concert at (University of California) Riverside, the year before, that spring before, and he and Patrick had been working together up there. Patrick had been doing the sets and designs for his concerts there. And that particular year they had done this concert, and they called it Eyes Wide Open. So all the posters had Eyes Wide Open and all that kind of stuff. And it was just simply a statement. Because Fred was doing some interesting stuff and Patrick was doing some interesting stuff and the combination was just fresh. So we went through all kinds of names and thought about all kinds of ideas, about whether we even wanted to do this thing, and we sort of settled on "How about calling us Eyes Wide Open Dance Theater?" Because I loved the name. It was fresh. It seemed there, right there. So we did (take that name), and we did this concert. We were the opening act, and along with us that year was another new company, Johnny (John) Clifford's Los Angeles City Ballet. Now, we were the

opening act. And Johnny had just come from (George) Balanchine and was the new enfant terrible both there and here, and they had hired him to come and start a ballet company, which nobody else had been successful at here before, so-- And he was successful at it. (inaudible) So we decided to do something special. (laughs) Since it was the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion-- The Pavilion was right next to Skid Row. We had all these images of things, and we had individual solos that we had done, and then we did these group pieces. So we tied it all together. We made it one afternoon. We had one forty-five minute piece with a bunch of pieces inside of it. The first thing we did was come up and down the staircase, from upstairs and downstairs, to a ten-piano version of "Stars and Stripes (Forever)" in Flintstones costumes and yellow and black pom-poms, and we did a pom-pom routine, six of us doing pom-pom routines in little sylph wings and little Flintstones costumes. (laughs) Well, the audience just roared. And out of that we set up then these television sets with all the snow on them, and then we did a fashion show. And then there were two pieces that were about derelicts. Melanie had done this wonderful piece on (Samuel) Beckett's Waiting for Godot, and it was just this frenzied kind of rags and things. So in the middle of the fashion show they were doing we were doing down-and-out characters, and it just-- Everything moved one thing into another into another into another, and it didn't stop. So you just were mesmerized by these myriad images that just kept occurring and changing.

KAUFMAN:

And you worked together on this.

BATES:

Yes.

KAUFMAN:

You worked towards this show.

BATES:

Yeah, and we put it together that way purposely. It was seamless from beginning to end with these various images of downtown Los Angeles going on--you know, fashion, derelicts, bums, art--

KAUFMAN:

Who took charge of the group? Was it you and Fred?

BATES:

All of us.

KAUFMAN:

All of you did.

BATES:

At that point we became a collective. There were several other collectives going on at the same time, a couple in New York and one in San Francisco. We had another woman involved, the one who has the studio on Melrose (Avenue) and does the concerts.

KAUFMAN:

Oh, Karen Goodman.

BATES:

Karen. Karen had joined us at this point that summer and stayed with us for about eight or nine months and then left. So it was Karen Goodman, Kathe Howard, Melanie Snyder--who is now at Virginia Commonwealth (University) teaching--Fred Strickler, myself, and Patrick. Six of us, three women and three men. Patrick didn't do a lot of dancing, but he did do some things, and they were quite interesting. Johnny, of course, was mortified. Johnny Clifford was mortified. Here was this very strange group of people running around in tennis shoes and pom-poms and down-and-out things, and, you know, we're doing ugly movement. "What does this have to do--? After all, I'm doing art, and I'm ballet, and we have to go after that?" So it was really quite a thing. We got a front-page picture in the Calendar. It was very well received. The audience loved us, and we were set. At that point we began to have an audience following that never left. It kept growing through the next five years. Right immediately after that we were the only company-- There was a little theater called the Vanguard Theater on Melrose near Doheny (Drive). I mean, the stage wasn't bigger than this room (laughs), and because it wasn't bigger than this room-- And they'd invite-- They didn't invite, they opened it up to dance at that time. And it was really important, because there were very few venues for dance to emerge, and there were a bunch of companies emerging at the same time--Dance/LA, two or three others that were emerging that were showing promise. So we needed the venue. There were also a number of soloists going on at the time. So they opened up this venue for dance as well as theater and music, and in the mid- to late seventies it became quite a little avant-garde theater place for very special kinds of things. We were the only company ever to be invited to perform. Other people did audition, but because of that concert and because of the talk going on all over at that point we were invited to come and perform. So we did the concert at the Dorothy Chandler, I think it was in August, and in September or October--I think it was late September--we were invited to come to the Vanguard and do a concert. And that one we did absolutely, totally different. We did all solos. We did six solos, and they were very stark and very presentational and very dance orientated, except for Patrick's last piece, which was quite gorgeously rich. He had scrims that were with these flowers, and he stood there and barely moved, and music was happening, and it was just this visual-- It was this absolutely gorgeous visual. It looked like a (Michelangelo) Antonioni film, that's how beautiful it was. Very misunderstood, very unappreciated, and extraordinarily beautiful and interesting. We all got to do a piece. I did a piece called "Indio," which flew off the stage and came back on the stage and flew off the stage. It was about an automobile accident, a car crash, and it was about dying, death, and disintegration, and whatever. I had imagined the piece some years ago before that driving out to California from Florida to do seven days of rehearsals and driving back in two days, and at that time all these images came and this piece got choreographed in my head. It was about losing perspective, about getting smaller while you were behind the wheel and everything getting larger around you. Or about things not moving and then all of a sudden shifting and changing. Or the rhythmic constantness of telephone poles and those

little white lines. So the piece starts in this kind of very-- I'm going to demonstrate right now. (begins demonstrating the stooped-over pose of "Indio")

KAUFMAN:

Go for it! (laughs)

BATES:

(there is a period of silence on the tape as Bates dances while making wind effects--whistling, howling--and making sharp exhales) And it goes into things that were going on in the street, and eventually it becomes a piece of paper and a bunch of nothing things that are just flopping all-- You know how sometimes the wind blows and blows up the-- And this body was just flopping all over this floor. And then it reaches out and flies off the stage, disappears, and then flies back on the stage and flies back-- Well, it just kind of scared people.

KAUFMAN:

Do you have that on tape?

BATES:

Somebody does, because I've done it-- A couple of people did it after me. Three's Company did it. Patrick did it there. It's quite a fascinating-- I had platform heels on, a helmet-- (laughs) So again, you know, it was very strange. And people-- Well, Bella heard about it and laughed all the way to wherever they were traveling at the time, Texas or someplace. You know, "This weirdo." Bella and I didn't speak for about four or five years after I left the company, so any opportunity that there was within the company to laugh at "that weirdo," they got the chance to do that, and "Indio" was one of the great laughs of the time. (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

It seems like that was a very dynamic piece.

BATES:

Yeah, it was. And--this was done in '74--I think in some ways a little bit ahead of its time in what happens. You know, behind the times, ahead of the times, who knows? It was interesting. It was an interesting piece. I'm very grateful for that piece, because I think that piece and Vesalius both gave me the courage and the support-- And I got a lot of positive feedback from people in terms of being a choreographer. It set me on that motion to want to be more, want to have more control, want to get at my ideas in more interesting ways. This piece was about time, about disintegration of time, about time passing, about time being distorted. Because if you've ever been on long trips, you know how it's five after, it's ten after, it's fifteen after, it's now seven hours later, and they're both about the same. So I really tried to play with all of those images of time just shifting, just changing, and suddenly another image and another something, and all of a sudden you're in a different place. The piece had a kind of ABA form, starting, developing, destroying, and then coming back and beginning the whole beginning again.

KAUFMAN:

Interesting.

BATES:

The ongoingness of things.

KAUFMAN:

It would be great to get you on videotape doing parts of this.

BATES:

(laughs) Well, you know, I've been thinking lately about doing a retrospective, a twenty-five-year retrospective of my work, or twenty-year. And that would certainly be one of the pieces that I would want to see done again, because I've always liked it. Later Patrick did-- The first time we did it we did it in just regular cut-off pants and red platform shoes and a red helmet. And then the next time we did the piece, because it became part of our repertoire, I had a silk tricot headpiece with just silver lips and a silver helmet and silver-- He did tricot, he did these gloves, which is sort of like skin color, and a wonderful elastic material. He did stockings for me and gloves for me and this head thing, like somebody wearing nylons over their head--silver lips, silver veins, because he took the idea of my veins and did that, and then silver muscles on the legs with silver trunks and silver platforms that high (indicates about three inches). So the whole thing had a bizarre, otherworldly look the second time.

KAUFMAN:

Now that you describe the costume--

BATES:

The second time. The first time it wasn't like that. When we did the piece, I mean, it really did have a kind of menacing, threatening kind of quality. Melanie did her Godot piece, I believe, again. Fred did a piece called "L.A. Stories." Kathe did a beautiful kind of animal magnetic thing that shook-- (demonstrates) Kathe and I did the most-- Our works were the most dramatic most of the time. I mean, they were very abstract. It wasn't about somebody necessarily, but they were dramatic, they were tense, they really dealt with motion. Fred's work was always so beautifully constructed--and also abstract--and was very fascinated (with the surfaces of things). And we'd talk about this for hours. This is how we started sharing information. I'm going to divert a minute, because this was a typical example. We had to start learning to articulate with each other

what we were after, what was interesting to us, so we would talk about this sometimes for hours. We used to go to Langer's (Delicatessen) and have these business meetings and talk about what we were after, what we wanted, what we were looking at, what we were trying to build. Fred always talked about the surface of things. He was fascinated trying to capture that line. Therefore line was important and the surface of things, the floor, and the patterning of things, and how it just sort of evolved into something else. And it was really beautiful. And he had such a command of his vocabulary. He was a beautiful dancer. And the sense of him-- Wonderful line. You know, it just was there. And he could do almost anything, but it always had that kind of solid, easy, and never effortful, where my work and Kathe's work had all the tensions of effort. So we were really quite an interesting contrast. Melanie's work was also theatrical, but in again a much more surface sensibility. She did a piece called "Six Faces of Fools" a few years later, where we were all commedia dell'arte characters. Fabulous sense-- In fact, hold on, turn it off a minute. (goes to find a program with a photo of the characters in costume and is talking as he re-enters the room.) --painted on them, these wisps of people sort of flying onto them. And then in that he cut out the material in some places and put in other kinds of material so that they had-- It was really eerie and ethereal. Fred's costume, this was all ribbons. He had actually taken one-inch ribbons in pink, blue, green, and white, and had sewn them together to create his costume. In the Columbine and the Pierrette costumes--each character had a name and a very different costume-- And over there I'm sitting down. Those costumes-- Columbine and Pierrette had diamonds in them, a little less large than this (indicates a two- or three-inch length). He cut them out, dyed them, both ends different colors, and then re-sewed the entire thing together again so it had a quilted look that was absolutely incredibly beautiful. Hers was in pink and white, and hers was in red and pink. My costume was the most simple: big satin pants, this red T-shirt, this big belly. I constantly got into bellies; they always had me in a belly. (laughs) So this was Melanie's piece, and that was Melanie (pointing out her picture). Okay, we can go back to--

KAUFMAN:

So that was the "Six Faces of Fools" piece.

BATES:

Did we--?

KAUFMAN:

The tape is on.

BATES:

Oh, good. That was "Six Faces of Fools." Anyway, we did this very stark concert in September of '74, and we kept getting invitations to perform. We got another here and another one there, and we were part of three in Schoenberg (Hall) at UCLA, we were part of this and that and the other thing. It just kept happening. I mean, I was teaching and trying to finish my master's. Kathy was teaching, finishing her master's at UCLA. Fred was working at Riverside. By this time Melanie, I think, had gone to teach at UC (University of California) Santa Barbara. Patrick was the only one who was sort of like not doing anything that way. We lost Karen Goodman and then gained a couple of other new people who had been either working with Bella before or somebody that we knew from UCLA. So we started doing concerts. (laughs) You know, we never had to solicit a concert. I don't believe we ever had to solicit a concert at all. We kept getting gigs, and we kept having to do different things. In 1975 we got a gig at Golden West College. Nanette Pistoli Brodie, who had had a company too, was there and invited us to come and do a Valentine's (Day) concert. So we did a Valentine's concert. We did a very funny thing-- We did ten pieces, all of them brand-new. No, two of them were not brand- new. Eight of them were. Eight of them were absolutely totally new pieces in that concert, and we had two months to get it together. So we really did choreograph practically eight pieces in a few months. I was in seven of them, I think (laughs), six or seven of them. I was in about all of them, and I had choreographed one, and the piece I choreographed was this (shows Kaufman a picture from the duet), the "Don Q Pas de Deux." And the opening night-- That week was an incredibly difficult week. I had gone up to Mammoth (Lakes, California) for the first time in my life that Christmas with a friend of mine and got cut-- My leg got cut very badly. So I came back with these stitches and this whole leg thing, and Fred was just furious with me. "We had less than two months to get this concert together, and here you are all torn up. And if you ever go anyplace again I'll never speak to you--" Well, we had that kind of relationship. Anyway, I started working on this piece for the two of us. I wanted to do a piece about our relationship, and Patrick suggested "Why don't you do something based--?" Because all the Don Q(uixote)s are usually about Quiteria and Basil. It was always about the lesser characters, and I wanted to do something about Sancho (Panza) and Don Q. And all that year before, strangely enough, I had been working on this quasi-Spanish material. I would be doing all of this funny stuff, these big, long phrases--in classes, you know--all of them with a kind of Spanish influence or a Spanish theme or something about them that had something to do with that sensibility. And I choreographed this piece in six weeks. Fred hated it. The music was Steve Reich, and it just goes on and on and on and on, and it doesn't ever seem to change, and yet all of a sudden it has changed. And it goes in these sections of links of time of each development, and it's all absolutely rhythmic. It starts out with sixes--"one-two-three-four-five-six, two-two-three-four-five-six"-- Eventually it gives "two, one-two-three four-five-six seven-eight-nine-ten-eleven-twelve." (continues to count measures of increasing lengths)

So it just keeps getting longer, the pieces just keep getting longer, but they all sound the same. So I did this piece. Absolutely every single step was a beat.

KAUFMAN:

Wow. Oh, my God.

BATES:

So it was just this absolutely convoluted piece of choreography where oftentimes we're sort of like three counts different. The entire time we performed it--and it was performed a lot over the next three or four years--we had to count every single count. (begins counting out rhythms again) At that time I was starting to play with rhythms anyway. I loved it. I would do these two-hundred-count phrases in my classes. (laughs) Usually I didn't start out at two hundred counts. It would start out a simple thing, and I would keep adding, so by the end of about three weeks there would be this two-hundred-count phrase. And it would have different rhythms in it. It would start out-- (counts to demonstrate)

Tape Seven, Side Two (August 9, 1995)

BATES:

--to learn from Fred, because he was very good at things like that--not quite as harried and crazy and all over the place as my work. But I was learning to pick up some ideas and then transform them in my own way. This piece was very difficult for Fred. He hated it. He didn't think it was going to work. He hated working with me, because I was sort of both convoluted and never quite knew exactly what I wanted. "Well, lets try this." And he'd go "What is that? Show it to me again! Can you do it twice?" (laughs) "I want to see you do it again. If you can do it again, then I'll try it. What is that? That's not the way you did it the first time!" So we had those kinds of rehearsals. Well, that week at the concert we all got to the theater one afternoon and never left for an entire week. (laughs) It was the most disastrous moment in our history, February of 1976. This was a Valentine's concert, supposed to be love and kisses and sweetness. Eight new premiers. And the first night we get there we had to put the theater together. And then the lights didn't work. And then the floor was wrong. And by then nobody was speaking to anybody. For a

solid week we never got to rehearse, we never got to do the concert, we never got to take class. We were in absolute limbo while things got straightened out on the concert. I think we finally did something, but by that time, by mid-week, no one was speaking to anybody else. Not one of the company members was speaking to another one. (laughs) We hated each other. We knew this was going to be the end of this whole thing, and good riddance, because none of us wanted it anyway. We all had more important things to do than do this kind of crazy thing and to work with these crazy people. (laughs) I mean, it was hilarious. And we were trying to do our other jobs, and then we just finally gave up on that too, and we just stayed there. I mean, we sort of literally camped out in that place just trying to get the thing to go. I think finally, the last day, we got to have some kind of dress rehearsal. These were brand-new pieces; they hadn't even been done. And it was awful. Well, the theater was behind classrooms--or in front of classrooms, whichever. So we were in these classrooms doing our makeup and things. We had this big greenroom that we sort of like collected our-- We had lots of things. And Patrick had done another new piece, equally mesmerizing, hardly moved--I mean, they moved from here to here--which was also very present. You know, it was very kind of butoh without knowing about butoh and very visually beautiful. And it had this big crystal kind of fish bowl that got broken, so we had to run off and get another one. And this (other thing) wasn't working; we had run off and get another one of those, you know. So there were always these things going on. The concert stage was here (indicates). There was a back wall here, there was an entrance this way, and a darkroom, an office--probably the theater office, hallway-- Down here was where we were. "Don Q" was the second piece on the program. We had just done the first piece with the whole company. We ran out of there to change clothes, came back in, and as we were walking in from this door to this door to get on stage, somebody opened the door and hit me right in the head. I had blood running down. Fred gets on the stage, I turn him around, the hair puffs out--you know, because he had lots of powder in it, and it was perfect, because it became part of our signature in that piece-- As I turn him around he's sitting there like-- It's like two dolls, two kind of funny dolls. He's sitting here like this, and I'm sitting here like this (demonstrates positions). And at that point the music starts up, I turn him around, he goes (demonstrates), and all this hair, this dust flies-- Well, he does this and forgets the entire dance. (laughs) Mind you, he isn't speaking to me anyway. I'm bleeding, almost got knocked out-- He hates the dance, and then at this point he's hoping that the whole floor will just fall in and eat us up. And he forgets the-- (laughs) Heâ€™s never done that. I mean, he's not the kind of person who forgets anything. He forgot the entire dance. And luckily I could either nudge him along, because it was part of the character, or he would get convoluted, and I would just get convoluted too and push him on to someplace else. So it worked out. They absolutely adored it, which made him even madder. (laughs) They absolutely adored the piece. The audience just loved it. And it became a signature piece of Eyes Wide Open from then on. We were having the (Dance) Kaleidoscope concerts; Kaleidoscope asked us to do that piece. San Francisco was doing something similar to Kaleidoscope up in San Francisco, and the two cities had a thing of inviting at least one company from San Francisco or one company from L.A. to do their concert, and we were invited specifically to do "Don Q Pas de Deux" in 1979. So we got to do it at the really wonderful theater up there. As poorly as it went and as difficult as it was, we did manage to get through it and got through the entire concert. People absolutely adored it. Full house twice, you know, two nights. Again, one more time we had secured our place. People got to a place where they knew that if we were going to do something it was probably worth seeing and they probably hadn't seen it before. So we had become really a signature company, innovative company, young company. The students were

following us, friends were following us, peers were following us and anxious and eager to see what we were going to do next. You know, there are still people twenty years later who talk about Eyes Wide Open with a great deal of fondness and endearingness. This piece that Kathe did was extraordinary. This was "Mysterium," the piece you saw that Mary Ann and Scott did, that she had done on Kathe and me at the same time, '76 to '77. So it became a part of Eyes Wide Open also. This was a very beautiful piece-- This is Mary Ann Kellogg, who after we dismantled in '79 joined Twyla Tharp's company (Twyla Tharp Dance Foundation) for the next ten years.

KAUFMAN:

That sounds so familiar, that name. Was she at UCLA last year?

BATES:

She might have been.

KAUFMAN:

I think she was. She was there a couple of weeks.

BATES:

She might have been to do a guest--

KAUFMAN:

Yeah, I remember her.

BATES:

Gorgeous feet. Beautiful lady. Aries, also. (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

(looking at program) So that was "Flying Dream"--

BATES:

No, this was-- Well, Mary Ann was dancing in that, but that's Mary Ann there.

KAUFMAN:

"Near Dusk."

