

June Chocheles

Interview conducted by

Helen Weiss, Historian

September 26, 2016

SAN DIEGO TECHNOLOGY ARCHIVE



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Ms. Chocheles had a distinguished 23 year career at Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) from 1983 – 2006. During her tenure she held a variety of positions focused on program management, operations and business development. As Vice President of Science and Technology Strategy she managed operations for SAIC's Internal Research and Development (R&D) portfolio that included developing and rolling out company-wide systems to support program activities. She and contributed to the strategy, team formation and capture of R&D contracts, primarily in the federal defense sector. June managed the company's Research and Development Business Acquisition Committee Meetings, Quarterly Research and Development Sessions and served as a member of the SAIC's intellectual property protection and commercialization team, Risk Committee, and the 21st Century Leadership mentoring program for high potential employees where she led the team who developed the program's core curriculum.

As the Chief Operating Officer of CONNECT from 2006 – 2007 Ms. Chocheles led the development of operational process improvements establishing a robust foundation to support CONNECT's mission – providing entrepreneurs in San Diego's start-up community with the resources and programs to support growth and success.

From 2007-2015, as Principal for Chocheles Consulting Group, she supported the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) Office of Small Business Programs, and the San Diego Regional Innovation Cluster, working with small tech focused companies on application identification, supply chain insertion and strategic partner identification. During 2007 and 2008, she was a member of UC San Diego's consultancy Global CONNECT's and worked as a member of the Department of Labor funded WIRED Initiative's evaluation team.

From 1979-1983 Ms. Chocheles worked at the Smithsonian Institution, first at the Institution's Central Office of Public Affairs and then at the National Air and Space Museum's Office of Public Affairs with a focus on promoting various research and educational activities and managing a variety of special programs and events.

Ms. Chocheles is the founder and Chaired Athena San Diego's Pinnacle **Century Club** Scholarship Fund Campaign from 2003 until 2010. In 2010 she joined the Athena Foundation Board in 2011 and was Board President from 2012-2014. During her tenure, the Athena Scholarship Campaign and Pinnacle event teams increased donations to between \$75 - \$100K annually. Since 2001 Athena has awarded scholarships to more than 75 young women pursuing undergraduate studies in STEM fields.

Ms. Chocheles is also a member of the San Diego Chapter of Achievement Rewards for College Scientists (ARCS) Foundation that awards funding to Ph.D. students in STEM fields studying at UC San Diego, SDSU, USD and The Scripps Research Institute. She was previously a member of, and chaired, the ARCS Community Advisory Council (ARCS) providing mentoring and networking opportunities for ARCS scholars within the San Diego business and government communities.

Ms. Chocheles is a recipient of the YWCA Tribute to Women in Industry (TWIN) award, Athena Pinnacle Technology award and the Athena Pinnacle Chairman's award.

Ms. Chocheles is a classical violinist, a fine artist and over the years has dabbled in a variety of sports including biking, mountain biking, swimming, sculling, yoga, and running.



THE SAN DIEGO TECHNOLOGY ARCHIVE

INTERVIEWEE: June Chocheles

INTERVIEWER: Helen Weiss, Historian

DATE: September 26, 2016

1 **WEISS:** I'm Helen Weiss for the San Diego Technology Archive housed at the Special
2 Collections at the UC San Diego Geisel Library. I'm interviewing Ms. June Chocheles
3 on September 26, 2016.

4 Ms. Chocheles joined SAIC in 1983. In 2006, she left SAIC as the Vice President of
5 Science and Technology Strategy after several decades with the company, where she
6 held a variety of positions in program management and business development.

7 We are interviewing Ms. Chocheles today at the UC San Diego Geisel Library. Thank
8 you Ms. Chocheles for making time for this oral history interview. We will be
9 walking through your background, education, and then find out about your
10 experiences at SAIC, especially here in the San Diego area.

11 After leaving SAIC, you have remained very active in various aspects of education
12 technology, so we will explore that as well.

13 Tell me about your background before you joined SAIC. Where did you grow up, and
14 what were your childhood interests and hobbies?

15 **CHOCHÉLES:** First of all, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this
16 project. Very exciting for me. I'll tell you a little bit about my background. I actually
17 have a bachelor's and master's degree in history. I do believe that oral histories and
18 historical documents—primary and secondary source materials—are very, very
19 important for people to understand what happened during a particular point in time.

20 A little bit about my background. I grew up on Long Island, New York and I was in a
21 family of a mother, who was in the arts – she was a commercial artist for some point
22 in time – and then my father who worked for an aerospace company in
23 manufacturing. He later got into quality assurance and quality control and worked on

24 the Apollo space program and on major aircraft programs. So technology is very, very
25 much a part of my background.

26 I also grew up in a family where books were very important, and reading, and
27 education. Neither one of my parents attended college; they both went to trade
28 schools, but they were very well read. We had a lot of books in the home.

29 It's very interesting; my parents were do it yourselfers, DIYers. My parents built the
30 house that we lived in, of course with some support from contractors, but they were
31 two city kids that decided that they wanted to move out to the suburbs, and they
32 decided that they were going to build a house.

33 My father wanted to learn how to sail a boat, so he learned how to sail a boat. He
34 wanted to learn how to do celestial navigation, so he learned how to do that.

35 My mother was very interested in growing things, and botany, and plants, and so she
36 had kind of an extensive self-education in that area. She learned and taught herself
37 to do all different types of crafts, and just different artistic projects. For them their
38 philosophy was: if you want to do something, you just learn how to do it.

39 There weren't really a lot of boundaries in terms of you can't do this, you can't do
40 that.

41 The other thing that was very important in our family is that, music was very
42 important. I learned how to play the violin when I was eight years old, and I am still
43 a violinist. I played in a variety of different groups throughout my career. Always had
44 that as a primary hobby. My sister played the flute, and my brother played the
45 saxophone and bassoon. My other sister played the cello and guitar. My father
46 played classical guitar. That was another thing. He wanted to learn how to play
47 classical guitar, so he took lessons, and he practiced, and he did that as an adult.

48 I would say I came from a family of entrepreneurs in their own right in the sense that
49 if they wanted to do something, they just went ahead and did it. It did not take a lot
50 of money then for what we wanted to do, and I think that we were fortunate in that
51 we grew up in a town where there were good resources.

52 Free music lessons in school, which I am an advocate of. I think it is really important.
53 I think that our society needs to rethink the arts in education. There are a lot of good
54 things that come out of having young children learn a musical instrument, learn a

55 second language. I think those things really need to be brought back into the
56 curriculum.

57 **WEISS:** What was the name of the town you grew up in?

58 **CHOCHELES:** I grew up in a town called Babylon.

59 **WEISS:** And then you went onto college for your bachelor's and master's. Where
60 please?

61 **CHOCHELES:** Before I get into that, I also wanted to say that I was also very active
62 in the Girl Scouts. I think between the music and the Girl Scouts that's where I really
63 learned leadership abilities or capabilities.

64 Being a musician is very competitive. People don't realize that, but you have to
65 compete for chairs. You have to practice your music. It's discipline, and competition,
66 and achievement. The same thing with Girl Scouts. You had a sash, and I wanted my
67 sash filled with badges, and I achieved the Senior Girl Scout status. Then also when I
68 was a senior in high school, I also became a junior leader to a junior Girl Scout troop.

69 Looking back, very early on I just decided to take on these responsibilities. I don't
70 think it was conscious at the time, but everything was so interesting to me and I
71 always wanted to try. Oh, let me try this, and this looks interesting, and let me see
72 how this goes. This is going back from say, eight years old, fourth grade, until the
73 time I was 17.

74 I think the foundation was laid early on that supported my achievements, both
75 academically and then in terms of my career.

76 The other thing is that in our family all of the kids had summer jobs, or had to work
77 from an early age. I remember starting to work when I was 12 years old. I think I was
78 babysitting. Then when I got a little bit older I had summer jobs. Worked at a local
79 pool, community pool. I was a receptionist in a law office. There were a couple of
80 summers where I worked at Grumman Aerospace. They had a summer program for
81 students.

82 Essentially, I have been working since I was 12 years old, and I think it's a good habit
83 to have, and it is nice to be able to know that you can generate your own money, earn

84 your own money. All those components came to play in how I proceeded forward
85 with my life in general.

