

Speaker 1:

This is what oral historians do.

Speaker 9:

What is your name and is there anything significant to your name?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Whoa. My name is Peter Lawrence Lassen. Lassen is a relatively rare Danish name. My parents are immigrants from Denmark. There is in Northern California, a Lassen National Park. It was, at the time it was discovered, the only live and active volcano in the continental United States. Since we've had Mount Saint Helens and some other explosions. But Mount Lassen was the only active volcano. It was late 1800s. It has since gone dormant, so there's some mud pits and bubbling pools, but that's about it. And his name, the guy that found it, distant family, was named Peter Lassen. I was not named after him, but it's kind of cool having a mountain and a volcano named after you. It turned out he was kind of a rotten guy. Do all of you know about the Donner Party?

Speaker 3:

Yeah.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

He was second famous to the Donner party for leaving settlers in a snowstorm up by Marysville and they... The word is they ate each other, so he was not a good guy.

Speaker 9:

All right. Nice. Where were you born and where were you raised?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

I was born in Los Angeles after World War II. I was born in 1939. World War II broke out in '41. Did I get that right?

Speaker 6:

[inaudible 00:02:27] '40 for us.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Not Denmark, by the way. Denmark, it was 39 that they were invented. I'm steeped in Danish history. That's the nature of the son of an immigrant. You sort to know stuff like that. Anyway, after the war, my parents took us back. I have a brother and a sister, so my young upbringing was in Denmark and my father worked for the FAO, which is Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

And so we were back and forth. But as I say, much of my schooling was in Denmark, much of it here. I went to a college in Minnesota, for my undergraduate work, and was drafted in the military immediately after I graduated.

Speaker 4:

So what part of LA did you grow up in?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

An area called Baldwin Hills.

Speaker 4:

Okay.

Speaker 1:

Okay. What's that?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Do you not know it?

Speaker 1:

Bowling?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Baldwin. Baldwin as in bald.

Speaker 1:

Oh. Oh, I know it.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

It's over towards Hawthorne Park.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. Yeah.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Inglewood.

Speaker 4:

Did you ever go to the Holiday Bowl?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

We did that. I went to Dorsey.

Speaker 4:

Oh, wow.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

I got in a little trouble. So they switched me over to Lutheran High School, which was down near Florence and Crenshaw, in that area. Grant's-

Speaker 4:

That's a great school.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

It was a pretty good school, a little rigid from my taste but a pretty good school. And then I went on to a small college in Minnesota called Saint Olaf College, which is notable from its music. It was a very good school. I learned a lot. So where did I grow up? Yeah.

Speaker 4:

All over.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

All over.

Speaker 1:

By the Way, on his car, his vehicle, he's got DK in the back for Denmark. That's the [inaudible 00:04:40] He lets you know he's Danish.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Which usually, those of us who have that sort of thing are letting other people know you speak the language. So that's the intent of it. Danish is not a real language, but having grown up... I actually grew up trilingual. In my grade school there was an experimental Spanish-speaking project and of course at home we spoke Danish and then in the real world we spoke English. So I grew up trilingual and languages have always been very important.

Speaker 5:

Oh, this is a fun question. What's your favorite place in Southern California?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

My house. It's a nice house. It's a weird odd thing that I would, as an architect, I would never design anything like that. And I love that it's sort of funky and odd and strange. It is in Echo Park. It's right next to Dodger Stadium. Like my property and Dodger property touches. The wonderful thing about it is, when there's no Dodgers game, and I stress, when the crowds aren't there, great view out over downtown LA and yet I'm in the middle of Elysian Park, so there's birds and trees and coyotes wandering through regularly. It's just kind of a neat little place.

Speaker 4:

How long have you lived There?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Thirty years.

Speaker 1:

He didn't tell you, but part of that house has a prime swimming ramp. It is just marvelous. And he does superb gardening on that site.

Speaker 4:

What's his gardening like? What do you do?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Well, what my intent was, was to make my house, which was built in the fifties by a well known southern California house builder. I won't call them an architect. I'm an architect. I have the training for that, but been a well known house builder at the time. And when I bought the place, I wanted to make it as totally accessible as it possibly could be. I don't want to own a place and then not be able to fully use it. So that required a lot of... It's on a hill, a very steep hill that required modifying, a lot of steps and other things, taking out some stuff and then putting in trees and bushes, things like that. But I can get all the way down through in my entire garden. And I have about an acre of land, just short of an acre of land that has some nice switchbacks. Go downhill.

