

**MC.0356**

**Interviews of the Margaret MacVicar Memorial AMITA Oral History Project**

**Virginia Barber** – Class of 1939

(interviewed by Heather Back)

September 23, 1994

# MIT Women's Oral History Project



Interview of: Virginia Barber  
name  
PhD '44 Biology (VII)  
year graduated major

\_\_\_\_\_  
accomplishments  
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Interviewed by: Heather Back  
name  
1996 Mathematics (XVIII)  
year major

Interview: Sept. 23, 1994 1 hr, 40 min  
date length of interview

MIT, 4E-304  
location  
Dr. Barber visiting Cambridge  
circumstances  
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Supporting documentation available:

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personal  
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general—archival

H: I was very impressed by looking at your c.v that you sent me and all those kind of things that you were involved in.

V: Well, this is the thing, you see, I switched after I was married for the first few years. My father and mother were both ill; my husband's grandfather died and then his grandmother died, and my father and mother both died. So we had a lot of hassle at the beginning of our marriage, and when we had children, I could have stayed on doing research but I didn't. I didn't feel I wanted to leave the children. I don't know whether it was psychological because of my.. you know, the fact that I had lost my parents, or just what it was, but I don't think... I think in my day, we didn't do it this much. I don't know whether you know it or not, but I brought down with me the data.. did you read about, last June, about how the Wellesley classes did a survey of what their women graduates....

H: You had told me about that; but that's all I knew.

V: Yes. Well, I brought the data.

H: Oh great.

V: This is only the initial letter... it doesn't mean anything but I think the data's okay. (papers got wet)

H: That's all that was compiled from this survey?

V: This is A.. this is where it starts.

H: So what kind of interesting things came out of this survey?

V: Well, there's also a yellow page. It is a summary of some of it, but not all of it. They did the classes of '29, '39, '49, '59, '69, and '79. And it's very aspect of your life; your disasters, your successes, your medical problems, your lifestyle, the whole bit..you know.

H: So you found this to be an interesting thing...

V: Oh, it's very interesting. For one thing, I'm not the only grandmother that's paying for my grandchildren's schooling.

H: So how did you decide on going to Wellesley in the first place?

V: Well, I lived in Arlington; I went to Arlington High School and that.. Everybody was going somewhere; I was the only one in my class that actually went to Wellesley. There were some people from Arlington who were there when I was there, but they were not people that were in my class. Some of my friends went to Mt. Holyoke; everybody went somewhere. And it was just understood that I'd go... It's the only place I applied to, to tell you the truth.

H: So what did you like about the time that you spent there?

V: Oh, I had a marvelous time. It's a beautiful place. When you go back to reunion, it's the one place that you go to that is really as beautiful when you go back, years later, as you thought it was. The trees have all grown up..

H: Yes, I've been up there a couple times. I've really enjoyed the campus.

V: Have you taken courses there?

H: I haven't, no.

V: You should. Just to go, just to be there for a term, because it is such a beautiful spot. It really is. To be there for four years, even if you've never learnt anything. But the interesting aspect of it is that when you're there, you write papers all the time. And when I got here, in graduate school, they go in for seminars and that kind of thing, and I found at Wellesley I wrote and wrote and wrote, and at MIT I talked and talked and talked. I don't know whether they still do that or not...

H: I tend to balance out my courses between humanities and science classes that I'm taking because otherwise I think I'd just drive myself crazy. So I do do a fair amount of writing, although a lot of it is in French, because I'm minoring in French.

V: Oh, you're interested in French? Oh well, come to Montreal.

H: I'd love to, actually. I haven't made it there yet. But yes, I would agree with the fact that there isn't that much writing going on at MIT, but.. Did you know already that you were going to come to MIT?

V: No, I didn't. When I at first went to Wellesley, I thought I was going to be a language major in high school. I was very interested in classics; Latin and languages and English and stuff. I thought I'd probably major in English or something like that, but at Wellesley, they have a set of things called distributions (I think they still do) where you have to take a certain number of courses in social sciences and a certain number of courses in languages and literature and a certain number of courses in math and science. In your first two years, you have to take two courses in each of these three areas. So I had taken...you had to have a science to get into Wellesley, so I took Chemistry. So I decided I'd take Chemistry...and I found the Chemistry department full of very interesting people, so I majored in Chemistry.

H: So then when you decided to go on to grad school, MIT seemed like the right place to be?

V: Well, that was another interesting thing. I sort of fall into things in life somehow...the thing where I never intended to marry and leave the country is... During the summer, my father was an executive with the Hood Milk Company, and we never knew there was a Depression because they took over a lot of companies. My father and one or two of the other executives made all these businesses pay; that was when the company expanded all the time. So we really...our circumstances improved constantly during the Depression, rather than the reverse. I never had to worry about paying for things, but as I say, in those days, Wellesley was a thousand dollars a year, everything found. And your books...well, I have a few books around; a science book might be five dollars, an English book might be a dollar, you know, this kind of thing. It was a different situation. I worked in that my father, at this particular point when I was in college...one of his responsibilities was to be in charge of the laboratory that they had. In the milk business, they had a quality control laboratory and they did some research on the processes and stuff. They wanted to improve the status of their laboratory so they got a bacteriology professor from one of the western universities... I forget which one, Missouri or something.. to come and take over the lab. At this point, I

