

**Barbara Mettler.**  
**Costa Rica Discussion with Staff, 1979.**

Tape Side I

Barbara Mettler: But I am really, I really am in a different condition. The twelve days – or was it more? – was exactly what I needed. I did nothing. And it did rest me so that I could pick up this very big and very demanding national problem!

When I got there, the thing that I want most of all to try to give you a picture of if I possibly can is the uniqueness of this country. I do not think I'm dreaming this, because I think the little book you gave me, Denise, said that it is an island of democracy and the dictators, they know it. They want it. It's been this way for a long time. And all of the things from the president right down to the lowest member of the working force is aware of the need to keep going in this really very democratic direction. I've never been in any country where I felt that the unity of wanting to keep free, wanting to keep independent, wanting to help all of the people grow – it is a poor country. Nobody has very much. There probably are big landowners somewhere. You don't see them. You see no beggars on the street. Not one. And it's a small country, it's not bigger than New Jersey I think, somebody said. And sparsely populated. Just farms here and there and the mountains, the products of course are coffee and bananas. Of course it's a land of fruits. And growing just wild, guavas! I've got a – they gave me a jar of guava jelly, which never let me forget, you can taste it, I can give you each a little bit. There are mangos. They just grow, you know. So there is a natural richness which helps them economically in every way.

You do not see exploitation of the country even by other countries. They know what they're doing even there. They've taken back some of the land or some of the industry – I guess it was the United Fruit Company, was it? There was one country that really was exploiting and they're getting rid of them. They got rid of the Nicaraguans – some of them I guess. But a huge area in Costa Rica – they say he had the aim of being able to force troops in there and do what he wanted. Maybe he did that to other countries too. They've gotten him out. They got it back from him. They do not want anything that is not the best for their people. And this is the atmosphere in the government. This is not the government of the rich over the poor, very definitely not. The government is wholly concerned with education. Wholly concerned. It supports the universities – in fact it's a church, the university is really – there's a minister of education and he's the boss.

But they all feel the same way. It's not someone up here dictating down here, dictating to the ones below. I've never felt a kind of unified direction in culture, trying to get the best — they're absolutely independent. They don't just reach out, oh they're doing this in the United States so we ought to be doing it here, they're doing this in England — nothing doing. They choose what they want. It's true with my work. They didn't have me come here and tell us all how to do it. They said, we need you. We need you, we need the creative support. Not, we don't have anything, give us something. We're going along in this direction, now just help us.

The unbelievable — I do not think I am exaggerating — I was very much a part of the people, I lived of course with a family. They say everybody speaks English down there, nobody speaks English down there. The staff and the faculty, the university doesn't speak English. The head of the college of movement — I was completely surrounded and I'll tell you about the language problems for later.

But what I've got to tell you is about the university. I knew nothing about the university except that they call the school of physical education — which withdrew from the college of education because the college of education was too conservative. They wanted a more creative direction. So we were at this college now, they call it the college of physical education. They call the school — college, actually, means high school. It should be called the school — it should be called the college of body movement. In which case you see how far ahead they are. They have sports — they love their sports! Their main sports are soccer and volleyball. You know what that means. These are sports that anyone can take part in. They are not highly individualized, specialized sports. And they love their sports. And they would work so hard — in fact their goal was to get all the good things in the schools. From the preschool up. So they train teachers and they train teachers and of course that's what they want to pay for, to get teachers more to work with. They're very concerned with science, science of body movement. I can't give you the material about it, but you know the scientific, psychological stuff of what they call psychomotor perception and sensorimotor perception and stuff like that. They're very concerned with the sciences, you can't get enough science. They're very concerned with movement therapy about which they have no material and begged for, in fact one of the teachers said, can you help me find the material? So that in a way they are doing what I have said for the past many years is needed — the college of body movement, which goes in all these directions.

And they have me there as a teacher of creative dance, I thought this is a school of physical education, maybe I just better talk about movement. So I was talking about creative movement — they were

talking more about creative dance than was I, they had me as a professor of creative dance and that's what I was bringing there. The only other dancing that is strong, of course, is the folk. Folk dancing. Which is part of their national expression which they develop and covet. So here was a school which seems so far ahead of any physical education department that I have ever met anywhere except in Germany in the pre-Hitler era, which I told you was the most creative in the arts and education in anywhere probably in the world. And which was crushed by Hitler. Now here's this school. I have no way of telling you numbers. I don't know how large the school is, I don't know what the faculty is, how long is the faculty there, although I was right there all the time. I'd like to get some facts about that because somewhere I want to be very accurate in my report.

There is this spirit of cooperation everywhere which I have never felt anywhere else. Of course, they are - I give all these positive things about their temperament and I think those of you who have been there would feel it - they are very warmhearted, kind, cordial, open-hearted, generous people! And to each other. And they made a big show to me, they overwhelmed me with their appreciativeness. I got a suitcase full of gifts! From the groups, from the faculty. It wasn't me, it was there. I see them doing it with each other. I see that the slightest - I mean, if they can.

It doesn't mean that they pick up every bloody body on the street. When I was going to the airport, when they were taking me to the airport we went through the middle of town and here were two men lying on the street as if dead and others were milling around, doing not much, someone said, well, there's been a fight. So things like that happen, but that doesn't mean that where you contact others - you are one. You're all together. The differences, rich, poor, problems, they're all the same. Nobody really - nobody that I saw had a lot of money. Now there must be some. I also didn't see any beggars. The government is very concerned. It is also concerned with every aspect of the really good life. Signs all over, in the buses, pictures of savages, some horrible creature - only savages waste things that are usable. And a picture of somebody wasting water, and then signs about garbage, signs about this, trying literally to help educate in the right direction. Interesting thing is, it's all combined with obviously the political direction. The government has been the same party for many, many years and apparently that is what has maintained this direction. There was just a recent change, and I don't know exactly why but everybody was scared that there might be some differences and apparently not. Apparently this man is apparently moving right ahead. They give I'm sure as much money as they possibly can to help education and social welfare, social welfare, they have their social security. And I'm trying to think -

they take care of the government – it seems to be the goal of keeping this democratic, independent way of life.

