PROFILES OF SWE PIONEERS

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Dorothy Morris Interview

May 19, 2003

Bridgewater, New Jersey

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Dorothy Morris

Dorothy Morris began her career in the engineering field as an administrative assistant in 1950 after graduating with a degree in business and accounting from Concordia Junior College. She returned to college to study engineering and in just eight years became vice president and general manager of Colvin Laboratories, Inc. Morris was also general manager, treasurer, and vice president of Victory Engineering Corporation and went on to establish her own consulting firm, Morris Associates. A Fellow of the Society of Women Engineers, she served on the board of trustees for many years. In the 1970s she represented SWE on the Engineering Manpower Commission, becoming the commission's first woman president. Morris passed away in 2014.

In her 2003 Profiles of SWE Pioneers Oral History Project interview, Morris discussed her early childhood and education; her experiences working in sales and upper management, including instances of gender discrimination; and her involvement in the SWE, including her participation on the board of trustees and in international conferences.

- July 2016

INTERVIEW WITH DOROTHY MORRIS, MAY 19, 2003

LAUREN KATA: It's Monday, May 19th, 2003, and this is an interview with Dorothy Morris for the Society of Women Engineers Oral History project. The interviewer is Lauren Kata. We are in Bridgewater, New Jersey. And I want to start by thanking you for participating in this project.

DOROTHY MORRIS: You're welcome. I feel honored.

LK: Can we begin by establishing your date of birth?

DM: I was born March 19, 1931, in New York City.

LK: Okay. And can you talk about your family background and your early childhood?

DM: Yes. I was an only child. My mother was a native of Cologne, Germany, and came to America as a young woman. And my father was a native of New York; he was born in New York. He had a brother who was married, and they had no children. And my mother had a sister who was married in Germany and had no children, so I grew up without cousins. So I'm really from a very, very small family. And my father's parents -- his father was dead when I was born, and his mother died when I was quite young, so my family was pretty much my mother and dad.

LK: Okay. And your father's surname was Ohl, O-h-l?

DM: O-h-l, uh-huh.

LK: And did you grow up mostly in New York City?

DM: Yes. I'm a Bronx kid. It was the upper part of the Bronx, which was considered a pretty country-like atmosphere as compared to other parts of the city. And we, you know, were in quite a bit of open space, and it was rather country-fied.

When I decided to go to high school, there was a choice between a school close to my home, which did not have a very good reputation, and an all-girls school, which required about -- oh, about an hour and fifteen minutes of bus travel each way. And I can remember when I told friends that I met in high school where I lived they were shocked. And during Christmas vacation they would come to a lunch at my home and be so amazed because this was really country.

LK: And so did you enjoy school when you were growing up?

DM: It was a very unusual experience for me. The elementary school -- I lived in a neighborhood that was predominantly Italian Catholic. And I'm not of that background, and I felt like a little bit of an oddity. And the first day in high school, there was a huge auditorium, and they gave us an IQ and a comprehensive examination. And based on those results, we were put in classes, and I was put in an honor class.

And of the thirty-seven girls in my class, I was the only Christian. And I had never been with Jewish people before. So it was a whole new learning experience. And I really think it helped

significantly. I think it was an important part of the education to learn about another culture and to become friends with the people of a different ethnic and religious background.

LK: Absolutely.

DM: And so I think it was a good education, again, because here I am, the typical American, you know, Protestant, and so on and so forth, and I was a good part of the time the only non-Catholic, and at other times the only non-Jew. So it was a good education.

LK: It sounds like it. What was the name of your high school?

DM: Walton. Which is, if you've ever heard of Hunter College, it was across the street from Hunter College in the Bronx.

LK: And so when you graduated high school, what was it like looking for your first job? Is that what--

DM: Well, when I graduated high school, I went to college. I went to a small college in Bronxville, New York: Concordia College. But I had worked before. I was a big kid, so I was able to get working papers and a job when I was fourteen years old.

LK: I guess that was my question. Could you talk about your first work experience?

DM: Okay. My first work experience was as a salesperson.

LK: Interesting.

DM: And I began when I was fourteen years old. And I worked in a rather elegant shop that made leather handbags and leather gloves for ladies.

LK: Very nice.

DM: And then because I -- and by the way, I also remember that my pay was twenty-five cents an hour, my first pay. And then I recall that I was able to improve my income the senior year in high school. I worked weekends and during the summer for a rather large pharmacy that had, you know, cosmetics and all sorts of things. And that was a retail experience, but different. And I felt it was a good education.

LK: Did you know that you always wanted to go to college?

DM: Yes, I did. That was always a dream on my part. Unfortunately, my father did not feel that this was necessary for a girl. And so he provided two years, and then I found a way to do the rest.

LK: How did your mother feel?

DM: My mother was very supportive, but she couldn’t win.

