Cynthia Skier– Class of 1974
(interviewed by Tatiana Mamaliga)

January 16, 2013

MAMALIGA: Could you please tell me about your childhood a bit? Where were you

born and what was your upbringing like?

SKIER: I was born in San Diego, California. My father was in the Navy. My

parents were actually, originally from Pennsylvania, and they were out

there, in California, because he was stationed at the Navy base in San

Diego. So I was born out there. During my childhood, we moved

around a bit because of that. When I was around five, we moved to

Maryland. Shortly after that, we went to Barcelona, Spain. I lived in

Barcelona for three years. I came back when I was eight. After that

point he was stationed in Groton, Connecticut. I did my schooling in

Groton, Connecticut from that point in time. Neither of my parents

went to college. But I was always good at math and lousy at

penmanship, which was unusual for girls at that point in time. Most of

my interest for math and science was from my teachers I had in the

public schools system that I went to in Groton. Some of that was

probably related to the fact that in 1957 Sputnik went off in Russia,

and, suddenly, the federal government, here in this country, had

decided to put money towards math and science education. I was born

in 1952. I really benefited from that because there were special

materials developed to teach science and math, and there was money

in the schools for math and science education. So I timed it right. I

remember, even in high school, I had a calculus class where there were

just four people, and they hadn't taught calculus before. They made

smaller classes even though it was a public school system. I had some

really great teachers early on, who influenced me and got me excited

about science and math.

MAMALIGA: It must have been really nice to have that kind of encouragement, even

from the government.

SKIER: The government provided the resources, and the teachers ran with it.

My mother and father were not college graduates, as I said. My mom

was a stay-at-home mom and a bookkeeper. My father was an enlisted

man in the Navy; he went up through the ranks, and he ended up

working in supply, as a chief in the Donald department. He was trying

to convince me to join the Navy and not even go to college. He never

understood why I was studying all the time. He would say, "You

should be dusting and helping your mom with the housework." My

mom was more interested in dancing and singing, and we did a lot of

that. She wasn't really into the academic side, but she liked the good report cards.

MAMALIGA: How many boys and how many girls were in your high school?

SKIER: The female/male split was roughly equal. My high school class had about 400 people in it. The whole school was about 1200 people (grades 10-12). I was often taking classes with the students a year ahead of me. By the time I got to my senior year, all my friends were in college; it was a little distressing. I had a really terrific high school chemistry teacher, which is why I thought I wanted to be a chemistry major when I came to MIT. But I did not end up majoring in chemistry.

MAMALIGA: Did your teachers treat you any differently from the boys in classes?

SKIER: Looking back, I think I wasn't aware of that so much. I was an "odd duck" compared to both the girls and the boys, probably because I was an only child and I didn't have really great social skills. We had also moved around a lot, and since the towns I lived in also had mostly other families where the father was in the Navy, even if I didn't move, a lot of my classmates moved. We had different students at the beginning of the school year than we did at the end. There was a lot of

flux, and it made it hard to make close friends or have a sense of permanence in the community. I just buried my nose in a book, and that was fine with me. I read a lot. Outside of school, because my mom was interested in dance, we took dance lessons. Then I got involved with competitive roller-skating and played the violin. But it was all structured school activities. We didn't have any extended family living in the area. They were all still in Pennsylvania or New Jersey. We never lived near my aunts, uncles, or cousins. I gravitated toward teachers because they would say, "Here, you should read this." My fifth grade math teacher realized that I was way ahead of the curriculum, and even though he didn't quite understand the seventh grade math, he borrowed a textbook from his friend at the junior high school and had the teachers' answers book and tried to teach me algebra. I had people who really made an effort when they saw that I was interested. I don't think that had much to do with my being male or female. Although, back then, if you were a girl who was good in math and science, they kept saying, "Oh, you should be a nurse." The careers for women were: secretary, nurse, and social worker. I was good in math and science, but I was not interested in medical things.

MAMALIGA: So you were in all the advanced classes.

SKIER: Yes. Though they didn't have classes at my high school called "AP" or "Honors." In high school, I ended up doing three years of chemistry, and one was a really advanced organic chemistry class, my senior year. I was also the lab assistant for the first year class. I would stay after school and put together the experiments that the first year students were going to do. There was also an anatomy and physiology class, too, but I did not take it. I was not premed. I was not going to dissect a cat. I liked the inorganic chemistry and thermodynamics.