They do say that the communists are trying to ... I spoke to someone here, I said there seems to be such stability here, it seems to be so stable. And everybody in Costa Rica says that the other Central American – probably South American countries too are all dictatorships and those are miserable, just miserable. And they're proud of the fact that they're an island of democracy, but as they say and this was a Guatemalan man, he said that communists are desperately trying to cause troubles. There have been sort of upsets which they say have been really instigated from outside, strikes and stuff like that but not from within. They love their country, they love their country. It is the least competitive feeling.

As I said, the sports are not that – of course they want to be in, but it's not you've got to beat this and you've got to beat that and that's what counts. The interaction of the faculty members, the interaction of the – it doesn't seem to be – it's the success, the success syndrome you'd call it, here you've got to be the best, you have to be the best and you have to be a success. Which means that most do less than the best.

It's very much – now this was, this is in the air everywhere but it has also been demonstrated to me. The entire staff of the college of physical education to say nothing of the minister of education. It was an honest act. In other words, the first day when I was introduced I taught three groups. The first group was a group of physical education teachers on a high school level, about fifty, maybe more, fifty-five. And I was wholly unprepared for it. We had – oh I don't think I'll forget the facilities. They'll say, oh we lack, we do not have facilities, they do not have facilities. This college, having moved into its own area, really has no place. It works in three different parts of the city. It is given – the city gives it space in a huge complex which, as it says, it is a place for everybody. It is a recreation place where they can have events of any kind. And the city gives to this college because they have no other place. So we had a great, huge gymnasium. And of course there were people coming and going, and it was a little noisy some of the time with trains going back and forth.

But here they were, out on the steps, my students I was going to work with that weekend, others too, faculty members. And there was a table with a representative of the university, a representative of the minister of finance, the head of the college of movement. And one other person who seemed to not understand the language at all, not entirely get it translated – I don't know whether the representatives were on that level, but they introduced me as a very – as something

very important. Before they introduced me, these people talked about the importance of creative – I don't know whether it was creative movement or creativity, the importance of creativity of education and in the college of physical education. So this was my introduction that here's this background and now we're fortunate to have this person come and teach us. And nobody knew me.

Only Jean knew me. And Jean was so convinced – Jean actually is quite a weight, quite a weight. I spoke to Paul this morning, Jean doesn't show herself as she is especially when she's speaking English. Even over there when she was speaking English she wasn't herself. When she's speaking her language she's a power. Really a power. She gets things done, she knows what she's doing, she knows what she wants and they respect her very much. They consider her very much – as she kept emphasizing, team work, we work together! But just to the extent that somebody was cleaning up our place for us one morning and I said, who's that? And they said oh that's one of the faculty members who teaches something else and she said we all help each other, we all do this.

The head of the college of physical education met me at the airplane with another teacher and Jean and absolutely insisted on going to the airplane with me, leaving the house at 5:30 in the morning. Plus another member of the physical education staff, a man. And this is natural! This is what they do! They help each other, they're thankful for any help they get, they know what they want, and we felt that I was contributing and even before they knew me they just wanted to make my stay. They overwhelmed me with gifts.

The three groups that I wanted to tell you about. The first week, I talk to physical education teachers, men and women on the high school level. The second week I taught preschool teachers alone. Not as big a group, I think – well, some were 40 or 50, these groups were a little smaller. And the last week they drove lots and lots of people away, but the bulk of it was college students plus some elementary school teachers. Now there's only one thing that's very hard for me, meeting a new group. Each week I had to start from scratch and having to build up enthusiasm. But at the beginning of each of these three weeks not all these officials but many of them were there at the table with me introducing me as a very, very important thing for their way of work.

Now my language – it was an awfully interesting language experience. I didn't have any time, not any, to socialize and listen. It was not a vacation. I was burdened with my work and I had to think in English. And I started out with Jean standing beside me and translating everything that I said. Now Jean, otherwise now, has experience in teacher training, but none of my other students in the

country – she stood beside me watching, translating every little thing I said and absorbing it, you see. Now this is, if you know I don't help my teachers in any way and being on the inside is very different from being on the outside. She was on the outside seeing how things work, she would see how I would change my course if it didn't work, she would see how I juggle, so I have to say – and I thank her for it – that I was glad to have someone with some good teacher training, plus the fact that she was here for two weeks. The three groups – the third group, the physical education teachers, all in all there were lots of men and women by that time and also some elementary school teachers. That was a big one, that was over a hundred. That was over a hundred.

Now by that time I had picked up many, many words. I was picking up the language. You see, I didn't hear it spoken very much, except I did. I think the main problem was that I was working in English, I had to work in English, I couldn't think in Spanish. So that I wasn't just relaxed going around hearing, listening and trying. I tried to pick up the words that would help me in my work and I did, lots of them. The first time I said to the group Buenos Dias, which is good morning, oh, they clapped! Then I began to use more and more words. Of course every time I used a new word they would be very, very happy, often applaud. Then I began to make full sentences such as please sit down, or they've got a wonderful direction which we've got to get. You know, I would talk about the scatter position. You see, it comes out of a well rounded education, I mean they're actually getting a very good education. Espacio periale and espacio proprio. In other words, general spacing means that you fill up the whole space equally. Proprio, I don't know how you translate that, individual perhaps, but your own space. That means that you have plenty of space. I learned to say espacio periale, I learned to say espacio proprio, oh there were lots and lots of things! And by the end, when they were introducing me for the third week, the head of the department said, say something in Spanish! Say something to them in Spanish! I don't know, all I did, I think I got some help before I said what I said, but now I think would be a good time to tell you the jokes about my language experience so you get the picture.