LK: And what was your college experience like?

DM: It was a wonderful experience. It was really a wonderful experience as compared to the large schools that I had gone to. For example, in my high school graduating class, there

were 700 girls. And this was a small school, and it was a -- oh, just a wonderful new experience for me. And I made many friends, and they're still my friends. We keep in touch.

LK: Oh, that's wonderful.

DM: And it was an excellent experience. And I found that after I became acclimated, it seems to me that I wasn't working as hard as I did in high school, and I did very well. I wasn't having a difficult time getting four points, you know, or good grades, and it was a wonderful experience.

LK: Did you have any favorite or important instructors during that time that you can recall?

DM: No, I don't think so. I was always inclined to, I think, enjoy mathematical things and things that I guess required some imagination and common sense problem solving. I enjoyed problem solving.

LK: Within a specific course that you took, do you remember?

DM: No, just generally, I think, generally.

LK: And just to verify, what year did you receive your degree?

DM: This goes back to 1952. And then I went to work in New York City.

LK: What was it like to be in New York City at that time?

DM: Well, I was not unfamiliar with New York City because my

mother enjoyed New York City. And as a youngster I remember shopping on Fifth Avenue with my mother. And by golly, every Christmas and every Easter we went to Radio City Music Hall for the special movie and show. So I did not feel uncomfortable in New York City. And my first job was in the Lincoln Building right on 42nd Street, and between Lexington and Third Avenue.

And New York City back then -- it's very interesting to tell you -- to try to compare the difference. I had a job where sometimes I had to work late. And my parents had moved to Mt. Vernon, and I took the New Haven from Mt. Vernon to Grand Central Station. And when I worked late, my father wasn't the least bit concerned about my walking to Grand Central Terminal by myself.

And in those days, there was the Third Avenue El [elevated train], and there were bars along there, and the feeling was, my goodness, if anyone looked at this young woman, I mean, there'd -- everybody would be protected. And his only requirement was that he would meet me at the railway station in Mt. Vernon because of the dark couple of blocks walk home. So when I was a young woman, you felt pretty safe in New York City.

And my first job was really a wonderful experience. I went to work as an assistant to the--

(PHONE RINGS)

(INTERRUPTION IN RECORDING)

LK: Okay. Let's begin again.

DM: My first job was for a man who headed up a chemical sales company. And the job was to assist him, and to keep all of the accounting records, and to do secretarial work as well, I mean, bottom line. And it was a wonderful experience, because he was quite an entrepreneur and I learned an awful lot from him. And he encouraged me to just do more and more things. And I thought it was an excellent learning experience.

LK: Can you talk about how you came to that position? Did you interview for several jobs?

DM: Well, actually, what had happened -- I said it was my first job, but that wasn't completely true. Someone who had known me up at college was impressed and offered me a job in lower New York. And I was so bored that I just kept looking in the newspaper for something that I thought sounded more interesting. And this company was Fisher Chemical Company. And they had an ad in the paper. And it took three interviews for me to get the job, because he was afraid I was too young. He couldn't figure out that I could do the job at my age, and he just thought someone should be older.

LK: Oh, that's interesting.

DM: But three interviews later, I got the job.

And so that's how it happened. Yeah, there was an ad in

the newspaper that I had followed up.

LK: And what was his name?

DM: Robert Fisher. Yeah, Fisher Chemical Company -- deceased. It was quite a long time ago.

LK: What was the office environment like there? How many people worked there?

DM: It was very, very, very limited. There were perhaps two or three other people that would come in and do sales work with him and do some research. Many, many times it was just the two of us. But it was -- it went into so many different areas. And he had this sales effort throughout the country.

And it was wholesale resale of chemicals. He would buy from Union Carbide, as an example, and then sell to small chemical ventures.

LK: Other than, you know, the experience of working, do you feel like you learned about that specific industry?

DM: I don't think I learned as much about the industry as I did about what kind of marketing goes on that isn't obvious to the average person. I think that was the experience. I had never been in that kind of a situation, and that was interesting.

LK: Can you expand on that a little bit?

DM: Well, I guess you know, as a young woman, I had never realized all the different levels of distribution, you know, and

how you buy from -- a marketing person can be buying from Union Carbide in great quantities and actually have it distributed to other people who were going to be vendors, to others again, and how that whole system worked. I mean, that was so fascinating.

LK: Wow. And how long did you stay with Fisher Chemical?

DM: Well, I was there -- hmm, let me see, it must have been about four years. And I married, and I went to -- I married a chemical engineer, and I went to live in New Jersey.

LK: Okay. Prior to that you were staying with your parents in Mt. Vernon, is that what you said?

DM: That's correct. And I went to work for Ciba Pharmaceutical. And I was an assistant to vice president of sales. And I was bored.

