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James Volz Interview, Former WSU Student/Alum, Department of Theatre Arts at Wright State University

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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
Retiree Association Oral History Project

Interview date: 1/16/2018

Interviewer: Abe Bassett (AB)
Professor Emeritus, Department of Theatre Arts

Interviewee: James Volz (JV)
Former WSU Student/Alum, Department of Theatre Arts

Abe Bassett: This is Abe Bassett, Professor Emeritus, Department of Theatre Arts, and current member of the Wright State University Retiree's Association. Today is Tuesday, January 16, 2018, and it is my pleasure to be interviewing Jim Volz, James T. Volz, former Theatre Arts student and Wright State alum, as part of the Retiree Association's Oral History Project. Jim, thank you for being with us today.

Jim Volz: I'm glad to be here, Abe. Thanks for inviting me.

AB: Good. Well, you are a naïve of Dayton, are you not?

JV: I am, I'm a Dayton boy, through and through. Even though I left in 1975, which would be over 40 years ago, I will always be a Dayton boy.

AB: Right. And you came to Wright State in what year?

JV: 1971. I graduated from Carroll High School, all Catholic schools, St. Helen's, Holy Family, in Dayton, Ohio. We grew up near 3rd St., near downtown Dayton, and then we moved into Mad River Twp. where we had choices of a lot of different schools, and graduating from Carroll High School, great academic program at Carroll, and Wright State just looked like the place to be.

AB: Okay, and let's see, graduating in '95 [1975], and I will say for our viewers that you've had a 25, 27 year history as a Professor of Theatre at Cal State-Fullerton, which is a very well esteemed theatre school, and an illustrious career, and we'll talk a little about that, but I want to talk about you coming to Wright State. You were a product of Catholic elementary and high schools, so was there pressure on you to attend the University of Dayton?

JV: There was pressure to attend the University of Dayton, more pressure to attend Notre Dame, because there were a number of family members that had graduated from Notre Dame, and I was pretty clear that I was done with nuns and priests, and in 1971 when I graduated from Carroll High School I was looking for a more public experience. I wanted to be in a big school, a big state school, and I wanted the anonymity that came with being

at a big state school, and what I perceived as an 18 year old as the freedom of being at a large state school, and Wright State had a reputation through Ohio State and Miami in its original collaboration, and my brother went to Wright State University and I knew it was a great school, and I came out here and said, 'Well, I'll check out Wright State'. I had planned to go to other universities, and in the final run I decided I was going to stay home and live at home with my family, and attend Wright State, and be an English major. That was the plan.

AB: Well, I just want to put this on the record, your father worked at the Wright-Patt Air Base and he had a responsible job and presumably made decent money, so he could have helped you go to Ohio State or Bowling Green.

JV: Absolutely. Yeah, my little brother went to Ohio State, and I could have gone really anywhere from the point of view of between scholarships to- I had scholarships to Yale, I had scholarships to Ball State, I had scholarships to go to Case Western at the time. There were options in terms of financial aid packages to go just about anywhere. But again, I decided I wanted to try out Wright State, and I wasn't sure that I was going to stay here for all four years, but I decided it was the place to start my college career.

AB: Well, you did stay. What was it that kept you here?

JV: I was hooked within three months of coming to Wright State University. I loved the youth of the university, meaning that this was a university that was breaking out into its own self right before your eyes, and the opportunities for students would be unimaginable today. I mean, you had a chance to run major programs. I ran a film series when I was here, I ran an international artists and lecture series as a student; with a faculty advisor, but the students made the decisions on tens of thousands of dollars of funding. I had the opportunity to work for the university newspaper and study journalism, and have a newspaper editor as a mentor, and eventually, thanks to you, the opportunity to work as a theatre critic and as a theatre writer, and eventually develop a career as a theatre historian and researcher. So, yes!

AB: Technically, what were your majors?

JV: I graduated with a BA in English, and a BA in Theatre, so I had two separate degrees.

AB: What were some of your outstanding classes and professors that were memorable?