I got to the point where I was using lots of words and were doing a position dance. We had 12 to a group and I had over 100 people. I think we had 11 groups or something like that. A huge gymnasium and I was probably standing up there and everyone was numbered off, everyone in the position dances numbered off. And I called number one, then that person danced. Then I called number two and that person danced. And I was standing up there calling, uno! Dance dance dance. Dos! Dance dance dance. Tres, dance. Quatro, dance. Cinco, dance. Sieze, and then septeta, which means 70! I

forgot how to say seven! It broke up the whole thing. I mean it just broke it up. Everybody stopped and laughed, and laughed!

The next one, you can guess what this would be. I was saying los manos, los brazos, et cetera et cetera, and then I came to head. And I said, cervesa which means "beer." That broke it up! And some of the things that I didn't think were funny they thought were terribly funny and sometimes the other way around, some of the things I thought were terribly funny they didn't laugh at! Now this thing I didn't see anything funny about it, but they just nearly died! Again, it comes in a series where I'm very, very secure, talking in the language and then something comes along - I was giving them the stong qualities. And I know all those words, I'm used to saying them in Spanish, fire, water, wind, and then I said "Montana," mountain is "montan~a they nearly died! They thought it was the funniest thing they'd ever heard! Montana - well there's no such thing. There's no such word. But that's not montan~a, that's just not how you pronounce it. It can - now is it... but that was the funniest thing they had ever heard. And sometimes I would fumble and stumble. But it's interesting, I had a very strong feeling that they do it [?] when you speak their language. I guess it's an expression of wanting to be one of them. I was surprised at how much joy they got in my fumlings and stumblings.

So we had these three groups. Each group - I mean, this is just plain generosity and wanting to show appreciation. Each group loaded me with gifts. The last time - I'll have to tell you these experiences because it was so comical! The first group - oh wait, you kiss all the time. You kiss when you haven't met anybody. You say pleased to meet you and you kiss them. Not everybody, but a great deal. And oh, a warmth beyond imagining! And I had kissed them all goodbye two or three times and had said goodbye and then Jean said they don't want us to go. I said we've got to go. But this whole group - I don't know how they did it - this whole group of about 13 came out, using some of the words I'd used for movement, terrible words for skipping, compaleno is little horse, you can see how that is for us, the little horse. Here they were saying some of the locomotor words I had used, and here were all these gifts. And they did a circle dance coming in, about 50 people coming in and out and in and out. It was a very beautiful thing. We have a few pictures.

And the next group wasn't to be outdone. So, I had a taught a circle dance at the end and they wouldn't let me out. And we had a - it became a game, they wouldn't let me out. So pretty soon someone came in with a load of gifts and I was to dance with them. So I had to dance with a load of gifts and I had to tear the newspaper off and dance with them and that was a great thing to. And I thought, it

would be a terrible anticlimax for the third group to do anything like this. We had these two beautiful dance-gift-givings.

Last thing doing, there were a hundred people and I got gifts from three organizations: the National University and something they said was simply wonderful, they had invited the University of Costa Rica, which is a bigger school but doesn't sound as good, and they had never been able to do anything together but they had the opportunity so they invited them and the University of Costa Rica was right there. And they had presents. And then I think some of the teacher groups or something had presents. So here I came loaded on with presents.

Unfortunately, I had thought we were going right home and this was the only time when I was really close to reaction. I had been drinking orange juice in the morning every chance I got and here it was about twelve o'clock. We were supposed to be finished at about 11, I'd decided to keep them a half hour extra longer and here it was close to 12:00. And I was kind of scared, I did the best I could and I don't think - by that time I'd used up all the orange juice and I'd made the mistake of not taking any candy, candy's one of the best things and I could have concentrated on that. [Barbara Mettler was diabetic.]

But listen to this, everybody of course won't let me go, they were talking and everyone wants to come to the summer school. Not everyone, of course, but there are two or three that are very, very serious. Very serious. Jean has two real artists, two young women in her classes, I would give anything in the world to have them. So they were asking me questions, getting addresses, and I should have taken lots of photos, I didn't have enough room anyway, and I was just not sure I was going to make it. I was having a very hard time and all I had in my bag were raisins and you have to take them and munch and chomp and munch and chomp so you can't really go up.

Then here come two young men and translated - they were members of the soccer team. Here they come, very, very serious, and they said, we are going to dedicate our soccer game to you today. This was a Friday. And we want you to come and kick the first ball. It was a gift; some of them had been my students, you see, not all, but many had. It was a touching gift because they wanted to give me something. They gave me the gift of a soccer game. But I thought, oh how are we going to make it? I said, oh where are we going to do it? And he said right out there, you know, right out there. I thought, oh, it was halfway across the campus and here I was getting closer and closer to reaction. And they couldn't speak a word of English and by that time I was out of Spanish and couldn't have conversed anyway. So I just finally said, I've got to get something and chomped on raisins with



my sandals on, tromping through the mud, and there was this soccer team and here they were taking a picture of me and I was in the worse shape I'd been in the whole time. And I had a ball to kick, isn't that lovely?

Not only that, I'm done doing this, and you will see some of these things, they wanted me to talk. In fact they called off the last half day of the afternoon I was working with students because the faculty wanted me to talk. So we had a lovely meeting of the faculty and then I have this formal presentation of this lovely scrapbook with all the photographs that had been taken and the press releases printed on the front. I don't have it unpacked yet, printed on the front with my name. And they had been... they're terribly busy out there. They're busy. But they do what needs to be done. This was the head of the college... he'd come in every now and then to take pictures. I suppose I thought he was part of the press or something like that. Nothing doing, they ended up in my scrapbook. I did have interviews, the press came and took a lot of pictures, but one day I looked in the paper, they'd made an announcement but they didn't publish the pictures as the other one did. So they took these pictures that were not published but there was supposed to be a feature article today and they will of course send it to me.

