SICULAR: -- then I am going to sit down and ask you questions. You’re staying.

RYAN: OK, well, say it real loud. I think my hearing’s going.

SICULAR: OK.

CREW: Rolling and action.

SICULAR: Hi, my name is Patty Sicular. I’m director of archives for the Ford Model Agency in New York City, and together with Professor Karen Cannell, director of special collections and archiving at Fashion Institute of Technology, we’re archiving the history of fashion, beauty, photography, and Ford Models. We’re at the Celebrity Vault in Beverly Hills. Today’s date is July 23, 2010, and we’re so happy -- we’re going to be interviewing Helen Ryan, whose era is 1950 to 1963, and Helen studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology. So we’re going to open up with that. Helen, so you studied at -- well, first of all, you’re from New York,

RYAN: Right, yes.

SICULAR: Where did you grow up?

RYAN: I grew up in Queens, basically, and Manhattan.

SICULAR: Manhattan.
RYAN: And then, I was lucky enough to get a scholarship [01:00] to what was then known as the Fashion Institute of Technology and Design -- after high school. So, I did go there for a number of months, and I enjoyed it very much, because it was very interesting -- how to make hats and how to draw velvet. It was really a wonderful education, but I really wanted to go to a more academic school, so that’s what I did. And in between, in summers, I was in the water ballet at Jones Beach for about four years, and that’s where I met my lifeguard husband, and that’s where I got discovered -- if you will -- discovered by a photographer whose name I’m afraid I can’t remember, who asked me to do some pictures -- to do some photographs for him [02:00], and I wound up on the New York State magazine. They have a very -- they used to have a very thick book about what New York had to offer. And then later, he came to me, and he said, “Would you mind if we took some test shots? I’d like to submit them.” And I didn’t know what it was -- he didn’t tell me. And lo and behold, about six weeks later, he said, “Oh,” he said, “It was really great.” He was doing spec shots, and he said, “Oh, it’s really terrific, because you’ve got accepted by the Ladies’ Home Journal. They were running a campaign of the underdiscovered American beauties.” So...
CREW: Is there a way you could look at Patty when you’re doing the [interview]??

RYAN: I’m sorry.

SICULAR: Look at me [03:00].

CREW: Instead of into the camera.

_: During the interview, if you could look at Patty, just like you’re telling everything right to Patty.

RYAN: Oh, I see. I see -- OK.

SICULAR: And this is a cover from that, right?

RYAN: Yeah.

SICULAR: OK. So, this is the cover from *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and I just have to add that she knitted this sweater that she’s wearing -- two sweaters, one for herself and one for her husband -- and this is from February 1950.

RYAN: So, of course, I was supposed to be undiscovered, so I couldn’t do anything until the magazine came out. So I worked in the New York State lab up in Albany, because my husband was going to law school there, and -- later, when it came out, I commuted on weekends to Albany, and I stayed with my mom and dad. Fortunately, they lived in New York. [04:00] So I was very lucky. I was accepted by Huntington Hartford at the time -- just for a while -- and then, I switched over to Eileen and Jerry Ford. And I always remember -- we were going to go camping, and I was going to
meet everybody on 57th Street and Fifth Avenue...

SICULAR: Do you mean with Jerry and Eileen Ford -- camping?

RYAN: I went -- I was with -- when I was with Eileen and Jerry. And they were pick -- my friends were picking me up, and we were going to go camping in the Catskills, I think, and I popped in the car, and I was so ecstatic, because it was the first time -- I said, “I’d had 10 jobs this week,” and it was really terrific.

SICULAR: And who were the jobs for? Do you remember?

RYAN: Oh gosh, no. It was fashion shots and -- I guess mostly illustrations.

SICULAR: Do you remember the first time you met Jerry and Eileen?

RYAN: Yes, I remember Eileen [05:00]. Yes, yeah, and it was...

SICULAR: Were they on Second Avenue, then?

RYAN: They were on Second Avenue. They moved a couple of times since then. And Jerry, of course -- good-looking guy, ex-football player.

SICULAR: Everyone says the same thing.

RYAN: And I remember Carmen.

SICULAR: And how about Eileen, meeting her the first time?

