

MarilynRuekberg_20190814_Trint.3gp

Madeleine Solomon [00:00:25] A 94 year old picture.

Jenai Cutcher [00:00:28] Oh my gosh.

Madeleine Solomon [00:00:31] There are several different costumers of the same era.

Jenai Cutcher [00:00:35] Wow.

Madeleine Solomon [00:00:36] Yeah yeah.

Jenai Cutcher [00:00:36] You're three?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:00:37] Uh-huh.

Jenai Cutcher [00:00:38] Yeah. I've never seen a three year old look like that before.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:00:43] No. I've never heard of three year olds on toe, you know, it's really prohibitive. But my mother used to have my shoes made where the midgets go so I could have a high heel, it looked like a Spanish high heel or a pair of toe shoes.

Jenai Cutcher [00:01:06] Wow.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:01:08] So that's how- Oh my mother had a good time.

Jenai Cutcher [00:01:13] So your mother is responsible for all of this, huh? Is she who got- she got you into dance at age three years?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:01:23] Of course. Age two!

Jenai Cutcher [00:01:24] Two. Oh my gosh.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:01:33] We moved to Chicago. I lived in Kenosha, Wisconsin and we moved to Chicago I think when I was five.

Madeleine Solomon [00:01:47] Let me take this off. How does this come off?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:01:50] And-

Madeleine Solomon [00:01:56] There you go. It's not real pretty. How's that?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:02:03] It's not pretty is it?

Jenai Cutcher [00:02:03] No.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:02:06] And that's what I went to Muriel Abbott.

Jenai Cutcher [00:02:12] When you moved to Chicago?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:02:13] Yeah.

Jenai Cutcher [00:02:13] Yeah. And why her?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:02:17] Well at five I don't remember my being in, you know, in on the decision. But I think it was because everything was available: ballet, tap, acrobatic. Where as a wonderful teacher by the name of Edna McRae taught only ballet. And I've always felt that a dancer must be rounded and be able to accept any challenge. When Harold Kreutzberg was here from Germany he was a modern dance teacher and it was for teachers. He gave a class for teachers and Abbott paid to watch and for me to experiment when I was about eight or nine. I was the only kid in the class. But oh I had a wonderful time, you know.

Jenai Cutcher [00:03:28] You were eight or nine-

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:03:29] Yeah.

Jenai Cutcher [00:03:29] And you watched class for teachers?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:03:31] Oh sure.

Jenai Cutcher [00:03:32] Oh my gosh.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:03:34] Nothing frightened me, you know. I mean, I could do it.

Jenai Cutcher [00:03:39] So you were very serious about dance-

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:03:43] Oh yes. Oh yes.

Jenai Cutcher [00:03:43] From an early age.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:03:45] I must say that my speech must be: keep moving. Everybody, not just dancers, but to walk, to run, to move, because not too long ago I fell. And I really took a terrible spill. And I stayed there for at least a minute thinking, 'Do you think I'll get up?' You know after all I got up. And it's from bones not cartilage and that comes from the moving.

Jenai Cutcher [00:04:33] It seems like it has served you well. So are you- you're still active, I'm assuming?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:04:45] I'm active.

Jenai Cutcher [00:04:46] Yeah.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:04:46] Yeah sure. I have lots of things to do to finish up.

Jenai Cutcher [00:04:52] Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So I think I'm just about ready and we've sort of moved into talking already. So let's just pick up. So you said you were from Kenosha.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:05:06] Yes.

Jenai Cutcher [00:05:07] And you started dancing there.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:05:09] Yes. At two.

Jenai Cutcher [00:05:10] At two.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:05:11] Yes.

Jenai Cutcher [00:05:12] Do you remember your teacher there?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:05:13] Sure. Cecile Barnett.

Jenai Cutcher [00:05:17] And she taught everything?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:05:19] Yes.

Jenai Cutcher [00:05:19] OK.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:05:20] And my mother put rubber pants on me and brought me to dancing school and they say at the age of two I used to bounce it in the back waiting for my turn. I couldn't wait [laughs] funny little kid, you know.

Jenai Cutcher [00:05:43] Pretty much born to dance, huh?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:05:45] Right. That's it.

Jenai Cutcher [00:05:47] Do you remember her dance training, your teacher's dance training?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:05:51] My who?

