ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE FASHION INDUSTRIES

FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

BEN SOMMERS

FORMER PRESIDENT

CAPEZIO, INC.

THE FASHION INDUSTRY LEADERS

DATE OF INTERVIEW

Thursday, November 4, 1982

INTERVIEWED BY

Mildred Finger
Ben Sommers, since 1976 the head of the Capezio Foundation, Inc., worked for Capezio Inc. for most of his life. The company made dance shoes, primarily for use by professionals. Ben Sommers believed in the importance of the dance profession, and devoted his life to promoting the growth of the dance together with the growth of the business of shoes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - 2</td>
<td>Childhood in New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 7</td>
<td>Early years at Capezio including stores of families in the business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - 8</td>
<td>Capezio, Inc. as a retail establishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Importance of dancing at part of physical fitness programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 11</td>
<td>Dance critic Walter Terry stages the Dance Profession Victory Ball at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel to publicize the dance as a physical fitness profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 - 13</td>
<td>Growing importance of promotion of dancing to the increase of business in ballet shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 - 15</td>
<td>Growth of various dance forms including ballet and modern dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Fashion editors develop an interest in ballet slippers as a fashion accessory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 - 19</td>
<td>Description of styles in the collections made strictly for the dancers and ways of making them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 23</td>
<td>How Capezio entered the fashion industry, making special shoes for designers; selling to department stores dance shoes as well as fashion shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 - 30</td>
<td>Division of Capezio into two parts, one for fashion shoes, the other for dance shoes in 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Ben Sommers retires in 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 - 36</td>
<td>Ben Sommers continues to run the Capezio Foundation to promote the interests of the dance profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 - 38</td>
<td>Advertising's role in Capezio's growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 - 40</td>
<td>Awards received by Capezio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Capezio Foundation story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 - 44</td>
<td>Description of present activities of Ben Sommers and family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q: Could we start off our...the interview with a discussion by you of your early life, and then the ways in which that early life affected your choice of career?

A: Ah...

Q: Where were you born, when were you born...?

A: I was born December 1, 1906, in lower Manhattan, and my parents were immigrants from Russia. From the Ukraine. My father died when I was five years old. I had two older brothers, much older than I was. My mother couldn't adjust herself to life in America. My father had a brother here. And he stayed, and she went back with the two boys. And...I had pieced it together...They must have come here about 1900 the first time and went back about 1904, and came back in 1905, and I was born in 1906. So I was the sort of the link to bring the family together again.

My father, as I say, died when I was five years old, and I went to the public schools of....We moved over to Brooklyn...

Q: You were down on the lower East Side.

A: Yeah. Born on the lower East Side. We moved to Brooklyn, and went to what turned out to be the first junior high school in Brooklyn. My memory isn't too good, but these things I can remember. P.S. 33. It was a little red schoolhouse on Lynch Street and Broadway, in Brooklyn. And the two most important teachers I had, I can remember, were a teacher...they were sisters but had two different names...And one taught me Spanish, and the other was an English teacher. They made a real impact. So much so, that...

-1-
In those days, you know, my mother was a widow, and my two brothers went off. The oldest one got married and went off into the big world. And here I was, at this ripe age of 14, a graduate of Junior High School, and I knew I was going to continue my High School, I had to get a job. And so I looked in the papers, and they needed an errand boy at a place called Capezio.

Q: Up until that time you had had no particular knowledge of or interest in...

A: No, no. In those times children didn't have a chance to exist. And I remember, the job was taken. But about a week later, on a subsequent...looking for a job and going for these interviews...That was way up on 40th Street. That was way uptown in those days. I went up and I thought that the man had seemed to be very interested in me, although he had somebody, who he didn't know was going to be satisfactory or not. So I went back. And he's just writing me to come in. And so...It was very funny, because he was a young man by the name of James Salvaggio.

Q: Would you spell Salvaggio?

A: Salvaggio is S-a-l-v-a-g-g-i-o. And he turned out to become, later on...He went into business for himself, as a competitor of Capezio in 1925, and that's when I knew this was going to be my last work because I took over his job, with my five years of experience, because I had already gotten to know Mr. Capezio personally. I'd go to the factory...

Q: Tell us in considerable detail what you did during those five years.

A: Well, during those five years as an errand boy I think...
the most important thing I did, besides running all kinds of errands, is that when I got to know Mr. Capezio—he came over to the factory, which was on 39th Street and 6th Avenue at the time—40th Street and Broadway happened to be very close to the Metropolitan Opera house, because we did a lot of things for the Metropolitan Opera...

Q: Which, of course, in those days, was down...
A: Oh, sure. It was on 39th Street, 40th Street, and Broadway.

Q: Right. The garment industry wasn't yet there?
A: Well, it was coming. And actually, I got to know Mr. Capezio.... He had no children, and I had no father, and he began to say that he wanted me to come with him, I should help him carry bundles, when he goes down to buy leather, down in the leather district, which was called "the swamp." And so, he used to call me to come down, and, of course, I went with him, and... But every time we went, it was right next to Little Italy, and we always had lunch in Little Italy, and that's how I got to get even more acquainted with him. And slowly but surely what happened was that when Jimmy went into business, I took over his job, and from that point on, I sort of became the prime person for Mr. Capezio.

Q: Would you tell us about Mr. Capezio, and...?
A: Yes. Salvatore Capezio came to this country in 1887, and he earned the title—I gave him the title—of the dancer's cobbler. Now, how this came about is because, he really was making more theatrical shoes, because when he first came to this country he began to repair shoes. And he
began to...He was in the same theatrical district, and there was an old shoemaker by the name of Azzimonte. I met him. And Azzimonte used to...

He loved Mr. Capezio, and he used to send Mr. Capezio, whenever he had something to fix, he used to send it to Mr. Capezio, and he was a ranking theatrical shoemaker of those years. And little by little, Mr. Capezio became involved in making theatrical shoes. So when Mr. Azzimonte retired, Mr. Capezio practically had the Azzimonte business.

Q: Azzimonte is...
A: A-z-z-i-m-o-n-t-e...And Mr. Capezio really inherited a theatrical business that Mr. Azzimonte had developed, and in that way he carried on the tradition, in making theatrical shoes.

Q: That was about what year, that he took over?
A: Oh, that would be the years of 1887 to 1890....1890 to 1900 or 1905. Thereabouts. That decade. Two decades. Because I think he was in business until about 1900. And then it was from 1900 to about 1910.....And by 1920, when I came in, dance had already become a little more important. And the dance was the smallest portion of the theatrical business then. But it...I became tremendously impressed with dance.

Q: Could you just tell us a little bit about the Terlizzi family?
A: Yes, I will. Because you see, actually, what happened...in 1925, when Jimmy Selva...He took the name Selva. That's who you know as Jimmy Selva...Many years later he became the ranking competitor to Capezio. He was a model competitor, but we were very, very friendly. And he.....
Unfortunately he retired about five or six years ago... When I retired from business... Sold his business... And the man who bought his business is out of business today, so there's no link there of Selva's business at all.

Q: Selva is spelled...?

