

VDC Interview Transcript
 Živili/Melissa Pintar Obenauf
 2.21.18
 Total Time: 1:59:24

OhioDance
 Verne-Riffe Building
 77 S. High St.
 Studio 3
 Columbus, OH, 43215

Key:

CF: Candace Feck
 MO: Melissa Obenauf
 JC: Jessica Cavender
 JD: Jane D'Angelo

CF: We begin our long-awaited conversation!

MO: Yes!

CF: Let's begin by talking about what inspired the founding of Živili, what led up to it, and how it began.

MO: It's an oft-told story, so I have no problem telling it again.

When I graduated from college, and I graduated from OSU, where I had what was called "the elective sequence in dance" — so, basically I had two majors.

When I graduated, my father, who is of Croatian descent — my grandparents are both from Croatia — said "Let's go to Croatia! And let's see where Ma and Pa are from." And I said, "Sure — let's do it!" So, I had grown up in a household where my mom was a professional violinist, so I was real involved with music, and had taken ballet from a very young age at Miami Conservatory¹ — Miami is where I grew up. I was wanting to know more about my heritage, and had recently attended a dance company performance of a Yugoslavian dance company that had come to Miami, Florida. I was entranced with that and thought "Oooh! This is something I would like to know more about." I had taken Folk Dance classes while I was in college with Maggie Patton,² and loved folk dance.

At any rate, my dad and my brother and I went to Croatia, we had just checked into a hotel on the sea coast, and my father had *just* bought us tickets to go down the coast to see more, and simultaneously, he calls the relatives in our village. Within less than an hour, my relatives — whom we had never met — I mean, my grandmother kept in contact with them, so we knew of them and they knew of us, but we didn't *know* them — they come knocking on our hotel door, check us out, turn in the tickets, take us to the village, and there we stay for two weeks. But it was life-changing; it altered the course of my life. I met relatives I didn't even know about, I ate food I had never tasted the likes of before, and I witnessed a village wedding: they came down the village streets, they came

¹ The Miami Conservatory of Music in Miami, FL.

² Maggie Patton: 1940-2011: A well-loved dance educator and choreographer at OSU, Kenyon College and College of Wooster, Patton also founded the first professional dance company in Columbus, Dancecentral, in 1973.

to every door in the little village, picking up people, and for two days and three nights, we sang and we danced. It was the most *amazing* experience of my life and I thought, “I need to know more about this! This is my heritage, this is something that I wasn’t privy to as I grew up.” I knew more about the Cuban culture because of where I was located!

So, back to school we went. I came back to Ohio State and took a course in Labanotation from Ann Hutchinson Guest³, and just had a ball doing that. So that prepared me therefore, when we eventually got scholarships to go to Croatia and we studied at the Ljetna Škola Folklor, which is the summer folklore school. We went three years in a row, and we studied with Dr. Ivan Ivančan⁴ from LADO,⁵ who was the major dance ethnographer/dance ethnologist in Croatia at that time. He was also affiliated with the directors of the KOLO Ensemble,⁶ the Serbian ensemble, and TANEC Ensemble,⁷ the Macedonian ensemble. So we were studying with all of those people and doing the ethnologic zones, and learning the dances from each of those. Everything was conducted in Croatian, so I had to learn Croatian, as far as dance went, very quickly, but I had notation. So, *desno* (right), *lijevo* (left), you know, *ovuda* (this way), and *onuda* (that way). After he had taught a particular dance, he gave you time to write: he says “*pisa*.” And I’ll never forget when Dr. Ivančan came over, because we went to write, and I was done quickly, and he came over and he was, like, scowling at me, and he said (she adopts an indignant tone), “What? You’re done! Everybody else is still *writing*.” — I mean, he is saying this in Croatian, obviously, and I said, “No, I’ve written it down.” I showed him my Labanotation. And Lucy Venable⁸ at Ohio State would check it when I got back, and Alan Miles⁹ would check it, so I was pretty sure. And eventually, the folklorists put it in their archives in Croatia, and it’s my notation as checked by Lucy Venable and Allan Miles. So *they* have this record of it, too. He [Ivančan] was amazed, and he said “What, what...? This is...” You know, he wasn’t used to that — he just wasn’t used to seeing that done. He *knew* about Notation — and actually, the first director

³ A British movement and dance researcher, and a preeminent authority on dance notation, especially Labanotation, Hutchinson Guest wrote a history on the subject of dance notation, and her many works have been translated into multiple languages. She co-founded the Dance Notation Bureau in New York, in 1940.

⁴ Born in Molva, Croatia, Dr. Ivančan (1927 – 2006), was perhaps best known for his role as a leading Croatian thinker in ethnology, ethno-theory and ethno-coreology. He worked in the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, the Institute for Ethnology and Folklore Research and the Committee for Education, Culture, Physical and Technical Culture. He was a longtime general and artistic director of the Ensemble of National Folk Dances and Songs of Croatia LADO.

⁵ Founded in 1949 in Zagreb, the National Folk Dance Ensemble of Croatia is a professional national ensemble, with the aim of researching, artistically interpreting and presenting on stage examples of the rich traditions of Croatian music and dance.

⁶ Active until 2012, KOLO Ensemble was established in Belgrade in 1948 by the decision of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, at that time one of the six constitutional republics of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia.

⁷ The Tanec Ensemble of folklore dances and songs of Macedonia was founded by the government of the People's Republic of Macedonia in 1949 with an aim to collect, preserve and present Macedonian folklore: folk songs and folk dances, folk instruments, national costumes, and so on.

⁸ Originally, from Charleston, WV, Lucy Venable (1926-2019), moved to New York City and danced for many years with the Jose Limon Company. In 1968, she accepted the invitation of Helen Alkire at the Ohio State University to join the faculty, and there established the Dance Notation Bureau Extension for Education and Research. Her numerous accomplishments also included development of the Laban Writer, and she was a well known proponent and teacher of the Alexander Technique.

⁹ A dancer, educator, author and highly acclaimed notator, consultant and proponent of Labanotation, Miles (1929-2018) developed two workbooks that schooled generations of Labanotation students in this method of writing dance.

of LADO, the Croatian Folk Ensemble, was a woman — she unfortunately didn't last too long there, in an all-male world. But she was the first, and it was Vera Maletić's¹⁰ mother, Ana. Ana Maletić¹¹ was the first director of LADO, and she worked with Rudolf Laban¹² — you know all about that! We visited Ana at her house, and she showed us pictures and costumes that she had —and then Vera even donated to the company some costumes that were embroidered with real gold, through a process where they would melt the gold down and then dip the needle and sew gold. So anyway, that's how I got started with this, and that led us to study in Croatia three years in a row. So, we graduated from this course, and then we would go back for refreshers every once in a while.

CF: What years were these studies? And what years did you study at OSU prior to this graduation trip?

