

## Field Notes

**Narrator:** Dr. Sandra Sutphen

**Interviewer:** Cassandra Edwards

**Date:** October 14, 2003; 3:00 P.M.

**Location:** Dr. Sutphen's office in the California State University, Fullerton Faculty Development Center

**Language:** English

**Ephemera:** Photo of Dr. Sutphen; protest leaflets from 1970.

Dr. Sutphen has been a faculty member of the Political Science Department at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) since 1967. Currently, in addition to her professorial responsibilities, she is the director of the CSUF Faculty Development Center. The Faculty Development Center's offices are located in the basement of the Pollak Library on campus. The corridors are stark and quiet, contrasting with the masses of students and the flurry of activity above.

I spoke with Dr. Sutphen on a previous occasion regarding my desire to interview her for this project. My purpose was to find out if she would be an appropriate subject for my project which is to examine antiwar activists in Orange County during the Vietnam era. At that preliminary meeting she stated that she had been interviewed in 1973 and the transcripts and tape of that interview were in the Center for Oral and Public History. Our preliminary meeting proved fruitful and I told her I would like to conduct a more lengthy formal interview focusing specifically on her antiwar activities. She agreed and suggested I contact her when I was ready.

Dr. Sutphen is small in stature, her voice gravelly from a lifetime of cigarettes (she kicked the habit 2 years ago). Not one to suffer fools, she expresses her opinions forcefully yet with care, which only heightened my anxiety as our second interview approached. Per her request, I phoned her office and left a message offering a choice of several dates and times for the formal interview. On Tuesday, October 14 at approximately 11:00 a.m. she unexpectedly phoned to say she would be available that afternoon at 2:00. Since I had class at 1:00 p.m. and had not conducted nearly as much research as I planned, I suggested we meet at 3:00. I hurriedly checked out a tape recorder, borrowed blank tapes from COPH, and leaved through as many of the archive files as possible before and after my 1:00 p.m. class. Feeling insecure and totally out of my depth, I descended the stairs to the library basement offices. Sure that my lack of preparation would show, I felt like I was entering the lions den and was about to be devoured.

Busy with grading a midterm exam, Dr. Sutphen escorted me into her spacious office. A large cherry wood desk, with coordinating credenzas and book shelves occupy one end of the rectangular room. Lively frames filled with personal photographs and numerous well-worn books and binders are marshaled along every shelf. Colorful framed posters adorn the innocuous grey-toned walls. Filling the majority of the room is a large oval conference table. It was here that I stationed myself near an electrical outlet and set up the recorder. Stylishly yet comfortably dressed in a casual sage green pantsuit and carrying a thermal cup adorned with characters from *The West Wing*, Dr. Sutphen took her place next to me at the head of the table and readied herself for questioning.

Before recording, I explained to Dr. Sutphen that I had listened to her 1973 interview, had read the transcript, and would pursue a different line of questioning to avoid redundancy. In the 1973 interview, she shared a wealth of information regarding her youth and collegiate years. I assured her that I did not want to recreate the wheel, but for sake of context, would ask about her family and her childhood years, where she grew up, her years in high school and so forth. I took this opportunity to reiterate that whereas the 1973 interview focused on her activities in the women's movement, I would be questioning her about her antiwar activism and her political development.

Once I turned on the tape recorder, Dr. Sutphen answered my questions without hesitation, asked for clarification when she needed, and overall seemed to enjoy the opportunity to share her history. On more than one occasion she apologized for hazy recollections. On the whole, her memories seemed vivid yet unrehearsed because she exclaimed more than once, "My goodness, I haven't thought about this in over 30 years!"

From a purely technical standpoint, the interview went smoothly. The recorder functioned properly and was well placed so I could monitor when to flip or change the tape. Our hour and a half were totally uninterrupted. The phone did not ring, nor did anyone knock on the door. The only intrusion was an occasional signal from the computer on her desk indicating that she'd received an e-mail. To her credit and my relief, Dr. Sutphen gave me her undivided attention.

For myself, the most enjoyable aspect of our time together was at the end when we discussed the current political situation. This subject arose when I asked what she perceived were either similarities or differences between the Vietnam era and the current conflict in Iraq. She shared her views on the current president and his administration, the opportunities that have been lost, political deceptions then as well as now, and her predictions for the future.

Once the interview ended and I had packed the recorder and notes, I thanked her for her time and asked if it would be alright if I contact her in the coming weeks should I have a few more questions or simply need clarification. She agreed to make herself available and we said our goodbyes.