

The Minnesota
Women in Architecture
FAIA Legacy Project

Sally Grans Korsh Oral History Interview

Introduction

Legacy Project

The Minnesota Women in Architecture FAIA Legacy Project, is a joint effort of the Minnesota Architectural Foundation (MAF) and the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Women in Architecture Committee. In 2018, the Legacy Project began to amplify the achievements of our female fellows by documenting the stories of the women architects in the Minnesota recognized with the AIA's highest membership honor, Fellowship (FAIA).

The project's primary goals are: 1) to increase the visibility of women architects to break down stereotypes that may be instrumental in the formation of unconscious bias about the women in the profession and 2) to increase the visibility of women architects to encourage more women to seek a career in architecture and to stay productive in the profession despite adversity.

Funding from the Minnesota Historical Society supported the first eleven interviews and oral histories; with this template, the project will continue to grow.

Sally Grans Korsh



Elevated to Fellow in 2007, Sally Grans Korsh is leading change in government, creating inclusive tools that advance design knowledge and diversity for state leaders, and broadens the knowledge base and influence of architects to improve the built environment.

Interview

Sally Grans-Korsh, Interviewee

Kimberly Long Loken, Interviewer

April 11, 2019

Kimberly Long Loken: **KL**

Sally Grans-Korsh: **SG**

Track 1

00:00

[General discussion]

KL Alright, today is April 11th, 2019 and we are here at Minneapolis Community and Technical College. This is Kimberly Long Loken and I am conducting an interview with—

SG Sally Grans Korsh—June 3rd—born in St. Paul, Minnesota.

KL Alright. So Sally, let's get started with more of a chronological look at your career in architecture. Let's start by talking about how did you find architecture or how did it find you?

SG You know, it's a good question and you never know how to answer depending upon who your audience is, you know? But the one thing that I've always talked about was that I really didn't have a clue what an architect did. All I knew was that I liked the idea of it being sort of an amalgamation—sort of like the Venn diagram of social, art, and science. Like, I was kind of greedy and I loved all three of those things, so to have that kind of intersection to me was really fascinating. And it really was because I wanted to do the social piece, but I also liked the idea of building. And then, I'm not a particularly great artist, but I do love visualization. I do love the senses. I do love hearing, smells, and things. And that's what the built environment is all about. So yeah—it was just sort of by default and if I would have known what it was all about, I don't know if I would have done it [laughter].

KL So your realization that it is a Venn diagram between art, science, and—

SG Sociology.

KL Sociology—

SG Right—community people.

KL —community—when did you have that realization? Was it when you were choosing a college path or did it come sooner than that? Did someone help you to—

- SG** No.
- KL** —uncover this relationship?
- SG** I do recall understanding planning at a very early age. We had houses that were very close to each other in St. Paul, and I recall how critically important it was to know your neighbors and be a part of that community. I even recall hollering out the bathroom window when I was five years old at my neighbor saying, “Can you throw me some toilet paper.”
- KL** [Laughter].
- SG** And to this day, when I’ve told that story, I have to be careful, maybe I shouldn’t have told that story—I don’t know.
- KL** This one’s not going on the video, see? [laughter].
- SG** It’s a classic though in the sense that I realized how kind and considerate it was to be next to people. And so, from a very early age, I became aware of planning dynamics—where streets were, where sidewalks were, where buildings were located, how windows were placed. It was just a really profound piece to grow up in the late 50s and early 60s with neighborhoods that really cared about each other. And it was very impressive. And it made an impression on me. So like I said, I don’t even know if I knew what an architect did. All I knew was that they did plans and buildings and I wanted to do that. I thought I would—I thought I could help communities, help myself, and yet I wouldn’t have to be a total dilatant. I could pay attention to cool material things and I could pay attention to cool art stuff too.
- KL** Did you draw a lot and do 3D manipulation as a kid?
- SG** Not at all—no, and that’s probably one of the reasons why I’m not a good designer. And I’m serious about that. I’m not—one of my big benefits that I have this self-awareness and I am not a great visual design thinker. I recognize good visuals and I recognize good design, but I don’t necessarily have the ability to pull that off. But I tried. I mean, I did try drawing and designing things, but it was more the conscious thought process of thinking about things.
- KL** Right. Where do you think your visual acumen—I mean, certainly we all have innate skills—but did a parent or relative or someone in your community sort of promote or expose more visual literacy?
- SG** Not that I’m aware of. No. I mean, I recall early on knowing the difference my grandfather taught me between the two newspaper headlines, so I knew the difference between the two papers. And I think up to this day, I’m more sensitive to fonts than other people are—
- KL** Interesting.
- SG** —because that’s been a long-time component. But I think it was just that I had parents that were very aware of their environment, whether it was the decision to have all red

plants planted in the garden, or another year they had all white plants. You know, there was just an understanding—an innate understanding of that color and design coordination.

