SUSAN RESNIK (SR): Today is Wednesday, June 27, 2012. This is Susan Resnik. I am here in my Delmar office with Ms. Frea Sladek, the former CEO and long-time employee of the San Diego State University Research Foundation. We’re recording her oral history as part of the oral history project for Special Collections and University Archives at San Diego State University. This project is sponsored by a John and Jane Adams Mini-Grant for the Humanities. Good morning, Ms. Sladek.

FREA SLADEK (FS): Good morning, Susan. Please call me Frea.

SR: I shall! Tell me about where you were born, when you were born, and about your parents and siblings.

FS: I was born in Bangor, Maine, in 1939. I grew up next to campus, the University of Maine. That was the only University of Maine at the time, and that was in Orono, Maine. So I lived in Orono, Maine, for my first sixteen, fifteen years, and I had a very nice family life. My dad was a professor at the University of Maine, taught English; and my mom was a writer and published lots of stories and books. I was the oldest child. I had a sister Sheila and a brother David, and then the youngest brother, Johnny. Growing up next to campus, we had lots of fun. We got to play on campus. My mom always was very creative and always arranged things for us to do in the summer. And so we would do things like we would take I.Q. tests for the psychology students, and they would give us ice cream cones.
afterwards. And we would take painting classes or learn French. We loved going to the football games, sneaking into the games and collecting pop bottles under the bleachers.

And then as far as our family life, we didn’t have TV or anything like that. We loved to read, there was a library. This was a very small town. So we’d go to the library every week and get, I think it was five books you could take out at a time. And one time a relative sent us a boxful of books like *Black Beauty*, and all of the classics. That was such a wonderful gift for us. At home after dinner my dad would always play the piano for half an hour, and we would sing all the old folk songs. And then we would play a board game. Of course we had to have our homework done.

SR: What kinds of games, do you remember?

FS: Oh, we’d play Monopoly or cards sometimes. I learned how to play poker when I was about six years old. I would sneak downstairs when my brothers and sister were asleep. My parents wouldn’t teach me how to play bridge yet, because I couldn’t hold the bridge cards. I had fun, because I taught my brothers and sister how to read before they got to kindergarten. My dad always had things for us to do. For me he decided I should learn Latin. So when I was just barely able to read, he was paying me a penny a word for any Latin I translated. And then I got too good at it, and he paid me a penny for *two* words. Then I sort of lost interest.

SR: Oh, that’s funny!

FS: So I had a pretty easy, fun childhood. There was snow and ice, we’d skate on the university skating rink.

~04:21
SR: Sounds idyllic. Well actually, I was so delighted that you encouraged me to look at the oral history of your father that was recorded in 1993, and his name, as I now know, is George W. Sanderlin, but they made a mistake and put George A. I learned that. But I also learned that he and your mom collaborated on so many publications, they did so much together.

FS: They did. And it was great for my sister and brothers and me, because they talked about plots when they were doing the dishes after dinner. So our friends had to do the dishes, but we didn’t have to do the dishes after supper—we had other things we had to do, but not that. So Mom and Dad did collaborate.

SR: That’s wonderful. It sounds like there was a really nice home atmosphere. Now during those years, however, you were born in 1939, so what happened during the war years with your dad?

FS: He ended up, he was disqualified from service. He had had an operation in his ear. But he ended up going and working in a factory in North Carolina for a year I think it was. So I remember that. And then I do remember when the war ended. We were back in Maine because the university needed Dad again because the soldiers were coming home from the war and they needed to learn math, so he taught math for a little while. But we were on a beach someplace in Maine. I was pretty little, and all the fireworks went off, and I knew it was an important time, but I didn’t really know the extent of it.

SR: I can totally relate to that, being of the same vintage. I remember at the time that it didn’t seem unhappy to me.

~06:28
FS: Yeah. We didn’t have bananas, I remember that. Oh, and my parents, there was a young Jewish girl from Germany that was a refugee, and she actually lived with us for about a year. Again, I don’t remember much about her—I was so little at the time. But I know that she was part of our family for a little while.

SR: How nice. That’s great. So do you remember anything in particular about grammar school or high school?

FS: Well let’s see, grammar school, I remember being chosen to be the May Queen and having a little crown on my head, and I got to get a fancy dress for it. Usually what we did was at the beginning of the school year we’d look at the Sears catalog, and we got to pick out three cotton dresses for eight dollars or something, so that was kind of memorable. And I remember one of my teachers wanting me to stand up and sing. So I was sort of shy, but I managed to do some things that I didn’t think I could do because people encouraged me. I remember getting in trouble. (laughter) I was in kindergarten, and my parents had taught me how to write my name. And I was a little bored with what we were doing in kindergarten, so I was writing my name in columns, and the teacher did not like it.

High school was fun. We had to walk a couple of miles through the snow in the winter, and we came back at lunch, and then we went back to school. There were lots of activities, like photo club and yearbook and cheerleading and all of those. There was plenty of time to do that, because high school wasn’t that hard.

SR: Now, from what I recall, didn’t your father come to San Diego State in the mid-fifties?

~08:37
FS: He came out, it might have been ’54, and just for one semester. It was just an exchange thing for one semester, and then we came back to Maine. Of course in Maine my father and mother and brothers were big tennis players, and there, they had to sweep the snow off the courts, or else play in the campus gym. And so after being spoiled in California, then they wanted to come back. And as it turned out, the English Department professors—Jack Adams was key, and Sidney Gulick—they were key in convincing my dad to come back out here and take a job at San Diego State.

SR: Is Jack Adams the John Adams that helps us do this?

FS: Yes. I forget that he was John. And he was a very special person.

SR: So then you all came out here?

FS: Yes.

SR: And how was that transition?

FS: That was a big change, going from a small high school where the whole seventh through senior grades had 150 people in the school, and out here my senior class had 330 people in it. But people were so nice and so friendly, that I got involved right away. I worked on the yearbook, and I joined a social club, and people were really friendly. I can remember being horrified that I had good grades, and somehow or other somebody found that out. And there was another boy with high grades, and somebody in the school paper took a picture of both of us, and they wrote an article about, “these people are smart, but they’re okay,” or something. But the reason I was horrified was in Orono, even though I was at
school with professors’ kids and all of that, if you got an “A” on a paper, you’d cover it with your hand. It’s not cool to get an “A” on a paper.

~11:21

SR: That’s very interesting, because I grew up with a similar environment.

FS: Where?

SR: Rockville Centre, Long Island, New York. But I can remember kind of downplaying the “A’s” and up-playing being captain of the Red Team.

FS: Yes, I totally understand.

SR: Yeah, it’s interesting.

FS: But high school, I had it pretty easy in grade school and high school.

SR: So because your parents—and I remember your mom’s name because I think it’s so beautiful—Owenita.