was in Wellesley and I took a course in bacteriology and I thought it would be nice if I worked during a summer. I never had to do it; I thought it was about time I did. So I worked in this..this was during the summer of my sophomore and junior year, I did this. I got to know the man that was in charge quite well; his name was Dr. Fay. He told my father that he thought I should go on and do graduate work, so.. I really hadn't given much of a thought to what I was going to do, you know... I don't think we were as career-oriented at that time as they are today. He suggested that I go over and interview the department here, it was nearby, you know. So I said okay. So we went and had an interview. Dr. Bunker was in charge of the biology department; by the time I got here, he was the dean of science, and the dean of graduate school or something, I forget. I had this interview and of course they started telling you how difficult it is and this is useless..are you sure you really want to do this and all this kind of thing. Well, all you have to do is tell me that there's something I can't do and I immediately decide this is just what I want to do. After all that, I decided, well, I might as well give it a shot and apply, I probably won't get in anyway. Well, then I did get in and I felt like I had my bluff called, you see, and I wasn't sure whether I wanted to do this at all. My senior year at Wellesley..when I was in college, everything was just having fun with the crowd. I had nobody that I was terribly interested in, in the long term...so I had somebody that I had gone to high school with that was at Harvard when I was at Wellesley and we were both seniors at the same time. I went to a lot of things; the Harvard-Yale game, that kind of thing, house dances and stuff. And then, in the meantime, we had a summer place.. a place up in North Conway, New Hampshire. Do you know North Conway?

H: I don't.

V: You don't. My father hadn't been too well one period in the late 1920's, and we had gone up there to this inn for the summer, since I was quite young, we liked the mountains and that. In those days, instead of traveling around all the time, people tended to go somewhere and stay for several weeks. Then my father would come up on his holidays and we'd take trips around and one of the places we used to take trips up to was Canada. Now, we went to Quebec City at that point. Now, first of all, the Hood Milk Company has some connections with some of the milk producers in Canada, and my mother liked to buy china and wool. So I'm loaded with china, but that's another story. Of course, at this particular time, when I was quite young.. this was back in the 1920's and early '30's, prohibition was on and people used to go up and have a toot..over several days. Go up to Canada and see the sights and have a good time in the evening. I always had to go to bed because I was young...So over the years, this is what we did. My father decided that he'd like to have a place up there so we looked around, and we had opportunity to buy this farm from the family of Professor Merriman at Harvard. He was a historian; a professor of history. This was early 1930 when everything was...the Depression was on. The family was interesting in disposing of the property; the children...he had a son, I think he taught at Philips Andover or something like that, and he wasn't interested in the property. At that particular time, Cambridge University gave the professor an honorary degree and he went over to England. While he was away (he wasn't too enthused about selling it, because it was his mother and father's place), but the son could care less and they made the deal while he was gone. So we bought this property in the Soca River Valley, about a mile and a half outside of North Conway, on a road going north. It was a beautiful spot. My mother, in the meantime, had been to Williamsburg, which had just recently opened at that point. You know they had all the reconstruction of the 18th Century Virginia capital. She became enamored of American furniture, of which they

have quite an interesting collection of in the museum here (MIT) so they went around collecting antiques. While I was at college, she drove around with my father on his businesses trips.. they picked up all these antiques. So the result is, I have all these antiques. I was an only child by the way. Up in North Conway, there were a lot of dentists that had places in the vicinity and further up the line. One of the chaps that I met there was the son of one of these dentists, and he was going to MIT in electrical engineering at that time. So I had one beau at MIT and one beau at Harvard, and I was having a great time. My senior year, I really had a good time. I heard a lot from the one that was at MIT about how dreadful the co-eds were...and he wasn't all that keen on terribly intellectual women. Well, along about that time in the spring, I got elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and then the next thing he knew, I was coming to MIT!

H: Must have surprised him.

V: Anyway, after he graduated...as I say, he was an electrical engineer, he went out to Washington to work on the Grand Cooley Dam, so that disposed of him. The other one went to law school at Harvard, and of course, then the war came on, and he ended up in the judge advocate's department over in Japan during the post-war period of occupation. So that's how I came then; I sort of fell into it, as it were.

H: I don't know information about that time; how many women grads were there?

V: Well, we were about 90 women all together, 90-odd women; graduate and undergraduate. I don't know just what the proportion was.. it wasn't something that I was terribly interested in. Do they still have the Emma Rogers room?

H: Yes.

V: They do. That was very nice. And of course, when I came to MIT, my father bought me a car. We lived in Arlington so I commuted. So living was not a problem. And as I say, the fees were five hundred dollars a year.

H: So with that small number of women, did you find that you bonded?

V: Oh yes, it was very nice. We knew everybody. I don't think we thought too much about who was a graduate and who was an undergraduate, really. They used to have a bridge game going during lunch hour and you'd sit down and play a few hands. You'd get up and go and somebody else would take your hand, and this kind of thing. We had record players, and one of the things that I remember; that was when they brought out Horowitz's interpretation of Tchaikovsky's first piano concerto. Whenever I hear that, I think of sitting in the Emma Rogers room, listening to that. They played it a lot.

H: So you had that sort of support group in the background...for the women.

V: Yes, that's right. And also we had a lot of support from Mrs. Compton. Margaret Compton; she was very supportive of the women students. She used to come to our events and things.

H: What was her position?

V: She was the president's wife...President Compton. She was his wife. She took a great interest in us...if there was anything we felt we needed and stuff. I think that was when we first organized the MIT Women's Association.

That was the first time the women students had an association. A number of the students at that time were architects. That was a very popular field for women students. Another one of the dentists who had places up in that area...his two daughters were here then; Molly and her sister Martha. She married an architect; Molly was the one I knew the most; she married a doctor with the Massachusetts Health Service. Her aunt left her a place up in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, and they live up in Jaffrey, New Hampshire now.

H: So you've kept in touch with a lot of these people?

V: Oh yes. Mary Guinan...have you done her?

H: No, no..

