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ZAIRE: New York City, make some noise! We are the STREB Extreme Action Company and we'd like to welcome you to SLAM, the STREB Lab for Action Mechanics, home of the extreme action architect, Elizabeth Streb.

ELIZABETH: In the STREB Lab for Action Mechanics we experiment with the idea, the concept of extreme action. I really love Evel Knievel's quote, he was asked once,

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ELIZABETH: would you do anything differently in your whole life? And he said well I probably would go a little faster on some of my jumps and then he said I never had any trouble with the take off. It's the landing that's the problem.

[Aubin Pictures Presents- images of notes and dance moves as Elizabeth speaks]

ELIZABETH: I think my original belief and desire is

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ELIZABETH: to see a human being fly. It's an age old human quest, can we fly and my first approach was, well it's not going to be the way birds fly. So how could a human fly?

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[*Born to Fly*, violin music and dancing footage]

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[‘Soho, Manhattan’, establishing shot]

ELIZABETH: I think that conversation happens better when you're facing each other.

ELIZABETH: Do you want AM over there and Catharine over here?

LAURA: Well what about putting Bjorn over there.

ELIZABETH: And am I over here?

LAURA: Yeah. Break up partners; do you know what that is?

ELIZABETH: Let's put Paul here... and then where does this person go? Where does this... where does this person go?

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LAURA: That person's me.

ELIZABETH: This person... if this is there, is that bad... a bad idea?

ELIZABETH: I got to start cooking.

LAURA: Does the choreographer help people decide where to put their legs around the table.

ELIZABETH: I'm trying to think about who would make a conversation with everyone and not just talk to each other. I think this is good.

ELIZABETH: I guess the genesis of my obsession with action was incubating a long, long time ago.

ELIZABETH: I came into the Streb family from somewhere else

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ELIZABETH: and I was adopted when I was 2. My mother was housekeeper. My adoptive father was a mason, a brick layer. We sat down for dinner at 5 o'clock every day and he would come in the door, just completely ravished with dirt and cement dust and sweat. As time went on he became more and more covered with just a thick layer

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ELIZABETH: of callus, with a series of injuries, with scars, and I think I was so enraptured by the beauty of that, that a body could be all used up by the end of its life. I didn't so much like hanging out with him because he was so gruff and rough, but I went with him a lot to fish, to hunt. Hunting meant carrying a gun in the thigh deep snow for eight hours,

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ELIZABETH: it wasn't just like go out for an hour and come back. I would go with him on his construction jobs. This time I went, he had run out of nails and he was putting up a ceiling in a cottage and he said just climb up this ladder and hold this ceiling up and I'll be right back... and he... he was not right back. Maybe it was 40 minutes. I was just a little skinny kid, but I knew in my mind if hell froze over I was not letting that ceiling fall, I was not

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ELIZABETH: getting down from that ladder and the pain that I was going through just like the firing of the muscles it was like I could stay here two more seconds. I felt like it was early training for what would eventually be called PopAction, that you'd go beyond your comfort zone. You don't just give up; you don't give yourself a reason to stop. When he finally came back to the door, he was so freaked out that I was still

there. He probably went to the bar, had a few drinks, forgot he told me to be up there and I was like, do you have the nails?

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JOHN: I always want to feel alive, so pain is one way of knowing that I'm alive and I remember when I was younger I wouldn't take my asthma pump just so I could feel sick and I could feel what that was like. Maybe because deep down I feel a lot of pain in my heart all the time and so to have physical pain reminds me. I know that Elizabeth is adopted, so that was a thought of mine as well, you know how does her adoption drive her

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JOHN: exploration the same way it does for me? And all I can really think is from my perspective that there's no true sense of like root, like a truth or a "groundingness" that you can just come back to. So I think that that's what is driving me. I'm still learning a lot more about my body.

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JOHN: I'm only 24 and my peak is just beginning now.

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[Music, footage of John on his bike]

ELIZABETH: So dancers, I'm changing the agenda a little. I'm making a guess that this whole hunk from the beginning until this moment where we're going to start is going to work. I think we have enough information that I know it's going to work. So let's start where Fabio said which is his exit and on with the rest of what we know. Alright? How does that sound?

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[*'Invisible Forces* (rehearsal)', footage of the dancers rehearsing]

MAN: Stop!

ELIZABETH: Dancers I want you to know that what Daniel just did was pop action. He got out of the way in half a second. That's what the training is for, you know

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ELIZBETH: part of it is to avoid any of that. It was incredible what you did.

DANIEL: I just changed my grip at the top and it didn't serve me at the bottom.

ELIZABETH: Yeah. It didn't serve you on the bottom, yeah, yeah.

DANIEL: And I didn't realize it until it was too late so. I'll just keep the grip that I have.

ELIZABETH: Yeah

DANIEL: Elizabeth has this new idea of there being three male balls in the cage as it's spinning, as it goes around it whips us out and we do this huge fly.

ELIZABETH: That was gorgeous

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DANIEL: It's one of those moves where it turns your insides and you think about it the whole show until it comes and then when it's over you're like, thank God.

ELIZABETH: Dancers, because we haven't really had the opportunity with this machine for lots of reasons, everyone who feels they need more... like Samantha you can get in there. Jackie you're a pretty perfect.... John I want you to get in there and practice the walk. I see some of you do it, I don't see everybody doing it. All right? Every opportunity, take out that walk so you are one with the machine.

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ELIZABETH: PopAction is a way of figuring out how to harness a force, a particular force like centrifugal force and examine them for what they are and try and exact a move out of them. I believe that action has not reached its full potential as a form of experience to the human race. And I want to take it across the great divide

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ELIZABETH: you know, across the red sea or whatever sea, get it up into the stratosphere for everyone to see.

ELIZABETH: When I started dancing I was 17. What was available to me then and I did think I was going to do that was to become a phys ed teacher. I went to the phys ed department at SUNY Brockport and I just thought wow, they all look like lesbians, and I'm not going there and I was... I was always gay, but I was not... I wasn't clear that I was gay and it was probably one of those very homophobic

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ELIZABETH: but luck induced choices.