FS: Oh, thank you.

SR: That’s such a lovely name. They were both so involved in English and literature and writing. Was that something you thought you would follow initially? Or how did it go for you when you were going to college?

FS: Well, I didn’t know. They probably thought maybe I would be a teacher, although they never said anything to any of the kids about what they wanted us to be—that was up to us. So there was never any pressure. I had a boyfriend, and he was anxious to get married, so I just thought the next thing I needed to do is go to college, but I didn’t really think about after college. I thought I’d probably have kids, and that would maybe be that.

~12:55
SR: Because your dad was on the faculty, did you just say, “Well, I’m gonna stay at San Diego State,” or did you think about going elsewhere, or how did that work?

FS: I went to Stanford. I applied to five different colleges, and I picked Stanford. It was very expensive at the time, and when I got accepted, I got honors at entrance, but that didn’t pay for me to go. And I had an aunt who was fairly wealthy, and she said she would pay for my first year, along with my mom and dad helping with what they could. So I had that great experience of living away from home for my freshman year at Stanford. It was a lot of fun. Of course my high school boyfriend came up to see me, and then I ended up coming back to San Diego and getting married pretty young at the time.

SR: How old were you when you got married?

FS: I was nineteen.

SR: Tell me a little bit more about what it was like in that first year at Stanford, in terms of the social existence, anything.

FS: It was great. I was a little homesick at first, because I’d never been away from home. But the administrators didn’t allow you to be homesick very long, because they had all these mixers. We were in the girls’ dorm, and there were a couple boys’ dorms around us, and so they would arrange all kinds of mixers for us. And before I went off to college, my boyfriend and I—who later became my husband—but my boyfriend and I had agreed that we would date other people, we were both pretty young. But he came up to see me. I had one experience because I was so naïve. I took some art classes for fun, and I liked that. I got kidded a lot because it turned out that one day I went to the art class and there was a lady
standing up in front in a blue bathrobe—how weird! And it turned out that that was our day to do a life drawing. And here I was in a class with—it was probably about 15 percent women at Stanford at the time—mostly men. So here I was sitting in a class with all these guys around me, and I’m looking at my paper and looking at the lady and trying to draw her without blushing. At the end of the class, the professor said, “Next class we’re going to do the male figure.” And I got teased because I skipped the class. I was pretty young and naïve I think at the time. But overall, I went to some fun dances, and I had good classes. I have to say the classes at Stanford, I had one full professor for western civ, but graduate students taught the rest of the classes, and they were good. But then when I came to San Diego State afterwards, I had all full professors, and actually very good ones. But Stanford was a nice experience.

SR: So then you came back to San Diego State, and what happened?

FS: Well, when I came back, I got engaged. Then I wanted to get through school fast, so I took a lot of units, and I went to the career planning center, because I needed a job. And the woman there knew my dad, and she offered me a job finding jobs for students. So I worked halftime doing that. And then I majored in English literature, and also had a French minor, which was an accident that it turned out a minor, because I also had a minor in history, which I intended to do. I had really good professors. I got married the next year. And then a few months after I got married, I got pregnant. So I can remember having the baby and having about two more classes to finish, because I did take a lot of units. But I did it. So
really, at San Diego State, because I was married or working or studying hard, I
didn’t get into joining clubs or activities—I pretty much had a full life.

~17:57

SR: Yeah, I was going to say, it is very different when you’re oriented towards your
own family at that time. It’s a different experience. It sounds like it was okay to
be married (FS: Yes.) because I am aware at some colleges during that same time
frame, there was a lot of resistance—and also to being pregnant. It sounds like
once again it’s reinforced my sense that the West is great, because I experienced
something very different on the East Coast.

FS: Well, before you think the West is not against pregnancy at high schools, after I
finished college, graduated…. Oh, this is just a personal thing too—before I left
Maine, it turned out that I had a boyfriend there, and during the time that I came
out to San Diego in the spring for the one semester, I was just fourteen. Anyway,
the last day I was there, a boy asked me out, and he went home and told his
mother he was going to marry me. And when I came back out, of course he was
still there. So the Maine boyfriend then came out to my graduation, and my
California boyfriend kept him busy, took him everyplace.

SR: Those are all good memories though. It’s part of the time.

FS: But back to the pregnant thing, after I was married and I was having my second
baby, I wasn’t looking for a job, but I was asked to correct English papers for high
school, and then I was asked to come in and teach a class for high school, just
part-time, so I could manage it. And I did that. And then I went to a party and the
dean of the English Department at Grossmont Community College wanted me to
teach a remedial English class, so I did. It turned out, though, I got pregnant, and the high school people said, “You can do some work at home for us, but you can’t come to the campus. People will see you’re pregnant.” But the community college people said, “Oh that’s fine, no problem.” But it was the same campus! The high school and community college students were sharing a campus.

~20:53

SR: Isn’t that interesting?!

FS: Yeah, on the same campus!

SR: Because that was prevalent in the East.

FS: I had no idea that it was prevalent in the East, or just going to college, you couldn’t be pregnant.

SR: So tell me more as you went on with your young family and the combination.

FS: Well, I ended up with having five kids in seven years, trying not to—faithfully trying not to. But I’m so glad that I did, because they’re all wonderful kids, and we had a lot of fun. But while I was bringing them up and sewing their clothes and doing all the mom things, I did have these part-time jobs teaching at the community college and correcting English papers.

And then it happened that when I was twenty-nine, my husband who worked for Convair, they put him on nights. We were just at the point of wanting to build a house. We had borrowed the money for the house, but we didn’t have money for carpet and drapes. And so I saw a library job advertised, and I thought, “Well, I worked in the library at Stanford. I could work in the SDSU library and make a little extra money for carpet and drapes.” But it turned out that job was
full when I went to apply for it, and so the person sent me over to the SDSU Foundation and said, “Well, you might want this job. I know somebody that’s looking for a job.” They were looking for a grant and contract administrator, somebody that managed the money and followed the regulations and all of that. So I met Bill Erickson, who was in charge of the foundation, at that time. And then he had me interview with another man who was going to hire the position. And the other man interviewed me, but he had a friend whom also he interviewed, so he hired the friend, which was fine, a very nice lady. But before they told me that I didn’t have that job, I got a call from a professor in the College of Education. He was the quarter-time head of the Foundation’s International Projects Center. And so he called and he was very direct. He said, “Well, I hear you’re lookin’ for a job, and I’ve got this job, and my wife says that she thinks you would do it.” I had met his wife working on registration, a very nice lady. This was Bob Nardelli, my first boss at the foundation, a faculty member. But in the phone call he said, “Well, I hear you have five little kids. Do you really think you can do the job?” (laughter) I was little taken aback by this. I said, “Yes.” (SR: Good for you!) And I can remember driving to work the first day on the freeway and thinking, “What am I doing?!”

