

# A LABOR OF LOVE

By Frann Bart



Clare White '80, co-author of *The First Forty Years*, says USD foundress Mother Rosalie Hill was a determined tiger.

*Dr. Iris Engstrand and Clare White '80 spent a year talking to USD longtimers and leafing through old newspaper clippings, year-books and university documents. The result? The first comprehensive book on the university's history.*

What started out many months ago as a simple effort to produce a brief chronicle of USD's first four decades culminated late in the summer with the printing of *The First Forty Years*, a 122-page book filled with more than 100 photographs. Along the way the year-long effort produced two new experts on the

university's history — the book's co-authors — history Professor Iris Engstrand and public relations consultant Clare White '80.

Dr. Engstrand and her former student conceived of the idea for the history a couple of years ago, when they realized that no one had ever written a comprehensive book on the university's unique beginning and evolution. They decided to rectify the oversight — but only in an abbreviated fashion.

"We were thinking maybe 50 pages of text and some pictures, a brief overview," White recalls. "We started in August (1988) and expected to be done by Christmas. We had no idea what we were getting into!"

Both credit Sr. Sally Furay, RSCJ, vice president and provost, with helping to focus their work, and John McNamara, vice president for university relations, for his enthusiasm and support for the project. "She (Sr. Furay) did expand it," White says, "because she saw an opportunity for the university to tell the story about its first 40 years. It all mushroomed from there, but it was worth it, and now the product we have is better."

Dr. Engstrand, who has taught at USD for 21 years, says with a laugh she thought she was through with university histories after co-authoring one on the University of Southern California in the 1960s. During her career she also has written seven books on California and western history in addition to numerous articles about Hispanic California.

For White, head of Clare White Communications, a marketing, writing and public relations firm, and a free-lance writer for *San Diego Magazine*, the history book was a new and valuable experience.

Initially the co-authors divided up the

research and writing, with each writing two chapters until "it was meshed together," as Dr. Engstrand describes it.

The editing was done cooperatively until the pair recognized they were too close to the project. That's when they hired White's colleague, *San Diego Magazine* Associate Editor Ginny Butterfield, to bring the two writing styles together.

According to White, sifting through the university's archives for photos in a dusty, airless room at Copley Library was a tremendous challenge because of the amount of material available. "You're dealing with thousands of unlabeled photos; identifying them had to have taken as much time as writing the book," she says.

But discoveries always seemed to balance the frustrations. "Actually, it was fun looking through all the photos," Dr. Engstrand remembers. "We spent an enormous amount of time there because it was so much fun sitting and exclaiming over them." She says she and White particularly enjoyed photos of the College for Women taken during the 1960s, a period when the students were required to dress formally for dinner.

The co-authors agree that USD's founders were people of courage and wisdom. "What people will read in the book is that USD had a really unusual start under some very adverse conditions," White says.

"What we found was the strength of the women. Mother Rosalie Hill was a demure little lady; you would think she was just a sweet little nun. Well, she was a real determined tiger," White explains. "When Bishop Buddy asked her to help found the college and showed her sites to build on she kept declining until they found the mesa."

Another historical gem the writers unearthed from the archives was insight into the tough work involved in landscaping the university's dry, dusty site.

Jail inmates were recruited to do the landscaping for the college's first buildings. They were closely supervised, but that's how much of the work was completed. The nuns couldn't do it all themselves.

Therese (Truitt) Whitcomb '53 told the co-authors that if a student wanted to talk to any of her professors she could find them outdoors, where they were planting flowers and watering the grass. A lot of students, according to Whitcomb, brought flowers from home to help the sisters

plant the gardens because the mesa was so barren.

Dr. Engstrand and White also learned that while the men's and women's colleges were operated separately until the 1970s, the nuns operated the College for Women in the black consistently, while the College for Men was in debt constantly. "And just about every nun who taught at the College for Women at the beginning had a Ph. D. from Stanford," White points out.

Research into student life on campus prior to the 1972 merger of the two colleges was a source of constant amusement for the authors, who found that even though the two colleges were completely separate, the young men and women kept finding ways to get together on social occasions.

Laughs Dr. Engstrand: "There's always a catalyst if you've got men on one side of campus and women on the other. It's human nature!"

Asked if writing the book provided any insights into what is required to build a thriving institution, Dr. Engstrand responds unhesitatingly: "People who work about 18 hours a day and never look at the clock. The salaries here have never been tremendous, but the spirit and dedication has been overwhelming. The students are really cooperative, too. We've never had any riots, and even during the '60s, they were still their same nice souls."

In White's opinion, long-term stable administrative man-

agement has been essential to USD's success, along with a firm commitment to its mission.

"Smaller universities like USD promote good communication between professors and students," she adds, "and the bureaucracy is less intrusive."

Looking back at the entire history project, Dr. Engstrand tries to put it all in perspective. "At first you're real enthusiastic about the undertaking and you're learning a lot. Then you get so frustrated you want to throw the whole thing down because problems become overwhelming. But then you see the blueline (final draft before publication) and you say 'Oh, aren't we glad we did it!'"

*Copies of The First Forty Years may be purchased through the order form in the Bookstore catalog included in this issue.*