A: S-e-l-v-a... It was originally Salvaggio... Now, you know, names have a very important meaning. I'm glad you said that. Because my family name is guess what? Schusterman. Which means "shoemaker man." And the "c" would indicate that it had a German, some background there. Because otherwise it would be "sh." In fact, my father's brother, who had five girls, he spelled his name "Shusterman." We spelled it "Schusterman." And when I came to Capezio, I thought that German names--World War I--I was very self-conscious about this, and I quickly changed it to Sommers. And this business of names, you know... We quickly adopted names. Because it was a theatrical thing. People in theatre adopted names, you know. In my family we had a very prominent man, whom I get to see very seldom. George Burns, the Burns and Allen man. And George Burns was "Birnbaum." Mac Birnbaum was his Jewish name, and it was his sister who married my brother. That's how we're related, you see. At any rate... going back to...

Q: Mr. Selva...

A: In 1925, after Mr. Selva left the business, Capezio... they lived in New Jersey, incidentally, and he had a sister who was married to a man who was in the barber business by the name of Terlizzi. So, the Terlizzi family had two sons, and one was Nick and the other was Ted, and Mr. Capezio brought them to me in 1925 to say that, since he had nobody
in this business, because he knew...He wanted me to nurture them, you see. So I suggested to him that he take Nick....

Q: Were they quite young then?

A: Oh, yes. Well, Nick Terlizzi was only six months younger than I, but I had an older appearance. And I suggested he take Nick Terlizzi under his wing at the factory, and that I would take Ted under my wing. I changed his name immediately to Nelson instead of Terlizzi, because in the retail business, for example—he was going to take care of the retail business—we'd train him for that. I said, he'd have to take care of the store, the retail business, and I began to make my office at the factory.

Q: Could you explain what the separation was between the wholesale business and the retail business because...?

A: Well, actually, you see, the wholesale business...There was very little wholesale business, but the factory, you see, you make shoes in the factory and that becomes the wholesale business. But when you have a retail store...

Q: And that was in New Jersey...

A: No. From 39th Street and 6th Avenue we then moved to 209 West 48th Street. And the store moved to 39th Street and Broadway, and was there for many, many years. Because the theatrical business was moving up, and we were moving up with it, you see. Of course...this was the natural evolution. In the meantime, that was how the Terlizzi family, who ....Now the Terlizzi boys are running what is called Capezio Ballet Makers. It's officially Ballet Makers, Inc., but with the rights to use the name
Capezio in the making of dance, theatre and recreation products. That's very important, because later, when we explain the division, after the fashion business, it makes a lot of sense.

So, that's how the Terlizzi family fit into the business. And the boys who are running that business are the sons of Nick Terlizzi.

Q: The ones who are running it today.

A: Today. Are the sons of Nick...The President of the company is Al Terlizzi. And his brother Nicky, who was older, Nick Terlizzi, Jr., is head of the production department. And they have another young man by the name of Aldo, who is...I never got to know him, he was much younger... Now he's at the production level now, and I look forward to his development, because he shows great signs of being able to improve a lot. So that's the Terlizzi family.

Q: now the manufacturing part of it, I assume, resulted in production of merchandise all of which is sold only in your shop.

A: Well, some...What happened was...When I made my office over at the factory, and Ted Nelson was running the retail shop, I began to think in terms of how to distribute, and that's how we began to develop customers. As dance grew, increase came, and somebody would come along and carry some shoes in Philadelphia, Boston, here, there and the other place. And the next thing I knew I was...technically, I was in that title while Mr. Capezio was alive...was the Sales Manager. So I became the Sales Manager. Then we incorporated the business. And Capezio, Inc. was born. And the retail shop became a separate corporation. Still is today.
Q: What year was that?
A: I would say that that was about 1930. About 1930.

It was during the Depression. And we went through the Roaring Twenties, the Depression Thirties. And lo and behold, Mr. Capezio dies in 1940. January of 1940. We started the decade....An anecdote is that Mr. Capezio had a brother on the West Coast, whom I got to meet, when I used to visit the West Coast. And he never left a will. Mr. Capezio never left a will. I guess he just couldn't get himself to write one. His brother came, when he died, to the funeral. And he had a meeting with me, and he told me that Mr. Capezio did not leave a will. Therefore, he would be left 50% of his estate, and the two Terlizzi boys would be left 50% of his estate, each 25%. He wanted me to know that while Mr. Capezio didn't make a will, he promised (It was Mr. Capezio's request) that nobody could have access to his 50% without my okay. And that if I wanted it, that I could then purchase it from him. Which is exactly what I did. And that's how we became 50-50 partners. The Terlizzi family--the two Terlizzi boys and myself--which lasted until the time I retired. We still are partners in the retail business, because my wife and my daughter are now partners in the retail business.

Q: You said that the two businesses really had split. That is to say, the retail business and the manufacturing...
A: Well, they were separate, they weren't split. But they were separate businesses, you see. Now, Mr. Capezio died in 1940. It's a very short hop. That's why this incident that I told you about, with Walter Terry...Let me repeat now, is very important to the story. Because Pearl
Harbor, December, 1941, is not too far. And I was very self-conscious about being too young for World War I and too old for World War II. I was also very lucky. But I was still self-conscious. But I lost sleep worrying about how I was going to make this business essential with a nation at war. Dancer's shoes...Because primarily by that time dancer's shoes had become more important than the theatrical shoes. So that it was actually growing. And I thought and thought about it and I had a hint of what I thought could happen. I would make ourselves essential, and that was because dance had begun coming into the colleges and was being put into the physical education department. Not as theatre would be, in fine arts. And I took this as a cue. Educators believed that dance had a quality for physical being, which would mean physical fitness. And so I said, how do we go about it, but this is a good cue. Physical fitness is very important. Especially to women. And in those years, I would say, we had about 10,000 teachers in the U.S. teaching dance, by that time. And to make a living, they would have to have an enrollment of at least 100 people, 100 children. This is a lot of children, and they could use a lot of shoes. But...They weren't the greatest teachers in those days. I used to say they'd teach toe, ballet, acrobatic and tap with a little bit of baton twirling thrown in. I mean, it wasn't so developed. And so that actually I went to Walter Terry, who was then the young critic for the Herald Tribune, and our two principal papers, the New York Times had John Martin, who was considered like God, you know, he was way up there. So I went to Walter Terry, who, as I said, was of my generation, and to tell him that I felt it was very essential
that we do something. And I told him what my thoughts were, for him to consider. He agreed with me wholeheartedly, that it was a good idea. And that dance exercises could be converted to physical fitness exercises, by virtue of what the colleges were doing. But they would have to be done in a very grand manner to get attention, because dance was way down low as an art form, so to speak, you know, compared to the other art forms. And I said, "Like what?" And he said, "Well, like doing it in the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel." Which at that time was the peak hotel in America. And I said, "Well, Walter, do it there." And he looked at me and he said, "Who's going to pay for this?" And I said, "I'll guarantee. We'll raise the money for it. You organize it and do it." And he said, "Okay," and he began to do it. He did a marvelous job of getting top teachers of each of the forms of dancing--ballet, modern, tap, jazz, ethnic--and they converted their exercises and it was advertised and about 250 teachers were on that floor, who had come mainly from the New York area, but from other outside... New Jersey, Connecticut, etc., and dedicated and signed that they would give the results of the...whatever we were giving them that they would give for free, in their communities, to women. And that way, we would make dance essential, by giving the women, making them more physically fit, so they could take over the jobs if men went to war.

Q: I'm sorry...The purpose of this thing at the Waldorf was to have these teachers...

A: Take the work, given by top teachers of each of these forms, who were converting the dance exercises to physical fitness exercises.
Q: But they were actually to do this...to work this out at the Waldorf?

