HELEN O'HAGAN - 11/29/89 - SAKS - BUSINESS IMAGE

Q: Helen O'Hagan is our first interview at Saks Fifth Avenue and she's going to walk us around the wall.

HO: Well the first shot you see at the top is a photograph of a young boy all dressed in his (Liedehosen) and at that time we had a whole shop and things with young children, all with the Swiss/Danish sort of look. And that actually was a full page, part of a full page in (Eugenio) in those days (Eugenio) had a wonderful front page.

And underneath is the, is his sister and that also was part of a full page of activewear. Saks Fifth Avenue in those days had a complete active shop for skiing, for riding, tennis.

Q: Those are early 50's.

HO: Early 50's. And underneath is just a picture of a little girl who was the daughter of Margo Prendergast, who is all dressed in her riding habit. And we sold all of that.

And at the top,

Q: Who was heading the store at that time?

HO: It was Adam Gimble.

Q: Adam Gimble.

HO: And Adam, as you know was a fine horseman, a fine polo player, good tennis player, great shot and a great fisherman.
Q: So he understood the value of active wear but it was primarily at that time an (elitest) recreational business.

HO: Right. And up in the corner is a picture of me with Sophie and Adam at one of the, I think it was a party in honor of one of our buyers who was retiring. And the rest are family. And this is a photograph of my great friend, Ellen Saltz. We were always known as El and Hel and will continue to be known as El and Hel.

And the picture is of Char-gele with Alex and Tatiana Lieberman, the doctor who I was seeing at the time who is a friend of the Lieberman's. And you can see that Alex shot the picture from remote and Tatiana, years ago my office was where the tower is now going up. And Tatiana's work rooms are right above my office. And we lunched every day together -- Tatiana, Sophie and myself. And Tatiana said I can't believe it, Helen, you have a picture of everybody on the wall but not me. And I said well Tatiana I don't have one and she said I bring it to you tomorrow.

Q: What was Tatiana doing then?

HO: Tatiana was designing our millinery, our made to order hats. We had ready to wear and made to order. The millinery department was as large today as any dress salon down on our present floor. Plus a small area for custom
made hats.

Underneath is a photograph of my dear friend Robert Benzio in the window, who we lost to AIDS. And behind here is a picture of me with Sophie Gimbal. And that's Adolfo.

Q: What was your job at that point?

HO: My job at that point was publicity director. And, Q: That's the early 50's?

HO: That's the early 50's. I came as just a girl Friday in Grace Dumon's office and in three months she made me the assistant to her and she was there for three years and then I took over.

And this is a picture which I think is rather amusing. That's Mrs. Reagan, Sophie and Eugenia. And it was when he was governor. They really at that time knew no one in New York and Anita May, of .. company, was Sophie's dearest friend and she asked Sophie to look out for Mrs. Reagan when she came and Sophie invited Eugenia to lunch so that she would meet her. And it was a cold day. And this is Sophie's coat.

Q: I love it.

HO: Her cheetah coat and her famous monkey pin, which I'm very fortunate she gave to me before she died.

This is a sketch by. It was a series of three of them that ran in Vogue of Sophie. I have another one at
home that's just within a Sara evening dress. But it was interesting,

Q: Sophie from the beginning was involved in the store?

HO: 1929.

Q: And she was doing all the couture things?

HO: Yes. And last night I was at a ho-down that Liz Smith cheered. It was a wonderful party and the best group of people, everyone was there. And I was talking to Denise. And Denise said do you know that I opened your first boutique. And nobody really knew how to spell the word boutique in those days. And actually the first boutique in America was here and it now is a Louie Vuitton Boutique on 49th Street.

And she opened it and ran it for a while. That's our friend, Perry Ellis, whom we have also lost. And this was a wonderful sketch of Adam that ran in Town and Country. It really, to me, is the best likeness of him. It really is how I remember him. And it was so funny when you have nostalgia. I was at Jeffrey Beams house in Long Island about four or five years ago, more than that, and I walked into the livingroom. I looked, Jeffrey was sort of standing behind me and he said what are you looking at. And I said those pair of chairs. And I said I know those chairs. He
said of course you do. They were Adam's from his bedroom and he had bought them at auction. And I thought oh Sophie would be so happy that someone who really loved,

Q: Beautiful things.

HO: Things would have bought them instead of somebody who just was buying to be buying. And so I, often when I'm out at Beams, I often sit in that chair because after Adam died I used to sit at his desk at home many a Sunday doing paperwork so it really,

Q: Before you continue with this, give me a feeling of what those times were at Saks for you.

HO: For me they were wonderful times, they were learning times for me. Because I was very fortunate to be exposed to them within the first three years after Grace left. I became,

Q: Because they also were such a close part of everybody in the store, is that not true?

HO: Yes. Adam would walk around the store every night. He would start on the 8th Floor and go to every floor on his way out and he left his coat in the sweater shop, which was then the men's hat shop. And it was wonderful because I of course had had no experience in retail, had no experience really, of having been born in the south in probably the most cultural city, little city in the
world, Charleston. I learned so much from being with them because they took me under their wing, they treated me as a member of their family, as a daughter. I spent all my weekends with them in their house in the country or here in the city. So that I learned the fine art of entertaining from two pros.

Q: And the fine art of retailing.

HO: Yes. Learning,

Q: The fine art of retailing which is a phrase that clearly we don't use anymore do we?

HO: No.

Q: These were the years of the (inaudible), these were the parallel years. I remember my first encounter with

HO: I remember him well.

Q: Where he walked me from the top to the bottom of the store and into the back rooms and turn clothes around to show me the inside of the ...

HO: And to watch them being designed. [Sophie did not begin designing until '40, until the War. And then she had to because we could not get clothes. Before the war she went to Europe and bought samples and then brought them back and we produced them here in her salon.]