SR: How far was it from your home to the campus?
FS: About twenty minutes’ drive—we lived in El Cajon—to campus. And I thought, “Well, I’m gonna give this two years. If I’m gonna do something, I’ll do it for two years, and we’ll have the carpet and drapes, and then I’ll figure something
But it worked out really well. He was a good boss, and I think the fact that .... I don’t know, it’s now 1969.

~25:16

SR: I remember reading that, yeah. Okay, and you have five children. Wow.

FS: They’re all good, four girls, a boy in the middle. They’re Kathy, Teri, Steve, Lori, and Debbie.

SR: That’s terrific.

FS: I’m lucky.

SR: Yeah, that’s really marvelous. And so this is the sixties, though, and as we know, the sixties was a time of a lot of changes on campuses. Tell me about this international program. It sounds like it’s something—I saw some of the material. It’s also the time, like the beginning of the Peace Corps and all of these kinds of thinking. The Kennedy years were before, and then Johnson. So what was it about, that job?

FS: Well, it was managing a lot of Peace Corps contracts. It was actually Peace Corps training, so we had Peace Corps training in Jamaica and then later in other areas of the Caribbean. We had Agency for International Development programs. These were million-dollar programs, and they were in Jamaica to start, and then Brazil. We also had some smaller Department of Education International Educators programs. So there were professionals coming from other countries to San Diego to get trained. And then starting the Peace Corps, our job was to hire the people to run the programs and do all the logistics, buy the books, and just arrange for the hotels. We had in-country training, too, for a month each summer
for the first four years. So here I was, hired in the end of February, and the first program was a summer program in Jamaica, with 120 volunteers...I loved the volunteers, they were great…and with 50 Jamaican staff members. And they all came up and worked in Southeast San Diego. This was when there were some shootings in Southeast San Diego, but we had moved our offices, so I was sharing an office with the principal at Stockton School. And my kids were always involved in these international programs. My son would come down and play baseball with the little kids down there on the weekends, because I’d work on weekends sometimes. And the girls would come down and help with the old-fashioned ditto machine. But what happened that first year was, the woman who came from Washington who was supposed to go to Jamaica with the Peace Corps volunteers, got sick, and my boss said, “Frea, can you learn what her job is and do it?” And then he wanted me to go to Jamaica, and really, at the time I wasn’t much of a traveler. Although I’ll take that back: my family always took us to Washington, D.C. about three times a year to visit relatives. But it was a little scary, the thought of going, so I said I didn’t think I could. My husband was already worried about me going to Southeast San Diego. When I came home and I said, “A really funny thing happened today. My boss asked me to go to Jamaica for a month.” Bless his heart, he’s a good man, and he said, “Honey, you’ll never get a chance like this again, so you go and we will be fine.” And the kids at the time were ages three to ten. He said, “You go.” So a little bit trembling about the thought, I went.

SR: That’s marvelous.
FS: Of course from then on, the next four summers, I was doing Peace Corps training again. There were some great experiences, just working with the Jamaican staff and working with the Peace Corps volunteers was just great. I can remember visiting a little town in Jamaica where the volunteer was working—it was called Wait A Bit. And the family had made us this really nice chicken dinner. They dressed up, and the little boy had aqua colored rubber boots to dress up.

SR: Nice!

FS: So there were a lot of nice experiences with the Peace Corps training programs.

SR: It was a very special time. I mean, there was that whole spirit in the sixties after Kennedy. People really felt they could make a difference.

FS: And they learned, the volunteers benefitted—it wasn’t just them benefitting the country—they benefitted, and it was a really nice time. It was when the Peace Corps had just started accepting older couples and older people. So somebody who’d retired from welding or something would get involved. And so we had some older couples in there.

SR: It sounds like a wonderful beginning in terms of your beginning work in the San Diego State University Research Foundation. In addition to doing your job, were you also learning about the foundation and what else it did at that time, or were you pretty much just focused on what you were doing at the time? It sounds like you had a lot on your plate with the children and everything else.
FS: I was pretty much focused on what I was doing, and especially the big U.S. Agency for International Development Brazilian program. And I went down there for a month and set up an office in Brasilia.

~31:38

SR: Did that happen in the seventies?

FS: Well that program had started in the sixties before I actually came, but they moved their office from Rio to Brasilia in the seventies.

SR: Because I believe I’m recollecting when I interviewed Dr. Brage Golding, talking about going to Brazil.

FS: He did. I was going to say, although I wasn’t very involved, I knew the foundation, basically when the faculty got a grant, that the foundation would handle the money. And that was the job that I didn’t get, which I was so glad afterwards. But it’s an important job, though—very. But Brage Golding, the way I did know what was happening on campus was when we had all these events that I would have to do the logistics for, Brage Golding and the other campus officials would always attend, and they were very supportive. And in fact, when Brage first got his job—he would never remember this, but I do because I was over at the campus Commons, having lunch, and this man walked up to me and said, “I saw your picture in Brazil.” And apparently in the office in Brazil, they had my picture. So I thought that was really friendly of the new president to do that.

SR: That’s very nice.
FS: So that was nice. And he had always been supportive. But as far as the various things that the foundation was doing, it was pretty much really doing just the business part of the grants at that time.

~33:22

SR: Uh-huh. I’d like you to tell me about the genesis of the San Diego State University Research Foundation a little bit, and then about its mission. And then within that context, please describe as you went on from your initial job, the next jobs and how it all worked.

FS: I’d love to. Well, the foundation was formed in 1943, a long time ago. It actually, I think, first started getting a few little grants in the 1960s. It’s an auxiliary organization within the California State University System. Its mission is to serve the university, to serve San Diego State University. It’s a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) corporation, and the foundation has been able to serve the university in ways that supplement and enhance what the university’s able to do. And so the traditional activities at the beginning were to, I think, mainly manage some small grants. In the early sixties, they started getting some Peace Corps training programs, and so then they started managing more grants. The foundation was very small. I understand there were maybe three people in the office to begin with, before I came. But in the early sixties, when they got some Peace Corps training grants, and then in the sixties the university got its first joint doctoral program in chemistry, and that led to more grants.

When I got there in ’69 for the International Projects Center, I remember there were about six million dollars of grants, but of that, between two and three
million were grants for the International Projects Center. So they weren’t mostly faculty research grants. However, as the joint doctoral program started, that led to more faculty grants. My dad had mentioned that it became more important to publish. (SR: Absolutely.) So when that started, then of course there ended up being more grants. So to begin with, it was managing grants. Then I think they bought some property for the university—just a little bit of property. Then there ended up being some fee-for-service special programs where faculty would do workshops, or they’d be given a little money, so any kind of extra money that came into the university, then the foundation would manage that money. And so the foundation handled those special programs.

