Duke Kuehn

Interviewed by Anthony Zaragoza

The Evergreen State College oral history project

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FINAL

Zaragoza: Good morning. It's July 28, 2021. We are with Duke Kuehn. Duke, it is good to talk with you again. Welcome back.

Kuehn: Thank you, Anthony. I'm happy to be back. I think you're supposed to read me my Miranda rights, aren't you? [laughter]

Zaragoza: Habeas corpus and all of that.

Kuehn: Anything I can say can and will be used against me. I got to thinking the other day about a couple of things in regard to my experience at Evergreen that were probably relevant and fit into the earlier sessions.

I am the perfect undergraduate student. I loved being an undergraduate at a liberal arts college. Quite frankly, much of the appeal of Evergreen for me was the opportunity to intensively spend a quarter or two focusing on a single subject and learning a whole lot about it.

Zaragoza: I hear that.

Kuehn: I was not a good scholar because I didn't like the intensity of scholarship. I didn't want to spend my whole life learning about these things, but I did want to learn about them enough so that I felt I had some grasp or sense of. In fact, I used to talk to that to my students. I'd say, "I want you to get a sense of what this is all about." Enough so that one of them ultimately knitted me, I don't know what you would call it—placemat, doily, something like that—that said, "Thank for the sense of." I really appreciated that. That's what I tried to do, and that's pretty much how I've led my life.

Evergreen offered me the opportunity to follow up on these intense curiosities I would have in a number of ways that had a very profound impact on my life. One of them I thought about the other day is—I don't know this for a fact, you can find out—I'm pretty sure an early faculty member told me that Evergreen, in its planning stages, had really anticipated having a marine studies program that would include an option for learning to handle sailboats, not just little day sailboats but pretty good-sized sailboats. I think the college actually bought three or four or five Cal 20s or Cal 25s, something like that.

Eventually, the idea was abandoned, but they had hired some of their initial faculty partly based upon their maritime skills. I had the good fortune of spending a few days sailing from here to

Vancouver, B.C. with two of them, Pete Sinclair and Bob Sluss. Bob sadly passed away a few years ago. Sinclair might still be alive.

My buddy, Les Eldridge, and I discovered early on that we were both interested in maritime history. I had been before I came to Evergreen. We began to share interests, and Les was very interested in naval history during the Civil War and I was interested in naval history during the Second World War.

We matched up our interests and we ended up [teaching] an evening/parttime studies course a couple of times called Nelson to Nimitz. That pretty much encompassed it. Les got a chance to talk about Lord Nelson and I got a chance to talk about Admiral Nimitz, and we had a really, really good time doing it. One of the highlights of it was—this was from Dan Evans, who was our employer and our boss, was President—we got Evans to come and talk about his time serving on destroyers during the Korean War. Really fun stuff.

Les really got into it enough that he wrote a couple of novels about a character serving in the Union Navy during the Civil War. Just another part of our deep and enduring friendship. I'm really glad because Les died last year. I don't think you ever probably had a chance to meet him or interview him. It's sad I'm sure he's pretty much lost to everybody's memory, but he was critical.

Zaragoza: I didn't know him, and I want to offer my condolences in the loss.

Kuehn: After our first interview, when I had a chance to talk about how Les and I worked with Evans, I wrote his widow, Mary, who had been a staff member at Evergreen, and told her how happy I was to be able to get into the record what he had done, not all of it, obviously, but some of the very important work that he did. Somebody may stumble across that someday.

Sluss and Sinclair invited Les and I to come on this voyage to Vancouver. The occasion was very important to me. It was the 200th Anniversary of Captain Cook's voyages to the Northwest. I was a big Captain Cook fan. Read all his journals. Learned a lot about him. Fascinating person. They were having this 200th Anniversary conference in Vancouver and we were going to sail up to attend it. We did, and it was great, and I have wonderful memories of it.