Q: And there was only one Saks Fifth Avenue then.

HO: Oh, no, [we had our first branch in 1926.]
Q: Oh.
HO: Adam had,
Q: And where was that?
HO: That was in Palm Beach. Because Adam felt that we should, the first thing in the word for im was service to his customers and he felt that by opening a store in Palm Beach he would be able to service his customers when they went there in the winter. And then we opened,
Q: So he began to follow his customers?
HO: And then we opened South Hampton. And that was a peach of a job because the manager was in Palm Beach from November until April and then he had a month off and he was in, May until September in South Hampton.
Q: And that was also '26 or '27?
HO: I think that was more like '27. I have a whole list of dates.
Q: We'll be able to do that.
HO: And then our next store was Chicago.
Q: And that was what year?
HO: Chicago I believe was '29.
Q: All right. I didn't want to stop you on this little journey around the wall but I did want to get this into the context of the store as it was emerging then. So you learned the art of living really and the art of,
HO: Retailing.

Q: Of retailing and those two are intertwined.

HO: Very much so. I mean he was a Renaissance man. I mean I haven't been exposed to anyone like an Adam Gimble ever since. I think the closest we have come to it now is a Mel Jacobs who you know has a great interest in art, design and for me the year since Mel has arrived have been the most exciting for me.

Q: Mel arrived when?

HO: Mel arrived, I want to say around,

Q: Ten years ago now isn't it?

HO: '83.

Q: '83.

HO: But all these we can check out.

Q: All right move on then, move on to the wall.

HO: And that's my dear friend, Willie Blass, who will always be Willie to me. At a memorial of the dedication of the Adam and Sophie Gimbal library at Parsons.

And then above is Adolpho with me and my great friend, Doris Shaw. The period with Doris was incredible here. I mean she was the most stimulating promotion director Saks has ever had.

?: Hi.

Q: Would you do us a favor? Since this perfect
machine isn’t working, would you mind taking it out and see why it’s not. Fortunately Helen is giving us hers but,

HO: There’s another plug right by those trash cans.
Q: This perfect, you want to unplug that.
HO: Brand new machine.
Q: Given to us by the president of FIT, worked last night. I put it in and it just doesn’t move. So see whether you can move it, and for future interviews it’s terribly important otherwise I’ll have to borrow Helens.
HO: But there is right outside I know a live plug.
Q: I will appreciate that. Maybe I didn’t put the tape in right, I don’t know. I think I did. Helen checked me but it’s not going... Doris Shaw’s period.
HO: And that was, Doris came let’s see ‘69. Adam left and then Hal Johnson and Gordon Franklin were here. Doris came, I want to say, in about ‘72 and stayed until 1976.
Q: I remember the period, I remember the crafts, I remember the Aspen tie-in. I remember all the great...
HO: She was here for the 50th anniversary, )
Q: I have that whole campaign.
HO: SHE was a wonderful woman to work with. I reported to her and I have never, that was another period that I absolutely loved because she stimulated me. Everybody she was around. We would have these think tanks
and it would involve the merchants and they all were very turned on by this lady. And,

Q: And the synergy, you see the thing that is interesting is when you project where her career went after that. That it never ignited quite in the same way. She did wonderful things at A&S for A&S. But not the same thing..


Q: I have those seven issues. I'll never give up those seven issues.

HO: Wonderful. You must have a large house to keep,

Q: Large office as well as large house. My archives, you know, these are touch stones. But what it says is that there are times we sort of get a rest period inbetween don't we.

HO: Yes. I mean I'm so mad that when Sophie left she gave me all her magazines that are bound with the understanding they go to Parsons to her library, which is named for her. When I leave Saks. And I very stupidly from '69 didn't keep them up. I'm missing '69 to '79. But now what I do is I bound those,

Q: Which magazines? Vogue?

HO: I have Vogue.

Q: 69 to 79?

HO: I'm missing that. I have Harper's Bizzare and
Vogue and Town and Country to '69 and then from '79 on I've only bound Vogue.

Q: I'll check and see what I have.

HO: Oh wonderful.

Q: I'll check and see what I have.

HO: And that's my great friend, Fiama Fere... We met oh many many years ago just after Salvatore died, which is about '59/60 and became thick, thick friends. And that's my new love, one of my new loves, Christian L... That was, we took his curture collection to Beverly Hills and did the first L...on the west coast and we,

Q: Why not in New York?

HO: Because Bergdorf did it. And we were given the west coast. We recreated on the set of 20th Century Fox the whole setting of aura and we had a wonderful food, tables, carts, everything to do with the south of France. And then from there we went to another sound stage and had reproduced the set identical to Paris. And he could not believe that such workmanship and craftsmanship. And he was a joy to travel with. We were, I had 11 people with me and it couldn't have been easier. We flew from here and American Airlines for me is the only sort of airline to fly when you're traveling with that many pieces in a collection. Everything was put into a container. Everything arrived
without our running all over the county. And so that was a wonderful experience for me.

And then that's Oscar when he launched his perfume here, we gave a luncheon.

And this is, as you know when we open a store, I've opened I guess about 42 out of the 46. And we tie in with cultural groups, various charities. And this was in Dadeland, outside of Miami. And we tied in with with the zoo as one of our four groups.

Q: That was what year?

HO: That was oh I guess that was about 84/85. They are all merging. And that's me talking to the elephant. I think that's even further back and I've got on a Beaux hat suit that I wore. That's a very old photograph of me. That was when my hair was dark.

And that's my great friend, Claudette Cobean and her black llama hat. And this is Ruth Derejinsky. You remember the photographer for Derejinsky? He had never,

Q: Looks like Audry Hepburn.

HO: He had never photographed his daughter. And she was six months old and I did that as a Christmas present for Ruthie to give to him. Ruthie did a lot of work with me when I photographed myself.