ELIZABETH: My identity as an artist was extreme and so when I saw the movement thing which I thought was dance and art of dance, art of movement, I was like, oh, I'm going to pick that. They let me major in dance because it was a young program and that's where it began. In '72 when I was 22 I graduated, got on my motorcycle and drove across the United States. It was a Honda

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ELIZABETH: 350, not a good bike to take on the road, but it's what I had. I was headed to San Francisco. I took the money I had left and I rented a room in Haight, Ashbury. It was kind of one of those holes that you live in when you're young and you can handle it, and then I took the rest of the money and bought a month of dance classes

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ELIZABETH: at Margy Jenkins Studio and at San Francisco Ballet. I didn't think I was ready for the fiscal demands and the complexity of surviving in New York City yet. I wanted to practice in a kinder, gentler place.

ELIZABETH: 6:14, yeah... this is a knife that Catharine Stimpson gave me for my 60th birthday two years ago. I better sharpen it up.

LAURA: Does it summon up nightmares from your restaurant days?

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ELIZABETH: Yeah, in San Francisco I made donuts. It was a very, very, very filled with skill.

LAURA: Remind us what the technique was

ELIZABETH: No if we do this I'll never get my pasta ready

LAURA: But it's such a good story

ELIZABETH: you'd stand there with two chopsticks and then this is number one donut and this is number 36 donut, you know just like this. And you had to go and you looked at the other side and you saw they were done and you had to go like this so they all turned over at the same time and then when they were done on that side you'd pick them up

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ELIZABETH: like this, move back because the oil is going everywhere and then there was a perfect exact same size vat of glaze... glaze and you went like this... like this and you went...like that an all 36 flew through the air and landed in the vat of glaze and then you went like this and glazed the top of them and I don't remember how you got them out of the vat of glaze, but it was really a cool move. Really difficult. For the first month

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ELIZABETH: I think my donuts went all over.

LAURA: Still, that is skilled labor

ELIZABETH: I know. I'd go to work from eight to two, go to sleep till six, and get up and take a couple of dance classes and go in the middle of the afternoon and pack more.

LAURA: They should have paid you way more than 3 dollars an hour for that.

ELIZABETH: Yeah, I liked it, behind the scenes kind of work. Like I've noticed my dancers would never have done, you know what I did then in terms of difficulty.

LAURA: Was that first meal, no live

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LAURA: on camera?

ELIZABETH: Don't tell anybody, it's just....

SAMMY: As a first year STREB dancer, you know your paycheck is really tiny, so you know and on top of student loans, your own bills and then your living expenses, it's like this is my only choice. The month of December we have a huge, you know like show, it's a lot of money, but you know we're not on salary and then January we get told, oh, you're off for all January.

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SAMMY: So to me what that means is I have to cut every paycheck in half so I'm really back to making like 250 a week. Then I just remind myself why I came to New York. I came to New York to be in the STREB Extreme Action Company to be the best dancer I could be, like I'm not in New York to start a family or a life or find a husband. For me it's not about what... it's not about what I'm doing, it's about how I'm doing it, every single move that I'm performing

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SAMMY: I'm giving the most energy and most power to every single move. So it's like all of these different angles like I want my... this like slick, I want this like volume and then this is where my shoulder always gets tired. And I always think like god, like what does she see in me or like why did she pick me

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SAMMY: and if anything, I know that I would be willing to like never stop, never quit, go all the way, keep getting back up for her and I think that's the one thing she can see in me.

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SAMMY: My mom was a clown and she was... her name was Brushy the Clown. She like taught like good dental hygiene to children, that was her whole gig. I don't know if she taught me to brush my teeth, but she taught me songs about your brushing her teeth and magic tricks. From the moment I was born I felt this rage. It's a good rage; it's not bad; it's not evil. I need the rage

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SAMMY: to perform, but then the rage is why I perform. Elizabeth knows what makes us tick. Like let this girl, get out there and ah, you know.

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SAMMY: [yelling while performing *Writhe*]

SAMMY: That's what drew me to STREB, like watching this beautiful woman almost getting her head swiped off by an I-beam, it was like taking these hits and it was just like...

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ZAIRE: Ladies and Gentlemen, the iron man

[STREB in *Crush*]

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ELIZABETH: As the years went by and I started to focus on being a dancer, I wondered why dance was so facile and gentle and it was not like the movement I had fallen in love with as a kid.

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ELIZABETH: In 1974, I came to New York . I sold my motorcycle, so I had 401 dollars. I had a place to live for very cheap, I had set that up. I went to Alfredo Corvino's, bought a month of classes, he was a ballet teacher for Cecchetti Ballet and then I went to Viola Farber who was an ex-Cunningham dancer and bought a month of classes and then I, you know needed to get a job and I was wandering around The Village because I really felt I should live

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ELIZABETH: down there and there were gay bars down there and at that point I was out, so I was like going to Bonnie and Clyde's and I passed a sign in a window that said, chef wanted, good with eggs or something like that. So I walked in, it was called The Wild Mushroom... my mother taught me how to read recipes so I just sort of said I know how to cook, I'm a cook... I'm a cook and they were these two women, you know that ran this restaurant, and they gave me a job. I didn't really know how to cook in a restaurant

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ELIZABETH: But they were lovely and it was one of those people you meet on the way that if it weren't for them. And I mostly worked in one person pivot kitchens. I'm doing some herbs. I don't have the same skills that I had many years ago. Like at the stroke of 6 you read, okay one chicken or two chickens, five chickens, okay one fish and you just take it out or you ask somebody to bring it to you and then you have to start cooking things while you're getting the

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ELIZABETH: appetizers out. It's all about timing and it's a little nerve wracking if people don't pick up their food. Like when you ring the bell when it's ready and I want them through that door when I ring the bell. I was very strict. I was very strict, because otherwise it comes back in and the customer wants you to reheat it and then everything is ruined if you have to reheat it.

CASSY: I see Elizabeth as like a rebel, you know and she's like I will not wear pink, you know and so

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CASSY: she wears black.

ELIZABETH: Do you want to get me a glass of red wine?

CASSY: Not going to wear heels. She wears these like... like motorcycle boots, you know? I mean she does her hair, but it's like, you know it's just like spiky, like you know it's not... I feel like she embodies that..., you know that paradox I guess where you're a female and you're feminine, but you're not trying to be that convention.

CASSY: Sarah, do you know where my shoes are?