I wanted to say something about – oh, one of their mottos is, "Work and Peace." Work and peace. And they are – as I said to Paul, you think I work hard and I'm just a playgirl compared to how they work. They work all the time. They get up at 5:00 and get their colleagues up and they keep working with meetings and workings and teachings and helping students – I saw almost nothing of Jean. Almost nothing. The college – it wasn't the college, it was someone in the government department of education that put a car at my disposal with a driver and all I could do to make use of him was run back and forth twice a day. He was just a good young man and very good at timing, which was unusual down there. And I talked a lot in Spanish, I can't remember – I'd look up just little words, I had no grammar and I had no sentences but I've got lots of words and you'd be surprised how you can get along. I mean I'd want to say something to him and I'd look it up and I'd say the words and I'd say another word, so when Jean would come he would tell everything that I had told him. And she couldn't believe it. Because I told him everything. I told him about how... I told him that the class had given me all sorts of gifts. We conversed. And that was very helpful too!

But the work, I want you to – I also have – they just work all the time. They're dedicated, that's the word for it. This college where I was, they are all dedicated. Well, I don't suppose everybody is. But the majority are dedicated to education with a democratic basis of now what is the most creative approach as they can. The

work, the hard, hard work, it has also to do with the fact that their facilities are nothing and they have to make up for it. They don't have enough time; I think their problem is almost more time than facilities, although that goes together. The university is a college locally so a lot of time is wasted, wasted. But I was with Jean, I lived in Jean's home with her mother. I never saw her. We started work at 7:30 the first week and she'd sometimes eat before that and she'd always get back much later. I would work maybe till four, sometimes three-thirty, sometimes four-thirty. Just awfully hard working people, so you get just so grateful for just the giving – it's a very giving atmosphere! They're struggling to keep after their goals and here they are giving, giving, giving.

I think they were very satisfied with my work, I think one summed it up by saying – well let me just see what I was going to say. When Jean invited me down there I said, what do you want me to go for? You've got your teaching and you've got your work. She said, I need support. I need lifting up of the whole thing and showing that there is a direction to follow. So as I say they didn't care who I was. I didn't have to come out of New York City. I didn't have to have a Ph.D. They called me doctor, and I think it was a mistake. I think they cared so little about Ph.Ds they called me doctor because I was important, because I thought like a doctor so they called me doctor. Thinking it was a mistake. But they don't care. They... inspiring me, that is my role, when I'm gone I suppose the teachers will say, now what are we supposed to do with this? How can I do it? But at the time they felt that my experience, 45 years of experience and ups and downs and still feeling that this is a great support to them. They want to of course keep in touch with me in case I come back, which I don't think is necessary. What I do think is necessary is for me to provide them with material.

Now we are a nonprofit organization, and there is no reason why we can not help another country that is in need and will make the best possible use of what we send them. I want to send them all the books they want of course in English, so they won't want very many. I mean English is not spoken down there, of course they say it is but it isn't. And there are a few individuals, one of these teachers, who – he was a man, he asked me very intelligent questions, by the end he came and was asking many questions and we had some interpretation and I said, would you like these books? And he said please. And I want to send them to him. There are – Jean is the other one, her book is absolutely worn out. Every work is translated and she works with these two students. I want to send them books, I want to send them articles. I think right now they don't need any more film, they are using them and I don't think anymore is necessary, maybe eventually.. But they need something special.

They asked me to confer with them about how to set this up in the schools. And I said, well of course, if you could give a solid foundation to the young ones, the very young ones, concentrate on that, then they will grow up and you'll get a new generation. And that sort of caught fire, they were fumbling, they didn't know how to do this after three weeks. But we've got to set up a curriculum for teachers on all levels. Preschool through university. So the thing is, after we set up a curriculum, what do we do? And after my saying, well you can only start on the bottom each year and add something, you would be getting new people, and that sort of caught fire and before I said it, they said we're going to concentrate on preschool. We're going to concentrate on preschool. We'll set up a center in the curriculum so that preschool teachers can use it. And then I thought, well goodness alive. It would not be difficult for you to outline selective things for preschool teachers. And I really want to do that, it would take time but I think I want to do it for Costa Rica, and of course we could have it in English here too.

Oh, the University – I told you that the head of the college was beside himself with joy, I mean he – they're very humble. He just doesn't say... he was very, very helpful. As you know, I have a notebook on the trip and the only way I could do this – we had a weekend... I think I'm going to need to get a little more anyway, I think that's one of my problems, that I have been here seven days a week. Every week. I think if I could take these two written projects down there and get away for – two nights, I think, I might be able to do it. And as I said, they would publish it. And it would be for...

(Music)

Tape Side II

...Was the hardest part. Because they're very social people, they don't understand the need to be alone. And they're not intellectuals. They don't have a need to sit and think. Jean attends her classes and that's it, then she wants to turn on the television or something, or to talk, people come in, the children come in, they're very social. I have a room to myself, I have a bathroom, but there is barely room to get away. They are very sturdy people. I don't think she understood at all my need for rest. I don't think she understood it. I mean she gets five or six hours of sleep a night and they don't think anything about it. And they never understood my need for regularity in my diet. They just didn't understand it. It just didn't mean anything to them. They knew it. Mrs. – uh, the house mother wants to keep people alive and wants to take care of people. But not understanding, nothing I would say would make her do it, nothing. I had a real hard time. And of course the very lax – the very looseness in the time. They'll say, we'll have our supper at say 5:30, then I'd make my

plans and we might have it maybe at 7:00 or something like that. Or she would say we'd have our supper - oh then I would get the idea, the next night it would come at 5:00. No relationship to the clock. But as I say, it works, it works. But it was a very difficult adjustment. Very difficult. And even the fact that I had to buy - I found that I could, we weren't anywhere near stores, but I'd get juice, somebody would get me some juice. They didn't have any raisins so I'm weaned off raisins, I'd turn to the candy, it's just as good. So they'd bring me this stuff but they didn't realize what it meant to me. They think I had this sort of nice special thing and they'd take the can and pass it around. I'd have some juice, everybody would have some juice, but I'd be out of juice! It was wild, just absolutely wild. And the only way I made it was to keep a perpetual heart that it didn't hurt me, it was very strenuous and I was very, very active all the time.

