

Jean Deken [00:00:00] This is Jean Deken at SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory, on Thursday, July 29th, 2010, interviewing Mil Van Dyke. So first, let's ... I've got some questions, just sort of general background... Somewhere ... Right here. Where were you born?

Mil Van Dyke Gowans [00:00:24] In Washington State.

Deken [00:00:25] Oh, okay.

Gowans [00:00:27] Oak Harbor.

Deken [00:00:28] Oak Harbor?

Gowans [00:00:28] Oak Harbor. Oak Harbor on Whidbey Island.

Deken [00:00:31] Oh, on Whidbey Island. Oh, nice. And where did you go to school?

Gowans [00:00:38] Stanford.

Deken [00:00:39] At Stanford in...?

Gowans [00:00:40] And Whittier College a few years, and then Stanford: I graduated from Stanford.

Deken [00:00:44] With a degree in?

Gowans [00:00:45] Psychology.

Deken [00:00:48] In psychology. Okay. And how did you... What was your first job?

Gowans [00:00:54] Well, to back up just a bit, I started out in chemical engineering my first two years.

Deken [00:00:59] Oh, okay.

Gowans [00:00:59] And got engaged to be married during my sophomore and junior years, transferred to Stanford. And everyone seemed to think that in that day and age, chemical engineering was a ridiculous goal for a woman, and I should take something more practical. And I didn't want home economics. And psychology was the shortest major in the book. So that's what I graduated in. And now, for my first job ... How far back do you want to go?

Deken [00:01:30] All the way.

Gowans [00:01:33] Well, when I was eight.

Deken [00:01:36] Wow.

Gowans [00:01:37] My friend and I talked the corner grocer into letting us stock shelves for \$0.10 an hour.

Deken [00:01:42] Oh, my.

Gowans [00:01:43] Briefly. My mother didn't approve. Oh, when I was 15, I was assistant playground manager for the summer. I worked in the student store in junior high school. Every year I worked at the entomology laboratory, the U. S. Entomology Laboratory, we were testing citrus scale.

Deken [00:02:08] Citrus scale?

Gowans [00:02:09] Citrus scale.

Deken [00:02:10] Is that an insect?

Gowans [00:02:11] It's a scale that attacks citrus fruits. And they were testing DDT to see how much was residual on the fruit when it was sold and all of those kinds of things. I worked at the supply depot for the US Army one summer. I worked for Crown Zellerbach packaging paper napkins one summer. Oh, what else did I do? That's all I can remember now. I'm sure there were others. Whatever came along, whoever would pay me for something, I would do.

Deken [00:02:52] Okay. And then when you finished your psych degree at Stanford? What happened?

Gowans [00:02:59] Okay. Backup again.

Deken [00:03:01] Oh, okay.

Gowans [00:03:01] At Stanford, I worked in *The Cellar*, I babysat, and I had the laundry concession for my dormitory.

Deken [00:03:10] What's *The Cellar*?

Mil Van Dyke Gowans [00:03:12] It was the student union.

Deken [00:03:13] Oh, okay.

Gowans [00:03:14] Where you'd go for a milkshake...

Deken [00:03:16] Oh, okay. It was called *The Cellar*?

Gowans [00:03:19] Uh-huh.

Deken [00:03:19] Okay. Okay.

Gowans [00:03:21] When I graduated, I worked for a doctor in San Francisco for six months, office chores. After I was married, I worked in a hardware department at T. H. Davies in Honolulu, which is where we lived.

Deken [00:03:42] What did your husband do?

Gowans [00:03:44] He was an engineer at ah.... Not Dole, what's the other one? Anyway, one of the pineapple plants.

Deken [00:03:48] One of the pineapple plants? Oh, Okay.

Gowans [00:03:55] He had gone to Caltech when I met him and then was in the Navy during the war and finished up at Stanford. With a degree in some kind of engineering.

Deken [00:04:07] Okay, So, you're in Hawaii, he's working for the pineapple company, and you're working for T.H Davies?

Gowans [00:04:16] And they were importers and suppliers. Almost everything. Then I had kids. And next job was at Punahou School, a private school there.

Deken [00:04:33] What's the name of it?

Gowans [00:04:35] Punahou.

Deken [00:04:35] Punahou? Okay.

Gowans [00:04:37] Where Obama went.

Deken [00:04:38] Oh, really? Oh, Punahou School. It's a private school?

