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Interviews of the Margaret MacVicar Memorial AMITA Oral History Project

Suzanne Weinberg – Class of 1972

(interviewed by Jean Choi)

May 21, 2013

SUZANNE WEINBERG
Class of 1972
Interviewed by Jean Choi
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Paris, France

CHOI: I'm here with Suzanne Weinberg. What class of MIT are you?

WEINBERG: I got an MArch, a Master's in Architecture in 1972.

CHOI: If you could start with your childhood: where were you born?

WEINBERG: I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1945. My parents were German-Jewish refugees who came to Pittsburgh. My father had been practicing dentistry in Dortmund for 15 years and had to return to dental school for two years to get his accreditation from the State of Pennsylvania. The University of Pittsburgh gave him the shortest time possible for him to get his degree. He had enough money to study for two years and Pitt guaranteed him a degree in that time.

CHOI: How about your mother? What was she doing?

WEINBERG: My mother went to law school and, in 1933 under the Nuremberg laws, all Jews were thrown out. She was never able to go back to school. She learned to become a seamstress, and she came to France for a year to be a companion to an older woman. Back in Germany with her parents, she met my father in 1937. She convinced him to apply to dental school in the US and not go to England, which was his plan. They married and left in 1938.

CHOI: They left together?

WEINBERG: Yes, they left together in 1938, which was quite late.

CHOI: Did they know anybody in the States?

WEINBERG: Well, they knew some people. They got an affidavit from

somebody in the family who gave affidavits out to everybody. It was extraordinarily generous. It was a big commitment to give an affidavit because it is a financial guarantee. Then they went to study in Pittsburgh, which people say is a great livable city. It was a good place to grow up, but a little provincial.

CHOI: So you grew up in Pittsburgh.

WEINBERG: I grew up in Pittsburgh together with my older brother who is a professor in MIT, in the biology department.

CHOI: His name is Robert Weinberg? Were you guys close growing up?

WEINBERG: Yes. Well we have a very close family in general. We have a happy family where people have very good relationships.

CHOI: That's great!

WEINBERG: We are very close, in spite of the diaspora. The family is now in the US, Canada and Holland. My mother was an only child, but my father was one of five, from a close, solid family.

CHOI: Where were his siblings?

WEINBERG: His older sister was in Canada. It's actually her husband's family who gave my parents their affidavit. They saved many people.

CHOI: Wow.

WEINBERG: There was a sister and brother in the New York area in Newark. My father was in Pittsburgh and then his youngest brother stayed in Holland. He married an Aryan. He was able to survive in Holland during the war.

CHOI: Marrying an Aryan woman.

WEINBERG: Yes, he married a German woman, and so I have three cousins in Holland. They never left Holland.

CHOI: Oh my goodness.

WEINBERG: Yes, they survived, with the greatest difficulty.

CHOI: That is pretty remarkable. Do you talk to him about that experience?

WEINBERG: I spoke to all of them. He's not with us anymore, and the last member of that generation just died two weeks ago. My aunt was 99 years old.

CHOI: Wow, she lived a long life! When you were growing up in Pittsburgh, at a young age did you like specific activities? Did you like school?

WEINBERG: Yes, I think I was always attracted to the arts.

CHOI: I can tell by looking at your house.

WEINBERG: (Laughs) I have always been interested in visuals, in design, in shape, form, and color. In school, I was behind my brother who was obviously the high performer in school. People said things to me as I was growing up; like the math teacher, Ms. Maloney said to me, "Oh, you're Bobby Weinberg's little sister. Well, if you're just half as good as he is, it's okay with me!" He was a hard act to follow.

CHOI: Did your parents have that attitude as well?

WEINBERG: My father did, but born in 1899, he was very German, very Prussian. He was a very nice man, but my mother was my great defender. My father was really of the school of the three "K's," the famous German, "Kinder, Kirche, Küche:" Children, Church, and Kitchen. That was his generation. I don't think it would be like that today. My mother wasn't like that. She was a modern woman, very liberated.

CHOI: She had gone to law school as well.

WEINBERG: Yes, she had a very good education and after the Nazis forbade Jews from getting an education, she continued to educate herself. She was very smart, both of my parents

were very smart. My mother, to her dismay, unfortunately never had the time to return to school. Money was short, and my father went to school, and, by the time they got their footing, she had had us in 1942 and 1945. She had a lot of interests, and she was an absolutely wonderful person. They both were. She tried to make the best of Pittsburgh, constantly looking for sidewalk cafes, interesting restaurants with views and cultural activities.

CHOI: She had worked as a seamstress and other things too?

WEINBERG: She did that because she wasn't allowed to do anything else. That served her well when she came to the States because she went to work in a department store where she made 22 dollars a week, and that was enough to buy a bag of groceries to feed them. She volunteered in a library and taught French.