Q: Doesn't she look like Audry Hepburn?
HO: She does. She really does.

Q: I thought that's who it was.

HO: No, it's Ruthie.

Q: And Sophie.

HO: And that's a wonderful picture of Sophie. One of the years, it was taken one of the years she was named to the best dressed. That's a photograph I shot in, I think it was 1960 of Claudette in her last movie, Parish. And it was taken up in Hartford in the .. Tobacco area. And on it she says to Helen O'Hagan who is this big ..., Affectionately Claudette. And that was a suit. That suit, Sophie designed all the clothes for the movie and it's very funny, I had the same suit. We have always had similar taste. And now she borrows what I have and..

This is Horst. It's a birthday party at Jeffrey Beams out on a boat who I've always admired. The one time we could afford to work it. That's Paloma Picasso who we launched her handbag collection. I've always, and her fragrance. I've always had,

Q: Did she do handbags before the fragrance?

HO: No. The fragrance came first.

Q: Fragrance came first.

HO: Yes. This is Gebrowski .. who I just love. In the years that I photographed, the photographers in Europe,
we always had our pictures taken as a team and there I am on top of the .. shoulders. And that's another group photo. This is just a photograph of me working on the runway. And this picture, Claudette and myself, that was taken in Birmingham, England, which did the 'Aren't we all' for the first time with ... Chaplin DeReed, we launched her collection very successfully and that was in Washington oh about five years ago. Gabby, who was with Chloe, she was really the great editor and when .. Lockfield first began, Gabby .. had a great influence in editing the Chloe collection and that was I guess in California. We took out to California many times and I think this was in '69 and that's with Estee. That's a Bacarra vase that was given to me by the company on my 30th anniversary. This is,

Q: Who was the head of the Star then?
HO: Mel and Bert. This is my Italian Godchild, Olivia Ferragamo. She is one of the little grandchildren of Wanda Ferragamo in this daughter of Rucha, the eldest son. These are my two friends that began Gloria's Food -- Christopher and Sean. And I was their second customer and you know became a vital part of pushing them along and making them glorious. And they give us credit and they give me credit in the book.

This was one of the first shows that Uber Shevronshi did
his first show in America with us and that’s quite some time ago, I’d say that’s at least ten years ago. Can look at my suit and tell.

This was Claudette’s 86th birthday that Peter Rogers gave and that’s with Arnold Scozzi. This is one of the Misomi’s grandchildren who I just thought was divine.

Q: I love the photograph.

HO: It’s a wonderful picture. And this is Jean Jock Pecard and Marie Sezak of Laqua. That was when we took Christian to Chicago for the first time and we had a wonderful evening there and I’m very close to the two of them. And that is, I’m with the Pope and with Claudette here at the Vatican. Those are two of the Misoni children who I’ve always -- Victoria and Angela. And when we opened our store in Las Vegas, we opened with Neaman Marcus,

Q: What year?

HO: It’s got to be about ten years ago. But all of those I’ll have to look up. And I flew, we flew, I asked about six designers to come to the mall and we did a show that night and they were part of it. And that’s me with my Italian family, Fiama Feragama, Fulvia, Giovano, Perucchio and Leonardo. And that is the rest of the family. That’s Mosomo, who is head of the American company and they have a home called , the boys called Villa Rose. So when I first
went he met me with a bouquet of roses. And this is momma Feragama, Wanda, with my little Godchild and this is Fiama's daughter when I was visiting in Sicily. And another picture of Claudette and Peter. And this is Claudette with her blow up of her from Cleopatra. And again that whole Feragama family, my little Godchild.

And this is Christian when we were in Beverly Hills. Again you see the Feragama's were very close to my heart and this is Pat Buckley who is a person I rely on so much who is such a greater supporter of ... anything we asked her to do.

And this is a birthday card, you know the actor Michael Goff, the British actor?

Q: Yes.

HO: This he did for my birthday and it's like a .. heart spelling out Helen.

Q: An innocent.

HO: Yes. To repeat, let us not forget Thanksgiving and do be happy as a .. not only in high days and holidays but happy every single day. With love from Mick and Henrietta. And this was, oh, this is a birthday at Jeffrey's house. It was his birthday, he's got his party hat on. And this was last year when I went to the White House and met the Reagans. And over here,

Q: Did she remember the first days here?
HO: The Mitsomi who I'm so mad about. This Christian did as a surprise for me. When we were doing, launching his Ready to Wear collection here, I had paper down on the runway and while we were rehearsing he was drawing and then I said oh I love that sun and he didn't say anything, he ripped it off and he had it framed and sent to me. That I love, that's Jeffrey ... [That's a column Vogue did on me.]

And this is the year I think it was two years ago we have something called the Chairman's Award and it's presented to the person in the company for outstanding for rare achievement and quality performance and it's given supposedly to the leading executive in the company that represents the company.]

Q: That was what year?

HO: I have to look at home. I want to say[about three years ago and that's Mel presenting it to me.]

Q: He looks wonderful.

HO: And it's a very sweet, funny. I have the tape where he says this is a person, the person I'm presenting this to, I don't know why I'm giving it to them. But[This is a person that's like my Dutch uncle who sits on my shoulder and says now go to the right, go to the left, oh you did it all wrong. This is a person who tells me what to do, what I should not be doing?] This is a person who is a
historian of the company. And this is a person who is Saks and then he presented.

Q: What year was that Vogue article?
HO: ’74.
Q: ’74.
HO: No, I’m sorry, ’84.
Q: ’84. Okay. That was April, right?
HO: Yes. And that’s just a happy sun that Slim Keith gave me one birthday in Barbados. I just loved the photograph because it always makes me happy. The butterfly and the sunflower. And this was Sophie with the dog that I loved. This I’m embarrassed, I should clean it, this was an award given to Adam that when he died somebody gave to me. It says: Members of the 915 Club, take pride in honoring Adam on his 40th anniversary at Saks. And it had a tree. And this was 1964 and the tree had all of our branches.

