SICULAR: Hi, my name is Patty Sicular. We are archiving the history of fashion, beauty, and Ford models, along with Fashion Institute of Technologies Professor Karen Cannell. And today it’s May 18th, 2010, we’re at the Ford offices in New York City and we are interviewing Susan Brainard, whose era is 1966 to 1971. And here’s Susan. Thank you for coming in today.

BRAINARD: My pleasure.

SICULAR: So tell us how you got started in modeling, how you were discovered. [01:00]

BRAINARD: Well, I was actually discovered at Syracuse University my junior year. I was sitting in front of my sorority, Kappa Alpha Theta, and a photographer came by and asked me if I’d like to make some extra money modeling sportswear. And it was I think $50 a session, so it was more than my parents were sending me at the time, so I took him up on his offer. And then from there my senior year at school I was dating a law student and he introduced me to his father who owned a record company and asked me to be on the album cover. And so I came into the city and posed for Charles Barron, it was supposed to be just for an album cover. And a couple months later at Grand Central Station I saw myself
on the cover of In Magazine, which was a popular teen magazine, and I wasn’t even in modeling. I really never thought about modeling until [02:00] I guess after college. My first job I got through Frank Shields, Brooke Shields’s dad. And his best friend was John Cochran, who was a fashion photographer who needed an assistant. And I worked for him for about a year and a half. He taught me how to process and print film. I hired mostly Ford models who kept telling me that I could make in one hour what I was normally making in a week. So after a year, OK, so after a year of working as an assistant as a stylist, everybody did their own makeup, so I didn’t do that, but I processed and printed film, I decided to ask John Cochran if he’d take a few shots of me. And he did and I brought them over to Eileen. And that’s when she said to me, “Oh, you’ve got a wonderful swan-like neck. But took bad you have such a fat behind. Can you find a girdle for your interviews?” [03:00] So that’s how I started modeling.

SICULAR: And do you think starting in Mr. Cochran’s studio helped you to become a better model here, apprenticing there?

BRAINARD: Probably, because I was always on the set watching the different models and how they posed and how they moved and,
you know, certain mannerisms. And so I think that was probably a good tool for me to begin modeling with.

SICULAR: So how did you -- were you very close to Eileen and Jerry, did they give you advice, did you live with them?

BRAINARD: No, I never had to live with them. Most of the, I think the girls from maybe the Midwest and the West and European girls lived with them. But I was brought up in New York and lived with my parents. Had a curfew.

SICULAR: Which is where?

BRAINARD: Which was in Westchester, Pelham. And I commuted every day with my little mini skirt on the train, which my father thought was terrible. And when I had consecutive bookings and needed to stay in the city I stayed with Wells Franken and her family [04:00] on 40, I think it’s 40 East 62nd Street.

SICULAR: What was the best piece of advice that Eileen gave you?

BRAINARD: Probably buy a girdle on your first interview so I didn’t jiggle.

SICULAR: When you started out did you go through the different sets of tests for new faces and then the regular board?

BRAINARD: No, I think they just sent me out from the start on go-sees. They told me to make sure that I ask the photographers if they would do some test shots. And some
of them agreed and in those days they were free. And that’s how I started building up my book.

SICULAR: Wow, that’s pretty interesting. And what did you prefer doing, editorial, catalogue, advertising?

BRAINARD: Probably advertising, because I looked like the girl next-door. I was easily relatable to. [05:00] And it was always a fun set. I liked doing television commercials too though.

SICULAR: What did your parents and family think about your success?

BRAINARD: Well, they weren’t exactly happy my family, because I graduated after four years at Syracuse University. And after spending all that money my father thought I should be doing something, you know, in the field that I studied. Of course, it was political science, so I don’t know what I was thinking I was going to do with it. And neither did Frank Shields, and that’s why he introduced me to John Cochran. And also he said, my father said, who is a concert pianist, said that it was a very competitive field and I probably wouldn’t have a chance. So I didn’t get a lot of encouragement.

SICULAR: You were at the top agency in the world.

BRAINARD: I was very lucky and fortunate.