Jenai Cutcher [00:05:52] Do you remember Cecile's history or dance training?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:05:57] Cecile's? No.

Jenai Cutcher [00:05:58] OK.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:05:59] I really don't.

Jenai Cutcher [00:06:00] Yeah.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:06:01] In Kenosha, you know, you have a choice of one. But she was a friend of my mother's because, she would be a friend of my mother's because mother was so interested in dance. She should have been a dancer.

Jenai Cutcher [00:06:16] She wasn't?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:06:16] No her mother wouldn't let her.

Jenai Cutcher [00:06:18] OK.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:06:19] It was not fashionable.

Jenai Cutcher [00:06:22] Right.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:06:24] So she lived, as I say, vicariously. We had a good time together.

Jenai Cutcher [00:06:32] It sounds like it.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:06:33] Oh we did. It was wonderful. And wherever I went, it could be South America, any place, I would send her material, you know, pictures, things in the paper, loved it and she loved it. So that's the story.

Jenai Cutcher [00:06:56] Did you have siblings?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:06:57] Hm?

Jenai Cutcher [00:06:58] Did you have siblings?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:06:59] No.

Jenai Cutcher [00:07:00] Oh OK.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:07:02] No, I did not need siblings.

Jenai Cutcher [00:07:07] [laughs] So when you moved to Chicago, what neighborhood did you live in?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:07:12] We lived in Hyde Park.

Jenai Cutcher [00:07:16] OK.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:07:16] Yes [coughs] excuse me. And Muriel Abbott was the choice. And she put me in the baby professional and I was in the third row. When I came back and I told my father he said, "Don't go back." I mean he didn't care. And I gave him a look, how could he say such a thing? Give up so quick? Never. I was in the first row very soon.

Jenai Cutcher [00:07:56] And ever since.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:07:57] Well we had a lovely relationship. [coughs] Excuse me. She called me into her office when I was 9 and said as long as she had studio, I had a free pass. No- no more money. It was expensive and it was the depression. So my mother, very smart lady, said- called me in, I dont know, someplace, and she said, "Marilyn you're not too young to know you don't always take, you must give. And I think Miss Abbott would be very pleased with you if you would say you would dance in front of her classes." Thank you darling. She was really not much of a dancer. She was a teacher and could teach anything. You know that kind of a woman. But when I told her that she was so pleased and that's where I spent the rest of my life.

Jenai Cutcher [00:09:23] So this was- you were nine when that happened? So you started demonstrating.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:09:29] Yes. And you know it's very nice to have a little somebody to say, "Susie take- take Susie back there and help her with her jetes" or whatever, you know. And that was the relationship we had for many years. Then when I was fourteen I danced at the Empire Room as a soloist and I did the little show it was called, which was

at 10 o'clock. The orchestra played, an orchestra singer would sing, there would be a soloist and then orchestra and that was it. And that was the little show and that's the one I started with. So I started by just doing one show a night when I was 14 and incidentally got one hundred dollars a week which was outrageous. So anyway I accepted it graciously. It's to help raise the family.

Jenai Cutcher [00:10:51] Right.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:10:51] Oh yes.

Jenai Cutcher [00:10:52] So you were fourteen, you went to school during the day.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:10:57] Oh sure.

Jenai Cutcher [00:10:58] And you performed in the Empire Room every night?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:11:01] Yes. Seven days a week. And it was really- a performance was like three minutes.

Jenai Cutcher [00:11:12] What did you do?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:11:14] I did a toe solo. I say three minutes but before you warm up and get your shoes on and your costume and your- you know, it takes a minute to do it.

Jenai Cutcher [00:11:30] And you had a solo on toe?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:11:33] I had what?

Jenai Cutcher [00:11:34] You had a solo on pointe shoes in the act?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:11:37] Oh yeah.

Jenai Cutcher [00:11:38] OK.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:11:39] Yeah.

Jenai Cutcher [00:11:40] And what else happened throughout the performance? Was it a variety of things?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:11:46] Well the show I was- the first show I did was a 10:00 show. If I was the only dancer at 10:00 at night. Yes sure. And and time day or night just click your fingers and I'm ready to dance. Not now but for many years.

Jenai Cutcher [00:12:16] OK. So how- it was the little show?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:12:20] That was the little show, yes. And then I after I did sixteen weeks of that then I joined the other girls. There with a group of twelve who danced in the Empire Room and there was a group of eight who traveled. And I was five foot five which was the tallest for the Empire Room and shortest for the travel. So I always had a job.