KL Interesting. What kinds of careers or hobbies did your parents have?

SG My mom was a nurse back in the day when you were either a nurse, teacher or prostitute. So luckily, she chose the nursing career. And my father was a traveling salesman. And I was lucky enough to travel with him sometimes. So I got to see some different cities that—at a very young age that a lot of kids aren't exposed to. And I think that actually was a pretty important visual piece too. It wasn't like Paper Moon the movie, but it was a good experience.

KL So where did you go to college?

SG At the University of Minnesota.

KL And you started off in architecture there?

SG Yes. In fact, I went to a small school, Hamline, because I knew I went to a lousy high school and I didn't have the physics or calculus background. And my claim to fame is I always try to tell people who said, "well I couldn't do the calculus or I would have gone into architecture school", so I always remind them that I took calculus the three quarters for six quarters. I took it. I flunked. I took it and passed. I took it and flunked. I took it and passed. I took it and flunked and I took it and finally passed. So, it took me six quarters to get through the three-quarter calculus class. And luckily, I got allowed to come into the University of Minnesota Architecture School which was amazing. We had stunning, stunning faculty that many of them were FAIA, many of them were practicing—most of them were practicing architects. We only had one or two theorists. And I think because they were practicing architects, it really made a difference in how we perceived how to not just execute projects, not just the actual execution of project, but the whole concept of how you think about a project with users and clients and funding. I mean, there was a total package of understanding about architecture. I was really—I'm really—I really feel lucky that I got to have some of the instructors that I did.

KL So that brings us to our next question which is about people and events that influenced your career—which may include some of these instructors.

SG Yeah, I think they influenced me to keep on going, more than anything. I don't think they necessarily influenced my career. What really influenced my career was I had some amazing bosses, some were really bad and difficult. And they taught me how to trust myself and to still pursue good work. And then I've had some really good bosses that recognized my skillsets that allowed me to then flourish with those skillsets. And that makes a huge difference because later on, as I hope to explain, I'm not a traditional architect. And that's what's so impressive about the fact that I was elevated to fellowship, is that I understood earlier on that I wasn't a good designer. I understood early on that I cared more about people, places, things, the finances, how the project got built. So becoming a project manager and working as an owner representative in the public realm was really important to me. And the more I did that, the better benefit and positive reinforcement I got. That

the skillsets that I did have were complimentary to helping build good projects for the built—for public good.

So the influences really were great that I had some people that were difficult to deal with, and that the influences were great that I had people that were great to deal with, you know? I was really lucky that as I progressed in different in both department of administration and then at the Minnesota State College and University System. I got to meet amazing presidents and people in great positions of power who understood how important it was to pay attention to nuances from architects, to pay attention to nuances from contractors and also pay attention to me once in a while. That made a huge difference in how we did really end up with good work.

10:09

KL So before we get too far into your career, can we talk just a little bit more about school? What years were you at U of M (University of Minnesota)?

SG Boy, you're asking a tough question there. Let me see—I started in early 70s—'73 I think, and yeah, by the end of the 70s I was done. Unfortunately, I never paid my graduation fees, so my actual diplomas—there's I think 1982. But at that time, I literally was registered. I was registered by the time I got my diploma which, you know, you're supposed to be registered for I think three or four—you're supposed to be working for three or four years before you take the registration test. But I forgot to pay that nasty \$15 graduation fee, so I think it actually says '82, but it was really '79.

KL And how many women were in your class just percentage-wise if not exact?

SG There was a handful. There was probably two or three in every class. There was—I always think that's very symbolic that at the University of Minnesota Architecture building there was like one woman's toilet on the third floor or the second floor and on the basement. So we always had to run the gamut of the courtyard to get to the bathroom, and it was crowded sometimes.

KL So as you started to move into practice, did you always work in the public sector?

SG No, I was lucky enough to—I chose very conscientiously to work at three different firms for two years each—a small firm, a medium firm and a large firm. The last one was a large firm and it was just an amazing experience. It was at HGA, and they were just a stunning organization—just well executed. I actually got to sit outside of Dick Hammel's office when I started there, and I got to see just—again, this is an example of a sterling boss—just how conscientious he was about the cultural environment, not only of the office, but of his clients and of his contractors and how just a great guy he was. And I was grateful when it was one of the many layoffs that a large firm has that I did get laid off and that's when I started my own firm and working pretty primarily with non-profit groups. I think I only had one or two for-profit clients in eight years. And that was wonderful because I was

following my dream of working with community groups, non-profit groups, volunteering my time. For instance, there was a burnt-out clinic that was offering birth control that some anti-choice people had arsoned. And it was just great that I could just take and do that work and rebuild the clinic, you know, and just do pro-bono work without having to talk to a boss.