(Laughter)

DM: I really didn't enjoy my job very much. I was kind of bored. And there were some other women who were working. And you know, you get to know people, and what-have-you. And one of the women heard of a man who was starting his own business and was looking for someone who wanted to get very involved and assist him in the setting up of this company, multi-talented, who could handle an office routine, do accounting, and what-have-you.

LK: All of the things you had done at Fisher.

DM: Exactly. And so I became very interested. And I made

an appointment with this man whose name was Charles Colvin.

LK: C-o-l-v-i-n?

DM: That's correct. Charles Colvin did the instrumentation on the Spirit of St. Louis. He was also the founder of Bendix Engineering Division.

He sold that company to Bendix. And he was on the board of GM Giannini, who was a top flight instrument manufacturer, and Fairchild. And he felt that Gianinni and Fairchild were taking a wrong approach in the design of instruments for spacecraft and drones, and he was going to show them. So this older man started a company called Colvin Laboratories.

And he hired me to run the office so he could be involved in building the company and the engineering and the manufacturing. Charles Colvin was the most unique individual I have ever met. He did not see black or white in a person, he did not see male or female. And it was a matter of months when I would come to him and say -- ask him for a decision and his response became, "What would you do?" And I told him, and typically he said, "Well, why don't you do it?"

And he got me involved in the manufacturing. And he decided that besides running the office and so on that I had managerial talents, and he wanted me to take over running the manufacturing part of the company.

LK: How did you feel about that when he made that offer?

DM: Scared to death. And I thought this was impossible. But I went to NYU [New York University]. I took courses in mechanical engineering. And with his support and his complete confidence, I mean, I went ahead, and I became manufacturing manager of Colvin Laboratories. And eventually, everything reported to me. I became general manager of Colvin Laboratories [in 1958].

And so this is how I entered the engineering world.

LK: And this was in the late ‘50s?

DM: Uh-huh. Yeah, this would be -- I haven’t got my resume here, so I’m having trouble remembering all the dates.

LK: That’s okay. We can verify this later.

DM: Yes. But as I said, I haven’t got my resume here to verify all the dates. Would you like me to get -- stop that, and then I’ll get that resume to be able to give you the dates?

LK: We can verify that afterwards.

DM: Okay.

LK: That’s okay.

DM: And then what happened is that Charles Colvin was getting older, and the company was growing very, very rapidly, and he felt that the time had come that the company should be sold because it was going -- and you’re talking about capital now that

was running into multimillions, and this man was really getting on in years. So it was a decision that was made. And I was involved in the sale of the company. And we had, oh, quite a few people looking at us: TRW and Lockheed.

And actually, before I talk about the sale of the company, I think one of the things -- I should backtrack for a moment.

I hope you can straighten this out, I mean, you'll know that I'm going back.

LK: That's fine.

DM: The wonderful experience was that there were no women in this business.

LK: Well, I was about to ask you that.

DM: There were just no women in this business at all. And I had really a very -- some very wonderful experiences. A lot of the -- the ultimate customer, of course, was the government. And a lot of the aviation companies were West Coast -- I mean, you're talking Northrop, you're talking North American [Aviation], that were companies, and here in the East, Sikorsky. And I found that I had to work much harder than a male in marketing, in getting a contract. But I also found that when I succeeded -- apparently we did well, and I had a loyalty and a following from some of our customers that was absolutely wonderful, because it was novel. And by golly, I can remember going out to San Diego and just being

overwhelmed by the fact as I went into these plants and saw that there just wasn't another woman around.

So there were some very positive experiences. I can talk about a negative experience, because they happened too. We had a contract with North American Aviation, ultimately the Air Force, and there was a difference of opinion regarding a specification and whether or not we adhered to the specifications. And a meeting had been set up with a representative from the Air Force and North American, and Charles Colvin was to be present. And he had an emergency situation and asked me to take his place in this meeting.

So the Air Force man was there. And oh, he had all this braid and brass, and so on. And I went into the conference room and introduced myself. And the North American man stood up, looked at me, and said, "I didn't think I'd have to deal with a broad."

LK: Oh, no.

DM: And I can remember that my first reaction was that I wanted to turn around and leave. But I got hold of myself, and I looked at him. And I said, "Sir, I'm afraid that's the case," and I sat down. And it was very interesting. This older Air Force man, whenever there was a little bit of an opportunity for him to bend in my favor, he did so.

(Laughter)

DM: Which was a great experience.

LK: Wow.

DM: Yeah.

LK: And so the negotiations, then, were successful?

DM: Yes, they were. Yes, they were. Well, actually, I knew we were in the right. But you know, there again, I just -- I got the biggest kick out of the fact that the military man seemed to think that the North American guy had been pretty offensive. And he leaned a little bit whenever he could.

LK: After referring to you as a "broad."

