Like any ethnic group immigrating to the United States there is a struggle to not lose ones identity and culture. My journey as a second generation Ukrainian was no different. My grandparents survived World War I, immigrated to Ellis Island, New York and settled in the metropolitan area. As they struggled through the Great Depression their American dream was to make a better life than they had for their children. To accomplish that they believed in education and to support that ideal my grandfather worked at the cemetery digging graves, making caskets and eventually becoming a contractor.

That dream was accomplished when their first son graduated from Fordham. Their second child, a daughter, went to what was known in those days as secretary school. My dad, the youngest went to Pace University for a business degree.

Those same ideals of education being the keys to success were instilled in me as well. I guess it’s no accident that I spent more than half of my life in academia. The path may have been there but it was a circuitous one. As my father climbed the corporate ladder, big moves and frequent changes of address became the norm.

As a result, I was born in New York the youngest of four and you know what they say about being the baby in the family. At an early age we moved to Connecticut and back to New York before heading west to Eugene, Oregon and finally settling in Menlo Park, California. The moves were hard transitions on us children. Starting in a new school and making new friends takes its toll on a child but my mom was a pillar of strength. Dad wanted the best for us so he worked hard to accomplish the same goal his parents had which was to send to send his kids to college.

My toughest transition was to Menlo Park as a 6th grader but I started gymnastics soon after we moved there. Looking back at my journey I realize how pivotal gymnastics was for me. It gave me an identity, personal goals and discipline. It also gave me some tools that would carry me through my career as an athletic trainer.

High School was a blur in some ways. I was quiet, shy, and had a terrible freshman year. In the span of one month I got glasses, braces, and sustained a displaced tib/fib fracture skiing. Being on crutches for three months was terrible! I felt like I was always being watched. After I got my third cast off I recall a comment from my high school gymnastics coach and PE teacher, Dixie Lynch. She told me to stop turning my foot out when I was walking. Back in those days there was no physical therapy for a fracture. Once the bone healed you took the cast off and ran. In hindsight I had so much atrophy, tightness and compensation that I lost all movement efficiency. Dixie may not have been an Athletic Trainer but fortunately for me she had an eye for gait mechanics.

Gymnastics took me on a journey personally and professionally. I was recruited by Ed Franz, the Head Gymnastics Coach at San Diego State University where I majored in math. At the time, NCAA for women did not exist. We competed in the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW). Although I was not a champion at the national level I qualified which was a great experience at being around top level collegiate athletes. It paved the way for me to become a local, state and regionally rated gymnastics judge. Beyond evaluating gymnastics routines I developed a keen eye for dyskinesis and bio-mechanics which has been one of my corner stones as an Athletic Trainer.

There was also a tune in and focus aspect that I learned from gymnastics. As a gymnast, you are part of a team but when it came time to compete it was only you out there. It’s the same for an athletic trainer, when called upon to tend to a stricken athlete, all eyes and cameras are on you. You will be evaluated, judged, scrutinized and maybe criticized on how you handled yourself under stress just like in gymnastics. That helped me when I would tend to a stricken athlete. I credit gymnastics for my ability shut out everything around me and concentrate on the task at hand. Whether it was a football game or a sold out TV men's basketball game, I was at one with my athlete.

I recall our starting point guard rupturing his Achilles tendon while we on the road. I’m at one with him when the home team athletic trainer is in my ear grilling me. "Do you need an ambulance?  Gurney?  Should I get a doc?"  It went on and on. I began to lose focus before I snapped at him, “I got it”! I later heard a different version of the story told by observers that said I actually pushed him away and the crowd went crazy but I like my version better. All’s well that ends well. The next day that athletic trainer apologized and brought me candy.

I had zero exposure to athletic training until I went to college. In those days the athletic trainer was just referred to as “the trainer”. That changed later in my career and for good reason. Like others I didn’t know an athletic trainer from a personal trainer from a horse trainer. My first visit to the training room was not as a student athletic trainer, it was as a student athlete.

I over rotated on a tumbling pass, landing on my head/neck and fractured my sternum. Coach Franz took me to the training room for evaluation by the head athletic trainer, Bob Moore. What I remember from that experience, besides the not so gentle palpation, was the men and women working side by side in unison with purpose in the training room. They were conducting evaluations, taping, doing rehabilitation which made me think, wow, this is really cool. A few weeks later I attended a SDSU football game. To this day I can’t remember who they played or who won. I wasn’t there to cheer. I was there to observe the athletic trainers on the sidelines. I was fascinated by their energy during the game. Yes, they were helping with hydration, but they were taping and stretching and wow, they were running out onto the field to care for the players. Some athletes were treated and able to return to the game, others not. It was a life changer for me and at that moment I knew what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I changed my major from math to physical education the very next week.

I enrolled in Bob’s basic athletic training class and asked how I could become a student athletic trainer. He gave me a chance and till this day I am grateful for the opportunity. Along with Bob there was an assistant athletic trainer by the name of Russ Cagle who took me under his wing. It’s no wonder that these two athletic trainers became widely respected in the athletic training community and I was their student. Russ even served as President of our Board of Certification. I didn’t know it at the time but I was part an educational genealogical tree that would one day be considered athletic training royalty.