Jenai Cutcher [00:12:57] You did both?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:12:58] Yeah. Sure.

Jenai Cutcher [00:13:02] So tell- and that was the main group, the Muriel Abbott dancers?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:13:05] Yes.

Jenai Cutcher [00:13:06] Yeah.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:13:06] And I spent my 16th birthday in Rio de Janeiro. And I have a telegram from my folks to prove it. It was very sweet of them to send a wire to wish me a happy birthday.

Jenai Cutcher [00:13:26] Wow, was that your first trip? International trip?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:13:29] Yes.

Jenai Cutcher [00:13:30] Wow.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:13:31] Yes.

Jenai Cutcher [00:13:32] And you turn 16 in Brazil.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:13:36] Yes. I was there again when I was 19 but it wasn't quite as exciting, you know. And we were very carefully chaperoned. I tell you it was something. But we had a good time. And we saw Rio.

Jenai Cutcher [00:13:59] So what was the travel- what was the touring show like?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:14:03] The what?

Jenai Cutcher [00:14:04] What was the traveling- were the show's the same?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:14:10] At the- in the Empire Room every 16 weeks we have a different show. When we travel we would carry X number of costume changes and trunks, and trunks, and trunks and use that depending upon how long we were going to stay. We did tour the United States with Eddy Duchin and his orchestra. We did six cities and we were the vaudeville show of the movies. You know they use a movie, vaudeville show, movie. And so we did anywhere from four to five shows a day, seven days a week. And it was nothing. We loved it.

Madeleine Solomon [00:15:12] When were you in movies?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:15:13] Huh?

Madeleine Solomon [00:15:14] Movies.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:15:15] Oh yeah. We did some movies. I have one with me, Jack Benny-

Madeleine Solomon [00:15:26] Jack Benny Rides Again.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:15:27] Yeah I think I have Man About Town.

Madeleine Solomon [00:15:30] Yeah. Yeah.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:15:31] And something with Fred Allen. You know Jack Benny and Fred Allen had a fictitious feud.

Jenai Cutcher [00:15:44] It was fictitious?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:15:45] Oh sure.

Jenai Cutcher [00:15:46] Okay.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:15:48] It was all in fun because they were two very bright, nice guys. So we did that. We did movies. We did, I did a Broadway show. Abbott was very nice to me. She said that I was welcome to do anything I chose. That I always had a job with her which was a very, it was a comfort, because I was taking care of myself. So when we were in San Francisco, the other dancers, at the warf, you know they have- I was chosen to find a class, someone to teach us. We always, always took a class of some kind. And I went to the San Francisco Ballet School and I took a class with Christensen. He was wonderful. So I came back I said, "It's a go," So he, we had a special class for just the nine of us. And we did that from the whole time we were there. And then when we were about to leave Christienen said to Abbott., "Do you think I could have Marilyn?" And she said, "It's up to her" and I said, "Yeah I'd like to be in the ballet," So I stayed and we did some wonderful things. Wonderful things. Then we went to Chicago and we were doing Swan Lake I think. And lo and behold after the performance Abbott came to me and said, "You must leave, you're beginning to look like the rest of them." I said, 'That's because I've work so hard on my technique,' She said, "Yeah and you lose all of your individuality," So I left. I did anything she said. As a matter of fact I was rushing home from school one day and I bumped into a car. I mean literally it was not the car that bumped into me. I bumped into the car. This man was really frightened and he said, "Are you all right." I said, 'Sure I'm on my way. I'm late for class' you know. And I left and I paid no attention to it. But as time went on it didn't get, I got an ache in my shoulder. So I wore a sling and oh it felt so good. And, no but it didn't bother anybody except Abbott. She said, "what are you are you wearing a sling for?" I said, 'Feels better'. She said, "No it doesn't take it off and do a flip flop." Now that's a really, that's a flip that goes backwards. If she said so I did it. So I took the sling off, I did the flip flop, and I passed out. [laughs] So she went to my mother and said, "I think you should take her to the doctor." Good idea? It was. Because I had broken a collarbone and it was mending the wrong way and I didn't want to miss anything. So I just danced with the sling.