DM: Right, right, right. I wanted to share that with you.

Getting back to the sale of the company, there were a lot of people who looked at us, and I remember many meetings. And one of them was a company called Victory Engineering, whose owner was also the president of Breeze Corporation. And another one was a John Smith from Spartan Industries that was out in the Detroit area. And Spartan Industries won the bid for the purchase of our company.

LK: How long did that review process last?

DM: Oh, I would say that from the time it was put up to sale through the final negotiations and so on, oh, that must have been a good six to eight months.

LK: Wow.

DM: Yeah. Because there were a lot of people that had looked, and there were negotiations and so on and so forth. And we had the closing.

And I went to work, you know, the next day. And I remembered so well it was the last day before Memorial Day weekend. And I walked into my office, and I was there only a short time when the telephone rang. And it was John Smith, who was the president of the company that had just acquired us. And he said, "As I'm talking to you on the phone," he said, "My deputy will walk into your office, and will observe you as you clean out your desk."

And I was rather taken back, of course. And he said, "I won't even commit a female to be a draftsperson in my companies." And he would openly admit it. And this man walked in, and so on and so forth.

And I remember calling Charles Colvin on the phone, and I said, "I've just been dismissed." And of course, he was, you know, shocked. And he had had a contract to continue on with Spartan for about -- I don't know, a year or eighteen months. And so I left that day without a job, and I was devastated.

LK: I can imagine. You'd put so much into--

DM: Yeah. And there's two endings to the story. The interesting thing is that Charles Colvin found a way to break his

contract, so he did not stay for the year or so with Spartan. And other people who had assumed that they would stay, employees, were so shocked at what happened to me that they left. And the whole thing became a disaster for Spartan Industries, because the key people didn't -- wouldn't stay. That was it.

And I was at home the following week, feeling very badly, when I received a call from the office saying that the president of Breeze and Victory Engineering had called and wanted my home phone number when he found that I was no longer there. And they wanted permission to give it to him, and I said, "Okay." And the reason he wanted my home phone number is that apparently he was impressed with the way I handled the negotiations, and he wanted me to come in and become treasurer of Victory Engineering Corporation. So I had a job without looking for one within a very short time. And I ended up being general manager of that company.

LK: Do you remember how you felt when you got that phone call?

DM: Well, the phone call was for me to go over to meet with him. And I said I would get back to him. And I'm saying, "You know, I really don't know that I want to do this. I can't, you know, figure out why." And my husband said, "You're feeling sorry for yourself and you're bored, so why don't you just go over and find out what it's all about?" And that's why I did it. At first

I had a very negative reaction, (Laughs) and never thinking that it was a company that he wanted me to take over. So that's how I started my career with Victory Engineering.

LK: Wow. Up to this point -- let's shift gears a little bit -- had you heard about an organization called the Society of Women Engineers?

DM: Yes, and way back. When I became manufacturing manager for Colvin Laboratories there was an article in the local Newark paper. And by golly, I got a phone call from Beatrice Hicks, first president of the Society of Women Engineers, and she wanted to see me. And then it was followed with several more articles. And Beatrice Hicks' company, Newark Controls, was probably five miles from my plant.

I mean we were in the same part of New Jersey. So we met, and she told me about the Society of Women Engineers. And of course I explained that I did not have a degree in engineering, but that I had taken engineering courses. But she said that there were varying degrees of membership, and so I said I would be interested. And one day I walk into my office, and Charles Colvin said, "I received a request for a reference for you to have membership in the Society of Women Engineers. And I said, "Well, no, I can't be a member." He said, "Now, they explained the different levels of membership." And he said, "My reply is that I

will be offended if they don't give you senior membership standing." Well, of course, they didn't give me senior membership, but they did give me full member based on his references, and I guess also the size of the Society in those days. So that's how I became a member and became active in the New York Section.

And the first thing we worked on was the First International Conference of Women Engineers and Scientists in New York. And I was given the job of trying to find names and addresses of people to write to throughout the world, by working with the U.N. And I can recall many evenings working in the office in New York, stuffing envelopes and doing all sorts of things to prepare for that conference. We worked very, very hard.

And it was a wonderful, wonderful event. It was very successful, and of course, just started, you know, such a series of conferences around the world since that beginning. And you know, the old-timers know about a Ruth Shafer who was very instrumental in the New York Conference, and we worked very closely with her. And Carolyn Phillips, who is a trustee -- is Chair of the trustees -- I can remember Carolyn and I stuffing envelopes together back in those days for the International.

LK: Were you involved in any of the earlier conversations about just the idea of an international conference, or did those

conversations take place outside of the section?

DM: I really -- I do not recall being a part of the idea. I rather -- my involvement was to get it going. Yeah, yeah. And that's how I became involved.