MAMALIGA: How did you get the motivation to come to MIT? Did your teachers encourage you?

SKIER: I would borrow catalogs from the library about different colleges and read about them. Back then of course it wasn't on the Internet. I knew I was interested in science. I was pretty sure I wanted to be a chemistry major, because I had this great chemistry teacher. The only scientists I knew in my town were the fathers of some of my classmates-- because there was a Pfizer plant in the town; they were chemists -- and that was the only kind of scientist I knew about, and I was good at chemistry. I thought, "What were the best places to go?" and I applied to all those schools. When I told my guidance counselor that I wanted to go to MIT, he immediately said, "Oh no, that's not a co-ed school." And I said, "No, it is." I had to "fight" him to submit the things to MIT,

because he was afraid it was just a school for boys. It was also at the time when a lot of the Ivies, like Harvard and Yale, were going co-ed. I thought about those schools, which were very prestigious also, but I really didn't want to be the first co-ed class at a place like Yale. I was living in Connecticut, so I was looking at places that were in the New England area. But I also applied to places like the University of Rochester and Rensselaer that were good in chemistry and science. I really liked the idea of being in Boston, even though I didn't know anything about Boston, and I came to MIT. I don't remember if there was an early admission, but I didn't apply early. I got in, and I was so excited, because it was my first choice. So I came.

MAMALIGA: Did MIT advertise in their catalogs that they were co-ed? Were they encouraging girls to come?

SKIER: At that point, McCormick, which was a women's dorm, existed. But I had to point it out to the guidance counselor, who was not aware that women had been at MIT for more than a hundred years and it wasn't a new thing. McCormick had been built in the mid-early sixties. I think this year is the 50th anniversary of the first tower in McCormick being built. There had been a quota system for women. There were all these rules for the women that did not exist for the men. A couple of years before I was there, they had curfews for the women; the women

6

weren't allowed to live off campus, unless they lived at home, with

their parents, or they were married. They had all these housing

restrictions, and they would only admit the number of women that they

had housing for. The first year that I was here was the year that Senior

House went co-ed. Then my sophomore year, East Campus went co-

ed, but all the other dorms were still all-male. And there were no

sororities. My class was between 9 and 10% female. Out of all the

students, about 95 of us were women. It was very different from today,

when it's about 43%.

MAMALIGA: Where did you live on campus?

SKIER: First year I lived in McCormick, and the second year I moved to East

Campus, which was the dorm where my boyfriend, now husband, that

I met freshman year, lived. But the dorms starting to go co-ed allowed

MIT to admit more women students. They also started to actively

recruit more women. There was a booklet called , "MIT – a place for

women." They were trying to get more women to apply. Then, when

women applied and got in, they didn't necessarily come here. Because

MIT was a place with so few women, they needed to get a critical

mass before women felt they wanted to be here. Sometimes families

thought it wasn't such a good idea to be at a place where there were so

few women. I was often the only woman in a classroom, and that was

an awkward situation. Also, because MIT had an exchange program with Wellesley, if I was in a class, the assumption many times was that I was a Wellesley student, which made me angry. I wanted to say, "No, I am an MIT student. I am just as smart as you are and just as good at math and science." It was a very different kind of place. In terms of ethnic diversity, it was mostly white guys and some Asian guys, but very few underrepresented minorities – hardly any South-Asian (Indian or Pakistani) people. Among the graduate students, the number of women was even smaller. I knew only one undergraduate woman who was course 6 major. Most of the women who came were going into biology, chemistry, and architecture.

MAMALIGA: So there weren't so many women in engineering or computer science.

SKIER: The ones who were, were in chemical or materials engineering. There used to be a department called, "Nutrition and Food Science." That is what course 20 used to be. And there were women who majored in that. I started as a chemistry major. The entire freshman year was pass/fail for us. My sophomore year I was taking various chemistry courses. I wasn't doing that well in them, and I was also having a lot of financial difficulties. I was working many hours at the library and at the food service places to try to earn enough money. That was detracting from the amount of time I had to spend on homework. So I

