AFRICAN-AMERICAN ARCHITECTS OF LOS ANGELES:

Norma Merrick Sklarek

Interviewed by Wesley H. Henderson

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

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None.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

PERSONAL HISTORY:

Born: April 15, 1928, New York City.

Education: Barnard College, 1944-45; Bachelor of Architecture, Columbia University, 1950.

Spouse: Dumas Ransom, married 1948, divorced; Ben Fairweather, married c. 1949, divorced; Francis "Harry" Peña, married c. 1960, divorced; Rolf Sklarek, married 1967, deceased 1984; Cornelius Welch, married 1985; two children from the first two marriages.

CAREER HISTORY:

Architect assistant, New York City Department of Public Works, 1950-52.

Architect, Katz, Waisman, Bloominkrantz, Stein, and Weber, New York City, 1953-54.

Architect, Robert Schwartz, New York City, 1954-55.

Architect, Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, New York City, 1955-60.

Director of architecture, Victor Gruen and Associates, Architects and Planners, Los Angeles, 1960-80.

Lecturer, architecture, UCLA, 1972-78.

Vice president, Welton Becket and Associates, Los Angeles, 1980-85.

Partner, Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond, Los Angeles, 1985-89.

Principal, Jerde Partnership, Los Angeles, 1989-92.

AFFILIATIONS:

American Institute of Architects, 1954-present; director, 1966, 1968; vice president, California Council, 1970; chair, education and scholarship committees; College of Fellows, 1980; director, Los Angeles chapter, c. 1975; member, National Judicial Council, 1993--.

Architectural Graphic Standards, technical adviser.

Architectural Record, contributing editor.

California Board of Architectural Examiners, Commissioner.

National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, design exam, master juror.

HONORS AND AWARDS:

College of Fellows, American Institute of Architects, 1980.

Commendation as judge for Golden Nugget Awards, Southwest Builders Conference, 1990.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

Wesley H. Henderson, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program. B.S., Art and Design, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Master of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Ph.D., Architecture, UCLA.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Sklarek's office, Venice, California.

Dates, length of sessions: April 9, 1990 (79 minutes); April 23, 1990 (50); May 14, 1990 (30); June 11, 1990 (50); July 9, 1990 (43); July 23, 1990 (28); August 13, 1990 (40); August 27, 1990 (45).

Total number of recorded hours: 6

Persons present during interview: Sklarek and Henderson.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

This interview is one in a series related to the history of African-American architects in Los Angeles. In preparing for this interview, Henderson held a preinterview meeting with Sklarek and relied on the background research for his UCLA doctoral dissertation, "Two Case Studies of African-American Architects' Careers in Los Angeles, 1890-1945: Paul R. Williams, FAIA, and James H. Garrott, AIA."

The interview is organized chronologically, beginning with Sklarek's childhood, family, and education, and continuing on through her career as an architect in California. Major topics include her work at large architectural firms, her most important projects, her involvement with the American Institute of Architects, and the status of female African-American architects.

EDITING:

Alex Cline, editor, edited the interview. He checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names.

Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Sklarek reviewed the transcript. She verified proper names and made minor corrections and additions.

Cline prepared the biographical summary. Steven J. Novak, editor, prepared the table of contents, interview history, and index.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings of the interview are in the university archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the university. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

APRIL 9, 1990

HENDERSON: We can get started.

SKLAREK: Yes. I was born April 15, 1928, in New York City. Actually, to be more specific, it was in Harlem, uptown Manhattan, which-- Oh, I was born at home rather than in a hospital because it was cheaper that way. [laughter] My parents could not afford a hospital at that time.

HENDERSON: Where was your home? Do you remember the address?

SKLAREK: No. I don't remember the address at all, other than it was in midtown Harlem. We lived in an apartment there. My mother was working, and my father was going to school at Howard University, which is in Washington, D.C.

HENDERSON: Was he commuting back and forth?

SKLAREK: No. He was living-- You know, he had to be there. And she was working. My grandmother [Josephine Willoughby] lived in the house there too.

HENDERSON: Do you mind giving me your parents' names?

SKLAREK: My mother was Amy-- Willoughby was her maiden name, and Merrick was the surname. And my father's name was Walter Merrick.

HENDERSON: And your grandmother was on which side? Paternal?

SKLAREK: No, maternal. My maternal grandmother was Josephine Willoughby, known as Jo. And I never knew either of my paternal grandparents. They had been dead a long time, and the family never spoke much about them. And my maternal grandfather [Hughe Willoughby] had also died, so the only grandparent I knew was Josephine, who took care of me while my mother worked.

My parents had been married eight years and wanted desperately to have children, but I was the only one that they ever had. And even though they couldn't afford it at that time, they didn't want to turn me back, because they wanted so badly to have a child. And my father, his dreams were always to have a son. [laughter] But after I was born, he was just delighted to have a child, and he wouldn't even admit later on that his first preference was for a son.

HENDERSON: Were both your parents native New Yorkers? Where had your parents grown up?

SKLAREK: They had lived in the Caribbean, in Trinidad.

HENDERSON: Both?

SKLAREK: Both. They had been married back there, and they moved to New York. My grandmother moved her whole family to New York. She had had eight sons and two daughters, and she moved them to New York for personal reasons. And within a few months my grandfather died, leaving her alone

with eight boys and two daughters. The boys were-- Well, her children were probably from the ages of eight to twenty-eight at the time that she moved. She had ten children spaced from-- Well, she had her first child when she was sixteen and her last when she was thirty-six. So that was the span of ten children, so they were twenty years apart. And most of us lived in one apartment. Then, later on, we moved to a house in Queens, in Jamaica [New York]. And I remember that house.

HENDERSON: Do you remember its address or its location?

SKLAREK: No, other than it was in Jamaica, Queens. Jamaica, Long Island, it's sometimes called. There were so many children and grandchildren the same age as I in that house that there were fingerprints and dirt marks just at two feet high on all of the walls. [laughter] All of these toddlers learning to walk had their prints all around.

HENDERSON: You were in a house with your uncles, aunts, and cousins?

SKLAREK: And cousins. Six of us were born the same year. [laughter] So I have lots of cousins who are the same age, but no brothers and sisters. But they were almost like brothers and sisters since we lived in the same house because of poverty.

HENDERSON: It sounds like a very nice, together family.

Or one big, happy family.

SKLAREK: Well, we didn't have much money, but I had lots of clothes--many, many dresses--because my mother worked in a factory. She would bring home the scraps of fabric, and she and my grandmother would make me dresses. One time I remember my mother crying because she didn't have money to buy me shoes. And I told her, you know, "Don't cry. I've got lots of clothes. Look at all the dresses that I have. I don't need the shoes." Anyway--

HENDERSON: Well, you said your father was going to Howard. Do you know what degree he got or what his major was or what did he do right after graduation?

SKLAREK: Oh, yes. He got first a bachelor's degree and then a medical degree. He was a physician. And after he graduated, we lived in an apartment on 112th Street in Manhattan, which is just north of Central Park and the beginning of Harlem at that time.

HENDERSON: So you moved back to Harlem from Queens, then?

SKLAREK: Yes, back. My father opened an office around the corner in another rented apartment on Seventh Avenue, Seventh Avenue near 112th Street. This happened to be a large apartment, and we moved in. So the office was in half of the apartment, and we lived in the other half of the apartment.

HENDERSON: Oh, was he a general practitioner?

SKLAREK: He was a general practitioner. He had a great sense of humor and probably a great bedside manner with patients. However, he was not a businessman. [laughter] He was probably the poorest physician in New York City.

HENDERSON: Well, that's a public service, though. [laughter] Now, about this time, I guess, the Depression was happening.

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: And perhaps some of his clients could not pay, as well as him being lenient on collecting.

SKLAREK: That's right. Both. He probably didn't charge them enough. And at that time, there were some very prominent black entertainers who lived in the neighborhood and sometimes would come to him--to his office--or he would visit them, such as Ethyl Waters and Art Tatum, the pianist. And there was a gal pianist who got married to Adam Clayton Powell [Jr.].

HENDERSON: Oh, I can't think of her name. [Hazel Scott] I'll look that up. She married Adam Clayton Powell II.

SKLAREK: I don't know whether he was the second. He was the famous one.

HENDERSON: The minister [Adam Clayton Powell, Sr.]?

SKLAREK: Yes, the minister and the--

HENDERSON: The congressman?

SKLAREK: Congressman.

HENDERSON: I can think of her face.

SKLAREK: Anyway, it was time for me to start going to school, and the schools were not very good. In fact--

HENDERSON: Even in Harlem at that time?

SKLAREK: Even at that time kids were carrying knives to school--maybe not guns, but knives--and this frightened my parents with their one and only child. So they figured the best school was the Catholic school, that the public schools were too dangerous.

HENDERSON: Now, you're not a Catholic yourself, are you?

SKLAREK: Well, I was converted to Catholicism in order to go to the Catholic school, and my cousins were also. Now, some of my cousins-- They did not all continue living with us. They were living separately at that time. Their mothers happened to be Catholics, and they were Catholics. But my cousin Sylvia [Price Carman] and I were Protestant at that time, and we both were converted, rebaptized, in order to go to this Catholic school. So we went there.

HENDERSON: Oh, which one was this?

SKLAREK: Saint Thomas the Apostle, on 117th Street, I believe, near Seventh Avenue. This was our school up to the sixth grade, after which I wanted to go to a public junior high school, which had better facilities.

HENDERSON: This is the public junior high school?

SKLAREK: Yes, the public junior high school. The Catholic school I could have gone to from kindergarten to the eighth grade, but I did not want to remain there through the eighth grade. I wanted to transfer. And the best junior high school was P.S. [Public School] 93, which was not in Harlem, but about one and a half miles south of Harlem, near Amsterdam Avenue.

HENDERSON: Oh, okay. On the West Side.

SKLAREK: On the West Side. In order for me to go to that school, my parents had to give a false address, because we were outside of that district. I remember walking with my father--because we knew nobody in that area--walking up and down one or two streets. He was a very friendly, sociable person who could talk to anyone. [laughter] Meeting somebody on the street, you know, and speaking to them, "Good morning, ma'am," and talking to her. He found somebody whom we did not know before who agreed to let us use her address so that his daughter could go to that school. Then my cousin Sylvia also used, I think, that same address. [laughter] And we went to P.S. 93, which was also called Joan of Arc Junior High School, although it's a public school. I think later on they probably dropped the Joan of Arc, which sounded too religious.

Before I left the school, a new school was built, which was I think coed, the new school. The first P.S. 93

was all girls. So for about one semester or so I was in the new building, which was P.S. 118.

HENDERSON: And this was located next to the old building?

SKLAREK: Yes, in that same area. We used to either take the subway--which was five cents at the time--to school or walk. So, by walking, we could buy two ice-cream cones. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Save that money, eh?

SKLAREK: Yes, so very often we walked. We'd walk through Central Park in order to save the nickel each way. It was just about maybe one and a half miles.

The school was like probably 95 percent white and 5 percent black at that time.

HENDERSON: Nobody was suspicious about where you had come from in terms of living in that neighborhood to go to that school? You were just accepted totally?

SKLAREK: I wouldn't say that I was accepted totally. They never tried to expel us, but they probably were suspicious that we didn't live there, because the few blacks that were in that school were generally the offspring of the janitors and the maids who lived in that area, who resided there.

I used to work very hard in school because I think I just had a very competitive nature. As a child, I was involved with a lot of sports. I had a great deal of energy. I used to ride bicycles and-- We didn't ride a

bicycle to school. That wasn't done. It just wasn't done at that time in Manhattan or New York City.

But I used to feel that these teachers and people, generally--white people, generally--thought of all blacks as being inferior human beings, and that I was going to show them differently. [laughter] That was one of the motivations, I suppose, that I had in school for working hard.

Oh, when I was about thirteen, I guess--twelve or thirteen--I had an appendectomy operation, and I missed school for about a month. I was out of school. When I returned, they were in algebra, and I did not understand anything that was going on with these x's and y's. I just couldn't understand it. I had people try to explain it to me, but it was just totally meaningless. At that time, sixty-five was a passing grade. And we had exams during the course, the semester, and I would get grades like fifteen. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Oh!

SKLAREK: Fifteen and twenty, you see, because I just didn't understand it. And gradually it began to break through, I suppose, and I was getting test grades in the fifties. [laughter] I'd improved.

HENDERSON: It came up. But did anybody specifically help you? Or did you just kind of learn on your own?

SKLAREK: Some people did help me, I do recall. My father didn't know, even though he was a college graduate. He didn't know much algebra, or he couldn't explain it very well. My mother didn't know anything about even arithmetic, much less-- I later learned that. But she didn't understand anything about even arithmetic, much less algebra. She had had what would be the equivalent, I suppose, of an eighth-grade education.

HENDERSON: In Trinidad or here?

SKLAREK: Yes, in Trinidad, in the West Indies. But she was very artistic and had a lot of ideas about things. She was not very vocal, but she loved to prepare for weddings and parties and decorating and sewing and doing very artistic things. She would ask me to draw up and sketch up her ideas, and she was always talked about. She was impressed by the fact that, as a very young child, the first time I was able to save $5--you know, in a piggy bank, that sort of thing--that I went out and bought a book on art and sketching. She was always talking about that. I wouldn't have remembered it except that she talked about it.

HENDERSON: In a way, I'm surprised you didn't become a fashion designer, you know, designing clothes.

SKLAREK: Yeah.

HENDERSON: Your mother's making clothes, and you're

sketching, and you two are collaborating. We'll get to architecture later.

SKLAREK: Yes. I started making my own clothes when I was about eleven, so I always had a lot of clothes. By that time, my grandmother had died. But I used to do the sewing. And if there was a teenage party on Friday, on Thursday-- Or if there was a party on Saturday, say, by Thursday or Friday I would manage to get some fabric from someplace, either from a friend or going out and buying it. And I was fast. I could make a dress fast. They may not have been the best quality inside, but the outside would look beautiful. And my mother would always say, "You could never sew for me," because she would examine it on the inside, and the inside was sloppy. [laughter] But the exterior looked great.

Well, anyway, by the end of that semester in algebra, the teacher said anyone who gets seventy-five on the final examination she's going to pass for the entire term, which was something I had to work on, because, up to that point, my grades had been under sixty-five, which was normally the passing grade. But she said, "If you get seventy-five, I'll pass you for the entire-- Anybody." Because there were others in the class who were in the same predicament that I was. And on that final exam I got a seventy-four, which was the highest I'd ever gotten, and she passed me.

That's how I got through the first semester of algebra.

Well, from there, I was off and running, and I began to understand it, you know, and I was getting higher and higher grades. And at the time of graduation from junior high school, there's a citywide exam that only the best students take to go to Hunter High School.

HENDERSON: Now, is that exam the New York State Regents Exam? Or did regents come later?

SKLAREK: No, that's just New York City. Regents is New York State. Hunter High School was an all girls high school, sort of a magnet school, that only accepted the best students. They had an exam in math and one in English. They figured that if you were good in math and English they could teach you anything else. So I took that exam, and I got the highest grade in math of anyone in New York City. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Goodness!

SKLAREK: They had thrown in some trick questions which were not elementary algebra. They were more advanced algebra. And at first I remember how I was stuck on one problem. I just couldn't-- I had been really doing well, and I had not had any difficulties recently--the algebra difficulties were much, much earlier, the year before--and here I was faced with a problem that really stumped me. But I kept working on it and working on it. And I guess

the other students had never had it, either, this type of a problem, the others who were taking the exam. That problem was worth like ten points. On the entire exam I got ninety-nine, and the closest grade to me was probably ten points lower, you know. [laughter] Because--

HENDERSON: That question made a difference.

SKLAREK: Yes, that one question. And I also got a good grade in English. But after the grades were published, or the school was notified of the grades, I realized how much teachers talk about the students, because teachers I didn't know were stopping me in the hall. "Are you the girl who got that fantastic grade on the Hunter exam?" And as a result of that, also, I--

Oh, all of the teachers were not that pleased about it. I remember my homeroom teacher saying something in a very hostile tone. Her remark, I'll always remember, was, "I see if it hadn't been for math, you never would have gotten into Hunter." And I was too timid at the time to challenge that and to protest that, because there was another girl in our class, in the same homeroom class, who had gotten a much lower grade than I had gotten. You know, she'd gotten a much lower average than I had gotten in English. And so, you know, they average the two together. So had my math grade been the same as the English grade, I still would have gotten into this magnet

school. Her hostile remark showed prejudice and her resentment of the fact that I had even gotten into Hunter, because it was a big achievement, you see.

HENDERSON: Did the other girl get into Hunter?

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: Oh, she did.

SKLAREK: Oh, there were several who had taken the exam from the school, and about four of us, I think, from that school at that time got into Hunter. But the system was that they would average English and math grades together, and if they needed two hundred out of all the five boroughs in New York City, they would start at the top, and when they reached their two hundred, that was the cutoff point, you see. So Hunter had students from Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, the Bronx, all, you know, the best students going to this school, high school.

HENDERSON: Oh, where is Hunter located?

SKLAREK: It's in midtown Manhattan right next to the college, Sixty-seventh Street, on the East Side.

HENDERSON: When you say next to the college, next to--

SKLAREK: Hunter College.

HENDERSON: Oh, okay.

SKLAREK: Now, during the summer, or right after school-- Oh, when I graduated from that junior high school, I received a medal for math at graduation. I always remember

that the parents who were in the audience-- And, of course, the parents were predominantly white, also, the same as the students. When I went up to receive this medal, they kept on applauding, which kind of embarrassed me. [laughter] I was getting so much more applause than anyone else who was receiving any medals. [laughter] I almost stumbled on the stage because it was obvious that they were applauding me much more than other students that-- You know, a few others were receiving medals for other subjects.

HENDERSON: Your parents were there, of course.

SKLAREK: Oh, yes.

HENDERSON: And they were happy to see you getting this medal and getting these prizes?

SKLAREK: Oh, yes. They were very proud. They were extremely proud. And in junior high school, I used to work in the library.

HENDERSON: The school library?

SKLAREK: The school library. So the experiences in junior high school were the first where I had any contacts with other than black people.

And we moved to Brooklyn.

HENDERSON: At the same time that--?

SKLAREK: Right after graduation, yes. We moved to Brooklyn. And I had been accepted to the high school, which was in Manhattan, so I used to take the subway.

Every day I would walk about three quarters of a mile to the subway, take the subway, change trains, and then walk just a few blocks after getting off the subway to school.

HENDERSON: In Brooklyn, what neighborhood did you move to?

SKLAREK: I think it's called Brownsville. I never called it a neighborhood. It's right near to Bedford-Stuyvesant, adjoining it. But it was not officially Bedford-Stuyvesant.

HENDERSON: I think at the Huntington [Library lecture], you had used the name Fort Greene.

SKLAREK: No.

HENDERSON: No, it wasn't Fort Greene?

SKLAREK: No.

HENDERSON: Oh, okay.

SKLAREK: Oh, I lived on Dean Street.

HENDERSON: Dean, oh.

SKLAREK: Dean Street and Brooklyn Avenue.

HENDERSON: Okay.

SKLAREK: Dean Street and Brooklyn Avenue, which is just a few blocks from the children's museum, the Brooklyn Children's Museum.

The first day that I went into high school was traumatic in that I had been given instructions on what subways to use and how to get to school, where to change trains. But I was going alone, and I was just a kid,

twelve or thirteen.

HENDERSON: And your parents had given you these instructions?

SKLAREK: My parents didn't know either. They were new in Brooklyn. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Well, who gave you the instructions?

SKLAREK: We found out from somebody.

HENDERSON: Oh, okay.

SKLAREK: Somebody had given me instructions. [laughter] I got to school fine, and the day went well, but coming home I just could not find the station in which to change trains. I rode that damned train all the way to the end. Couldn't find it. I rode back, and I couldn't find that station. And I was really frustrated. I asked people. They didn't give me a satisfactory reply. So eventually--and it was getting dark, getting late--I got off at a station which was not the same one that I came on. It was a few blocks farther from where I lived, but a different line. And I walked home in tears. The problem, I learned later, was that nobody had told me the name of the station coming back is different from the one going. [laughter]

HENDERSON: I'm surprised at that myself. I thought the station name would apply to both directions. But it was different?

SKLAREK: It was different because there are two different

subway lines. On one line, it's called one name. You know, one was the IRT [Interborough Rapid Transit Company], and the other one was the Independent.

HENDERSON: IRT, IND [Independent Rapid Transit Company], and BMT [Brooklyn Manhattan Transit Company]. [laughter]

SKLAREK: Yeah, IND, I guess it's called. Independent. So the name of the station was different, and that was the problem. Because I had looked at the subway maps, and I just couldn't figure it out. When I got home and I was so terribly frustrated and in tears, my parents said, "Well, you know, you don't have to go to that school. You can go to a local school in Brooklyn," because they didn't like to see me so upset. But I don't give up easily. [laughter] So even though they said it's okay to go to a school like all the other teenagers around, a local school, I just said no. And I learned how to use the subways.

HENDERSON: Were there any teachers at your high school that you particularly remember? Any mentors or inspirers?

SKLAREK: No. I don't remember the teachers. At this high school, everyone in the school took an academic, college preparatory track. There were no slow students, so we had the best teachers. It was probably the best high school in all of the United States, you know, academically, even though it was a public school. It was mandatory to take Latin--

HENDERSON: Goodness!

SKLAREK: --and one other foreign language. I had taken Latin even in junior high school, so I took French. I would have preferred Spanish, but at that time Spanish was not offered. Later on it was, but at that time it wasn't. It was a choice between French and German, so I opted for French.