But after a while, making four or five thousand dollars a year got to be a little hard, so sort of in just as a fluke, I decided to take a job as the project manager with the Department of Administration, and that's when I found out I really, really just totally enjoyed being that translator between clients and the architect in how I could maneuver between the two groups to end with a better product. And that was really important to me. And that's where I also learned how to take some great risks with contracting and contractors working them into the—you talk about the holy triangle of the Venn diagram of social science and art. I mean, I almost felt that that was the owner, contractor and architect that very few people kind of have the privilege to get involved in. And I was lucky. Like I got involved in that and really able to I think help manipulate end results that I think were really good. And I liked working for the public good. I liked knowing that tax dollars were being used, but that, more importantly, the mission that whatever they were—the mission of the correctional facility, the mission of the community college—that both of them were being served well by the physical spaces that they were being built.

KL And what was the name of your firm?

SG Well, originally my firm was just Grans and Associates, but it was the Department of Administration which is now—then it was called the Division of State Building Construction, then it became the State Architect's office. Now I think it's actually called Real Estate Management, they actually took the word architect out, which I was very sad to see happen.

KL So were you always a consultant at Grans and Associates—

SG No, I was—

KL —or you became [unclear].

SG No, after eight years of my own firm, I literally was a project manager for—I was paid for by the state of Minnesota. Your tax dollars paid me. And that's actually—it was a great deal. Like I said, I think I found my true calling. And I would have stayed there except that we started getting—the merger came through from the University State College and University System which took seven state universities— think it was like 40-some community and technical colleges and sort of smashed them together. It wasn't well-executed in terms of how it was done. But it was very clear that as an entity, the MNSCU [Minnesota State Colleges and University] system didn't want to use the Department of Administration. They wanted to have their own internal planning group. So I lobbied and got the job with them because, frankly, I didn't want to work on correctional facilities anymore. I had worked on the largest project to date at that point in time which was the Rush City Correctional Facility which was \$ 92 million. And I worked on a Shakopee

prison and I just felt that if I was going to use my skills for the built environment, it was going to be for education and not for correctional facilities. Albeit, it's really important to be concerned about those correctional facilities, and I'm particularly proud about one instance which I'll talk later. I think I've got a good success story I wanted to mention on that.

KL Well, we can jump around. I think we should talk about some of your favorite projects and what made them successful. And I think we should profile a couple of moments in your career.

SG Yeah. Well, the correctional one that I'm the most proud of is Rush City because, first off, again, it was the largest project done to date. It was the first project that had been done in 30 years that had an environmental impact statement done with it because of its size. It was just complicated and big and difficult. And the politics were just extraordinarily tough because no one wanted to fund it. But more importantly, I think the people involved, the consultants that got retained were really excellent—top notch. And as a result, we were able to work as a team to sort of ferret through environmental issues, political issues. And then the contracting issues became really important. We actually entered into a general construction manager owner at risk. Which most owners and most politicians would go, “Oh my gosh, you can't put me at risk.” But the reality is is that they're at risk at all times. I mean, everyone is at risk in building a project. And we made it sure that the owner was at risk, so in essence, I was taking—because I was signing the forms—taking the risk.

But we listened carefully. We were a solid team of engineers, architects, professional consultants who had worked on other correctional facilities from around the United States. And we pulled it off in the sense that at one point—I love telling this story about how we paid attention to what the contractor was saying. It was a particularly mild fall. We thought we could do some excavation in advance of Spring. And it was really—it was taking a huge risk that we were going to be able to get a certain amount of work done before the heavy frost came in. We ended up saving close to \$ 600,000 that we were able to—well, if you consider \$ 92 million, we were able to pull that into the project. And we actually ended up by making two training spaces simply because—and we never would have done that if we wouldn't have had that money. And I was really grateful for that.

And little things. It's like we paid attention to one of the consultants who talked about how difficult it is to not see the horizon. Because most of the people who enter this institution were going to get out in a matter of 10 to 20 years. And what are they going to look like when they get out? And so, we managed to change the window slit from five inches to seven and a half inches. Doesn't sound like much, but if you're looking at a five-inch window versus a seven-inch, all of a sudden you can turn your head and see.