V: She was an architect. She lived in Arlington. There were an awful lot of cripples in MIT at that time. That was the day when a lot of people had polio; there were a lot of people like Jack Pearlman around in those days. He's unusual now, but in the 1930s and '40s there were several polio epidemics and there were a lot of people who were lame, and paralyzed and that... And then we had one girl from China... there were quite a few Chinese students at that time. Of course this was before the war; before the revolution. They all wanted to back and help build up China. There was one Chinese girl, she was very deaf. And there was another girl whose father was in the Marine Corps and he was in Panama. I can remember the day they read the speech declaring war on Japan, and she was very disturbed about that at the time.

H: So did you find that the professors and the rest of MIT's society were also supportive of you as women?

V: I would say so. I never gave it too much of a thought, to tell you the truth. You get used to it, you know. I always thought; it's a value to have gone to a place like Wellesley because about ten or twelve years ago, there was a period when a lot of places were going co-ed. Princeton went co-ed, Dartmouth went co-ed, Vassar went co-ed...this kind of thing. And at that time, Wellesley had a lot of surveys and considerations as to whether they should do the same. The consensus was no; they wanted to stay. They felt that they had a mission to be what they were, so what they've done is, they have this cross-registration program with MIT, so that you can take courses back and forth. But they don't award degrees to men, and I think they have a similar arrangement with Amherst and a few other places too, where you can go there for a term or something like that, but they don't award degrees to men.

H: So you got a fair amount out of the experience of going to an all-female school, then?

V: Well, what I found...of course, this was before all this lesbianism business..before homosexuality was a big issue. It's always been around, I suppose, but we just didn't think much about it in those days. What you do when you go to a place like Wellesley is you make a solid contingent of very close women friends in your adult life. Like, I have a widow friend in Kansas City; she married an older man who died when her oldest child was twelve and the youngest one was six. He was a gynecologist, so she hasn't felt any pain as far as that's concerned, financially. But she had all that responsibility, and I think she's done a marvelous job. She went into education...she took librarians and from that she eventually got into administration and she was the dean... she's done a lot of research on how to select medical students; what factors are important in the selection of

medical students. She's still going around giving papers on this subject.. The point is, as a result, as I've grown older, and her family has grown up, we've traveled together quite a lot. After my husband died, a couple years ago.. a year ago, we went to France together and this kind of thing. I felt it was a good thing. As far as the women in MIT are concerned, basically, they all did very well. The simple reason is, I don't think that you'd be interested in coming to a place like this if you weren't both motivated and pretty good at whatever it was you were interested in. You wouldn't do it, you know. My impression is that, by and large, the women do better than the men do, on the average, because they're a higher level...both from the point of self-selection as well as the institution's selection. While I was here, we had two people of considerable social note who were there. One was somebody by the name of Katherine Aldrich, who was the daughter of Winthrop Aldrich. He's a prominent financier in New York. And the other was Emily Vanderbilt. Now Katherine Aldrich didn't make it; she quit after a couple of years. But, Emily went right through and she'd go around in lab in jeans and all this other stuff, like everybody else, you know. I guess she's been very successful; I think she's quite a prominent alumni now, is she not? She was somebody that was here when I was here..

H: So, in term of what you took out of the experience of being here, not really the academics so much, but just sort of the general way of approaching life.. is there anything that comes to mind when you think about that? A way of approaching problems?

V: Well, when I had that interview that I told you about with Dr. Faye, he said that he thought the interview had gone very well, and so on. And he said, "I have just one comment to make; don't start unless you intend to finish." He said he'd seen so many people who stayed on for two or three years, and gave up, for one reason or another. I thought that was a very cogent thing to say; it makes you think whether this is something that you really want to see through or not, and if you start it, finish it. And that's a message I would give to anybody. When you undertake something, see it through. Because I think anybody that does graduate work, when you get into your thesis work, you go through periods where nothing seems to be going right in whatever it is you're working on, and you get very discouraged. Of course, you have to do it on your own; it's all part of learning to do research. Sticking it out is the thing. Other than that, I thought it was great. I think too, I'm glad I came at the graduate level.

H: Why is that?

V: My impression is that the undergraduate work is difficult to the extent that I had the impression that they tend to feel that it's a big thing if they've succeeded. And of course it is, in a way. But, I found that they were very egotistical in their attitude. They thought they were great stuff because of this and that...I don't think the women are like that.

H: We see that a bit now in incoming freshmen. They're always at the top of their class and then you get in here...

V: Of course, the same thing happens at Wellesley as far as that's concerned. You get there and everybody's a valedictorian. You know, what else is new? But, all I'm saying is that I don't think that women get as impressed with themselves as men tend to do. Or maybe it was just my experience because my mother's sisters...well, both my mother and father came from big families...but my mother's sisters' children all were very academically inclined. In fact, I had a first cousin five years younger than



me, and she came the last year I was here, when I was finishing up. She got her PhD in... I think it was organic chemistry in the late 1940's or 1950's. Her brother was the dean of the business school of Boston College, and the other sister (my mother had two sisters) got a master's degree in sociology and she was working up in Maine. And then the other sister had a son that was a professor of psychology at Fordham, and this kind of thing. There seems to be an academic strain on the family, so it didn't seem to me that I was doing anything so unusual at the time. I didn't think it was that way at all. MIT seemed like a local school, and a good place to go..why not take advantage of the facilities that were there, and so forth. I didn't think all this business about a world-famous institution at all.

H: It's funny; I find that now when I mention MIT, about half the people know what it is and are fairly impressed and the other half have never heard of it all and have no idea.

V: Now, of course, up in Canada, you get a lot of people who don't know what it is. Most people do, though.

H: So how did you end up heading to Canada, then, after your graduation?