By 1975, I ended up being invited to become a full-time staff member of the foundation. Before, I was partly soft money and a little bit foundation money. So at that point I established the Proposal Development Office, where we provided a lot more help. Faculty in the sciences generally know who’s going to fund them, but there were faculty all over the campus in different disciplines that we started finding funding opportunities for and encouraging them to apply. I was able to borrow part time of the secretary of the general manager, and I started publishing a newsletter, and finding grant opportunities, and going to Washington and checking with people.

SR: That’s terrific, because I am aware, and I think I really notice this, that beginning with Brage Golding, he was a scientist, and Thomas Day was a scientist, and so much happened in the scientific realm, that it sounds very marvelous that there was something else going on.
FS: And that really has contributed to the university’s research growth. Brage Golding brought in Jim Cobble, a chemist, a scientist, and Jim became graduate dean and later on vice-president of research. Brage had named Jim Cobble to be the vice-president of the foundation, and I think Jim’s huge contribution was putting together so many joint doctoral programs. I think there were fifteen or so when he left, and all of those have contributed a lot to the research reputation of the university.

SR: Right.

FS: So Brage brought Jim. So back to what the foundation does, as that happened, as we added the function of helping faculty to get grants, and speaking for them in Washington sometimes, depending. Again, the scientists could take care of their funding—they had their own connections. But we found a lot of opportunities, and we also were able to develop some big major programs ourselves, where an individual faculty member wouldn’t necessarily do it, but we could bring together faculty members and people from other organizations around the country, and in some cases around the world, and put together some major programs, and then help manage those.

SR: Exciting!

FS: Yeah, that was really an exciting thing. And this is backtracking a little bit, but one of the things about me is I always love matchmaking. And so when I was a little girl, when we visited my family, my relatives in Washington, D.C., I was six, and I made friends with a little eight-year-old girl, and then I made friends
with another little eight-year-old girl, and they didn’t know each other. So I put them together, and they loved each other, and they went off and left the six-year-old alone. But I had this really nice feeling that I had put them together.

~40:29

SR: That’s very nice.

FS: So when I was offered this job to do the proposal development, start that function, I thought, “Wonderful! I can do this matchmaking, and get paid to do it!”

SR: That’s lovely.

FS: So that was fun.

SR: That’s a great skill, to see what could work together.

FS: Yeah. It doesn’t always work, but a lot of times it does. But the foundation also, as the programs grew, like the first year that the proposal development office started, we went from what had been a steady state around six million dollars in grants and contracts, to ten million. So it really worked to put that extra support into that function. But then we needed to have more space—there wasn’t space on campus for these projects. So the foundation, in a fairly big way, got into buying up properties that the projects could be housed in. And in fact, I had mentioned Bill Erickson as being in charge of the foundation. (SR: Yes.) When I was first there, there were maybe enough people to fit in one room. And he called us all into one room for a meeting. He was great. He just always, his thing was to remind us that we’re here to serve the university, “Always keep that in mind.” So that kind of was imprinted on my mind, and I’ve always done that, so I always felt that way.
After Bill Erickson left, Bob Benshoff, who had been our CFO, was
general manager for a little bit. And then he appointed me to be associate general
manager. He and Davene Gibson, who was a big part of the foundation, was the
special assistant, and later an associate general manager—one of several. They
were the ones who decided first that there be a proposal development function;
and then Bob decided that I should be the associate general manager. And so that
was a very nice thing. Then when Bob decided he’d rather do the financial thing
and not be the general manager, Harry Albers was selected. I think you’re going
to interview him.

~43:05

SR: That’s what I heard. He’s next.

FS: Great. Well, he was a terrific boss, so he was my boss, and he was very
instrumental in helping to—he got me more support for my job, which was really
good, and very encouraging. But he also was quite active in getting more
property. When he found there was an opportunity to get the Alvarado Medical
Center, he worked really hard to get that. And all of this getting the property was
in connection with trying to help the university so when the university needed to
expand, there would be a place for them to go. So a big function of the
foundation became obtaining property on behalf of the university.

SR: At that time, did you have any contact with, or are there other foundations in
some of the other state colleges that became universities? I’m just wondering if
there was communication among....
FS: Oh yes, the CSU system, I think there were foundations on all of the campuses—they were called auxiliaries. And there are other auxiliary organizations on the CSU campuses too. Associated Students is considered as an auxiliary, and Aztec Shops is an auxiliary, and then there are fund-raising foundations too. And the Campanile Foundation is one for SDSU. But we had annual meetings of the auxiliaries. And then there are other campuses around the country that have foundations. It’s not necessarily a common thing, but we had meetings of directors of foundations around the country.

~45:11

SR: I was wondering about that.

FS: So I was a member of that: University Connected Research Foundations.

SR: Yeah, because I noticed when I was reading your resume, that you were involved outside of this context.

FS: Yeah, very much. In terms of other organizations, we were always collecting information, or sharing information. The SDSU Research Foundation was by far the largest in the CSU system. So people used to come down and ask, “What are you doing?”

SR: That’s great.

FS: So yes, there were. I was talking about the property, and Harry Albers encouraging that. And I want to say that Steve Bloom was an associate general manager for property development. As the foundation grew, we added associate general managers. Steve Bloom was very instrumental in making all of this work with the property. He was in charge of that—also in charge of grants and
contracts administration for a while, until that was handed to me too. I did want to mention Steve.

And in terms of what the foundation does, we also provide money and support to the university, to help, like, for example, project directors get money back, based on some formula for money that they turn in. And then that helps them to develop—you know, they have the seed money to develop new projects. And we bought research equipment for the campus, and gave the money for other buildings, and just basically provided support. Fortunately, we’ve been able to do that.

After Harry Albers become general manager, Bob Benshoff then became the CFO and managed the money very well. Davene Gibson was there at the foundation before I was, and she was the special assistant to Bill Erickson, but she really was the heart and soul and made things happen for the foundation—ended up associate general manager for Harry. So those are some key people at the foundation: Harry, Bob, Davene, and Steve Bloom.

And then the other thing that we did, and I think this may have started under Harry, I’m not positive, but KPBS came under management of the foundation. We had always handled all their money, but they then came under foundation management. So that was a real interesting thing.

SR: Did you get involved at all in dealing with them?

FS: Oh yes, right. Well I didn’t until I became the CEO, and then I was. We really had a long-term team since the late seventies (some of us earlier) working for the foundation: Harry Albers, Bob Benshoff, Davene Gibson, Steve Bloom and me.
Since I’m being interviewed because of John or Jack Adams and Jane, I can say a little bit about that.

~48:37

SR: I would like that, yes.