JV: The ones that really stand out to me before I plunged into theatre, I remember having I think it was Gary Hollingsworth, Dr. Hollingsworth was a fabulous professor who actually invited us into his home, so it made a real impression. He was passionate in the classroom, but he wanted to get to know all of his students individually, and that was impressive for a university the size of Wright State University, to be invited into a home and to have a formal dinner with a professor and his wife and their guests. That always had an impression on me. And Cecile Cary was my first Shakespeare teacher, and one of

my titles as being a scholar and the pre-eminent scholar in terms of the understanding of Shakespeare festivals around the world, and that all started in Cecile Cary's class, when she would come into the class dressed in Shakespearean costumes to teach Romeo and Juliet and Richard III and Pericles, and made such an impression on us as opposed to getting Shakespeare off the page and getting it on the stage. But certainly my life took a whole different turn when you approached me and said, 'What are you doing in the English Department? You need to come over here to the Theatre Department. We need more men in Theatre, and I want you to consider Theatre as a major', and you set up an appointment with me, you tracked me down after a class and asked me to come visit with you. So I thought, 'Well, why not? I'll check it out' So I started auditioning for shows, and had baby parts in *Taming of the Shrew*, and helped to open the Creative Arts Center with *The Time of Your Life*, and *Celebration: The Musical*, and then started writing and working in the business management of the theatre for Alan Yaffe and for you, and discovered a whole other area of theatre that was much more interesting to me. I thought I wanted to be an actor, but I never wanted to be an actor. I never had the patience to put up with directors and with other people making all of the creative decisions for you. I thought I wanted to be a director, that's where you control everything, then I learned that directors don't really control things in professional theatre, because somebody else assigns them the shows that they are going to direct. So eventually I decided I wanted to be a producer, and Wright State taught me how to be a theatre producer, and taught me how to organize my life and time through the theatre, because you have deadlines, you have opening nights, you have a series of tasks that must be done to produce a theatre production, and by learning that I learned how to shape all of my life activities- my family, the rest of my personal life, my academic activities, my research activities- as if it was an opening night. I had these deadlines, these responsibilities, and of course theatre is all collaboration and human resources, so the Theatre faculty, Abe Bassett and company, Bob Hetherington, along the way a few other faculty that gave me experiences I couldn't have gotten at a larger university, or frankly I would not have gotten at a small liberal arts school, because they wouldn't have had the equipment or the resources or the size of faculty to give me the opportunities. You know, I was vacuum-forming scenery for *The Time of Your Life*, and I was sewing costumes for five different productions, because if you got cast, you had to make your own costume from scratch if you wanted a costume on stage, and help other people make costumes. I had the opportunity to direct two or three student productions when I was here. So you had a chance to work in so many areas of the theatre, and blending that with English was great, because my interest in English was mainly English drama, and that's what I teach now. I teach Greek/Roman/Medieval/Shakespeare/Spanish/Golden Age drama, history and literature, and the roots of all of that came out of Wright State's English Department and melded with the production values of Wright State's Theatre Department.

AB: You mentioned *Time of Your Life*. That was our dedicatory production, with George Grizzard directing, for the Festival Playhouse.

JV: That's right. I was one of the few people that worked the opening galas for both theatres, because I was in *Celebration* in the Celebration Theatre, which was the opening

show down there, and *The Time of Your Life*, with George Grizzard and company. It was a great experience.

AB: Yeah. And you mentioned *Taming of the Shrew*.

JV: Right! Well, that was my first introduction, because I think when you were recruiting me you were also looking for men for future casting, and *Taming of the Shrew* has a lot of men in it, and you cast me as a tiny little role as... I can't even remember the name, but it was one of Petrucio's many servants, and I think I had two lines in the show, but it was outside on the quadrangle between Allyn Hall and Millett Hall, and we set up an outdoor amphitheater in the middle of the grass in the quadrangle, and it was a highly successful show. You made me do a flip off of the stage into the audience, which scared the heck out of me at the time, but it showed that you could take risks and do fun work. We had a great experience doing *The Taming of the Shrew*.

AB: You were involved also in the "pre-show" show.

JV: That's right. We did a *commedia lazzi* pre-show, with the voice and movement professor at the time, which was Alan Timothy, and a couple of people that have been my best friends ever since. Joey and Mike Marcus and Bob Bailey were all in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Nancy McDonald was in *The Taming of the Shrew*. We've remained lifelong friends 40+ years later.

AB: Jim, that was a remarkable group of young people, wasn't it?