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CASSY: (It's hard to live with another person.) I come from a gymnastics background. I never thought I would be a performer, you know it never entered my sphere of thinking, you know like performance and I actually, you know it took me a while to be able to acknowledge the audience, you know and to remember like okay you're here for people, like it's not like a competition, it's not a balance beam. You have to be so introverted when you're a gymnast, you know you think about your skill because it's so intense what you're doing.

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CASSY: The boys don't understand that you're stronger than them or that you have more muscle than them, so they tease you, you know and the girls are like what are you, you know like are you trying to be a boy and then, you know you realize that like the only reason you're able to do this kind of thing is because you have that musculature. If it didn't have this I couldn't fly.

CASSY: You always see the ballerina being hoisted, the lifters are always the guy

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CASSY: but in STREB it's like actually the women are lifting the men.

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[STREB in *Invisible Forces*]

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ZAIRE: Superman!

ELIZABETH: No one's early; no one's late. This is good. We have a very unbelievably magnificent group of people, Bill T Jones, we're colleagues from our youth, Bill's partner, Bjorn

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ELIZABETH: Who is a designer, AM Holmes the writer, and then there's Laura Flanders, my beautiful life partner I met 21 and a half years ago. Laura is an author and a journalist. We have Anne Bogart the director. Anne that's amazing, a hip replacement. And you're walking around?

ANNE: I have a new life

ELIZABETH: You've got to be kidding. Anne that's outrageous, and there's no pain?

ANNE: No pain.

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ELIZABETH: That is a crazy miracle.

ELIZABETH: Catharine Stimpson, she's a scholar and academic, and she was the head of the MacArthur Fellowship program when I received one in 1997.

ELIZABETH: Okay, you let me know.

LAURA: That was a good day.

ELIZABETH: That was a very good day. I laid down on the floor and a giant X when I heard that, that McArthur had called.

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"People drinking, wine, mingling, Elizabeth cooking food"

ELIZABETH: Hey Laura can you bring people to the table?

LAURA: Sit, sit... sit, sit. Food.

ELIZABETH: Uh-oh.

[chatter]

ELIZABETH: I mean I can't believe that you can't figure out what time is. You know there's evidence of time, but not proof. Like you can count it and I think that if you can't say

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ELIZABETH: what time is, then you can't construct an action event.

CATHARINE S: But you can't take away the concept of time for the concept of change. This is how we know time exists because of change.

ELIZABETH: But it's not proof, right, it's just evidence.

CATHARINE S: Well you see (Liz) Streb we have to learn to live with mystery and we all can nibble at mystery and gnaw at the bone of mystery and the bone of mystery is really made out of steel and so that's what we do, we nibble at it.

AM : Marking the passage of time, isn't that proof that time passed?

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ELIZABETH: Okay, however, I guess for the next however long I'm going to live until I burst into dust, which I hope does happen because that could be exciting.

ELIZABETH: I still believe there's something, some... maybe it's only one move, you know maybe it's only falling, maybe it's just falling, you know that everyone would understand or maybe my whole movement history is just one second. Okay, it's over. Boy that was a lot of work for one second.

ELIZABETH: I think I was always interested in the invention of action moments.

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ELIZABETH: My interest wasn't as being someone else's dancer and I hit New York right at the advent of the independent choreographer.

ELIZABETH: Trisha Brown, she was a magic force in dance. I went to every one of her shows. She, to me, is the only choreographer even including Merce that invented a new way to move.

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ELIZABETH: She was the reason I was able to say I'm a choreographer and I realized that I needed my own space and it started with going down into SoHo and renting a loft. It was when a number of artists were going to SoHo and squatting on these manufacturing buildings that were not zoned for living and there's no walls and no electricity and, you know no plumbing. It was all illegal and be there anyway and kind of live like a sleuth

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ELIZABETH: in the night, like a carpetbagger. So I had 3,010 square feet in Industrial Plastics at 309 Canal Street for 450 dollars a month which was a huge amount of money in my late 20s and what I ended up getting was a dance studio that I could rent out, live in and rehearse in for 18 years and as a choreographer I just, you know starting making my own stuff and trying to get it seen.

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ELIZABETH: This is a loft that we got as a settlement for my studio next door that I had for 18 years and in 1995 we kind of got out of the loft board court and decided to make a settlement and this was raw and this was my... my settlement which is pretty great. This is my... I know it's to the horror of most people, like how can you think in here and I have a pathway to my desk now, but usually there's just everything everywhere.

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ELIZABETH: but you also want to be respectful of the person you're living with so...Let's see, ah, this is the London Eye. This is one piece for a series of action events I'm planning for the London Olympics this summer so it's kind of top secret. So this is Artificial Gravity, yeah... first came the set...

LEO: Artificial Gravity, go!

ELIZABETH: I wanted our floor to move.

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ELIZABETH: This was going to be the picture on the floor so it could create an optical illusion because we have an overhead camera. Rather than turning the audience, you'd get to change the aspect of angle of viewing constantly. And I've just started to make up these maneuvers.

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[*Artificial Gravity* performance]

ELIZABETH: If you scrunch up a piece of paper and you go like that, this could be a model of space, that could represent space. This is a good way to talk about or warp space, but if you wanted to do the same thing,

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ELIZABETH: scrunch up time, that doesn't work as a model for time. That's just the way it is, but if you really ask why, probably a lot of mysteries of space would explode into your consciousness.

ELIZABETH: Certainly my early work, I didn't have the PopAction technique and I didn't know really where I was going with it, I just knew that certain questions interested me and I was constructing sets of questions that I was then going

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ELIZABETH: into the studio to address. This is a piece I did, a dance on a triangle of Astroturf with Danita Geltner's sculpture this creature that had a leash and who comes, but John Gage and Merce Cunningham. If you saw it now, you would think, what's she doing? She looks like a fish flopping on the beach.

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[Footage of Elizabeth performing *Space Object*]

ELIZABETH: I think what STREB was doing from the very get-go, the quandary ended up being critically, you know is it dance, is it not dance.

ELIZABETH: In 1981 I presented my first full evening of work at Dance Theater Workshop.