FS: I have to call him Jack, because I first knew him as Jack, as a colleague of my father’s and someone who attended my wedding.

SR: Well, you solved the mystery. As I said, I read it in your dad’s oral history—he kept referring to Jack Adams. And I thought, “Is that the same person?”

FS: Well Jack and Jane didn’t have children. I think they lived probably pretty modestly. I don’t know, it’s not my business. But when he was older, he wanted the foundation to manage his funds, and it was getting harder for him to get to the bank and all of that. So he came and he had about a million dollars that he wanted the foundation to manage, and so Bob Benshoff said sure. Jack Adams said he wanted to leave it to the foundation for good purposes afterwards, and he wanted it to be things that would help faculty and students in the arts and humanities. And so Bob managed it for about a year, and we knew that it was going to be earning interest. Then we wanted to know what to do with it, so I suggested that, “Well, why not let Jack Adams have some fun with his money?” Because we had collected some interest on it, I think we had $50,000 or something more of interest. “Why don’t we see what he’d like to do?” And so we solicited little mini-grant proposals. And we had faculty and students that submitted mini-grant proposals for no more than $5,000, and some of them were
less. And the first year I took the proposals to Jack’s house, and he just had so much fun reading them. Trish Moulton from campus development joined us.

SR: That’s great!

FS: And so he picked some. He might have picked all of them the first year. Our only requirement then was that after the people got the grants, all I wanted—it’s not like a formal report or anything—I just wanted them to write a letter to Jack telling what they’d done. And so we had some wonderful letters from students and faculty. And we did that for two years. And Jack had a great sense of humor. He had a twinkle in his eye always, and a great sense of humor. And he was sharp as a tack right up until he died. So then the second year, before he died, in a gentle way Bob and I thought of a way to say, “What would you like to happen when you die?” We didn’t put it that way, but he was very much into that. He said, “Well, I’ve got my six favorites.” And one of his six favorites was this project, (SR: How wonderful!) because he had always wanted a history of the university, and he loved this.

One time he came into the office, when he was able to get around better, and he told me, “Frea, there’s a new librarian who doesn’t like books!” (laughter) I’ve forgotten who the librarian was. I think it was at the time that they were introducing computers and things.

~52:23

SR: Which is similar to your dad’s comments.

FS: Yes, right. Dad liked the card catalog.

SR: The early nineties, yeah.
FS: Jack Adams was a very nice man, and he loved this project, so it’s really nice.

SR: Well I’m happy to be sharing as part of it, to help this to happen. And it’s nice to learn about him, because I was wondering who are… And what about Jane?

FS: I never met Jane. She wasn’t alive. Although, since he was a friend of my dad’s, for my first marriage, I know that he was there, and maybe his wife was, but I didn’t know her. She collected buttons and postcards. I think he loved her very much.

It was a special treat to be given some money, because mostly my job was finding money we could apply for, and then maybe going and talking to people in Washington or wherever about the project, or meeting with collaborators, or that type of thing, and asking for money. But here Jack Adams showed up with a million dollars.

~53:39

SR: That’s a great model. Has that been emulated by other professors since?

FS: Well, now there’s the Campanile Foundation that handles gifts. By the time I left, I’m not aware of anything else from professors. However, there was the June Burnett Institute for Children, Youth and Families. I must say my friends Jack and June, because June Burnett left us a million dollars. We didn’t have to ask, it just turned out in her will she had a million dollars, a bequest to San Diego State University. And it was based on an experience that she had had with a man named Mel Murphy, who was a professor at San Diego State at the time, and she wanted to do something that would be helpful to children, youth, and families, and make their life a little better. So when that million dollars came, my boss
Harry said, “Frea, can you figure out what to do with this?” And I thought, “Oh, good!” At the time, I was in Washington, D.C. for some other purposes, and I wanted to see if I could get a little more money, because I wanted to make the Burnett bequest an endowment. I didn’t want to just advertise for the million dollars to get spent. And I knew that $50,000 a year…at that time, interest was like five percent—it’s not right now…wouldn’t be enough to fund an active institute. Anyway, I was talking to a man, one of the officials in Washington, Department of Health and Human Services. It was back when they wanted—I think Reagan was in.

~55:31

SR: In the early eighties?

FS: Yeah, this was. They wanted to have some public-private partnerships.

SR: I totally understand that. I wrote grants during that time.

FS: Oh, so you know, yeah. So after I finished my other business with the Washington official, I said, “By the way, I’ve got $50,000 that we’d really like to partner with, to get an important social service program going. We’re forming this institute”—I made the name up—“so is there something that you would like to do with us?” He said, “Well, you decide what it is you’d like to do, and we’ll write up an RFP for it.” So they had to publicize it, but we wrote up an RFP.

SR: This was in Health and Human Services?

FS: Yeah. It had to do with homeless and runaway youth. Well, when I started looking around, I knew that for the institute I had to get board members, and I had
to find out what was an issue. So it turned out I talked to, I think, Bill Kolender, and homeless runaway youth was an issue.

Concerning forming the board, I talked with several people, and I got a couple community members, and our SDSU Vice-President Al Johnson, and then for sciences and education, I asked for the deans to name two faculty members. Then I had to find Mel Murphy, because Mel Murphy was the one she had mentioned. So I found Mel Murphy up in Northern California, and he, along with the others, was on the original board.

Concerning funding, what ended up happening was we got about $400,000 from Health and Human Services and we coordinated with a couple of other communities, and it was enough for a large program. Health and Human Services officials agreed to pay for me to hire a director for the institute—because I had made myself the acting director to start, because we didn’t have money to hire anyone. And I got this wonderful man, John Wedemeyer, who then became the director of the institute, and he eventually expanded the board, and we applied for all kinds of projects. That institute ended after John died and I retired. The university decided they would like to use that money for an endowed chair, so that’s what they’re doing now. But over the period from the mid-eighties until close to 2005 or so, the June Burnett Institute for Children, Youth and Families brought in over $40 million of grants.

~58:40

SR: That’s marvelous.
FS: And it worked with local groups, it had a National Parent Center, and it had a Choice Program, working with Judge Jim Milliken to help kids that are on probation. There were some wonderful stories. We used to have events, kids that were on probation and their parents. The project staff served as junior probation officers in this project, and they would go make sure the kids went to school, and they’d visit the families, and save the Probation Department money too.

SR: What a wonderful role for a university!

FS: It was really great.

SR: Well, you know, you talk about the mission of the foundation, and I know there’s so much conflict, I’m aware, on the East Coast: some of the universities are criticized for not doing things like this.

~59:38

FS: Oh really? I think that’s one of the things that San Diego State University does really well. They’ve really done outreach. I was all over the country, and the world, making collaborations with others. And the faculty was so talented—anytime I’d look for somebody with some kind of expertise, I’d find ‘em! I’d be amazed at the things that they’d do.