20:00

It's a huge difference. And to this day, I'm proud of those training spaces and the window sizes. And I don't think that would have happened if it hadn't had been for number one, taking risks, but number two, being a cohesive team player, working with others and taking advice from them. And that's something that we're really lucky to do.

KL Let's talk about a project from earlier in your career. You brought some drawings and documentation with you, and you were telling me earlier about a project that you designed and then lived in with other creatives.

SG Yeah, I was doing a lot of infill housing—two and a half story walk up conversions in Whittier neighborhood. And those were interesting in and of themselves because they were a typology of housing that was built in the 1960s that was just plain bad. They were just one-bedroom housing that was put up there for the swinging singles of the 1960s that then became ghettoized and really unfortunate housing situation with a lot of families living in one-bedroom apartments. So we ended up doing some really creative work where we knocked out floors and made two-floor units out of them. And in doing so, we came across this empty lot that was in the middle of the block with this tiny little house next to it. And at that point, we were trying to figure out how we could do affordable housing for artists. So with the neighborhood group buying the two properties, we ended up building a six-unit condo where each individual artist got to sort of choose how they made their space. You know, we gave them a shell space done with trusses that was like 18 feet by 32 feet. Excuse me—no, they were 22 feet by 32 feet. And they could do whatever they wanted to with them. And then we literally made an ala carte menu of if you want a bathroom, it's a cost of this much. If you want a closet, it's a cost of this much. So some were pretty minimal. Some were very minimal with just basic spaces. But it turned out to be very successful. Unfortunately, what happened was not all of them were resold to other artists. But many of the units still are artists who are working and living in them even though it's been built 30 years ago. So it's kind of fun.

KL Did you have a role in developing that project as well?

SG No, it was really just being the architect. But again, I go back to the design. Whenever I actually had to actually do something that wasn't a [laughter] two-dimensional plan, that I actually had to think through three-dimensionally, I was smart enough to hire other people. And so, I always had to hire other people. And so, I always hired some really good people on a temporary basis, but they were good at helping to provide that design flair and strength that frankly I knew I didn't have.

KL Alright. Let's talk about some other moments in your career—expected or unexpected challenges that shaped the arc of your career or may be shaping it yet.

SG [Laughter]. Well, I think like I mentioned, you know, I had the decision to make with whether I wanted to continue working on correctional facilities for the state, and I was very pleased that I got to move on to the MNSCU system and there, as I mentioned, I had a great boss—the vice chancellor facilities. And Al Johnson, Associate Vice Chancellor for the system, taught me a lot and mostly about how to understand and help sculpt conversations. I want to mention this because I think it was important—I talked about the

correctional facility, but the campuses that I worked on were pretty impressive in that we have academic folks that were far superior in brain power than many of us, but didn't understand necessarily how capital projects work or how design works or how [unclear] projects.

So one of the things I'm most proud of is early on we had a science project that came in that was supposed to be like \$50 million and that was ludicrous. There was no way that that, frankly, that the legislature was going to fund it. So we had to work with them to try to figure out why is it so costly and what's the deal. And they were going to tear down a building and then rebuild it. And lab spaces are innately more expensive. They're \$300 to \$600 a square foot, whereas a normal classroom might be anywhere as inexpensive as \$100 to \$300 a square foot. So what we ended up doing was coming up with this great format where you build lab spaces adjacent to the existing building and let the existing lab space become classroom and offices because it had lower ceilings usually. And then the lab space can have much more interstitial space¹ and stuff like that to allow for optimum flexibility and growth.

By doing that we ended up by cutting the cost of the project in half. And it was such a benefit to that campus because we literally got the project up and running within a four-year time period. We ended up using that methodology in four other campuses, and it was very successful. So what I learned by that was just how you have to sometimes think outside the box. It was interesting. I'm now moved on from that position, and I'm in a national position now trying to overlay good facilities management with college and University business officers. And it was funny—we were having a chat a couple of weeks ago and they actually complained to me because I was causing more work for them because I think outside the box. And I thought that was a classic because it's like—yeah, I do think outside the box. And that's what's really important, and it was a benefit. So I thought that was such a clever question.

So I think I kind of roundabout—I'm not too sure if I hit on what your original question was. What were you originally asking me? [Laughter].

KL Asking about expected or unexpected challenges that shaped your career [unclear].