BATES:

In "Near Dusk." This was a piece of-- Let me talk a little bit about-- We got a studio at that point called Pacific Motion, Pacific Motion Dance Studios, with Eyes Wide Open Dance Theater and Lynn Daly and Dancers and Medha Yodh, and a number of other people were a part of it. It was down on West Washington (Boulevard) right near Venice (Boulevard) in a two-story brick place, and we had the whole top floor. We had two studios, and we had a theater there so we could do

concerts and other people could do concerts. And it was really quite exciting. Jeff Slayton came and taught classes. Lynn and Fred were the codirectors of it. Out of that came Lynn Daly and Dancers, Eyes Wide Open, and then eventually Jazz Tap Ensemble. That's where they did their first concert, so that when those companies dissolved those people went right into Jazz Tap Ensemble and created an astounding company. We all worked together. We all struggled and fought and dealt and scrimmaged and jockeyed to teach each other. Each summer we would get together, and that would be our time to work together. The rest of the time was, you know, trying to keep everything together. And then we did concerts. In '77 we did a piece called Proximity. It was a ten-act dance drama. It was based on a bunch of writings that Patrick had written about a friend of his that he was in love with and who had died in a car accident. It was very, very strange. And this piece was so ethereal and so dramatic and so gorgeous that (Lewis) Segal said something about "flirting with genius," you know. But we never got it finished, and we never did it again. I mean, it was one of those pieces that we could have taken on the road, and it could have been a signature piece, because it had all the elements, again, but in a totally different sensibility than the Cinderella and the Vesalius and the opening concert had had. Ten acts, each very special in themselves. Two speakers reading the stories and sitting on like high church boxes, and then this thing going on, and in each section of it it had a peculiarity. I had come out of a concert at UCLA one time, and it was not a very pleasant concert, and I had one of those Gary Bates reactions. I was walking down the hall on the second floor of UCLA, having just gone to the bathroom after trying to get rid of this concert that I was watching, (mimes running) and I ran down the hall. (laughs) Well, that became one of the dances in this piece. (mutual laughter) You know, going on back to working, (during) the summers we worked, we played, we sometimes started new pieces if somebody wanted to do a piece. That's how "Flying Dream" got started, that's how "Six Faces of Fools" got started. Fred did a piece based on his interest in rhythms and jazz and tap dancing, "While Waiting for the Muse" it was called. And it was long, full of little bits and pieces of images and actions and kinds of music and problems. It was really quite wonderful. So every summer we got to play. I might teach the class, Fred might do an improv(isation) and things, and we would try things, you know. And over the five years it seemed we all kind of-- Not merged, because we never became one of the other persons. But we began to shift into our consciousness and share and merge with new things. Fred's work after 1979-- He always was like Fred Astaire--easy, very--

KAUFMAN:

Vertical?

BATES:

Vertical. Even if it wasn't vertical it still had all of that shaping, and it never was out of control. He went from that kind of stuff to being able to start to toss himself and throw himself. And his work started reflecting that kind of dynamic, of getting off balance. In fact, "Waiting for the Muse," one of the last pieces that we did, had a lot of off-balance, tossing, reaching, grabbing for space beyond where it was comfortable. So there was that change. My work got smoothed out a little bit. It got more abstract and more dramatic from the experience with Melanie. It got more rhythmic and more clear as a result of working with Fred. It got more abstract and--I don't know the word--eccentric in a way because of my work with Kathe. Kathe was one of the few choreographers that I've ever worked with--and I've worked with over fifty choreographers in my career, good, bad, and indifferent, amateur to professional--that it was very difficult to know what she was after. She used to drive me crazy, because she would say, "Okay, I want you to try this phrase. All right, letâ€™s do it again. Now turn around. Now stand upside down." (laughs) And she would try every possible relationship with it. "Now do it in front of each other. Now do it side by side. Now do it one at a time." And it was like, "Come on! We already know what the right idea is." So I was constantly being challenged with my, quote, "right ideas." She was always looking for something else. She's always looking for something, and it always seemed so obvious to me what she was looking for, and it almost never turned out to be what I thought it was going to be. And her pieces had such magic, such mystery, such beauty, that you-- I mean, there were times when you just-- You wanted to cry, and you weren't even sure why you wanted to cry. They were that mysterious and beautiful and interesting and intriguing. And when they finally would come out they weren't at all this obvious something. She always started with the most obvious something, and it always then just got honed and refined and shifted until it was unrecognizable. And I learned a lot about trusting, going beyond what I thought was the right answer, with her. There were incredible sessions. Because we were all overworked and overyanked and trying to do too many things at the same time, it got to be very difficult. We became the leading company for Idyllwild. So in 1960 I went up there as a student, where I met Bella Lewitzky and Eugene Loring for the first time. The following year I became a Dance Player with Eugene Loring. A few years later I became a dancer with Bella. So I got to go there as a student, then I got to go there as a company member, then I got to go there as a teacher on my own terms, and finally with a company, with my company--or with our company. So it was really a very special relationship. From 1960 to 1979 I had this relationship with Idyllwild that was very special to me. Our company would go up there for two or three weeks at a time and do a concert and teach all day and rehearse, and it was a really wonderful, special time. Bella's company also did the same thing. We had done that starting in the late sixties, and she continued that all the way up until not too long ago.

KAUFMAN:

So your company basically mixed mediums, like text with visual-- It sounds like you did that.

BATES:

Back in 1976 again! (laughs) Again, another one of those elements that is very prevalent today.

KAUFMAN:

Yes, in Joe Goode's work--

BATES:

Yeah, and other people's. We did things like that. I think without meaning to be and without knowing it we sort of were the West Coast innovators of ideas that were probably also happening on the East Coast but not because we were involved with that. And we were doing it in a very different way, very different ways. The element of time that we played with I think is very current. The element of both beautiful line and thrown away, ugly--what might be considered ugly--movement was very much not a part of the times. We were so out of sync with New York at the time, too, in that our works were not measured, abstract, endless piecesof movement vocabulary. (laughs) It was not the kind of (Alwin) Nikolais stuff or the (Merce) Cunningham stuff or the Judson (Dance Theater) school stuff. We were just standing around nude, picking our noses, and, I mean, a lot of those kinds of things. So our work was out of place. A lot of times because it was in Los Angeles we got reviewed as being Hollywood, theatrical, and movie-like, television-like dancing. And it really wasn't that. This was really first-rate, serious, questing for ideas into movement, movement into ideas, the whole thing into some kind of statement.

KAUFMAN:

Although very much, I would say, influenced by the location.

BATES:

Probably. Oh, yeah.

KAUFMAN:

I would think so. And that's not a bad thing.

BATES:

No, no. I mean, this-- And the costumes themselves, I mean Patrick's work, nobody was doing work like this, nobody's done work like it since. Patrick's costumes stand uniquely on their own. That press, that push that he gave us, also influenced us deeply. Musically he had an enormous collection of modern music, twentieth-century music. He didn't like anything else. Except occasionally-- We would do other things, you know, but basically he was a modern music person. So he influenced and broadened our scope about music. And we were doing things with Ives and Reich that other people just weren't doing at the time. So to go to our concerts, there was a musical feast, something that people didn't hear. We weren't doing Pachelbel, we were doing wonderful fourteenth-century (inaudible) songs. He was an (Olivier) Messiaen freak; he loved Messiaen. We did some things with Messiaen. Now Messiaen is coming into his own again, but at that time he was a cult figure. Steve Reich. You know, in 1975 we were doing Steve Reich, and not too many people were doing that.

KAUFMAN:

Really? Not even back in New York they weren't doing--?

BATES:

Hmm. Yes, some. But not much, and not the way we were doing it. Steve Reich was-- That was

still part of maybe the Judson school, where they were just-- It was too rhythmic. See, most of the kind of music that the Cunningham people were doing, the Judson players, and all that-- (gets up and demonstrates some sharp gestures)

KAUFMAN:

Yeah, it's a lot about shape and body.

BATES:

Yeah, so to do Steve Reich-- I mean, that had nothing to do with Steve. There was just no relationship. Later that started happening, and then it was influenced by the kind of music that Steve Reich and John Adams and some of the others started doing, which was called--

KAUFMAN:

John Cage.

BATES:

Not John Cage.

KAUFMAN:

Not yet?

BATES:

No, John was already in another whole ballpark. What was that music called?

KAUFMAN:

Minimalist.

BATES:

Minimalist. Then the movement started becoming minimalism, too. You get the work of some of the other people in New York. So our treatment of this stuff, our work with it, was very different from anybody's. It was theatrical. I mean, this ("Six Faces of Fools") was an absolutely adorable piece.

KAUFMAN:

Yes, commedia dell'arte. From that range--

BATES:

Very abstract. It was like a moment in our history, and we were these characters who were trying to put a show together. So we'd pull things out of the trunk and do things, and it worked. This was one moment, and this was a second moment. (shows two very different performance photos) It was that broad and that silly, but it was effective. We did that to-- And with the "Don Q Pas de Deux" to "Flying Dream," which had a very, very abstracted quality, to this, which was just very

beautiful. (Fred Strickler) did this duet, "Near Dusk," on himself and another dancer, who later went on to become one of the members of Iso-- What was the company before Iso?

KAUFMAN:

Pilobolus?

BATES:

Pilobolus, and then into the next company. There was a company between Pilobolus and Iso. So his partner who was a student of his at Riverside. Fred choreographed "Near Dusk" on her. And then the following time we did the concert he did it as a quartet for Melanie and me and him and Mary Ann. Again, it had taken on another whole dimension. Here it was a duet, and now suddenly it was a quartet. So Fred was doing wonderful things like that. He would choreograph a piece overnight and do it. He taught me a lot about working more quickly, getting at your ideas. Melanie taught me a lot about taking ordinary movement and blowing it up. One of the famous pieces that she did for Eyes Wide Open was a-- She became Betty Boop. Patrick did a costume for her. She did the Betty Boop thing, and it was extraordinary. She absolutely looked like Betty Boop (in) this costume, which was so adorable. We did two or three versions with her as Betty Boop, and Karen Goodman and she went on to Vegas at one point, where Karen did Olive Oyl and was absolutely perfect as Olive Oyl. Patrick again did the costumes, and they were sensational. So, yes, Hollywood, the motion pictures, the cartoons, all were a part of something that we did draw from but we were not tied down to in any way. The real search was to try to get at choreographic ideas. In 1977 we did Proximity, and I was the artistic director of that piece. I helped put it together, although a lot of the movement stuff and a lot of the piecesâ€™ ensemble stuff was done as group choreography. I fashioned it, sometimes I honed it, (sometimes) I would step out of it because I wasn't a part of that thing and I couldn't help shape it. But basically they discovered the movement, or we got ideas and then we would try, literally, those ideas, and then they became-- Some beautiful stuff came out of that. In '78 I did a piece called "Chronicles" for three women. There was a composer at UCLA who had done this work that I just absolutely adored, and I got to make a piece of choreography out of it for three women. We did the piece live with his musicians from UCLA, and it was really quite exciting. That got to be played both at UCLA and at Loyola (Marymount University). I think it was one of the last things-- Loyola was one of the last places that we performed in '79 before we closed doors. So that was Eyes Wide Open. Eyes Wide Open was an extraordinary group of people. Out of that-- Mary Ann Kellogg and Mary Duval and (Martha) "Cookie" Morrison, Richard Korngood, were people who passed through there or were part of us for a while--Karen Goodman, Theresa Anderson, some really exciting people. Some of them went on to do other things, like Mary Ann went on to do

Twyla Tharp, the other one went on to do Pilobolus, and Fred and Lynn went on to do Jazz Tap Ensemble and lots of exciting stuff that came out of that. It lasted five years. And it was over.

KAUFMAN:

How did it end?

BATES:

A couple of things happened. One is that we got involved with this-- I think Fred and Lynn got burnt out with their own companies and with all the other stuff that they were doing. By this time I was teaching out at (Scripps College in) Claremont and chairing a department. Fred was chairing the department at Riverside. Kathe was teaching here (at UCLA). Melanie was at Santa Barbara. So we were scattered. We had been doing this for five years. We didn't always agree with each other. We were to the hilt, you know, stuffed. And then we had this studio that started (inaudible) on us. We had gotten money for it. Lynn and I went out and actually solicited money and got some money, and then we got some grants and things. But it became a real burden. And then there were also artistic changes and differences. Patrick wanted to absolutely control the people who (performed) in our concert hall. Others of us wanted it to be more open. It didn't matter who performed there if it kept getting that money in. I think Fred got tired and felt overly responsible. They did not want anybody else to run it. And rather than anybody else run it, we closed the doors and dismantled Eyes Wide Open.

Tape Eight, Side One (August 23, 1995)

KAUFMAN:

Eyes Wide Open Dance Theater-- Towards the end of that and moving into the solo career that you--

BATES:

Okay. Eyes Wide Open existed from 1974 until 1979. It came out of the experience of doing the Vesalii icones, the forty-five-minute solo that sort of established me as a choreographer and a dancer in this city (Los Angeles).

KAUFMAN:

That was at the (Leo S.) Bing Theater (at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art)?

BATES:

At the Bing Theater, Monday Evening Concerts series. It was the last one of that season. The reason I bring that up again is because it really was a moment when all of us wanted to work together. We weren't particularly interested in forming a company. What happened after that is that we got a lot of gigs. We kept getting things, and we had to call ourselves a company. We became incorporated. We eventually--I think in '77 or '78, I can't remember which--started a school in Venice called Pacific Motion (Dance Studios). As a result of that we sort of became solidified. We joined forces with Lynn Daly and Dancers. So Eyes Wide Open and Lynn Daly and Dancers formed this place where we could perform and we could teach. However, we were all still teaching other places. (University of California) Riverside, (Scripps College in) Claremont, UCLA, and then other places around town. I'm not sure whether Melanie (Snyder) was already gone from (University of California) Santa Barbara or whether she started at Santa Barbara somewhere around there. We were all over the place. This added another burden to the already overly burdened emotional and mental aspect of Eyes Wide Open. I don't think it really burdened us in other ways, because we were still very productive at the time. We had been doing interesting work. We were noted-- You know, people came to our concerts because they knew it was not going to be the same as the last concert. And we had followings. Each of us had followings in our own right, and collectively we had a following. That shows up later down the road when in '86 we did the Lewitzky Legacy concert, which was a twentieth anniversary concert for Bella (Lewitzky) and the (Lewitzky Dance) Company, and it sold out two nights in a row. And it was just an enormous-- Everybody was there, it was thrilling to be in the audience, and lots and lots of people showed up, partly because of Fred (Strickler), partly because of me, partly because of any number of the other people--Rebecca Bobele. Because it was Bella. We'd all become choreographers and dancers in our own right, and interestingly enough people wanted to see-- They had looked at it in terms of Lewitzky, so they wanted to see what this legacy was. They also were curious, in seeing in our work, if there was anything that either tied it together or reflected Bella. You look at a lot of the people who come out of (Martha) Graham or (Merce)

Cunningham or whatever, they often reflect very clearly those roots. And in some ways we did too, but in other ways we were very much our own people, and I think that's a mark of Bella's success. But getting back to Eyes Wide Open, by 1979 we were becoming split. Generally in any company, the first five years have the growth pains and the excitement of growing and everything else, and then at about five years oftentimes things either fall apart or they go on and become more defined. And in this sense we either had to become more defined or we had to quit. It sort of exploded. And part of the reason that it exploded is that we had a balloon payment come due at Pacific Motion, in the place that we were operating from, and we weren't making the kind of money that we needed to make in order to keep it going. Fred and Lynn were codirectors of the school. It was okay for Lynn, it was opportune for Lynn, but it wasn't for Fred, because Fred was teaching way out in Riverside, so it became a burden for him, and I think he wanted to let go of it. When he saw that we had this balloon payment, or the rent was going up because we had a five-year lease, that seemed to be a perfect opportunity to quit, to let go of it all. And Patrick (Scott, also known as Patrick Marca Registrada) wasn't happy. Probably none of us were happy at the time that this was going on. I think we all kind of wanted to get away from each other. (laughs) It was just-- It was one of those times. We were still operating as a collective. We had added three more people who were full-time regulars with us. Martha "Cookie" Morrison, Mary Duval and Richard Korngood were also now full members of the company, making decisions with us, and had signed on with us. We started looking in '77 for a place to work. We had been working in various places, in the summers often at UCLA. One year we had St. Paul's Cathedral downtown. We were given that free to do something, and in exchange we did some liturgical masses and things. I did movement and things like that for them. And then we'd find other places. At different times we had different places to work. UCLA was very generous to us, partly because both Kathe (Howard Copperman) and I had been there. Kathe I think was still there. Lynn had been there, and Melanie had graduated from there. Mary Duval, Martha Morrison, and Richard Korngood had all graduated from there, so they were sensing that we were part of them, and that was one of the ways that they could support what was going on. With that we had started looking for our own space. Our company, Eyes Wide Open, was mixed about getting a space. One, because they saw it as deciding something for us; two, they were afraid of the expense, they were afraid of the possibility of being able to match or meet it, whatever. They were very mixed. We weren't sure-- We didn't want to-- We were postponing it; we weren't looking. During the summers we had been going to Idyllwild (School of Music and the Arts, now Idyllwild Arts), and we had been meeting people who were interested in our work both as teachers and as performers or choreographers, and some of those people were very, very supportive and were willing to help us. So Lynn and I started pursuing some of those people. We started asking, could you do this or could you do that. And the daughter of Wyler drinks, the lemonade and all those kinds of things, was one of those people who was very generous. The daughter loved our work. She was a follower of ours. She took classes with us. She was at Idyllwild, where she met us. She introduced us to her father, her father gave us money, a considerable chunk of money, to help get our studio together. And several other people did. So Lynn and I went out and solicited the funds. At that point we had a manager (Daniel) who didn't like Lynn for some reason.

KAUFMAN:

Really?

BATES:

Well, she's very assertive, she's very clear about what she does and doesn't want. And after we had gotten this money and we had found a space-- We had found several. We had gone and looked in Culver City, we had gone to Santa Monica, we had gone to Venice, we had gone all over the place. There was this place near where I lived above a barbeque. It had a large space, a large enough space where we could have a dance theater, and we had a small studio that we could also teach in. Medha Yodh and a lot of different ethnic groups would come in and teach classes in the smaller studio. And we had Jeff Slayton, we had any number of other people coming in. Just a whole lot of people came in and started teaching for us at different times. We had summer workshops, we had Christmas workshops, and things like that. But at the beginning of this, Eyes Wide Open was not sure they wanted to continue with pursuing an idea of a studio, and Daniel, who had been our manager, decided that if we did do this we shouldn't do it with Lynn. And I was furious (laughs), because we had really taken the effort. You know, I was still considered the flake of the company, but we had taken this effort, and we had gone after these things, and we had done this stuff. And then they wanted to push Lynn out and take it over themselves. And I was furious. What happened in that is that I refused to sign the contract. Two years later, when we broke up, there were a number of people left holding the bag, and I refused to help them pay for it. I helped them by being there. I helped them by trying to make the thing work. One of the difficulties that happened is that Patrick only wanted certain people to perform there. There were a lot of people, different people, who wanted to perform there, but he was trying to keep up an image for the studio instead of just letting people in and doing concerts so that we kept it going. The more that people knew about Pacific Motion the better it was going to be no matter what. And a performance there did not necessarily have to reflect our aesthetic or our belief system or anything else; it was simply a performance. But that's not how Patrick felt. Patrick saw all of this as being in control of it. Fred also wouldn't let anybody else-- He never thought anybody else could run the business of it. When he got tired of doing it, we were not supposed to do it anymore. And that was a real sad point, too, because at that point I had not been working regularly, and I had a chance to either become the chair of Scripps College in '78 or take over as the director of Pacific Motion. And Patrick and Fred voted me down. They didn't want it, but they didn't want me to have it. And it was the beginning of the demise of Pacific Motion and Eyes Wide Open.

KAUFMAN:

Was Lynn Daly pushed out?

BATES:

Lynn got in.

KAUFMAN:

So you didn't sign the contract.

BATES:

I still didn't sign the contract, and I never took responsibility.

KAUFMAN:

But she still managed to get in.

BATES:

Yes. I really fought for her. I never realized that I had more power and clout than I thought I did. And this was one of the few times that I really took a stand of leaving or not, and it worked. We did get Lynn in. Daniel quit, which was fine, because I think he was being more of a nuisance to the company than not. And that doesn't mean that he isn't a nice person. He's a very talented

person. He did a lot of shows. He was a theater person. He didn't understand either the workings of Eye Wide Open-- He was trying to put some definition on how we worked and who we worked with, and I feel it turned out not to be the right moves. I kind of forced the hand at that time. We finally got somebody else in who was much better, because it was a dance person. And we weren't trying. None of us-- Well, I'm not sure about that. I think the majority of us wanted to continue as a collective. It was difficult, but I think we could have done it at some point. Fred was never very sure of the whole thing. Melanie was not very sure a lot of the times. And Patrick had very clear ideas about what he wanted. I suppose I-- I guess I did act at times like a flake, because I sort of tried to-- With so many powerful people in there, I tried to be, you know, "Let's see if we can do all of this or clarify all of this." You know, I have to tell you--because I'm smarting over this still, after years, and I've lost the friendships of Patrick and Fred and Charlotte (Adair) as a result of some of this--that I was considered a flake. I was never considered responsible, and yet I was probably one of the few people in the entire group who continued all the way through, who didn't miss rehearsals and meetings and doing all those kinds of things and was there consistently and doing a lot of the grunt work. Yet I was still considered the flake, because (adopts a mock serious voice) I didn't take it seriously. You know, I didn't go around worrying and screaming and hollering at everybody if they weren't doing it my way, which is what some of the others did.