There was no schedule for the student athletic trainers. If you were not in class you were expected and wanted to be in the training room. It was our home away from home, our nest, it was where we were needed and where we needed to be. It took about a week before Russ noticed my presence and asked me, “who are you and what are you doing here”? Bob didn’t tell Russ that he added me to the roster of student athletic trainers. I told Russ my story and my infatuation for being in the training room. That infatuation grew into love and I made it my business to be there whenever I could volunteering for anything and everything.

Looking back on my journey I now realize how fortunate I was to be in the SDSU program. Bob was inducted into the National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA) Hall of Fame. An honor that in bestowed on few people in our field. He was a visionary, a pioneer in utilizing proprioceptive techniques and became world renowned for his skill and application of Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation (PNF). The name Robert Moore became synonymous with PNF and San Diego became the Mecca for this technique. He advocated his philosophy because he could back it up with science not because it was easy or trendy.

Bob who we affectionately called Bobo was truly gender blind. His training room was one of the first coed training rooms in the country. Men and women worked side by side treating athletes of all sports. As a student athletic trainer I watched in awe as another female student certified. She was a guiding light for all of us. Her name is Connie Spooner and she proved that a female could be a certified athletic trainer just like Bobo and Russ were. Connie went on to be the head athletic trainer for the Professional Women’s Tennis circuit but she left an impact that would become her legacy at SDSU. She was one of the first women to work college football along with the men which paved the way for the rest of us

When I was a student athletic trainer the road to certification was through the internship program which required 1800 hours under the supervision of a certified athletic trainer. Most students started as a freshman and took four years to complete the program. I did it in two working a variety of sports which contributed to a well rounded experience.

I have a vivid memory of covering a women’s basketball scrimmage during my first semester. It was on our floor so I was the host athletic trainer. One of their players sustained an anterior cruciate (ACL) ligament tear. I lieu of an athletic trainer they staffed medics who are not particularly trained to respond to such an event. She was their athlete so I stood back, observed and let them handle it. It became a scene as the injured athlete went into shock as she was transported to the training room.

When things calmed down, Bobo approached me and said, “you didn’t handle that very well”. I felt horrible that I disappointed him after he put his faith in me and told myself I would never allow that to happen again. I learned that if I were given a responsibility that I better take charge. It wasn’t long after that experience I was asked to cover a women’s field hockey scrimmage vs Grossmont College (JC). This time there were two injuries. One was a bloody a laceration to the forehead of a Grossmont. It caused a big stir as other players were gawking and commenting on the amount of blood. Seeing things were turning into a panic I quickly took control of the situation by clearing the area.

In the same game one of our players sustained a neck injury with symptoms of radiculopathy which is often indicative of nerve compression. I evaluated and stabilized her with seamless precision. Bobo was quick to comment, “that was better”. I remember being proud of my progress and appreciated the acknowledgment.

I had so many high-minded mentors as I developed as an athletic trainer. Along with Bobo and Russ I attribute my on the field evaluation skills to Ron Courson. He had a wealth of knowledge that he was willing to share it. If he was presenting at a conference, I made it a point to attend. He was instrumental in how our emergency action plan developed and how much we practiced scenarios for on the field care. At times I would e-mail him with a question and he would get right back to me even sending presentations and/or videos.  He is a selfless educator and willing to share because he believes in athletic trainers and he wants us to be the best.

Our role playing was best exemplified when one of our football player was concussed on the road. He was semi-conscious when we got to him. When the paramedics came over they asked if I felt okay being at the head. We had already activated our protocol and I assured them I was. The process was textbook efficient just as we practiced it.  The host athletic trainers commented on how proficient we were. I told them it was because we practice to which they responded, "we need to practice more”.

Eventually I earned the privilege of working football. Football is where you really make your bones as an athletic trainer. There are so many athletes and so many injuries that you can’t help but me bombarded with experience. I loved everything about it, the constant energy, business and unpredictability of it.

Student athletic trainers took turns going on road trips with the football team but I found another way assist. Our team physician, Dr. George Brown, would fly his private plane for away games to which I would hitch a ride. I also traveled with men’s soccer, staying four to a room at the Motel 6. I recall one trip to the Bay Area where we played Stanford. I opted out of the Motel 6 going back to my roots in Menlo Park and staying with friends. I learned to do whatever I could to make the best of any situation.

As a grad student we would teach activity classes to supplement our incomes. It was a natural for me to teach gymnastics. Physical education majors were required to take a wide variety of activity classes. My gymnastics class was popular with the athletic trainers and football players. The football players did learn skills but I also taught them to how to “spot” skills, specifically on the balance beam and uneven parallel bars.

After completing my course work and internship hours I was eligible to sit for the National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA) certification exam. I traveled to the University of Arizona in the spring of 1978 to take the exam which consisted of both written and oral practical portions. You would think after all of my hours of hard work in the classroom and training room I would exude confidence but it was quite intimidating.

There were two examiners, Tow Diehm, Head Athletic Trainer at University of New Mexico and Dave Knoppel, Head Athletic Trainer at UNLV. There was also a proctor and a model. The first thing I noticed was the Resuscitating Annie had a helmet on. I had to evaluate a semi-conscious athlete with a head/neck injury, do CPR after explaining what I would do with the helmet, tape an elbow for a hyperextension injury, tape an ankle and evaluate a quad injury utilizing three techniques. Tow was always smiling, and made me feel comfortable. Dave had such a serious look on his face, I avoided looking at him.