was thinking, "I'm working all these hours so I can be here, and then I can't really make the most of it." I was confused about whether I should be a chemistry major. I did not like my advisor. My freshman advisor was great. But the chemistry department advisor sophomore year wasn't that good. He actually said to me at one point, "Why do you want to major in chemistry? My daughter is a classics major, and I know she is just going to get married – and so are you. You're not going to do anything with your major." I was going to him for advice on how to do better in these classes, and he was just saying, "Don't bother." So I thought, "This isn't where I really want to be." The classes I did like tended to be the ones I had taken either in the humanities department or at Sloan. So at the end of my sophomore year I withdrew from MIT, because I had no money, and I worked for two years. I worked here in the libraries as a typing person, back when they had the physical card catalog, and I was involved with typing cards for the catalog. I earned enough to live, and I took a couple of classes as a special student at Sloan, and I liked those classes. I thought for a long time whether or not to come back; I knew I wanted to finish, but I didn't know if MIT was the place for me. When I ultimately did come back, it was because I decided I wanted to finish what I had started. I had also already done all the core courses here (General Institute Requirements), and if I went someplace else, I would have to do different core courses in subjects like sociology; I

would end up being a year behind. So I came back here, and I ended up majoring in humanities, because it meant that I could fit together the classes I had already taken and graduate in '76. Although I affiliate with my original class of '74, I actually graduated in '76. After graduating from MIT, I worked for a couple of years. I ended up in the management consulting. Then I came back to MIT and did a Master's at Sloan from 1980 to 1981. I decided that I loved being around people who were at MIT, because I had a lot in common with them. At MIT was the first time I didn't feel like an "odd duck." I didn't necessarily want to be the person in the lab, but I liked working with the people who were in the lab, and I liked the same jokes and things that they did. But I was more of a generalist, and I like bringing people together from different backgrounds to work together. Through a lot of the management consulting that I did and my time at Sloan, I ended up being a translator between the engineering people and the marketing people, who didn't always understand each other, and I could talk to both of them and translate. I would say, "Here's what the engineers need, here's what the marketing people need. Yes, you might have different priorities, but you both have to work together." That was a good skill set to have.

MAMALIGA: Was the job that you got after MIT in Boston?

SKIER: I worked at MIT for awhile on an education project, which was funded by the state of Massachusetts, to help teachers learn more about careers in science. It's funny because in some ways it is similar to what I do in Women's Technology Program, only it was for high school teachers, not for high school students. After I worked there for a couple of years, I worked for Bain and Company in Boston. They were still pretty small at that point. I worked for them for two years, and then I came to Sloan for one year. After Sloan I thought I'd come back into management consulting, but my husband and I ended up starting a software company. It was 1982. We got married in 1980, when I was in business school at Sloan, and we decided, "If we don't start a company now, before we have children, we probably never will, because we wouldn't give up good jobs once we had a family." Entrepreneurship was really my husband's dream. He had been working at Wang labs, and he was one of those engineers who didn't always get along with the marketing people. He got tired of developing all this cool stuff that never made it out to the people in the marketplace; so he wanted to develop cool stuff and sell it himself. I took care of everything with dollar signs in front of it, and he wrote the code. He is also not a course 6 major. His majors here at MIT were in political science and in writing and civil engineering. He helped found the MIT Writing program back in 1975.

MAMALIGA: That is pretty amazing that you started a company.

SKIER: It was just at the time when they were beginning to put PC's on desks in places like banks and offices. As we were thought about staring our company I called up Mitch Kapor, the founder of Lotus, who had been a Sloan student. I contacted him and said, "I'm thinking of starting a software company. Would you talk to me?" and he said, "Oh sure, anything for another fellow Sloanee." I took him out to a small Italian restaurant in Central Square. He was just starting Lotus at that moment. He had written some software for a company VisiCalc. He had developed a program called "Tiny Troll," which was probably the first spreadsheet program, and he sold it for a couple of million dollars and then started Lotus. But our (my husband's and mine) software company didn't turn into Lotus. We didn't turn into Microsoft. We didn't even get bought by Lotus or Microsoft. But we did it for twenty years, and it was a great way to do the work-family balance. The company was home-based. We stayed small. We outsourced functions like pick-pack-and-ship and order-taking at different points. There used to be software stores called Egghead, before things started being distributed online through Amazon. We had packaged software selling in those stores, so we had to produce packages and ship them around the country. I took care of a lot of the management of the operations

12

side of the business, and my husband went off to conventions and wrote the code.

MAMALIGA: Was your company handling products?