SICULAR: And who were your bookers then?
BRAINARD: Well, the one I remember probably most vividly was Rusty.

SICULAR: Rusty, is that -- [06:00]

BRAINARD: Yes. And, of course, in those days we didn’t have cell phones. So if we wanted to know who to see we’d have to, you know, find a telephone booth and put our -- I don’t even think it was a quarter, it was probably a dime. I’m aging myself. So Rusty was a, you know, a big influence in my life.

SICULAR: How so?

BRAINARD: Well, she kept track of where I should be and who I should see and she was very organized and very pleasant to work with. And I enjoyed going to the agency and spending some time with her also.

SICULAR: And did you ever spend time with Jerry Ford, did he ever give you advice?

BRAINARD: Jerry was a tall, handsome, wonderful, kind man. I knew him more, I guess as a friend, because it was always on a friendly basis. But I don’t remember getting a lot of advice from him, because he handled the men’s division. And occasionally I would see Eileen and wait and smile and move on.

SICULAR: And how long were you in New York before you were sent to Europe? [07:00]
BRAINARD: I would say about a year and a half. I worked almost from day one, because I was fortunate enough to meet Norm Griner. He was very popular at the time. And they knew I was new and I needed the money and so they book me for just about anything and everything that they could. And --

SICULAR: Are you still friends with these people?

BRAINARD: Unfortunately, Norm Griner died a few years ago, but I’m still friendly with Steve. And hoping to do some work with him when I move back to New York soon.

SICULAR: That’s great. Do you want to ask anything?

LINDA: Well, (inaudible) fascinated. Steve Horn, what kind of work did they do mostly? Didn’t they do some wonderful calendars and you had some crazy poses?

BRAINARD: Oh, gosh, that was my -- yeah, those are framed. I can remember two that were sponsored by Rheingold Calendars that they were famous for. [08:00] One I was with Barbara Bach, who married first Ringo Starr. And she and I were pilgrims coming over on the Mayflower. Dressed very, very plainly. And then the back of us were all the hookers with all these great costumes on. So that was a fun month to do. And I did one where I was the first woman horse thief captured in America. So I had my little bonnet on and I was surrounded by cowboys who were really, you know, ad
people and a horse. So those are the two that I recall with great fondness.

SICULAR: And who are some of the favorite photographers you were lucky enough to work with?

BRAINARD: Well, my favorites really, again, were probably Steve Horn, because I worked for him continuously. And when I was working for [Sikulski?] or any of the other ones and I had some time to spare, rather than taking the train back to Westchester I could hang out at their studio and they became like a second family to me.

SICULAR: That’s nice.

BRAINARD: It was nice. Yeah, that’s why I’m still friendly [09:00] with Steve Horn today.

SICULAR: And what are some of your favorite campaigns that you had before, besides Rheingold?

BRAINARD: Well, I think I’ve had to go, OK, Peck & Peck. I did a lot of lot of work, I was like the Peck & Peck girl. And funny thing is I thought they went out of business decades ago. And I happened to find some of their clothes, you know, recently in the south in Steinmart, which brought back wonderful memories of the campaign that I used to do for them.

SICULAR: Since you were in so many campaigns did people recognize you on the street very?
BRAINARD: They always thought I looked like Mary Tyler Moore for some reason. Even though she had brown hair and I was a blonde there was something about I think our personalities and our smile, or the way we carried ourselves. And a little bit of Jane Fonda. But nobody ever said, oh, there’s Susan, because we didn’t have names in those days [10:00] like they do today. They’ve got one name and everybody knows who they are. But in the ’60s, no, we were just models.

SICULAR: Did you enjoy working in Europe?

BRAINARD: I loved working in Europe.

SICULAR: And how did that differ than working here?