A: Yes. It gave the work. The complete day's activity. From 9 in the morning to 6 at night. And then he got Paul Draper, who was then at the height of his career, because he had taken tap dancing and he added ballet movements to it and made it into a beautiful art form, and Paul Draper developed a whole group of people who entertained that evening to show...put together the professional field and the non-professional field in the dance profession. It was very, very successful. The success can only be judged this way. John Martin, the senior editor of the New York Times, came to see what was going on. These young...What's going on here? And he wrote glowingly in his Sunday Times dance section about the project, and said, "At last there seem to be forces in the dance profession that can make things happen." I think he said "a force" which can make things happen. I took it as a personal thing. I took it as a personal thing because my associates, my partners...The project had cost about $5,000 to do. The expenses were about $5,000. And I'll never forget. Nick Callendrella's attorney, a very, very fine man, called me in for a meeting. And I could tell by the manner in which he was conducting the meeting with me that he was really testing me to see if I was all there. Because they were telling him..."Ben is going into this thing, and he made a commitment for $5,000 bucks and we can't see the connection between what he's doing and our business."

Q: I'm sorry. Who was John Callendrella?

A: No. Nick Callendrella. Nick Callendrella....I must put in
...was a New Englander. And, as you know, New England was a great center for the manufacture of shoes. And Nick Callendrella came to New York...

I don't know how he met Mr. Capezio, but he came to New York and Mr. Capezio introduced me to him. He introduced me to him as a man he was going to bring into the factory, because it was growing, and he wanted to put some mass production methods and stuff like that in. And he brought Callendrella into the factory, and in the Italian spirit you know--New England Italian--and New York Italian were very, very much different--And who was this New England Italian who was going to come in and show us how to make things better. Quicker, faster, different. And they were gonna kill him. And Mr. Capezio got into a panic, and came to me and said, "My God, I brought this man from New England, and they're gonna kill him. Maybe you could take him and ...make him something in sales, you know." So I got Nick Callendrella, like I got the Terlizzi boys, and I made Nick Callendrella come in as a salesman. He was the first real full time salesman that we had. On the wholesale level. So we became very great friends. But his prime thing was manufacturing. And that's how, later, when we got into the fashion thing, he went back to New England to open a factory to make all the shoes that we needed for fashion. Which was his natural place. That was Nick Callendrella.

Anyway....His attorney, as you know, called me in and I could tell...So I told his attorney, I said, "Listen. Tell the boys I'm all there, but you must also teach them something. Because more and more this is going to be done. I see it as things that we're going to have to do, that are going to be just as important as making shoes, in the dance profession. Because, you see, I was really, really hooked into the dance
profession. Because the people that I've met—dancers, choreographers, writers—and, of course, after that incident with Walter Terry, I don't have to tell you we became very, very, very close, right through his life. We were very, very close in most anything and everything. And the Capezio Award could never have come about...

Q: Which award was this?
A: The Capezio dance award...could never have come about if it weren't for the Dance Profession Victory Ball, because that's what the project was called. June 20, 1942, because Mr. John Martin...

Q: 1942?
A: Sure. That was when...That day at the Waldorf-Astoria. That was the Dance Profession Victory Ball. We called it that. Now, when Mr. Martin wrote that article, praising it so highly, I went to see Mr. Martin, to tell him that...He said there were forces in the dance profession that could make things happen, and I was one of those forces. And I said, "Mr. Martin, I must go back to make some ballet slippers to pay for that project." But I said, "In years to come, anything that affects dance, please count me in, as being one to be called upon." And he remembered that. Now, he didn't call me. He was busy then developing the modern dance world, because he was a great advocate of the modern dance world, and he was really the man who made Martha Graham and Doris Humphreys and Charles Weidman, as important as they were, through publicity and things. Plus Ted Shawn. And Ted Shawn, to me, represented a very, very important person, because he was the one who, as the father of the modern dance world...When he part-d from Ruth St. Denis, who stayed on the West Coast, to come and open Jacob's...
Pillow in the thirties...

Q: That was the dance festival... or is the dance festival...
A: Still is the dance festival... Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival. And he... We call him the father of the modern dance, my era. And then we're going barefoot. And here I am, a shoe man, and I just couldn't stand this. I went to Mr. Shawn to plead with him, that while I agreed that modern dance had great values in terms of freedom for the feet, that it also had a terrible thing about it, that it could ruin the feet. Because he was taking his group... he had a group of male dancers and they were doing one night stands and they were dancing on all kinds of floors, and they were bandaging their feet, because the floors were terrible. Today we have different kinds of floors. They make special dance floors. But in those days we didn't have that. So I pleaded with him. Modern dancers cannot, should not go barefoot. Let me make a sandal. I'll guarantee complete foot freedom. And he let me do it. And he liked very much the way I did it, and it was called the sandasol, which Capezio still sells to this day. And it was really my first effort at real design.

Q: Would you spell Sandasol?
A: S-a-n-d-a-s-o-l. You know, one of the things I must say... is that in that era... When I said that my education came... I did go to school at night, in 1940, when I got the job with Capezio, to complete my high school education. I needed three years more, and I did go at night, but I never went back to get my diploma, because I was too busy doing some kind of a show or something...

Q: This was in 1940....
A: That period between 1940 and 1944...But it was in that period--I'm talking about the Jacob's Pillow thing--the thirties really. So that modern dance really grew. And John Martin was sort of the father of that movement. He gave it a lot of publicity and value. It had a great value. Its growth to this day...It speaks for itself. What was happening was that this growth of dance took place with the coming of modern dance. Ballet was growing too. It was not at the expense of ballet, but it was a new form. And the educators went into modern dance almost exclusively. Now, there's a little bit of ballet coming into colleges. But it was almost exclusively, in that period, from the '30s, '40s, that period, really the '40s, it was exclusively, the '40s and '50s and '60s, were almost exclusively modern dance.

Well, this growth was coming. And Mr. Shawn was a great man, and when he...He probably admired the manner in which I approached this, and he came to me one day and he said, "Listen, young man, I want you to stop worrying about the feet of modern dancers and give some time to the aspects of dance, the other benefits that dance has." And I didn't quite understand what he was referring to. But I began to read up on Mr. Martin...on Mr. Shawn...and I found that he had studied for the ministry. That he fell in love with dance. Met Ruth St. Denis, fell in love with dance. Left the study of the ministry, and devoted himself completely to dance. Ruth St. Denis was much older than he was....Wonderful woman...So when he came and parted from her to come to Jacob's Pillow with this group of male dancers, it was with the sole purpose of promoting this form and dance. So I took it very seriously, and it was...Mr. Shawn and I...I don't remember when Mr. Shawn died, I'm sorry to say. But anyway, that period...reaching all through the thirties...
prepared me for something which happened in the '40s. Because after Pearl Harbor, and after the...when the war was ended (during the war shoes were rationed), one of the fashion editors, who obviously had had some dance training at some time, began to use the ballet slipper, and the next thing I knew I was being called by a number of fashion editors about ballet slippers, and were planning to come and visit with us. And I thought about this, because even though I was at the factory, where my offices were, they reported to me. Ted Nelson was reporting to me. They knew. Anybody who comes to get any of our products, I want to first know who they are, where they're from, and what they're doing. And if it's anybody who's not involved in the dance profession, you must write me a note and tell me who that is and what they got. So, he was reporting to me that people were coming in from the fashion magazines. So I began to get in touch with these people and I began to say, "Now, what is your interest in this? Why are you getting ballet slippers?"