MO: I graduated in 1972, so I was at OSU from 1968 to 1972.

CF: And you mentioned that you had two majors...

MO: Elementary Education. So when I graduated...do you know Helen Sanders?

CF: I don't think so...

MO: Helen Sanders was a big advocate for arts integration at OSU; I took several courses and was actually working on my Masters in that field, but she and Hank Russell got me an interview for a job in an Arts Impact school. So I taught in an Arts Impact school while we were establishing Živili, getting that going.

CF: While we're clarifying details, may I back up for another piece of information? How was it that you got from Miami to OSU?

MO: Well, I was born in Columbus; my mom was from Columbus: she graduated from the Morrey School of Music and OSU's Music Department/School; my dad was a Communications major here, where he acted in several theatre department productions. So that was one factor, plus we had family here. I knew I wanted to go away to school, and I wanted to find a good dance school. My

¹⁰ Vera Maletić (1928 – 2015) was a Croatian born dancer, choreographer, educator, film maker and author. A specialist in Laban Studies, she taught from the 1970s to the 1990s at the Ohio State University Department of Dance, where she retired as Professor Emerita. Among her many accomplishments, Maletić pioneered the use of digital technologies in documenting and preserving dance.

¹¹ Maletić (1904-1986) dance artist, choreographer, writer, choreologist and pedagogue, was a strong force within the dance scene of Croatia, and forged significant connections between the study and practice of dance and the work of Rudolf Laban. Though no evidence of Maletić as the first director of LADO could be found, Maletić, among many other achievements, founded the School of Rhythmics and Dance (now the Ana Maletić School for Contemporary Dance) in 1954, focusing on elementary and secondary school dance education.

¹² Born in Hungary, Rudolf von Laban (1879-1958) was a seminal figure in the development of European modern (expressionist dance). Dance artist, author, and theorist, his work laid the foundations for Laban Movement Analysis, Labanotation (Kinetography Laban), and many other more specific developments in dance notation and Laban Movement Study.

mom had taken courses from Helen Alkire¹³ when it was still in the PE Department, so she knew Helen; also, a really good friend of my mom's — because they played trios in the summer, she and some friends of hers — Carroll White, was one of the first accompanists in the Dance Department. I knew Carroll, so I felt like I wasn't completely remote, completely removed from everything that I knew. My mom's old violin teacher would have me over for dinner. She lived on Indianola, on the ravine — and that was great...

CF: As you've been talking about your three summers going back and forth, developing the idea of Živili and getting it up and running, you've kept saying "we/us"...

MO: Pam Kelley.

CF: So how did Pam come into it?

MO: Pam is originally from Gary, Indiana, which at one time was a big hub for the Croatian community — the Chicago land area ...so she grew up knowing the dances, or being taught the dances. What we found out later was that they were not particularly correct or authentic — but *many* years later... She was familiar with the Tamburitza music, and her husband was transferred to Columbus, so I met up with her through a mutual friend who was in the Columbus Croatian community, small though it is. And so we met and the three of us, Drucilla Rouselle — Drucilla Badurina Rouselle was her name, and so the *three* of us formed Živili in 1973.

CF: Was it 1973, then, when Živili became a performing entity?

MO: About 1975. We auditioned people from the get-go; we recruited people that I knew from OSU, and also people from the folk dance community. I think it was 1975 when we performed our first concert, which was at Battelle — and we got funding for that, got a \$9,000.00 grant from GCAC to produce costumes because, of course, those are very necessary, and then it was 1979 when we became fully professional. And by fully professional, what I mean is that is that Pam and I received a full-time salary, and we had a staff that received a part-time salary, and our dancers and musicians received stipends for both rehearsals and performances. And we were determined to make that happen from the very, very beginning. We really, really wanted to make it — I had just grown up in theatre and music, and I just really wanted to preserve it in a way that was more meaningful than just people getting together to dance. Which is *fine* — there's a reason why people do that, and I wish we had more of that — but to bring people, to bring audiences to see a live performance was something...you know, I felt like my ballet and my music and my theatre, and Pam's theatre — she had theatre background and her ethnic background — it just sort of all came together then.

CF: When did you give up, as it were, your day job as an elementary school teacher?

MO: I taught four years, so my first school year was 1972/1973, so around 1978/1979.

CF: How did you and Pam determine a size and scope for the company? How did you determine your goals for what you wanted to accomplish?

¹³ 1915 – 2015: Founder and Chair (1968-1983) of the Ohio State University Department of Dance.

MO: Well, it evolved. I can't really say that we developed a five or ten-year plan upfront — that came later. But we knew we wanted a professional company. So, instead of recruiting people, we're now auditioning people — and auditioning people for dancers *and* also for musicians. And going to the Ohio Theatre¹⁴ for rehearsals, making that sort of a statement that we were serious, very serious about it — and we wanted to do it *correctly*. We wanted to do the dances, as much as we could, as they were done in the villages. So, actually, we worked with La Meri¹⁵ a little bit — on her idea, her concept from her book, *Total Education in Ethnic Dance*, and we knew that once it made that jump from village to stage, it would change the nature of it. But we also wanted to preserve as much as possible, as much as we humanly could. We started by performing choreographies — Pam would do the choreography at the beginning; at the end — I always taught the dance — but at the end we were co-creating choreographies, and making the choreographies more about our American/Croatian or Croatian/American experiences. So it wasn't simply the case of "Okay, these are dances from the region of Posavina in Croatia, or these are the dances from Serbia and Šumadija — we would pull it together in many cases by using slides, multi-media in whatever way we could, a narrative, using voice-overs... For instance, we did this Macedonian piece called Biljana. It's about weaving together ribbons that people would be washing on the river banks to make a bridal veil — but we decided to give it a voice. We talked in the beginning when there was some action on stage about how women would come together and they would share stories — and that that was what they missed most about coming to America, was the coming together — and that piece was called "The Coming Together." So it really transitioned from ethnographic regions of former Yugoslavia to experiences that we had either read about through Ellis Island kinds of documents or heard about through my grandparents — I did a lot of oral histories of my grandparents and made sure I had a lot of that information, and moved forward with it. In our first piece like that, I juxtaposed the stories of my grandmother and Pam's grandmother—it was done at Sullivant Hall¹⁶ — and it ended "And so, Grandma, Živili is my gift to you." And our dancers were behind a scrim, in costume; as the scrim comes up, the village comes alive. It was really cool!

CF: What year was that?

MO: Probably early '80s — our first years of stories, and narratives and slides. We used slides. We found an artist in Strawberry Hill outside of Kansas City, Kansas, who is NEH-funded and she would do primitive artwork of the first Croatians who lived on "Strawberry Hill," as they call it. You know, gossiping over the fence, baking bread together, so we used those slides, we got permission from her — turns out now we think she's a cousin...