Then Jean's mother is a power, she's a very strong woman. Her grandfather was a French colonel, he had three children, three sons, by a um - in Jamaica, black, and Mrs. ...'s father is black, one of her three daughters is white and the others are pretty much mixed. And she is a strong woman and Jean is a strong woman. In fact in three strong women there was two of me. We sometimes - and I actually have to do this. And Mrs. - would feel that I had to do this, which wasn't the same at all. She would feel that I had to eat. That I had to eat, she put food in front of me, and it was too much. And really, I'm not used to encountering people who can push me around. And she would insist that I had to be there. And she and Jean were always at each other's throats about what to do with me, because Jean is a very strong person. And Jean would have one idea and her mother would have another idea and my ideas didn't count at all. And Jean would always win out and her mother would be furious, absolutely furious or crestfallen.

I don't know - I don't ever want to do it again, I don't ever want to live in a family, certainly not in a Latin-speaking country because it's talk talk talk. Oh, are you aware of this? Oh I can't do a very clear picture. The difference in languages - in fact, one of the English-speaking, one of the members of the peace corps, Sharon, was down there and she's a citizen - no, not a citizen, a resident. She said the English language is more exact. In other words, you've got one word in English and several words in Spanish, and you have to make it clear. And this accounts, I think, for a lot of the talk talk talk. They're trying to say this, but to know how to say that you have to talk about - I would try to just say this, in order to understand it she'd have to put a lot of, sometimes even going through the students. Well that's not true, you can't always translate one word into another language, but the quantity of the

words! The quantity! It was a lot of talk, a lot of talk. And I don't think that was the hardest part of my experience.

The easiest part was that I had nothing to do but teach dance. I was transported there, it was organized, all I had to do was at least try to get it started on time which was a very great effort! And this meant – you asked... I said I danced rhythm more than I danced for years with any group. I dance with [?] all the time. They need a stimulation and they need to get a sort of meaning going. And obviously the reason was I was really fresh here. And as you've probably heard them say here many, many times, my creativity gets used in other things so when I'm in that studio I have no need to dance. In fact it's very difficult for me to get in and really dance, but I was only in the field there, and – oh I danced a lot with them! And it was kind of delightful. Nothing shocks them, or surprises, they love it. I'd roll on the floor and jump around or pick up one of them and start to dance with them and I'd demonstrate and I'd do this, and I'd sometimes just dance and let them accompany. I haven't danced that much for a long, long time and I think that that...now of course I don't think harder than how I can try to not get the creative energy up. I think probably, I think if I could get away on weekends it would happen a great deal because I'm here and I'm still working with all the things here even in my mind if not in other ways. Also, I'll try in every way I can to be more objective and not waste my energy.

Am I talking too much? Because there are a few more things that I'd like to say, I'm just picking up on a few things I might have missed. Because, you see, one thing about Costa Rica, there are no tourists there. There are no tourists. It's just not a place for tourists to go. There are no conveniences. We have – oh, we had none of the facilities here. Sure she has a washing machine or an electric outlet. Not much water, hot water only at certain times, you know, and no – well, just lots of them. I'm just trying to say, I've forgotten – the tourists, the tourists. I don't know what tourists would go there. I mean I don't think I'd want to be in a hotel in San Jose, I can't imagine that there would be anything worse. And I think everything was done for my convenience, but you wouldn't go there as a tourist. You know what tourists want, you say, I had this experience going down on a boat. The only thing – I mean, I had a very hard time just – there was plenty of room, and I had a hard time keeping people away without being unsociable. Because people go on trips to be sociable, and I managed, but I think tourists – tourists want to be comfortable. I don't think anyone's very comfortable in Costa Rica. But who cares? I mean they've got other things. But I didn't have a feeling there were any tourists of any kind, anywhere. It's a very small city.

There's one other thing which I think is very important in the unity. It is a religious, very religious country. And it unified work under God. There are many religions. It's a Catholic country, everyone is Catholic and it's the religion of the country. But heavens alive, whatever your religion is, they're happy about it. They're happy about it. Jewish people, happy about it, Protestants, happy about it. But there is a spiritual atmosphere. In fact when they were talking about my work they said it strengthened the spiritual growth of our work. And this is not – combined with the freedom. The freedom of religion, the freedom to work and of God is very – to me – is very, very strong.

Incidentally, I mustn't forget – I think it's as beautiful a city as I have ever seen. I don't mean the streets and the houses. I mean the environment. It is very high. You see, Costa Rica has the two coasts, the Atlantic and the Pacific. And not too far between them, right in the middle is the most magnificent mountain range. And San Jose's right in the center, in a very high valley, I'd say over 3500 feet high. And there's a volcano. Magnificent scenery, and lush, lush green. It's the greenest city I've ever seen, and the air is the freshest I've ever breathed in the city. Just fresh. A beautiful, beautiful thing. The airplane trip was so beautiful, we got so high I could see Costa Rica coming along here, and I could see us on a Nicaragua lake, and then landed in a Guatemalan city. Then we took off and it was perfectly clear, and I could have looked out of my window seat, I just got one by accident, I could have seen the whole of Mexico, and PanAm made us pull down our shades and show us a film of Superman! This was the – well, they could have let me keep my shade up! I just couldn't believe – it was a clear day! We could have seen everything. And I would peek up once in a while and look around. I was just furious, absolutely furious. Right at the end, I said, "Can we possibly open our blinds?"