My first NATA convention was in Las Vegas. I was surprised by the small number of female athletic trainers there. On my way to a meeting there was a room with a “Women in Athletic Training” sign outside. I thought, wait we are all athletic trainers and I wanted to fit in as an athletic trainer, not necessarily a female athletic trainer. I believe at the time of my certification there was only about 5% of the membership that were female. I saw Dave Knoppel, my certification examiner in the hallway, and I was apprehensive to approach him. I shouldn’t have been, he was the nicest man, smiled and looked at my badge. It said, “CERTIFIED” and he congratulated me and said, “I knew you did it”!

There were relatively few women in the field but one of the first to have a huge impact on me was Sherry Kosek Babagian. She was an assistant athletic trainer at Stanford when I worked summer camps there. She was a genuine and confident woman that had my dream job. I was in awe when I found out that she first became a member of the NATA in 1966 and was the first female to take the certification exam in 1972. She was a true trailblazer. The other was Janice Daniels. She was an athletic training student at the University of San Diego under Larry Roberts. Over the years she was active in our district, and became the first female NATA District Director in 1984. She helped me recognize the need and opportunity to be active in our association when most of the leadership positions were males.

Truth be told, the NBA changed my life. It was the summer of 1978 when I was working summer camps and looking for a job! I had a phone interview with Southwest Missouri State University but did not get the opportunity for an on campus interview. Summer was ending and time was running out to fill jobs for the new academic year. Then the stars lined up for me. The next month the NBA relocated the Buffalo Braves to San Diego and renamed them the San Diego Clippers.

Larry Roberts left the Head Athletic Trainers position at the University of San Diego to become the first Clippers athletic trainer. USD needed a 30-day interim athletic trainer and I took the challenge. Tom Burke was the Athletic Director and Dean of students. I applied and interviewed with Tom for the permanent position. Tom Burke had the vision and the confidence to place a woman in a job that was in a man’s world. There were several coaches that objected to having a female in that role. They were told by Tom if they can’t be open minded than they can’t be involved in the decision. Thirty days morphed into 40 years. I often joke that human resources just got it wrong, and thought the 30-day letter of appointment said 30 years. The football coach just called me “hey trainer”, not sure he ever did learn my nameMy first day on the job on September 9th, 1978 USD had a home football game. I met Larry at the Field House where he provided me with keys, students, supplies and a football team. Although I felt qualified I was also petrified. I had been under the tutelage of Bob Moore but he was no where to be seen. I was all alone in the big bad world of mens football. USD was certainly not a powerhouse so Larry had a difficult job, with little to no resources or support.

I went to work evaluating the needs for a well functioning training room. I couldn’t find paperwork on the athletes because there wasn’t any. There had not been documentation of physical exams and insurance claims were backed up. The team physician was an M.D. but not a true sports medicine doc so that needed improvement. I was flying by the seat of my pants but I did it with confidence because I was given significant administrative responsibility when I was at SDSU which laid the foundation for this job.

My first year we hired Dr. William Curran as our new team physician. Together we established a pre-participation physical exam plan and coverage for our high risk sports. My budget was almost non-existent. I became good at scavenging which continued throughout my career. I made contact with the San Diego Clippers and Chargers obtaining their discarded supplies. One of the basic tenets of athletic training is to keep your athletes hydrated. That became difficult one year when all of my water bottles mysteriously disappeared. Necessity is the mother of invention so being a mother of boys I took their bottles to work. I’m pretty sure we were the only college football team hydrating withTeenage Mutant Ninja Turtle, Power Ranger and San Diego Zoo bottles. My first purchase order for that year was so hard, but I came up with a plan, only to have Tom Burke say “you forgot about sales tax”, he laughed, I cried.

I worked hard to establish my knowledge and confidence. My physical stature didn’t help. I was a petite 5’2” young female. Larry Roberts was an imposing man which could be challenging for a young lady in collegiate athletics. I worked hard to gain the respect of the athletes but being one of the few women I was kicked off of football fields, basketball courts and out of locker rooms. I was even asked if I was a girlfriend, coaches daughter, cheerleader, coaches wife, and as years past if I had a son on the team. I was once asked if I was the “Mrs. McNabb” of the team. A reference to the mother of the Philadelphia Eagles player, Donovan McNabb who appeared in a Campbell’s soup commercial. I responded with, yes kind of.

Travel had its own issues. My first overnight road trip was to UC Davis with our men’s basketball team. We checked into the motel, and my roommate was the male Sports Information Director. Awkward, but we both respected each others space. The next trip was at UC Santa Barbara. Opportunity arose when Tom Burke and his wife Barbara were on the trip. She was asking how I liked my job. I told her I loved what I did but I also mentioned it was a bit awkward rooming with a male SID. I knew she would have Tom’s ear, and going forward I had my own room.

I always felt like I could use more experience. USD Athletics had teams scheduled to practice after 3:00PM. Football practiced every night from 7:00-9:30. I took advantage of that by working in the mornings when I could at physical therapy clinics. My connection again was with Bob Moore, who along with Byron Wildermuth PT opened the Sports Injury Clinic. I improved my evaluation and rehabilitation skills working under these two manual therapy based physical therapists. They were pioneers being one of the first PT clinics in San Diego to combine the talents of physical therapists and athletic trainers working side by side. I was fortunate to be a part of that but I still felt I could do more and I did.