V: Well, one year when I was at Wellesley, I took a trip out west. Some of my classmates came from out that way; Wyoming and Kansas City and that sort of thing, so they invited me out there to visit them, so I spent about six weeks out there touring around the west with these two friends and their families. While I was gone, my mother and father took a trip up to Canada, and you know, my mother liked to go there anyway, and they stayed at the Manoir Richelieu and then took a boatride up the Saguenay River. That tour is not longer on; some of the European boatlines go up there in connection with other trips, but they had a cruise that left Montreal that went up the St. Lawrence River and up the Saguenay River and back. It took about four or five days. My mother thought this was great, so after I graduated, one of her close women friends was widowed. So my mother thought it'd be nice if we did something for Grace. I hadn't been on this trip and she thought it was such a beautiful trip, let's go and take this trip up the Saguenay River. So my mother and I and a friend went up the Saguenay River. It was a Canadian steamship line, and they have a large freight business in that, but they ran these cruise ships at the time; they don't anymore. It was quite a place for college and university students to work in the summer. So my husband was working in the purses department on that boat. Everytime we wanted to get on and off and there were tickets to be collected or funds to be changed or whatever, he was there, so I met him. He was just graduating and I was just going into MIT that September, and he was going to work for a chemical firm, CIL, which is sort of a Canadian DuPont. Anyway, that was what he was going to be doing at the end of the season. So we got friendly and we started to correspond. Well, one thing led to another...During the war, he was an investigator and developer for time fuses and things like that. He was in northern Ontario for quite a period of time in a remote place working at one of these ammunitions places. In the meantime, his younger brother joined the Air Force in the beginning of the war and went over and was shot down. All this was going on while I was going to MIT, you see, so during the summer I'd occasionally take a trip up there and he came down and so on and so forth. I went out with a lot of other people while I was here, but nothing gelled. During my last year, my mother and father were having a lot of people down for New Year's at this farm we had up in New Hampshire, and asked if there was anybody I'd particularly like to have up over the holidays. I had nobody in particular at that point, so he came down. So that was it. We'd been corresponding, you know, for years,

but it never occurred to me that I might be interested in marrying somebody and leaving the country. But, I did. He had a very cheap courtship, because it was all postage stamps.

H: So then you headed up to Canada and started working at the Children's Hospital after that, right?

V: Yes, when I first was up there, that was one on of the periods when they were having a polio epidemic. I went and gave my credentials to Dr. Thompson, the dean of science at McGill at the time. He circulated it around. Both my parents were not well. When I married in 1945, everybody was remarking on how well-preserved they were for their age. They had this place up there; I never knew anybody who was so well fixed for their retirement as they were. Then they both got cancer and died. One of the people who had seen my credentials had gotten in touch with me; it was a Dr. Karl Stern. Now, you probably have never heard of him, but he was a German refugee of considerable note following World War II. He and his wife met in London; he worked there at one of the psychiatric research institutes in Germany and they had a head that protected them from the Nazis. He had an international reputation, then he had a heart attack and died. Dr. Stern realized that he was going to have to get out because he was Jewish, so he got a fellowship to get some kind of research appointment in Queen's Hospital in London, and he was able to get out. When he got to London, he met his wife, who was the granddaughter of Willstätter; one of her grandfathers was Willstätter, the man who discovered chlorophyll. And another on was Mr. Bayer of Bayer Aspirin. She was a book binder who had a job with Barburg's, the German bankers who had a famous collection of early manuscripts. They got here out to London when they go out, as their librarian. So they met, and they eventually came over to Montreal. This was because, one of the people that he had met in London, who was over there doing research was Dr. Wilder Penfield and they were just setting up the Alan Memorial Institute of Psychiatry in Montreal. Montreal is quite a center for neurological research, as you may or may not know. He asked Dr. Stern if he would think of coming to Canada, and Dr. Stern said that if he heard of something, to send him a postcard. So he got the postcard and he and his wife came to Canada and settled in. He wrote a number of books. He was one of the early people who felt that the pysiology of the brain...it was all a question of the enzyme systems in the brain. So he was interested in this. Now when I was working here doing my thesis, what I really wanted to work on, was what they were just bringing out at that time; synthetic peptide chains and I wanted to get a hold of some of these to do some work and study the actions of the enzymes on specific linkages in the molecule. The war came on and you couldn't get stuff out of Switzerland. The deparnement was doing a lot of work on collagen at that time in connection with wound-healing and stuff, so I did some work on the functions of enzymes in relation to collegen. But, by this time, the war was over and we were able to get the synthetic peptides so that was what we were working on. It was really the beginning of what's led in the long run to these opiates and things. Forty years later, they're able to do what we really couldn't do then, because they didn't have all these.

H: So you were there for several years?

V: Three years or so, yes. As I say, my father died in '47. He had cancer of the lung. He was not well during the winter but the previous summer my mother had had a lot of... I didn't realize it all the time, I'd had nothing to do much; we'd all been well all our lives, we never had any serious illnesses. My father came from a long-living family; he had brothers and

sisters that lived up into their nineties, and his mother lived to be 88. Neither family had a lot of medical problems....