Speaker 4:

What do you grow?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Yeah.

Speaker 4:

What do you grow?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Where do I grow? I have been growing a Japanese plum. I have a lot of fruit, apple, blood of orange, regular orange, lemon, lime.

Speaker 1:

And you've never shared?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Well.

Speaker 1:

You have those poppies the white puppies with the yellow-

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

-The Matilija poppies.

Speaker 1:

Matilija, I always forget the name of, they're just gorgeous.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

They're wonderful. They look like fried eggs.

Speaker 1:

Is she allowed to visit?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Sure.

Speaker 1:

He has to show you his place. It's really... He's got a guest bedroom. He's been very helpful to me. It was one time I had a guess and I needed to put up somebody I had to have a place for and he accommodated her. [Marriette 00:08:28] Oh, that's right. The retaining wall fell so I couldn't put anyone in.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

You're a retaining wall, yeah, not mine.

Speaker 5:

Yeah, his wouldn't fall.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

That's right.

Speaker 6:

How do you define feminism?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

How do I define feminism? I consider myself a feminist. I have lots of women in my life. And on the surface, of course, equal pay for equal work is critical and we are not there yet. But I also think honoring women's ideas listening... Some people are talking constantly so I have to listen.

Sorry. But listening-

Speaker 1:

-You could say to be quiet.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

That is true.

Speaker 5:

But it couldn't work.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

It doesn't work.

Speaker 1:

You've got to try.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

It is basically pushing for we, males and women... My mother never considered herself a feminist.

Speaker 1:

Consider herself what?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

My mother had never considered herself a feminist.

Speaker 1:

Oh.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

She said, "I'm liberated." She was a powerhouse. She was a very strong woman. Said, "I'm liberated. You know, it's okay." But then I've seen so many women not being equally treated. And of course that's absolutely unacceptable. When I lived in the south, I lived both in North Carolina and in Georgia and I saw how women were put in their place. When I went to Vietnam I certainly saw how women, oriental women, were treated as having a defined job and that's what you're going to do the rest of your life. That's unacceptable. Women really need to have a place where they can do what it is they want to do as we men have done for the last centuries.

I look at women in the Muslim world and I know a number of them. I've known a number of Muslim families where the Muslim women have told me that they feel equal but separate from their male counterparts. The idea that they can't inherit land is unacceptable. Not in all Muslim countries, but in some. So it's in there. Do I have a fairly, fairly tight definition? No, I don't. But I always feel a little put off at a rigid definition that they never take in the universe of that subject. Does that help?

Speaker 4:

It's a hard question.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

It is a hard question, but it's a very good question. And I certainly, a man that was profoundly affected by the sixties went through the era of women's lib and all that. And much of that has been forgotten, of course at this point. Bra burning and things like that. They were important. It was necessary and they were successful to some degree, but not completely. We still don't have equal pay for equal jobs. We still have people like Roy Moore, the guy who's running for senator from Alabama who says, I didn't do anything wrong. Yeah, right.

Speaker 3:

What or who motivates you to succeed find success?

Speaker 4:

You define it.

Speaker 3:

Touche.

Speaker 1:

[inaudible 00:13:17] sequence.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

I was injured in service. I am a paraplegic. I have a spinal cord injury. I would say that that kind of traumatic event in my young life forced me to either get out and succeed or become a vegetable. When I got out of the army I came to the VA. My home hospital is VA Long Beach and there were guys from World War II that were still occupying a hospital bed. That is truly unacceptable medical care. You know, "Get out. Get your life into order and go do something."

And I vowed at that time, "I will never be one of those guys." It's just I'm not going to allow it. So that was kind of a scary lesson learned. I learned keep learning lessons as I move along in life, but it's often things you don't want to be. And I'm not going to allow my disability to control me that I control my body, even though half of it's basically done I control of my body. And that kind of an attitude really opens up a lot of worlds to you that "I'm not going to give that up, no." "Press on.", as they say in the military.

Speaker 1:

My also want to say that Peter helped me understand something. Whenever I get now, an appeal for money for the Special Olympics, I write them back and say, I'm not going to give you money because I don't think, I don't believe in the Special Olympics. If you are able to do whatever it is that is being done except for wheelchairs, you do have an advantage rolling along. Yeah, I can never compete with that. But if you can compete, then just compete. Don't tell me you're intellectually this or that. Just get out there and do it. And if you can make it, make it. I'm not giving you money until you treat people that way and let them compete on absolutely gold terms.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

And I will tell you that I run... I actually quit two years ago. I have run fifty-five and a half marathons in my wheelchair.