SKIER: My husband designed products and wrote the documentation, and then we sold them to people. We started our company with our MasterCard. We bought him a suit, a briefcase, and a plane ticket. And he went off to Epson because they were coming out with this little laptop that had a paper-tape printer (like a receipt) that came out of it. They needed someone to write the documentation and software for the laptop that engineers in the field could use and print out on this little printer. So he got the contract. We started out licensing software that he wrote, and then eventually, developed packaged software that we sold through stores and directly to customers. We had one product for the visually impaired. Everything was DOS; there wasn't Windows. He wrote this product that made the print on the screen really big for people who only had limited vision. He called that "Eye Relief. " And we had another product that made the cursor really big called "NoSquint." He came up with all these innovative products with crazy names, and I basically made sure the bills got paid, that we had income coming in from customers, that things got shipped. In the meantime, we had two children, and I got to do things at their schools. From

looking at the few women that were in the management consulting, the reason that I didn't want to go into the management consulting at the other end of Sloan was that I didn't want my kids raised by nannies. It was a personal decision. I didn't want to be on the road all the time. I wanted to be involved in their lives day to day. And it was tough. I made decisions at that point that impacted my income for the rest of my life, but it was a personal decision. My time was more valuable than money. I may be regretting that now (financially), but I like the way my kids turned out, so maybe not.

MAMALIGA: When did you have your first child?

SKIER: I was thirty. I've now turned the tipping point, where I've had thirty years before I was a mother and thirty years now that I've been a mother. My daughter, Stephanie, is going to turn thirty in February. My son is twenty-five; they're about four years and a half apart. She's currently a grad student at Columbia in history. She wants to be an academic and become a professor. My son went to USC Film School, but he doesn't really want to do things in the film industry. He did a lot of improv and comedy in college, and right now he is supporting himself by driving a tour bus around Boston. He drives and talks to people about all the historic sites. Then he occasionally goes to these open-mics and comedy clubs and tries to do stand-up. So, no math and

science careers for either of them. They did well in math and science, but did not want to go into math and science. My husband and I did well in math and science, but other than the software, we didn't really end up in careers in math and science. I certainly didn't end up working in chemistry or for a pharmaceutical company.

MAMALIGA: Do you remember how many women there were in the chemistry department, when you initially declared you major?

SKIER: Not that many—I'm not really sure of the number. If there were only about 95 women in the whole class of 1974, then maybe there were around 15-20? I didn't tend to see many of them. There would be only one or two of us in a given classroom.

MAMALIGA: What were the professors' and guys' attitudes towards you, being a woman in your classes?

SKIER: A lot of them assumed I was from Wellesley. Or they would ask, "What's the women's point of view?" I wasn't going to speak to that. Yes, I was the only woman in the room, but I resented being singled out.

MAMALIGA: Did the professors ask that?

SKIER: Yes, that was the attitude, but it really varied. Some of them were

gender blind and didn't say anything. Others couldn't help but notice

you. In some ways, I had to be on my toes more often because they

were more likely to call on me. I couldn't hide in the background as

easily as the guys could.

MAMALIGA: What was your next adventure after starting the company?

SKIER: We did it for twenty years, and we progressed from licensing software

to doing packaged software. Eventually, towards the end, my husband

was writing enterprise software, and it got harder and harder. At some

point, we had a couple of employees doing things in sales or technical

writing. That was difficult for my husband, and as much as he said he

wanted to sell products and not his time, he was very independent and

it was hard for him to work with other people. He tried to get venture

capital, but that didn't pan out and we basically just bootstrapped it.

We never had venture capital. Eventually, customers started saying,

"Well, we love your software, but you're too small." It got harder and

harder, and the company went under. My daughter was at Harvard as

an undergrad, my son was in high school, and the businesses had

failed. I hadn't worked for anybody else for a couple of years, and my

husband was trying to start another company with venture capital. We

had a couple of really tough years there. We were just living on our savings, and then the stock market also tanked. Stocks we owned disappeared, and we got into huge debt. I just started going around looking for jobs. I was looking to make a career change, and I ended up here at MIT. I was looking to work in Development or the Industry Liaison program. I interviewed for some jobs at the Alumni Relations at Sloan. During the years that I worked for myself, I'd stayed involved with MIT through volunteer work. I was involved with the AMITA, the Association of MIT Alumnae (women); from '96 to '98 I was the AMITA president. There used to be a visiting program that AMITA did, similar to the Women's Initiative now, where MIT alumnae instead of students went to high schools and said, "What do you think an engineer looks like? I'm an engineer." I was involved with that and with networking with MIT students. I thought, "I really love all the volunteer stuff that I'm doing through the MIT Club of Boston and AMITA. So maybe there's a way to come back to campus and be here everyday and work with really smart MIT students again?" I don't know if Bonny Kellerman is one of the people you've interviewed. She's class of '72. I've been a friend of hers from back when we were students. She taught me how to ice skate. She still teaches the figure-skating class on campus. She saw the job posting here in the EECS to direct the Industrial Connection Program and sent me the information. When I interviewed for the Industrial Connection

