

# UC Santa Cruz

## Institutional History of UCSC

### Title

Karen Sinsheimer: Life at UC Santa Cruz, 1981-1987

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## Introduction

This oral history interview with Karen Sinsheimer was conducted by Randall Jarrell, former director of the Regional History Project, on August 12, 1990 as part of the Project's University History Series. The transcript was carefully preserved in the Project's files, but Sinsheimer's time commitments as a busy curator of a thriving photography museum and the Project's resource constraints as a small oral history office delayed publication by two decades. We are pleased to finally release this short but compelling oral history, which documents not only the unique perspective of the wife of a University of California chancellor during a period where the nature of that role was in transition, but also the founding years of Shakespeare Santa Cruz.

Karen met Robert Sinsheimer at the California Institute of Technology when Robert was chair of Cal Tech's Division of Biology and she was serving as an executive assistant to President Harold Brown. Shortly after that meeting, Robert Sinsheimer left Cal Tech to accept the chancellorship of UC Santa Cruz in June 1977. Karen and her first husband, the photographer William Current, separated and Karen visited UC Santa Cruz in search of a position on the campus. As Karen put it, "Well, there were no jobs, but the chancellor and I became interested in each other and for the next four years we subsidized PSA (Pacific Southwest Airlines) flying up and down the coast to meet each other on as many weekends as we could manage." Karen continued to live in Los Angeles, working as the executive assistant to the chairman of Twentieth-Century Fox.

After four years, the commute became unbearable. On August 1, 1981 they married and Karen moved into University House at UC Santa Cruz. She quickly turned her dynamism and ambition to what in her oral history she calls “a huge array of outside activities that kept me both challenged and interested.” These included the Historical Society, the UCSC Women’s Club, the Cultural Council, and finally serving as the founding board president of Shakespeare Santa Cruz, which after thirty years is still a thriving professional repertory company in residence at the University of California, Santa Cruz. In the appendix to this volume we have included an excellent article by Don Rothman, UCSC faculty member emeritus and vice president of the Shakespeare Santa Cruz board, about Sinsheimer’s visionary work in founding the company, which pays more eloquent tribute to Karen’s accomplishments than I could muster here. I thank Don Rothman for allowing us to reprint this article.

In his oral history conducted by Jarrell in 1990 and 1991, Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer acknowledged Karen’s vital role in cultivating and facilitating the social aspects of the chancellorial office. “She’s very sociable. She’s very good at making people feel at ease, at keeping conversation going . . . She became very much involved with the community and did a great deal to improve the relationship between the campus and the community.”<sup>1</sup>

After Karen settled into the role of chancellor’s wife, she joined a systemwide effort to organize the spouses of chancellors that resulted in the establishment of the title “associate of the chancellor.” The labor performed by

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<sup>1</sup> Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Editor, *Robert L. Sinsheimer: The University of California, Santa Cruz During a Critical Decade, 1977-1987* (Regional History Project, University Library, 1996), p. 120.

spouses (almost always women) of UC chancellors had been unrecognized professionally up until that time. “What about pension or compensation if you choose to stay out of the job market for eight years? What about the money you spend on mileage, lunches, entertainment on University business?” Sinsheimer points out in her oral history. Until the awarding of this title, chancellor’s spouses were not listed in the campus directory and did not even receive a library card. Now University of California policy grants the chancellor such benefits as travel reimbursement, access to university facilities such as recreation centers and campus parking facilities, and workers compensation coverage if the spouse is injured while on University business.

Before her marriage to Robert Sinsheimer, Karen lived in Carmel, California with her first husband and immersed herself in the world of fine arts photography. Her college degree was in art history. She and William Current were personal friends with Brett Weston and Wynn Bullock. In an online interview Karen explained, “We moved to Pasadena in 1970 to work on an exhibition and book on the architecture of Charles and Henry Greene, the Craftsman architects. William taught me a lot about photography. I worked in a darkroom and knew how to print, but I was working at Caltech, and I was writing books. William was doing the photography, and we were producing shows.”<sup>2</sup>

After Karen and Robert Sinsheimer left UC Santa Cruz in 1987 they moved to Santa Barbara, where in 1992 Karen accepted the position of Curator of Photography at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Over the last two decades she

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.photography.org/interviews/sinsheimer.php>

has organized fourteen traveling exhibitions, each with a publication, as well as numerous photographic exhibitions from the permanent collection. The photography collection at SBMA has doubled in size during her tenure. The UCSC Library's collection includes many of the publications from the exhibitions Karen has curated over the years, including titles as diverse as *Chaotic Harmony: Contemporary Korean photography*, and *Made in Santa Barbara*.

I am indebted to Karen Sinsheimer for taking time out of her schedule to journey back twenty years and review this transcript for publication, which she deftly edited for readability. Copies of this oral history are on deposit in Special Collections and the stacks at McHenry Library at the University of California, Santa Cruz; and on the UCSC Library's website. The Project is supported administratively by Christine Bunting, head of Special Collections and Archives, and University Librarian Virginia Steel.

