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Interviews of the Margaret MacVicar Memorial AMITA Oral History Project

Carol King Seligson – Class of 1971

(interviewed by Jean Choi)

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CHOI: Hi, I'm here with Carol King Seligson and we are going to talk about her life. So if you could just start out with your early years: your childhood, where you grew up, and what it was like.

SELIGSON: Okay. I was born in New York City on East 89th Street. My father was a second-generation New Yorker. He was born in Brooklyn. And my mother was born in Ecuador and came to the US when she was about eight years old. I grew up in the city on the east side, and my parents were in business together. My dad was an interior designer, and he manufactured custom furniture and other custom things for the home. His business was to the trade only, in other words wholesale. We lived first in the East 90s then in the East 80s and my father's business was in the East 80s.

CHOI: Very close.

SELIGSON: Very close. My mother never wanted to move out to the suburbs which was typical for the time, moving out of the city to the suburbs like Long Island, Westchester and New Jersey. They wanted to be close to their business. They didn't want to have to commute, which ultimately, as far as I'm concerned, was a wonderful decision because I think that growing up in the city at that time was very special. Unlike today we had an awful lot of freedom as kids and we did a lot of things by ourselves. My mother sent me to preschool, we called it nursery school, at the Ethical Culture School for two years prior to kindergarten. At that time our local elementary was Public School 6 and it was in a very old building on 85th Street and Madison Avenue and my mom didn't think she wanted me to go there. She planned to have me attend the Ethical Culture Elementary School. But then, a year before I was to enter kindergarten the City built a brand new building on 82nd Street and Madison Avenue to house P.S. 6. My mother went to visit it, and she liked it a lot. So she said, "We'll send you to kindergarten at P.S. 6 and we'll see how it goes," and as they say, the rest is history, and I was there through the sixth grade. P.S. 6 was a wonderful elementary school. It was unusual in many ways, primarily because it had everything that money could buy. The part of New York that I grew up in was called the Silk Stocking District because it was a very affluent area in the city and P.S. 6 reflected that affluence. Although my parents were solid middle class, hardly affluent, in those days a middle class family could live in that neighborhood. Most of the kids who went to P.S. 6 later went on to private high schools and private colleges. P.S. 6 had excellent teachers, it was a plum assignment for a teacher, the school was brand new and beautiful and state of the art for its time. I was able to walk to school because I lived really close. In those days you could get a monthly bus pass, I think it was 50 cents a month. Although I did not need the bus pass to get to school, I would get one each month so I could ride the bus to go other places. By the third grade I would walk to school most of the time by myself, and walk home or go to after-school activities by myself. I guess today it seems like we were very young to be able to do that – people don't let their kids out by themselves anymore. But it was great, because as a kid I just got to go around the city and do lots of fun things.

CHOI: Really? By yourself! So you have brothers and sisters?

SELIGSON: I have one sister who is four grades younger.

CHOI: Oh, so you took care of her. You watched over her.

SELIGSON: Well I didn't really take care of her.

CHOI: Really?

SELIGSON: Well, no. Not too much. We each did our own things. I don't know at what age but I was quite young when I started going to the Museum of Natural History on Central Park West. At first I would go there with our nanny, we had a nanny because my mother worked full-time, which was unusual in those days. We would take the cross-town bus to get to the museum, which I really adored. My mother bought me a membership, and by the time I was in fifth or sixth grade I was going over to the museum by myself. I loved the animal exhibits and I would draw the animals and study them. I spent the greater part of my life in New York living in libraries and museums, and New York has a lot of really cool ones. The American Museum of Natural History was my favorite.

CHOI: So when you were young did your family support your interest in things like museums?

SELIGSON: Oh yes, absolutely. My mother was always very proactive in getting us to do all kinds of extracurricular activities and she bought us memberships to many of the museums and to a marvelous private library. I also took music lessons, from an early age. I played violin and then later also classical guitar. My sister played piano. I took ballet lesson because my mother thought it was a good thing to do, for grace, posture and movement, which it was. We used to go swimming after school. I'm trying to think of what else we did after school. Oh, and we used to go ice skating! And I took figure skating lessons.

CHOI: Wow! So you were very well-rounded then.

SELIGSON: Yeah? Both my sister and I were really into horseback riding. We would ride in Central Park, about three times a week. It was one of the few things that we did together. We'd take the cross-town bus to the stables, sometimes we would take lessons, and sometimes we would just go riding in the park.

CHOI: Do they have horses there?

SELIGSON: Yes they do. We took jumping lessons at the stables. And we'd ride through the park at all times of the year, winter, spring, summer, fall. In hindsight, it was pretty amazing.

CHOI: In elementary school were you the hard-working student?

SELIGSON: Yes, in our school we had what they called IGC classes, “Intellectually Gifted Children’s” classes. And I was in those classes from the third thru the sixth grade.

CHOI: So from very early on.

SELIGSON: Yes, very early on. And as I said, most of the children in my school ended up going to private high schools. My parents had intended for me to go to a private high school seventh through twelfth grade. I took the tests, and I was admitted to two, Dalton School in the City and to the Fieldston School in Riverdale. I told my parents I didn’t want to go to Fieldston, I wanted to go to Dalton because I could walk from the house – it was only about five or six blocks. I didn’t want to get on a bus every day, and I liked the Dalton School, I had a good feeling about it. But then I learned about a school called Hunter College High School, which was part of the City University of New York. It’s one of a handful of university schools in the country. It’s not part of the public school system of New York. The building that housed the High School was attached to the building that housed Hunter College, which was one of the four city colleges of New York. In addition to Hunter High School there was Hunter Elementary School. The elementary was K through 6 and the high school was 7 through 12. To get into the high school you had to take an exam, and it was only for women in those days. But in order to take the exam you had to have taken an IQ test. I don’t remember if it was during the end of the fourth grade or the beginning of the fifth grade that we took that IQ test because every two years or so we would take IQ tests. In those days you had to have a 140 IQ, be a girl, and be a resident of the City in order to take the test for Hunter. Any girl, had to be a resident of New York City, living in one of the five boroughs. So I took the test with approximately 2000 other girls. There were 120 slots for the seventh grade. The girls were ranked based on their scores and the top 120 girls were admitted to the seventh grade.

CHOI: That’s so competitive.

SELIGSON: Yes, it was. But I do not remember thinking about it at the time. But I will tell you a funny story. At that time we lived in an apartment where the rooms were laid out such that you could run around in a circle continually from one room to another. My sister and I used to chase each other around the house and we could chase each other endlessly going round and round. A few days before the Hunter exam my sister was chasing me and thinking myself very clever, I slammed the bathroom door to stop her in her tracks. But unfortunately I slammed it on the middle finger of my right hand, and I write with my right hand, and nearly sliced off a piece of finger. To this day you can see that the nail on that finger is goofy. So I go to my mother, I was in such shock I wasn’t even crying, and she sees this dangling finger and puts it back and wraps it up and calls the pediatrician. Now in the meantime there’s a huge snowstorm that day. So the pediatrician gets on the subway and comes over to my house and looks at it. “You should take her to a

surgeon and have him look to make sure that it doesn't need stitches," he said, "but it looks pretty good, I think it'll be okay." And he gave me some codeine pills for the pain, because by then it had started to hurt. My mum took me to the surgeon and he also said, "It looks pretty good." He cleaned it up and bandaged it. Well two days later I had to take the Hunter test. I'm taking codeine, the finger's killing me, and it has a big bandage on it. But the test was multiple-choice, where you fill in the box with the pencil. Somebody had to fill out the registration card for me because I couldn't write my name. But I was able to take the test. My mother told me years later that she considered calling to see if I could retake the test because of the circumstances. But I got in anyway! So maybe codeine helped me, I don't know (laughs). So then I went to Hunter, which was really a very good experience for me. It was transformative.

CHOI: Why?

SELIGSON: I think for a lot of reasons. One was, it was an all girls' school. Although I'd been to a coed elementary, it's hard to know what it would have been like to be in a coed high school. As a group we were very close. There was a lot of competition in the sense that people tried to do very well and worked very hard. There was a long tradition at Hunter that a hundred percent of the women would go to college. Everyone went to college, even if it was a public college. But many women went to private colleges and got really good scholarships. We also had a lot of National Merit Finalists, and National Merit Semifinalists. As a school our stats were really off the charts. So people worked very hard but we were very close. But the competition wasn't a negative competition it was a positive competition. I hear today how so many students feel a tremendous amount of pressure in high school. But I really cannot relate to that because I never felt pressure at school. I never felt that any one was pushing me or that my school or my family had unrealistic expectations for me.

CHOI: How many girls were in your grade?

SELIGSON: 120. And we really helped one another, and it was a very—I'm trying to find the right words now—it was a very positive and nurturing environment. Most of the teachers came from Hunter College and most of them were brilliant and inspiring. The classes were all very small with twenty or fewer students in each. And the whole school was small because there were about 120 girls in each class, and there were seven grades. We were in this old building on Lexington Avenue. It was the building that Hunter College had occupied before they moved to a new building on Park Avenue. It was about seven or eight stories high and we had to walk up and down the stairs all day.

CHOI: No elevator?

SELIGSON: There was, but only for the teachers. (Laughs) And we had no cafeteria. You had to bring your own lunch. If you didn't bring your lunch, you didn't eat. The only

thing available to drink was water from the water fountain. You had to bring your own beverage if you wanted something. I laugh today when I hear all the brouhaha about kids being allowed to go out and get lunch and the complaints about what's being sold or not being sold in the cafeterias. Well for six years we had no cafeteria, and we couldn't go out. We started school at 8:40 in the morning and left at 2:10 in the afternoon. There were six classes a day, plus lunch. We had forty minutes for lunch and we all went to lunch at the same time.

CHOI: That's kind of nice!

SELIGSON: Yes, everyone ate together and that was one of several things that helped to instill the sense of camaraderie that we had. Sometimes I brought lunch, sometimes I didn't. Many times I'd have lunch after school because we got out of school so early. Sometimes I'd have other activities after school, but not at school. That school just had school. We really didn't have any after school activities, unless you worked on the magazine or the newspaper or the yearbook. And we didn't even do that in the school, we would do that away from the school, at someone's home. It was very different, I think, as I understand schools today, and probably different from where you went. And so it was a very special experience. Also, the girls who went to our school came from all five boroughs, including Staten Island, and in those days that was before the Verrazano Bridge was built. So that meant the kids from Staten Island—there were only a few of them—had to take the ferry, and then had to take the subway to get to school. I had one friend in my class who came from Sheep's Head Bay in Brooklyn, which was the longest ride and farthest stop on the subway. It took her about two hours to get to school each day. I walked to school, I lived three-quarters of a mile away (laughs). It took me about 15 minutes to get to school, unless I dawdled.

CHOI: That's amazing.

SELIGSON: So for me it was great. And I have to laugh because in our senior year they gave awards for best attendance and for not being late, and I got the award for never having been late. And to me it seemed like a silly award because for most of the girls lateness was often unavoidable, with bus and subway delays. But for me there was no excuse, I would only be late if I overslept, and I didn't.

CHOI: Well that's good, at least. What kind of student were you?

SELIGSON: I was a good student.

CHOI: Did you tend to lean towards humanities or science?

SELIGSON: Oh, very much towards science and math. I did very well in math. Math was my best subject.

CHOI: Since elementary school?

SELIGSON: In elementary school, I don't know. I think today it works differently, but we had just one class and one teacher. We didn't travel to different classes.

CHOI: Even in seventh and eighth grade?

SELIGSON: Well seventh and eighth was high school.

CHOI: That was high school?

SELIGSON: High school started in seventh. And then we traveled to the different classes. But elementary school was just one room, you were with your teacher, and you never left that room. Except to go to the park or go to the library. I didn't think of subjects separately in grade school.

CHOI: Really? That's interesting.

SELIGSON: Yes, I didn't think of it that way, at least that's my recollection.

CHOI: Because of how they taught it, or...?

SELIGSON: I guess it is because of how we were taught, yes. I got all A's when I was in grade school so I didn't think of subjects separately. But in high school, yes, we traveled. The way it worked was kind of interesting. In seventh grade we chose a language. The choices were French, Spanish, German, and Latin. Not enough girls chose German, so we had only French, Spanish, and Latin. We were assigned a homeroom, we called it "Official Class," based on our language. There was one Latin official class, three French, and two Spanish. There were six homerooms with approximately twenty girls in each. Now our homeroom, I think had a little less than twenty because there were only eighteen people taking Latin.

CHOI: So you took Latin?

SELIGSON: I took Latin. Yes. We traveled together with our homeroom during seventh grade. And then in eighth grade, one could start to take some more advanced subjects depending how you'd done in seventh. And then each year as one took more advanced classes one traveled less and less with the girls in your homeroom class. But you stayed with the same girls for six years in the same homeroom class. We were the Latin homeroom and we took the same language all through high school.

CHOI: Why did they sort them by languages, do you have any idea?

SELIGSON: I don't know, that's just the way they did it.

CHOI: Did you tend to enjoy your math and science classes or was it that you did better in them?

SELIGSON: Yes. No, I did better, and I enjoyed them more, both. And I got into all the advanced math classes. I finished the high school math by the end of tenth grade, so that meant I was allowed to take calculus in eleventh grade, and then in twelfth grade I was allowed to take calculus and differential equations next door at Hunter College.

CHOI: Wow! Were you unique in the fact that you were very advanced or were there a lot of other girls like you?

