

Interview with Margarita Suarez

J.L. This is Jane Latour, on December 26th, 2004, interviewing Margarita Suarez.

So Margarita, so tell me about your beginnings, where you were born and when and ...

M.S. Well, I was born in Manila, Philippines, that's where my family is from, but at an early age, at six months old, we moved to Rochester, New York. And so I spent probably the first half of my time at home living up in the upstate region. and .. and then, when I was about eleven, I think, we moved to northern Florida, Jacksonville, Florida, where I finished high school and got ready for college. And I actually came to college at Columbia University. I attended Columbia College and graduated in 1989.

J.L. Okay. Now, first, tell me what year you were born.

M.S. I was born in 1967,

J.L. Okay.

M.S. so I'm thirty-seven years old.

J.L. and what was your major at Columbia?

M.S. At Columbia I studied computer science. the interesting thing about it was that I was attending the liberal arts college so I .. I had a few .. I had fewer engineering related electives and more humanities related electives, but the .. the major was computer science.

J.L. Now,--you know--my ... my knowledge of this is related to experience I had at Hewlett Packard. I worked for them in 1967. And the computer was the computer. There was a huge mainframe and it was in one room and everything had to be air conditioned for the computer. But I was working on making circuit boards.

M.S. Oh, nice.

J.L. and .. but,-you know? so tell me about the state of ... by the time you got to college?

M.S. Well, by the time I got to college I guess in high school was when the Macintosh personal computer had come out, the original Lisa and Mac 128-K. And, of course, PC's were starting to catch on. Microsoft was just getting started. That was in the early '80's, I guess. And so by the time I got to college I'd had a couple of years of experience actually having a computer in the house. I did my high school term papers on the computer. I probably was the only person in my class not to use a typewriter. And then, by the time I arrived at college, there were mainframes that we had .... We actually had email. I think the .. the origins of email and the

Internet are routed in Department of Defense and their funding to universities for research. so being at a large research university

I had access to Internet resources that only recently have become available to everybody else. so, yeah, when I first arrived it was a mainframe, although the mainframe was probably about half as big as the one you were working with. It was in an air conditioned room. But by the time I finished college I started working at the University for the computing department, the academic computing department.

J.L. Now, let's back up a little. A couple of things. First, in terms of your parents, what .. what did your parents do for occupations?

M.S. My parents were professionals, so my father was an architect and my Mom is a chemist. and my Dad's pretty much retire right now but he still does projects for churches and residences. but when we were in Rochester he worked for large firms that, I think, built corporate buildings. And when we moved to Rochester my mother was working at a hospital, I believe, for a while and doing research on cancer or liver disease, and then she worked for Eastman-Kodak for a number of years doing research on polymers.

J.L. Now, when did you ... Obviously you're good at math. Right?

M.S. I can manage, yes.

J.L. I ... I just assumed that that's a prerequisite for work with computers.

M.S. It is. It is to some extent. I mean, I had to take calculus and there is some conversion of number systems, like, from decimal to binary and .. But really, I guess, it's not so much the numbers math that's important but the logical math that's important, Boulian logic, if/then else and--you know--control structure, flow structures and that kind of thing. It's a very logical field.

J.L. So now, when you ... in high school did you take many classes where .. did you notice any gender differences in the classroom in terms of your interests and your aptitudes?

M.S. Well, I attended Catholic school for my entire time and by the time I got to high school there were honors track classes that, if I think about it, my closest friends in those classes, I had more female friends than male friends. But I'm trying to think if I were to count the kids in the class, I think in the physics class there probably were more boys than there were girls. But the valedictorian and salutatorian of my high school were both women and they were both very strong in science and math.

J.L. Um-hum. Okay. so now, you started to work for the Academic Computing Program at Columbia?

M.S. Yeah. I worked for the Academic Computing Program and when I first started working with them I as a student consultant. I would sit in a computer lab where there were terminals accessing the mainframe, not personal computers but terminals, and we would

assist the students who were doing their homework. Now, at that time in 1985 or--I guess it was the fall of '85, spring of '86, when I started,--the users of the computers were mostly social scientists or social science students,--you know--psychologists and I don't know what else,---

J.L. Trying to do data survey and

M.S. regressions, yes.

J.L. and statistics ...

M.S. They were running statistical analysis packages. There were sci ... There were, like, civil engineers trying to run Fortran programs and other scientific applications. and it wasn't until ... Let's see. That was when I was an undergraduate. And then, just as I was about to graduate, I landed a full time job as a systems programmer and so from the year 1989--and I think I quit in 2000 so eleven year period of time,--I saw the computers move from these pretty large--you know--at least refrigerator sized mainframes

J.L. Yeah.

M.S. to pizza box sized supercomputers or very fast computers that could handle hundreds and hundreds of users. And somewhere in the middle of there people started to get e-mail who weren't just the computer science students and the social science students. And then probably a couple of years after that, people's grandmothers and mothers were having e-mail. and now,--you know--I think it was around 1993 that I first was introduced to a Web browser, and Internet browser, and now, ten years later, eleven years later, you see how many people use a Web browser every day.

J.L. When you were an undergraduate were ... what were the gender ... what was the gender breakdown in terms of your studying computers?