Speaker 3:

I saw that online.

Speaker 1:

You saw That online?

Speaker 3:

There was on the LA Times. I searched up his name. They listed the times and it was really cool.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

It's cool. It's cool. My best time is three hours and ten minutes. So I started when I was twenty.

Speaker 1:

What's the best time for a runner?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Oh, wheelchairs are always-

Speaker 1:

-No, no for the actual runner. You know, run around with their feet?

Speaker 6:

I have no idea. Not the six-minute mile was a big deal that I'm back [inaudible 00:16:34]

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Yeah, you're. The best wheelchair is one hour and I think, thirty-six minutes. And the best male runner, because they distinguish between male, the best male runner is still I think, two hours and ten, something like that. There's a disparity of about 20, 25 minutes, something like that. But the trouble with that is, it's technology, it's ball bearings. I can go out, "Hey man, I got ball bearings." That's what's winning. Yes, there's a lot of work and tough and all that. But to rely on technology, that's what Oscar Pistorius did, the South African runner who later killed his girlfriend. I'm so glad he ran in the regular running races. I think that's exactly what he should have done. That's where he belonged. On the other hand, I do think he benefited from that special C-foot that made him faster. And that's questionable.

Speaker 4:

Especially if people are willing to go under the knife to become better looking or better Performers.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Oh, well.

Speaker 4:

Do we have to modify our bodies to compete?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

And he had a disability, he had his leg removed at birth or soon after birth. But yeah, there's that whole area of... and it includes the genetic modification issue too, of modifying ourselves to do something particularly like being an actor or a major athlete or some of the shallower things.

Speaker 6:

Yeah, I heard mention-

Speaker 3:



So can you tell us about the Vietnam War and your injury?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Oh sure. I was injured, my explosion, I was in the mine explosion November 21st, 1964. Does that date mean anything to you at all? Does anybody react to that date?

Speaker 9:

Isn't it, no, anniversary with Kennedy, first Anniversary of Kennedy?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

You're right in the right direction. It's one year less one day from the anniversary of Kennedy.

Speaker 1:

Of what?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Of Kennedy's death. Oh, I bring that up because I was drafted. I bring that up because we thought at that time Kennedy wanted us to go, that of course you do that, the great man. Our government doesn't lie to us. And we loved the Camelot thing of the Kennedy's and all of that. We had been with him for a couple of years. We thought just this wonderful, great president with magnificent [inaudible 00:20:20] All of this stuff, we believed it. I will tell you that my sister was marching in Berkeley at the time after the war. So I was well aware and knew all about that. Felt slightly betrayed.

On the other hand, knowing she was right knowing, "We don't know what the hell we're doing here." We were advisory. I was working with some wonderful people that I liked very much still to this day. And then I was in a mine explosion. Now that's a landmine explosion. A couple of the guys died. I survived. I was area-vac'd out and brought back to my home station, which was Fort Bragg North Carolina. And there, diagnosed as a paraplegic. My spine is, if you will, severed, low on the lumbar. Lumbar is sort of right here. This is thoracic up here. Chest level is thoracic, this is lumbar.

What else can I tell you about it? That's how I [inaudible 00:22:13].

Speaker 5:

How long were you in Vietnam?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Three or four months, something like that.

Speaker 1:

So what happened early?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

It happened early and I was in the hospital a year.

Speaker 3:

How old were you?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

I was 23, 24. I had my degree from college St. Olaf College. And so 23 I believe, I [inaudible 00:22:40] I was athletic and probably in the best shape of my life when I was in service from all the training that they put you through, really in good shape. And I went from somewhere around 190 pounds down to 90 pounds. So I lost a hundred pounds during that year and I was in a coma for two months. I do not remember being evacuated. I don't even remember the mine. So none of that stuff is in my memory.

Speaker 5:

Did you ever have any out of body experiences when you were in your coma?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Yeah, I don't remember being in the coma. People said I acted nice. I don't even know what that means. In other words, I wasn't bitching and moaning and complaining and owing and all of that.

Speaker 1:

Well, if you're in a coma it's little hard.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

It's a little hard. Exactly.

Speaker 5:

It's not pleasant.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

On the other hand, I have had out body's experiences during my treatment and medical clearance or coming out of it.

Speaker 5:

Would you tell us about them?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Oh...