RYAN: Well, she kind of glared at me, and, “Well, go ahead.” Well, she was kind enough to take me, and I think I did
pretty well by her. So then, I went around to, I guess, about 300 photographers with my little photo clutched in hand -- oh, and Eileen and Jerry got me some test shots -- some photographers where I could get some test shots [06:00]. So, clutched in my hands, I went to all these photographers about four times. “Would you like to see some new pictures?” You feel so pushy, but it worked, because after about three months, I had gotten those 10 jobs that week. So I guess I launched myself. It was great. I love it. It was great for your ego, but I think we -- all of us stayed pretty grounded, and it was nice meeting all the photographers. It was fun. I mean, you know, they want you to -- everybody would clown around, so you’d be alive and peppy and fun for the pictures. So, that’s it.

SICULAR: I see you started as an ingenue. I see you have a few Seventeen covers -- I see three right here [07:00]. And what was the first cover you were on? Was it the Ladies’ Home Journal?

RYAN: Well, the first major cover was the Ladies’ Home Journal.

SICULAR: And how did you feel seeing your pictures? I’m sure you’d walk by the magazine newspaper kiosk, seeing your magazine.
RYAN: Yes, it was a thrill. But you know what was even more of a thrill was -- when I was in Capri, in Italy -- you know, the island -- and we were walking along, and there was my magazine, you know, the cover, in the stores, and I thought that was kind of interesting.

SICULAR: They had American magazines back then in Capri?

RYAN: Oh yeah -- yes, they did.

SICULAR: And did people come up to you?

RYAN: Yeah. They imported the magazine.

SICULAR: No, I didn’t think Seventeen. I know Vogue. And did people come up to you?

RYAN: Another thing that was fun was when I was in Europe -- in Egypt, one time -- this was years later [08:00]. And I had done a large, life-size picture for Kodak with a camera, in my bathing suit -- God forbid -- in Egypt, and there I was in a dusty window covered with dust. I was right there, holding my little camera, and that was fun, because it was Egypt, for heaven’s sakes.

SICULAR: It was amazing around the world.

RYAN: So anyway, those were the outstanding things.

SICULAR: So who were some of your favorite photographers you got to work with?

RYAN: Gosh, there was Howell Conant.

SICULAR: And he photographed Princess Grace so much.
RYAN: Yes, he did, but he had done a lot of fashion before that. And I remember the first important photographer was Dan Wynn. He did a lot for Seventeen. I did a couple of things with Avedon, and I did a few things with Irving Penn [09:00]. And that was always fun and interesting, and I was very respectful.

SICULAR: Do you remember what those bookings were for, for Mr. Penn and Mr. Avedon?

RYAN: I beg your pardon?

SICULAR: Do you remember what the products -- the clients -- for Mr. Penn and Mr. Avedon...

RYAN: Yes, one of the Irving Penn’s was the cigarette ad -- the Gold cigarette ad that I did.

SICULAR: Old Gold?

RYAN: Huh?

SICULAR: Old Gold.

RYAN: Yes, Old Gold, and they had asked me if I smoked, and I said, “Oh sure, I smoked,” but I didn’t.

SICULAR: (Laughter). We won’t tell anybody.

RYAN: And I guess that’s about it. And then, I guess I was approached a couple of times to go to Hollywood, but at the time, none of the models went. We thought Hollywood was, you know, really déclassé, so I wasn’t very interested. And they were offering me more for a whole week [10:00]
than I would be making in a day, like that, so -- and I
didn’t like the people very much, at the time. Of course
now, everything has changed. Everybody is dying to go to
Hollywood.
SICULAR: Right. Did you walk around carrying one of the hat
boxes? One of the model...
RYAN: No, it wasn’t a hat box. It was the end of the hat
box era, actually. No, we had other type of bags, yeah.
And at the time, everybody was dressed up to go to jobs,
and we walked around in high heels, and sometimes, you
couldn’t get a cab, and...
SICULAR: You had to do your own hair and makeup, then, too, and
carry a lot more than the models do now.
RYAN: Oh, we did our own. I would always like to do my own
makeup anyway, but hair, I wouldn’t mind. And of course,
the hair would be blowing -- especially if it’s raining --
it’d be a little -- you know, I’d come in dripping, looking
awful [11:00]. Now, everybody comes in Levis and...
SICULAR: When you were a young girl, before you started in the
modeling and fashion business, who were some of your style
and beauty icons? Were they movie stars or...
RYAN: I was never really -- I was never really into it.
Well, actually, I was. I had wanted to --- when I was in
high school, -- you can cut this, too, if you want. When I
was in high school, I went to Connors, Candy...

