PATTY SICULAR: [00:00] --tty Sicular, Director of Archiving at Ford Models, and together with the Fashion Institute of Technology, we’re archiving the history of fashion, beauty, photography, and Ford Models. Today, we’re lucky enough to be interviewing Jane Meehan, who is a booker on the high board at Ford Models between 1977 and 1983, and today’s date is September 14th, 2010, and we are filming in New York City. Hi, Jane!

JANE MEEHAN: Hi.

SICULAR: It’s so great to see you, because --

MEEHAN: This is fantastic.

SICULAR: -- I was a client of yours first.

MEEHAN: That’s right.

SICULAR: And then I worked at Ford at the same time as you did, but I started in the men’s division when you were there.

MEEHAN: That’s right...

SICULAR: And then I wound up working on your board, but we missed each other by a year, unfortunately --

MEEHAN: I know.

SICULAR: -- so we never got to work together.

MEEHAN: What a time, though.

SICULAR: What a great time.
MEEHAN: And we did work together for a while when -- when you -- where were you?

SICULAR: I was at [Belair?].

MEEHAN: At Belair.

SICULAR: So I’d hire -- You were one of the nice people. You always try to hook up with one booker that you really like, and you were one of the nice ones.

MEEHAN: Thank you.

SICULAR: So I remember speaking to you all the time, booking [Deborah Brittanne?] [01:00] all the time.

MEEHAN: Right, Deborah Brittanne --

SICULAR: All the time.

MEEHAN: -- and Karen Bjornson, and...

SICULAR: (inaudible).

MEEHAN: So many of the models that were with me at that time -- working with Eileen on the high board was quite an incredible experience.

SICULAR: How did you find your way to Ford? How did you wind up there?

MEEHAN: Deborah Brittanne was a friend of mine for years --

SICULAR: A model.

MEEHAN: -- of -- a model, and always wanted me to work with her. We had mutual friends in fashion and beauty business, and we were always together doing stuff. And I was going
to open a restaurant, and unfortunately the restaurant burnt down, and I came for an interview with Eileen and Jerry, and was hired.

SICULAR: On the spot?
MEEHAN: On the spot, and --
SICULAR: Crap, that’s great.
MEEHAN: -- which was so -- such good fortune for me on a multitude of levels, to, one, go from one thing to another, to work with Deborah, and work with Eileen and Jerry.
SICULAR: And when you -- And you interviewed on a Friday, and you started on a Monday.
MEEHAN: That’s right.
SICULAR: Did you have a résumé? You just walked in? They told you on the spot? They had a good --
MEEHAN: Well --
SICULAR: -- feeling?
MEEHAN: Deborah had told them about me. And I did have a résumé. I had years of experience -- more in beauty, and hair, and working with some designers. But the restaurant was my dream coming to a reality, and then, poof. Literally up in smoke. So, Friday afternoon, walking up 59th Street, I knew that my life had changed, and fortunately Eileen and Jerry nurtured me and worked with
me, and then we were able to have the kind of career that I really wanted to have --

(phone ringing)

MEEHAN: -- which was working with the models.

SICULAR: Is that your phone?

MEEHAN: I think so. [03:00] That’s OK.

SICULAR: So, tell me some of the models who you got to handle.

MEEHAN: Well, what I tried to do is diversify a little bit, based on what the models wanted. Some wanted to do a lot of editorial, and they were at that part of their career where they were up-and-coming, even though they were already on the high board, and wanted to skyrocket to the next level. Some models were already established, and wanted to do catalogue, and make a lot of money, and weren’t that interested in the glamor side of the modeling business. And we had a lot of those. I worked with Deborah, and [Kim Acey?], and [Linda Rile?], who did the Perry Ellis contract. I worked with Esme, with -- her beautiful short dark [04:00] hair was kind of the new special... lovely... Roseanne Vela, who had so many Vogue covers, and really brought a certain athleticism, and worked with so many photographers. I think, at one time, I had maybe 27 girls that were --

SICULAR: That’s a lot.
MEEHAN: -- mine, exclus-- So it was quite a lot. And [Maggie Fey?], and Susan Hess, who I remember was a --

SICULAR: Oh, she was such a great dancer. She moved so beautif-

MEEHAN: She was up for Flashdance, and so there was a lot of...