But the highlight of the trip was that we were sailing in Charlie McCann's boat. Charlie was, at that time, the President of Evergreen. Charlie had given us the boat to sail, so Pete, Sluss, Les and I took off one evening and spent a day and a half or two sailing up to Vancouver and pulled in late morning to the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club, where we were going to tie up. That sounds kind of posh, and it really was the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club. I distinguished myself, and in some ways hallmarked my sailing

career, by falling into the waters of the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club and having to be rescued. [laughing]

Sinclair was docking the boat alongside and I was up in the bow ready to jump off and tie up the bow. We were coming alongside a boat that would be moored behind us, a fairly large cabin cruiser. As we came in, Sinclair had kind of misjudged. We got pretty close to the cabin cruiser. It looked like we were going to scrape it, so I leaned out to push us off away from the cabin cruiser. A fairly easy thing to do on a sailboat, even one as large as McCann's.

But I made a fundamental mistake—something I've done many times in my life—when I pushed off on the other boat, I waited a little bit too long, and all of a sudden, as McCann's boat is beginning to slip away under my feet, and my hands are still on the hull of the cabin cruiser, my center of gravity shifts from my knees to my chest, and it's pretty clear there's no way I can stay on the boat. As we push away, and my fingers leave the side of the cabin cruiser, I have no choice but to fall into the water. [laughter]

Kind of a dumb thing to do because Pete could have brought the boat back in and crushed me against the hull of the cabin cruiser, but he was smart enough not to do that. On top of it, everybody within 500 yards began to scream, "Man overboard! Man overboard!" This was much to my humiliation and embarrassment. The dockmaster was right there, too. They had to throw me out a life ring, and they pulled me drenched out of the waters of the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club.

But I did feel it was kind of a baptism of sorts, and it was a memory that I cherish to this day. I'm sure they still haven't forgotten the lubber from Olympia who fell into their waters.

Zaragoza: How many martinis in were you at that point?

Kuehn: No, it was morning. I was stone sober. Just dumb. The other thing I wanted to share with you is that I don't think anybody probably even knows about this. Fairly early on, I taught a course at McNeil Island, which at that time was a state penitentiary. I taught a group contract in the form of four individual contracts with inmates. They must have contacted the Admissions Office and the Admissions Office must have passed it on to me. You know me. "That sounds like an interesting thing to do."

I had a background. I hardly ever talk about this, but one of my subspecialties in graduate school was sociology of law. I knew a lot about corrections theoretically. What was appealing was I knew McNeil Island ferry well. To this day, the state operates this nice boat that runs back and forth between McNeil. In those days, it carried staff and visitors.

Zaragoza: In fact, I know one of the workers on that boat that works there today.

Kuehn: Oh, then you're really going to enjoy this story. So I thought, that would be fun to take a boat triponce a week for a quarter to go back and forth from Steilacoom to McNeil, and I did.

The four guys were great. I'm sad that I lost touch with them. I don't know how it all turned out. All of them were getting close to release. All of them were getting close to graduation, so I don't know how it all went, but I did these individual contracts with them and some work with them.

I came to hate it, not because of them. I came to hate going to McNeil. If you've ever talked to anybody who's had any experience around prisoners, they will tell you that everybody there is confined, whether you're an inmate or a staff member. I just absolutely hated the sense of confinement.

One day, I was standing in the dock at Steilacoom, and I don't know what happened, but I didn't get on or didn't get off. Whatever it was, I didn't follow protocol. From the small bridge above me, the skipper yelled down at me, "Get on board the boat!" Anthony, I just don't take orders very well.

Zaragoza: I hear that.

Kuehn: I climb back on the boat. Geez, I'm just another inmate here. It was a good experience, though. It was a service I'm glad I achieved. I regret that I lost track of those people. I hope they all went on to have successful, law-abiding, happy lives and careers after that.

The other thing I wanted to share with you was—and I just can't imagine I didn't mention this to you the other day—I ended up spending relatively recently—in the last 15 years or so—an enormous amount of time out in Micronesia. Most people don't know Micronesia. They know Polynesia, but Micronesia is essentially a span of island nations west of Hawaii, all the way to the south of Japan.

This is one of those crazy stories I have where the contact and the friendship of a client turned into a major life-changing event. When I first came to Evergreen, a terrific guy, a public policy analyst named Ron Perry—may he rest in peace—somehow or another got ahold of me at Evergreen. He worked for an entity downtown called the Legislative Budget Committee, the LBC, which now today goes by the name of the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee, JLARC.