So they began to tell me that they think this is very lovely and what else do we have, what else do we make? And I began to invite them to come and see. And that was our entry into the fashion business. I date it to being about 1944. And..I just pick that date at random, in a way, because I can't put the exact date on it. But I'd say that period from 1944 to the period of 1964, that 20 year period, is what I say is the period that I devoted to the fashion business. And devoted myself really wholeheartedly to the fashion business.

Q: Let's go back a little bit. When you were doing dance slippers, strictly for dance, how many different models, or how many different styles were you making?
A: Oh, in the dance field, specifically, most dancers... ballet was the thing to study...the soft ballet slipper. So we made a soft ballet slipper for a student. We made a soft ballet slipper for the professional.

Q: There's a difference?

A: Well, the student's slipper was called the technic ballet, and it's made with a split sole, as it's being made today. The professional slipper is called the "Russian ballet," and it had a leather sole, and it was what we called hand turned. It's made on the left side and then turned over on the right side. That's the most flexible method of shoes, and they had to be made that way; it's made with pleats.

Q: Was it made also with the stiff toe?

A: No. The softer ballet slippers. Then came toe shoes. Now, toe shoes...You know, foreign dancers used to come with toe shoes from Nicolini," who was a great ballet shoemaker in Italy. In Naples. Nicolini.

Q: N-i-c-o-l-i-n-i...

A: N-i-c-o-l-i-n-i. Nicolini. And it was the first...They used to come with Nicolini shoes. This was the foreign artists. Now, American artists, we'd have to make shoes for them. So when we got to make shoes for them, the American artists couldn't wear shoes as light as Nicolini...We used to make a student toe shoe which was made stronger, and the professional toe shoe, which was made lighter. For example, a Pavlova toe shoe is a student toe shoe. And then we made a Nicolini toe shoe, named for Mr. Nicolini, and a Nicolini toe shoe is a professional toe shoe. And then later on we began to
make... As ballet grew, with different styles of working, we made a little broader toe. Today, for the past few years, we've made four different styles of toe shoes.

Q: But at the beginning you were just making one.
A: Well, two. The student one and the professional one.
Q: And were they made in different colors or...
A: Yeah, any color. They were dyed. And, of course, in the theatrical field, there, everything was made special. I mean, the boots... Because we'd work with the designer in the theatre. They'd send us sketches and you'd make the boots, to fit the sketches. In colors.
Q: So this was really a custom made...
A: Oh, sure. Theatrical shoemaking. To this day we have a theatrical shop. And we still do it. They draw it and we make it. I mean, you make special patterns, fixed last, everything necessary. Anything at all. It's still being done that same way. There's no other way of doing it. You don't know what period it is they're going to dance. You don't know what period they're going to be playing, you see.
Q: About what kind of money are we talking about?
A: Oh... Ha, ha... Toe shoes today average about $25. And it was $5 then. The average price was $5, for a pair of toe shoes. I laugh because the lowest price was during the Depression. $4-$3.95. And today it's $25 and up. $25 to $30, depending on special make. Stock shoes are $25. Theatrical shoes... Well, we used to make a pair of boots for $35. Today it's $135. But the point is, no matter how much you get for them, you lose money.
Because you have to keep a special pattern maker. You have to keep special shoemakers. If they don't have work, they work on things you sell for $10, when they should be working on things they could sell for $100. That's why you lose money on it. But the point is that the boys run the business still keeping that up, and they're still doing it. Because, see, it's a tradition. And I must say, I'm very, very proud that whatever the influences that I've had upon them, that their fathers had, because Terlizzi, Jr. was only six months younger than I. So when I retired, I mean, he had his sons, he retired, he also retired. But the point is that his sons were there, and they're keeping that tradition. And one of the most important things that they're doing in addition is that they're maintaining and continuing the philosophy that I espoused from the early beginning, when I told Nick Callendrella's lawyer, that in the years to come more and more of this would have to be done, because I felt especially after I got to know Mr. Shawn--and I must put in another word for the man who was probably the greatest teacher of all for me--besides Mr. Capezio and shoes. And his name was Chujoy.

Q: Oh, that you have to spell.

A: Chujoy is spelled C-h-u-j-o-y. "Anatole." In Russian, I understand, I was told, it means "strange one." Because his name was not that. It was a taken name. Anatole Chujoy is the man whose photo is up there. That's him. And there he is.

Q: He's one of the many people whose pictures you have on the wall.

A: And Anatole Chujoy was managing the Vilzack Shollar
school.

Q: That please spell.

A: I will. Vilzack...S-h-o-l-l-a-r. Shollar.

And it was one of the most prominent schools in New York. These are the professional schools that grew, not the schools I described as being 10,000 dance schools who were teaching...This was the beginning of the professional schools, at the time that Mr. Balanchine came, with the School of American Ballet. Mr. Vilzack is still living in California, and I think he's connected with the San Francisco Ballet, at their school. And Shollar died. Shollar was a woman, and she died. But Anatole Chujoy...I used to go visit with him at the Vilzack-Shollar School, and he was the one who taught me more about the ballet world, and I used to go to watch class, just to understand. Later on, we used to have lunch at the Russian Tea Room, and the Russian Tea Room used to have a corner that finally became known as the Capezio corner. I tell it because there was a pair of red toe shoes hanging there. And then they went to fix the place up again and they redid it, got very fancy about it. They never asked me for another pair of toe shoes, and I've never been to the Russian Tea Room since. Ever. Tonight I'm having dinner at Sardi's. When I left the Russian Tea Room, I went to Mr. Sardi, who's Italian, and I said to him very honestly--because Sardis is the theatrical restaurant--and the Russian Tea Room is the dance restaurant, so called. I went to Mr. Sardi, and I told Mr. Sardi, "I would like to know if the Capezio Award Committee could meet here." That I'd be doing what I did, and he said, "I'd be very proud to have you. Thank you." So that's the reason why I'm
having dinner tonight with my nephew and his sons and his wife at Sardi's. Because Mr. Arnold Sommers is a direct nephew of Mr. George Burns, and he has a direct connection, or should have, in the theatrical field. That's my reason for doing it. And I try to keep young people involved in that way, because there's a tradition, there's a tremendous meaning, I think, for the future and the world. In my opinion...

Q: Now tell us if you will about the Capezio award. When it was started, and what it was intended to achieve.