—*Irene Reti*

*Director, Regional History Project*

*University Library, September 2011*

## Meeting Robert Sinsheimer and Coming to UC Santa Cruz

**Jarrell:** It's August 13, 1990 and we're at Ruth Engel's house. Karen, so start with, can you describe the circumstances that brought you to UCSC?<sup>1</sup>

**KSinsheimer:** Bob [Sinsheimer] and I had met at Cal Tech when he was chair of the Division of Biology. I was the executive assistant to President Harold Brown at the time, having returned from a leave of absence to work on a bicentennial project with my first husband.

When Bob was leaving to become chancellor at UCSC, he said that if I were ever interested in a job, I might consider [UC] Santa Cruz. I thought it very unlikely and didn't take his comment seriously, but Dr. Brown left to become Secretary of Defense, my husband and I were separated, and I was looking for a change. So I called the chancellor's office and said I would be interested in looking at the campus and seeing what jobs might be available. A friend from Cal Tech, Lea Sterrett, lived in Santa Cruz (she later worked for the university) and so I stayed with her.

Well, there were no jobs, but the chancellor and I became interested in each other and for the next four years we subsidized PSA (Pacific Southwest Airlines) flying up and down the coast to meet each other on as many weekends as we could manage.

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Engel was a dedicated friend of the UCSC campus. She served as chair of the Friends of the Library Membership Committee for more than a decade, was an active member of the Garden Club of the UCSC Women's Club, a member and former board member of the Friends of the UCSC Farm and Garden, and a member of the Friends of the UCSC Arboretum. In 1996 the Ruth Franklin Engel Horticulture endowment at the library was established in her name.

In 1981, Bob simply said, “I can’t do this anymore. Either we get married or it’s over.” I had been working at Twentieth-Century Fox for the past four years, and I didn’t want to give up the job—but I didn’t want to give up Bob either. It was a choice—I hoped he wasn’t serious— but after three weeks of not hearing from him, I called him up and said, “I’m quitting my job tomorrow and coming up.” We got married at University House three weeks later, on August 1.

**Jarrell:** So that’s what brought you to the campus. You said you were working at Twentieth-Century Fox. What kind of job was that? It sounds very interesting.

**KSinsheimer:** It was. I was the executive assistant to the chairman of the board, Dennis Stanfill, so I took care of his schedule, the board of directors, planned the logistics for board meetings, including the social events, and generally kept the chairman on track with his jam-packed daily schedule. I had an amazing insider’s view of the movie business, albeit from the corporate side (which was always at odds with the creative side), and the board of directors was an exciting dynamic group of people that included Princess Grace of Monaco; former Secretary of State William P. Rogers; John Johnson, the African-American publisher and founder of *Ebony* magazine; Donald Frye, chairman of Bell and Howell, among others. It was an amazing education in how corporations run, what goes on behind the scenes and of course, to be in the world of Hollywood after academia. But it was also a very demanding, more than a full-time commitment, so it was nice to be single at the time and just go all out for the job.

### **Adapting to Life at UC Santa Cruz**

**Jarrell:** When you came up here and gave up your position, no more commuting, you were committing to your marriage and to living in Santa Cruz. Did you have any sense

of what would meet you here, in terms of— talk about a large corporation—this was a very large academic institution, large in the sense of what would be required, what was required of the chancellor, certainly. How did you initiate yourself? How did you take hold?

**KSinsheimer:** Well, I was curious because there certainly were no guidelines. I didn't know exactly how the chancellor was supposed to be involved in the community or how to find my way in the university community. I immediately called up Jane McHenry and I invited her and Dean McHenry for lunch to ask for any suggestions she might have. She said, "I pretty much did what I wanted to do," and she didn't really give me a lot of advice or guidelines, but it was helpful. I tried working as a consultant for a while for a friend in Palo Alto, driving up there a couple of days a week, but that proved unsatisfying. At the same time, wonderful people came to me and invited me to participate in one or another activity. Sara Boutelle<sup>2</sup> immediately came to me and said—

**Jarrell:** Of all people

**KSinsheimer:** Of all people. She had read my book on the architects Charles and Henry Greene<sup>3</sup> and she said, "I know you're interested in architecture. You must join me on the Historical Society board. It's a wonderful group of women." (They are now part of the Museum of Art and History). So before I knew it I had my first involvement in the community. I had never had the time, in my past working life, to serve on community

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<sup>2</sup> Sara Holmes Boutelle was an architectural historian who taught courses at UCSC. She is best known for her work on Julia Morgan. She also served on the Historic Preservation Commission in Santa Cruz.

<sup>3</sup> *Greene & Greene: architects in the residential style. This traveling exhibition of architectural photographs by William R. Current was later shown (May 23-August 22, 1986) at the, Santa Cruz County Historical Museum, Santa Cruz, California. (Text by Karen Sinsheimer) Imprint [S.l.]: Octagon Historical Trust of Santa Cruz County, 1986.*



boards, but I really enjoyed it; the next thing I knew, I was on several boards that enabled me to meet a lot of people and to start to know the community a little better. And of course the UCSC Women's Club was an early involvement because they met at University House and they were a wonderful group of people. So within a year I had a huge array of outside activities that kept me both challenged and interested. I was glad to give up the consulting and the commute to Palo Alto.