And I did not like subjects that I had to memorize things in. I found it to be a chore. That's why I liked math. I didn't have to memorize anything. I could work it out. I liked physics, and I like chemistry to a point. I never took biology because it seemed to me you'd have to memorize a lot of things in biology.

I didn't really like foreign languages because it required too much memorization. Then, one time, my Latin teacher-- I thought of myself as not being too swift in foreign languages, especially Latin. My Latin teacher met me someplace and introduced me to someone else as "Norma Merrick, one of my best Latin students." I was dumbfounded, because I certainly didn't consider myself as that. But I used to study hard on the subways. I'd be studying the Latin because I felt it was necessary. Besides, I had never failed an exam ever since that first experience with algebra in junior high school. I have never in my life failed any exam since then, including

architectural licensing exams. [laughter]

HENDERSON: You went through that on the first try.

SKLAREK: Yes.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

APRIL 9, 1990

HENDERSON: We can get started again. We're talking about high school.

SKLAREK: Yes, in high school there were two other girls in my neighborhood who were good friends whom I met who also went to Hunter High School. Later on I got to know them. Of course, I didn't know them initially. We would travel to school together. We would take our ice skates with us over our shoulders in the subway, and people would look at-- You know, because after school we'd go skating. We thought it was comical that people looked at us and thought, "Their poor parents think they're going to school, and there they're going skating." [laughter]

Oh, I was telling you about the math and about different teachers. This one teacher in Latin considered me one of her best students. That surprised me, because I didn't consider myself as that. But then there was another teacher who I had for math who one day came in boasting to the class that she was at a conference of math teachers and that two problems were presented to them which were trick, very difficult problems and that she was the only one of all those math teachers who could solve those problems. She was boasting about this and put the problem up on the board, "if any of you want to try this." I took it home,

and I worked the entire weekend. You know, one and then the other, and I couldn't get it. Back to the first. And eventually, you know, it dawned. I got the first one, which I felt was an achievement, and then I went back to the second problem and eventually worked it out. I put it down step by step very neatly, and I brought it in to her on the Monday. And she was angry.

HENDERSON: My!

SKLAREK: I don't know why she was angry, if she thought that somebody else had done it for me--but I didn't know anyone else who could have done it for me--or because I, as a student, or as a black, had worked out these problems which the math teachers could not.

HENDERSON: And she was white?

SKLAREK: Oh, all of my teachers were.

HENDERSON: Oh, by the way, were all your teachers female even at the female high school?

SKLAREK: Yes. They were all women and all white. Yes, I never had a male student [classmate] until I went to Columbia University, at the school of architecture. But instead of having some sense of pride that here one of her students was able to do this, she was actually angry.

HENDERSON: And your reaction to that? Well, I guess at that time, you just didn't have a reaction? Or you just kind of withdrew?

SKLAREK: No, I sensed that she was annoyed, angered. I sensed her annoyance and that she-- I suppose there were other teachers who didn't like me. And in offices, also, later on, there were people who-- But I always figured I'm not in a popularity contest. [laughter] I can't help it. There's nothing much I can do about it, except at times I've considered it a challenge to turn people around. That was later on, when I became more mature. To take somebody who doesn't like me and see how I can manipulate it so that it will be different.

HENDERSON: Well, let me ask this conceptual question. In studies of black people that I've been looking at, psychologists have said that a key developmental point for a black child in the United States is the discovery, at some point, that they are black and that there is a white society, and usually it's some sort of a confrontational incident. Did that ever occur for you? Or did your realization of racial awareness happen independent of something confrontational or an incident with a particular person? And usually that happens around twelve or thirteen.

SKLAREK: I always had, as far as I can remember, a sense of identity, of being black. And I have, as I mentioned before, a lot of cousins, because my mother had eight brothers and one sister. Some of them had as many as five

children, so they're all my first cousins. Many of them are much fairer in complexion than I, and some of them had a similar sense of identity as I, but others did not. Any opportunity that some of my relatives had, they would pass, so to say.

HENDERSON: Really? Oh, okay.

SKLAREK: And I have never ever in my life felt that I wanted to pass or claim that I was anything other than black or Negro. I remember once, as a child, going into a Woolworth's store with one of my cousins. Some white adults stopped her and were talking to her.

Afterwards I asked her, "What did they want to know? What were they talking to you about?"

She said, "They were asking me what nationality I was and if I was Hawaiian."

I said, "Well, what did you tell them?"

She said she told them, "Yes, I am Hawaiian." [laughter]

And I was angry. I said to her, "Look, if anybody asks you what I am, you tell them that I'm Negro. You can tell them whatever you want about yourself." [laughter]

HENDERSON: At what age was this? How old were you at that time?

SKLAREK: Probably about ten. [laughter]

HENDERSON: But, in the United States, it seems that if

someone had one drop of black blood, they were considered black. I figured if that's what the country or the society and the laws have identified me, you know, I accept it. I have always felt that way. Many Americans don't seem to realize that people who have lighter complexions are probably at least 50 percent white and 50 percent--

HENDERSON: And probably passing.

SKLAREK: And probably more. But in the United States, you know, as long as you have one great, great, great grandparent who is black, you're considered black. So that's fine with me.

HENDERSON: In New York, there is a West Indian culture, or there are plenty of West Indians who have maintained contacts with Trinidad and the home islands. Did your family maintain those contacts? Or do you think they became Americanized very quickly?

SKLAREK: They became Americanized. They had a lot of West Indian friends, that's true, but they became Americanized. For one thing, they didn't have the money to be traveling back and forth and keeping up contacts. And the entire family had emigrated.

HENDERSON: Oh, okay.

SKLAREK: You know, my grandmother with all of her ten kids.

HENDERSON: So there was nobody back in Trinidad to keep

contact with?

SKLAREK: No.

HENDERSON: So you never felt any conflict between identifying yourself as Negro, black American, versus West Indian, Trinidadian, or see any separation on that count. You were always just a regular person. I don't know what I meant by "regular person." You didn't see yourself as a foreigner?

SKLAREK: No. No, I didn't. The people from the West Indies have generally done better as far as education goes, better in school and better professionally--earning money and so on--than many others who were born and raised in Harlem. And, to me, that is because people who come from other countries, whether it's the West Indies or Europe or Asia or even South America (except for Mexico), people who come from abroad, from other countries, are not the lowest level economically or educationally. They have more ambition and more drive and more money, or they never could have gotten here in the first place, you know. Now, it's different with many who come across the border from Mexico, because they don't have to save up thousands of dollars to fly here or to come by boat. They can just walk across the border sometimes. But those who do come from other countries generally have a lot more education, drive, and ambition than the average person in that country.

HENDERSON: In their country.

SKLAREK: So they're going to do better. You know, they've got more ambition, more drive, they're more disciplined, probably, in order to have acquired the financial means to emigrate here.

HENDERSON: Well, let me ask another conceptual question. Growing up in Harlem during your junior high school years, were you aware of Harlem's reputation as a neighborhood, that is in terms of being a literary center or a cultural center for black America? Or did that awareness come much later? I guess what I'm trying to ask is, what was the atmosphere like on the streets of Harlem? Was it just like any other neighborhood? Or did it see itself as special?

SKLAREK: I never thought about that. I was keenly aware of the discrimination and the problems in Harlem, because, when I was a child, a black or Negro couldn't get a job even in Harlem, other than running an elevator or as a janitor. They were excluded from the white-collar jobs and even blue-collar jobs that were around. And the unions excluded them. You know, the construction unions, they couldn't get on to be an apprentice. They were not welcomed in-- Except in lower--

HENDERSON: Here's maybe what I mean by seeing itself as a special neighborhood. There's Striver's Row in Harlem, and you had mentioned a little earlier that there were movie

stars or musicians, jazz players, who would come to your father's doctor's office.

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: So, in a sense, if you were black at that time and lived in New York City and you had some money, you would want to live in Harlem versus living anywhere else.

SKLAREK: I don't know that they wanted to live in Harlem. It's just that in other places they were not welcome. They were excluded from living anywhere else. They were prevented, you know, and that's why they were living in Harlem.

HENDERSON: So it wasn't so much a choice. It was that options were limited and--

SKLAREK: Yes. Around--

HENDERSON: See, what I'm asking is that--

SKLAREK: During World War II, for example, my parents-- Well, we had never been on vacation anywhere, because vacations were-- You know, you just couldn't travel to resorts or to hotels. You were not welcome. So they decided to buy a house. They learned of an area out in Long Island where they could buy a house. Several of my uncles got together, and they figured that if they pooled their finances they could afford to buy this house. And the house was going just for taxes, because the former owners hadn't paid taxes for years. So the government was

selling it just for taxes. The house was in Remsenburg, Long Island. And it was on three-quarters of an acre: a house and a two-car garage. It had apple trees. It had nine bedrooms and three bathrooms.

HENDERSON: That's a big house.

SKLAREK: And it was being sold just for the taxes, which was such a small amount, but, still, it took the five uncles to buy this. And then the neighbors just saw my family looking at the house and had a meeting, a town meeting that same night, to prevent us from buying the house. They put pressure on the real estate agent not to sell us this house, that they, the townspeople, would buy it instead. And my family threatened the agent that this was against the law and what they were going to do, suing him, you know, the trouble that he could get into. He wanted to return the down payment, but my family refused to take back the down payment. And maybe he knew that he could lose his real estate license or get into trouble. Besides, he wanted the commission. [laughter]

So the deal went through. And then the neighbors, or the townspeople, said that we couldn't get any electricity unless we had a recommendation from somebody in the town. And if you can't get electricity there, you can't get water, because the water comes from a well which is pumped by electricity. They also said you couldn't get fire

insurance, which was sort of a veiled threat that they were going to burn down the house. Anyway, my family went ahead and bought the house, and the threats did not materialize. Maybe that was on the books a long time ago about not being able to get electricity, you know, to get the power, unless there was a recommendation, but that did not turn out to be so. And they never burned down the house, and we were able to get the fire insurance.

HENDERSON: It sounds like you had some pleasant memories playing there in the summers.

SKLAREK: Oh, yes. We used to go there every summer, and our friends would come up. We were just about a half mile from a bay. We could walk down the road to the end of the road and go swimming in the bay and dig for clams in the bay. And we had a little second-hand, used rowboat which I painted. I used to do a lot of painting. There was no TV in those days, and I was the official painter. They would have me decorate things, so I would put some, well, wall paintings, murals, onto the boat. I'd paint all the furniture in the house different colors, all the doors and designs on the walls. I would also sketch pictures of my cousins and aunts and uncles, so there were sketches of anyone who would sit still for me. [laughter]

HENDERSON: This is interesting. Is that house still standing? Have you visited there at any time lately?

SKLAREK: They sold it. Yeah, I'm sure it's still standing, but eventually it was sold. After I moved out to California and after my parents and my Aunt Ruby and Uncle Louis died, they eventually sold the house. The younger people didn't have as much interest in it. But we had many, many happy days up there. One town was two miles away; that was Speonk. That was the railroad station there. Speonk was about two miles in one direction. And four miles in the other direction was Westhampton.

Oh, the neighbor who called the meeting, the town meeting, to prevent us from buying the house, he moved, because he said that his son had been fighting in the war, and he wouldn't want his son to come back and find out all he had been fighting for was to be living next door to niggers. So he moved. And the new owners, of course, came there when we were there, when we were already living there, so--

HENDERSON: They didn't mind.

SKLAREK: They didn't mind. And we had this rowboat down in the bay, and there was an inlet from the bay that people parked their boats in because it was calm there. They docked the boats. So we put our boat down there too. And there would be a note in the boat: "This is private property. Take your boat out." So my father and one of my uncles went to offer the owner to pay rent like everybody

else, you know, and, "I do not want your money. Just take your boat out of there." There was no place else to put the boat, so we left the boat there. And every year there would be this note in the boat: "This is private property. Take your boat out of here." So we didn't know whether they would try to sink the boat or what, you know. But, anyway, the boat didn't get sunk. It remained there. So after about three years there was a note in the boat: "The rent is $15 a season." [laughter]

HENDERSON: I'm surprised he didn't want the back rent. [laughter]

SKLAREK: So, anyway, this is what I grew up with. We used to have a lot of fun down there. In fact, I taught all of my cousins how to swim, because I went to camp one summer when I was-- That's before the house in Remsenburg. When I was still in junior high school, I guess, I went to camp. And in two weeks I learned to swim in camp. I went to camp two years. The next season, I was studying lifesaving. And so, from those lessons that I had there, I taught all of my cousins out at Remsenburg how to swim.

HENDERSON: Did you ever become a lifeguard? Did you get employment?

SKLAREK: Not employment, but one time, when I was in high school, my cousin was going to the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association], which had a swimming pool, and he

said that Thursday night or some night was girls' night. You know, that girls could go to this Y also, and if I wanted to go-- So, of course, I went with him, and the director there at the Y was so elated to find a girl who could swim that he drafted me. [laughter] He called up my parents to [ask] if I could be in a water show he was having. And I may not have been the best swimmer, but I was the best girl swimmer! [laughter] The only one! So I was the star of the show, and I played like Esther Williams. You're swimming in time to music. And he taught us. So I used to be there swimming. He taught us all the different formations. We'd go in and so on for this great performance we're going to have.

HENDERSON: Oh, was this the Harlem Y or the Brooklyn Y?

SKLAREK: No, this was in Brooklyn. I had to take the subway to get to it. We used to train, be practicing for this big show, like three days a week.

HENDERSON: Goodness. That's a lot of time.

SKLAREK: And then, on Saturdays-- Or maybe it was Friday. I don't remember which day. But one day we were not practicing, but he taught those who wanted to learn lifesaving, senior lifesaving, and at the end of so many classes that you had with this lifesaving, there was a test, the Red Cross test. And that test-- See, I was the only girl with this test. And there were parts where you

had to jump in the water fully clothed. So they had the same pants, trousers, for everyone, because they were wet, and a shirt and so on, and shoes, incidentally. But you'd jump in the water, and you had to remove all of this while you were in the water. This is in the deep end of the pool, you see. So you had to remove all of this without drowning yourself. And how to handle this? So I did all of that. And you had to swim out and carry someone a certain distance, so many feet. You had to swim back towing this person. And there were three or four different ways of doing this. But if someone grabs you from the front, how you get loose, you know? And if they grab you from the back, how to get loose?

So I did the entire thing, and then I was exhausted. And the final part of the exam, you had to pull someone out of the pool, throw them across your shoulder, and walk ten or fifteen feet. So every time that-- They got the lightest person, the lightest guy that was there, you know, flung him over my shoulders, and my knees would collapse every time. I couldn't walk fifteen feet. I think even if I wasn't tired, I couldn't have carried him. I didn't have the physical strength. Well, I couldn't carry him. My knees would collapse. I said, "I can't do it." And they said, "But you have to. You've done everything else. This test is three hours long. You've done everything else.

You have to do this." He'd go on my shoulder, my knees would buckle. So, eventually, I did it. I don't know how I did it. [laughter] I think somebody must have been helping from the back, from behind. [tape recorder off]

HENDERSON: So you passed the test somehow.

SKLAREK: I passed the test, and I got a senior lifesaving certificate. And then, when I was in college-- I went to Barnard College, because I had visited the school of architecture at Columbia University, and the dean said, "You'd have a much better chance of getting in if you go to Barnard College," which is the women's college of Columbia.

HENDERSON: That's an undergraduate--what?--liberal arts college that's in--?

SKLAREK: Yes, the liberal arts college of Columbia. Oh, with the regents exams-- I had gotten exceptionally high grades on all of these regents exams, especially in math and physics, and I suppose they were impressed with that.

HENDERSON: So the officials at Columbia knew that you had gotten a high score on the regents exam? The announcements are published?

SKLAREK: Oh, yes. They know that. The regents exams are given throughout the entire state. So even if one school is more liberal with their grading than another school, the regents exam is the great equalizer. But I had done very well. I always enjoyed the challenge, I suppose, and felt

that it was a challenge, and really worked hard. I figured that I could learn whatever I wanted to learn if I put the time into it. I think that that experience, that early experience with the algebra-- You know, "I'm not giving up." Because I think that a lot of people, both male and female, in that position, where you don't understand anything, would just give up. And by not giving up but sticking with it, I found that I would even surpass others.

HENDERSON: We're nearing the end of the time that I wanted to spend today, but I want to cover one issue. And that is, when did you first decide that you wanted to get into architecture? You've just told me that you went to--

SKLAREK: My parents had just this one child. And I used to do everything with my father that, perhaps, if I had had a brother, I would not have been doing with him: carpentry and housepainting, because they couldn't afford, really, to pay professionals to do these chores. So I used to get involved with him. And he wanted me to have a profession, preferably medicine, which was what he was in, but I did not like being around sick people. [laughter] Medicine did not appeal to me at the time. He said, "Well, what about law?" Well, I was extremely shy and could not envision myself as a lawyer. And they said, "What about architecture?" I didn't know anything about architecture, but it seemed like architecture embodied some of my

interests, the art as well as the technical.

HENDERSON: The math.

SKLAREK: The math and--

HENDERSON: Now, they were saying this in like a family conference? This was a particular conversation you remember where this was discussed?

SKLAREK: I don't remember any particular conversation. It just was an ongoing conversation. So I thought, "Well, I'll apply to the school of architecture. If I get in, I'll study architecture." If not, I was going to become a physicist. So I went to Barnard for one year, which was the minimum at that time, and then I applied to the school of architecture and was admitted. And the die was cast. I studied architecture.

HENDERSON: Now, you've said--I'm thinking of the talk that you gave at the Huntington--that you knew that black women, middle-class women, would need to work.

SKLAREK: Oh, yes.

HENDERSON: And so you had no illusions about being supported. You always felt that you were going to be an independent person.

SKLAREK: I always knew from the time I was a young child that I would have to have some sort of a career and that I would be working and that I was going to be independent. I was not going to have anybody else to support me, or I

would have to contribute to family support.

HENDERSON: The way you put it at the Huntington was that this was known for not only you but for everyone in your circle. All your young friends at that time knew this was--

SKLAREK: We never discussed it. I don't remember ever discussing it, but I think that they were aware of that.

HENDERSON: These were expectations?

SKLAREK: And the girlfriends that I had, most of them became schoolteachers because that was the only role model that we had. We didn't have any role models of architects. And most of them-- Well, if you went to Hunter High School, you automatically got into any free college. You were trained for it. You could go to Hunter College. Any college or university in New York that was free. And some of those were absolutely free. You didn't even have to pay for books or registration. Or sometimes there was like a $10 charge for registration.

HENDERSON: Yeah, which is nominal.

SKLAREK: Yes. So 99 percent of the girls who graduated from Hunter High School went on to college, to a four-year college, that is. And it was expected of us all. Now, all of my friends did not go to Hunter High School, but they also did well in the high schools that they went to. They went on to Brooklyn College or Hunter College, mostly Brooklyn or Hunter, and some to NYU [New York University]

or City College [of New York]. You know, NYU, at the time, was a private school, but City College was a four-year college that specialized in mathematics and science.

HENDERSON: I didn't know that.

SKLAREK: Yeah, City College in New York. In fact, at an office that I worked in here, the head of the mechanical engineering department and the head of the electrical engineering department were both graduates of New York City College.

HENDERSON: Oh, by the way, have you sort of kept in contact with some of your friends from like high school or college?

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: Is there an extensive network of the New York people out here in California?

SKLAREK: I don't know too many out here. I know many of them who have remained in New York or somewhere around New York, in that vicinity.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

APRIL 23, 1990

HENDERSON: There were some questions I wanted to ask you on tape that were not definitively answered for the first time, and one of those was your grandmother's name.

SKLAREK: My grandmother's name was Jo, Josephine Willoughby.

HENDERSON: And you had a cousin named Sylvia. What was her full--?

SKLAREK: Yes, Sylvia Price.

HENDERSON: Sylvia Price.

SKLAREK: And now it's Sylvia Carman.

HENDERSON: Carman?

SKLAREK: She's been married to the same husband all these years, unlike me. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Okay, I've got another question. On the tape you told me that you had no fellow male students until you were at Columbia [University]. Did you have only female teachers up until that time? Or did you have a mix of male and female?

SKLAREK: I don't recall ever having had a male teacher in elementary, junior, or [Hunter] High School, or even when I went to Barnard College, which is the women's college of Columbia.

But I went up and saw the dean of the school of

architecture to talk to him about my possibly entering the school. This was when I was still in high school, a senior in high school. The dean recommended that I go to Barnard College for one year, which was the minimum requirement at that time for entrance into the school of architecture. So instead of going to Hunter College, which was free, I went to Barnard College, which one had to pay tuition at. It was a hardship, but since the dean had recommended that, I went to Barnard for one year and then applied to and got accepted into the school of architecture.

HENDERSON: Oh, a question: Did the regents exam entail any money, like a scholarship, that you were getting? Or it just indicated a score on exams and indicated intelligence? It didn't imply any scholarship?

SKLAREK: I did not get any scholarship. The subjects that I had elected to take in high school were not the subjects that one could get-- Well, there were certain subjects that I had which I did well on, but not high enough on to gain a scholarship, because all of these grades were averaged together. I was never spectacular in foreign languages, and I had to take foreign languages. I had taken physics and chemistry, and the dean at the school was obviously impressed by the grades that I got in physics and chemistry. But, still, it was much easier for other students to get closer to a hundred in foreign languages.

[laughter] But even though, numerically, my grades in technical subjects may not have been as high, they were impressive to people who knew. There were also college entrance exams, in which I had done extremely well. And there I elected to take the exam in physics, and I suppose that was impressive to the schools.