SR: Well it sounds, as you said, you’re a good matchmaker too, so you probably were tuned in.

FS: For some. As I say, there are plenty of faculty that know exactly what they’re going to do, and they don’t need that help. They need more the help of managing the project.

SR: Well as you said, it was sciences, that whole … hard science.
FS: What I really enjoyed seeing was how…. When I first started, it was only the College of Education, the College of Sciences faculty—they were the ones that had the grants. And now, it’s almost every college.

SR: What a wonderful accomplishment! That’s great.

FS: Just to see the university grow like that.

SR: It’s clear that you innovated and nurtured.

FS: I used to call myself “the mom of the Jim Burnett Institute,” when I talked to the new folks.

SR: That counts for a lot. I think that’s a great skill.

FS: One of our other times, we had our million dollars that we managed to do things with, and there was the Institute for Children, Youth, and Families; there’s June and Jack, and then we had Fred. And Fred left some money to promote world peace. It wasn’t families, it wasn’t humanities, it was only world peace. So the executor of his estate came in to see—I guess he went to UCSD and he only had $100,000, and they kind of said, “Eh, I don’t know.” And they came to see Harry, and Harry said, “We’ll take it!” And then there was a man named Bob Ontell, a faculty member, and Harry got him involved. He said, “Well, let’s have an institute! We’ll have the Fred Hansen Institute for World Peace.” And so with that $100,000, we checked around the world. I wasn’t so involved at the very beginning of this. Bob Ontell, I think, went to Israel and Egypt and found there was an agreement to cooperate on agriculture, so that opened the door.

~01:02:34

SR: I remember hearing about this.
FS: Oh, good! Well, what happened was….

SR: What years was this, do you recall?

FS: Yeah, it was around—the Camp David agreements were ’78, I think, but then it was around ’80 or ’81 that we brought scientists from Israel, from Egypt, and from the U.S. Agency for International Development, and brought them to San Diego to see if we could put a cooperative program together. And then a couple of experts, U.S. scientists came also. So here was a group of around eight or so, and Harry had worked with Bob Ontell to put this one together. It turned out that right when they came—I’ve forgotten what happened—but Harry did ask me to come and sit with them—and good ol’ English major [me]—write a proposal, depending on what they wanted to do. So I went and I wrote the first Cooperative Arid Lands Agriculture Proposal. It wasn’t all that scientific. And it was so much fun meeting with them when they were doing the budget, because of course we didn’t have any money yet, but we were putting together a ten-million-dollar budget. And the Egyptians and the Israelis really didn’t know each other that well, so we weren’t sure what to expect. Instead of it being the Egyptians all wanted this much money, and the Israelis wanted this much money, it was more, okay, the salt-tolerant-crops group, the American and the Israeli and the Egyptian, that trio, they were fighting for their money. And so we had, I think, three or four different topics, but they all got together and fought for their money. And I had to kind of negotiate to make sure it all worked out.

~01:04:51

SR: That’s great, though. That must have been fascinating.
FS: It was fascinating. And then what really was fascinating was we did get five
million dollars that year. Over the next twenty years, we got a lot of money, and
we also got to do a national agriculture training program for Egypt, which was
twenty-some-million dollars, and I got to go over there and negotiate that. That
was really fascinating. But over twenty years, we had a steering committee.

SR: Were you working closely with Dr. Day at that time, or with someone he
appointed? How did that work?

FS: Let’s see…. Dr. Day would always be there if we needed him for an event or
something, but I don’t remember that he ever went over there—I don’t think so.
We had trips, our management team and the steering committee, we had trips. I
know a lot about plasticulture and various agricultural topics—we visited Spain
one time, the meeting was in Spain. And we ended up adding Morocco to the
group, which was nice. Right before the program ended, we were ready to add
the Palestinian Authority to the group. It was really interesting, sometimes
there’d be little crises where things weren’t going that well between Egypt and
Israel, and we had to figure out what to do. President Weber went over there, and
even before President Weber came on board as president, Shimon Peres in Israel
had noticed our program. He knew what we were doing, because the government
authorities in both countries knew. And so we met with him in his office, and he
decided to have an institute for world peace, and he named President Weber, at
the time he did it, to be on the board. I don’t know, President Weber must have
talked about this.

~01:07:07
SR: Yeah, he did.

FS: Because when Harry decided to take a—before he resigned, it was the end of December, he called me in and said that he was going to take some time off, and so I would need to go on this trip with President Weber and a couple of congressmen and do the tour of the projects in Egypt and Israel.

SR: That’s exciting.

FS: And I’d gotten to know all the people involved in the program over the years. And Al Johnson was on the steering committee too, so he helped. So I really worked with some great people.

SR: Also, it seems like as you developed, as you went along, you also mentored others, and you published. Talk about that a little bit, because I think, from what I understand, you were guiding others too.

~01:08:20

FS: Well, I had staff that were interested in doing a little more; I feel really good about things that I gave them to learn overnight, or when they wanted to; but then I did workshops and spoke on panels.

SR: And published.

FS: And published, yeah, the book. That was an interesting thing. I’d been invited to do a workshop in Los Angeles and was driving home, bumper-to-bumper and thinking about it, because they had just asked me to give them a written report of everything I’d said during the eight hours, and I thought, “Well, I think I could write a book and be first into the market.” And so I did, I sent a query letter to four publishers. I was a little worried that the first publisher, Plenum…. They
had published one book about grants, and I thought, well, this was a different book, but maybe they would give my idea to their first author. But instead, they called and said, “How soon can you have it ready?” And I didn’t even bother with the others. But I was getting my MBA at the time, at night.

SR: And you did that at San Diego State.

FS: At San Diego State, yeah. And I was doing that, so I thought a couple of my classes, I could just offer to write a chapter, for my paper, and that worked out. And then I had a colleague, Gene Stein, who was very much a part of the foundation and worked in the development office with me, and I asked if he’d like to co-author the book. I had my outline for the workshop, and I said, “Shall we take turns writing chapters? We’ll pick which chapters.” And that worked out really well. Then it turned out once the book was published, the woman—Virginia White was the woman who had written the book that I thought maybe the publishers would give her the idea. Well, she decided to resign as editor of the grants magazine, the Journal of Sponsored Research and Other Programs, so then they asked Gene and me to. So we co-edited that for ten years.

~01:10:39

SR: Did you have to travel anywhere to meetings for that?

FS: For that we met with the publisher in New York, and we’ve met with them a couple of times in Washington, D.C. when we were there anyway. But it was a nice thing, because it gave us—I’ve talked to lots of different people, inviting them to write articles, so we could keep up on the latest things happening in our field. I felt really good, we had one author, I asked if he would write a humor
column—he thought of the title—“Grins in the Grants Office,” because you don’t want to be too serious about all of this. So that was an interesting thing.