¹⁴ A prominent architectural and cultural landmark, the Ohio Theatre is a large (currently 2,779 seat) Spanish Baroque performing arts center located in the heart of downtown Columbus, Ohio, on the site of the old Columbus City Hall. Known as the "Official Theatre of the State of Ohio," the historic 1928 movie palace was saved from demolition in 1969 and has been completely restored. It was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1977 as one of the nation's finest surviving grand theaters.

¹⁵ Born Russell Meriwether Hughes in Louisville, Kentucky (1898-1988): and began her dance training in Texas, studying ballet, Spanish, and Mexican dance forms. She continued her training in Hawaii, where she studied Hawaiian dance, and then New York, where she studied modern dance and ballet. She taught and performed with her own company at the New York School of Natya, which was absorbed into the Ethnologic Dance Center she founded in 1942. The school continued until 1956 and was an important source of training in ethnic dancing. La Meri taught at universities across the nation, and wrote five books on dance esthetics, technique and composition. Her extensive collection of material on ethnic dance, given to the New York Public Library in 1948 and 1962, is a major holding of the library's Dance Collection.

¹⁶ The campus home of the Department of Dance at the Ohio State University

CF: Small world!

MO: We're all related, right? Small world. It is! So we used that up against the narrative.

CF: Who was it that did your first costumes — the ones you produced with that \$9,000.00 grant that you mentioned.

MO: It was internal. It was people within the company, with the exception of me, because I don't sew. I mean, I sewed — Pam was a seamstress and we had Tina Gehres, who was a very, very good seamstress, so she would help. We got instructions and diagrams from Europe and so forth. We purchased most of the material here — at Joann's Fabrics; I remember many trips to Joann Fabrics. But they would make these costumes, and Pam said at one point, "If you could just sew the Velcro..." I sewed — and this is no joke — I don't know how I did it, but I was wearing jeans, and I sewed the Velcro to my jeans! I mean, she never asked me to sew again. Thank God. I would sew snaps upside down...yeah.

CF: Could you talk a little bit more about the funding picture? In those days, I assume \$9,000.00 was good money for costumes, but how did you put it *all* together and keep it going?

MO: It became the case that performance revenue was a third of our budget, and we worked like crazy to...okay, we started by writing letters to people all over the state and contiguous states — theatres, you know, EJ Thomas¹⁷, and so on. You know, "Hire us!" and we sent pictures and got zero responses. So I got in the car and I just went to all these places and said, "You should have ethnic dance! You're in Akron, EJ Thomas Hall." You know, "You have a huge Croatian community!" We joined every organization — we joined OPN, which at that time was OPAN, I think — Ohio Presenters Network. We joined OhioDance — of course, that was a given. We joined every organization that served the arts in Ohio. We met with Wayne Lawson,¹⁸ we met with Vonnie Sanford at GCAC and Tim Sublette, who followed her. We just were, you know, relentless. And there was a lot of — I wouldn't call it opposition — nobody was mean or anything like that. But even with OhioDance, to a degree: "It's not real dance. What you do is not real." And I'm like (indignantly), "It's where *your* dance comes from — *buddy!* It's where it all emanates from. It's the *source.*" So, we won that — I'm not sure where it stands now, but it used to be that the touring program within Ohio, at these major theatres, included three types of dance on their programs per year: ballet, modern and ethnic. Late 80s, hmm-mmm (shaking her head 'no') — it went away. The dance touring program, I think — while it brought in dance from elsewhere, it didn't reciprocate with Ohio Dance companies going *out*.

CF: It imported, but it didn't export.

¹⁷ Edwin J Thomas Performing Arts Hall is a part of the University of Akron, built in 1973. It is a flexible space by design, varying from a one, two or three tier seating structure, holding as many as 2,955 patrons.

¹⁸A pivotal figure in arts leadership across the state of Ohio. Lawson served for nearly 30 years as the fourth executive director of the Ohio Arts Council. Following his retirement in 2006, he has continued his fervent support for the arts by serving as a professor of Public Policy and Arts Administration at the Ohio State University, advising the Greater Columbus Arts Council on strategic initiatives, and volunteering on a number of arts and cultural boards.

MO: Exactly.

CF: And I think that was baked-in to the way the money was earmarked...

MO: It was. It was.

CF: Was that NEA money?

MO: It was NEA, funneled through OAC.

CF: Did you get anything from NEH?

MO: No, everything we got was NEA.

CF: And that dried up, of course, in the 90s.

MO: Yes. That was sad!

CF: Tragic.

We went to the Columbus Foundation, we went to the Battelle Foundation, we went to Chemical Abstracts, we went to...

CF: Did you hire a grant writer, or did you do it all yourselves?

MO: Me. I did it. And I was pretty good at it. And I enjoyed it, because I like writing — my son is a writer now, by the way — writes fiction. I enjoyed that, but in that final year when we were touring in Europe and you recreate the wheel — every, single year. You know, GCAC, OAC, NEA, Columbus Foundation, Reinberger Foundation, Wexner Center— every, single, year. I was just tired. I was really tired. So, we thought, “Well, let’s give it a year.” And then Pam got sick.

CF: I see. Okay, so you were writing the grants, you were choreographing...

MO: Mm-hmm.

CF: ...teaching the dance...

MO: Mm-hmm.

CF: ... running the rehearsals...

MO: Mm-hmm.

CF: What was your rehearsal schedule like?

MO: Well, Pam and I both ran the rehearsals, but I did all the administration. And Loren Bucek was helping me with that as company manager. And before her, Ann Dils.

CF: What did a week look like for your company?

MO: Every Tuesday, every Thursday and Sundays were rehearsals.

CF: Those were at the Ohio Theatre?

MO: Mm-hmm. Yes. We had evenings, Tuesday and Thursdays, 7:30 – 10:30 — that normally went to 11:00/11:30 — and then on Sundays, in the afternoons ‘til 6:00-ish.

CF: And I think at some point — or perhaps right away because of the convergence of your interests and experience, you were doing Artists in the Schools...

MO: Yes. That was a *big* part of what we did, because of my interest in education and feeling that we *needed* this kind of thing. And it was so gratifying. We did residencies through OAC, and we did — what did we call those? “Run-outs” — through GCAC. They weren’t exactly residencies, but we figured it was better than nothing...so we would take a small group — we had an “Informance” group that we would take for GCAC: we would do a one-hour performance, but just with maybe fifteen people. Pam and I would conduct the residency, and then we would bring in company members — whether it be musicians and dancers — and then generally people liked to see the company perform, so we would start out with that or end with it.

CF: What was the size of the larger company?