SELIGSON: There were many other girls who took classes at the College, not just me.

CHOI: But it wasn't a huge population of the girls.

SELIGSON: Well, enough. Everybody was taking advanced classes. Okay, but not everybody in math, some in science, some in math. I don't remember having advanced classes in history or English. But most of us took the AP exams in History and English. I think all the advanced classes were in math and science. I guess maybe because we were an all girls' school, or maybe the nature of the school, I never realized that boys were supposed to do better in math, until later on. I didn't realize there was anything unusual about excelling in math and science. We were just expected to do well in everything. Some girls did better in some things than others, but there were a lot of girls who did well in math and a lot of girls who did well in science. Everybody had to take Biology, Physics, and Chemistry, had to. Everybody had to take a math through solid geometry. Everybody had to take at least five years of a language. The sixth was optional. Every semester, we had English and Social Studies, Social Studies being Civics, History, Political Science. So we had English, History, Math, Science... English, History, Math, Science, and what was the fifth one? We had five core subjects, every semester. What am I missing?

CHOI: English...

SELIGSON: English, Social Studies, Math, Science and Language. Those were the five subjects that we had every semester. The only difference was the level that you were at. And each of these classes met five days a week. And then, we had the little subjects, speech and drama, art, music, physical education. Speech and drama was wonderful and it met almost every semester. And it varied. The purpose of speech and drama was to teach us to speak correctly, without an accent, to give us poise, to enable us to become good public speakers, so that we could deliver a written speech as well as an extemporaneous speech. We did plays, we did radio plays. We had to learn to debate, to form ideas and to articulate them. I think it was unusual that these classes were compulsory. We had to do it, but it was wonderful and fun.

CHOI: That's a good thing.

SELIGSON: Very good thing. It really prepared me for things that I did later in life.

CHOI: Were you always confident in speaking, though?

SELIGSON: I don't know, because they made us confident.

CHOI: Because you started...

SELIGSON: Started so early on. Exactly. Art was really very limited. But it was okay. Art class was one of the few classes that we just goofed around in. With our demanding schedule it was good to have one class occasionally in which we did not have to do anything. And we had phys-ed. In eighth grade we had swimming. We went to the college pool, and everybody had to pass a swimming test. But I was a good swimmer, because I began swimming as a young child. So that was no big thing, but some of my classmates had never swum before. So they had to learn to swim, and they had to pass the swimming test, which meant they had to swim four lengths of the pool. Hunter was traditional in many ways and yet liberal even radical in many ways.

CHOI: Yes, it sounds very thorough. Did you guys have interactions with a male private school?

SELIGSON: No, we didn't have a brother school. They had had a brother school before, but it was no longer in existence. So no, we didn't really have a brother school.

CHOI: Did you ever think, "I wish I was in a coed school?"

SELIGSON: Not really. It never really occurred to me.

CHOI: Okay. Did you really enjoy school then?

SELIGSON: For the most part, I did, yes.

CHOI: What was your favorite part of school?

SELIGSON: Good question. You mean my favorite subject?

CHOI: What did you really like about your school? Because if I remember my high school, I didn't enjoy a lot of things.

SELIGSON: Well, what I liked about the school was that, some of this may be hindsight, I'm not sure. We were treated like adults, and we were very independent. We were very self-motivated. Quite like MIT in many ways, very self-motivated. We didn't really have to be disciplined. But I'll tell you a funny story. This just comes back to me, a memory, and I might not be able to tell it well. Our homeroom teachers

were randomly assigned to us because we didn't do anything in homeroom other than take attendance. The homeroom occurred after lunch each day. When we came back from lunch, we'd go to our homeroom and they'd take attendance, and that was the only time attendance was taken. But they didn't have to worry about it because very few girls cut school. The girls who were at Hunter, wanted to be there. A few young women left but they went to other schools. So we take attendance in homeroom, and in the eighth grade, well in our Latin class—let me take a step back. The girls in our Latin class were even a little more interesting than a lot of the girls in other language classes. Girls who chose Latin were just a little stranger (laughs). The only thing I can attribute it to is that girls who choose to study a dead language are just a little different. In eighth grade, we had one of the music teachers as our homeroom teacher, and she was a bit bizarre. She would frequently bring instruments to class, which was understandable. She had a big gong, which was used in the orchestra and she often brought it to class. Our homeroom classroom was on the first floor. It was the only classroom on the first floor and it was close to the principal's office. All the other homeroom classes were upstairs. And in the eighth grade we were little monsters. Homeroom is not meant to be for anything but attendance taking. It lasted for only ten minutes. But this teacher, for some reason, thought that we should read poetry in homeroom. That did not go over big. We just knew there was no rationale for doing this. To the eighth grade mind this was just stupid. One day our homeroom teacher comes into class late and we are running around like little banshees and making lots of noise, and I guess the principal complained to our teacher about the noise. The next day she comes in and we are even worse. I guess as eighth graders, the minute you complain about us we worsen. Our teacher had a little plant on her desk. So she comes in and she is really annoyed at us and she bangs her gong trying to make us be quiet, of course this just makes us noisier. And then she says "I've had it with all you girls," and she picks up the plant and the gong and stomps out of the room. And she didn't come back for weeks, and was not missed at all because we took our own attendance. We became really good little girls, quiet, and just went about our business. So it was kind of like, if you left us alone, we'd do what we were supposed to do. If you tried to push us in some absurd direction, we knew it was absurd and we weren't going to be pushed that way.

CHOI: So you didn't get a new homeroom teacher?

SELIGSON: No, we did our own thing.

CHOI: So you guys were super good afterwards?

SELIGSON: Yes, we kind of were (laughs). And we drove her away. She just disappeared. I guess she came back eventually, but it was weeks, months. I don't remember how long it was that we had no homeroom teacher. The principal came in and scolded us and told us to apologize to our teacher. I don't remember what else the principal said, but someone stood up and said "We don't need a homeroom teacher. We'll manage this fine by ourselves." And we did (laughs).

CHOI: So when did you start thinking about college?

SELIGSON: At Hunter everybody thought about college pretty early on. It was expected that 100 percent of the women would go to college. Now, of course in New York, we had the City University, which we were a part of. In those days there was no open enrollment. You know what open enrollment is, right? That's where there's no criteria and anybody can go. The City University of New York really had very high standards and a lot of very famous people went there, especially to Brooklyn College, which was one of the best of the four City colleges. But if you went to Hunter College High School, your grades would be good enough to get into the City University, so it was everybody's safety school. And it was free; it was 100 percent free in those days. But at any rate, everybody went to college. When it came time to apply for college—I'm getting ahead of the story—we were only allowed to apply to three private colleges and one of the City colleges. We had to apply to one City college. Oftentimes, former Hunterites would visit the high school and tell us about their college experiences. As far back as I can remember I knew that my parents expected me to go to college.

CHOI: What was your home life like? They really supported your going?

SELIGSON: Oh yes, there was just no question that I would go to college.

CHOI: They were very education driven.

SELIGSON: Absolutely. Yes. My father had gone to the Pratt Institute in New York, which was a school for design. He had wanted to go to MIT, but his father would not send him. His father was an interior designer, and this was during the Depression. So his father sent him to the Pratt Institute, and that's where he went. But I always knew that my father wanted to go to MIT.

CHOI: Oh, it was like you were fulfilling his dream.

SELIGSON: Kind of, yes. Now my mother had other ideas. My mother was a bit of a snob. She thought I should go to Radcliffe or Vassar, or some other Ivy League school. But the bottom line was I was expected to go to college. And furthermore, I understood that I was to go to a very competitive and prestigious college. In tenth grade our class was assigned two college advisors. They were two of the high school teachers, who were doing double duty. The advisors talked about what they knew, and oftentimes girls would come back to the school to talk about the colleges that they were attending. Hunter had been sending girls to MIT for several years before I entered MIT. For each of the three years prior to me, two girls from Hunter had gone to MIT. That was more girls than from any other high school, including Bronx High School of Science, which had never sent two, only one in any given year. Hunter sent two for the class of '70, the class of '69, the class of '68. Then for the class of '71, which was my class, two girls also got in,

me and Marcia Osborne. So I knew about MIT, and I knew girls who'd gone from our school. I did well in math, I liked math, and I thought I was going to be a math major. And that's why I went!

CHOI: So did you have an idea, a preconceived notion of MIT before, or had you just thought, "I like math so I want to go to MIT?"

SELIGSON: Well, I knew some things about MIT, and of course then I also had to look at other schools. So I applied to MIT, I applied to RPI, and I applied to Case Western Reserve, plus my City college.

CHOI: Did you choose which schools you wanted to apply to?

SELIGSON: Oh yes, absolutely. And I'll tell you a couple of funny stories about that. So we had these two college advisors. One was Mrs. Greenspan, who was a social studies teacher, and one was Mr. Kizner who was the Latin teacher. I told you I took Latin. Now I did very well in everything except for Latin. I was last in my Latin class consistently for five years. And I would have taken a sixth year but they didn't offer it my senior year because there weren't enough girls who wanted to take it. Anyway, Mr. Kizner didn't think I was too sharp. In fact, one time in Latin class, I don't know whether this was eighth or ninth or tenth grade, I wasn't doing too well. It was interesting how my fellow students were always sticking up for me. They'd tell him I was always very smart even though I didn't do too well in Latin. And this one time someone said, "Carol can remember anything." I think I had gone home one night and memorized an entire radio play in one night, and came back and recited all the parts the next day. So my classmates thought that was pretty cool. I don't know how the challenge came about, but Mr. Kizner said, "Let's see if she can memorize the elements of the periodic table, in alphabetical order, not in the order of the periodic table."

CHOI: Why was he picking on you?

SELIGSON: No, he wasn't picking on me. Well, maybe he was picking on me. I think one of my friends had said I could do this. So I said I would try. So the next day, it had to be the next day, because someone had to get them in alphabetical order. I came in and instead of going to Latin that day I went to Mr. Kizner's office with a list of the elements. Well I didn't get them all but I got about seventy of them, and I came back in a half hour and recited them in alphabetical order (laughs). It was kind of funny.

CHOI: That's amazing!

SELIGSON: Yes. So anyway, when it came time to apply to college, he just never had bothered to look at my record. And he thought I wasn't so smart, and he said, "I don't see how you could ever get into MIT." But Mrs. Greenspan had looked at my record. And she knew that I had already taken calculus, and I was at the top of

my class in math. I had already taken the AP exams, and I'd already taken the SATs. We have something in New York called the State Regents Exams. We would take several of these exams each year. They're standardized tests for each high school subject. You would take them in geometry, in solid geometry, in algebra as well as in English and history. And I got 100 percent on all the math Regents exams. Mrs. Greenspan knew that and that I had taken AP Chemistry. So, she said, "Oh you should apply to MIT. I think you have a very good chance of getting in. Don't listen to Mr. Kizner." So I applied Early Decision, and I got in Early Decision.

CHOI: Was that your top choice?

SELIGSON: Yes.

CHOI: So you really wanted to go.

SELIGSON: I really wanted to go. I had visited all the other schools that I had applied to. I thought it was very important to visit them because I really needed to know what they were like. My parents took me to Boston and Cambridge, and we visited MIT.

CHOI: What did you think?

SELIGSON: I liked it. Yes, I really liked it. And we visited RPI. I went with my dad, not with my mom. We drove up one day to RPI. And then I wanted to visit Case Western because that was my safety school. It was really important to me that I visit it before I made the application. And in those days I wouldn't get in an airplane. I was afraid to fly. And we'd been to Europe but we always went by boat and by train. And so, I said to my dad, "We're going to drive to Case Western Reserve?" He said, "No we're not, we're going to fly." I said, "No we're not." He said, "Well that's the only way you're going to get to go. I'm not driving." I don't know how many hundreds of miles it was. He said, "It's one thing to drive to Boston, but it's another thing to drive to Cleveland." So we had a plane reservation in the morning, and we left on a seven o'clock flight, that took about an hour to get there by air. And then we had a five o'clock flight home that night so we could spend the whole day there and go for an interview and go to classes. This was in November. And that night, I got home from Case Western Reserve, and I had liked it a lot, but I still wanted to go to MIT. And when my father and I walked in the door of our apartment my mother said, "There's some mail for you." This was in the days before cell phones. And it was my MIT acceptance letter. I then said, "One more day and I wouldn't have gone on that plane." And my father said, "This was the best thing that ever happened to me to get you on that airplane. If I'd seen that letter I'd have put it in my pocket and kept it for another day." So he made me fly, and the rest is history, because I've flown all around the world, and I even got my pilot's license in 1973.

CHOI: Wow, that's a big jump.

SELIGSON: Yes. But when I got into MIT, I didn't even make the other applications. I accepted MIT's offer and that was it. That was where I wanted to go. And then later I went to MIT and visited again.

CHOI: Was there a pre-frosh program?

SELIGSON: No. Whatever that means, no.

CHOI: Oh, well it's a program for people who have been accepted, and MIT tries to persuade them to pick MIT out of all their choices. They take the "pre-froshes" into MIT and give them a lot of things to do.

SELIGSON: No. Okay, no. There wasn't. And if there was it didn't matter to me because I accepted. And I got the Early Decision or Early Action or whatever the heck it was called in those days.