JV: That group of people, I think we were 53 majors in 1971, and those individuals whose lives I've followed have turned into commercial entrepreneurs, medical doctors, international researchers, New York actors, and just an amazing array of professions that had to do with that kind of liberal arts blending of performing arts and a pretty strong general education background at Wright State University. Because at that time you still had to take a foreign language, you had to take psychology and sociology, and a broad series of classes. That post-Vietnam War era, general liberal arts education was still valued in a major way, and I think that had a big impact on us. We were lucky, these were all people, everyone that I just mentioned, lived at home, they commuted to Wright State University in the cold and snow and rain, they took classes from 9 o'clock to 5 o'clock in the afternoon, and then came back for rehearsal from 7 to 11 or 11:30 at night, and then we used to go out with George Grizzard after every rehearsal to the Airway Inn and talk about our experience working onstage and our college experiences and our life experiences, you know, with the actor who opened *Hamlet* at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis. You know, one of the foremost actors of his time, working here at Wright State University. We were so fortunate.

AB: And with your undergraduate classmates, are you still in contact with some of them?

LD: I'm in contact with probably 20 of the 53 students, including one who is a dentist in Los Angeles- Weldon Glenn [sp?]. Bruce Collier, who is a lawyer in New Orleans, David Heath, who runs a publishing company in Minneapolis, Michael Marcus, who is a medical doctor who got his medical degree after his theatre degree here, Bob Bailey, who is an international entrepreneur, selling import/export products out of Chicago, Illinois. These were all the major acting students at Wright State University during that time period from 1971 to 1975. A great group of very loving and loyal individuals, we have been friends since 1971, so that's- 29, 39- 47 years!

AB: Yeah, well, I think you were describing a great undergraduate experience.

JV: Right, absolutely.

AB: Good. I always suspected that was the case. In fact, I knew that was the case, and you are verifying that that was the case. There was a lot to offer here, and the people like you took advantage of it. Okay, so you graduated in 1975, and then became a bum?

JV: 1975 I graduated, and did not become a bum, I became the activities programmer for four residence halls at Bowling Green University, because another Wright State Theatre graduate went to Bowling Green State University and said, 'I've discovered something called college student personnel', which is now called student administration, and it was a new major that had been created out of Geneseo in the New York system, brought to Bowling Green, and it was training people to be teacher administrators and college administrators in everything from admissions and financial aid to the president of the university. So it was a combination of counseling skills and administration skills- and I often say this, and I don't know if it's really true, but it's pretty true- that with a BA in English, a BA in Theatre, a masters in counseling and administration, and a PhD in Theatre from the University of Colorado, that my most useful degree was an MA in Counseling, because whether you are directing onstage, or working in any business, understanding human relations and human resources and interpersonal dynamics and group dynamics were among the most valuable skills I ever had. So that relationship between Wright State and Bowling Green State University really paid off for me. And it paid for everything, so, you know, I came from a lower middle class family, my dad was a comptroller at Wright-Patt Air Force Base, and the highest ranking civilian officer who retired making \$25,000 a year as the major administrator at a major air force base. So, not so much a lot of money, it might have been a decent salary in the 1960's and 1970's, but we were far from wealthy, so looking to a place where you could support yourself, and even at Wright State I had three jobs. I worked at a paint factory, for the student newspaper, and for the University Center Board- which was Student Activities at Wright State- all the time that I was a Theatre major. So, I always had at least three jobs, and as an orientation leader for incoming freshmen. So, I always had three or four jobs all the time I was here, and most of my contemporaries also had jobs that helped them pay their tuition to Wright State University, and then when I graduated, at Bowling Green they provided you with a house, food, and a stipend, and paid all of your tuition for graduate school. So it was a very valuable, transitional experience.

AB: And just to put this in perspective, you graduated from Wright State debt-free.

JV: Debt-free, didn't owe anything. And actually, not only debt-free, but I made money at Wright State that helped support my graduate studies both at Bowling Green and at the University of Colorado.

AB: Okay, so did you leave Bowling Green in-

JV: 1977.

AB: 1977. And then what did you do?

