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I'm a New York City kid who was born and raised in New York City. I was an only child, with relatively older parents. My dad had been a native of New York, too. I went to New York City public schools. From about sixth or seventh grade on, I was a bus-and-subway commuter. I went to Stuyvesant, in Manhattan; my dad had gone to Stuyvesant, thirty-two years before. We actually shared two of the same teachers, one in chemistry and one in English. Both had been very young men when they were teaching him, and they were very old men when they were teaching me.

That's one of the best high schools, traditionally.

Right. It's one of a handful in New York City, what we would call "magnet schools" today. In those days, they were just special New York City high schools. They drew from all over the city. We had kids from all five boroughs, we had kids from Staten Island, we had kids from you-name-it. They were coming to Stuyvesant because it was one of about eight or ten schools, some of which were specially focused. Bronx Science and Stuyvesant were both focused on science and math. There was Music & Art, there was Performing Arts, and there was Hunter College High School, which was the women's school. In my day, Stuyvesant was men only—we had no women in our high school.

My dad had been a salesman. He missed the Second World War, largely because by the time they got around to drafting him, he was over thirty-five. I had always wanted to come to MIT, and I came to MIT in 1957. It was a very different time then.

Edited and excerpted from an oral history interview conducted by Clarence G. Williams with William J. Hecht in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 9 September 1999.

How would you describe your performance at Stuyvesant?
Well, I was pretty good. In fact, I thought I was *very* good. It was the great leveling influence at MIT that changed my view. We had about seven hundred kids in my high-school class, and I think I was twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth. I did awfully well in just about everything.

It was an interesting time. I would commute about an hour each way and did a lot of activities which were always extra—played some football, was on the debating team, and wrote for the newspaper. I loved New York. I thought it was the greatest place in the world. I thought Boston was a really provincial, quiet, sleepy place when I came here. This was more than forty years ago, a long time ago.

How and why did you choose your field or career, and who was most influential in your choice?



From when I was a little kid on up, I was in love with airplanes and I wanted to be an aeronautical engineer. I came here to do aero and astro. The year 1957–58 was a good news–bad news year. In 1957 Killian, who was the president here, went to Washington as science advisor. It was a bad news year because in the spring of 1958—these were the latter days of the Eisenhower administration—there was a huge downturn in the defense industry. In those days, Long Island had a whole bunch of airplane makers on it. Fairchild was out there, Republic was out there, Grumman had a huge plant. They actually started laying people off in phenomenal droves.

So even though when I was a freshman at MIT, I wanted to do aero, between my freshman and sophomore years I had a job for the power company in New York—Con Ed—and my dad, who graduated from college in '29 and lived through the Depression and a couple of years with no work, said, “Boy, you’d really better think about this aero stuff. I mean, does it have a future?” There was no space program in '58. They were just beginning to build jet airplanes, and everybody said, “Ah, they’re going to build twenty or twenty-five of them. Who needs them? We have DC-7s, DC-6s, and you can go anywhere you want in the world.”

So the only bad advice my father ever gave me was, “You probably ought to think about getting out of aero and astro.” So I did. I went into electrical engineering, which was a disaster for me, although I made some good friends here in the department—John Tucker, whom you may or may not know, and there were good faculty and good teachers. But I sort of flopped around until the middle of my junior year, and then I transferred into management.

I actually couldn’t believe how easy management was for me. It was like, “This can’t be a subject.” There were all these things that appeared to be obvious to me. I think what was clear is that that was the right thing for me to be doing. It’s something I’ve carried whenever I advise students or other people. I say, “Look, find something you really love to do—find something that feels easy to you. That doesn’t mean it’s all going to be easy. There’s hard work there. But find something that just feels natural and comfortable, and do as much of it as you can.”

So anyway, I ended up graduating here in '61. The last two summers I worked for the Telephone

Company of New York. I went from the power company to the telephone company. Again, you’ve got to understand—Depression-era family. My mother said, “You’ve got to get a safe job, a secure job.” So I spent a couple of years with New York Telephone. It was a great learning experience for me. I learned a lot. One of the biggest things I learned is that I couldn’t stand working for the telephone company. It was more regimented in those days than the U.S. Army. There was a style of dress. We were told, as young managers, that you had to wear a hat. The joke used to be in New York in the summer, if you saw a guy with a hat on, he either worked for IBM, the phone company, or was an FBI agent. He had to be one of those three guys. Who the hell else would wear a hat?

So in '63, I quit the phone company. I went to work for United Aircraft for about five years, in Hartford. My wife and I bought a little house. I was pretty certain I was never going to leave United Aircraft. I was doing personnel and administrative work for them. And in the summer of '67, a guy you may remember—Pete Buttner from the Dean’s Office—put in a word about me at MIT. Buttner had wanted to work in admissions work in the Educational Council. He and I had been roommates as sophomores. If you remember, he was a really small guy, and I’m not a small guy.

It’s like Mutt and Jeff.

Exactly. And one of the things he said was, “Well, if you don’t want to hire me, you need somebody. If you think I’m not the right guy, go find somebody entirely different—go talk to Hecht.” I actually spent a couple of weeks here, in the summer of '67, recruiting in Boston for United. I got recruited by Roland Greeley in the Admissions Office to come and work in Admissions as an assistant director and also the number two guy in the Educational Council.