BRAINARD: Well, there was pros and cons. It was very professional working in New York. We had the voucher system, the end of the week we got a paycheck that we could count on. When we went to Europe the commercials and the print work would take up to two days what they would do in New York in an hour. It was hard to get paid there too, because we’d have to go to the secretary or receptionist and they were either out to lunch, or had a cold, or were on vacation. And I think half the time we were there we didn’t collect. So --

SICULAR: But you were with an agency then?
BRAINARD: It was Francois Venoit who came over [11:00] to Eileen and selected, I think it was about six girls to go back to Paris to do the collections. Linda Moran went, Alana. Her name was Alana Collins and she married George Hamilton and then Rod Stewart, so she was with us. Dale Hadden. Wallace Franklin was really my closest friend and she was the one who encouraged me to go over. And I was supposed to come back in two weeks and a couple years later I decided to come back. It was a great experience.

SICULAR: What were some of your favorite, when you were growing up who were some of your beauty icons, what models or movie star?

BRAINARD: Well, of course, I always loved Jean Shrimpton. She was like the ideal, she had the most beautiful face. And when I was modeling Twiggy came into vogue and had that waif-like look, so that we all became as thin as we possibly could. Which is kind of hard for somebody like me who likes to eat and drink wine and have a good time.

[12:00]

SICULAR: Let’s see. What are some of your favorite memories of Eileen and Jerry? Did you get to spend weekends with them or go to parties?

BRAINARD: I went to a few of their parties. They were really a lovely couple. He was handsome and she was a very sharp
and intuitive woman. And they were always very kind to me, very kind.

SICULAR: What’s the biggest surprise of your career, tell us?

BRAINARD: I think it was probably before I even modeled and found myself on the cover of a magazine when I was still in college. I never expected to go to Grand Central Station and see the magazine racks and there I was. And I had no idea whatsoever that that was going to happen. I think that was probably the greatest shock. I was surprised.

SICULAR: And did your friends see it?

BRAINARD: Oh, yeah, of course they did. I made sure they did. [13:00] I don’t know how many copies I bought and, of course, passed them out to all my girlfriends, sorority sisters, my parents, etc. So it was a lot of fun.

SICULAR: Any magazines that you wish that you were on that you weren’t?

BRAINARD: I was more of a, I think a commercial model than I was, you know, doing editorial. I did a lot of editorial in Paris. But then again, when I went to Italy then it seemed like all I did was TV commercials. And I loved doing TV commercials, because I could act and had to speak three languages half the time to promote a cheese, and it was fun.
SICULAR: Would they do the commercials in different languages to be exported?

BRAINARD: Yes. One was [Fromage De Du?] And I had to sit on a chair at a table and when I said Fromage De Du, and I had to say it in English and Italian. And then the table and chair would rise up to the ceiling for some reason or other and tilt a little bit and then come down again. [14:00] And we did it over and over and over again. So there were a lot of funny times when I was doing commercials. In fact, most of my stories are funny.

SICULAR: That’s great that you have such great memories of it.

BRAINARD: Yeah, very much so. And now they’re being brought back, because these fashion reunions have started last year and started in East Hampton, a few in New York. And the next I think is July 21st in Beverly Hills. And it brings together all the people that I worked with, plus a lot of people that I didn’t work with, but we all worked with the same photographer and took the same route through New York and Paris and Milan and England. And made a lot of new friends that way. And that’s been a surprise, I think.

SICULAR: And also I think the Mad Mini Mod ’60s website brings a lot of --

BRAINARD: Oh, absolutely. Yes, because I was certified as a nursing assistant several years ago and had patients that
I’d have to tell stories to. Some of them didn’t always remember my stories and I’d change them a little bit. But Linda Moran was always in my stories. And after a few years I started thinking, I wonder what happened to Linda? And was able to find her on the internet. And, of course, now we’re, you know, best of friends, joined at the hip, bosom buddies, whatever. And it’s brought back a lot of fun. And, of course, we exchange stories all the time. So it’s --

SICULAR: The stories about --

BRAINARD: Yeah, do you remember when? Of course, I remember when, you were with me, you know, that type of thing. And we went out with these two guys one night and she ended up marrying one of them. It was really cute. I wasn’t that lucky. But we have a lot of stories together.

SICULAR: Who are some of the greats that you met along the way?