SG Well, it's money. It's understanding those kind of things. It's understanding skill-sets and that there are just some people that don't have the ability to understand, but that doesn't stop them from having great opinions. And so, it's how you work with those people to try to get the end project. It's very—I think it's so important to understand the mission. You know, the mission of not just the client, but what's the mission of the contractor? What's the mission of the architect? There are some contractors who literally say, I want to do good work and number two, make money. Vice versa, there are some that say, I just want to make money and I don't care about the good work. You know, and so those are kind of the ones you want to steer clear of. And so the same way with architects. There are some architects who are willing to listen, and then there are some that are literally willing to only build the project that gives them the award or the pretty photo. So it's a struggle to try to figure out where truth lies in—.

KL So it sounds like your focus is really in overcoming the day-to-day challenges.

SG Yeah, I would say—yeah. And now what I'm trying to do is to embrace better, holistic energy efficiency, space utilization. I'm trying to kind of layer those kinds of concepts and words. Many campuses obviously are into understanding environmental resiliency and the climate commitment that needs to be done right now for higher education, not just for their own operational costs, but for the education and benefit of the future leaders of tomorrow with who they are sending through their educational trough.

KL So what complimentary skills or interests enhance your practice? What helps you think outside the box?

SG I don't know. I think not growing up knowing what an architect did—it made me a—it allowed me to have a different viewpoint of what the end product should be and what the process should be. And I think that the skills that are the most important truly are two ears, one mouth. And being able to listen, but also to know “to thine own self be true”. I've used that phrase a lot. And again, going back to having really excellent bosses and really difficult people to work with. Sometimes you really have to know yourself. Like what's your real authentic self and what's the backbone that's going to make the project successful?

Like sometimes I've had to have a backbone and go against the grain and speak up. I used to have a phrase when I was at MNSCU that I hated being right. Because if I was right, it meant they built the darn thing wrong.

30:02

And there were times when I would just be begging the president to really rethink a decision that was made or I'd be cajoling an architect on a decision that had been made that I just had a gut sense for—and usually it wasn't just gut. Usually I had a series of listings of pros and cons and it was hard. And I, to this day, sometimes I've gone back and seen some errors in building placement, errors in other things that, you know, it's just hard to see. So the skillset that you have to have, I think, is to truly know how to be strong with that backbone, but also to know when you're allowed to take the risk. And then unfortunately, sometimes you have to just back off and say, well, I did my best and that's all there is to it, you know?

KL Thinking more about these complimentary interests, I'm wondering just how you and your family spend some of your free time, and are there experiences that you bring back from that?

SG Yeah, I think the best part about my family is that they are all strong individuals, and I don't know if it's just by sheer chance or they had to be otherwise they couldn't survive. You know, I'm lucky enough that I have a spouse that's just got very strong opinions and

that's great because they're either with mine or without mine. And my daughter knew early on that she wanted to be a teacher, and she's just doing amazing things right now in academia. And as she said, we never went on a vacation, we only went on architectural tours. And our son's now at his second masters at the University of Hong Kong. He just finished Berkeley and also City College in New York, and he's thriving as an architectural historian. But again, it's got that social bent to it, because I think we talked early and often about how important it is to think through things when you see something, you must think about it. So yeah.

KL How satisfying is it as a parent and as a sociologist?

SG [Laughter]. Yeah, I don't know. As my accountant said one time when she found out that one was—that they both really were in academia and she just said, “Ah, it's too bad they won't make any money.” I just said—and my husband said, “Yeah, but they'll make the world better.” So, you know, I thought that was a pretty good statement to make.

KL Well, talking about younger people, what advice would you give to emerging professionals just beginning their careers?

SG Well, first of, to take everything, to do everything, to never stop, to be as embracive as you can, try as many different things as you can. The one thing I do really say a lot though to young people getting out of architecture is that they really have to get registered. I'm pretty adamant about that that it's the last indignity that the profession can give them. But at the same time, I don't think I could have been an owner's rep or a project manager unless I had done shop drawings. I don't think I could have made the risks that I took with contractors unless I had done a traditional contractor-architect relationship in a number of different firms—small, medium, large. I don't think that—unless I had—the registration process forces you to do things that may not be in your comfort zone. And I think that's really important to do. And again, I don't think there's a problem with—you know, take I flunked contracts which I thought was hysterical, because that was the bane of my existence. I hated doing contracts, and yet, it was one of the most important things you had to do as a project manager, right? You have to do good [unclear] contracts. Of course, I eventually also learned how to hire well too, and there are other attorneys that can do contracts in a better way.

KL When you're taking the test, you're really just understanding contracts in theory, not yet in practice.