86 I graduated in 1973, and I went off to school at State University of New York at
87 Fredonia. I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do. This was back in the early 70s, and
88 I remember going in to see my [high school] guidance counselor. I remember the
89 guidance counselor saying, "You have three choices for a career. You can be a
90 teacher, you can be a nurse, or you can be a secretary." That's what the times were
91 like then.

92 I said, well, I don't know. There was nothing that really jumped out at me. I knew
93 my disposition wasn't well suited to the medical profession. Secretary, I don't know,
94 that didn't thrill me that much. So I said, "Oh, I'll go into education."

95 I still was very much into my music, and so I said, "Well, I think maybe what I'll do is
96 I'll take music as my major, and I will become a music educator." So after about
97 probably one or two semesters I realized that my life as a musician, and even as a
98 music educator, was going to be too narrow for me, because I'm just very interested
99 in a lot of things. So I said, "I think I just need to open the aperture a little bit more.
100 I'm not sure what's there, but let me see what the other options are."

101 After I attended Fredonia for about a year and a half, I decided that it was a little bit
102 too cold near Buffalo, New York for me, so I transferred to SUNY Stony Brook
103 University on Long Island. And when I was there, I continued with taking my credits,
104 and one day I had to declare my major. This was not very scientific, but I added up
105 the classes and I saw where I was, and I thought I could swing it to be a history major.
106 I was incredibly interested in history. It was a big decision.

107 Like I said, not very scientific, but I just started to go down that path. I do want to
108 say that one of the teachers that I had in elementary school, sixth grade history
109 teacher was instrumental in encouraging my interest in history. He was forward
110 thinking. I remember doing a couple of projects.

111 One of them was the history of the Greek playwrights. I was about 12 years old. And
112 my mother helped me, with her arts background, helped me develop a diorama of a
113 stage, and I made these little stick puppets of the Greek playwrights. I actually did
114 this whole little presentation where I was just talking about what their philosophy
115 was, and I was just fascinated.

116 Whether I consciously knew it or not, I was fascinated in how people think, and what
117 their ideas are, and how that influences the society that they are living in.

118 Even though I couldn't really articulate it at the time, I was very curious in trying to
119 just understand how things work.

120 **WEISS:** So then you finished up at Stony Brook, and then what happens?

121 **CHOCHELES:** Yes. So I finished up at Stony Brook. I actually student taught to get
122 my teaching credentials. And the class that I taught was called Technology in
123 Society. So even though a lot of my career path has been focused on technology, it
124 was more opportunistic, and things just started to fall into place.

125 I do not remember having a choice for that. I remember that I was assigned to a
126 school. I got there. My teacher that I was assigned to was teaching a class in science
127 and technology, The History of Technology, specifically on Long Island. This is in the
128 70s. This is pre-internet, and there were not a lot of primary source materials around.

129 When you taught, you taught with secondary source materials. You primarily taught
130 with textbooks, maybe there were some special books in the class, books that were
131 written by other people that maybe relied on primary source material reviewing, and
132 then they did compilations to create these books and documents.

133 I remember at that time I became interested in use of primary source materials to
134 teach history, because there are some biases here when you are looking at textbooks,
135 for example. I got into encouraging students to read primary source materials, and
136 then this was a way that they could actually do their own analysis, start to see how
137 there was all these different variables that came into play.

138 This was when I was a senior in college. I remember seeing the lightbulb go off in
139 some of these kids, because they're like, "Oh, history is really boring." And I was like,
140 "No, history might be boring if you're reading dates and things in a textbook, but
141 history is not boring at all." When they started to dive in, it was very exciting to me.

142 I knew that I had to get my master's degree to get my permanent teaching
143 certification. I'm the type of person who likes to just power through. And I was
144 encouraged by my academic advisor to apply to graduate school.

145 I applied and I got into Stony Brook in the graduate program in History, and I had a
146 choice to go on past my master's for a Ph.D., but after I was there I just realized that
147 the Ph.D. was not the right fit for me, and I graduated with my master's.

148 This was during the recession in the late 70s, and I was not able to find a job. It's
149 really interesting when I hear young kids today talk about the challenges of finding a
150 job, and that it's very, very difficult. I believe that every generation has had their
151 challenges looking for a job, and I think that you just have to be very creative and you
152 have to be extremely persistent, and you have to use your network. Now you have the
153 internet, you have all these different systems where you can put your resume up and
154 things like that.

155 When I graduated it was banging out letters on a typewriter, electric typewriter. But
156 banging out those letters and mailing them, and going in for interviews, and just a lot
157 of persistence.

158 While I was doing that, I was working different temporary jobs. I had a job working
159 in a bookstore that was closing down, and we were doing inventory management. I
160 had a job as a clerk at a hospital where I was supporting medical records retention,
161 and Xeroxing, did a lot of Xeroxing. So you just have to keep on going and see what
162 happens.

163 A couple months after graduation, I had an opportunity—through some of my peers
164 from my history class—to go down for an interview in Washington D.C. with one of
165 the defense contractors. And, I had the interview, but it just wasn't quite the right fit.
166 But I fell in love with Washington D.C.

167 And DC was to me – just coming from New York area – a wonderful city. I never
168 thought in a million years that I would ever leave New York City. I thought that is
169 where I would be forever. But it was really exciting to be somewhere different, and
170 just the history that's there. I was interested in politics, not that I thought I could
171 have a career in politics, but there was an excitement there, and a different type of
172 excitement that wasn't in New York.

173 When I didn't get the job at this contractor, I said, "I'm just going to stay and see
174 what happens." I know this generation thinks that they invented couch surfing, but I
175 did my share of couch surfing when I first started, and this is back in 1979.

176 I was running out of money. I do believe I had under \$100, and that was my life
177 savings at the time. But you're young, and you're just like, oh, this is all going to work
178 out, and this is kind of an exciting adventure. So I was getting low on money and I
179 was on the bus, and I passed by a building that said, Washington School for
180 Secretaries. So I pulled the cord on the bus and I got out, and I walked in and I said,
181 "I need a job."

182 And they said, "What's your background?" And I said, "I have a bachelor's and
183 master's degree in History. I'm certified to teach in New York, seventh through 12th
184 grade history and social studies." And they said to me, "How many words a minute
185 can you type?"

186 I was like, okay, it is a start. And so I took a typing test and went back out in the
187 room – and the reason I'm telling you this, because it really speaks to persistence. So
188 I overheard the two placement officers at this temporary employment agency.
189 Somebody picked up the phone and then they said, "Oh, they need somebody at the
190 Smithsonian."

191 I was in the waiting room and I just thought, I have to go for it. I stuck my head in the
192 door and I said, "Send me to the Smithsonian." And they did, and I got a temporary
193 job as a clerk typist at the Office of Public Affairs for the Smithsonian Institution.
194 And that was very exciting because I was doing something that was interesting and
195 fun in the sense that I was around all these people that were doing really interesting
196 and fun things [related to media and public affairs], even though I was Xeroxing and
197 typing, things like that.

198 It just so happened that after I was there for a very short period of time, there were
199 several people that left the organization, and there were openings for me. I ended up
200 taking a civil service test and I became a GS4 clerk typist. And at the time, there was
201 the federally funded side of the house and the privately funded side of the house for
202 the Smithsonian, and I was on the federal side of the house for some time, and then I
203 moved over to the private side of the house.

204 I just remember thinking, this is an opportunity to really learn something new. I'm a
205 very attentive observer, and I do believe in the power to learn and teach yourself
206 things. And so I was typing press releases, and after I typed, I don't know, whatever,
207 25, 35 press releases, I go, "Oh, I can write one of these things."

208 I was always volunteering for things. Once I had typed the press releases, they'd go
209 out for copying, and then they come back, and then I'd have to fold them, and I'd
210 have to stuff them in envelopes, and then I'd have to glue the envelopes with this
211 little sponge thing.

212 I remember thinking, "This is really not an efficient use of my time." So I did some
213 research and I found a machine that could automate the process. So I did this whole
214 cost benefit analysis saying, "Well, if you purchase this machine, this is how much it's
215 going to cost, and then this could free me up and I can do these other things for you."

216 It's not like anybody taught me how to do that, it just seemed logical to me. And I
217 think what propelled me in so many direction is, if something doesn't seem logical to
218 me then I say to myself, let me figure it out. Let me figure out another way, a better
219 way of doing it. I know that people say, "Are you born that way? Do you learn how
220 to do those things?" I think it's probably a combination of both.