**Jarrell:** So almost immediately then you started having these contacts in the community. And what about in terms of the campus community? You said you went to Jane McHenry. But also, were there any people on campus who were particularly helpful in terms of learning the ropes? Because there must be all these social functions and receptions and cocktail parties and dinners and that sort of stuff.

**KSinsheimer:** Well, I'd say in the first year or year and a half, I went with the prescribed schedule of events that the chancellor's position demanded: welcoming the new class of students; graduate and Regents scholars' receptions; dinners and various donor and foundation board functions. In the first few years I simply did all the things that the office or the chancellor scheduled. Then, as I became more involved and began to understand not just the role of the chancellor's spouse but the opportunity, we started to initiate things together. We began to have smaller dinners to introduce people to each other and to the university. I had an annual Hallowe'en tea, which was great fun, and I began to work with development and others to bring people to the campus. I also had a fabulous, creative—somewhat fey—manager of the house, who trained work-study students as help. She designed some of the most incredible events on the smallest of budgets.

**Jarrell:** Bob was saying that somebody was in charge of overseeing University House. Who was that?

**KSinsheimer:** That was Diane Divine, the woman I just described. We would meet briefly and she would talk over ideas. Her instincts were nearly flawless, and she worked with aging equipment and newly minted student help. I'll never forget one young student at the ironing board, working on a tablecloth. "If my mother could see me now," he said. She had an incredible artistic flair with flowers, table design and of course, beautifully prepared and presented food. I was so lucky, as she also managed the house and the facilities staff that had to come from time to time to repair things. There was also the garden. I can't remember when she left, but she was replaced by an equally talented (though in different areas) house manager named Diane Olivieri.

**Jarrell:** Now what year did you come?

**KSinsheimer:** August 1981

**Jarrell:** And then you had a couple of years where you were already becoming active in the community and kind of just getting comfortable.

**KSinsheimer:** Yes.

**Jarrell:** Then you started becoming an active participant and catalyst yourself in terms of working with development and just kind of facilitating—

**KSinsheimer:** I started a series of round-table luncheons that gave me an opportunity to bring ten people from town to meet a faculty member so that we could meet the professor as person and learn about her research in an informal setting. They turned out

to be very satisfying events that I looked forward to every month, because you came to know a little bit about each person. And then of course, you were always impressed with the career paths of these interesting professors and the fascinating work being done on the campus.

**Jarrell:** How often did these round tables take place?

**KSinsheimer:** Once a month. Initially, of course I didn't have any help, so the invitations and the event were generated by me.

**Jarrell:** One of my questions was about what kind of paid staff you had.

**KSinsheimer:** I had none. Diane Divine managed the house and the catering, and she was on flex hours. Facilities provided a cleaning service one day per week for two hours.

**Jarrell:** The public part of the house? Or the whole house?

**KSinsheimer:** Two hours per week were for the private part of the house; I think the public part of the house was scheduled for four hours per week. They would do the floors and bathroom; kitchen and other needed maintenance, but Diane Divine required her staff to leave the kitchen and public areas spotless after every event.

**Jarrell:** What did it feel like living in University House?

### **Living at University House**

**KSinsheimer:** There were some wonderfully amusing moments, but it was very much like living in a public place, truly. Of course the maintenance people and others

considered it like any other public building that needs to be maintained, so University House would be on the regular schedule for fire extinguisher and smoke detector check-ups, for instance, and they necessarily had access to the house. Needless to say, there were some surprising moments. One morning about 9 a.m., the plumber was in the shower fixing something and I came tearing back from a meeting and dashed into the bathroom. All of a sudden this man leaps out of the shower and—

**Jarrell:** (laughs)

**KSinsheimer:** I gasped, and he gasped and managed to say, “She didn’t tell you I was here?” Another time a gardener was watering the plants in the guest bedroom and I didn’t know anybody was in the house. I heard a door shut and I got nervous. He didn’t know I was in the house. When we bumped into each other, we scared ourselves silly! So you realize you live in a very public building even though there were private quarters (but without a kitchen). We usually had students in the kitchen, preparing for some event or other, so I quickly gave up on the idea that I would be perfectly put together for the day before that first cup of coffee.

**Jarrell:** There were students in the kitchen?

**KSinsheimer:** They would often be there by eight o’clock to set up for a lunch or a function. We got to know each other on a fairly casual basis, which was fun.

## **Working with University Development**

**Jarrell:** So you had these round-table luncheons. You started working with University Development on some of your own projects, things that you thought would be

important in terms of donors and ways to support the campus. Did you work with Dan Aldrich?<sup>4</sup>

**KSinsheimer:** Yes and Collette [Seiple]. We planned some events and I let them know I was available and willing to go to events in the community.

Then I started to host some events, such as a pumpkin patch party every year. I realized what a big holiday Hallowe'en was in Santa Cruz. The first year, when I walked downtown and saw adults in costumes, I was surprised, but I thought, what fun. Let's have a pumpkin patch and invite women to wear costumes. That idea broadened to other holiday events and I would invite 100 or 150 people to come and mix it up and have fun.