That was the same fall and winter that the faculty committee actually first said, “You know, there’s got to be something screwy about the system here. We have one or two black kids every one or two years, and that’s it. You sort of scratch your head and say, this can’t be real—we must not be recognizing something.” We coopered up a program, sort of a really half-baked program, which we gave the unfortunate title of Project Epsilon. This was before Interphase, the before Interphase title. Pete Richardson came up with the term,

largely because of the calculus term—you know, epsilon, the little difference, we were going to make just a little difference. We recruited, I think it might have been six black kids—or five black kids and an American Indian—that year. I remember the Admissions Office being so worried about it that I actually interviewed three of those kids after they were admitted, and said, “Look, we want you to come. On the other hand, this is going to be a very different experience for you. I’m not trying to scare you away—I really want you here—but we just didn’t think it would be moral or reasonable to have this letter come down and say, you know, everything’s fine.”

We had them in the summer program. I can only remember three of the names. There was an American Indian named Richard Spang, and two blacks—Fred Johnson and Rich Prather. Those are the three guys I remember. There were three other people, no women. We ran this kind of ad hoc program with a couple of faculty members. I think Alan Lazarus might have been involved in it, although I’m not sure about that. He may have come a couple of summers later. We tried to do a little bit of calculus, a little bit of physics, a little bit of making sure people were prepared.

Then, of course, in the fall of ’68 we really started getting serious about the thing and putting a recruiting program together. We had a lot of help and a lot of pushing from people like Shirley Jackson, who pushed like hell in her shy, retiring way. So it was a really interesting time. That gradually grew into Interphase and the whole summer program. It was a remarkable set of experiences.

And, of course, that time was also the crazy times. We had unbelievably weird things go on, on campus, in terms of occupying Howard Johnson’s office and Jerry Wiesner being provost and having faculty meetings in Kresge with four, five, or six hundred faculty members—standing between the Cambridge tactical police, the dogs, and the kids. It was an absolutely unbelievable time. And at the same time, MIT was not only undergoing all this sort of social changing with the war, but also the whole set of social changes aimed at really becoming a much more open, more diverse place.

So you were in the Admissions Office when all of you recruited John Mims.

Yes, we recruited John. John was a good old colleague of mine. He and I got pretty tight in more ways than one, actually, a couple of times. I stayed

in Admissions until probably the spring of ’75, and then the year of ’75–’76 I took leave and was a Sloan Fellow.

Then I left MIT. I left MIT in September of ’76 and came back four years later, in ’80. In ’76, I went to work for a company called Waters Associates. It was kind of one of those interesting MIT connections. There was a bunch of MIT guys running a company and they were looking for somebody. We had a long conversation and I said no, and they came back and said, “Come on!” To make a long story short, I left for four years and frankly never expected I would come back to MIT.

I think by early 1980 Paul Gray had been named president. I think he had been actually named in January, or something like that. He and I were old friends. We got very close. When he was a young assistant dean, we worked together in admissions areas. Paul focused a lot of time and energy on that. Then he became chancellor, Jerry’s chancellor, and I spent a fair amount of time with him in those days.

To make a long story short, a search committee came after me—really through an old friend, another MIT guy. But frankly, in January of ’80, I couldn’t see myself coming back here. It just didn’t make any sense to me. I suppose it was the right thing to do. The search committee pushed me to have a couple of breakfast meetings with them and said, “Tell us what you think,” and I did. I figured, “They’re never going to talk to me again because I told them the truth.” I had some not very nice things to say about the Alumni Association. I didn’t think it was particularly open to young alumni, never mind minorities and women. I just thought it was kind of a looking-backwards, old-boys’ shop.

I had seen some of it when I was running the Educational Council. The Council, of course, although they used alumni volunteers, basically was run out of the Admissions Office. Anyway, I made a couple of silly demands and they met a couple of them—didn’t meet them all—and the next thing I knew, I was sitting there with an offer in my hand, saying, “What am I going to do?” I talked to Paul a little bit and decided, “Well, I’ll give it five years.” I think I committed to doing it for at least five years, and that was nineteen years ago. So I’ve either lost my capacity to count, or something.

Paul was class of '54. Was he a faculty member when you were a student?

He must have been a junior faculty member when I was a student. I never had him as an instructor. He must have been a junior faculty member, because I remember I've seen pictures of him and Doc Edgerton in the late '50s, and Paul must have been just a brand-new-minted Ph.D. He was away in '55 and '56, in the Army. Then he came back and finished his Ph.D.

Who would you say were your role models and mentors in your studies and subsequent career?

There were a couple of guys. They're both long dead now, but one guy was the fellow who ran Course XV's undergraduate program, a guy by the name of Houlder Hudgins. He had been an executive for much of his life and was recruited by Penn Brooks, the old dean at Sloan, to come back and kind of run the undergraduate program. This guy was a really fascinating man. He was a very ethical, very interesting character who had a marvelous collection of war stories. That was always fun, but in fact he was a very demanding faculty member. He would start you with a thirty-page paper and you had to do a one-page synopsis of it. That's hard, but literally by the end of the term, he'd have you reading a novel—a 300-page novel—and you had to hand him a one-page synopsis. It was this whole idea that no executive is ever going to read anything on the second page, so you'd better get really good at writing quick and to the point—what's the object, and so on.