I have maps and I want to talk to you about the Costa Rica accent sometimes, I'm not sure it's the same everywhere. But I have maps to show you and I have many gifts, but probably that's about all I need to tell you. Some of the students are trying to work on some written material for them, we'll send them some books and films. And I will have to correspond with them because they're really – it's not just a group that was kind to me, it was many, many individuals. I do feel that it was a very important opportunity for me. I think that the new direction in all our work – which was a little ahead of the, uh, the rest of the field, because it's democratic. Because the whole purpose of it is to make an authentic art experience over which all people – that's the whole point of it, authentic creative art experience, not therapy, not something else, art experience, the art of body movement. Somehow meets in a remarkable way their leadership. Well they aren't leading anybody and they're not following, but the

independent need, desire and work to keep moving ahead as a whole for the benefit of all people, for the benefit of all people not just a few. There's something that I felt, at home there, I felt very much at home, I felt understanding of a part of me. The leaders in the group... as far as I could understand it they would ask me questions so it was a very remarkable experience. And I don't know how we can – I think the only way to go on it is to help them as much as you can. Does that make sense, to send creative efforts out of the country and do what we can? I would say do what we can to help them keep going and not be snowed under.

Other people don't come there because of what they paid me... They paid me for roundtrip air fare. They gave me 54 *colona*, I think that's about six dollars, a *colon* is about 8.60 to a dollar. *Colona*. And they paid me 6 dollars a day for 22 days for living expenses and I turned that right over to Jean because their expenses were probably a little more than that, but they were at least that. Then they gave me 52 – no wait a minute, they gave me 100 *colona* a day which is twice that, about 12 dollars, just for my adjustment expenses which I still have a lot. As I've said, I have quite a lot. I took the family out for a meal, of course, and I did have expenses, I had to get paid and I did buy some gifts for you all. So I was talking to one of them and I said, this is a professional fee, he said nothing doing, this is not professional fee, do you think that is what we pay, a professional fee? We can't pay a professional fee. We have no money to pay anybody a professional fee. This is just to make it possible for you to be here and have a good experience. We don't pay professional fees. So they paid us 12 dollars – I mean, they won't accept that concept of the professional fee for the work that I did.

And yet all the gift-giving I don't think was any effort to make up for that professional fee. I think that was for their enjoyment and I think they just wanted to do that. And what I'm trying to show is of course a tremendous experience, I mean a real event in my life. And I want to share it with you as much as I can but what can I give you of it besides a little souvenir to enjoy while I unpack? Does it give you anything? I think it should give you a feeling of accomplishment and a feeling of good work because if this little country with its – there's a purity in their direction, they really want the best thing for everyone in the country. There's a purity in that. And which of course leads them to creative work. I mean if that's what you really want you have to. You approach each person according to his own needs and that's what it is. I also think it's encouraging to us to find a whole little country down there just ready and needy, and trying to get some here and trying to get some there, they want books. And of course they're making some use of the direction. And they want material, I'm going to send Norma's book,

I'm going to send books for the library, the university, plus some individuals.

Now is this the time for you to give me any general – oh, I have to tell you one more thing. Oh, I have to tell you this. Jane, Denise you will die. Denise says that in all South American countries – and other central American countries too – the stealing is just awful. And Costa Rica says that too. They say you can't go in to Colombia and come back in your skin. And Denise told me how they rip open your bag, slit it with a razor, and you wear your valuables inside in a bag, a larger bag and they cut that off and you end up with absolutely nothing. Well this was obviously not the attitude there. And I walked all the way across the street and found my bag was open! Heavens alive! Well nobody was interested. I got on the bus, a crowded, crowded bus. And here someone was handling my bag! Handling my bag! Well he was helping me get my bag on the crowded bus. Now this is not – Costa Rica is very different. It's just different that's all. It's an island in a sea of dictatorships. Well it unites – that's a lot, I won't go in to it.

But I – oh, heavens, oh I'll remember that day. I was only in one city, but all the dreadful things that happened, just dreadful. I was in a hotel and the electricity was off for a long, long time, they made me wait hours and hours and hours to get in to the room, well I only had a few hours there anyway. Oh yes, that's where I started learning Spanish, asking questions, when will it be ready? But there were almost no restrooms in this big hotel, this pretentious hotel. ...Almost no place to eat, and they're only open odd times. But when we got to the airport – oh nothing hurt me really, even the hotel, I was opening the trunk. And I got there and nobody would tell me anything. And it was obvious that I was having trouble with Spanish. But they just said, no, nothing here. And I said well what do I do, I've got all these heavy bags, do I just have to sit here for an hour? They said I did. So then after an hour the locks to the airline, Costa Rican airline opened up, someone took my bags and that was all they did. They didn't tell me I needed anything else, that was it. So then ... Then I went up to get something – to get some coffee. And I thought, oh I can say black coffee, that's not so difficult to say in Spanish, but I got coffee with milk in it. And I said, in my Spanish, "Is it necessary to have coffee with milk in it?" And they said yes! Can I buy some coffee without milk? No!

June: It is interesting that in Colombia they have two totally different words for coffee with milk and coffee without milk. Coffee with milk is *café*, or *café con leche*, or *leche con café*, but without milk it was called *tinto*.



Babara Mettler: I think that was the problem! Then I went down, by that time the planes were flying. Oh hundreds of people, endless lines! I stood at the end of one line. I left hours for getting there and I got there, nope, you don't have this, you don't have this. Well what don't I have? I don't know. Well finally they said that I needed a tourist card for Costa Rica.