**Jarrell:** And this would be from all different walks of life?

**KSinsheimer:** Yes. I met people through all my involvements and then through the university support groups, and other events. I liked bringing different groups of acquaintances together.

**Jarrell:** And you had gotten involved in the—now it's called the Historic Trust?

**KSinsheimer:** Yes

**Jarrell:** What other areas, boards were you interested in getting involved in?

**KSinsheimer:** I joined the Cultural Council at some point, which was very close to my interest in the arts. And I started a "Friends of the Arts" group at the campus, as the

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Aldrich was chief development officer at UCSC for two decades and left the campus in 1998 to work on special projects at the Office of the President.

chancellor initially had been very interested in building a town-gown museum at the base of campus to serve the visual arts communities on the campus and in Santa Cruz.

### **Shakespeare Santa Cruz Festival**

**KSinsheimer:** Of course, my major involvement came in 1981, when theater arts professor Audrey Stanley came to me and said, “Could we have tea? I have an idea for a little Shakespeare Festival.” So we had tea and the subtly persuasive Stanley said, “Would you be able to get a group, a few community people involved to support a small festival?” The chancellor had given some seed money to bring the Will Geer Company in 1981, the first year I was in Santa Cruz, and we had hosted a reception at University House. It was very successful. So building on that, Stanley began to plan a second season. That began my involvement which continues to this day. I started to organize a small group of community people, and of course, including Cleo Barber, wife of the Shakespearean scholar Joe Barber, and there were about five of us. We set about raising money; with Audrey as the “force majeure” we went forward.

**Jarrell:** It started off so simply and informally.

**KSinsheimer:** Yes.

**Jarrell:** I didn’t know that.

**KSinsheimer:** Well, Audrey had a way of making us feel it was all quite manageable. It was just two plays in the summer, you know. (laughs) One of the most memorable courses of my entire college career was a course in Shakespeare, which began my life-long affection, and theater was always important to me. I had no idea, however, what

was involved in organizing or funding a festival. We devoted huge numbers of hours and effort during those first years, Audrey Stanley most of all.

**Jarrell:** To get those plays mounted and those productions.

**KSinsheimer:** The chancellor had given seed money for the first two years and we tried to match the fund but didn't quite measure up. The third year we had a deficit and I remember going with great trepidation to the chancellor's budget meeting where the committee was considering funding Shakespeare for the third year. I went as chair of the board, and I stated, "I am not going to run another deficit. I am here to ask if we could carry over the deficit and raise enough money at the same time to get ourselves into the black." It was extremely important to the festival—and to me—that this not be perceived as "the chancellor's wife's little pet project." I wanted them to know that we would be accountable and I promised that if they would fund us for a third year, we would get ourselves on a stable financial footing. Sheila Baumgarten agreed to take on the role of managing director for two years, for practically a pittance, and at the next board meeting, I told the group, "I cannot be president if we are not going to seriously commit to doing the fundraising we need to do to make ourselves financially sound." It was one of the hardest meetings I've ever led, but it started us on a new level of professional commitment. We lost a few board members, added others, and launched a serious fundraising campaign.

**Jarrell:** Did you at this point become a non-profit?

**KSinsheimer:** No.

**Jarrell:** What is your legal standing as an entity?

**KSinsheimer:** We operate under the UCSC Foundation so we are able to accept charitable contributions. The advantages of being part of the University far outweighed being a stand-alone non-profit.

**Jarrell:** I see.

**KSinsheimer:** We are still under the UCSC umbrella.

**Jarrell:** And that's good for many reasons.

**KSinsheimer:** Absolutely. We've had to break some new ground with some foundations, such as the Packard Foundation and the Cultural Council, for instance, which initially would not give to "state-supported" institutions. We were able to make the case successfully that the percentage of our budget that came from the University was less than one-third of the festival's total cost. We also made the case that this was a town-gown enterprise, community-based but on the hill and community-sponsored, with the University providing facilities and infrastructure as well as accounting and other services. We are now one of the affiliates, one of the six groups that is funded regularly.

**Jarrell:** Oh really? What are some of the other groups?

**KSinsheimer:** Cabrillo Music Festival, KUSP, Tandy Beal, the Symphony—

**Jarrell:** So Audrey's initial simple—

**KSinsheimer:** Yes, "Could we have tea?" (laughs)



**Jarrell:** Could we have tea? Really, within three years Shakespeare Santa Cruz had really blossomed in a really unexpected way.

**KSinsheimer:** Well, perhaps to all of us, but Audrey Stanley knew what she was about. She brought in Royal Shakespeare Company people that first year. She knew that we needed to set a level and tone that would indicate we're not just a light, fluffy little piece of entertainment. We're serious and we're aiming for a high level of professionalism. The initial questions, "Why another festival? Are these 'student' productions?" had to be answered before asked. We labored for a few years under the misapprehension that these were student productions, though of course Audrey included many students, but the presence of RSC and then equity actors from the beginning was key. Stanley knew that.

**Jarrell:** Now you were very active in the organizing of the board and approaching people to support the festival, but what about personnel? Or did Audrey take care of all that in the early years, in the sense of recruiting actors, production staff, the artistic focus. Did board members have any influence in what plays were chosen? I've heard some interesting stories from Cleo about that.