It was innovation that came out of the progressive movement that meant that there should be a bipartisan committee that should look at public policy issues, not unlike the work the Institute did, but they also were frequently giving me assignments by the Legislature to do evaluations and assessments to determine whether or not programs were successful or not.

Ron called me in because he wanted to some assistance to do some survey research. Thus began a lifelong relationship with JLARC to do some work with them. Right up to a year or so ago. Forty years, a client. Amazing.

I loved it. It was fascinating. It was just the kind of work that—after my internship with Evans on the enrollment problems at Evergreen—was just the kind of thing that I got fascinated in. I got involved in all sorts of studies. I got involved with all sorts of efforts to help evaluate programs.

A couple of years into that, the Director of the LBC retired, and they hired—this is kind of revolutionary—a woman. I don't even know where she came from. Her name was Cheryle Broom. Like all these other events in my life, it was life changing. Cheryle became a great client and an even better friend.

Cheryle came in and she decided immediately that she wanted to change the operating culture of the LBC. She's probably responsible for getting it renamed to JLARC. In those days, it was a kind of, I don't want to say dumping ground, but kind of a place where legislators who had relatives who couldn't get work with staff or with committees.. They were all good people, but they weren't very hardworking or very focused, except for Ron. Cheryle went through the process of rebuilding JLARC into something quite powerful today. Very, very rigorous, good, solid research to help the Legislature work through all sorts of policy issues.

Ron introduced me, and Cheryle got to know me, and she liked my style and my approach, and I basically became her assistant in reorganizing the LBC. We stayed friends and I got involved in various projects. Cheryle, wherever she went after that, called me up and brought me in.

She went back to work at the Public Auditor's Office of the MTA in New York City and that was a hell of an experience going back to New York, working in New York City. When you're a consultant, I guess it's kind of like being a movie actor and saying, "You've got to get to Hollywood. You've got to get to Broadway." Making a buck in New York City is an affirmation of sorts.

I worked with Cheryle there, and then Cheryle came back and became the Public Auditor for King County and brought me in for all sorts of projects there. Cheryle was very active in ASPA, the American Society for Public Administrators, the national association, enough so that she became the national President one year.

When we worked together, we had this great friendship, this great client relationship. Cheryle is part Pacific Islander. One day she called me and said, "I've been invited to come out to Guam and help them work on their public auditor's office, but I don't know how to do the stuff you do. Would you come team up with me and go?" I said, "Sure."

Cheryle and I fly out to Guam. Again, this is totally unexpected. This was never predicted in my life plan. I'm going to fly 6,000-7,000 miles out to Guam and help the public auditor's office in Guam get its act together. But anyhow, here we are.

After we finished that, Cheryle went off to do some other projects, but I got known, and I got invited to go to a number of nation states out there, including the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, the Marshall Islands. All over Micronesia, literally.

It was an extraordinary experience. I was able to have a very powerful impact on governmental operations in these nations. They have very thin and not particularly well-educated workforce to staff state and national offices. I got drawn into all sorts of things and can truly say I was able to have a real impact at very high levels in terms of how these nations operated their programs, evaluated their programs, revised their programs in what is absolute tropical beauty.

Micronesia has never been promoted as a tourist site because the United States government did not want that. They have never been independent nations. They've always been somebody's colony, and obviously, all of them were occupied by Japan during the Second World War. When the war ended, the United Nations granted them trust status, and they were our trust territories for the next 20 or so years.

Today Guam is still like Puerto Rico. I don't know officially what it's called, but it's like Puerto Rico. It has that status. The others became independent nations. In fact, I was amused to watch the parade of Olympians the other day and to see the Marshall Island and FSM march in.

I spent a ton of time out there. Kathleen had the opportunity to come many times. We saw extraordinary things and met extraordinary people. It never became a significant part of my teaching curriculum, but it certainly was related to what I was teaching and was related to my experiences at Evergreen. It was just unreal, and, of course, all the adventures to go along with it—snorkeling in these deserted bays and untouched regions. Just one of the best experiences.