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[Archive footage of Elizabeth dancing]

ELIZABETH: I got the best review I ever got, it was in the New York Times and it was a rave review. So when I woke up the next morning, I go you're kidding. It might be the only good review I've ever gotten from the New York Times.

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[Elizabeth's performance and a shot of the NYtimes review]

ELIZABETH: I carelessly let slip some severe criticisms of dance and at one time I said, dance stinks of elitism. Elliott Feld wrote a letter to The Times saying who does she think she is and I'm thinking, well it is true, but I got good reviews from Star Ledger in New Jersey from the SoHo Weekly News.

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ELIZABETH: Every single week the Village Voice would have a photo to accompany whatever dance review was being written about by Debra Jowitt. I took note of this and realized that I wanted my picture in there. Lois Greenfield was clearly

the dance photographer of the '80s, '90s. She shot some of the most gorgeous photographs with me in the air with my things, my ropes, my balls,

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ELIZABETH: my hoops, my sticks. I was able to really see my work in a new light and it was unbelievably exciting and I was like, does it really look like that when I'm five feet off the ground, wow and I got a picture in The Voice every single time I performed, except for maybe once. I really developed a deep collaboration with Lois for 20 years. She and I

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ELIZABETH: were choreographing together, you know in terms of time and where you are in space. It was one of those feelings of just such stupendous joy. And it was a great business gesture on my part, I wasn't that savvy, but my intuition said, a photo is worth a thousand words, no matter what the critic says.

ELIZABETH: I got my technique really great, so all eight people were landing at the same millisecond.

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ELIZABETH: We were basically wrecking the building because I was on the third floor and all the walls below us fell down and people's pictures on the fifth floor were falling off their walls and people would call and say what are you doing in there? I said we're just dancing, it's a dance studio and then our landlords would go up to the fourth floor above us and then drop barrels on our ceiling and so part of my rehearsal started to be about, stop rehearsing, go to the walls so you don't get anything

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ELIZABETH: dropped on you, okay, half hour, clean up the floor, start rehearsing again. So it was really a dodge and dart kind of thing. So in the '80s our dances were mostly ground based and vertical wall based and all about impact trying to do what they can all do now.

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ELIZABETH: Nice. Yes, that's it... that's it, beautiful. All these dances that I have now are supreme performers and practitioners. Nice, that's it. Wow. Nice. These dancers are flyers and crashers and soarers, beautifully articulate with their bodies.

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[*Rebound* performance]

SAMMY: Who wants some?

ZAIRE: Watch them fly!

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JACKIE: When I first joined the company, I wasn't officially hired yet, they just were doing a trial run. I had three weeks and then we were going to go do a show in Washington, and within the third week I had sprained my ankle, so I couldn't even go and I like stuck around and was like what can I do. Then they gave me a contact.

GINA: He was so cute as a boy.

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JACKIE: I used to not hurt as much I think because I'm getting old, I thought it would never happen, but it's true. And I have drop foot, it's the weirdest thing every. When you're walking your foot like flaps around. When I went to the doctor he said in three months it'll be like 50 percent better, I was like what? No. You know like doing back hits, you really have to fully commit.

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ELIZABETH: Being careful in an action enterprise is really frowned upon at STREB because then you're going to stop a little before the wall or slow yourself down or do something that mitigates the action.

ELIZABETH: Hey dancers can I see the Eli which I want to happen both with quartet Eli and the da-da.

ELIZABETH: If you're going to take full on force

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ELIZABETH: and it's affect onto your body, onto your instrument, then it isn't really about skill.

ELIZABETH: Could you show one Leonardo where you're pushing off like that, but you almost land with straight knees doing that?

ELIZABETH: Skill is really being able to navigate the known world and then throw yourself into an unknown universe where you are mildly out of control, but you're so skilled you understand how to navigate that mostly

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ELIZABETH: in a harm free way.

ELIZABETH: Perfect. Yes. Jackie your face comes right out, you know right through the window, that's beautiful.

FABIO: You want to see this two-foot punch, you don't want to see the foot... foot drop.

ELIZABETH: Not really, I mean I want to go back to the fact that this is impact and that would be just more visual placement

ELIZABETH: I mean that's exactly the idea, you weren't leveled, you know, you weren't in the same spot.

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ELIZABETH: Like both this way or this way but that's the move. Ok. Let's take it back.

ELIZABETH: I think you have to get beyond the barrier of self-protection before you can really fly and do the moves.

ELIZABETH: Much better.

ELIZABETH: And your ability to navigate space, time in a way that no one's ever seen anybody move, increases, increases, increases.

JACKIE: Little ease, go

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ELIZABETH: *Little Ease* is my seminal solo. It was really the purest idea how much can a body do in that amount of space, that's all you've got. In 1985

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ELIZABETH: it was premiered at The Kitchen downtown. It has never changed choreographically. Completely measured for the size of my body, it's a limited space. I try to direct and trying to figure out how to direct people to perform that is a little grizzlier than me asking them to do other things because of my memory of doing it which was completely grizzly.

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JACKIE: Little Ease, go.

ELIZABETH: The current performer, Jackie Carlson, is...is perfect and she's absolutely precise. I was much more flagrant, you know I would never achieve the lines she achieves and she's this gorgeous ballet dancer. She's able to go that fast and that hard and hit every line precisely, it's like she's... she's building a crystal really and it's so moving.

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[Jackie performing *Little Ease*]

ELIZABETH: Especially the end move where you're skidding along

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ELIZABETH: you're upside down walking on the top, but you're... you're skidding on your head, you're skidding along on your head. It's bloody *Little Ease*. It's the name of a medieval torture device. The boxes were smaller, but then you'd get put on the rack and then squished back in and you'd stay in each for days. I really wasn't related to the medieval device I was just thinking it was such a beautiful phrase.

JACKIE: I have huge like

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JACKIE: raw part on my head.

GINA: Like a bloody piece of her scalp was missing.

ELIZABETH: Little Ease, I love that word. I mean I have to be able to ask someone to do that and be okay about it. Those aren't easy requests.

JACKIE: If it weren't for her nobody would have came up with this stuff. She lets us play around on her visions.

JACKIE: Fly!

01:40:11:08

[*Fly* performed]

01:40:41:01

01:41:11:07

ZAIRE: Helicopter!

ZAIRE: Side swipe!