**KSinsheimer:** Aaaah.

**Jarrell:** So I just wonder, if your preferences or your input or other board members' input in those early years—was that part of the process also?

**KSinsheimer:** It was truly a learning process, understanding the role of artistic director, who they are and what their function is. Audrey was the visionary, but she was also very canny in understanding that she had to bring people along. She always consulted

us about her plans and the board had a lot of opportunity to discuss the season with her. I do remember one instance when *Merchant of Venice* was proposed, and several members were very nervous about that. Because the festival was so young, many felt the community was not ready for it, and Rabbi Litvak, who was on the board, voiced his concerns. It was very interesting, because in the end, we decided to go forward and Audrey asked Patrick Stewart to direct it (he had played Shylock for two years on the stage and was fantastic). When he was unable to do it, we decided to present the play later. Many of us felt it was a very important play and I think honestly it will be done. But the board did voice serious concerns.

**Jarrell:** And this has not in the past been a particularly cosmopolitan community, although it's getting more and more so as the population changes. I think that the influence of the university community on that larger community is certainly undeniable.

**KSinsheimer:** Yes.

**Jarrell:** So I had no idea that that would have been a concern.

**KSinsheimer:** Well, it caught me by surprise, it really did. Because I felt that if anything, it was the function of a university to be a cultural and educational role model in a community and we could truly create a forum in which all opinions could be aired. I think now we have an opportunity because the festival has a decade under its belt. We have talks before the plays. We have a newsletter that provides background about the plays and informs people about content.

**Jarrell:** The context.

**KSinsheimer:** The context. And so I think that the play will certainly be done in the next few years and it will be an amazing experience for people. But in the end, the board trusted and relied upon Audrey to present the season, and her contacts were invaluable: Royal Shakespeare Company actors; set designers; and of course university faculty and staff. The festival now has become more broad-based as its reputation has spread, and we bring in tech people, scene and costume designers, from other places. Initially, however, we relied heavily on university-trained faculty.

**Jarrell:** When you made your original case, in terms of university support, were you alone with that, or did you discuss this with Bob in terms of something that is part of his administration, that this was really a development, although it stemmed from your own interest, and sense that this would be valuable—how much of this did you share with him and how supportive was he?

**KSinsheimer:** Well, he actually had funded the Will Geer production before I came to Santa Cruz. He had decided, when Audrey Stanley had presented the idea, that this would be a way of reaching out to the community, to bring the community to the hill. UCSC doesn't have sports teams and we don't have a lot of things that create a connection to the campus. He had funded the first Shakespeare production before I arrived, as a way of bridging the two-gown gap, so when it came time to martial further support I told him that I wanted to be responsible.

**Jarrell:** I hadn't thought before, that of course we don't have athletic programs or the more traditional kinds of activities that help to bind town and gown, so that doing this cultural activity would be a natural.

## **Fundraising for Shakespeare Santa Cruz**

**KSinsheimer:** The chancellor knew that UCSC needed to reach out to the community to create something that would bring people to the campus. You'll laugh at my initial fundraising efforts, but by the third year, I knew I needed to learn how to ask people for money. I couldn't be shy about it because the consequences—not meeting our budget commitment—were even more painful. So I started in and I called up a donor in Watsonville. He said, "Who is this?" So I told him who I was and what I was calling about. "No, I'm an old blue. I helped bring that place (UCSC) here. I sure get mad at it, I'm really mad at that place." But he continued, "For Shakespeare, huh? I'll give you a hundred dollars." So I got off the phone (laughs) and he began to support Shakespeare.

**Jarrell:** He said he was an old blue?

**KSinsheimer:** Old blue—meaning UC Berkeley. (laughs)

**Jarrell:** (laughs)

**KSinsheimer:** He also told me, "You know, if you only had sports there." (laughs) but he continued, "Well, I'd support it. You know I sure get made at those, you know, 'those hippies'," but he sent me the hundred dollars and I'm not sure he's been to the festival actually. But in any case, he let me know what he thought and then he came through. So I thought, if that's the worst that happens to me fundraising—it wasn't a no, but it wasn't a friendly yes. (laughs) So I found that there were many ways to bring people back.

**Jarrell:** Was it difficult at first for you to ask for money?

**KSinsheimer:** Oh yes. Oh yes. The first thing you hear from anybody when you ask them to join the board is, "I'll do anything, but I won't fundraise. I hate to ask people for money." So I went to some seminars and decided I had to learn how to do this.

**Jarrell:** Act really professional.

**KSinsheimer:** Yes. There was a wonderful woman who held a seminar sponsored by the Cultural Council called Grassroots Fundraising. So I attended a couple of her seminars and then we held a fundraising seminar for our board to try to help us all learn.

**Jarrell:** Improve those skills.

**KSinsheimer:** Yes. That really helped us all because we knew we had to raise the money to keep going.

**Jarrell:** So you became more adept.

**KSinsheimer:** We had to. We all learned that we could do it. If you were a schoolteacher there were ways to get twenty-five dollar sponsorships. You didn't need to go for a five-hundred dollar donor you didn't know. Then we made lists of people we knew. One woman said, "I do business with these people. I can ask them." It was empowering once we saw that everyone could raise money in his or her own way. We met our goal. We found out we could do it.