The Micronesians have a ritual. If you come in to do work with them—this goes back to my days—I'm not sure if I mentioned this, but I'd gotten a job offer from the University of Hawaii, not the main campus in Oahu in Honolulu, but a new subsidiary campus they were opening on the Big Island in Hilo.

The occasion of my visit prompted three or four huge parties, because in those days, particularly out in Hawaii, it was isolated enough that the Big Island, Hilo, was even more isolated, so these people out in the middle of the Pacific in those days wouldn't get any live TV at all. The arrival of an outsider from the mainland is an occasion for a party. "Seen any movies?" [laughing] "Been to a ballgame?"

Anyhow, I was used to that. Micronesians are very welcoming to begin with, but they're particularly welcoming when somebody's coming from the outside. When you're finished, you cannot

leave Micronesia without them giving you gifts. You have to get gifts. Over the years, they gave me wonderful things—models of Micronesian sailing canoes, and tapestries, all sorts of stuff.

My favorite story is I was working in the Marshall Islands with the staff of the public auditor's office in the Marshalls. About six or seven staff. It started before we get [there] and then after we get [there]. I was in Majuro, the capital of the Marshalls, and on Sunday, I went to Mass at the local cathedral. It was in June. It was a wonderful experience. It was graduation for whatever the local Catholic high school was. They had all the graduates there and they were dressed in leis and a variety of costumes. Very serious and exciting time.

I was struck by the fact that the young men graduates wore—the best way I can describe it, it was like one of those Western ties that just has two strings and a big, round thing in the center. You know what I mean?

Zaragoza: I think they're called bolo ties, right?

Kuehn: Yeah. I'd never seen one of those made out of a traditional string of woven grasses, I guess, that you see all over Micronesia. Then a big conch shell that represented the holder.

On Monday, I came into work at the office, and I mentioned to people that I had been at the ceremony and how moving and touching it was. Because you know, as a teacher, you never go to a ceremony like that, even if it's a strange institution, and are not moved by commencement.

One of the women raised her hand and she said, "My son was in that group." "Oh, gee, that's wonderful. Those bolo ties were really cool." She said, "Oh, yeah." Two days later, I'm wrapping up. We're all done at the end of the day. It's been an exciting day. The power had gone out all over the island. We finished up our session working outside in a barbecue. We pulled in grills from their homes, all over the island and we had a big outdoor barbecue at the end of our planning session.

There came time when I knew they were going to give me some gifts. I got my usual coasters. I'm using one right now, a conch shell coaster. The lady whose son had graduated said, "I want to give you this," and she handed me a box. I opened it and it was one of the bolo ties. I said, "Oh, that's wonderful. It's beautiful." She said, "My son wanted you to have that."

Zaragoza: Aw-w-w.

Kuehn: "This is your son's tie?" She said, "Yes. He knew how much you liked them, and he wanted you to have that." That's Micronesia. That story tells you everything about Micronesia.

I had some incredible experiences out there. Still have many friends. As with many of my consulting jobs, I kind of worked myself out of business. The funny thing is, when I was a kid growing up

in southern California, I used to fantasize about going to the South Seas. Here I am. I'm actually doing it.

I actually got to Polynesia, too. I had a client in American Samoa. Beautiful spot. Wonderful place. I did some work in Samoa, too, so it just opened a world that I never imagined. It opened a world that I was, because of the Tacoma Program in many ways, all of a sudden prepared for. I think I made a real difference there.

I have one last story that I've got to share with you because it's kind of silly.

Zaragoza: Please do, Duke, and I really appreciate these stories. It helps round out your experience at Evergreen and all the doors that got opened up through your various work.

Kuehn: Oh, yeah. As I think I mentioned in an earlier interview, had I followed a very conventional academic path, most of this stuff never would have happened. Maybe it would have. Who knows where life will take you? But Evergreen's openness to new ways of thinking, its very lax administrative structure, which allowed you to get away with a lot of stuff, permitted me to go through these doors, to try these things out.

I can surely say that while—you'll probably find this a bizarre thing—if you see my obituary, imagining that I even had enough acclaim to get one of more than an inch, I'm sure it would mention that I was a college professor and had been all my life. But my life has been so much more than that. I've been presented with such phenomenal opportunities to learn things and meet people and go places I never would have seen. It never would have happened.