HENDERSON: Okay. Well, a question: You really intended to go to a college in New York City? You didn't ever think about going outside New York City and going away someplace?

SKLAREK: I had friends and relatives who had been to Howard University, and I had thought about going there, but my parents thought that I should go to Columbia instead.

HENDERSON: Even Columbia over Hunter?

SKLAREK: Oh, yes, because Columbia had the school of architecture.

HENDERSON: So your parents were really the ones who wanted you to go into architecture? They were very supportive in that way.

SKLAREK: Oh, they wanted me to have a career, and they wanted me to have a career other than teaching, which was about the only role model that I had around, you know. I'd been exposed to teachers. So I applied to the school of architecture and was accepted. I found it extremely difficult because I was-- First of all, I was in competition with fellow students who were all much older

and more mature.

HENDERSON: Oh, really?

SKLAREK: Yes, I was the youngest in the class.

HENDERSON: They didn't have many undergraduates in there? Or you were just the youngest?

SKLAREK: At that time, the architectural program was a five-year architectural degree, one year of which was liberal arts. This was the minimum. And you received a bachelor of architecture degree. Columbia had it that the first year was taken in the college, so my first year was really at Barnard College. And then the other four years were concentrated in architecture at the school of architecture. Now, most of my classmates had been veterans [of World War II]. They had not just one year of college, but many had bachelor's degrees. And others had worked in architecture and had on-the-job training and experience. Because of the G.I. Bill, they decided to go back to school, because they could under the G.I. Bill. Some of them even had master's degrees, but since the G.I. Bill was there, they would take advantage of it. The master's may have been in liberal arts, so they decided to go back to the school of architecture. So they were studying architecture for the first time. And--

HENDERSON: But they were still older and more mature?

SKLAREK: Oh, much more mature. And some had worked in

offices. I had never even seen a T square and a triangle.

HENDERSON: What? [laughter] How did you learn basic drafting?

SKLAREK: I had to learn it there. That's why I came from behind again. But the first time I had seen a T square, a triangle, or an architectural scale was when I was in the school of architecture.

There were other students who had had one or two years of architectural education in another college, and then their studies were interrupted by the war and they had to serve in the military. When they came out, the dean figured that whatever they learned in one or two years in another school was nothing, and he put them all back into the freshman class. [laughter] So this was my competition. You know, those who had already studied architecture for one or two years, some of them, but in another school, which the dean figured could not have been as good as Columbia, so he assigned them all to the freshman class, and these were my competition.

HENDERSON: Were there any other women there, period?

SKLAREK: Yes, there were. Initially, there were ten women.

HENDERSON: Out of how many total students in that year?

SKLAREK: They only had space for about twenty-five. And

these soldiers were coming back all during the year. They didn't come back initially, you know, at the beginning of the year, or else the dean might not have accepted so many women. This was a record--ten. And after the first year, he was admitting all of these men back into the freshman class, so he got rid of eight students. No, he got rid of ten, and eight of them were women.

HENDERSON: Oh, ouch. When you say "got rid of," you mean he just forced them out? Sort of squeezed them out?

SKLAREK: Yes, they were forced out in that there was a rule at the school, two F's and you're out. And they could not do that to-- I don't have proof of it, but I know that these were arranged. They could not do it to an A student, but to someone who was a little more borderline, who was a C, they would arrange for that individual to get an F in order for these people, students, to get two F's and be dropped.

So ten students were dropped at the end of the first year, and eight of the ten were women. [laughter]

Anyway, I found architecture to be really tough. I had not had any exposure, or not enough exposure, to buildings and design and-- And even though I lived in New York, in Brooklyn, which is part of New York City, I still did not have the type of exposure. I was extremely naive. And I never got any F's.

HENDERSON: Thank goodness. [laughter] Well, let me ask this question: You're encountering an architectural scale, and you've got all these concepts to learn. Did you seek help from anyone? Or you just decided to conquer it yourself, and you read books and you studied and--?

SKLAREK: I studied very hard and, with studying, managed to scrape through. Not to get A's, but to scrape through and to survive. For example, we had, in a structural course, a number of problems that were integral calculus problems, and I had never studied integral calculus. I'd only been through differential calculus. When I got to Barnard, my high school grades and the regents exams in mathematics were quite impressive, and so I was exempted from any college algebra or college trig[onometry], and I went straight into differential calculus. But I had never studied integral calculus. And here I've got problems involving integral and it's completely different language. I didn't understand how to do these problems. I would go to other students in the class who were good for them to explain it to me, but I still didn't understand. There was someone on the outside whom the family knew who helped me. And I had a rough time. I still didn't understand. I'd go from one student to another for help. I'd be embarrassed to go back to the same student because I still didn't understand. Well, I guess, gradually it began

to dawn on me what this was all about, and by the end of the semester I was explaining how to work these problems to other students. So it did dawn on me, you know. And later on, because I was doing problems in integral calculus, I understood that, or could do that better than the differential, which I'd forgotten. [laughter] Personally, I think that all of that calculus was totally unnecessary.

HENDERSON: You mean you don't use any of it now?

SKLAREK: No. And the only thing it helped me in was to attack a problem either in mathematics or in life that I couldn't solve and learn not to give up but to keep trying until you get it.

HENDERSON: You seem to love challenges.

SKLAREK: It's not that I love it. [laughter] It was painful when it was occurring, but, anyway--

HENDERSON: Oh, one other question before you go on: Did you live in the dormitories while you were at Columbia? Or did you commute from home?

SKLAREK: No, I lived at home and took the subways to school every day, both at Barnard and at the school of architecture. No, my parents couldn't afford for me to be living in dorms. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Which leads to another question--

SKLAREK: The subway was five cents or a dime, either a nickel or a dime at that time. [laughter]

HENDERSON: It's hard for you to remember that prices have changed so much, because I'm thinking that subway fares now are $1.25 or something like that.

SKLAREK: It was all my parents could do just to pay the tuition every year.

HENDERSON: Oh, well, what I was leading to was, what kind of socialization did you have with the students at Columbia? You know, going to parties or, I don't know, whatever social life there might have been? Did you join into that? How did you fit into that?

SKLAREK: I suppose, compared to students today, we had very little. There was maybe one school party a year, and I would attend and I'd have fun. I'd enjoy it. But another thing that happened when we had homework, say homework in those calculus problems, if there were ten problems, I might do five or six, and I'd be so dead tired and sleepy that I'd fall asleep. And all that I would turn in would be the five or six. Whereas other students who lived in the dorms would have three or four students together, and each one would take two or three problems and then they'd copy from each other. [laughter] So they would turn in ten, not that each had done ten. Sometimes all I'd get through would be seven or eight, so the most I could get on the homework was 70 or 80 percent, whereas they were sharing and just doing a fourth of the homework

each. But the work that I turned in was always my own. [laughter]

HENDERSON: That's honorable.

SKLAREK: Anyway, even though I managed to pass everything that first year, I spent the entire summer deliberating whether to quit because it was so tough. I found it extremely difficult, staying up studying till after midnight and all that sort of thing and doing homework, and I couldn't make up my mind whether to quit. My parents said, you know, it's up to me if I decided to drop out and go back to Barnard or some other college. Anyway, I couldn't make up my mind and so-- [laughter]

One thing that bothered me is I felt that if I left architecture, I would have wasted a year, and time was very important to me. I couldn't see myself having wasted a year. Because the subjects that I'd studied at the school of architecture would not have been transferable; I wouldn't have gotten credit for them back in liberal arts. So I decided to stay with it. [laughter] And I guess it got easier.

But during those years, in addition to going to school five days, Monday through Friday, almost every Saturday there was what they called the Saturday sketch problem. This problem was issued at eight in the morning or eight thirty, something like that, and collected at six.

HENDERSON: That evening?

SKLAREK: Yes. It was not mandatory that one attend every Saturday, but you had to pass a certain number of these in order to pass the year, in order to pass at the end of the four-year period there.

HENDERSON: This is similar to the beaux arts system?

SKLAREK: I suppose it is. I knew that in order to have all the requirements for graduation, I would need to pass a certain number of these, so it meant, for me, going to school just about every Saturday. And once or twice a year, it was a longer sketch. But instead of collecting it at six, it was collected at ten P.M. So it was--

HENDERSON: And these were design problems?

SKLAREK: Design problems. Anyway, that's how I spent most of the Saturdays. I don't know how I got so much social life in, but I managed that, also. And I got married before--

HENDERSON: You got married while in college?

SKLAREK: While in school.

HENDERSON: I didn't know that. Was this to [Rolf] Sklarek?

SKLAREK: No.

HENDERSON: No. Oh! [laughter] Excuse me. His name is optional.

SKLAREK: I got married twice while I was in college.

[laughter]

HENDERSON: Twice! Well, I'll tell you why I'm saying this is optional. A feminist criticized biographies or studies of women by saying that the biographers concentrate too much on their social life or married life or their spouses, etc., and they wouldn't ask those questions of men. So, you know, I don't know how to handle that at this point. If you want to skip that and go on, or if you feel that's integral to your career and to your education, then you can tell me whatever you want to tell me. But if you want to skip that, that's fine.

SKLAREK: I don't need to skip it. I'll just briefly say that I was married twice while I was in school because, in those days, it was the only acceptable way to have sex. People did not live together. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Oh, okay. [laughter]

SKLAREK: And I'm sure that, had I been a youngster in these days, like today, it would have been different. My first husband was a student also. Not in architecture. He was studying law. But we didn't get along even before we were married, much less after. [laughter]

HENDERSON: And his name?

SKLAREK: His name was Dumas Ransom. And my older son was born while I was still in school. Anyway--

HENDERSON: This is a lot of juggling that you're doing,

school and married and son.

SKLAREK: I was always able to juggle time. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Your son's name?

SKLAREK: My son's name is Gregory Ransom. He's now a mechanical contractor in New York City. His father and I did not get along, and we separated and divorced. And I got married again to Ben [Benjamin] Fairweather.

HENDERSON: Oh, by the way, what year were you in school? What year did you start Columbia? Or Barnard?

SKLAREK: Nineteen forty-five. And I graduated in 1950 with a bachelor of architecture. No, I guess I started in 1944 at Barnard. And--

HENDERSON: Oh, let me ask this question. This is maybe probing a little too much. Getting a divorce was not a hangup for your family? That was not a problem for your family--getting a divorce?

SKLAREK: No.

HENDERSON: That caused no conflict with your parents?

SKLAREK: No. They realized that I was better off being divorced than with him. He had been a student studying law, and he was extremely argumentative and thought that he knew more about every subject than anyone else. And I always figured because he did not have an open mind--you know, he thought he knew it all--he had a hard time learning. What had happened was he flunked out of school,

and then he became so unlivable, unbearable, because of the male ego, that the only way the marriage could have been saved was if I dropped out of school too. And I opted for school rather than the marriage, and I've never regretted it. [laughter] Yes, the male ego is-- And I suppose maybe it's not just the male ego but the particular individual's temperament, personality.

HENDERSON: And your second husband, Ben, was he also a student?

SKLAREK: No. He had graduated and was in the military. He was an officer in the military.

HENDERSON: He graduated from Columbia?

SKLAREK: No, not from Columbia. He had graduated from New York University. It wasn't New York University. I can't think of it. It's a school up in the Bronx. I can't think of the name.

HENDERSON: Fordham [University]?

SKLAREK: Yes, Fordham, Fordham. And, anyway, I survived the university and went to work and--

HENDERSON: When you were approaching graduation, how did you conceive that you were going to find work? Was there any anxiety on your part? Or did other students say, "Here are our plans. What are you going to do?" And how did you approach even graduation? What were your thoughts?

SKLAREK: I was very naive and unknowledgeable about

things. I didn't even think about it. I used to think about the immediate problem, so that the immediate problem was getting through some design problem. The immediate concern was studying architectural history on just the area of architecture that we had that semester. The next semester, I would transfer my thoughts into the new area and forget about everything that came before, push it out of my mind. So I never planned far ahead in the future. It was just what I had to do with the immediate problems.

HENDERSON: Okay. So after you had graduated and you're finding your first job, what did you go through in doing that?

SKLAREK: I went to about twenty different offices.

HENDERSON: And you just went? I mean, you didn't preplan?

SKLAREK: No.

HENDERSON: Oh, I mean, you didn't select any? You just went?

SKLAREK: And it must have been a recessionary period in architecture, because I couldn't find any work. Obviously, that's why I went to twenty different offices.

HENDERSON: All in New York?

SKLAREK: Yes, and Brooklyn. I was very discouraged and depressed over this. Then I got some work in a very small office. He's no longer alive. His name was Sam Glaberson. And then he didn't have enough work and was

having a hard time meeting the payroll.

HENDERSON: And you say he was small. I mean, how many people were there in this office? Three, four?

SKLAREK: Probably five, including himself.

HENDERSON: Goodness. [laughter]

SKLAREK: And then I went and applied to the city of New York and got a job with the Department of Public Works. I worked there until I became pregnant and left to have the baby. That was David Fairweather, my second son. David is now deputy district attorney. He--

HENDERSON: In what city?

SKLAREK: He lives in Santa Barbara, but he works out of the Ventura [County] Courthouse. David showed signs of being very intellectually brilliant from the time he was very young. He started reading everything in sight from the time he was about two, without being taught. And that was a remarkable, astounding difference between him and my first son, who had dyslexia and found it very difficult to learn to read.

In fact, I asked David once, "Does your teacher know you can read?" You know, when he was in the first grade.

He said, "Yes."

And I said, "How does she know?"

He said, "Well, she asked me to read for her."

I said, "What did you read?"

He said, "The newspaper."

HENDERSON: Oh, my goodness! Reading the newspaper in the first grade?

SKLAREK: Yes. He was probably reading all the signs that are in a room, you know, and the teacher was amazed. Has he memorized these things? Or how is he able to call out all of these words? She was curious as to how much he could read. And she had a newspaper there and asked him to read. [laughter]

HENDERSON: And you didn't teach him how to read yourself?

SKLAREK: He used to go to the market with my mother, and he'd say, "What's that?" She'd say, "Carnation milk." And "What's that?" Pretty soon, when we were driving in the car, he would say, "That sign says Stop. That says No Parking. That says Coca-Cola." So he was doing this from the time he was two. I used to read to him, and I'd let him read the simple words, and pretty soon he was reading them all. [laughter]

HENDERSON: The reason I asked the question is that I learned to read by recognizing the alphabet and then went from the alphabet into reading, but it seems like he skipped much of that or went through that stage very quickly.

SKLAREK: Maybe he did. I don't really recall except that the teachers in school--and he went to just public schools--

knew that it didn't make sense to have him read "See Spot run," so they would go to the library and bring him special books, and he would be off by himself reading them.

HENDERSON: Okay. I realize your time is limited, so I'd like to sort of get to the point where you arrived at SOM [Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill], and then we can leave.

SKLAREK: Oh, okay.

HENDERSON: So you'd been working for the public works.

SKLAREK: Yes, Department of Public Works. At first, after I'd had three years of experience, I was preparing to take the licensing exam, and I suspected I was pregnant at the time and that that was no time to take the exam. And it turned out that I was. And that's when I had David. So after David's birth, I decided the following year to take the exam, which I did all in one week and just once, which was impressive to people at the time, because that was kind of unheard of. In fact, when I called the dean at Columbia, he already knew. [laughter]

HENDERSON: My goodness! There's a grapevine here!

SKLAREK: He invited me up to see him, and his comment was that not even Bob [Robert] Schwartz did that. Bob Schwartz was one of the students who managed to get through the school, I guess, with no grade lower than an A-. He was exceptionally good in everything. And he was one who had a lot more education than I had. My competition was really

tough while I was in school because of the much heavier pretraining and education that most of my classmates had.

HENDERSON: Oh, was there anybody in your class or whom you knew at Columbia who went on to become famous, or a big name, or maybe even who you worked with later on out here?

SKLAREK: Well, Bob Schwartz had studied art, had majored in art in his undergraduate days, and he became a famous renderer, architectural renderer. And I worked for him for a few months where I developed tempera rendering techniques. I used to do moonlighting jobs in rendering at that time.

Then Joe Wilkes, Joseph Wilkes, FAIA [Fellow, American Institute of Architects], is now the editor of the new Encylopedia of Architecture and Building Construction. In fact, Joe asked me to write the chapter on women in architecture, which I have written. They just sent me a reprint of that. I'll have to give you a copy of it. And there are probably others, but I've lost track of them.

HENDERSON: Okay.

SKLAREK: After the baby was born and I had taken the licensing exam, I looked for a job again. And I think it was at that point in time that I applied at an office: Katz, Waisman, Bloominkrantz, Stein, and Weber. [laughter] Theirs was a medium-sized firm with five partners and about ten other employees. [laughter] And

when I was interviewed there, they kept questioning me about a certain supervisor whom I'd had when I worked for the city, for the Department of Public Works. I wondered, "Why are they questioning me about this man in such detail?" Because I had worked other places too. I did not work entirely for the city. I'd worked in several other places, smaller offices. And after I was hired, they kept asking me, "Did you get along with this man?" I said, "Sure." "Did he complain about your work?" "He never complained about my work." And so after I was hired, I met a couple of young people from the old office, from the Department of Public Works, and they said, "Where are you working?" I told them. And they were shocked.

HENDERSON: They were so shocked.

SKLAREK: They were shocked, and they said, "Shall we tell her?"

And I said, "Tell me what?"

One was saying, "No, I don't think we ought to tell her."

The other one's saying, "Yes, I think we ought to tell her." [laughter]

And I said, "Tell me what?"

They had overheard this man when he was called for a recommendation. He told the architect that I didn't know anything. I was lazy. That I never did any work. That if I did work, there were mistakes. That I came in late every day, and he gave the worst possible recommendation.

Now, one thing that I've never had a problem with is punctuality. And I knew that he had a pet peeve on punctuality, so I was there early every day. A second thing is that, had he been dissatisfied with my work, he could not have had me fired, but he would have had me transferred to another team. The fact that I worked on his team exclusively for a year and a half, the entire time I worked with the city, showed that I was performing well for him. And I was really stunned, because I could not

understand how I could have been working for someone for a year and a half and not realize that he hated me.

[laughter]

HENDERSON: Goodness.

SKLAREK: And then this architect [Sidney Katz] must have thought, you know, that there was something personal, that nobody could be that bad, as bad as what he was stating, that there was something personal in the diatribe. But I wondered how I could not have realized that my supervisor hated me. I guess I'm not very sensitive.

HENDERSON: Were there other women at the city office?

SKLAREK: There were very few.

HENDERSON: So do you suppose--?

SKLAREK: There were about one or two hundred architectural and engineering people working there in a huge drafting room. There were about four women, and there were about three or four blacks. I think maybe just three blacks who worked there. And--

HENDERSON: There was no indication from this guy that he did not like you at all?

SKLAREK: I was not aware of it. So it made me think, just because someone smiles at you and says good morning every day does not mean that he likes you. The things that he said were totally untrue, also, you know, how he stated these things.

Anyway, I got that job at Katz, Waisman, Bloominkrantz, Stein, and Weber. And I think that--

HENDERSON: If you need to leave, we can stop and I'll pick this up at another time.

SKLAREK: Okay.

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MAY 14, 1990

HENDERSON: We were talking the last time about your working for Katz--

SKLAREK: Katz, Waisman, Bloominkrantz, Stein, and Weber. There was one young man who was at pretty much the same level as I who used to constantly say derogatory things about my work. And I would be furious because it was not true--what he was saying. He would say this whenever one of the bosses was within hearing reach. I couldn't believe that he would be making these false statements about me, especially when I could hear them.

HENDERSON: And he was doing it purposely within your hearing range and the boss's hearing range?

SKLAREK: That's right. I remember one time he was blaming me when something was-- The boss was complaining-- Sidney Katz was complaining about something that was wrong on the drawings, and this guy said, "It's all Norma's fault. She's the one who's responsible for it." And Sidney said to him, "Well, that's impossible because Norma never worked on this drawing." [laughter] And he ended up the conversation in a loud voice so the entire office--which was a small office--could hear, "Well, it's all Norma's fault."

And, at that time, one positive thing from that office

was there was a young woman named Joyce Gildersleeve, and Joyce and I became very good friends. She was at the same level except that she was a lot more sophisticated than I. She's the one who told me, "You've got to change. You just can't stay there mute when somebody is accusing you unjustly." That if a lie is repeated loudly enough and often enough, people will start believing it. That's the hypothesis that Hitler went on.

HENDERSON: And it's effective.

SKLAREK: Yes. So I had to learn to change my personality from being so timid and speak up, so that if somebody accused me unjustly, that I was to blast him in an even louder voice and manner. [laughter] And--

HENDERSON: Oh, by the way, where had Joyce gone to school? Where or what was her background?

SKLAREK: She had graduated from this school in Brooklyn.

HENDERSON: Pratt?

SKLAREK: Pratt. Pratt Institute. And she had graduated the same year that I had from Pratt.

HENDERSON: So she was probably a native New Yorker?

SKLAREK: Yes. And there was one time at that office where we were doing a project in Brooklyn. It was of Erasmus High School in Brooklyn, and we were doing an addition and remodel, renovation, of the school. There were no existing drawings because-- The building department in New York

keeps the plans forever of every job that's filed. That's their system. But around 1906 or something like that, the building department burned down, had a fire.

HENDERSON: Wow.

SKLAREK: And the plans for the school were not in existence anymore, because this school, the original school, was prior to that year. So we were sent to measure up this building so as to make existing drawings.