June: It was on your list. It was on your-

Barbara Mettler: Wait just a minute, I guess... I guess this is one of the things that I did get, I said where do I get my tourist card, no he didn't give it to me. I said where do I get my tourist card, he said over there. Well, where do I get it? Over there, the cashier - well there was nobody there. Nobody there. Not anyone in sight. Well I waited and waited and asked and finally somebody came. And they said you can get your tourist card here, wait just a minute. A minute? Well I know what that means. I know that means half an hour. So I waited for that. And then I got in this long line, and I got in the front of it and they said you've got to go over there. So I got out of that line and went to the other long line, I mean really as long as this building. And so I got in that line and got up to the front. And that wasn't for a tourist visa at all. He said you've got to pay a tax, you've got to pay an airport tax. I think probably a travel agent should know that because I heard nothing about airport tax. And well I said, I'm going to miss my - well the plane was going in ten minutes! And I said I don't know what to do. And some kind man who didn't really understand the idea of tax, took me by the arm and rushed me across the airport building to get me to pay tax! And I just barely made it.

And all the other things that were coming to me, I had bad experiences in Ventura. You know, this is interesting. It's recommended that you take anti-malarial pills for Costa Rica. And especially if you're on the coast. When I got there I was in the mountain area, and I thought I won't do it. First weekend they marched me off to the coast and mosquitoes swarming about all the time! And I said, do you have any malaria pills? They said no. You aren't supposed to buy vegetables and fruit by the side of the road, we went out and we bought strawberries, oh terrific strawberries, and we would eat 'em and I was...

Oh I know one thing I haven't told you. I was there for Costa Rican Independence Day, September 16<sup>th</sup>, and it was really a wonderful time to be there. These people love their country! It's not America first, it's Costa Rica, Costa Rica, just Costa Rica! And I had an invitation by the president to sit in one of the boxes up by the press. Way down is a mixed stadium of a high school. It was put on by the school of physical education and doing gymnastics and foot

dancing, folk dancing, and that's where the murals are. The typical attraction of Costa Rica is the ox cart, and the ox cart has always been used to haul coffee mostly, that's the main product, and they paint it. It's just part of the artwork of the country, these painted ox carts. They gave me an ox cart that has to be put together. I think maybe you'll want to help me put this together sometime, it'll be very interesting. I tried to learn how to do it and... it was very, very –

By the end the children were marching, marching, well, walking. Something that might interest you with the children walking, we couldn't get a bus, and there were four groups of children and each little group of children did it differently. Each one doing a different movement. But I think it was one of the most moving things I've ever seen was this group of children, elementary school aged, do one of the Costa Rican songs, patriotic songs, walking slowly. I mean you just don't see children walking slowly. You see these little things walking slowly down the street. And I discovered a very interesting thing. One of the patriotic songs is not the national hymn, and the folk dancing that I saw is a three-beat measure which is unusual. Most of our Western songs go one, two, three, four, one – the popular beat, a four beat measure. This was three. A rather dignified, somewhat leisurely – I didn't have any chance to study a dance, it would be more like with the skirts – it would be like tap dancing! Calm, tranquil kids. Tranquil, tranquility in the people!

The other word I wanted to use, cheerful. Unbelievably cheerful! Complaining is almost out. In other words, you don't do it. And gay, but in a dignified way. Not screaming out – well there's folk dancing, even though they're dressed up – I'm not quite ready to talk to anyone, maybe I could... of course, there is the dignity, there is the dignity in the women, I don't know where, it comes from Spain I guess. There is one thing I'd like to tell you all about, the blood [?] which is very clear to see in the faces and very clear to see in the skin. But there is a dignity – both sexes, really. Dignity is the only word for it. And in this case – well... I was very disappointed to see no indication of an Indian anywhere and somebody told me before that Costa Rica is the first country that the Spaniards came into and they massacred the Indians, they were massacred. And it's not that way in any other country, and there are a few up in the mountains but they're not a part of the land at all. And the faces are so clearly Spanish and black, so clearly. You have absolutely Spanish, absolutely pure, and then you have whole lots of black – I don't know, perhaps slaves were coming over from the islands, coming over from the Caribbean Islands, and all colors of black. All colors of black and white. All colors. And all black hair, I didn't see anything but black hair anywhere. And I think it must have something

to do with the combination of strength, and tranquility, and cheerfulness, and religious belief.

I said to Jean, I said that... is this atmosphere the same throughout the country? She said yes, this is pretty much how it is, some people are more educated here. And I also said, is this feeling that – our first contact was a member of the Peace Corps, Sharon. She went down there and liked it so well she stayed. She's a resident now and I asked her, am I just dreamy eyed about this? And she said no, these qualities are there, there are problems but these qualities are there. And the one thing I think I say, there was one other English-speaking person in the staff who went down there I think as a religious missionary and is now working for the college of education and camping and things like that. And then I was talking, I spoke of the, I said we all know that in order to have freedom there has to be discipline. He just said, this is what needs to be stressed. I think – it is a problem, you say you're going to start then you have to wait an hour until someone comes, it's a problem. But as I said to you, they get things done. I don't know how they do. The clock is not that dictative in many ways there. Yet they get things done. I couldn't. It's just a very different way.

M: Did you find very often that an appointed meeting didn't take place at the-

Barbara Mettler: Always. Always. There was one exception, it wasn't a meeting. The young man who drove me around was always on time. Exactly. Except one time his car broke down. He was an exception, a real exception. Nobody – I mean, Jean had no concept of the clock. She would say, oh we'll have to leave... never "what time will we leave." Without planning ahead. That's another thing, it's not what you're going to do, it's what you're doing now. We would come in every time for supper and her mother would say, well I just have to go out now and get what we need for supper. Never ahead of time. And Jean would say – I'd say when are we going to eat? We'll eat at 8:35, half an hour from now. Well we weren't even beginning to get ready, no plans or nothing! And I would know it would not be 8:30, it would be well after 9:30, so you begin to work that way. Perhaps they learn not to waste time.