**Jarrell:** Well, that's very interesting. I didn't know that Bob had actually provided funding that first year. What is your participation now? Are you the President Emerita?

**KSinsheimer:** (laughs) I don't know about that title. I hope I'm an honorary life board member.

**Jarrell:** I know now you're living in Santa Barbara. But I just wondered what kind of connection—I know you come up to the plays.

**KSinsheimer:** Of course.

**Jarrell:** During the rest of the year, what is your connection with the board?

**KSinsheimer:** Well, I get the minutes of the board meetings and I read those, and I still do some fundraising. There are four or five donors that I can still ask for contributions. I call them up and say "Will you join me in giving to Shakespeare/Santa Cruz this year?" But I'm not involved during the year.

**Jarrell:** But you keep your hand in a little bit.

**KSinsheimer:** Somewhat. But as my husband wisely knew, it's important that once you leave, you stay out of everyone's way. You pass things along, turn them over, and then just enjoy coming back. It's sort of like this adolescent you remember and when you return, you think, "Oh my goodness, you've grown so big!"

**Jarrell:** (laughs)

**KSinsheimer:** And sophisticated! (laughs) It's just amazing. I mean, when I saw chairs in the Glen for Team Shakespeare, and they had a seating chart, wow, was I impressed.

**Jarrell:** Yes. All the little touches and changes.

## The Role of a Chancellor's Spouse

If you look back on this whole experience of being the hostess, the social first lady, however you want to designate that very special role that you have, that you had at UC Santa Cruz, what do you think of this? Did you feel comfortable with it? You don't seem to have been resentful.

**KSinsheimer:** No, never resentful.

**Jarrell:** Some wives of chancellors in this era might not feel very comfortable about a role like that.

**KSinsheimer:** True.

**Jarrell:** You seem to have had no problem with it. You made it your own. You did what you wanted to do. Did you feel burdened with expectations or obligations or were there any feelings like that?

**KSinsheimer:** You know, I *really* didn't. I felt, in looking back, that I was just the luckiest person. I landed in a place that I think was hungry for somebody to reach out, and because I'm extroverted, I found the community most welcoming. The chancellor is not a "hale fellow, well met." He's not a glad-hander. He doesn't make small talk easily. He is who he is. While he's wonderful company when he's with small groups, large groups weren't his best arena. So I think that I was welcomed and appreciated. Many people commented that, "the house seems so warm and it's just so nice to come here," because I genuinely like people.

**Jarrell:** You really enjoyed yourself.

**KSinsheimer:** Absolutely. And I enjoyed most of the people, and I defined my role. I didn't feel, therefore, that there were obligations that I couldn't fulfill. People didn't seem to come with expectations, though if they did, they never said so, I don't know. I remember Beverly Groves, Director of the Cultural Council, saying to me, "Karen, we didn't really expect you to do very much. You really didn't have to." I was astonished. I think I said something like, "Why join a board if you're not going to do things and participate?" So I think it was a surprise to people that I was out there and active. I wasn't a figurehead. If I joined a board I was going to sell tickets and do what I could. When I was on the Historical Society board we raffled off a dinner in the Davenport Jail which Diane Divine prepared and which I helped serve from Gerry Fitzgerald's well-equipped RV.

**Jarrell:** I remember that.

**KSinsheimer:** So it seemed to me that people didn't have high expectations, and when you put yourself out—

**Jarrell:** They were very appreciative.

**KSinsheimer:** Indeed, they were appreciative. I learned so much, and of course, my past work/life experience contributed to my sense of responsibility. Having been an executive assistant, working in both academia and the movie arena where you deal with complex issues and people who have a lot of expectations, I knew how to organize and maneuver through all kinds of social events.

**Jarrell:** So you felt very comfortable with all that by the time you got here.



**KSinsheimer:** Yes. It was just a fortunate circumstance one couldn't have predicted, that everything I did before came into use. I wasn't uncomfortable, but I learned that for a lot of spouses being thrust into a very public role could be very hard.

**Jarrell:** If you were an introvert. (laughs)

**KSinsheimer:** Yes, or if you worked. One spouse had worked in libraries all her life and it took some real doing on her part to get herself into the public arena. She wasn't used to it. It was not a role she had ever had or wanted.

**Jarrell:** And this was where?

**KSinsheimer:** She started at UC Riverside.

**Jarrell:** As the spouse of the chancellor, is there any kind of informal organization where the wives periodically get together?

### **Organizing the Spouses of Chancellors**

**KSinsheimer:** That's interesting that you ask. The Regents began to meet again on campuses and the chancellors of all nine campuses always met monthly with the UC President, followed by a Wednesday night dinner. We decided (we were all women at the time) to have some informal meetings. If the chancellors were having dinner with the president or the Regents, we decided the spouses, including the president's spouse, could meet for dinner as well. We didn't meet every month but—

**Jarrell:** Now I'm a little unclear. This would have been like at our campus?

**KSinsheimer:** Right. There are nine Regents' meetings a year and all the chancellors are required to go, and usually your spouse too.