221 I just leveraged my way up. I wrote a couple of articles. There was a Smithsonian
222 news service. I had the opportunity to write some articles for that, because I
223 remember somebody was not there and I was like, "Hey, I'll volunteer to do that." I
224 just think that's really important. You can't wait for things to drop in your lap. It is
225 very important to be assertive and, just go for something if you think that it might be
226 something that you want.

227 After I was there maybe for a year and a half or so – there was an opportunity to have
228 a temporary assignment at the National Air & Space Museum. I moved over there and
229 I worked in the Public Affairs office and also managed special programs and events.
230 So we did all types of special events, exhibit openings, and I ended up working on a
231 team for one of the Inauguration balls [for President Reagan]. We had dignitaries
232 coming in from foreign countries, and so it was very, very exciting at the time. I got
233 to meet some historic figures in aviation and aerospace.

234 At that time, we had some liaison opportunities with different people in the federal
235 government and different government agencies. It wasn't by design, it was just
236 because of where I was at the time, I started to develop a fairly large network of
237 people from the defense industry, the aerospace companies, and this was pre-merger
238 of many of these companies.

239 There were a lot of Washington reps for those companies, and you're just traveling in
240 those circles, and you're at meetings and talking to people. And again, pre-internet,
241 so you have your rolodex [a manual contact storage system], and you make sure you
242 that you get everybody's business card and you start to build that up.

243 I ended up being up at the Air and Space Museum for about a total of three years.
244 Just a wonderful experience. Very exciting, but it was a little bit too structured for
245 me, and it was very hierarchical, and I am an out-of-the-box thinker. Quite frankly, I
246 never quite knew what that meant, because I just thought, well everybody must think
247 this way. I never thought that there was a distinction between people that think
248 within some parameters and people that think outside the box. I am always thinking.
249 I have a zillion ideas.

250 I just knew that it wasn't the career for me. I didn't know what was for me, but I just
251 knew that wasn't for me.

252 I had an opportunity to come out to California to visit my sister who had moved out
253 here, and she was a little over three years younger than me. She was a physics major
254 – that shows the difference of how quickly things started to change. I talked to her
255 when she was going to school, and I said, "Since you are studying physics, do you
256 want to get your Ph.D. and go into academia or do you want to work at a company?"
257 No, she wanted to work at a company.

258 I said, "You should think about engineering, electrical engineering." So she went into
259 electrical engineering and she moved out to San Diego after graduation and she got a
260 job here in San Diego. When I came to visit her, we went down to La Jolla, went
261 down to the cove and stood looking at the ocean, and I thought, "Hmmm, I could live
262 here just as well as I could live there. I think I'll live in San Diego." And that's how I
263 got here without a job.

264 I quit my job at the Smithsonian, which was pretty scary, because that was a really
265 good job. A lot of people covet working there, and I was very appreciative, but I just
266 knew I had to be adventurous and do something new.

267 **WEISS:** So you are here in San Diego, no job. This is 1982?

268 **CHOCHELES:** It was '83.

269 **WEISS:** '83. And then you begin with SAIC? How did that happen?

270 **CHOCHELES:** Well when I first got here, again, I just knew the power of
271 networking, and there was an organization in San Diego called GROW. It was a
272 networking organization for women. At that time you just looked in the paper to see
273 where these networking events were being held.

274 I said well, I can generate my resume, and went to one of these meetings, and there
275 was a panel of speakers, women representing different businesses in San Diego.

276 And when I first got down here I thought, well tech is starting to really emerge as a
277 kind of a career path. It was more than aerospace or the defense industry. There was
278 something that was changing.

279 Before if you were in the sciences and technology, and you had that background, you
280 worked for an aerospace defense contractor, or you worked for one of the
281 government labs, or you worked for the phone company, you worked for Bell Labs.

282 It was pretty narrow. I remember hearing about these little companies that were
283 starting to develop. And so I thought, well, I really like technology. Now I have this
284 background in media relations and in public affairs, maybe I'll get into public
285 relations and media affairs for tech.

286 I came down here to San Diego and I started talking to some public relations firms
287 but nobody was really doing tech. The only person that was doing that was Regis
288 McKenna up in the Bay Area, but I thought that people would start to develop that
289 here. I talked to a bunch of different agencies, and then I ended up getting a
290 temporary job with the Stoorza Agency, and Gail Stoorza was the founder of that
291 company.

292 She was very generous to offer me this opportunity, and I worked on some small
293 media campaigns. But after I did that for a while it just wasn't the right thing for me.
294 They were into media relations for development companies. It just wasn't my
295 domain experience.

296 But in parallel, I was working my network back in D.C. I was like, "Hey, I'm out here
297 now. Who do you know, and who can you introduce me to?" And again, before the
298 internet, you are calling people on the phone and sending them letters.

299 One of my colleagues at the National Air & Space Museum knew somebody who was
300 an administrator at UCSD. And before he came to UCSD, he worked at SAI. He said,

301 “Well I know this little company. They might be interested in you. They’re
302 entrepreneurial.” Quite frankly, I wasn’t even quite sure what that meant. But I said,
303 “Okay.” And they were located in La Jolla.

304 I was like okay; I think that this could be a pretty good deal. I was lucky enough to
305 receive an interview and I went down to La Jolla, because that’s where SAI offices
306 were at the time. They had several offices down in the Village of La Jolla. I had an
307 interview with a gentleman, and I think I interviewed with about three people.

308 I was just very confident. I wasn’t sure what I was going to do. They weren’t quite
309 sure either. They explained to me that the company was a research, technical
310 services and engineering company. I didn’t have an engineering degree. I wasn’t a
311 scientist, but they had different roles. They had business development. They had
312 people that were involved in the operations of the company. Even though it had been
313 started in 1969, it was still a smallish company in San Diego.

314 We started talking, and I remember this key question that they asked me. They said,
315 “Tell us something about yourself.” I said, “Well, I’m the type of person if I set my
316 mind to doing something, I will be successful at it.” And I truly believe that. If I really
317 want to do something, I’m going to make the commitment and I’m going to do what I
318 need to do. I’ll go back to school. I’ll read. I’ll talk to people. I’ll just do whatever I
319 need to do if I really want to be successful at something.

320 Then they asked me a little bit about my network in Washington, and I told them a
321 little bit about this. And they said, “We think that you are the type of person that we
322 want to have here at this company, because you’re assertive, you’re a go-getter. You
323 are a self-starter.” So I thought, okay, this sounds pretty good.

324 I was offered, what would be more like an entry-level position with the company, and
325 it was in the government operations division. We were doing program management
326 support for some government agencies, and I basically learned the business.

327 You had to be quick. You had to be quick on your feet. This was not a paternalistic
328 type company. [It was very competitive, however] many of my colleagues were very,
329 very supportive. So you could go in, “Hey, what about this? What do you think
330 about this, and what exactly do they want me to do?” I learned about government
331 contracting, and worked on different contracts.

332 I found out I did have an aptitude for structuring things, for managing things, for
333 talking to customers, understanding what their issues were. I also had an aptitude for
334 talking to the technical staff and understanding technology and, most importantly,
335 how science and technology is applied to solving specific problems.

336 I also learned that I am a systems thinker, and I like to look at the big picture, and
337 that I can break it down into all these small parts. I can understand how different
338 parts are related. I can understand dependencies, and I think that's a talent I have.
339 And I'm able to work across different levels in an organization.

340 I just feel very fortunate, because that was the place for me.

341 **WEISS:** When did you first meet Dr. Beyster, or Dr. B.? I don't know how he was
342 referred to, and what was your first impression of him, and did it change over the
343 years?

344 **CHOCHELES:** Yes. I met Dr. Beyster probably around 1990 or so. I remember seeing
345 him in the parking lot. But he wasn't the type of person that you could just go over
346 and talk to. He was always deep in thought.

347 You just know that his mind was constantly going. He was usually with other people.
348 And at the time, being a woman in SAIC, there were women that worked in the
349 company, but there weren't a lot of women that worked at SAIC at the time. I was
350 younger. I was in my late 20s when I started.

351 There were various management levels where you say well, this is really not the level
352 that I'm at now, [but you aspired to that level]. But it's interesting, because I
353 remember I started seeing people with the same briefcase. So I asked about that. I
354 said, "What's the deal with the briefcase?" They said, "Well, if you work for SAIC for
355 ten years, you get a briefcase."