CHOI: When you had gone to Cambridge you weren't shocked by how different it is from New York City? You didn't think it was boring? I mean, going from New York to Boston is like –

SELIGSON: Well, no, Boston was very, that was one of the things I liked about Boston. Boston has a lot of stuff to recommend it. There's a lot going on there. There's a lot of culture, there's symphony and opera and dance and a lot of museums. It's not New York. And of course, I think in those days there were 51 colleges and universities. I don't know how many there are today. That was another thing I liked. I liked the notion of being around all these other colleges and college people. I still think it's a great town to go to school in, I don't know if I'd want to live there. But I had traveled a lot before I went to college, too. I had traveled abroad several times with my parents. We traveled all around the US. So I'd been to an awful lot of places. So no, I thought Boston was great!

CHOI: That's perfect then.

SELIGSON: Yes.

CHOI: Then you didn't have that stereotype that men are meant for science and math and women are supposed to do mainly humanities.

SELIGSON: No.

CHOI: When you were going into MIT you still didn't?

SELIGSON: I started to get a little bit of the stereotype by the time I was in eleventh and twelfth grade.

CHOI: How?

SELIGSON: Well I came in contact with more of the world. Also, I was taking classes at Hunter College, which was coed.

CHOI: Did that intimidate you?

SELIGSON: No, not really.

CHOI: The classroom setting was very different?

SELIGSON: It was very different, sure.

CHOI: With people speaking up? Or just...

SELIGSON: Well it was just different. It was not as supportive and not as warm and cuddly (laughs) I guess as Hunter had been. I don't think Hunter was trying to shelter you, but it was very, very supportive. They made, for the most part, other than Mr. Kizner, they made us feel that we could do anything. And that being women wasn't a factor at all.

CHOI: So when you first got to MIT, first of all, where did you live?

SELIGSON: I had to live in McCormick. When I first got to MIT, McCormick had only been open two years. And we had to live in McCormick. In those days all freshman had to live on campus, and all women had to live on campus unless you were married or lived with your family. And the reason they had to live on campus was because they needed to fill up McCormick. They had all those rooms and if we didn't live on campus they would be empty. And when they admitted our class, it was only the second year they admitted more than twenty women in a class. We had fifty in our class, and there were fifty in the class of '70 also. And the new wing of McCormick was under construction, and it was slated to open between semesters, between our first and second semester. So they took extra women, and instead of being in doubles we were in triples for that first semester in McCormick. Which was okay.

CHOI: You got along with your roommates?

SELIGSON: Yes, I liked both my roommates. They had, in those days anyway, for the women, they had this extensive questionnaire that you filled out, and since this was before the day of great computers, it was done manually. One of the deans went through and matched up the women to try to make sure that the roommates were a good match.

CHOI: Did they only do this for the women?

SELIGSON: Only for the women.

CHOI: So do you remember what kind of questions they asked?

SELIGSON: No, I don't. Well, sort of. They asked about your interests, they asked about your study habits, they asked about your family life, they asked... well, I mean that was the gist of the questions.

CHOI: Why do you think they only asked the women?

SELIGSON: Well, the men chose where they wanted to live. They would choose. They would come on campus, I think, it's probably similar today, they would come on campus and decide where they wanted to live. The fraternities would rush them, but the dorms would rush them too. You'd go to the dorms and the men had a choice of singles and doubles although not all freshmen got singles. They had a choice. We had no choice. We had to live in McCormick, we had to be in a triple, at least for one semester. So I guess, in order to not have total disaster, they made an effort to match people up. And I think they did a reasonably good job. For the most part I think most people kind of liked their roommates. And if you didn't, in the next semester you got to make a change because when the new wing opened, and there were more than enough rooms.

CHOI: Oh so then you switched out after first semester.

SELIGSON: We could, although I didn't. I stayed with one of my roommates in the double. And one of my roommates moved to a single on the same floor.

CHOI: She had a single. From a triple to a single.

SELIGSON: Yes because some of the singles freed up. Some of the people wanted to move to the new dorm. So some of the upperclassmen were in the singles, and the single freed up on our floor. My two roommates were Ellen Cheng and Pam Reekes. And Ellen and I stayed in the room together. Ellen was from Allentown, Pennsylvania. And Pam was from Hollywood, Florida. And Pam moved into a single on the seventh floor. We lived on the seventh floor of McCormick Hall, the seventh floor in the old tower. We had a bit of reputation on the seventh floor. Yeah, we were a little bit nutty and a little bit bad. And some people moved up to the seventh floor to be with us, and some people moved off the floor to be away from us.

CHOI: So you were like the social...

SELIGSON: Well, not that we were social, necessarily. There were other groups that were social, we just were out there. A little bit out there. A little bit more eccentric, perhaps.

- CHOI: When you first entered MIT, socially, how did you feel? Because there were only fifty women in your class. How many men were there?
- SELIGSON: 900.
- CHOI: So how did you feel on you first day of classes to see mostly men?
- SELIGSON: Well, I kind of felt like I was back in Hunter. I just was in the reverse. Like I said, I went to an all girls' high school, and this was an all male college. And it sounds funny now, perhaps, but there was a similarity there. I can't quite describe to you in words.
- CHOI: A similarity?
- SELIGSON: Because it was unisex, it was just a different sex.
- CHOI: Then did you feel unsupported?
- SELIGSON: Well I didn't feel, by the student body, I didn't feel unsupported, and I didn't feel that different. I realized that there were a lot of jokes made at the expense of the coeds, but I would say for the most part, I was treated like one of the guys by the student body. Now we're not talking faculty. That's a whole different story. But by the students for the most part I felt like I was one of the guys.
- CHOI: Do you think that's because you're unique and you're confident or was it in general that all women were treated...
- SELIGSON: I think in large part the women were treated as peers. There was no question there was some joking, there was all kinds of joking that went on, I think that was to be expected. We had a freshman picture book in those days. I don't know if you still have them. And of course the guys were looking at the women's pictures and of course they were talking about the good-looking women in the book and the not-so-good-looking women, and of course the stereotype had been that all the women at MIT were not good-looking. But we had a lot of really good-looking girls in our class. Oh, a lot of them. But it still was, we were still more like one of the guys than not, I would say. Now also of course we lived in this dorm that was all women, all by ourselves. And that was another thing, and that fostered a certain kind of closeness. And women were very supportive of one another. We had big sisters in those days. I don't know if you even have anything like that now.
- CHOI: Well, I didn't live in McCormick...
- SELIGSON: Well, I think we had the big sister program because there were so few women. You were assigned a big sister, who was an upperclassman, when you entered as a

freshman. She helped her little sister get oriented and settled. So, you knew, somebody was looking out for you.

CHOI: Who was your big sister?

SELIGSON: My big sister was from Hunter.

CHOI: Oh! So you knew her!

SELIGSON: I didn't really know her personally, I knew of her. And I'm blanking on her name right now.

CHOI: That's okay.

SELIGSON: She was two or three years ahead of me.

CHOI: And what did she, did she help you out?

SELIGSON: Well, she was there when you needed to ask her questions, there for support. As it turns out, I think we had our own support group on our floor and amongst our classmates. And Irene... I can't think of her last name, I'll come up with it in a minute, I don't remember calling upon her for a lot of things but, yes, there were things I'm sure I asked her to about.

CHOI: What was your major?

SELIGSON: I started out in math, in 18, and I ended up in humanities. In those days we had two humanities, 21A and 21B. 21A was engineering and humanities, and 21B was science and humanities. I was 21B, which meant you had to pick a science major, which was math, and you had to pick a humanities major, so it's like a double major.

CHOI: Oh, so you couldn't just major in a humanities alone.

SELIGSON: No you had to do engineering and humanities or science and humanities, so I did math and history. Math was my science and history was my humanities. And my degree's in 21B. Today I know it's different.

CHOI: Was it hard that way? Did you have to take more courses?

SELIGSON: No, you didn't really have to take more courses, you needed the same 360 credits to graduate.

[end of tape 1 side A]

CHOI: Do you remember what your freshman classes were?

SELIGSON: Some of them.

CHOI: Can you name some of them?

SELIGSON: Well I placed out of 18.01, so I had 18.02. And I had 8.01. I had 5.01 and I dropped it, never finished it. In my days we had to take one chemistry class, and I never completed it until my senior year; I was never good in chemistry. I had a couple of electives. I had a math class with... oh god, a very famous guy... I can't think of it. Brain dead, I can't think of them all.

CHOI: The ones you do remember, do you remember what you felt about the workload? Did you go in feeling completely lost or were you very well prepared?

SELIGSON: No, I was lost. Well I mean partially lost. I mean the workload was very hard, even coming from Hunter. Maybe I wasn't as lost as some other people, but it was hard.

CHOI: Were you discouraged?

SELIGSON: No. I thought it was hard. And I mean I didn't get A's in everything, that was for sure. But I gradually... each year I took more and more subjects. I kind of got into it.

CHOI: Did you do enjoy doing the work?

SELIGSON: Some of it yes, some of it no. It's like anything. I mean I was amazed at some of the things I enjoyed doing that I never thought I would have enjoyed doing. We were the first class to have to take a computer science class. Most of the people took it in course 6, I took it in course 1. And it was a programming class. And we basically had, I think the class was 12 weeks or 13 weeks. We had to write one program each week. There was no final exam. We got graded on the program and that was your grade. Here's one of these stories, I'm going to have a lot of these for you, about the difficulties of being a woman. My professor later became dean of students, and I forget his name. I guess I want to forget his name. But I really enjoyed that class. I never in my wildest dreams thought I would, but I guess it's kind of really mathematical. And I got an A on every single program. And I got a B in the class. And I went to the professor and I said, "I got an A on every program. I thought that your grade was based on the programs." He said, "It is." So I said, "So why did I get a B in the class?" And there was little me going to this full professor and saying this. He said "That's because you're a woman and you have to learn that you have to work harder to get ahead in the world."

CHOI: Are you kidding?

SELIGSON: Swear to God.

CHOI: So what did you say?

SELIGSON: I just turned on my heel and left! Oh, I was so angry, I never got over it. In those days he could say that. And in some ways he may have meant well, this is because he said you have to learn to work harder. Well, in a strange kind of way, he probably did mean well. Because it was true, women did have to work harder. When we were admitted—okay when I had my interview at MIT, and I was interviewed by a woman, I don't remember her name—it was on the admissions letterhead at MIT. In those days you could have an interview at MIT. She told me—you can't even say these things anymore—that one out of three men were admitted but only one out of four women. And she said the standards were higher for women because they felt that it was harder for a woman to adjust to the whole environment. The fact is at that time the women did better than the men did. As a group, they had higher scores on everything and better grades.

CHOI: So working in this type of environment, like you said, did it have any direct effect on you or did you think this is part of—

SELIGSON: Well, no, not at that time. However, I came to realize that there were two standards. I learned that at MIT.

CHOI: So you were a math major. So how did you decide to switch?

SELIGSON: To humanities? Well I just liked to do more things, that's all. I just wanted to have more freedom to take more kinds of classes. I took classes in the architecture department in visual design, which I really enjoyed. I just liked to do different things. I didn't want to be pinned down.

CHOI: Which is kind of not like the stereotype of MIT, right? Which is that someone picks one thing and seriously concentrates in that. But you liked to fan out.

SELIGSON: Yeah. I wanted a more, let's say, classical and broad education. I didn't know what I was going to do. I wanted to study a lot of different things.

CHOI: So what was one day in the life of your year like? Like a typical day?

SELIGSON: I don't know.

CHOI: For example, did you study a lot? Did you party?

SELIGSON: Well it depended on the day. My friend Diane Feldman, who's now Diane Feldman Eisenstat, who's probably my closest friend from MIT today, she lived on the seventh floor—I don't know if it was during freshman year or sophomore year that she moved to the seventh floor. She lived two doors away from me. I never went to breakfast in McCormick.

CHOI: Why?

SELIGSON: Well I never went to breakfast when I was a kid so I never went to breakfast when I was at MIT. And she told me that her father said breakfast is the most important meal of the day. So she always went to breakfast. And in those days we were all on a meal plan. We had to be. Anyone in a dorm was on meal plan. And McCormick was closed to the residents for breakfast. So only the women who lived there could go to breakfast in McCormick. But lunch and dinner were open. Anyone on meal plan, any of the guys, could –

CHOI: Who liked McCormick?

SELIGSON: Who went to McCormick. We had meals there. There were lots of guys who came to have meals: lunch and dinner. Just like we could go to other dorms and have meals there. You just took your card. So breakfast was closed so we could go down to breakfast in our pajamas. Or our bath robes. There was nobody there except the coeds. And I was hard to wake up in the morning. Diane said to me, “If I wake you up, will you come to breakfast with me?” So I said sure. So she used to come wake me up at 7:30 each morning, and we’d go to breakfast, where we just talked about stuff. And not a lot of people went to breakfast. And that’s how my day got started.

CHOI: You’d wake up at 7:30 in the morning?

SELIGSON: Yeah. Every morning we went to breakfast. Except for Sunday, they didn’t serve breakfast on Sunday to my recollection. We’d go to class, go to lunch, usually at McCormick, go to class, study, go to the library... I spent a lot of time in the library in the student center because I liked that library. And the other library I liked was the one over by Hayden.

CHOI: Hayden Library?

SELIGSON: Yes, Hayden Library. I liked that one, too. I spent time there.

CHOI: So you studied a lot.

SELIGSON: Well you had to study a lot.

CHOI: Most of the day?

SELIGSON: Well yes, a lot of the day. But I did a lot of other things. I loved music, and I used to go to every concert that came to town. All of the popular music, rock... I saw every famous group that came to town. I also liked symphony, chamber music too. I used to go to all types of concerts.