Jenai Cutcher [00:20:01] Wow.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:20:02] That's how we found I had a broken collarbone because she made me do a flip flop. If she said so I do it. I'd do anything.

Jenai Cutcher [00:20:13] Why did you trust her so much?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:20:19] Well I think I felt that she trusted me, you know? I wasn't so unusual but she knew how much I loved to dance. And she had, when she graduated from college she went to New York supposedly to brush up on her teaching skills and then instead she went to a dancing school and she fell in love with dance. Well she was never a

dancer, but she could teach anything. Have you ever known anyone that? Anything, you name it, she could teach. And this is how our association progressed.

Jenai Cutcher [00:21:17] She must have really been something to become like the director of all entertainment for Hilton, right?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:21:23] Yes.

Jenai Cutcher [00:21:24] And to change the shows every sixteen weeks.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:21:26] Yes.

Jenai Cutcher [00:21:27] Did she choreograph them?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:21:29] Did she?

Jenai Cutcher [00:21:30] Did she choreograph them?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:21:33] The dancing.

Jenai Cutcher [00:21:35] Yes.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:21:35] Yes. If she needed help, she would bring somebody in. You know it does get tiresome to see the same thing over and over. But generally she handled it quite well and she really was a successful woman. When she was eighty four they diagnosed her with cancer. She said I've lived the way I've wanted to. And I'm going to die the way I want to. And she took some whatever and died. But a remarkable strong, strong woman, a delight to work with, dependable, reliable- I mean you know she said it was true. That was it.

Jenai Cutcher [00:22:31] Is it true that she weighed all the dancers and fined you if you were overweight?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:22:37] Oh yes. [laughs] That was murder. My weight was one hundred and six pounds and five five. And that's not very much. As a matter of fact I couldn't swim. I had no fat. And we went swimming and someone had to rescue me because I just sunk to the bottom. A hundred and six was a little bit too little. And after I got older, she had increased by a few pounds but not much. Not much. I was really a skinny mini. And I looked good.

Jenai Cutcher [00:23:32] But yeah that doesn't sound-

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:23:33] But that, but I couldn't eat. [laugh] I had rye crisp one day a week for dinner. I mean it was terrible. I don't remember that part.

Jenai Cutcher [00:23:50] Yeah. So what were the shows like in the Empire Room?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:23:57] Well I have some cards on the Empire Room. We had Henny Youngman, you know. We had Victor Borge. We had Hildegarde.

Madeleine Solomon [00:24:21] Carol Channing.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:24:23] Huh?

Madeleine Solomon [00:24:23] Carol Channing.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:24:25] I don't remember Carol Channing. If she was there, she was not one of the really sparkly stars you know. We always turned out a good show. And the Empire Room was really number one in entertainment.

Jenai Cutcher [00:24:49] Who was coming to see the shows?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:24:50] Hm?

Jenai Cutcher [00:24:52] Who was coming to see the shows.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:24:53] Well anyone was welcome as long as they would pay the price. And there were people from Chicago who for a treat, for an anniversary celebration or a wedding anniversary or a birthday would come. Lots of people from out of town who stayed at the Palmer House. Oh I would say we had everyone. Everyone was welcome.

Jenai Cutcher [00:25:32] And how many shows a night was that?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:25:34] Oh we did two shows, two big shows. Eight and twelve. And then, as I say, we did a little show but not everybody did the little show. Eight and twelve. And I lived at the Palmer House because my folks had moved back to Kenosha. So they gave me a display room. You know there huge room. And they put about four bed in and dressing tables. That was it. That's where I live. And you've heard of Eloise at the Plaza? Well I was the Eloise at the Palmer House. I knew where the ice cream was. [Laughter] I had a wonderful time there.

Jenai Cutcher [00:26:24] You had a very short commute for work.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:26:27] Right. It was great.

Jenai Cutcher [00:26:29] Wow. So give me a sense of the big picture. How long were you with Miss Abbott.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:26:38] I think from my first to my last. From 14 to 26.

Jenai Cutcher [00:26:51] Wow that's quite a long time.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:26:53] Well I missed some shows though. If I had a few babies in the meantime

Jenai Cutcher [00:27:00] In between?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:27:02] Yeah.