In 1981 I became the athletic trainer for the San Diego Friars of World Team Tennis. I also did stints in the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles with artistic gymnastics and the NBA Summer Pro League.

The University of San Diego became a NCAA Division 1 affiliate in 1979, joining the West Coast Athletic Conference (WCAC) now the West Coast Conference (WCC). I was one of the first female Head Athletic Trainers in Division 1 athletics.

Going Division I didn’t change my job much. It was challenging to cover so many sports with just student athletic trainers as was the custom in those days. The first nine years I was at USD I was the only certified athletic trainer so I had students cover both home and away games. I was on a ten-month appointment for the first 15 years which was also customary for small division I athletic programs. When we traveled with football, it was me and one student for 60 players. Basketball was an extremely limited travel party. Reality hit home once at the University of Texas Austin. Their personnel asked where the manager, sports information director, ticket manager and athletic trainer were. I responded that on the road, I wear all of those hats.

Reality struck again when we played at UC Berkley. They did not know what to do with me because you had to go through the men’s training room to get to the men’s locker rooms. I was eventually escorted outside and around the back through a fire door to get to my team.

I had a player that did not know where to change into his uniform because I was taping in the middle of the locker room. His teammate told him not to worry, she just tapes and never lifts her head up.

Finally in 1987 I hired my first full time assistant! He was an ex-marine by the name Steve Nellis with an incredible work ethic and an excellent skill set. A few years later I was able to hire Pete McMahon, a USD football alum in a half time position. Both men eventually left for physical therapy school and I hired Suzi Higgins who’s now at Vassar) and then Paul Signorelli, now at Cal State San Marcos. In all of those years I was blessed to have assistants that were so talented and committed to the success of our program. At an average height on 5’3” Suzi, Paul and I had the distinction of being the shortest athletic training staff in NCAA Division 1 athletics.

As I reflect on my career I realize how lucky I was to have had skilled, caring, athletic trainers by my side. They helped create a positive atmosphere of hard work, accomplishment and fun. My last athletic director was there a year and a half before I retired. He had met with my staff individually before meeting me. The first thing he said was, “your staff sure likes you”. There was nothing more satisfying to me in my work life to have been liked and respected by my peers.

Those first 15 years I worked in the two summer months without compensation to close out the previous years rehab, manage supplies and prepare for the upcoming season. As our department grew I became frustrated and felt overlooked at times. It seemed like we were in the dark ages of athletics. I approached our AD about having my own office. He couldn’t understand why a desk in the middle of the training room didn’t work. I explained that I had administrative duties, phone calls and a need for confidentiality. After 12 years I finally got a cubby hole.

My annual request was for my appointment to be changed from a 10 to 12 month and an increase in salary. Our Sports Information Director had his appointment extended before I did. I wanted to know why he was prioritized over me when I had more tenure. The AD said it was “because he is the head of a household”.

I was confused because I thought I was in good standing with this AD. When he first arrived he told me my area was the last to be evaluated because it was so well run. I watched as he hired a new swim coach and gave him a new computer. I had an old hand-me-down without a printer. I finally became an advocate for myself. I wrote up my needs including the appointment and met with the man that originally hired me, Tom Burke, who by then was solely Dean of Students. He heard me and within weeks I had a new computer, printer and some other items I had asked for. There was a budget increase and the following year my appointment was extended. Mens basketball was king at USD and Jim Brovelli was the coach when I was hired at USD. He was already well respected in the WCC as a former player at the University of San Francisco (USF). He guided USD’s transition from a NCAA Division II power to Division I ranks. After he left USD he went back to coach USF and later held several positions for different NBA teams.

It’s no surprise to me that he had a great career as he was great to work with. He asked the players how they were treated, and since they were happy, he was. He never challenged any of my actions or decisions and respected my work. When he left for USF I was asked to be on the selection committee for a new head coach. A finalist was Hank Egan, who had just been fired from the Air Force Academy after 18 years. He was a graduate of the Naval Academy, so I was concerned about a coach that had been at institutions that were primarily male. During the interview, I asked him about working with a female athletic trainer. His response: “male, female, blue, green, purple….I don’t care, I just want to win basketball games”. We became great colleagues and I am proud to say we are still friends today. After Hank left to be an assistant coach with the San Antonio Spurs, we hired Brad Holland, a UCLA grad and former Lakers player. Establishing my rapport with him was more challenging and I felt I had to prove myself every day. He at times would question my authority with injuries and athletes, but he did listen. Over the years, our working relationship improved. We ended up on the same page knowing everything being done was in the best interest of the athlete.

My fourth mens basketball coach was Bill Grier. He came from Gonzaga which was in our conference so he knew me from playing them on the road. Their long time head athletic trainer, Steve DeLong assured Bill that I was good.

I even had things come full circle a couple of times having alums come back to coach men’s basketball. Lamont Smith played for Brad Holland at USD from 1995-99. He arrived as a freshman with a previously undiagnosed knee injury that required surgery and extensive rehabilitation so we spent a lot of time together. When he returned to action he became our defensive player of the year in 1997 and 1999. He also became my fifth mens basketball coach. How many athletic trainers get to work with an athlete and then later they become the head coach. There was no need to establish a relationship with Lamont, we already had a great one, as I did with Sam Scholl, also a USD alum that followed Lamont.