JV: I went to Colorado College, in Colorado Springs- a small liberal arts college- as the assistant to the Dean of Students. I was the head of the career center on campus, and I ran a performing arts school for 45 students. So I had a performing arts residence hall, and the top of the residence hall, the 45 students that lived on the top floor of the residence hall was a performing arts community- theatre, dance, music- that I created based on my experience at Wright State University. They never had had anything like this before, and they loved it. So we went through all of the resumes of the incoming freshmen, and we picked out all of the musicians, and we said, 'Do you want to live with musicians, theatre people, actors, directors, designers', and said, 'Do you want to live with other artists?', and 45 people said that sounded like an ideal experience. So we put them all together as an experiment, and it was probably the most successful arts experience that Colorado College had experienced in its- at that time- 100 year history. And we produced 12 performances, 12 productions per semester. I think I was there two years, and I was involved with 45 shows. But that was half of my hat, working as a career counselor, and also as a "counselor" counselor. We wore beepers back then, where we would be called to the scene of a fraternity problem, a judicial problem, a sexual assault on campus, and I would have to run across campus and confront harassers and problems. So we were- there were three of us- so we were the judicial arm of the university. That was half the job, and the other half was working in the Theatre Department. So it was really an interesting combination.

AB: So you were there one or two years?

JV: I was there two and a half years.

AB: Two and a half years. And then what did you do?

JV: Took off for Europe. I decided that I wanted a broader experience, and I'm a believer in what Samuel Johnson said, that you are never truly educated until you tour the world, and so I took off for Europe, and I had a small grant from Colorado at the time to work in theatre management at a number of theatres in London, and they also allowed me to visit the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, and Webber Douglas, which was one of the leading theatre schools at the time. I could go take classes or sit in on seminars and things

like that. I did that for three months, then I took off for Greece. Well, I toured all of Western Europe, and then settled into Greece to pick oranges and lemons and build a hotel in Epidaurus. The city of Epidaurus, which is about four miles from the Theatre at Epidaurus, which is out in the middle of nowhere, as you know. So, that was really exciting. And of course I had you for Theatre History, so I actually knew where the Theatre of Epidaurus was, and I got the job because I wanted to see the Theatre of Epidaurus when I was there, and a Greek citizen came up to me and said, "I am looking for American workers. They are so much better workers than the Greek young men. Where are you from?" And I said, "Ohio", and he said, "I went to the University of Chicago to school, and the Midwestern workers are the hardest workers and have the best work ethic, so if you come live with me I'll give you a room in my hotel while you help me build it, and you can eat with my family everyday, and I'll pay you to work in the fields". And so my job was to climb orange trees and lemon trees, we'd take the blankets from the hotel and put them under the trees, and my job was to go up and shake them, and I was skinny and weighed 120 pounds at the time, so I would climb the trees and shake all of the oranges and lemons out- and olives, olive trees- and then catch them in the blankets, and then take them into the house for dinner and for I think they had a little market that they would sell. So that's how I worked my way through Greece, and when I was in Greece I had an address at American Express in London, where I could receive mail. This was before cell phones, you know, telegrams was the only way and that was a little expensive, but you could get mail through American Express. And I took a trip to London to see plays, which I did often, and I think I saw maybe 80 plays during the 10 or 11 months that I was in Europe, and when I went to check my mail at American Express, I had a letter from you, saying basically, "I want to be doing what you are doing. I have been working so hard at Wright State and building this program, I want a break. I need a break. I want to go on a sabbatical and tour Europe. So how about you come back and help fill in while I'm gone, and direct children's theatre, be our business manager, and eventually fill in for me while I go on sabbatical". And so I read that and I thought that sounded like a fun opportunity, I hadn't planned on coming back to Dayton, but my dad was dying of esophageal cancer, and so it was the perfect opportunity to be back with my family at a very important time, and also to get another grand experience at Wright State University working with you and that team, as a staff-faculty member.

AB: And so you did come back to Wright State, and you were here for about two years?

JV: Yeah, I was here for about two and a half years, I think, because we worked summers with summer stock, we had summer stock theatre going on back then. And so it was about two and a half years, then I went to do a PhD at the University of Colorado in Boulder, and I was there for two years. I was supposed to be there for three years, but then at the end of my second year I got a job offer to be the CEO and managing director of Alabama Shakespeare festival in Montgomery, Alabama, and to build "the theatre of my dreams", as they proposed it to me. Because I turned them down twice for the job, and they finally said, "You have 21 million dollars", which was a lot of money in 1980 in Alabama... in 1982. And I said, "Okay, I'm going to do that", and we built this beautiful, Neo-Palladian theatre, that was funded by the former Postmaster General under Richard Nixon, Winton Blount, and on my board of trustees were George Wallace- Governor

George Wallace, ex-Governor George Wallace- and his wife, Cornelia Wallace, were both on the board, along with the head of NATO, Dick Cheney's wife, Lynn Cheney, and the head of the War College. I was on a board with 56 board members, and 54 Republicans.