356 So that was my first goal – I said to myself, I'm going to get a briefcase. There was
357 just something about the company where you wanted to succeed. It was almost like
358 you wanted to prove to yourself and to all your peers that you could succeed in this
359 environment, because it was very competitive, and it was very Darwinian. It was
360 really survival of the fittest, and you kept on your toes in terms of doing your job.

361 I felt it was very exciting, and I've always been a very competitive person, so it was
362 perfect for my personality.

363 **WEISS:** So in terms of working your way up through the company and staying
364 competitive, were you mainly here in San Diego, La Jolla area, or were you traveling
365 to Washington D.C. to see some of the customers, or work on contracts?

366 **CHOCHELES:** Yes, actually to just get back for a minute about Dr. Beyster just to
367 finish that. I did meet him, I believe, in about the 1990s, early 1990s, because I had
368 been supporting some Navy customers down in Point Loma. I was primarily doing
369 that.

370 Then there was an opportunity to come to corporate, and I interviewed for that job,
371 and they wanted somebody that could administer the internal Research and
372 Development program and work with the different Principal Investigators. That was
373 very similar to the work that I was doing for the Navy.

374 In addition to that, one of the other jobs I had at corporate was managing the
375 meetings for the business acquisition committee, and that was a committee of senior
376 executives that met and reviewed bids, research and development bids that the
377 company was going after. So I then was able to attend meetings where Dr. Beyster
378 and some of these senior managers were. [That is when I had the opportunity to meet
379 Dr. B.]

380 We didn't really have formal mentoring when I first got to the company. You're just
381 in the room and you listen to what they're saying, you listen to the questions that
382 they ask, and that was my "Ph.D." – being with all these highly intelligent very
383 accomplished people.

384 I remember them being very, I would say, intense in a good way, but I wouldn't say it
385 was like a super friendly kind of environment when you're working towards capturing
386 these different projects and everything.

387 But what really impressed me is the intellectual capability of most of the people that I
388 worked with. Very, very intelligent.

389 **WEISS:** When you say you moved to corporate, where were the corporate
390 headquarters at that point?

391 **CHOCHELES:** Corporate headquarters were here in La Jolla, and they had a campus
392 that they had built, a campus of offices off of Genesee.

393 **WEISS:** As you worked your way up in SAIC from '85 to '86, you were an analyst for
394 the government operations, and then you went on to a Technology Assessment
395 specialist?

396 **CHOCHELES:** Yes. It was just working on different research and systems
397 engineering focused contracts. I'll say some of the titles – they're kind of generic –
398 Advanced Research, Systems Engineering, Program Management Support. But I was
399 involved, again, as I said earlier, in program management support. I was doing a lot
400 of analysis for the customers. Then I was doing some work while I was actually doing
401 research on different technologies that were being developed that maybe could be
402 applied to different problem sets that a government customer had.

403 We were working, for instance, on support equipment for aircraft, and there was
404 testing equipment that needed to be development, or testing equipment that needed
405 to be calibrated. It is interesting, because [on break from college], when I worked as
406 a summer intern at Grumman, I worked in the fabrication plant where they
407 assembled ground support cables for aircraft.

408 Going back to when I was in college, [during that period of time] I learned all these
409 things, and then all of a sudden here I am working for a customer where I do have the
410 background. Even though I haven't been in the military, I have a certain amount of
411 background, not a lot, but I understood basically what are these cables used for, and
412 how do you test them, and things like that.

413 There was some on the job training, but I never did any engineering work or anything
414 like that, because you had the engineers to do that. But I thought what was really
415 interesting about SAIC is that they brought all these people together so that you
416 could have a really strong team of people with various capabilities. That's what I
417 think the customers really liked about SAIC, is that they were getting this kind,
418 sophisticated team of people that really are bringing different skill sets to the table. I
419 feel that I was one of those people that was a little bit different, that made the team a
420 little bit extra special. That's the way I like to think about it.

421 **WEISS:** Did you find yourself taking RFPs, request for proposals, from the federal
422 register, and then taking some of that and then translating some of that contract
423 language into English so you could go for the bids?

424 **CHOCHELES:** Not necessarily. I think that my role was more understanding what
425 the customers needed. I would say that I was brought in after [the company decided
426 to bid] to a certain extent. There were some times when I did work on proposals, but
427 often times the company would have already won a contract. They were contracts
428 that had a specific dollar value ceiling, and then you'd go in and you'd talk to the
429 customers and you'd [discuss specific issues they have and propose support and
430 solutions to address and those become] task orders under the main contract.

431 The customer would be having a specific issue, and because of the work, the types of
432 things that I was working on, you can't talk about a lot of details, but basically I felt
433 that I was able to understand what the customer wanted, and then I knew a lot about
434 the capabilities within the SAIC line organization I was a part of. So I knew the
435 capabilities of our technical teams, what their backgrounds were, the experience base
436 that we had in integrating different technologies together.

437 [When I was managing operations for Internal Research and Development,] I was
438 then able to go across the company and pull technical teams together to support
439 proposal activities. What I did on many proposals was really understand where the
440 expertise was within the company, and I was able to work with the line organizations
441 and find the people that had the technical domain experience, and then identify the
442 people that had the customer domain experience.

443 Maybe they had Army experience, or Navy, or Air Force, and basically bring these
444 teams together. That's what's very exciting, getting these people together and then
445 working to develop solutions.

446 I was also on review teams. There was a point in time where I was on the company's
447 Risk committee, and that's really interesting, because you're learning about the
448 business side of things. You assess risk vs. feasibility. For example, you might be able
449 to do something, but what's the risk involved in it, and how do you address risk?

450 There was a lot of learning in how do managers make business decisions, and how do
451 managers make good business decisions. What are the decisions that are involved in
452 pursuing your business? How do you create new infrastructure to support that? And
453 that's what was very exciting about SAIC at the time – is that it was almost like a
454 bunch of companies constantly starting up and then growing within this umbrella
455 called SAI, which became SAIC. At the time it was very unique compared to where
456 else you could work.

457 **WEISS:** What was the technological landscape at that point here in Greater San
458 Diego? Did you see, in terms of biomed, what was going on the mesa here? What
459 was going on in Sorrento Valley? And were there other hubs starting to happen in
460 the San Diego area?

461 **CHOCHELES:** Yes. I started to see two major hubs. I would say communications
462 and then life science and biotech. I believe that was by design to a certain extent.

463 I know with communications some of that work started with the federal government,
464 federal funding, and then it started to branch out into commercial. In terms of life
465 science and biotech, technologies were being spun out of the University. Also I recall
466 some other technologies were being spun out.

467 Then you start to have this cluster forming, and so you have a company that's
468 successful and they go public, or they're sold, and all of a sudden people have money
469 and they're still really interested in the next challenge. So all of a sudden another
470 company forms, and then the people that were working for the first company, they
471 either move over to the new company or they become a member of the board of
472 directors, or an advisory board. And so it's very organic. That's the way that I saw it.

473 I saw this organic approach to building these new businesses in San Diego. I became
474 a member of Athena San Diego, which is an organization for women executives in the
475 high tech and life science and biotech sectors in San Diego, probably about 18 years
476 ago.

477 Through my association with Athena, I saw beyond my immediate world, which was
478 defense. That's how I knew what was going on outside of the defense sector in San
479 Diego, because quite frankly, a lot of sectors are separate. If you're defense, you're in
480 that world. You can't share a lot of information that's in that world, but there are
481 linkages.

482 Through Athena I was able to meet women who were executives in life science,
483 biotech, and in other commercial companies. I was able to meet women that were
484 working for the services companies, the law firms who were addressing intellectual
485 property protection, the accounting firms who had expertise in not only government
486 accounting, but commercial accounting, and the companies who provided human
487 resources and benefits services.

488 that was an education in itself, because you start to pull back from being focused on
489 the technology and you say, you know what, technology is such a small sliver in many
490 respects for companies. I think that true leaders of companies realize that you need
491 to bring in all these people with all this expertise in order to have a successful
492 company.

493 I think that's what was really unique about what was happening in San Diego is they
494 started to build that support infrastructure so that if a company was going to start, it
495 was like which law firms are here that can support them, which accounting firms,
496 which human resources and benefits companies. Then you start to have your whole
497 ecosystem that supports that company as they are attempting to develop and then
498 launch new technology out to the markets.