Jenai Cutcher [00:27:02] OK.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:27:04] I said to Abbott I wanted to get married. She sent you crazy. You don't get married at 21, you get married at 30 it's early enough. But he was too good to get away so she didn't discourage me. And so I dropped early. I would. I did a show

right before I became pregnant with Madeleine. I used to drag poor Ben under my arm you know like a sack of potatoes and take him to rehearsal. He hated to see me dance. He would sit there and cry. He wouldn't cry for anyone else just for me. So anyway we managed that and then we have Madeleine. And then my mother took the children to Florida for a spring vacation and my husband said we're too young to be without children. You know this- We should have another one. So of course we did. It was no problem. And that was Abigail. And Abigail is 9 years younger than Madeleine. So we have a very happy little family. Ben used to come home from school and teach Abigail math. I'd say "Ben, she can even talk," She was a year and a half old. He said "Oh sure she can. Abigail, how much is one and one?" And she'd say "two!" He said "That means two," And he taught her that. And she was always a math person from that time her first degree with an economics in college and second was in statistics. You know it's strange how a little something like that could ignite a route.

Jenai Cutcher [00:29:18] Like dance did for you.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:29:20] Yes. Yes.

Madeleine Solomon [00:29:25] How about teaching.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:29:27] Oh yes. I taught for thirty two years. After I was married I really didn't like housework. It was, it had no appeal to me. And even the doctor you know I have an overworked back.

Jenai Cutcher [00:29:54] I wonder why.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:29:55] Yep, and he said "You really shouldn't wash floors or vacuum, push a vacuum," and I said "All right. That's fine," So I opened up a dancing school and I had fun with that. That was thirty two years. Then I stopped because my mother was ill. She lived in Pittsburgh. She had remarried and I felt I owed her. She had devoted so much of her life to me so every month I would go and spend four days or so with her. Until she passed away.

Madeleine Solomon [00:30:43] So one of the things I found interesting you started dance therapy in Little City. You remember that.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:30:51] Oh sure, yes. I went to Little City, do you know Little City? It's in Roselle and it's for Exceptional Children. They had a blind, deaf, retarded, you name it, it's got all of them. I went to the head. I said I would like to teach them. He said "Oh another one of those good, goody-good women," I said "No, no I really do," He said "OK we don't have- we have no volunteers but if you're not going to get out," I said Of course. So I was there for 10 years and then I decided it was time for me to leave. But there is a plaque some place with my name on it. I've never seen it but I understand, because I was the only volunteer they ever had. [Laughter]

Jenai Cutcher [00:32:06] So I'm assuming you got some dance students there and after a while.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:32:10] Well not really because they lived there and we gave a recital and all the parents came. They never saw so many people in their life. The kids insisted that their parents come and the kids that were blind were led on the stage by the retarded and they tap dance. And I taught them to tap dance by sitting on the floor and

shuffling their feet. So they were very good. And then we had other things that we danced and the children were very proud of themselves. You know, they had never had an opportunity like that. And I asked my husband come and see him and after the show when he said "How did you like it?" He said "I don't know, I could watch," It bothered him. So that was alright. Anyway that's how I've spent a lot of time. Wonderful time. Dancing.

Jenai Cutcher [00:33:36] Yeah it sounds like it.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:33:37] Yes, and as I say you must keep moving.

Jenai Cutcher [00:33:48] Sounds like the key to a happy life.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:33:53] It is. And happy bones. Yes.

Jenai Cutcher [00:33:57] Right.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:33:57] Did I forget anything?

Madeleine Solomon [00:34:00] I don't think so. I think it's- I mean from my standpoint the social work that you did with the children- well, there were adults too- Before anybody had done any dance therapy. Oh just to teach young people to count who couldn't count.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:34:22] That's right. The head of Little City. I said I'm going to teach the teenagers how to ballroom dance, he said you're crazy. I said watch it, and by golly, I had them ballroom dancing. So I had an orchestra, a band from the high school that my kids went to came out and played for them. Can you imagine? Live music when they danced. Oh they were so proud. You know it's so nice to see people pleased with themselves.

Madeleine Solomon [00:35:01] And you invented chair tap. You taught here. It wasn't hugely successful but when you have people who are in chairs, and they have chair yoga- She had rhythm and she choreographed routines with tap shoes and clapping. Sure. It hasn't stopped.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:35:27] Oh yeah I dance sitting down.

Jenai Cutcher [00:35:32] Yeah.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:35:34] I dance anyway.