HENDERSON: Now, Erasmus is a Gothic-style building, isn't it?

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: Yeah, okay. Just checking to make sure I know the right one.

SKLAREK: And the office selected people who lived in Brooklyn to work on that project. So Joyce and I and several others-- There were about four or five of us in all who were assigned to that project. And it was good experience, but we were in the basement. We had an office set up in the basement of the school with no windows, and it was summer. No air-conditioning. [laughter] And it would never have occurred to me to complain. [laughter] Joyce said, "We have air-conditioning back in the office in New York. We should have air-conditioning here too." See? She was very assertive. It would never have occurred to me that this--

HENDERSON: You deserved something--

SKLAREK: Yes, better than this. So they installed air-conditioning in this basement dungeon.

Now, every week, every day, I started having fierce headaches, very severe headaches, which was unusual. I went to the doctor, and I didn't like what the doctor was telling me. "It could be a brain tumor." [laughter] You know, things like that. [laughter] I decided not to go back to that doctor. But he couldn't figure out what was causing these headaches. Aspirin wouldn't help. You know, nothing would relieve these headaches. Then on Saturdays and Sundays I didn't have the headaches, but it was during the week.

Well, eventually we finished measuring up the building and went back to the office in Manhattan, and the headaches stopped. And I figured out that it was because of the people. There were about five of us working there, and two or three of them were smokers, and it was the same foul air being circulated. You know, it might be cooled, but it was this same air. I had never lived in a house with anyone who smoked, and I guess I was allergic to it. And that's what was causing the headaches.

HENDERSON: And the air in the office in Manhattan was well ventilated?

SKLAREK: Yes, it was well ventilated. And since then,

over the years, I've noticed also that if I'm in a place with smokers and the ventilation is poor that I get these severe headaches. In fact, I play a lot of competition bridge, and if I go to a bridge club that has this, what I consider a problem, I come home and take some aspirin before going to bed, because I know that I'm going to wake up in the middle of the night with my head bursting. And also, I don't go back to that bridge club anymore. [laughter] I find a different bridge club. Anyway--

HENDERSON: You've kept up on--

SKLAREK: Oh, yes, I've kept up with Joyce through the years.

HENDERSON: With Joyce.

SKLAREK: Joyce-- Well, when I left New York, Joyce was pregnant. And as soon as she had the first child, which was her only child, she never worked again for the next twenty years or so. Which was kind of unfortunate, I thought. Well, it was unfortunate as far as her career went, because she missed all of those years of experience. And it wasn't until her daughter was in college that she finally went back to work. She was really a brilliant young architect, but that's what happens sometimes. I think it was her husband who wanted her to be home with the child, you know, so she sacrificed her career. And it wasn't because he was wealthy. He was a

schoolteacher. But I've kept up with Joyce. And after she finally did go back to work, she soon got sick and had to stop again because of health reasons.

Anyway--

HENDERSON: Back to the office. [laughter]

SKLAREK: Yes. I left that office--

HENDERSON: This is Katz?

SKLAREK: Katz, Waisman, and went to work for someone who had been a classmate of mine [at Columbia University]. That's Bob Schwartz, Robert Schwartz. He had been a straight-A student with real talent for rendering. And as soon as he finished school, architecture school, he opened his own rendering office. So we used to get plans and elevations from architects from all over the United States and do tempera renderings--an opaque watercolor.

HENDERSON: And he didn't need a license to do that. He could do that immediately, couldn't he?

SKLAREK: Well, he got his license. Actually, Bob was a lot older, or somewhat older, than I, because he had been through World War II. He had also studied art at one of these magnet schools in New York which specializes-- It was the High School for Music and Art. And then later on gotten a degree majoring in art, but he was brilliant in every subject. Then he was in the service in World War II and, because of the G.I. Bill, was one of those who came

back to school and got a degree in architecture. His renderings were far superior and more professional than any of the faculty when we were students, so he immediately opened an office where he was trying to build up an architectural practice, but it was the renderings that kept him afloat.

HENDERSON: Did you contact him? Or he contacted you to go work in his office?

SKLAREK: I contacted him because I'd always been interested in renderings. We did tempera renderings. And Bob had--

Oh, incidentally, I took the licensing exam--I think I might have told you--all in one week.

HENDERSON: Right.

SKLAREK: And passed it all. And when I called Dean Arnaud at the school of architecture to tell him, he already knew. But he said to me in amazement, "Not even Bob Schwartz did that!" [laughter] And I had passed it all. That was quite an achievement in those days. It was unusual that-- Here someone who went through, I guess, his entire higher education, his professional education, with nothing less than an A, you know, who did not pass all of the seven parts of that exam.

HENDERSON: And the exam is tough. It is tough. I've taken it, but it's tough. [laughter] So you yourself were

licensed at the time you were working for Bob Schwartz?

SKLAREK: Yes. And he was licensed, too, of course. Actually, Bob Schwartz had two different types of people working for him. There were those who were trained in art and those like myself--one or two--who were also trained in architecture. And he was trying to build up an architectural practice. Now, those who were trained in art were receiving a far lower salary than any of the architectural people, and they probably did a better job than we did for his purposes.

So my job there came to an end. I only worked there like nine months. And I called up someone--like networking--whom I had met through the AIA [American Institute of Architects].

HENDERSON: Oh, when did you join the AIA? Right after you had gotten licensed? Or before?

SKLAREK: Right after. Immediately after getting licensed. I had met people in architecture who were active, and there was a group that I was with which was--What was it called? The AIA Committee for the Advancement of Negroes in Architecture.

HENDERSON: This is like a forerunner of NOMA [National Organization of Minority Architects] or something, I guess.

SKLAREK: Yes, it was like a forerunner of NOMA.

HENDERSON: I may even get that name sooner or later,

because I may want to do some looking up of what this association was. I may do some research on that.

SKLAREK: I think that it was an AIA committee.

HENDERSON: Local AIA? Or the national?

SKLAREK: Local in New York, local AIA. The people on this committee were mostly either blacks or Jews who were interested in seeing blacks--Negroes--get a fair shake. And they're the ones who encouraged me to join the AIA as soon as I-- I guess that's when I-- As soon as I became licensed, I joined the AIA, so that was in 1954.

HENDERSON: And they obviously knew of you before you joined, because I guess the architectural community there was very small.

SKLAREK: Yes, yes. Isaiah Ehrlick was like the chair of this committee, and I called him to tell him that I was looking for a job again. He's the one who recommended me to go to SOM [Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill] and who to speak to and that he would make a phone call and this sort of thing. And I went up there and got hired right away.

So I worked at SOM, and I decided that my career had to change. I didn't like the way that it was going.

HENDERSON: Well, what were you doing at SOM? Or maybe I'm-- I'll just let you answer that.

SKLAREK: Yeah. When I went to SOM, I decided this. I felt that things were not going the way that I would

like. It was my fault, I decided. Because if it's factors beyond my control--such as being female or being black--you know, I can't change that. But I can change myself, so that I had to take full responsibility. I did not know that this was going to work, but it was the only option. I felt that I had to change myself. Looking around, I did not think that it was entirely because I was female, because Joyce Gildersleeve was female and these things were not happening to her like they were happening to me. And if it's because I'm black, well, you know, I can't change that. So in discussing my career with Joyce, she gave me hints, you know: Always look serious and businesslike and walk fast, you know, even if you're not going anywhere. [laughter] You just don't walk lazily in an office. You've got to have a certain appearance, you see, of being efficient.

HENDERSON: So Joyce is like a mentor.

SKLAREK: Yes, although we were the same age. In fact, she might have been a few months younger than I. But she was.

So I started working at SOM and was assigned tasks which I felt were beneath me. [laughter]

HENDERSON: I know the feeling.

SKLAREK: And I didn't refuse to do them, but I let my supervisor know that I was capable of much more and that I wanted much more. So he started, instead of-- Well, in the

beginning he was assigning me toilet rooms and basements and that sort of thing to draw. And he started giving me more serious and detailed work to do.

HENDERSON: Do you remember any of the projects that you were working on at SOM at that time?

SKLAREK: One in particular I'll always remember. It was a sixty-story building, the Union Carbide Building in Manhattan. And it was easy to remember the cost in those days because $60 million was the cost of the building. A million dollars per floor, which today would probably be ten times that in today's dollars. The project was very complex because, in addition to being such a high-rise building, the basements were over the-- Well, the New York subway ran under the building, and the Long Island Railroad. And the columns coming down could not-- The construction was never to interrupt the operation of the trains.

HENDERSON: So the columns couldn't just go anywhere. They had to fit between the tracks.

SKLAREK: Yes. So the superstructure had columns for what was best for the layout--the office layouts on the upper floors--but when they came down, there had to be transfer beams to take these forces down columns between the tracks. I remember the transfer beams were sometimes ten and twelve feet high, built-up plate girders.

I decided to learn as much about this project as possible quickly, because others had been working on it for months. I don't remember. I don't know how long, but for a long period of time. So I would get the engineering drawings and mechanical and electrical and everything and really go through them so as to learn as much as I could. And, in a very short time, there were men who would be coming over and asking me questions about the project. I was amazed, because they were much older, had been working on this in this office maybe for years, and on this particular project for possibly a year or so, and they're asking me, who is new in the office, how to detail certain things or what to do. I never would tell them I've never done this before. [laughter] I would just sit down and figure out what they should do and then answer. [laughter] I was really amazed, because here are people with twenty years more experience than I have, you know, who are coming and asking my opinion. And I suppose the fact that I was licensed gave me a lot of credibility. The license was prestigious. They assumed that I knew much more than I did. [laughter]

And then, one day, Wayne Sovereigns, who was like the project architect--he was called the job captain in those days--he came to me with something, an assignment, very apologetic, telling me that he's sorry to always be giving

me these rush jobs and difficult jobs but that I was the only one he could depend on, you know, when he has a rush or a difficult job. And that's the first time that I was aware that he was giving me more work or more difficult assignments than anyone else.

HENDERSON: Well, let me ask you this question: Were you spending more hours in the office? Were you coming early, staying late?

SKLAREK: No. No, I never worked more than forty hours. In fact, it was less than that, because in New York we worked thirty-seven and a half hours a week, typically. It was from eight thirty to five. I think all of the architectural firms in New York worked those hours.

HENDERSON: So you were just working harder. You weren't putting in the extra time.

SKLAREK: I realized from the very beginning that I was more visible than anyone else. If two of the other employees who were-- The employees up there were predominently--nearly all--white males. And if two of them are talking together, no one notices it. But if anybody's talking to me, it's noticed. So I would discourage-- And I felt that the assumption would be that it was social and not work. So I would discourage any kind of small talk, and while I was in the office, I was working. And this was also noticed. I would also analyze things to try to

figure out what was nonessential. Sometimes there are tasks that require a lot of thought and which, in order to do them, take a lot of time, but they're really not essential. [laughter] I would leave those things out. [laughter] So I'd get more done in that respect, you know. That there's no point in drawing something that's going to take a lot of time and which is not necessary to give the story for the contractor to build or bid on. And so I think that I used to-- Oh, I couldn't really work miracles, but I used to get more done because I would not do things just because they had been done that way before, you know, if I felt that it wasn't necessary. And because of my rendering ability, I could also produce very good-looking drawings.

HENDERSON: Were you rendering for SOM or drawing for SOM?

SKLAREK: No, no. I was doing construction documents at SOM. And every important detail on that Union Carbide Building, from the exterior curtain wall, which was all new and different, because Union Carbide-- One of their products is stainless steel, and the curtain walls at that time-- The most economical way to get a good curtain wall was out of aluminum, and we were not detailing this in aluminum. It was in stainless steel, which is a completely different process. So everything from the exterior walls to the executive furniture I had detailed and been

responsible for.

HENDERSON: Did you have interaction with, say, the trades people, construction people, directly overseeing shop drawings?

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: Okay. Did you have problems with the workers themselves?

SKLAREK: No, no.

HENDERSON: Did you do site inspections?

SKLAREK: I did not have any more problems after I changed my own modus operandi. You know, I decided to change myself. It really worked, and I was amazed because of how well it worked and how quickly.

HENDERSON: That is, everyone took you very seriously? You were about business and no funny play?

SKLAREK: Yes. And I used to get a lot more accomplished than anyone else, and this was also noticed. But, even before, I never did any casual chitchatting around the office. But my going to SOM was a decided change in my career, I felt. And I was going--

HENDERSON: It was also a step up.

SKLAREK: Yes. And there was a gal, an architect, who worked at SOM, Natalie De Blois.

HENDERSON: Oh, yes.

SKLAREK: And Natalie was in a very high position for a

female architect at SOM.

HENDERSON: Did you work under her? Or did you just get to know her socially?

SKLAREK: I worked with her. She was the chief designer on this project under [Gordon] Bunshaft. So Natalie and I became friends but did not socialize outside of the office.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

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HENDERSON: You had said you were working at SOM [Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill] and then had taken a vacation here in California. Was it just a normal vacation? I mean, you weren't out here for any business reasons?

SKLAREK: No, it was just a vacation.

HENDERSON: Any particular reason why you chose California?

SKLAREK: I had some friends out here in California, and California seemed like an exciting place to visit. My mother [Amy Willoughby Merrick] was always full of ideas and suggested to me, "Why don't you go to California for a week or two?" [laughter] And I guess she recognized the fact that I needed a vacation, which was very nice. She took care of my two kids while I came out on vacation.

HENDERSON: And you came out with your husband?

SKLAREK: No, I was divorced.

HENDERSON: Oh, from [Benjamin] Fairweather?

SKLAREK: Yes. Yes, from Fairweather. [laughter] Again. These marriages just didn't last. It seems as though they had something to do with the male ego. [laughter] The very sensitive, delicate male ego.

HENDERSON: This is sort of an aside, but do you think that your being an architect was contributing to their problem, or--? Let's say if you had been a schoolteacher--

SKLAREK: Oh, definitely. Definitely my being an architect and being in a more prestigious and a better-paying job than they were in somehow, even if it wasn't at that time--Yeah, it was better paid. That had a lot to do with it.

HENDERSON: You would need a very secure guy to be your husband at the time.

SKLAREK: That's right.

So some friends of mine out here said to me--these friends with whom I was staying--"Do you like it out here?"

I said, "Yes."

And they said, "Well, why don't you move?"

I said, "I never thought about that, but it sounds like a good idea. I'll move next year."

So I got the names of a couple of architectural firms and visited them. One was Welton Becket and Associates, and I got an appointment.

HENDERSON: Now, this is still while you're on vacation? Or this is the next year?

SKLAREK: Yes, while I was on vacation. The architect, Alan Rosen, said that they had never had a woman architect work there before. This was--

HENDERSON: Becket is a big office.

SKLAREK: It's a very large office, one of the largest. But, of course, they had no objection if one were

qualified, you know. But they had just never had a woman architect working there before. They'd had one or two who'd worked in interiors, but no one in architecture. So, anyway, I went back home and made arrangements to move the next year.

HENDERSON: And you had been hired by Becket? That was firm in your mind?

SKLAREK: No, no.

HENDERSON: Oh, you were moving even without a firm job. You were ready to move.

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: Wow.

SKLAREK: Architectural firms generally don't make commitments for six months or a year in advance because they usually don't know whether there's going to be a need to increase the staff at that time, you know, that far ahead. People at SOM were really surprised--because I had being doing so well there--surprised that I would be leaving. Many of them said to me, "Well, if you must move to California, San Francisco is the place." But I wasn't interested in San Francisco because I had friends in Los Angeles. And besides, I think that the weather in Los Angeles and Southern California was more attractive to me, because I had had enough of cold winters and this seemed more tropical down here.

When SOM realized that I was moving, they helped me by giving me letters of introduction to firms out here. And even the editor of Progressive Architecture [Thomas H. Creighton] visited in New York, and he gave me letters of introduction. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Okay. This was in 1960? About then?

SKLAREK: Yes. Nineteen sixty. So I had a great deal of credibility in architecture in New York, one, for having passed the licensing exam at a very tender age and, two, for getting things done efficiently and quickly by really sticking to my work and working conscientiously.

And then there was another trick that I had, which probably helped even in taking the design exam and in an office, which is that my drafting, lettering, and presentation of the work was done with an extremely bold hand, much more so than others. Anyone looking at it could not only read the drawing at a flash, but, psychologically, I think it worked that anyone that draws like this, you know, is really-- [laughter]

HENDERSON: I know what you're saying. [laughter]

SKLAREK: Yeah. [laughter] It's so bold that it's got to be right, you know. You've got so much confidence that they wouldn't dare question it, because it looked like I never intended to ever erase anything, not that that was so. [laughter] But it was done in a manner which seemed

to exude confidence.

HENDERSON: Okay. That style had been something you just picked up naturally over time? Or that was the way you were from the beginning? It was a conscious effort to be bold?

SKLAREK: I learned from asking people and watching and observing, really from observing others and copying what I thought was good. In fact, the only firm that I interviewed with, even though I had all these letters of recommendation and letters of introduction to firms out here-- The first one that I went to was Victor Gruen and Associates [Architects and Planners]. It was called Victor Gruen at that time. Later the name was changed to Gruen Associates. So I visited Victor Gruen's office, and I managed to negotiate a salary which was higher than others who had been hired that same month with essentially the same background as I. It wasn't until much later that I learned that that's why I had so much static in negotiating the salary, because he had just hired someone with exactly the same qualifications--a male, at that--and I was getting like 30 or 40 percent more.

HENDERSON: Ouch. [laughter] Now, were you negotiating for that salary because of your salary history in New York or what you thought you would need--?

SKLAREK: I was negotiating for that salary because I needed

it. [laughter] By that time, I was supporting myself and two children [Gregory Ransom and David Fairweather] and my mother, the sole supporter of all of them.

Oh, just before moving to Los Angeles, I met a young man whom I fell madly in love with again. [laughter] And within a few months, we were married. His name was-- "Harry" was his nickname. Francis Peña. He wanted to move to California to go to aeronautical school out here. He was very bright, intelligent, handsome. Even though he was intellectually bright, he never had had the opportunity to go to college before. So he and I drove out to California. Well, he did nearly all of the driving. And I had to find a place to live. I found a house to live in, and then I sent for my mother and the children, who flew out. But my mother didn't like it out here and moved back very quickly, after just a few months.

HENDERSON: Oh, a question, though, at this point: Now, your father [Walter Merrick] was he still on the scene? When your mother was moving out here, was she leaving your father?

SKLAREK: My parents, at that point, were divorced. They had become divorced after thirty-three years of marriage.

But my mother missed her friends, and it was difficult for her because she did not drive.

HENDERSON: Yes. You have to drive in L.A.

SKLAREK: A different life-style completely. So she went back after a few months.

But I got the job at Victor Gruen's, and I never used the other letters of recommendation or introduction. I remained at Gruen's for the next twenty years. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Well, you were pleased, I guess. [laughter]

SKLAREK: I was happy there. I think that that firm gave me the opportunity to advance and to learn and to progress. Within a very short time, I was assistant to the department head, Sydney Brisker, the man who hired me. After a few years, he moved into a different position with the firm and then out of the firm, and I inherited his job.

HENDERSON: Now, you were director of design?

SKLAREK: Of architecture. Director of architecture.

HENDERSON: Okay. I'm not sure what those duties were/are. Can you maybe just sort of sketch that out? When you say "director of architecture," that is--?

SKLAREK: All of the technical documents, the architectural production, it was called. Production of construction contract documents.

HENDERSON: In the old-fashioned parlance, that might have been called, like, head draftsperson or something like that?

SKLAREK: Chief draftsman.

HENDERSON: Chief draftsman.

SKLAREK: Possibly. It was somewhat higher than that.

HENDERSON: That term is an old-fashioned term, yeah.

SKLAREK: I think I told you about some friends telling me that "Norma, you think so highly of this man who hired you--"

HENDERSON: Yes.

SKLAREK: That he would not have hired anyone that was black.

HENDERSON: This is back in the city [of New York]? The guy you got the--

SKLAREK: No, no. This is the one here in California.

HENDERSON: No, you didn't tell me this story.

SKLAREK: I was having lunch with some friends whom I had met, some black friends who were in architecture.

HENDERSON: Oh, yeah. You did tell me this story. [laughter] Now I remember it.

SKLAREK: And they-- So it's on tape already?

HENDERSON: No, no, no, no. You told me this story-- Was this at the Huntington [Library]?

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: Yes, okay. So that's not on tape.

SKLAREK: They said, "Oh, you think he's so great? It wasn't so long ago that he would not have hired you or anyone else who was black." And I said, "That's ridiculous. I don't believe that." And I went back and I

asked him. I said, you know, "I heard the most absurd statement made that a few years ago you would not have hired and it was your policy not to hire anyone who was black." And he looked me straight in the face and said, "That's true." [laughter]

HENDERSON: Goodness.

SKLAREK: I was stunned. [laughter] But then I figured it's better that he has changed.

HENDERSON: And was honest about it.

SKLAREK: You know, some people never change these ideas.

Anyway, of course, after I was in charge of hiring, then there was no discrimination against blacks or females. [laughter] And we had probably a larger percentage of those--blacks and females--than the average office, because I suppose those groups related to me and figured that they'd get a fair shake.

HENDERSON: You weren't aggressively pursuing blacks and females.

SKLAREK: No.

HENDERSON: You were just being fair in terms of hiring.

SKLAREK: It's just that you hire, maybe, from those who have applied, and there were more who applied. That did not mean that the whole department was that way. They were still a minority of the department, but there were still more than most offices.

At Gruen's we were involved with high-rise apartment buildings all along Wilshire [Boulevard]. Some of the names were Wilshire Comstock, Wilshire Doheny, Wilshire Terrace.