499 **WEISS:** You talk about competitive environment within SAIC. I understand that
500 Saturdays were –

501 **CHOCHELES:** Oh yes, Saturdays also included. [Most of us worked six days a week.]

502 **WEISS:** Did you look to the possibility of joining other companies, or is that the
503 culture in biotechnology and life sciences here in San Diego?

504 **CHOCHELES:** I thought that I would stay at SAIC forever really. What was
505 interesting is that there were people that were there past 65 years of age, and they
506 were vibrant, and they were just getting better. They were working in these amazing
507 areas.

508 I essentially “grew up” in a work environment where there were people who were in
509 their late 60s, 70s, going into 80s that were still incredibly productive. SAIC was very
510 agile. Constantly going into new business areas, so it was very exciting. So where
511 else would you want to go?

512 The other thing is, when I started talking to some other people, once you get into
513 these more formalized companies, you really don't have, you didn't have the option
514 of having really more of a broad based experience. It was more, this is your job, and
515 stay in your swim lane. That was my experience [and that wasn't the right fit for me].

516 But because of the nature of SAIC, and because I worked at corporate starting in the
517 early 1990s, I had a lot more opportunities, I think, to just be involved in a lot of
518 different things. That's what works for me.

519 **WEISS:** Qualcomm was starting to come up through [Linkabit]. Can you tell me
520 some of the larger companies and how many women did you see in the capacity such
521 as yours paralleling executive management?

522 **CHOCHELES:** Well, I think that there was always a few women that were involved
523 specifically in the late 80s through the mid-2000s, and I think that you have to look
524 back and you have to say, okay, a lot of the managers were probably graduated maybe
525 ten years before me, so they graduated in the 60s from college. You have to look at
526 that pipeline.

527 Yes, it just takes a while for women who were engineers [to rise through the ranks].
528 And I feel very grateful, because I did have a very unusual background, and I was able
529 to find these niche positions within the company. After proving yourself, they'd say,
530 "Okay, June, you're good at working these special projects, so we're going to put you
531 over here. We're going to put you over there."

532 If you go to the history of Athena you can see the women who became the CEOs of
533 the different companies in San Diego. Women who then went on to be on boards in
534 some of the different startups.

535 It was definitely a slower process and different challenges, but there is a lot of
536 persistent, very, very bright, talented women in San Diego.

537 **WEISS:** The Forbes profile I read talked about you overseeing SAIC's multimillion
538 dollar diversified project portfolio. You were a manager of operations in the IR&D
539 program management office. What was that?

540 **CHOCHELES:** Yes. Basically SAIC, the organization of SAIC had divisions, and this
541 changed over time, but they had divisions, which was the lowest profit and loss
542 center within the company. At one point in time, I think there were over 1,000
543 divisions. And those divisions were focused on supporting specific government
544 customers.

545 In order for these divisions to be positioned against our competition, SAIC created a
546 program – most defense contractors have this – called Internal Research and
547 Development (IR&D). It was a pool of funding [at the Corporate level] where they
548 could allocate a certain amount of funding that was matched by the line organization
549 to address specific technical issues and you thought was going to either help you

550 develop a new system, write software, develop algorithms, develop new technology,
551 something that was not going to be funded by your customer, but you knew that this
552 is where you needed to be in order to be competitive moving forward [in order to
553 develop solutions for various customers].

554 So every year we had – it was a very similar process to how the government does
555 business – we put out a call for proposals to the divisions, and we had an [internal]
556 review team [to identify projects the company would “invest” in]. We selected
557 between say 125 to 140 projects a year, and the principal investigators that were
558 running those had to have a detailed statement of work and a budget, and technical
559 milestones. We had reviews [throughout the year to discuss technical progress and
560 potential mapping to customer’s interest areas]. And the whole goal was to make
561 sure that the Principal Investigator and the technical team was moving in the
562 direction that they said they were going to move in to accomplish specific milestones.

563 Of course, it’s R&D so things change over time. But the goal was to have a
564 competitive position across a bunch of different domains.

565 **WEISS:** Was this a venture capital corporation that took outside investors and
566 proposals, or was this all internal?

567 **CHOCHELES:** The IR&D program used internal funds to fund projects within the
568 company. Since SAIC was employee owned, we did not take any outside venture [to
569 fund these projects].

570 SAIC did create a venture capital corporation, which then invested in third party
571 companies. So that was different. That was a totally different company. This started,
572 I believe, in around 2000.

573 **WEISS:** Well let’s talk about the employee ownership and what it meant for you, for
574 your colleagues, and talk about the culture at SAIC that may have kept people
575 involved because of that. Because I understand that they really had a good retention
576 rate.

577 **CHOCHELES:** Yes. I hate to sound binary, but I think either SAIC worked for you as
578 an employer or it didn’t. People came in and they’d be there for a while, and you’re
579 like, you know what, they’re not going to make it. Not because they weren’t smart
580 enough, it’s just that it wasn’t the culture for them.

581 I think what was exciting to a lot of us is that there was a lot of freedom in the
582 company to get involved in different things, and be proactive, and have interface with
583 the customer. And I think that was very unusual.

584 In SAIC you could be a technical person, but then really you also had a role in
585 business development, and that was very unusual. It wasn't all these stovepipes,
586 okay, you're only technical, you're only business development, you're only marketing.
587 You had these hybrids. And I think that was one reason why people wanted to stay
588 there.

589 In a way, I think that you felt like you had more control over your destiny, your
590 career. Also, there was a lot of comradery. There was competition, but there was
591 comradery.

592 Then I think the other thing was that employee ownership was a very unusual model
593 at the time. Which company could you go to where the company says, "You get
594 profit sharing? You have the opportunity to purchase stock in the company," and
595 that helped finance a lot of things that were going on.

596 So at the time, it was a very, very unusual model and I think that it just appealed to a
597 lot of people that felt that this was the place for them.

598 **WEISS:** So when it started the venture capital focused on third party investment, did
599 some of the people at SAIC see something they wanted to do that made it out of the
600 realm of defense contracting, they said, "Oh, we want to just try to see how this
601 technology is going to go, and we believe in it?" What would the patents be if they
602 were an SAIC employee?

603 **CHOCHELES:** Well, in terms of the venture capital corporation, each deal is
604 different, and I wasn't involved in the deals, but I was involved in many meetings
605 where we would meet with the companies who were interested in securing funding
606 from the SAIC venture capital corporation.

607 My team and I were reporting to a senior vice president for research and
608 development. We would ask: where do we think this technology might help us be
609 more competitive? So there had to be a direct link between the technology that was
610 being developed by this third party company and where our customers needed
611 specific types of support. It could have been something in – it could have been

612 software development. I could have been hardware development, but there definitely
613 had to be that link.

614 **WEISS:** There was international work that SAIC was doing, eventually it grew to a
615 Fortune 500 company. What kinds of services were you involved in, and were you
616 now traveling as part of corporate to other sites to talk with people?

617 **CHOCHELES:** I wasn't involved in the international work per se, but I was involved
618 in some meetings related to this business. We were supporting some oil and gas
619 customers. We had quarterly meetings for management in the company and those
620 would be in different locations in the U.S. I did not do international travel, because
621 by that time we did have the internet and communications just started to change, so
622 you could do a lot of things over email.

623 I did travel domestically. Most of my travel was back to the Washington D.C. area,
624 and then to some of the major SAIC locations, Orlando, Florida was another location.
625 But I'd say that the northern Virginia area and Maryland was probably where I
626 traveled the most back to.

627 **WEISS:** You headed SAIC's mentor advisory board. It had one program for junior
628 technical staff. How many women approximately were working for them when you
629 ran the program?

630 **CHOCHELES:** Yes, and I think to clarify that, the program, was called 'Leadership
631 for the 21st Century' and it was run out of the HR department at SAIC. I believe I was
632 asked if I'd be interested in being a mentor to a junior member of a team in the
633 company, and I said, "Of course."

634 So I asked to look at the program, and it was a very, very good program, but me being
635 a systems thinker, I drew my block diagram, and what I did was I deconstructed how
636 SAIC did business.

637 I said, "It would be really interesting to have these modules that basically talked
638 about each of the components of how SAIC does business, starting with how does
639 funding get appropriated in Congress." I got together some of my colleagues and I
640 said, "Let's form, like, a subcommittee, a task force." And so I led that.