He also was a guy I got to spend some time with. A long, long time ago, there used to be a secret society at MIT called Osiris. It was a very interesting society—very egalitarian for a secret society, in that the outgoing senior class elected five, six, or seven juniors, and those juniors in their senior year picked another bunch of seniors. They also selected faculty members to become part of the group. What was amazing about it was that there was a lot of stuffy, old-boys' stuff about it, inevitably: this is Boston, after all, and it was the '50s. But we literally had private meetings with guys like Killian. Everybody went by their first name—it wasn't Dr. Killian and Mr. Hecht, it was Jim and Bill. It was an attempt on the part of the Institute to level the playing field to some degree between students and faculty and administration, and to have candid conversation.

There were some fairly rigidly applied rules. Nobody ever quoted anything that was said in one of those meetings. You literally walked out of the meeting and you exchanged information, but you weren't at liberty to say, "Well, Killian thinks ..." But it did help you think about somebody else's point of view in a private way. The problem in public discourse, as we all know, is that people have to posture. You've got a bunch of your friends sitting around watching, and they're going to say, "Well, gee, if Clarence gets up and says this, is he going to represent the right position, or is he going to cave in?" What you do in a private conversation is that you can be candid, but you can also say, "Well, I didn't understand that, didn't understand your point of view." So it was a very interesting kind of exchange. I met a fair number of faculty through this. It was really a privilege, a rare privilege.

There were some obvious candidates for the group. There was usually the guy who was the head of *The Tech* and there was usually the UA president. In those days, we had a simpler undergraduate organization. But there frequently were people who were just interesting guys, who actually contributed, whether they were an athlete or a scholar, to the life of the place. There were people you wouldn't know from Adam, except that when you went to the department of electrical engineering, they'd say, "Boy, he's one of the brightest guys we've ever seen, and he really pushes us in the right direction." Then we got an opportunity each year to pick a faculty member or two as an honorary member of the society.

What ended up happening is that it was a meeting ground for faculty and administration and undergraduate students. It had some funny rules. There were very few women at MIT, therefore there were no women in this group. We met in interesting places like clubs on Beacon Hill that were "men-only" anyway. But it was a very interesting kind of thing that introduced me, at a reasonably young age, to some fairly powerful people in some very informal circumstances.

Then there was a guy who lived in Burton House—actually, one of the first housemasters, a fellow named Howard Bartlett. He and his wife had to be in their sixties, probably my age now. Of course, they looked ancient when you were twenty. He was a very interesting character—a Dartmouth grad, very tough-minded, no non-

sense. You didn't have to agree with him, but he was going to let you know what he thought. You didn't have to like it, but that wasn't his problem, okay? He only had a problem if he couldn't say exactly what he thought. He was very direct. We had a pretty elaborate student government at the time. In fact, Allan Bufferd and I lived in Burton House together and knew each other—not intimately well, but certainly knew each other.

So those two guys were really quite influential, Hudgins and Bartlett, in a variety of ways—helpful, supportive, demanding, really very good role models. But interestingly enough, there was also a guy who was one of the worst people I ever worked for. That time at United Aircraft I worked for a man who was a liar, a cheat, a total Teflon guy. If anything wrong happened, you did it and he didn't. Eventually, several years after I left, he got fired for embezzlement or something. He was the worst boss I ever worked for, but I actually learned a tremendous amount from him. I really learned how absolutely miserable a human being can be and how bad it is, how tough it is to work for someone like that. I had a family by that time; we had a house and a mortgage. You sort of say, "I'm not going to do anything unethical, I'm not going to do anything incorrect, but I've still got to live with this son of a bitch." How do you do that? Well, you suck up your socks and do it.

Then I came here and actually learned a lot from Rollie Greeley, whom you probably remember as director of admissions. Rollie always was a very philosophical person. He had an interesting family history. He was a Greeley of the Horace Greeley clan, a real old Yankee and a good Unitarian and all those kinds of things. He was bright as a bean, and had had an accomplished career as a city planner—Adams, Greeley and Kram, I think, but I'm not sure, the city planning firm. Then he was director of admissions, and just an interesting character—good guy. He really put a lot of responsibility on young people. He worked a lot with Paul. Paul and I were almost in parallel roles, although he was obviously a much more senior guy, and the truth is we were more colleagues. There wasn't much of a mentoring relationship there.

The other guy I always admired, and really grew to have enormous respect and affection for, was Jerry Wiesner. He was another guy who would tell you what he thought exactly, and would

get in your face. If you disagreed with him, he'd get in your face. On the other hand, he was also one of those guys who, if you got in his face, it was okay. You could disagree, and you could agree to disagree. He was very honest, a brutally honest kind of man, and deeply caring.

So I had some really good role models. I'm not sure I ever had anybody I would call a mentor, but I had an opportunity to see these guys in very tough circumstances. The early '70s around here were tough circumstances, and I saw men ten, fifteen, or twenty years my senior tested in tough ways. They weren't battlefield conditions, but they were pretty close for civilian life. These guys had tough, tough decisions to make. They had to do the right thing, and in many cases it wasn't at all clear what the right thing was. I can remember a lot of flak that we took in Admissions for recruiting minority kids. But I think there was a sense that it was the right thing to do, and you had to come to one or two conclusions about this—there's something busted in the system or the rednecks in the world were right. We all knew the rednecks in the world weren't right, so there had to be something busted in the system and you had to just do the right thing.