Jenai Cutcher [00:35:38] You know there's a famous chair dance. I'm a tap dancer and there's- The Copacetics had a chair dance.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:35:45] Oh, I didn't know.

Jenai Cutcher [00:35:45] Yeah yeah. It's kind of built on the B.S. chorus so you know the story goes that when they would get really tired but didn't want to lose their rehearsal hall they would sit down and just sort of pretend that they were dancing. Yeah

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:36:07] Sure.

Jenai Cutcher [00:36:07] Yeah. Yeah.

Madeleine Solomon [00:36:09] Well your philosophy of dance is that it shouldn't just be ballet and you always taught tap ballet and acrobatics.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:36:17] Yes. I always felt-

Madeleine Solomon [00:36:23] - to the same students.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:36:25] -that to be a dancer you must be a well rounded dancer. I really dislike, dislike these teachers who say my kind of dance is the only kind of dance. That's balogna.

Jenai Cutcher [00:36:49] Yeah I agree.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:36:52] And really if you want get a job you can't go in and say I can only do ballet. Anyway. I had a very good time with that.

Jenai Cutcher [00:37:06] Where was your dancing school?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:37:09] Highland Park.

Jenai Cutcher [00:37:11] OK. What was it called ?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:37:13] Marilyn Ruekberg.

Madeleine Solomon [00:37:16] How about your relationship with Judi Missitt.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:37:20] Oh yes. Judi Missitt is a wonderful young woman. She came in and taught jazz in my school. We had a wonderful time. She would bring her baby and I would babysit.

Madeleine Solomon [00:37:44] And just background. Who is she.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:37:47] She was with Gus Giordano in Evanston and she was one of his outstanding students. And so she came and she taught class for me and they loved her. She- Sweet. Young. Happy. Yeah. And so it grew to be Jazzercise all over the world. And now her daughter does so for her and Jack her husband. I have- They bought a little. Oh what do you call the stores that are in a row.

Madeleine Solomon [00:38:38] Oh, they had a townhouse?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:38:39] Well, no, no. A store.

Jenai Cutcher [00:38:43] A strip mall?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:38:44] Yeah. They bought a little strip mall and they became the Jazzercise strip mall and that's where their headquarters were.

Jenai Cutcher [00:38:55] That's a huge enterprise.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:38:57] It's all over the world.

Jenai Cutcher [00:38:59] Yeah.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:39:00] Yes. It was very successful.

Jenai Cutcher [00:39:03] Wow.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:39:04] Yes. She was very talented but she got it, and it was hers. Wonderful. As I say now her daughter does it.

Madeleine Solomon [00:39:16] How about the adult exercise you started.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:39:19] Oh yeah. What happened was, you know, when my husband said that we were too young to be without children. I became pregnant. I had the baby and my doctor came in and said there is something going on in the nursery and you don't want your baby there. So you leave as soon as you can. So I stood up in my sheath, because I had gained a total of nine pounds, and said I'm ready to go. He said "You're kidding. Then he looked at me. He said "Would you please start a class for new mothers?" I said sure, and that's how that started. And you know it just- they just walked in on me and I took it. That was fun

Madeleine Solomon [00:40:24] And that was before anybody did adult exercise.

Jenai Cutcher [00:40:27] Yeah

Madeleine Solomon [00:40:28] And you had- That was very successful.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:40:29] Oh yes I had about a hundred students a week.

Jenai Cutcher [00:40:34] Wow.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:40:35] Just exercise. They- And when I stopped, one of them said "I'll never speak to you again," [Laughter] But you know I can only do so much.

Jenai Cutcher [00:40:55] Sounds like you did a lot

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:40:56] I think so.

Jenai Cutcher [00:40:59] So was it typical for Muriel Abbott dancers to get married and have babies and continue to perform.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:41:07] No.

Jenai Cutcher [00:41:08] You sound like an exception to that rule.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:41:10] Yes I was. Yes. I mean yes. I don't know anyone else.

Madeleine Solomon [00:41:19] That was before my time.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:41:23] Yes it was. No, I was the only one. And she was not an easy woman to deal with. But we understood each other. She knew I loved to dance and she liked having me. It's a nice arrangement. Not so wonderful when I worked at night and my

husband had to sit home alone with the baby. So we didn't do too much of that. That wasn't fair. I was having too good a time.