ELIZABETH: Extreme action is as profound as any other discipline; film, poetry, music. It hits the hearts and souls of people...

01:41:41:19

ELIZABETH: more immediately, more directly than any other discipline. So much of the early work was so clumsy because the skill of the moves were awkward and imprecise, my back would go into spasm all the time and I... I would take Valium, you know because I had to... I had to relax and go up the hill again. PopAction sort of emerged out of taking your lands on different parts of the body, a different base of support than the bottoms of your feet.

01:42:11:14

ELIZABETH: It's oh I'll land on my stomach. Oh I'll land on the backs of my legs. Oh I'll land on my shins. Oh I'll land on my back. Oh I'll land on my side, you know so it was like figuring out how to make those alterations to change the audience's perspective of where we were in space. If you're just like this the whole time passing by each other or by the eyes of the audience, you're nowhere. I mean you're really nowhere. You're just where you are, but it's not like making a choice about it. Where am I right now in space?

01:42:41:06

ELIZABETH: And what forces am I encountering there.

ELIZABETH: This is pretty. This is Airwaves. Yeah, this is the first dance we did in the air with a harness. So this was just rotating harness hung from a single cable from a single point, and it was extremely grizzly and Michael Schwartz, my dancing partner there and I did this together and we just built moves in the air and we'd hook our feet and then we'd try and turn

01:43:11:18

ELIZABETH: in our harnesses.

ELIZABETH: Well this is my first huge wall dance when the audience looked at the wall. It was as if they were transplanted above looking down on them because of the angle of viewing. This is a dance we did on a 40-foot wall at the Brooklyn Bridge Anchorage. It was called *Look Up* because the audience was underneath and they were looking up.

01:43:41:10

HOPE: I mean that was a big deal. It was a 40-foot wall. This is the company at the Anchorage. Eventually you'll destroy yourself, but I was feeling pretty sexy I think at that time.

ELIZABETH: And this eagle, after this next one. Stomach to the wall.

ELIZABETH: Once I was behind the desk with my drawings and that's how I was choreographing in my 40s, I was not putting myself in the new ones. Once it got

01:44:11:11

ELIZABETH: more aerial, I was out. Let's put the belts on.

HOPE: I started dancing with the company when I was 26 years old. I believed that I could do anything.

HOPE: I've always dreamed about flying. I've always kind of wanted to disappear and fly, so there I was. We were really in touch with each other and really in touch with how to keep ourselves safe. Knowing where you are

01:44:41:14

HOPE: Is how you survive the work. It's not the moves that are surprising, it's the challenge of them, the speed of them, the endurance of them.

01:45:11:01

HOPE: I felt like a wild horse. It celebrated my most powerful self. I don't think very many things in the world do that.

FABIO: I've been with STREB for 10 years, and I've seen people come and go and by the time I

01:45:41:13

FABIO: joined STREB the scale had gotten a lot larger. I don't know if Elizabeth knew exactly where she wanted to go.

ELIZABETH: This is a building.

FABIO: And what I later learned was that she didn't want to go back.

ELIZABETH: My new dream space that I've been searching for it seems all my life. I mean you just see it all, right?

FABIO: She wanted something bigger and more colorful and more explosive.

ELIZABETH: This is our new STREB Action Invention Lab. By the time we started doing these designs

01:46:11:16

ELIZABETH: and I started seeing the cost come back, I literally felt like I was in a barrel going down the rapids heading for Horseshoe Falls, but if you look at these you can see how absolutely beautiful they are. Someone can look at this and look in the spec books and know how to build it.

ELIZABETH: Once I moved into SLAM in 2012, the company grew exponentially. We're gonna build a theatre, a PopAction school, a kids' action school. I wanted to keep inventing action but I wanted to see, hey what's the relevance of the

01:46:41:13

ELIZABETH: PopAction I invented over all those 20 years to the every person walking by this garage on the street.

ELIZABETH: It's going to be an action lab.

MALE: What is an action lab?

ELIZABETH: We do extreme action like with trampolines. It's a little bit like the circus. We're pretty established.

MALE: Well you're very brave too to come into..., you know to this area to...

ELIZABETH: I know it's an experiment.

ELIZABETH: What I felt was the future would not be just the theatrical model but it would rip into the populace world and

01:47:11:13

ELIZABETH: the scale would be enormous. That's my dream. People who are obsessed with a certain kind of extreme action can come here and invent moves that you need this type of space, this type of encasement to invent. You really have to have the hardware to fly and this is the place to do it.

FABIO: Elizabeth has a really clear strong sense of what she wants and that usually is more force, more velocity, more risk

01:47:41:15

FABIO: But I think she'd learn that if she wanted to get something very extreme out of somebody she was going to have to speak to their hearts.

SARAH: Sammy you wanna cuddle with me over here?

SARAH: As long as you're not spooning me, we can sit together.

SAMMY: You're very nice to me because the cameras are rolling.

SARAH: Sit on that hard chair then and see how comfortable you are.

01:48:11:02

SARAH: Every time Sammy says something to me, she always like expects like a response and I'm always just looking at her and she's like, all right Sarah and I'm like, what, I don't "emote."

SAMMY: Yeah. I'm like what does that mean?

SARAH: She's like just because you don't have feelings.

SAMMY: That's how I want to be because me and Felix were saying how feelings aren't facts.

SARAH: Which I don't believe in.

SAMMY: And feelings aren't real, so if you can control your feelings, then you makes you stronger, that's why I want to be like Sarah Callan because she doesn't have any emotions.

SARAH: But why aren't feelings real?

FELIX: I think feelings are real, they're just ideas though.

01:48:41:06

SARAH: I don't feelings are real.

FELIX: I think they're real. It's just how long you hold onto that idea.

SARAH: Oh, how long... I see what you mean.

FELIX: You can't let it occupy everything, you know.

SARAH: I do have feelings, Sammy.

SAMMY: Do you have coffee Sarah?

SARAH: Yeah. Do you want to make some coffee?

SAMMY: Is that like a lot?

SARAH: No.

SAMMY: Thanks.

[Magnet reading. "I no longer skinny dip, I chunky dunk."]

SAMMY: We're probably the only dance company that's not super skinny

01:49:11:05

SAMMY: underweight people.

SARAH: Yeah. I think so, too.