CHOI: Did you stop playing the violin?

SELIGSON: I played the violin right through graduate school. But I don't play anymore. Well, I didn't play professionally; I was just tinkering around. You have to be too good to really play. It's a hard instrument. But I went to all the musical performances at MIT. And there was a lot of good music at that time. I don't know what they have today but we had a symphony orchestra. We had a Gilbert and Sullivan Society too.

CHOI: What's that?

SELIGSON: (Laughs) I guess maybe they don't have it anymore. You know who Gilbert and Sullivan are? Well they were these two English guys back in the 1800s who wrote operetta, light opera. And their operas - have you ever heard of H.M.S. Pinafore, the Pirates of Penzance? Okay, that's Gilbert and Sullivan. And they wrote about ten of these operettas, they were the social criticism, social satire of their day. They're all scathingly funny. And there was GS Society, and they put on a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta every year at MIT. And there was a jazz band also.

CHOI: So socially you were very active, and there were a lot of things to do.

SELIGSON: Yes, I went to a lot of musical performances—that was my big thing. And then we had our fair share of parties and other social events.

CHOI: Parties at dorms?

SELIGSON: Parties at dorms or fraternities, yes. Campus parties, yes. And then of course there also—I still visited museums. I've always done that. I spent a lot of time in the museums in Boston. I got to know them all pretty intimately by the time I left.

CHOI: So then did you interact with a lot of other students of different colleges?

SELIGSON: Not that much, not as much as I had thought. Now I had friends at Radcliffe and Harvard. I had friends at Boston University. I had friends at Brandeis. So I would go and visit with my friends at these schools. Sometimes stay overnight in their dorms. So in that sense, I did.

CHOI: Did you feel really different when you went onto the different campuses?

SELIGSON: A little bit.

CHOI: A little bit? In what sense?

SELIGSON: Outside of MIT there were two worlds, the world of men and the world of women. See, one of the interesting things about MIT is that it was accidentally much more progressive than any of the other schools at that time. In those days all

of the schools had... I forget the word now... but they had restrictions about when you could leave the dorm and... and when you had to be there at night. You had to be in by a certain hour on certain nights.

CHOI: Like curfews.

SELIGSON: Like curfews. Thank you. Now at most of the schools, curfews applied to both the men and the women but at some schools it only applied to the women and not to the men. But at MIT they never had any curfews. Because it was all men, and men didn't have to have curfews. Only women had to have curfews.

CHOI: So did they give the women...

SELIGSON: No, we did not have a curfew. Now the dorm closed at a certain hour. So you couldn't get back into the dorm after a certain hour, but you were allowed to stay out (laughs) all night. So you had to sneak in, if you got locked out.

CHOI: Did you get locked out?

SELIGSON: I don't recall ever being locked out. But that was one big difference that I noticed in the other schools that my friends went to, they had curfews and we didn't. In that sense, the women were treated the same as the men.

CHOI: That's good. Then, for your first winter vacation, how did it feel to have done one semester at college and go back home?

SELIGSON: Well I believe I went back home before the end of the semester, quite frankly.

CHOI: Why?

SELIGSON: Why? Well, in those days it was eight dollars each way on the Eastern Airlines shuttle from Boston to New York; it was no big deal to go home. I could go home for the day!

CHOI: Oh! So what was it like going home?

SELIGSON: I was going to say, I'm sure I went home for Thanksgiving just for a couple of days. And that was before the end of the semester. And I may have even gone home prior to that, I don't know. But see, it was close, it was easy. Just hop on the train, and it was about five hours. I still remember, I don't know how I remember, it was freshman year, the full fare was sixteen dollars, and for the student fare, you would show your student ID card, and it was eight dollars on the Eastern shuttle. And they put on as many planes as were needed. You could take the T over to Logan, hop on the shuttle, take the subway into the city, and then go back the same day if you wanted.

CHOI: Did you feel transformed into a college student when going back home or did you feel the same?

SELIGSON: I don't know. I never thought about that. You know that's one of the things—we had a lot of freedom as children in New York. Not just me, but in general in those days. I mean, like in high school, we used to go out and do all this stuff on our own. I was just as independent there, if not more independent in some ways, as I was in college. So in that sense, at least, I didn't feel that there was a big change. I remember, when we were juniors in high school, there was a big New York City subway strike. They went on strike for about two weeks. So our school was not really open. We just took attendance, and then we left. And if you could get there, fine. If you couldn't you were excused because most of the girls had to go on the subway to school. And so those of us who were in the city and those who would come into the city we would just go off for the day. I remember going to Broadway plays. And they were still running the plays, and they weren't getting good attendance because with the strike it was hard for people to get around. I remember going to a Wednesday matinee and then going to a Wednesday evening performance of something else. We'd just go around and do stuff like that.

CHOI: So there wasn't that sense of "Oh! Freedom!" at that point.

SELIGSON: No, not at all, it was always that way. That was a time when people didn't worry as much about things, I guess.

CHOI: Yes. That makes sense then. So what did you think of the classes? Were the professors interesting? Were you thrown off because there were so many students in one classroom?

SELIGSON: Ah. Well. See, coming from a school with tiny little classes, never more than twenty people in the class, these big lectures were a little bit of a put-off. There's no question about that. But then we had a small recitation and the even smaller tutorials.

CHOI: You had tutorials?

SELIGSON: We had tutorials, too. Recitations and tutorials. I don't think you had to go to the tutorials, I believe that was optional. But we had the recitations for 18.02 and 8.01. But for physics, I got into a special physics class. Now this was for 8.02 not for 8.01. They started this physics program where they didn't have the big lectures and you could apply to get into the special physics program where you just had a small class with a full professor, and that was really good. I got into that, and it was really wonderful. There were about ten of us in the class. And then we could meet individually with the professor, and you could discuss individual topics.

CHOI: Did you apply to get in or was it a lottery?

SELIGSON: It may have been a lottery, I don't know. I don't think that many people wanted to do it quite frankly. My recollection was that it was easy to get in. And I really enjoyed that. I really liked the small classes. Those big lectures... But you know, I'd go into the big lectures and in some cases the big lectures were wonderful. Professor Rota, who was a mathematics professor, who's no longer alive, he gave one or two classes that were very popular, even with non-math majors. They were big lectures, and they were a lot of fun. And of course Jerry Letvin was famous for his psychology lectures. Do you know who Jerry Letvin is? No. Okay you ought to know these famous MIT people (laughs). Yes, he gave Psychology 101, which was really 9.01? Psychology is course 9? 9.01? And that was a very popular lecture because Jerry Letvin was just such an unbelievable character. And it was a wonderful class. And it was huge, but it was fun. Some of them were fun being big, and I got used to it. And then, of course, being in the humanities, we had tiny, tiny classes. And there were many of our classes that didn't have more than five people in them.

CHOI: And were you often the only woman in the class?

SELIGSON: Correct. Almost always. Even in the huge lectures.

CHOI: So what did you feel like?

SELIGSON: I felt like I wanted to hide most of the time. Well I couldn't hide because if I wasn't there, they'd know it. Everyone would know it.

CHOI: You couldn't miss lecture!

SELIGSON: I couldn't miss anything – they'd know it.

CHOI: It wasn't intimidating though?

SELIGSON: It sometimes was a little bit, yeah.

CHOI: So how did you deal with that?

SELIGSON: I don't know, you just persevered. You were noticeable. That was something, now that I think back, there's no question, you were noticeable. People noticed us because we stood out.

CHOI: Okay so when you actually switched from a math or science class to a humanities class, did you have more interest in one vs. the other?

SELIGSON: No. About the same. See I had a wide variety of interests. It probably wasn't classical MIT. I took some classes in economics, I took some classes in political science.

CHOI: You went all over the place.

SELIGSON: I went all over the place. And I took classes in civil engineering, I took my labs in civil engineering.

CHOI: And you pretty much enjoyed a lot of it.

SELIGSON: Yeah. I basically I took what I thought I would enjoy. And anything I didn't like I tried to get out of. Like chemistry. (laughter)

CHOI: You weren't nervous that you were taking it at the very end?

SELIGSON: Well I could have graduated earlier if it wasn't for my chemistry requirement.

CHOI: Really?! It's okay. You wanted to stay there.

SELIGSON: Yeah, I did want to stay there. I liked the whole four years. That's correct, I did want to stay there.

CHOI: Because it was a very positive experience for you.

SELIGSON: Yes.

CHOI: And when it came time to graduate, what kinds of strengths did you take from the whole experience?

SELIGSON: Well I guess it's going to sound sort of like I'm reading from the MIT playbook, but I didn't learn a specific skill. I learned a way of looking at problems and thinking about things, and approaching problems. I think that's really more of what I learned. And I didn't go there to...as it turns out, I wasn't going down one specific career path.

CHOI: Did that set you apart from the other students?

SELIGSON: Some yes and some no. In my day there were more people like me. Now this may be folklore but you could probably find people to support this contention. When they admitted the class of '70, they supposedly changed their requirements a little bit. They tried to get a class of students with more broad interests than they had had in the past. Not only the women but the men, too. They supposedly were interested in people with more diverse interests and more diverse experiences, away from the engineering, away from the science.

CHOI: They made that clear to you when you applied?

SELIGSON: No, I learned this later. And they supposedly also did the same thing with the class of '71. I'm '71. The people in the classes of '70 and '71, still to this day, are definitely different than the people in the classes that came before them and after them. Supposedly one of the directors of admissions, Brice Leggett, I think I got the name right, made a comment to one of my classmates, "After the classes of '70 and '71 we had to go back to the old way because you kids were just, like, too much! We couldn't handle you." But aside from that, it was also the times. We entered in 1967. Class of '70 entered in 1966. Right at the height of the Vietnam War, right at the height of the drug culture, it was a very different time. So they admitted different students in a different time. And it was a different environment. It was not like it is today, and it was not like it was prior to that time. Now, can you say that the class of '69 and the class of '72 are slightly different? Probably, yes. But we were the core of that time. But there was a time of four, five, six years that things were different, and students were different, and the whole milieu was different. We were demonstrating, we were sitting in, there was the drug culture.

CHOI: At MIT?

SELIGSON: Oh yes! One of my classmates who I never got to know was arrested before classes even began for making LSD, in the basement of his fraternity.

CHOI: Oh my goodness! I can't imagine this. Really?!

SELIGSON: Yes, but what happened was that most of the kids who got arrested for things like tampering with telephones or making drugs were just made to go work for their victims. I think the LSD guy ended up having to go work for the government. And the two that got arrested for tampering with telephones had to go work for AT&T. They knew they were really bright kids so sending them to prison did not make any sense. My classmates, when they wanted drugs they didn't go out in the street to buy them, they went to the chemistry lab and made them at night. Dean Wadley, who was dean of students at that time, went around at the beginning of each year to talk to the freshmen, sometimes upper-class people might sit in on the talk at the women's dorm – and he gave this freshman talk at each of the living groups. He went from dorm to dorm, from fraternity to fraternity, and basically gave the same talk. He told us what campus life was about and what was expected of us. In those days the drinking age was 21 in Massachusetts. And we had the campus police. Basically what he said to us was, if you're going to drink or you're going to do drugs, do it on campus, don't do it off-campus because we don't want you to get in trouble and we don't want you to get hurt. If you have a problem go to the campus police – they're your friends, they're not here to punish you, they're here to protect you.

CHOI: Really? Wow.

SELIGSON: Yes. And in women's dorm, he added one little part. If you're going to have sexual relations, go to the medical department because they have birth control for

you, even though it was illegal in those days in Massachusetts. When we were freshman, it was still illegal to dispense birth control to non-married people in Massachusetts. But he said, go to the medical department. Don't get pregnant! They have birth control for you.

CHOI: Oh my goodness! Wow!

SELIGSON: (Laughter) And that was Dean Kenneth Wadley. I liked him. He was a good guy. Very pragmatic.

CHOI: So there was this type of culture that's so different that... obviously I had no idea about, that a lot of people had no idea about.

SELIGSON: But they were there to protect us. We had parties on campus. We had liquor. It was against the law, but we had it. It was on campus, you didn't take it off-campus, you kept it on campus. And like I said, they went and made drugs in the chemistry labs at night. But at least that way you'd know what you were getting – you never got bad drugs! (Laughter) The drugs of choice in those days were LSD of course, hallucinogens, marijuana, and hash, and opium, and speed. Those were the drugs of choice in the late 60s. That's what kids did.

CHOI: Honestly, there were a lot of students who were into drugs at MIT?

SELIGSON: Yes. Yes there were.

CHOI: Keeping up with all the work?

SELIGSON: Yes. But you can't do drugs all the time. Just like you didn't drink all the time. Now there were people who did drugs and drink all the time – some of them dropped out.

CHOI: Socially then, there was this sense that people didn't have a lot of fun. I don't know, there's this stereotype now that MIT, socially, is very unenjoyable. Like you don't have a social life, it's not fun or anything...

SELIGSON: Oh, we had a lot of fun!

CHOI: But you had a lot of fun.

SELIGSON: Definitely! We had a lot of fun. We had a lot of fun in different ways. Some ways were sanctioned, for example, like sports. People went out for a lot of sports. Sports were fun. Okay. Oh in those days, women had no PE requirement. It was instituted later. But we were allowed to take PE if they would let us in the class. Sometimes they wouldn't let us in the class.

CHOI: Do you think these rules were unfair at all?

