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Interviews of the Margaret MacVicar Memorial AMITA Oral History Project

Judith Perrolle– Class of 1966

(interviewed by Tatiana Mamaliga)

November 21, 2012

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MAMALIGA: My name is Tatiana Mamaliga and I am a senior at MIT. I am working on the Women's Oral History project, and I am interviewing Ms. Judith Perrolle today. Could you please tell me about your childhood a bit -- where were you born and how was it leading up to MIT in terms of your education?

PERROLLE: Well, I was born in Indianapolis, IN, and am the oldest of six children, Later on I had four stepbrothers as well. I was always just interested in how things worked, and I am told as a child I asked everybody questions constantly about everything. And it did not go away as it usually does in children. I just kept doing it. I was very interested in the Girl Scouts, and got involved with that early on. I did a lot of outdoor camping, making things, fixing things. I got into sea scouts, well mariner scouts they were called, and then at some point somebody told me about MIT as an engineering school, a very good one, better than Purdue even. When people said, "What are you going to do when you grow up?" a question I hated, I said once, "I'm going to MIT," and that

made them shut up, or say, "Girls can't do that." So I started saying that well before I actually meant to do it.

MAMALIGA: That is really interesting. So was it your own initiative, as opposed to your parents'?

PERROLLE: The person who came to interview me for MIT was an educational counselor, and he said, "There're no girls at MIT." And I said, "Well the catalogue says there are," and he said, "Well, okay."

MAMALIGA: Ah, interesting.

PERROLLE: There were very few in those days.

MAMALIGA: Do you remember how many?

PERROLLE: They had a freshman dormitory on 120 Bay State Road, which had beds for seventeen girls. That was their quota, and they took seventeen girls. Now, if anybody was a commuter student, they would take extra. I think we had actually nineteen in our class to start with. But the reason they only had seventeen girls is that that was the only room they had, and that went on until Katharine Dexter McCormick built a women's dormitory, and that was completed my sophomore year.

MAMALIGA: Initially did you live in the dorm?

PERROLLE: In 120 Bay State Road. Then in my sophomore year I lived in the new women's dorm. After that, I lived in apartments because McCormick was too expensive.

MAMALIGA: How was your experience in the dorm?

PERROLLE: The 120 Bay State Road was an interesting dorm. We had a housemother, and we had a senior upper level student, who was sort of a counselor; she was great. But the housemother -- we had a series of very bad ones, the worst one being someone who drank the food money, and so we only had tuna-fish sandwiches to eat for dinner and lunch. It was really quite terrible. We complained, and after, they found somebody else to replace her. It was very cold [walking from the dorm]. We had to walk across the Harvard bridge, and people, taxi drivers, used to stop and give us a free ride across, in the winter time.

MAMALIGA: That is nice.

PERROLLE: And people used to hitchhike across the bridge too, in the winter, when it was very cold and when it was raining.

MAMALIGA: It is really windy now [across the Harvard bridge] too. So, in terms of your social support – where was it coming from?

PERROLLE: All my folks basically thought that you could do what you wanted to do, and also, of the six children, the first four were girls. My father wanted a basketball team, so he made do with the girls' team for quite a long time. In terms of my family, I was my father's oldest son, until I was well formed enough that, when the boys came along, it didn't really make any difference. I was already into making things and doing things.

MAMALIGA: Your family obviously supported you morally throughout MIT.

PERROLLE: But not financially. They did not have much money. They helped out a little bit my freshman year. I had a scholarship and loans for the rest of it.

MAMALIGA: What about women who were living around you? Were you finding yourself friends among the women?

PERROLLE: The first time I had really good women friends were MIT students. You know the phenomenon.

MAMALIGA: Yes.

PERROLLE: In fact, I am still friends with some of them. Eleanor Klepser was the secretary of our class, and she and I were roommates freshman year. We have been friends ever since.

MAMALIGA: Interesting.

PERROLLE: And my roommate my sophomore year was Margaret MacVicar. She died quite young, actually. But she stayed at MIT for her whole career, and she and our friend, Harriet Fell, used to live in an apartment that I used to spend a lot of time at. Harriet is still a friend of mine. She and I both teach at Northeastern University. The women were fairly close, and women tended to know each other in those days of small women's classes. You tended to know people who graduated a few years ahead of you and a few years after.