KAUFMAN:

That's too bad. So to this day you and Fred don't--

BATES:

Fred and I don't communicate anymore for some reason. I don't know what it is. And it's been only in the last few years. Possibly it was my alcoholism, my return to alcohol probably, possibly. You know, I don't know. We've never talked really about the fact that I have AIDS since I have been diagnosed with AIDS. Not just with HIV. He's one of the few people who's always known (I was HIV positive). Since I've been diagnosed (with AIDS) I have not heard from him. Except recently--not recently, almost a year ago now--when a couple of friends let him know that I was not happy that he was not returning phone calls or anything else. You know, when I look back I realize I did a lot of stupid things. But I was not a flake. And I guess this is my moment of saying that. Because I put out a lot of energy, I did a lot of stuff even when I was drinking and using. Because I didn't holler and scream and try to force and all this kind of stuff, I suppose that my reputation became that of a flake. But I'm really looking at that today and realizing that that is not necessarily the truth. I took my dancing, my choreography, and my teaching seriously. One of the things that happened over the years, as-- And I was never a daily

drinker or daily user, but I was a drug addict and alcoholic and a periodic binger. One of the things that I've learned in doing the work that I've been doing recently to stay sober is to see where my part in all of this is and to see what some of the truth is as clearly as I can make it out. What I have come to realize is that my life was consumed by my dancing and my teaching, that I had no private life. And that's true of a number of the others, you know, as we got involved with different things. Fred certainly had little or no private life. He was running back and forth between Riverside and here and chairing that department and doing this and doing the other things. You know, we didn't have relationships except interpersonal relationships within the company. Those were our relationships. There was no free time just to piddle. There was no time to develop the kinds of relationships that normal people have. It was true of me, because I was constantly working--and, you know, a flake does not constantly work (laughs)--and it was true of Fred. I never saw Fred and myself as competitive. And I don't think we ever were except maybe in how Eyes Wide Open should exist. I don't think Fred was ever very clear that he wanted it. You know, he did it concert by concert, but never really saw it or took it seriously. Now, he screamed a lot, and he was very serious about his ideas about it. (laughs) But I don't think he ever held it as something--I want to say as something-- worthwhile, as something that he wanted to do for an extended period of time. He has some fond memories, as all of us do, and some probably very painful memories, as all of us do. To this day some of us aren't really-- We still are not communicating very easily. It was rough. It was rough in terms of trying to coexist and codirect and coproduce. It was difficult because we were all very, very strong-minded people, and sometimes the person who could holler the loudest was the one who got what he wanted or she wanted, but generally it was he. These are my opinions. I'm talking about what was inside of Eyes Wide Open that eventually destroyed it. There was not a belief in each other in the way that I think-- We didn't have the same belief in each other. Some of us did, some of us didn't. We had very strong opinions where none of us liked necessarily to be under the rule of anybody else. Most of us left situations that were single-minded and single-purposed. For instance, three of us left-- Well, at different times there were other members who had been a part of Bella's company who would go into Eyes Wide Open. So there were a number of us who left that situation because there wasn't a lot of room to make the kind of growth or do the kind of thing that we wanted to do. So we were people who were strong-minded, strong-willed, who had ideas about what dancing is, was, could be, whatever. We weren't all at the same time--or necessarily ever--always sure that this was what we wanted. That was true of all of us down the road, sometimes more than others, some of us longer than others, whatever. The other side of it too was, with all of this, with all of the determinedness that we exhibited in putting together Eyes Wide Open, with all the cock-sureness that we displayed about being who we were and being Eyes Wide Open, we were not real secure egos. I think that had we been more secure, more defined, we probably would have started our own companies. And too bad that we weren't able to keep Pacific Motion, because that could have happened. Out of Pacific Motion came Jazz Tap Ensemble, which was Fred and Lynn and a friend of Lynn's from San Francisco (Linda Sohl-Donnell). And the San Francisco group of musicians-- Among them was Keith Terry, who is very, very well known today. He was one of the three musicians. I mean, it was an extraordinary group that made its debut, again, as a lark. They just did a concert. They decided to do a concert together. They got these three musicians and these three dancers together, and they did this fabulous concert at Pacific Motion. And then both companies sort of dissolved at the same time for different reasons, and Lynn and Fred were able to step out and create Jazz Tap Ensemble as a real thing. It took off like wildfire. But even with that, had we been a little bit more secure, had

we not probably been so wounded, Jazz Tap Ensemble could have coexisted in that space, and Eyes Wide Open could have continued with or without Fred. Linda Sohl-Donnell could have started whatever she wanted. There were a number of roots, and there were a number of people generating out of that time. I think the one regret I have out of all of that is that I didn't one more time push to become either codirector with Lynn or the director of Pacific Motion and try to keep it floating. We did not seek out the help of other people to maybe help us do this again. There were other people who probably would have helped us if we'd looked like we were going to continue to stay solvent. Mary Ann Kellogg was very involved with a young man. They eventually married, and they went to New York, and she danced in Twyla Tharp's company (Twyla Tharp Dance Foundation). But her father-in-law was a very well-known actor and was interested in us, came to our concerts and things. There were a number of other people I think who could have helped us-- Barbara Bain and others--who were a part of the people who liked what we did and who saw what we did, and if we had asked for their help-- Now, they may not have been able to give us money personally, but they might have been able to do things for us that would have helped us stay afloat. And we were either too proud or too ignorant or too shut-down from the internal striving, and we didn't look at that. My one regret is that I didn't push and try to take over and keep it going. There's probably some anger at me for not helping pay for it, although there were several other people who didn't pay for it either and who were more a problem in that situation then than I was. (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

So basically a few people got stuck with the bill.

BATES:

A few people got stuck with a large sense of the bill, because the people who owned it decided to push it. And Fred was one of those people, and he paid it. You know, it's very strange, but I've never had one iota or moment of guilt about that. I can't tell you why. There are other things for fifteen cents that I feel guilty about (laughs), and there are other larger situations that happened because of my alcoholism and my drug addiction that probably I feel guilty about. But that is not one for some strange reason. I can't tell you why. I think it's because I feel like I tried to keep my side of the street clean on that issue. And I was very clear. I didn't sign the papers, and they knew I wasn't going to sign the papers. It was very clear. And I'm not usually that confident. (laughs) I'm never very confident. There are two things that I feel very clear about, that I did the right thing: when I left Bella and wrote the letter to the company and I walked out. I've never had remorse or regret either on how I did it or what I did. Strangely enough, when I did that it was probably one of the first times that I stood up for myself, whether it was negative or positive on

somebody else's account, that I was clear about what I was doing and I took a stand. And it changed the course of my life and the way I looked at my life, at least during that period of time, and I've never regretted it. I have regretted or felt remorse that Bella and I were not able to communicate about it or talk or that she has never in a sense probably forgiven me for that, that she'd ever try to understand what my feelings were. After years we're friendly. And I did try to continue to pursue that. For years it was to no avail. Then things softened, and by '86 I was able to be the director of this Lewitzsky Legacy, one, as a thank-you, and as a-- One of the areas in this city that I've often felt is a difficult situation is that we don't have any kind of historical thread. We never feel the history of where we're coming from and where we're going. And one of the reasons I wanted to do this concert was so that we could begin to see that there are threads, that somebody's coming out of somebody's coming out of somebody. Bella came out of Lester Horton. Out of Lester Horton came some fine people like Alvin Ailey, like Carmen De Lavallade, like Bella Lewitzky, like-- Several people. One was the director for years of the Atlanta modern dance (company, Carl Radcliff Dance Theatre), Carl Radcliff. So there were a number of people who came out of that tradition, who continued working. When I became a scholarship at the American School of Dance, Yvonne De Lavallade, Carmen's sister, started teaching again after having gotten married and having had five or six children, and Carl Radcliff was teaching at the American School of Dance at the same time. So that other than the year or two that I studied at Arizona State (University)-- That was basically kind of summer workshop (JosÃ©) LimÃ³n and summer workshop Graham, where-- You know, that's how dance got into the academic levels at all, at the university levels, is that they would go and take the workshops at the summer at-- Well, it eventually went down to Connecticut (College) summer school. But before that it was up in Vermont or Maine or whatever the name of that private school--

KAUFMAN:

Bennington (College).

BATES:

Bennington. People would come for that six weeks, study as hard as they could, write down notes all the way, and take it back and teach it all year. And then the following year they'd go back and get different stuff or refine the old stuff, and they would come back with a mesh of the old stuff and the new stuff and teach that for the entire year. And basically most of the schools that had any dance at all, that's how they did it.

Tape Eight, Side Two (August 23, 1995)

BATES:

For ten or fifteen years in New York (the modern dance people) did their seasons of concerts but they couldn't get out of it. They couldn't go anyplace, they couldn't do anything. Sol Hurok would keep bringing in people from Europe, and the modern dancers in New York were just sort of struggling constantly. I mean, they struggled for years before they got the kind of recognition that would move them forward. There would not have been a Martha Graham as we know Martha Graham, somebody who ran a company for sixty years. You know, that's unheard of that an arts institution has been run by the same person for that long. That's incredible. Just that is enough to make her a historical monument, let alone the fact that she created a whole new form of dance, that she created a vocabulary, she created a technique, and she did some of the most outstanding pieces in the twentieth century. You know, any one of those things would make her a historical monument. All of it made her something very special. But it was only after ten to fifteen years of struggling that, because of those summer workshops, they had created a network of people throughout the country who were able then to call them in and say "Come and do a performance here. I think we have enough interest." And that's how it started. By the time I got here the whole network of concerts across the country was basically built on the universities--and the universities abroad--with concerts eventually then happening in the big auditoriums. But that was in conjunction with-- It was the universities, and then it was occasionally an outside enterprise, and then eventually it was a melding of the two. Then on top of that the NEA (National Endowment for the Arts) became a part of that support, and the various arts councils in each state were able to supplement that or augment it. That's what we inherited in the sixties and the seventies. And at that time dance was the biggest thing going. It was the biggest thing going, and there were lots of touring companies and lots of various people doing things. But in Los Angeles there was less known about it--less, even though there were lots of companies. In '74 there were twenty-some companies started. We were only one of them. And it was very exciting. However, it didn't feel like anything at the time. It felt exciting for us in the middle of it. But out there in the great unwashed, just in Los Angeles generally, they were still looking toward New York for the answers, for the real dance. There was a wonderful group (the Grand Union in New York), another collective. Five or six choreographers coming out of various situations started a company, and it was really quite exciting--Douglas Dunn, Trisha Brown, David Gordon I think was a part of it, and there was another woman (Yvonne Rainer). They were wonderful. They lasted about five years, and then they all sort of broke up and became their own companies. It was not unlike Eyes Wide Open. What was unlike was that we were very different, what the end result was. What we were choreographing was very different from what that group was. That didn't mean that we couldn't exist. But we didn't have the kind of criticism or the writing about us or the-- Maybe because-- And also because we weren't sure of ourselves. No matter how popular Eyes Wide Open got-- And it was popular. The critics liked us; the audiences liked us. We had a very big audience reach that crossed not just university people and our students, it went into the regular public. And we had a number of people who were willing to write about us and did write articles about us. But there was never the feel that there was anything really happening or that this was really a part of a historical growth pattern that was going on in Los Angeles. That

was true earlier along with Lester Horton and Carmelita Maracci and some of those people, and it remained true with Bella, and it remained true with the smaller companies that started after that. One of the reasons that I wanted to do the Lewitzky Legacy-- One is that it was my way of thanking Bella. Two, it was a way of linking these individuals who were now on their own in different ways to a heritage, to a historical connection, which was Bella Lewitzky. It was also the twentieth anniversary of her company as we knew it then. Next year will be the thirtieth anniversary and the end of Bella Lewitzky as we have known her. So it was a way of marking that. It was a way of giving the public and critics a chance to look at "But what is this?" and not just to review us as dancers or choreographers. Are we good or are we better than, you know, not as good as? "We didn't like this piece; we did like that piece." But to be able to be more reflective than that, because in New York and other places around the country there is that reflection in the criticism. Sometimes it's not necessarily about the individual dances; it is about what is going on. "What does this mean? Where is this in the scheme of things? How does this emerge different from--?" And so forth. (tape recorder off) So 1986 was a time when my particular effort-- I've had many threads, and one of the particular kinds of efforts that I've tried to move forward--in awkward and silly and maybe sometimes discontinuous ways but that have always been there--is the historical sense, that this sense of legacy is part of Los Angeles whether we admit it or not, whether we like it or not. And I see it again in various different kinds of ways. I see it in the kinds of things that we do, the technique itself, what we chose to dance about, which is different from New York, and that should be okay. Certainly (Alwin) Nikolais was different from Graham. Does that mean that Graham was better or Nikolais was better? For years Nikolais got pushed down and shoved down because they thought he wasn't as good, because his work wasn't as interesting. That isn't the truth. And we had the same thing. We don't dance about the same thing (as they do) in New York, but we're continually being compared to it. Lester Horton was compared over and over again to being a watered-down version of Graham and LimÃ³n. Which is not true. His work and his technique were very different. And as it was exemplified in Lewitzky's work, which I think is the best example, it was manifested in another whole way. It proves to be a very different technique producing very different results, as any of the techniques will. You certainly don't take Graham and then learn how to automatically walk into a Cunningham work. It's not the same.

KAUFMAN:

Can you go into a little bit more what you mean by saying that we dance about different things in New York and in Los Angeles? What are those things that you think are different?

BATES:

I feel that there's a difference in what we're after, a difference in how we see space and time, how we see effort, what efforts we're looking at, what it is that we are seeing or feeling or disturbed by. It was so funny, because I woke up this morning, and I was giving lectures. Half awake and half dreaming, I was giving lectures on the arts and what is manifested in art and how does it work and how has it been different over the years. That's what I wake up doing some mornings, trying to clarify my ideas. (laughs) I haven't done any of this kind of stuff in such a long time that it seemed ridiculous that I would-- You know, I never stop. The crazy thing is that I never stop. Even though I've been retired from all of it for over three years, the mind is still trying to refine, question, identify, see. Whether or not I think people have gotten the training in New York or not, I think it's immaterial to the fact that we gravitate here, that we suddenly start building here and are seeing or doing something that has a commonality. Now there are circles of commonality. It isn't that we are all doing the same kind of dance. I never trained with Marion Scott until we did "Mysterium" in '75 or '76. At that time I didn't realize how closely connected we were. The longer I'm around, the longer I can think about it and see other people's works, I see that Marion and I are very connected. And Kathe Copperman, a.k.a. Kathe Howard, was also part of that connection. It wasn't that our works were all so similar, it's that there was a mysticism about that work. Rose Polsky is a part of that, you are a part of that, and interestingly enough-- I don't how more to say that. There are some other people who are much more into line or into spacial thrust or whatever. And it's different, you know, where-- The consciousness here is different. This is a city that creates at a moment's notice. On a daily basis we're creating new gods and new religions and whatever. So there's a tremendous curiosity. Now, we're laughed at most of the time because, "What's Los Angeles going to do next?" You know, "This is another Los Angeles thing." We've had them from Catherine Coleman through Marianne Williamson and any number of crazies or not-so-crazies trying different things. So we are a city, an area, that is struggling with some kind of consciousness. That is different from New York. New York is a much more intellectual endeavor; ours is a much more intuitive endeavor. And I think maybe that's one of the very big differences, that there is an intuitive questioning in our work that is not often exhibited in the New York work. It's very clear, it's very intellectual. The Grand Union was the name of that group, the collective that Trisha Brown and Douglas Dunn and that group, which happened at the same time. We were absolutely identical time-wise in our effort. They were in New York and we were here. But in Eyes Wide Open the work didn't reflect that same kind of-- The Grand Union was really about setting up systems, intellectually setting up systems, and then going for them. Trisha Brown's work still reflects that. Douglas Dunn's work, until he retired--I guess he's retired--was walking around talking about Einstein at the same time we were measuring things and moving here and going there. The parallelism, the minimalism, those kinds of interests, the intellectual interests, the measuring, the cutting off, the dividing and the conquering and all of that stuff that was going on in New York wasn't very interesting to us here. We were dancing about people at a time when nobody was dancing about people. We were reflecting a different kind of technique. We were searching for some kind of other meaning. And it wasn't just because we were behind. This was not like Graham or Cunningham or LimÃ³n. It wasn't something coming directly out of Mary Wigman, out of Hanya Holm. It wasn't about that at all. It was about another kind of system. Probably in the same way that the German school with Mary Wigman and that group was very much about German Expressionism, very much about the tensions of a particular time in Germany, and that was not at all what Graham and (Doris) Humphrey were doing in terms of the ethnic curiosity, you know, pulling out the roots of Americanism and trying to create a dance that reflected America. They were very different kinds

of dances. And in 1930, strangely enough, the Wigman stuff was more important than the Graham stuff, even though that might have reversed after the (Second World) War. Was one better than the other? No. There was a difference in what we were looking at, a difference from the pulse in which we were a part of. I'm feeling a certain kind of thing, a certain kind of rhythm, energy, distortion, dissonance in Los Angeles that you might not find in New York. Now, you might find the same dissonance in New York, but the interest in it isn't the same. That's why our work was both considered reflective, Hollywood, theatrical, and at the same time was misunderstood, because it wasn't just-- We were taking a trapping of the theatricality, but we weren't doing the same thing. It was a trapping that reflected Los Angeles. Now, if you don't have a very good feeling about Los Angeles, nothing we do here is going to even make a difference. And in some ways I think that was one of the difficulties. Just like Bella-- She can become world famous and still not be considered anything simply because she's from Los Angeles and she's Bella Lewitzky. Part of the problem in her trying to get her school and all the other things is that we really respect her, the city senses respect for her, but there's still that reluctance to give her her due. There's still that reluctance to honor her in the same way that we might honor Graham or Cunningham or somebody else, because we still are the stepchildren of modern dance. Our own people aren't sure, and they reflect that unsureness. In the same way Eyes Wide Open folded out of unsureness, out of not being able to clearly say "We're doing this and it's worth doing and we can do it." And I think that we still see that same reflection in the whole of dance in this city. Plus there's a lot of backbiting. You know, it doesn't matter whether I like Bella Lewitzky. It doesn't matter whether X5 people don't like my work. That isn't going to hurt the work. And it doesn't mean that I have to go to everybody else's concert. We need to be developing our followings, the people who understand what we're after, who are in tune with what we are seeing, who are being led into this new adventure. Because after all, it is about going into the unknown, not about the known. If we're doing what is known already, then we're simply following. And I do not think that that's what the dance has done here. Bella has been a leader. You know, Eyes Wide Open was a leader for how ever short a time it was in existence. It was leading us into new territory that was neither what the Grand Union was doing or Nikolais was doing or Cunningham was doing or Graham was doing. So we need to appreciate that. We need to honor it, and I don't think we often do. And it isn't up to each dancer to do that; it's really up to us and the critics and the other people to begin to say that Los Angeles has something and we might as well recognize it.

KAUFMAN:

Why hasn't it happened?

BATES:

It may never happen. It may never happen, because we are also a city that-- You know, the main industry of this city is movies and television, and as long as that's the main interest and the moneymaker--and now computers with some of those same people--there won't be any interest in it. See, at one point we could talk about it. We almost had an in, too, because there were so many musicals being done and so many television shows that had music and dance involved that we had a series of very, very good choreographers and dancers remaining in Los Angeles, and there was some very exciting stuff that started happening. It was not in the theater sense of dance. It had its own connection, and that was-- I mean people, all of them that came out of here-- Jack Cole, who was choreographing for movies and for stage; Tom Hanson on the Red Skelton Show; Peter Gennaro on the Andy Williams Show and the Perry Como show I think; any number of people working with Carol Burnett or Lucky Strike's (Your) Hit Parade; various people who choreographed for movies. There were some very important people.

KAUFMAN:

Well, there is a new thing happening now with what they call media dance now trying to form a dialogue with concert theater dance. Very new. There's a new magazine that came out a year or two ago called L.A. Dance.

BATES:

Great! We've had them periodically. (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

Yeah. So I'm wondering where that's going to take us.

BATES:

You know, the interesting thing about what happened in 1927, '26-'27, as things were beginning to take hold, when Graham and Humphrey started developing their works and the Russian ballet people were finding their home in America after having been all over Europe and such and they were developing schools and choreography, is that there began to be this really strong opposition to each other. And it was in that opposition that lasted for a long time that each of the companies began to create their identity. It was moving against, the effort, that kept sharpening and honing. Probably the good thing that happened, the good shot that happened for Graham, for Humphrey, and for LimÃ³n, is maybe the obscurity that they managed to survive for ten years, because it was in that ten years that they developed and honed the work, so that by the time it came out into the great unwashed it was really something of itself. That period of time in that struggle of just persisting, as Bella did, just persisting, was able to help shape and identify their work in very different ways. And eventually, then, Hanya Holm too, and out of Hanya Holm came Nikolais and that whole direction. Out of Graham came Paul Taylor and this (inaudible), (Joseph) Campbell's wife, Jean Erdman, Anna Sokolow, Merce Cunningham. Out of the fifties came that group, Taylor and Cunningham and Nikolais, as the nonemotion people. They took the "e" out of emotion and started looking at motion as the direction. And that became the direction, one with what Cage was doing in music and what the abstractionists were doing in painting. It was a phenomenal moment, a phenomenal moment. And it was one of the few moments--sort of like the early Diaghilev period--when they all came together, when the music, the dance, and the art came together in a particular way, in a fundamental way, that just knocked the socks off of things. That happened with Diaghilev's work, bringing in the musicians of the day and the artists of the day and the dance and creating something that was bigger than all of it or any one of them. It established those people as much as anything else established them. There were people who were trying to make sense out of Stravinsky's music and could not make sense out of it. You know, one of the wonderful stories that John Martin told was being on the New York Times-- The music person who had hired him, Olin Downes, had kept going to hear this Stravinsky person's music and just could not make sense out of it and could not make sense out of it. And finally the same piece which they just gave awful reviews to was being used in a piece by (George) Balanchine. John had heard the same music but had heard it through the Balanchine stuff and couldn't understand why they were having so difficult a time with it. He said, "I think you ought to go see Balanchine's work." Because it helped them, and eventually--this was the truth--it helped them figure it out. It helped them see the music. Not so much about what he actually danced about, but because Balanchine was such an extraordinary musician himself he was able to find out what the patterns and the lines and the rhythmic stuff and the melodies all were and was able to use that as his basis. The same thing was true at the beginning of the ballet with the French. It wasn't just the ballet, it was the music, it was the theater and the arts, it was the people who were writing the librettos-- They were famous people: Indigo Jones and some of these people who were doing these masks and things, the people who were setting up the entire product that we call dance today and helped form and give identity to what we know as ballet. Extraordinary stuff.