Speaker 5:

You don't have to.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

I don't don't mind. I do remember once I was on the operating table and apparently whatever drug they had going into me, I reacted to. So I, if you will, disappeared. But I remember floating, some, I'd like to say spirit, my spirit moved out of the body, floated saw what was going on, heard everything that the doctors and nurses were panicking about because apparently, my heart stopped and then brought back in. I did start down the tunnel all the way to death that I've heard described and was brought back from

that. I do think there is a higher power. It's not the way I was raised, which was Lutheran. It's not all of that sort of...

Speaker 5:

It has nothing to do with [inaudible 00:25:13]

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Right. But going down that pathway, first, there was somebody there to meet me. It was a she and told me, "It's not time yet." The other thing is, that move towards the end, the light at the end of the tunnel was there. And that gives you the sense that yes, there is more to it than that, but I'm also valuable right? That there's-

Speaker 5:

-You're connected to something much bigger than-

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

- Yeah, and in always near about that sense, of the Buddhist sense as opposed to the typical rigid. And I have also had the experience of people coming to me, an old girlfriend who died, had cancer, metastasis. But the instant she died... I'm sure she went to her husband and all that but she also came to me and...

Speaker 5:

Thank you for sharing that with me.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

You bet.

Speaker 5:

It's really important to talk about it.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

I think so too. I think so too.

Speaker 5:

I had a lot of people tell me I was crazy and I'm like, "Okay."

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Oh, I don't think so at all. But even if-

Speaker 5:

- [inaudible 00:26:45] that's fine too.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

It was a chemical reaction. "Oh okay." But it is and I believe it and that's the important thing.

Speaker 5:

Thank you. Okay.

Speaker 4:

So what are you passionate about?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Life. That's a really a dumb answer.

Speaker 4:

I think it segues beautifully based on what we were talking about.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Yeah. Yeah. And I like my life. My life is good. I have people that love me and who I love. Yeah. I'm passionate about life. I want to experience it all. Is that good enough?

Speaker 3:

Yeah.

Speaker 8:

I'm going to go off script. [inaudible 00:27:35] sent us a couple of articles I think that you had either been interviewed about and I think maybe a speech you gave in the seventies or something about accessibility in general-

Speaker 5:

-Congressional testimony

Speaker 8:

-I think it was that one. And you mentioned airplanes and how it was, they were almost not accessible. I wonder what's your review on accessibility of airplanes?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

They are almost not accessible. The aisles are getting... and I travel a lot in my work. And just so you know, my focus in the artificial field is adaptive reuse, which is taking old buildings and modifying them for modern uses. Clearly, a removal of architectural barriers is part of that issue. My experience is that the aisles of airplanes are getting narrower and narrower. Now that is under FAA rulings that the federal Administration, aviation Administration is allowing them to narrow to 18 inches. Clearly the airlines like that because it allows them to pack more people in sardines into the airplanes.

But that's the economy section of the airplane. First class is wider. And interestingly, I can get my wheelchair down the typical first class aisle. So when I fly, I always try to get the first bulkhead seat, which means I can go down the first class aisle and sit in the first row back there. When I go

internationally, I try to get the very back one. That means I have to have assistance on and off the plane, which I don't like doing.

Speaker 1:

Which one?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

The very back seat. Very-

Speaker 1:

-so what?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

So I'm near the toilet.

Speaker 5:

He doesn't like to ask for assistance.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Right, that's what that says. I don't like asking for assistance. My butt is small enough that the seats, they're okay. They're not real comfortable. But luckily I'm not obese and I don't have to worry about, I want a first class seat because I want to spread out. My butt's skinny and that's that makes the seat size. So that's where we are. Boarding and deplaning, for the most part, is okay on Boeing and air buses. So both the American built and the European built. Boarding, I'll note, boarding the plane on those is pretty good. Bombardier, which is a Canadian aircraft company, they have narrowed the entrance ramp into the door of the plane to the point where I cannot do that. My wheel goes off the edge. It's so narrow. So that's a problem. But does that help?

Speaker 8:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

Well just so you know, when I went to the bathroom, I noticed there are no... They violated 88. You couldn't use it.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Wow.

Speaker 5:

[inaudible 00:31:20] is awful. Yeah.

Speaker 1:

Well what do people do here on campus? Is there a special one somewhere or...?