M.S. In studying computers ... Well, of course, in liberal arts courses it was pretty much fifty/fifty. I think the school was pretty much fifty/fifty, maybe fifty-one women, forty-nine men. But in the ... in the computer science classes and even in the math and science classes,--I had to take chemistry and calculus,--I'd say in chemistry and calculus it was probably thirty or forty percent women and the rest men. And in the computer science classes often there would be a lecture of sixty people and three of them would be women or maybe four. So that was kind of interesting because in any class you sort of have a ... a demographic . the demographic of the students is that you have the ones who are super smarts, then you have the ones who are average students, then you have the ones who are always struggling to keep ... keep up ... keep along. And I found that sometimes among those three or four or six women more of them tended to be the strugglers so that was kind of an interesting breakdown. You know? You have ... At one point I actually remember consciously realizing that I didn't have to be a struggler. And, I mean, that's kind of a story in and of itself. I was project partner with a Russian immigrant guy and he had just moved to the state maybe ten years before I met him or eight years before I met him, and he just had this attitude of let's get the highest grade. And I'd never had that attitude ... I'd never heard of that attitude before. And we did it, and that kind of taught me that the guys who were in class talking as

if they know that they're .. what they're talking about, oftentimes they don't know what they're talking about, whereas a woman who doesn't know what she's talking about will just probably be quiet or ask stupid questions or ask the same question but in a less confident tone. And so I kind of came up with my own survival techniques and also a different attitude towards school. School wasn't something that you just survived through. It was something that you really conquered and got what you needed out of and excelled at.

J.L. So when you started in the academic Computing ... well, the programming job, now that's the technical part,--right?-of the computer world? And how was that for you? What did you like about it?

M.S. Well, I worked in a small group and the group was four people, two men and two women. So even though in the field of comput--of that ... of systems programming, probably--I don't know--it's probably getting to be more than twenty-five percent now,--but-you know-it's not as small a percent as women in construction but it's not ... it's not half either. But in my first job environment it was half,--half of us were women, and we were all ... I mean, I was the junior one, but pretty much we had equal responsibilities. And so that was a very nurturing environment and it was a great job, I mean, just the flexibility ... The culture of the work place as very relaxed in terms of dress code and what time you had to show up, and how long a lunch you could have. Also-- ... But we also had to carry pagers and be woken up at four o'clock in the morning and attend to things when most people would probably be off work.

J.L. And what about the challenge of the job itself? Were you learning new things and ...

M.S. Yeah. I had to learn everything I knew. And in fact, it was almost like an apprenticeship except it wasn't formal. It was on the job training, I guess. You're basically thrown into some situations and you're working with someone who's more experienced than you and you pick up tips and tricks and they instruct you and you figure it out on your own a little bit. And so,--you know,- - that's what I like to ... that's one thing that I learned, about at least my experience in going into computing because there are different kinds of ... there are different kinds of people who are attracted to jobs involving technology, or different kinds of skills that you can employ. And one ... one technique is to attend and academy and get a cer--certificate in a certain type of technology and then any company has to honor that you know that technology when you're holding that certificate. But I think what has been more ...

J.L. Isn't there a danger because the technology is changing so rapidly?

M.S. Yeah. That's ... that's what I think. I mean, I think it's ... and not everybody has these skills or is able to develop these skills. But I think if one is able to develop these skills it's more important ... more important than the certificate is to have the ability to look at anything new and figure out, based on what I know about the way things are supposed to work, what can I ... what can I figure out about this, not using any manuals, not using any certificate program but approaching everything as if it's brand new and different and ...

J.L. And this is where the logic comes in.

M.S. It's a lot of logic. It's a lot of synthesis of information. I mean, I know ... I mean, I think I have the knack--I have a knack for that that maybe

not everybody has. And I think the people who are the most successful and go the farthest in technological fields are able to synthesize a lot of information and--you know--deduce things from other things. It's not a matter of memorizing--you know--a textbook and repeating it on a certification exam. So that ... that's kind of the thing that I've been thinking about too, in terms of the sort of Department Of Labor has a big push to move people towards technology, technological jobs. But I think the danger is if we don't put an emphasis on education when they're a child and help them develop those analytical skills, the people who are able to enter technology by repeating things by rote aren't going to go very far. They're going to make ten dollars an hour and they're going to be stuck there and they're going to be limited to that technology. And when that technology is over, they're going to--you know--it's dead end job so it's ... you might as well work at Wall-Mart or something,--you know?--in my opinion. You know, I think ... I think there are probably paths that I don't know about, pathways to get father, or maybe the ones who are going to shine will shine out of that situation and move themselves up but, yeah, I'm not really sure the way ... With the rate ... rate that technology changes,- you know--it kind of makes it difficult to design, for example, a technology apprenticeship. I think a lot of the skills that you're going to have to teach aren't about specific technologies but about how to learn about technologies.

J.L. Did you start a Master's when you were at Columbia?

M.S. Yeah. Well, you're asking what did I like a lot about my job at Columbia, and besides the ... the very liberal culture it was ... we also got a lot of vacation days, access to all the University resources and tuition exemption. So right after I graduated from my undergrad, I think it was the following fall even, I entered the Maser's program,

J.L. Master's in?