641 It was really to create a more detailed curriculum. I felt that if new people in the
642 company could really understand how SAIC worked, how do contracts relate to

643 finance, relate to the business development, relate to IR&D. If people could see how
644 things work in a system framework, then I think that they could be more successful
645 as SAIC employees, because that's the type of thinking that you needed to be
646 successful.

647 You couldn't just go, "I'm just going to do my job over here." I think that's true in
648 every company, but I think even more so in SAIC, because sometimes things weren't
649 super clear in the sense that you just do this job over here, and then this person does
650 this over here. It was fluid in many respects.

651 **WEISS:** I saw an interview that you did with Pat Heim for the USCD TV Guestbook,
652 and you talked about utilizing her book, *Hard Ball for Women in a Male Dominated*
653 *Workplace* was the theme of it. Looking back at the time when you were at SAIC,
654 how did that book and some of her techniques prove useful to you when you did this
655 mentor program?

656 **CHOCHELES:** I was actually a mentor for both women and men, and I
657 recommended that book to both women and men. What was really interesting about
658 that book is that she addresses communication techniques, and that's something that
659 was interesting to me. There are different ways that men communicate and women
660 communicate. Of course, sometimes it's not gender specific, but there could be
661 different styles of communication [between the genders]. The older I get, the more I
662 realize that yes, there is a wide spectrum of how people behave.

663 One thing I think that helped me in a sense was that I was young when I started at
664 SAIC [and I was very open to learning and growing]. I think I had one of the first
665 Compaq computers when I got to my office with a double floppy disk drive, and then
666 we started to get the internet up, and networking. [I essentially grew up with the
667 technology as it was rolled out into our operations.]

668 Email was very helpful to me in my career, because I was able to talk to people all
669 over the country. Maybe they had never met me before, but they saw my title and
670 sometimes as a woman it is different if you're not face-to-face and they don't see that
671 you're young. They don't see anything about you [and just have to read what you
672 have to say].

673 I think that technology helped me in my career. I remember talking to other people
674 about that. The goal was to be very succinct in your emails. That was a shift in many
675 respects [from having a long conversation with someone].

676 The other thing that I found in her book is developing your alliances. I didn't always
677 like this – but I learned that sometimes I'm going to have to generate my alliances
678 and then have those people actually present things. I'm still going to be part of it, but
679 I may not necessarily get the lead there. That's just the dance that you play, and I see
680 men do that as well.

681 So I think that sure, were there challenges? Yes. Were there a lot of women when I
682 was coming up? Not a lot of women in management, but that's just the way that it
683 was, and it just worked out for me [mainly due to a lot of hard work, dedication and
684 perseverance].

685 **WEISS:** How would you characterize the relationships and exchanges of information
686 with the San Diego based labs, companies, and university researchers? Did you have
687 a way of trying to make sure that communication was open and try to get people
688 hired locally out of the universities at all in a variety of fields?

689 **CHOCHELES:** Yes. There is a lot of networking that goes on in San Diego.
690 CONNECT is another organization where I worked at briefly after I left SAIC in 2006.
691 I worked there for under a year as the Chief Operating Officer. CONNECT has
692 several networking events a year where there are students from all the universities
693 who attend. There are members of the academic community in general. There are
694 members of the business community.

695 They all get together and if you're a student and you want to stay in San Diego, then
696 you're going to be proactive about connecting with companies. There are a lot of
697 mechanisms that are available on San Diego to bring people together.

698 UCSD had a program where they work with industry members to do joint research
699 projects.

700 I know at SAIC we teamed with UCSD; we teamed with universities all the time to go
701 after government contracts. Sometimes we teamed on internal research and
702 development programs, and that's actually how I got involved and interested in
703 intellectual property.

704 Once you started doing those deals with third parties such as universities, then
705 intellectual property becomes a critical path. I'm not an intellectual [properties]
706 attorney, but I wanted to know everything about it, and so that helped me bring in
707 the right people and understand where SAIC wanted to have a specific position
708 compared to working with somebody else.

709 **WEISS:** Did that really relate as much as anything to the patents that may have been
710 created at SAIC?

711 **CHOCHELES:** Yes. I think what's important is that when you – again, I'm not a
712 patent or intellectual property attorney, but when you go into a potential deal with
713 somebody, it's very important that you document all the pre-existing intellectual
714 property that you have, because your party comes to the table and has developed
715 certain things. They may have patents. They may have trade secrets.

716 Then the other party has their own stuff. When you come together and you work
717 together, then you're going to generate something else together. So ownership is
718 very, very important.

719 There's a lot of intellectual property expertise here in San Diego. Many firms that
720 have expertise in different areas related to Intellectual Property.

721 **WEISS:** Because you work with so many defense contractors, was there any special
722 effort to hire veterans, especially women veterans, as the company expanded?

723 **CHOCHELES:** I don't recall any specific programs per se, but because there's a
724 requirement if you're supporting a particular government customer, they often have a
725 requirement to have people on the team with certain domain experience, military
726 domain experience.

727 I think it was just a given if you have military background, one of the first places you
728 might go to inquire about a job was at a defense contractor [in San Diego].

729 I think it was in the 90s, where there was some sort of special program at SAIC that
730 was focused on bringing in veterans who had retired from the military, but it was
731 quite common [for people with military experience to be considered for positions]. It
732 wasn't like other companies where there had to be direct outreach, because this was
733 just a common path where you go from your military position and then you look for

734 opportunities where you can use your skill base and experience base that you develop
735 while you're in the military.

736 **WEISS:** I would like to talk with you a little bit now about when you found a way to
737 look for other career options beyond SAIC. Why did that happen, and what have you
738 been doing since then?

739 **CHOCHELES:** Around 2004/2005 timeframe things start to change a little bit at
740 SAIC. There was a change in management. Dr. Beyster had stepped down from his
741 CEO position. They had brought in some new management, and there was
742 discussion about moving the corporate headquarters back to the northern Virginia
743 area.

744 At the time, I had some family commitments that were very important to me and I
745 was not able to relocate. Even though they said that it probably wasn't going to
746 happen for a couple years, I started talking to my network here in San Diego, and I
747 had a very nice network that I had developed specifically with the women that I had
748 met through Athena.

749 I started thinking where might I want to work. There was various companies, but I
750 had identified the CONNECT organization, which is a support organization that had
751 spun out of UCSD maybe one and a half years before that – or maybe at the time
752 when I start thinking they might have still been at UCSD – but they were getting
753 ready, or they had just spun out.

754 They worked with probably 80 to 100 companies every year, startups in San Diego. I
755 said, oh, that would be really fun to do that. I talked to some people that were
756 working there and it just so happened that the COO that was working there was
757 going to be retiring, and she recommended me for the job, and I was able to secure
758 that position in the summer of 2006.

759 I enjoyed working with that organization. It was essentially a startup because they
760 were recently independent from UCSD. So it's generating all your own revenue to
761 cover your expenses. I enjoyed meeting new people in the community that I had
762 some preliminary activity with, but I just spent more time with them once I got to
763 CONNECT.

764 It was a very, very challenging position, and it gave me a much greater appreciation
765 for what Chief Operating Officers do, because I thought I knew what they did. I had
766 been in operations at SAIC. But this was running operations for the equivalent of a
767 small company.

768 After I had done that for several months, I realized that the COO position is just not
769 for me. I greatly respect the position, but I really wanted to do some other things,
770 and I missed having day-to-day interactions with the technical folks, and solving
771 problems, and I missed actually just having my hands more in that.

772 I parted ways with CONNECT, and that was fine, and I wasn't sure what I was going
773 to do. I said, maybe I'll do a little bit of consulting, and I also needed some greater
774 flexibility in my schedule due to some family commitments. There had been several
775 other people that were starting to leave SAIC. There was a little bit of an exodus for
776 people that wanted to remain in San Diego.

777 We started having this informal network, you know, who's left the company? Who's
778 doing what? I started to get some calls from some of my former colleagues that were
779 now working for different companies. "Can you come and help us with this proposal.
780 You're doing some consulting. Would you be interested in doing some consulting for
781 us?"

782 I thought, I'm just going to form a small consulting company. And because of my
783 experience as a COO, and running the CONNECT organization for a while, I knew
784 exactly what I needed to do. Through my connections at CONNECT and Athena, I
785 contacted a law firm. I formed a limited liability corporation. I talked to some
786 accounting folks, got my benefits in order, and moved my 401(k). I created my local
787 entourage of support companies, and it was actually easier than I thought because I
788 had this experience [from working at CONNECT].