It was a big house; there were 23 rooms and 10 bedrooms, so we had a lot of company in the summertime and my husband and I were down there for a while and she'd had quite a number of people there. We had a lot of guests and stuff, and she didn't want to interrupt her summer, so she went down in September to see the doctor and the doctor told her she was going to have to have surgery. So she had rectal cancer. Well, she made a good recovery; she was operated on in December, and I went down while she was getting operated on. She got out just after Christmas, and we spent some time at the Parker House, and it was just after New Year's that I got a call from Dr. Stern that I got a call from Dr. Stern. He had put in for a grant, you see, when we had talked things over earlier on, before I realized how sick my mother was going to be. He was able to get a grant from the John and Mary Markle Foundation, so we started up. And there were three of us who were working. There was this girl who was a Czech. Her father manufactured leather stuff like gloves and things...leather goods in Czechoslovakia...of course with the Nazis and stuff. When she was in high school...she's four years younger than me...she had just graduated and gotten her master's degree when we met. Then there was another girl who had graduated from McGill whose father had been gassed in World War I. And his health was very bad, and she used to have to give him injections every day and so on... So she was the technician; she and Eta were the technicians. We carried on in that fashion. Alan Memorial was young...see, Montreal is a big city. There is a river and then there's a mountain, not a big mountain, it's a hill. It's like the Berkshires..it's all part of the same chain. It's in the middle of the city and it's kept as a park. So you have this hill and everything is going up and down. Where I live, in Westmount, we're at the bottom of the hill and then you go up the hill, and all the wealthy people live on the top. There's two postal codes in Westmount; H3Y which is the top of the mountain, and H3Z, which is at the bottom of the mountain. H3Y is supposed to have the highest income of anywhere in Canada. They have a lot of...well, the Broadfuns, you know, the Seagram's liquor people are up there and a lot of the houses have been bought up by foreign embassies and stuff. Then the river is down at the bottom; Montreal is an island sitting in the middle of the St. Lawrence River. It flows around it on both sides. It's a very interesting place; culturally, it's most interesting. Of course, we're full of politics. You should really come! We've just had an election, as you know, and the party that won, they think they want to separate from Canada, which is crazy. But they didn't get as big a majority as they thought they would and they realized that if... they were going to have a referendum right away and declare their independence. But they realized that if the French people themselves aren't for it.... In the meantime, people are moving out. I have one child of the three that is still in Montreal, working, but the other two are long gone to Ontario.

H: So one of the things that interests me a lot about what you've done is the teaching aspect, because I think I might be interested in that...

V: When I had my second child, by this time my mother also had passed away. My father died very quickly in the winter of 1946-1947; he got back pain and he thought it was the flu or arthritis or something, but it turned out it was lung cancer that had metastasised to his kidney, and he was dead in June. My mother had been operated on in December, and there she was. She had recovered; she was pretty good for about a year, then she was in constant pain for another two years until she died in 1949. In the meantime, I was

hitting thirty, and we'd been stalling around because of all this kefluffle. My husband's grandparents had died. They had a family business and this involved the estate and stuff... So it was a problem. We got a substantial grant while I was working with Dr. Stern. We really had a marvelous group. The girls have worked other places, and they said that nowhere have they had such a pleasant time. Labs are famous for back-biting and all this kind of thing; you're working together and you're prima donna-ish, highly intellectual types usually, and there's often times lots of trouble. We never had that; we had a great time. We're still very close friends. There was another girl that was there who was a secretary at the next doctor to us, Dr. Kleghorn. Dr. Stern in the meantime had taken to writing books. This is an interesting point; when I was doing my thesis, I was engaged by that time. I wanted to finish and I was pushing myself. I realized something; if you let down, you really have to build yourself back up again. But if you switch to something that's on the same intellectual level but different, it's restful. So what I did while I was writing up my thesis was read Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. You know, it's a complete switch, a very philosophical novel. That's what I did. When Dr. Stern took to writing books, and he was a Dostoevsky and he wrote several books, I should have brought one along so you could see it. Some of them were novels and one of them was his biography on how he got out of Germany, which was very interesting. So we would discuss all this stuff, you know, it was really great stuff. Eta, in the meantime, just around the time we got the grant, she had relatives in Europe. She had a sister who had gotten out of Czechoslovakia but was in Paris, and her husband had a brother who was in England. So they went over to England one summer, I think it was around 1949 or so, and she didn't want to spend all her time that summer with her relatives, so through Dean Thompson at McGill, she got a research position for the summer at the Cavendish laboratory in Cambridge. They were so pleased with her work, they offered her a fellowship so she stayed over there and got her doctorate in immunology and eventually, was the head of immunology at Mill Hill in London, that British medical center. So we still see her. And another girl, the girl that was the secretary, she developed the library at the Allen at the time, and she eventually went over into London and got her library degree in London, and worked for the World Bank of Canada in their special libraries that they have for banking business. She was the head of the special libraries group of the international librarians or something... She was in Moscow...the librarians all had a conference in Moscow when the balloon went up a couple of years ago and they were shooting in the streets and stuff, and she was there at the time. She went on to Leningrad; she didn't cut her trip short. All the Americans went home, but not Miriam! And the other girl that was our technician, after her father and mother died, she left and went to Michigan and eventually married a widower there. He has a subsequent heart attack and they were told to move to a milder climate, so they went to Menorca. And they're in Menorca; so we all take trips to Menorca to visit Andy. So we've kept up with them all these years as well.

H: So then you started teaching...

V: For a few years, I didn't do anything while the children were small. I'm a great believer in pre-school education, and I don't believe in daycare. When the children were very small, I had a live-in maid. A housekeeper to do the house work, so I could look after the children. We live in Westmount; Westmount is very fortunate in parks. There's a big park down off the main street that goes across the city, and then you go up the hill, and there's another park, towards the top of the hill. And then the top of the mountain is another park; Westmount Summit. So we're very fortunate with parks. It's