Gowans [00:04:41] Private school. Been there since 1842.

Deken [00:04:45] And what did you do at Punahou School?

Gowans [00:04:48] I tried substitute teaching, couldn't stand the kids, so I ended up secretary to the president.

Deken [00:04:57] Okay. And were your kids in that school?

Gowans [00:05:01] Yes.

Deken [00:05:02] Yes. So how many kids do you ... ?

Gowans [00:05:03] I have a son and a daughter. And when I was divorced, we moved back California because I knew people here in this area. And my roommate was married to a fellow who was working at Stanford, professor at Stanford, and he's the one who got me in the door at SLAC, arranged it for me there.

Deken [00:05:25] And who did you interview with? It looks like you don't know?

Gowans [00:05:31] I don't remember.

Deken [00:05:35] So who, who did you work for when you first came? Was it SLAC or was it Project M when you came, do you remember?

Gowans [00:05:45] I think it was Project M and, um....

Deken [00:05:48] Okay, so it was on campus, on Stanford campus?

Gowans [00:05:50] No, it was over in the trailers.

Deken [00:05:52] Oh.

Gowans [00:05:53] So maybe it was SLAC, I don't actually recall.

Deken [00:05:55] So, up here on the property?

Gowans [00:06:00] No, down on the campus, just off Campus Drive.

Deken [00:06:02] Oh, okay.

Gowans [00:06:02] Where the maintenance area was.

Deken [00:06:05] Oh, okay. Okay. In trailers?

Gowans [00:06:07] In trailers.

Deken [00:06:08] Okay.

Gowans [00:06:09] My first job, I think, was in what is now a warehouse, or what had been a warehouse, because I was working for personnel.

Deken [00:06:17] Oh, so you worked for Stanford personnel before you came?

Gowans [00:06:21] No, it was the SLAC Personnel.

Deken [00:06:23] Oh, the SLAC Personnel, Okay.

Gowans [00:06:27] Interviewing potential people and also people who just came to see what we were doing: physicists mainly.

Deken [00:06:39] Did you like it?

Gowans [00:06:42] Not my cup of tea, really. But I had two kids to support. I was about ready to leave, and the Plant Engineering Department rescued me.

Deken [00:06:52] Oh, okay. How did you make that connection, do you remember?

Gowans [00:06:56] Well, I knew them all because we were a close-knit group there. And they... I guess I had said something about my chemical engineering background, and they thought I would be useful to them, and they needed a secretary, and ah, I wish I could remember more, that was one thing I was trying to remember with Bill yesterday, and I don't remember exactly how that change came about. But they needed a secretary, and I didn't like what I was doing, and somehow we worked it out.

Deken [00:07:28] Somehow you worked it out. Okay. Okay. So then when you went over to Plant Engineering, you were the secretary for the group? Okay. And, and who was your boss?

Gowans [00:07:40] Ken Copenhagen.

Deken [00:07:42] Ken Copenhagen. Oh, okay. And at that point he was a pretty young guy?

Gowans [00:07:51] Oh, we were all young: in our thirties.

Deken [00:07:54] Oh, okay. Was the work hard? Was the workload heavy?

Gowans [00:08:01] It was fun. There was a lot to do, but it was fun stuff. And it was a good bunch of people. I enjoyed the people. I didn't particularly like the job, as I say, typing, filing, and making coffee.

Deken [00:08:16] Yeah.

Gowans [00:08:17] I asked Bill¹ what else I had done because I figured it must have been something besides that or I would have gone crazy. And he reminded me that I had sort of been a gadfly. I went over all of their prose and nitpicked it. Before I would type it, I would clean it up.

Deken [00:08:36] That was probably a big job.

Gowans [00:08:39] It was fun, you know. I suppose I must have done other things. But I am...

Deken [00:08:46] You're not remembering?

Gowans [00:08:47] It was a long time ago.

Deken [00:08:48] Well, one of the things that Bill said 'oh, Mil will remember, Mil will remember' was these pictures.

Gowans [00:08:56] Oh, yes, I do remember that.

Deken [00:08:58] So we can... we can write on these printouts.

Gowans [00:09:01] Are you trying to tell me to remember names?

Deken [00:09:03] Yes.

Gowans [00:09:05] That I don't think I can do for you. I had trouble remembering Ken's name the other day.

Deken [00:09:09] Oh, did you really?