I think that's one of the beauties of MIT. There have been several things that happened in the '70s, even in the '90s, that showed the kind of integrity that MIT has. We really sort of set the pace.

I think that was one area. The other interesting thing to me is the way they handled the war disruption stuff. I think those were both issues on which the Institute could have said, "We'll wait till somebody else takes the lead." And MIT actually sucked up its socks, looked at itself, and said, "You know, some of the stuff's right and some of it's wrong, and if it's wrong we ought not do it." I always admired the leadership for that. It was a really kind of gritty approach—no tap dancing, let's look it square in the eyeball. They were all really straightforward, honest men—brutally honest with themselves, no pretense, zero bullshit. There's no bullshit in any of those guys. They are who they are.

When you reflect on your earliest memories of contact with blacks, has there been any evolution of your viewpoints about racial attitudes and civil rights?

Oh yes, a tremendous amount. You can't grow up in New York City and not have racial contacts,

but I think there's no question that when I was a kid, I had very few racial contacts. I lived in a white suburb. It was Queens, but it was in New York. There was early white flight. My dad grew up on St. Ann's Avenue in the Bronx, which became a part of the South Bronx black ghetto. He lived in Harlem before it was a black or a Spanish community. He wasn't particularly enlightened in his own view of blacks at all. That always bothered me, I think. I've tried to figure that out. It was funny, because it was one of the few places he wasn't a fair man. My father was painfully fair. He really believed that things should come out in a just way. But when it came to race, he wasn't fair. He had some very strong preconceived ideas. He grew up in New York City in the '10s and '20s.

I think the big evolution for me started probably when I went to Stuyvesant. It probably even started earlier than that, because I had a number of teachers—New York City public school teachers—who were black and who were fine teachers. This idea that they were black didn't matter—"I mean, so what? The person is a fine teacher, who cares? I don't care if they're pink, purple, or yellow." It was an interesting issue, because I think it was the first time—and I can't remember whether she was a third- or fourth-grade teacher of mine—that I had a teacher who wasn't a white person. The truth is, I sort of saw her as a teacher. That was very simpleminded. Those were simpler days, right? You went to school, you'd better behave—there's God, there's the teacher, there's death on the other side, and you want to avoid that.

I think the other thing that happened is I went to Stuyvesant. There weren't a lot of blacks, but there were a reasonable number of very gifted black kids at Stuyvesant even in the '50s. At that time New York had probably eight or nine hundred thousand black folk. And you would have to confront the issue, how come only two percent of the high school is black? Yet these kids were marvelously competitive, ended up being quite successful academically and quite successful in a whole bunch of other ways.

Then I came to Boston, and Boston felt very provincial in some ways. I loved MIT, but I'm sure that part of it is that everybody who comes from New York City is really like the French who live in Paris—there's only one place. But Boston did feel a lot more like a small town. Then I went to

work back in the phone company in New York and had lots of contact, particularly with the Hispanic community and the black community in Flatbush. I worked in Flatbush, Brooklyn, and I had some clients up in the Bronx, so I had a lot more contact. Then I escaped again and went to the defense industry in Hartford, Connecticut. In the '60s, Hartford did not have a black population, or, I should say, only a very tiny black population. It changed pretty dramatically. The Hispanic influx is much later than that. But in those days Hartford was almost a lily-white city. New Haven wasn't, but Hartford didn't have a big black population. And there were very few minority engineers in the defense industry at all. Then I came back here, and we went through that whole period of questioning about what's what.

So I think I've gone through a number of phases of questioning, of changing my own attitude. I guess I would have started with a fairly simpleminded model. Both my grandparents are immigrants. My father's father fled Germany during the Prussian consolidation, and my mother's father worked as a coal miner—he was a Slovak, came from Central Europe, was probably brought over here, and was a strike breaker, although he didn't know it, and turned into a wonderful union guy. I think the naive model I started out with was, "Well, look, my two grandparents came over here, essentially penniless, and made something of themselves. Why can't anybody else?"

I think what I learned over time is that it isn't that simple, culturally, and that there are realities of race and ethnicity that you have to look at. The truth is, some of that is present for some parts of the impoverished group of whites in the United States. But if you are lucky and you have money, or you can escape your circumstances, and you're not a minority person in this country, nobody can tell that you were poor or that you started out in mean circumstances. You have money and you have success and everything's fine. But the truth is, it's inescapable if you're Chinese or Korean or Vietnamese or black or Hispanic. Those things are part of your culture, and they're with you. And unfortunately, the naive view I had as a kid just isn't that simple.

So I think I learned a lot about it. I learned to confront my own sense of—how open is this country, how open should it be, and how do you get there? I guess the biggest learning experience

I've had is an interesting one. I was thinking not long ago that I probably would have guessed, in 1968 and '69, that all we had to do was do the right thing for a few years, maybe a generation, and the whole issue of race in the United States would go away—it would be fixed. And it hasn't been fixed. It's a much more complicated, much less tractable, and much harder to talk about kind of problem.