MO: We tried to keep it around thirty. When it grew to forty, we happened to do a tour in Wyoming, and it was too big. Personality-wise, I think, it just was different factions, different groups that they broke down into...but the group of thirty just seemed to really work well for us. And it was great for the busses — we traveled by bus — because it gave us room on the bus to spread out. Forty did not. But the only time the company grew to sixty to sixty-five people was for *Christmas in Croatia*, that was the equivalent of our “*Nutcracker*.” So, we performed it here in Studio 2 [Vern Riffe studio theatre] for the first time. That was my favorite space, because it was in the round, and I loved that. But it ended up then going to the Southern Theatre. That was where it ended up. And then we toured that. We included children in that production because you can’t really have Christmas without kids, so that was fun for us, for many reasons. Working with kids was a passion, and I had my kids involved, too, so I figured this was a transference of culture for them. We had so many talented children, and it was just the greatest experience.

CF: How many years did you do the *Christmas in Croatia* program?

MO: Ten years. And people still to this day remember that...and they’re like “Won’t you please just do Christmas in Croatia? And I’m like, “Do you have any idea how many dollars we’d have to have?” That was a big show! That was a *huge* show, and it required lots and lots of rehearsals, you know, with the kids and the adults. And we had stage families; it got to the point where the kids were interviewed by a newspaper here or there, and the reporters would say “Well, what do your parents think?” And they were like, “Do you mean my *stage* parents?” They were so cute — they were just adorable. And they danced and sang just beautifully. It was a whole little story; there was no intermission. It was *so* much fun for us! And my dad played the main character. He was an actor, and it brought him out of retirement. He was the narrator, who was looking back on his childhood Christmases in Croatia. So it was very nostalgic, in a lot of ways.

CF: I'd like to hear about some of the highlights. I mean, you had some amazing experiences as a company: The Kennedy Center, being back in Yugoslavia after the war, and I'm particularly curious, myself, about the Mark Morris¹⁹ connection. But please site whatever you would find as really valuable highlights to pinpoint.

MO: Okay, we'll start with Mark Morris. I had read, as a subscriber, in *Dance Magazine*, that he got his start in Balkan dance, out in Seattle. And I thought how cool is that? So when he came through with his company, Tim Van Leer, who ran Merston Auditorium at the time, was a good friend of mine. So, anyway, I said, "Tim, see if we could do some kind of reception for Mark and his company when they come through. We'll bring in a few of our musicians..." And he's like (she drops her voice), "Melissa, *really?*" And I said, "Yes, just ask!" So he did, and Mark was like "Wow! OF COURSE, I want to do that!" And so, we did that. We met him and everything; that was our first time we had met him. And when our musicians were playing, he and I were dancing, I just remembered. He just loved, *loved*...and he wanted his company members to have this experience of this folk/ethnic thing. And I had read about that ahead of time, and I thought, "This is just perfect." So somebody called me, probably the next year — and I can't remember who it was — saying that there was money through the Lila Wallace Readers Digest Fund to hire a choreographer who maybe had never worked in ethnic dance. There was money there to do that. So, Pam and I talked about it, and she was like, "I think Mark would like that." So, we just called him — he was in Brussels at the time — and he said "Sure." We were shocked! So that's how it *started*, that's how we got him to do it. And he was...a challenge...*and* a delight, at the same time, to work with. And some of my favorite quotes are quotes from Mark. You know, because he observed the world as sort of an "Innocent"? Unencumbered by what people thought. I said, "I want to be more like Mark when I grow up," and his manager said, "Uh, no you don't — because you'd have to hire me as a poopier scooper." But anyway, he came to do this work, and then Susan Hadley,²⁰ of course, was our rehearsal director and he came in and out many, many times, and we had a blast working with him. And it was the case that he *never* came out and said that *The Office* was a piece on war, or Bosnia — or *anything*. And he called it, very innocuously, *The Office*.

CF: Right.

Technical problems ensue...

MO: It starts with a certain number of people, five people. And then each one eliminates a person until at the end, there's one person left. And I said, "Mark, this has *got* to be about the current war in the former Yugoslavia. It has to be." And he said (adopting a flippant tone), "Well! Whatever you think!" And of course it was, but...

CF: Remind me of the year.

MO: It was 1994 — the 1993/1994 season — because it was our 20th anniversary.

¹⁹ A notable Brooklyn-based modern dance choreographer and company director.

²⁰ Currently the Chair of Dance at the Ohio State University, Hadley was a principal dancer and eventually rehearsal director of the Mark Morris Dance Group in the 1980s.

CF: I can't remember, was his company infused with yours, or was it all you?

MO: No, it was all us.

CF: Okay. But his company has kept it in repertoire...

MO: Yes.

CF: Did you perform that in many places?

MO: Yes, yes we did.

CF: Did you take it back to Yugoslavia?

MO: Yes. We had the rights to it for, I think, three years — so yes, we performed it in Yugoslavia during 1997 when we went back to perform in refugee camps. That was a piece that we did there, yes.

CF: That had to be powerful.

MO: Yes, it was powerful! We could barely get through it, actually. And we performed it in New York, New Jersey, all over — I can't remember our schedule — but for three or four years, it was in our rep, so...

CF: I see. Would you care to share any of those Morris quotes that you mentioned holding on to?

MO: Well, they're just silly ones, actually. Yes, when we were walking down the street in Granville, Ohio, and I was taking him to the Buxton Inn for lunch, he got quite a thrill or a kick out of the servers who were wearing period costumes and these little puffy hats, so he couldn't help himself from staring. And I'll never forget, the server comes over and says, "Hello, I'm Amanda, and I'll be your server today." And Mark says, "Yeah, you'll be our server today, because it isn't yesterday and it's not yet tomorrow." I mean, just unfiltered comments that we got a kick out of.

(She relates an "off-the-record" tale of a lunch conversation between Morris and Barbara Zuck, *Columbus Dispatch* critic.)

CF: There must have been other Croatian or Yugoslavian groups across this country that were preserving these dances and songs.

MO: Yes, there were other groups — for example, you mentioned Youngstown's Happy Hearts group. There are the children's groups that do this, there are adult Tamburitza groups that get together once a year — this year it will be in Pittsburgh in November, and they do twelve minutes each, and some of our former Živili people are doing that through a group called Selo, but they perform once a year. So, actually, no! Even when Živili was around...no, there wasn't anybody. There was AMAN on the west coast, Tony Shay's group. And AMAN included Balkan in their rep, but it wasn't specifically Balkan because they did Middle Eastern and I don't know what else they did. So, it was a *part* of it. There was a group in Boston called Mandala, but they weren't professional; they did some good work and major performances, and so on. But Mandala wasn't

strictly Yugoslav either, or Balkan even, but they *included* it. And then there was the group Mark was with in Seattle, and I forget the name of the group,²¹ but they're still going. There's Ethnic Dance Theatre out of Minneapolis, but they do German, Austrian...and they do a good job of it.

CF: But you were the only professional Balkan adult group in the country?

MO: Yes, yes.

CF: Well, that must have taken you places...

MO: It did.

CF: What was your first big breakthrough, when you were asked to perform outside of Ohio?