789 Of course I'm type A, overbooked, working on a couple of different contracts for
790 folks, and I was off and running. Again, it was very fun because I was helping some of
791 these smaller businesses in San Diego grow and win contracts.

792 I also had an opportunity to work as a part-time employee at UCSD, and I worked on
793 a contract with Dr. Mary Walshok at Global CONNECT. That was a very, very
794 interesting experience. We were working as a subcontractor on a Department of
795 Labor contract where we were evaluating regional programs that were being funded

796 by the Department of Labor [under the WIRED Initiative] to spur economic
797 development in regions of the U.S. that were underperforming economically.

798 I along with my team members were able to go to places that I never would have
799 been before. Talked to people in economic development. Talked to people in the
800 government there, the state governments. Really trying to understand some of the
801 key issues that I personally was not familiar with in some regions of the U.S. In
802 Mississippi, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Maine – places that were vibrant during the
803 manufacturing era in the U.S. but were still trying to recover.

804 It gave me an appreciation for some of the challenges in education, such as high
805 school dropout rates. Then all of a sudden the lightbulb went on in the sense that I
806 said, you know what, if we can help small businesses form and grow throughout the
807 U.S., this could have a major impact on regional economic development. I became
808 very, very interested in [small business and] regional economic development.

809 Right when I became interested in regional economic development, I got a call from
810 [Mary Ann Beyster at] the Foundation for Enterprise Development (FED). They had
811 won a contract to support the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA),
812 which is a research agency within the Department of Defense. The DARPA Small
813 Business Programs Office was looking for some mentors to help the small businesses
814 that had received research grants to help them with commercialization and transition
815 of their technology into the defense supply chain.

816 Quite frankly, I felt that this was the perfect job for me. I couldn't have planned it in
817 a million years, but it was just a really, really good fit. I worked with Mary Ann
818 Beyster, who was the President of the Foundation for Enterprise Development to
819 build that program up over several years. I worked on that program [as a consultant
820 to the FED] supporting the DARPA Small Business Office until about 2014 [and then
821 the program moved to another Prime contractor and I supported the program for
822 another year].

823 We worked with probably 100 or so small businesses every year throughout the U.S.
824 Helped them identify potential teaming opportunities within the prime contractor
825 community. Helped them identify follow-on funding within the federal government
826 [to support their research activities to mature technology]. Helped them identify and
827 understand potential applications for their technology. Some of them had really
828 interesting ideas and prototypes, but because they didn't [have the defense domain

829 experience they didn't fully] understand where their technology could fit into existing
830 defense systems.

831 Again, I used the systems approach to address. [We developed tools to help the
832 companies determine] where they would potentially fit in the supply chain and how
833 the technology would be integrated into an overall system [that would be deployed in
834 an operational environment]. That was a very, very rewarding job, and I like to keep
835 up with reading about these companies on the internet. Where are they now? I like
836 to think that the team that I worked on, helped them figure out how they could be a
837 sustainable small business.

838 I personally still believe that small businesses are the economic engine for economic
839 development in the U.S., and it's still very near and dear to me.

840 I also worked as a subcontractor to San Diego State University. They were funded by
841 the Small Business Administration to support small businesses in San Diego who
842 were interested in either entering the defense sector or growing their business base in
843 the defense sector.

844 We supported training and mentoring for that program. It was called the San Diego
845 Regional [Innovation Cluster] (SDRIC).

846 **WEISS:** You also continued to remain active in Athena, and you were the winner in
847 2010 of the Athena Pinnacle Chairman's Award for the Board of the Athena
848 Foundation. How did that organization evolve from the time that you first started
849 working with them when you were with SAIC?

850 **CHOCHELES:** I was directed to join Athena by my management, because SAIC had
851 become a member of the organization. Quite frankly, I didn't want to be part of a
852 women's organization. I didn't want to be segregated. I wanted to be part of the big
853 picture.

854 You have all these preconceptions. What is it going to be like? And, you think, I
855 don't really know if I want to do this, and what are my [male] colleagues at SAIC
856 going to think if I join this organization?

857 When I got there, it was a really, really wonderful experience. I got to meet a lot of
858 women who were not in defense sector, but we all had a lot of similar issues. We had
859 work and family issues that we talked about, or whatever issues we were dealing with

860 at the time. [As a woman there's always a lot of juggling work and family.] I think it's
861 now different in 2016, but at the time, 20 years ago, I think women had different
862 issues. [Many challenges climbing the corporate ladder, but many issues] still the
863 same today – primarily having lead role in caring for children, and aging parents, and
864 that sort of thing.

865 We were able to share not only experiences, and challenges, and solutions for some of
866 those issues, but we also had the opportunity to talk about career strategy, and how
867 do you basically negotiate around certain issues that you have. It was really this
868 wonderful opportunity to share information amongst ourselves in a supportive
869 environment.

870 The other thing that I was really interested in is that Athena had a small scholarship
871 fund where they raised money every year and then they awarded scholarships to five
872 young women who were graduating from high school in San Diego and were going to
873 be pursuing undergraduate studies in a Science, Technology, Engineering & Math
874 (STEM) field.

875 When I came to Athena, it was 16, 17 years ago, I asked how much money was being
876 raised. And they said, "Oh, about \$10-12,000." So I started to do the math, and I said,
877 "Okay, so there's 500 women who are executives in San Diego, and we're only raising
878 this amount of money?" I said, "We can do better than this."

879 I started an initiative where I challenged the organization. It was fun. It was a fun
880 initiative. We challenged every woman in Athena to give up one new pair of shoes or
881 one new purse, or something else, just one thing, and give \$100 to Athena. So this was
882 just a really fun initiative and over the next couple years we increased the scholarship
883 funding from \$10,000 to \$12,000 to over \$100,000 annually.

884 All of a sudden, it showed the power of people getting together, working on a
885 problem and getting behind a really great creative solution. That is really what SAIC
886 was about. It was the same type of thing. You see something that's not quite right.
887 You get a bunch of people together, and you just go for it. I find that to be very
888 exciting.

889 The Athena Scholarship Program is still going strong. The first award I received from
890 Athena – A Pinnacle Technology Award – was for my role supporting women at SAIC,

891 and then my second Pinnacle Award – The Chairman’s Award – was for the work I
892 did for the Athena Scholarship Program.

893 Now I am a member of the Athena Foundation Board, which oversees the scholarship
894 program. I served as the President of the Athena Foundation Board for two years,
895 and now I’m continuing as a member of the board.

896 **WEISS:** Is Athena specifically focused to women in STEM?

897 **CHOCHELES:** Yes. Yes, women in STEM and then the supporting organizations.
898 The services organization, law firms, accounting firms. You could be a CPA [or
899 lawyer], and your firm supports STEM companies.

900 **WEISS:** You had mentioned some role in helping high school age women in doing
901 something at UCSD. What’s that all about?

902 **CHOCHELES:** The women that we give the scholarships to are high school students.
903 They could be going to college at UCSD or San Diego State, but they can go anywhere
904 in the United States. But this is basically to support them with their tuition payments
905 as it’s very, very expensive to go to school.

906 We recognized that early on. This is a merit based scholarship, so there’s a whole
907 proposal process. The scholarships are awarded, there’s a committee, but they’re
908 awarded based on merit. There’s been over 60 scholarships that we’ve awarded and
909 some of these young women are now in medical school, or are doctors, they’re
910 researchers [or engineers].

911 So we would, of course, like them to come back and work in San Diego companies,
912 but it’s really supporting the pipeline and creating a network. Now with Facebook
913 and LinkedIn, we’re able now to connect with some of these women that we lost
914 touch with and also create a network.

915 We do have in Athena a group on LinkedIn, and these women can start to
916 communicate with each other and help each other in their career trajectories.

917 **WEISS:** Speaking of talent in San Diego now, what keeps people here and what
918 draws them to the Silicon Valley. And please talk about competing for talented
919 professionals here and what are the challenges, especially for startups here in San
920 Diego?

921 **CHOCHELES:** I don't feel qualified to talk to that, but I think that there's still a
922 mystique about Silicon Valley. I've never worked there. I haven't done a lot of
923 business there, but there's certainly a lot of venture capital up there, and there's an
924 ecosystem, and it's different.

925 I think each region is different, because you have startups in New York. You have
926 Austin. You have Boston. You have San Diego. And there's a different culture in
927 each one of those places.