A: Well, my purpose in saying Anatole Chujoy...and I've never said this before....Mr. Chujoy, when I got the idea for the award, the Capezio dance award, because I felt there should be an award in the dance profession, a meaningful one...And this was about 1950...And we had become quite prominent, through the fashion world and what not, and I was beginning to get self-conscious about the fact that I was putting so much time into the fashion world that people might misunderstand, particularly in the dance world, and say, "Huh uh, we're losing our young proteges, who are going off to make a lot of money in the fashion business." And so I felt that the Capezio dance award was a very, very important thing to do. I went to Mr. Chujoy, and he said, "Ben there can't be an award in the dance profession without Mr. John Martin being not only a part but approving of it." And that was the indication that Mr. Martin was the father of the modern dance people. Mr. Chujoy could be the father of the ballet people. But these two people have to agree on something. So he said, "Go to Mr. Martin, who I think has a lot of respect for you." He knew....
Because Mr. Chujoy didn't exactly approve of what Mr. Perry and I were doing in this exercise business. He thought it was boondoggling. Because his interest was only in the art form as art. Nothing else. Pure. And he said, "Go to Mr. Martin. Don't you dare tell him that you spoke to me first. And tell him. If you can get Mr. Martin to agree about this Capezio Dance Award, then suggest that he and I get together and talk, and from that point on we'll take over." Because it had to be with the understanding that an award committee would have to come into being. And, that we would have nothing to do with it at all, other than provide it. And it would be called the Capezio Dance Award. Because one of the things I learned very quickly was don't get yourself involved wherever there would be controversy. We're not a critic. It's not our job to criticize. That's not...If we want to do something good, we must do it in such a way that it helps the profession as a whole. And that is really how the Capezio Foundation came into being. Because when I went to Mr. Martin--who remembered 1942--he said, "I disagree...I've never been in favor of awards. But I have confidence in your judgment. If you think that a dance award would be good for the dance profession, I'm willing to entertain it." I said, "Gee, that's fine. I think it's very important. At this stage in the dance profession, why don't you get together with Mr. Chujoy?" And they did get together, and the net result was that they chose Arthur Hill at Juilliard and Walter Terry for the committee for the first Capezio Award.

Q: In 1950?

A: No. The First Capezio Award was made in 1952. It took '50-'51 to organize, you know. It's now 32 years. And because the first
award, I'm sure, was Mr. Martin's selection, and the second award, I'm sure, was Mr. Chujoy's selection...Why I say this is because it was Zachary Solov who was the first award.

Q: Spell it.

A: Zachary Solov...S-o-l-o-v....is the same man who's taking care of Mr. Martin, who's over 90. And the second one was Lincoln Kirstein. That's why I'm sure it was Mr. Chujoy's, because one was in modern dance...Well, Solov is a dancer. Period. But the other one was in ballet.

[Side 2]

Q: ....how Capezio got into the fashion industry and what all of that represented in your total thinking.

A: Well.....I call the period between 1944 and 1964...and the reason I say 1944, from the exercise business and the people in the fashion world starting to call for ballet slippers--and I realized, you see, that this was coming from the fashion world--and more and more editors were calling...I said, my, this would be a marvelous opportunity to teach the fashion world about dance, through the tools of a dancer. And I made myself not only available, but induced them to come and know more about it. And they were tremendously happy to do so, because they were being constrained with shoes at that time...

Q: This was during the Second World War....

A: Sure. And actually, they were very happy to have this. Anyway...I won't tell you about fashion editors. I mean, they're looking....
...They saw this as being a great creative thing, and when the restrictions were lifted...When the war was over and the restrictions were lifted, I was letting them go and they were not letting me go. And we kept making more and more things, and I got to know the designers of course...Because, the same as we did work for the designers in the theatre, made shoes for the theatre, the designers of clothes; a person like Claire McCardell began to adopt a ballet slipper. Tina Leser. But then Rudy Gernreich...Rudy Gernreich was probably the one who was the most aware, because he had a streak of theatricalness in him, because even today he still does work on the West Coast that is connected seriously in dance, with companies there. So, actually, it was very easy. So, I made myself available and said, "Anything you need, within our sphere." Well, what do you mean by sphere. We mean we don't make high heels. We make only what we call "the dancer's last." Ballet...heels up to two inches, because...arbitrarily two inches, two and a quarter inches...tap dancing would be done that way, for women. And also, movements for jazz. Any kind of movements for jazz. So we stayed within that, and I made that line very, very strict. Because that was the only way of teaching them that there was a difference between dancer's shoes and the dancer's last...and ordinary shoes. And, of course, the rest is history. It took on, and frankly I think I can say this because, from a business point of view, from a business point of view, everything...progress is measured in dollars and cents, and I said...I'm going to mention this, because it's in that period from 1944 to 1964, which led me to make the decision to get out of the fashion business. And the fashion business was a wonderful experience.
Q: But we were talking about volume...

A: Well...I will say that the reasons....You have to put it together this way. The reasons for it would be this. Our business became ...we're a small business, comparatively speaking.

Q: About how much were you doing in 1964?

A: Our business became, by 1964, we were doing $5 million in business, of which $3 1/2 was in fashion and only a million and a half in dance.

Q: And how much did the dance business bring in in 1944? Do you remember?

A: I don't remember. But I would say that that was the business. To give you an idea, it was 2/3 of our business. And that's what made me to decide, it's enough. I've got to make a decision. The decision was, I must get out of the fashion business, because the dance needed the support ...all the support...that they could possibly get. You want to really bring it about. Because we could see, it was getting ready to bust wide open. And we'd never be able to take care of both. So I made the decision of separating the business.

Q: But how did you conduct that business during those 20 years?

A: Well, what do you mean, how did we conduct...?

Q: Did you have salesmen who sold stores?

A: Oh, yeah. Sure.

Q: Well, before that, you were not selling to stores...
A: Oh, yeah. Sure. We sold stores dance shoes. We had what they called Capezio dance agencies. But then fashion accounts came into being, and Lord & Taylor was the beginning. That's the place where we started, as our name became known in the fashion...Lord & Taylor put in Capezio fashion shoes...not dance shoes.

Q: Yes, that's the kind of thing I'm referring to.

A: For example, R.H. Macy carried Capezio dance shoes in their children's shoe department. As a matter of fact, the very interesting part about that is that the man who was the children's shoe buyer, the children's shoe buyer of R. H. Macy--Ab Rosenberg--is today the owner of the Capezio fashion shop down in the Village. And he became acquainted with Capezio fashions through Capezio dance, and he actually migrated down to Florida, and there was a store down there--Hartley's--that he was interested in, and they became our fashion...They were bigger than Burdine's, and they used to bring me down there to make personal appearances at the drop of a hat. We always had to do at least two a year for him, with Hartley's. And that's how he got to know the fashion business intimately. When he came to New York...One of the things I did in the separation of the business...The only personal thing I got out of it was that there could be no Capezio fashion shop, when we separated the business, on the West Side of New York, without our OK. So we had the--my wife and I really--opened the Village shop with some other people, and we sold it to Ab Rosenberg, because Ab Rosenberg came to New York and I knew that he was so wonderful, and to this day we're very good friends.
Q: I'm sorry...Since you mentioned Ab Rosenberg...He had been at Macy's, then he went to Florida?

A: Macy's, in children's shoes. He went to Florida, got involved with Hartley's, got into the fashion business. Capezio fashion became very important to Hartley's because of him, and when he came back to New York to resettle in New York--he lives in Westchester--he was looking for something, and we sold him...We turned the Capezio fashion store over to him. He does today a very big job in Capezio fashions. I don't know what Capezio fashion shoes he had...Because some of them are the U.S. Shoe Company...He has all kinds of shoes there. But he has the Capezio fashion franchise, which is through the United States Shoe Company. But anyway...I...that's an aside.

Q: That's after 1964?