Gowans [00:09:11] So Bill and Dave Brown, who were at the back of my trailer.

Deken [00:09:15] Well, I've got ... you know. I've got a staff list over here. I see....Maybe it will help? So we're looking at three color photographs that Bill Kinst had that he gave me.² And this is the ... the true, groundbreaking at SLAC.

Gowans [00:09:44] Unofficial.

¹ Bill Kinst, who worked with Mil, and who gave Jean Deken Mil's contact information for this interview.

² Photographs are accessioned in SLAC ARHO as arc01313, arc01314, and arc01315

Deken [00:09:45] Unofficial, right. There apparently wasn't an official groundbreaking.

Gowans [00:09:49] Oh, really?

Deken [00:09:50] There was an official dedication, but there was never a, so far as we can determine at this moment, we can't find any record of an official groundbreaking.

Gowans [00:10:02] I'm not sure I broke the ground. It was pretty tough but I tried. Oh, dear, familiar faces but...

Deken [00:10:15] And what is this? All right. So we're looking at the SLAC Staff Book, for let me see what year this is, 1962. And under Plant Engineering, it lists Ken Copenhagen as the group leader, Mil Gowans, is that how you say it?

Gowans [00:10:33] Right.

Deken [00:10:33] And Secretary Peggy Bein? B-e-i-n. Oh, okay. So if we look for people with 14so it'll be IV 14 under their name...

Gowans [00:10:56] They don't make it easy, do they?

Deken [00:10:57] No, they don't. They're kind of in alphabetical order...

Gowans [00:11:01] There's one.

Deken [00:11:01] Bein. P. Bein.

Gowans [00:11:03] Patty.

Deken [00:11:03] Patty, is she one of the people in the pictures?

Gowans [00:11:06] Yeah. I think that must be her.

Deken [00:11:07] Oh, okay. So, we could write that on there. Patty Bein.

Gowans [00:11:15] All right.

Deken [00:11:17] There's IV 14 D. Browne Jr?

Gowans [00:11:19] Dave, yes.

Deken [00:11:21] Dave Browne?

Gowans [00:11:25] And he's this guy, well, he's chosen.

Deken [00:11:29] Okay, so we finished looking through the People Book, although Mil is looking through it a little more...

Gowans [00:11:34] I was looking for someone who was there. But she's not there.

Deken [00:11:37] She's not there? So, this, this groundbreaking event. Can you tell me a little bit about ... about that? How...

Gowans [00:11:46] We had just about finished our job; we were winding down. And we were not getting any particular notice in the dedication ceremony, and we figured that we, we had the marquee event. So, we went out and had our own groundbreaking. It was just our group.

Deken [00:12:06] Just your group. Do you remember when it was?

Gowans [00:12:10] No. If I still have any calendars from that era, but I don't think I do. I seem to have tossed it all. but it had to be around 1962.

Deken [00:12:24] Yes, it's definitely '62.

Gowans [00:12:27] Because I left in 63.

Deken [00:12:28] Oh, okay.

Gowans [00:12:31] Shortly after that.

Deken [00:12:33] So we we've narrowed it down to 1962, sometime between probably April and August?

Gowans [00:12:44] Looks like spring or summer.

Deken [00:12:46] Yeah.

Gowans [00:12:47] Clear skies.

Deken [00:12:51] So what ... what did the event entail? Did you...

Gowans [00:12:56] I think we took a picnic up there and had our little ceremony and had a picnic lunch and went back to work.

Deken [00:13:05] So, you just came up the hill with the shovel and a stake, now did you all put the stake in, or was that there already?

Gowans [00:13:13] I think probably we did. I don't remember specifically, but I think we did. And I can't even tell you exactly where it was, but it was where they were going to start digging for the accelerator.

Deken [00:13:26] Okay. And it looks like he is, it looks like Ken is struggling to get the shovel in.

Gowans [00:13:33] Yes. I'm cutting the ribbon, I guess.

Deken [00:13:38] Yeah. You've got a pair of scissors in your hand.

Gowans [00:13:44] I really am... am, uh... And... You know, if you'd asked me this 50 years ago [laughs], I might have done better!

Deken [00:13:52] If only I could have been here 50 years ago to ask you that. [laughs]

Gowans [00:13:58] It's a long time ago.

Deken [00:13:58] Yeah.

Gowans [00:13:59] Yeah.

Deken [00:14:00] Okay, well, let's... Why don't we stop there?