SARAH: Before I joined the company I was at my lowest weight I've ever been at which was 125 and you can't be that weight and be in this company like...

SAMMY: What I've been calling it is mass because my weight is so high, but I feel most fit it's just like mass, you just get this massive person that just like keeps weighing more and more and eating more and more and you want sex more and more. You guys believe it?

01:49:41:15

FELIX: I missed what you said.

[laughter]

SARAH: Like even silly things like trying to get into pieces that were new and I remember being like oh I want to try that I want to do that and like I didn't weight enough whatever the counterpart was

FELIX: It's all practice, you get like things like the turning machine where you use like our hands and our feet and like our ground changed and we climb over things. I like things that require agility. That's kind of my thing, like monkey stuff.

SARAH: Well I got hit by a steel

01:50:11:10

SARAH: I-beam once, but it was like a not a big deal thing

FELIX: She had the most beautiful bruise.

SARAH: I did.

SAMMY: Do you know what's so painful, to sit in a crouch, this kills, but to smash into a wall or fall from the sky doesn't hurt.

SARAH: Yeah it's...

SAMMY: I'm like this hurts my knees so bad, like if people knew the truth.

SARAH: I sit in a 'clouch', like the clump crouch, half a crouch half a clump I'm like oh... and I'm like leaning on my foot, I'm like leaning on this foot, just change balance.

SAMMY: When we like show what gravity really does or how

01:50:41:17

SAMMY: impact really takes to the body, those things don't hurt because that... that's what PopAction is, that's what we practice and that's like what I want to show the audience like how hard my body can hit or what blows I can take. They feel good.

SARAH: Yeah, they're fun. They are fun.

01:51:11:10

[*Impact* performance]

MALE: Impact go!

MALE: Right back in!

ZAIRE: Get out of his way!

01:51:41:10

[*Impact performance*]

01:52:11:21

ELIZABETH: When I started inventing my way to move I believed that you couldn't camouflage gravity. You had to take the hits, you had to contend with the forces and you had to accept the fact that you were going to get hurt, maybe not mortally

01:52:41:02

ELIZABETH: wounded, but hurt.

ELIZABETH: That's something that the boxers would say about Mohamed Ali, in boxing heart is the capacity to go on after you've been hurt, that's a boxer that has heart and a bull rider has try, they call it try, meaning they're going to stay on the back of that bull for eight seconds no matter what. When somebody gets seriously hurt in a circus performance, the show does go on and they carry the person off.

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ELIZABETH: That's not necessarily true in my company, although I have had people taken away in an ambulance and the show did go on. I've had to do that. That happened once, that's the most extreme example, but that's just part of the protocol in my world. Part of the deal is you walk into the room and you agree to get hurt, you might get a little hurt, you know my job and everyone's job is not to get too hurt that you can't go on, you know that's sort

01:53:41:01

ELIZABETH: of one of our... one of our battle cries, not to be, you know too pugilistic about it, but that's part of the deal and some boxers have it, some don't.

ELIZABETH: Hey, um, I'm Elizabeth Streb, and I have an appointment with Dr. Rose. This one.

01:54:11:13

ELIZABETH: This one... goodness. See this was an injury that I got... this was a broken foot injury that I got right before I was going to dive through glass at the Joyce Theater for the first time. I was practicing with everything but the floor and the glass with a hula-hoop held at a certain distance off the sand and I did my last test dive, power dive and you have to punch and you're on your way through the glass. So I must have punched and then did that move pretty

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ELIZABETH: perfectly, and I thought I had a bone spur or something, but I really... actually had broken my foot. We were flying back that day and I did it at the Joyce that night and my foot was broken, but you know. It was also the place where I have bunion just from so many years of dancing, but they would have had to re-break the foot, reset it, really do an operation and I chose not to do that and so now I have a straggly toe, but it doesn't hurt.

ELIZABETH: Dr. Rose... Hi

01:55:11:17

DR. ROSE: How you doin?

ELIZABETH: When I waltzed in here I think it was two years ago. It was before we started the shots and I said, okay, that's it I want a double knee replacement and you just flat out said, no, that's not going to happen.

DR. ROSE: Right.

ELIZABETH: You stopped me.

DR. ROSE: Right.

ELIZABETH: Thank heavens.

DR. ROSE: There is nothing that can be bad about holding off from a total joint replacement. There's nothing that you need to rush into, it really comes down to quality of life and if we can improve your quality of life without

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DR. ROSE: putting metal or plastic in, certainly we'll try to do that. Nobody cares whether a football player loses five degrees of range of motion as they're running for a touchdown, a dancer on the other hand if they lose five degrees that's career threatening. So we're going to give two injections and then again one every week for a total of three weeks. Certainly Streb is an extreme

01:56:11:23

DR. ROSE: example of the great athlete squeezed into that artistic form.

ELIZABETH: Boy the way it feels when it goes... goes in...

DR. ROSE: And many of her dancers have had significant injuries in the past that have resulted in some surgeries that have corrected and alleviated the pain, however, it gets to a point where even their normal daily activities become painful and can result in subsequent surgery, total knee replacements, total hip replacements.

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DR. ROSE: And you can move the knee around.

ELIZABETH: You didn't just do two did you?

DR. ROSE: I just did two.

ELIZABETH: Did not.

DANITA: Yah.

ELIZABETH: Did not.

DR. ROSE: I did.

ELIZABETH: But every so often you get smacked.

DR. ROSE: And lie down let's take a look.

ELIZABETH: Every so often the instrument hits you or you go a little...

DR. ROSE: Leg up.

ELIZABETH: Beyond the edge of your space.

DR. ROSE: (Overtalk) motion (overtalk).

ELIZABETH: And either get a cut, a bruise or something worse.

ELIZABETH: No pain.

DR. ROSE: No pain?

ELIZABETH: No.

DR. ROSE: Life should only be so good

01:57:11:01

DEE ANN: From the very first moment I walked in the door at SLAM I was really entranced by the whole thing. Her work was really cool. It was really different than anything I'd ever seen, so I definitely knew I was putting myself in a different position. I mean especially since my technical training did not consider being in the air, except for jumping because I'd been a modern dancer

01:57:41:08

[scenes from *Streb vs Gravity*]

DEE ANN: It's raw and visceral and when you are part of it, you get to be part of her. You get to be Elizabeth, you get to be rebellious. There was a truck strap that went from one part of the truss to the other part of the truss and like we did all this

stuff on the truck strap. When you hop on it, it was like a trampoline it would just like launch you off. And she had never even touched it, like any of the pieces.