Although I worked primarily with football and men’s basketball throughout my career, I worked and traveled with every team at USD that would take an athletic trainer on the road. Teams like golf, swimming, tennis, rowing and cross country did not travel an athletic trainer and the host athletic trainer helped those teams when there was a need. We did the same for them. I loved being on the road, seeing other institutions, meeting other athletic trainers and getting to know them and their teams.

Our baseball coach and I would have great discussions as he was driving the bus and I was riding shotgun. We talked about heat vs ice, chiropractic, men vs women etc. Our conversations were always cerebral and ran the gamut. This was done as I put mayo on his sandwich from our sack lunch. Our teams traveled so poorly in my early years. We stayed in second and third rate hotels and ate horrible food. I felt a need to travel with them so I could experience what they were experiencing. This allowed me to advocate for better resources on their behalf.

Although basketball was king at USD, football was where the actions was. After surviving my first season of football at USD I experienced an August camp very different from what I saw as a student athletic trainer at SDSU. I am not sure all of the players actually went to USD, but we did physicals on whomever was on the roster. Head coach Bill Williams the guy that called me “hey trainer” had 3-a-day practices, with the offensive lineman and defensive lineman getting up early for a two mile run every day. It was mentally and physically brutal. I don't think there were any rules back then but if there were, we were breaking them. It was definitely an endurance test for all of us. The student trainers got a crash course in collision sports. The experience they received in one month would have taken years in basketball or any other sports for that matter. As I said before, resources were limited so athletes would often wear their tape all day. August football was bad for the players but it was great for the students who received so much experience that it gave them confidence when covering their own events. I learned you can take all the course work and sit in on all the lectures you want but there is no substitute for experience.

Everything was a grind from the players gear to travel. Equipment fitting was done by one of the coaches, which I took over when it came to helmet distribution. That was another challenge because we really did not have the quantity or quality needed to protect our athletes who just wanted to play. If we could bus for a trip we would and that included playing St Mary’s in Moraga, California. Moraga was a good eight hour trip each way and we did it round trip in the same day.

Our second coach was Brain Fogarty who came from a private boys high school and quite different then Bill. Brian was organized and structured with practices that were reasonable. His football career ended because of a concussion and this was at a time before concussions and CTE were a hot topic, so it must have been pretty bad. He was big on technique and the mental aspect of the game. If I had to pull a player out he would ask me the typical questions a coach asks but I made sure I had the appropriate answers, hold my ground and he respected my decisions.

Just as Brian and I gelled he decided to go into administration and was succeeded by Kevin McGarry. Kevin was more confrontational and impatient but also supported his team. He eventually admitted that it frustrated him when I was right, and he had to listen.

Next up was the now famed former player and current head coach at the University of Michigan, Jim Harbaugh. He literally changed football at USD. We were in the Pioneer Football League, a Division I football Championship Subdivision (FCS). This is a conference of primarily small private institutions that did not award scholarships. Jim played at Michigan and played and coached in the NFL. USD’s limited resources was a culture shock for Jim and his culture shock trickled down on my head. His demands were high, with intense meetings and when he didn’t get what he wanted he would go to the AD who had to tell him “she is right, no we can’t do that”.

To Jim’s credit, he created such intensity and winning spirit that it was really fun to work his practices and games. He accepted nothing less than maximum effort. If a player went down, he would ask who is the next one up? The best players played, no questions asked. He was instrumental in the administration letting us travel a team physician and a third athletic trainer. It was probably the first time he flew commercial with a football team. All seventy of us would be in the airport and he would walk from gate to gate doing shoulder shrugs with his luggage. One afternoon we were having injury clinic with our orthopedic surgeon. It was fall, a time when the training room is packed and he wanted something. He charged towards the exam room and I stopped him saying, “Not now Jim”. He responded with, “you put your hand up at me” (the stop sign)! I responded “this is my playing field and I am the coach” and he stomped out. He was tough but he took our program to new heights, which started a run of consecutive conference championships. One trip during a team meal he was staring at me and asked “Do you love being an athletic trainer?” I told him I did, which he enthusiastically replied “then you love football!”. No Truer words were ever spoken, I do love football.

After two seasons Jim left to coach the Stanford University Cardinals. He was replaced by Ron Caragher. It was his first head coaching gig and he was there from 2007 to 2012. Ron was a laid back born Californian which I think contributed to his easy going style with me. He even played quarterback at UCLA so he knew what it was like to be in a big time division I program. I enjoyed my time working with Ron and didn’t miss the challenge of dealing with coach Harbaugh.

Our current head football coach is Dale Lindsey. I am so fortunate towards the end of my career to work with this amazing man. He played and coached in the NFL for years and now at 77 he is still coaching. He is experienced, knowledgeable, and reasonable with everything, just a joy to work with. When people would ask me when I was going to retire, I said ask our football coach! It was incredulous to him that I would retire. He even asked me, “why would you do that”? he knew I loved being a football athletic trainer as much as he loved being a football coach. He is much older than me and he’s still going strong! Love that guy!