And I worked with the television department, too, for the
girls who wanted to branch out, and --

SICULAR: With Gene Barakat.

MEEHAN: And Gene. It was always a hoot to have Gene Barakat
around, and --

SICULAR: So handsome. So debonair.

MEEHAN: He was really so handsome. The high board was very
intense, very fast. [05:00] There were no mistakes, and
Eileen would sit there sometimes from morning till night,
and made sure that everything was exactly the way she
wanted it to be.

SICULAR: And the phones got picked up on the first ring, not the
second. The first --

MEEHAN: First ring.

SICULAR: -- ring, those phones were picked up.

MEEHAN: First ring. And there were certain times of the day
when it would be a cluster of calls, and it would just be
never-ending. The days went by rather quickly.
SICULAR: Did you stagger time coming in, or did everybody work the same hours?

MEEHAN: No, we staggered. I think I was a little bit later coming in, maybe even 9:30.

SICULAR: So you worked till six?

MEEHAN: And I worked till six, and we usually worked till much later, and making sure that everything was done for the day, so the next day would be...

SICULAR: All over.

MEEHAN: Before computers, before cell phones, before it was so easy to reach people. But we got everything done, and it was really --

SICULAR: And did you have [06:00] the wheel in the middle of the table with the charts?

MEEHAN: Oh yes. When I first came, the charts were on the wall, and everyone was standing and grabbing and bumping into each other, and then they graduated to the circular --

SICULAR: And how did you know when you had to reach a model? Did you put a clip on top, or?

MEEHAN: There were clips, or -- what I would do is I would pull all my models for the day, and do that. And if someone
needed the chart, they knew it was on my area. And I sat with Kathy, and -- Kathy came after I did, and we were able to sit together. And Kelly LeBrock used to come over. Kathy had Kelly. And Brooke Shields would come, and all -- Jerry Hall would come over and bring champagne and cookies, and it was a very [07:00] exciting and fast-paced kind of time. Really quite special. Quite special.

SICULAR: What do you think that -- certain things that you’ve learned working with Eileen and Jerry that you’ve taken to other parts of your life?

MEEHAN: Well, Jerry really took me under his wing and taught me about contracts. And we had done the Estee Lauder “Prescriptives” contract with Claudia Cron, and Lisa Rile worked Perry Ellis -- and really showed me the steps of how to be a good negotiator, how to get the most of what you want, how to be very fair. And one thing I always appreciated so much is that he would let me take it to a really high level, and then, obviously, he would always step in and [08:00] make sure everything was right, and make sure all the money was correct. But he gave me the opportunity to do a lot of the negotiating, and have it be that -- you felt that it was part of your deal, and that was a wonderful experience for me to take in any aspect of life. After I left the agency, I opened a small music
publishing company, and it was really Jerry’s thoughts and Jerry’s words, in the back of my mind, that helped me in every aspect of life. And Eileen, of course, would sit right next to me, and taught me everything in terms of the booking, and what to think about, and [weather permits?], and who’s doing hair and makeup, and the location, and if it was right, and... Just every single thing to make sure that every aspect was successful for everyone. We had such a wonderful [09:00] list of clients, and that was the goal. And it was really quite a time.

SICULAR: Who were some of your favorite clients that you got to work with?

MEEHAN: Well, I remember that -- I used to work with Barbara Tilzer at Brides, and -- Doing bridals was very difficult. It’s not easy to get into those gowns and be absolutely perfect. And some of the girls loved it, and some of the girls, it was like, “Bridals? No!” But we always were able to negotiate a good deal, and Barbara Tilzer made it really wonderful. We also did so much work for Saks --

SICULAR: I loved working with Saks. They were so nice, the bookers.