I thought that a lot of time was wasted just waiting for things to go on in relation to other people gone. Well Jean kept people waiting hours! There was one teacher, a wonderful teacher, she would drive us around and do things when we were outside of the working hours. She made her wait hours! I don't know what you do when you wait. Maybe you've got things to do when you're late. But you can't say, well you'll be late so I'll be late – it was a cultural difference which I neither understood nor could easily cope with. At

the same time, Jean was ... you see, I would have work to be scheduled about 8:30 or something like that. Well, about... 7:30, we had to be there. Then 8. Well people would start straggling in, I'd say Jean, I'm not going to start until everyone's here. They'd just wait, there'd be a group sitting on the porch while people came straggling in. They don't mind waiting, I guess that's the story. And Jean would seem happy about it. She would say, we'd love to see you start on time! She saw some game in it but not the game that I saw. And I thought, just the nothingness of having to sit there and wait for people! But perhaps that's some weakness. Perhaps sitting and waiting is just a good thing. Perhaps it makes up for all the activity. They're very active. Very active in that school. I think they're probably very active everywhere.

M: Commonly called culture shock. It's a normal phenomenon, it happens to them when they come here and see that everyone's busy every minute, keeping active throughout the day.

Barbara Mettler: Perhaps it's the waiting that rests them, because they gave me no time to think or contemplate or rest so I felt that they were doing things all the time. But maybe this is it, the waiting is the rest period.

M: I remember you telling me about someone who came down after two hours or something to tell you that they couldn't dance in the day, so there's that attitude too.

Barbara Mettler: Someone came – it was a two hour drive. They came from all provinces by the way, there's seven provinces, and the whole country isn't any bigger than the state of New Jersey. But many, many people came from other provinces to take part – the other teachers took part. That's why it was really a total country contribution, it wasn't just a city or a university. And I said one person came, a two hour trip from another province, just to tell me that she couldn't take part that morning, then she drove back and came back again. It is a great cultural difference. The two things that I really don't understand is that one, they had no understanding of my needs and relationship to my handicap. No understanding. And the other was this, no understanding at all, I mean no common feeling for keeping people waiting. I mean to me it's very discourteous, it's inconsiderate. But that's not the way it feels to them at all, that's just the way you do it.

M: I'm just a little bit curious about their attitudes towards your diet. In this country, for lots of people who I know, certainly, if somebody's diabetic, it's almost common knowledge that there's a diet regimen that goes along with it. Aren't there diabetics in Costa Rica?

Barbara Mettler: Well, you see even in this country a lot of doctors don't know about it. It's a specialist. And a very sad thing which I – when I explained it and finally got the idea that I had to have insulin, and two or three or four times I told her about insulin reactions, and once – she would forget them. And she told me, I said don't you know anyone who has diabetes? She said yes, I have a friend and she's in terribly bad shape. She's dying, she can't get out of bed. She'll call me in the morning and say she can't move. I said, does she take insulin? Yes, and she says she doesn't take insulin, because the doctor makes her take insulin. I said, this woman is in continual low blood sugar condition. Sometimes she gets up and eats – once in a while she feels better when she eats. Did you talk to the doctor about it? He said oh yes, she just needs to keep taking the insulin. But you see, it's not so far removed – nobody ever told me about insulin reactions. I found out. And they're getting more and more aware – not everybody is. But apparently – now Sharon said she had her operation and all sorts of things down there and no problem. This is a little advanced scientifically for them. This country needs a lot more, a lot more – I have reports from many diabetics in this country and I just can't believe that they aren't being handled right. I was watching a TV ... I often said to my doctor, do you know about my diabetes? And he does, and he says yes. He knows the scientific facts but not the daily life problems.

J: You say that you didn't see that much of Jean. Does that mean that during the classes you didn't have somebody next to your side to translate?

Barbara Mettler: Oh she did. I didn't mean – I didn't see much of her on the outside of the classes. Outside of the classes. It was a wonderful – a wonderful teamwork. A wonderful teamwork. She did magnificently, she said she had never translated before but she's very deep in this work, she's very deep and she understood what I was saying and when she had difficulty with some of the words she stood right beside me, right beside me trying to say everything that needed to be translated. And as I feel – as I said, I think she has had a bit of teacher training because everything I did – not willing, it wasn't that I talked to Jean. It was very interesting. You know that I express myself a lot in movement, so I would talk loudly, just exactly as if I was talking to them and say what I had to say, say what I had to say which showed enough sentences so that she could translate. And they would look at me, and sometimes they'd nod while I was talking because they got the idea, and then she would amplify once or twice as I got more and more into it, I would forget that I had to be translated and I would be talking to them on and on and poor Jean, then they'd begin to laugh a little bit so I had to slow down. She's really quite a person. She translated magnificently, do

you know how hard that is? To translate immediately? I'd say something – once in a while, at the very beginning I'd say well I'm going to talk about these things because she got in a bit of a bad situation once when I gave her a word and the word couldn't be translated. ... Now for instance, what is an example of that – oh. Jerky. I wanted them to hear the word jerky, and she hadn't had time to think about that and she said something that came out differently. I can't say enough for her competence in every direction.

Is there anything else that you would like – I do want to hear about your work. Is there anything in general that needs to be said or just individually – I would be happy to, but I'm not going to, certainly not try to do anything but get into our mutual work so I'd love to have a chance to talk with you each. I'd better open my mail first I suppose because there is a stack...

(Music)

Hampshire College Archives: MG7, Carton #22, Tape 7