SR: Yeah. And certainly helpful to others, it sounds like. So tell me more about your work in these different countries.

FS: Oh, I’ve been so blessed. There were times, like when I first got involved in the Egyptian-Israeli project, especially the very beginning, where I sensed that there was some concern about me, a woman, writing the proposal, being part of the steering committee, being part of the team. I think I was lucky, because since this project was blessed by the ministry in Egypt, I was accepted. But there was some worry, and a couple of comments about I looked different from the other participants. I think, in fact, when we were first putting the proposal together, somebody mentioned that all the men were in black suits, and I was the only woman involved, and they made some comment about I looked different, I said, “Yeah, I was wearing a purple blouse.” But over the years, I think I have been lucky because even when I first got involved in the proposal development and in some of the national organizations, mostly men that were involved. I actually did my MBA thesis on career planning for women in grants and contracts, and really looked at that.

~01:13:15

SR: I think that’s very important, and I think that as we began to discuss, it’s changed so much over the years. I mean, we had Betty Friedan hopping up in between. It’s certainly different now than it was back then.
FS: Oh, it’s very different now. I think you might still find that there are more, say, male heads of foundations, or at the national meetings more men that are deans or vice-presidents of research. I mean, it’s way different now, much more female involvement now than there was then. Sometimes there’s an advantage to being a woman. I think one of my fun experiences in Egypt was going to visit, at the time, the prime minister. He had been minister of Agriculture, but because I had worked with him in helping to plan the program, when I went to visit him with my Egyptian colleague, we had a very nice visit, and then he clapped his hands and seven people came in, and they said, “We want you to go to the Museum of Art.” I walked there, and I didn’t know what to expect. They clapped their hands again, and people walked in with seven different sculptures that had been made at the museum, and I was to pick one. And so I have this wonderful sculpture of a worker carrying a water bag. So in a way, you do get listened to. I don’t know that that always happens, and it probably wouldn’t have happened if I hadn’t had the support of the top people. But it was an experience!

~01:15:18

SR: It sounds like a wonderful experience. Do you recall, as you were having these experiences, sharing them with your daughters and your family?

FS: Oh yes, I think we talked about that. My daughters, I think, and my son—all of them—my whole family was very supportive, and I think they enjoyed hearing about the experiences, and also they got to participate in a number of them when it involved people from other cultures. I had mentioned going down to the Peace Corps office and some of the Arid Land meetings one of my daughters was able
to attend and listen to the talks about plasticulture or whatever it was. Certainly when the Brazilians and Jamaicans were here, we would invite them to our house and they would tell stories to the kids about what they were doing—that’s when the kids were younger.

SR: That’s really marvelous. Tell me about other highlights that come to mind.

FS: Well one of them is the Defense Conversion Center. We were able to obtain big grants to help people who had lost their defense jobs. We were able to retrain them. In that case, it was a little different from the regular grants because we did get appropriations. We worked with congressional representatives and were able to get the appropriations. There was such a need for the retraining of people, and it was a nice project too, because it involved faculty from a number of different disciplines on campus for the retraining efforts. It went on for quite a while.

We’ve trained literally hundreds of people who had lost their jobs, to get new jobs that were well-paying jobs. And that led to some additional—in fact, there’s still some programs going on now that were kind of spinoffs of the Defense Conversion Center. So it was different in the sense that we did get appropriations and worked with our congressional representatives.

~01:17:51

SR: That’s marvelous. As all of this is going on, and it’s very exciting, were there particular challenges or obstacles that you might want to discuss—or not?

FS: I have this memory that looks ahead to the good things. And I’m sure there must have been some obstacles along the way. (pause) This is a really hard question.
SR: Actually, it sounds like, from what you’ve described, that you had a really wonderful team approach there.

FS: We did.

SR: That’s helpful.

FS: We did. And all of these things weren’t easy—they took a lot of work. And people don’t always agree about everything either. But in terms of thinking of something really specific that was a problem…. I mean, the kind of obstacles might be, for example, in the Arid Lands project, when things weren’t going so well between Egypt and Israel, we maybe had to postpone a meeting or make it someplace else—that kind of an obstacle.

SR: It sounds like you had a really good team in the foundation, and also pretty supportive presidents of the university.

~01:19:36

FS: We had a lot of support. I should mention that the Defense Conversion Center, one of the key people, a part of the team on that, was Tim Hushen. And also a key part of the team on Arid Lands was Bonnie Stewart. And so we were really fortunate to have good, dedicated people. But that couldn’t stop the outside things, like maybe a grant that we thought we were going to get, we didn’t get—somebody else got it, and we put a lot of work into it—that kind of thing. And we had always budget concerns. Even though we were growing, we were trying so hard to get money back to the university that sometimes it stretched our staff, and then people might say, well, “We didn’t get quite the service we wanted.” But mostly I’d say the faculty was very supportive. And then new people would come
in, new administrators on campus, and a lot of times they were from universities where there wasn’t any foundation, and so the first question was, “Why is there a foundation? Why can’t the university do this?” But in all the cases I can think of, once they understood, they really liked the fact of the foundation, and were very supportive. So I think those were good things.

SR: Those are good things. Well then you became a CEO of the foundation. Tell me about that.

FS: Well, I was asked to become the interim CEO when Harry retired, and so I said yes, and I continued to do my other job and the interim job. And then about six months later, I was asked to become acting, because Harry had decided that he had had his time off, and he was going to go on to do other things. And so I was then acting for another year, and still doing my other job. But then when they advertised the job, I thought, well, I had enjoyed both the CEO and I enjoyed being the associate general manager in charge of proposal development, and in charge of tech transfer, and grants and contracts administration, and special programs. So it was a little hard decision, should I apply or not? But I thought, “Well, if I apply, I have a great team, and that gives me even more chance to look ahead and see what I can contribute to the future of the foundation.” It’s a new challenge, and I’ve had new challenges all along the way, so I thought, “I’ll apply.” I think someone told me, “Frea, you might be too nice,” (laughs) “but please apply anyway.” And so I thought, “Well, okay, I’m going to apply. And if it’s me, I know I can do a good job. And if it’s not me, then I’ll help whoever gets it.” I did get the job.
One of the first things, I really cared a lot about the faculty and their grants, and managing their grants, giving the best service we could to them. And I knew that there were a couple of things I wanted to do right away, or get started. One was, we had wonderful faculty in the biosciences, and they wanted a building. We had never done a building on campus, but that’s where it really needed to be. We’d never really done that. Again, working with Steve Bloom, who was in charge of the property thing, we worked with the university. I felt really good about we got the Bioscience Center building done, and I’ve been back for the dedication—the building was finished, and Darlene Shiley contributed to it, and we’ve had other contributors. We borrowed the money to do it, and so I felt really good about that.