MEEHAN: They were just excellent, and --

SICULAR: Marie -- I think her name was Marie, and she had an assistant, [Pat Henry?].
MEEHAN: Yeah, I vaguely remember that, but --

SICULAR: And I’d be on the phone all day, like, just doing nothing but Saks for the whole season.

MEEHAN: Well, they would do a week shoot, I remember, and it was always -- [10:00] And of course they always booked Deborah, which was great, and -- But there was a care, a professionalism, and everyone was on the same team, in a way, trying to get the job done, the best results, the best pictures. And such wonderful photographers to work with, and -- Patrick Demarchelie, and [Guy Lebeau?], and, just so many wonderful people that cared so much. And they cared for Eileen and Jerry in a way that you knew they were going to make it right on any level. And that was important to me, working with a few younger girls -- Maggie Fey -- at the time, and Julie Hagerty -- Julie Hagerty came to me with a crazy script called Airplane!, and we read it over a lunch one day, and it sounded so corny and so silly, but she --

SICULAR: She did it, right.

MEEHAN: -- wound up doing it, and it was great. [11:00] And I remember going over the lines, and it was like, “What? OK, let’s see if you could try this.” And [Lillianna?], who I saw a few years ago downtown by chance, walking down the street with her husband -- was just such a lovely and
wonderful girl to work with. And she had the best legs in the business at that time. It was -- She was just fantastic. I worked with Dayle Haddon, and --

SICULAR: She’s so nice. I saw her hailing a cab. I walked up to her, and I said, “You’re Dayle Haddon! I’m Patty from Ford,” and we --

MEEHAN: That’s so funny.

SICULAR: -- exchanged cards.

MEEHAN: She still was doing a lot of beauty work, and then -- but she was already doing some movies. Sharon Stone was on the high board for not that long a time --

SICULAR: Were you her booker?

MEEHAN: I was her booker for a very short time, and -- because she was always in California. And her focus at that time was --

SICULAR: Was acting? [12:00]

MEEHAN: -- was acting, and I remember her intelligence. She was really professional, and very, very intelligent.

SICULAR: One of my models, Barbara Newman, who’s her age, remembered doing doubles with Sharon Stone in bridals when they first started modeling together.

MEEHAN: Right. Barbara Newman, who I saw not that long ago, was always -- I remember she used to be on Long Island, and I would go --
SICULAR: Right. She’s a real outdoor girl. She -- She didn’t like coming into the city.

MEEHAN: And I would say, “Barbara, you’ve got to come in. This is a -- Make the commitment. Come, we’ll have lunch, we’ll make it a day, it’ll be OK. I’ll --”

SICULAR: And she’d say, “I don’t want to do that. I want to be windsurfing, or bicycle riding.”

MEEHAN: That’s right.

SICULAR: And did she come in?

MEEHAN: She would. She would come in, and she did such beautiful shots, and her athleticism showing through. It was just great to have that --

SICULAR: I have to tell you one great Barbara Newman story. So, I was the booker after you left, and it was summertime, and she had [13:00] to come into the city for an hour and a half booking -- a spec booking for Capri cigarettes. She said, “I’m not coming in for an hour and a half for 150 an hour.” I said, “Yes you are.” She said, “No I’m not.” I said, “Yes you are.” Well, she came in grumbling, you know, muttering under her breath that I made her come in, and the spot ran over and over and over and over and over. And she ended up making $43,000 on that hour and a half.

MEEHAN: (laughs) That’s great.

SICULAR: I know.
MEEHAN: That is a good story.

SICULAR: But you know, to get Barbara Newman into the city during the summer was not easy.

MEEHAN: That’s right. Well, she had a whole other life, and --

SICULAR: Yeah, which is great.

MEEHAN: -- I was so glad that she was enjoying that. And she was so good at it, and --

SICULAR: She was wonderful.

MEEHAN: And that was at that time when those shots of Jane Gill also (inaudible) --

SICULAR: Ralph Lauren, right.