a great place. They had this particular school that was a girls' private school; Weston School. They had a pre-school department and it was co-educational up to grade three. The main boys' school at the time, Salwat House, was located downtown and they didn't take students...you didn't start until grade four. So Weston took boys up until that level. Other than that, it was a girls' school. So my children went there. She was very interested in second language education; the principal, Dr. Winspeer. There was a person there, Mrs. Lamberg, who was interested in teaching second language at the pre-school level. They had French teachers in the pre-school who would talk to the children in French, play with the children in French. They didn't have any formal instruction in French, but they'd learn songs and all this...play games and stuff, and this was a big deal. They would pick up and talk to the French teacher in French and the English teacher in English. My kids...this is where mine went...it was a half-day deal. My kids went on to public school after that. Now when the third one started...the third one is eight years younger than the first one, and six years younger than the second one. And when she started pre-school, it had just happened that her science teacher had left. Now Dr. Winspeer knew more about education than anybody else I've ever struck. And what she did, aside from the ideas she had about second language education...and this was before all this linguistic business started up in Quebec. That didn't start up until the 1960's, when they had what they call the "Quiet Revolution." They had had a premier that had been in for a long long time, and after he died, things were in a state of flux. This is when all this business started. So she needed a science teacher because the head of her science department was a ...it was girls' school that went up to matriculation...because Mrs. Elliot had to leave; her husband was a biochemist also. He was one of the big shots in the biochemistry department at McGill. They were going to go to Ottawa, some kind of a government appointment or something. She was leaving, so she was looking for a science teacher and she asked me if I thought I'd like to give it a try. So I did. And I just started out teaching senior sciences; physics and chemistry and biology. And at that point, they didn't have a provincial educational system, as such. There was no Ministry of Education; there were local school boards, and at that point, the universities set their own entrance exams. So if you wanted to go to McGill, you had to take the McGill matriculation examination. They didn't have a provincial exam; you got your diploma from your local high school...like it is in Massachusetts. I went to Arlington High School and so forth.. But, there, during the 1960's, they changed and got a Ministry of Education and they've tried to bring up everyone to the same level. Somebody in the 1960's, out west, had done a study of the student attainments in the various provinces at the grade seven level and at the grade eleven level, or something. And the French area of Quebec was at the bottom of the list, practically. Well, for one thing, there was no other high school on the island of Montreal in that French section that had a science lab. The school-leaving age was fourteen, so that after you got to grade eight, they would all drop out and work. This was the situation that they had there. So McGill set its own entrance exams that the students would take, and you had to teach them the syllabus that McGill had set. Well, this was not normal high school biology, I can tell you. There would be no way that you could teach, in one year, to students at that level, everything that McGill thought they should know. No way. So you had to start back, at the grade eight level and work your way up. I found some English texts, they had a series of biology, chemistry, and physics, and if you started out in grade seven, eight and nine, and cycled them through, you could...by the time they got to grade ten and eleven, you'd have them with the vocabulary and the basic knowledge so you could get through the McGill syllabus in a year. It was the only way. See, this school, she was a remarkable woman, Dr. Winspeer. She had come from Toronto, and she ran the

school on a vertical system. The math teacher who taught... the senior teachers would teach the lower grades, from grade five on, you would have the science teacher. You would have a science class a couple of times a week, with the students and this kind of thing, you see. It was quite interesting. The teachers in the school were mostly the wives of various McGill professors. There were teachers that had gone through teachers' college and all this kind of thing. Of course, Dr. Winspeer used to say that the only teachers she ever had trouble with were the ones that had diplomas.

H: So you enjoyed that environment?

V: Oh yes. For one thing, the other teachers were really interesting people.

H: So after your time there, you moved on to...

V: Just when I was there, that was the period when they started restructuring the provincial schools. The private schools and all were required to have people with diplomas and stuff like that, so they put in a years' course where you could take education courses. If you were a university graduate with a major of some sort, you could take a years' course with education subjects, you know, you have to take the history and philosophy of education, and educational psychology and this kind of thing to qualify you for your provincial thing. So I did this; I took a year off and I went out and I found it very interesting. And then I went into the public school system. Eventually the private schools had to pay on the same scale, but at the time, they didn't use to. I began working in my summers. You really don't know education unless you've done graduate work in education. You study education systems in the various countries in the world, and the educational finance, you know, how the schools are financed and taxed. It was a required course and I didn't think I was going to be interested in it, but I was. The thing of education is what you have to give...what they call the foregone earnings, if you go back and take graduate work later on, you have to give up something in order to do this. It's very interesting. But then, after I got this thing, I wanted to get into administration. They were setting up a series of colleges, which they had not had before. The first thing that happened when we had this quiet revolution and they brought in all this interesting bilingualism and so on, the first thing they did was raise the school-leaving age. Everybody had to go until they were sixteen. And of course they had build a whole lot of new schools and so on. Then they decided that they would have a ....you see, Quebec, your school-leaving was after grade eleven, whereas down here you have twelve years. There, anyone went to university at the end of grade eleven. So it was thought to be advantageous...in Ontario they had twelve years. In fact, in Ontario they had thirteen years, if you're going to university, but the university is only three years. The Quebec government thought this was great stuff. So they changed the system. You still graduated from high school at the end of grade eleven, but they had these other institutions in between. They were called Colleges d'Enseignements General et Professionel (CEGPs), so your general course would be for your pre-university. You were going and you had three years at university thereafter. And the three-years courses would be for career-oriented programs, so called; technologies of various sorts, nursing, early childhood education, special education... In Ontario, they even have...their community colleges are all career-oriented because if you go through your twelve years in Ontario, you can go on to university, you see. It's a different concept. They had both the university streams and the career streams in the Quebec schools. They were just starting them up, so I went into one of those. But I quickly discovered that I wasn't going to be

able to get into administration there, because this was a period when they thought that everything should be relevant and young and so on...somebody my age wouldn't be on the same level as the student, which is baloney. But anyway, that's what they thought. I interview candidates for MIT, you know. One of the things I always ask them at the end of the interview is what they think of being interviewed by an older alumna, somebody that's been around a long time. And they all think it's great. So I don't think it had a thing to do with age. I think whether you tune into somebody else depends on something other than whether you're young or old.

H: Now, then you were starting this college level teaching. Did you find a big difference between doing that and teaching at the Weston school?