HENDERSON: These are those condominiums right on Wilshire by UCLA, right?

SKLAREK: At that time, they were apartment buildings. Later, they were converted to condominiums. But originally they were high-rise apartment buildings. There was Wilshire Comstock East and then Wilshire Comstock West. And then the market dried up for apartments, and we were doing office buildings along Wilshire and downtown Los Angeles and in other parts of the country.

But, mostly, Victor Gruen was known for shopping centers, enclosed-mall shopping centers. And Victor had written a book about this total enclosed, heated, and ventilated environment.

HENDERSON: I've seen that book, but I can't remember the title. I'll look it up. [Shopping Towns U.S.A.: The Planning of Shopping Centers]

SKLAREK: Well, this was a long time ago. He had written a book, and, because of this book, some developers decided that they liked that idea, especially in areas that are known for inclimate weather, such as in Minneapolis. He did the first enclosed mall, two-level center, in the

United States. It was Southdale [Mall] in Minneapolis.

HENDERSON: And you worked on that?

SKLAREK: Southdale was a little before my time. I worked on some of the additions to Southdale, the renovations of Southdale, but not the original one. He had also done Cherry Hill [Mall] in New Jersey and Westland [Mall].

[tape recorder off]

HENDERSON: Back to the shopping malls. I'm kind of curious about which one of these projects at Gruen you got a lot of satisfaction from or you enjoyed working on the most, or which one sort of sticks out in your mind. Maybe from the earlier years, because being at Gruen for twenty years, you've got a lot of projects in your mind.

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: When you were first there, which one of those early projects kind of caught your fancy?

SKLAREK: Well, I started out at Gruen's as what was called a job captain, and I did a couple of small banks and Westland shopping center, shopping mall.

HENDERSON: Oh, where is Westland?

SKLAREK: Westland is in Detroit, or it's in the suburbs of Detroit. And then I guess I was doing more administrative work and directing the work of others and setting up standards. I recently met the partner who was head of that department, who has retired now, and I told him that I was

appreciative of the fact that Gruen had given me the opportunity to advance and progress. And he very forcefully told me that that decision to make me head of the architectural department he has never regretted. He could tell from the very beginning that when I did a project it was done so much more cheaply. [laughter] Well, meaning that the firm made a lot more money on it. It was done with fewer man-hours than what had previously been done. And I think that's because I kind of analyze things and what is really necessary to do and what is not.

HENDERSON: Did he ever say there was any controversy at Gruen over your career going like it was? Your rise? I don't know if he would have been bold enough to tell you that, but did you ever feel like there was static over your career going up at Gruen?

SKLAREK: I was not aware of it. There probably was, but I think I was kind of thick-skinned. [laughter] I did not recognize these things, or they certainly didn't bother me. But when I was promoted to the head of the architectural department and director of architecture--those were my titles--there was one individual in my department with whom I had never gotten along and who was very difficult. I don't want to mention his name, but the one whose job I had inherited, Syd, whose job I was being promoted into-- I told Syd that he should talk to this man,

because, "If he is rude to me like he has been--" He was rude to the former department head also. That I was going to fire him, that I wasn't going to stand for it, and that he'd better change his ways. [laughter] So I guess this individual could not stand the thought of taking orders from me and asked to be transferred to the design department. So he transferred to the design department and stayed there for about a year, which was two pay-review periods, and did not get another raise, which was an experience that he had never had before, because, prior to that, he had been getting salary increases every six months. So then he quit. [laughter] But all of the others were either people whom I had hired or people who got along well and did not have a problem with me.

HENDERSON: How were your relations with others at Gruen at the top level, like Cesar Pelli?

SKLAREK: Cesar wasn't there at the time. Cesar was at Gruen for eight years, and that was sort of the middle eight years that I was there. Cesar is a very likable person. He is easy to work with and, in fact, a joy to work with, in that when you make a suggestion to Cesar he evaluates it in his mind to see whether it makes sense, and if it makes sense, he will agree to that change. Whereas there are many designers who seem to have some sort of pride of authorship or I'm not sure what it is.

HENDERSON: Like a prima donna attitude.

SKLAREK: Yes, who are very resistant to any suggestion that comes from someone else, no matter how valid. There are designers like that. But Cesar is not like that. Cesar has a personality such that people enjoy working with him. You know, what's best for the project and the office.

HENDERSON: You also told me, I think at the Huntington Library, that you worked on Fox Hills Mall [Culver City].

SKLAREK: Oh, yes.

HENDERSON: Could you tell me a little about that? Because I like that mall, and it's one of the places I go out of my way to shop.

SKLAREK: Yeah, that was one of Cesar's projects. We had been doing enclosed malls way before Cesar's joining the firm, but Fox Hills Mall was one that Cesar designed and Santa Anita Fashion Center and La Puente [Mall].

Now, South Coast Plaza [Costa Mesa] was not by Cesar. South Coast Plaza was by Rudy Baumfeld. He was the designer. And South Coast Plaza was a better quality in that the owner was not requiring us to design at the minimum cost like many developers are, so with a higher budget we were able to do a lot more.

Topanga Plaza [Woodland Hills] was one of the early ones. That was when I first started in the firm.

HENDERSON: Okay. One of the things about Fox Hills that I've been most curious about is that it's asymmetrical. There are three levels on one side and two on the other. Did you have any stories to relate on how that selection came about?

SKLAREK: I think that that was natural because of the [Marina] Freeway. We were designing within certain parameters and constraints with the freeway, the slope of the land. And it was designed with a parking structure on one side, but then on-grade parking, also. It was a combination of on-grade and parking structure. And some of the on-grade parking extended under the freeway. There were easement rights so we could utilize that space also.

HENDERSON: Okay. Usually, you've got malls that are two levels on both sides.

SKLAREK: Yeah.

HENDERSON: And that one, I walked in there and said, "How did they do this?" [laughter]

SKLAREK: Yes, it may have been the slope of the land. And sometimes we have zoning constraints with a maximum height. I don't recall exactly why.

Then, in addition to malls, we did, of course, the U.S. embassy. That was with Cesar also.

HENDERSON: This was in Tokyo, right?

SKLAREK: In Tokyo. The U.S. embassy in Tokyo. And we did

San Bernardino City Hall and the Pacific Design Center [West Hollywood].

HENDERSON: Okay. On the San Bernardino City Hall, that's fairly untraditional, as far as city hall design goes. What were some ideas floating around on how that design was chosen? I don't mean to disparage it when I say it looks like an office building, but it does have a sort of civic feel to it. I mean, at the time that the firm was doing that building, what were thoughts on that building? Did Cesar realize it was sort of revolutionary?

SKLAREK: I think that Cesar liked to experiment with new forms, different forms, and at the time there was a design theory on extruded shapes. So San Bernardino City Hall was somewhat extruded, and so was the Pacific Design Center, as though it came out of an extrusion mold.

HENDERSON: Like a cookie cutter or something.

SKLAREK: Yes. And they were designed in glass because it was an economical way to go. We also did, with Cesar, San Jose Center, which was a group of buildings in San Jose, of course, and Oakland Civic Center.

HENDERSON: Okay. I didn't realize that.

SKLAREK: Oakland Civic Center was a group of five or six office buildings and banks over a large pedestrian plaza which had subterranean parking under the whole thing. Oakland was done with a curtain wall of metal--not all

glass, but it was metal--and the shapes there were different from what was being used typically. They were not flat metal panels, but curved and angled. And the panels also had air intake and exhaust louvers in certain portions of it.

HENDERSON: That's a sophisticated wall.

SKLAREK: Functionally designed that there were two high-rise buildings, one, I think, of fourteen stories and the other of twenty-four stories. At the time they were called-- One was the Chlorox Building--and it was spelled C-h-l-o-r-o-x Building--and the other was the Wells Fargo Bank Building.

HENDERSON: Now, to do a curtain wall of that sophistication, that requires a high degree of sort of coordination or trust between designer and production.

SKLAREK: Oh, yes. And it also was an economical building, because it's a government building.

HENDERSON: Oh. So you had a strong cost constraint there.

SKLAREK: Yes. Well, they were economical buildings. I'm not sure about-- Oh, the civic plaza part was government, and I suppose the-- It was a combination with the government underground parking, because the Chlorox Building was the Chlorox Company, the bleach people.

HENDERSON: They've gotten rid of the "h" lately.

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: Have you been back to some of your projects to see how the curtain wall has performed and how it has, I don't know, sort of stood the test of time?

SKLAREK: They have-- This--

HENDERSON: Well, let me ask this: Are there any stand-outs on projects where you would never do that again, in terms of this curtain wall, or some that were really good?

SKLAREK: No, I can't think of any. There haven't been any major problems. Now, on the Pacific Design Center, because the building was so large and different shapes, we had to have a special seismic consultant for that curtain wall, and it's got expansion joints, seismic joints, in some strange places, but it's all incorporated in the design. In fact, the panels initially were like all five feet high, but that was changed because we needed eighteen feet floor to floor, not fifteen, and so how do you get the extra three feet in there? Something like that. So we had to change it, and the panels are not all regular five feet high, but I think they're a combination of five and three, so as to--

HENDERSON: That's a very subtle pattern, because I am not aware of it. I am aware that there is some variation.

SKLAREK: Yes, you're not aware of it with all of the blue, but they're not all the same size. It's a module that's like several five feet and then one three, then several

five again, and one three.

HENDERSON: Okay. I think maybe we should sort of come to a wrap-up on this session. I've got one question that maybe I'm going to insert now, which is sort of out of sequence. Your name is Sklarek, or that's the name you've been going by, and so I'm kind of curious to know when that comes up. [laughter]

SKLAREK: Well, the husband, Harry, whom I moved out to California with, was going to school, and our marriage started going downhill. [laughter] Even though I never mentioned anything about it, it was in the back of his mind that I was supporting him through school.

HENDERSON: Oh, and where was he going?

SKLAREK: He was going to Northrop Aeronautical Institute, and he became an aeronautical engineer. So I figured things would be better after he finished school. Well, he finished school, and things got worse between us. [laughter] He was very much aware and disturbed by the fact that I was earning more money than he. Of course, I had ten years more experience that he did. He also felt that he was being discriminated against on his job because he was black and-- You know, I'm not sure that that was the factor. The real factor was probably that other engineers on the job had ten years more experience in engineering than he had, and it may not have been entirely color, you

see. I think he was unrealistic about these things. And it could also have been his personality, why he didn't advance like he thought he should. Anyway, we finally split, and soon after that Rolf Sklarek was working in the office.

HENDERSON: And this was at Gruen?

SKLAREK: At Gruen. And this was after I was head of the department in architecture. Rolf was a vice president there and not really having anything to do with my department, but, of course, we knew each other. We had been working there in the same office. Rolf's wife died. And he asked me, "How is everything?" You know, the usual. And I said, "Oh, everything at the office is fine, but at home it's not so fine, because I'm getting a divorce." [laughter]

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SKLAREK: So it was after-- His wife had been dead for a few months; she had had cancer. So he invited me out to lunch or to dinner for the first time, really, and then we got married. [laughter] We got married February 14 [1967], which is Valentine's Day. But the reason why it was-- It was not because it was Valentine's Day, but that was the first day that I could legally get married. My divorce was final on the eleventh, I think, but the eleventh was a Saturday and the courts were closed, so we could not do it on the Saturday. Couldn't do it on the Sunday; the courts are closed. The Monday, which was the thirteenth, the courts were also closed, because they were celebrating Lincoln's birthday.

HENDERSON: Oh. Oh, okay, I'd forgotten about that.

SKLAREK: And so the fourteenth was the first day that we could get married.

Rolf was a very brilliant man. He was from Germany, but he spoke without a noticeable, discernible accent.

HENDERSON: Oh, let me ask a question at this point. Why I was asking about Sklarek was, people have wondered, is that a Hungarian name or a Czechoslovakian name or--?

SKLAREK: Apparently his father was from the part of Germany close to Czechoslovakia, and it's a Czechoslovakian

or Polish name, and it means "glazier."

HENDERSON: It means what?

SKLAREK: Glazier, glass--

HENDERSON: Oh, a window glazier. Okay.

SKLAREK: Glazier.

So he was very, very proud of me and of my being an architect. And after having had a wife who was very sick for ten years, he was so happy to have a healthy wife. [laughter] He was extremely easy to get along with and not the least bit jealous or envious, but extremely proud of any of my accomplishments. So, in the beginning of the marriage, people would sometimes ask me--because it is a strange name, Sklarek--"Are you related to Rolf Sklarek?" And then after a few years, a couple of years, they were asking Rolf, "Are you related to Norma Sklarek?" [laughter]

HENDERSON: It switched. [laughter]

SKLAREK: Well, Rolf had graduated from the Bauhaus in Germany, and he was a very knowledgeable, talented architect. He had left Nazi Germany and had gone to Spain, where he worked for an English architect for a few years, then left Spain and came to Los Angeles.

HENDERSON: Now, I perceive kind of a difference in your marriage at this point in that you've now got a husband who's also in the same profession you are, and so this means that, in terms of socializing and, like, AIA

[American Institute of Architects] club memberships, you can now be in those relationships a little differently because your husband is also in them. Did that make a difference?

SKLAREK: Yes, except that Rolf was rather shy, in that he would not join things like I did. I mean, he was a member of the AIA, but he was not at all active. I'm the one that used to be active and called upon to do things. I would meet people, and they would invite me to join them in some other activity with the AIA. I was invited to grade the licensing exams, and I did that for a couple of years. And Rolf said to me, "You know, that's something I've always wanted to do." So I got him to participate in grading. And he would also participate, but the reason that he was participating in some of these activities was because of me. You know, I was the one who started it.

I used to be active with the board of directors of the L.A. [chapter of the] AIA, and then later on with the California Council, which is the state of California AIA. I used to go on trips to San Francisco and Sacramento, oh, about ten times a year. I was a vice president on the California Council. And since hotels were paid for and my flight was paid for, it would be easy for Rolf to go along. We could spend the weekend, you know, or some time up there. But he wouldn't go.

HENDERSON: What? I'm surprised.

SKLAREK: He wouldn't go until finally, when my term of office was practically over, I said to him, "You know, we're not going to have this opportunity again, and you ought to go." Or to an AIA convention or something like that. And then I would talk him into it and drag him along, but most of the time I went alone. I've gone to functions alone, which I felt rather awkward in doing, because they were like a formal dinner, and it seemed like I should have an escort. If you're married, you can't take somebody else as an escort. [laughter] He wouldn't want to go, so I would go alone, you know, in my long evening dress, to some of these functions. But--

HENDERSON: But at least he would understand your going, whereas, perhaps, previous husbands might not have even understood or appreciated you going.

SKLAREK: Now, Cornelius, my present husband, enjoys going. He's a very gregarious type, and he really enjoys going.

HENDERSON: I don't have his last name. Or maybe I do.

SKLAREK: Welch, like the grape juice. He's a physician, M.D.

But I was the one who got Rolf involved in a lot of these different activities. He liked to travel, and we used to travel. We started traveling all over the world

looking at architectural things. The first year that we were married, we traveled in Europe, and we went back to Germany, which he hadn't been in in over thirty years.

HENDERSON: Goodness. What year was that?

SKLAREK: 'Sixty-seven. And at that point, actually, even though German was his native language and the language in which he had studied at school all the way through, he was better in English, actually, than in German. There were things like in the plastics industry or in the concrete industry and steel and so on, terms that he knew the English of, but he might not know the German equivalent of them.

We were driving in Germany and got lost, and he stopped at a hotel to ask directions. His German is a highly educated, intellectual type of German, and it's impeccable, you see. So he went in and asked directions, and the guy gave him directions. He said, "You go to the third umple." And Rolf said, "What's an umple?" The guy said, "You're German and you don't know what an umple is?" It's a traffic signal, you see. [laughter] When Rolf had left Germany, there had been no such things as traffic lights, automobile traffic lights.

HENDERSON: Interesting, interesting.

SKLAREK: Also, I would hear him on the phone sometimes, when we were in Germany, talking to someone, and then he

would lapse into English without realizing that he's going back and forth.

HENDERSON: It's funny how people can do that. Use of language is unconscious.

SKLAREK: Yes, I suppose so.

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE ONE

JULY 9, 1990

HENDERSON: You were about to tell me about the hospitals you worked on.

SKLAREK: Oh, yes. Most of the projects at [Victor] Gruen [and Associates, Architects and Planners] were commercial projects. They were enclosed-mall, multilevel shopping centers, office buildings, high-rise office buildings, some banks, department stores. And in the beginning, the first few years, there were some high-rise apartment buildings. So there were a variety of different types of projects. But we also did one hospital in San Bernardino and a really monstrous, gigantic hospital in Iran. It was for Tabriz, Iran. And we did all of the construction documents. It was an entire new city, almost, with the services, the power and electrical and mechanical services that were needed for this hospital. There were nine buildings, high-rise buildings.

HENDERSON: For this one hospital?

SKLAREK: One hospital. And the nine buildings were connected by four levels of ancillary services. The nine hospitals were-- One was oncology; obstetrics and gynecology; one was for surgery. Anyway, there were nine different departments which were each high-rise buildings. In addition to that, there was a medical

library and a nursing school.

HENDERSON: Goodness. This was like an instant city.

SKLAREK: Yes, it was.

HENDERSON: Totally instant city. Did you have to hire special consultants for doing these hospitals? Or did Gruen already have that kind of medical staff there?

SKLAREK: Gruen hired one expert with hospitals, Joe Balbona, Joseph Balbona, and there were also some consultants. Medical Planning Associates were our planning consultants on that.

And at times there would be conflicts between different ideas on doing the work, between the hospital experts and me. [laughter] I would usually resolve any kind of conflict just between the other party and myself, but this time there was no way of resolving it, and we had to go to the president of the firm. I was not an expert on hospitals, but I was an expert on buildings and construction, and to me a hospital is just another building. Even though it's got special services and ancillary-- Well, it's got interstitial spaces for carrying medical supplies and food and services in between floors, but it's still just a building. Anyway, with this conflict on how to do the construction documents, after hearing it out, I was the one who prevailed, because the president of the company, Herman Guttman, was a very practical person,

and he could understand which way was going to be less work and therefore make more money for the firm. So my way of doing it was the one that prevailed in this conflict.

Anyway, we never got to see the construction on this project because our client was the shah of Iran [Reza Shah Pahlavi], and he was deposed before it was completed. I doubt that it was ever completed. It may have been.

HENDERSON: Oh, you haven't even checked. No way to check. [laughter] Iran is a pretty closed-up place these days.

SKLAREK: Would I want to be a hostage? [laughter] And that was the largest project we had ever done.

HENDERSON: It sounds huge.

SKLAREK: It was.

HENDERSON: Were you more challenged by larger projects? Did you like working on larger projects as opposed to the small ones? You seem to get an enjoyment out of that.

SKLAREK: Yes, yes. With these major projects, there were very challenging, state-of-the-art systems that had to go into them and be coordinated, and it was more of a challenge, yes.

HENDERSON: Were you worried about construction in, say, a Third World country? Or did they just say, "We're going to import everything we need, and it's going to be like an American hospital just plunked down here in Tabriz, and we don't have to worry about materials"?

SKLAREK: Apparently the reason for this hospital was that-- I learned that in Iran the shah had been collecting taxes for medical services to the people and that the income taxes were like-- One-third of their salary, of each one's salary, was designated for medical. And the medical services were so poor in the country that if anyone had to have an operation or any serious medical treatment, they would have to fly out to France or to some other country for it. This was angering the population, because here they had been paying so much in taxes for medical services that were not available. There were not enough doctors. There weren't enough hospitals or anything. And so the shah must have seen the handwriting on the wall and decided he'd better build a big facility fast. That was in back of the decision for this major hospital. I'm sure that Iran did not have the physicians or nurses for this gigantic facility, but they planned on importing them from other countries, at least until they could train their own people.

HENDERSON: What about the building construction process? Was that just--?

SKLAREK: That also-- They'd probably have to bring in people from outside to do construction. I imagine they had enough workmen who were skilled and could perform the various services. But, if not, they could always hire from other countries.

HENDERSON: Were the plans drawn in the metric scale? Or were they English measurements?

SKLAREK: It was all in metric.

Anyway, we also did one hotel [Dunes] in Atlantic City [New Jersey], which was interesting.

HENDERSON: This was before the casinos were legal there?

SKLAREK: No, this was with a casino.

HENDERSON: I have not been to Atlantic City, but I read all the time about Donald Trump's projects in Atlantic City. [laughter]

SKLAREK: Yes.

And most of the time, the twenty years or so that I was at Gruen, I was reasonably happy. Then, the last year, I got very unhappy. There was one of the partners [William Dahl] whom I used to have conflicts with periodically, about once every two or three years. And in 1979 I had two fights with him within two months, which was an extreme escalation of the conflicts. And after the second fight with this man, I decided that it was time for me to leave the firm.

HENDERSON: So you went looking for other employment opportunities?

SKLAREK: Yes. I figured before I got any older and more gray that it was time to go for another job. Had I had no other alternatives, I could have remained there, but I

figured that I had other options and that it was time to leave.

HENDERSON: How did you focus in on Welton Becket [and Associates]? Or maybe I should ask this question: Did you look at other places and then decide on Welton Becket? Or you just went straight to there?

SKLAREK: I just went straight to Welton Becket and talked to them there. I guess that was around September, and I told them that I wasn't ready to make a move until January. I decided that December first I would give a month's notice to Gruen, my firm for twenty years, and that I would leave January first.

HENDERSON: This was 1980?