And then, of course, I stayed with the New York Section, and I became a chair of that section. And we did lots of things. And then my husband and I attended the second conference. That was in England. And we became very involved. He was very, very supportive of the Society.

LK: This is your second husband, Bob Morris?

DM: That's right. That's right. My first marriage did not work out well. It was very short-lived. And Bob and I were married in 1958. And as I say, very, very supportive of the Society, and enjoyed being with the women. I mean, he just thought they were a great group.

LK: Well, there were several men during the early decades of SWE who were supportive of SWE. In fact, there was the Men's Auxiliary of SWE.

DM: Uh-huh. My husband was a founding member.

LK: Can you talk a little bit about that?

DM: Yes. I think there was a group that got together. Winnie [Winifred] White was our executive secretary. And her husband was supportive. And there was -- oh, I'm having a

terrible time remembering the president's name.

LK: Rodney Chipp?

DM: Can we shut that off a minute?

LK: Sure.

(INTERRUPTION IN RECORDING)

LK: Okay. We're back, and we're talking about the Men's Auxiliary of SWE, which your husband was a founding member of. Can you talk a little bit more about MASWE, as it was called?

DM: Yes. Well, this was a group of men who were very, very supportive of the activities of the Society of Women Engineers. And I can recall one thing in particular to show some level of support. The society needed a new banner to have at conventions, you know, for the table and what-have-you, one of these huge banners. And my husband proposed to the members of MASWE that this would be a gift that they could give the Society. And it was agreed.

And instead of just ordering it through a catalog and so on, my husband went into New York City to find a place that manufactures these so that he could be there firsthand to supervise it and be sure that it was done properly. And of course, going directly to the manufacturer saved money too, so that was also a part of it.

But they were extremely, extremely supportive. And Olive

Salambier, I recall that during her presidency she worked very, very closely with the men, and she enjoyed them and appreciated their efforts. And of course, we have scholarships today that are MASWE scholarships. MASWE no longer was important once males could become members, but until that change was made, MASWE was very, very important. And they were just very, very supportive men.

LK: Can you talk a little bit about early SWE activities, like, you know, right around the time of the international conferences, and then maybe into the late '60s? I mean, nothing specific, but do you remember feeling a sense of importance that SWE continue and that women engineers continue to be promoted?

DM: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Well, I think one of the things that every member received when she went to a meeting is the comradery of being with others who were having similar experiences in fields where women were not welcome. It was unusual for a woman to be in a position where she didn't have difficulties. I'm not saying all the time, but they were certainly there. And back in those days, there were tremendous barriers for a promotion. And I feel that the fellowship that existed between members of the Society, and when we got together at section meetings, I really feel that there were times when it helped the individual member with a particular work problem or

home problem, because there were others that had already had similar difficulties.

LK: Right.

DM: And also, our meetings, our section presidents always tried to be upbeat. There was always some form of education. And I think it helped us to maintain a positive attitude about what we were doing and who we are.

And there was a great -- when we decided to do something, I really felt that there was great enthusiasm and working together. There were very few people in the section who did not carry their load when an assignment was given to them.

LK: Sure. And that seems important in an all-volunteer organization.

DM: Yes, yes.

LK: You've seen SWE evolve from, really, an all-volunteer driven -- I mean, administratively, now, to the organization it is today.

DM: Uh-huh.

LK: And do you think that there's still a need for a Society of Women Engineers today?

DM: Yes, absolutely. In the first place, I think that there is a lot to be gained from people, whether male or female, who are involved in similar type of activities. I think one can grow and

learn all the time. And I feel that women have made tremendous strides. But you know, when you think about it, it's only in relatively recent years that you're getting CEOs of major companies who are women.

And I think that there can be support in terms of the family problems that women have that are different than male problems. Again, there has been a change in the way men are cooperating, but still there's an attitude that women will have that they can share with one another that a man can't. So I think it's support. I also think it's stimulating to learn about what other women are doing. Oh, I think it's a very important gathering and a very important organization that can really contribute a lot to women.

And after all, let's think about the students. After all, that is one of our missions. And without societies like the Society of Women Engineers, young women still may not feel comfortable going into the fields of engineering. And here they have support that they wouldn't have if we didn't have our student activities. I think it has a lot of meaning.

LK: During your career, have you belonged to any other organizations, professional or volunteer organizations, other than SWE?

DM: Yes, I have, but never quite to the extent of involvement with SWE. The fact of the matter is that between

having a management job -- the buck stopped with me, and that means lots of hours. And I maintained a home, I did not have children, but my husband was very, very ill for a very long period of time. And there was no way that I could put in the kind of hours that I gave to SWE with another organization.

LK: Oh, absolutely.

DM: So they were rather minor interests as compared to this. But you know, I was active in church and that kind of thing.