SELIGSON: Well, you know, a lot of them were double-edged swords. They wouldn't let us in some of the PE classes, but we didn't have the PE requirement. Some classes you could get into, some you couldn't. It all depended. A classmate of mine was one of the founders of the women's crew team. We had men's crew, we didn't have women's crew, and some women wanted a crew team. At that time MIT's position was, if you can find an advisor, you can have whatever you want. So they went and found an advisor and they started a women's crew team. They had the boats already. It's like when some students formed the MIT Tiddlywinks team. Yeah, they went onto national and international championships. They played in China, which was famous for their tiddlywinks teams, because one of my classmates and his friends found an advisor and started the team. Not that the advisor knew anything about tiddlywinks. He didn't have to. You kind of got to do anything you wanted to do, and that's how UROP got started. UROP got started when we were juniors I think.

CHOI: A lot got started when you were there. What extra-curriculars did you really enjoy most? What did you do in your spare time? Like, tiddlywinks?

SELIGSON: No, no. I did not go out for many sports at MIT. There was an ice rink. I used to just go skating because I had been a skater for many years. I didn't take any classes but I skated there every winter. And I continued to ride horses when I was at MIT.

CHOI: Where did you –

SELIGSON: Out in the suburbs somewhere.

CHOI: And it was through MIT?

SELIGSON: No it wasn't, no. That I did on my own. And I went swimming. But again not in a class. I just used the pool.

CHOI: You just used the pool. Were there any women's support groups beside in McCormick, like the big sister program?

SELIGSON: Not really, McCormick was the support group because everybody lived there. Oh! Kenneth Wadley was dean of students, and we had a dean of women's students in those days. And that was Emily Wick.

CHOI: Was that helpful?

SELIGSON: Um...now, interesting. Emily Wick was dean of women's students. She had a secretary, Dotty Bowe, who I believe is still at MIT. Maybe she's retired already. Dotty Bowe was her secretary, assistant. And in my mind Dotty was really the dean of women students. She saw all the students. I mean, if you wanted

to talk to somebody, you could go talk to Dotty. She was much more than a secretary. She was a very special person. In fact I think she became an honorary alumna. We had a dorm manager, Mrs. Lutman-Johnson. She had an assistant named Norma. And I forget Norma's last name. But Norma was more like the manager, in fact after LJ left, Norma did become the manager. And you could always talk to Norma.

CHOI: You had all these connections.

SELIGSON: Of all these people... it seemed that the person in charge was never really the accessible one. It was always the second in command who made themselves available to the girls. I saw Norma just a year ago. Norma and Dotty, they were there for the girls. Norma still says "my girls"... referring to the ones who were there when she was there, she still calls them her girls.

CHOI: But things like, your incident with computer science, could you talk to the administration or anybody about that?

SELIGSON: It never really occurred to me. I guess I finally told Dotty about it, but it never really occurred to me to. I don't think there was much you could do, at least in those days. It was too early, it was before we could complain about discrimination and unfair treatment. I'll go on and tell you more stories about that – it gets even better. That was just the tip of the iceberg. You can see that it still hasn't ended.

CHOI: So just moving along, chronologically, and also, if you could --

SELIGSON: Sure.

CHOI: So you went onto graduate --

SELIGSON: And I graduated with my class. And my parents came to graduation.

CHOI: Your father must have been proud.

SELIGSON: He was thrilled.

CHOI: And then --

SELIGSON: And then I went abroad for a while. Well no, before I went abroad, I'm sorry let me get this right. No, before I went abroad, I worked for a year in New York. I worked at a nursing home, the Mary Manning Walsh Home. It was close to my parents' house. This home was part of the Archdiocese of New York. It was a Catholic nursing home. A year or two earlier Ralph Nader had done a study about nursing homes. After he left cars he went on to nursing homes, and he exposed scandals going on in nursing homes and the terrible conditions in many homes. This was in the early 70s. And he rated the Mary Manning Walsh Home the

second best in the nation. I went to work for one of the assistant administrators, she was a nun. In those days they wore the full habit right down to the floor. One of her responsibilities was the liaison with organization and people outside of the home such as the Archdiocese of New York. So, when dignitaries such as Cardinal Cook visited the home I would handle the arrangements and the press and things like that. It was kind of fun.

CHOI: So you went from... did you apply anything from your major to this?

SELIGSON: No, not really.

CHOI: Why did you decide to go there then?

SELIGSON: I honestly don't remember. I know that sounds really crazy. My father knew a lot of people in New York and he probably said "call this person" or something like that. I was trying to decide what to do at the time and it was an interesting job. I got to meet a lot of interesting people and working for the Archdiocese was a very different kind of experience for me. I'm not Catholic, but that didn't matter. My mother was Catholic, but not a practicing Catholic. My father was Jewish, not a practicing Jew. It was in the neighborhood and it was this very well known and well respected home. I was interested in the aging and in healthcare for the aging. I worked there for a year. Then I went abroad.

CHOI: Why?

SELIGSON: Well because I loved to travel. I had traveled before. Part of it was, I had a pen pal in Cape Town, South Africa since I was nine or ten years old. My grandfather had gone there. My mother's father was a translator. He worked for the Moore-McCormack Steamship Company for about twenty or thirty years. He was in the merchant marine during the Second World War. And he had gone with his ship to Cape Town, South Africa. He met a doctor and his daughter on the pier. The daughter said something like, "Oh I'd like to have a pen pal in the United States," and my grandfather said, "Well I have a granddaughter just your age." So he brought back this letter for me with some pictures. And I corresponded with her for all those years and I always wanted to visit.

CHOI: Were you corresponding even throughout college?

SELIGSON: Oh yes. Suzanne Hirschorn. They lived in Camp's Bay, which is a beautiful suburb of Cape Town. In fact, Suzanne would send me the postcards that were sold to tourists in Cape Town, and she'd circle her house because it appeared in every postcard. You could see Table Mountain in the background and Camp's Bay in the foreground and her house was right there. It was just spectacular. So I wanted to visit with her. One of my classmates from MIT, Paul Tanner, had come from London. He grew up there and he went to MIT for four years and then went back to live in London. Paul and I are still close, we keep in touch regularly. I also

wanted to visit with him in England. And then I had cousins in Nairobi who I had never met and I wanted to visit with them also. So I spent about six months abroad. I went to England, Scotland, East Africa including Kenya and Tanzania and visited my cousin and toured the bush. I was always very much interested in natural history, animals, and conservation. I was an environmentalist way before people knew what that was. And I went to South Africa to visit Suzanne and her parents.

CHOI: How was that?

SELIGSON: Oh, it was very interesting. They still have Apartheid at that time. It was an interesting experience particularly because I had never spent any time in the south here in the U.S. And that year, 1973 South Africa was celebrating 25 years of Apartheid, if you could call it celebrating, I'm not sure that's necessarily the right word. I had some Apartheid experiences that I'll never forget. Suzanne was taking a class in the morning, in town, near her father's office. His medical practice was right in town. Each day I would go into town and meet her for lunch. I would walk from the Hirschorn house known as "Windygates" down to the road that runs by the ocean and take the bus into town. The busses were double-deckers like they have in England. One day as I am waiting the first bus that comes by is a "blacks-only" bus so I'm not allowed to ride on it. They had "blacks-only" busses, they had "whites-only" busses, and then they had mixed where the whites sat on the first floor and the blacks sat on the second floor. And so the next bus that comes along was a "black and white" bus, so I was allowed to ride on it. But I had to sit on the first floor. When I met up with Suzanne, I said to her, "You know, I'm certainly not in favor of any kind of discrimination so I'm totally opposed to Apartheid." She and her family were also opposed to Apartheid because they were in English camp not the Dutch camp. And I said, "There's something that I don't get about this. The white people are in charge here, correct?" She goes, "Yes." I said, "They're making the rules, correct?" She says, "Yes." "And this is supposed to be to their advantage, correct?" She goes, "Yes." I said, "Then how come when the first bus came along I had to wait twenty minutes more, and I'm a white person. And then when the second bus came I couldn't sit upstairs. I'm at tourist and I wanted to sit on the top deck to get the view, but I had to sit downstairs, and I'm a white person." I then said, "If the white people are making the rules, isn't something backwards?" She laughed.

CHOI: So you weren't allowed to go up...

SELIGSON: No! There were rules against mixing the races; those were the rules for everybody. It was a very stratified society, and it is something that I'll never be able to understand. I guess this was what the U.S. South used to be like. They had drinking fountains for whites and drinking fountains for others, it was segregated. And in many ways it was more segregated than the U.S. because there were places for whites, places for coloreds, and places for blacks. There were towns that were only for black people. Anyway, it changed. Twenty-eight years later it

ended after 48 years of Apartheid, if I got that right. But it was interesting, it was a real eye-opener. That was more of a shock than perhaps anything else I had personally encountered in my life up to that time. Well, no not necessarily. I spent a summer in India. We missed that whole trip. After my freshman year I spent a summer in India.

CHOI: Doing what?

SELIGSON: On an exchange program.

CHOI: Through MIT?

SELIGSON: No, through the Experiment in International Living.

CHOI: Wow. So what did you do there?

SELIGSON: It was a cultural exchange and we each lived with a family. We had groups. My group had twelve people. And I was the youngest in the group. Most were in graduate school, some were out of college and a few were in college. I was the youngest one in the group because I had just completed by freshman year. Our group went to the south of India. The other nine groups went to the north. The south was more rural than the north. We went to the state of Mysore which is no longer called Mysore because they changed all the names in India and I can't get them straight now. And the main city in Mysore is Bangalore, I don't know what they call it today. But Bangalore is very famous from the days of British rule. We stayed in a coffee growing area outside of the village of Chikmagalore. Seven of the twelve of us stayed with the families who had coffee plantations and the other five stayed in town. Our families sometimes met with each other and did things together. And then we had time when we could travel on our own; and we spent two weeks at a University in Bombay. I spent about twelve weeks in India. It was very interesting, it was different. It's too long of a story to even get into. But I would say that the trip to South Africa was more surprising in many ways than any place I've been including India because this whole notion of Apartheid was something I just couldn't get my hands around. And it's a beautiful place and it was a very vibrant economy. Even though there was no question that the blacks could not achieve the same social and economic levels as the whites, I think things today are worse than they were then. It would take too long for me to begin to talk about South African politics. Then I came back and I went to graduate school at Johns Hopkins.

CHOI: How did you decide to do that?

SELIGSON: Well I decided I wanted to study the history of science.

CHOI: History of science.

SELIGSON: Yeah because that's kind of like a lot of what I was doing at MIT. History of Science.

CHOI: But after your work, I mean, at this point you had traveled abroad. Did you miss school? Is that why you decided to go back or had you planned it the whole time?

SELIGSON: No. I had thought about going to graduate school, it was kind of like, everybody went to graduate school didn't they? I figured I'd do that too. I was preprogrammed. And I liked history of science and I thought that I would teach college.

CHOI: Why did you choose Johns Hopkins?

SELIGSON: Okay, well first I looked to see which universities had the good History of Science programs. Yale had a very good program, Johns Hopkins had a very good program, the University of Indiana at Bloomington had a very good program, and the University of London Ontario in Canada had a very good program. Those were the four that I selected and I went to visit all of them.

CHOI: Oh wow.

SELIGSON: (Laughter) Yes. I had to visit them. How would I know where I wanted to go?

CHOI: Exactly. So why did you like, Johns Hopkins the best?

SELIGSON: I got into all of them.

CHOI: Oh, yes!

SELIGSON: You're smiling. I was offered money by all of them. And I made my decision in part on the school, but also in part on the city. I decided I could not survive in Bloomington, Indiana or London, Ontario, and I wasn't that keen on New Haven. And also, there were rumors that the History of Science department at Yale was not going to be around for too long. And they proved to be true because they closed the department a couple of years later. So I went to Johns Hopkins.

CHOI: Okay. Did you like it there?

SELIGSON: No.

CHOI: Oh, why?

SELIGSON: After MIT? It was like going to grade school.

CHOI: Really! You were just not challenged at all?

SELIGSON: It was not only a question of being not challenged, it was just so parochial. There was so much politics.

CHOI: In what sense?

SELIGSON: Politics. University politics.

CHOI: Like...even though they should do this...

SELIGSON: Everybody was fighting over turf. It was a very small department. They only conferred graduate degrees, you couldn't get an undergraduate degree there. They did have undergrad students. Everybody was fighting over turf. A lot of what I wanted to do was at the medical school. At the medical school they had a big school of public health and I was very interested in public health issues. And I took classes there and they didn't like me taking classes there. It was just like a tug of war. I threw my hands up after one year and I left.

CHOI: That's when you decided to leave.

SELIGSON: I just said to myself, this university stuff is not for me.

CHOI: Wow. You never considered going to MIT?

SELIGSON: Well MIT didn't have History of Science.

CHOI: But for any other type of...

SELIGSON: Oh for something else? No. I decided I was going to go to work.

CHOI: Where did you go to work?

SELIGSON: I became a stock broker.

CHOI: How did you decide to do that?

SELIGSON: I had always had an interest in the market. I had followed stocks a lot. I had not actually invested my money, but I had pretend invested my money for years. I wanted to do something that gave me more independence. It just seemed to be a natural fit for me. It required me to learn a lot in an area in which I had no real background. And I thought it would be fun.

CHOI: But the thing is most people are very afraid to jump into completely different things, right? Or is it because, well you seem to be very well-rounded, obviously your history... were you scared at all?