KAUFMAN:

Now it seems a little bit less cohesive.

BATES:

That always happens. And it always happens in the sense that we go to this peak, and we can't keep going. You know, we try. Our whole concept of getting into space is that we keep going out, but at some point we have to come back. John Martin also talked about that, the idea that we're not very far from our own breath experience. Even as great as we can get and as far as we can reach, we're very, very seldom very far away from our own breath experience. We have to fall back in order to yield again or in order to breathe out again. And as much as we try to defy that as a human-- The human consciousness tries to defy that always, but it never gets very far away from it. So we've had this great period and this great surgence and this great (inhales loudly) explosion. And as it filters back down in the release of that breath, it filters down into pieces of things--a particular kind of dance with no music and no this and a particular kind of theater with no this or no that. It filters down in little pieces of the greatness until it settles and something else rises out of that. And it will. It will. Somewhere, somehow, it will rise, and we'll find something extraordinary coming from it totally unexpected. The company, the four men and--eventually four men and two women-- Iso and all those companies were coming out it. But what was the name of that company?

KAUFMAN:

Was it Pilobolus?

BATES:

Pilobolus. It is not because I can't remember their names, it's because I have a mind that doesn't filter well anymore. Pilobolus was one of those companies that came into existence about the same time Eyes Wide Open came into existence, actually, about '73, '74. Because they met us in Lewitzky's company, they came to see us and perform for us, to show us what they were doing, and that was at the same time that they'd been going to Nikolais's and Murray Louis's studios, and Murray and Nikolais loved them so much they gave them a concert, and that's how they got going. They were so full of themselves that they didn't think that they couldn't do it. And one of

them (Moses Pendleton) is one of the Pendleton heirs, so they had a house where they could go and live and do these things, and they did all this stuff that just seemed impossible to do. You know, if there's a difference in some levels, one of the differences is in their ability to see something and grasp it, and with Eyes Wide Open we didn't always see it, and we certainly didn't always grasp it even if we did see it. The other side is that they had something that was just remarkably special, Pilobolus, and they continued to, just like an amoeba or like some kind of organism, breaking up and multiplying in different ways and drawing different ideas. Martha Clark's work is just extraordinary. She was one of the women. She doesn't do very much, but when she does it's really quite extraordinary, even if it doesn't work. She did a piece out of Hieronymus Bosch called The Garden of Earthly Delights, which is one of his paintings. She did a piece based on that. It was a full-evening theater work, and it was extraordinary. Now, some people didn't think that it worked, and it was flawed, but there was something so special about the effort and that interest in what she was doing and how she was doing it. And she has other works that are just--

Tape Nine, Side One (August 30, 1995)

KAUFMAN:

We're going to take up where we left off. Eyes Wide Open (Dance Theater) has just pretty much disintegrated at this point (mutual laughter), and Gary is now transitioning into solo artistry.

BATES:

Eyes Wide Open fell apart about 1979 directly as a result, I think, of just the loss of the energy as we were struggling along and the loss of direction or purpose, at least as a cohesive group. What was interesting is that everybody sort of took off into new territories and new ideas and new possibilities, and each in their own direction. I'm not sure how many of us-- I guess a number of us did stay in dance or dance related areas. Certainly Fred (Strickler) was one of the cofounders of Jazz Tap Ensemble, which grew out of that. It was called Jazz Tap Percussion Ensemble. Then eventually he went off into a solo career working with symphony orchestras all over the world, where he would do tap dancing to the Morton Gould Tap (Dance) Concerto with symphony orchestras, and that gave him something really very special to connect to. Out of that he has continued to perform with other companies or as a guest artist with people like Linda Sohl-Donnell. He left Jazz Tap Ensemble and went on to do his own work and get gigs here and there and then a couple of television specials with the tap dancers. So he continues to do very well. I understand that in 1995 he is starting his own company and is working on something. He did a pick up company for a while that was built with modern and tap dance and which he called

Fred Strickler and Friends. Mary Duval went into the L.A. (Los Angeles) Opera for a while. I don't know what she's doing. I haven't heard from Martha Morrison in a while. Rick (Richard) Korngood dances locally occasionally, and he's also in real estate. Melanie Snyder may at this very moment be the new chair of the (dance) department at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. Chris Burnside, who was the chair, I know has wanted to step down, and Melanie was thinking about it, and they were thinking about her, so-- I don't know what happened; I haven't heard yet. She just got back from Europe. Kathe (Howard Copperman) has just finished a degree. She moved to New York. She did some dancing there, some work of her own there. She had been dancing with Phoebe Neville at fifty-four and is married and has a child, a fifteen-year-old son she's raising. She just did the Effort/Shape workshop and got her license in that.

KAUFMAN:

Laban (Movement) Analysis (Theory)?

BATES:

The analysis work, and then the last two years has gotten an MFA (master of fine arts) or MA (master of arts) degree in movement therapy and is now working in Brooklyn, where she lives in a women's shelter with drug addicts and alcoholics and mentally impaired women, which is very exciting to her. She can take a lot of her stuff and translate that into helping and has and probably will help. She loves it. It's difficult, but it's something that means a great deal to her. So we have in some ways all sort of stayed in dance in one thing or another or whatever. Mary Duval went into doing video for dance and then doing her own video with art with her husband and some other people. So we've all branched. (tape recorder off)

KAUFMAN:

What were you doing at this time?

BATES:

In 1979-80 (Dance) Kaleidoscope was continuing. I think Kaleidoscope went on to about '85 or '86--Los Angeles Area Dance Alliance (LADA) supported that--and we did our concerts over at the John Anson Ford Theater. We had usually four or five (concerts), and there would be about thirty to forty companies represented or solo artists. In '79 I think Eyes Wide Open still performed in the last one. In '80 Kathe and I decided to kind of pool our resources and do two solos together, in that she did her solo and I did my solo. I decided to take my solo and run it up into the mountains in the back (referring to the hillside that comprises the area behind the stage at the Ford Theater). And then the following year we weren't going to work together but we wound up doing it anyway, and I wound up starting mine first and bringing it down the staircase over on the side and then doing this. It was a kind of memory piece. It was very interesting, because there have been so many memories, and I was at a very nostalgic point. I was forty-one years old, and I guess I was in another place, like I was when I left Bella (Lewitzky) and went to John Martin's, when I said that I kind of was lost and not sure what to do. I was in a very kind of curious place. I didn't have the same kind of depression, I think, but I was not sure where I was going to go or what was going to happen. My life has been so blessed, and I feel like everything has sort of come to me. And I worked hard at being able to be ready for it, but I never worked hard at getting it, if that makes any sense. I worked like a madman to get technique so that I could dance, because technique did not come naturally to me. I worked hard in companies doing all the shlepping work and helping this and pacing that, as we all did. I worked hard at getting schooling. I worked hard at getting my master's degree. I worked hard at teaching my classes. But I never had to do much soliciting either for concerts or for gigs or for jobs. So at about forty-one-- In '81 I was sort of like in the middle of this dilemma. What do I do? I was still at Claremont (at Scripps College), still teaching and still the chair of the (dance) department, but I was very frustrated--not so much with Claremont as I was with my own career at the time. You know, "Where do I go?" Because I felt I needed to do something. This was when I needed to really step out and take charge of my life, and I didn't know how. I think that there was a period there where I didn't even know that I didn't know how. I just knew that there was some-- It wasn't very comfortable, and it wasn't very right. Do I stay at Claremont? Do I continue being chair? Claremont seemed so far away. I realized that Fred had done it, being in Riverside (at the University of California, Riverside), which is even further away, but he was so used to it. And I'm such a different kind of person. I didn't know what I could really do. I had also made some dramatic changes at Claremont. At Scripps College we were given our salaries and our FTE, full time equivalence, and all that kind of stuff based on the amount of students that we had at our particular college. Well, we had probably thirty or forty Scripps women there, and probably out of those only three or four, maybe ten, were majors. So we didn't have a very big department according to Scripps. However, we furnished classes for (all the Claremont Colleges) and had over two hundred students a semester, and I had about forty majors. I had usually had ten seniors graduating every year. So we had a major department teaching major classes but given very, very minimal support, because it didn't show up as FTE equivalent within our own college. We were getting students from all the other five colleges, and some of them were majors, and all of it we were furnishing and we were also running. I mean, I had ten undergraduate theses I was dealing with every year. We also had no secretary. We had one full time equivalent, me, and two part-time teachers. So it was a very, very difficult time, with over two hundred students every

semester. I made some major changes in that area. First of all, I cut down our classes. I was teaching ten to twelve classes a year when the average was five classes, and if you were a chair it was only four. So we wound up realizing that each of my part-time faculty were teaching full-time loads. When I finally got that straightened out and I could write down what it was that we actually were doing and how we were doing it-- Even though I didn't participate in it in the following years, we did get to have major changes. So I was very busy doing that. I was very busy with ten seniors. I was very busy putting concerts together there as well as teaching here (at UCLA) and at other places and trying to start a career of my own.

KAUFMAN:

You were at Scripps then, which is--

BATES:

Yeah, the Claremont Colleges.

KAUFMAN:

Okay.

BATES:

Claremont Colleges. There are seven schools there. They're all independent and interdependent. In other words, they all have their own body, faculty, their own heads--you know, presidents and all that. There are five undergraduate schools (Claremont McKenna College (formerly Claremont Menâ€™s College), Harvey Mudd College, Pitzer College, Pomona College, and Scripps College), the (Claremont) School of Theology, and a graduate school (Claremont Graduate University). So there are seven schools with five undergraduate colleges, and they all intermingle with their classes. I had a couple of Pomona--even though they had their own little dance

division--students who were doing majors. I had Claremont Men's College people doing majors, I had Pitzer College students doing majors, I had one or two Harvey Mudd students doing majors, as well as the Scripps students. And then I had graduate school people taking classes, and occasionally some of the School of Theology people would take classes. So I had a lot of students coming in, but only the Scripps were counted in the major sense. We had some very bright and very interesting students. Once I got past their fear of me and they were able see what we were trying to do and who we were, we did some very exciting stuff there. We gave some wonderful concerts. We started bringing the city into their consciousness and back out. It was very exciting. I think that had I been able to talk with somebody or known to talk with somebody, had I been a little less stubborn, a little less self-willed, and I could have sat with somebody who would talk about the pros and cons, that could probably have been a very good base for me, because they were very wonderful to me. They liked me, I liked them. I got scared. I didn't have anybody, I didn't talk to anybody, I didn't know what it all meant, and I was falling apart. At that point something very, very dramatic happened to me: I started drinking. I started drinking seriously. More binges. And I started having blackouts around that time. I started doing heavier drugs on occasion--not very often, but I did. In one of my blackouts I went onto a campus of a major university. I will not mention the name of it. (mutual laughter) I was arrested in the early morning--nude. I woke up in jail not knowing where I was with half my clothes gone and the other half ripped. I'd lost my mother's car. I went to court a week or so later, thought I was being arraigned for lewd vag(rancy), no clothes on, drunk and disorderly, and what happened is that I was being charged with rape of a woman. It was devastating--first of all because I am gay, and also because I didn't do things like that in any sense, because I had such profound respect for women. I had worked so long in my life for women's rights, next to women, and urged women to have their rights, that it was a really devastating moment in my life. The district attorney who was arraigning me was a woman. I looked at her with this-- And then I was handed the papers of what was going on, and it was very ugly. I evidently had come up to a woman and said some nasty things to her. I was approaching a woman who was running early morning at this campus, and I was saying nasty things and playing with myself, you know, nude, and she called the police. The police found me and arrested me. I told the prosecuting attorney that I had no idea that this had happened--I had had a blackout; I never had had a blackout before--and that I was gay, and that I don't do that to women. So she called the woman, strangely enough. If this is God intervening in my life or a higher energy intervening in my life, she called the woman. And the woman said, "Well, he really didn't chase me, he didn't approach me, he didn't touch me." I was far enough away from her, and then as she went off on her direction I went off into another direction. You know, it was one of those things where I'm sure that I was saying it to the world and not necessarily to any individual. So she went on and she said-- Then the prosecuting attorney was willing to drop the charges. That was a very scary, very devastating, very humiliating moment in my life. And I'm not afraid to talk about it. It's painful sometimes, but I talk about it, because I think it began a directional change for me that I've still been on for the last thirteen years, more or less successfully. At that moment I was put on probation for two years, and I spent the next two years-- This was in '79 that this happened, teaching at this women's college with this over my head thinking, you know-- "When are they going to find out? What happens if they do find out? Here he is, a man who has been charged with rape teaching at a women's college." So it was an extraordinarily difficult time. I did not stop drinking. That only increased the pressure. I did see a therapist, and the therapist helped me. By this time I had stopped being grounded. Everything was in my ideas and in my thinking, and, I mean, I could

have been pushed over by a feather. I used to drive into town sometimes and feel as if I didn't exist, I was so heady, airy, so ungrounded in my life. I mean, my therapist would just spend the entire session every week getting me to put my feet down on the floor, to get me back onto earth, because by that time everything was just flying. I was not drinking on a daily basis, but I was drinking heavily and to blackout status whenever I could, whenever I had free time--and I had very little of it, thank heavens. I was a control freak over those kinds of aspects of-- You know, I used the drinking to let go. I was trying to hold onto to everything so constantly, so my drinking bouts were about letting it go, about throwing it all away, about not having responsibility. And the conflict was enormous. So by the time I got into '80, '81-- And at this point I was only doing one or two concerts a year, for instance as a guest in the LADA thing and other places. But I wasn't seeing that I had a life. I had no personal life. When Eyes Wide Open fell apart my personal life fell apart, because they were my personal life. They were my personal life, my public life, my creative life. I didn't realize how much of me was invested in that. It became a kind of personal tragedy. And I didn't know what was going on. I thought suddenly I was just losing my mind. I really thought that my worst fear was being realized, that I was going to be on stage someday and completely go out of it and do terrible things. That was one of my fears for a long time, that I would go crazy on stage. That period was one of the most difficult periods of my life. Here I was, continuing to teach and chairing in this department with this stuff going on, with this probation that I had to meet every week, therapy I had to do. I had to maintain an attitude that everything was fine, you know, because I wanted to keep working. I really wanted to keep doing what I was doing. It was the only thing I had left to hold onto. It became, though, the way in which I did start holding onto my life in the next ten or twelve years--in other words, trying to hold onto it, trying to keep this little bit of sanity going. And by the time I finally did get the kind of help that I could actually hold onto in that other way, dance--my classes, the teaching--was the only sanity I had left, so that when I was out of the classroom or out of the school I was completely unable to take care of myself and that over a period of years I developed that kind of insanity. And it got worse as it went on. In 1981 I was about to end my probation. I had come to a kind of place where I needed to definitely make some changes, either recommit to Scripps, come back into town, or get out of Dodge. And at that point I needed a break. I needed a complete, unequivocal break, and I had the opportunity to do that in Houston, Texas. I decided to let go of my job, my career, everything. In fact, I told somebody at the early part of 1981, "I have got to get out of here. And even if I dig ditches, I've got to find a new way of life. I've got to, I've got to find a life." As it turned out I moved to Florida, became a tile setter, and did dig ditches (laughs) and did begin a new life. So you've got to be careful what you pray for, because sometimes you literally get it. (laughs) I'm not ungrateful for it, believe me. I loved teaching, I loved choreographing, I sometimes loved performing. (laughs) And there were moments when I could perform and could perform with such ease and deliciousness that I knew what it was about. And there were other times when it was painful, when the ego was too invested in how people liked me, if people liked me. That kept me from having that experience on a regular basis. Fred Strickler is the consummate performer. Put a light on and give him an audience and, I don't care, the man doesn't have to do anything and he can make you like it. He can stand there and just move his arms around, he can stand there and do something extravagant and extraordinary. It doesn't matter. You're entertained. You come away feeling like you've been given something. He had just this luscious and generous capacity to perform. It was not something that I had. (laughs) It was painful sometimes. I don't think people knew that. I think a lot of times people thought--because I would seem to have so many friends and know so many people and was out there

bubbling over, bubbly-ubbly-ubbly, you know, all over the place, all the time--that it was easy for me. You know, it was painful for me. And I don't think that there are some people who would ever realize that, how painful it was, because I couldn't be perfect, because I couldn't do it well enough, because there were always the people around me who could do it better, because I was being-- I was thinking about this yesterday. I was driving a friend who's in his seventies and who's going blind. We had talked about me driving him on a regular basis. He had invited me over to have a picnic lunch someplace so that I could have a chance to do the driving and test it out for him and test it out for me. But I saw it as a test. Well, when I was eighteen I had a kind of nervous break in my life, and during that time I had flunked out of school twice. Even though I was going into my finals with A's, I flunked out because I couldn't take the test. So I got into this state of not being able to take tests. And when I went to Los Angeles City College-- This all sounds like diversion stuff, but it isn't; it really is a part of a fabric of Gary Bates. So when I went to City College in the early sixties to start my degree again or to get my academic classes, I was not able to take tests with the classes. I had to do them separately at different times. I would go into panic. Now, I don't know what thatâ€™s about. But yesterday I started to experience that panic again driving this car. Now, I'm very comfortable about driving, but suddenly I was aware that he was blind, he couldn't see, he was trying to feel me out. It was all going on-- And he didn't say a word about it. But that panic started coming onto me. You know, that panic was there oftentimes when I danced. I would go on stage, and I would start panicking that I wasn't going to do it well enough, that I wasn't going to be good enough, that I was going to forget, or that I was going to go crazy. Those are real fears that I had. I had them all the way through in my performing career. Sometimes it was okay, and sometimes-- I got to doing it enough times that most of the time, when I was doing it regularly, it would be okay. I could attach to something. I could love it enough that I could just go out there and show them my love even if I fell on my face. You know, I've learned some techniques through just the sheer numbers of times of having other people talk about what they did when they performed. I remember talking with Bella about it once. I had done this concert, this master's thesis at UCLA, and we were using the music of the Moody Blues, "Nights in White Satin." We used that whole album (Days of Future Passed) of the Moody Blues, and it was just wonderful. And the woman and I who did most of the dancing, I just had a great time choreographing for her for her master's thesis, and it was very special. And after the end of that concert each night I would burst into tears. I had given everything, and I would just feel the sheer joy of having done something that I loved and be overwhelmed in the experience, be awestruck by being able to do it. And I said to Bella, "Do you ever cry when you get through with a concert?" "Oh, never. That's silly. That's too emotional." (laughs) You're supposed to know what you did, be able to talk about it and think about it rationally, and go down the checklist to see what you did right and what you did wrong. And you've got to be paying attention at every given moment. Well, I learned to pay attention at every given moment, and I also learned that, for me, I always knew that I had done a good concert when I wanted to cry, when I was so open that I wanted just to fly away and cry. Bella did it her way, and I had to eventually find mine. For a long time I competed with that or I compared myself. "Well, you know, I've got to be more this, I've got to be more that." Carol Scothorn said I wasn't objective enough. Somebody else said I was too objective. I've had people criticize me from one side to the other in total opposition of each other, that I wasn't this or I was that or I wasn't that and I was this. One of the struggles I've had is finding my balance in all of it, finding who I am and what I do, and to be okay with that and do the best I can. The other part of it is to trust myself and all of that. These are things that I feel that I often as a teacher wanted to instill in people. If I could

give them anything-- It wouldn't be their talent, because that's theirs. It wouldn't be technique, because they can get that anywhere. I really feel that way. But if I can instill in the student to trust that intuitive process in their own deep little quiet place in them and to reach out for it, then I think I've instilled something that is very special. And that's what I have tried to do throughout my teaching.