(INTERRUPTION IN RECORDING)

LK: This is tape two for our interview with Dorothy Morris. Can you, Dorothy, talk about your work at Victory as a -- at first you were treasurer, and then eventually as general manager?

DM: Yes. And there was another very interesting element. We manufactured thermistors and varistors. And we made a thermistor for a new device -- then a new device called a thermodilution catheter, which is very common these days. And we decided to go one step further, and instead of just making the thermistor to sell to catheter manufacturers, to go into the medical field ourselves by manufacturing the catheter.

And the owner of the company gave me a particular assignment to get the marketing of that product started. And I found that there was quite a bit of competition here in the United States, although we did succeed. And one of our best customers were the

VA [Veteran's Administration] hospitals here in the United States. But there was substantial interest being generated overseas. So I found that for a relatively small company, all of a sudden I was doing marketing and activities overseas and establishing representation there. And we were relatively successful in Europe, in both Belgium, Germany, and in Great Britain we did very, very well. So that was a new aspect. I had never done marketing in Europe, and it was a new experience.

LK: Sure. You mentioned that the technology is now standard. But when you were working -- when your company was working on the product, it was new.

DM: Yes.

LK: What is it like to be involved in a new technology, I mean, just from a marketing standpoint, but just from being involved in that?

DM: Well, it was exciting. For me it was a tremendous learning experience. And I had, you know, never been in the medical field at all and I must say that I feel very, very grateful that my cardiologist became very excited about my doing this, and I had the privilege of seeing the catheter used and what he was looking for, and it helped me in the initial phases, and helped me in my marketing. So it was a good experience.

LK: Oh, that's very interesting. And so would you like to

talk a little bit more about anything at Victory Engineering?

DM: No, I don't think so. I think in terms of SWE, when we go back, do you think we should talk a little bit about the Engineering Manpower Commission end of things?

LK: Absolutely. Yeah, okay, let's shift gears and talk about some of the positive--

DM: Yeah, because I think that, again, is important from the standpoint of the recognition of women and what women can expect. And that I felt very, very grateful for having -- way back when Lydia Pickup was president of the Society, the Engineer Manpower Commission, which was a part of the American Association of Engineering Societies, said that they would welcome a representative of the Society of Women Engineers to serve on the commission. And Lydia Pickup asked if I would join, and I said yes.

LK: Excuse me for a second. Did that invitation -- I mean, was that an important coup for SWE at that time, a recognition in a sense, or was it expected that all societies would be invited? Just because SWE was so new.

DM: That's hard for me to answer. But I suspect that SWE -- after all, SWE was a part of the American Association of Engineering Societies [AAES] and I think they realized that, "Hey, let's not discriminate."

LK: That's right.

DM: So I think it became pretty necessary, and probably should have happened earlier. But I think it just, you know, became pretty necessary. And so I served. And then the fact of the matter is that the members of the Engineering Manpower Commission no longer were just society representatives, because to really -- on the EMC you needed people who came from academia as well as industry, and not all of them represented a given society, but could make a major contribution.

And it was a very, very interesting experience. And I was the only woman. And then I was asked to chair the commission. And by the way, interestingly, it's not the Engineering Manpower Commission today. It's the Engineering Workforce Commission today.

And I became Chair. And it was during my office that great problems came up between AAES and the Engineering Manpower Commission. I think primarily it was lack of understanding on the part of many AAES members as to what the commission actually was doing. And there seemed to be some politics involved. And apparently this had gone on for some years, and came to a head while I was Chair.

And I think one of the toughest things, but successful, that I did, was to work with AAES and to address a very large meeting.

And I think that they learned something about the commission that they really didn't know, or had misunderstandings about. And it was delightful and a great success that all efforts to abandon the commission fell by the wayside, and the Engineering Workforce Commission is still very much alive and active today. And I still get invitations and literature from them.

LK: Oh, good.

DM: Uh-huh.

LK: That's quite an accomplishment, quite a contribution.

DM: Well, some of the recognition I got indicates that there were some men in very substantial positions that thought so, but the important thing to me was not as an individual, but this was something that a woman did. And I don't think that there had been any women members or any activity on the part of women up until that time that really brought about meaningful results. Today it's different.

LK: Right, right. At the time, did you feel pressure specifically because you were serving as a female president, or was it just because of the politics that were going on between--?

DM: No, I did not feel that there was -- I did not feel any problem in being a woman. And I think the proof of that is the fact that they heard me, and they went along with my recommendations, so that -- I mean, they wouldn't have done it if

they were going to just dispute me because I was a woman.

(PHONE RINGS)

LK: Right. Did you want to take a break?

DM: The record has it now -- the recorder.

LK: Okay. There was another project that you worked on -- or that you represented SWE, the People to People Delegation.

DM: Uh-huh.

LK: Can you talk about that project and your involvement?