CHOI: Did she ever express that she missed law?

WEINBERG: Oh yes. She was frustrated that she hadn't been able to finish school. She received money from the German government early in the 1950s. I believe she got \$5000, a reparation for her interrupted education. How could the Germans pay for everything they did? An interrupted education was nothing compared to the rest of the nightmare. At least the Germans tried to repay for their misdeeds, no other country did. \$5000 in 1950 was a lot of money, but no amount can replace an education. She was interested in so many things. Had she become a lawyer in Germany, she would have had to return to school. Lawyers had the most trouble adjusting to life in the United States because they had to go to school from the beginning.

CHOI: When you were growing up you had this visual sense, and you liked art—which kind of corresponds with your mom's cultured mindset, right?

WEINBERG: I think so, but I also think it's an attraction that one has, it is innate. I was always conscious of structure and décor, and living in Pittsburgh I always adored the steel mills. They were such powerful buildings. I photographed many of the mills along the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers.

Unfortunately, they tore so many of those down. That was considered progress! I actually did my thesis on the re-use of urban industrial structures. The steel industry declined after the war, but my favorite buildings remained the very strong, industrial buildings with the chimneys and pipes flying all over the place.

CHOI: That's interesting. In school did you work really hard in your art classes or your science classes? Do you remember what kind of student you were?

WEINBERG: I think I was an average student, not a great student. Only recently, did I realize that I have been hard of hearing since I was a child. I was only good at classes where I was sitting in the front row. Isn't that ridiculous? But when your name is "Weinberg" you are always in the last row. So I would have a lot of trouble concentrating in class because I missed words, and I still do. I can't tolerate going to visits with guides because I can't understand anything they are saying. As a result, I think I've learned to be more dependent on my own senses and my own eyes and my own capacity to observe so that I didn't have to worry about what other people are saying. This is not very good when you're growing up because other people have important things to say.

WEINBERG: Right. I had a kind of allergy to math and science. I'm not interested in math, if you call it math. I think because my brother was such a performer, I think I just ran the other direction. An amusing example, is that when I took an acoustics course at MIT, I absolutely adored it and then somebody said, "But acoustics is physics, I thought you hate physics!" I said, "I do hate physics, but I love acoustics!" (Laughs) So you put things in the right package for me, and it's okay.

CHOI: Then you get sold.

WEINBERG: I also have a good sense of numbers, but if you call something math, I turn off. I have a very strange memory for numbers. My brother calls me an "*idio-savant*." There's no reason to have a number memory.

CHOI: Your mom was your defender, right? Even though your father was very traditional, he married a very modern woman.

WEINBERG: Yes, much younger, 13 years younger than he was.

CHOI: Did he support your going to school?

WEINBERG: Initially he objected, but eventually he followed my mother. We both managed to twist his arm in those endeavors.

CHOI: What did he say when it came to education initially?

WEINBERG: My mother decided to send me to a private school. She was very much the driver behind all of my educational. My father went along. He was the first person in his family to go to Gymnasium in Germany. All of the rest of his family, unfortunately, Jews in the countryside in Germany had very limited choices in terms of profession. He was the first one to get a classical education in Greek and Latin. He actually wanted to go to medical school, but his father died in 1916, kicked by a horse, and he cut short his medical studies by going to dentistry.

CHOI: Oh my gosh!

WEINBERG: My father was very interested in medicine and came home every night, at dinner and talked about his patients' diseases. He loved to talk about their diseases. That was often our dinnertime conversation!

CHOI: That was his passion. Do you think he was upset?

WEINBERG: Yes, completely frustrated, and he told my brother never to become a dentist, that it was a bore. He was frustrated, but he did what he had to do, and he kept on working. He didn't like dentistry either because as soon as people got into his chair they started talking about their lives as if he was their shrink. He always said, "I have to stick the saliva ejector in their mouths to keep them quiet!" (Laughs) Anyhow, my father was highly educated, as was my mother. My mother had an experience in 1942, in

Pittsburgh, walking in front of the local ice cream parlor, she heard a conversation between a couple of girls comparing the prices of their cashmere sweaters. This is a time in 1942 when people were being murdered in concentration camps. People knew what was happening and having these spoiled , superficial girls comparing prices of cashmere sweaters, my mother said to herself, "If I ever have a daughter, she will never go to this school and talk to other girls about the price of a cashmere sweater." So that was a how she decided to send me to a good Episcopalian day school called, the Ellis School. My brother went to the same elementary school, Linden School in Pittsburgh. It was an outstanding grade school, with a very strict principal. My parents bought a house in the neighborhood to be near Linden School, the way people in Brookline do today.