M.S. Master's in Computer Science. And this was through the Engineering School this time so there were a couple of prerequisites that I hadn't taken as an undergraduate since I had attended the Liberal Arts college,-excuse me,-so I had to take a probability ad statistics class. I might have had to take more math. I'm not sure. and I just took ...

J.L. And how did you do in those classes? Did you find you had an aptitude? You liked it?

M.S. I did have an aptitude. And I also had perspective. I was older and I was choosing to do this. I wasn't feeling like, okay, everybody goes to college and I just have to be here and get by. And I also was taking only one or two classes at a time, but I was working full time. But in a way even though I had to work all day, I only had to focus on one set of homework and one set of exams. You know? I had an advantage, I think, over the younger students who were a little more ... the ones who were completing their Master's in one or two years probably were a lot more stressed out than I was doing it in five.

J.L. And once again, you were in the School of Engineering now so did you notice ... How ... how did the gender thing break out?

M.S. I think there were even fewer women in the Master's program in the School of Engineering, very, very few. I think maybe half as many as there had been as ... as I was an undergrad. And I think a lot of the women probably also didn't stick to the program. I mean, probably men dropped out too, but they kept a critical mass.

J.L. I was reading that about fifteen percent nationally of women getting Ph.D.'s in engineering and technology are female. That's kind of a low figure.

M.S. It is pretty low. But,--you know--it's interesting because, like, the chairman of ..the chairperson of our De--of the Computer Science Department is a woman. She was one of my professors back when I was an undergrad. There were a few prominent professors who were women, but the bulk of them, of course, were male and the bulk of the students were male.

J.L. So you ... you went from that program ... It took you five years and you were at Columbia the whole time?

M.S. I was.

J.L. And then what did you ... did you ... did you have a job--a career change when you finished that?

M.S. Well, I finished the Master's program in '94, I believe, and then I was still working at the same job. I was moving up in the ranks. At one point I was ... At the time that I left I was lead of my group so I was pretty ... When I started the group I had taken the position of the boss that I had when I started, so basically, they ... they have a ... It's a professional job. It's what they call an officer position as opposed to a support staff position, so there is a lot of--you know--class-ism built into the structure there. But you start out as a beginner and you move up to--you know--from C to B to A and then you're--and then at one point you can be--you can be promoted to lead and that's what I was when I left. But all along I continued to take classes, even after my Master's was over I took some Spanish classes, I took an art class or two, and at some point I decided to enter the Women's Studies program and I got a second Bachelor's through my tuition exemption as well. So I stayed all through that. I finished that in ... in the end of 1999, and I guess the big thing that happened to me was that in 1998 Hurricane Mitch went through Central America and ... see, it's a long story. In 1997 ... Oh, I was doing some traveling too. That's what I was doing along the way, because the ... there was a ... a very generous vacation package so I had traveled around the world a bit and one of the places I had visited was Nicaragua and I had visited a women's construction collective there. So that was in 1997, just a tourist, and I actually worked with them a little bit for about a week.

J.L. Did you find out the history of that collective?

M.S. Yes. In fact, it's a very interesting history because, fast forwarding to just a few years ago, when I was working at Nontraditional Employment for Women I started encountering--or even before I worked for them; just right before ... this was ... this was in probably 1999, 2000, I was ... I started volunteering my time to help this town that I had visited as a tourist rebuild from the hurricane. And in particular, I was helping a women's studies--a women's construction collective and ...

J.L. And what was the town?

M.S. The town was named Condega, Condega, Nicaragua. And in the process of fundraising for this trip to Cunedege, I met Rebecca Lurie, Elly Spicer ... actually, I didn't meet Elly till a couple of years later, but Rebecca Lurie was involved in organizing similar building brigades for women back in 1986-'87, I believe, to the same town. And in fact, the school that they built with the women in Nicaragua and the women who had been involved in building that school

decided to form a collective which is the collective that I visited and then that I helped out. So along the way I've met a lot of women who have been to this town, a lot of tradeswomen who have been to this town. I think Beth Youne was even involved. She's in Oakland, California, and Evan Ruderman had been involved in organizing that.

J.L. And I think Bruni Hernandez was, who's an electrician.

M.S. Oh, I didn't know that Bruni was. I don't ... oh, is that Melinda Hernandez? Is that who it is?

J.L. No. No.

M.S. It's a different Hernandez. I don't think I've met Bruni.

J.L. She's a nurse now but she was an electrician, one of the first women electricians.

M.S. Okay. I don't think I've ever met her.

J.L. Yeah. She doesn't live here any more.

M.S. Uh-huh.

J.L. Yeah. But it's just interesting. It has a real New York connection.

M.S. Yeah. There's a big New York connection because those brigades back in the late '80's were organized out of New York and Boston. I think there are women from London who went and I think there were some women from California who went. But ...

J.L. So the experience of actually working on ... Well, you were doing fund-raising and then you ...