DM: Yes. The People to People meeting was something that was set up by President Eisenhower. And SWE was asked if they would like to participate in that. And once again, I took on the leadership role. And it was a wonderful experience. We went to China and the Soviet Union. And we had guides with us at all times. The fact of the matter is, in both countries, you were pretty much under surveillance all the time.

But we met with -- in China we met with professors at universities. We went into work areas. We went into -- we saw medical facilities. We saw educational facilities. And it was, I thought, a great experience.

There is no question that a lot of it was propaganda. That was pretty obvious. For example, in China, they kept assuring us that female infanticide does not exist. And we were taken to the home of a couple who had five daughters. However, at one point,

we were also taken in to see a typical school. And it was very interesting that in the two classes that we visited, I would say between thirty and thirty-five students in each one, one had one female and the other had two. So that tells an awful lot.

And in the Soviet Union, we had the opportunity to meet with engineers who were part of the government and other government representatives. And one of the most interesting experiences was meeting with a representative of Gorbachev. And he was explaining that boots made by Russians in a Russian factory only last for about a month because they are so -- the workmanship is so horrible and that Gorbachev wanted to change this, and he wanted to by giving incentives for good work. And I remember we were very careful about what we said, but I remember that I left that meeting and thought to myself, "My goodness, capitalism at work in, you know, the Soviet Union."

So it was really, really a very, very wonderful experience. And I think everyone who was on that trip would agree that it was a great experience.

LK: Absolutely. Do you think it's important for SWE to participate in these types of external projects or national projects?

DM: Well, when I think -- SWE as a society, recognition, yes, but I also think that it's a wonderful experience for the

members of SWE to have an opportunity. Last year I was at the International in Toronto, and I feel that it was a great learning experience to meet and talk with people from other nations.

LK: Is this ICWES?

DM: Yes.

LK: The International Conference of Women Engineers and Scientists.

DM: Yes. And I think it helps us Americans to grow, to interface with people from other countries, and to learn about their problems, what they figure their advantages are, and to just hear their attitudes, get their attitudes, see what kind of work they're doing. I felt it was a very worthwhile experience. And I think we grow as individuals and we grow as a society when we interface with other societies on an international basis.

LK: Having participated in the first and the second international conferences, do you feel that situations have changed for international women engineers in some sense?

DM: I don't know that I can answer that because--

LK: It is kind of a loaded question.

DM: Well, no, because I didn't attend international conferences in more recent times. So I think the time spectrum is -- keeps me from answering the question accurately. It does refresh my memory about an impression that I had in Toronto. I

was amazed at the number of African women.

LK: Interesting.

DM: I had no idea. And there were -- would have been more there, but after the September 11th situation there were a lot of restrictions, and some people were actually at the airport, I am told, and couldn't get out, and get into Canada, they were rejected. But the number of African people just amazed me -- and Asian, but the African was outstanding. And I was terribly disappointed at how few Europeans there were. Now, it may be that, again, this is a reflection on my not having gone to many conferences, you know, in the recent past. But that certainly was something that surprised me at this conference.

LK: Do you have any memories or experiences from the Second International Conference that took place in Cambridge that you'd like to share?

DM: Not specifically, but that was a wonderful experience. There was great comradery regardless of the country that you came from. We were very well represented. And overall, it was a great experience.

I think a fun thing that I think about as a fun thing now: we, at the banquet, I remember the toasting to the queen, and so on and so forth, that went on and on and on. And I also remember that we were -- I don't remember what it was that we were served,

but several of us found buckshot--

(Laughter)

DM: -- in our food, and that was a new experience for some of us Americans. But, no, it was positive.

LK: You've participated in so many different ways in the Society. You've spent a lot of your time as a member of the board of trustees. And can you talk a little bit about your service to SWE in that capacity, and just how SWE has grown over the years in that sense?

DM: Oh, yes. Well, in order to serve well as a trustee, you do need some financial background, and you do need some experience in investments. So considering that my initial background was financial, this was a good job for me.

And both through my corporate work, and as an individual, I am an investor, so I know something about stocks and bonds and that kind of thing. The work of the trustees has really been very good. We have -- obviously, because of the responsibilities we have and because of the nature of the funds, some of the funds we're very, very conservative in.

And other funds we have been more speculative. For example, the Rodney Chipp Fund, where you are giving an award to people who have contributed to -- men who have contributed to the Society of Women Engineers, we were a little bit more speculative, and we

made a lot of money, and some of that money can't be spent for the purpose of the fund.

And if one has been following information from the trustees in this past year, we are working to bring together a group of funds so that we can have better use of those funds. When it comes to the Contingency Reserve Fund or the Headquarters Fund, one, of course, has to be much more conservative. Our scholarship funds have grown beautifully. And of course, we're very, very grateful for any additions.