CHOI: That's what my parents did.

WEINBERG: Exactly, where did you grow up?

CHOI: In Brookline.

WEINBERG: Why do people live in Brookline? Because of the famous schools. Did you go to Brookline High?

CHOI: No, I went to private school for high school, the Winsor School.

WEINBERG: I was an average student, nothing great, nothing bad. My mother wanted to get me out of that materialistic and superficial environment. So she sent me to Ellis. It was a big cultural change for me and I had to adapt, but I did.

CHOI: Did you feel any prejudice towards you?

WEINBERG: No. Before that I didn't really know what it meant to be Jewish because everybody around me was Jewish. In Squirrel Hill everybody was Jewish! I got a very good education there, and I went to Boston University.

CHOI: Was this an all-girls school?

WEINBERG: Yes.

CHOI: Do you remember the application process for college? Everyone went to college—that was the feel?

WEINBERG: Everybody went to college. They tried to push us towards all-girls schools.

CHOI: Like Wellesley and Smith.

WEINBERG: Yes, the seven sister schools. I had been up to Boston, visiting my brother, and I thought Boston was really nifty! It seemed like a really big city. There were subways! There were all the universities, and Harvard and MIT.

CHOI: So you visited your brother on the MIT campus. What did you think of the look of it?

WEINBERG: At MIT, I just remember Senior House where he lived and how bad it smelled because the students kept cheese and milk under their couches. He had a couch in his room and they kept food under the couch!

CHOI: Why?

WEINBERG: I don't know! Maybe people didn't have refrigerators in those days. He graduated in 1964. It's a really long time ago.

CHOI: So they kept food and cheese under their couch!

WEINBERG: Senior House had a very specific smell. But Senior House was a really nice building, which I did notice. I did get a feeling for buildings because it was designed by Welles Bosworth.

CHOI: I'm not sure who Welles Bosworth is.

WEINBERG: He's the architect, MIT graduate, who designed MIT.

CHOI: Oh, I didn't even know that. Shame on me!

WEINBERG: And he studied in Paris.

CHOI: Really?

WEINBERG: He was an American who came to France to study at the Beaux Arts. He designed that whole main group, the Great Dome. I remember that I liked the way the buildings felt, and I had that feeling when I came to Paris, to the American Center in Paris where I was looking for work in the late 70s... (Now demolished, was on Boulevard Raspail.)

CHOI: That's where's I'm staying.

WEINBERG: It was replaced by the Fondation Cartier, which is a Nouvel building. I walked into the old building, and I said to myself, oh my god this place smells like MIT. MIT does have a smell, just like the Parisian Metro has a smell. When I went to speak with the director, I said, "You know, this is a silly thing to say, but this building smells like MIT." He said, "Well, it's not surprising, it was designed by Welles Bosworth." It's amazing that it's on another continent, and it was another function, but there was a feeling of MIT. I somehow smelled or felt the spirit of that architect.

CHOI: That's cool! Backtracking a little, before you applied to college and before you visited your brother, were you taking mostly art courses and literature?

WEINBERG: No, general American high school classes.

CHOI: Biology?

WEINBERG: Yes, biology. Language in high school. I was very good at languages.

CHOI: What languages did you learn?

WEINBERG: Well I studied French for four years. I studied Latin for two years and was normally was going to go on with Latin but the school decided to offer German. I wanted to increase my grade point average, knowing that I would get all A's in German, and of course I did. I got A's in French. I was better in French than German, oddly enough. My mother

spoke French because she was born in Strasbourg. She gave private French classes. When my parents wanted to keep secrets from us, they spoke French, so of course, I had to understand everything they said! I spoke German better than the teacher who was Hungarian. It was very useful to me, I learned grammar and after the two years of Latin, I really saw the usefulness of declensions. It really opened a floodgate for me, not even a door. Suddenly I was able to speak. My parents and grandparents spoke German at home, my grandparents most often addressed me in German, but I answered in English, like all immigrant children. Now I suddenly felt like I had an angle. Art, I was very interested in it. I took drawing classes at Carnegie Mellon. My mother took me to the biennial INTERNATIONAL at Carnegie Institute, an entry point in the 50s for abstract expressionists. She had a friend with a great collection of wooden Renaissance sculpture from the North. Also, the mother of one of my school friends was a collector. At lunchtime we would go to her house and I would see huge abstract expressionist paintings. She had great art, in a house where she lived. I had never seen major modern art in a living space. This was in 1959.

CHOI: You were great at language, and then the application process started. Your school was trying to chart you into the all-girls schools, but you had visited your brother...

WEINBERG: In Boston I saw the city lights. So I applied to BU, and I didn't want to go to a girls' school. I had had enough after four years.