Q: We have to have that, you have to clean it and then we’re going to have the photograph.
HO: Okay we’ll have it all cleaned up. I’ll send up to .. and have them clean it. Then this was just funny things about my 25 years and that Doris had gave me, someone had given it to her. It’s a poem out of Cosmopolitan when she left Saks she gave it to me. You know where you can have an affair in a stairwell at Saks Fifth Avenue after the
store closed.

This is just the award. That's the sketch done at Claudette's 1927. No, it was before that. It was when she was 18, her first trip back to Europe.

This is rather amusing. I did a recipe file of all the designers and Doris was writing it up in House Beautiful and we were at his apartment, George Lang.

Q: George Lang?

HO: Yes. He was opening the champaign and the cork landed in her guacamole, which splashed all over Mary McFadden. You see Mary trying to get it out. Then Calvin you see here is laughing and thinks it's very funny. Then when he picked up his stew the next time and I said Calvin look up, he looked up and he turned it all down in front of him. So we put him in the chef's apron.

I have redone, and that's the little girl who's 2 there, she's an actress now, that was in something in summer stock. But I have done another cookbook and I want you to see - Carlos could you bring me two of my cookbooks. You know they're in the back. There's a carton that doesn't have my name in it though. Give me one out of that. This has been quite a big seller this year. It was something that I conceived and we're selling and I would like to give you one.
Q: Oh thank you. Would you sign it for me?
HO: Of course.
Q: Helen think back quickly, freely, the keystone times for you were what?
HO: Were the times working with Adam and Sophie, opening a beautiful store in Chevy Chase which looked like a federal building.
Q: Year?
HO: The year was about '64 and you know you drove up to it and you said this couldn't be a store but he had majored in architecture, he wanted to be an architect. He did not want to be a retailer.
Q: Interesting. And now I see why Mel, Mel's interested in architecture. It would also give you that same sense about him.
HO: And he really hadn't you know, suddenly he had to go into the family business. Adam's father died early and had gone through most of his money so that Adam had to go to work and he came here in '24 when we opened the store as a Vice President working under Horris Saks and Horris Saks died within two years. In those days people died of, you know when you had a sore on your ... And Adam took this store over in 1926 and he created everything. I mean it was all his baby. He took over and redid the store in art deco.
He was,

Q: It was in this spot. It was already,
HO: Was never, ever involved with Gimbals or Saks 34th, ever, never.

Q: But his father had been?
HO: His father had been, yes. And he, the first costume jewelry Adam had done in Hong Kong, he traveled to Hong Kong and he created the first costume jewelry.

Q: Keep going, give me high points for you. Memories. Just a sweep.

HO: And then we, really my high points were and then, of course when he died it was a very rough time for me to decide whether to stay or to leave. And it was not for me an exciting store from '69 to you know, then when we got to about '79 for me it became exciting again. Yes, I did love opening all those stores. And that certainly has been a challenge for me.

Q: All right then let's switch right from that to give me some interesting, important things that happened that you think record the advance of the SFA USA name across country. How did you feel it as you entered each of these cities or what told you that this is where you belong?

HO: By the response. I would say the first store I opened was in Springfield, New Jersey. And then we went on
to Garden City and the little stores around here. But what was also exciting was to open a store like in Troy, Michigan, outside of Detroit, and that Adam had the foresight to know this was, we opened, we were surrounded by cornfields, absolutely surrounded by cornfields. And today it is a huge, very successful shopping mall. And it's one of our most successful stores.

Q: And he understood that. Now Troy was not an elitist area at that point.

HO: No.

Q: Why Troy?

HO: Because he felt that it could be by the people, I mean here is a man who went shooting, fishing with the Fords that lived there and he mixed and was friendly with people in every city in the world. I mean take our store in Beverly Hills, that was purely by accident. Adam had a skiing accident in Sun Valley, they were great skiers and they went out to Sun Valley and he broke his leg. So in those days it was easier to fly him to Beverly Hills to recuperate.

Q: But you're touching something. You're saying he lived the life of the customers he was identifying with.

HO: That's right.

Q: And so long before we had the word lifestyle he
understood this is lifestyle marketing.

HO: He understood that lifestyle, yes. And he was in Beverly Hills in a hotel and you know very friendly then again with the .. and he kept looking around Beverly Hills and he said well this is where I should be. And we built a store there.

But Chicago was a main market after New York.

Q: That was what year?

HO: That was '29 I think. And then we went on to Detroit, which is very sad because that whole area of Detroit suddenly just disappeared, people refused to come to town and we were so lucky.

Q: Renaissance Center.

HO: So we were very fortunate that we had built in Troy. And then we also went up to Fairlane in about, I want to say about '79 and we built a store in Fairlane, which is near Gross Point.

Q: I assume when you give me the time line for the openings, you also have a corresponding time line for the society, events that you supported that you identified with as you opened each store?

HO: I'm not sure whether I still have all of that. But I think I will.

Q: Will you check on that?
HO: We can check on that.

Q: That would be helpful. Would you make a note of it too please. You know what would be very helpful, if you would tell me, scanning the years, thinking about Saks Fifth Avenue, knowing what's going on now, how do you define Saks Fifth Avenue when you meet people today you don't have to tell them what Saks Fifth Avenue is about. What do they want to know about Saks Fifth Avenue from you?

HO: They basically you know have heard the name. The name has a great mystique and I was particularly pleased,

Q: A mystique or a meaning?