SELIGSON: Well my father had worked for himself his entire life. When he left college, I think he worked for his father for maybe a year, and then he went and started his own business. And my father always told me I should work for myself. This was something that was really ingrained in me. And this was close to working for yourself. You worked on commission. You developed your own group of clients. It was like working for myself. But they had training programs and I think the program I was in lasted for six months. Then you have to take the exams to get licensed.

CHOI: And this is in Baltimore.

SELIGSON: Yes, it was in Baltimore.

[end of Tape 1 Side B]

CHOI: Just, you were saying, this is a little bit off-topic...

SELIGSON: Yes, what I was saying was that women of my generation were probably a little bit less like the stereotype of the MIT woman. Again this goes back to the admission criteria for my generation.

CHOI: Was it just because of the time?

SELIGSON: I think it was in part because of the times, and in part because of who they chose to admit. They were looking for students that weren't stereotypically MIT and maybe they found them.

CHOI: I guess so. But still, the women of your time were similar to you then?

SELIGSON: Some yes, some no. We were all very different.

CHOI: So you were at the point where you became a stock broker in Baltimore.

SELIGSON: Oh yes. So there were, in those days the two largest brokerage firms were Merrill Lynch and Bache & Company. And Bache later became Bache Halsey Stuart and later got swallowed up again. They were the two that had good training programs, the only two with real training programs. So I applied to them both, was rejected by Merrill Lynch but accepted by Bache & Company. The way it worked was, they gave you a salary for six months while you trained, took your classes, and then took your exams in New York. And then you returned from New York you were just thrown into it and had to make money. And I do remember, they gave me \$1000 a month, which was in those days more money than it is today, obviously. But I found out that some of the guys in my training program were making \$1200 or \$1400 a month, so I went to my manager and I said, "Why," and he said because they have families, and they're married and they have to support their families. That was still in the days when companies could discriminate based

on sex and marital status. I went to New York, took my exams, and started working as a stock broker. And then I learned about a little known product which was a combination life insurance and equity product. Well really, it was more than a product, it was really a program. In those days you could sell a tax-deferred annuity to people who worked for not-for-profit organizations. That included people who worked for 401-B2s which were mostly schools or 501-C3s, which were charities such as the Red Cross. The idea was that since people who worked for these types of organizations were making less money and didn't have good retirement programs, they would be allowed to put money away tax-deferred for retirement. There were products out there available to them that they could put their money into. They were insurance/equity products and most were offered by life insurance companies. The Travelers Insurance Company's product was the one that I sold. The employee would make a payroll deducted contribution each paycheck. The employee could elect to put it into the fixed side or the variable side of the annuity. The fixed side would get a fixed rate of return, like a savings account, maybe seven or eight percent. The variable side was invested in mutual funds, and at that time the return was about nine or ten percent. They could move it back and forth without any charge whenever they liked. But all the money they put away was tax-deferred so it lowered their taxable income each year and they did not pay tax on it until they took it, which was usually out many years down the road. Upon retirement they could convert it into annuity if they chose. It was a very, very good product, so I was pleased to be able to see it. So I left the brokerage company to become an independent insurance agent so that I could see that product. I was already licensed to see insurance because when at Bache & Company we had to get licensed for the New York Stock Exchange, the NASD, commodities, and life insurance.

CHOI: And I just want to add, you were one of the five women?

SELIGSON: At that time, to my knowledge there were only five female stock brokers in Baltimore. There were two at Bache & Company and three at three other companies. I was only the second woman at Bache. There were fifty men and two women in that office.

CHOI: Was it similar to MIT in that sense?

SELIGSON: It was. That's where discrimination really hit you right in the face. The only reason they were hiring you was because they had to. Merrill Lynch, later, was sued in a class action suit, in which I actually participated. I received a few hundred dollars because I was in the group of people that had been denied employment, women. It's still going on today. Recently there have been several major lawsuits against the brokerage industry. So nothing has changed. At any rate, I found out about the tax-deferred annuities and decided to go off on my own to sell them. I negotiated with the City of Baltimore Public Schools for a payroll slot. They were about half-dozen slots so tying one up for the Travelers was a big deal. I was an independent agent, which meant that I was really working for

myself and I could represent other Insurance Companies at the same time. They paid me a commission on what I sold. The tax-deferred annuity was a fabulous product, a good deal for the investor, board, and therefore a very easy sale. And I could sell it anyone employed by the Baltimore city public schools. The majority of employees were women and most of them were married. So these families with two incomes could really use the tax deduction, and they had the available income to make large contributions to the pension plan. And of course the more money they put into the pension plan, the more money I made because I got a percentage of everything that was invested. And because it was a payroll deduction, once they started doing it, they never stopped. They didn't have to write a check. Month after month, year after year, I kept adding people to the rolls. It kept getting bigger and bigger. It was almost guaranteed income for me.

CHOI: Did you enjoy it?

SELIGSON: I enjoyed my free time. I only worked a couple of hours each evening and that was it.

CHOI: Wow.

SELIGSON: I would deliver literature to the Schools at lunchtime, and I had a woman I paid to set up my appointments. So when she called the teachers kind of knew about I already. And I'd have two appointments each evening. Out of every ten people I saw, I signed up nine. And they were happy and they couldn't get hurt.

CHOI: So you had all this free time, what did you do in your free time?

SELIGSON: Stuff. (Laughter) Well I got involved in a lot of volunteer activities, not the least of which included volunteer work for MIT. I was on the educational counsel, interviewing prospective students, and I was involved with the local MIT club. I helped with programs and with fundraising, sucking money out of other alumni. That's how they came to ask me to apply for a job at MIT, to work for the Alumni Association. So I worked at the Alumni Association for about two and a half years until they fired me.

CHOI: Really?

SELIGSON: Yes. Why did they fire me? Well there were five people who did what I did at the Alumni Association. We were called Regional something-or-others, I don't even remember. We each had a region. My region started in Philadelphia, went south through Florida and Puerto Rico, west including Oklahoma and Texas, and all the states in between. And that's where I traveled raising money for the MIT Alumni Association. We would have telethons (fundraisers via telephone), we would sponsor club programs, we ran a huge event in Florida every year. And there were four other people who did what I did and they were all guys. I found out that I raised more money than any of them; I had the biggest territory and guess what

else? I had the lowest salary. Isn't that just amazing? Isn't that truly amazing? Well I did, I had the lowest salary. So I squeaked. And I squeaked very loud. And they fired me. And then I sued them.

CHOI: Did you win?

SELIGSON: No because I only spent \$100,000 and they spent \$1,000,000 to defeat me and they did.

CHOI: So how do you...

SELIGSON: Now did you read about the lawsuit that, a while back, the women faculty filed against MIT?

CHOI: No.

SELIGSON: You didn't? This was about four or five years ago, maybe before your time. Yes, the women faculty filed a class action suit – Oh! They wouldn't let me have a class action suit. They said I was a class by myself. So I had to sue MIT by myself. I couldn't bring other employees into the suit. The women faculty sued MIT saying they were being discriminated against in many different ways. The cutest thing they did – I saw this in an article somewhere, I'm sure you can find it, (there were several articles in the Boston Globe, The New York Times) was they measured their office space. And they measured the male faculty members' office space. And they measured it for all different levels of faculty, tenured professors and all others. And they found out that aside from the salaries being different, the office space was different. The women had less office space, no matter what position they were in, the women had less space than the men, fewer square feet of office. It was brilliant and. MIT settled with them. That was the first time MIT ever settled a discrimination suit. In the past MIT would go to court and spend whatever it would take to defend against the suit. I couldn't afford to match MIT's spending, to fly in witnesses, and hire investigators. And witnesses disappeared. I'm not saying they were paid off, maybe they were or maybe they were just afraid to testify against MIT. I'm still waiting for the apology.

CHOI: So how does this make you feel towards MIT specifically? Even though this is happening all over the world?

SELIGSON: Well it does not make me feel good. I stopped giving them money. I just give them \$100 a year now to pay for my Technology Review. They're out of my will. Well not really. AMITA's in my will, and I do give to some of the women's projects at MIT. I guess something like 50% of my estate will go to charity because I have no children, I just have one nephew. He's going to get some of it but he doesn't deserve all of it. I didn't mean it that way, I mean he's a good kid. But MIT is not in my will.

CHOI: So do you think fondly of your undergraduate experience?

SELIGSON: Oh yes, absolutely, but with certain reservations. And you're right. Discrimination still occurs all over the place. And I guess the thing that, the reason I like to talk about this is that I think that people of your generation, no offense, and even the people significantly younger than me, they haven't experienced some of the blatant discrimination so they think everything's okay. But it's not okay. There's still a lot of discrimination. It's more subtle, there is a glass ceiling for women. And of course the discrimination is not just against women. It is true for minorities, particularly blacks in this country. It's the same. It's worse, perhaps. It is worse. I guess for blacks it is worse. It's different. Worse may not be the right word. Black people say, well we can't make our skin white. That's true. And with women, we can't make ourselves male, although some women have masqueraded as men in their lifetimes. One of the most interesting things that's come to light recently, there's a book written about this author who I've not read, but I really want to read her now. She wrote as James Tiptree, Jr., that was her nom de plume and for years everybody was positive she was a man. Even though they figured it was a nom de plume, they figured it was a man. Turns out to be a woman, and no one can believe it. They say she wrote with a male voice! She wrote science fiction. Her biography's came out recently and I think it is really cool that she got away with her deception for so long. So, it's like, yeah, if you can kind of masquerade as a man, then you won't feel the effects of discrimination.

CHOI: So what do you do then, to cope with all this?

SELIGSON: Coping... well, that's one reason I work for myself, I do my own thing. I've only worked for somebody for little periods of my life. I worked for at Mary Manning Walsh and I worked for MIT. Otherwise I haven't worked for anybody. I guess my dad was right, work to be your own boss. So in a way, that solves a lot of problems.

CHOI: But you came up against it a lot, and very blatantly too.

SELIGSON: Yes, but I think most women of my generation have. I'm willing to discuss it and confront it head on; I think other people perhaps are not. I think some women, to be honest with you and not to take anything away from them, it's how different people deal with things, I think some other women sort of pretend it doesn't exist. That's their way of dealing with it. I don't think that's a good solution, but I can't criticize anybody for doing that because you have to survive. And different people have different responsibilities also. I have no children; I've never been married, so I only have to account for myself. Other people don't have that luxury. So I don't want to make a judgment about somebody else, but I will say that a lot of people put their heads in the sand. And I think a lot of young people really don't understand what's going on out there and really don't understand how bad it still is.

- CHOI: Basically what I'm trying to get at is that I'm very intrigued by how, you constantly seem to be doing something or progressing somehow, despite the discrimination you have face. I can't imagine things like getting a grade lower and/or having someone say it to my face or, especially, going to court against MIT, a school that I went to and I enjoyed. I would be so upset.
- SELIGSON: Well, okay. The professor, I wish I remembered his name, but you can look him up, you can find his name and put it in there because, like I said, he later became dean of students, this professor in course 1, he was not the only one. Other classmates of mine, women I know, had things like that happen to them. They also were discriminated against. I can't remember what they were but I remember women telling me things that were said to them that today would definitely be called discriminatory. There was a lot of that. I guess that kind of goes back a little bit to what the admissions officer who interviewed me said. She said, the women have to be tougher. And that was true. You have to have a bit of a thick skin to get by. And I guess you have to have a good sense of your own self-worth also. But yeah, my generation, we encountered it because you were allowed to say it back then without any repercussions. Now you can't get away with being overt, so in some ways it's more insidious now because it's hidden.
- CHOI: That's very true. I would agree with that.
- SELIGSON: It's like racism. It's the same thing. In the old days you could be racist to somebody's face. Now you have to masquerade. So, it's the same notion. And again, back to the whole issue that women had to be better, they had to be better at what they were doing. It was the only way they could compete.
- CHOI: But you couldn't risk your reputation for that.
- SELIGSON: Being better?
- CHOI: Yes, you didn't get so frustrated at times that you wanted to snap?
- SELIGSON: Maybe, I don't remember that. I will tell you, though, the MIT lawsuit, that had a profound effect on me. I was probably depressed for three years afterwards. I think I really was, that had a profound impact on me. And what's even more unbelievable was, after the trial was over, I found out that there was a woman that could have testified on my behalf, who would have just blown their whole case out of the water, but it wasn't going to happen because they managed to make it not happen. And then of course you also find out about perjury. People got up on the stand and just perjured themselves. At one point, before I was fired from MIT I had already hired an attorney. And the attorney, she was a woman, a really top attorney at a top law firm in Boston, Hale and Dore. It's a famous law firm that was involved in some historic cases. I'm blanking on this woman's name again, it's terrible. But anyway, I'll never forget the day I met her to interview her. She was in a red dress and I was really impressed she wasn't in a black suit.

(Laughter) She was already a partner with the firm and she was only a few years older than me as I recall, so she was really impressive. At one point I was in my office at MIT talking to her on the phone when this other person came in and started yelling and screaming and she heard the whole rant on the phone. She heard the whole conversation. A lawyer is bound to tell the truth in court, she doesn't even need to be sworn in because a lawyer is an officer of the court. And at one point in the trial she's cross-examining this person. She says, now I was on the phone with my client and didn't you say such and such. A lawyer would never be allowed to ask that question if it wasn't true. So the witness lies right on the stand because she says, no I didn't say such and such!

CHOI: Wow.