SKLAREK: December of 1980. And that's what I did. Are you interested in knowing what these conflicts were about?

HENDERSON: I'm interested in whatever you want to tell me, whatever you feel is polite or appropriate to tell.

SKLAREK: Well, it was very often about personnel in my department. But one was-- How do I phrase this? I've noticed that architecture, in all of these years, has its ups and downs. It is very cyclical. And in times of recession, employees are let go. If it's a severe recession, they can't find any work in architecture, so they leave the field. Then, when business eventually picks up, it's almost impossible to find people who are

experienced, because those who should have gained two or three years of experience have left the field. I needed to hire, and there was no one around. I was putting ads not only in the Los Angeles Times, but up in San Francisco, in Sacramento. I was putting ads in the New York newspapers trying to entice people into relocating, and other sections of the country, Washington, D.C. And I wasn't getting any response.

I remember I did get one applicant from New York who sounded very good. At the time, we had a New York office, and so I called this promising applicant and told him to go to the New York office and get interviewed by them. I also told the New York office, "No matter what you think, I'm hiring this man. Just go through the motions of interviewing him. I'm hiring him." So he was coming out here to Los Angeles for a vacation with a relative, and then, three weeks later, he was supposed to start work. The day that he's supposed to start, he doesn't show. I'm backed up and waiting patiently for weeks now. I called the number that I had for him in New York, and I learned that he had been out to California and seen what the house prices were and decided that he would not sell his house in New York or move or relocate. He'll remain in New York, because housing was just too expensive out here.

So there I am, you know, with more work than I can handle and not enough people. I decided to take some of the less senior people who were very bright and use them in charge of projects and that I would teach them, coach them. And in order to make sure that they did not leave, that we should offer each of these people a hefty raise, a salary increase, just to make sure that they didn't leave.

And this partner-- Well, this was not the regular time for salary reviews, and he objected. He not only objected and wouldn't go along with my proposal, but, on top of that, he took one of my more senior people and transferred him to a different department to work for him.

HENDERSON: Oh, my goodness. [laughter]

SKLAREK: So he's taking someone away from me when I'm in critical need of employees. And then he had the gall to tell me that I didn't know how to hire, that it was my fault that I was understaffed, and I didn't know how to hire. Now, I can't manufacture employees, you know. If I run ads and nobody answers, what am I supposed to do, you know? If I've made calls around to other offices and talked to employees and, "Do you have a friend who's working in another office who we can steal away?" And I'm not getting any response. So he tells me that I do not know how to hire. So I said back to him, "I suppose you know how to hire." And I reminded him of different

individuals. The reason that he had to take this employee from me is because he had gone through a headhunter and hired an architect from another state. He had paid-- Now, in those days, it was a considerable sum for him to fly to this other state to interview the man, stay at a hotel, and then fly back. Okay? So that is quite a bit. Then he paid all of this man's moving expenses to relocate him. He paid the headhunter something like $15,000.

HENDERSON: Fifteen thousand dollars! Oh, my lord.

SKLAREK: He paid the headhunter, which was a sizable percentage of the yearly salary. And the guy stayed there for exactly--I've forgotten what the contract was--three months or so and then quit. [laughter] And the contract with the headhunter was that if the employee remained employed for a certain length of time--it was just like one day over that amount of time--that there was no refund. [laughter] So I told him, you know, "I suppose you know how to hire. And furthermore--" Oh, so after this-- Oh, that was one employee that he had.

Then there was another one that he hired. And after weeks of being without an architect to do that particular job, he hired this man who came into work on Monday and worked for four days. On Thursday the guy gave notice, and on Friday he left. So he worked a total of one week. I mentioned this other person. And that's the person whom

he-- Bill must have spent a sleepless weekend, you see, when this guy quit. Then Bill solved his problem by taking one of my people away. You know, he solved his problem by giving me more of a problem. So I said to him, you know, "I suppose you know how to hire." I pointed out the one with the headhunter and this other guy. [laughter] And the truth hurts.

So this partner, this particular one, whom I didn't like anyway, then sort of told me what he thought of me in very derogatory, loud terms. You know, very-- Well, he cursed me out. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Goodness.

SKLAREK: And when he was finished, I was shaking inside, but I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of knowing that. I said to him that "I suppose I am, then"--some of the things that he said, that he had called me--"because otherwise I would really be upset over what you've said, and I really don't give a damn, you see." And I walked out. So that was one fight with him.

And then there was a second fight with him.

HENDERSON: Oh, my goodness, you were that patient to deal with him a second time?

SKLAREK: After the second run-in with Bill, I went in for the first time in twenty years and bitterly complained to the president--who was really my boss--about the way Bill

Dahl was behaving. And I know the president, Herman [Guttman], must have talked to Bill, because for the next three or four months he stayed far away from me. But it appeared to me and to everyone at that time that Herman was going to be retiring and that Bill was going to take his place. And I figured, if Bill is the president of the firm, who do I complain to about Bill? You know, that it's time for me to leave.

HENDERSON: Okay, that makes sense.

SKLAREK: Yeah. So I went to Welton Becket's office, and there I became probably the first woman project director that they'd ever had. And I was first in charge of their new office building.

HENDERSON: Which one is that?

SKLAREK: On Colorado Avenue, called Colorado Place, Santa Monica.

HENDERSON: Oh, okay, okay.

SKLAREK: But then, shortly after that, the [Los Angeles International] Airport needed someone. They needed someone for the airport project and decided that I should work on that instead, for which I was very grateful, because I did not like the idea of working on our own office building. Too many architects around on that project. [laughter] Too many people whom one has to please and who won't listen. [laughter]

HENDERSON: You'll have a building full of critics.

SKLAREK: Yes. So I much preferred working on Terminal One at the airport.

HENDERSON: That's a nice terminal, by the way. When I go in it, it has a very nice, tranquil feel to it.

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: Oh, who was the designer for Terminal One, the design partner?

SKLAREK: Well, MacDonald Becket is, but there were-- MacDonald Becket was the head of the firm.

While I was still at Gruen, the wheels were turning towards my becoming a fellow of the American Institute of Architects, and it was in process. And so immediately after leaving Gruen, in February, I was notified that I had been accepted into the College of Fellows and that I was the first woman in almost a hundred years in the Los Angeles AIA-- The first woman to ever become a fellow.

HENDERSON: Let me ask about the fellow process. I'm a little unclear on how you become a fellow. They ask you rather than you apply to them. Is that the way it works? Or are others nominated?

SKLAREK: I had done a lot of work with the AIA, and on one of these trips the president of the [Los Angeles] chapter was questioning me about what I had done. I started telling him about the various projects that I had worked on

and my role in this office. It's Jim [James] Pulliam.

HENDERSON: Oh, Jim Pulliam.

SKLAREK: Yes. When I was finished explaining to him the things that I had done in architecture, he said to me, "You should be a fellow." This came as a surprise to me, because nobody at Gruen's office was a fellow. Victor [D.] Gruen-- [laughter] Victor Gruen had been a fellow, but he had retired fifteen years earlier. In fact, he had-- I don't remember exactly when he had died. He had also died. He had retired and moved to Europe, and I think, at that point, he was deceased. And no one in Gruen's office was a fellow. None of the partners, no.

HENDERSON: Oh, that's almost shameful. I thought they'd have a handful of fellows over there.

SKLAREK: So also the Los Angeles office--the Los Angeles AIA, I should say--was, at that time, the largest chapter in the United States, with more architects than most states. Just the Los Angeles chapter had more than most states. It had more members than all of Canada. [laughter] It had more members, more architects, than most European countries. And there never had been a woman made fellow from the L.A. chapter before. So I was the first woman, and now, ten years later, there has not been a second. This was in 1980 that I was made a fellow. So that was a big thrill.

HENDERSON: Does the machinery of fellowship sort of happen out of your sight? That is, maybe people come in and ask you little questions here and there, but you're not actively involved in that process?

SKLAREK: No. You become actively involved. Right now I happen to be chairing the fellowship committee for the L.A. chapter, and they're distressed because so few people have been elevated to the role of fellow, which is a big recognition of your contribution to the profession and to architecture. Last year was the first time that I was on the committee, the fellowship committee, and there were four new fellows from L.A., which is like the largest number they've ever had in one year.

HENDERSON: That's a big jump.

SKLAREK: Anyway, one of the partners from Gruen, Edgardo Contini, was made a fellow, but, unfortunately, he passed away a few weeks prior to the installation. And I went to Houston and accepted the award on his behalf. But Edgardo Contini was a very brilliant and dynamic man. He had more energy and personality and vigor than any of the other partners at Gruen.

And there's one incident that I remember where-- I don't even remember what caused it. He had such a temper, and one time I was the object of his temper.

HENDERSON: Now, he's Argentinean, right?

SKLAREK: No. He's from Italy.

HENDERSON: Oh, I always thought he was Argentinean. Okay.

SKLAREK: No, Cesar Pelli was from Argentina. Oh, Cesar and I became fellows the same year. But Cesar had already left the firm several years earlier. One of the things in preparing this portfolio for fellowship is that you need seven references. I was advised to get references from all over the United States--not just local people. So I got a couple of people from New York, where I used to work at SOM [Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill]'s office, and Fred Bentz from Minneapolis. We'd worked on joint venture projects in Minneapolis. Fred was a fellow, so that was good. And I got Natalie De Blois. Natalie was a fellow, also, from SOM's office in New York, but at this point she was living in Houston, in Texas. No, it wasn't Houston. It was Austin, Texas.

HENDERSON: She was with Neuhaus and Taylor in Houston for a while.

SKLAREK: Maybe. Anyway, she was living in Texas. So here I had people from all over the United States. I remember calling up Cesar Pelli, because I'd worked with him for like nine years when he was head of design at Gruen and I was head of the technical architecture. I called him up and asked him if he would be one of my references, to write a letter. He was very happy to. And he said, "You know,

I'm going up for it, too." [laughter] "I hope that we both get it together." And that's exactly what happened. We both got approved.

HENDERSON: That's a nice coincidence.

SKLAREK: Yes. Anyway, I was telling you about the incident with Edgardo where he blew up on me, and I was shaking. He bawled me out in no uncertain terms, and I don't even remember what it was about. Something I did he didn't like, obviously. I just immediately went home. I left the office and went home. By the time I got home, I was not only shaking, but--something that very, very seldom happens to me in life--I was crying. And hysterical. And Rolf [Sklarek] sees me at home, "What's the matter? What's the matter?" When I told him what had happened, he was just furious with Edgardo. Furious. You know, how dare he treat his wife this way? He's going to call up Edgardo and give him a piece of his mind. And here I was sorry I had told Rolf anything, because here I am supposed to be in this senior position in the office, and I'm going to have my husband calling to bawl out the boss for talking to me the way that he had. [laughter] And I couldn't stop Rolf. He called up Edgardo and gave him a piece of his mind. How dare he say those things to his wife? And he demanded an apology. [laughter] Rolf was retired at that time, so that's why he happened to be

at home. So Edgardo spoke to me and apologized to me and an hour or so later some flowers arrived at home. [laughter] Edgardo sent me, from the florist, a bouquet of flowers. It was funny. But Edgardo was one whom I could not stay angry with, you know. He was a very likable person, and I had a high regard for him. Not like this other son of a bitch who I left the office over, you know. [laughter] That one is one whom I disliked intensely.

HENDERSON: Oh, did he ever become president? Did he succeed--?

SKLAREK: Oh, two years after I left Gruen, Herman retired, and the other partners did not make Bill president. They made Ki Son Park president. And Bill was so angry at that that he left the firm. [laughter] But I was still happy that I had made the change.

I spent five years at Welton Becket. It was a good experience doing a different kind of work. One time, I was assigned to a project, a major project in Korea. I was assigned to this project on Monday, and it was the shortest-lived assignment, because on Wednesday I was unassigned. And the reason was that the Korean clients would not accept a woman in this position. [laughter] This type of discrimination was technically illegal in the United States, but architecture is a field where the office

has to comply with the wishes of the client who is paying, footing the bills.

HENDERSON: You never had any other clients object to you in that vein?

SKLAREK: Not that I was aware of. Initially, I suspect that the powers that be at the [Los Angeles International] Airport were somewhat hesitant about my being in charge of Terminal One, but later they were really surprised because I was able to get things done expeditiously, which-- There were other projects going up at the airport at the same time. Everything had to be done for the 1984 Olympics. It had to be ready. And they were having monumental problems on these other projects. We all had the same types of problems to deal with, but somehow I was able to avoid slipping into the real holes, potholes, and going under, whereas the other projects had not been able to. And, at one point, the clients at the airport [Los Angeles Department of Airports] asked me to go over to [William L.] Pereira's office and advise them on how to get their project through the building department and get it all approved.

HENDERSON: That's kind of messy. [laughter] That's not professional.

SKLAREK: They wanted to get the thing done for the Olympics, and, you know, it was not moving along.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE ONE

JULY 23, 1990

HENDERSON: What I wanted to talk about today was your work with Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond, that firm, and also talking about your teaching at UCLA. I think at the end of the tape last time you were still at Welton Becket [and Associates] and maybe you could cover the process of your leaving Welton Becket, maybe those background reasons, and why go to Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond. Maybe even how you met those other two ladies.

SKLAREK: The projects that I was working on at Welton Becket were coming to an end. It was primarily the LAX--Los Angeles International Airport--Terminal One project and the [Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority] Blue Line Wilshire [Boulevard]-La Brea [Avenue] station.

I went on several interviews where the firm was short-listed for new projects. At that time, there was somewhat of a recessionary period in architecture, which comes quite frequently and regularly. There were a lot of other firms, several other firms, each time going after the same project, and we were not selected. So my work was coming to an end, and I decided to leave before it slowed down even more, because I could not see sitting around there with practically nothing to do or very little to do. So I thought that I would go out on my own and try that.

HENDERSON: Even during a recessionary period?

SKLAREK: I needed a change. My husband had died. My husband, Rolf Sklarek, with whom I had been married for eighteen years, had died, and this made me keenly aware of my own mortality. So I decided that I should do something else. I got a small commission from Cal State L.A. [California State University, Los Angeles] to do--

HENDERSON: This is the one near Monterey Park on the east side of town?

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: Yeah, okay.

SKLAREK: For an addition to their student union building. And I did that alone.

HENDERSON: All by yourself?

SKLAREK: Yes. I got Benito Sinclair to do the structural [engineering] and an electrical engineer [Amos Slutzky] to advise me on the electrical for it, which I did. And I also did a rendering, which I promised them. [laughter]

HENDERSON: You were reaching way back. You're doing all of this all by yourself? You're a one-person firm? You had no employees? You were doing everything?

SKLAREK: One person. I did all the typing. I answered the phone. I did this out of my home. And I discovered that I didn't really enjoy working alone and having to do everything myself, all the drafting.

Kate [Katherine] Diamond learned that I was no longer with Welton Becket and told me that she had always fantasized about going into business with me. So she talked me into going into partnership with her and Margot Siegel. Margot had had an office, a very small office, for fourteen years prior to that time. So Kate and I joined her. And very rapidly the staff grew from Margot and a part-time secretary and one draftsperson. It grew to eleven people, because we were able to get commissions.

And the existing office that Margot had was totally inadequate to accommodate eleven people. There was one private office--it had been Margot's office--and if there was a conference, she had to be bumped out of her office for the conference. And we were working on top of one another, really on top of one another. It was called--

HENDERSON: Oh, where was this office located?

SKLAREK: It was near the [Los Angeles] County Museum [of Art] on Wilshire Boulevard. And it was the penthouse suite, penthouse being the mechanical penthouse. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Oh, not the luxurious penthouse? I mean, the real penthouse.

SKLAREK: In order to get to it, one took the elevator to the top floor, which was the third floor, and then walked up the service stair to the penthouse. [laughter] We had

to move from there because it was just totally inadequate.

I went out on a search for an appropriate space. Kate and I preferred it to be on the Westside. I preferred to be on the Westside, because even though that office was fairly close to Gruen's [Victor Gruen and Associates, Architects and Planners], where I had worked for twenty years, the traffic situation had deteriorated to the point where it took much, much longer to get to and from work than the twenty years I was used to, using that same freeway on and off ramps. So I found this space on Santa Monica Boulevard, and we fixed it up. It was a very, very lovely new building, and there was underground parking that-- It was a great building. Our offices were very pleasant with windows, windows in all of the three partners' offices. We each had an office. We designed a conference room that was a great conference room. The conference room was on the interior. And the drafting stations were designed as separate little offices. There we had some small and medium-sized commercial projects.

And we did a parking services addition for UCLA, which was mainly an interiors job that was inside of the existing parking structure.

HENDERSON: I think that's parking structure eight. That's the one that's closer to--

SKLAREK: No. Nine. Nine.

HENDERSON: Oh, it's parking structure nine? Okay.

SKLAREK: Yes, parking structure-- I think it's nine. It's on the west side of Westwood Boulevard, and I think eight is on the east side.

HENDERSON: Right, where Westwood turns a significant corner and then there's a--

SKLAREK: Yes, it's a very large parking structure that had the parking services offices in it.

HENDERSON: Okay.

SKLAREK: It was a problem because the existing floor-to-floor heights were only ten feet--very limited--and it was a post-tensioned parking structure, which made it difficult and costly to cut through.

HENDERSON: Right.

SKLAREK: We also added a separate entrance from the sidewalk. Prior to that, one had to enter through the parking garage and be conflicting with all of the automobiles.

We also did a project for the City of Los Angeles, which was their telecommunications offices. Again, this was sort of an interiors project in the basement of the existing city hall.

And we did Lawndale Civic Center, which, unfortunately, to this date has not been built due to politics.

HENDERSON: Did you also do that parking garage for UCLA, the one that's sort of stair-stepped?

SKLAREK: I did that, and I was in charge of that project when I was at Gruen.

HENDERSON: Oh. Oh, okay. I thought you were at SSD [Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond] when you did that.

SKLAREK: No, we never had anything that large. [laughter] No, that was a project which I had brought to Gruen. I was responsible for that commission.

HENDERSON: Okay. The reason I ask about that is that that parking garage is sort of unusual in how it combines planting and parking, and I've very seldom seen a sensitively designed garage like that.

SKLAREK: We not only did the parking structure, but the entire area around the parking structure, which, prior to our design, was just Westwood Boulevard, a wide, ugly street. And here we segregated the traffic, the bus traffic, the service vehicles, trucks, and we separated the pedestrians and made it all landscaped with trellised areas and shaded areas and seats and made it into an attractive part of the campus. But that was when I was at Gruen. And I was personally in charge of that, project architect or project director, as well as director of architecture on that particular project.

HENDERSON: Oh, you were wearing two hats.

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: Did you get that UCLA job through your contacts at UCLA? That is, you had been teaching at UCLA.

SKLAREK: No. No, I got it through--what's his name?--Ed [Edward G.] Krause, who was the campus architect at the time. I had met him somewhere or other, and he was impressed with me, I suppose, and that's how I got that job for the Gruen office.

HENDERSON: Okay. Well, I detoured you from-- You were talking about Siegel--

SKLAREK: Oh, at Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond. We also did four stations at Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond for the light rail.

HENDERSON: Oh, the Blue Line?

SKLAREK: Yes, the Blue Line light rail. And there were four elevated stations, which encompassed more work and technique than the on-grade stations.

Now, most of the jobs that we did there were small jobs. In fact, they all were small jobs. And it's very difficult to make money on small jobs. The light rail project, the Blue Line, was one that was an exception that we were able to earn a decent fee on, or a decent profit, I should say. And I was managing that job completely. But after four years of working there, I was becoming disenchanted, because the bottom line was that I made less--

HENDERSON: In terms of take-home pay?

SKLAREK: Yes, than I had made ten years earlier working with the big offices. So I thought that, at this stage of my career, I'd rather be retired than having so much liability, potential liability, being responsible for meeting the payroll and all the other bills, and with very little in return monetarily, and that I was not interested in building up a firm for ten years in the future which might earn money. That I was not planning to be in architecture ten years in the future, down the line, and so I was not willing to sacrifice, at that point in time, for something that possibly would be a success ten, fifteen years away. At that time, I had been negotiating with the Jerde [Partnership] office about doing some joint venture or associate consulting work with them, that my firm, Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond, would be doing this work with them. And, quite suddenly, I decided to leave Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond. [laughter]

HENDERSON: It was very sudden. [laughter]

SKLAREK: Yes. One of my partners said something to me that she should not have said, and that was the last straw, because I had been dissatisfied for quite a number of months earlier, or even years. So I decided, "That's it. I'd rather be retired." I called up Jerde's office and told them that I could not accept this work for the firm

because I was leaving the firm, and they invited me to come join them to do the same work. [laughter]

HENDERSON: But for them?

SKLAREK: Yes. I asked Eddie Wang, "Who do I speak to about terms?"--meaning salary. He said, "You're talking to the right person," that Jon [A. Jerde] does all the design and lets him take care of the business end of the office. And the deal that he offered me was really attractive. It was an offer I could not refuse. I had already told my partner that I was leaving even before, prior to having this offer with Jerde, because, as I said, I was ready to retire rather than stay there. And I had called my son [David Fairweather], who is an attorney, to ask him, "What do I write down to make this all legal?" He told me all the points to cover, and he said, "You don't have to give them two months' notice," which is what I had intended. He said, "Just write down 'effective immediately.'" [laughter]

HENDERSON: Oh, my goodness.