HO: A mystique. The mystique still carries on in Minneapolis. When we went to open that store, the people were so turned on, I made many trips out before, I'm like in a campaign, the front man and I made the first trip out for the ground breaking. And there I met the columnist for the local newspaper, I met some politicians. Then I'd go back out and I'd hire a PR firm and then an events company to work with me. And I started meeting people in that community and I was so thrilled to hear that there was this mystique about this store that they have, so many of them had charge accounts. And they felt, to me, and I feel even, they felt that the name stands for quality and high fashion above every other store in America. Because there isn't a
store that has translated across the country like we have. I mean other stores open branches but I think we have been the most successful because it is what we stand for, and fashion. And that they think that you could buy anything here. I mean people have always said oh but they come from Europe, well we did build that mystique if you wanted years ago a top hat, you came here. If you wanted an animal that moved. Well we don't have those sort of things now but you could find practically anything here of great quality.

Q: What today? What today does SAKS stand for?

HO: It still to me stands for quality and fashion, and high fashion

Q: Project something that I learned only by speaking to Paul two or three years ago was the strategy for the introduction of the Folio. Talk to me about Folio.

HO: Paul would have to talk to you about Folio. I don't really,

Q: You don't involved yourself in Folio, all right.

HO: Paul was involved in the very beginning with Folio,

Q: But not even the fashion direction,

HO: No, that was Ellen.

Q: That was Ellen.
HO: ANd now you see,

Q: Who will take her place?

HO: We have not appointed anyone. Ellen, we were very fortunate that Ellen had three fashion directors working for her. One in sportswear, one in accessories and one in better ready to wear. So each one of them are moving on. And maybe we will replace her in, after the buy out but I don’t think with the buy out happening it makes sense. So I basically was not involved. My major involvement was creating all the fashion shows, although she was fashion director.

Q: (What is your job?)

HO: I’ve always defined it as doing everything no one else really wanted to do."

Q: Which is?

HO: "Which is all the public relations, all the fashion shows, personal appearances with designers, opening all the stores, doing all the big parties. Our small lunches."

Q: As the archivist for this store, the passage of time you knew it then, you know it now. What is the striking difference between then and now?

HO: "We have grown and we have become far, I don’t know how to say it but everything, we’ve become far more modern."

Yes there are times off the record, Estelle, but I miss the
great elegance of the beautiful rooms in the store where a woman went to buy her beautiful clothes, where the clothes were all hidden. Remember the days of ... saloons.

Q: They've brought them out to you. They were treasures.

HO: I miss all of that. They were treasures. I miss all of that. Today we're living in a fast paced world where, Glory Food lives in the fast, fast food world. So if Glory Food can survive in the fast food world, ...

USA

HO: Has survived and yes, we have just grown to, we do things differently but we still,

Q: Big difference being?

HO: Big difference being we do many more events than we ever did before. We're not a highly promotional store. But we do things in great taste. Before I didn't do events in a home area. I mean we're launching cookbooks.

Q: Tell me about the home area a little bit.

HO: It's,

Q: You're involved with them a great deal?

HO: No. Only, again, with events. If we're, when we launch some of Christopher's cookbooks and then when we're very fortunate that Lee Bailey left Vendels and came to us.

Q: Is that doing well?
HO: That's doing very well. And it's a more modern.

Q: You don't promote it enough?

HO: No, we don't.

Q: You don't even get the...

HO: Yes I mean he gets a lot of items but we should be running more ads.

Q: The point is the memory is...endels than Lee and I remember the transplant but you haven't reminded me of the transplant.

HO: No. He, so it's a much more modern home area than when we had the Carlin comforts and all the beautiful linens. And today people don't have the help to take care of those beautiful linens. I mean it's very difficult to find a good laundress.

Q: All right let's now talk about the people that you remember in this passage of time. Who were they and give me a one line recording of what they represented in terms of Saks Fifth Avenue.

HO: Again the Carlin Linen, wonderful company, represented the most beautiful, elegant, linens in the world. I mean it's sort of on a,

Q: I'm not talking about resources. I'm talking about people you've worked with.

HO: The people I remember, Tatiana for the beautiful,
beautiful hats and millinery she created.

Q: Part of this store for how long?
HO: Oh I think she was here to about '68 and I think she had been here since probably '48, at least 20-some years.

Q: You still see her?
HO: I see Alex. She's not well. I send flowers, send notes. Eleana Shuboloff, who was our millinery buyer at the time, not a (Millinea) who could put the fear of God in someone.

Q: Does it amuse you that hats are back?
HO: Oh it does. I mean when I think of the space we devoted to it and now you know you can hardly find it. But I'm delighted. If a woman can wear a hat, and many of them do, we had a great response yesterday at the Bill Blass show when one seemed elequent with the women, the models in the big hats. But Eleana was, oh she could scare everybody to death but she had great taste and a good business woman.

And we had people that, lovely black women who worked with Sophie and Mae Taylor and Elvira Lowe, who I miss terribly. They dressed the models. They were such cozy, wonderful friends to me and you don't have that sort of thing anymore. These close, cozy sort of people.

Q: Why is that?
HO: I think it's because we're all trying to do too much. I mean I know that, I don't even have a chance to, I use to read a couple books a week but with all the new magazines that we have to read, you won't have time anymore. It's because of the fast track.

I find it's,

Q: Keeping up?

HO: Yes, keeping up. And so many nights you know, yes, you want to go home but really you can't I mean you really have to go out to something and you really would rather just go home and have a couple of friends in for a quiet dinner. And that's just not possible. I think the whole lifestyle, fast track, is just, what's also in retailing, I mean you see something in the department and the next day that's moved and something else is there.

Q: Blurry.

HO: Yes but other people, as I said Doris Shaw who really was incredibly creative and could spark the thinking and get something out of you that you never realized you had. I really, the Chairman and Presidents that were there after Adam I worked with, they didn't inspire me. I did my job.

Q: They were missing what you call that Da Vinci view, that wholeistic view?
HO: Yes and then when we went through the period with Bob Susslow who really did not understand quality and taste.