MO: You mean as far as touring?

CF: Yes. Taking your work outside of the state.

MO: We had lots of tours...a *big* break for us was performing at BCBC²² — that was a *huge* accomplishment for the company — and the only place that I couldn't perform! I had just given birth to my second child and it was not an easy birth... But I had gotten the booking, and (ruefully) they told me stories... And we went back — not to BCBC but it was some other place else in Brooklyn — I can't think of where...but it was also a good experience. So, that was thrilling, even though I wasn't a part of it. Epcot Center — that was huge for us. That was two weeks of performing at Epcot on the international stage there, and it was very interesting, to say the least. That was someplace else I couldn't perform! Because I was pregnant at the time. Have you heard about how Disney, in order to keep the illusion of nothing dirty happening — like when you throw your trash away, it goes under...they don't have any trash trucks around! They pick it up underground. There's a whole city underground: banks, restaurants — all of which exists for the people who are employees, and we were considered employees at the time. They paid us really, really well and of course we did four small shows a day — that was really fabulous. They fed us, and they put us up, and they flew us in. That was so wonderful.

CF: What year was that?

MO: That was 1983.

CF: How did those opportunities come to you? Here you were, having to drive to EJ Thomas, persuading them to include ethnic dance in their programming, then suddenly you are getting gigs in New York, and Epcot...what happened?

MO: Just calling people and... We didn't have a connection at Epcot. It just sort of fell into our lap, going back to Dade County. Now that — Dade County Auditorium in Miami, we picked up... Have you heard of Duquesne University Tamburitians?

²¹ Koleda Balkan Dance Ensemble

²² Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts at Brooklyn College

CF: Yes!

MO: Okay. They are out of Pittsburgh. They canceled their Florida tour, and we assumed their tour. So that happened because of them.

CF: I see.

MO: The Wyoming thing was because AMAN couldn't go, so we took the bus clear to Wyoming. There's no big town in Wyoming, so we did all small towns. It was surprising how many Croatians there were out that way... And once we did — and this sounds weird — but we did a retirement home tour in Florida, and I thought “Well that'll be fun for a winter tour!” And the theatres in these retirement communities in Florida are state-of-the-art! They are something to be seen. I mean, they are like EJ Thomas Hall — unreal. And so we did Deerfield Beach, Vero Beach, the whole east coast of Florida. Did the whole thing. Flew home — and those were major performances, well-received, and lots of fun for us. And then flew back the next week-end to perform with the West Palm Beach Symphony Orchestra — because we thought it would work. I don't know. Having a mother with a symphony background, why *couldn't* our music be transcribed for a symphony orchestra? So it was, and a young man from Denison University was the first to do that, and then someone from Youngstown came on board from a Serbian Church, who has his PhD in Music, and he transcribed for symphony... Anyway, so we had the opportunity therefore to perform with symphony orchestras; we weren't limited to using just our musicians. We could do that, and that was really *awesome*. We flew in the next week-end and performed with the Palm Beach Symphony, and attended this reception that was...like I've never seen before. Everybody was older than I, but everybody looked younger — that kind of thing? But it was really fun.

Probably, I would say for me personally, though, the highlight of Živili's years of performances was when we went in 1997 to perform in refugee camps. Because it was full-circle. It brought everything home. It brought everything back to the reason why we did this. How this came about was of course we were ... very dismayed by what was happening — the war and the ethnic cleansing and that whole thing. We were very tuned-in; we staged vigils here, locally, on the statehouse lawn, we did a lot of fund-raising to send supplies, and so forth, and then we came into contact with a lot of the directors of these camps, camps that existed for people who had lost their homes. And they said, “You know what? We have medical care, we have food, we even have schools. We have gainful employment that we can offer, a roof over people's heads. But people's souls are *dying*: they miss their music, they miss their dance.” So! That was the most difficult thing I have *ever* had to sell to anyone! It was *hundreds* of grant proposals later, and finally! An Irish Catholic family in Columbus, through the Columbus Foundation, listened. And they gave us, I think, \$20,000.00 and from then on, people were giving. So we raised enough money — performers donated their time for those rehearsals and performances over there. We took Eric Albrecht from the Columbus Dispatch, the head photographer there, which was unbelievable, because everything that happened is documented and chronicled and archived, and we have *so many stories* about *how* music and dance *can* make a difference, and transform people's lives. It was a trip that none of us, who journeyed there and took part in this, will ever, ever, ever forget. I think after that everything was...it wasn't downhill — we did things afterwards, like in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, where we were part of an effort to bring young adults from the former regions together through dance. We have stories about that, too, which are awesome, awesome. And that put us in prisons after that — it sounds weird, but using dance to help people transform their lives and bring them a sense of community — and that's what a lot of people

here in this country, as you know, are missing. This is just part of my thinking these days, but are you familiar with the Harmony Project?

CF: Yes.

MO: Well, I went for the first year because my granddaughter is involved in Momentum. And I was amazed. Momentum was a dance component of that. But I thought, “The Harmony Project needs a Monica Kreidler or somebody to do a dance component: people who are in prisons, people who are homeless, people who are CEOs for companies need to experience dancing together. It would be so wonderful, and I don’t probably have the number of years left to do it, but I’m like, “Yes! We have to do this. We have to see if there’s somebody out there who can bring people together through dance.”

CF: Very inspiring! How about the Kennedy Center performance or anything else you might choose to talk about or highlight?

MO: The Kennedy Center was also an amazing experience. Being able to perform there was, for us, *fabulous*. I mean, just to be on that stage, and bringing the dancing and the music alive for people. We were only there for one performance, though, so other than...and that was the same year...I think we did the Kennedy Center and the refugee camp tour the same summer ...Oh, *and* Rhythm on the River. So we did Kennedy Center, we rushed back, did Rhythm on the River, and left for the refugee camp tour. So, the [Kennedy Center] tour...it was *thrilling* for us, but it wasn’t transformative, probably, for anybody, you know — whereas the refugee camp was.

CF: What about the European tours?

MO: Yeah, that was also...*Two* of those...the first one that we did was in 1980, and that was all about performing in various parts just so that people would know that someone else in the world was carrying on traditions from there. That was in 1980. But in 1997, 2000 and 2001, those performances were all involving in one form or another, refugees, orphanages...you know, bringing [them] dance and music. Because after a performance, we would get up, our musicians would play and people would dance together. So we also had that going, and our musicians rehearsed *so* much music because we didn’t want to offend anybody over there: it’s one thing for us to stand on this side of the Atlantic and say, “Everybody should get along!” But it’s quite another thing to be over there and perform a dance that’s from another culture that, you know, murdered your whole family — we didn’t want that to happen. But the amazing thing was that even if we hadn’t drilled our musicians the way that we had, I don’t think it *would* have happened. Because people missed their cohesiveness, they missed their dancing together; when they heard a Serbian song, they would sing along, when they heard a Bosnian song they would sing along, when they heard Croatian...it didn’t matter. It did not matter.