AB: Now, you were about 28 years old here.

JV: I was 28 years old at that point, so it was unusual to have the opportunity to run a major LORT theatre, and within five years we were one of the top ten theatres in America, in terms of productions, critical values/artistic values of theatre, and the number of productions, and the number of performances. We were in the top 5 of the Major LORT theatres of America, and we were the 5th largest Shakespeare festival in the world.

AB: LORT theatres, that's the League of Resident Theatres.

JV: League of Resident Theatres, so that's all the major professional theatres. In Ohio, that would include the Cincinnati Playhouse and the Cleveland Playhouse, but it would also include the Lincoln Center, the Roundabout Theatre in New York, Ford's Theatre in Washington DC, and other major theatres.

AB: And while you were at Alabama, a number of Wright State students were hired.

JV: That's right. They actually- the reason I ended up in Alabama is because I fell in love with another Wright State girl, Evelyn Carol Case, and we were married in the Wright State chapel. After we moved to Colorado, we came back for a wedding at the Wright State chapel, because Wright State held so much meaning for us. But before I ever went to Alabama, Alabama Shakespeare was known as "Wright State South", because one of our faculty members, Anne Sando-Donadio, and her husband, Jim Donadio, both worked at Alabama Shakespeare, and they would bring student interns from the [WSU] theatre to play minor roles at this professional theatre. So it was a great link to a professional theatre at Wright State University, so there were over a dozen students that had that opportunity, including Bruce Cromer, who had a long career at Alabama, and then came back to have a long career as a faculty member at Wright State University.

AB: Yes, he's a professor of Theatre, and has had a long, established career here.

JV: Right, and so that was the link, and I was actually chasing my wife. I was in Colorado, and she was touring as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* with the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. So I would go down and visit her on tour, and I got to know the board of directors, and so I sent down a note saying, 'I'd like to write my dissertation, my PhD dissertation, to do a management history of a major LORT theatre, and I'd like to do it with the Alabama Shakespeare, but I will need access to all of your financial records, and all of your board members, so here is my resume so that you can call my references so that you can trust me to do that'. And when they got my resume, they said, 'Hey, while you're down here writing your dissertation, would you mind running the theatre?'

Because everybody else had turned them down, including Alan Yaffe, who was a former managing director at the Wright State Theatre. People who were 20 years older than me were turning the job down because they were afraid of that it had a million dollar debt, and it was in Anniston, Alabama, and they were afraid of Alabama and the deficit. But I had nothing to lose. I was 26 years old with no money in the bank, no great prospects, who knew what the future held, so for us to take a risk and move into a theatre that looked like it might go under at any time, was a safe bet. We had nothing to lose, and it turned out that we had everything to gain, because Alabama Shakespeare Festival, according to USA Today and the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times, was one of the great success stories of professional theatre in America, and the major success story in the 1980's of a theatre that came from nowhere. We created a theatre in Montgomery, Alabama that had never had a professional theatre, and by the time we left 10 years later, we were doing 8 shows in repertory- which was the same as the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis- 8 shows in repertory, 14 productions a year, we had a major music festival, we built a museum with a new art collection, we ran an international dance series, and we were doing 300 performances a year. Audiences went up 580% between the first year and the tenth year. We went from a budget of \$300,000- no, \$750,000- to \$6 million in four years.

AB: Yeah, and that's all under your leadership.

JV: Yeah. Just lucky I guess. But having a dad who was an accountant and being a good Midwesterner gave the Alabama Shakespeare Festival board the idea that a 26 year old kid could come in and clean up their financial messes. 29:15

AB: Well, one of your techniques, I recall you saying some time ago, was that you always managed to come in under budget, even though people were clamoring for more support.