Q: How did ... that period?

HO: Well with Sussel I had thoughts of leaving, opening my own business. Someone came to me offering to put up a lot of money. And then I felt well I'd been here, I love this store more than anything, it's been my life, as Blass often has said. I'm like the soul of Saks. And I decided well I would outlast Sussel and I did.

Q: Are you going to outlast the buy-out?

HO: I think it will go well for us. And people were nervous in the beginning.

Q: Gary's is not pushing to sell it.

HO: No, they'll sell it.

Q: Do you think, Helen I'd like your counsel on this, do you think that I should go and see them and tell them about this? I certainly would like to involve them in this because I feel that whether they sell SFA or not, they should know about this and they should be,

HO: Well by the time,

Q: ...scholarship program.

HO: By the time this is done, the company will be sold, they won't be a part of it.

Q: Are you sure?
HO: Yes.

Q: But even if they're not part of it, they have been part of it. Who would be the key person...

HO: Well the president is Henry Fregone.

Q: And where is he located?

HO: He's located in Louisville. There's Wilson Wyatt, who is head of public affairs.

Q: I want to let them know about this.

HO: But I have a feeling, the book will come out in February or March, which you know that's a tough thing because you lay yourself wide open when that prospective is put together.

Q: And with Bloomingdales. I hope you're not going to do what Bloomingdale's did?

HO: Ours will not be full of fluff. And you have to relieve your figures.

Q: Well I just feel that they, it's a corporation that has made the decision and seems to be handling it a lot better.

HO: Well there's Arthur Martinez.

Q: Who is he?

HO: He is Senior Vice President of (Gladys) which will be dissolved you see.

Q: But he's here in New York?
HO: No, all of them are in Louisville.

Q: All right I'll speak to Tansky about this. I would like to talk with him and I think that they should do something quite wonderful.

HO: I'm not sure they would.

Q: ... excellent PR for them. They want to go out looking not like the other. I have a completely different sense of how to approach them.

HO: I do think by March it will all be out. We'll be finding out who is going to buy us or whether we're going to be fortunate ourselves to buy ourselves and maybe by June we will either have a new owner or Saks will be owned by our Chairman, President, etc.

Q: I hope so.

HO: We hope so. But I think we stand a very good chance. Certainly in a buy-out you would rather have the people who have run this company and know how to make it successful be owners.

Q: How much involvement have you had with customers?

HO: Customers? Up until two or three years ago I received all the customer complaints. And then we set up an office downtown called Customer Relations really and they take all the complaints. I still get a lot. I certainly am very involved with the customers because I'm the one who
selects the charities that we benefit for any fashion show or any event in New York City. I select the group. So that I have a bright, yesterday at the Bill Blass show, all of those people I know very very well. We give now luncheons when we like for Arnold Scopz we gave a luncheon and we invited a lot of the customers in for lunch. They all came. And when we launched 273 for Fred Hayman, in addition to the press it was also a personal list of mine and I was very pleased to see that people like a Katie Maron would come for lunch. I’m doing another luncheon and I hand wrote, well someone in the office whose handwriting is like mine, wrote to 30 of the ladies inviting them to come in and meet Melville Sasoon from London. First time we will have them here. And you know Blain Trump, all of them, have said yes.

Q: Are you staying with the idea of, or how do you feel about it now that it’s a few weeks since we discussed it, of having a presence of a key person from each of the cities?

HO: We haven’t discussed it since.

Q: Keep the idea alive.

HO: I think we really have to talk to Mel and Bert.

Q: Keep it aflame because I think it would be a wonderful thing and could be a great public relations event. You probably could have very special night programs, morning
programs, interviews, you know. I think it would be a wonderful thing to do.

HO: There are key ones in each city. Because I said in Minneapolis I was just overwhelmed when I brought Ellen out and we had breakfasts and lunches with leaders in the community and they were saying you know all my life I’ve wanted to be able to shop at Saks, I can do it when I go to Chicago. But to have it right here in our own front yard and,

Q: That’s the difference.

HO: It made a difference. I mean they were all so turned on by this store and it is a beautiful store. Filled with beautiful, beautiful merchandise.

Q: Let’s leave it at that and I thank you for this morning.

HO: You’re welcome.

Q: And I owe you so much …

HO: Good. Now I’m going to take you into my conference room.

These are the old ads from the beginning. This was our campaign when we opened. You look at the phone number, in 1924 we were just Plaza 4000 and then they had to add the 3. Our shoe department. Evening gowns, evening wear. Shoes, all the different departments, furs. And in those days the
dress was called a frock.) Our beauty salon, which we're building a new one and it's going to be beautiful in the new building.

Q: Is it still franchised, still are licensing,

HO: Yes.

Q: Who do you use ...?

HO: No it was Steigman and Lack and then Steigman and Lack sold and it's a company out in Minneapolis.

Q: Oh I love this.

HO: Isn't that marvelous.

Q: Isn't that, how contemporary.

HO: I love this one.

Q: From over seven seas gathering,

HO: ..shawls.

Q: They're great. These are for me?

HO: I have to make copies. These are my set.

Q: All right. Wonderful, okay.

HO: So you have a lot.

Q: Wonderful. These are the first ads,

HO: At the ad campaign.

Q: At that point it was just Saks Fifth Avenue, New

NY.

HO: New York.

Q: Okay. Start making a record here of what we're
getting.

HO: I'm sending this out.

Q: Make a record of what we're getting. I'll put that back. Do you have a time line?

HO: I have an 11:30.

Q: No I mean a time line for Saks Fifth? You don't have, this release I suppose does it.

HO: Well we have, I think what we'll give you is, let's see what's the date on this one. This is the newest history that gives you square footage,

Q: Of their photographs of the stores and country estates.