SKLAREK: So, on Monday, I went back to the office and wrote this all up--my withdrawal from the partnership--and I wrote "effective immediately." I also finished up some loose ends that I had there in the office. And then I decided to take a month off. Maybe it was less than a month. I guess it was less than a month. I wanted to take

a month off, but Jerde's office kept calling me to come in to meetings on various projects and attend these meetings. And so it ended up--

HENDERSON: You might as well come on in and get to work, yeah. [laughter]

SKLAREK: --with my having had a vacation of maybe two weeks.

HENDERSON: Now, I'm curious about one thing at Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond. You were older than your partners. I thought you were. Was there a generation gap there, a generation problem?

SKLAREK: Yes, I was about five years older than Margot and considerably, a generation older, than Kate. Kate was the age of my children. But Kate is very talented, and Margot, having had so many years of experience running an office, though it was a very small office, she was more experienced in the bookkeeping and--

HENDERSON: Administrative?

SKLAREK: --the administrative parts of running an office.

HENDERSON: Why I was so curious about your firm was that on the street, or among other architects, people had interpreted that office as being a feminist office. Did you see any--?

SKLAREK: I think that it was. But it was very difficult getting commissions, you know, even with affirmative action

and women-owned businesses and so on. The competition was really keen in getting anything. And not being part of the good-old-boys clubs, it was tough getting commercial work too. I suppose the developers are used to working with people whom they relate to, which are white males, and that they feel more comfortable with them. So it was very difficult breaking in. The jobs that we did get with developers were at commissions that were almost impossible to make any sort of a profit on, you know?

HENDERSON: What about your school work? Because you had several institutions.

SKLAREK: Oh, we got a couple of schools, and that was different. For the L.A. [Los Angeles] Unified School District, we did a couple of schools that were actually additions to existing schools, new wings to existing schools.

Anyway, now I'm back in the large office environment, which is really my expertise. I'm back at Jerde's, which is different, because the architecture that I had been involved in at Gruen's office and also at Welton Becket was very conservative compared to the architecture that is designed here at Jerde's, which is extremely creative--far-out.

HENDERSON: Yes, yes.

SKLAREK: Some people might say wild. [laughter] So it's

a challenge, another challenge.

HENDERSON: What was the design philosophy at Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond? Did you have one? If you call Gruen conservative and this place wild or creative--

SKLAREK: Well, the design at Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond was limited because the clients had very restrictive budgets. The L.A. school district had even more restrictive standards that you could not vary from. Sizes had to be-- You know, they gave you a square footage for each classroom, and it had to be that. It could not be--

HENDERSON: Exact? Right on it?

SKLAREK: Yes, yes. You know, that sort of thing. The worst, though, was one project we did for HUD [United States Department of Housing and Urban Development].

HENDERSON: You told me about that one at the Huntington [Library], this HUD project.

SKLAREK: Oh, I see. Yes, there they had square footages for-- This is low-cost housing. And square footages for rooms, and it had to be exact. You could not have any offsets in the exterior wall, the exterior facade, because every offset or corner meant more money in their eyes. And the fact that you had to design everything in a straight line-- No offsets where people could feel that they had a space of their own on the first floor, that they could set up an outside table, a patio table or chairs with potted

plants, you know, that this would be their own space. Instead, it looked like a barracks, which would invite graffiti.

HENDERSON: Where was that project to be located? Or did it get built?

SKLAREK: Now, I don't think it ever got built, or at least not while I was there. It may have gotten built afterwards. But it was on 105th and 106th Streets in South Central Los Angeles. There was to be no embellishment whatsoever on this building. You could not have a little canopy over the entrance or a projection to shelter people from rain or sun.

HENDERSON: These are barracks. Goodness.

SKLAREK: Yeah. And, on top of that, you couldn't make any money on them, doing them, the fee was so minimal, the architectural engineering fees.

So I don't think there was any real design philosophy other than to provide the client with what the program called for and to make the building as attractive as is possible.

HENDERSON: Now, my interpretation of Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond's design style, I guess, is that they were very modernist, mainstream modernist. And this is from my looking at the models of schools and, I guess, the pictures of their work. That they were not postmodern designers in

any sense.

SKLAREK: No. No, I think that it was just good architecture.

HENDERSON: Yes, yes. Dead straight-ahead, good architecture.

SKLAREK: Yes. Well, I think that that's about all that we have time for.

HENDERSON: Okay. I wanted to talk about UCLA, but we'll save that for next time.

SKLAREK: Oh, UCLA was quite an experience. Mostly positive. Not completely, but mostly positive.

HENDERSON: When were you teaching there? I don't know the years.

SKLAREK: I taught there from 1972 through 1978.

HENDERSON: That was right when [Harvey S.] Perloff started the school, right, I think. Or the first few years?

SKLAREK: Well, he had started it before. When I first started teaching there, the school was not yet accredited.

HENDERSON: And you were teaching design? Studio?

SKLAREK: No. I was teaching-- Well, I'll tell you about that next time. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Okay, I'll save that.

TAPE NUMBER: VII, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 13, 1990

HENDERSON: Okay, our topic for today is your career at UCLA.

SKLAREK: I was first contacted by UCLA because my name had been recommended to them. They wanted to add someone of color, I believe, to their faculty and, possibly, preferably someone of the female gender. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Now, I also want to say, for the record, you were recommended to them by a black planner.

SKLAREK: Yes. So I went up and interviewed with the dean, Harvey [S.] Perloff, and he offered me the job. I had also been recommended, I guess, by Cesar Pelli. Cesar was on the part-time faculty at that time. And I worked with Cesar. He was--

HENDERSON: At [Victor] Gruen [and Associates, Architects and Planners]?

SKLAREK: At Gruen. He was a partner in charge of design, and I was the director of architecture, which was all of the technical documents in order to make all of Cesar's designs work. [laughter] I was responsible for them.

HENDERSON: Did they recommend you for design or teaching structures or working drawings or--? What were you being brought in for?

SKLAREK: It was for the technical end of architecture,

which would be like construction documents.

At first, I was very shy and uncomfortable speaking to more than six people at one time, but I was too proud to tell Dean Perloff that, so I went back to my office kind of half hoping that they'll say, "We can't spare you for two days a week all afternoon." Two afternoons a week is what it amounted to. But they didn't say that. [laughter] They said, "Well, I think you'll enjoy it, and that's fine." So I had no excuse, and I agreed.

It was surprising to me, because I had heard over the years how poorly teachers were paid, and what Harvey Perloff offered me was not the least bit poor. It was very generous. And my experience there, teaching at UCLA, as well as my experience teaching in the junior college in New York-- I had taught previously.

HENDERSON: Oh, I didn't know that.

SKLAREK: Yes, when I was in New York, I taught two evenings a week.

HENDERSON: And which college was this?

SKLAREK: New York City Community College [of Applied Arts and Sciences]. I taught there for three years prior to moving to Los Angeles. In fact, I had been offered a full-time faculty position as soon as one became available, but I decided that I preferred working in the field of architecture rather than as an educator, so I had turned

down the full-time position. But I had worked there two evenings. I used to rush from work at SOM, at Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, to the school. On Mondays, my class was from six to eight P.M., and on Fridays it was six to ten P.M.

HENDERSON: Goodness. Mondays and Fridays, those are the two worst days. [laughter]

SKLAREK: And during intermission, or between classes, I would go to the cafeteria and get a bite to eat.

HENDERSON: Goodness. How would you compare the students at New York City College to the ones at UCLA?

SKLAREK: It was two entirely different things, because the students at the junior college were studying drafting and designing a house. Small-house architecture is what I was teaching there, designing a house and drawing it up. I'm trying to think back--it was a long time--to what else I taught there on the Fridays. For the moment, I can't remember.

HENDERSON: Okay. You began teaching at UCLA in what year?

SKLAREK: Nineteen seventy-two through 1978, six years. When I first started thinking about the class that I would be teaching at UCLA, I was supposed to teach these students who had-- Most of them had no educational background in architecture. They had a bachelor's degree in some other discipline, and they would be getting a master's degree in

architecture in three years. At the time, the school was fairly new and was not yet accredited. So they needed some technical courses in the school, and I was teaching them everything they should know about wood construction, steel construction, unit masonry, and concrete in ten weeks. [laughter]

HENDERSON: And these students knew nothing about any of that, and you were going to take them from ground zero to--

SKLAREK: Yes. In ten weeks. And this was the only such class in the school.

HENDERSON: Oh, my. [laughter]

SKLAREK: And most of them did not know anything about drafting, either, or-- Yes, most of them, I would say. Well, I should take that back. The first year that I taught there, it was to the second-year students. Now, this is the second year out of a three-year program, so it was in the middle. But I structured the class a certain way and had it in my mind how I would teach this class. It was being team taught, so there were others on the team. There were several others, and the same week that I was to start, I had a meeting with my co-teachers, co-instructors, and it was sort of a clash of wills between Tim [Thomas R.] Vreeland [Jr.] and me.

HENDERSON: Uh-oh. [laughter] Tim is still there. He's still at UCLA.

SKLAREK: Tim wanted to continue the class with the same structure that it had always been taught with. In fact, his argument was "That is the way it was done at Yale [University]." And my feelings were that Yale University had a five-year architectural program rather than three. In five years maybe there was time to fool around, but with three years it had to be a lot more structured. You had to get into the meat of the course as quickly as possible to teach the students about the technical end of architecture, how a building was to go together and the appropriate use and design of the typical structural materials, such as wood, steel, bricks, and concrete. So we had this very serious disagreement on how the course should be taught.

I felt that we would give the class a design project. The ten weeks would be divided into four projects: one project in wood, one in steel, one in masonry and concrete, and that there'd be two weeks of flex time in between. You know, the first week and possibly the last, or the first two weeks. And then, at the start of each project-- We'd give them a design project that was to be done in one particular material as much as possible. The structure as well as the finished materials would be as much as possible in, say, wood or, the next time, for the next project, in metals, and so forth.

HENDERSON: Sounds very logical.

SKLAREK: So that the students would learn how to use these materials both structurally and as finished materials and, at the same time, how to adequately show this information on drawings. The way that the class had been taught prior to that was entirely different. I'm trying to think. I've blocked it out of my mind. [laughter] I've destroyed it. But it would not be meaningful to the students. And we would also, at the beginning of each project, have a class discussion and a lecture on the material and what one could do and what one could not do with this material.

So we had this fight, and at the end of about two hours neither of us had budged an inch. [laughter] And everyone else around the table were not siding with either one. The others were mute, and it was just Tim and me fighting.

HENDERSON: But, now, in that situation weren't you the only decision maker? Or, in terms of co-teaching and team teaching, everyone was equal?

SKLAREK: I was new to the school. [laughter] He had been in the school teaching already.

HENDERSON: Oh, okay. So you didn't want to overrule him or rock the boat too much, I guess.

SKLAREK: I don't know that I had the authority to overrule anyone in this matter, but I was boiling inside. At the end of two hours, we hadn't gotten any closer together on

how to structure this class, so I just got up and left. I said, "I'm sorry, I have to leave now" and walked out. And the next day, you know, it was bothering me terribly that-- How can I teach a class that is meaningless, that is not going to--? You know, the way that this thing had been taught up until then, how can I do that? The students would not be benefiting from it. So then, on the other hand, I'd be thinking, you know, "You're being very childish." That "Here, the first time you're teaching at UCLA, you want to change everything, and because you can't have your own way, you're ready to quit," you see.

So I wanted to talk to the dean, and on my way home from work this day--UCLA was halfway between home and my office--I decided to stop in and talk to the dean. Of course, I had not made an appointment, and he was not there. [laughter] You know, to tell him that I just can't be involved with a class that's meaningless, that I didn't like. But he was not there. So I asked his secretary, Ms. [Jean S.] King, who was-- I guess, which is-- She's not called a secretary. His--

HENDERSON: Receptionist?

SKLAREK: No, she's his administrative assistant.

HENDERSON: Is she still there?

SKLAREK: No.

HENDERSON: No. Oh, okay, I've forgotten what the title is.

SKLAREK: But the titles are not-- Executive assistant. I think it's administrative or executive assistant. Oh, her name was King. Something King. Anyway, I told her I'd like to see my contract, which I had signed and everything. And she goes into the files, brings me the contract, and I tore it up into pieces--I was so mad--and left it on her desk without saying a word. And she stood there with her mouth open. [laughter]

So the next day, Harvey Perloff calls me laughing, and he says, "What was that all about?" [laughter] By that time I had calmed down a bit, you know, but-- [laughter] But maybe I was being unreasonable because I couldn't have my own way. So I agreed to come back, and he would type up a new contract for me to sign. He said, "You know, sometimes I feel like tearing up my own contract." [laughter]

So on Thursday, the next day, was the first class. And I went to the first class. And, to my utter amazement, I was told that the class had been structured exactly the way I wanted it.

HENDERSON: Really?

SKLAREK: I had won on every point. And the [architecture] program head at the time was-- He's still up there. What's his name? [Richard Schoen] Anyway, he had gone to the students who had taken the class previously and told them,

"We're thinking of making this change and this change and this and this. What do you think of it?" And the students said, "Oh, that would be great. This class was stupid before. We didn't learn anything before. But that would be a big improvement." And when he got that universal response from the students who had taken the class previously, he decided to make the change.

So when this was announced to us that my way was the way the class would be structured, it was very well received by the students. They enjoyed doing it. And the powers that be with the faculty felt that this class was so valuable that we should have it not just for the second-year students. Oh, we were supposed to teach them all there is to know about wood, steel, masonry, and concrete in ten weeks, and initially it was not a required class. It was an elective. It was the only such class that they had in the three years.

HENDERSON: Wow. Yeah, that's not enough.

SKLAREK: So they decided to make this class mandatory and that it should be taught to the first-year students. So the very next quarter, I taught the same class to the first-year students, which was even more difficult in that they didn't have any experience--or very little experience--in drafting and drawing, so you had to concentrate on that, also.

HENDERSON: But I think that's a good move, because I think, in order to design, you really need to know what you're designing with.

SKLAREK: Yes. And, you know, since I left the school, they've changed the course structure.

HENDERSON: Yes. The class is not in the curriculum anymore, I don't think. They've got other classes. They split up the technical areas, but they don't have a concentrated class in the same way that yours was.

SKLAREK: And the students all liked this class very much. They had to prepare drawings that were about two or three sheets, with a plan, with one or two elevations, a section, and all detail showing the appropriate use of whatever material it was. The students enjoyed the class, or thought so highly of the class that they were doing this work during times when they should have been doing their design work. So we started to get a lot of flak, hassle, from some of the design faculty, who resented the fact that, when the students should have been doing their work, they were working on my projects. Of course, I wasn't there with a whip over them telling them what to do. I remember one of the guys saying, "Well, this is my design." Because some of the design they had, again, was based upon the old type of design that was done in a five-year program, where you had time to fool around in ways

that were more abstract art than architecture. So students would be working with collages, paper collages, montages, and things which were not really architecture. It's sort of pure art, which has its value. I'm not saying that it doesn't have any value, but--

HENDERSON: That is part of a longer-time curriculum than three years or two years, yes.

SKLAREK: Yes, that's what I felt. So these students appreciated the fact that here is some real architecture that they're getting into, and they would prefer to spend the time doing my projects than the other, which was their actual design.

So the faculty kept pressuring me to change the format, the requirements. They said I was giving the students too much work. And I was from the old school where I felt that that's the way one learns, by getting too much work. [laughter] I also felt, why change a winner, you know? That this class is obviously a winner, and that any changes, significant changes, would be to water it down. And I didn't want to water it down. Giving the students less work would be watering it down.

Oh, the funny part is, after the students had voiced so much enthusiasm about this program and the class, once the architect with whom I'd had the big fight got up and gave a talk to the students about how we decided to change

this because it was going to be so much more valuable and more meaningful to the students, as though it was his idea.

HENDERSON: Let me ask this question on your interaction with the other faculty members: Did you feel there was more static or reaction to you as a woman than as a black person? Or did you get along with everyone fairly well? At the personal level rather than--

SKLAREK: At the personal level, there were some faculty members whom I got along with extremely well. And one of them remains a close friend. In fact, he was over to my house just on Sunday for brunch, he and his wife.

HENDERSON: Oh, who was that, if you would care to mention it?

SKLAREK: Don [Donald N.] Mills and Dianna [Mills]. Don Mills. And there are others whom I was very friendly with. Dean Perloff, Harvey Perloff, and Murray Milne. And there were others who have since left the school. But there were some faculty members who refused to acknowledge my existence. I would enter the school and say, "Hi, hello," and they'd look me straight in the face and not even respond.

HENDERSON: Wow.

SKLAREK: And one of these people who refused to speak to me for three years, the first three years-- We were at a party that the architecture school gave. It was in the

botanical-- Not the botanical gardens, but those gardens that are just north of UCLA.

HENDERSON: The [Hannah Carter] Japanese Gardens?

SKLAREK: The Japanese gardens. We were there for some sort of a party the school was having. And this faculty member was asking Cesar Pelli-- They were standing close to me, and he was asking Cesar about what he should do for certain technical problems on his house that he's designing, building, how he should handle it. And, since they were standing very close to me, I could hear what they were saying, and Cesar was telling him, "Oh, the expert on that is Norma." You know, "Do you know Norma?" And here is someone who has refused to acknowledge that I exist for the past three years, who refuses to smile or say hello or anything to me. And Cesar said, "Come, I'll introduce you to Norma. Don't you know her? She teaches here. She's really good at this. She's the one that you should be asking these questions, who can answer these questions for you." And, naturally, he didn't want to say anything to me.

Oh, I'll have to tell you of another incident just prior to that.

HENDERSON: Good. Yeah, I've got plenty of tape and plenty of time.

SKLAREK: So Cesar insisted, and because we were standing

really close together, I told him that I would be happy to answer these questions and that if he would bring it to my office-- [laughter] He never brought the drawings to my office or the specifications to my office. But after that incident he started saying hello to me. [laughter]

Oh, one time I went to a party at Murray Milne's house. First, I declined, because the party was supposed to be from six to eight or something like that, five to eight, and I told him that I had another engagement, you know, that I had something else, a commitment that I'd made, and that I wouldn't be able to get there until about eight o'clock, you know, when the party was supposedly over. And he says, "Come anyway, come anyway," and insisted that I come. So I went to Murray's house, and everybody was leaving, so there were just three of us who were there: Murray, me, and this other man who had refused to acknowledge my existence. [laughter] And we sat in a triangular formation, three of us there, sipping some wine and eating some hors d'oeuvres. And, for the entire time, this guy turned his back to me and refused to even look at me.

HENDERSON: Oh, my goodness.

SKLAREK: Can you imagine three of you sitting like that, in a triangle, and he's--?

HENDERSON: And that's so obvious. That's not even

polite. [laughter]

SKLAREK: And then, soon after that, Cesar was telling him that he should come to me for advice on his house, which he never did. This was hostility to me, you know.

HENDERSON: You couldn't tell if it was because of gender or race? It's sort of hard to separate?

SKLAREK: How do I know? I never asked him. [laughter]

But most of the experiences at UCLA were positive or I wouldn't have stayed there for six years. And, at the end of that time, the class was getting to be very difficult to manage in that we had more and more students. In the beginning, the classes were relatively small because UCLA was not accredited at the time, and why should people select a nonaccredited school that was going to have them come for three years when those with a four-year BA degree in architecture could go to an accredited school for two years and get a master's degree? So in the beginning we did not get just the pick of the crop. And while I was there, the school did become accredited, so this last year--Oh, up until that point, they would accept a certain number of students, and half of them, because of multiple applications, would select to go to other universities. So this time they decided to correct that situation by accepting a larger number. And because the school was finally accredited, they nearly all accepted. [laughter]

HENDERSON: So now the place was jam-packed.

SKLAREK: Yes, it was jam-packed, and it was almost impossible to give individual attention to each of the students in the class.

HENDERSON: Do you have feelings on why you left? Did you have a particular reason why you left? Or did you just--?

SKLAREK: Oh, yes. I became very busy in my office. We were doing, among other things, the largest building, a hospital building, that we had ever done.

HENDERSON: This was that project in [Tabriz] Iran?

SKLAREK: Yes, which died, incidentally, before the construction was completed. But we had completed all the architectural work, and, more importantly, we got paid for all the work that we did before the project died.

So, anyway, I was just too busy in the office, and I called up Harvey Perloff and told him that I would like to take a rain check on teaching that next year.

In the beginning, when I first started teaching there, it was during one of our recessionary times, and there wasn't much work in our office. So I had a lot of empty drafting tables there that I would sometimes invite the students, anyone who wanted to come, up for more personal instruction and direction. I'd sit them at these empty drafting tables and teach them how to draft and letter, because that was not part of the curriculum, and also help

them with their design. I would also grade the papers. And the grading of the papers was not just grading, it was correcting papers, because I felt that the students learned by your suggestions for improving the details or whatever it was, rather than just a grade. A grade doesn't mean very much as far as their learning process goes. So I would do that in the office. And I would prepare the talks or the lectures and slides in the office.

Well, over the years, I got busier and busier in the office, and I was doing all of this work not in the office but after midnight. [laughter] So when I stopped teaching, I could breathe again. I thought, "I'll never do that again." You know, even though I requested a rain check on it, I decided that was it. And, by that time, we were getting more and more flak from the faculty to water down the class, and I was tired of fighting them, anyway.

HENDERSON: Oh, what are your relations with UCLA deans and faculty now? Are you still on good terms with, say, [Richard S.] Weinstein and know many of the faculty that are there now?

SKLAREK: I hardly know Weinstein. I've been introduced to him once or twice, but I really don't know him. He doesn't know me, let's put it that way. In fact, when I was at one of the student recruitment days-- Every year, as you know, I've been invited to come back there and talk to the

students, the recruiting of minority students. When I was there sometime recently, Weinstein gave a talk and said that they had never had a black on the architecture faculty.