Speaker 5:

I think that they might have one depending on the floor. They have to get to know in advance.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

They also are required to modify if somebody, let's say, has a bladder problem that they have to modify it for them. But they have to know that they've got this construction that they've got to do. But you can't send people up, down whatever flights of stairs, elevators of course are here. But you can't do that. It's got to be, there isn't a specific distance of between the classroom and the toilet.

Speaker 1:

By the way, in order to flush, you need to use your foot. You have to get over there.

Speaker 6:

You have to put a lot of pressure in there. I don't think you have enough weight to push it.

Speaker 1:

Oh, well I was able to, but I'm thinking of you. You couldn't use it.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Wow. That needs to be straightened out.

Speaker 8:

Yeah, they have it near floor where it's like a thing you have to [inaudible 00:32:26] You have to use your hand maybe

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Because I can use my hand on the foot pedal to sort of crack it. [inaudible 00:32:33].

Speaker 1:

You have to get down.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

That's Right. So be it. But if it's way in the wrong place then-

Speaker 1:

-It's ridiculous. Well, I just want to round. Yeah, I believe in interdependence because I was in hospice care and I learned I was totally dependent from being totally independent. So in regards to you, I feel you have a legitimate right to ask for the help you feel you might want. It doesn't diminish you. I don't agree with that. I feel if he has the disability of a particular kind, a learning disability... With you, you are so independent, Peter, you don't need help. But with you, I think in your condition, yes, absolutely, you should get help. Why not?

Speaker 6:

And by doing so, you might help someone else who feels the same way.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

I buy that, of course. My sense is, don't ask for it if you don't need it. If you need it or if you feel you might need it, go for it, do it. Actually, absolutely. The other thing to remember is that out of everybody here in the room, all of them have a disability of some sort. Don't forget that. The things that are there for you may not benefit me. There are cheaters out there that are going to want extra time on the exam. And so they're going to... There's a case in LA Unified School District right now that somebody has put their child in, that was not diagnosed. It was an ADHD case. And somebody has put their child under the ADA rules for education. I can't remember what they're called, that-

Speaker 3:

IEP, usually.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

IEP Education program. And somebody got that for the kid and they were not diagnosed with ADHD and all that. So there are already people cheating on it. One of the things I have to have to is the placard in my car that allows me to park in a handicap space. I have to have that because in order to get my wheelchair in and out, I can't park in a standard width stall. I have to have that wider space next to me. So what I'm suggesting is, first, there's a lot of people out there that are cheating and it's so easy to say, "Oh James, you don't look like..." Well, what are we supposed to look like. "If you get old, we're supposed to look like everybody else." You must ask for that if you need it. What I would do for my own is I will specifically ask for what I need, but no more.

Speaker 3:

That's, that's been the policy for a while but-

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

-Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 3:

Thank you.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

I get it.

Speaker 1:

What would the questions have been? I'm curious as an oral historian, what kinds of questions that you didn't...

Speaker 3:

I was actually going to ask about as activism on behalf of people with disabilities. So [inaudible 00:36:14]-

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

-Oh, I'm very active in that field. I usually working with veterans, but much broader than that, of course. The veterans right now, first we were treated pretty badly at the end of Vietnam or during it. And when I think about... I'll get a little political here. George Bush, when he decided to invade Iraq didn't add any money for veterans. In other words, you go in there... He said it was going to be a short war. We are now in Afghanistan, the longest war ever. But providing no money for the particular medical care of vets, what is just atrocious? How do you justify that? "Well, he said it was going to be a short war." But people are still going to get hurt. He was just clearly not thought out. And I think in general, vets, the Vietnam era, we had some negative feelings about us. The general populace was not very good to us. I think now we're just forgotten, that people just don't think about it. And that's got to change. We're just a forgotten group.

Speaker 1:

You may say some people have forgotten. Lots-

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

-I would say the general population-

Speaker 1:

-of people will have remembered and have written about it. And [inaudible 00:38:08] the one that Burns just did.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

That was a very good [inaudible 00:38:13]

Speaker 1:

When I mentioned some people, I support the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and the Iraq Veterans Against the War. These are two separate organizations. [inaudible 00:38:23] the Vietnam ones put out a fabulous publication. What was the other question that you didn't ask? [inaudible 00:38:32] changed the script.

Speaker 8:

Oh no, we Have set questions, but I had made a note about I wanted to ask.

Speaker 6:

Yeah, anything you want to ask that's not on the script, please do anything.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Yeah, feel free.

Speaker 6:

Yeah.

Speaker 5:



Who's next?