HO: We have a book that we're thinking of,

Q: I think some of these early ads ought to be part of the exhibit.

HO: We have, we can pull for you a picture of each store.

Q: Now when you have a picture and it's just a straight out shot of the store or,

HO: We have some ...

Q: No you don't have any that say the city, the city and the store?

HO: No. You have to get them from the cities. No, these are,
Q: I'd like to talk to Bill about shooting the store and the city as one you know. That sense of whatever it is that almost creates a kind of double image of St. Louis and SFA, Chicago and SFA. I think that that would be a very important kind of reputation because otherwise you know,

HO: We have basically most stores here. And you know we can give you duplicates. Bill would not have them. I might have given him copies of some of these but we have basically most of them.

Q: So then as far as the shops or the stores,
HO: Stores, we have.

Q: S-Stores you've got a file of those.
HO: And we can just pull out each one.

Q: And we can pull out the best of each.
HO: Right.

Q: Can you have someone do that for us?
HO: Yes. And we can duplicate them for you. I think, this is an article you might want to borrow. This was Adam's bound copy that again Sophie gave to me.

Q: That's a beautiful shot.
HO: Isn't that a beautiful shot.

Q: Beautiful shot.
HO: We're right here.

Q: Walter Richards. This was what year?
HO: This was I think '38.

Q: I love that. I have before every xerox of that article.

HO: Yes, November 1938. And you know it's ...

Q: I'd love a xerox to take back.

HO: Okay. And this was our newspaper, our little magazine that we do. And this was our 50th Anniversary, which we can xerox.

Q: We'll need the originals if we use material from it but at the moment I'd like as much reading material as possible.

HO: Right. I mean you know things of that, I don't know whether they're in there about Sophie. She did the first culottes in America.

Q: Do they exist?

HO: Only that sketch on my wall. But I think this is, ...

Q: Would you write a note about the photograph she has in her office, Sophie and the culottes.

HO: These were just photographs of Sophie's ..., that was her head fitter, Genevieve. That was the letter, she was the first designer, American designer ..., the only one on the cover of Time Magazine. It's a letter from her.

Q: Do you have the time of her ...

HO: I'm not sure that Jay still doesn't have that.
Probably, I might have given that to Parsons. This was an article to,

Q: To who?
HO: To Parson.
Q: Oh to Parson?
HO: In her library. ...
Q: Do you think we can get that?
HO: I hope so.
Q: Please make a note of the Time cover with Sophie Gimble.

HO: This was an article written by Blair Sobel on our 50th Anniversary. And she actually spent just a day with me and it was all,

Q: What year did Parsons do,
HO: The library?
Q: Do the, transfer the library to ...
HO: The library was done before Adam, right after Adam died. Adam died in '69. They started working on it about '73 and then it was rededicated when Sophie died in '81 so it was, .. '82.

Q: '73 and '82. Make a notation of that. Is it being kept up? Is it wonderful?
HO: I think so. I haven't been there in a while.

This is a clipping that I was able to retrieve. No one kept
anything and I just went crazy trying to get, when we celebrated our 50th Anniversary. But that's a clipping I got from the New York Times that we can have, xerox for you.

fact sheet.

Q: He was so handsome.
HO: Yes.

Q: Does Jay come around at all?
HO: I had a letter from Jay two days ago. Actually I'm sending the cookbook, which I dedicated to Sophie in her memory. Some of the, this was an article that was in Business Week, I'll xerox it, I think it's important. This is our 50th Anniversary."

Q: What's over in the library that I should have, that we should have?

HO: I don't think anything of that time.

Q: Okay. Just of that period.

HO: Right.

Q: The early period?

HO: Yes.

Q: They have photographs and things like that?

HO: I don't think they do. I think I still have everything. That was the first store out of Gimbals.

Q: I can't believe it.

HO: That was out in Milwaukee. That's the first Adam
Gimbal.

Q: You're going to get us a print of that?
HO: Yes. This is unusual. This if I remember was Chicago, I'm just showing the city. This I think is amusing. It's a sketch showing the construction of the store. This is the, would be interesting that when he retired .. tells about the change of the, that was the first change in 47 years.

Q: The first change in 47-years was what year?
HO: '69. So it was '24 when he began.
Q: 1924.
HO: So it's about 45 years.
Q: 1924 and then 45 years later he did something .. I think the fact that it was, you know it began with Adam.
HO: Yes.
Q: I mean his name is very ...
HO: Yes. Someone wanted to do a book, never got around to it... been after me. The man that did the cookbook is very anxious for me to do a book with him. And I just don't have the time. Because I've involved in so much now that ..

Q: He's very special, isn't he?
HO: Yes.
Q: Talk about Mel a little bit.
HO: He's very much a [Arthur] because he knows what he wants, he has great definite taste.

Q: Talk louder.

HO: Oh. He's very definite taste, very much into [I feel we're very much back into quality, into what is Saks Fifth Avenue. He's very strong on our own real clothes, our own product development and seeing that we have the very best in quality of sportswear.] He can really charm people just by sitting there, being with them. We made a trip once to Europe and he was just there with the buyers and all and just that they could have one on ones with him and he could tell them how he felt about the new store and the tower and he himself. He's just like Adam, he's planned every single thing in that store. He sits by the hour with those workers]

and,

Q: Who's the architect for the tower?

HO: I'll have to get that for you. Towers, you know, it's part of the Swiss Bank. So it is Swiss Bank.

Q: It's their architect?

HO: Yes.

Q: Who is doing the interior?

HO: It's, I think it's the Walker group.

Q: The Walker group.

HO: Which we had just started.
Q: Who he's worked for. He's worked with them in
Bellevue on all the experimental stuff for Federated.

HO: So he worked with them there but then when he came
here, we still were with Hembreck.

Q: I know.

HO: And then we changed. (Charlotte, in a few
minutes, okay). That's an old diagram of the stores. This
is a copy.