MAMALIGA: I see. Were they coming back?

PERROLLE: Margaret Cheney left the Cheney room, and it was very, very important as a way to meet people who lived off campus. Some people had

actually moved in for the [winter] since it had beds and the kitchen and saved walking across the bridge.

MAMALIGA: A lot of the people use it now too -- the women.

PERROLLE: It was a place where you got to know people who were ahead of you and behind you, and also almost everyone's commuters. There was only a freshmen women's dorm, and everyone else lived in apartments until the women's dorm was built. And we did not really like the women's dorm all that well, when it was new.

MAMALIGA: Oh, yes?

PERROLLE: It was very paternalistic. They locked the doors at eleven. You had to be in at eleven.

MAMALIGA: Wow!

PERROLLE: They did not do that for the guys, but the women had to be in at eleven. If you came in after eleven you were locked out.

MAMALIGA: That is so harsh!

PERROLLE: Well, I guess I do not need to complain. I think I got locked out once, and I went back and slept on the couch at my friend's house and said, "My mother is going to be very unhappy that you made me spend the night in a boy's apartment because you would not let me into the dorm" (laughter).

MAMALIGA: That's interesting.

PERROLLE: So it was very paternalistic, and the housemother was fairly into having a housemother for girls. It got much better later.

MAMALIGA: But the housemother, was she a staff [member] or a professor?

PERROLLE: No, she was a professional housemother. I think her experience was somewhere like Smith or Wellesley. And also the rooms we were in were badly designed in the first tower. The rooms were around the rim of the building; so everybody had light and windows, with all the bathrooms and things – elevators, in the center. But it meant that people would go to their floor and walk around this empty corridor, because there were very few people living in the dorm the first year it was open. There were several suicides -- suicide attempts. That first year was very lonesome. Actually, that was sophomore year. My roommate, MacVicar, and I did an interesting prank at Thanksgiving that year.

They had built all the furniture so that the closets were built into the wall. They thought it would keep people from reshuffling the furniture in the dorms, but all the drawers were the same size all over the whole building. So we borrowed the keys from the housemother. And we got a random number table, and we reallocated people's dresser drawers, while they were away for their Thanksgiving break. And when people came back, bearing little bags of goodies from home, they found that their dresser drawers were shuffled.

MAMALIGA: That is so funny!

PERROLLE: It took people about an hour to sort it out. They had just put the drawers out along the hall, and then people walked all around and said "Hi" to everybody, and found their drawers and shared their cookies. And we had a really good time.

MAMALIGA: That is a good social event.

PERROLLE: But it was interesting how it was an actual random number table and she distributed my drawers, and I did hers too, so that we could play too.

MAMALIGA: And then you could complain too, and nobody would find out.

PERROLLE: Yes.

MAMALIGA: That is funny! Were the women supporting each other and being friendly?

PERROLLE: Well there was a certain amount of friction. Freshman year the physics final was very hard. And there was someone who came home from the physics final to the freshman dorm and said, "Oh, that was just so easy! I got an A." And the rest of us picked her up, and walked over to Charles, and threw her in. We didn't even say much – we just picked her up, and took her down to the river.

MAMALIGA: She was not very happy, I take it.

PERROLLE: Well, it was a warm day.

MAMALIGA: What was the attitude of the guys around you and the professors?

PERROLLE: Two things -- one is a lot of people were just oblivious. The first week of school, I was walking down the hall of infinite corridor, going to the library, and I came to some doors. And some guy ran around from behind me, and ran in front of me. And I thought, "Oh my goodness,"

and he went right through the doors, and they slammed in my face.

That's what it was like.

MAMALIGA: Wow!

PERROLLE: I went out with someone, who was a junior, one who had been in there for three years and did not know there were any women students. Oddly enough though, they sort of ignored us. You were ignored and tolerated. The boys had a quote, which they said, "Co-eds are better than real girls," which meant that there are stereotypes of women, and Co-eds would just be some exception. And some thing very strange happened, when they first started to take a lot more women in. More sexism and more rude comments and stuff appeared then, when there were women becoming a large enough number to be threatening. A few token women can be better than real girls, but when you start letting real girls in, that was a problem.

MAMALIGA: They were calling the women "Co-eds?"

PERROLLE: They were called "Co-eds." What do they call them now? Their names, I hope.