And another area that I wanted to do was a marine lab, a coastal waters lab. And so we cooperated with the Geological Survey, and they had a facility down near the airport, and we built a marine lab right next to their facility, and our faculty is cooperating with them. Those were a couple things that I definitely wanted to do. And we were able to get more money back to the faculty to help them with their seed money on their grants. I think those were a couple of highlights during the time I was CEO. At one point, we got the grants up to $150 million for SDSU, for faculty, and a lot of that was faculty grants. In the earlier days, there had been some of these big major foundation-generated projects, but we were able to do that. So those were really good things. And during this period while I was CEO, the university got named number one small research university in the country. And then also, even better in a way, is we got
classified as a doctoral research university with high research activity and productivity, which is really an honor. So I was really, really pleased with that. Those were some of the things I enjoyed while I was CEO.

We did a lot of—it was sort of a period of change, too, with the foundation becoming even closer to the university than it had been in the past. I served on President Weber’s cabinet. Jim Cobble retired, and I had been working closely with him, and Tom Scott came in as vice-president of research. He had come, again, from a place where there wasn’t a foundation, but he quickly realized that there are advantages of the foundation. And I think he really helped in providing funds to the university, and being really involved, very closely involved with the university. So those were some key things.

~01:27:29

SR: You were there through 2006?

FS: Until 2006, right.

SR: Wow, that’s 1969 to 2006. So clearly you helped it to grow and you nurtured it.

FS: I did my small part, but when you think of all the good people there, and the support that they did give over the years, I was fortunate to be able to work with them. And I just lucked-into that job. I had mentioned earlier about the carpet and drapes, and clearly, after two years, I decided the kids were in school and I didn’t need the carpet and drapes anymore, but it was a good thing.

One of the other big projects that was going on—a very big project—was the redevelopment project surrounding campus. And that had started in, I think, the early nineties with Tom Day and Harry Albers. And the foundation by that
point had already bought quite a bit of the property surrounding campus—not all of it. And plans were being made. Because of the economy at some point in the nineties, we had to pull back and not do too much. And then a little later in the nineties, before Harry left, it was going pretty well. And even when I became CEO, it was going pretty well. We were very close to being able to—we had the financing, and we were very close to being able to do this project, which would have been putting shops and student housing and mixed use into the area. You know, as you come up the hill to college, what it looks like. And it was going to make that a really thriving, fun place—a movie theater that the arrangement was it would be used for classrooms when it wasn’t movies—just a lot of really nice things. And so I guess one of the disappointments I had as CEO was the project ended up not being able to go forward. It’s left now with the university to do what they’re able to do in the future. So I guess my hope for the future is that all of the work that went into getting ready for that, and the properties that were bought by the foundation on behalf of the university, that in the future the redevelopment is going to happen. It may not be exactly the way it was planned, but it would be the same idea, I’m pretty sure. So that was going on while I was CEO too.

~01:30:32

SR: Tell me about your family during all of this time.

FS: Okay. I feel almost too much blessed or something, because the family has always been really supportive. And even after my first husband and I divorced, the family’s been very supportive, and so have he and his partner been very
supportive. My husband, Bill Feeney, has been super-supportive too. And he was a faculty member at San Diego State in the College of Business. He retired about nine years before I did. I think what happened was, I had been CEO for about six years, and I was driving home from work on a Saturday, and I remember the exact time. Somebody had told me that when you’re ready to retire, you’ll know it. I was thinking, “I really feel good about the years I’ve had as CEO, and the years I’ve had before that. My husband’s been very patient with me while he’s been retired.” And we both love to travel, and fortunately he had been able to travel with me on some of these trips. He had traveled to a Peres Institute annual meeting, and I had spoken at a workshop there. I spoke on a panel with another Nobel Peace Prize winner. And then Bill was there when we went to Ramallah for a council meeting—you heard about that (SR: Yeah.)—with seven peace prize winners. Bill was always very supportive, although he did buy me a guitar, because he knew that I played the guitar a little bit earlier in my life with the kids. And he bought me some watercolors in case I was ready to paint, which I’d done some of. And he bought me a red hat in case I wanted to be one of the red hat ladies. He said, “No pressure, but when you’re ready to retire….” So at any rate, he’s very supportive.

In terms of the family, I guess what I would say is—well, even in the family, when I was going to get my MBA, with Frank, my first husband—Frank Sladek—I started my classes at four and I’d get home around seven, and then I’d make dinner. After about a couple of weeks, he said, “I think that you kids can each have a night for dinner. That way it’ll be ready when mom comes home.”
So for several years, they did dinners—even my son learned how to cook, and shared a recipe with a neighbor. The kids, at some point a lot of them were going to San Diego State, and my son Steve was on the baseball team with Tony Gwynn, and he used to bring his bats into my office, and Harry used to tease me about all these kids coming in and out of my office. But I was able to share things with the family, and they were really good about it.

I will say this about San Diego State University: I have seen a lot of changes. I mean, thinking back to when I was a student, and what the campus looked like, and now what the campus looks like. And even the students and the faculty, their dress code is way different!

~01:34:29

SR: I’m aware of that! (laughter)

FS: As a matter of fact, some years ago, even before now, I can remember a faculty member coming in with his proposal, and he was on a skateboard—and it was a skateboard he had designed—from Engineering. So I’ve seen these huge changes in the professionalism and the look and everything. I guess I’ve always really been a part of San Diego State University, and my family—and I’ll end with my family.

My dad was a professor, and he was chosen to be the distinguished professor of the CSU system one of the years before he retired. And then my husband was a faculty member at SDSU. I got a couple of degrees there, and my sister got her degree there. I have my kids, four of them got their degrees there—I have to count!—and a son-in-law. And then right now I’ve got a nephew who
just graduated, another nephew who’s there, and four grandkids who are at San
Diego State, and another niece that’s coming on her way. So I figure it is a great
school, and I just look forward to hearing lots more good things about it in the
future.

SR: Well, clearly you have made great contributions there as well. I’m so glad that I
had this opportunity to speak with you and to share in making this, your oral
history, and thank you so very much.

FS: Oh, you’re welcome!

[END OF INTERVIEW]
In addition to the special colleagues I’ve named in the interview, I’d like to add the names of two long-time executive assistants who contributed mightily to my efforts through their wonderful—efficient, effective, loyal, beyond and above—support.

- Mary Gellner, who supported me for many years while I was associate general manager, and
- Renee Daniels, who supported me while I was CEO.

Besides their outstanding professionalism, with their keen senses of humor they added laughter and fun to my days. I enjoyed working with them immensely.