17

Program (ICP), they looked at my resume and they said, "We just did this pilot program this summer, called the Women's Technology Program (WTP), and we're not quite sure what we're going to do with it after the first summer. Would you be interested in running that?" I said, "Yes!" So that's how I ended up here in EECS, running the Industrial Connection Program, doing some alumni stuff, and running WTP. That was just one of those in-the-right-place-at-the-right-time situations. But it took me two years of looking for a job to get to that point. I was approaching 50, and it's not easy to get a job when you're in your 40's - 50's.

MAMALIGA: So through your involvement with the Alumni Association you saw the attitude of the administration at MIT and in society change towards women throughout time. How did that happen?

SKIER: A lot of it was people in MIT admissions actively trying to recruit women in the 70's; a lot of it was the housing change. They had more spaces where they could house women. In the late '70s - early '80s, there was a real push to try to reach out also to women who had been admitted. This was possibly when Campus Preview Weekend started; they didn't have that back when I was a student. They were trying to get MIT women to reach out to people who had been admitted because the yield was very poor for the women students.

MAMALIGA: Even after they had been admitted?

SKIER: Yes, they were going to other colleges. What disturbs me is that there is this myth that circulates around the men from the classes of '70 that the standards were lowered for admission for women, and that is why the numbers of women rose. I point out to them that no, in fact, the standards were higher for us in the '60s and '70s because there was a quota system, and they couldn't admit more than a certain number of women. We tended to have better grades and test scores than the men did. If anything, we were finally admitted at the same playing field in the late '70s - early '80s. Once MIT got above 30%, that was considered a critical mass number. When you stop being the only woman in the class you stop feeling like this small, minority, and it's not quite as bad. As women became more visible, more women wanted to come here, once they weren't going to be such a tiny percentage of the class.

MAMALIGA: How did the guys react to there being more women on campus?

SKIER: Some of them thought that there was this affirmative action and the standards were being lowered. The guys who lived on campus were more welcoming than the guys who lived in the fraternities, who had

always dated the women from Simmons and BU. In the '60s there were a lot of songs and negative things going on with regard to the "MIT Co-ed," which is what they called the women students. I always did not like being called a "co-ed." I thought, "I'm an MIT student. I'm not a strange anomaly."

MAMALIGA: Who were singing the songs about the "co-eds"? Was that on campus?

SKIER: Yes. They were singing them at shows on campus and there was this negative image (sometimes as artwork in the campus newspapers): the hairy legs and the unwashed image. It was just really awful stuff. But that predated me, and it was evaporating by the time I got here. Things were changing for the better. It was also the time of Vietnam War, so we had other things going on. There was a demonstration in Central Square that moved on to the MIT campus, and the police came, and we had tear-gas on the Kresge oval. SDS was demonstrating on campus. There was a lot of other kind of upheaval and change. So being female was a small part of other changes that were happening with regard to student involvement and power on campus. Also, there were a lot of people in my class and other classes in the mid '70s, who ended up graduating from MIT, not having liked their MIT experience. Compared to other classes, our class was affected more.

MAMALIGA: Was that because of the Vietnam War?

SKIER: Partly. When we graduated, there weren't any jobs, and then there was

a gas shortage. People felt like they invested all of this time – "blood,

sweat, and tears," to get an MIT degree, and then it didn't pay off in

terms of a really good job, the way it might have ten years earlier.

People were disenchanted with large institutions, in general, too,

because of the Vietnam War and all the other things that were going

on in government. The politics of the time impacted the experience

here on campus for a lot of people, but I think it changed things in

other ways. It allowed students to be more involved in determining

things that impacted their lives on campus. A lot of those changes

happened then. I've seen a turn around, in the last few years, where

more decisions are being made top-down, rather than bottom-up. MIT

students definitely had a voice on campus that got heard in the '70s.

People did want MIT to be more welcoming to women and

underrepresented minorities. There was definitely a feeling that if MIT

is going to be a world-class institution, it needed many ideas and lots

of different people contributing to those ideas.