928 I think that probably there's the most amount of venture up there right now, and I
929 think that it's just so established that people think that that's the "go to" place.

930 There are benefits to being in San Diego. I think that it's very collaborative here in
931 San Diego. I think that you can pick up a phone and talk to people even if they don't
932 really know you; you can get introduced. It just seems like it's smaller in many ways,
933 and then you have access. It seems to me that you have better access here than you
934 do in other places. So it's a secret. You don't want it to get super big, but I think
935 there's still a lot of opportunities here.

936 The lifestyle is really great. I know housing is expensive now, it is one of the
937 challenges. It's expensive up in the Bay Area too.

938 **WEISS:** Where are all the hubs today in San Diego? People keep talking about a hub
939 here and a hub there. Where would you identify the different areas where these
940 innovation hubs are emerging?

941 **CHOCHELES:** I think that Sorrento Valley was one of the original hubs, and then
942 here right off of Genesee Campus Point. Then you have the Mesa where all these
943 biotech and life science companies are. There's a hub up in the Carlsbad Vista area.
944 Things are happening now in downtown San Diego.

945 I think that there are just so many different opportunities, and I think that one of the
946 challenges is transportation. More public transportation, affordable housing for
947 young recent graduates that are just starting. These are some issues that I know City
948 Council is addressing here in San Diego, which they're addressing in other cities
949 within say North County and down in the San Diego Bay Area.

950 **WEISS:** You have also been on the board of the San Diego Aerospace Museum and
951 do you continue to facilitate projects or exhibits, or is there a special love with that?

952 Do you maintain connections with any colleagues from the Smithsonian Air & Space
953 where you first started?

954 **CHOCHELES:** Yes, I was on the board of the San Diego Aerospace Museum for a few
955 years, but that's been many, many years ago. You have to pick and choose because
956 there are only so many hours in the day. I always say I could be much more
957 productive if I didn't have to sleep.

958 I'm not engaged with the Aerospace Museum now. I try and support them when I can
959 [such as being a sponsor for their annual golf tournament that raises funds for their
960 educational programs]. I was a member for many years, and now support through
961 donations. I decided that my primary volunteer efforts were going to be with Athena.

962 I'm also involved in a national STEM-focused organization. I am a member of the San
963 Diego chapter of Achievement Rewards for College Scientists (ARCS). Before I
964 became a member I was a member of their Community Advisory Council for many
965 years, and I started when I was at SAIC, so that was over ten years ago. I really just
966 wanted be involved to learn more about the organization and also identify potential
967 employees for SAIC].

968 That organization was founded in the 50s by the wives of scientists and engineers
969 post-Sputnik. They wanted to ensure that there would be a pipeline of scientists and
970 engineers to work on important problems for the U.S. I formally joined as a member
971 about two years ago.

972 ARCS provides funding for graduate students in STEM fields at UCSD, San Diego
973 State, USD, and the Scripps Research Institute, and we provide funding for about 60
974 graduate students each year. Again, we're building the network. The ARCS
975 Community Advisory Council helps the ARCS students get connected if they want to
976 work in San Diego after they graduate.

977 So I like to create these ecosystems where you have these communication
978 mechanisms where you have academics, you have the companies, and then you have
979 these organizations that facilitate the interaction between them. It's really all about
980 keeping the best and the brightest in San Diego, and also helping to grow companies
981 that are here. Bring in some new blood and startups, whatever. Whatever anybody
982 wants to do, we're here to support them.

983 **WEISS:** So looking back over years at SAIC, when the company went public, and you
984 talked about that whole culture of employee ownership, and you look back on your
985 time there, can you talk to me about what that meant for you personally and how you
986 saw maybe a change in the company as you look back over your time?

987 **CHOCHELES:** I actually left before the company went public. But just talking to
988 some of my colleagues, they just said that the company became a little bit more
989 “traditional.”

990 Priorities change with public companies that have external stockholders. You may
991 not be willing to take the same level of risk that you were willing to take before,
992 because you want to maintain that proposed growth trajectory. People want to know
993 that you have a plan for growth that’s going to increase the stock price.

994 For me, the company was becoming more “traditional”. I was told “You need to have
995 a [succinct] description, for what you do.” And I said, “Well, I do this. I do that.”
996 “No, we’re going to narrow things down.” So I think when that happened it felt like
997 the company was becoming a little less entrepreneurial [and you had to stay in your
998 swim lane].

999 But also it was a function of the size of the company. When a company gets to be
1000 several billion dollars, in order to manage it, you have to have a little bit more
1001 structure and things like that.

1002 But the culture was just different. Plus, when you have different people that are in
1003 senior management, they have their own culture, and then they bring that culture in.
1004 I like to be pretty Zen about it. It’s not good or bad. I just felt that it’s different, and
1005 then you have to determine, is that the right fit for me anymore, or do I go do
1006 something else? So you have to make those choices.

1007 **WEISS:** Are there other people that you think that should be interviewed for this
1008 project, either within SAIC or from other companies that you’ve had interactions
1009 with?

1010 **CHOCHELES:** Yes. Actually, I have a bunch of names, so I can give those to you
1011 afterwards. But yes, I think that there’s women who have started companies and
1012 have been CEOs of companies, not necessarily in defense, but I have been a member

1013 of Women in Defense, which is a sub organization of NDIA, National Defense
1014 Industries Association.

1015 I've also been a member of AFCEA, which is Armed Forces Communications &
1016 Electronics organization. So between those organizations and Athena, I'm happy to
1017 provide you with a bunch of names that I think they'd be more than happy to speak
1018 with you.

1019 **WEISS:** Are there comments you want to add as you look back on this amazing
1020 interesting career that's still evolving?

1021 **CHOCHELES:** Yes, actually what I'd like to say is, sometimes you think you have to
1022 have it all figured out, but when I mentor younger folks, or even folks my age, I say,
1023 "Be an opportunist to a certain extent. Look for opportunities that are presented to
1024 you and that you may have never thought of and just consider those." Because you
1025 can talk yourself out of a lot of things.

1026 When somebody said, "I'm going to introduce you to SAIC." I could have said, "Oh,
1027 well, I'm not a scientist. I'm not an engineer." You could overthink it. Instead, I
1028 thought about my background, and I thought about my successes, and I thought
1029 about what can I bring to the table, and what makes me different and unique? A lot
1030 of it is your ability to learn and grow, and I think that's really, really important,
1031 because sometimes you think, well, I have my four-year degree, I'm done.

1032 If you really want to be a successful person, you need to keep on learning and
1033 growing. I know it sounds very cliché, but I think that's very, very important
1034 especially with technology. Things are changing and I know I am just constantly
1035 trying to keep up with what's going on from a technology standpoint.

1036 Another thing is that I think it is really important to maintain your enthusiasm and
1037 curiosity. I remember reading a lecture that was given by the physicist, Richard
1038 Feynman called something like, The Pleasure of Finding Things Out. That is my
1039 philosophy. I love to learn new things.

1040 If you have that interest in learning new things, it's going to enable you to just do so
1041 many different things that you never thought about. So, if I could leave to whomever
1042 is listening to this—and it is exciting to think that maybe somebody in the year, 2075

1043 or something is going to be listening to this—I would say: What should your
1044 philosophy about life be?

1045 To come full circle, this reminds me of my project that I did about the Greek
1046 playwrights, and a lot of those Greek playwrights – when you read about their
1047 philosophies – there’s just so many things that are applicable today. You need to start
1048 with what is your core philosophy is, and how is that going to be with you through
1049 your life trajectory? I’m excited to see what’s next.

1050 **WEISS:** Thank you so much for spending your time, lending your expertise, and
1051 giving a lot of people, future listeners to this some exciting possibilities for their life.

1052 **CHOCHELES:** Thank you. I enjoyed it. Thank you for asking me to participate.

END INTERVIEW

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The San Diego Technology Archive (SDTA), an initiative of the UC San Diego Library, documents the history, formation, and evolution of the companies that formed the San Diego region's high-tech cluster, beginning in 1965. The SDTA captures the vision, strategic thinking, and recollections of key technology and business founders, entrepreneurs, academics, venture capitalists, early employees, and service providers, many of whom figured prominently in the development of San Diego's dynamic technology cluster. As these individuals articulate and comment on their contributions, innovations, and entrepreneurial trajectories, a rich living history emerges about the extraordinarily synergistic academic and commercial collaborations that distinguish the San Diego technology community.