I had no idea how Mission Valley was named or what it represented until I had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Iris Engstrand, a history professor at the University of San Diego. “Mission Valley”, she informed me, “is so named because the oldest Spanish Mission in all of California is there.” I had no idea.

Dr. Engstrand has been a long standing member of the USD faculty for 42 years. Engstrand is a native of California who grew up in the Newport Beach area of Orange County. She attended USC and received her Bachelor, Masters and Ph.D. degrees in History. In 1972, she was told about a position at the then named College for Men in San Diego. They were looking for women faculty members. Engstrand jumped at the opportunity. San Diego was a beautiful city and the campus was stunning. It was shortly after that the College for Men and the College for Women joined to become The University of San Diego.

As a specialist in the histories of Spain, California and the Spanish Southwest; Engstrand lectures extensively in both English and Spanish. She has lived and traveled throughout Spain and Mexico and has even led excursions for students, parents and alumni throughout Spain. She has also led tours of California's Missions and other Spanish colonial sites. Because of her expertise, Engstrand plays an integral part in keeping the look of USD true to its inspiration, la Universidad de Alcalá en Henares. This university, located outside Madrid, is housed in 16th and 17th century structures. When a new structure is planned on campus, Engstrand is consulted so the Spanish Colonial vision for USD is maintained. Because of her contributions, Juan Carlos, King of Spain, awarded Engstrand the prestigious medal of the Order of Isabella la Católica for outstanding contributions to the history of Spain in Americas. She serves as the co-editor of the Journal of San Diego History and has even shared her knowledge on the History Channel.

When asked what makes USD so special, Engstrand pointed to the strength of the faculty and their relationship with the students. She added, “the ethical and value based education and the ability of the professors to truly be one on one with the students is invaluable.”

The University of San Diego played such a huge part in her life that her daughter, Kristin Moran, is not only a USD graduate but is also currently serving as Chair of the Communications Department. Engstrand is not surprised that her daughter followed in her footsteps at USD considering the fact that it is where she spent a great deal of her childhood.

Engstrand sees only a bright future for USD especially with its new designation as a Changemaker Institution.