Speaker 10:

What's your favorite food and what's your favorite food prepared by your mom?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

My favorite food prepared by my mom who is dead is [foreign language 00:38:59]

Speaker 10:

What's that?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

What's that. It's a Danish dish. What would I say? It's sort of a gelatinized red soup.

Speaker 1:

What's the red?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Currents? Red currents. It's a fruit soup red made with red currents. Raspberry juice. I can make it. I can't think of anything. And raspberries are in it. So it is very good. So next time you're in the restaurant [inaudible 00:39:47]

Speaker 1:

Write it down. Spell it.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Well there was another question.

Speaker 10:

What's your favorite Food?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

That was my favorite food. But I'm an omnivore. I like everything. I have a favorite restaurant that's here. Something called Pho, which is yummy soup. Love Pho.

Speaker 5:

What's your favorite restaurant?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Is it's called Viet Noodle on Glendale Boulevard in Atwater Village. And it's just... It's a North Vietnamese recipe. The founder told me. It's a North Vietnamese restaurant with noodles and basically chicken and he's just a lovely Pho. And I am a Pho aficionado. I travel around the country and often will just say, "Okay, I'm in New York. Okay, well I know this little Pho restaurant or noodle shop." or whatever. So

that's something I like. I will go out of my way for sushi. I am very fond of sushi. And I was in a little tiny town called Mankato, Minnesota at a conference here, [inaudible 00:41:13] and sought out a Japanese restaurant and they had sushi and it wasn't very good. But you're in the middle of Minnesota, how many miles from the ocean? 2000 miles from the ocean. But it was really nice to try and that a restaurant could serve that and survive in the middle of nowhere, you know [inaudible 00:41:40]

Speaker 3:

Can you talk about your experiences in Washington DC?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

Sure.

Speaker 5:

What years were you there?

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

1968. I was asked to be executive director of a group called the Paralyzed Veterans of America. It's a group of... All of us have to some degree, a spinal cord injury. And the PVA hired me as executive director that also at that time included basically being a lobbyist. So I got in and out of places like Congress and got to know some the Congress people and all that. It's a very nice job. I know we hear bad things about lobbyists generally, but it is an honorable job. They are important. The Congress people... Congress is so screwed up right now that that's whole other issue. They cannot know everything about everything. So to pass a law... but you know something about the subject matter and how the law worked, it really is honorable and important for you to get in there and tell them this is the way it should be. Now. I represented a veterans group chartered by Congress back in the '40s. That gave me some voice, having that as my credentials, also having college education had all of that helped.

After I did that, I did that for a couple of years. Then the VA hired me as an architect, staff architect. Even though I did not have the credentials to be an architect, they put me on as it was mostly planning. So I worked for the VA, designing the hospitals and parts of hospitals, mostly parts of hospitals for five years. And then was offered a job as Chief of Compliance for the federal agency that does ADA compliance. So when we got the laws passed, it was my job to ensure that the government was living up to its responsibility to make things accessible.

All those three jobs were absolutely fascinating. And then by the way, after I did that, I went back to architecture school and got my degree from North Carolina State University. So I have my masters of architecture from North Carolina, [inaudible 00:44:51] and then I came out here and found a job out here. And I loved Washington. It was not as insane as it is now, but at least Republicans and Democrats and independents talked to each other, dealt with each other. There was a sense of willing to compromise that I thought was very important. And that is in my heart what I think of as Congress. What I hear now, what I see now, it's deteriorated. And while I have been back to lobby four particular issues, I think it's gotten so rigid, so ideological that I really don't like to deal with that. See what I'm saying?

Speaker 3:

Yeah, that's cool. Thank you.

Speaker 11:

So since this class is focused on women in American society, I wanted to ask about your relationship with your mother.

Peter Lawrence Lassen:

My relationship with my mother was very good. I will tell you that my mother... My father was a PhD biochemist. My mother was a physical therapist and both, immigrants from Denmark as I said. My mother was a very strong woman. My father didn't talk very much and a little bit reticent, I would have to say. But she was kind of a neat lady and she was one of those, "I can do everything" job. So one of those, "I can do everything." people. I have never seen my mother not be able to do things. She was one of the early drivers that women back in her time, in the twenties were just beginning to get driving. When my mother came to this country in 1925 or something like that, first thing she got was a driver's license. Whoa. She had four children. She raised three children. One died early. She wasn't a very good cook, but those things she cooked were very good. We all remember our mother with food.