John Mims and I used to have wonderful, very candid, direct conversations about that set of issues. I learned an enormous amount from John about that. I think, for a whole bunch of reasons, John led me inside parts of his head. It was a very powerful, disturbing experience—a difficult experience, but a really good learning experience in the sense of understanding what his anxieties and fears and motivations were. And then I had to be smart enough, I guess, not to try to generalize that everybody was like that, but to say, "Holy cow, I can't imagine thinking like that." I couldn't imagine thinking like that because I just couldn't imagine it.

It wasn't just the fact that he was a different human being than I was; it was that, being black, he had a different set of struggles, period. Some of those struggles were bound to be there for everybody who was black or who was a minority. It was a very different kind of issue than for my grandchildren, who don't even know who the heck they are in terms of ethnicity. They are such a polyglot mixture—who could tell, and who cares? But that's not true for the grandchildren of a black family. They're black. Some people will react to that in a negative way and some people will stigmatize or will behave weirdly. That's a hell of a burden.

I don't think I really realized how tough it was until the first time I went to Tokyo. I was on a Tokyo subway and realized that a lot of people were staring at me. The answer was, they were staring at me because I wasn't Japanese. That's a tiny little example of a whole series of learning experiences for me.

You can almost feel that people are watching you, and they are.

That's right. I went from the airport to downtown by train, and it wasn't until I got on the subway that I felt it. There is a reasonable mix of people coming from the airport—businessmen and non-

Japanese—but the minute you get on the subway, it's a Japanese subway in a Japanese city with Japanese signs and Japanese writing, and you stick out like a sore thumb.

I don't kid myself in saying I understand, but I have some glimpses that people have been willing to share with me. I think I learned a lot from Fred Johnson and from Rich Prather, from some of the students and advisees I had. Not always. The truth is, for somebody to let you inside themselves is very personal. It only works when it works, and you can't force it. But I learned a lot.

When you came into this major position at the time you did, how did the workforce look, relative to race?

I think there was literally only one black person on the whole Alumni Association staff, a woman who had been born and raised in Cambridge and worked in the records operation. I can see her face, but I couldn't grab her name if you shot me. She had been a long time staff member, part of that local Cambridge black community that had always worked at Harvard and MIT.

It was also very clearly an organization that was largely male. There were some women beginning to move into the professional ranks, but the men were the professionals and the women were the support staff. Over the twenty years or so, a whole bunch of things have gone on. One, we've gotten a hell of a lot more ethnically diverse. We pushed that, and yet at times it has felt God-awfully hard to have it happen. But we pushed that one. I've had a really wonderful privilege in a handful of ways with a couple of black colleagues of mine, guys I hired.

There was Larry Milan, who still comes to visit me now and again and is a man I just think the world of. I think this is a guy who had an opportunity to straighten himself out and did—and, by God, my hat's off to anybody who does that. I don't know of any human being who hasn't made mistakes, maybe Paul Gray. But most of the rest of us have made some really bad mistakes, and usually sort of escaped the consequences of those mistakes because you didn't get caught, or it happened in a way in which it didn't blow up in your face, or you could sort of slide by it. And God bless Larry's heart, he just turned himself around. I think one of the best investments of time and energy I ever made was in that guy's situation.

Larry and I talk a lot about you. I've never in my twenty-seven years here seen a supervisor support and work with a person the way you did with Larry.

I just respected his willingness to try to deal with it.

Then we got really lucky when we hired Nels Armstrong for awhile. Nels worked with us. And again, he was a man whom I grew to have a very deep sense of respect and affection for. There's no other way to describe it. I'd say that he and John Mims are guys I really loved. I don't want to make a contrast. It's not that I don't respect Larry and like him a lot, I do—but I really loved Nels Armstrong and John Mims. We're all three so *shy*, and so *small*!

All three of you are so much alike.

That's right, carbon copies—slightly different colors, but carbon copies. There's a funny story about Nels, the first time Nels and I went to an Ivy League meeting together. This was when Nels was not the director of alumni affairs, he was working in the Annual Fund. We were in a meeting room and Nels does this thing—he comes in and he's kissing all the women. I looked at him and said, "Nels, how come you're kissing all the women and you're not kissing me?" He looked at me and I went over and gave him a big kiss. Well, since those days, Nels and I do that. We tear up the Ivy League. We come into a room, right? Can you imagine the guys at Dartmouth? These two big guys, both look like ex-linemen, grab each other, do the bear hug, and give a big kiss. He refers to me as his father—"That's my father." And I say, "That's Nels, my oldest son." So we have a great relationship, and it's been a great learning experience.

I think the other thing that was important to me about this is that, again, it was an opportunity to see somebody grow. I really enjoy that. I enjoy seeing people I can have some effect on in some way. I recognize you can't do that for everybody. You can try to do it for everybody, your aspiration ought to be to do it for everybody, but the truth is, there are some really good people for whom the chemistry doesn't work, or what they need you can't supply, what they have you can't use effectively, and those kinds of things. But those are three guys I remember very, very fondly.

They're very special folks, and all of you remind me of each other. What about mentoring that goes on within the ranks of the administrative staff?