SICULAR: Conover?

RYAN: Huh?

SICULAR: Conover.

RYAN: Conover -- Candy Conover wanted $100. She said, “Oh, you’d be great, but we’ll send you to school.” Well, $100 -- my mother and father didn’t have that kind of money, and they didn’t even know about it, because I’m sure they thought it was not a good thing for me to get into [12:00]. And then, I went to Powers, and Powers wanted to see my knees, so I got out of there. I hate to tell you this.

SICULAR: No, it’s a great story.

RYAN: Really?

SICULAR: This is what makes these interviews so fabulous.

RYAN: And so, nothing happened, and so when I just discovered at the beach, it was terrific for something that I had want to do, but it was hard to get into.

SICULAR: And what did your parents think about your career?

RYAN: Well, they were so cute. I was in the Rheingold contest, which is beer.

SICULAR: You have a picture here, somewhere.

RYAN: Yes, I do.

SICULAR: Let’s see -- where is it? Is it on this side or that side?
RYAN: There are a whole bunch of us.

__: Here it is.

RYAN: There’s that one, and then there’s a big...
__: This is the one with...

SICULAR: Do you want to hold it up, or do you want me to hold it for the camera? Can you see that, or do you want me to hold it closer? [13:00] And that’s Tippi Hedren right next to you.

RYAN: Yeah, and this was ...

SICULAR: Point to you.

RYAN: Hmm?

SICULAR: Point to where you are. Bottom.

RYAN: Where am I

SICULAR: Right down there -- yeah. The cute one.

RYAN: I’m here. I hated the way they did my hair. They had a very important Hollywood photographer come to New York and do us, and it was awful. We didn’t like him.

SICULAR: And weren’t you afraid, if you were chosen, that you would lose a lot of your work?

RYAN: So, yes. I had signed up for it just to see if I could get into the contest, and I got into the contest, and I realized I didn’t want it, because I would be identified with beer, and you never see some of those gals afterwards, so -- and I liked the fashion part. But the campaign was a
lot of fun [14:00]. We did a lot of interesting things. But mom and dad really wanted me to win, so they went to all the bars, and they voted for me, and I said, “Mom and Dad, please don’t stuff the ballots.” So I came in second, thank goodness.

SICULAR: Who came in first, do you know?
RYAN: Yes, Nancy -- oh, [Mary Alston?] came.

SICULAR: Which one is she?
RYAN: This one.
SICULAR: Because she probably had more family that stuffed the ballots more.

RYAN: I don’t know, but I’ve never seen her again -- the poor thing. So anyway, I was very lucky that my career went on for about 12 years.

SICULAR: That’s a nice career. Do you remember any special advice that Eileen might have given you when you started?

RYAN: No, because I don’t think she was worried about me, because I was married. I had gotten married. Actually, I have gotten married the day after the photographer [15:00] took the test shots for that Ladies’ Home Journal cover, down by the East River. So I think she thought that I was pretty secure. I wasn’t going to go bopping around at night and get bags on my eyes.

SICULAR: Did you have -- when you started out your career,
right around the time of the *Ladies’ Home Journal* cover, what was your perception of the business, and was it a reality when you finally started working as a model — what you thought it would be?

RYAN: It turned out to be everything I wanted it to be, except, you know, it is hard work.

SICULAR: What’s the hardest, most difficult?

RYAN: The hard work is going — the hard work for me was kind of pushing myself, you know, saying, “Would you like to see some new pictures of me?” — and things like that, because I’m not like that. But, you know, you do what you have to do.

SICULAR: And back then, did they just give you a list to call and you went around on your own [16:00], or did the agency make an appointment for you, and you would have a specific appointment at that studio?

RYAN: No, I had a list of photographers and advertising agencies, and I went around myself, you know, many times. Every time I got one new picture, I went around.

SICULAR: And did you have one specific booker who helped you — a booking agent at Ford that you called every day or — back then?

RYAN: No. Most of us did most of the stuff ourselves.

SICULAR: Because as the years went on, models were assigned to
different bookers, so you spoke to the same person every day, and you built up a relationship.

RYAN: Oh really? No, we had none of that.

SICULAR: Did you have any fond memories of going up to the agency with the staff or accounting?