MAMALIGA: In the more recent, what has your experience been running the ICP and

WTP?

SKIER: I love being on campus. I get the best of being on campus, because I

                don't have to do any problem-sets or take any tests, but I get to be here

                with all these very smart people and hang out. I love seeing students

                come through. I see high school students, before they're in college

                with WTP, and with ICP I see companies coming and trying to recruit

                the course 6 students as they're graduating. I don't actually see the

                students too much while they're here, unless they come work for me at

                WTP.

MAMALIGA: We disappear.

SKIER: I see you on campus, and you look very tired. You look like you're

                working hard. But it's great because, in some ways, a lot of things

                haven't changed. You come to MIT, you're going to work hard. This

                isn't a party school, this isn't a football school, and the students are so

                smart. It's just wonderful to be around all these people who want to

                start their own companies or who want to do research. UROP is

                terrific. UROP started at about the time that I was an MIT student. I

                think that is such a great experience that other colleges copied, and it's

                typical of MIT to have new ideas and get the students involved in

                research and the frontiers of knowledge. It is exciting. I love looking at

                the MIT website every day to see the newest cool thing that somebody

                has invented or they're working on. The professors are very accessible

here, compared to other schools, where grad students end up teaching

the classes. Paul Gray, who is a past president of MIT and who is still

an EECS professor says, "Being an MIT professor is the best job." He

loves interacting with the students. I find it a great place to be. The

thing about MIT is that if you're smart and you've got great ideas,

people will listen, and it is possible to try out your ideas here. It

doesn't matter if you're male or female. There's definitely an

atmosphere of people getting excited about new things, new

technology, and new ideas.

MAMALIGA: Your involvement with WTP provides not only MIT students, but also

high school students, an opportunity to feel the push towards science

and technology.

SKIER: The person who started WTP was a male student in course 6, who had

done some TA-ing and said, "How come, if MIT is around 40%

female, I have only one woman in my course 6 classes?" Back then,

course 6 was about 20% female. It is now about 34%. A lot of progress

has been made. What was looked into was that a lot of these girls were

starting to take the high school chemistry, physics, biology, and math

classes, and they were taking AP exams, and doing really well at them.

Then they didn't apply to schools that had engineering programs

because they really didn't know what engineering or computer science

were. Even at MIT a lot of the women come here and they major in biology; they haven't necessarily had exposure to engineering. The thought behind starting WTP was, we'll show these really bright, high school women who are great at math and science what engineering is and then they are going to want to major in it. In fact, I've tracked people's majors, at different schools, and at this point, over the ten year history of WTP, 65% of the women are majoring in some kind of engineering or computer science (though it's not EECS). Many of the women who go through WTP, say to me, "I didn't even know what engineering was before WTP. People were telling me to go into premed." They didn't know what engineers did, and by coming to WTP, they learned some EECS or mechanical engineering (which was added in 2006) and they got to do a lot of hands-on stuff. All these studies have come out that say women don't go into engineering because they don't have any role models, they think it's an isolated rather than collaborative career, and they don't have an idea of what engineers do. A lot of these women also want to give back and do work that has impact. This why they are thinking of becoming doctors or teachers, because they want to give back to other people. Engineers are helping people all the time. I think engineering needs a public relations makeover. Engineers are creating all these wonderful medical solutions for people with prosthetics or machines in the operating theater, and nobody seems to appreciate that engineers are doing this.

People are carrying around all this technology – phones and all, and they don't understanding that it's all designed by engineers and computer scientists. The message should be that if you really want to impact people's lives you should be an engineer. I am hoping that by exposing the WTP students to some of the faculty guest speakers we have and to some of the research we have on campus, it will excite them. The goal is to let them leave after four weeks wanting more. Many of them do come to MIT. Even though that is not our stated goal, it is a result – 43% of them have come back to MIT. A lot of them, when they come back to MIT, are mostly coming into the school of engineering. They're not in biology or chemistry. So I feel good about that. I feel that I'm getting the message across. A lot of them say that they might not even have applied to a school like MIT. Before WTP they were thinking, "I'll go to a state school or I could go to Harvard," but they were not thinking, "I could be an engineer." I think that the program is doing what it sets out to do. And once they come to MIT, they already have a community they already know. Community is really important; I think it's especially important to women. Women like to get together and talk about stuff a little more than men do. Having people that you already know here and familiarity are very good. Even if they don't come here, we've made them familiar with some of the terminology of engineering, so maybe they're a little less intimidated by the jargon.