I have some sense of it, and I guess the thing I've observed is that mentoring itself—to do it well—is hard, because in a sense it requires two things. First, it requires mutual trust. You can't really mentor somebody who won't let their guard down and you've got to be willing, as a boss, if you're the boss in that situation or the more senior person, to let your guard down. That takes a lot of trust. I think the second issue is one of the funny things about MIT that I think is not a good funny thing, I think there's a lot of great funny things about MIT, but I honestly don't think, institutionally, we have sort of stepped back and said we value good management. We're clearly bad on bad management. If you screw up a lot of shit, we're going to deal with you. But there doesn't seem to be any recognition that people who mentor, people who do those kinds of things, are important to the system. I think there's a tendency, therefore, for faculty members to mentor students and for senior faculty to sometimes mentor junior faculty, but I don't think the model carries over very well into the administrative side.

What I think happens is that it then becomes a double bind for both women and minorities, because it is harder. One of the things that has been a challenge to me, and I don't think I'm wrong here, is that it was easier for me—of course, it may be that a Milan or a Mims or an Armstrong are very special people, and they are—to mentor those guys than it is to mentor some of the women who work for me right now, because the gender issue is just different enough. But I think around here, I do notice that, with a couple of exceptions, there isn't the kind of mentoring of women and minorities that ought to be going on. I don't think it's a value we emphasize. I don't think we've somehow absorbed it in the culture well.

It's tough administratively. Yes, I'm getting older, so I'm tired, but I think this place is a hell of a lot busier than it used to be. It's not that it was ever unbusy. But the whole idea that you ought to take time once or twice a month to take some younger person out to lunch and say—"How's it going, what's happening?"—just doesn't happen as often as I think it used to happen. I think part of it is that we're busy and we're short of staff. There's more on everybody's plate. But there's also, I think, this missing value there somehow.

I look to guys who I think do pretty good jobs of mentoring. Gray is a good mentor. I was not fortunate enough to have him as a mentor, but I got to watch him a lot. Hell, I was forty when I took this job, so I came in at a fairly senior position at a relatively young age, and I got to see a lot of very senior guys. I guess they allowed me the flexibility to do what I do, I allowed them the flexibility to do what they do, and we respected each other for it. But there certainly, in the last generation or so, hasn't been the encouragement to mentor as much. You begin to sound like an old guy—I mean, shit, my next birthday I'm going to be sixty years old, so I am not a chicken anymore. But it seems to me that a decade ago there was a real encouragement on the part of senior folks in the administration to do more mentoring. It was harder, because we didn't have as many blacks and women in senior middle positions, but the handful of people who were here actually got some attention.

I think what's happened is that time seems to have compressed and everybody's got more on their plate. Again, I think there's value in mentoring. I think it's desperately important, because I think that's how you really learn how things get done. It seems to me you only learn things two ways—one of them is by having a boss who will enable you to take some risks and then, if you fail, not shoot you down but use it as a teaching opportunity; and the other one, it seems to me, is by having a mentor who's willing, maybe not in a formal way but at least in a pretty regular way, to just check up to see how you're doing and be there, available to listen to you, and if you need some counsel or advice, somebody you can go to and, as they would say in the military, take the bars off and just have a conversation.

It's frustrating to me, personally, because I've been a vice president for nineteen years now. So, have I done something different? I don't know. I think if there's anything different that I've noticed, it's that my schedule is fuller, and it's just harder to say to Mary or Sam or George that on Tuesday we're going to just do lunch and sit and not have a conversation about business, but have a conversation about life. I think a big piece of it is that there's more on my plate.

I think the other piece of it is that it's easier to romanticize the old days. But I think of Jerry. Jerry was a guy who used to spend a fair amount of time,

when he was president, wandering around the place. I think of Paul. Paul used to wander around—not just at seven o'clock in the morning, when he'd walk from the president's house, but he wandered around. You could run into him in the halls, and there was this sense that there was a value to that.

Frankly, that is one of the major pieces that has made this place so different from other places.

I think you're right. I think the values get transmitted to people in very informal ways. Sure, they very much get transmitted under times of great stress when you see somebody like a Jerry or a Howard or a Paul doing the right thing, at some substantial personal cost to them. You know this is not fun; this is hard work, and they are putting their shoulder to the wheel and doing the right thing.

But I think the other piece is that I really think this place, at its best, takes time for people, makes time for people. You almost feel as if people just keep squeezing out the time, as opposed to saying, "Look, one of your principal jobs is to make that time happen."

I have this theory I'm going to talk a little bit about. I call a lot of you "the MIT gatekeepers." These are the people who kind of set the stage, and everybody takes their cues from these people, particularly as it relates to women and minorities. You can almost pinpoint people who are either on committees doing very powerful work, or are doing things that are really more a voluntary type of thing. It's their heart, not their mind. That group of people, in my opinion, are actually at an age where they're not far from either leaving or retirement or moving into the background. The problem is that you don't see replacements for people like that, really.

I think you're right. Vannevar Bush used to say that it certainly can't be the buildings at MIT, it's got to be the people. I think it is the people, and it's a bunch of pieces. It's to some degree integrity, and I feel funny saying that—you hate to sort of say, "I'm a guy with integrity." But the truth is, I learned a long time ago that you either have it or you don't. You don't have a little bit of it—you either have it or you don't. It's kind of like oxygen, it's either there or it's not.

I think you've hit it, in terms of this sense of caring, this sense that this is my place. This is not just somebody else's place and I work here—this is my place and I'm responsible for it. It's not enough

to just say I do a good job and I give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. That's just like, so what? That's only the beginning. I think to myself about this committee I'm almost finished chairing. Why did I spend eleven months doing this? Because it matters. I was able to convince three good faculty members, a dean, a couple of random alumni, and four students to join me on this project. It mattered to all of us. We put in a tremendous amount of work.