MAMALIGA: Yes.

PERROLLE: Well I think you have gotten past this era of sexism.

MAMALIGA: There are still women's issues [as related to] the work place and salaries.

PERROLLE: It was very difficult to cut class, because the professor knew who you were. Even in 10-250, the professor knew if the women were cutting class. In 10-250, there would be five or six women in your class at most.

MAMALIGA: What did you study at MIT?

PERROLLE: I started out majoring in physics, like everyone else in my class. They washed us out; 8.01 was pretty hard. I had an A going into it, about until the midterm, and round up with a C. But a lot of people dropped. And then I decided to major in something else. I tried chemistry my freshman year. I had a wonderful internship in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, working on chemical sterilants for cockroaches. I found that I was allergic to acetone and benzene. So it seemed like a chemist is not a good career choice.

MAMALIGA: Smelling?

PERROLLE: No, it is just if contact. And smelling does not do you any good, but that is true in general of everybody. So I wound up wanting to be a computer scientist. But there was not any computer science program in those days. So I took a program called Humanities and Engineering. Nowadays somebody in an MIT office has tried to retroactively change it into a humanities major, but it was not a humanities major. We were Humanities and Engineering. If you wanted to do computer science, you could go and do humanities and engineering or math and engineering, because that was the only way you could get all the electives you needed. I took some linguistics and psychology, learning theory, electrical engineering, and the software courses. I went off into the world and did that for a while. Actually, when I first graduated, I taught high school physics, because I got married, and we moved to Providence, because my husband was in graduate school. I was working, and I got a job at a Quaker Girls' School, teaching elementary school science one day a week, and then high school physics. And I did that, until I had a baby and could not afford to teach anymore. So I worked on 128 and worked in the computer industry for about six or seven years.

MAMALIGA: What does 128 [mean]?

PERROLLE: 128 Route around Boston; it is where the high-tech startups all were, when Boston was Silicon Valley, before the Silicon Valley moved to California. Then, in '69, the company I worked for went bankrupt, and I started a little consulting business of my own, and worked at that for a while. Then we went off to Asia, so my husband could do his dissertation research in Taiwan. I got a job there as a computer engineer in a Chinese computer company. The manager was an MIT fellow student, and I worked for them for a year on networks, multiplexing networks; it was stuff that would turn into the internet. Then I came back and did some projects in New York, and some projects in Connecticut and Rhode Island . I just had a series of contracts. And one day, I went out for lunch and bought an oriental rug that I liked, and had it sent to my house. When I got back home that evening, my husband said, "I thought you said you were going to graduate school. You keep living like this, you'll never go to graduate school." So I decided to go to graduate school. While I was in Asia, all the interesting problems were actually social and cultural, not technical. It got boring to do the same things over and over again for different clients, and so I went in social science.

MAMALIGA: What was the social atmosphere for women in Asia?

PERROLLE: In China, it was being an American woman. There were mostly women programmers and mathematicians. A lot of women computer operators also, but no American women. And being an American woman was really bizarre, because I did not really fit in. But I did have some wonderful times.

MAMALIGA: Did you know Chinese at all?

PERROLLE: At the time no, I did not. In graduate school, I studied Chinese. So later, I went back and lived in Beijing for a little while. I can actually speak a little Chinese. Well, I can say, "Madam if your cabbages were made of gold, they would still be overpriced" (laughter).

MAMALIGA: That is interesting. Why that phrase?

PERROLLE: Because I was shopping for cabbages, and that came to me. It was the most elaborate thing I ever managed to say in Chinese. And when I lecture, I have to lecture in English, because you really have to lecture in the language you learn the material. I think [you have to be] really good at a language [otherwise].

MAMALIGA: You said you went back to grad school. What grad school did you go to?

PERROLLE: Well I had a Danforth Fellowship. So I could go pretty much anywhere I wanted. We were living in Providence. So I looked at Harvard, and I looked at Yale, and I looked at Brown. Frankly, Harvard and Yale looked snobbier. And I thought Brown looked nice, and it was only eight blocks from my house. It was very convenient, so I went to Brown. I did my dissertation on what is now called, "Globalization Theory," and a Master's thesis on deforestation, and a Doctoral dissertation on the social effects of the Green Revolution. I got very interested in social consequences of technology -- got away from computers. I taught at the University of Missouri, in the Agriculture school, for a while. That was sexism. I think in all of the whole Agriculture school there were eleven women faculty -- ten of them were in home economics. I was the other one. It was quite horrible.