SG Yeah, right—right. But yeah, so I'm pretty insistent about that public realm stuff—and also, I really—my advice is I really—and it's something that when I became FAIA, I purposefully went after it because I wanted to endorse and include people to go into the public realm. That was really important for me. I mean, I didn't—of course I wanted the FAIA for my own silly ego, but at the same time, I really wanted it because I wanted others to see that you could flourish and be recognized by the profession for doing good work as working in the public realm. Needless to say, my office in (Washington) D. C. was wonderful because the public architects committee at the local AIA D. C. office is huge, you know? And I got the privilege of having meetings with people who worked for NIH

(National Institute of Health) doing lab stuff. And the parks—national parks and Health and Human Services and Homeland Security and there was one woman from the Smithsonian who actually got to be an [A.I.A.] Fellow while I was there, and I had helped work on her proposal. And I was thrilled for her because she was really doing yeoman’s work and improving these incredible public spaces for millions of people. And besides that, she said it was really fun. She got to do the elephant building at the Simsonian Zoo, which, you know, how many architects get to say they did an elephant building?

And there was another architect who worked on the veteran’s cemeteries—all the cemeteries. I mean, there’s 50 states plus the territories. There’s veteran cemeteries everywhere. And he was an astounding landscape architect and architect. And really making a sensitive—impressive decisions for the next hundred years, really having a—even though he wasn’t actually doing the work, he was the one who was creating the pre-design proformas and the capitalization project costs and monitoring the work that was being done. And what a—now, that’s one unusual piece, but even in Minnesota, boy, we’ve got lots of positions at school districts and at cities that could use the benefit of an architect’s ability to look at the whole process of design and apply it to a project. That whether it’s examining the history, it’s looking at the options, it’s coming up with the reasons for the spaces and it’s figuring out the little options that you could do—the scheduling options which are critical—contracting and then the execution. Every piece of that in my opinion should be done by an architect. That shouldn’t be done by somebody who’s an economic planner or a contractor because they won’t have the full depth and breadth of thought and of sense analysis that can be done on that. So that’s really important to me—that architects—that young people coming in know that there is a variety of really fascinating jobs that they can be a part of if they choose this profession.

KL So is that what you would tell someone considering architecture also?

SG Oh, yeah.

KL As opposed to the person who’s starting their path as an intern. If you’re talking to a 14-year-old.

SG Yeah, and I’ve done this talking to interns and school groups. I’ve gone to high schools and I’ve said, “This is the best field you can go into because you can branch out into interiors. You can do things in the outside environment. You can do things playing with software. You can do things with art.” I mean, again, it’s that Venn diagram of science, art and sociology that can all be pinpointed to really excellent stuff. And it’s great—I love saying “go into the field, if nothing else, to understand the process of how decision-making gets done”. I mean, we do talk a lot about thought leaders where I’m in my current job about thought leaders on higher education, thought leaders in civic awareness. And in order to be a thought leader, you actually have to think. And I’m so impressed with my education because I—it forced me to look at the history, the analysis, the different kinds of way in which you can look at things to come to some conclusions. So yeah, I think it’s a great field to get into.

It used to be that everyone would go into law because of the specificity of the written word. But I think that—if t you can teach the thought process as well as problem-solving that can be done with an architectural career. I hope you're doing that as an instructor. I hope you're teaching them how to think.

40:04

KL Absolutely.

SG [Laughter]. I'm giving you—

KL That's my favorite part of it—

SG Exactly. I mean that's just—

KL Systems design.

SG Yeah.

KL What affects what. How's everything connected.

SG Yeah, and when we do—there's a recent book that just came out called *White Rage* which talks about the systematic way in which this country has screwed up on racism. And that's a really important thing that somebody recognized that system component and is bringing that to the light for the rest of us. Now unfortunately, the people that should be reading that book won't be reading it, but that's the way. That's why all the more important that we need people to be thinkers and to think about that architectural design problem-solving process for the future.

KL So we keep covering these—touching on some of these more concluding topics about what it means to be FAIA and legacy to the profession. So I'm going to backup and ask a couple of clarifying quick questions and then kind of revisit those topics. You mentioned the Vice Chancellor of Facilities—Al—

SG Yeah, Al Johnson—right.

KL Johnson—okay—just wanted to make sure.

SG Oh, he's amazing.

KL And then who were you working with in D. C.? What was your role and who was your employer?