I think you're right. I suppose it always worries people our age, but to some degree you sort of wonder about who's going to keep the flame burning, who's going to say this place really matters and what matters about it is its willingness to kind of not just go along, but to sort of say, "Look, this counts."

I think one of the other interesting watersheds was that lawsuit we won. I think about that financial aid lawsuit. That took guts—it took balls, in plain English. It would have been so easy at a whole bunch of points to say, "Well, you know, we could back off a little bit." But it's just not the way we are. We're fierce. If we think we're right, we're fierce. And if you prove us wrong, we'll try to fix it.

It does concern me, because I think you've got to have people who care about an institution. I don't know, quite, what the competency is that you do interviewing for that says, "This person cares deeply about the place." I know you don't have to grow up in it to do that. I think certainly Mims and Milan and Armstrong didn't grow up in this place, but they cared deeply. Joe Collins has a wonderful expression, "That guy bleeds cardinal and gray." Those guys bleed cardinal and gray. They care about this place. They didn't just grow here, they gave back.

I guess that's the other issue. I guess if I go back to this old Osiris thing, that's what I saw a bunch of these characters doing. A bunch of these older men were willing to say, "It's not just enough to be a good teacher here and to be a good researcher. I've got to give back something else." At our best, that's what we do. It's the crazy Woodie Flowerses of the world who say "Why not?" instead of "Well, why should I?"—who say, "I don't understand this, but it looks dumb to me, so let's try and fix it." Thankfully, there are a bunch of people still on the faculty who think that way. I think it's tougher in the administration.

If you had to give advice to a student of color coming to MIT, what kind of advice would you give him or her?

I guess I would say two things. One, I would give my standard advice, which is to find out something you really enjoy, because I think if you enjoy it you're going to be pretty good at it, or maybe exceptionally good at it, and do as much of that as you can. I think the other one, which is a tough one, is to find somebody you can connect to who's an adult. I think what a lot of our kids do—and I think it is harder, much harder for minority kids—is that they do a doggone good job of connecting with each other, but for a whole variety of reasons they don't try to reach out and connect with an adult here.

I think that when I look at all the things I've learned, there are only two things. They were either because a peer of mine—a fellow student, a colleague on the staff, coworker—sort of hit me up upside the head and said, "Look at it this way," or I got somebody older I could respect enough to say, "Well, gee, I never thought about that," or "I didn't understand that," or "I didn't see the variety in that situation," or "I didn't understand that this little violation turns into a big violation." So I think I would advise to try to connect with an adult. I think one of the toughest things in this community—and some of it's real, there's no question—is that there's a terrible perceived barrier between the students and the faculty, because the faculty is busy and smart. I think the faculty, if you can try to connect with them, many of them—not all of them—are really much more open to that connection.

I guess the third piece of advice I would give, and I give this to any student as well, is that this is a truly rare experience. This is probably the only time in your life, unless you stay as a faculty member, when you're ever going to be in a community of people this smart—all this smart—and you might as well take it for all it's worth. If there's a chance for you to do something and you don't go for the brass ring, you're making a mistake—whether it's, "God, I'd always like to have learned to fence, or learn to sail, or learn to do this or learn to do that," or "I've always admired this guy—he helped train the astronauts and I'd love to meet him." The answer is, if you don't go up and stick your paw in his, or go out of your way to meet him, he's not going to know you're going to want to meet him.

I think it's that extra step. The kids who I think have the best experience here are the ones who are bold enough to try that. It is tougher for a minority kid and it's tougher for a woman, because they're going to have to connect with somebody who isn't, in many cases, like that. It's always harder to connect with somebody who's less like you. But I think that's really important, because if you don't, you're missing out. This place has so much to offer, but you've got to take it. It's not just "Yeah, we package a lot of it and we give you some," but you've got to take the rest of it. The hard part is helping a student figure out which pieces to take and how not to take too much of this and too little of that.

I look at the people who have gained the most from this place. There was Rich Prather. I think his son graduated a couple of years ago. I was like, "Huh? Holy cow!" And you look at a Greg Jackson, or you look at a whole bunch of guys who really have kind of taken this place and said, "I'm going to take it for what it's worth." I think you can do that, but I don't minimize the reality of it being tougher for a minority kid—it *is* tougher. This is not yet the kind of environment that we hoped, thirty years ago, it would be.

Why do you think that's so?

Because I don't think we have enough tenured black faculty members. I don't think we have a staff that is as black and representative of the community here in Boston as it ought to be. I think that makes it harder. I remember being with John Mims when John would say, "You know, I'm one of the ten guys here—me and Clarence and we can name the eight other people. If we don't give, there's going to be a group of kids who won't have an opportunity to have a connection."

We've had some really terrific, outstanding students who have graduated from here, and at least about fifty per class have been black. When I look at our faculty, and I look at the fact that at one point almost fifty percent of them had gotten at least one degree from MIT, we have had all of the opportunities to have all these bright black kids come here and we haven't been able to take advantage of that for faculty positions. Is there something I'm missing on that?