From 1978-2000 I was in a training room in our old Sports Center. It was tiny with no windows. I had three treatment tables, two taping tables, my desk, a sink, a refrigerator and storage for whatever rehab toys I could fit in there. The small hydrotherapy room had one whirlpool that was there when I got to USD. It was so meager but I made the most of what I had. I could access a grass area behind the building with the pool and gym nearby at the Sports Center. Athletes were seen all over the training room as well as laying in the hallway waiting their turn. It was absolute chaos but I loved it. Football practiced in Torero Stadium where I had basically a closet to work out of. We taped football for practices and games by pulling the tables outside. Thank goodness it doesn’t rain very often in San Diego. Visiting athletic trainers would laugh and joke at my facility, but it was what I had and I was so proud of it and what we accomplished in that space.

Those days were not only tough working conditions but being an athletic trainer was tough on the family life. As a rule we are overworked, understaffed and underpaid. We don’t spend enough time with our own kids because we’re taking care of someone else's kids. I’m often asked how I did it. I don’t know. Athletic Trainers “just do it”, like the Nike slogan. You know what has to be done at work and with your family and if you want both badly enough, you find a way.

There was a time a few years after I got married that I thought I should have a back up plan in the event a traditional athletic training job was too much on the family. I had accumulated enough hours working under PT's through Bob Moore and the clinics to successfully challenge the California Physical Therapy Assistant (PTA) exam.  My education at SDSU fulfilled the required course work. I didn’t do all that to obtain that license, it was part of the back up plan.  It made me more marketable to clinics because as a PTA they could bill for my hours, with 50% of those hours unsupervised.  As an athletic trainer working at the clinic I had to be 100% supervised and everything reviewed and co-signed.  The exam was taken in a ballroom at a hotel near LAX.  I kept the license active throughout my career but never used it as part of my professional identity. It was still worth going through the process because I met Mohammad Ali in the lobby. He was the most gracious man.  Unfortunately, this was before cell phones so no photo op.

Jeff and I married in 1983. I often say that we have been married only 18 years because of how much I traveled and worked. We met at the Sports Injury Clinic in 1980 but he did not ask me out until after he was discharged. He was rehabbing a revision of an ACL reconstruction that was done while playing football at Oregon State. We were two people with busy schedules, but managed to make it work. I was the only athletic trainer at USD when we met so I had an impossible schedule. We had our first son, David in 1985 right before football season which makes you wonder what we were thinking.

I had to find a three month interim athletic trainer while I was on maternity leave. Fortunately one of my former student athletic trainers was now certified and available. Vicky Cutting did a great job of being me. You can imagine how hard it was going back to work being a new mother. I cried every day I dropped my baby off at day care to go take care of someone else's kids. Those days were a dichotomy, I felt guilty about being home when I as home and I felt guilty about being at work when I was at work. I felt like I could never do enough as a mother or an athletic trainer.

Travel was the hardest. We were fortunate that Jeff’s parents were local and could help out. When David was an infant, Jeff would bring him to basketball games and put him in the training room. David would fall sleep and Jeff watch the game with a nursery monitor in his hand. Games were played in the old Sports Center. It was small with limited bench seating, bad locker rooms and a bad training room. After games, Hank Egan would meet with the press in my training room holding David in his arms. Hank was so witty, he would tell the press things like “you can’t ask me how bad the officiating was”. As David grew older, Hank welcomed him to his practices and David would pace the sidelines with Hank mimicking him. One of our players with the same maturity level as David constantly teased him. Chris Grant, who became the former general manager of the Cleveland Cavaliers and Mike Brown, who became the former Cavaliers, Lakers, and current Warriors coach would tease and chase him around. Their antics would finally end up with David being tossed in a trash can. David loved every minute of it.

Jeff told me that my job forced him to do things like cook, clean and help with homework. He thinks he would not have done as much of those things if I was there more. He believes my absence made him a better parent and sent a message to the boys that dads can do it all too.

Jason was born in 1988, at the end of basketball season. I worked until I couldn’t and had him the night we beat Pepperdine at home. His arrival was announced on the PA system to the crowd! Having two boys and working was a blur. Days were like a sprint but weeks were like a marathon. I would think of my favorite Pink Floyd song: “and you run and you run to catch up with the sun but it’s sinking…..only to come up behind you again….”. My boys attended the pre-school on USD’s campus. Their favorite was when I would pick them up in the golf cart at the end of the day. They were the envy of the class. They played sports and between getting them to practices and games Jeff and I played “tag-team parenting” juggling our schedules to make it work. As much as we made it work there was always this underlying sense of guilt. I was missing school events and games because I was on the road. I recall having an especially bad day when Jason was seven. I remember crying while I was driving. I asked him if I should I quit my job. He told me no because I had a really cool job. Tag team parenting had its downfalls, especially during the pre-cell phones era. It was hard keeping track of who was with who and where and when they had to be some place. I shudder to tell this story but one night we met separately at a pizza joint. I had David and Jeff had Jason. All was good until we got home and I asked Jeff, “where’s Jason” and he responded, “I thought he was with you”. We had left him there.

In 2000 we had a dream come true. After 20 years of promises we opened the Jenny Craig Pavilion. This 5100 seating capacity facility became home to our volleyball and men’s and women’s basketball. My athletic training room was 10 times the size of my cubby in the Sports Center. There was a hydrotherapy space, offices, private exam room, taping stations, storage and space for so many treatment tables and toys. It even had windows. The facility was adjacent to Torero Stadium, so we could also work football out of there. I was given the footprint and able to design my own space. I loved our facility and it made me happy to walk into the training room to see what the day would bring. We have now grown out of it but I will always have a soft spot in my heart and be proud of what we accomplished with our athletes.