01:58:11:09

DEE ANN: But she would say, I want this shape on there, how can that happen? And so OK well I don't need a skill to do this because this has never existed before so let me just try out using the skills I have. And then that ranges between someone who has a dance background to someone who has a gymnastics background to someone who has a musical theater background. Everybody looks at it completely different.

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DEE ANN: I remember learning *Ricochet*, Elizabeth wanted a straddle on the top and so you'd be in a split against the wall and then from you're straddle you'd drop, horrible idea, very bad idea, yes. So, I did the straddle and dropped to the floor, did it successfully a couple of times, so I was like this is... this is possible, this is a totally possible thing. Third or fourth time I didn't get up, I had dislocated my

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DEE ANN: sacrum. I did all this pilates and like mended myself all up and got back to rehearsal. You're so passionate about something and you believe so wholeheartedly in what you're doing, you believe you can do anything. It is possible to move in any way you want to move. It's like being invincible.

01:59:41:09

DEE ANN: and then suddenly just one time... It was a beautiful day. I remember going across the Williamsburg Bridge on this bike and the sky was blue I remember just like being in a really easy going mood that day. It was just like any other SLAM show. Everything felt very easy and effortless.

02:00:11:09

DEE ANN: We had plank size doors kind and they would fall and you'd pick them up and you'd turn them and you would dance through them and that kind of thing, pretty straight forward in terms of STREB moves and I was running up the plank and jumped off and I... I tripped. I landed kind of in a plow position.

FABIO: Somebody said

02:00:41:09

FABIO: Clear or go or something. I heard her screaming, no.

DEE ANN: People were pulling up my shirt gasping, they were "Uh!"

FABIO: There was on her back like... sort of like an indentation> she was holding my hand and she said to me, "I'm really scared."

DEE ANN: I didn't really feel pain per se until someone decided the needed to put an ice pack on my back and then that really was painful, I remember that surge of pain.

FABIO: I remember Elizabeth talking to me and saying can't

02:01:11:07

FABIO: we at least finish the show, can we do *Splash*, the piece that happens in the sidewalk and half way through *Splash* 9-1-1 arrives.

ELIZABETH: Time doesn't go backwards, and I believe it is my fault. It was a benign moment. You would have never thought that that moment was going to cause such an injury, but it did.

DEE ANN: Before that moment, I was involved

02:01:41:12

DEE ANN: in this magical experience of being able to do anything but even in my state which was... like close to shock probably. I was like this is it, this is the end. That was it. I had danced my whole life and that was... that was it, suddenly that was like my retirement, retirement from dance. I mean the first day I left

02:02:11:07

DEE ANN: my apartment after I broke my back, I couldn't walk across the street. People who come in my situation are typically people who have been in accidents and don't have feelings in their legs anymore. So it was just fortunate that I wasn't paralyzed.

DEE ANN: Five years down the line I now see it in a very different way because I can see there is magic in being

02:02:41:50

DEE ANN: Able to do art and that's important. It doesn't exist everywhere, so you do have to catch it when it comes. You can't ignore it. You do need to believe in it. I don't think I had it before STREB and that's the part that any STREB dancer when they leave really feels, how will I ever catch anything like that again? When will that magic exist again?

HOPE: This is a letter I wrote to the dancers,

02:03:11:04

HOPE: To you, the dancers, find out what it is that you love about what you are doing now and try to carry it with you when you leave for that is what you will have, your experiences and your memories. When you dance for Elizabeth you are not your own act, you are a STREB performer,

02:03:41:09

HOPE: You are her vision. You only have yourself, and I would like to think that we have each other. For it is the dancers, and only us, that know what it is like to do that work. We are like soldiers, but we have no real war. We have given our lives. We have been a part of art.

02:04:11:10

HOPE: We have had a job, an incredible job, but there's no pension to give us security and the only organization we have to hold us to our death is the power of our self.

ZAIRE: Ladies and gentlemen, we are the STREB Extreme Action Company!

02:04:41:07

ELIZABETH: Two weeks before the London Olympics we staged a series of extreme action events to clear the air for the Olympic athletes. I called it "One Extraordinary Day." In terms of theatricality and choreography was my ultimate... a good part of it wasn't something that I could have ever planned.

02:05:11:10

REPORTER: You can see behind me in the red those are dancers and I'm joined by Elizabeth Streb. Elizabeth, they are jumping off the Millennium Bridge.

ELIZABETH: They are. They're going to hurl themselves, they're going to walk the plank, stand on the edge and then seven, one at a time, are going to hurl themselves toward the Thames doing outrageous stunts on a bungee which is one of the more irascible machines. They're going to fly like the birds and swim like the fish.

REPORTER: It doesn't sound safe.

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ELIZABETH: Anything that's too safe is not action, in my opinion.

ELIZABETH: Against all STREB principals, the measurements are not what we had at our rehearsal, so the dancers don't really know if you jump off and do a certain technique, the bungees could come back and smack you into the overhang. We don't know.

FEMALE: I'm scared.

MALE: Did you get out?

JACKIE: I did, but you can check me again.

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ELIZABETH: I'm making my dancers do that without knowing.

ELIZABETH: Don't hit the bridge. Don't hit the bridge. They're not going to hit the bridge right Kim?

KIM: No, no, no, no.

ELIZABETH: This is it, stand up. Whoa. Oh how gorgeous.

02:06:41:08

[performance on *Millennium Bridge*]

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ELIZABETH: Jackie, woo!

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ELIZABETH: Cassandre... woo! Woo!

02:08:11:09

ELIZABETH: Here come the boats. Here come the boats. That is so great. Woo.

ELIZABETH: This bridge is a pure essence of a line in space and the air and my dancers cavorting under it was to me a dream come true to put people there, to put dancers there

02:08:41:50

ELIZABETH: That could, you know carve the air out in that manner above the water. We have six more events to go, and I'm just very happy that we've begun the journey.