Q: DO you have the yellow sheet? Wonderful...

HO: You see we had a vice president, a woman in 1938.

Q: What?

HO: Mary Lewis.

Q: Oh my God, the great Mary Lewis. How many people
do you think remember that ...?

HO: I don't really .. to tell you the truth.

Q: Oh come on, come on. She was of a generation before
me so there must be people around,

HO: That would remember her.

Q: Who remember her, remember the Mary Lewis.

HO: Yes, I guess so. This is the first Dun Baro show
we did here. This is a story on Bernard Gimbal. His 80th
birthday.

Q: Anyone in New York ever did anything on Saks?

HO: Not that I can remember. They wanted to but we
stopped advertising. Now I don't remember .. This is interesting that we had printed this whole thing about Anteius; it was printed in French in '64. This was an interesting article. All of these I think we're going to have for you ...

Q: That would be wonderful.
HO: This is the, that actually was the store going up.
Q: I remember this campaign.
HO: That was our first stint that I did ..
Q: ..campaign wasn’t it? That was when Doris was here?
HO: Yes.
Q: I have that whole campaign.
?: Would you love my ... on Saks when I'm free?
Q: I'd love it. I'll turn it all over to you. I did it for Robin. I had more in my artifacts that they had in their advertising.
?: Sure because each time the ad department changes, people throw things out.
HO: They throw everything out. Just to ... And I came in here and I have nothing.
Q: I'd like to talk with you about eventually assigning a lot of this to FIT. We have to talk about this, Helen.
HO: We do because most of it's been .. and that was part of the,

Q: Including this?

HO: Yes. When I campaigned and raised funds for them for that library. So that that was a commitment that I had made to them meaning like all these books, when Sophie gave them to me with the understanding they would all go there. And that was part of the agreement when the library opened that I would give them the archives with the understanding that they named it for them. This was an exhibit Richie remembered that we did.

Q: I also remember the crafts things that you did.

HO: Yes. I'll put it out here. That was a cover sketch. He was our general manager who since passed away. That's a very good, that's the official ... Which we started working on this, they came to me, New York Times, when they heard he was ill and they said would I be willing to help and I put them in touch with two or three people and then I sat with them for a long time. And we were to have had a party the night he died.

Q: I make sure it's running, look at it every little while, I don't want it to run out.

HO: That was the change.

Q: Fun piece. .. character.
Q: Was he friends with Stanley?

OH: Oh very close friends, like that. Stanley flew in for he was a pole bearer. Whenever Adam found something like the Roger Faray Gloves, Faragama Shoes, Sacha Heimbacks, he would call. In those days we didn’t compete, we were not in the same .. he would call Stanley. Best gloves ... than Neaman Marcus. That’s why we have so many things similar. Those two men talked at least once a week at least.

Q: We should let Stanley know about this.

HO: Absolutely. When he came to the funeral, he was wonderful,

Q: You know what I’d like you to think about since there is this commitment you have made to continue the archives at the library at Saks Fifth Avenue, the Parsons, what would you want the Saks ... I’m not, this is not a demand item right now. I’d like to have you give some thought to what is the legacy you’d like to leave at this institution when you come down you will see what’s there and what the opportunities are. And as we walk through it, I want you to have this in mind, all right?

HO: Okay.

Q: I’ll have to talk with Alice.
HO: Yes.
Q: Here's Anthony. What did he mean to you?
HO: I was crazy about his father. His father really, as you know, he and Adam Scorsi opened up to each other. He,
Q: His father's name was?
HO: F. Raymond. And he created a great deal, along with Adam, of what Saks Fifth Avenue was. He, particularly with the appetizing and the, my area, he was very interested in photography and he was a great loss when he went ...
Q: Now what was his relationship to? He wasn't related to Adam.
HO: He was the Executive Vice President.
Q: And then Allen?
HO: Allen took over. (Allen was never as creative as either his father or Adam.) We worked well together. I don't think I ever felt, you know [this is off the record, the stimulation that I had from the other one. And I don't think I had the backing from an Allen than I had when Aronson joined the company and .. Jacobs]
Q: I got it.
HO: Here the two of them are. It's a wonderful shot.
Q: I remember this. His wife is still alive. Laura. This old one, this one...
HO: I think that's an old one. They must have done that long ago. ... It's when we still had Potosky, we had all the, we had a summer store there too out in Michigan and that did very well.

Q: Who is keeping the legacy up now? Are you still doing it?
HO: Yes.
Q: They're lucky. There is no one at Bloomingdale's who's recorded it as a matter of fact,
HO: No. That's a wonderful shot of the first ...
Q: Not really usable. I wouldn't write about.
HO: No. That's interesting. That was, that Bookingham Hotel that they tore down to build Saks.
Q: To build Saks.
HO: These were our windows in the 40's. Christmas. That interest you?
Q: I don't think so. ... do them anyway. Going to have to be very selective.
HO: This is, saying the millinery department.
Q: I remember it. I remember it. That was .. early in my career.
HO: This is the .. Sophie and .. Now I could lend you this entire magazine because that's mine and the other one was Adams.
Q: We’ll treasure this. All right.

HO: ..Jay had sent me those,

Q: You’re going to xerox them. This you’re xeroxing?

HO: Right. You know what is at Parsons is all of Sophie’s scrapbooks from oh I guess some time in the 60’s whether we could borrow those, to see them.

Q: Well make a notation and it will be a question of how far back do we go.

HO: That’s right.

Q: And how much do they want the identification of Sophie beyond what your recording of her. And I caught that in the meeting the other day. And we’ll discuss at another time, all right.

HO: Okay.

Q: I’ll feel my way on that. It’s a no, then .. the important thing.

HO: It’s all there.

Q: Okay.

HO: You want to turn that off now.