CHOI: I understand.

WEINBERG: (Laughs) You went to Winsor. So I applied to Penn, and I only got onto the waiting list. I didn't really care where I went, I just wanted to be in Boston. So I went to BU!

CHOI: What did your family think? Your parents?

WEINBERG: They were happy. They didn't know much about the system. They knew about Harvard and MIT. BU was my fallback school, but I got a very good education. I think I learned more at BU than at MIT! I was in a two-

year program called, DGE, Division of General Education. My daughter was in the same department, under a new name. It's a really good program. I learned many things that opened horizons for me. I had two more years and got my degree in the Art History department.

CHOI: How did you find out about BU?

WEINBERG: I don't know (laughs).

CHOI: It just kind of happened?

WEINBERG: I really don't remember. Did they help us? I don't actually really remember the process.

CHOI: Did they have dorms for the women at that time?

WEINBERG: At BU? Yes, I stayed in the dorm for two years. I had the most beautiful view on the Charles. It was just fantastic to have the flickering light, but living in those dormitories was a nightmare. I moved out in 1965 and took over my brother's apartment in Cambridge. I really loved being in being in Cambridgeport, which allowed me to bike back and forth to BU.

CHOI: You loved your school and your experience there?

WEINBERG: Yes, but I don't have the same feeling for BU as I do for MIT. I have a very positive feeling for MIT. I think school is about other people. I got a great education at BU. I think an education is one thing, but the links you have, the future links you have with the school depend on the people. I really have lots of friends from MIT. I married a man I met at MIT too, but I don't have the same feeling for BU, and I think it all comes down to the physical plant of the place. There is no campus. There is a trolley in the middle of the campus. There is traffic, a highway on the right and on the left. There is no peace and quiet. It is a place you go to and leave. It's been shown that physical proximity and contact with others is very enriching. The MIT campus is a place where you bump into people in the main corridor and in the elevator. I met my husband in the elevator in building 7. This is not a joke that all of this exchange is terribly

important. I have very serious questions about, open courseware, I think the contact you have with other people is very fundamental. I maintain my MIT contacts and have been active in the MIT Club de France for 30 years. Every time I go to an event, you meet such great people and, particularly, young people. It is exciting. MIT grads are very smart and dynamic.

CHOI: You had to pick what you wanted to do. You graduated from BU, and then...

WEINBERG: In 1967. In 1965 I went to Europe for the first time, and I represented my family at my cousin's wedding in Holland. I went with a program from BU to study Tuscan, Romanesque architecture. That was really interesting for my first trip to Europe. It was very exciting, and I picked up some Italian. I have an ear for languages, spoke a little French, and when I returned, I was very motivated to learn Italian, which I did at BU for the last two years. The following summer I went to Middlebury College to learn, to perfect my Italian. I continue to speak Italian, I haven't forgotten it.

CHOI: You are a language woman!

WEINBERG: I had a client here in my building. I did a bunch of apartments for her here. She insisted on speaking Italian. She was also very lazy, I think. She didn't want to speak French. That was very good for me to have to express myself professionally in Italian. I can rattle off in Italian now without too much problem, just the way I rattle off in German. It just sort of comes back to the surface. It's funny.

CHOI: How did you pick Middlebury College?

WEINBERG: There was a language program there in the summer, and it was very famous. I got a scholarship to go there so I just went. It was a nice place. It's hot in Boston, so you're happy to get out town to Middlebury, Vermont. All the cute guys were studying Chinese and Russian. You weren't supposed to be speaking with them, but we snuck into town. Middlebury is really strict. You're only supposed to

speak “your” language.

CHOI: You could get into trouble?

WEINBERG: Yes, there was a contract you signed saying you swore you would speak Italian unfailingly for six weeks. I think that’s the way my mother must have trained me, but I was never allowed to be idle. One summer during high school my brother and I went together in Pittsburgh to learn type at Schenley High School, a technical high school. It took six weeks! You know what a typewriter is (laughs)? With no letters on the keys. There was a room that was 100 feet long with hundreds of typewriters.

CHOI: With people learning how to type.

WEINBERG: I think that was very important because Americans do know how to type, certainly my generation learned. It was an incredible plus.

CHOI: How did they teach you to type without the letters?

WEINBERG: You just have to remember; it’s in your brain. I forced my daughter to do the same. Nobody in France learns how to type. It’s considered a lower form of life.

CHOI: Really?

WEINBERG: I sent her to a secretarial school for a two week vacation. Everybody is on vacation here all the time. There was a fall vacation, and so I sent her to a secretarial school for two weeks.

CHOI: What did she think?