Tape Nine, Side Two (August 30, 1995)

BATES:

I was felt so out away from balance most of my life. Moving from one side of the ideas to the other side, to one feeling to another feeling that eventually-- What Bella helped me with so deeply is to root myself. What I was then able to do with that rooting that Bella gave me, that absolute just dug-into-the-floor ability-- Then I could start floating out, and I could start yielding and into other thing. And eventually my technique was really developed on being out of balance or taking my balances in many different points. Sort of like what they talk about with Merce Cunningham, when we talked about his choreography being many focused and many pointed. My sweep of movement when I was at my height had that same quality of being able to take the balance point to very different kinds of extremes (claps hands loudly) and change them (snaps fingers) just like that. And it was exciting. And part of the excitement that people got was seeing me do that. I mean, "How did you do that where you were here, then you were there, and then you're over there, and your body seemed to be in three different pieces?" (laughs) So there was a charge in learning how to do that. Bella gave me the grounding. Strangely enough, both Jack Cole and Mia Slavenska opened up the joints so that the extremities could reach out further than they were supposed to. They were able to grow that extra inch or two, which gave me the sense of being out there forever. So between the grounding and the stretching of the joints, the releasing of the joints, I began to find both a vocabulary and a technique of performing that I began to trust. Now, the third thing I did in all of that was to do the same thing in my choreography. Instead of trying to measure around each little bit of the movement to try to trust motion. You know, I would improvise all the time on something that I was interested in. It might be an idea, it might be some piece of music, it might be just a feeling that I was having that I couldn't put into words. And often times the feeling came, then an idea started generating, and then a piece of music, so then I could just keep going. I mean, sometimes it would take me a year to get to this final piece, and none of that year was focused on that final piece. It was focused on this little bit of feeling, that little bit of idea, and this little bit of music. And then (claps) all of a sudden it would all come together and I would say, "Oh, that's what I've been working on." And it wouldn't be a steady working, and it wouldn't be a directional working. See, this was also very foreign to Bella, very foreign to Carol Scothorn, who would just (snaps his fingers several times) put those things out. Carol could just put it out objectively. Bella got her idea and she never wavered from it. You know, once I put myself in their shoes I was like, "I can't do it that way. It's not going to work, and I don't know what I'm doing, and I must be wrong." What I found eventually-- And Fred helped me with this. He would be getting his Riverside dance concerts

together and realize that he had promised to do a work and was already scheduled into a solo, and he hadn't done it yet. So the night before the concert he would do a piece. He would just simply create the piece and perform it. And I would go, "How does he do that?" But I started trusting that possibility. And then I worked--we've talked about this--with Marion Scott.

KAUFMAN:

Yes. When was this?

BATES:

In 1976. I was at UCLA at the time, and she did a piece called "Mysterium" for Kathe Howard and me. I want to say Copperman because that was her name at the time, but she changed it. Marion would come in and she would kind of-- She wasn't walking very comfortably. But she would sort walk around a little bit and sit there and stare at the floor and say, "Can you try something that does this?" (sketches a shape in the air) And as I'm gesturing-- I may be like a floating leaf, you know. So we would try something, and she would say, "Now can you move that really fast? Can you move it really slow now? Oh, I like the way you touched each other there. Let's start there. Can you do something else with that? Can you stay touching and turn away from each other?" So there was just this wonderful kind of unfolding and developing and focusing. It would be the unfolding and developing, and we'd be playing, and all of a sudden there would be this focused moment on this one little piece of what we had been doing, and that would get enlarged and go on. And then we'd have a bunch of things, and then something else over here would get focused on, and that would get large. Well, we created a five- or six-minute dance by a series of sessions like that. One day she walked in, and we were all ready to get the six-minute dance going and get on with it and get the rest of it done and see where it led, and she would say, "You know, I've been thinking. Why don't we pick--? You remember that one little moment in the middle over here? That was so special. Now we're going to this fast dance, because I see you and Kathe as very quick movers. I know we're going to do this fast dance. But this is a little moment. Let's just see--" And we started another whole six-minute dance, and we worked another whole number of sessions. And Kathe and I started panicking, of course. You know, we've got two dances now, and neither one of them are connected, and they're not going to go-- And this one's different. And whatâ€™s Marion going to do? You know, we're not going to have enough time to get this dance together and learn it and be perfect. She comes in a few minutes before everything is starting, you know, going to be done for the UCLA Dance Company, and she says, "I've been thinking. Remember that little moment?" (mutual laughter) And for the third time we started over. We gave ourselves to her, we kept deepening and giving ourselves to her. We kept deepening and giving ourselves to her. We kept letting go and falling

into her ideas. And at the same time she was just constantly nudging us on in different directions to find out who we were together at that moment.

KAUFMAN:

I see.

BATES:

And she created "Mysterium" in that last third of this time that we had, and out of that came an extraordinarily beautiful dance, unbeknownst to any of the three of us that it was possible, where it was going, what it was going to be, or anything else. And she's the one who truly freed me to realize that I could trust the intuitive process that was mine, not somebody else's, that no matter what it might look like or where it might be going or not going, that if I stayed with my process, if I stayed with that intuitive place-- In some ways I think that is the kernel of the dance in Los Angeles that I think is very special. Bella is much more East Coast in that way, in the way she went after dance. I'm not saying that she didn't use her intuitive process. I know she did; I watched her. (laughs) I worked in enough pieces of hers to know that all of this was not something she knew. But it's not something that she relied on in that other way. She really did rely very much on going from here to here (demonstrates a shift in space from one shape to the next) and then that taking her there and honing it and going after it and molding it through her head and through her eye and through her understanding of movement and her curiosity about movement. Marion was floating around in the space, and Marion was kind of oozing her way through something and oozing her way into us and us oozing our way into each other and into her. Everything was kind of oozing around and not looking like very much and not necessarily knowing where it was going but trusting that it was going somewhere. Bella and I argued about that one time. "Bella, do you always finish the same dance you start with?" "Oh, yes, always! That's the dance I'm doing, and that's the one I'm going after. You don't start new dances in the middle of old dances." And I said, "You know, I can never-- I may start out with this idea and this idea and this concept and this everything and wind up with something else over here, and I don't understand that." "Well, you must be doing something wrong." That's the message I got. Now, whether she ever said that or not, the message I got was that it was probably wrong. You know, it wasn't until Marion, in the mid-seventies-- Because I'd never worked with Marion, at least in that way. I never worked with her as a student, with her as my teacher or anything else. So this year that she and I got to work with Kathe was probably one of the most profound moments in my career. That is not to say that working with Bella wasn't a profound time; it was. I learned so much about technique. I learned so much about my body. I learned so much about

taking a movement and developing it and manipulating it and taking it someplace. You know, that whole concept of, you remember, working in that theme and variation--

KAUFMAN:

Yes, I remember that very well.

BATES:

Such a simple little concept. And yet if you really get into it it just continues to make more and more movement--but a very specific movement a very specific kind of way. That's how I learned to do choreography. I learned to take that intuitive stuff, with Bella's ability to manipulate and the inner eye that Carol Scothorn had so well, that I began to trust-- I began to see my own movement so that I could repeat it. I could repeat the inner line over and over again. Even if I had been messing around for five minutes, what I could understand was that I had a sense of motion and direction and knew where that was going, and I could repeat it well enough to start honing in. And that's the playing I did, and I would play and play and play. Sometimes I would take the play into the classroom and develop phrases out of it for my students. Sometimes they would go into the dance, sometimes they wouldn't, but they were beginning to be a part of that. And I realized that that's what the East Coast did, that the East Coast had all these companies and all these classes that they could take their material into and keep playing with, and then they would have concerts. I mean, literally they could do that, and they could develop their work all the time. And I began to realize that I had a way of doing that. I could make all of it work for me. The stuff I'm doing in the classroom-- Not literally, necessarily, but it was always a playground, and I was teaching them how to play as well. And all of that stuff became, then, a process for me to get at my choreography, to free it up from this-- "Well, now I've got to move here, and then this idea means this," (flings himself around) and get away from that bullshit. It changed. It changed everything choreographically for me. So this fear, this panic stuff that shaped a certain kind of thing, the grounding, the freeing, the choreographic stuff, all of this became part of the melding of what my work eventually got to or how it eventually got to be and how a technique developed out of that, how a process of choreography developed out of that, how a process of teaching developed out of that. That was so important to me. Some of it was not comfortable. Probably none of it was very comfortable. It was struggled with. It was painful in the letting go in order to let it come out, in order to not be fearful of it. And you're talking about a person who is full of fear doing some of this, full of self-will, full of stubbornness. You know, at some level I used to think that was my defect, and I realize today that probably was one of the greatest assets I had, that kind of stubbornness. Because when I sensed the goodness or the rightness I would hang on for dear life. I did that long enough with Bella and I did that with Marion and I did that

with other people in a way that I was able--getting my degrees, that I was able to get them--to get something that was important. I was able to even have a career when all those other things-- Any one of them could have stopped it. So by the time I was forty-one, all of this stuff was both working-- You know, my career was just bubbling up and doing all of this stuff, and I was inside of it feeling like I couldn't go any further, I couldn't do anything, I didn't know what I was doing. I really didn't know how to do this. And I had done those two concerts every summer. I had gotten a lot of very positive support from it. In '79 I had gotten the NEA (National Endowment for the Arts) grant to do some choreography on some people. I did a couple of pieces in San Diego on Three's Company. I did one on Mary Duval. I never finished the one on Mary Duval, and I'm sorry I didn't, because there was some really beautiful stuff in it. It was really developing my technical range. It was really after some of the stuff I was after technically. I began to falter. I began to slip in my trust of myself. I began to see myself as I thought other people were seeing me: not trustworthy, not able to do this. I started projecting onto everybody else my fears and seeing them seeing me through my fears. And that wasn't necessarily the truth, but that was how I was seeing myself. At that point I decided to leave. I was going to go to Houston, but things weren't ready for me in Houston that summer, and I wound up visiting some friends in Miami and wound up living in Miami for three years.

KAUFMAN:

Three years?

BATES:

From '81 to '84. And at that point, in '81 to '84-- In '81 I won the first Vanguard Award for solo choreography--totally unexpected, totally surprised--and I came back for the honor. I was very surprised, and I was very tickled, but I-- It was just shocking that I got it. And it was for the piece where I went up into the things, the piece called-- What was it called? (sighs) I can't remember. John Renbourn was the music, and it was-- It's interesting, because all my works, when I look at them now, are so autobiographical. This was a piece done in military garb, you know, shiny pants and one of those--what do you call it?--spreckled camouflage T-shirts and a red bandanna. And it was struggling, you know. It started out on the floor, sort of sweeping, and coming up, and struggling, and getting full of the-- Lots of fast footwork all over the stage, full of fear, and then eventually running and dodging through the trees and through the bushes up into the thing, disappearing.

KAUFMAN:

Is this at the Anson Ford?

BATES:

Yeah. And it won an award. Now, it won an award-- It was a piece that, again, I did out of improvisation--struggling, playing, but it was improvising. My pieces became choreographic pieces not because I did each individual movement but because I learned how to trust a process of moving through an idea and making the idea motional. And I did learn to do that. I learned to do it well, so that people saw my pieces as choreography, not just as dancing. Now, some people say, "Well, it was your ability to dance that enabled you to do that" or "You're just a real cheeky person. You can get up there and do anything and people will kind of like it." And I don't think that's the truth. I think the truth of it is that I worked hard on my dances. But I didn't work on them in the way that most people do. Probably I was more connected to New York's new schools than I thought I was, but in a totally different presentation of it. I studied the lines in the movement, the Bella stuff. When I improvised, I improvised on thematic, motional ideas. They stayed with me, and they found places to reach. As I added the ideas that I'd been playing with anyway, or feeling or struggling with, that became larger ideas, I would include that energy or that drop of the shoulder or that reach of the chin, to start shifting it. I would let the agitation or (exhales heavily) the lack of energy fall into it, and it would get thicker, or it would get stringier, so that as it cooked, as it mellowed, as it played in my system, I knew the dance inside and out. And it still had room for little shifts and changes. I knew the dance inside and out. I knew where it was going, I knew how it was getting there, but in the same way that you could have a lecture prepared and give it as if it were extemporaneous and allow for any interruption to come in and shift the idea and yet still come right back into the thread so that you're not giving this "talk." I could never give a lecture and try to read a lecture, because (adopts a flat, robotic voice) that's the way it would sound. And I could never dance that way. When I learned how to dance the way I taught, the way I'm talking right now about a period-- And as you can see, it comes into one whole thing, but it goes there in many different ways. When I learned to dance the way I taught, I learned to be comfortable with both of them. And that same process started working for me as a lecturer, because I could pull ideas. I knew where my hangers were, I knew the framework I was working in, so that the form was there in the framework of the idea, the motion, the physicality of it, and the music. The structure was there, the form was there, the vocabulary was there, and I could now converse. So I learned to be a conversant choreographer. (laughs) That's very special for this person who probably was scared most of his life about anything, and that was a very wonderful gift that I was given through other people. And in '81, when I was forty-one, it was the thing that I began to not trust and not know where I was going with it and not know where to take it, and I began to slip back into the fear. From thirty-three to forty-one (years of age) there was this big sweep of things: the Cinderella (at Midnight) in October of '73; Vesalii icones,

which was my debut as a solo artist, the forty-five minute solo in '74; Eyes Wide Open, '75 to '79; my chairmanship and the solo pieces that I did for LADA in '80 and '81 with Kathe. I could have picked anyplace I wanted to teach, I could have picked anything I wanted to do, and I could have done it. People trusted my work. People trusted me. I was producing, I was predictable. And I lost faith. And at that point I knew I had to leave, and that's when I eventually moved to Miami. I was there for just a few weeks. I was going to wait there for a few weeks while everything got ready in Houston, and I never made it back to Houston. I wound up working with a friend of mine, one of the people I had gone to visit, who was a tile setter, and I learned how to lay ceramic tiles. I did that for three years there. I also taught at various dance schools, but that was a complete disaster, because I was working in ballet schools, and there's nothing more ballet than Southern ballet schools, with little girls who have just now learned etiquette and learned to be pretty. And there I am going "Bend down, open those cheeks, (claps) lift that leg out, pliÃ©," you know, in these awkward parallel positions, fall-- And I got down to two students. (mutual laughter) So I eventually had to let go of it. One more time I had to eventually let go of what I saw dance as or where I saw even my teaching as. It was a real interesting period, because when I let go of things it seems like the whole thing lets go. I left and walked out thinking I was going to go teach someplace else and just pick up the little pieces and go on. By the time I got through there in '84, I had let go of every part of it. I remember a friend of mine coming over, and I was just devastated because the school I was teaching, the Cocoanut Grove, was beginning to push me out, because they didn't know quite what to do with me. (laughs) And I had just gotten some pictures--my mother had just sent me some stuff, the stuff that I had packed up--and I said, "David, this is who I am." These were pictures of me performing in various things with Eyes Wide Open. "You understand, I cannot teach aerobics. I know I could make money, but I cannot teach aerobics. This is who I am." He said, "No, that's who you were. Who are you now?" And I lost it. (laughs) I lost it. I did not know who I was except as it was revealed in these pictures and these memories and these ideas of what I had been as a teacher, as a performer, as a choreographer, as a member of Eyes Wide Open, a part of Bella Lewitzky, you know, all of those things. That began a process of totally letting go and then also totally rebuilding, which eventually got me back at Scripps College for another couple of years and then a guest artist thing at Cal(ifornia Institute of the) Arts and at (University of California,) Irvine and eventually at Loyola (Marymount University), and then eventually my last three years of teaching at Loyola. And during that time, the breath of fresh air was my teaching summer classes at (Santa Monica College). It was probably another one of the high points of my life. What was interesting-- Because at that point, at that time, the only place that I was comfortable and safe was in the classroom. The rest of the time-- I had started doing drugs again by this time, in '87. I was not drinking anymore because I did not like blackouts, but I was doing drugs again. I had been clean and sober for almost two years at that time. I couldn't cope with my life. I was so alone and so empty that I didn't know what to do with that feeling, and the only place that I was comfortable was when I was actually teaching people how to open their bodies up and how to perform and how to choreograph and working with them. The minute I walked out of that classroom I was a scattered, empty-- A piece of used toilet paper that was blowing in the wind. That's exactly what my feeling was. When I was in that classroom I knew that I had this information that I could pass on, and I could give it completely. Most people did not know the disparity of those two experiences with me, because-- I mean, they saw me as a whole, a live individual in the classroom, and I was this little worm outside of the classroom that had no-- anything. I started shutting my friends out one by one. I started letting go of things. I started

tearing my house apart and not being able to put it back together again. I lived from paycheck to paycheck. I lived from using spree to using spree. I didn't use on a daily basis, but I did enough damage in one night or two nights every couple of weeks, and it got to be that. And then there would be periods where I wouldn't-- I was going to (twelve-step program) meetings every day. Most of the time I was trying to reconnect. But for three years it was just an absolutely huge nightmare. Only in the summers would I have some peace again, and I wouldn't use very much. I would use, but I wouldn't use very much, because I wanted to teach those classes. Those classes became very special to me. And the reason they were special-- I never kept anybody out of a class. My classes were supposed to be at a certain level, as they are there. I taught the 1s and I taught the 2s, or 2s and 3s, I don't know what it was. And beginners would come in and say, "Could I take your class?" and I would say yes. People from the community, dancers from the community, would come in, and teachers from the community would come in and say, "Can I take your class?" and I'd say yes. Some of them paid for the class and others didn't pay for the class. Some of them were brand-new beginners, and some of them were advanced, already professional dancers, and some of them were older people, and some of them were faculty people or other people in university or this college. And I let them all in.

Tape Ten, Side One (September 6, 1995)

KAUFMAN:

We're going to now talk about pretty much the last ten years of Garyâ€™s career, up until the present.

BATES:

Yes. I'm not so sure about all the ten years. I haven't done anything since basically '93--I guess it was '92, '93--when I did Santa Monica College, which was my last teaching stint, where I taught a wonderful class in creativity and sort of beginning choreography, sort of the introduction stuff of choreography. I want to digress a minute, because I think it's kind of exciting-- Already I'm digressing and I haven't even started. I saw the last episode of the Dance of the Twentieth Century series that's been going on several times on Bravo (cable television network), and it was the Europeans in the eighties, late eighties into the early nineties--well, basically late eighties, the new crop--throwing themselves, tossing stuff, absolutely outrageous, crazy stuff going on. It was wonderful, and some of it was brilliant. I mean, I just felt very excited about it. And I realized that twenty years ago I was teaching classes where I was having students throw themselves at each other and skip over each other and fly underneath, you know, having somebody do a jump or leap and have somebody come underneath them sliding, and they all thought I was crazy. And

ten years later in Europe this is absolutely what they're doing in all of their dances. They're kind of tossing and throwing and dragging and spinning and turning. And then the outrageousness, too, the men dressing as women and blah blah blah, and in 1973 I did the Cinderella (at Midnight) show and doing some of the kind of outrageous things I did in that, and then "Indio," which had silver platform boots, and Bella (Lewitzky) thought it was absolutely crazy and weird. I was doing some of that stuff. Vesalii icones, when I shaved my eyebrows and my hair. I'm not the first, but I was in a sense already anticipating. I remember doing a piece for Carol Scothorn in my junior year, and it just was a piece where I threw my body all over the place, and it was just unacceptable, it was totally unacceptable. They didn't want to look at it, they didn't want to watch it, they didn't want to see it, they didn't-- It was not acceptable. And ten years later, or fifteen or twenty years later, it's the norm. It is the norm. La La La Human Steps (a dance company) is tame in comparison to some of the things that I saw in these excerpts coming from Europe who are the rage, you know. And then more of them now-- And even butoh, you know, with its-- They showed some butoh. They showed the different influences happening, that America was no longer the only place that modern dance or dance (inaudible) is happening. And I was very-- Vindicated I suppose is the only word that I can use in this. I was not a traditionalist ever. I didn't know that. I didn't know that I was breaking (new) territory. And I was. Now, it happened in Los Angeles, and it happened with somebody who was very--what's the word--uneven. That's not the word I want. Was not predictable. Uneven in the sense that I wasn't consistent in my product. But I was exploring it. I was exploring it in my dancing, my teaching, the stuff that I was doing. It crossed barriers. It moved into different territories. It was interesting to me, and I had an audience for it. I was just really touched by seeing that film, because no one will ever know and probably nothing will ever-- You know, that's not the point. But I did realize that I had my hand on the pulse of something. If I'd been more clear, more assured of myself, more ego, whatever, more consistent, I could have been literally one of the leaders in that field, because I know that I was right on target. And, you know, I'm glad to know that. I think it has nothing to do with wanting to be somebody; it really is that I just feel good that I was moving in a direction and trying to help my students find something that was in anticipation of what they were going to be doing, literally what they were going to be doing or what they were going to be seeing if they didn't do it. Because that's what is being done. It's not the violence of it that-- I was interested in some of the violence of it. But I was mostly interested in how people could be in such violent situations and survive them, like near misses and the kind of tension that is created by this kind of action. People are throwing themselves around, and yet nobody is hurting themselves necessarily. What I saw in all of that was the amazing ability of the human body and the human spirit to come into such conflict--and we see it all over the place--and not only survive it but actually start finding a rhythm and a texture and a lifestyle in it that eventually smooths out. Eventually the hurricane passes and we rebuild our lives. We survive it. That's exciting, you know. The diversity in this city is so complex and so difficult, and yet when we look at it we really probably have less violence and murder and such than we probably could have given that kind of situation--given that kind of situation a hundred years ago, where people would have just been wiped out because they weren't "useful" or they weren't "real people." So it fascinates me, and that aspect of it fascinated me. To some extent when you look at Pina Bausch I'm sure you got some of that, too--the survival sense, the absolute eccentricity of life juxtaposed into this survival and actually spiritual sensibility. It's amazing. It's truly amazing. Well, I had to throw that in there because, in looking back at my career, which in a sense this has forced me to do--And not to dismiss it completely for myself, not to say, "Well, I didn't do anything, and I didn't

have anything, and I didn't produce anything, and I didn't touch anybody." That is not the truth. Part of that is I didn't have enough confidence in what I was doing and probably didn't draw around me the same kind of people who supported-- You know, both of those need to be happening there. You don't have anything in a vacuum. You know, the women--also the men, but particularly the women--who were part of this great period of dance art form had to have enormous egos. They had to have surviving egos that would allow them to go on and to then pull in the kinds of people who would help them get there and just simply do it. And when you look at those people, they did. They were absolutely blinders on, straightforward, and "this is what I'm going to do," and they found the people who could support it financially, they found the people who could support it artistically, and they created their audiences, and they didn't waver. And for that we had this great period in dance. Charlton Heston talked about (how) film was the art form of this century and of this time, and that's partially true. Back in 1975, when I was doing my master's thesis, I talked about that in the biography of John Martin that I did for my master's, that dance and film were the statements of the twentieth century, because they both dealt with motion. If we go back to 1914 and 1915, then, you had Duchamp painting the "Nude Descending a Staircase." It was about trying to capture motion, and in the plastic, the immovable, arts. Stravinsky creating The Rite of Spring-- And when I saw it being played by four-handed pianists, it's all over the piano keys. It's enormously amazing. You know, they were fascinated with this sudden burst of energy and mobility that happened across the whole world, and motion pictures and dance began to reflect that. I am convinced that part of the great success of our artists in the twentieth century had a great deal to do with our obsession as human beings with our capacity to mobilize, to move, to think, see our brains thinking further beyond, to see our bodies moving further beyond, to see ourselves being propelled in objects further on--planes and trains and cars and speedboats and all the kinds of things that engines and then other situations brought to us. I don't think we had a sense of that, because I think space and capturing moments, capturing the tensions of the moments, seem to be more of what was going on in the first half of the century. Even with (Merce) Cunningham and Paul Taylor and (Alwin) Nikolais and Balanchine, of course, the first one, distilling away from the emotion of motion and just giving us pure motion, whatever that is and however they did that, was still spacial, still figurative or whatever. It hasn't been until, I think, in the eighties where you really began to see the tensions of life as almost just pure tension, the distortions that living creates, particularly when there is that drive, that motor drive, the tension of constantly being in motion, the head constantly being on, the thoughts coming and colliding, the bodies coming and colliding, the information coming and colliding with us, because it's about the collision of all these elements that we're not catching up with yet. See, we're behind it all now. Before we were dragging that up and we were the stars of it, and in just a few years, a few decades, we're behind everything. We're all trying to catch up with everything, and that's what the human condition is today. The human condition is everybody trying to catch up, catch up with the information, with the ideas, with each other, with-- (laughs)

KAUFMAN:

That's interesting.