Among those interests, somewhere or another—I still don't know what prompted this—somewhere in the mid-1970s, I think when I was still at Riverside, there was a period of time when there were a number of rather significant defections of Russian artists to the West. A number of them were dancers. I think Rudolph Nureyev may be the most significant of all of them, but there were many others.

I can't remember their name—Nova or something like that—husband and wife classical ballet dancers broke away and came to the United States. As part of their welcome, I guess, they made a tour around the United States, dancing. My then-wife and I went into Los Angeles and saw this concert, this performance.

I'd never had any interest in classical ballet at all. I'd been kind of interested in dance. I've had all my life—this is not anything people usually talk about very much—a curious interest in the Broadway musical theater, and I followed it as a kid. Just an odd set of circumstances. I think I'd mentioned that

I'd written about the influence of lyrics in my writing. I knew a lot about dance, but classical ballet was never anything I'd been interested in at all. At all.

I watched this husband and wife go through this tremendous dual performance and I was really quite struck by it—by the athleticism, by the art, by the whole thing. Anyhow, I got interested in classical ballet. Before I came to Evergreen, I began to read everything I could about it and see everything I could. This was before the days of VCRs and stuff like that even, so it was a bit of a trek to see some of this stuff. But at the end, I learned about it. I wanted to become knowledgeable about it. Very curious, so I continued.

When we moved to the Northwest, I can remember getting season tickets to the Pacific Northwest Ballet, which in those days was a very new company. For years and years and years and years, I went to PNW performances.

In those days, there was a company based in the Chicago area called the Joffrey Ballet. The Joffrey had an international reputation, largely because it integrated a repertoire that went much broader than classical. It brought in modern ballet, but in classical terms, so it was interesting in that regards.

Every year, the Joffrey would make a tour to the West. It would go to Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles. That was a significant part of their season. One year we got tickets to go see the Joffrey dance in Seattle. What I'm going to tell you in a second sounds kind of unbelievable, but everything I tell you is absolutely true here.

We went to see the Joffrey on a Saturday matinee. My marriage was in real trouble—really falling apart by then—and I was just all over the place and not, well loosely, connected to anything. I watched the ballet and enjoyed it. It was good. The last performance of the afternoon was a thing called, I think, "The Wedding Bouquet" or "The Wedding."

I'm watching this ballet that's depicting a wedding with all the drama and circumstances around it, and a woman comes onstage, and I am absolutely electrified. I can't take my eyes off this dancer. I am just locked into her. I can honestly say, before or since, I've never had a moment like this in my life. I love women, and I hope I do so in a respectful manner.

I've seen a lot of women and I've looked at a lot of women and appreciated a lot of women. Something about this woman absolutely blew me away. I looked up her name in the program. I was just astonished. I could not get the image of her out of my mind. I had to meet this woman.

I went back to Olympia. Went into work Monday, and my secretary, Eileen—this was when I was working for Evans—who was about 15 years older than me and very aunt-like to me. She loved me

and helped me in many, many ways. I was very open with her about things in my marriage, things in my life, and I told her what had happened. I said, "The Joffrey left Seattle last night for Portland and they're going to have three or four performances down there. I'd love to go down there and see her. I'd love to go down and meet her." Eileen said, "You should." I said, "Oh, I couldn't do that. I wouldn't even know how to do that. Even if I contacted her, it would sound like some weird pervert, stalking her." She said, "I'll call her for you." "You would?" "Sure. I'll explain who you are and see if I can't set up a dinner after the performance."

This is unbelievable, right?

Zaragoza: I'm sure it gets even more unbelievable.

Kuehn: I go back to my office and Eileen comes in a couple hours later and she says, "I set up a dinner date with you for Jan Hanniford." I said, "What?" "Yeah, I talked to her. I explained you weren't some sort of weird guy, that you're really interested in ballet, and you enjoyed her performance and wanted to meet her. You're going to go to"—I guess it was that evening's performance. "Better get going."

Zaragoza: Wow.