WEINBERG: She was happy to do it, but the school tried to say, “Oh Miss, I think there’s been some mistake. You go to the École Bilingue, you shouldn’t be here, you’re much too educated.” I tried to get a typing course at Anna’s school. They snubbed me, and they said, “Oh no, people should go off and learn things on their own.”

CHOI: I agree. Because someone taught me the difference

between école versus a university, etc. So your daughter went to an école?

WEINBERG: No, she went to high school in Paris. She went to a bilingual school. It's almost like a public school, but it was good because she met other people who were like her. It's good she went to that school, it's a very good school.

CHOI: Did you apply MIT right after you graduated?

WEINBERG: No, I went to MIT in a very round-about way. My parents, when I graduated from college, said, "Well, what do you want to do now?" Because in those days you just had to go straight to graduate school. There was a lot of pressure. I had studied art history, and I had investigated museum work, which is what my daughter actually does, at the Boston MFA. I spoke to the director of the Pittsburgh Museum, the Carnegie Institute, and he said, "Oh this is no job for a woman." It was very sexist. You would never dare say that today. It was very difficult to get a good job. When I was at BU there was a career development course in which you had to study various paths for yourself. It was my sophomore year I believe. It was a psychology course, I think. So I interviewed people, and I did some research. The director of the museum basically said forget it, it's hopeless, but I still studied architecture and art history. It was architecture that particularly interested me. My parents would say, "Well, what do you want to do, what do you want to do? In art history, what can you do? You are either an academic in art history or you write books. My father had an idea about going to library science school. He had come up with this idea from a patient who was the head of the University of Pittsburgh Library School. He said, "This is a good profession for a woman. You could work and get married and have kids." He still had a Prussian mentality. My mother said, "Ho hum ho hum, why no?" She went along. I said, "This sounds silly, I don't want to be a librarian!" That's why I could never do research. I can sit in front of the computer and do research but not in a library. Some people love libraries. Finally, I realized that I didn't really have any ideas and I was afraid to apply to Architecture school since I didn't know how to go about it. I didn't feel ready. I didn't know how to make a portfolio. So

I was railroaded into applying to library school.

CHOI: You did?

WEINBERG: I just couldn't listen to it anymore. I said, "Okay. I hope I don't get in anywhere." Unfortunately I got in everywhere except University of Pittsburgh where I had an interview, where they told me I had a bad attitude. So I got into Columbia, Chicago, and all these places I had applied. They sounded pretty good. My mother said, "Oh, I don't want you to go to Columbia. It's in a bad neighborhood. I don't want you to go to Chicago." They had had a friend who got gunned down in gang crossfire when they still had been living in Germany. So these things keep pouring in. I didn't want to go. The last one to come in was Berkeley. Not bad, I thought, California. So I accepted Berkeley, and I called up my parents and said, "Guess what, I'm going to Berkeley!" They said, "No, no, no, it's too far away. It's in California!" I said, "Too bad, I'm going." So I went, and it was a beautiful campus, but library science was boring. Library science now is all information science, but then, no.

CHOI: What was it?

WEINBERG: It was just cataloging and reference. I realized rather quickly that if you wanted to go anywhere in the library world you needed a PhD in another subject, i.e., if I wanted to go work in the Morgan Library I had to get a PhD in Art History. And I said, "Well if I had a PhD in Art History, why would I be a librarian? I audited courses at the Architecture School in the Environmental Design School. I thought, this is great, I like this. I really didn't like California. I felt uncomfortable. California is not my place. I felt very far from Europe, I didn't feel like I belonged there. I felt like an alien, but it was a great place! I'm a swimmer and there were 7 beautiful swimming pools. Julia Morgan, the architect, built gorgeous marble pools on the campus for William Randolph Hearst. Absolutely fantastic. I swam in all those pools. I swam my laps every single day, and I got very good grades. The director called me and she said the same thing as that woman from Pittsburgh, she said, "You know, I can't throw you out, but you have a very bad

attitude." I said, "I do have a very bad attitude. I hate it here! But...I'm coming back, just to be mean (laughs)." But finally when I went home at the end of the semester after Christmas vacation I decided to leave because I just decided this was ridiculous. So I went back to Boston. I tried to find work, but it was very difficult.

CHOI: Doing what?