V: Well, quite a lot of differences were occurring in the schools everywhere at that time. The sixties was when you had the drug situation. You see, what we did not have in Canada was the Vietnam situation. One of the reasons I've always been glad I brought my children up there is because, during their formative years, we didn't have that to cope with. My son graduated from high school in '68; this kind of thing. He would have gone to Vietnam if I'd have been down here. One of my Wellesley classmates, she had three children, but she had two boys and a girl, and I had two girls and a boy. She had two sons; one of them went to jail because he was a draft...not a draft evader, but I mean he was anti-war, he refused to serve. The other one did serve and went to Vietnam. Now, the one that went to jail has subsequently become quite a noted Philadelphia attorney. The one that went to Vietnam never could settle down to anything; he never could seem to find himself. So I figure I was well off in Canada.

H: The reason I ask about the difference between teaching at the college level versus the other is because I'm trying to decide that in my mind as well, in terms of what I'm going to do in the future...

V: Teaching at the high school level...what I'm really interested in now, if you really want to know..if I was somewhere where I could do this, I would. That's science and math at the elementary level. That's where it's at. The way those high school texts are written, there's no way that the kids can just step into this..to science at grade ten, eleven, and twelve, with no background. And the elementary school teachers are not science-trained. Most of them don't have any science background. An awful lot of teachers, you know,...you have to have algebra in order to qualify for a teaching diploma. And an awful lot of teachers just barely scrape through algebra, after repeating it two or three times. And I ran into one head of science who was teaching chemistry in one of the high schools had failed chemistry when he was in high school himself. One of the things that surprised me when I got into the system was the number of teachers who are in the system who don't like children. You wouldn't believe it. It makes you wonder... You see, one of the things is that teaching is an upwardly mobile thing for people to do who are at the lower-middle class level, whose families can't afford to send them through a four-year program. To get into teaching, you can get an elementary diploma, or at least you could when I was doing it, with a two-year certificate. And you could teach at elementary schools, with this certificate. So you could do that, and then you could go into summer school and stuff up to your bachelor's degree on your own. The professor that I had teaching educational administration; he was a fabulous individual, he left Quebec and now is the dean of I don't know what all at the University of Alberta. He's made great strides in Alberta; he left Quebec in the 1970's when things were starting to go, you know... He was the one that pointed this out to me, that this was an upwardly mobile thing to

do. It gives an opening for people, and a lot of elementary school teachers have never left elementary school, really. They're at that mind set. If you want to go on for education, go on and get into your master's program. I did a study on the cost-benefit of technical education in Canada and the United States and a couple of other countries like the Soviet Union. That would have made a nice doctoral thesis, but at that stage in my life, I didn't see any point in getting another doctoral degree. But, you don't really understand what education is all about until you study the cross-cultural education, educational administration, financial aspects of education; it's most important. And it's right down at the beginning. You've got to get them keen and going. My grandsons have been going to this Montessori program in this private school in Ontario. They live in Hamilton, Ontario, which forty or fifty miles past Toronto, around the end of Lake Ontario. Lake Ontario turns around, and you look across it from Hamilton, you look across the harbor to Toronto on the other side. It's a small place, about 500,000; that's there they live. Her husband teaches at Humber College, which is one of these community colleges outside Toronto.

H: Interesting. A lot of teaching going on. Now the other thing that I was interested in is the educational counseling aspect of what you've been doing in terms of doing stuff for Wellesley and then finding that you were championing MIT...What's involved with doing that?

V: Well, they send you the names of students and they get into touch with you. You interview them. Do you know anything about how this works?

H: Is this a similar sort of program where if you are interested in coming to MIT, then you proceed to have an interview with an alum in your area?

V: Yes, this was part of it. Now, they're not interested in having us making any guesses as to how well the students are doing in school, because they have their own ways of assessing that. What they want to know is what kind of a person they are; how they come across, what their interests are, if they have anything that they've done that they're real keen about... Like, I interviewed one who was fascinating; he was a sailor out in Vancouver. He was describing his races; you'd think you were in the boat with him! It's really interesting. This is the kind of thing. I had an excellent student from Ethiopia. You see, at Weston, they now have bought property in Westmount and greatly expanded their operation; they now start with kindergarten and go right up through high school, and we get quite a few people to interview from that school. A lot of them go for a year to the CEGPs and then apply; some of them come directly from high school, some of them have been a CEGP for a year. This guy, he was a great big, tall handsome fellow, oh I was most impressed with him. His father was in something to do with the airlines. Of course, now they've thrown us a curve because we've just been informed this fall that only ten percent of the incoming class is going to be foreign students. And, whereas, up until this year, the Canadian students have been considered on the same basis as the American students, they're now going to be put in with the categories of the foreign students, who will fit in with this ten percent. So, you're not looking at yourself as ten percent of the applicants from the United States, you're looking at ten percent of the applicants from all over the rest of the world.

H: Is there any reason behind doing that?

V: It's going to limit them. They only take in ten percent of their incoming class through all the different countries, all over the world. This



probably means they'll only take in no more than three or four from all over Canada.

H: I wonder why...

V: I think it has to do with NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, you know. We're in with South America and Mexico and all these other places, and we're considered on the same basis.

H: It seems to me that there are a fair number of foreign students here now.

V: There always have been. Even when I was here, they had a whole bunch from Turkey. There were a whole bunch from South America who were taking sanitation courses; you know, public health courses. They had a whole group from South America; I don't know whether it was Peru or somewhere...they were obviously sending them up to train them for their public health services. They always had a lot of foreign students. And as I said, there were a lot of Chinese students when I was here, of course this was before the Cultural Revolution. We didn't have the Japanese then; this was during the war.