BRAINARD: Well, if you mean great as far as like celebrities go, because the first one I met was a man that I had seen a movie and didn’t realize that I was dancing with him the first night in Paris, and that was Alaine Delon, who was France’s number-one movie star. And we were all sitting at a table at Regine’s one night and somebody came from behind and tapped me on the shoulder and asked me to dance. And being as handsome as he was, of course, I
danced with him. And he said after 20 minutes, “We’ve been
dancing for 20 minutes and you haven’t told me your name
yet.” And said, “Susan Brainard. And what’s yours?” And
he said, “Alaine Delon.” And said, “Excuse me?” Because I
thought I was going to faint dead away on the floor. I
mean really I knew him. And he said, “How long have you
been in France?” And I said, “Oh, let’s see, about seven
or eight hours.” And he said, “The first time?” And I
said, “The first time.” And he said, “Well, I’m going to
show you Paris my way.” Grabbed my hand, out the door, got
into his convertible and we drove all over Paris that first
night, so it was quite memorable.

SICULAR: Boy.

BRAINARD: And outside of him, of course, I did a TV special with
Sammy Davis Junior [17:00] with Burt Lancaster, Omar
Sharif. A lot of really fun exciting people. That was
part of the wonder.

SICULAR: So did you model with him at all?

BRAINARD: Well, the only one I have pictures of is Sammy Davis
Junior, who came over to Paris to do a made-for-TV movie.
And there were three of us that were asked to join him and
his crew. And so up on the top of the Eifel Tower I was
put next to him and next to me were probably six models and
actresses. And on the other side a group of people. But
the paparazzi zeroed in on Sammy Davis and the next day the front page said, “Sammy Davis Junior discovers double of wife while filming in Eifel Tower.” So I mean all the tabloids the next day. Of course it wasn’t true, but it was fun. And I still have that picture.

SICULAR: Did Eileen see the picture?

BRAINARD: She probably did. I don’t know if she commented on it, because I was still living in Europe. And it was just a lot of fun. [18:00]

SICULAR: Did you want to ask anything?

LINDA: No. I just wanted to say that Susan and Wallace and I, and several of the others were the naughty girls who never came back from Paris.

BRAINARD: I know.

LINDA: And Eileen was annoyed, very annoyed.

BRAINARD: We were supposed to come back after two weeks. But we were having such a good time.

SICULAR: Was she trying to get you back?

LINDA: Yeah.

BRAINARD: Well, yeah. Because she said you’re going over there two weeks, not two or three years. And, of course, that went in one ear and out the other.

LINDA: It be foolish to turn down weeks of (inaudible) bookings.
BRAINARD: And to this Joey Hunter every time he looks at me he says, “You should’ve come back, you would’ve made a ton more money.” But I wouldn’t have had the experience and all the fun stories that we have to tell now.

LINDA: Being swept off your feet by France’s number-one movie star on the first day.

BRAINARD: Not too bad. Not too shabby, huh.

LINDA: And here in New York it was really just a job. We would get on the train, go to work --

BRAINARD: That was right.

LINDA: -- and go home.

BRAINARD: And go home.

LINDA: No partying, it wasn’t all that. [19:00]

BRAINARD: But they believe in partying a lot. And so we would always, every night there were 10, 12, 15 models, photographers, ad people, movie people, nobody spoke the same language, but somehow we all were understood. And a lot of good food, good wine, good times.

SICULAR: And how were the bookings different in Europe than they would’ve been in New York?

BRAINARD: Well, it took every photographer so much longer to complete the ad or whatever he was doing. In those days too most of the time we’d have to bring our -- do our own makeup, do our own hair. Sometimes bring our own shoes.
It just took longer for -- they expected you to stay for an entire day. So you just came at 8:00 or 9:00 in the morning and expected to leave at five o’clock. And we got paid about half of what we got paid in New York, as I said. A lot of the times we never even were able to collect the money. I probably have some in a Swiss bank account decades later. [20:00] I should look into that, huh.

SICULAR: Yeah.