San Diego was ahead of the curve putting women at the forefront of athletic training. At one point in the 80’s there was an all female line up with the likes of Carlynn Smith at SDSU, Marcia Klaiber at UCSD, Sue Lalicker at San Diego Mesa College, Carol Comer at USIU, Heidi Peterson at University of San Diego High School, my former student Maureen Stafford (RIP) who left for Oklahoma City University and Sally Nogle who left to be a grad assistant at Michigan State University, where she is now the head athletic trainer. I developed a professional relationship with Juie Max, another female athletic trainer at California State University Fullerton. Julie became the head athletic trainer at Fullerton and the first female NATA president in 2000. Carolyn Peters, a long time SDSU assistant left to become the head athletic trainer at San Diego Christian College and is now the athletic director and formerly the NATA District 8 Director from 2014-2018.

Currently, Vanessa Yang is the head athletic trainer at UCSD, Jamie Adams is the head athletic trainer at Cuyamaca College (JC) and Shawna Baker is the head athletic trainer at Point Loma Nazarene. All these women began their athletic training journeys in San Diego. There are also women under the radar that have no idea how much impact they had on me. Gail Weldon (RIP) was a pioneer establishing herself in the Olympic and International experience along with Sandra Schultz, at TRACC Sports Medicine and UCLA. I introduced Bob Moore at the NATA Hall of Fame event in 2003. At our rehearsal I was in awe with Margie Albohm and her orating skills. It motivated me to go back to the hotel and practice articulating my words. I still apply those lessons learned when I present at conferences. I now enjoy watching the professional path that my assistant Justine Coliflores and Jamie Adams have taken. They are the future, and great representatives of the Far West Athletic TrainersAssociation (FWATA).

Theteam physicians I had were all amazing and we shared a mutual respect and support for each other. Dr. Curran was the orthopedic surgeon that helped me early on to establish physicals, coverage and protocols. He was also a Team Physician for the San Diego Clippers and loved basketball. In fact, he loved basketball so much and got so fired up that he got two technical fouls during his tenure. We later added Dr. Heinz Hoenecke to assist. Their support of my department and teams was so appreciated. Some time later, DR. Paul C. Murphy became our Team Physician. He was also one of the team physicians for the San Diego Chargers. As an ex-Navy doctor he was a rock star with trauma and on the field emergency care. His endless energy has supported USD Athletics.

Athletic training has evolved over the decades and staying current is integral as research and technology improved. Along with the daily responsibilities of being an athletic trainer I took every opportunity to keep learning. I always felt that you stay sharp and learn the most by teaching. I taught different years at SDSU when they needed help. In 1981-82 I taught Cause and Prevention of Sports Injuries in the fall and Evaluation and Treatment of Sports Injuries in the spring. In spring of 1985 I again taught Evaluation and Treatment. I loved the opportunity, and especially the review.

In August of 1993 Bob Moore asked if I would teach again so he could go on sabbatical to finish a book. The appointment would be Modalities in the fall and Evaluation in the spring. I couldn’t say no even though modalities was definitely not my strength. I hung my hat on manual therapy. I thought he would give me his lectures and I could update and adapt. Well, his idea of help was bringing me a huge box of textbooks and research articles to refer to for my lectures. I almost cried, once again this was pre-internet days. There was no information highway. I took on the challenge and some nights I was up to 3:00 AM preparing for lectures. I am sure I learned as much or more than the class did. It was all worth it when the semester ended and I got my reviews. The comments made me smile: “good job for a last-minute panic professor” and “perhaps Carolyn should try decaf”. We also had a physical education minor for a few years at USD and I taught a basic athletic training class. That was easy.

I have presented at the local, state and national level on various topics but mostly my wheelhouse is proprioception neuro facilitation (PNF). Each presentation was a valuable learning experience for me, and hopefully to those I presented to.

Although the world has changed drastically for female athletic trainers the challenges sometimes seem to have never left. Over the years I went from setting people straight on what I did to just accepting their ignorance. Late in my career, Joe Parry and I would travel football with one student. Joe is a big guy, a Nevada State heavy weight champion wrestler. I got used to people assuming he as the head athletic trainer. He was great, and always corrected them, but I really didn’t care. As a team I called us the “brains and the brawn” but there were instances that I believe in my heart that I was looked at and treated differently because of my gender. I’m not afraid to say that it hurts when you try your hardest to stand side by side with anyone in the profession but you are typed out because of what you look like.

As much as hate to admit this there are times that we don’t help each other as a profession. I heard a male head athletic trainer say his job was harder and more important because the pressures were different. I mentioned the comment to long to James Collins, the long time head athletic trainer with the San Diego chargers. He responded that we are all the same. We are all athletic trainers and we all have our unique challenges. He felt it didn’t matter if you were Pro, college, high school or other. Our jobs are hard and we are all important. I always appreciated that about James.

At a NATA Annual Symposium I took a learning lab taught by a female on PNF. During the lab I showed a different way to apply a technique. After the lab she just stopped in the hallway and gave me the cold stare. There could have been a choice here. We could have collaborated. My experience at USD was from starting with nothing. It was not unusual in the early days to help set up the gym, work an event, and help tear it down. When I worked a bench, home or away it was spotless when I left. Many athletic trainers feel it is beneath them to clean up. Times have changed and now staffs are larger with personnel that can keep their bench in order. On the road if you ask for something like more towels or water you would get a response like “that is not my job”, instead of “let me make that happen for you”. There’s something special about those old days when there was more professional courtesy.