There is something missing. I wish to hell I understood it, because I think it's this issue of people—the faculty—not taking the extra step early enough. Most faculty members, let's face it, are

awful damn bright. They're in the one percentile. I think most of them, very early on in their academic career, realized they were really quite smart and could do all this stuff. It never dawned on them that they wouldn't just keep doing it. It never dawned on them that they needed somebody to tell them to keep doing it. I think we don't do that very well for people who are just as bright as the faculty, but for whom it isn't obvious that they could do this, do it as a faculty member, and it's a hell of a good thing to do.

I think back to a number of kids I've seen who were really awful damn bright. I'm not sure anybody got to them in their junior year and said, "You've just got to keep driving. If you do it, then you'll be fine, and you can do it just as easily as I can." I think it's part of that barrier. It's that the faculty doesn't understand that you really need to reach out to somebody and say, "You've got to do this."

I've been lucky all my life. I'd love to say it was all talent. Some of it is talent, but some of it's luck. At a whole bunch of points in time somebody reached out and either aimed me in a direction or was willing to say, "Try this," or, "Don't be shy about that." I think we haven't made that kind of outreach. I think it's a kind of blindness. I suspect most of these faculty members, on this faculty anyway, have never from the time they were seventeen or eighteen had a self-doubting moment at all. They just didn't. It all started to click, and it was like whiz. They may have had self-doubts about the rest of their lives—marriage, relationships, children, grandchildren, you name it—but when it came to academics, they never had a self-doubt. I think they don't understand that a whole bunch of people who aren't white and who are just as smart as they are, or who are women and just as smart as they are, need a little bit of encouragement.

I really believe that. Look at the number of faculty members who will say to a student—one who doesn't come to them and say, "God, I'm thinking about becoming a graduate student"—"You ought to think about being a graduate student." I just don't hear about it. I may be missing something entirely. I'm not a faculty member and I'm not close to that kind of thing, but you don't hear about it a lot. You hear wonderful stories from faculty members who say once they stepped over the threshold and talked to a faculty member

about becoming a faculty member, it worked well. But you don't see the outreach.

I think it's exactly that kind of personal outreach that's so important. I think to myself, in those three strong relationships I built with black guys, what was it that worked? It was my willingness to be open and reach out. And they reciprocated. I've had relationships where it didn't work, but those guys reciprocated. That's how you get to have a relationship. The truth is, I think if you don't reach out, it doesn't happen.

What we have had here—and still have—is a golden opportunity that no other university or college has. We know how to select people. That's one thing that is very clear.

There's absolutely no question we know how to select them.

We know those who fit us.

That's right. We do, in general, a much better job of educating students than most other places do. In a sense, it's wrapped up in this residence stuff to some degree. Our kids believe—and they kept beating us on the head about this—that it's only when somebody extends a personal interest in you, and it's not organized, that it matters. I kept saying back to them, “Well look, the trouble is you've got to organize it in the first place, in order to get somebody to know you well enough to know that you care about them, even though it's an official thing.” If you go back to the days before associate advisors, there was a hell a lot of advice being given by upperclassmen—some of it good, some of it bad. But now suddenly, since we've institutionalized it, I think we give much better advice here.

I don't think, and I may be dead wrong, that there's any more profound sort of racial lockout on this faculty than there is in any other faculty in the United States. It's there, but it's no different here than it is in any place else. I think it's the simple issue of faculty members not understanding what a profound effect they can have on a young person, by just doing a little reaching out.

It's a really funny kind of phenomenon. I think what you're doing is, in effect, reinforcing a kind of unfair system that, for the kid who sort of grows up in a faculty surrounding—both parents have Ph.D's—the expectation is, “Well, what the hell else will I do?” But if you don't come from there, you need a different push. Let's face it, most

of our black kids don't come from there. They come from middle-class black families, but not usually two-professional families and certainly not from families with science and technology in their background. They're just as weird as all the other kids, because they've got science and technology stars. But you just need to encourage that, and if you don't encourage that, it's not fair.

BAMIT has done a pretty good job—not always, but sometimes—of trying to mentor kids and do things to reach out. But how many BAMIT alumni are faculty members? Very few.

Is there anything else you'd like to say about racial issues?

I still think we need to do more all over the place, and I think the best places still have the biggest responsibility. I really do believe that we still don't make it easy for men and women to talk about these kinds of issues. It's never going to be easy to talk about these issues, but it's important to try to establish ways in which people could encounter and be intimate and be connected and in a sense feel safe enough to say some things that we need to talk about. It's a damn tough set of issues, but I think the responsibility is ours.

I think it's a very different order of responsibility than where we were twenty-five or thirty years ago. Twenty-five or thirty years ago we solved problems that were relatively easy to deal with. They were not trivial, and it took a lot of courage on the part of this place to do that. But I think the next set of problems is even more challenging and more difficult, in the sense that they require us to sort of share little pieces of each other's personal stuff. That's hard.

And yet, I don't really think the promise of our society is ever going to get there unless people do that. I think we're missing a kind of richness about ourselves. It's complicated and it's hard and it's not all lovely and wonderful, but I think we're missing this kind of opportunity. There aren't a hell of a lot of societies in the world that have that opportunity. We're blessed in a whole bunch of ways—a reasonably strong economy, reasonable laws—to the degree that they're reasonable, the laws are quite reasonable in this society—and our aspirations are pretty high. But fulfilling those aspirations takes a lot of work.