SELIGSON: So it was obvious that she perjured herself, and the judge knew this. But they don't get people for perjury very often. But the judge knew she had perjured herself. So it was really interesting. It was a very complicated case. We sued under several different laws, both federal and state, title 7 laws. The instructions to the jury were very, very long. It was a six-member jury. I think it took about half an hour for the judge to give the instructions. And I think that the case was too complicated for the jury. I should have never had a jury trial. And the judge did something that was absolutely unheard of. After the jury brought in their verdict and they left, and everybody stood up, the judge looked at me and he said, "I would have not found that way for you," which is just unheard of, that a judge would say something like that publicly. It was just devastating.

CHOI: It was so complicated, that's why...

SELIGSON: Well that was part of it but not all of it. MIT spent a fortune on the defense. A million dollars.

CHOI: How can they argue away the fact that you were making the most money, you were in biggest region, and you were paid the least amount. That's just impossible to me.

SELIGSON: But that's how it works. And, at any rate, the fact that we had a jury trial, that'll teach you not to have a jury trial. But the judge said he would have found for me. But anyway, for a couple of years, I was not a happy camper.

CHOI: I can't imagine. I think I would break down after something that big. Especially from your school.

SELIGSON: But it wasn't the first time and it wasn't the last time. When I read the article, the article about the women faculty, having MIT settle with them, I was yelling and screaming and crying while I was reading it. I wanted to write a letter to President Vest and say, where's my apology? but I didn't. I probably should have.

CHOI: But now we have a woman.

SELIGSON: What?!

CHOI: Now we have a woman president now.

SELIGSON: Assuming that makes it better. We don't know that yet. We don't know that yet.

CHOI: So after that whole thing you moved to South Florida. And why did you choose to?

SELIGSON: I moved to South Florida actually for my health. I had discovered when I was about sixteen that I had some really bad pollen allergies to grass and leaves and other green stuff. And I had these allergies for years; I had them when I was at MIT. It was awful. In Baltimore they were really bad because that's the worst place for people with my allergies, the mid-Atlantic, Delaware, Washington, Maryland, Virginia. And it was bad, I was sick all the time. I was sick 365 days of the year. When it got cold and the pollen went away, my sinuses were messed up from the allergies, so I would have a cold all winter long. So my doctor told me that I had to get out of there. He said that I had to go either to South Florida or to San Diego because those are they only two places in the country where I wouldn't suffer from my allergies to the pollen and to the cold. Well I had relatives in South Florida and I had been going there to visit for a long time so I finally took his advice and I moved and it was amazing. After about two months I couldn't believe how healthy I was. I didn't realize I'd been operating in this fog for about twenty years. It was really amazing. A lot of people have that problem.

CHOI: So then what did you do in Florida?

SELIGSON: I had gotten my real estate license in Baltimore because I'd had all this time on my hands. But I never really sold real estate; I would only give referrals if I had customers who needed to sell a house or other real estate. I would just refer them to my broker and he would give me a commission for referring them. Oh! In 1986 the IRS changed the tax laws so the market for tax-deferred annuities changed dramatically. People could no longer defer taxes and the large sums that they had in the past, so they were putting much smaller amounts into their pension plans. Now it was limited to something like 5% down from a high of about 50% of their annual income. So that totally influenced, I'd been receiving commissions on my business when I was working at MIT, how my insurance business was going. When I left Baltimore I still had my insurance business and I was still collecting commissions on the people who were still participating, but the size of those commissions changed completely after the tax law was revamped in 1986. So I said, well I can't do that anymore, I can't make any money out of it. So it was a choice of either going into the life insurance business and selling life insurance and health insurance, which I had sold before, but only in a very limited way, or doing something else. So I got my real estate license in Florida.

CHOI: You just decided to do it?

SELIGSON: Well I had a real estate license already. So I said, oh I'll get my real estate license instead of getting my insurance license in Florida. I got my real estate license. I went to work as an agent, eventually got my broker's license, and went to work for myself.

CHOI: Again.

SELIGSON: Again, well it was easier to work for yourself, straight commission; you do what you want, when you want. You have to work under a broker, but it is really being in business for yourself. I sold houses.

CHOI: Did you enjoy it?

SELIGSON: Well, yeah, I enjoyed it. It gave me a lot of free time. I worked whenever I wanted. I dealt with whomever I wanted. If I didn't like you, I didn't have to deal with you.

CHOI: Did you find yourself doing different things with your free time now that you weren't sick all the time?

SELIGSON: Well, I've always done a lot of volunteer work. I became a Guardian ad Litem. I don't know if you're familiar with the program. In some states it's called Guardian ad Litem, in some states it's called CASA. I'm not sure what it is in Massachusetts. It's for children who've been removed from their families either for neglect, abuse, or sexual abuse. Their family members each get a lawyer to represent them, but the kids don't get a representative. But they do get a volunteer if they're lucky. And the volunteer can either be a lawyer or a lay person, you don't have to be a lawyer. You're not a big brother or a big sister, it's not that kind of program. You're their representative in court, and you advocate on their behalf. The Guardian's job is to learn all about the kid, you meet with the parents, you meet with the social workers, you meet with the teachers.

CHOI: You meet with the parents too.

SELIGSON: Oh sure, you have to meet with everybody, you have to learn about them. And you meet with the child. And then, when you go to advocate for the child you tell the judge what you think is best, whether you think they should be reunited with the family, whether you think they should be placed with a relative, what kind of services they need, you're the child's representative until the child gets out of the system.

CHOI: That's a very, very responsible person.

SELIGSON: Yes, it's kind of amazing.

CHOI: How did you even get into it?

SELIGSON: Well I just know about it, I know about it for a long time. And I wanted to get involved for a long time. So after I came to Florida and started having time I applied to be a Guardian. They do a background check and you have to take a class, and then you learn on the job. You get one case, and then you can volunteer to take more cases. I had about ten kids.

CHOI: Wow, you're just really good at picking up things and being able to do it then.

SELIGSON: Well, I mean, anybody, well not just anybody...

CHOI: It's not anybody can do it. That's a huge responsibility.

SELIGSON: Yes, but it's good to have a big mouth. But also if you're successful in real estate, real estate is really about negotiating, then you can be an effective Guardian by using a lot of the same skills. It's not perfect, you have to try to find the best of what's available.

CHOI: But you have to figure out first what you think is right.

SELIGSON: What I think is right, yes. I listen to everybody, and then I make my own decision. Then I go to court and I appear before the judge, and what is so amazing about the program is that the judges really respect the Guardians, the family court judges, they know that the guardians really know more than anybody else and truly have the child's best interests at heart. I have no axe to grind. Everybody else has an axe to grind. Everybody. The lawyers, the parents, the social workers, everybody has an axe to grind except the guardians, the volunteers. The social workers are always covering their tail, the parents, who knows what they're doing, everybody, even the teachers! Everybody except the guardians. And so the judges listen to the guardians.

CHOI: Has it been really hard for you?

SELIGSON: With the kids? Yes, I got some really tough cases. I'm not a guardian anymore. But I got some really tough cases. Some of my cases had very, very good outcomes. Others had almost no outcomes, kids that have just been lost. The older they are the harder it is. And I think when they're boys it's harder than when they're girls. I had two teenage boys, and they were my last two cases. I might do it again but I needed a break. We lost both of those boys. I don't know where they are, and I can't imagine any good outcome. I had really good outcomes with others. You know, it cancels each other out. And the judges in this are just wonderful. It is usually the judges that are at the bottom of the judge totem pole who get assigned to family court. And if the judge doesn't like it, they can get

promoted up and out pretty quickly. They don't have to spend a long time in family court. But some really top judges choose to go there and then some choose to stay there because they want to do it. And they end up having the very best judges there. They're just amazing.

CHOI: So then you did that also and then...

SELIGSON: Well that was just one of my volunteer jobs. In Maryland, I told you I was an educational counselor and co-chairman of the Maryland council. I was chairman for the Baltimore area and there was a chairman for the suburbs of DC. Together we were the co-chairs for many years. So when I came to Florida I drafted into becoming an educational counselor again; and then I became chairman for Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties. Monroe County includes the Keys. Chairman, John Sterner, he was about 80 at the time, he was anxious to retire and he said, please! And I said okay. So I was chairman here for many years and I gave up the chairmanship about five years ago and I stopped being an educational counselor. I had always said that I would remain an educational counselor until 50% of the undergraduate students at MIT were women. And when I finally gave it up MIT was 45% women. I said that's good enough.

CHOI: (Laughter) Rounded up? That's so cool.

SELIGSON: So I did that for many years.

CHOI: And then when did you move to San Diego?

SELIGSON: About five years ago.

CHOI: And why did you decide to do that?

SELIGSON: Well that was the only other place I could live, remember?

CHOI: Because you wanted to live in two places.

SELIGSON: Well no, not exactly. I had been going out there, I have friends there, friends from school, from high school, from MIT, and I just liked California. I got to know it better, I really liked visiting. And San Diego's the only other place my doctor said I could live, and the weather there is really good, I always feel really good when I'm out there. It's a little cool for me in December, January, February, because it can drop down into the forties sometimes, but I'm not there that much. I got my real estate broker's license out there and I thought I would move out there and live there full time.

CHOI: You wanted to leave Florida. Why did you want to leave?

SELIGSON: Mmm... I'd have enough. Florida is a vast cultural wasteland.

CHOI: You think so? Why?

SELIGSON: Well, there's no culture as we know it in the Northeast. Now, San Diego doesn't have the most culture either but it's a lot better than Florida. I got tired of the summers here; they're very hot and humid. But it's not just the weather. And culture, not only culture in terms of the music and the art and the dance and all the rest of that but culturally here, this place is...how do I try to not totally bash South Florida...People here are not very nice. It's very difficult to do business here. There's a real clash of cultures here, it's a melting pot in the true sense. We are really south of the border. The U.S. border stops at the Broward County line, we're no longer in the United States here. I don't know how else to put it. Okay I'll give you an example. You go to the Bal Harbor Shops, which I guess is the most expensive mall in Miami-Dade County, and you walk into the stores and people start talking Spanish to you, they don't even want to speak English. Now we're not talking about your local drug store, we're talking about a high class clothing store that's trying to sell really expensive merchandise. In California, I'm staying in this little dinky hotel. It's nice. I would stay in small hotels there. One day I wanted to ask the chambermaid for something like extra towels so I used my three words of Spanish, "Good morning, hello, how are you. Do you speak English?" And she looks up at me in astonishment, and in an accent says, "Well of course I speak English," and she was insulted because in San Diego everybody speaks English. Here in Miami nobody wants to speak English. I have nothing against people speaking their own language, but you're working in a store, speak English! I wouldn't care if the chambermaid didn't speak English for what they're paying her. People in Miami do not know what the word service means. I think they believe service means punch him in the nose and see if I can pick his pocket. I mean, the whole work ethic here is upside down. At first it didn't bother me, now it's drives me crazy.

CHOI: How long have you been here?

SELIGSON: I've been here twenty years. Too long, it's time to go. California is such a breath of fresh air. It made me see what is going on here and what I don't like.

CHOI: But you're from the Northeast though, you're already from a different type of area right?

SELIGSON: Yes but California's more like the Northeast than Florida is.

CHOI: I trust you because I've never been there.

SELIGSON: I really like California. Things are different there. In many ways they're better than the Northeast. California is very progressive in many ways. That's where they have the strictest auto emissions regulations, that's where people are more concerned about environmental issues, that's where they're worried about

whether they're going to drill offshore, all those kinds of things. California leads the pack in progressive ideas in this country. And although it doesn't have the depth of culture that's in the Northeast, there's a lot of new culture in California. L.A. is a really exciting city. If it wasn't for my health and the weather I'd like to live there but I'm only a two hour drive. A lot of exciting things are happening there. Exciting new museums, new performances, there's a big new fashion component there. L.A. is not just film and television anymore. There's a lot happening out there. And it filters in both directions. Of course Northern California is the home of Silicon Valley as we all know. California is a cool place.

CHOI: How interesting. I just want to touch on something else before we move to California, which is that you ran for political office –

SELIGSON: Yes, here in Florida. Yeah I've always been very political. I ran for County Commission here in 1993. In 1993 we had a restructuring of the County Commission. I'll just explain to you real briefly what the County Commission is. I just had this discussion with a friend in California who's from the Northeast. Unlike the Northeast, here in Florida, government is very county-centric. The cities in Northeast are the important entities, Boston, New York, Chicago, even though it's not Northeast, Philadelphia. Here, the cities are really subservient to the counties. In Miami-Dade County, we used to be called Dade County now we're Miami-Dade County so people know where we are, we have 31 municipalities. One of them is Miami, but Miami's a small city. And Miami as a city is also very poor, but we won't go into that. With 31 municipalities county government is very important. It's more important than city government, because most things happen and are decided at the county level. And the county is run by 13 commissioners. We now have a county mayor. Back in 1993, we didn't have a county mayor.

CHOI: A county mayor? How interesting, okay.

SELIGSON: But we have a weak mayoral system here. But that aside, the county commission is the big deal here. And in '92 they redistricted and restructured the county commission. They increased the number of seats and they redistricted the seats. They made 13 seats on the commission. And that opened up a lot of seats and the possibility for a lot of new people to get into county government. And I got talked into running.

CHOI: How? Like did you want to do it?

SELIGSON: Well yes, of course I wanted to do it.

CHOI: Why did you want to do it?