SG Sure. Mmany things happen when a new chancellor comes in, and there was new movement in upper-level leadership and my position got eliminated. So I was like, what do I do now? I'm not technically skilled to be an architect, but I still wanted to continue on in higher education. So this position down in D. C. opened and it was the Director of Facilities Management and Environmental Policy.—it's the National Association of College and University Business officers—they realized that they needed to help business officers

in operational issues. At most colleges and universities, 92 percent of the cost is really the faculty cost, and about 6 to 10 percent is the operating cost—turning on the lights, paying the utilities, sweeping the floor, paying the debt—that kind of stuff. But that being said, you know, if I can save 1 percent of a \$ 4 million, that's \$ 400,000, you know, that's all of a sudden maybe four people's salaries. So what I tried to do was overly good facilities management there in terms of space utilization, understanding that, energy savings contracts, power purchase agreements—. I'm heavily trying to understand how we can improve climate issues not just, again, internally and operational issues., But when we do things like that save operational issues, when we do water savings and energy savings, we invariably teach our students, too, about how the benefit is of what we're doing and how they can be a contributing factor to improving the climate—the reduction of carbon issues in our world.

So that's basically what I'm doing right now, and trying to use it as—trying to use the specific knowledge that I gained in Minnesota plus the fact that, you know, I visited a couple hundred campuses. So I've gotten to know how campuses work. And I've been able to highlight certain successes that certain ones have and how they can share that information. Because, again, most colleges and universities have really smart people working for them,—a few dullards, , they have really smart people. And so, getting them to be all on board, getting them to be moving in the direction to not only help the student, but to also be community members that care about the institution and their environment but then also move onto the global sense—you know. So that's really important.

KL So are you currently—were you—you're back in Minnesota as of late. Are you still in that role but long distance?

SG Yeah, after I'd been there six years, and my husband and I had gone to every museum, oh, ten or twelve times, we really missed family, we missed friends, we missed our house. So I offered to telecommute as —I still want to work here. I love this job. It's great. And a year ago they allowed me to move back to Minnesota and I've been telecommunicating. So just this morning I had an hour and a half Skype call and so far—knock on wood—it's been going okay.

KL So it's always a little funny to ask the legacy question when you're still a very active practitioner, but—and you've hinted at this—but in addition to talking about how you envision your legacy to the profession, I would also ask how do you envision the practice ahead of you yet?

SG Yeah—well, I'm hoping to continue to do what I'm doing. I mean, the reality is that I really wish my legacy—I really wish that other people could see the benefit—and again, this goes back to being a fellow—that AIA did recognize that people who serve in public entities are improving the built environment. And the processes that we go through are really critical to get good results that benefit the taxpayer or benefit whoever the mission of the organization. It doesn't necessarily have to be the taxpayer. It could be a private non-profit too. But it's not always necessary to be a traditional architect I guess is what I hope my legacy is. And I hope that—and we'll see how that goes.

KL Can we talk a little bit more about your investiture and your reaction when you found out that you were FAIA application had been awarded?

SG Well, first I guess I should tell you about the failure, you know, because I always think you learn more by failures than you do by anything else. It was a problem doing the actual document because I didn't have staff to do it. I had to do it myself. And it was very funny—I didn't make it the first time. And I called and they'd say, "Well, you should really find out why you didn't make it, etc. You had great letters. You had great documentation." And the woman on the other end of the AIA said, "Well, you know your graphics looked like they were put together on a xerox machine. And I said, "Yeah, they were. Hello—hello. What, you expected something different?" And she said, "You know, we're kind of a visual organization here." And when I looked at them now, honestly, it's embarrassing. I can't believe that I actually slapped them together on a xerox machine, sent them in, and thought it would be okay. So I applied for the second year and got it right away—which is good. And I did a much better job. And I actually had a graphic person who helped me kind of organize it. And that was really good. So the investiture felt like almost a let-down. It was kind of like getting the thing was the most important because, again, I wanted to use this as a tool with which to tell other people that there's value in being an owner's rep who's got an architecture degree and registration—that there's value in being part of a larger scheme to improve the world other than one project at a time. Nothing wrong with that, but you know, it's important to do that.

So the investiture was humbling. And again, I was just more impressed with some of the other people who had gotten it and what their titles were. You know, they read briefly what the title is of the person, and that was really impressive to see some of the diversity that was done, whether it was for affordable housing, or energy sustainability, or the committee on the environment, there were some really impressive titles—it was very humbling to be around those people. I'm more humbled around those than I am about the design divas because frankly, they tend to be their own kind of group onto themselves, which is great. But I'm more concerned about how people actually use spaces than how they photograph well.

KL And what year did you earn your F?

SG It was 2007.

KL And where was your investiture ceremony?

SG It was in the Alamo.

KL Wow!