**Jarrell:** I didn't know that.

**KSinsheimer:** Bob noted, "Well, it was noticed if you weren't there." For spouses, I'm not so sure, but it certainly applied to chancellors. The spouses realized it was a great opportunity to know each other and to make the connections. We got together from time to time on those Wednesday evenings, and then as we met on other campuses, each spouse would plan a tour of the campus. We came to know each other and I think it was here in Santa Cruz at Casablanca Restaurant before the first Regents' meeting on the Santa Cruz campus since the 60s, that we hatched the plot to consider the role/expectations of the chancellors' partner.

**Jarrell:** Yes, because the Regents had had a very unfortunate experience here.<sup>5</sup>

**KSinsheimer:** That's when they stopped meeting on campuses, for a long time.

**Jarrell:** Yes.

**KSinsheimer:** At Casablanca there were almost all the spouses. I think Therese Heyman from UC Berkley was the only spouse not able to come. I hosted a dinner and we started to talk about the role of the chancellor's spouse, and with the appointment of new chancellors, what the expectations might be. We started talking, we had dinner,

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<sup>5</sup> On October 17 and 18<sup>th</sup> 1968 the UC Regents met at UC Santa Cruz and encountered intense student protests. See Chancellor Dean McHenry's account of this protest in his oral history: Elizabeth Calciano and Randall Jarrell, *Dean E. McHenry: University of California, Santa Cruz: Early Campus History, 1958-1969* (Volume III) Regional History Project, University Library, UC Santa Cruz, 1987, pp. 1125-1131. This is available online at <http://digitalcollections.ucsc.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p265101coll13/id/3700/rec/18>

and we concluded that we should have a retreat.” They said, “Karen, when you sit next to [UC President] David Gardner tomorrow night tell him we need some money for a retreat.” The next night at dinner I said, “David, we’re talking about a having a two-day retreat for spouses to consider our role, the expectations, the problems, the support systems.” And he replied, “I think that’s a wonderful idea.” (His wife, Libby, had been part of the Casablanca dinner.)

So in February 1987, my last year, the Regents were meeting in Santa Barbara and the president’s wife and chancellors’ spouses held a two-day meeting at the Biltmore. It was, really, a landmark event. Dr. Mary Meyer (chancellor’s spouse at UC Davis) and I prepared an agenda after meeting with Libby Gardner, and we sent a questionnaire to all the participants. We asked about the issues they wanted discussed, the problems encountered, and the needs to be addressed. Each spouse made a presentation and we came up with the title “associate of the chancellor” as well as a list of things that we felt a spouse should be accorded, like a library card and a listing in the campus directory.

### **Associate to the Chancellor**

**Jarrell:** This designation, Associate of the Chancellor. Will you explain that a little bit?

**KSinsheimer:** At the time, there were no male spouses, and we all remember Sue Young, wife of UCLA Chancellor Charles Young, saying, “I’ll dye my hair green if any male spouse does what we do.” But at the same time, each of us felt unconstrained to pursue our own careers while choosing what we did or didn’t do as “spouse.” Professor Mary Meyer (Davis) continued to teach; Dr. Rita Atkinson (San Diego) continued to update the psychology textbook she and her husband had authored; Therese Heyman, Founding Curator of Prints, Drawings and Photographs at the Oakland Museum,

served as curator throughout her husband's tenure as chancellor of UC Berkeley; Sue Young (UCLA) went back to school and received her BA in linguistics.

**Jarrell:** So you're saying to be called the Associate to the Chancellor would be the preferred nomenclature?

**KSinsheimer:** Yes. We were looking at the idea of "the role." What about pension or compensation if you choose to stay out of the job market for eight years? What about the money you spend on mileage, lunches, entertainment on University business.

**Jarrell:** Doing University fundraising, enhancing the whole mission of the University.

**KSinsheimer:** Exactly.

**Jarrell:** Yes. In your private life.

**KSinsheimer:** Of course, some of the wealthier campuses, like UCLA and Berkeley, accorded the spouse the opportunity to order a car and to use some discretionary funds to cover expenses. But for smaller, newer campuses, that was not covered. So this two-day meeting at the Biltmore simply asked the questions: "What is the role? Should you have to do it if you don't want to? If not, who does it? If they do it, do they get paid? How much? What are the responsibilities? Let's think about—

**Jarrell:** Job description?

**KSinsheimer:** Yes. And let's think about some of the problems and staff support. I think it's accurate to say the Santa Barbara meeting was a landmark. We held a follow-up meeting at UCLA a few months later, and talked about presenting a proposal to the Regents, a title that at the very least would empower the spouse to get a library card.

**Jarrell:** You couldn't get a library card?

**KSinsheimer:** No. I wasn't "official" in any way. So I became a Friend of the Library and got a library card.

**Jarrell:** Here you are in this anomalous—you're this person who's privy to everything and at the same time, you have no status.

**KSinsheimer:** You officially don't exist. You aren't listed in the campus directory and people would ask, "How do I reach you?"