MAMALIGA: The field is more familiar to them.

SKIER: Yes. If somebody throws out the word "MOSFET" to them, then they know what it is. They could say, "Been there, done that."

MAMALIGA: What do you do with the ICP?

SKIER: ICP is an industry-affiliate program here in the department, where a few companies – right now 14 are participating, pay a membership fee and get my assistance with recruiting efforts on campus. Companies like Google, Microsoft, Dropbox, Facebook, Analogue Devices, Linear Technology Corp want to focus on Course 6 majors as they are recruiting at MIT. It's a little bit different, depending on what the company needs. Some companies might not be as well known, and I need to help them craft their publicity and how they approach the MIT students. I help them understand what is going to appeal to the MIT students. I do a fall event, and if they want, I also do a spring event. I do it in the evening. They take place at 7:00pm, and there're always really good food. It's not just pizza, it's Chinese food, or Thai food, or Red Bones BBQ. So I get the feet in the door, and then I tell them if you want them to stay in their seats, have a raffle. I help them with all the logistics before and after the event, and I help them connect with

the students. It is an add-on to what they're already doing over at the main career development center. I don't do interviews. They still do their interviewing there and post on CareerBridge. ICP is an enhancement to help them build visibility in the EECS department. Sometimes I help them connect with clubs in the department. For example, Etta Kappa Nu (HKN) is doing a Project Expo in February, and they asked me to send out the message about it to the ICP companies, so I helped pass that along. Or I help connect them with different contests in robotics and programming over IAP and encourage the companies to sponsor some of those contests or get involved with UPOP. Depending on who they're trying to recruit, I try to help them target their message. Sometimes I also tell them, "Look, not every person who knows about computers is in this department. You might want to reach out to the math department or people at Sloan." I help them understand a little better whether the students they're looking for are in the EECS department. Sometimes they're also in other departments, so they can spread the net a little further. Sometimes they'll just have questions for me, such as, "How do I do this on campus?" or "Is this okay to do on campus?" or "Can I use the MIT logo in our publicity?" I tell them, "No, you can't use the MIT logo. MIT doesn't like that" or "You can't have a hot-air balloon over at Kresge. MIT doesn't like that" or "You can't do a product announcement." I help them navigate what is okay to do at MIT and

advise them not to have their event over spring break or CPW – I give them guidelines over the calendar too. "Students are doing midterms this week, and nobody will come."

MAMALIGA: So you're taking care of the students.

SKIER: I'm mostly a guide for the company. I don't match them with particular students, but occasionally a student will walk in and say, "I'm trying to approach this company," and I'll say, "Okay, send me your resume, and I'll pass it along." I don't do a lot of individual counseling, but I'll tell students, "If you're interested in optics, then you should come to this event because this company is hiring optics people." Sometimes with the PhD students, who have been out of the job market for a while and they're not quite sure if they're going to be academics, I help them figure out what direction they could go in. It's mostly undergraduate and MEng students, but I do get PhDs who turn out for the event too.

MAMALIGA: It's really nice to have this program for the students to have opportunities to connect with the companies.

SKIER: Yes. I encourage even freshmen and sophomores, even if they're not at the level yet where the companies are hiring to come, because you

hear the presentation, you hear what the companies are looking for and then after the formal presentation, there's always about 30-40 min where representatives from the company are standing around and chatting with people. So it gives you a chance to network a little, tell your story, listen to other students and how they tell their story and approach the companies. It doesn't hurt to start practicing that early. I also encourage a lot of the companies, who didn't have internship programs, to do internship programs. I tell them, "The students are your best ambassadors. If you have a really great internship experience for a student, he or she is going to come back and talk to their friends, and you should have them stand up at the fall event and say, "This is a cool project I worked on this summer." As part of their internship experience, MIT students want to be learning things; it isn't a 'make coffee' kind of internship. Sometimes companies have a project they figure that is going to take 12 weeks, and the MIT student finishes it in 5; and so they have to create another project for the student. So I try to educate companies about what the MIT students are capable of and that they need mentoring and guiding; you don't just drop them in a cubicle and expect them to work in a vacuum. I help them understand how to make most of the MIT students and hopefully make a really good experience for the MIT students.

MAMALIGA: That is really important for the students.

29

SKIER: I hope so. MIT students are in high demand. They get great salaries, and I hope that I'm helping contribute to that.