MAMALIGA: You moved to Missouri at some point?

PERROLLE: Yes.

MAMALIGA: Right after graduate school?

PERROLLE: Right. That was my first job, right out of graduate school but still finishing up my dissertation. I had some part time jobs -- I have taught

at the University of Rhode Island, a men's maximum security prison, and some other local. I worked at Missouri for two years before, and got the PhD done at the end of the first one.

MAMALIGA: Why did you decide to move from Providence?

PERROLLE: Because there was a job in the Agriculture school, and I had just about finished a dissertation on Export Agriculture and the Green Revolution. So it seemed quite reasonable to do that. My husband and I were getting divorced. He was taking a job at NSF, moving to Washington. I moved to Missouri. Then when I finished my PhD, I went back into the job market again and got a job at Northeastern University. So I came back here. There was not a lot of interest in agriculture. So I taught some courses on the environment, but there wasn't much interest in the environment in those years either. I wound up doing a course on social issues in computing. When Northeastern started their computer science college, I started an undergraduate course, and I have been teaching that for the last thirty years. In fact, next semester is the last. I am retiring. Thought after I retire, I am going to teach part-time for two years. So this course has been going thirty years. Content changes a lot. But it is basically everything you need to know about computers, and the computer science profession that they don't teach you in school. It is fun.

MAMALIGA: How do you like teaching?

PERROLLE: I really like teaching. I have always liked teaching. I have resisted it for a while, because my parents were both teachers, and one of my sisters is a teacher; one brother is a teacher; my daughter is a teacher.

MAMALIGA: In the genes.

PERROLLE: It is not really genetic. I enjoy teaching a lot. I do not particularly like grading papers, but I really like teaching, in the classroom.

MAMALIGA: [At MIT, and since MIT], what have been your extracurricular activities that you have kept?

PERROLLE: The main thing that I did as an undergraduate was Student Committee on Educational Policy. I was the chair of that, and [was] on Institute Committee. I got the Compton Award for that. So that was the main one. And also sailing. But I had to quit sailing because the problem with sailing in the Spring is the weather gets really right for sailing just when you ought to be spending all your time studying for finals. After doing really badly -- it showed on my exam, I decided that I would quit sailing. But I am starting again. I just joined the MIT athletic program.

MAMALIGA: The sailing club?

PERROLLE: I thought this spring I would go sailing. I started up last year, but I had trouble with my knees, and I had to drop out. But I think it would be nice just to go back and use the pool. It is very convenient.

MAMALIGA: The alumni pool?

PERROLLE: Alumni pool is nice, because the other pool is full of fit, young people, who swim fast. The alumni pool is filled with flabby, old people who swim slow, so I really like the alumni pool.

MAMALIGA: I think the other pool is too fast for me too.

PERROLLE: I used to be on the swimming team, when I was in high school.

MAMALIGA: But then you did not continue at MIT?

PERROLLE: But then I did not at MIT. I did the educational policy, and there were some other things. Going to dinner with the MIT Science Fiction Society was always a good event. They had the policy that they would pay for girls' dinners, if girls would come to their meetings. They

would pay for their share of the dinner. So a friend and I used to go. We did it on Fridays to get free food -- Chinese food.

MAMALIGA: That is very nice. So then now your hobby is sailing, you said.

PERROLLE: I am planning to start it again. I [also] build computers.

MAMALIGA: You build computers?

PERROLLE: Yes. I am working on the Raspberry Pi. I just got one. It is lots of fun, and I had my oldest grandson up this summer. I taught him how to build himself a high performance game machine for a very budget price.

MAMALIGA: That must be taking so much time.

PERROLLE: Two days from start to finish.

MAMALIGA: I guess if you know how to do it.