SG Yeah [laughter]. Considering I'm a fighter that never gives up [laughter] and hates it when I'm right. It was the perfect place for me. Yeah, it was very impressive—actually I was so in a daze. I really kind of didn't know what was going on. And I actually was at the Alamo e last year. I was on a board of three-year term at a sustainability organization, and we were down at the Alamo.

We were down in San Antonio. And it was wonderful to go back there and realize some of the history there. And some of the sacrifice that was done there, both in terms of not just the people who died who were the people with guns, but many of the citizens. So it was humbling to see that and to know that liberty lives, and don't forget the Alamo and don't forget the people who are behind your built projects that benefit the world, you know?

KL What sustainability organization were you working for?

SG AASHE, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. And I was one that board. I also started a couple of non-profits that were pretty important.

KL Yeah—let's talk about that.

SG One of them was Groundworks Minneapolis which was an environmental group that took brown fields to green fields. The biggest one was Central Community Housing Trust where I literally walked the streets right behind here at Mpls College to get people to sign up for an organization that was going to— only work on developing affordable housing in the central city. And was very active in getting the single-room occupancy law changed. Back in the 60s to get rid of the World War One drunk vets they eliminated all single-room occupancies. And it wasn't allowed until we got the law changed in 1984 . And again, it was wonderful to be able to stand before the City Council with legal aid attorneys, and they would talk about, "oh, we have an architect". Even though I wasn't doing any architecture, the fact that I had this title was very impressive, and it lended credence to this law that we were going to be making single-room occupancies.

So one of the very first projects that I did was also a single-room occupancy for Central Community Housing Trust, which in now gotten an amazing director—Alan Arthur. And he's brought the organization into now I think there are over 3000 units of housing that they've done that's affordable housing. So they changed their name, but they've morphed into really great stuff. But, yeah.

KL Are you still on the board or [unclear].

SG No. In fact, when I went to [Washington] D. C., I had been on my community board, the St. Anthony West Neighborhood Group for—oh my gosh—for almost 14—15 years. And I just took a breather on all volunteer groups. And being in D. C., it was interesting. I'm back and I'm looking around trying to figure what else to belong to though.

KL So, in conclusion, this is a project of the A.I.A. Minnesota Women in Architecture Committee, so we always like to hear more about how being a woman has and has not influenced your architectural career.

SG Well, I'm just going to do a quick sideline, because I think it's really important. Back in 1980, I actually formed a Women in Architecture Committee with Linda Bank. And she's no longer living in the Minnesota area. She's out east. But we operated for two years. And a whole piece was just to try to get equity to understanding. And at that time, if you were pregnant, you literally lost your job. I mean, it was not a good situation. And I was not married or with child at the time, but I was very angry about a couple of my friends that had been displaced and let go because of that.

So that was really kind of a turning point, and we eventually ended up by kind of fizzling out. But we had a few good meetings and a few good happy hours where we talked and complained and got things done. There was a sense though at that time from a lot of the women that they didn't want to be separate. They wanted to be viewed as "one of the guys" and so—and not to be as a separate entity. Since coming back to Minnesota, I had been thrilled by the Women in Architecture Group—that they're all together and seeking equity—. I go to their monthly meetings now, and there's 20 very astute women who are trying to move not only their careers, but helping each other step up the ladder. They're doing great stuff. And I was very proud of them for doing this. I organized an event at RSP Architects on April 30th [2019] for other fellows. You named a few of them who are going to be speaking about how to become a fellow.

So I'm just thrilled that this younger group doesn't find it a problem to be part of a separate entity—that they can help push and prod each other into doing better in their field. And I think it's just really exciting that they're there. It's very clear that it's not just one or two leaders that are pulling the group—that they're all leaders that attend those meetings. And they're really—they're great. I feel like they're making a difference right now in how they're operating and moving other women up the ladder. So that's great.

KL So before we wrap up, are there other stories that are important for you to share for this oral history?

SG Being authentic, being humble, having backbone, to thine own self be true. Let me see, what other platitude can I give? But it's those platitudes that help in the end of the day, you know? When you go home and you just question if you should have stuck your neck out. And then you realize ten years later it's a darn good thing you did stick your neck out. Because, as they used to say, medical mistakes get buried, but our mistakes we have to look at for a long

time. There were lots of little examples that I could have brought up, but you know time flies[unclear].

KL Alight. Thank you very much, Sally. It's been a delight.

SG [Unclear].

[End of Interview]

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¹ An interstitial space is an intermediate space located between regular-use floors, commonly located in hospitals and laboratory-type buildings to allow space for the mechanical systems of the building.