CF: It seems it would be safe to say that, in fact, your experience of doing the refugee camp in ’97 really changed your vision of what you could accomplish — or what you *wanted* to accomplish, in terms of the people that you wanted to reach. Is that a fair assessment?

MO: It’s a fact, yes. Definitely. Because upon our return, we were going to Children’s Hospital, we were going to high-security prisons — where after a performance, prisoners would *rush* up, and the guards would try to get between us, you know, because they thought “What is going on?” But they

all had a story, they had a story to tell us, about when they were young and their grandmother, who was a Gypsy, or their grandmother who was Romanian – and it didn't matter if it was the same culture — sang them a song or told them a story — I mean, it was amazing. And we did have an experience for which we were *somewhat* prepared — when we reached a camp that was a *huge* camp in Slovenia, and the director of the camp had been placed in jail for taking TVs and things that were sent to his people in the camp and selling them on the black market. So, we were somewhat *thinking* that this might happen, and it did here. This young lady came up to us and said, “You know, you're coming here today, you're performing, you know, *an hour* — you're giving an hour of your time — but you go home, you're done when this is over, you go back to America, you go back to a life, she said, “whereas I was an attorney in Sarajevo, Bosnia, and I have been in this camp for seven years. I scrub toilets for people who use this bathroom, and that's what I do. She was bitter, of course. Her brother had been killed, her family members were dispersed — she didn't know where. And it was the type of camp where there was barbed wire up at the top, and it wasn't meant to keep people in; it was meant to keep people *out*, because people *could* become a little bit agitated if they thought they were going to take their jobs, and all that. So this young lady was like that, and Pam and I were like, “Yes, you're right. You're *absolutely* right. You know, we have no argument for you, we understand fully...well, we don't *understand*, but we're trying.” So, we did the performance, and afterwards, we would get people up to dance if they wanted to. And she got right up, and she danced. Can I show you a picture? I'll show it later, of her dancing, that Eric Albrecht captured, where she's *glowing*. And we thought, “Well, we've been told what this is like,” and so we packed our costumes up, loaded the bus, and we were leaving when this young lady comes over and she motions to Pam and me and she goes, you know, “Come here.” We went, and were like, “Now what? Now what is she going to tell us?” And she said, “You go back home and you tell your government that what happened here today was better for us than bread. You gave us one happy day.” It was *unbelievable*. It was something that we *hoped* might happen, but to see that transformation in her! And then she went on to say “You know, we will talk about this for days after you leave! We will sit around here and *remember* that *someone* else in the world *cares*.” So Eric wrote a two-fold for the paper when we came back, and his title was “One Happy Day.”

CF: Where are your archives kept? Photos, videotapes...

MO: My house. We have hundreds — well, Pam has all the videotapes... She's with her mother right now, who is in Hospice care; I'm afraid it's not going to be too much longer...but she's trying to transfer the videos over, you know...before they fall off completely, but... I have *hundreds* of photo albums and hundreds of photographs, and ...

CF: Costumes?

MO: No (ruefully). We *sold* them! We figured they weren't doing *us* any good, and we'd rather see them go to somebody who could use them, and so a lot of the kids' groups bought them.

CF: I'd like to clarify something about your time with the refugee camps...how many camps? How long were you there?

MO: We were gone three weeks. We first went to Hungary; we performed in camps in Bicske, Debrecen and Békéscsaba. And then we went to Slovenia and we performed there in seventeen different camps. Then we went to Croatia and we performed in two camps, and then to Sarajevo, Bosnia, and we performed in an orphanage, which was hard, and a home for the abandoned elderly.

So when we arrived — and the security clearance — I don't know how I did it because we didn't have...well, we *had* email. We did, because otherwise... but mostly I did it through faxing, and so we had high clearance, or high-security or whatever, to get into the camps. But when we arrived in Sarajevo in Bosnia, it was at night — so it was dark out — and we were told that we would stay at this Home for the Abandoned Elderly. And they had rooms for us, all set up. And I mean, we had thirty people with us, so that's a lot of rooms. So they had that, and it was late at night because it had taken a long time to go through Bosnia.... seeing the destruction really did a number on everybody — we were really pretty depressed by the time we got there. So, it was late at night, we were ushered into these beautiful rooms — I mean, nice rooms — dinner was on the bed on a tray for us, with little flowers — it was so sweet! So we went to bed, got up the next day, went out on the balconies from these rooms — and the *whole* 360 degree-view that you could see was *devastated*. All these buildings were *gone*. *Completely rubble*. I mean, I had *never*, ever — until 9/11 in this country — seen *anything* like that. So, I said to the person in the camp who was the director there: “Why is *this* building still standing? And he said “We restored it, because the elderly are our first priority.”

CF: How did that trip actually come about?

MO: It was our idea. We were encouraged by them. There was a woman I spoke with who was from New York City and she was in one of the camps, I remember. And she was the one who said to me, “Spirits are dying. Someone needs to come here and bring music and dance back to these people. They miss it.”

CF: Would you care to recall any other highlights, or on the flip side, would you want to mention any of the low points. Obviously, the war and the refugee camps — but perhaps just in terms of your ability to sustain the company... Every arts organization — perhaps dance in particular — lives with a great measure of precarity...

MO: I think the transition was difficult for us, moving from amateur level to professional, because it meant that some people chose not to continue, and they were mad at us. That was hard, because both Pam and I are people-pleasers; we enjoy people. So that was hard for us, you know? We had standards. And it didn't happen overnight. I mean, we didn't snap our fingers — this was slowly happening. And we used a lot of people from the Dance Department at Ohio State, who would audition. People needed to have a sense of their bodies, and posture. And to perform you need a sense of confidence, and you just need to know yourself and your body. So that was a little bit difficult.

And another difficulty — you know, taking orders from people younger than you sometimes had its challenges. Also, working in a world that was pretty much all male — you know, at that time, and maybe still? I don't know — most directors of dance companies were men, and particularly in the Croatian culture. This one gentleman, I'll never forget it, came back stage and he was like (adopting an angry tone): “Where are your directors? Where is he?” And we were like, “Excuse me...” So that was also difficult — not insurmountable; we carried on. And when we worked with the Columbus Symphony — I can't recall the conductor's name at the time, but he was from Eastern Europe — we were so used to working with them, he didn't bother us. And he came in the rehearsal studio and was like (arrogantly) “Where is my chair? I want my chair *now*.” And people in our company were like “Don't even give into that.” And we were like, “Yeah, we will — because we want to perform with the symphony, and we understand where he's coming from.” So we got him his chair and then we laughed about it.