Jenai Cutcher [00:42:07] And I imagine. Did you stop touring at some point.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:42:10] Did I what?

Jenai Cutcher [00:42:12] Stop touring at some point then?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:42:14] Oh yeah. I didn't do any touring after I was married. No, no, no. I was a very good wife and I was right. My husband was a remarkable man. He was so bright and so good looking that it was just what I wanted for my children. So we had three of them, but he was not as well as I'd hoped. And I was a widow with 60. Too bad. But my son Ben was the first one, and he teaches organic chemistry at the University of Rhode Island. And Madeleine, who has had a very interesting public health career. She's- where are you now.

Madeleine Solomon [00:43:20] I'm retired. I was at Emory University.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:43:24] But you're working for-

Madeleine Solomon [00:43:25] The American Heart Association?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:43:29] The university

Madeleine Solomon [00:43:31] Oh, Lifelong Learning. We teach a class. No.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:43:34] Well the one in Atlanta.

Madeleine Solomon [00:43:39] That's Emory University

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:43:40] Emory. Yeah. And then Abigail is in charge of the finances for a series of hospitals. Very good. She's very good at math. "One and one is two," So everybody, it's just been a very nice life. And I so appreciate it

Jenai Cutcher [00:44:12] Sounds like it.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:44:13] Oh yes. It's been great. Now I string beads. Not these beads other beads. I do stringing, I do- I make Violet pots. Slip cast. I mean that's all in the craft room. I mean, I think I'm the only one they use as a craft room. I love it. And I like to play you know a big scarves, I've done all kinds of things but I can always find something to do. Which is good.

Jenai Cutcher [00:45:00] Yeah.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:45:02] No there's nothing worse than idleness.

Madeleine Solomon [00:45:06] Right.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:45:06] Well, that's it.

Jenai Cutcher [00:45:13] Well it sounds like you learned discipline at a very young age because of all your- because of your dance career.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:45:19] That's right. That's the secret to my life, is discipline. You're absolutely right. It's remarkable.

Jenai Cutcher [00:45:35] You're remarkable.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:45:36] Oh no. I just go along. I love it. I just love living. That's it. Have I forgotten anything? Okay.

Jenai Cutcher [00:45:55] Well thank you for sharing some of your life with me. It's been a real treat.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:46:01] I'm so pleased! Any time!

Jenai Cutcher [00:46:01] Yeah. I'm so happy to learn about your dance career.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:46:06] I brought you a thing of my movie.

Jenai Cutcher [00:46:12] Oh really.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:46:16] Yeah.

Madeleine Solomon [00:46:16] Now we couldn't find Buck Benny.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:46:20] No but this-

Madeleine Solomon [00:46:21] What's this?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:46:21] That's it.

Madeleine Solomon [00:46:24] No. These are the these are the cards we played last night. Are you sure you had- it might be in the box because we brought it.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:46:33] Yeah.

Madeleine Solomon [00:46:35] Brought it last- oh the family was together last night. Yeah. Here it is. This is one of the movies.

Jenai Cutcher [00:46:43] Okay, this one?

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:46:46] Yes.

Jenai Cutcher [00:46:48] So that the Muriel Abbott dancers are in it.

Madeleine Solomon [00:46:51] Yes. Yeah. You've got to see it. It's a hoot.

Jenai Cutcher [00:46:55] What kind of number is it.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:46:58] You won't believe it, it's an adagio.

Jenai Cutcher [00:47:02] You're right. And I don't believe it.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:47:04] Yeah! Well this is the thing, this is the story. They will not accept anyone in the AGVA, which is the union, if they have someone who could already do what you do and we showed them that eight of us could do adagio together synchronized, and no one else has been able to do it since. So I'm a member of AGVA, and that's in that. That's one- and then there's another.

Madeleine Solomon [00:47:45] Well there were a couple, there was "Buck Benny Rides Again"

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:47:48] No. No. But there's another routine in there.

Madeleine Solomon [00:47:51] Oh yeah, there's two routines.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:47:53] Yeah I don't know what it is. I forgot.

Madeleine Solomon [00:47:58] They're very unusual both very unusual. They're unusual. Yes. Talk about the guys that they would hire.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:48:07] Oh they tried to get, you know, strong looking men. Lucky me I get 2 ex-burlesque comedians and they used to get me up in a back bend, one holding my hands, one holding my feet, and tell jokes. Hello Joe. Whatcha doing, Joe. And I'd collapse, and I'd ruin the set. They did that to me. They were so nasty but they were funny. There were certainly not sixteen adagio men in Hollywood.