MEEHAN: Ralph Lauren, and all those beautiful shots -- outdoor shots, and the water, and canoes --

SICULAR: Skiing, and... Yeah.

MEEHAN: That was really so great. I loved doing all the beauty campaigns, and -- difficult and interesting -- and making sure that everyone was at their correct weight, and their [14:00] skin in the perfect condition, and how to do that, and get that... It was always better for me to have the models that were already established, and take them to another place.

SICULAR: That’s like me. I didn’t like working with the new faces. Like, Louise loved it. Some people love that. I found it (inaudible) that they got them all built up and
then I had to give them to someone else to take over for the good stuff. So I like -- I’m like you. I like working with established models. Well, I liked to do what they wanted to do, what Eileen thought was best for them, whether it be to push for fashion and beauty, whether it -- push for editorial. If it was, working with all the magazines was just fantastic, and to see those ad pages, and to see the editorial work was really great. Capitalizing on -- as an example -- Susan Hess, and her beautiful, beautiful dancing, and how to incorporate that into fashion and beauty --

SICULAR: I think [Martha Elgort?] [15:00] booked her a lot, because she moved to, well...

MEEHAN: That’s right. She was -- She, like Rosie, would just be able to move, and that was -- that was always a thrill. I found that the girls were very appreciative, and loved being at Ford. They loved the family feel of it, they loved how we cared for them, and Eileen really stressed that this was not a nine to five job. For some, that might not be what you want to do, because there were many weekends and nights, and even holidays, that you’d have to be doing things. But it was worth it.

SICULAR: Do you know -- I think I told you - About two and a half years ago we had dinner -- lunch -- at Jerry and
Eileen’s, and all of the top models from the ’70s and ’80s came. There were about 14 top models -- [Paula Tio?], Karen Bjornson, Dianne DeWitt, and so on -- Patricia [Boland?], Jeanette Hallen, [16:00] and [Anne Bazinet?]. And anyway, all of them -- when we were all discussing memories, not one person spoke about being on a cover or a major campaign. All their favorite memories was the family atmosphere at Ford Models -- being taken care of by accounting, going into the booking room and knowing everybody, and that was their favorite memories. That’s what they spoke about.

MEEHAN: A lot of girls would come visit on Friday in the late afternoon, or if they --

SICULAR: That’s when they got the champagne.

MEEHAN: And we’d have champagne. Sometimes they’d pick up their paycheck. And that kind of security, and that feeling -- whatever inspired Jerry to make that part of his mantra, to have the girls get paid on Friday -- It was “Work, reward. Work, reward,” and it made everything OK. They would go down to the accounting department, and -- They felt safe, and that was good. They’d come up, check their work for the next [17:00] week, see what was happening, and always bring a little something. Champagne, cookies -- You had to --
SICULAR: Flowers...

MEEHAN: -- watch it, because there was always so much to eat.

SICULAR: So much food, and flow-- Huge amounts of flowers in the middle of the table, and cookies, and candy.

MEEHAN: Beautiful flowers... And that made it, just, even more comfortable. And a tremendous amount of work to be done, but it was always great to have people stop by, and then see them go off. To see them grow, to see them mature professionally, to see their life -- they got married, they had a baby -- it was a wonderful thing. Eileen was always so on top of those attention to detail kind of things. I remember walking by her office -- and I don’t remember if it was August -- she would be doing Christmas, and there would be wrapping, and wrapping. And she’d go, “Come in, I want to talk to you,” and we’d be talking about whatever we were doing, [18:00] and -- “All right.” -- And I’d be wrapping, and --

SICULAR: I know. I remember wrapping those Christmas gifts too.

MEEHAN: She was obsessed with Christmas --

SICULAR: Christmas.

MEEHAN: -- wrapping. And -- Which just made it feel even more special. And there would be boxes of presents, and --

SICULAR: Hundreds, if not thousands.