BATES:

So when you see the dance today, you see people colliding and colluding and falling and hitting and running or standing there doing weird things with their head and their shoulders because they're frozen almost into that stuff, and it's absolutely amazing to me. You know, it had to come back to the passion of living. Whether that passion was a complete distortion, almost a manic or catatonic distortion of the passion, or a neurotic or almost a psychotic distortion, it still had to come back to it. Even with film, we're still talking about-- No matter how bizarre they get, how mechanical they get, how many ways in which they can distort the film and move creatures in and out like they do in some of the action hero films, you know, how they can become fourteen different things before your very eyes and-- (laughs) Or the Internet, where all of us human beings are now going through the Internet and coming out with something else. (laughs) No matter how much of all of that technical creation we're fascinated with, it's still about human beings. It's still about the human condition. It's still about a person feeling something--terror, overwhelm, all of those things that we're dealing with today. Confusion. We were just talking about the O. J. Simpson trial, you know, the confusion of right and wrong, good or bad, being/not being, spirituality, no spirit, atheism, all of these. Given one of those-- At the turn of the century, when Freud and that whole group of people began to set the doubt for us about a higher being, a God, that one thing rippled across Europe and America and just created all kinds of effects. Well, when you're given any number of those all rippling, you've got a riptide, and you got a lot of you stuff going on. One idea, giving women the right to vote, sets off a whole group of things. Well, if she gets the right to vote, then it means she's this and it means she's that, and means she can do this and can do that. Or it means I can do this or that. And we do, and then all of a sudden our entire social structure changes. And we have so many of those at once that are reaching out over each other and coming through and creating a kind of chaos that is absolutely dance. Even in the frozenness, even in the emptiness, there is a dance. And it's still very much a part of-- Whereas film can get so technical, it can become almost abstract. And that's why action hero films are so exciting to us, because they can be so abstract that they don't even have the reality of human beings in them. They have the fantasy of what we want to be able to do but not the reality. Dance still has the reality, which is why sometimes it's so difficult to watch. It is still a live production of people doing things that are frightening, overwhelming, unbelievable, but they're doing them. And they're creating that imaginary world for that brief moment to take you and suspend you into another belief, into another reality, into another consciousness. And they're doing that on a live stage that forces us to feel it, that forces us (to make) the kinesthetic connection that John Martin used to talk about. And in a time of fantasy it's not easy to accept. Do you realize that I--? We don't talk about this often, but the very time of the beginnings of (Martha) Graham and (Mary) Wigman and Doris Humphrey and then later Hanya Holm, all of that woolen-underwear dark stuff that was going on and that strange movement that was being created and eventually icons developed out of that, was exactly the same period as Busby

Berkeley, the fantasy movies, 42nd Street, things of that sort, which most people were watching. You know, most people didn't want to watch Martha Graham do this odd, weird stuff, (laughs) this really crazy stuff, this neurotic movement. They didn't want to watch that. You know, she didn't have big audiences. But she had a sense of a commitment to what she felt in the times, the tensions of the times and what that tension produced. And it wasn't pretty movement; it wasn't little frappÃ©s and little pirouettes. It wasn't presentational; it wasn't to the stage front, you know. These were people who were pounding, who had flexed feet, who felt the angst of life, who sensed the life flow through their entire bodies. And it rippled and it riveted and it pulsed, and whole new ideas were created out of that, absolutely brilliant stuff that still affects us today. Out of that stuff and out of that stuff and out of that stuff comes the dance of the eighties and nineties. It's not going to be acceptable. It's not going to be pretty. It's coming out of a different impulse of-- Not just a country anymore. You know, we're so caught up in Los Angeles and what's going on in Los Angeles. It's about a world coming together in a different way than it's ever come together and having to solve different problems, having to come to some kind of agreement in different ways, which means that we're dealing with different cultures, we're dealing with different ideas, we're dealing with different modes and methods of doing that on a daily basis, and all of it is different. We have different spiritual connections or religious connections. All of those elements create a diversity. Then we have things like the Internet, which separates us even more between the haves and the have nots. The Internet itself separates us, because it controls in some ways the information. I mean, just the thinking of a library that you can browse in, that you can play in, that that still has all of the books. The Internet and most of the computer things have really sort of simplified that until you can get into the library itself and find out-- So it diminishes information on some levels, and then it opens it up extraordinarily wide at some other levels. I mean, it's amazing. We don't know anything about it yet, as much as we do know about it, and what its potential is. But its potential could be that we could go into another dark age. We could have somebody--three people--hold the information and the rest of us not be available to it. And we're already getting into a world like that. We're getting into a world with-- As much information as we have, fewer and fewer people are aware of it. Fewer and fewer people rely on it to get to that next stage, which is developing an idea, seeing beyond. Every day I watch the television, and I watch different things going on, and I see that we're being tossed and turned. This day we believe this, and then the news comes on and says "radical changes," and we go (gasps as though in horror and mimes dodging something), and we believe that. You know, we don't put yesterday with today or tomorrow with the next day. And then "radical new--" and "Oh, this--" and it's all loud noises that just keep us in turmoil. Every day we go from one idea to another idea, one set of information to another set, as if nothing has happened, as if there is no tie-in, as if we don't have control over seeing. It was so funny, because I was sitting here writing a letter the other day to a friend and-- What does this have to do with my dances? (laughs) But you know it does.

KAUFMAN:

Yeah, it does.

BATES:

This is all of the information that I've always drawn from to create and to help my students see the link between, the reason they're doing these pliÃ©s and what theyâ€™re going to be either dancing about or creating about. We aren't doing this in a vacuum. It isn't related to a vacuum. It isn't related to just being pretty. It isn't related to a pretty picture on the wall or doing the table in a pretty way. And yet it is, because that pretty stuff, that stuff of form that attracts us--color, shape, all that stuff--is part of our aesthetic. So when we're reacted to, when we are subjected to, when we are facing life, all of it, those parts of it that attract us, we are taking in the very impulses of our aesthetic, or we're rejecting the impulses for our aesthetic. But in any case, we're creating and shaping it. And it's that that is more interesting than the pliÃ©. Because you know what? If you really are affected by it you'll fall into the pliÃ©. When you are really excited about something you'll stretch those legs up to the ceiling. Because that's how life affects us. Life affects us by moving us, moving us in extraordinary ways, moving us in extraordinary ways, either inside (demonstrates an emotional shift from apathy to abject loss) or outside (opens his body out in a moment of growing joy) either inside or outside. (physically demonstrates another shift of feeling) And it does this to us. So weâ€™d better pay attention to it, because otherwise we don't have anything to work with. And that's why it gets boring, that's why we get disinterested, and we're running from one interesting little thing to another interesting little thing, and we don't have a sense of tossing the salad, tossing the metaphors and the images in life to life to find out what falls in front of us, what it looks like, where it is, how I feel about it My last ten years-- (sighs) When I did Vesalii icones in 1974, having done the production of Cinderella (at Midnight) up in San Francisco-- Those were both breakthrough pieces, because they were way out there, way out there, for the audiences, for me, for other people. They were really bizarre things. I mean, working with gender-bender people in San Francisco who were so far out there, both on drugs and alcohol and on being bizarre, and to be able to pull something together and create something with my two friends Tim Troy and Patrick Marca Registrada (also known as Patrick Scott) was an extraordinary event. I was working with brilliant people, and I got to be a little bit brilliant as a result of that. We did some very exciting stuff. Whether anybody notices or not has nothing to do with it. Here's where I really believe in the Italian Benedetto Croce, who was a turn-of-the-century Italian aesthetician. He was one of our last great aestheticians, and one of the things he believed is that if you think it, you've created it, and you are an artist. If your mind works like an artist, you're an artist. You don't have to even create the event. And at some level the event doesn't have to be spectacular either. We don't all have to be famous. In that sense I can look at my work and look at what I was doing and realize that I was doing it. I was doing it. I was right in the middle of it, right in the middle of a very exciting age of things happening. Cinderella was part of that. Vesalii icones was part of that, because it was bizarre according to most people's calculations. I was in this sausage skin throughout the whole thing. So I had this bald head and this painted eye and this kind sausage skin tricot stuff doing movements like this (demonstrates the motions of the dance) You know, at one point when it comes to--not the crucifixion but--the jailing, the denunciation, when they accuse Jesus, I take a pair of scissors and look through them (demonstrates) and proceed to cut the tricot off and undo it. And then

here I had this gorgeous costume that is half spotted animal, half just nothing, but the bare bones left and some of the viscera all the way up, my head bald with some patches on it-- It was all part of the piece. Bizarre. But when I did that cutting of this costume off of me, it sent shivers down people's spines. I was cutting off my skin, and it just literally-- It frightened them. Bizarre stuff. And if I were to do Vesalii icones today, it would be right on target. People today, the generations today, would know that piece. They would know that piece. Well, that's the piece that brought Eyes Wide Open (Dance Theater) together. People wanted to work with Patrick and-- We wanted to work together. And that freed me. Out of that came "Indio." "Indio" was the piece that I did on the platform heels, and I threw myself off the stage into the audience and back on again and off again and on again. It was another one of those moments where-- And they laughed at me. The audience didn't laugh at me, but the other people around thought that "Oh, Gary's being weird again," you know, but it was a very potent moment. To simply just throw myself off into the audience and throw myself back in and throw myself off and throw myself in, I mean, suddenly I was breaking those lines. Not in the usual way of breaking it, by just walking off the stage and, but just (claps loudly) literally jamming into the audience. It was a roll, and I just flew off the stage, and I just rolled back onto the stage.

KAUFMAN:

With their help.

BATES:

No.

KAUFMAN:

No?

BATES:

I didn't need the help. I mean, I was good at it. It was a right sized stage so that I could go off the stage and then come right back and roll right back onto the stage and reach the other direction and go right back off and right back on without a seam. Now, that's technique, technique that pliÃ©s and tendus don't help you with. But the willingness to try something, the willingness to bridge a heretofore unknown moment, and this was part of that moment. That moment had to go off the stage, it had to attack (claps) the audience, and then come back. It had to attack them (claps three times) and then pull them back onto the stage. So it was one more place-- I mean, people-- Evidently Bella heard about it, and they were telling--

Tape Ten, Side Two (September 9, 1995)

BATES:

--seen it, but, you know, they all are just "Oh, Gary is just being very weird and stupid and strange." But it is one more example of this connection between that and what is now happening in a lot of different directions. If I could do a retrospective I would do it, including Vesalii icones. The next piece was my-- In '74 I did the "Indio" piece. In '76 I did the "Don Q Pas de Deux," sort of based on my relationship with Fred (Strickler)--humorous, funny, interesting. Again, parts of the elements of my dance had to do with how life affected me, so a lot of it was internal. A lot of it had to do with, you know,"My God, I just got it." (exhales loudly as if someone just punched him in the stomach, and then, all the while moving, starts speaking in a monotone) "Oh, my God, what is happening to me? I feel like I'm in a pluhhh!" You know, it's that dialogue. It was basically the inner dialogue that was going on for me. Therefore it had these very real experiences of being reacted upon, but they were the thought processes in some strange way of what I was experiencing. And as a result of that, the very direct motional shapings that it would create, that's the stuff I began to improvise on and then began to develop the vocabulary and the rhythms and things out of. And that was true form. The form of my dances really got clear with "Don Q Pas de Deux." The working out of that rhythmically, the putting it together, the breaking it up into pieces so that it could be re-put together and extended and such-- Because it was a precision dance. It was a dance about two people galloping along life, getting knocked over, getting picked up again, you know-- This wonderful moment-- (gets up to demonstrate) The Don was always about to declare the Idea. (stands straddling an imaginary horse, chest puffed out, one arm half raised) "This is the Idea." And he'd always be off of his foot about to fall over. And there was one time he was like that and just about to fall over, and I'd come underneath and start carrying him, and we'd start riding down. Little funny moments like that. Or moments when we'd be getting there and we'd go "Ewww!" (exhales a pinched, painful sound as he does the steps) and we'd fall right back onto the stage and then roll right back up. Silly, crazy, interesting, you know. But I learned about taking a six-count phrase and reconstituting it in a lot of different ways until I got things. And I was working with Steve Reich's music, which was all about permutations, all about taking a six-count phrase and seeing how much we can develop out of it. It was a perfect piece. Then I did a piece called "Chronicles" in '78 for three women. I liked

it, but it never worked. I'm not sure if it didn't work because of the costuming or if it didn't work because I didn't have the setting for it or if it was just too abstract or just a little bit ahead of its time. If I could do it again-- I'm not sure whether or not it would work now. I think some of the people who saw it were very touched by it. It was definitely a piece that moved my choreographic skills and ideas further. It was a deepening of some of the processes that I had worked with in the past. It was a very different piece. It was in three sections, and it was really one more time about the inner working, the inner soul. This was a deeper aspect. Three women standing there on a diagonal and going through a whole series of-- They were all the same in that first section. It was like how this kind of thing can be kind of universal, when we have a discovery, you know-- (demonstrates the movements, slow and subtle postural shifts) And it went much slower than that. They all three were in unison, and then each one of them at a particular moment broke apart and had her own experience. And then they came together in this big sweeping motion of work but in a totally different way. It's called "Chronicles." It was done in 1978, '79, before Eyes Wide Open (dissolved). Then I did some series of solos, solos that Kathe (Howard Copperman) and I connected to each other's solos. The '81 one won the Vanguard Award. I moved to Florida. Then I did the "Is It Love?" Lewitzsky Legacy piece in '86, just about the nervousness of-- Again, all of my work had to do with an externalization of the internal thought process, the internal feeling and thought and experience. It was the residue of what was happening inside. So the externalization was only the residue in much the same way as if you look at a street person you're not seeing a person doing movement consciously, you're seeing people doing things as a result of what's going on in their head, and whether or not in any given minute it makes sense or not. You know, if you listen to them sometime, you know they're talking to somebody. It may have been somebody ten years ago. It may still be that anger they felt with their mother and their father that comes up in all of us in moments. I mean, I have those awful feelings sometimes, wanting to stab myself in front of my mother and say, "Is there any more I can give you?" You know? Which came out of my childhood. Those were real, vivid, frightening moments, but I wanted to do that, you know, those thoughts that are so big and they're so real, that cause us to kill, that cause us to close down, that cause us to do whatever we do to survive them. But they're real. They're big, they're motional. Inside of us, that stuff that makes you feel like you can't move, that just keeps making you feel like you're just sort of sinking down into life and you're about to drown and you almost can't breathe in it. (makes suffocating sounds) That's real stuff. Now what's happening to me is not anything. It's the residue of what's happening in me, in here (points to his head) between my ears, and the result of how I am taking it in. That was the basis of my work. "Beneath The Tears" was another one of those, too. "Beneath The Tears" is the piece that starts out-- It's the refined piece, it's the piece that has the least movement. The first section of it is on a chair. It's simply this whole thing of sitting at something-- You know, you're about to face something or you're looking at something and suddenly you realize what you're looking at. And all I'm doing is sitting here pulling my pants. (demonstrates, plucking at the trouser fabric over his thigh as an expression of horror slowly grows on his face as he watches some invisible event) And all of a sudden it dawns. (goes through the steps of the dance) And that moment of reality and then trying to make sense out of that reality, that moment-- About death-- It certainly was-- That piece was created around the time that I found out for sure that I had HIV, that I was HIV positive, that my life was probably going to be over soon. Because at that time, '86, '87, our lives were over pretty quickly. (snaps his fingers) The disease took over, and people were dead within six months or a year. It was the coming to grips with the fact that I had already lost a number of friends. I watched a number of

friends go. I knew that if I had it it was going to be-- It was the coming to grips with my own reality, the reality of my friends, the reality of how much larger this was going to be than we were recognizing at the time. It was the beginning of a breakthrough of my denial, of my own denial, in a lot of (inaudible), because at that point I also came back to using drugs and alcohol. I discovered crack, and I couldn't get off of it, and I couldn't get away from it. I wasn't doing it every day, but I was doing it in a very destructive way. I think between '87 and '90 I wanted to die. I felt the end of my career, and I didn't know what to do about that. There was a wonderful biography out on Martha Graham on film in which they talked about her not wanting to go off stage. She did not want to relinquish her place on that stage, even in her sixties. And to some degree, I understand, it was not simply because of what they thought was the ego, although I think a lot of it was the ego, but it was her-- She had created this dance, she had created these images, this thing, and it came through her. I think the fear that she wouldn't be able to create at all if she weren't doing it-- It was frightening, was literally frightening. You know? And she was on pain medicine, her body was all crippled, she was becoming an alcoholic, and all these things were happening to her as a direct result of the fear, the anxiety that she wouldn't be able to do what her whole life had been about. And even though my life didn't have that same directness that hers had, that I had chosen to be in a city that doesn't respond a lot to dance (laughs), or that I had chosen to be both a university teacher and a performer and choreographer, or that I had become interested in both the intellectual aspects of it as well as the direct aspects of it, that made no difference when I came to that point of realizing that I was, one, going to die very quickly probably and, two, that my life was over anyway because I was feeling like I couldn't do those things. You know, I couldn't perform like I did before. I couldn't do this kind of dancing with a fifty-year-old body or fifty-five-year-old body or whatever, I felt. And my art was so personal to me, I didn't think I had a way out. I tried to drown it. You know, whether you're drowning it with something you're smoking or injecting in your body or dropping down your throat, I was trying to drown that, I was trying to drown that pain, that fear. I'm not excusing that. That was a choice I made, and I made those choices early along. I realized that the other day, when I was writing an amends letter to somebody who's dead now, that I started using that escape back in the early seventies--not very often and only periodically, but it set up a pattern. That coupled with the fact that I didn't take a stand for my own art-- That I didn't aggressively pursue either of my careers or my potential in some of the arenas that we talked about earlier with Pacific Motion (Dance Studios) or with Eyes Wide Open or whatever led to a situation which finally defeated me on some levels. One of the most exciting times I had during that period was starting to teach technique in a different, a totally different, way. I had really put together all of my ideas about what I wanted the body to be able to do. I wanted the body to respond freely, whether it moved from softness to hardness or from tossing to quiet or from the loud aspects of our minds and fraughtness to the tender, soft moments. I wanted the body to be able respond to all of those levels, because I see that the dancer today is going to do that. You know, she's not going to do Swan Lake often. (laughs) And I wanted a body that could respond quickly to those different experiences. So I started being able to teach in a way that I thought would be-- I think I began to get people to do that. I began to find ways to do that. I began to find ways to get them to move their bodies with abandon, and they could begin to trust their own sense. The technique had a lot to do with where you were going, not so much where I wanted you to go. It was really to try to help you find that place-- And when I developed the kind of stuff I did at the beginning of the class to get the body aware, the relaxation stuff, the moving into the tension-and-release stretch and contraction, all of that sort of began to be an intuitive inner