PERROLLE: Then, for a while, I used to do tech support for the graduate students in our department. In the year 2000 I wound up doing some sort of hardware stuff -- upgrading everything, and one student wanted to build

a low performance supercomputer out of leftover 386s. So I got a little lab for us to do that, and we built a low performance super computer out of full 386s. It actually worked. It was amazing. The kid that did the project was incredibly bright. Then one of the engineering labs was giving away workstations that were in pretty good shape. So I put Linux on them, and gave all of our graduate students computers, which they had not had before. A previous professor had gotten an undergraduate laboratory some grants for undergraduate computing facility, and it was pretty dead, so I found some machines. Shall I say “found?” Yes, I “found” some machines, and got the computer science undergraduates to help me rebuild them. We fixed up the lab. Then a Microsoft representative gave me Windows NT network. They thought I would promise to say something nice about Microsoft, once a semester, which I always do. This year I said, “Windows 7 worked a whole lot better than Vista.” (Laughter) But we do not do that anymore. I am old and tired. But I did it as a hobby. I still do tech support for my family and my neighbors.

MAMALIGA: That is really valuable.

PERROLLE: My daughter thinks I should do that, instead of part-time teaching, when I retire. But it would not be any fun at all to do it for a living again. I just like doing it for fun.

MAMALIGA: Like for company, in a company job.

PERROLLE: Well I had my own company.

MAMALIGA: You had your own company?

PERROLLE: I had my own company. When I started graduate school, I kept doing little jobs to help pay for graduate school.

MAMALIGA: How was starting your own company?

PERROLLE: You get some letterhead. It was very easy. Anybody could start their own company. If you are just doing consulting and helping people out, and they give you a problem, you solve the problem. Then you can do something for somebody else. It is not hard. I am not selling any products. I am selling service, not a product. But I do not do that anymore because it is not fun anymore. Raspberry Pi is fun. Have you seen them? It is one of those new \$25 multimedia motherboards.

MAMALIGA: I should look [into it].

PERROLLE: What is your field?

MAMALIGA: Biology.

PERROLLE: Biology. They are making computer chips out of single cell organisms, which I think is really creepy.

MAMALIGA: I heard about that. I work more in the RNA, more wet lab, not really much technology involved. But I do not know much about computer science, unfortunately. I took a course in Python. That is pretty much all.

PERROLLE: Well the thing about computers [is that] at one time everybody wanted to do computer science. Then they realized if they want to use computers in biology, they should be biology majors; if they want to use computers in arts, they should be graphic design. So it has become a new general purpose tool.

MAMALIGA: Well [in] biological engineering students study biology and also they teach computer science courses along with that. They incorporate that into the biology.

PERROLLE: There is a lot of interest in biological applications. I liked the exoskeleton development. Have you seen those?

MAMALIGA: No

PERROLLE: It is basically walking suits. They got them from the military. The Japanese are using them for warehouse workers. There are people, who work in old people's homes, who have to lift heavy bodies all day. The suits make you strong. It is a science fiction thing. The military is using them for people who go on long hikes, and they are thinking of trying them out for paraplegics. I think they are perfect for old ladies, who have trouble with stairs.

MAMALIGA: How do they work?

PERROLLE: Just Google "exoskeleton," and you will get the exoskeletons that the U.S. robotics makes. There are a couple companies that make them. One company has got a paraplegic woman, who was an athlete before she had her car accident, [who] ran a marathon in their product.

MAMALIGA: Is it allowed?

PERROLLE: No, she took two days. She just went on the marathon course just to show it could be done. It is very interesting. Some of my former

students have interesting projects going on, and I could work on their projects -- some open source thing. It might be fun.

MAMALIGA: You are inspiring a lot of the students with your teaching, [who] are involved alongside with you in cool projects.

PERROLLE: Yes, although, as of last few years, I have not done very much in cool projects because my health is not very good, and I am having a lot of knee trouble. And I just cannot do a full load anymore. One course a semester is just about right for a while. But it would be nice to be able to wake up in the morning and play with your toys, and not have to grade papers and go to faculty meetings. But also, I have another hobby. I take my youngest grandson on Eco adventures around the world.

MAMALIGA: On eco adventures?

PERROLLE: Eco adventures: white water rafting in Costa Rica, kayaking amongst the swamp lands of South Carolina, being junior rangers at Yellowstone, studying at the Bermuda Coral Resort Reef Station.

MAMALIGA: That sounds like so much fun.

PERROLLE: Yes, we have a lot of fun; we go to these little things. Llama trekking in the [Smoky Mountains]. He is really enjoying [it]. He wants to be an animal photographer or an engineer.

MAMALIGA: How old is he?

PERROLLE: He is almost 16. The oldest one is in college, the one that built his own computer this summer is in college.