RYAN: No, not -- I mean, everybody was, you know, great, but I was kind of busy, so I didn’t get a chance to go over there very much.

SICULAR: That’s great. Did you prefer working in studio, where it’s more controlled, or did you prefer being on location? [17:00]

RYAN: I loved the location, but I like the control thing, because you know where your hair is, you know -- and there aren’t birds flying around.

SICULAR: And did you ever get to go to Europe for your paying clients?

RYAN: I got to -- I went to a few places, like Bermuda, just mostly -- no, I didn’t go. Yeah, that’s right. I was supposed to go to Paris one time, but my husband didn’t like the idea very much, so I didn’t go.

SICULAR: What was that for?

RYAN: I’ve forgotten. It was a fashion thing.

SICULAR: Maybe the collections?

RYAN: Hmm?
SICULAR: Maybe the collections for the magazine?
RYAN: I don’t’ know. I don’t’ know.
SICULAR: But at least, you were asked, which is awfully nice.
   So, what has working with Eileen Ford -- what has it taken
   -- what has it given you that you’ve taken through life all
   these years later?
RYAN: Well Eileen, I think -- just being Eileen [18:00] --
   makes you realize that if you want something, you can go
   and get it yourself. I mean, you can really do it
   yourself. I mean -- the drive, the push. I think that’s
   good.
SICULAR: You look -- going to the next topic -- you look so
   beautiful. What are your beauty secrets -- health and
   beauty secrets?
RYAN: Oh, thank you. I keep pretty active. I bicycle at
   least once or twice a week. I used to be on the swim team,
   just a few years ago, but now my shoulders aren’t getting
   so good, so now, I water-aerobic, and I kayak some -- do a
   little walking with my doggie. I just keep moving, and
   fortunately, it seems to be OK [19:00].
SICULAR: And when you were modeling, did people often recognize
   you and come up to you in the streets?
RYAN: When I was modeling?
SICULAR: Uh-huh.
RYAN: Yes, and they would ask me for an autograph, and of course, I gave it to them, but it was -- you know, I didn’t think I was important enough to ask for.

SICULAR: Obviously you were -- they asked for it.

RYAN: And one time -- well, you can cut this, too.

SICULAR: We’re not cutting anything.

RYAN: One time, I was between -- I was running from one studio to another, and I had to go to the restroom, so I went to Altmann’s -- remember Altmann’s, on Fifth Avenue?

SICULAR: Right, on Fifth Avenue and 34th Street.

RYAN: Right, it’s on 34th Street. And I dashed in there and just before I got into the booth, a lady asked me for my autograph. And I had to really go.

SICULAR: The problems of fame.

RYAN: Yeah, I know. (laughter)

SICULAR: So what’s life for you like these days, in California?

RYAN: Oh, you know, it was -- the first year was terrible.

SICULAR: Which was what year?

RYAN: Nineteen sixty.

SICULAR: OK [20:00].

RYAN: It was really difficult because of the tempo -- especially then, because California wasn’t quite so hip, if you will -- not that I was really jobbing or anything like that. But I had three little kids and we were in
Mandeville Canyon, which is a circuitous road, and I had to drive them everywhere, and we didn’t even know any -- I didn’t know anybody. So the first year, it was hard, but then, I started playing -- oh, and yeah, I used to play a lot of tennis. I have bad knees because of the tennis, but I got to know a lot of people that way, and I was taking some courses and things like that. And then, Eileen would book me every few months, and I’d run back to New York -- she would book me for like a week or two weeks, and I would run back to New York and model [21:00]. But I do like California very much, now. I love the outdoors, and I love the fact that you could just be outdoors, running around in the woods, or the beach, for that matter, so soon. I mean, it’s a quick...

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

RYAN: Last thoughts.

SICULAR: OK, we’re going to cut. OK, what’s your question?

__: I have some more questions for you, Helen. You were such a popular model in Seventeen. Sometimes, you were in every issue. How did you like working for Seventeen, or is there a special memory about working for Seventeen?

RYAN: Seventeen was wonderful. It was really -- if I have gone into anything else, I would love to have gone into advertising. And I remember Rosemary McMurtry. She was
the -- she was head of the [22:00] -- she was the editor...

SICULAR: Photo editor?
_: One of them.