M.S. Well, I was doing the fund-raising and I guess I should mention that ... well, one of the projects that I had done--extracurricular project that I had done while I was at Columbia using my vacation time--was to help a pottery school build a wood fired kiln in the Catskills so there was a lot of commuting on long weekends in the summer ... over the summer and there was pouring concrete. There was--you know--wood frame ... a pole barn, I guess, is what you call it. It's a ... a roof on poles--construction of that, and also laying the blocks for the kiln itself which included an arch that we had to make by laying the bricks on a form and pulling the form out after the bricks were there and leaving the arch standing up. So there was ... I've always had an interest in building things,--you know,--and this is just kind of all tying together because when I was young my Dad, who is an architect, used to have a carpentry shop in the garage and I remember at the age of five or six being in there with him while he was building something and he would--you know--let me finish pounding the nail in or finish screwing the screw in, or I would hold the wood together while he drove the nail and that kind of thing. I would hand him tools. And that just seemed really normal and I always ... I always was comfortable with that, I think because of that experience. And so,--you know--there were some building projects along the way. There was the big kiln building project. I built pieces of furniture for friends for their kitchen and that kind of thing. And then ... So by the time that the hurricane happened and there was a chance to help this collective out ... Oh, I should also mention that when I was visiting

the collective as a tourist, I also spent two or three days working with them. They taught me how to lay blocks, how to tie .. tie the iron reinforcement together; I guess you call it metal lathing here in New York. I learned how to pour the concrete,--you know--in ... in just ... just three days. They let me try all that stuff. And so I actually had a pretty selfish reason for getting involved with their fund-raising project because I wanted to be one of the women to go on the building brigade. And actually, they would have preferred having professionally skilled tradeswomen, 'cause it would just be a little bit less of a ...

J.L. speed things up.

M.S. Yeah. It would speed things up. On the other hand, they ... they welcomed anyone who wanted to help because there's always a ... there's ... there's a powerful exchange when women are helping each other from different countries with different languages. There's something that each side gets from the other. And so they--you know--they knew about that 'cause that was happening all through the '80's, I'm sure, with all the solidarity workers coming through. But that brigade: we raised funds for it and we went down in February, 1999, and there were six of us. Only one of us was a professional builder from Wales and there were probably three or four women from New York and a couple ... one from Boston--yeah, and one from Boston. And we were there for a month. Some stayed for two, and we started the first house of that project. And eventually there were thirty houses built so--you know--that was really great to be the inaugural brigade to start it all off.

J.L. So this ... did this lead to your egress from Columbia and your moving over to NEW?

M.S. Well, it most certainly led to my egress from Columbia. You know, I tend not to make long term plans at all. Maybe I plan a year or two in advance, but I kind of have been taking life as it comes and that's been working for me. So at the time I think the main thing that was happening in my head was I was realizing that--you know I'd had this incredible experience of going to Nicaragua, helping out these people who lost their entire house and working with these women who had third grade educations but were .... were learning a trade to make a living and ... and building something that someone could live in,--you know?--actually making something out of nothing. And also just being around--you know--a different way of life, different tempo, different values,--you know,--different levels of wealth or poverty. And after going to Nicaragua a couple of times, scraping together vacation days and leaves of absence and feeling guilty all the time because I was the lead of the group and so it was hard for me to take off for indefinite periods of time, the main conclusion that I arrived at was that there are many types of crises in the world. There's losing your e-mail and there's losing your house, and I found it harder and harder to reconcile the amount of stress and pressure that ... that I was putting upon myself or people were putting upon me to get that e-mail back up now at four in the morning when I had just returned from helping someone get their house back up. So I--you know--it was a really hard decision to make. It took me about a year to ... to come to the conclusion that I really could make the decision. Part of it was fear of change, I'm sure, and just insecurity of what--you know--of the unknown, but part of it was also that I had a mint position. I was making a lot of money,--you know--for a nonprofit,--you know--without the pressures of being on Wall Street or somewhere where I could make more money, and a lot of education: a lot of smart people everywhere and lectures to attend and movies--movie screenings and classes to take and access to the gym and the library and ...



J.L. Twenty-two libraries.