A: Yes. That's after 1964. Now...What happened is this. Because of the division of the business...When I made that decision, to get out of the fashion business, I decided that I had to devote my time to the dance business. My nephew, Arnold Sommers, was the Sales Manager for our company. And I gave everybody the choice of which business they wanted to be in. Nick Callendrella, who was the partner who took over the fashion business, because he was that New England factory man--and that was a very natural thing for him--and my nephew, decided on the fashion business. So he became their Sales Manager. In fact, he became interested financially with Nick Callendrella in the fashion business. And that's how the separation, Ballet Makers, which was the name of the dance factory--Ballet Makers, Inc.--
had the rights to the use of the name Capezio, because only one can have the name. Capezio, Inc. became the fashion business. So Ballet Makers became the dance business. But they had the right to call themselves Capezio Ballet Makers, and their rights would be restricted to dance, theatre and recreation. The reason for the word "recreation" was because of all the exercise things and the things that were coming in. So today that's the way the company...

Q: At that time, that was your company...
A: At that time...yes...I was...Well, when we made the separation...

Q: That's where I would like...
A: I resigned then as the President of Capezio, Inc., and I was a Vice President of Capezio Ballet Makers. I never replaced.... Nick Terlizzi, Sr., was the President of Ballet Makers and remained that way. Titles mean nothing, you know. But I devoted myself completely to dance, from that point on....

Q: Now, what was the other part of the business called?
The fashion business?
A: Capezio. Capezio, Inc.
Q: I see.
A: See, Capezio, Inc. was the fashion business.
Q: And that is what was sold to U.S. Shoes, subsequently.
A: Well, I don't know...Frankly, I don't know how they took it over. I don't know what the circumstances were. Because I was not involved.
Q: But in 1964, the business of Capezio, Inc. and Capezio Ballet Makers...

A: Ballet Makers separated. The two Capezio businesses. And so....I don't know how they came...I don't know how the United States Shoe Company got control. I never did find out. Maybe I'll ask my nephew tonight. Because, you see, it was a very, very touchy subject. And, you know, he got connected with, what's his name, Miller. Margaret Clark's husband...I. Miller...I. Miller & Sons is one of our competitors in the theatrical business. They were a famous theatrical house. They used to have a store on 46th Street and Broadway...I looked at it today, as I was coming up, and I said, 'My God. That's the corner where I. Miller & Sons had a theatrical store. Forty-sixth Street and Broadway.' And there's only one of the Miller's left, and that's Margaret Clark's husband. Margaret Clark is a very great friend, designer of shoes. Very sick woman. She's still living, I guess.

Well, at any rate, it was a ticklish subject. And then, of course, the Terlizzi boys, because of my nephew being in the fashion business, you know, the very natural thing would be for them to say, "Well, that's Ben's nephew. Maybe he is giving his nephew help without...Maybe he's helping him." And I would help him. I would help him. Because...Anything having to do with the name Capezio. When they got into that trouble, and the United States Shoe Company took over from them, from that point on, I never had any inkling, nor have I ever been able to find a way to make them understand. You see, the United States Shoe Company is in Cincinnati,
Ohio. It's peculiar, because my wife first was married in Cincinnati and raised three children there. She was a Baltimore girl. We get back to Cincinnati once in a while, and we have a Capezio dance shop in Cincinnati, now run by an ex-dancer, which is wonderful. They're having a hard time having a shop there.

Q: But that is part of the Capezio Ballet Makers.
A: Yes.
Q: And a retail division of that...
A: Officially...I am the head of the Capezio Foundation, and I head the Capezio retail business, nominally. It's nominal.
Q: But when the split took place in '64, production for Capezio Ballet Makers was under whose direction?
A: Nick Terlizzi, Sr....production end. The production end was under Nick Terlizzi, Sr., and the total sales end of it was under my direction. In other words, officially then, I became the Vice President in charge of Sales for all Capezio Ballet Makers, and Nick Terlizzi was the head of Capezio Ballet Makers in terms of production.
Q: And now, after his death...
A: Whose death?
Q: Nick Terlizzi is alive?
A: He's alive. He's very much alive.
Q: Yes. I'm sorry. Then he is of a different generation...
A: No, no. He's six months younger than I am. His son, Alfred Terlizzi, is President of the...He made him the President of his
BEN SOMMERS

All of them have titles there. So, they're running that end of the Capezio dance business, and my daughter is running the Capezio retail business. That's how it's worked. So the two younger generations are Sommers (her name is Miller)...she's a female. You know, it's a very funny thing. There were no male sons. Arnold changed his name to Sommers. Because of me. But the important part of it is that in talking about the progress that's been made...By the time I retired...

Q: You retired in what year?
A: 1976...From 1964 to 1976, the Capezio dance business went to $10 million. That gives you an idea of the success of what I did by separating myself from 1964 to 1976. I'm very happy to say that the Terlizzi boys have doubled that.

Q: Since then?
A: Since then. Okay?
Q: Since 1976?
A: Yes.
Q: So that they're now doing $20 million?
A: That's right. Plus. You know something? I'm very proud of them. I'm very proud of them because...The important thing is not that they've done it. They've kept pace with the growth. In a very, very difficult time. And outpaced the number two competitor. Selva, who is out of business. So it shows, you know. Here's the man who had no children--Mr.
Capezio--and the business goes on. And here is a fellow who developed into being the second ranking competitor, sells his business...Out of business and finished. Today our principal competitor in ballet shoes would be English--Frieds of London. Probably our principal competitor. And Mr. Fried, who is a good friend, he...I hope...we can make them contribute. You know they are now...You know there are a number of things that have taken place, in terms of how to keep the dance profession going that I think are interesting, because since I did teach them that it's not going to be enough just to make good shoes and price them right and deliver them on time. But that there are other things that are expected of Capezio, and that was the reason for the forming of the Capezio Foundation. And that was the reason why, when retirement came, I told Al Terlizzi that while I'm retiring from the business, I will continue to head the Capezio Foundation, providing they agree to see that the Capezio Foundation gets the money, and provided that they keep the same philosophy. They have done more than that. And this is the reason why I devote all my time to it, as a so-called "do-gooder," because indirectly it's got nothing to do with the business whatsoever. Because once the money comes into the Foundation...They're on the Board with me, but they've never, never, never in any way, shape manner or form did anything...Or wanted to do anything...That I wouldn't approve of. See, I'm very proud of them. Because these influences on young people to make something go on is important, and I'm now doing the same thing with my daughter. And my daughter is divorced. She has one child, she divorced. She went to live in California with her husband, who wanted to lead the leisure life. The leisure life was not for
her. She was raised in Cincinnati, and she went to college in Boston, and ... the leisure life was not to her liking. So she divorced him and she came back East, and that's how... And that's how... "Well, what do you want to do with your life?" And she said, "I'd like to get back involved in the dance profession." And I said, "Want to come and take over that New York store?" Your mother can't keep... Because my wife began to do that. Because when we married... When my wife and I married, in 1962, it was only two years later that I made the decision to get out of the fashion business. Well, it was during that period that we took over that Village store. She ran that Village store.

Q: Was that the beginning of the change, so to speak?
A: Well, no... It was the West Side... I felt that it was the West Side of New York that we should be interested in. And so I said it would be advantageous for her to run the fashion store there. When we decided to get out of the fashion business, you know, I then said to her, "That goes for you too. I'd like you to devote yourself completely to dance." And that's why we gave up the Village store. That's why she gave up the Village store to Ab Rosenberg, to devote herself to... So she ran this store. Then Gail came and took over the running of this. And what does my wife do today? She's a do-gooder with me. She ought to be in any minute now. She's doing a wonderful job.