BRAINARD: And you wanted to know about my favorite ad, I know this because Linda always reminds of this. It was for a very light colored liquor in Italy. And being a blonde, I guess that’s why they hired me. And the liquor was wrapped in a gunny sack. And so I had to wear a gunny sack as a dress and I was called the blonde in the sack. Which of course had double meanings. But I was very popular after that and it was one of my favorite ads to do. I think I was on every billboard too, besides just being in the magazines.

SICULAR: In United States also?

BRAINARD: And I don’t know if it got over to the United States, I really don’t remember.

SICULAR: And (inaudible) back then or was it just a one time?

BRAINARD: Well, the residuals really just in the United States if you did Coca-Cola ad or whatever and it ran nationally,
of course, you’d get residuals for as many weeks as it would run. And we belonged and SAG and AFTRA. But the rules were totally different in France and Italy.

SICULAR: Did you want to add anything?

LINDA: Well, I know most of the stories.

BRAINARD: Linda knows all my stories by heart. You could’ve interviewed her for me.

SICULAR: Who are some -- when you look at the magazines today who are some of your favorite icons, model icons?

BRAINARD: Model icons that are today?

SICULAR: Now.

BRAINARD: I don’t know if I have any favorites. All these girls are so beautiful and they come from so many different countries. We didn’t have the South American girls like Gisele or the models that are coming over from Russia. So there’s a lot more competition and each girl has a different looking and they’re all very, very, very attractive. God bless them. [22:00]

SICULAR: What’s your favorite part of your modeling career?

BRAINARD: Oh, it would have to be being in Europe. I not only had a group of girlfriends that were models, but there were a group of guy friends, three brothers in particular, and we became almost like a family. We would go to Munich for the Oktoberfest and we just did a lot of traveling. I
think I was probably one of the first to work with Patrick Demarchelier in Portugal. And the funny thing is I ran into him in South Hampton two weeks ago, literally ran into him.

SICULAR: Did he remember it was you?

BRAINARD: And I think he was just nodding his head and probably had no recollection of that. But I said, “I was with you on Portugal for a week doing a” -- I don’t remember what the ad was for, I think it was a wedding, and I was there for Fiat. But he was just starting out. And I always have a camera [23:00] with me all the time. As you can tell I love cameras. So I had an album full of pictures that I took at some of my shoots, which ring back the good times and stimulate my memory.

SICULAR: Would you like to add anything?

BRAINARD: Well, I’m glad to be back in New York. I’ve spent the past 27 years living on Hilton Head Island, which was lovely, raised my three children there. And now I’m anxious to get back to New York and hopefully back to work, maybe doing some print, doing some TV commercials. Looking up old friends, going to the reunions and life is good.

SICULAR: And would you want to share any of your beauty secrets with us?
BRAINARD: Well, for me it was just trying to be as natural as possible. Of course, in the beginning when we started out we had these little eyeglasses that we’d put on the top, put on the bottom, it was a Mary Quant look. I think that’s kind of out of vogue now. And I think probably [24:00] with the makeup less is more. Just be natural and show that you’re enjoying life and people will relate to you.

SICULAR: And do you have any advice for young girls starting out now?

BRAINARD: Young girls starting out right now, number one, should really want it. They shouldn’t be pushed by their parents, their friends, because if you don’t really want it it’s -- you’re never going to get anywhere. You have to be willing to put in the hours. People think that modeling is a very glamorous profession to the outside and the people reading the magazines it looks very glamorous. But it really involves a lot, a lot of hard work. Pounding the pavements all sorts of weather, go ahead and go-sees. Always showing up on time and with a great attitude. And that’s what I thought then and that’s what I would tell them, now.

SICULAR: Would you like to add anything else before we close this? [25:00]
BRAINARD: I think that my life is so interesting, because of modeling and, of course, being with the Ford Agency, which has always been the number one agency, as far as I’m concerned and still is today. My life changed from being, I guess a young child growing up in the suburbs to an international model and having the opportunity to make good money, to travel, to meet very interesting people and now with reunions meeting up with all these new friends and starting with a part of my life.

SICULAR: We thank you for taking the time to come meet with us today.

BRAINARD: It was fun, I enjoyed it too.

SICULAR: Thank you.

END OF AUDIO FILE