JV: Right, we were in the black for all ten years. After they had suffered a half million to a million dollar deficit for the three years prior, for the next ten years we were in the black, we paid off our deficit, we created over a million dollar endowment, we built a twenty-one and a half million dollar theatre and we increased our audiences from 30,000 to 300,000 people a year. And we used the technique, the same technique that we used at Wright State University which you and I would have discussions about. You would question me every once in a while, because when I first came to Wright State, I would send out a brochure that said, "Get your tickets now because all the seats are going to be sold out." And you said to me, "We've only been playing to 59 to 62% capacity for the last few years. You really can't say in a brochure that were going to sell out", and I said, "Abe, we're going to sell out. Self-fulfilling prophecy. If we tell everybody we're going to sell out and they have to buy their tickets before they sell out, we're going to increase our audience". And that's exactly what happened. When we were at Wright State under your leadership as chair, we had the largest theatre and dance audience of any university in the state of Ohio, and our audiences were much larger than even Ohio State University.

With all of their resources and all of their theatres and they're twice the faculty size, our audiences were bigger than Ohio State and every other university in Ohio.

AB: Yes, that's true Jim, and you were responsible.

JV: No, no, no, no. It's the artists who are responsible. But you were the producer, and the directors that you hired, and all you have to do is... people buy tickets because the work is good, not because of good marketing. But it was a good combination back then, and you made great choices. We had great guest artists. A.D. Cover, George Grizzard, a series of professional actors and directors that took Wright State to new heights.

AB: Well, that you very much. Now, you left Alabama after 10 years, and you went to Southern California?

JV: I did. I got chased out of Alabama, actually. We had a great time, after a while we felt like we accomplished everything that we could accomplish in Alabama, and to be honest with you, having 45 Republican bosses as a board of trustees didn't match my liberal democratic taste oh so well. Evelyn and I were always concerned that it would probably a good idea to find another job before I got ridden out of Montgomery, Alabama. They used to introduce me as, "This is Jim Voltz, he's really a nice guy for a Yankee", and they'd never let me forget I was quote, "A carpetbagging Yankee" down in Alabama", but I was their favorite Yankee, they told me for many years. But we knew it was time to go after a decade, and so I started looking for a university position because we created four MFA programs in acting, directing, and design, and created programs that turned out people like Norbert Butz, Tony Award winning actor, came out of the Alabama Shakespeare's MFA program. I knew I wanted to teach, and I did not want to be a full-time producer, you know, 16 hour days, six days a week for 10 years, and so I had an opportunity to move out to California State University-Fullerton, near Disneyland, one of the major universities and the largest university in the 23-university California State University System. That turned out to be a great decision, because it was a big program. 600 theatre and dance majors and a growing program.

AB: Right. You've been there for 26, 27 years now.

JV: 27 years.

AB: So, retirement is not too far away then, probably?

JV: That's right.

AB: But Fullerton has a very excellent reputation, for its baseball team, but also for its theatre. You have former students who are on Broadway, who are in movies-

JV: That's right. Kevin Costner was one of our graduates, Linda Woolverton, who wrote Beauty and the Beast, and Aieda, the movies and the Broadway productions, she's a graduate of our Education Children's Theatre program at California State University-

Fullerton. But even as I speak, we have 10 students on Broadway right now and another 10 in international tours of plays and mostly musicals, and we have a heralded musical theatre program, especially.

AB: Right, and speaking of musical theatre, you told me one of your favorite courses, one of your prime courses now is the history of musical theatre.

JV: Right! 4:19

AB: And your dad had something to do with that.

JV: Had everything to do with it, because growing up as a good Catholic boy in the Volz household, my father loved- he was again a controller at an air force base, but his real passion was musical theatre and opera. So on Sunday after church, from 10 o'clock in the morning to 10 o'clock at night my entire life, which would have been eighteen years in the family household, every Sunday he played Broadway musicals and operas from 10 in the morning to 10 at night. So, by the time I moved out I knew all the lyrics from every musical from 1948 until 1971, every lyric to every musical ever written. Because it was just part of your weekly regimen, so even though I don't think I ever took a music theatre class, I've now just lectured at 12 different universities in musical theatre and Shakespeare. I teach musical theatre, history, and literature, and the history of Broadway musicals, based on my Wright Patterson Air Force Base father's experience, so, yes.

AB: And one of the other things that you do, besides teaching musical theatre and besides being a professor of theatre, is that you have an arts consulting company. You've been an arts consultation for a long time.