In retrospect, being at USD lent itself to a lot of fun. It was a practice site for the San Diego Clippers. Bill Walton is from San Diego. He played for the Clippers from 1979-1985, and then the Celtics. He would play in the summers at our gym, so I was the one who helped him. He taught me his favorite tape job that Ducky Drake did when Bill was at UCLA. Bill is a character and a free spirit. I so enjoyed our great conversations and somehow the Grateful Dead always came up. We remained in contact, since he was frequently at our gym and later he covered our games as a broadcaster.

USD was also a training site for the 1984 Summer Olympics for Men’s Basketball team. Hank Egan had just gotten the job as our Head Coach and was a scout for the team. Bobby Knight, the head coach and Hank were great friends. Hank introduced me to Bobby as the USD athletic trainer. Bobby just stared at me and stated “but you’re a girl”. I reassured him that I was. My son David played football for Harbaugh at USD. One day David was in my office and Brandon Johnson, our starting point guard walked in and told him, “she’s my mama now”.

In the over 40 years I’ve been around the toys have changed. I recall traveling with men’s basketball with a boom box blaring as players walked through the airports with them on their shoulders. Thankfully the Walkman was invented, followed by Discman, Mp3 players, iPods, and now the I phone. We went from wired to wireless, from analog to digital.

For better and for worse the beeper and later cell phone became the savior and curse for the athletic trainer. We went from impossible to reach everyone to you are expected to be available 24/7. Coaches could never change a schedule before cell phones, especially football. It was impossible to get a hold of everyone! When I started there were no computers, we didn’t even have a copy machine let alone a computer with email. When we finally became computerized, it was a Univac that fit in a giant room with less speed and memory than is now available on an I phone. Technology has changed the world and sports. We are now connected by social media. You want to find out where someone is, what they are doing or what they think just go to Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, and now TikTok.

In my world the training room was always the resource for everything. If you needed a safety pin, an iron, wrapping paper, a small screw for your glasses, a snack, you name it we probably had it. My favorite request was when April 15th was approaching and an athlete called asking for a tax form.

I even have favorite voicemails over the years: “Hi Carolyn, it’s 10 o’clock on a Sunday night, guess you’re not there.” A comment: “Carolyn, I have never seen you in a bad mood”. The PT: “you are the strongest female pound for pound I have ever worked with”. Jen Petrie our successful volleyball coach said, “you are the best role model for our women. You are in a position of authority, you have a family, you make it work, and you love what you do”.

*Y*ou can’t live in a locker room and training room without picking up a few quality nicknames. Here are a few of mine: ‘The Greer’, ‘Mama’, ‘Mama C’, ‘Mama G’, ‘Mama Torero’, and my favorite ‘Miss Carolyn’. (no, Grand Poohbah is not one).

As for my peers, I’d like to think I was respected. I got a glimpse of that in 2007 from someone that I highly respected. I mentioned him earlier, his name is Steve DeLong from Gonzaga. He wrote a letter in support me as a candidate for the NATA MDAT award. His words touched me: “When I first met Carolyn, I thought wow what a spitfire, this small in stature woman worked like a 200 lb. man. She was focused and full of energy. I knew what kind of job she had, that she worked as the only certified athletic trainer at a small Catholic university, long hours and low pay, little if any resources, what a dynamo!” He ended the letter with “most important, she really, really likes being a Certified Athletic Trainer”. The only thing is I don’t like being an athletic trainer, I love it.

My last FCS playoff game at North Dakota State was also my last football season. They had an amazing indoor facility. The lights were dimmed for the National Anthem. I had tears in my eyes thinking this may be my last football game. I knew I would miss the smell of the freshly cut grass in our stadium for our first football scrimmage the next season. I would miss the team singing the fight song after a win. I would miss it all. USD is an impressive academic institution, where I was fortunate enough to hear Mother Teresa speak in 1988 and the Dalai Lama in 2012.

When I told my direct supervisor of my decision to retire after 40 years, his jaw dropped and he said “but you still have so much energy”. But that is how I wanted to leave, I never wanted to contribute less then I had. My AD said, “but I just hired you the nicest coach in America”. He had just hired Sam Scholl as our men’s basketball coach and he really is the nicest coach in America. I had told him previously that if he hired an asshole I was out of there. Hardest thing I did in my career was to leave the job and University I loved. Now it is still hard to go back and watch games. I cry when I see my athletes. I watch Torero contests on TV or the internet. My house is Torero Blue, my favorite color. I still can’t get myself to wear SDSU Aztecs red. I love it when my coaches, staff and former athletes reach out

I am keeping my brain active. I have guest lectured at SDSU, presented at FWATA, was an injury spotter for the Alliance of American Football (AAF) and will be teaching a class in the fall at SDSU. But one day it will be time to also step away from all of that as well but I don’t want to think abut that now especially after I just took this walk down memory lane.

I was once featured in an airline magazine as a female athletic trainer. The title of the article was “The Rams Should Be So Lucky” , but I am the lucky one to have found a profession, career, and institution that gave me so much.