**Jarrell:** (laughs)

**KSinsheimer:** "Well, I'm not listed." It seems silly and at the same time you really are in this strangely wonderful powerful yet powerless world. You can't order anything up. If you thought, I'd like to get a shuttle to show the chancellors' spouses around the campus—

**Jarrell:** You don't have any authority to order anything.

**KSinsheimer:** Right.

**Jarrell:** There are all these contradictions that never have been acknowledged.

**KSinsheimer:** Yes.

**Jarrell:** So you all acknowledged them and made them explicit. I think it's very fascinating. Whatever happened to your agenda, to your questionnaire, to any written material that came out of this meeting, of the retreat?

**KSinsheimer:** I certainly have the job description that we evolved. Of course, we sent the title “Associate of the Chancellor” to the Regents. Now I understand that in fact they are talking about a pension or annuity for the spouse that chooses to assume the role of “Associate” for five years. A case in point was Tomás Rivera, who was the chancellor at Riverside. He died suddenly and his wife Concha was in a very difficult situation. Tomas had served less than five years. Thankfully, President Gardner was able to step in and solve the problem. It pointed out that the spouse could indeed be very vulnerable.

**Jarrell:** It’s unpaid labor.

**KSinsheimer:** Yes. It’s an anomaly. On the one hand, it’s unrecognized and on the other, it’s expected. The Regents had the expectation—

**Jarrell:** That you be at those dinners. (laughs)

**KSinsheimer:** Oh yes. The Huttenback situation—

**Jarrell:** Oh, at Santa Barbara—

**KSinsheimer:** —put this into giant relief.

**Jarrell:** In what way?

**KSinsheimer:** Frieda Huttenback never appeared at anything. Even when Charter Day was at UCSB and the dinner was held at University House, she never appeared. I never saw her at a Regents meeting or dinner and I remember her saying, “Why do all these things? I’m not going to appear. It’s not appreciated.”

**Jarrell:** Yes. I'm so glad I asked because I wondered if chancellor's spouses, wives in this case, ever got together, because I would say you're all kind of close generationally, not completely, I'm sure there are some women who are older, but basically all of these women have come of age during this intensely important period in terms of consciousness raising. And that would also be reflected in their roles.

**KSinsheimer:** Absolutely. There were many women like Sue Young, who had been a chancellor's spouse for twenty-something years, and I, who had just arrived. It was the perfect time to look at the role of the spouse as the profile of presidents and chancellors was changing. They were younger, they had families; there was little gender distinction.

**Jarrell:** Exactly.

**KSinsheimer:** Family life. How does one maintain family life?

**Jarrell:** What do you do about professional women? Faculty members, or whomever?

**KSinsheimer:** You mean, what about a woman that comes in as a professional and everyone says, wait a minute—

**Jarrell:** You're supposed to be here. You're supposed to be being this or that. Don't we have a woman chancellor at one of the UC campuses now?

**KSinsheimer:** We have two women chancellors, one at Santa Barbara and one at Riverside.

**Jarrell:** That should shake up the deck of cards. (laughs)

**KSinsheimer:** Absolutely. We all asked, “Are these men going to do what we do?” It was the perfect time to talk about the role of the spouse.

**Jarrell:** Well, that is fascinating, that you requested the first retreat from David Gardner.

**KSinsheimer:** He thought it was a great idea, and his wife Libby became very involved which was interesting. We weren’t sure but she became very involved in the retreat, and that was heartening, a president’s wife who was truly in a traditional role and very family-oriented who wanted to talk about the issues.

**Jarrell:** Well, I think it’s all a question of choice. You might have women who are choosing to not be in the work force, but the idea that there would be more comfort in whatever choice the spouse, male or female, will make.

**KSinsheimer:** Yes.

**Jarrell:** And that if this is such an important function that it will be somehow institutionalized as this associate.

**KSinsheimer:** Right. It was major recognition that there is in fact a huge amount of effort and time that someone has to devote to the job of the university. Somebody’s got to do it if the institution is going to be out there in world. So it will be fun to look back and see what happens.

**Jarrell:** I think in terms of University history it’s a real milestone.

**KSinsheimer:** Yes. People know very little, and why would they?



**Jarrell:** You're so public and yet in another sense, completely unrecognized in terms of the status that's accorded.

**KSinsheimer:** Diane Olivieri [mentioned earlier] told me that several people who knew she worked at University House asked her, "What does she [the chancellor's spouse] do all day?" Diane would say that she would see me flying in and out of the house as though on wheels.

**Jarrell:** (laughs) What does she *do* all day?

**KSinsheimer:** At some point the Women's Club asked me to give a talk about what it's like to be a chancellor's wife. I went through a few months' calendars. I told them about typical days and what some of the demands were, some of the frustrations. And I remember telling them that at the end of the day one felt sort of isolated. It was hard to make real friends. But from that talk, Ruth Engel came forward and said, "I'll be your friend." And from that day, she became a beloved, trusted friend and role model.

**Jarrell:** Karen, we're running out of tape. You have perfect timing. Thank you so much.

**KSinsheimer:** Thank you Randall. I feel very fortunate to have had six wonderful years at UCSC, and it's been a pleasure to reflect on them with you.