M.S. Twenty-two libraries, and ... and that was the thing that I discovered when I was doing my ... my second undergraduate degree because I actually chose to do that degree, that whenever I needed a resource from the library it was at the Columbia library. I think I went to inter-library loan three times or four times, but for the most part, if I was looking around in the indexes for what kind of article or book I would want to see, they had it and I was, like, wow! This was ... this was really great to be here and have access to this. So ... so really the decision wasn't ... was only to leave Columbia and go to Nicaragua for an indefinite amount of time and then see what happened. So the plan included subletting my apartment for a number of months to save money on rent, saving up money, getting rid of all my worldly possessions,--you know--storing them with that friend, giving them to that friend and selling them on E-bay,--whatever,--and I ended up moving down here to Jayne Street and into a small room. all my possessions pretty much fit into that room and it was a pretty different--you know--change of life style from having a two bedroom apartment pretty much all to myself. But it was also pretty freeing to ... to realize that I didn't need all that stuff. And I didn't end up moving to Nicaragua for an indefinite period of time. I ended up deciding to go there for three months and I went there ... I quit my Columbia job in June, 2000. I went there from July through October, 2000. And when I came back, of course, my ... my whole life was new and I had no trappings of--no obligations really. And the reality of it is that I'm kind of a workaholic so I started getting a little depressed and not knowing really what to do with my days because I didn't have a job to show up to and I didn't really have a project. So I started looking around in around November--I guess it was about a month after I got back,--for a project and at the end of the month I was calling Habitat For Humanity ... I called NEW, whom I had contact--contacted when I was doing my fund-raising for and searching for Briggdistas for the brigades back in 2000. I hadn't been in touch with them at all but I just called up and I said: Hey, I have some spare time and I'd like to volunteer, and they said: sure. Send us your resume. So I was about to get my resume ready and I was looking on Idealist.org and I found out that NEW actually had a paid position that was open three days a week, coordinating the Federal WANTO grant, and WANTO stands for Women in Apprenticeships in Non-traditional Occupations. And I knew nothing about labor unions, really. I mean, definitely not about construction unions in New York City. I didn't really ... hadn't really even focused on labor so much except for--you know--reading a little bit of Marx and Engels in college, and so it was almost--I almost felt that I wasn't qualified for that job. But it did really interest me so I ended up interviewing for it and I ended up landing it so that started ... that started the career change. But I can't say that I set out to do that when I left Columbia although I was open to seeing where it was going to take me.

J.L. So as the coordinator of the WANTO grant what ... what did you have to do? What were your job responsibilities?

M.S. Well, at first it was pretty difficult 'cause there was a large learning curve but ...

Side Two

J.L. So you were describing the WANTO job on paper as a personal reality.

M.S. Well, to implement the grant as written, which had to do with reaching out to a number of employers and unions and providing some supportive services to tradeswomen and it also encompassed a little bit of, I guess, enhancing the

training programs, and then there were, like, I'm sure what they were mostly worried about was getting the reports in on time because the agency was doing the work really. The work was going to go on no matter what. But because it was Federal funding there were quarterly reports due and a final report at the end of the year.

J.L. So which ... which parts of all those things ... I mean, everything ... It's so interesting because everything is connected to everything else with the world of tradeswomen,

M.S. Yeah.

J.L. And everything has to be done.

M.S. Yeah.

J.L. Everything has to be addressed. So what ... what were the things that you brought to that job and that you started doing that ... to try to ...

M.S. Well, I think probably the part that I enjoyed most about the job was reaching out to the tradeswomen and supporting them because I guess, maybe ... maybe it's because they are the willing party in the whole equation.

J.L. Right.

M.S. You know? It's real ... I think it's really important to educate and promote and bring the message of ... of--you know--supporting women in the trades to the employers and the unions but unless--until you can get that contact, that in, who is the willing party it's an up hill struggle because, basically, the grant paid for us to provide technical assistance to these entities and only until recently have these entities wanted the technical assistance. It became sheik or-you know-I guess, for legal reasons, maybe economic reasons, they chic to cover themselves. Or ... or maybe they really have a good will reason for wanting to get technical assistance. But at the time that I started, and given that I had no contacts ad no ins,--I have to develop all these relationships,--it was really difficult to cold call--you know-the owner of a company and say: wouldn't you like help fixing your problem, because they didn't think that they had a problem.

J.L. Right.

M.S. And they'd rather just not talk about it. So definitely helping ... helping the women and ... and encouraging them and supporting was the most worthwhile part, especially in the very beginning.

J.L. So in terms of the biggest challenges of that position, what were some of the real difficult ... I mean, things that you see that needed to be done that hardly ... are ... are difficult to move forward.

M.S. Right. That's a ... that's a hard question. I mean, it got easier toward the end to do that outreach to the employers because a lot of them became more willing or even proactively sought out help with their recruiting. I still would think that ninety percent of the constructions unions in New York City don't think that they need help, but there are a certain number of unions that did foster good relationships with us and ... and ask for help.

J.L. What unions?

M.S. Well, I know that there is ... there are good relationships now with the Painters, the Laborers, the Carpenters, and there's always been a pretty good relations with the Electricians in particular.

J.L. Um-hum.

M.S. Some of the other trades have been historically more difficult, like, especially the more stereotyped the work is,-- ...You know, not obviously every man is going to succeed at being a brick layer and also not every woman will succeed at that, too, but a lot of times a ... a trade will ... will close their door rather than open it and see who walks in. I ... I think the most frustrating thing was lack of resources because I was one person and it wasn't even a full-time job and there were so many things that I could think that we could do and materials that we could make, and meetings that we should have had, and--you know--there wasn't enough time in the day for me to do everything all by myself. I think even, in terms of reaching out to women ... I mean, I ... I enjoyed my interactions with the women that we did have access to but there were ... there are so many women out there who

J.L. Need good jobs ...

M.S. Need good jobs and who would be good at this. I mean, that's the other thing because I think one of the challenges that NEW has as an agency is that--you know--times are hard for everyone, especially nowadays, and even for the men who need a good job and that's the only thing that they're concentrating on at the moment, and more for women. Maybe they have child care responsibilities or family care responsibilities. In a perfect world, if we had infinite resources, I think I would start with young girls and that way they would have ten, twenty years to figure out whether this is right for them.