MAMALIGA: So what does he want to be?

PERROLLE: Math major, I think. Although, he is thinking about switching to computer science. Not that I suggested it.

MAMALIGA: Where is he going?

PERROLLE: The oldest is at University of Maryland, where all his friends went, and the youngest has no idea where he is going, but somewhere; he wants to go. Which is another reason to keep working a while -- tuition for grandchildren. There must have been other things I did on campus, but I cannot exactly remember, so it must not have been that important. But the student Committee Educational Policy was interesting. Interesting because we did a survey, when they built the new Student Union,

[Student Center]. We had just done a survey asking students what parts of their education were inadequate. They hated the reserve book room at the library, because there were not enough seats and there were not enough open hours. So we proposed that they add a library floor to the Student Union, which they did right in the middle of the building; they added the extra [floor].

MAMALIGA: Which one?

PERROLLE: The Student Center. [The] students wanted [the library]. Paul Gray was the Dean then, and he was in charge of the Faculty Education Committee. Our student committee worked with him, and they actually did something that [the students] wanted.

MAMALIGA: The Reading Room, you mean?

PERROLLE: The Reading Room -- is that what it is called now?

MAMALIGA: Yes. We call it that.

PERROLLE: Anyway, that was a student thing. Students said, "Do it." I know then students all over the country were occupying administration buildings and trying to end the Vietnam War. But MIT students asked for a

reserved book room opened 24 hours a day. It was not exactly very political in the early sixties. It got political later; but it did not start out - very much.

MAMALIGA: The reading room is pretty popular now.

PERROLLE: People slept there a lot.

MAMALIGA: They do now too. Some things do not change.

PERROLLE: And of course our class had one of the best hacks of all time. We did the great pumpkin.

MAMALIGA: Like [the pumpkin drop]?

PERROLLE: The Great Pumpkin – they hung a little face and some eyes on the great dome, and then the group that I was with put orange cellophane over the floodlights, so that it was orange. We also had invited a photographer from the Boston globe to come. Because they had it taken down in twenty minutes, after we put it up. But there was a picture in the Boston Globe, because we had the photographer there in time to catch it. So that is one of the world's finest hacks. Unfortunately, somebody just wrote in our class notes, who was on the other team that

climbed up and put that stuff that they used; the poster paint that they put on the posters they hang out turned out to bleed into the limestone. They had to re-sand, blast it. Do perpetrators still have to pay for cleaning up after their hacks? They used to. They had to pay. There was no intention of turning the thing black. It was just the wrong paint.

MAMALIGA: Jumping a bit back, you mentioned that you started your own company, which I think is pretty incredible.

PERROLLE: [It was] just a little letterhead, business cards, and me. It was easy to do.

MAMALIGA: You describe it [as though it is easy].

PERROLLE: I kept it very simple. Just me. [I] did not hire anybody, and usually had one client at a time; sometimes two. And then, I must confess, when I started the graduate school I got busy. I had a sister, who was working in arts management consulting; [she] worked for rich people in New York, helping them manage their art collections. They were starting to get computers, so they could computerize their little home office operations. I would go down to NY and charge \$500 to un-box an IBM PC, and hook it up, and show them how to turn it on, which is a pretty

loathsome actually, but it sure paid for an awful lot of soup and salad for dinner.

MAMALIGA: That is pretty major.

PERROLLE: I stopped doing that because I got more interested in doing sociology things.

MAMALIGA: Do you have anything else that you would like to add about your experience at MIT or about being a woman in the workforce?

PERROLLE: Ah, woman in the workforce... It is much better than it used to be. Just like I say nice things about Microsoft once in a while – it is better than it used to be. Well, I was laid off, when the company I was working for on Route 128 went out of business. I was on unemployment for a couple of weeks, and there was \$6 for each child that they would pay extra. But they would not give it to me, because I was her mother and not her father. So I appealed. When I finally got through all the appeals, the guy that interviewed me said, “Well, why are you appealing? It must cost you more lost work time than you would get [with] \$6.” And so I said it was the principle. He did not understand the principle, because I had already made a lot of money for a woman, and why was I complaining. This was to protect women [so] that their fathers had to

support their children and not them. So you cannot have \$6. So as far as I am concerned, the state of MA owes me \$12, because I was unemployed for 2 weeks. In graduate school, one of my colleagues in the economics department, [who] was a woman, found out she was making \$200 a semester less in her teaching assistantship than the men were. When she complained, they said, "Women make less than men. [You have] just got to get used to it now," without blinking an eye.