RYAN: She was very sweet to all of us, and I thought that was a nice experience.
_: Who were some of the other models that you worked with during your years at Seventeen? What were their names?

RYAN: Well, there was Patsy Shally, Lorraine Davies, Betty Johnson...
_: Tippi Hedren, who went on to be --

RYAN: Tippi Hedren, Dolores Hawkins, June Ross, June Emmett. [Olson?], there was a gal named Olson.
_: Are you till in touch with any of those gals?

RYAN: Just a few of them. Tippi, I see, and Loraine, I see, and Betty. Oh, and yeah, and then there was Maggie [23:00]...
_: McNamara?

RYAN: Yeah, the one who did..

SICULAR: The Moon is Blue, with William Holden.

RYAN: Yeah. I see her once in awhile, too. No, we’ve tried to reach out to some of them, but we haven’t -- I don’t know, they must be somewhere else right now.

SICULAR: Any last thoughts?

RYAN: Hmm?
SICULAR: Any last thoughts.
RYAN: No.
CREW: (inaudible).

SICULAR: They’ll tell us when they’re ready. Who’s on the phone?
__: Linda -- she’ll need to go --

SICULAR: Linda. You have to go outside -- I’m sorry -- because we can hear you. And also, we have a gift from -- you know, Barbara Minty was married to Steve McQueen, and her friend makes shampoos and stuff, so this is for you from -- Barbara Minty was married to Steve McQueen. She was a model in the 70s [24:00].

CREW: Rolling, and go.

SICULAR: So, I know that you were an ingenue model, and you modeled a lot for Seventeen Magazine, but you were married at that time, isn’t that right?

RYAN: Yes, that’s right.

SICULAR: And did that create any funny moments in your career? Because Seventeen Magazine was known for teenagers.

RYAN: Well, I feel like -- I was cheating a little bit. I did have three sons while I was modeling. And one time -- it was the only time that I ever -- well, I won’t even tell you what -- but I was doing brides. I did a lot of brides, and this was a very elaborate dress with a train
and everything in, and they were pinning me down, just to make sure that all the pleats are in the right place. And during that era, we used a lot of waist cinches. And so I had a waist cinch on, and also I was pregnant [25:00]. I was five months pregnant, and so they bound me, because I was getting a little bigger than I usually am, which is not very big. So I was really squeezed in, and they were pinning me, and it took an hour pinning, and I was still standing, and still standing, and it was the first time -- and the only time -- in my life that I fainted, and I actually saw stars, just as they have in the comic books.

SICULAR: And then, did you get to rest, or did they scoop you up? Or give you smelling salts, or a compress?

RYAN: No, no, no -- not with all those pins. I just went straight down, and they gave me some smelling salts and propped me back up, and we finished the job, and I don’t think anybody was the wiser, thank goodness.

SICULAR: And what did -- did Seventeen Magazine -- the editors laugh when they knew that you were pregnant? In modeling for them, did they know that you were pregnant at the time [26:00]? When you modeled for Seventeen Magazine...

RYAN: Did they know? I don’t know if they did or not, because I really didn’t get very large. Instead of out, I sort of went around. And I went back to work, actually,
about three weeks after I had the babies, so.

SICULAR: Now, I know you moved back to California, but you delayed that move, right?

RYAN: Yes, yes. I was successful, and I was making a little more money than my husband was, and his company asked him to move out here one time, and we thought it over and thought it over, and we decided I still had a little bit to go, so we turned his job down -- or at least the transfer. And then, two years later, they did ask him, again, and it was either his job or -- I mean, moving out or nothing [27:00], so at that point, we decided that we would all move out here, but Eileen was kind enough to book me periodically to come back to New York and work, so I did that for a few more years after that.

SICULAR: And do you have a favorite client?

RYAN: Did I what?

SICULAR: A favorite client.

RYAN: Oh yes, well, Lana Lobell, of course, was very good, and -- first of all, Seventeen Magazine was just great, and Lana Lobell. And there was an advertising agency -- Rita Shevlo, who was a very nice person, and we got to know them very well, and, oh, just, everybody was wonderful. It was really a pleasure to work with everybody because almost everybody had a sense of humor [28:00], and it was fun on
the job, you know. We would kid around.

SICULAR: That’s nice. OK? Because we have the other part --
that’s great.

__: Oh, that was great, Helen. That added a lot.

END OF AUDIO FILE