J.L. Right. Now, you did do some job training. You worked with Rebecca Lurie on the Construction for Worker Education program? Tell me about that.

M.S. It's called Construction Skills 20000 and there was funding from New York State, I believe, through a Built On Pride grant. And it had a number of facets. She could probably tell you a bit better than I, but as I recall, there was some case management to make sure that those entering the trades would have the support that they needed and the tutoring that they needed, if necessary. And there was also a youth component which involved getting kids from high school, from vocational programs, and ... and bringing them to the trades. So, of course, vocational high schools in New York City there is that report by the National Women's Law Center, I believe, that--the report card that showed that ninety-five percent of the students in trades, high paying trades, tracks in those vocational schools were boys and ninety-nine percent, I believe, of those in the beautification tracks were girls. And if you compare the salaries of those two kinds of jobs,--you know--the girls are making a third of what the boys are eventually making. So as a worker in that ... helping out in that program, I made some visits to high schools. I tried to go to classes where there would be girls so business--the business track sometimes would have girls, and I would just go with a couple of tradeswomen and talk about what it was like for women to work in the trades. And,--you know--I think the ... I worked there for about a year--one ... one cycle and a half, and in the first cycle I believe out of sixty students there might have been six girls so it was about ten percent, which was better than the ratio in the trades, but the boys tended to be coming from programs where they had a little more experience than the girls. The girls might have been coming from the business programs. And some of them succeeded; some of them dropped out, but it was pretty challenging.

And this is my first real interaction with New York City high school kids, especially coming from vocational programs which, unfortunately, often tend to be the place where people shove the behavioral problem kids and the learning disabled kids as well as the kids who want to be there, I'm sure. But,--you know--it was a rude awakening, the state of the New York City schools, to ... to realize that ... that some of the students couldn't read. Some of them, if you handed them a piece of graph paper they couldn't draw a ten by ten square,--you know--that ... that was ... was pretty hard for me to realize that. And there were a lot of behavioral problems, some stealing, some fighting, but all in all, it was ... it was really great to have that experience. I taught a class with another teacher called Hands On Technology and we tried to ...

J.L. And you designed that class. Right?

M.S. We designed that curriculum, yes, and we used, actually, a project that came from, I believe, I think from West Point. But it was a bridge building project so we got to look at the bridge that links Queens to Roosevelt Island and see how it was made;--it's a truss bridge;--you know;--most railroad bridges are truss bridges;--and then we built a truss bridge out of Manila file folder material that could with stand about twenty pounds of weight. And so a lot of the kids didn't really have the ability to ... to see ... to envision what the outcome might be like so it was hard to get some of them to do the project. But once the bridges were made I think those who didn't do theirs were a little bit envious that the others got to test their bridge. And everybody was excited on the day that we ... that we tested the bridges and--you know--to see whose bridge would take the most weight and that kind of thing.

J.L. And you see what can be done with the kids when there's effort and ??

M.S. Oh yeah. If we'd had more time, definitely, or if we'd been able to split the classes by ability level, or whatever. I mean, this is ... this was just kind of it seemed like a random conglomeration of kids. Some of them were able to ... to ... Some of them had learning environment issues, I'm sure, anyway, 'cause they'd probably been having a hard time in school before they got to this situation. But all in all, it was a pretty neat opportunity because most of those kids got placed in apprenticeships and I don't know how many of them were able to stay.

J.L. And any females?

M.S. Yeah. Some females were placed as well, a handful.

J.L. So speaking of that, I know that you were involved through TNT on this ... this national effort to address principles of training for women and girls, and you want to speak a little about that?

M.S. Well, TNT started as ... I guess it was ... it's a group of tradeswomen activists from around the country, many of whom were involved in ... in national tradeswomen's organizing previously. I think ten years before TNT had started there was a group called National Tradeswomen's Network which was started and then ended up getting dissolved for ... for ...--you know--there was a schism or it didn't ... it didn't stay together. Funding issues ... I mean, whenever you have a group of people trying to change a situation radically there's going to be different ways that people envision that it can be done, and I'm sure that probably even vision might have been one of the reasons why. And I

think there were class issues ... It ... it just didn't fly for some reason. So when TNT was being envisioned it was with the context of this other failed group and also with ten more years of ... of seeing what has happened to women. So by the time TNT started a lot of women had been working in the trades since twenty--you know--twenty-five years of women in the trades. And I got involved in the strategic planning period as part of my job as WANTO coordinator I was working closely with Evan Ruderman and she had been involved in the organizing of this new group and so she kind of hooked me in. And a year or two after I got involved we actually were able to launch the organization. We'd come up with bylaws and--you know--an officer structure, Board ... Board structure, and the ... the main purpose of TNT is to try to influence policy on the national level regarding women in trades and girls in trades and technology. And I guess the idea was that in many local--localities we have tradeswomen's groups, in Chicago, and New York and ... and Portland, Maine, San Francisco and LA and Seattle and--you know--scattered around the country, probably about forty of them that we know about. And I'm sure there is a few more ... more informal ones that we don't know about. But everyone's working so hard at their local level, but then we have these national funding streams and national policies and legislation that effects everybody on the national level and we needed a voice to advocate for tradeswomen on that level. So since the inception of TNT we've gone to Capitol Hill a couple of times, we've ... we've visited with Senators and Congress people and we had Hillary Clinton speaking at our congressional luncheon a couple of years ago. Was that last year? You know? We're really getting a lot of visibility and really educating a lot of the law makers about what our issues are, working on different pieces of legislation like the Carl Perkins Vocational/ Technical Education Act on WANTO, which it seems like that funding stream had gotten taken out of the budget but maybe we can get that put back in, maybe even under a different Department of ... of the government. There is legislation in the Transportation--Department of Transportation that would allow for job training of women and minorities.