ELIZABETH: In London ,I wanted to do a piece dedicated to Trisha Brown. She took walking and decided to put it at a 90-degree angle on another surface.

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ELIZABETH: When she was reconstructing her work at the Whitney Museum, she asked me to do the dance *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*. I did it eight times, I couldn't make it look like a walk any one of the times. I couldn't... which was so humbling.

ELIZABETH: She was always at the bottom.

ELIZABETH: Oh Trisha.

ELIZABETH: My hands get clammy thinking about it and so then when we got an opportunity to do the London Olympics I wanted

02:09:41:18

ELIZABETH: to do a piece walking down city hall called *Sky Walk*, and I wanted to dedicate it to Trisha. She incorporated the sky and the waters and the earth into everything she does and that building was glass and reflected the clouds and it was by the Thames. It was perfect. We were a trio... help, then you can always come this close to me even though there'll be tension

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ELIZABETH: Like that. I wanted two men and I wanted it to be symmetric, and I wanted guys with the most gravitas.

MALE: You want to put your feet together for a minute. How does that feel?

ELIZABETH: It feels good, it feels tight.

JOHN: We had so many technical and like rigging staff that were always on top of what we were doing that I never had a

02:10:41:09

JOHN: problem. I said well if... if this shit like breaks, then I'm dead just stop worrying about it because that's not going to get you anywhere.

ELIZABETH: You have to hold tension. If you start to tip like this we'll... we'll just keep smacking ourselves. We'll smack ourselves all the way.

LEO: I had a little conversation with Elizabeth right before we walked down and I was like, you know how do you feel right now and she said, "I'm really nervous, I'm really scared," and I was like, oh, me too.

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ELIZABETH: I was scared out of my wits. Man in the morning I was just like I wish I could just do it right now and get it over with which is always the worst thing in action hero can think. If things aren't, on some level, really dangerous I don't believe you'll ever discover anything that you don't already know.

MALE: How about audio down there, can we give Zaire a go please, go Zaire's announcement.

02:11:41:09

ZAIRE: We started off on a journey this morning by bungee jumping off the Millennium Bridge and now we ask that you turn your attention to city hall as we present *Sky Walk*.

LEO: When I got up there, you know I felt completely fine. I could see the entire skyline and... you know, the boats, maybe I had taken like maybe five steps and then I hear Robin, who is one of the riggers, and he said,

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LEO: "Leo, you're going to have to lean over to Elizabeth Streb and unclip your carabiner and put it under."

ROBIN: Stop everyone.

ROBIN: Leo, could you look over your left shoulder towards Elizabeth can you walk along your white line there and unclip the carabiner from your back and see how much rooted around Elizabeth's rope?

LEO: And I was like, what? There's no way I'm doing that, there's no way I'm unclipping myself from here. I'm 21 stories up, I'm on a glass surface I could slip any moment, are you crazy?

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LEO: There's no way I'm doing that.

ROBIN: Just go sideways, you got it mate.

LEO: So I'm kind of shimmied myself over to Elizabeth and I stand there for a second and so I figured out all right well it's not my carabiner that holds me up here, so maybe it's the other one.

ROBIN: That's it, over the top and underneath.

ELIZABETH: He went over there and he unhooked the rope and untwisted it, re-hooked and then went back to where he was.

ROBIN: Top man, resume.

ELIZABETH: He was such a major hero. He just did it.

02:13:11:16

ELIZABETH: Our goal is to be in the moment and not think about what you just did and worry about the next move, but to be right here right now.

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ELIZABETH: It was the most elaborate version of remaining in the present tense for the entire time. I didn't even know my name. I was just taking the next step, taking the next step in utter ecstasy.

LEO: Just walking down the building, seeing the juxtaposition of the clouds on the glass and the clouds above.

LEO: It was like walking on the moon... yeah.

02:14:11:09

[*Sky Walk* performance]

02:14:41:01

[montage of performances in London]

02:15:11:13

ELIZABETH: Cheers, you guys. Thank you for everything you did to make that possible.

02:15:41:16

FEMALE : Like the London tower was so beautiful at night.

JACKIE: Yes... yes...

02:16:11:07

JACKIE: The night that we went to rehearse for the London Eye the first time, I was scared out of my mind. I was really scared. and I had been for a few months, but actually I loved it. Climbing up the ladder 201 feet, people were singing in this hollow tube, it was good. I was just quiet looking at my ladder, stepping.

02:16:41:10

JACKIE: It was like a dream, it's hard when people ask me, you know how was London? You can't just tell them. You will never understand what it was like. It was the greatest day of my life.

ELIZABETH: I was at the hub at the London Eye and watched every single person climb up, every single one of these fragile

02:17:11:20

ELIZABETH: bodies all rigged with a million cords, attach themselves to the spoke as the wheel was moving. I was lost inside. It was the first time I realized the magnitude of what I was asking you to do. I was standing there thinking this is wrong, this is too much to ask people to do. This is crazy.

ELIZABETH: I'd look up and Cassandre was the first one on and she'd be 201 feet above me.

CASSY: I'm wracking my brain trying to think of the appropriate words to try to even come close to that kind of experience that, you know we all went through together and I haven't found the words yet.

DANIEL: I had this idea that I wanted right about midnight

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DANIEL: So I was at the very top of the wheel and I wanted to invert and hang upside down, and unlock my break and just fall. I actually got to do that, no one else has had that perspective before.

SAMMY: Right as I was about to jump off the Millennium Bridge, Elizabeth Streb looked in my eyes and she said, wreak havoc. I took that with me throughout the whole day.

02:18:41:15

FABIO: The highs were so high; I'm still coming down from it.

ELIZABETH: I can't even express how much I learned and what I think about movement when the body gets miniaturized in a skyscape, how deeply profound it was to realize that the where of it had so much more to do

02:19:11:11

ELIZABETH: In a way, took such precedence over the what of it. It was just the most moving thing that I've ever been through as a choreographer.

ELIZABETH: What to me is moving about the work, when I think it works best is that there are archetypes, physical archetypes that people relate to

02:19:41:08

ELIZABETH: and respond to and they are moved by those moments in time and space. When I hit my target correctly, people quake inside because they recognize that physical moment and they feel included in the experience.

02:20:11:09

[Credits roll]