There are sections who are now -- have raised funds to be able to give scholarships by the section. And they have asked the trustees to manage those funds for them. And there are certain restrictions and so on, but we are doing that. And we have received individual funds to open new scholarships. Well, last year, there was one awarded in my name, because a donation of $25,000 now opens up a new scholarship for a student.

LK: That's wonderful.

DM: And it's $1,000 scholarship at this time. So our scholarships have grown. I believe last year we gave out something around $50,000.

LK: Wow.

DM: Uh-huh. And so it's quite a responsibility. And the way the economy and the market has been these days, it's a big

problem.

LK: Right. Having been involved with the trustees, you know, from your early membership until now, it must be amazing to you how much SWE has grown--

DM: Oh, yes.

LK: -- just on a general level.

DM: Yes, yes, absolutely, absolutely. Well, and not only from a financial standpoint, but to go to a meeting and to see the number of people attending a conference. I mean, I have a great memory of an annual conference that was in Allentown, Pennsylvania. And my husband accompanied me. And we were very excited, terribly excited because there were a hundred registrants.

(Laughter)

DM: So that shows the difference. Yeah, when you think of the thousands now, you know, and that was very, very exciting.

LK: I have a different sort of question. You've been involved in SWE at a national level, but also from a local level in the New Jersey and in the New York Sections?

DM: I was very active in New York when I lived there, and that goes back many years ago. I have not been as active in the New Jersey Section. It was because of various complications, and the fact that the meetings are in different parts of the state.

And sometimes my work schedule just did not permit me to travel. When the meetings are more local, then I'm active. But in terms of the real activity, it has been far more on a national level than on a section level in recent years.

LK: Do you feel that you can comment in a general sense on just the difference between SWE at the local level and SWE at a national level, I guess in terms of activities or even--

DM: I really don't think that that's -- that I have an expertise in that.

LK: Okay. That's fine. That's fine.

DM: I might say something wrong, and I don't want to. I really don't feel that I have an expertise.

LK: That's fine.

DM: I think on the local level, certainly, my feeling for it in New Jersey -- and I think it's -- hopefully it's true in other sections, is that to work with the students is so important. And I really feel that the New Jersey section is doing that, although I haven't been involved in that activity myself.

LK: Okay. This is sort of a loaded question, but what would you say has been your most important contribution to the engineering profession?

DM: Oh, boy. To the profession -- I think that my biggest contribution has been management skills in an engineering company.

Not all engineers are necessarily good managers. And I think I've been able to extract engineering talent using my management skills, and recognizing engineering talent, that an employee felt that they were compensated and respected even if they didn't necessarily have a management position.

I have seen too often where wonderful, creative design and development engineering talent has been wasted, because it's been so good, and then someone is moved into a supervisory position, and you lose a lot of that. And I think that I have helped in working ways to circumvent that and to maintain talent.

LK: Excellent. Looking back on your career, is there anything you would have done differently?

DM: Oh, you know, if one says, "I wouldn't have" -- for example, this is not career, but if I hadn't made a mistake in my first marriage, I would never have met Charles Colvin. So this matter of "I shouldn't have done that," and "This could have happened," I don't think that that's a good way for people to think, unless you've made some very, very major mistakes. Because in my lifetime for -- there seems to me that when there's been a mistake, if it hadn't been for a mistake, there may not have been a learning or a good happening. So you know, I think I'm just grateful that it worked out the way it has.

LK: Do you have any final thoughts about SWE or advice for

young people in engineering, or both, if you can answer both questions?

DM: Well, I think it's important for SWE to continue to serve its membership and to work with the young people. I think that from things that I have heard -- I served on the Executive Search Committee this past year, and that gave me some insight into SWE's problems -- some of SWE's problems. And it would appear -- and then when I was at a meeting and met with some student sections out in California a couple of years ago, I had the impression that we are not helping our students, in some cases, to the extent that we should. And I believe that the Society is aware of that, and that under our new executive director there's a real feeling about that, and affirmative action is going to be taken. So that's one area that I think we need improvement, and I think it's going to happen.

LK: Excellent. Do you have any advice for young men or women today who are thinking about going into engineering or engineering management?

DM: It's an exciting field. If that's where your talents are, certainly someone should pursue the field where they have the greatest interest, because you spend so much of your time at work. If you have chosen a field that you're not happy with, oh, what an awful way to spend the day. I don't think that there's anything

worse than an individual who's unhappy with the work he or she is doing. That has got to have an effect, not only on his personal attitude, but on his family life -- his or her family life. So I think it's very important to be -- to like what you're doing.

LK: Well, if you don't have any final thoughts--

DM: No.

LK: -- then I think we can finish.

DM: Okay.

LK: Thank you very much.

DM: Right-o.

END OF INTERVIEW