Kuehn: I hop in the car and drive on down to Portland. Eileen had gotten me a ticket. I go into the Portland theater and here's Jan Hanniford. She comes out and she dances and she's doing stuff. I've never even been backstage in a high performance, much less anything like this. At intermission, I ask an usher, "How do I get backstage after the performance?" He showed me there was a little door off the side of the stage and to just go through there.

I got back to my seat, and my seat was on the orchestra level, but it was kind of in the middle, and I explained to the people sitting around me, "I'm sorry. When the performance ends, I need to get up and exit right away. I've got to get backstage to meet one of the dancers." That was pretty impressive to all of them. "Oh, yeah, sure." [laughing]

I sit through this thing, and I am again captivated by her. I can't believe this. It is an experience—I was trying to think about it when I knew I was going to share it with you—in which my love of the art and my love of beauty and my love of aesthetics and her sensuality all merged into one. It was unreal. Un-fucking-real.

The last act or performance came on. Curtain comes down. Before I can rise for the people to take their bows, I say, "Excuse me." And I scoot out of the aisleway, run down the aisle, and go to this door. Now I had absolutely no idea what lies beyond this door. My ignorance about theater and theaters physically is profound. I fully expect to be met by an armed guard.

I open the door and I am literally right next to the stage. [laughing] I walk upstairs, stand at the side of the stage, and the dancers are taking their bows. They are covered with sweat. They are young, all of them in their late twenties or younger. The applause stops. The curtain comes down, and the start to file off the stage.

I have absolutely no idea what I'm going to do and what I'm going to say. I see Jan coming off the stage. She doesn't appear to be looking for me or anybody else for that matter. She's just a dancer who's finished her night and is coming off the stage. They're tired. As she approaches, I step forward and say, "Ms. Hanniford, I'm Duke Kuehn. I'm seeing you after the performance tonight." She smiled. "Oh, yes! Sure." She leads me back alongside the stage, down some stairs. Points to a waiting area and says, "I'll be out in a few minutes."

To this day, this is not a very good story that I'm telling because I can't find the words to adequately describe what I felt. It was all very much like a dream. I went and stood in this waiting area, and there were a couple of other people who were waiting for relatives or whatever. There wasn't anybody else who was a sort of Stagedoor Johnny like me. I waited for a few minutes, and sure enough, out this door, here comes Jan Hanniford dressed in regular clothes. Very friendly, very effusive. Shook hands. "Can I take you to get a bite to eat?" I knew Portland fairly well, so I knew there were several places nearby for late night dining. She said, "Sure."

We got in my car. I had a little Fiat 850 convertible sportscar, a little, teeny, tiny baby blue car. We got in that, and we drove a few blocks to a restaurant. It's now probably 11:30. We go in, and we sit down, and we have a wonderful conversation. I was just full of questions about ballet, about her life, about her career, about the Joffrey Ballet Company. She very patiently and engagingly answered all those questions.

It was fascinating because she was about the age and very like one of my students. On the other hand, she had had a life unlike anybody I'd ever met. She had been to Moscow, she'd been around the world, she had danced on the world's greatest stages, she knew some of the greatest ballet dancers in the world, yet she'd never been to a high school prom. I'm sure she'd never been to a high school football game.

She has this very, very strange, almost foreign life. As we talked, many of her questions directed back to me were as curious about what a normal life was as my questions were to her about this extraordinary life that she lived. We became friends on the spot.

We finished dinner. It was getting late. She had to perform again tomorrow, so I drove her back to her hotel. We're sitting there and we're talking. Part of me felt the desire to lean over and kiss her.

Part of me could not. I don't know how to describe this, Anthony. She was like a goddess to me. I couldn't violate the purity of her goddess-ness. She literally was of some category of human I've never known before or since.

We're sitting there wrapping up and I thanked her profusely for spending the time with me. She said, "What are you doing tomorrow night?" "I don't know." "Would you like to come to the performance?" "Of course." She said, "I'll leave a ticket for you." Those words, "I'll leave a ticket for you," much like Dan Evans's words when he put his arms around me, "He speaks with my voice until I tell him to shut up," represent a moment that is almost incomprehensible to me. If I had dreamed about the highest compliment that I could be paid in the world, to have a classical ballet dancer say to me, "I'm going to hold a ticket for you" was just unbelievable.