MEEHAN: -- ribbons...
SICULAR: I know. I helped wrap -- We all -- Anyone who walked by her office while she was wrapping would be called in to chat and wrap a little bit.

MEEHAN: And then when other agents would come from all over, it was --

SICULAR: Like [Sonny?], and --

MEEHAN: -- always so nice.

SICULAR: -- and wonderful Nina Blanchard from California --

MEEHAN: Right, Nina Blanchard.

SICULAR: Everybody loved Nina Blanchard.

MEEHAN: She was a special one, and I always enjoyed being with her. And to see their relationship, and just to see --

SICULAR: They were very close.

MEEHAN: They were close. And also to see women in business --

SICULAR: Strong women.

MEEHAN: -- succeeding. Strong --

SICULAR: Decent.

MEEHAN: -- taken seriously, and creating this field that, really, Eileen and Jerry helped create -- that it was -- it was wonderful to see that. It was great for a younger [19:00] woman to see -- to see how you can succeed, and -- and it was always something so wonderful and cool about Jerry. His calming presence, his knowledge of everything, just...
SICULAR: I know, and he never got -- I never saw him angry. I never saw him hysterical. Always, “Let’s talk about this unfortunate situation,” if there was a problem.

MEEHAN: Yeah. And somehow, he would go up to his office, handle it, come back down, and just sit there --

SICULAR: Calmly, and say, “This is...”

MEEHAN: Right.

SICULAR: Right.

MEEHAN: And calm Eileen down when things were getting a little toasty, and just make everything all right.

SICULAR: I remember walking in those doors everyday thinking how lucky I was that I got to work with Eileen and Jerry Ford, that I worked at the Ford Modeling Agency. And all the bookers -- I mean, to have a chance to be there --

MEEHAN: And what that meant nationally and internationally.

Wherever I was, if someone heard that I was an agent with Ford, [20:00] or if I was going somewhere, you were extremely well-received. I got -- always got special treatment, and everyone wanted to know stories.

SICULAR: I’d always tell people -- if they asked what I did, I would just say I worked at a model agency, because I always thought it was bragging if I said the Ford Modeling Agency. So I would just say, “I work at a model agency,” and then if they asked which one, I’d say, “Ford,” and all of a
sudden, like, the gates would open, and their eyes would shine, and they’d ask all these questions.

MEEHAN: Very, very true. And I’m thrilled to say that some of the models that I worked with way back when, I still speak to, and see whenever they’re in town, and that makes me feel really great. These are lifelong friends now, and --

SICULAR: That’s wonderful.

MEEHAN: And that is really, really a thrill for me. It wasn’t always easy. The work was very, very intense.

SICULAR: It was a difficult, challenging, fast-paced, and a lot of money, and you had to get it done right, and get it done fast, and --

MEEHAN: A lot of money. [21:00] A lot of money.

SICULAR: -- with good grace, and -- If you have someone nasty on one phone call, you have to pick up the next call and be up, and --

MEEHAN: But everyone still -- Because of the reputation that Ford had, it seemed like everyone wanted to please. Of course, there were arguments, debates, this and that. But the goal was --

SICULAR: It was the best for the girl and the agency.

MEEHAN: The agency, the girl... If you were a photographer, you knew you were going to be getting something that was
extremely valuable, and the situation -- all the clients, I think, really were very devoted to Eileen.

SICULAR: And I also think that a lot of photographers, and hair and makeup people, and stylists -- they wanted to be taken under the wing of a place like Ford Models --

MEEHAN: Absolutely.

SICULAR: -- that they would be thrilled to be invited to our parties, or for lunch, or just to be a part of the Ford -- and extended part of the Ford family.

MEEHAN: And Eileen -- There was no separation. The home was the agency. The house in Connecticut, [22:00] or wherever, was part -- everything was done totally, and solely -- besides, of course, her own family -- was for the girls.

SICULAR: But people don’t realize how hard she worked because she worked all day, she had her family to look out for, she had the models at her home to look out for, and then she had to entertain at night, and then start all over again the next day.