J.L. Is that the "ice tea?"

M>S. That's ice tea-T-21. Right. So all these--all the places where there is existing legislation and even we're trying to come up--we've come up with language on the new piece of tradeswomen's legislation that we're trying to sell that Hillary Clinton is helping us put together.

J.L. Which is?

M.S. Just about educating ... educating Congress, I guess, on the status of tradeswomen and advocating for more funding for the training of women the enter the trades. It's in its pretty early stages. But we have a Senate resolution number SR-103, I believe, that has to do with--or maybe it's 163--that has to do with ... It's a resolution honoring tradeswomen that Hillary Clinton and ... and others sponsored. So the issue is ... is bubbling to the fore and we're really pushing it there. We've got also contacts with the Building Construction Trades Department of the AFL/CIO and support from them on a number of things. We had ... with them we hosted a leadership summit for women in the trades back in January, I believe, and it was attended by labor leaders and tradeswomen's leaders and that was pretty productive. And what's in the works is a Committee in the AFL/CIO Building and Construction Trades Department for--you know--a Committee on Women--on the Status of Women.

J.L. After ... after all these years it's (inaudible)

M.S. After all these years, yeah.

J.L. Yeah. But it's major.

M.S. So it's ... it's ... it's bites,--you know? It's bites and steps and, you know--getting these good faith agreements and these handshakes,--you know--that's ... The fight ... the struggle is not going to be over ... and plus, you ... you also have to figure that these policies are going to have to trickle down to the local level, so it may be years before we really see the fruits of this. But it's very encouraging that ... that we're making headway. And ...

J.L. It seems that, with the struggle to get Congress to pay attention to he requirements,--the ... the real needs of women in terms of training, in renewing TANIF or ...

M.S. Yeah. Actually, we're trying to renew it.

J.L. Oh. It seems like a very frustrating kind of effort to get them to understand or incorporate with the Republican mentality and the kind of anti-labor mentality.

M.D. Yeah. And ... and it's also frustrating ...

J.L. Traditional ways of thinking about women's role. All this ...

M.S. Yeah. And it's also frustrating that there are Congressional acts that are trying to ... that they're trying to overturn, like Title IX is threatened. And,--you know-it's just ... You'd think that this ... that we'd be moving forward instead of moving backwards and then forwards again, but I guess that's the nature of social change so we just have to keep plugging at it.

J.L. Okay. Well, I want to talk to you a bit about your ... You've moved in a new direction recently,

M.S. I did.

J.L. And so describe that.

M.S. Well, let's see. I guess it was around last summer, working at NEW, one of my roles at the WANTO Coordinator was to help ... obviously help employers and unions with their recruitment practices, and there was actually a very specific recruitment effort that, I guess, we were trying to make into a model. And we secured an agreement from the Elevator Mechanics Apprenticeship program,--it's part of the IBEW, Local 3,--to ...

J.L. What does ... That logo was just ... it's a light bulb.

M.S. Yeah. It's a light ... It's a ... No. It's a ... it's a hands-on kind of the shape of a light bulb with light rays coming out.

J.L. Okay. Okay.

M.S. It's the logo of the IBEW, Local 3 ...

J.L. Electrical Division.

M.S. I guess it's the IBEW's logo, and it's the Elevator Division of Local 3.

J.L. Oh.

M.S. They were recruiting ... They recruit every three years or so,--the contract goes for three years and the contract stipulates how many apprentices they can take in. So they actually worked closely with us and opened up their recruitment procedures to us so that we could ... and this all had to be approved by the State Department of Labor, but why wouldn't it be.

J.L. And us means NEW.

M.S. NEW, yes. Okay. And,--you know--why wouldn't the State Department Of Labor approve these things. You know, that was one of the things--one of the stumbling blocks that I ran into at NEW trying to advocate for extra measures to be taken in recruitment. A lot of times the Apprentice Directors would say, Oh, but the Department Of Labor has to approve everything. But, you know, they have to approve it because you can demonstrate that you have a ... a lack of female applicants. You know? And so, in this case, the Department Of Labor had approved that the application filing fee and the testing fee, or whatever, could be waived and that the applications wouldn't have to be sent in individually by the women but that we could actually process them and help the Apprenticeship by processing them, making sure they were complete, and then sending them to the Apprenticeship. So we were able to actually able to collect, I believe, a hundred and twenty completed applications out of thousands and thousands of requests for information. And out of that a hundred and twenty only a ... only fifteen or so, I think, actually finished and went to the testing and the interview. And out of those I think seven passed the test and four were admitted after the interview, but,--you know--showed up.