I got out of the car, and I walked her to the door, and we shook hands. I went and got a hotel room. Stayed overnight. I hung around and did work all the rest of the next day. Waited with great anticipation. That evening, I went back to the theater. Went to the box office to will call. I asked if there was a ticket waiting for me, and there was. I went in and sat down, and this time when I sat down, it was different than the performance the night before because I was sitting in the seat that Jan Hanniford had gotten for me.

I watched the performance with awe. This time at the end of the performance, hey, no big deal. I just got up and walked down to get on the stage. She came off. I waited for her, and we had another lovely dinner. Took her back to the hotel, and the next day, she left for San Francisco.

I never saw her again. We corresponded for a while. She went on to dance with a dance company in The Netherlands for a bit. Then I lost track of her. I got married. Somewhere I've got some letters tucked away from her. I looked her up on the Internet the other day. She's apparently a choreographer or a dance instructor now in Florida.

It was a moment in my life that was precious. I'm glad there was never anything physical about it. It kind of reinforced to me the degree to which my regard for her and her regard for me were on a totally different plane altogether.

That's the story, buddy. [laughing]

Zaragoza: One thing I hear in that story, Duke, is essentially, you wrestling with awe. We use that word "awe" and "awesome" quite a bit, but the word itself gets diluted in what I hear you talking about is the real meaning of awe.

Kuehn: Yes. It was, I can't say religious, it was transcendent. Obviously, I'm building all this stuff into it. I'm sure she didn't feel anything of that sort at all, but I was with somebody who was so different from

me in so many ways, and who represented an art form, really, that was so—I couldn't do a waltz step much less a classical ballet move. It was so far beyond my comprehension. Yeah, it was "awe-some." I'm pleased that I had the inner balance, I guess, sense of mind to be able to speak with her intelligently and in ways that I think she found interesting and entertaining. But it was just, in the best sense of the word, alien and fulfilling. I was doing something with someone—

You know what part of it was? This is immodest. It reinforced what my concept of learning, my sense about things, meant. I did not want to become an expert in classical ballet. I did not want to become a ballet critic. I wanted to enjoy it and appreciate it, and to have a sense of it, to have an understanding of it. That's what Jan Hanniford gave me. She gave me a sense of what it meant to be a ballet dancer, to do the things that she did. I didn't come away from the feeling expert. I did come away feeling knowledgeable. More knowledgeable. More sensitive to what that was all about, what it really meant.

I can remember asking her, probably the second night, "When you're dancing, what are you thinking about? Are you thinking about what your character is doing? Are you thinking about the next step you have to take?" She shook her head at both of them. "I'm not thinking about anything, I'm just doing it." [laughing] As a longtime sports fan, I think that probably if I talked to some of my favorite athletes, they would tell me the same thing. Much of what they do, they do almost by intuition and by rote.

I was a fairly good tennis player when I was a young man. I knew a guy who was a very good tennis player who played semipro. We were talking about playing tennis one day and he revealed to me something that I still have a hard time understanding. When he was playing tennis, he saw something very different than I did. When I was playing tennis, I was concentrating on the ball, and if I could, the position of my opponent. He said, "When I play tennis, it's as though I'm sitting 20 feet behind me and 20 feet up. I can see the whole court. I can see the whole thing unfolding."

I couldn't figure out how he could do that, much less how he could hit the ball with any authority. I think my experiences with Jan Hanniford were somewhat the same. She was extraordinarily generous to do that for me. It gave me an intimate knowledge of the art. It made me appreciate it all that much more, even today. [laughing]

Zaragoza: We go through this life learning, and we take advantage of the learning moments we get, and we give.

Kuehn: I have told people for several years—and I hope this is true—my hope is as I take the very last breath of my life that I'm still sentient enough to say, "Oh, this is what it's like."

Zaragoza: Duke, I want to thank you again for sharing your stories with us, and I look forward to sharing more stories with you in the coming days and weeks and years.

Kuehn: I hope so, too. It's a wonderful service that you're doing, and you're very good at it. I admire your patience.