connecting of the body, so that by the time we stood up and we were doing pliÃ©s and tosses and throws and reaches and controlling and letting go all that stuff could happen. People, beginners to advanced students, could find their way in that and not hurt themselves. That stuff I got developed at Santa Monica College. The freedom I had there to be who I was and to work in the way that I wanted to work was the most freeing that I had ever had. Except for the space when-- There was a place in Santa Monica on Fifth Street that I taught in, and that was the other place that I had tremendous freedom, and in that I got to do some things technically. With Santa Monica (College) I also got to explore in that creative class that you were in, ideas, playful ideas, trying to help people discover the impulse to create, that impulse to create coming from taking an idea and going for it. If there's a difference between what happens in L.A. or what happens in New York or Europe now it is simply that these people will take the idea and go for it. They will believe in the idea, and oftentimes in Los Angeles we don't believe in the idea. We don't believe that we have just done something and go from there and keep building on it and keep going after it. There's a skepticism and there's an unwillingness to see, to explore, to believe, that I find so detrimental in Los Angeles, so detrimental. And I don't know what it is. That doesn't mean that everybody's that way, but it's so hard to work in that vacuum. And it's not just me. I watch it in everybody else. Bella had to be so determined in order to absolutely close her eyes and do her work and get that work done in a particular way. And she did it after she was fifty. She's going to be eighty next year. She did it in those thirty years when most people quit. I think that I could do it today if I weren't ill with the HIV virus. I think I know today-- I have a new sense of myself and a new sense of what it is that I'm after, that I literally could go back into dance and create what I want to create without any of the hassle and without caring about what other people thought about it or how they reacted. I have a clarity today that I've never had in my life about all of it and particularly about what I want from it. I realized a long time ago that if I wasn't liking what was going on it was because I wasn't doing my work. And when you get to that place and you're looking around and you're not seeing what you want, it's because you're not doing it. You're the only one who knows what you want to see, and if you don't create it you're never going to see it. The disappointment and the kind of--what's the word I want?--the nudginess that people get into who were dancers or who stayed on the periphery, and the older they get the more peripheral they become, even if they're teaching, comes from that sensibility. That irritableness, that discontent, comes from them not having done their work but not seeing it anyplace else, seeing parts of it, a glimmer of it here or there, seeing a little bit of it in that company. "Aw, I don't like what's going on today!" Because they're not doing their work that they're seeing in their heart, that they're feeling in that pulse that is theirs, that is their aesthetic, their sensibility, their reality of this world. It is that that I saw that was more important for me, more important to try to awaken it in others, than my own work. That wasn't being altruistic. It was my mission, just like Bella's mission of the last thirty years was to create this company and Martha Graham's for sixty-three years was to create her company, and whatever the others-- To do what they were doing, to discover emotion, to discover motion, to go this direction, to go that direction. I felt the lack of something here, and I tried the best I could to be a part of changing it, changing the perception of it, changing the image of it, changing our perception of ourselves, so that we could go someplace with it. I don't know what happened with that. It doesn't matter. I did the best I could given who I was, and today I do not feel sad about where it went or what it did. I realize that there was a lot that I had, and some of it I didn't do well, some of it I did poorly, and some of it I did very well. And, you know, I'm very excited about that. I don't know what else to say. We talked about my career as a solo performer. My solo work began quite accidentally and

then developed into something quite interesting--interesting in the sense of where it was coming from and what I was trying to get after. Because I really wasn't trying to make dances that were shaped and spacial; I was trying to make dances that were coming from inside. I was trying to bring the psyche out. My dances were about the residual movement that was the result of inner conflict, not trying to express the inner conflict but the result of it in a sense and an exaggeration of it, opening it up here, closing it down here. So using space only in the sense that the figure felt that or needed that but not as a spacial concept. Graham's work was built on that, too--space, that sense of the great large expanse of America. The dances had formal patterns which were spacial, coming out of the old English and European and American ethnic dances. They were formal. They had to be formal because they were about celebrating to the gods, about having a baby, about making sure the corn gets in, about making sure we won the war.

KAUFMAN:

Well, the last couple of years of your life, now, from like when you taught your last class at Santa Monica College until now, what has been going on for you?

BATES:

Okay, that. Thank you, because I probably got a little slipped out all over the place. About two years ago I hit a really devastating bottom. I had been trying since 1990 to stop using drugs and alcohol to kill myself. I'd gotten to a place of being angry. I mean, it was a disgusting place. I was practically a derelict. And I was certainly negative, I was certainly angry, and-- I had practically destroyed most of my relationships that I had for years and years and years by just simply cutting them off or whatever. I got to a place where I was hopeless and didn't know what to do and couldn't do anything and felt like the various ways in which I tried to get help didn't work for me, and I was going to be the person who was left to die at some point, and not fast enough, in some back alley down on Main Street. And I didn't care. I just had just kept hoping that I would die. I had felt sorry for myself. I had felt like a victim. Everything was against me, and there was nothing to live for anymore. Everything had passed me by, and I hadn't done any of it very well anyway, so it really didn't matter. (laughs) I had ruined a career, I had ruined my life, I had ruined-- I had not faced it, and therefore it was all bad. About two years ago I was in one of those places, and then some things started changing. And the last two years has been a slow process of rebuilding my life. I woke up one day and realized-- I made a commitment again to try to get help, and I did get some help. And to this day that has worked. I have found a relationship with my higher power, with a spiritual contact that I had lost some time ago. I began to have a way of reconnecting with some of my friends and rebuilding my life by cleaning up some of the stuff that had happened. And over the last couple of years slowly a transformation

has happened, and it's something that I had never ever experienced in my life. With the HIV virus taking its toll on me, I'm now down to nine T cells and dealing with a lot of energy loss and all that kind of stuff, and fear, and not knowing from day to day how I'm going to feel or when some opportunistic disease is going to just knock me on my ass. I'm happier. I'm fuller. You know, my days are very full, I'm very active and doing a lot of stuff. I've never been more calm. I've never been clearer about who I am, I've never been more comfortable with who I am, than I am right now. I have been moving toward that now in a consistent way for a couple of years. It's unbelievable. I couldn't tell you that-- I mean, if I were to die right now I know I would die happy, I know I would die comforted, I know I would die with a sense of having accomplished something, even though it didn't turn out the way I saw that it could at some point. I feel fulfilled, and I still have a lot of feeling for doing more. I really want to write about dance in Los Angeles. I want to write about creativity, about art. I want to write about what happened here while I was here. I hope that this work that we're doing will eventually lead to that. I'm going to do my best to do it, whether it gets done or not. I also recently have been-- I was telling somebody about this, a friend of mine who I know, and she said, "You know, I've done that same thing for somebody else, and I can't write. Would you be interested in helping me write it?" So I may be doing a book on Claude Rains, a biography on Claude Rains. She had twelve or fifteen tapes that she did, and she has it now on the computer and the transcriptions, and she wants me to help her write it. I mean, fascinating--isn't it?--that there may be a whole new career at this point in my life when I thought it was over and there was nothing left, that whole new stuff is opening up, whole new possibilities beyond my wildest dreams. I really couldn't have imagined this from where I was just two years ago, where it was over. I wasn't dead yet, but I was hoping to die and I wanted to die. And then something else happened. I'm still alive. When I woke up one day after the last time I went out on a two-day binge and found myself sitting in MacArthur Park for a whole day not knowing where to go because I had no place to go--at least I thought I had no place to go--and I was scared, and I-- I knew I wasn't going to die right away. I knew that I would just linger and that I would be going from one alley to another and trying to make sure I didn't have my shoes stolen and every month use up my check in the first day or two and then not have anything to eat and be eating out of cans. I mean, that's what I saw, that I wouldn't die, I would just go on living this dead existence. When I asked for help, and when I got the help and started changing, I made a commitment to myself and to life that my business was about living, that I needed to get on with my life, wherever it took me, whatever it was going to be, and that God's business was about dying. So I let God have the business of dying for me, and that will happen when it's going to happen. But right now I get to live, however that's going to be. And some days it's good and some days it's not so good. Most the time wonderful things keep revealing themselves. I'm writing to over fifty people again all across the country and into Ireland and places. I have a regular group of people that I write to, over fifty people right now. I call and talk to a lot of friends. I talk about dance or about art or about life or about other things with other people. I'm busy doing stuff. I'm allowing myself to be the kind of person that I desperately wanted to try to help in the years past. That whole idea of my mission is to help people find their creativity and express their creativity, part of it because mine was blocked.

Tape Eleven, Side One (September 13, 1995)

KAUFMAN:

We're going to go into a little bit of where you are now in your life, the things you're working on, struggling with, doing currently.

BATES:

Life isn't over until it's over. (laughs) You know, that's the only thing that I can come up with now when I think about saying something profound or exciting or whatever. And the truth of it is that is the truth. Life isn't over until it's over. A couple of weeks ago I woke up and realized that I had all these projects going and that I had better get a life, because I am very busy right now. I have nine T cells. I told a friend of mine this morning at a meeting, "I have nine T cells, and they've all got assignments." (laughs) "So instead of naming them I just put them all to work." I mean, that's where they've been since April or so. And it's okay. I did wake up a couple of weeks ago and realize that part of me has always been sort of waiting to die, and in fact I'm living. I called a friend of mine in Florida this morning to find out how he was doing with the floods and everything. He's getting ready to retire--we're the same age, and he wants to get out of the business. And I sort of told him what I was doing, that I have all these little projects that I'm doing right now. He said, "Well, you know, you're living proof that you can be too busy to work." (laughs) I just needed to hear that. Because the truth is, if I had a job it would interfere with all the things I'm doing, and I'm having a ball. You know, I'm having fun doing stuff. I have to keep reminding myself, because by myself I think I'm not. What I tell people when people ask me what I'm doing, I say, "Oh, nothing," because I tend to dismiss it or I tend to minimalize it. And the fact is I'm doing a lot. The fact is that I've always done a lot, and I always dismissed it, I always minimalized it. I always figured that somebody else was doing something more important. The things over there were better. You know, what I'm doing, I'm just doing what everybody else does. To some extent that's always the truth. I am just doing what everybody else is doing, putting one foot in front of the other and (inaudible). And the other truth is that I'm doing a lot.

KAUFMAN:

This is quite a shift, though, from when I first met you back in 1991 at Santa Monica College. Can you talk a little bit about where you were there and how you got here?

BATES:

In that period I was probably hitting the lowest place of my life. I was preparing to die and wanting to die. I didn't feel like my life was-- I didn't have a life anymore. The two or three years between 1990, when I tried to get into recovery again, when I had retired, when I had left my job at Loyola (Marymount University) and stopped teaching at Santa Monica, I really thought my life was over. My whole life had been wrapped up into all of that. You know, when that was over I didn't have anything.

KAUFMAN:

Meaning teaching.

BATES:

Yeah. When all of the teaching and the performing and everything, when that world collapsed for me, everything collapsed. And I spent a couple of years sort of like bouncing around in and out of recovery, in and out of being healthy. Because I just really thought everything was over, and all I was doing basically was treading water until I died. Well, the interesting thing is that I don't have any control over when I'm living or dying. (laughs) I have control over what I'm doing while I'm alive. I don't have much control over when I'm going to go. And that's finally hitting me. Over the last couple of years, as I've been in recovery and looking at my life and taking some inventory and shifting and getting rid of some old stuff, my life has come alive. Now, my body and my health seem to be deteriorating, but my spirit and my usefulness is increasing. And that's been an in, that in itself has been one of the most wonderful parts of this journey. There isn't any part of my life now today that I look back at and say, "Oh, that was terrible. I shouldn't have done that." I can look back on it and I can go to meetings or I go other places, and part of that, even the worst of it, part of it becomes useful to somebody else. So I'm not looking at my life as being a mess or a mistake or "If Iâ€™d done it better this way it would have turned out better." I can look at it and say, "This has been my journey." And this is my journey, this is my path, and I've really experienced my path. (laughs) There is no doubt that I have really experienced my path. And even that I can look at today and say, "How wonderful!" how wonderful that I took big chomps of the apple and chewed them, that I didn't look around and ignore most of what was available to me. I jumped in with both feet and both hands. On some

level it hurt me, and on many levels I learned so much from it and I got so much from it. And I got to be here. I've gotten to be where I am today with all the experiences that I have, and I'm very grateful for that. Looking back, I think that a couple of years ago, when I met you, I really-- The only place I really enjoyed teaching anymore was at Santa Monica College. I'm not quite sure why that was true. I loved the students, I loved the mixes of students. They didn't have any expectations, and they didn't have any ideas about what was good or bad or indifferent, so it was very refreshing to work with a group of students who were just curious and who were willing to sort of play along and figure out what was there. They weren't at that other level where they expected something, and they weren't at a level where they thought they knew something. So they were fun to work with. Anything that you did, they kind of like, "Oh, my God," you know, and were willing to try it. So that was very refreshing. It was that that also helped me get through some times that were really difficult. I'm not the kind of person necessarily to commit open suicide, but I'm sure that some of the activity that I did was covert suicide--trying. And at this point it didn't work and hasn't happened yet, and I have another life. I have another whole thing of which now dance is part of, not exclusive to.

KAUFMAN:

Can you talk a little bit about that, how it's now part of your life rather than the whole thing?

BATES:

What's interesting for me is how dance now, by having shifted-- First of all, I'm a whole person today. I've never sensed myself--maybe once or twice in the past--where I really felt like every part of me was focused in the same direction, every part of me was the whole thing, and that these different things that I did were just different things that were a part of the same whole. At some point all that got fractured and pieced, and I kind of lived a Jekyll and Hyde life. Dance is a part of my life today in different ways. It's in talking with friends about the dance experience or still working occasionally when I can or when people want it, to work with people in-- Talking about their experiences with their choreography or their dancing or their careers. So I'm still in conversation and talking with various people. I go to concerts. Last week Rose Polsky did a concert, and the review was so bad that I wrote a letter to the (Los Angeles) Times. It was a very good letter; I was very pleased with it. Nothing got done about that, and that was just disappointing, and I'm still now looking at seeing what I can do. I'm beginning, in a very tiny-little-footstep way, to take my place, maybe as an elder statesman, somebody who's had some experience and who can share that experience with others. These taped interviews have been very, very important to me, because I've gotten to reassess what I thought might have been a bad career or not a helpful thing or maybe a waste of time and reevaluated it to see that I did

contribute and that I have something to offer, that I have a line of experience, and I'm part of a continuum in this that needs to be there and that I can be there for students and other people. I'm beginning to do that a little bit at a time. I'm doing some volunteer work for Dance Resource Center, and I do keep in touch with a number of people, so that when I can help-- You know, I am willing to do that if I am able to. That has been gratifying, the change in how I look at my career, when I stopped looking at it in comparison to other people's careers and where mine went and where it didn't go and what I did and what I didn't do, and I started looking at the fact that I made choices out of a particular belief system over the years. Now, that got distorted on occasion because of other actions. But the real fact of it is that I did make some very clear choices along the way, and a lot of the time, if not most of the time, I acted on those particular beliefs. It wasn't as important for me to become a big star or have a company or go to New York or go all over Europe. It was important for me-- My initial being of staying in Los Angeles was because I wanted to help create and build dance in Los Angeles, and I have done that to an extent by teaching here, by staying here and teaching, by working with young people, by sharing my own experience, strength, and hope in that area, by being involved in a number of different ways in the dance community. That was something that I really wanted to do. I also wanted to help dancers and choreographers get started, and I've done that. I've helped people move along. So there's a lot in that area that is stuff that you don't necessarily see and you don't necessarily experience in a bigger way that I feel very proud of, I feel very good about. You know, I had so many wonderful experiences in dance, in understanding life and beginning to have a sense about how life and philosophy and moving and action and all of that stuff kind of relates to each other. But it's only been in the last couple of years, when I left it and lost it and thought I wasn't going be able to do it again, that I began to see how it has really been a wellspring of my information. I look at life very differently because of my experience with dance. I feel and see life very differently. Even through the crisis period of those few years when death was imminent, when everything was over, when I felt probably the worst sense of failure, there was something about that experience, that accumulated experience, that kept me going.

KAUFMAN:

Can you articulate what things about dance make you think differently about life?

BATES:

Dance is an active, an action situation. The spontaneity of it was something that-- When I could no longer be spontaneous, it worked on me. The fact that you put one foot in front of the other to make the movement-- Doris Humphrey always talked about dance being the arc between two deaths, standing up and lying down, and that everything else that we do, the minute we begin to

shift those two straight lines we begin the motion of dance. So dance is something where the minute I start to move I'm creating the motion. Now, that's something I've always known, but within these last few years, when all the other stuff was happening, that started moving me. I couldn't move, there were times I couldn't move, and that experience moved me right into life again. When I wanted to stay in bed or when I wanted to die or when I wanted to get some more drugs or whatever, that experience that I had gone through started moving me into-- It took me-- And now that I'm in the twelve-step programs and working with that and putting that together, all this other stuff makes yet another level of sense to me. You know, I operate from that sense of the spontaneity and the motion and the idea that this is the life, this is the creative act, this is the ultimate creative act: how we move through our life. You know, it's the ultimate dance. And that has become part and parcel to my whole existence right now. I'm learning. Because I was so gifted-- I mean, these are the things that I was given, not things that I did. I was given an enormous amount of energy, I was given intelligence, and these are things that were givens. I didn't have to do anything for them. Because I had some of those things, I never had to do anything for them. Therefore, they were there all the time at my disposal, that I could abuse-- which I did. When I started losing those things, I had to find out what other people do in life. That is, when they get tired they have to rest, when they run out of energy they have to take a deeper breath and move through something. I was always able to go, go, go, go, go. And now I'm learning about the shiftings and subtleties that I've always been fascinated with. So I'm learning to do shading. You know, shading may be that I slow down here and pick up there and rest at this point and stop here and-- I'm learning to have fun with that, though. But, see, I watch other people in life, and I realize that they don't have that sense of those moments, those little moments in life that I-- That's been one of the great gifts of being a dancer, and not just any dancer but the kind of dancer that I have been, and the kind of people that I have gotten to work with, and the kind of atmosphere that I've worked in all of my life since I've been in dance. It wasn't just "Kick your legs up and get those legs out and move this and-- " You know, that part of the discipline was also important. But the sensitivity to a motion, the acknowledgment that every single move is an expression of something-- And that colored everything that I did, in my teaching, in my choreography, in my performing. When I look back on that, that was probably the essence of everything that I did. And that was also a gift to me from the teachers that I had, from the place that I operated within: Eyes Wide Open (Dance Theater), Bella Lewitzky, Carmelita (Maracci), UCLA and the wonderful work that Alma Hawkins brought into the dance community at UCLA in terms of looking at the person within. At the end of the nineteenth century there were three main issues that came up for people and came into the twentieth century, changing our outlook in society, at least in Western society, and there were three disciplines that grew out of that: psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Psychology was looking back at ourselves in relation to others, sociology looking at others in relation to ourselves, and anthropology looking at ourselves from the past and trying to assess. All three of those disciplines came out of a new curiosity about man himself. For a long time, from the medieval period in Western philosophy, we tried to denigrate the human body. And I think it was that shift in the nineteenth century that allowed dance to come into its own as an art in this century, when we were able to recognize that this body that we're in was in fact our beingness, not just the spiritual. Now we've taken that very far, shifted that quite too far. The quest into the twenty-first century is going to be spiritual again--in a different way, though, because it's a mind-body connection rather than-- And it's not out there. You know, it's not that thing we're waiting to die for; it is something that we can attain while we're moving in our lives, while we're acting in our lives. And that's a shift. That's another

shift in this century, and it's a shift that I'm getting to experience before I go. It's bringing those two together, that mind or body, spirit or material world, into some kind of harmony. I felt it at moments in dancing. I felt it at moments in the classroom. There is no doubt about that. I've said this before, that the period of time that I was in the classroom, those last few years of teaching, were probably my only sane moments for a period of time. And the sanity was in that blending of the physical with that kind of spiritual quest that I call creativity. You know, creativity is an expression of that, because the spirit is that ability to reach beyond what is visible. And any time that we're trying to reach beyond what is visible, what is apparent, we are beginning to move into the realm of spirit. For that reason, art is such an essential part of our beingness. It is not something, you know-- What's that word? It's not something separate or something you just buy because it's a pretty picture. It's not something incidental. It is essential to our being, because it is our need and our curiosity and our desire to bring forth something that we can't necessarily see in front of us or just maybe to bring forth what we do see, what is really going on here, what is the balance and the rhythm and the texture and the forms and the things that we're living with, that are going up against us, that we're having to (face) or trying to ignore. We call it denial today. You know, everybody is talking about denial. It doesn't matter what area you're in. We must be in denial, because it's one of the big sociological, psychological words today. But in fact we do have to, in a life that is so busy and so fast and so-- Everybody is trying to catch up with everybody else and get the chicken in the pot. There is a sense of being blinded by all of the noise, being blinded by all of the pollution, being blinded by all of this tension. Dance helped me begin to see that stuff and feel it and realize that there was something going up against my back and to identify it and use it and let it become the thing that's operating me. This was much more obvious than just doing the battement, much more interesting to me than learning how to do ten pirouettes. I wanted to learn how to do that too, but more important was what is happening to me. So all of that had one level that I-- The sensitivity to that, the stuff that I got to learn from other people and experience and draw from, which at one point I wanted to dismiss, I wanted to think I was looking at the wrong stuff. But the truth is I wasn't looking at the wrong stuff. I wasn't believing myself. I used to accuse my students of going out-- And it's true. Oftentimes we can have wonderful classes, and you've been in some of those, where the most amazing stuff happened, and people will walk out and not believe it and think nothing happened even though they were all going "Oh, my God! Did you see what she did?" and "That was fabulous!" And then we'd walk out, because the world is there, the reality is there, and we'd have to shut that all off and say, "Oh, that wasn't meaningful, that really wasn't important," and cut it off from our experience. And I did the same thing. I used to accuse my students of doing it, but I was doing the same thing. You know, when I started learning how to tap into that and realize that was it, there was some essential shifting that went on for me. And that's when the integration began. That's when the integration among my spirit and my body and my sense of being here and my sense of being in the larger context, of creativity or life or whatever, began to make sense. The richness of that exploration, whether I understood it or not, whether I did it well or not, has enriched my life and is something that I value greatly today. I have integrated it into my life. It is not my life. And that's the gift that I've been given, one more gift that I've been given. I've lived a very blessed life. I've had wonderful experiences. I've tried a little bit of the whole pie. And I'm still alive to do more of it. (laughs) I'm looking forward to doing some writing about this period and about art--about arting, about creating, about what that means as a spiritual context. I think that's the next step for us. We write a lot about ourselves today, and we write a lot about these things and spirit and spirituality, but there's an interesting aspect that we're losing, and that is that

the very act of making something is a spiritual quest. We don't hear much about that. Well, in fact, we've lost a lot of our ability to make. Other things are made for us, and the computer is a wonderful example. It gives us a chance to do all these things that are already accumulated. You know, there is a certain amount of creativity that goes on in that, but-- You know, there's nothing like knowing--

KAUFMAN:

It's not the same.