WEINBERG: In architecture. I wanted to find a job in an architect's office, but I was having a lot of trouble because no one wants to take a totally inexperienced BU graduate. Then somebody said, "Go to the BAC, the Boston Architectural Center. It's an architectural night school." So I said, "Okay, okay." I signed up there. That was easy, and I had two really good teachers. I did pretty well there. A man from the BRA, I don't know if that exists anymore, the Boston Redevelopment Authority, a man named Tony Casendino, who was very smart, and an MIT architecture student from Rome, an Italian called Pietro Ferri, who said, "You shouldn't be here, you should be going to MIT. This isn't a place for you. You should be going to MIT" I said, "MIT? Architecture?" I didn't even know MIT had an architectural school. I said, "What? I can't go to MIT. My brother goes there." So one of the guys took me over to the studios which were really wild in those days in 1967, 1968. I can tell you about those crazy places, mezzanines all over the place. The minute I walked in there, talk about the smell, I got good vibes. I loved it. I said, "How am I going to do this?" This was in April or May. I said, "I can't apply to architecture school in May. What am I going to do?" He looked into it and said, "There's a way of doing it. You have to go to MIT as a special student, and then you will apply in the fall." I said, "Oh, okay." I told my parents about it. My father was not happy at all. He said, "Architecture?" He said it with his accent. "That's not a profession for a woman!" Actually in retrospect, he was quite correct. It's a profession for no one. It's an absolutely horrible profession. You don't ever make any money. Anyway, that is what I did. Then I got a job at MIT. I was at the BAC then I got a job at the MIT Planning Office. I worked at the MIT Planning Office for over year while I was in my first year as a special student, but I was taking the full course load of

four courses, which was kind of crazy.

CHOI: Did you have no free time?

WEINBERG: No free time, and it was kind of unfair to my employer (laughs). I would always be doing my homework. So I learned a lot there because I did some office renovations, and there was a very nice woman architect, an Indian woman. Lalita Das. I remember her very well. She was a bit of a mentor for me. I was going to school and working at the same time. That was not a good idea, but it was also a bit spontaneous.

CHOI: It just kind of happened.

WEINBERG: Well it didn't just happen. I followed advice. The Italian student told me to do these steps. You have people in your life—it's like getting onto a horse—they hold the stirrup for you to get to a higher level. They said, "Do this," and I said, "Okay I'll go across the river and see what MIT is about." I liked it and then I got the job at MIT. So the whole thing worked out well, but it was pretty frantic the first year. Then I left the job because it was too much for me.

CHOI: What was the department like? Was it big?

WEINBERG: No, it was a very small. One of the funny things was that I remember the boys said to us—there were six girls. 35 people in the class and there were six women. The boys said, "Well the only reason there are six women this year is because of the Vietnam War. Every previous year, there was only one woman in every architecture class. But, all six women got their degrees, and 22 people graduated. So a lot of men dropped out. 13 men dropped out, something like that. I think those figures are about correct.

CHOI: Was it a crazy time on campus?

WEINBERG: Yes. It was crazy, strikes, Vietnam War, bra burning and all that.

CHOI: Were you a part of that?

WEINBERG: No, I'm not a very political person. I'm a dyed in the blood feminist but that's because my mother brought me up that way. But I'm a quiet feminist. I face feminism on an individual basis. As an architect, when people irritate me I just send them packing, right on the spot. I'm really mean to people when they're sexist. I just send it right back, but it feels good.

CHOI: I'm sure (laughs).

WEINBERG: It's works. I've done well that way.

CHOI: When you were taking the classes you dropped your job because it was too much.

WEINBERG: Well I finished the year and then stopped working

CHOI: Where were you living? With your brother?

WEINBERG: No, I had an apartment in Central Square on Austin Street/Bishop Allen Drive, near the, on the side of the City Hall and near the Post Office. It was a huge apartment which I inherited from my brother's thesis advisor at MIT. It was a great apartment, and all of the doors missed the bottom corner because their pet rabbit had eaten all the doors (laughs).

CHOI: That's a cute detail (laughs). You were living there, and you would walk or bike to school?

WEINBERG: Central Square is convenient. You can go one station or you walked to MIT. Back to MIT! I went for four years, Then in my last year—I'm sort of a born organizer,-kind of impresario. Don Lyndon, the head of the department asked me to run a events program. It was amazing. MIT is a great place! He gave me a desk and a phone, in his office! There was a kind of big administrative space. He had his private office.

CHOI: Because you were such a good student?

WEINBERG: No, I don't know. I must have done something that made him realize I was a good organizer. I ran a lecture series for

the architecture department. It was very, very successful, but I learned quickly that MIT is a great drawing card. I had no budget, but I got great architects to come to the architecture school. I had a program, and my big job was to get a big roll of white paper and with markers I would make a schedule of all the activities and the lectures we were having. I got some really fantastic people, and I never paid anybody a penny. That was very successful. On that basis I got my job with the vice president of MIT, running the program called the Lobby 7 Committee which I did from 1972 to 1976.

CHOI: What was this committee?

WEINBERG: An exhibition and events program. A committee of two.