Jenai Cutcher [00:48:54] Right.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:48:55] They look good, but don't believe it. Anyway. I got those two. They were so funny. Terrible. Anyway you'll see it if you see it.

Jenai Cutcher [00:49:10] I would love to see it. Yeah.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:49:12] OK

Jenai Cutcher [00:49:13] Cool. And didn't- I did see a video clip kind of sports-like. Were you in that? Like, a dance that was sporty and- okay. I think that was, it wasn't a part of a big movie it was more like a soundy or something.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:49:32] Yeah. Well when we were six year- when I was 6 years old, we went to New York and we made shorts. Sound, the first sound shorts ever made. I mean movies didn't have sound then. And we made two of them and then we came back to Chicago.

Madeleine Solomon [00:50:02] You know we have some reel-to-reel... Don't we have some reel-to-reel, you know, that kind of movie that's on a reel, in the basement? My basement is filled with everybody's things.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:50:17] I don't know.

Madeleine Solomon [00:50:17] I know I've seen pictures of you dancing and they must have been on film. Other than movies.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:50:25] I guess I don't remember.

Madeleine Solomon [00:50:27] Yeah

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:50:27] I mean there's only so much I can remember.

Madeleine Solomon [00:50:32] We'll have to look for it just for fun.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:50:34] It was a good life!

Jenai Cutcher [00:50:35] There's a lot to remember!

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:50:39] Ninety-seven years

Jenai Cutcher [00:50:42] Busy ones too.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:50:43] Yeah. I never known anyone 97. I'm very happy with it. My very dear friend who is two years older is not doing well. She's on whatever.

Madeleine Solomon [00:51:01] Hospice. Hospice.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:51:05] So I have to go see her. But we- Every year for 25 years we went to another place together and we got along so well because she was smart and I was easy going. She speaks four languages, which really took us any place you wanted to go. We did some very inspiring things. Like, went up to see the Guggenheim in Bilbao before it was open. You know, stuff like that. We rented a car and off we went.

Jenai Cutcher [00:51:56] You've had a lot of adventure.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:51:59] When we were young, we didn't think anything bad could ever happen. And it never did. It's remarkable. It was a different time. Today when I read the paper. Oh, I get so discouraged. There's nothing nice in the paper. Terrible. So I don't read it. OK.

Madeleine Solomon [00:52:30] So what. What is- tell us a little bit about your project.

Jenai Cutcher [00:52:34] Sure. Yeah. So we're researching the histories of all kinds of dance in Chicago from 1893 to the present and we're interviewing as many folks as we can who were involved with Chicago dance on camera like this. I think we've done about one hundred and eighteen of them by now.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:53:00] My age?

Jenai Cutcher [00:53:03] Some are younger and some are a little older.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:53:05] No.

Jenai Cutcher [00:53:07] Yeah. Did you-

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:53:09] I wonder if I know of them.

Jenai Cutcher [00:53:11] Do you know Lester Goodman? He grew up on the South Side and danced with Katherine Dunham and started the Joseph Holmes Company.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:53:23] Oh, lovely. Black?

Jenai Cutcher [00:53:25] He's 105. Yeah. What about maybe Charles Grass. That sounds familiar. Okay, so he's ninety. He was Bob Fosse his teenage vaudeville partner. Yeah in the 40s and then he danced with Miss Page.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:53:46] Yes. Yes.

Jenai Cutcher [00:53:49] So he and I are buddies.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:53:51] You're really getting a wonderful group of people

Jenai Cutcher [00:53:54] We're trying. Yeah, I'm so happy that your daughter found us so we could find you.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:53:59] I'm so happy too.

Jenai Cutcher [00:54:00] Yeah.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:54:00] So what are you going to do with all this stuff, put it in Newberry?

Jenai Cutcher [00:54:05] We're going to put it online so everybody can see it.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:54:08] Really? Good for you.

Jenai Cutcher [00:54:13] Yeah because everyone should know about you and your dance career.

Marilyn Ruekberg [00:54:18] Well, oh no. I knew enough people, I had a good time. What more do you want.