And then when we would go to study over there; a lot of the people would say (she whispers): “You’re traveling by yourselves! Where is your husband?” You know... So that was another thing, and then of course as I’ve already mentioned, being an ethnic company amongst ballet and modern — I have to say, you know, not to disparage anybody in the modern dance field, but it [our work] wasn’t serious enough, it wasn’t introspective enough — but it wasn’t *meant* to be! It was about joy and community, and all of that. But I think we won that battle. I think we won the others as well. Of course, we always likened the development of our dance company to a child — you know, going through the toddler years and then through puberty — “Oh, you know, this must be puberty, we’re adolescent now,” and “Oh, this is young adulthood...” Somebody had wanted to give us a big hunk of money, at one time, to have an office downtown— and I was like, “Let me *think* about that...but an office downtown is going to accomplish *what*?” I don’t understand...I mean, it would give us a *presence*, but we were already rehearsing at the Ohio Theatre — “I can’t think how that will make a difference.” Plus, it was money for just *that*, so we turned it down, believe it or not. I said, I don’t know that it’s going to get us from A to B, or B to C — or whatever. That wasn’t really a low point, but normally I wouldn’t turn down money...I think I mentioned earlier, a third of our income was performance revenue. A third of it was grants, and the other third was fund-raising and board.

CF: To get your 501c3 you had to have a board, and that was 1979?

MO: No, we got our 501c3 status in 1975, so we were not-for-profit.

CF: How large was your board?

MO: The largest, I think, was 12 people, and we always had the proviso that Pam or I, or both of us, would be full board members with full voting rights, and we would say “That’s it. That’s the way it goes.” We had a very dynamic [board member], president of Ohio Dominican College, Sister Mary Andrew Matesich²³ — *that woman*: “Give, get, or get off.” And she could tell people — because she was a nun.

CF: Good to have a nun onboard!

MO: It’s good! It’s good — she was my mentor.

Jessica Cavender reminds us that we need to circle back around to the beginning of the company, since there were technical problems in filming at that time.

CF: Would you mind, for the record, talking about how the company came to an end?

MO: In 2000 and 2001, we undertook three European tours. They were successful, they were wonderful, we were very happy with them, but upon our return, we decided we needed a break — we needed a break from writing grants, from everything.

There is another pause, as Melissa deals with an irrepressible cough.

²³ Sister Mary Andrew Matesich, O.P (1939 – 2005) was President of Ohio Dominican College (now Ohio Dominican University) from 1978 until 2001.

We resume 1:23:20

We were exhausted, decided to take a year off, and see where that would lead, and in the meantime, the co-founder and co-director of Živili, Pam Kelley was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. So, it turned out to be something that would require lots of chemotherapy and lots of radiation, over a period of time. But it didn't stop us — I mean, we still attended meetings and conventions, but we started to find ourselves getting involved in selling products from Croatia. Mostly having to do with folklore — things we had found interesting, things that were traditional. So we acquired those, and did that. We established a web presence and a store online, and then started selling at Croatian events, large ones, around the country, which are getting fewer and fewer. So we did that. And then, we were doing some teaching at University of Rio Grande, and found ourselves doing a tour for teachers who were working on their Masters degrees. We organized a tour, and it was so successful — we did it either two or three years, I can't remember. And of course we would intersperse these tours with looks at education in Croatia — primary education — with sight-seeing — things that we found interesting — and folklore, and music, and dance — because that's what we were teaching these teachers to use in their classrooms. So we would bring friends of ours whom we'd met — musicians and ethnologists and dancers — to work with the teachers, and we thought "Hmm. I think others would be interested in this type of tour." So we call it "cultural immersion," and now we're offering three tours a year to Croatia. We love doing it. It's a lot of work.

CF: I'm curious, given this timing, how much of a factor do you feel the end of the NEA touring program was in the demise of Živili as a performing company?

MO: I think everything came together, and we often said, "Look around us. You know, the funding is drying up." It no longer was the case that theatres — or campuses — were hiring three types of dance per year. Often, they weren't including *any* dance on their schedules, on their calendars! So that was part of it. And the end of the dance touring program was another thing. And of course, loss of funding, all the way around. I mean, we thought in the '80s that things were difficult — and they were! But that was like... (long, audible sigh)... Heaven! Compared to what it became, and then 9/11 happened, so people were at that time afraid to travel. There were a lot of different things that converged, in addition to Pam's health.

CF: Since you brought up the 1980s, maybe we could circle back to the beginning, as the film record was interrupted by technical difficulties.

MO: Sure. When I graduated from college, my dad said to my brother and myself, "Let's go to Croatia. Let's see where Ma and Pa are from. Would you like that?" And this is an aside, but my dad worked for Pan American Airlines, and he said, "This is my graduation gift." But really the trip was \$40.00 round trip — which was fine, but we joked about that for years afterwards. Anyway, we had the opportunity to go, we went, and we were staying in a hotel —

A recurring noise in the room imposes another break...during which we look at some photos Melissa has brought. We look at a review in the New York Times by Anna Kisselgoff, and one in The Wall Street Journal by Dale Harris that she feels is the best review they ever received, and we also discuss a piece written by Joan Acocella. Jane D'Angelo, looking at the photos asks Melissa to identify the performers. It is a photo of The Office: Stephanie Kemper, an OSU dance grad, Lisa May, and Rick Graber, also OSU dance grads (Graber went on to be involved with another

Eastern European company, Csardas (Houston) and Fred Todt. Obenauf also mentions that their lead violinist, performed in a concert by Madonna. Jeff Gottschild is listed as the photographer.

Our relative showed up, knocked on our door, shucked us right out of the hotel and took us to the village — at that time, there was not even a paved road up to the village — and turned in the tickets that my dad had bought on Jadrolinija, which is the ferry that was going down the coast, got our money back, and said “You will stay with us!” I never ate so much in my life — and we just now went on this February trip; I took everybody to my grandparents’ village — it was so fun — with the snow “this deep.” But you have to eat every place, and you have to eat more, and you have to drink more, and if you don’t eat at Teta (which means “Aunt”) Sophie’s house the same amount that you ate at Teta Ana’s house, there’s a big family feud. Anyway, it was wonderful.

So there was a village wedding that happened while we were there, and I’m so grateful. It was two days, three nights of...I mean, they just pick up where they left off — you know, from breakfast on, feeding people and the bride and groomsmen going door to door, and every time they came to someone’s house, they were given a drink, and the musicians came down the streets with their instruments, their accordions and their bases, and you know, just very jovial people. [They] danced all afternoon and all night, and then you had the next day, when it started all over again! And it was wonderful! And I thought “These men are *dancing!*” That was the other thing — because coming from the ballet world, or dance in general — you know, nobody dances here. You’re an oddity, which I never minded — but there, it’s natural. Everybody danced and sang, and most played an instrument, too. So, there you have it, and I’ll never forget, because my dad said his mother would cry when the kids were growing up and so forth, you know, to go home, to see her village again. She missed it, and she was actually deceived; I think many immigrants were — because, you know, people would come here to America to work, and then they would go back. And my grandfather *did* that, but on his second trip, when he brought my grandmother to America, they *didn’t* go home, ever again. So, anyway, standing on the hillside, looking over this village, which is an entrance to a national park with snow-capped mountains and where my grandmother would go with the cows in the summer — “a la Heidi,” you know? — I’ll never forget, my father looked out over that, and he said, “You know, *now* I understand why Ma cried every day to go home. I *get* it.” Because where she ended up was in a coal-mining town in southern Illinois, just outside of St. Louis, and it was dreary and ugly — and there were not just Croatian people but lots and lots of different [groups]. There were *lots* of Italians there and lots of Croatians and lots of Polish people, French people...all immigrants, working in the mines. There were so many mining accidents...*of course* she wanted to go home! So that was just one story, and he got really emotional...