WEINBERG: (Laughs) So that was my education at MIT. It was very nice. I had already met François in the elevator. I was in Paris. Oh my last year I also got sent to Paris. It was the year my mother died. That was a terrible year, 1971 to 1972. It was a Grunsfeld Fellowship to go to Paris. I, together with 11 other students, we were all architecture students, went with Stanford Anderson and Don Lyndon, to study the streets of Paris and why the urban form in Paris worked so well as opposed to the American urban form. I went as a photographer. I took a lot of photography and film my last year at MIT with Minor White.

CHOI: That's so cool! So you were taking a lot of photos.

WEINBERG: Yes, across the street in the Dupont gymnasium. I don't know if the program still exists.

CHOI: Your husband went with you as well?

WEINBERG: No, the first time I saw him was in Paris in January 1972. He came to visit one of the men in my group. He told us we were doing everything wrong, that we understood nothing. He was actually a student at MIT, which I didn't know. I thought he was kind of cute, and I thought it was fun that he was telling us we didn't know what we were doing. I thought that was perfect. I ran into him in the building 7

elevator a couple months later in February, March.

CHOI: Then you started dating?

WEINBERG: Yes, that was that. It took us seven years to get married.

CHOI: Well, lobby 7, and then 7 years!

WEINBERG: It was good for TWA. That was an airline in the old days, do you remember it? That was the only one with a direct Boston to Paris flight.

CHOI: Because he was living Paris?

WEINBERG: Oh he went back. He graduated in 1973, and then we commuted back and forth.

CHOI: So you were part of this Lobby 7 group?

WEINBERG: It was an interesting thing. They contacted me, and my mother had died in 1971 in November. My father died eight months later in August. It was crazy. I was a photographer on a dig, in Cyprus, Idalion. MIT offered the job, and I was completely shaken up, alone in the world, didn't know what to do, was about to go look for jobs in architecture, and when they offered me this great job with very little pay and very little budget. It was part of the whole atmosphere of the Jerome Wiesner era. Jerome Wiesner was a science advisor to Kennedy. He was an important scientist and, as president of MIT, very interested in the arts. The arts were very lively at that time. He began the Center for Advanced Visual Studies founded by Gyorgy Kepes, who was member of the Bauhaus. Things were popping in the arts at that point in time. They are again now, I gather. I was called to meet John Wynne, the vice president of MIT and a corporate captain, very elegant man, very nice. I was a schlumpy student, but he gave me the job of animating the Building 7 Lobby, which is 100 feet high and 100 feet wide, because it was empty and lifeless and they decided they needed to do something. Between 1972 and 1976, I ran the program in which I basically tapped talent at MIT. It was at the beginning that I had to think about events to do and ask people to perform, but a short while after I

started, people just started showing up on my door step. I had a fantastic office. 7-122 ? It was gorgeous, with huge windows like an artist's studio, prime real estate! And I ran this program just below. I used clubs, associations, departments, individuals. For example, the MIT Chess Club approached me and we had a human chess game. People being the pieces, the chess pawns. Lots of music. Marcus Thompson who is still there, would play. There was the symphony orchestra at Christmas, choruses, you name it. An undergraduate woman from Texas came to me, whose parents were roller-skating professors. She said, "I'd like to roller-skate in building 7 lobby because it excites me." She came in a pink tutu and little pink tights, and she did classical arabesques and jumps etc., a performance in building 7 lobby.

CHOI: That sounds cooler than when I went to school.

WEINBERG: This was between 1972 and 1976. It was always at lunch hour. People would come in and out and see all of this crazy stuff going on. I did two major exhibits. One called FOOD, one called WEATHER. Weather, the first one together with Otto Piene at the Center of Visual Studies. It was very good, top-level people who have become very famous artists now. It was Otto Piene who was running the center at that point in time who helped me by providing me with artists. We often collaborated, and I got the then brand new media lab to do posters for me. I used a graphic designers, the MIT Design Services—the famous graphic arts department...

CHOI: (Laughs)

WEINBERG: Jackie Casey, Ralph Coburn, who has become quite a well-known artist since.

CHOI: So it was a huge creative time for you.

WEINBERG: Oh, fantastic. Fantastic, all we did was documented. I have pictures I can show you—all kinds of crazy stuff. For the human chess game, I had a photographer (Roger Goldstein MArch) because I realized very quickly that if I didn't photograph these things, they were so intangible,

they would be forgotten. He went up to the oculus of the Dome and he took a fish-eye photograph, and it went all over the wire presses of the world!

CHOI: Wow. So I can look this up.