SELIGSON: Well, the government here in South Florida is extraordinarily corrupt and most of the people in government are stupid beyond belief. And I always thought, just get

a few intelligent people in government, they've got to be able to do a better job! And in many places the same people get elected over and over again. So we thought this was possible because of the redistricting, and so I ran. County elections are nonpartisan. You don't run as Democrat or a Republican. I'm a registered Democrat. And a Democrat can be running against another Democrat. And we have a primary but it's not a primary in the sense you think of a presidential primary. You run in the primary and if nobody gets a majority, 50% or more, then there's a run-off. Frequently there are more than two people running, so no one gets more than 50% and that necessitates a run-off. Anybody can run, you don't need party backing. So the incumbent was a Democrat, I'm a Democrat, and there was also a Republican running. And the incumbent was quite strong but the people who supported me thought he was vulnerable. And we threw him into a run-off, in other words nobody got 50% of the vote. He was so sure he was going to get more than 50% in the primary that, he didn't even mount a campaign! And little me came here from nowhere and created quite an upset. So there was a run-off between the incumbent and me, and I came within about 5 percentage points of winning, but I did not win because he had so much more money than I had, but I came really close. The county commissioners normally serve a four year term and the terms are staggered. So the seat that I ran for came up again for election in a year and a half and in '94 and I ran again. The incumbent retired and then an even stronger candidate ran against me and I lost a second time. And that was it; that was enough. And I was happy I didn't get elected.

CHOI: Because you didn't want to stay here right?

SELIGSON: No, I mean I could have served just four years; that was in '93 and '94. I was happy I wasn't elected because, I think, I just feel once you get on the County Commission your reputation is so compromised you can never recover from it. There are rare people who are not, but most people are corrupted. And even if you are not corrupt, everybody thinks you are. But it's okay. It was a good experience.

CHOI: That's kind of discouraging.

SELIGSON: It's very discouraging. And we have a similar system in San Diego too.

CHOI: So are you thinking of running now?

SELIGSON: No. I've given that up. Just for the time being.

CHOI: So you moved to San Diego five years ago. And you worked part-time as a broker?

SELIGSON: No. I'm a broker in both states. Up until recently I've been working full-time, period. I divide my time but I work full-time.

CHOI: So what is it like in San Diego for you? What do you do in your free time now?

SELIGSON: Right now I don't spend that much time in San Diego because I'm trying to get out of Florida.

CHOI: Completely.

SELIGSON: Yes. I'm trying to sell all of my property here. So I spend about a week a month in San Diego.

CHOI: Well you do a lot of traveling then.

SELIGSON: I just go back and forth once a month. That's basically it. So I spend about a week there mainly to get away from here. Right now I'm not working that much. I'm on the verge of retirement. I'm just trying to sell my Florida property and move on. I'm in transition right now.

CHOI: Wow. I caught you right when you're transitioning.

SELIGSON: I really want to get out of Florida.

CHOI: At least you know that and you're going to do that so that's a good thing.

SELIGSON: Yes. That hurricane really had profound effect on me last year because I had this house under contract, and it fell through right after the hurricane, and I had a couple of my buildings under contract. They fell through right after the hurricane. So I'm back to where I was exactly a year ago. The hurricane's anniversary is like today or tomorrow. I've spent a year getting nowhere, just running in place.

CHOI: And then you started writing you said?

SELIGSON: Oh yes, I've been working on a novel for years.

CHOI: Okay, can you explain?

SELIGSON: I've been working on a novel for about four years now but I'm not making too much progress on it. It's strange story; it comes out of my political endeavors in a way. I started writing about four years ago but it was before... I want to say it was before 2000, before 9/11. I was reading the Miami Herald, which I don't read anymore, I only read the New York Times now. I don't know why I used to read the Herald, but I used to try and keep in touch with things here in Miami. The Herald is a terrible newspaper. I'm spoiled. There was a columnist who was writing a political column and it was really badly written. Some of the ideas were interesting but the writing was terrible. The guy who was writing the column also was writing a political newsletter that he emailed to a large mailing list once a week. Today he would be writing a blog, but this was five, six years ago. And he

couldn't write to save his life. To make a long story short, I met him and I offered to help him. Shoot me in the head. So I started writing the newsletter for him. He collected the information and wrote the first draft and I edited it every week. We even had an editorial section each week. And it was fun. So I did that for about a year and then it got old. It was very time consuming and I wasn't making any money doing it, but he was. That's okay.

CHOI: But how did you know how to write?

SELIGSON: I don't know I just learned how to write.

CHOI: Where did you learn how to write?

SELIGSON: In high school. Oh yes, they made us write.

CHOI: And did you write throughout MIT?

SELIGSON: Some. Yes. But in high school they made us learn to write. We wrote in social studies, we wrote in English, even in speech class we wrote. We learned how to write. My high school had some very good... As important as MIT is to me, I would say my high school was more important in some very, very basic ways.

CHOI: Wow, high school is not like that at all these days. I think that how you learned how to write in high school is pretty amazing.

SELIGSON: I've become a fairly good writer. At any rate, the novel came out of that experience. Do you know who Carl Hiaasen is? He's a Florida writer who's very well-known. He's done very well. He writes a column for the Miami Herald. He's very liberal. He's very much into the environmental issues. He's very concerned about the everglades and what's not being done there. And his novels are hilarious. Everything in his novels comes out of the newspapers. He clips all these interesting stories, real things that have happened. Like alligator swallows python and dies because it gets stuck. That was a recent headline. His clippings are about weird people and weird things. And he incorporates these events and people in his novels. I just finished reading one called *Skinny Dip* that came out about two years ago, and it's about a guy who throws his wife off the side of a cruise ship trying to kill her. Well that one also came from a true story. But he takes the ideas and makes them funny and very Florida. And that's what I've done. I've taken some of my own experiences and some of my experiences with this guy who was writing this newsletter and I've added lots of other things that came from the headlines and from true events from that time period. And it's a Carl Hiaasen-type novel in that it's zany. The bad guys in it are pretty funny. It all takes place in Florida. Anyway, that's my novel.

CHOI: So what's your writing habit? Like how do you...

SELIGSON: See I don't have a writing habit, that's my problem. I need to have a writing habit. I don't. When I have an idea I jot it down. Sometimes I write when I'm on the plane, sometimes I write at night. That's why it's still... it's outlined, part of it's written, it's in chaos and hopefully when I get out of Florida I'll make a writing habit. I think it's a good story because I ran the outline by a couple of friends of mine. They just loved the story. They were laughing very hard when I was telling them the story. And one of them said to me "this shouldn't be a novel, this should be a screenplay." I said, "Well I don't know how to write a screenplay so I have to write the novel and somebody else can write the screenplay."

CHOI: Like a movie!

SELIGSON: Like a movie. It would make a great movie. There's a lot of action, it's very funny. I don't know where this came from. So we'll see.

CHOI: Do you have an aim for when you want it done?

SELIGSON: Oh yeah, it was supposed to be done already! (Laughter) Four years is ridiculous. This was supposed to be done already. So we'll see what happens. And it may never get done. I have a cousin who writes television shows in California. He writes for a lot of well-known shows. I kept thinking, if I never, if I don't get it done maybe I'll talk to him and see if he wants to write the screenplay.

CHOI: For TV.

SELIGSON: Well not for TV, but the screenplay. So if I ever get there I'll talk with him. But I don't really want to give it up yet because it's still my baby. And it is pretty funny.

CHOI: So that's what you enjoy these days.

SELIGSON: Well, yes. Except that's a very small portion of what I'm doing. Right now I'm trying to get out of Florida.

CHOI: So going back to your work experience. You worked for yourself but you tend to say what you enjoy very most is that you have free time. That you volunteer and you're very active.

SELIGSON: I'm very scattered. I do a lot of things.

CHOI: But somehow you obviously keep it very much together. So with your work, how do you connect your life with your work? Work is just work?

SELIGSON: Yes, work is just work. Right now I'm really not working, well barely, if at all. Work's always been just work. It's been more a means to an end than anything else. It's been a way to make a really good living without working very much.

And also without doing anything that's harmful. There are a lot of things I wouldn't do because, to me, they're harmful. Helping people buy homes is a good thing. Just like the insurance product I sold, it was a good thing, it was a good product. There's a lot of stuff out there that's really not good. I have a conscience. I couldn't sell things that I thought weren't good. And so I've been able to do something that doesn't do any harm to anybody, in most cases helps them in some fashion. I don't have to work forty hours a week. I'm not tied to a desk, yet I've been able to make a pretty decent living, probably better than some of my classmates. Now I want to do different things. I have an idea for this product. I'm working on a patent for it.

CHOI: What is it?

SELIGSON: I can't tell you. It's just a frivolous thing. Well I'll tell you what type of thing it is. It's a greeting card, but it's not like any greeting card you've ever seen. And I have a friend who's working on it with me. We're at an impasse now and we'll see. If we can get over the impasse maybe we'll actually be able to start manufacturing it.

CHOI: Did you come up with idea?

SELIGSON: Yes.

CHOI: And are you doing this just as a way to make money or is it interesting to you?

SELIGSON: Well it would be a way to make money and it would also be fun. It really would be fun, if we can get past the impasse. But we may not. This is a very fun greeting card. In fact, when I was at MIT for my reunion in June, I met a fellow who I've known for many years. He's not a classmate of mine but he's an entrepreneur. He's been involved with a lot of start-ups. And he was telling me about his start-up and how he'd been working on this idea for ten years and before they finally started manufacturing. Ten years, Brian, I can't believe it! So I asked him if he would talk with me about the impasse. He said yes. So I'm going to call him and see if he has any advice for me.

CHOI: So you went to the reunion then?

SELIGSON: I went to my thirty-fifth reunion.

CHOI: Did you want to go or were you a little bit upset.

SELIGSON: Oh no, I wanted to go! Yes I wanted to see my classmates. I had a great time. A lot of my friends were there. We had a blast, we had a really good time. So I am working on my greeting card and I want to work on my novel. I would also consider going to work for a foundation or another organization in the not-for-profit sector.

CHOI: A foundation?

SELIGSON: Yes.

CHOI: Do you not like not doing anything?

SELIGSON: What do you mean, not doing anything?

CHOI: Do you ever think, "I just need a break?"

SELIGSON: Oh well I can't just... I joke about retiring. I have to do something.

CHOI: Do you have anything really that you would like to say? You've just said so much, I'm kind of blown away.

SELIGSON: I have to tell you a funny story. When you were asking me about my parents and deciding on MIT. My dad always thought it would be a good idea for me to go to MIT but my mom didn't. My mom wanted me to go to Radcliffe or Vassar or someplace that in her mind seemed better than MIT.

CHOI: You didn't even apply there.

SELIGSON: No of course not. And so one day we were sitting in the car, and I don't know how this got started. My mom started going on and on about my applying to Radcliffe and she didn't want me to apply to MIT. And my father, never ever said anything against my mother. And suddenly he pipes up and says, "Well this is my daughter too, and if she wants to go to MIT she'll go to MIT." So that was the end of Radcliffe. My father, I think, had less set ideas about what I should do than my mother did. He passed away four years ago. But he was very influential in my life, much more than my mother. And I think everybody who knows me says I'm a lot like him. And I guess I get a lot of my ideas and values from him.

CHOI: How about your sister?

SELIGSON: My sister lives in Colorado.

CHOI: Did she go to MIT?

SELIGSON: No, she went to Boston University.

CHOI: Oh she went to Boston though.

SELIGSON: Oh yes, went to Boston because when I was a freshman she came up to visit, and she liked Boston. And she said "I want to go to school in Boston!" My sister was a piano major, a music major. So she went the School of Fine Arts at B.U. And

she got her B.A. from there. And then she later went on to teach music. She has one son, the dancer. And now she lives in Colorado and has a bunch of horses and teaches riding as therapy to disabled kids, as well as to regular kids. And she has a small foundation called the Tame Foundation which is supported by donations.

CHOI: So you don't regret going to MIT.

SELIGSON: Oh no, not at all. If I had to do it all over again, I'd go there again.

CHOI: You would? Through all the hardships and everything?

SELIGSON: Oh yes, absolutely. You're going to have hardships no matter what you do. This whole discrimination issue, it's all over. I'm sad that it's at MIT, but it is. And I'm sad that both people and organizations are so two-faced, claiming it doesn't exist but it does exist. We're never going to get beyond it until the guilty own up to their guilt.

CHOI: If you could make it a little bit more specific, what are your sentiments towards MIT?

SELIGSON: Well, I have very mixed feelings about it. As an institution I'm still very angry at them, but I do whatever I can to change their policies. In terms of my classmates and friends I have very positive feelings. Going to my reunion, has nothing to do with MIT per se, it has to do with the people I met there. When I was still in high school and everybody was talking about the colleges that they were going to attend, one of my high school classmates said to me, "The really cool thing about going to MIT is all the people you're going to meet who are later going to become famous." I don't know that I have met anyone who is now famous, but that's okay. But I sure have a lot of interesting classmates. Many are doing very interesting things. And even those who are not doing interesting things, are very interesting as people. I think that many of my classmates and those from the classes that were close to ours are very socially conscious. I suspect a heck of a lot more than your classmates, no offense. I think it is in part because of the times that we grew up in. I think the vast majority of us, not all, of course, but many have taken those old liberal values along our paths with us and have not discarded them. And I'm amazed at how liberal is considered a bad word today. But my friends don't see it as a bad word. They're proud of their liberalism, they're aggressive about it. I'm amazed in some ways at how informed and well-read they still are. And I'm even more amazed at how much I still have in common with a lot of my classmates.

CHOI: How interesting.