H: So the other you've got here is your list of the many things you are doing currently; your lawn bowling and that sort of thing...

V: My husband died in 1991, so I had to find some new interests. So I took up lawn bowling. There are several different lawn bowling clubs in the vicinity of Montreal, and Westmount is one of them. We have our rinks right next to the City Hall, on city property. I don't know what we're going to do next year, because we've got so many big apartment building that have gone up in recent that....We buy our electricity from the city of Westmount, not from Quebec Hydro. We have a country place; we pay Quebec Hydro for that, but the city buys electricity from Hydro and then sells it to the people in Westmount. So we get better service, because other parts of Montreal have been out of power for days...we had a very severe winter last year and various places were without power for three or four days at a time. All your freezer stuff melts and so forth. So we have insufficient power for all these people and so they're going to build a new substation and they're going to put it under the lawn bowling green. In the meantime, we have this old building, it's an old Victorian-looking thing for a club house, and that's got to go. They're going to put up a building and half of it is going to be for the working of the substation and the other half is going to be our new clubhouse. See, the clubhouse is in the middle and they have greens on one side and greens on this side. Well, the one side is going to be the substation, so we'll only have half the space next year.

H: So what do you find you enjoy the most of the things you are involved in now?

V: Well, I enjoy the lawn bowling. It's a marvelous sport for somebody my age, because it keeps you limber, you have to stoop down and roll the ball and so on... You're walking up and down; the fresh air outside, you know... it's great stuff. I've met a lot of new people. The other thing that I've been doing is the McGill Institute for Learning in Retirement.

[digression about rain and catching a taxi later]

Have you heard of those down here? Harvard has one..because I know some of my Wellesley friends are involved in that.

H: I haven't, no. What is involved?

V: Well, it's set up usually in connection with a university if it's available. But it's not formal university courses; you teach each other. They organize the thing and they had moderators..

....economic union and the British commonwealth, Japan, China, what they call the five dragons, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Korea, and Taiwan, and Australia, New Zealand, Africa, the Middle East. Each week one or two people...like if it's Africa, somebody might do the southern part of Africa and the other might do the northern part of Africa. You each make a presentation of twenty minutes to a half an hour and then you discuss. Oh, it's very interesting; it changes every year. We read the Economist as a basis. The other one I'm doing is music and we listen to records. They had one on opera, and various topics in history of various countries. One of my friends does Australia and New Zealand; the culture....there's creative writing, one on writing your autobiography..

H: My grandmother is involved in going to a lot of classes; it's not quite the same thing where she would ever have the chance to give a presentation, but it's held during the summers mostly at schools, for senior citizens..

V: You mean elder hostels? Yes... One of our courses, last year it was on Costa Rica and the group went to Costa Rica. This year they're having one on Turkey, and they're going to some of the archeological sites in Turkey. The other thing I do is play the piano with this group on Friday afternoons. And during the winter I've taken up regular bowling. A group of the lawn bowlers bowl in the wintertime so I do that on Tuesday afternoons. I have a service club that I've belonged to for a number of years; Altrusa. It's a women's..sort of like a rotary, but it has a different feel. It's quite different from organizations of teachers and stuff because they don't do that; you can't all be bankers or nurses or something. We do social service work o different sorts. Since my husband died, the other new organization I joined is the University Women's Club, and they have interest groups. One of them is.. I got my daughter into that too. I joined and she was getting her masters in business administration, and that's another long story. She got her masters and now the hospital where she works, the Montreal General; she's in charge of research in renal (?) failure there. They've closed out that research and they've reassigned the technicians....the doctor retired...to various other labs in the hospital. Well, what happened while she was getting her masters program going, various people in the Montreal General Hospital retired; it's big hospital like Mass General, a big central hospital. They've brought in a new gang; they've been restructuring their hospital to make it more efficient and all this kind of stuff. They brought in people from the outside. It's not only my daughter who's not got an administration job but other friends of hers in the hospital who've also applied for some of the same positions have not also been selected. Indeed, they have not selected anybody that applied from the General Hospital for any of these things; they bring them in from outside. So, it's changed the whole complexion of the hospital. They're not happy about the whole thing at all. From what Betsy knows about administration, everything they're doing is the wrong thing. You know, if you make your staff unhappy, they're not going to work. Because one of the cardinal principals of administration, whether it's education or anything else, is that informal groups are formed. And if the informal group works against you, you can't do a thing. You've got to get the people that are working for you to want to work for you, if you're going to be successful. My father knew this; he didn't have to take a course in that. He took administration and discovered it was all what he knew anyway.

V: Somebody that you people should interview is my cousin that's in Washington, the one I told you about that came just as I was leaving. Because she's had seven children, and her husband is a world-famous gas chromatographer in the U.S. Bureau of Standards down there. He's done a lot with gas chromatography. And she's taught chemistry at the junior college down there. After her kids got to a certain age, she went into education too. She's written lab manuals and texts for non-science major first-year chemistry students. Very interesting.

H: What's her name?

V: Barbara Enagonio; Barabera Vantassel was her maiden name, and her married name is Enagonio. My maiden name was Cox. I would imagine that... she's got one daughter that's in the Navy; she's a symphonic french hornist, but she was unable to get a position in a symphony orchestra. She did a lot of work during the summers and stuff, but she took some women into the Naval band...Central Band in Washington, D.C. So she plays at the White House and all this kind of stuff. Another daughter is a physicist out in Chicago at the Fermi lab; she's an atomic physicist. She's got another son that's gone into hotel/motel management, working down south somewhere. Another son is an engineer and he's doing something in the oil business, I don't know what... The youngest daughter joined the Navy as an aircraft technician; she's out in California. She's had a very very interesting life. Especially if you're interested in education, she's had a very interesting career.

[END OF INTERVIEW]