Q: Working with the Foundation.
A: She helps me with the Foundation, and she's doing a job in Israel, a Dance Library. She's taken on the project of the Dance Library.
of Israel, because as Jewish people, we're very much concerned with Israel. I feel that one day we'll probably take dual citizenship. Which I think would be very advisable for any Jew in any part of the world. Because I think that the time is coming when the full credit to the Jewish philosophy, as the "book" people--I feel it--And I feel it, and without taking anything away from the country of your birth, so that...I'm an American in and out, you know. But I do feel that I owe something to a Jewish heritage...

Q: Actually, you had mentioned earlier, when we were talking, that Ecumenism is very important to you.

A: Well, I'll tell you, I think it's a very important thing, because I think more harm is done in this world, has been done in this world, in this business of race, color and creed, and that one of the things that I learned from my experiences in the dance-theatre world...I never felt it, ever. And that's one of the reasons I love it so, because you hear about it, and read about it, but we'd never felt it. And the arts...the people in the arts world...And the reason that...I feel like a preacher, see. I'll give you a little note...I'll give you two little notes, see. One which has to do with how we preach....And because Mr. Shawn was such a great....had such a great affect on my life...

Q: And he was a Protestant minister...He was styding in the Protestant faith.

A: That's right. But he had written so much, that I felt it was only fair...I'm going to read it to you because I think it should be recorded: "The first international seminar of the Bible and dance was
held in Jerusalem in August of 1979, under the auspices of the dance division of the International Theatre Institute. The results reinforced the understanding that dance was not only an international language, but is ecumenical and universal. It has the ability to communicate and engender respect for all races and religions. These qualities of dance were best expressed by Ted Shawn, who studied for the ministry before he joined Ruth St. Denis. He wrote: 'I believe the dance is the oldest, noblest, and most cogent of the arts. I believe in dance as the most perfect symbol of the activity of God and his angels. I believe that dance has the power to heal, mentally and physically. I believe that true education in the art of dance is education of the whole man. I believe that dance is a universal language and as such has the power to promote one world. I believe that dance is a way of life which will lead humanity into continually higher and greater dimensions of existence. The world needs us today more than ever. Keep dancing.'

Q: I think that's beautiful.
A: And I'm also going to give you.....to show the progress that's been made toward attaining this, I'm going to give you a little note, which I won't quote, which has to do with National Dance Week, and the fact that already, through the International Dance Committee of Unesco, they've adopted International Dance Day, and the International Dance Day was to commemorate a great choreographer by the name of Noverre...

Q: Spell that.
A: N-o-v-e-r-r-e....And his history...He was born April 29,
1727, in Paris. And so they're commemorating that day. I hope, look forward to one day... Each country will have a national dance week... But there will be an international dance week. And that International Dance Week, in that way, will be able to attain what Mr. Shawn has predicted what dance has to offer. You can take these with you.... Because this is the way I preach a gospel. I keep two copies.... three copies in my pocket. And I think my day is wasted if I haven't given one of those copies away to somebody. And... frankly I am enjoying my life now more than ever before.

Q: I don't want to let you get away with enjoying your life now, because there are still a few things that I would like you to go over from your life of before.

A: Well, there's my wife, coming in....

Q: Would you go back a little bit and talk about a couple of things that you had mentioned about the effect of advertising agencies on you, in your career.

A: Yes. I'd be very happy to. Because they were a very, very important part of my education. Remember, my high school education was.... I needed to have a little bit more of it. I am convinced that you can get an education in the world as well as book learning. While I am of the race that is considered to be "book people," I can't claim the credit for that. I was Bar Mitzvahed when I was 12 years old, because my people were Orthodox, and in orthodoxy, if you don't have a father, then you should become a man a year sooner. Now, that makes sense doesn't it? So, instead of 13, you're Bar Mitzvahed at 12. And so I went out into the world at 14, see. I was ready to take on my responsibilities as a man.

-36-
In the Capezio business, as I got involved after 1925, when I took over the job from Mr. Jimmy Selva, and I became to be more, and I told Mr. Capezio we had to do something to enlarge the scope. So, we had to use some advertising. Well, the picture you see up there by Anatole Chujoy, that grey haired man, is Mr. Rudolf Orthwine.

Q: Spell it.

A: O-r-t-h-w-i-n-e. Rudolf Orthwine was the printer who printed Dance Magazine. But the principals of Dance Magazine at that time were Anatole Chujoy and a man by the name of Paul Milton—who's disappeared out of the field completely. Anatole Chujoy and Paul Milton went broke in the publishing of Dance Magazine, and the printer was being stuck for the money. Mr. Orthwine was the printer. I convinced Mr. Orthwine that he should continue to print Dance Magazine, and that we would guarantee him 12 pages of advertising a year. A page for every month. And on the basis of that guarantee—that Capezio would advertise in Dance Magazine a page a month—he would continue to publish Dance Magazine. And he did. It is still being published today, although Mr. Orthwine died. And his friend Gene Gordon, who had a son whose name was Stern, today publishes Dance Magazine. And the Capezio Ballet Makers Company is giving them extensive advertising. A page spread every month. They're giving double page spreads today, plus some other pages, and so on. So I'm very proud.

Now, that brought me into advertising. I mean, you have to have somebody to do the advertising, and that brought us to our first advertising agency, the Wesley Associates. I don't remember how we got to them,
but we got to them. And I was ripe for learning, and The Wesley Associates was their name, they were two brothers, and I learned everything I could from The Wesley Associates, and one of the partners was a man by the name of Lindsay Fairweather, whose picture is up there too. And Lindsay Fairweather became my principal teacher, and through him I got to learn about advertising and things about business and how you go about it, and how you make things do. How you develop a market, and so on, because that is so essential. Because we're talking about that in terms of Capezio.

Q: Well, was this in the period where you'd begun to be into the fashion industry?

A: No. This is the period of the '20s and the '30s.

Q: When you went into the fashion industry, was Wesley Associates...

A: When we came into the fashion industries, it was a lady by the name of Margaret Hockaday. That's her picture there. Margaret Hockaday became the agency for... It was a very unusual agency. Very small and compact. That was Margaret Hockaday, who was the one in the advertising business who was able to steer us, because we didn't do a lot of advertising. But the earning of publicity, because of the... It was comparatively more important to get the publicity than the advertising. And the fashion world was very kind to me. And when I was given the American Fashion Critics Award--the Coty award...

Q: Yes, I would like to...

A: I was very proud. And then the Neiman-Marcus award, and Neiman-Marcus because our... Lord & Taylor was the New York key account in fashion, and Neiman-Marcus was the key account in Dallas.
Q: Now, the Fashion Critics Award was given to you in 1952.

A: Yes. And the Neiman-Marcus award in 1953. But...And Bullocks-Wilshire on the West Coast. Bullocks-Wilshire with Magnin, together. And these were the key fashion accounts. So that Margaret Hockaday was really the guide, not so much in advertising, but in a general total picture of our name in fashion. That is one of the reasons why I feel so badly about what the United States Shoe Company is not doing....Because there was more to it than just making a line of shoes with the name Capezio.

Q: Could we also talk a little about F.I.T.? I noticed that you have a degree from them.