CF: For you, it was life-changing...

MO: Life-changing! Because I wanted to know what those dances were and what they meant! And it became important to me to know not only the dances but the history of the people who would come from different places, even within Croatia. What did the costuming mean? Or did it mean anything? The materials that were used — why were they used? Was it because people were on a trade route, or was it because they were in the “bread basket” of Croatia? Or was it because that was all they could get? That was important. The food that people ate, the influences, because ex-Yugoslavia is bordered by six other different countries plus the Adriatic Sea, so all of those were *tremendous* influences! You know, the Italian influence, the Austrian influence, the Hungarian influence, the Bulgarian, the Macedonian, the Greek — all of them. And it was *important* to me to know that before we would teach the dances to our company members back here.

CF: But the *thought* — the first thought — that “I want to make a group that will do this. This is my life’s work now.” Did it take meeting up with Pam, and talking together... I *get* what the spark was, I get the interest, but how did it materialize as an actual plan?

MO: Maybe because both of my parents were in the arts and my mom, especially, said “Well, you should do something in music, because you can always play somebody’s piano, or grab an instrument” — or whatever. “But dance is hard, Melissa. I mean, you can’t just go someplace and dance.” So when I was sixteen, my mom said, “That’s it. No more dance.” I cried for days. *Days!* And I think, you look back and you think, “Maybe that wasn’t a *bad* thing, because it made me want...” I wanted to dance more than I wanted to eat. I wanted to be in motion, *constantly*. I just wanted to be a dancer my whole life. And the concession was that I could come to Ohio State *if* I also had another major — “a real major,” you know. But they knew, my parents knew — because my mom was a violinist and my dad was in acting, and they met in USO camp shows, and they *knew* what a rough life...and that you had to teach it or you had to do something *else*...

CF: Yes, but when you came back with *your* family, just *your* family, had this amazing new world that you wanted to investigate, but how did that *become* Živili? When did you know “This is what I’m going to do?” I know it evolved: you met Pam you had a...

MO: Yes, she wanted the same thing. You know, she had worked with kids, primarily, back in Gary, and had been a director over there, and so she was passionate — as passionate as I was — we were both *passionate* about it. So passionate, I think, that we drove the third person crazy, and she eventually left. One of the lower points, but... it happened, because she wasn’t as — I mean, we got up in the morning and started this and went “What can we do? Who can we talk to? Who can we find out more from?” And “Let’s get a scholarship to go there and study.” And that required lots of research and so on, and we finally did figure that out, but you know, it just, it was something... I was always putting on performances in my garage, as a kid: I was making the programs, I was selling the tickets; I practiced by *playing* at what I did later in life. And I would write resumes for my mom — you know, she put me to work on that. So I had good experience in that — she made me take typing, which I hated, but I was glad I had it. She had *great* organizational skills, my mom did. And I would take all the kids from my neighborhood and teach them ballet all year, and then we would sell the tickets, make the programs, and get people seated, and do our shows. And that was my “play.” I remember one time telling that to Mimi Chenfield,²⁴ and she was like “Yep, yep! It’s all about play.”

Pam and I would study. We figured out how to get a scholarship from the Croatian government. Such a thing doesn’t exist now, but it did at that time. So we went three summers in a row and graduated from the Ljetna Škola Folklora which was where all the ethnologists and musicologists and everybody sort of came together to teach during the summer on a little, tiny island in the Adriatic. It was amazing! Before doing that, I wanted to make sure that I had a way to record the dance, so I went back to Ohio State. It was with Ann Hutchinson Guest; she helped me a lot — it

²⁴ Mimi Brodsky Chenfeld has been a teacher, speaker, and writer in the early childhood field for the past fifty years. Currently, Chenfeld teaches children of all ages, consults, and writes in central Ohio. She also conducts seminars and keynote presentations around the country and is a part-time instructor at Otterbein College in Westerville, OH. Her books are widely used in early childhood education.

was really, really excellent. She really acted as a mentor that summer, and so then, when I went the next time to Croatia, I had tools by which to record the dance, through Labanotation. I would write it down, notate it, and come back and Lucy Venable and Allan Miles would both check my work. So now, that work is in the archives in Croatia, in the Folk Institute in Zagreb, so *they* have it.

CF: Would you mind repeating the story about the teacher who didn't understand how you were getting it down so quickly? And perhaps about the relationship to Vera Maletić and her mother...

MO: One of our teachers, a very strict teacher, was Dr. Ivan Ivančan. He was the foremost dance ethnologist and also the director of LADO, the Croatian Folkdance Company. When teaching dances, he would give time after he had instructed, for people to sit down and write the dance down. So, I notated it, and he came over, and before he saw the notation, he said, "You're not writing anything! What is it? They're writing and you're not..." (In Croatian, he's saying all this.) And I said, "I *did* write it," and I showed him, and he went (chagrined), "Oh." Because he knew that I had notated it. So that was sort of fun. And as an aside, the first director of LADO, the Croatian Folkdance Company was Ana Maletić, Vera Maletić's mother, and it was a tenure that didn't last very long for whatever reason, I'm not sure. But it was interesting that a *woman* was director, because this is not a common thing that you see over there – or here — but we had the opportunity to meet Ana in her home in Zagreb. It was such a stately home, and beautiful, and she showed us costumes and she showed us photographs of when she was directing LADO. So when I met her daughter, Vera, Vera confided to me on more than one occasion, "This folk stuff, I never took it seriously, being from there, but now I realize how *rich* a culture I come from, and how diverse! You know, it's not just one dance, it's many dances and influences from all over the place, and the costumes, and so forth..." In any case, Vera donated a costume to us, with the — it's called *zlatove*, which means gold embroidery — it's where they melt the gold, dip the thread in the gold, it hardens and then they sew with this actual gold, on the costumes. It's thick, heavy embroidery — it's just gorgeous. So we are *honored* to have one of these costumes.

CF: We are way past time, having been interrupted by so many technical issues, but is there anything you'd like to tell us that we weren't able to get to?

MO: I can't really think of anything...