BATES:

And our body is a resource. William James talked about our body being a resource. This is how we know when we pick it up, when we turn it upside down, when we fall and stub our toes. When we break an ankle or touch somebody else, when we hug somebody, when we cry, that's our body responding to life. And it was from that base that modern dance began. It's from that base that a lot of other things began. It's from that base that twelve-step programs came from, too. They were very influenced by William James and his ability to see and to touch. That hands-on experience, that's very rich. That's very rich, that pragmatism that he talked about from Charles (Sanders) Peirce. I want to talk about that. Not just now, but, I mean, that's something maybe in this last remaining time that I have that I would like to emphasize about the creative process. Because there's no place-- Twentieth century art has been about motion. The computer is certainly an aspect of that motion--quick information, information (snaps his fingers) just like that. Motion pictures has certainly been the big expression; itâ€™s now a multibillion-dollar entertainment business. And the two are now merging. Computers and the information highway and television, interestingly enough, are now merging. That's an interesting mix of these two individual and separate entities. But dance was also the art form that emerged as essential in the twentieth century. Motion pictures were on celluloid and the computer is in this machine, in essence, and although we turn it on and we move the mouse and we type it in and all that kind of stuff, it's still outside of ourselves, where dance is that one physical expression that draws from inside of our own selves, that forces me constantly to listen with my whole body, to taste and feel and experience with my whole body, so that I know that when that ankle gives that there is something happening. I know that when I'm being attacked that my body crunches and crumbles, or it stiffens and forces out, and that this is the expression, and it's that stuff that you want to grab hold of. It's what is happening to us and how our body is responding, whether it's a sad, soft, languid, energyless, inertia-bound movement, or whether it's the (smacks fist in hand) pounding, that relentless rhythmic thing. The early dancers, Isadora (Duncan) and Ruth St. Denis, who was

our spiritual dancer, pulled from the sequences of Eastern and other religious areas. Isadora was the one person who essentially had that sense of the inner spirit.

Tape Eleven, Side Two (September 13, 1995)

BATES:

Mary Wigman felt the tensions, as did Doris and Martha Graham. The tensions in America were different in many ways from the tensions in Germany, particularly in the twenties. And the strife that occurred for (Mary) Wigman forced her into another kind of direction, the use of the mask and the use of a kind of resistance, where with Graham that turned into a kind of bravura, a wanting to jump and celebrate and feel the tensions of the-- The music picked up the tensions of the streets, which were booming into life at the time. It was discordant and it was jarring and it was rubbing up against each other and it didn't have a kind of prettiness of the landscape of the nineteenth century and the romanticism of nostalgia. This was harder, and it was relentless, because it had the beat not of the heartbeat but the beat of the drum, steady and constant, and we were having to catch up with it. Our music today reflects that very much. So there was this constant feeling from that, feeling for that-- "What is that energy? How is it affecting my heartbeat and my breath pulse (pants loudly) and forcing me along? How am I resisting it as a tide?"

KAUFMAN:

And now we're moving into something where-- The information century is what people are calling it. What's going to happen with dance now? You mentioned something about it incorporating a spiritual sense.

BATES:

Well, you know, the whole idea of arting has been absorbed into big sales, entertainment, prettiness, so a lot of the art that we see today is in reaction to that: it's ugly, it's frightening, the movement is not pretty at all, the paintings are-- I was really fascinated a few years ago, because there was this just amazing work coming out of the young painters: these brilliant, gorgeous colors--so sensual, and, you know, you just wanted them to smear them all over your body--

against the most ugly content. And I thought, "How interesting." Here is this absolutely gorgeous color, so rich that you just want to taste it and touch it and feel it and smell, but the content was so ugly that the juxtaposition was frightening and alarming and made my hair stand up. Wonderful. Beautiful stuff and at the same time the most ugly, you know? Two life forces hitting against each other. Now, is that the kind of stuff you want to hang in your living room and look at every day? I don't know. I don't know that, and I don't know that-- A lot of the dance stuff that we see today, particularly coming out of Europe and Asia, like butoh, is extraordinarily beautiful and extraordinarily difficult and ugly. But there is something so powerful about that statement, about those juxtapositions of forces that we're having to deal with--no movement, too much movement, you know, that kind of stuff going on. The concert I saw last, Sacha Waltz, who is a new German artist, who was very exciting-- There was one of the most beautiful apache dances, male-female dances, where they were trying to get together, and he would open her legs and slide in between her legs, and his whole body would wiggle and jiggle, and she would sort of look like she was giving in and then push him away, and there's this in and out and this trying and not trying and yes and no and all of those energies, and it was wonderful. It was wonderful, and it was relentless, you know, this pace that just kept going on. And all of a sudden there would be all of them doing this one movement, these accumulated movements that they would be doing, that had no meaning, or things would be going on with one group, going on as if practical everyday stuff--going in and out of the room, carrying things and putting things down--while other things were going on in these thought processes. That's something else that came up for me over the years teaching, is I really began to connect to how I think and how I move and how I exist. Now, it made sense in a choreographic way for me for years, but it never made any sense to me in a living sense until-- Again, I think my life changed with having to face my own mortality. Now there's a lot of that stuff. It is so much more easy to deal with, so much easier to deal with and so much more fun to play with, than it ever was. Because that stuff that I'd learned in my creative process I had not yet learned to put into my life. I knew more about it there than I did here, and now that's integrated into my life in a different way. It's fabulous. And I'm listening to myself, I'm listening to my body and interacting in my life in a much different way. That process of our thoughts and how they work and how they influence us and also how they motivate us-- I mean, you've sat with yourself and thought and started thinking of things and found yourself twitching or starting to get up and move and get going or getting so overwhelmed by what you had to get done you sort of fall down into the seat and you start sinking into the seat or feel like you are anyway, that you're never going to get it done. Our thoughts play on us. That became maybe the essential underline of my choreography for a lot of years, how I could exaggerate the thinking process out to visibility. It became fascinating to me. And some of my work became minimal as a result of that, but not necessarily because I was doing minimal work. It was trying to find how I could express something by simple movements that would tell you something and still be dance and how that could lead you into something that would grab you, that you would see. I have never had any trouble moving. Even when I couldn't move I was a mover. Even now, when I can't move around a lot, I'm still a mover. I had no trouble making movement. What I did want to find was some way to make expressive movement, to make movement that was at least meaningful to me. I could have made 150,000 dances, and did. I did them in the bathroom, I did them in the kitchen, I did them walking down the street, I did them with my dog, I did them in restaurants. But those weren't the dances that were interesting to me, they were just the dances I could make. Had I been a little more sensible and practical about this whole thing, I probably could have made a lot of dances and maybe done a little bit more

(laughs), been a little more successful in the other ways. But, you know, that wasn't interesting. The fact that I could make dances was not interesting. The fact that I wanted to say something and might have something to say was interesting to me. There was a period in my life that I wanted to negate that, and today I can look at that and say, "I don't want to negate that." And I want to encourage other people to do the same thing, find out what that is in their body that's trying to say something and try to listen to it. Now, today, I can listen to that voice, not only as a creator, but I can also listen to that voice as a person who's living the creation. And that's a shift. That's maybe where I think that-- You know, all this is leading up to that question. This is what I think dance has had to offer the twentieth century. First of all, to get back in touch with our bodies and not try to be outside of our bodies. The Judeo-Christian idea is to always let go of this vile thing and to think out there when in fact this is where we start. To get us back connected to our bodies was essential, and I think the twentieth century and dance as an art form did that. Then, to get that physical, material thing called the body connected to the spirit, I think we can do that in the next century. I think the next century is about that. As I've discovered this stuff about integrating me with this information that I knew out here, I have a whole new life that shifts all of that stuff. And it's not about just the repetitions. I mean, we can watch today's average person just get on those treadmills and walk those wheels and do those things and be at that gym and do those step things and "We're there and we're going to get into this life," but in a sense it's all so disjointed from the experience of "How is this affecting me? How is life, this thing called life, and this job and this marriage and this boyfriend or this girlfriend and this bedroom and this house and this dryer, how is it affecting me?" Not "How am I getting through it?" (laughs) but "How is it affecting me? What is it telling me? What is it teaching me?" What I got from my experience was that it was teaching me how to kill myself; it wasn't teaching me how to live. And I didn't need a guru over here and a gym over here and a life over there and a job over here to do that for me. I needed to be a whole person, moving into my life, with all of that like this (twines his hands together), all of that alive and stimulated but moving in the same direction, so that no matter what I was doing, a job over here or that over there, there was a rhythm, a texturing, a sensitivity, that I could take with it. One part of that was creating, one part of that was teaching, one part of that was being a friend, one part of it was learning, one part of it was cleaning my house, one part of it was driving to the store, one part of it was in a job, but that it was me, the center of it, moving, and not in the self-centered way of me being the center of the universe but me operating from this mobile, active life force out there. In some senses that's what (Konstantin) Stanislavsky's early twentieth-century change in modern theater was all about, (Vsevolod) Meyerhold, Stanislavsky, going into the Actors Studio (Drama School).

KAUFMAN:

Do you ever at any time feel afraid--?

BATES:

Lots of times.

KAUFMAN:

Because you are facing moving on to another place.

BATES:

In different ways.

KAUFMAN:

Can you talk a little about that?

BATES:

Yes, fear. I could tell you that a lot of my life was motivated by fear. I was immobilized by fear. I tried to avoid fear. I was running from fear. And I had a lot of resources at my disposal to do that for a long time. Because of energy, because of intelligence, because of whatever, I was able to run from my fear or ignore it or hide it. When I finally, I guess, surrendered a few years ago to (the idea that) whatever was going to happen was going to happen and that I couldn't control it anymore, it was one of the first times I really began to realize how deeply rooted in fear I had been most of my life. The only place I wasn't afraid--and this should have been a clue, but I couldn't integrate it at the time--was in the studio. Where I had gotten to by the time I was fifty years old was that the only place that I wasn't afraid was in the studio. The minute I walked out of that studio I was terrified. When I'd go into the studio, whether I was teaching or I was working on a piece or I was playing with a class or by myself even, I was safe, I was integrated, I

was focused, I was okay. When I'd walk out of that room I was terrified. I was terrified to walk out the room. I was terrified to go home. I was terrified to be alive. I was terrified of everything. The other day I woke up and I thought it would be great to stick a needle in my arm. That scared me enough to get to a meeting. The other day I woke up thinking, "Oh, I'm just full of myself. I've got all of these things going on, and I'm just-- Who do I think I am?" I was terrified. I'm terrified about the idea of maybe writing a book. I'm terrified that somebody gave me these twenty-six taped interviews of Claude Rains that I'm going to be looking at to make a book out of. I suddenly had to write that letter for Rose Polsky, and I got terrified. Because I have so much of that as an ongoing part of my life, I've had to be facing it. I'm realizing that I (inaudible) the terror. I had been able to walk through it today in a different way than I've ever known possible. I tell people that even though my life is what it is and I don't have any of the things that I used to have, today I have a better life than I have ever had in my life. I have a better life. I have a more integrated life, and I have a more successful life. And part of that is because I do not try to hide my fear anymore. I talk about it. I share with people about it. I have some tools to work with in that. I know it's not necessarily the truth. Where before, because I couldn't talk about it, I began to believe it was the truth, and it was a secret. It began to be my secret, that I really wasn't able to do any of this, that when you would find out about it that you would find out that I was a sham. I began to believe that, and it was my secret. But I couldn't tell myself, so it really was a secret to me. I was operating totally out of fear. But I couldn't even tell myself. When I began to break through that-- I still have fear. I still sometimes wake up and think, "I'm not going to get through the day." I wake up sometimes and think, "I've got too much to do." This whole week I have done so many things I can't tell you how much I've done, and I keep thinking, "I can't do it." But, see, I do do it. This morning I had to call a friend-- I almost called you to say I can't do it today because I have too many things to do, and I double- and tripled-booked myself. And I had to call another friend to cancel going to a concert, because I really promised a friend of mine, Phil, who's very ill with cancer, whose wife is out of town-- We had booked a couple of weeks ago-- He wants to fill up his time while his wife's out of town because he's afraid, because the cancer has gotten a hold, and there's been a lot of things, and he's just afraid. When we get sick we get more emotional, we get more afraid. It comes more to the surface; we can't hide it. See, humans can hide a lot of stuff under that kind of tough exterior, just going through it, but it kills us. You know, the great thing, the great win, is when we can admit our failure, when we can admit defeat and get on with it, when we can say "I can't," when we can say "I'm afraid" and then get on with it. And Phil's been afraid lately, so we made a date. You know, I could probably stuff the dinner in and then get over to the concert and do all that kind of that stuff, and I said, "I don't need to do that." And I don't need to call my other friend and find some kind of elaborate excuse. I just shared with him that I made a mistake. I double-booked myself, and I've been doing that lately. And I said, "But the great thing is that I have things to do to double-book myself." So that's the great news. The great news is I have a lot on my plate right now. And sometimes I forget what I've already put on there (mutual laughter), and I'm over here trying to get some more. But isn't that wonderful?

KAUFMAN:

Yeah. So you're in a great place.

BATES:

I am.

KAUFMAN:

So if you were to go anytime soon you would be ready.

BATES:

I am ready, yeah. And the other side is I'm not. Because I've got all these things to do. (laughs) And that's okay, too. So I get to get a life. I get to stop waiting to die and continue living. Another little shift. Little shifts. And shifting, isn't that what dancing is all about? Shifting. I had become so rigid and so afraid to shift that I had frozen into this thing that would have been the pillar of salt that Lot's wife turned into. I was becoming that pillar of salt. I don't know if that makes any sense, but that's exactly what I felt like I was becoming. At some point I would have just frozen right where I was, and that would have been it. (laughs) I was already dead for all intents and purposes. And the shifting-- You know, when I hear that resistance, when I can go into the surrender and let go, then I can go into the shift. I understand that today, because I understand it in relation to dancing. And I watch other people going through that and resisting, and I want to scream at them, "Take a dance class!" I've been wanting to do some work with HIV people and recovering people to try to get to that process, the inner-- You know, so they begin to listen to that body, because it will help them in that life thing. If they're resisting, their body is taking on a certain shape. If they're not doing anything, their body is taking on a certain shape. Our body takes on a shape whether we know it or not. Now, if we could start tapping into that, we tap into our spiritual connection. That's why I think that we in the dance community still have an enormous amount to offer to the rest of the world about listening to ourselves. And it's going to be a spiritual shift, because it isn't going to be about information. It isn't going to be about the information highway and how quickly we can bring these two thoughts together. It's going to be what those two thoughts do to us and how we're reacting and interacting with them that's going to be important. Because the information is going to come quicker than we're able to deal with it.

It already is quicker than we're already able to make sense of it. Barbara (W.) Tuchman talked about that before she died. There's information, there's knowledge, and there's wisdom. Those are the three phases that we move through to get to from information to wisdom. We have to move from understanding that everything is information. All of our life is a series of bits of information. Knowledge comes in how we organize that and make sense of it. Wisdom comes in how we act with it. You see, there is so much information and it's so available to us today that we don't know what to do with it. We have less knowledge and somehow much less infinite wisdom than we've ever had. So we're going to have to have something to help us move through that. I think understanding to the degree that I can what dance has given me, why I did this--Why did I spend thirty-five years in this thing? Why couldn't I let go of it? I have no idea. I could have made more money, I could have made a better life in other ways. Why did I hold onto it? What did it teach me? And I think maybe if nothing else it has helped me get to this place. And now that I can integrate that stuff into my life there is this enormous wellspring of potential wisdom. And that's worth something. That's worth something. And I think that's something that we yet have to offer the world as artists.

KAUFMAN:

Right. We have to make that connection first. A lot of what I now see people struggling with in dance is up against a brick wall, trying to go about it in an almost self-serving way instead of how they can serve the community.

BATES:

Partly because we're still seeing it from the outside. And once I can tell you what this is doing to me, how I'm being affected by this, then I can begin to serve. If I'm just showing you what is is, that's a difference. We always have to go through that showing what it is first anyway. We have to find it. But when I look at Isadora, Ruth St. Denis, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Mary Wigman, (Alwin) Nikolais, (Merce) Cunningham, all of them have been on a spiritual quest. All of them have been on a spiritual quest. They've all been people who have, and to varying success, tried to move beyond. Cunningham's dances become spiritual; his dances have just become spiritual mantras in many ways--that ability to disassociate all of the ideas and all of the emotion and all of the knowledge that we have translated through this, carrying these bodies in certain ways. By Martha revealing it and then Cunningham throwing it away, he has allowed this body now to maybe have some new ideas. And we see differently because of him. He threw it all away and reconnected the circuits in funny, different ways. Now we go to his concerts and we don't have to understand, we just know we come out feeling different. That's a spiritual moment. So his concerts in some ways have become spiritual mantras. Now, that's something that some of

the early-- My mentor John Martin didn't get that. He didn't get that. And that's okay. That's okay. He didn't get that. He's been criticized for it, and people have assumed that he was not a very good critic because he missed that. He missed it. You know, I think it was Tolstoy who didn't really believe that Turgenev could write or somebody like that. I think Turgenev wrote first. But Turgenev didn't like a French writer. I've forgotten who it was. Everybody's had mentees or whatever they're called and often think, "Well, they're not going to do very well," and they turn out to be even bigger than the other person. And John wasn't interested in that-- But see, we weren't ready either for that spiritual moment that Nikolais and Cunningham and even (Paul) Taylor brought into the world. Twyla (Tharp) made us look at the rapidity about which we were trying to do things. There are a couple of artists recently who have been trying by doing these long concerts that don't stop, and everybody's just going until they drop. It tells us about what that's about or just what they're trying to do. So what you're talking about, that kind of people who are just showing us things-- We have to be shown sometimes, and then we make sense out of it. Or we put it together in certain ways, and somebody else will come up out of all of that and do something with it. There will be a lot of people showing us what we do, and then there will be people creating something out of that. So the cream will rise, as it always does, and it will go on. But we do have a mission. Dance is still essentially important. John Martin used to say that dance will probably be more important than it has been, and I think he's right. Because I think it is our last connection to our physical body, that we're moving so far away from our-- See, the computer is still one more attempt by the Judeo-Christian belief system to get out of our own bodies, to dismiss our own bodies, and dance will bring us back to our own bodies.

KAUFMAN:

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

BATES:

Nothing. I think it's a good place to stop.