WEINBERG: Yes, human chess game, MIT. It was very beautiful. Since I had little money for this program I bought pieces of felt, red and yellow, for the two opposing teams. The chess club had approached me because of the checkerboard floors. You've got a place and you've got somebody dynamic like I was, and the chess club approached me and they said, "Hey we noticed there's a checkerboard, we could do a game!" I said, "Great, yes." But this is like the rollerskating girl, like all the things we did. When I would get Marcus Thompson to perform, it was all freebies. I once had an event with a professor of Astrophysics, and I had him do a hot air balloon ascension in front of Kresge Auditorium. This was a little bit outside of the Lobby. Manfred Lichtensteiger. To make the long story short, we did so many things. I irritated a lot of people during WEATHER, because the Provost, Walter Rosenblith was beside himself from the noise. I had a storm going in building 7 lobby. One of the composers, Paul Earls from the Center for the Advanced Visual Studies, had written the music. He wrote storm music, but of course, but everybody in the offices nearby was going crazy.

CHOI: That sounds so fun and dynamic!

WEINBERG: It was a lot of fun, and then it disappeared and that was that. After that in 1976 I was still hedging, am I going to move to France? I worked for a couple years for a firm in Harvard Square called, Arrowstreet. It was an MIT type place. It still exists, and I still have friends there. I did that for a couple of years, and then I got another job at MIT in Architecture Engineering and Construction. I had missed a step that architects need to go through, which is to learn how to do working drawings. You don't do that anymore by the way.

CHOI: You use CAD?

WEINBERG: We learned CAD in our first year in 1968. Nicholas Negroponete came and told us about the modern world. We had to go learn Fortran and everything in the basement of building 26 and so on at 3 o'clock in the morning. That was no fun. So I could never do that kind of thing because the place was ugly. I can't stand being in ugly places. It was a problem... fluorescent light... I can't be in ugly places. I'm touchy. But Building 7 Lobby was a great place. It was a great time. I spent a lot of time on the campus. I had all these different jobs, so I really kind of know my way around there. The last job I had was quite interesting because I came in touch with people I had never met before, the people who were weekly employees and biweekly. It's a whole different world from academia. It's a parallel world in MIT. It felt like civil servants, but it was fun. I renovated a bunch of spaces. I renovated an IM Pei building. I renovated a couple dining rooms in the Faculty Club, so it was fun. It was a good experience. And I learned from a professional draftsman who taught me how to draw. He taught me all the rules you have to abide by when you do drawings because contractors have to be able to read these drawings—how to do plans, sections, elevations, details etc., mechanical drawing. I had never learned how to do them because in school, they thought that you need to go out and learn that somewhere else. There are things you should learn in architecture school! That's one of them. Another thing is office practice, meaning how to make money in a business practice. The other thing is psychology! Bedside manners, how to deal with clients! I was never trained how to behave with people. I'm not sure I could be, but maybe I could try to learn how to behave! I think those are very important subjects to survive as a professional. MIT doesn't like to think of itself as a professional training school. They think they're above that somehow. I don't think that's true. I think architecture is a profession. I don't think it's a crusade or a political mission. I think if you want to build, you have to know the ropes. I've learned the ropes of course. When I moved to France, I was working in an office for about six years. Then I started working on my own which is not very easy. But I'm very relaxed. Jobs have always fallen in my lap, and I've done them. It turns out when you're on your own, projects are limited. You need quite a big team these

days to do a job. It's very multifaceted. So I've done a lot of renovation work, and I think I can do that well. It ends up being interiors, but not décor. It's always structural changes and so on, which is about my size. I'm 68, and I am technically retired. I find working with contractors is an okay thing thanks to the cell phone and to email and texts, because they're really an impossible lot. I know how to master them now: harassment through texts and email. It used to be all phones. You used to have only landlines. It was awful. I have managed now with my iPhone!!

CHOI: You're also a good storyteller. You're a very entertaining storyteller.

WEINBERG: So I just finished a job for a friend of mine, a 1,000 square foot apartment next to Paris. It's always good to do a little work. But I have so many other interests. I take piano lessons every two weeks, and I work really hard playing a lot of Bach. I work in and manage my large garden in the country. I read a lot. Those are my three activities in the country. I go twice a week to gym class and play tennis 3 times a week. We go to museums to see exhibits and we go out in the evenings to concerts and to theaters and so on. My husband François Bursaux (MCP 1973) and I travel together a lot. We have a nice life together. We go to the country every weekend and there are lots of visitors.

Our daughter, Anna, lives in Boston and works for the Museum of Fine Arts. She also studied art history at Boston University. Fortunately, she does not want to become an architect!

Altogether I had a lengthy experience at MIT. I went to school for four years between '68 and '72. I worked for the MIT Planning Office, I worked for a year running the Lecture Series Committee in the architecture department while a student. I worked for four years between 1972 1976 running the Lobby 7 Committee. I then worked for one year in Architecture, Engineering and Construction. To top it all off, I have been working for the MIT Club de France for the past 30 years in Paris.