HENDERSON: Yes, he did say that. He sure did.

SKLAREK: As though he wasn't even aware that I had ever taught up there or that I was black.

HENDERSON: Or even that Eugene Brooks had been there. I'll get into that later. Eugene told me he had been there.

SKLAREK: Well, Eugene was probably there just a short time. But I was up there six years.

HENDERSON: It is sort of ironic that blacks who have made some achievements have been invisible in some ways, and here's an example of that. I don't know how Weinstein should or should not know the historical trends of his faculty. I guess there are pictures of people in yearbooks or program statements from years past, maybe. Maybe not. Anyway, you were about to say something, and I cut you off.

SKLAREK: Anyway, he did not seem to be aware that I had ever been teaching at the school.

TAPE NUMBER: VIII, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 27, 1990

HENDERSON: At the last interview session, we had left off with your teaching at UCLA. You had left UCLA because business was picking back up again at Gruen [Associates, Architects and Planners]. I don't know if you want to talk more about what you've done at Gruen and at the Jerde Partnership. Actually, I guess that the gap that's in that is that we've talked about your work at Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond.

SKLAREK: Oh, we have already.

HENDERSON: We've talked about that already, unless you want to go over some more. I can look at my notes and look at what we talked about. I was thinking this was our last session and that what we would talk about would be your overview of--

SKLAREK: I talked about Welton Becket [and Associates]?

HENDERSON: Not a lot about Welton Becket. That's when you were doing the [Los Angeles International] Airport Terminal [One].

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: No, we didn't go over that.

SKLAREK: Yes, I left Gruen and went to Welton Becket's office.

HENDERSON: Okay. Oh, when did you leave Gruen?

SKLAREK: In 1980, at the very beginning, January 1, 1980. I started at Welton Becket the first week of January. And it was interesting that twenty years earlier I had visited Welton Becket's office when I was told that they had never had a woman architect work there before. But I would be the first. So twenty years later, I was not only hired by them, but hired in a senior position, as a project director, which in some offices is called project manager. And shortly thereafter I was made a vice president with authority to sign contracts for the firm.

HENDERSON: They'd had women employees long before you were hired?

SKLAREK: They'd had some women employees in the decades after I first came to Los Angeles. However, they had never had any licensed architects or any women in this position before.

So I was in charge of Terminal One at the airport, which had to be completed in time for the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, when large numbers of visitors would be expected to visit Los Angeles.

HENDERSON: In one of the sessions, you were telling me that [William L.] Pereira's office wanted you to come over and give them some help to get a building permit for their terminal. [laughter]

SKLAREK: Yes. Pereira's office was doing the [Thomas

Bradley] International Terminal, and they were having trouble. Our client, the [Los Angeles] Department of Airports, the manager of the department of airports, asked me to, because the airport was getting really concerned about the fact that they weren't getting the building permit on the international terminal and asked me to go over and help them out. [laughter] I suspect that initially the airport manager, although he never voiced this, was probably a little skeptical of having a woman architect in that position. But then, later on, he was pleasantly surprised at how efficiently and in a timely manner the job was carried out.

The airport was a very complex project as far as the building officials went, because it just does not really comply and fit in with the building codes. Building codes are designed around typical, average projects, which are much, much smaller in size and in complexity. Having aircraft all around the terminal, where you've got FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] requirements, security concerns, and having a double-decked roadway at the other end, is just-- There's just nothing in the typical building code that this would fit into. And because the building code requires exits at certain spots and exiting people from the terminal building onto the aircraft mat [tarmac] is not acceptable to the FAA, which is concerned with

security. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Golly, that's like being the--

SKLAREK: And the building code wants exits from both levels, and the double-decked roadway--. The closest thing that they had to a double-decked roadway with automobiles on each level the building code considered as a parking structure, and you're not permitted to exit onto a parking structure. So where does one exit the building? [laughter]

HENDERSON: Oh, my goodness.

SKLAREK: And they wanted, initially, to have a three-hour [fire-rated] wall between the roadway and the terminal.

HENDERSON: A three-hour wall! Golly, that's--!

SKLAREK: A masonry wall. [laughter]

HENDERSON: With no windows.

SKLAREK: Yes, with no windows. And, of course, we wanted all glass. So everything was a struggle with them to get them to accept alternative means which we felt were safe.

HENDERSON: "Them" being the [Los Angeles Building and Safety] Department?

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: Okay, for permits.

Let me ask you a question about your experiences, say, with Gruen and Becket. In talking to other black architects, like Roland [A.] Wiley, he said that there is a

glass ceiling that most minorities can't rise up through to get to a senior position. You've been very successful and have flourished in these large offices. Do you have that same perspective? I guess, from his perspective, he saw that, with the glass ceiling, you've got to eventually get out and have your own firm.

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: And you have a different perspective.

SKLAREK: I don't know whether it was pure luck or what, but I have been more successful in large offices than women generally have been or than blacks generally have been. In fact, when I left SOM [Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill] in New York [City], they were surprised that I was leaving because I was doing so well and progressing so rapidly there. You know, this is why they were surprised that I was going out to the West Coast. And at Gruen, I don't know whether I told you that in a very short time--I think I did--I was assistant to the department head.

HENDERSON: Yes, you did.

SKLAREK: And then, later on, I was the department head in just a few years. But they didn't give me the job immediately. They first advertised all over the United States. [laughter] So I don't know whether it's just luck or what, because I seem to have been an exception. So--

HENDERSON: You didn't see any glass ceiling conspiracy

per se? You just kept on and just kept rising? As far as you're concerned, you didn't see anyone holding you back?

SKLAREK: No. I have generally found that most people in architecture have been cooperative and helpful, most of those whom I've come in contact with. There are a few who have not been, but I just ignored them. [laughter] I don't let it worry me. I think that when it comes to-- Oh, well, when one goes above a certain level, one is representing the firm. And the policymakers of the firm, or those who are in power positions in the firm, feel more comfortable with having architects represent them who look and seem like them, you know. They are probably more comfortable, and they just don't think of minorities or women as being in that kind of a role. They don't want to take a chance perhaps. So I think, to a degree, what Roland is saying is accurate.

Although I guess I've been an exception. Most women who succeed or go into higher positions in architecture, you'll find, are in smaller offices where either their husband or their father is a principal in the firm. And that was not the case with me. There have been a few that have succeeded completely on their own.

HENDERSON: Can you think of those few? Would Natalie De Blois be one of those?

SKLAREK: Yes, Natalie was definitely one of the

forerunners.

HENDERSON: Anybody else you can think of?

SKLAREK: Beverly Willis. And of course, at an earlier time, there was Julia Morgan.

HENDERSON: Oh. Do you keep up with, say, the younger women who have worked under you and sort of watched where they go? That is, you're a mother figure, father figure, a patron figure now, and there are a lot of people in Los Angeles who know you. And I'm sort of asking, do you keep up with them? Maybe like Michaele Pride-Wells. Do you keep up with her career, where she's going?

SKLAREK: Oh, yes. She now is out on her own. She's also expecting a baby and finds that she enjoys working at home, really, rather than-- With another young woman who used to work with me, Meredith Howe.

HENDERSON: Oh, okay. They've got a partnership [Howe-Pride-Rosenthal Architecture].

SKLAREK: Yes. So the projects that I worked on at Welton Becket were mainly the airport, which took like five years, [laughter] and also one of the stations on the Metro Rail.

HENDERSON: This was on Wilshire [Boulevard], I believe you told me.

SKLAREK: Yes, the Wilshire-La Brea [Avenue] station.

HENDERSON: Was that underground? Was that underground or elevated?

SKLAREK: Underground.

HENDERSON: Underground, okay.

SKLAREK: And I told you that I was appointed director on a Korean project.

HENDERSON: Yes, you told me just a little bit about that, that there--

SKLAREK: It was the shortest-lived-- [laughter]

HENDERSON: Well, tell me more about that, because you said that the clients didn't want you handling it.

SKLAREK: Well, the office was told that the clients would not accept a woman in that position.

HENDERSON: Oh. So you never talked to the clients?

SKLAREK: No. And this was after two days. [laughter] So I was unassigned two days later.

HENDERSON: Do you know more about the politics of what went on in the office about that? I mean, like, who made the decision and who sort of countermade the decision? Or what were they thinking?

SKLAREK: At this point in time, when one is doing work, especially in a foreign country, they have to consider the biases and the customs of that country, such as right now one would not send a woman to Saudi Arabia because women are just not accepted in certain roles. I think that in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Iraq and Iran are some of the countries where it's not their custom and they would

not accept a woman.

HENDERSON: Although you worked on a project for Iran.

SKLAREK: Yes, but I performed all the architecture work in the United States. [laughter] I didn't go over there. See, my role on the Korean project would have required me to travel to that country and deal with the clients and their building officials and so on there.

HENDERSON: For some of the women architects that I've studied, like for Julia Morgan, I think that she had some-- Well, she went out on sites and did her own kind of negotiations with craftsmen, but some other women whom I have studied had, like, male front men in the office who would handle certain things and would go out and handle workmen. I don't know if that might have had to have been the role that could have evolved for you with that Korean project. You stay here and you handle things here and have somebody else go to Korea and handle that.

SKLAREK: Well, not in my position. It would have meant that I would have had to travel quite a bit overseas. I don't think that Korea is as bad as the Near Eastern countries, but it's sort of in between. And, in architecture, one has to please the client.

HENDERSON: That's the bottom line.

SKLAREK: Now, in the United States there are laws against this kind of sexual discrimination, but it's not realistic

or easy to apply those laws strictly in architecture. I think that's why minorities and women don't rise up into positions of power, generally, but things are improving.

HENDERSON: Yes, yes. Tell me more about what you think about opportunities and new horizons, new areas that are coming up for women to go into. Say, computerization. Do you think having computerized drafting sort of more or less evens the playing field for men and women? You know, a computer doesn't care if you're male or female. Are there areas in architecture that women formerly didn't go into that they're now going into?

SKLAREK: Yeah, I think that CADD [computer-aided design and drafting software], or computer drafting, is one area that we will see women achieving more and more in. Right now there are other women I know who are going into working for governmental agencies, because there, again, they find that there's less discrimination. There's less discrimination, more security, and more security also in, like, having pension plans, because most people in architecture can't afford to retire, unless they've saved on their own, which many people find difficult. They have no pension other than Social Security, which is generally not enough to live on, so they continue working until they drop. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Whether they want to or not. [laughter] Okay.

SKLAREK: That's true of most. You'll also find that most people in architecture have their spouses also working, so they're two-income families. And unless one has inherited money, which is very few--

HENDERSON: Or married money.

SKLAREK: Well, then, after leaving Welton Becket, I went to work at Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond, and there we were able to-- I think I told you this, didn't I?

HENDERSON: Yes, you did. You told me a lot about Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond.

SKLAREK: Okay.

HENDERSON: But I have another question, though, about Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond, and this relates to issues about women and minorities. I had seen the office, and other people, in talking about the office, thought of it as a feminist office. That is, it was very much a political statement as well as a gender statement to have an office that is owned by women. How was that seen within the office? Was that definitely an intention? Was that a marketing tool? Or it just happened? Was it a conscious thought on the part of the three principals?

SKLAREK: I don't think that it was deliberate other than-- We had more women applicants than the typical office because many young women felt that they would be getting a fairer shake and more opportunity for advancement working

for us than working in a typical office. And perhaps they had experienced negative things working in the typical office, felt that they were not given the opportunity or given projects where they could really advance, you know, so they were not given the opportunity to advance, and they felt they were better off working for us. So we would get more women applicants. And I think it was the same way when I worked at Gruen, where I had a larger percentage of minority applicants and of women than the typical office, you know. Also, I suppose, for the same reason: that they felt that they would get a fairer shake with me than with the typical office. So it was natural.

HENDERSON: At Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond, you didn't go out of your way, say, to do the reverse? That is, to specifically hire men to balance anything out? You just hired whoever.

SKLAREK: No. Whoever was the best applicant at the time, you know, the best that was available, we would hire.

And finally I left there. Did I tell you about how I left there?

HENDERSON: Yes, you did. [laughter] That was kind of a tricky--

SKLAREK: I'm very happy that I left there, and I'm now at the Jerde Partnership. And I enjoy working here, especially since our office is now in Venice [California] and I can look out of my window and see the Pacific Ocean

and the waves and the sand. [laughter]

HENDERSON: We can hear the waves, in fact, yeah. This is a beautiful office.

SKLAREK: And I'm working on major-scale projects again, which I enjoy more, which is really my expertise, the large-scale projects. I'm working on a project in Sacramento, which is not only large scale but extremely complex. It's an existing shopping center. There are many existing shopping centers that were built twenty-five years ago.

HENDERSON: In fact, some that you worked on.

SKLAREK: In fact, some of them that have my signature down on the drawings and that are now being updated and given a new and more exciting look, because those that are twenty-five years old are somehow looking a little bit dated.

HENDERSON: Yes, they are. You know, they recently renovated Fox Hills Mall.

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: Mostly sort of cosmetic things on the outside and a few little things on the inside. But that's still one of my favorite malls. I like to go there. [laughter]

SKLAREK: Yes, Fox Hills was one of my malls in Culver City.

HENDERSON: Right. Let me ask you about, say, architects and politics. And the reason I ask that is that I was

invited to the Harvey Gantt fund-raiser, but I didn't make it.

SKLAREK: Oh, I went there.

HENDERSON: Yes. Can you either tell me about the event or tell me what do you think about architects getting into politics? Is that a good trend? Or should we stay out?

SKLAREK: What do you mean, "get into politics"? Like Harvey Gantt, who's running for--

HENDERSON: The [United States] Senate in North Carolina. Do you think that it's a good idea for an architect to, say, run for governmental office, since architects--and I'll include planners in this vein--are concerned about urban issues? Would it be good for an architect to run for mayor?

SKLAREK: Yeah, I think that architects, generally, are concerned with the environment and with people, and they are concerned with living conditions, not only from an aesthetic standpoint, but from a functional standpoint, and are generally knowledgeable about state-of-the-art building concerns and building elements. So I feel that architects are more suitable than many other people. You know, architects are also generally knowledgeable about legal issues, and I feel that we have an imbalance of too many lawyers in politics. It would be beneficial to have others also--architects--who are interested and would be

effective.

HENDERSON: Oh, did you enjoy the Harvey Gantt dinner?

SKLAREK: Oh, yes. Yes, we enjoyed it. I don't know what else to tell you.

HENDERSON: Well, maybe let me ask you a few other questions. Some that I had in mind in my outline were-- I think of you as a pioneer, as someone who is a role model for the profession. What are the joys and burdens of that? That is, I'm sure your time is called upon by many people. How do you resolve that in your mind? How do you resolve that in your scheduling? For example, the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], they want you to come and do something. Or, I don't know, you are grading exams for the licensing program. All of these are sort of demands. How do you choose between--?

SKLAREK: I think that generally I enjoy participating. And, right now, the AIA [American Institute of Architects] wants me to run for a California Council [of the AIA] position, which I've done before, incidentally. I was on the California Council as a director many years ago, which was a three-year term, and then I was there as a vice president for another three years. So I have served in the past. That was quite some time ago, so I agreed to run again. If I get elected, I'll be traveling up to

Sacramento regularly again. I don't think that I would enjoy doing it every single year, because it meant like ten trips a year, you know, every single year. But since there's been a lapse in between, I think it would be interesting to serve again. So are you going to vote for me? [laughter]

HENDERSON: Yes, I will. [laughter] Yeah, I'm a member of the CC--California Council--because I'm a member of the [AIA] Los Angeles chapter.

SKLAREK: Yes, well, the L.A. chapter wants me to run as their delegate.

HENDERSON: Oh, okay.

SKLAREK: So you can ask your friends to vote for me. [laughter]

HENDERSON: You might get a NOMA [National Organization of Minority Architects] endorsement.

SKLAREK: Oh, that's a good idea.

And these other things that I've participated in I've been happy to serve on. I've found that they were more or less enlightening and that I was able to contribute something. I'm looking forward to doing more of that kind of work. Like I just-- See this thing in back, Golden Nugget Awards?

HENDERSON: This was an award, a plaque you have on your office wall. Oh, yes.

SKLAREK: Yes. That was for participating as a judge for the Golden Nugget Awards.

HENDERSON: Who sponsors the Golden Nugget Awards? This plaque says "Design for the 1990s, 1990 Golden Nugget awards, best in the West, in recognition of your selection and participation as a Golden Nugget Awards judge, 1990, Norma Sklarek, FAIA [Fellow, American Institute of Architects]." That's a nice plaque. Who's the sponsor?

SKLAREK: That is-- This is embarrassing. I can't think of the name. [laughter] [tape recorder off] It's a publication.

HENDERSON: Okay. It's not--

SKLAREK: Oh, it's a building conference. What is the name of the thing? Builders--

HENDERSON: Dodge?

SKLAREK: No. [tape recorder off] Southern Builders Conference? The Southwest Builders Conference.

HENDERSON: Southwest Builders Conference.

SKLAREK: Yeah. [tape recorder off]

HENDERSON: Well, it's not crucial that you really dig all of that out.

SKLAREK: Yes. And then I was the keynote speaker at the Y [YWCA, Young Women's Christian Association] in Cincinnati. I have another plaque from them at home. This is the Y in Los Angeles, the YWCA, this one here.

HENDERSON: Oh, that?

SKLAREK: Yes, that was--

HENDERSON: That's a trophy.

SKLAREK: That was a trophy from them as an award for outstanding work in the professions. I was recognized. That's the Y here. The Y in Cincinnati, I was the keynote speaker.

HENDERSON: Is that a convention of all Y's? Or just that local Y?

SKLAREK: The local Y's have, as a fund-raiser, awards given to local women who have done something outstanding in the professions.

HENDERSON: Oh. I guess the reason I was asking is--

SKLAREK: But then they had somebody from out of town, who's not local, as the keynote speaker.

HENDERSON: Oh, okay. That's what I was about to ask. How are you connected to Cincinnati? [laughter] So they just asked you there to speak?

SKLAREK: Yes. And it was fun. We enjoyed it, seeing what they are doing. They're really into a lot of social work. The YWCA is completely different from the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association].

HENDERSON: Oh, really?

SKLAREK: Yes. They're not the same sort of organization. The YMCA is mainly concerned with physical

activities such as gyms and muscle building and swimming and aerobics, that sort of thing. The YWCA has some of that program also--they've got the swimming pool and they have some of that--but they also have other programs which are more socially oriented. They have programs where they feed the hungry, where they house the homeless, help with the homeless population. They have literacy programs where they teach adults, just adults, who are illiterate on a one-to-one basis.

HENDERSON: And you're involved with some of these? Well, as much as you can, I guess. [laughter]

SKLAREK: Yes.

HENDERSON: Well, let me switch the conversation around just a little bit before I run out of tape. Let me ask--this is a personal area--how did you meet your present husband [Cornelius Welch]? [laughter]

SKLAREK: Yes, he's wonderful, isn't he? [laughter] Actually, when I first started working in New York, I worked for the City of New York Department of Public Works, where there were about 200 architectural and engineering employees in a big drafting room. And out of that 200, there were about 3 of us who were black and there were about 3 of us who were women. [laughter] So, say, 6 out of 200 were-- Well, the other 194-- Six out of 200, and the other 194 were white males, so, naturally, the few women

who were there and the few blacks I became friendly with. And even though I might change my name and my address, they always find me. [laughter] People have come out to Los Angeles and said, "I knew a young woman architect years ago in New York, and I think she lives out here now. I don't know her name, but her first name was Norma." And they call the AIA office, and the AIA office says, "Oh, of course. [laughter] Here's her phone number at home and at her office where she's working and what her name is at this time." So they find me.

And Jim [James] Snead was one of these coworkers whom I had worked with years ago. I had him and his wife out to dinner after he looked me up, after I hadn't seen him in twenty-five years. I had visited them at their house and had them over to mine a couple of times. So one day Jim's wife calls me and invites me to a dinner party. Would I come? I said, "Sure." So I said, "Should I bring a friend?" And this is exactly one year after my husband [Rolf Sklarek] had died, incidentally. I said, "Should I bring a friend?" Then there was a long hesitation on the other end of the phone, a long pause. And I catch on quickly. I said, "Well, unless you have somebody interesting you want me to meet." She said, "Well, as a matter of fact, it's my brother." So I didn't bring any friend, and I met Cornelius, who was her brother, Cornelius

Welch, there. Immediately we gravitated to each other and were attracted and enjoyed talking to each other. That's how I met Cornelius. So six months later we got married. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Okay. [laughter] Sounds great, sounds great.

SKLAREK: Yes, Cornelius is a physician, and he had been divorced for many, many, many years when I met him.

HENDERSON: Oh, let me ask you, what year did you get married? What is your wedding date? Maybe that's a better way to say that.

SKLAREK: Five years ago, 1985. October twelfth.

HENDERSON: So things sound pretty good, and you are very happy, the two of you.

SKLAREK: Yes, we're very happy. I always remember the first-- Oh, before he left that party, he told me that he'd like to see me again and would I give him my phone number. I said, "Sure." But then he didn't call me for almost a week. And I learned afterwards the reason was because he was living in Denver, and he was traveling in to Los Angeles on the weekends, so he was waiting until he returned to Los Angeles. But then I used to see him every weekend, every time he was in town. [laughter]

HENDERSON: This tape is about to end, so why don't I end here and-- Well, let's just end here. [laughter]

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