JV: A long time. I had a lot of employees at one time and I scaled back because it was too much personnel work, so now I have a company where I hire the team for whatever project it is, mostly I work in executive search, artistic directors and managing directors and producers, sometimes marketing and development directors. Not just for professional theatres but for museums, art centers, and dance companies, and we do a lot of strategic planning and marketing, audience development, and fundraising. Again, that entrepreneurial spirit was all generated during my time at Wright State University because the theatre was young and there were opportunities. The university was young, so I could work with theatre administrators from the president to the vice presidents to the deans. You had an opportunity to get to know all those people when you were here, because we were so small. I could work with Student Activities and have a budget in the tens of thousands of dollars as an 18 year old. Having control of tens of thousands of dollars to do arts programming, and that all translated to a consulting business that's now 45 years old.

AB: Yes, and some of your business was overseas

JV: Started a Shakespeare festival in Tasmania, a little island off the South of Australia, consulted with the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-Upon-Avon, one of my best

friends and ongoing colleagues that I'm going to see this weekend in Cincinnati is the education director for Shakespeare's Globe in London that they built on the Thames, and Sam Wanamaker, the British actor-director, was the person that founded it. The theatre is called it the Sam Wanamaker Theatre, and Sam Wanamaker used to come to me at Alabama Shakespeare Festival and say, 'teach me how to fundraise, and help me fundraise, and come back to England and help us get this theatre together'. Great opportunities.

AB: He was responsible for The New Globe Theatre in England, Wanamaker.

JV: That's right, yes, it's now called Shakespeare's Globe and the main theatre is called the Wanamaker Theatre. It took an American to go recreate Shakespeare's theatre in London.

AB: And his daughter is a very established actress.

JV: One of the great actresses of the English stage, Zoe Wanamaker.

AB: Right.

JV: Just saw her in Agatha Christie's- the reboot of Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*.

AB: Oh, the movie?

JV: Yes. I've been watching her since she was 20 years old, and now she's playing 60 year old roles, directed by Kenneth Branagh and *Murder on the Orient Express*. It's a small theatre world, that you know.

AB: Yeah. And finally, Jim, you are a published author.

JV: You know, again, that was a great combination that Wright State afforded me as a journalist, because I worked as a journalist for three years that I was at Wright State, writing news articles and being mentored by some terrific people in the communications department, not the academic department, but the communications for the university. So, they were full time, professional staff members, they took in students, I worked as a photographer and as a writer, and they'd let me intern at The Dayton Daily News when I was a student here, and I'd work with the editors of The Dayton Daily News. The editorial board, that was fun back in the days where it was Lou Grant style, where they smoked cigars in the newsroom and had bottles of scotch, you know, that was rough and ready. That's when I decided I didn't really want to be journalist, all those smelly old men, they were crazy. That's when I decided I was going to commit to theatre. So, yeah, those writing skills came in handy, and somehow along the way, you know, 9 published books and about 120 published articles and journals and things like that came together.

AB: And, let me see, you were once recognized as the Department of Theatre Arts Outstanding Alumni?

JV: That was really sweet. Yes, the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, on the recommendation of the Theatre and Dance faculty, asked me to or gave me the opportunity to come back and visit the campus and be one of the many outstanding alumni at Wright State University, that was very exciting.

AB: And you also had the honor of Burbage Award.

JV: The Burbage award, named after James Burbage, one of Shakespeare's contemporaries in England, is given to someone that has contributed internationally to the creation of Shakespeare festivals, and the legacy of Shakespeare internationally. So, I have some great contemporaries. Other people who have won that award are Trevor Nunn, who ran the royal Shakespeare Festival for years, Bill Patton, who was the architect behind Oregon's Shakespeare creation for fifty years, and the current education artistic director at the Shakespeare's Globe now. So, I was in really good company, Tina Packer from Shakespeare and Company, that was very kind of them. I don't think I deserve that kind of attention, but it was fun to go to the Blackfriar's Theatre, Shakespeare's indoor theatre that they created at the American Shakespeare Center, to receive that award.

AB: Well, Jim, one last question. Your name is officially James T. Is T for Thomas?

JV: T for Thomas, absolutely. Two good Christian names, James Thomas Peter Volz, if you want the whole collection. Peter would be the confirmation name.

AB: Okay, well, thank you very much for coming here, and congratulations to you on a wonderful career, and we're very proud of the fact that you are a graduate of Wright State University.

JV: Thank you, Abe. You've been a terrific interviewer, but a lifelong mentor, friend, colleague, faculty influence from the time I was 18 up to my 64th year in the universe, so thank you for all of that. We're lifelong friends, and I appreciate that.