MAMALIGA: I think now that issue still exists, but they are denying it.

PERROLLE: Well, they used to. When I was working with Amita early on, when I came back to the Boston area, there was a problem with tenure. Women were not getting tenure. I gather it is still a problem that women have more trouble getting tenure. And [the] math and chemistry [departments] had little misogynistic cultures. So they would have women undergraduates and maybe even some women graduates students, but no women faculty. But now, look, MIT had a woman president; Harvard has got a woman president. Brown has got two women presidents in a row. It is slowly coming along. But it was a lot worse before.

MAMALIGA: What would be your advice for incoming freshmen women to MIT?

PERROLLE: I think advice about being a woman at MIT from people of my generation does not apply to MIT today. My advice [is] to get your advice from recent graduates about what the environment is like. Does that make sense to you?

MAMALIGA: Yes.

PERROLLE: If you are interested in oral history then the experience is worthwhile, if you are interested in the history of sexual relations, gender discrimination in academia. But it is not as bad anymore, I do not think. So women can get tenure; they can get promoted -- not as easily. One other thing [is that] -- I must end with this [story], people used to write things in the women's bathroom, which there were almost none of in my day. Now they have lots of them. And on the wall of one of the stalls was written this wonderful comment, "In order to get anywhere in this world, a woman has got to be twice as good as a man." Underneath someone else had written, "Fortunately, this is not difficult" (laughter). And it is true that the GPA, the grade point average, of the women in the early years was higher because it was more selective. They took only seventeen out of nine hundred. But they went to open admissions -- equal admissions. And something quite funny happened. The Women's Association went on a big recruiting drive, trying to get high school girls [to apply]. We used to go around to junior high schools, talking to

guidance counselors, because junior high school age is when the girls lose interest in math and science. We tried to talk to guidance counselors, trying to encourage women to apply. So the early admission pool, the year they were going to open admissions, was running overwhelmingly women, and the admissions people panicked. But it worked out to what it is today. It is about a third, largely, self-selection.

MAMALIGA: The women, you mean?

PERROLLE: Isn't it about 30% to 40%?

MAMALIGA: I think it is 48%, actually.

PERROLLE: 48% now. So it has gone up quite a bit. But if there are differences, it is probably self-selection now.

MAMALIGA: Probably.

PERROLLE: So MIT has changed a lot.

MAMALIGA: It has gotten better.

PERROLLE: So you do not have to be twice as good as men anymore. And maybe it is not too easy anymore. Anyway, this has been fun.

MAMALIGA: Thank you so much.

Addendum:

PERROLLE: I noticed that [Julie Fasset] has been forgotten, because [the] plaque on her garden is all run over with ivy. One of the most important people at MIT, in my whole time there, was the wife of the dean of housing, a woman named Julie Fasset. She was an amazing, wonderful woman. She decided that she should do something for the students, and she learned the name and the hometown and something about each incoming freshman. Dean Fasset had little teas, where they invited students in small groups, the entire freshman class, and she would look at your nametag and say, "Oh, you're the girl scout," or, "You're the guy who won the ski championship." It was [special that] somebody knew who you were freshman year. She was always there with cookies and just to talk; she was wonderful. Right after Her husband retired from MIT, they moved to Maine, and she died very shortly after. When she died, the students chipped in to build a small garden right outside of Burton house or Baker house. Just this little walled garden, Julie Fasset

memorial garden, built by the students to remember her. Somebody should get the building grounds people to clean off the plaque.

MAMALIGA: That is very nice. I have not seen the garden. Maybe I just did not notice.

PERROLLE: It is just a couple [of] little walls with a bench inside and some flowers; it is very open. It may be a little bigger than this room.

MAMALIGA: That is nice.

PERROLLE: It is very nice.

MAMALIGA: I guess she was a good support to have as a freshman.

PERROLLE: A lot of people came from small towns, and you come to this big place and there is somebody that actually knows you; it was wonderful.

MAMALIGA: That means a lot. As a freshman you are lost and do not really know your way.

PERROLLE: Some more than others.

MAMALIGA: Thank you.