MEEHAN: And sometimes that was hard, because we would put a really long day, and then we would have a dinner, we would have a meeting...

SICULAR: And they would take four hours, those hours -- those dinners. Like 10, 12 people, and four-hour dinners.
MEEHAN: Yeah. And it was great, but very hard at the time. I remember coming home from work -- I would call it “my 30-second bath” -- and back, dressed, and out the door for the evenings, whatever. And that was work, you know? A lot of people would say, “Oh, you’re this,” and then, “You’re going to here, you’re going to there.” Absolutely, and it was wonderful, but it was a lot of work.

SICULAR: You kept that -- Because you kept that conversation going. You weren’t just [23:00] sitting there eating. I remember complaining to a boyfriend at the time, that, you know, I worked all day, and I had to go out for dinner, and he said, “So let me ask you -- You’re going out for dinner, and this is being paid for?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “And there are going to be the top models in the world?” I said, “Yes.” And he said, “What are you complaining about?”

MEEHAN: Right. That was the thing.

SICULAR: I said -- But it was -- But it was really -- Because you worked that dinner. You worked -- You made sure everybody was happy and ordered, and the conversation was flowing, and...

MEEHAN: And also, things didn’t end at six o’clock. If you were working -- doing shoots on the West Coast, and --

SICULAR: Or here.
MEEHAN: -- someone’s location wasn’t right, or -- especially in Europe -- and I remember getting -- the [Talexus?] people would be going out to lunch for three hours, and we were right in the middle of a negotiation, and we’d just have to wait. And that -- it would be -- but...

SICULAR: It all got done.

MEEHAN: It -- Somehow, it all got done.

SICULAR: And with good grace.

MEEHAN: And the campaigns were sensational, the work was excellent, [24:00] the people were really quite fabulous.

SICULAR: Were you into fashion as a young girl, as a teenager?

MEEHAN: I was into fashion. I went to the High School of Music and Art, and it was more art and beauty, and -- But I never really devoted a lot of time to the magazines. My parents were very strict, and --

SICULAR: Where did you grow up?

MEEHAN: I grew up right in Manhattan. I was born on 14th Street -- as I said, went to Music and Art, went away to college, and came back, and originally to be in business and wanted to open my restaurant. And look what happened. It was one of the best experiences -- really -- best experiences of my life, learning what it entailed to go from an idea to the printed page, or the television commercial, or even doing [25:00] some movies, which was just great.
SICULAR: Who were -- When you were younger, who were some of the style icons that you looked up to, whether they were movie stars, or models? Did you --

MEEHAN: I loved Katharine Hepburn, and I loved The Fountainhead, and I really always -- and even though I think my time was --

SICULAR: That’s Patricia Neal.

MEEHAN: Yeah, Patricia Neal, who just passed not that long ago... That I wanted to be in business. That I wanted to be something on my own. And the Fords were wonderful in providing that. I did a lot of photography in my -- I got a degree in business and in music and education, but photography was another love. But I wasn’t into fashion photography so much. I was into --

SICULAR: They must have been --

MEEHAN: -- beauty.

SICULAR: They must have been so sad when you decided to leave.

MEEHAN: I decided to leave for many reasons, and had to go to [26:00] California, and -- Again, another great change in my life. I did not want to leave, and it was really, really quite sad for me. But I kept in touch with everyone, and it was great to always have the Ford family as a part of my life. It was great. Also, Katie and [Lacey?] and Billy -- it was wonderful to have them at
those -- in those years going in and out, and watching them grow up, and --

SICULAR: They were our contemporaries, really, so... Yeah.

MEEHAN: Yeah. It was really -- To see the whole family together was great, and the grandchildren, and -- it was always a nice feeling to have them around. They’re really, really something.

SICULAR: Do you have any last thoughts you’d like to add?

MEEHAN: Well, I just want to wish everybody well. [27:00] The experiences and the friends are still here, and I wish only the best for everyone, and it’s really been a wonderful experience for me.

SICULAR: Thanks.

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