MAMALIGA: Besides ICP and WTP, what other things are you involved in? What are your hobbies? What else do you like to do?

SKIER: My kids are gone out of my house now – that used to take a lot of time. For a long time, I was figure skating, but my knees have gotten too bad to do that anymore. I'm kind of sad that I can't figure skate anymore.

MAMALIGA: Were you doing competitive figure skating?

SKIER: In high school I did competitive roller-skating. I did pairs and fours. I did jumps and spins on roller skates and competed. I went to Nationals with my partner, in the early '60s. I've got some old footage of me skating at the 1964 Nationals on my Facebook page. And I like to sing. As you know from the karaoke night at WTP, I love to sing. I'll occasionally get involved in shows at my temple. We did a children's play for Hanukkah this year called "Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins."

MAMALIGA: Did you coordinate that? Did you organize it?

SKIER: No, I didn't to organize it, but friends of mine did. They talked me into

being part of the chorus, and then I ended up with a little solo. Because

I doing the evening events for ICP, and when WTP is in session I'm in

the dorm on the weekends and am pretty much on call 24/7 for the

whole month that the girls are here, it doesn't leave me a lot of time to

do other things. I'm active in my temple. I belong to Temple Isaiah, in

Lexington, and when I can, I volunteer through the sisterhood there

and try and go to some of their events. But I don't have much free

time. I work pretty long hours. But I really enjoy being here with the

MIT students. So my job is my hobby too, but don't let on, because I

want them to still pay me! There's less to do at home these days. I

don't really cook anymore. I buy stuff that's already cooked and heat it

up. My husband's dinner is "fend-for-yourself." There's some chicken

and some tomatoes and carrots – make your own dinner. He's fine

with that too. He's not working still and hasn't been looking for a

while. His mother and father got ill after our company died. First his

father was ill and then passed away. Then his mother was ill and

passed away. They lived in Worcester, which is pretty close by. His

brother was out in California. So he couldn't really look for work

while that was all happening. Now he's continuing to write software,

but he hasn't earned a paycheck, so it's all on me right now. I bring the healthcare and the money home, and he shovels the driveway.

MAMALIGA: I don't know how much more time you have, but another questions is: what was the most challenging thing throughout your career?

SKIER: When I was here, as a student, the biggest challenge was financing my education. When I took time off and came back, I had a wonderful person named Dorothy Bowe, who was in the financial aid office, who helped me with the paperwork so I could declare financial independence from my parents. My parents divorced when I came here as a freshman, and my father wasn't providing documents so that I could get financial assistance. It was really a struggle for money during the first two years that impacted my education. When I came back to MIT to finish my degree, my budget was tight, but the tuition was a lot less then too. I ended up with some loans, but I managed to struggle through. So finances have been a theme through my career. When we ran our own business, we lived at work and worked at home, and we've always done things because we loved them, not necessarily because it was the most financially prudent thing to do. We made decisions along the way that resulted in our not having a huge bank-roll right now, but I think we had a good time doing what we've done. And as I said, I really enjoy being around all the creative and smart

people at MIT. I like being in education rather than in management consulting, where I could have earned a lot more money, but I don't think I would have liked the people. I actually worked at Bain and Company the same time as Mitt Romney, and I'm not a big fan of his. I'm glad I took the path where I'm around smart MIT faculty and students that I like, and I enjoy coming here to work everyday and being around those people.

MAMALIGA: Although, your work is pretty similar to consulting. You run different projects and interact with a lot of people.

SKIER: I am a generalist. I discovered that partway through my MIT undergraduate degree, and I think that was part of my struggle too. A lot of the job descriptions are for specialists, and running my own business and doing a lot of different functional things always appealed to me. The same thing is true now with WTP. I've got to do the budget and hire staff and manage every aspect of the program.

MAMALIGA: What would be your advice to the women just entering MIT?

SKIER: I would tell them that the best thing you learn at MIT is how to learn and solve problems. Don't worry too much about what major you choose or planning out your whole career. Chances are you will

33

change careers several times along the way, and the area you end up in may not even exist yet. But if you learn how to learn and adapt to change, and if you figure out what is really important to you, then you will be happy. Do you want a lot of money? Do you want independence? Do you want to do research in industry or academia? Do you love teaching? If you follow your heart you will be fine. The problem-solving approach we learn at MIT can be applied to any and every career, and the people we meet here will influence us for years to come. Work hard, but make friends and enjoy your time here!