A: Yes. Well, being a New Yorker, the Fashion Institute of Technology was very important for my education. If you're going to do something in fashion, the Fashion Institute of Technology was the place to do it. And, of course, it was much smaller in those days. But I was very fortunate in making a friend out of Shirley Goodman, who was very, very helpful. And through Shirley Goodman, I became more involved with anything that fashion...anything that was happening with the Fashion Institute of Technology. Of course, when I was given the Coty Award, it was long before F.I.T., who now is the controller of the Coty award. But this was a very, very proud moment, because every...I don't want to give the impression that I was ashamed of anything I did in fashion. I was very proud of everything I did in fashion. And I was very proud that it was being recognized. I was also very, very happy that I felt I was teaching the fashion world something which had to do with the
art of dance, because the tools of dance are for fashion use. And when the Neiman-Marcus award was given, it was more of a commercial thing. A commercial business. F.I.T. is more than that, and I am very, very proud of the growth of F.I.T. And I religiously go, as an honorary member of the Board, to their Board meetings, to get the pleasure of watching that growth. And I get the double pleasure of seeing that whatever seeds we've sown about dance to fashion makes Shirley Goodman and the Fashion Institute of Technology do more and more things which have to do with dance.

Q: Could you go back a little bit? You mentioned that you used to go down and do shows for Hartley's in Florida. Did you do shows for anybody else?

A: Oh, sure. Well, we didn't really do a show. We'd make a personal appearance. They used to do the shows....To make a personal appearance....And frankly...

Q: Because that was an interesting selling technique that was not terribly....

A: No. It was an interesting selling technique, because, frankly, I am very, very proud of something that's happened. I don't mind saying it...You see, the reason for the Capezio Foundation, the reasoning behind it was that I felt very strongly that...Do you have to be a Ford or a Rockefeller, whose Foundations were the first to do something for dance. And I was terribly impressed with this. And here we were, a small business, so vitally concerned with dance, and that we had to have a Capezio Foundation for whatever good we could do. And do you know that
the Capezio Foundation started with $500? And I'm very proud to say that this year we're giving a little over $100,000 to service organizations, who serve the dance profession. Because we cannot do anything that would in any way show any partiality to people. So we could never do anything for a dancer or a school or a company, without showing partiality. But, we chose then, that the way to help the dance profession would be to help organizations that serve the profession as a whole--management--for example, this little organization I went to see yesterday. Absolutely, I'm going to recommend help with speed. Arts Resources and Collaboration, Inc. Art-Video Dance, because video is going to be one of the most important ways of making the dance more understood, and even for recording dance. Because there is such a thing as dance notation. The Dance Notation Bureau, which we have helped. And dance notation is the registering of dance steps. But the registering of dance steps....If you see the new program, "The Magic of the Dance," which is another inspiration because it is being sponsored by Esmark and Danskin....Esmark took over Danskin, and I'm sure that that cost a lot of money to put that on; the ten shows that are going to be put on. "The Magic of the Dance." But I saw last Monday night some of the old pictures of Pavlova, some of the old films of Pavlova. Now, video, today, the recording of dance today, in addition to dance notation, must also come through video. And only then can you see...Why we can't see...Paul Draper's putting ballet to tap dancing...It's not available. It's gone. Never seen. I can never talk about Paul Draper without saying what a wonderful thing he has
done. And it's such things as this that...I'll make a recommendation...If we can give these people $500 a year that's a very, very good thing. But it no longer is the amount of money. I'm very, very proud to say...and I say it very humbly...that it seems like the name Capezio Foundation, in connection with helping some project, has almost become a mark of approval. And I gulp every time I see our name associated with The Rockefeller Foundation. And I think that Jerry Robbins does the same thing. The Jerry Robbins Foundation is patterned exactly after the same thing. So I'm very, very proud.

Q: Is it technically The Jerome Robbins Foundation?
A: Technically it's the Jerome Robbins Foundation. Jerome Robbins is one of the great, great, great men...
Q: Incidentally...I'm sorry to go back to something...But you never made shoes for men?
A: Oh, sure.
Q: You do.
A: Oh, sure. Only, in the field...
Q: For ballet.
A: Ballet. Sure. Sure. Oh, sure. Of course, today, men have become much more important than they ever were.
Q: But have you always...?
A: Since the beginning.
Q: Since the beginning. I didn't realize that.
A: Always, from the beginning. Always made for men. And
it's, you know... I have my evening shoes, all of my evening shoes were always made for me by our theatrical department. But coming back to the Fashion Institute of Technology.... I can't begin to say what a tremendous job they have done. Because, after all, this is the dance capital of the world now, New York, and it's also the fashion capital of the world. Without question of doubt. And the F.I.T. organization has done yeoman's work in preserving and making that happen. And those four blocks square of Manhattan are really, really fantastic. All you have to do is go... Just walk it. Walk it. And watch the people there. And I always get a great kick out of it, because, you know, to the outside person.... They'd say, "If you get such a thrill out of fashion, why couldn't you have developed the strength to do both?" It just couldn't, in my opinion, be done. I just couldn't have the capability of being able to do it myself. Maybe what was the lack is that I lacked the ability to form organizations to be able to do it. I think that's probably true. I probably lack the ability to build an organization that could do both fashion and dance. But, after all, we have to deal with whatever our limitations are. And I'm reasonably pleased with myself, that I've made the most out of my life. Both my wife and I agree that in divorcing our spouses and coming together that we did it in the nicest way we possibly could. I still take care of my ex-wife; will for the rest of her life. And I felt that it would have been a waste if we hadn't been able to come together. And we enjoy it very much. We spend a month of each year in Israel, and someone we know said, about our trip to Israel, "We don't dare say, 'How did you enjoy your vacation?' Because we know it's not a vacation."
We don't think of it as being. I could never think of retirement and playing golf. Here's the pattern of my life. Mondays through Thursdays, we take care of our personal affairs in the morning. We get to our office at noon. We have lunch in. We work through to 6:00--meetings, people.

Q: You mean the various people you might be involved with or are involved with.

A: Open door. Everybody in the dance field knows. And at 6:00 we go out. We have dinner. And we're every night at either a meeting or a performance. Now, that's Monday through Thursday. Religiously. And once in a while we have to do it over the weekend. And we run as quickly as we can Friday afternoon up to Candlewood Lake, and that's where we can relax, read, and just get enough strength together to start in again Monday morning. And come back Sunday night, Monday morning, and this is how we take care of our family. Because we don't have time for any family during the week. So we take care of our family. They're welcome. Everybody's welcome. They're all....standing invitation. And bring your friends. We'll make room. All over the place. We've got five bedrooms, and there'll be enough room for everybody. And if not, we'll make room. And that way we keep things together. Now, unfortunately, my daughter by my first marriage couldn't find her way to adjust herself to becoming the oldest of four daughters. But what can I do?

Q: Anyway...You've built a wonderful life and you've done a marvelous thing for the world of dance, and I thank you very much.
Transcripts housed in Special Collections:

1. No photocopying without written permission from the oral author or his designee. The Director of the Library will furnish addresses; the reader must write for permissions.

2. Written permission is needed to cite or quote from a transcript for publication. The user must send the Library Director the pertinent pages of final draft; the Director will assist in obtaining the final permission. The form of citation normally used is: "The Reminiscences of ______, (dates), pages _______, in the Oral History Collection of The Fashion Institute of Technology." No fees will be charged for published use. User is asked to furnish Oral History Program with a copy of the published work.

3. In order to see PERMISSION REQUIRED or CLOSED memoirs, the reader must obtain the written permission of the oral author or his designee. Contact the Library Director for addresses. The reader writes for permissions. Written permission if obtained must be presented when the reader visits.