J.L. And the test ... so how did ... how did ... do you want to ...

M.S. So how did I get there?

J.L. Yes.

M.S. Well, so I was running this whole recruitment process and at some point even sort of just as a test to see if my name would make it though, I ... I went ahead and applied for this as well. I requested an application. And I guess the way I was thinking about it ... You know, as I told you, I don't often plan too far in the future, I guess I just wanted to keep that opportunity open. There was something in the back of my head saying,--you know--WANTO funding might be running out and ... and--you know--maybe this would be a good trade for me. And I knew it would be a good trade for me because two of my best mentors are elevator constructors in the International Union of Elevator Constructors,

J.L. Lauren Sugerman ...

M.S. Lauren Sugerman and Connie Ashbrook.

J.L. Okay.

M.S. So getting feedback from them, they knew that I would be happy in this trade and probably more happy ... Even though I really have most experience in carpentry, probably more happy than working as a commercial carpenter hanging sheet rock. You know?

J.L. Now, why is that? Explain to me ...

M.S. And the reason for that is that in my trade, although there are many manual aspects to it and actually very menial as well, there is a trouble shooting function that the best mechanics are good at. And ... and again, going back to our discussion about technology and the changing nature of it, some of the thirty year mechanics are having trouble with the new computerized controllers because it's not what they're used to. And,--you know--I can kind of appreciate the pros and cons of computerized versus mechanical. The mechanical controller is the old giant,--you know,--it's kind of like a mainframe is to a small computer. It's a giant controller with a lot of electrical contacts clicking in and out, and you can actually see the movement of the contacts so you can actually imagine the current flowing,--you know--when they close and not flowing when they open. And the new computerized ones all that's done in circuitry. So when there's something wrong on the old ones, you might be able to see something fell off,--you know-physically fell off, and the new ones you have to use other techniques of diagnosing what went wrong.

J.L. Um-hum.

M.S. So again, it's ... it's a good trade for me because I think I'm really good at synthesizing that much information and ... and drawing conclusions about different technologies. And being introduced to new ones, I'm not really--I don't feel threatened or ... or nervous about that, whereas a lot of the older mechanics are having more trouble with that. But at any rate, I ... I ... when I was pretty sure that it would be a good trade for me ... I knew my funding was going to run out so it was either stay and fight for more funding and ... or actually switch to the other side and advocate for women from the inside. And it was actually an experience that I had with TNT going to Washington and meeting--you know--very important legislators and meeting with the head of--I guess it's the Secretary ... Vice-President of the Building and Construction Trades Department, and around the table the other activists that I'm working with are saying: Hi. I'm Lauren Sugerma, Elevator Constructor. You know? Hi! I'm Beth Youne, Operating Engineer and then ... and then I would introduce myself as Margarita Suarez from Nontraditional Employment For Women and already that's placing myself outside this conversation: I am an outsider. So I thought--you know--why don't I see what it's like to be on the inside. I'll get some first hand experience. I'll ... I'll enjoy it,--you know,--and I'll ... I'll build some credentials for future work. So I ... I still am working on the ... on TNT. I'm still on the Board of TNT but it's not in the same capacity. I was the Secretary of that organization before and now I've resigned so that I can--you know--concentrate on my apprenticeship. And it's true. I really have a lot less time for typing memos and letters and putting together packets.

J.L. ?? But I see ... I printed out the schedule for 2005 for TNT

M.S. Great.

J.L. And you have a ambitious program.

M.S. Yes.

J.L. And it's all over the country,--

M.S. All over the country ...

J.L. All kinds of exciting things happening.

M.S. Yes.



J.L. So will you be able to participate in some of that?

M.S. Well, I will. There's a board meeting coming up March and ...

J.L. And that will be in New York City.

M.S. Thankfully it's in New York City 'cause I ... we were trying to decide whether to have one and I ... I didn't realize that my hesitation was that I didn't think I could travel again. And we hadn't been to New York in a long time and we were planning to go to the West Coast in June or May, so it made sense to come to be on the East Coast. We've been meeting in Chicago,--you know? So ... so that makes it easy for me to attend. And, yes, I ... I will try to get time for to go to the annual meeting in ... in Sacramento and maybe even attend that conference, the tradeswomen's conference, that ...

J.L. So tell me about your experiences in your apprenticeship. First of all, how many classroom hours and how many years and all those basics?

M.S. Oh, the classroom hours? Oh, I don't know the number off hand, but we have to have fifteen sessions every semester,--there's eight semesters,--and the session is four hours so we can do the math.

J.L. And where do you attend school?

M.S. And I attend school at Park West High School which actually has a vocational elevator program for the high school students in that ... in that school and I hear that it's threatened but it's really cool because the kids who go through that elevator program get to come in as second year apprentices.

J.L. Ah. Is that in the Bronx?

M.S. No. It's here on 50th and Tenth. [Avenue]

J.L. Okay.

M.S. It's in midtown. And so I ... I attend once a week for four hours. And I've already studied Intro to Elevator Systems where we studied all the parts of an elevator and how they work and how the safety mechanisms work: different types of elevators, overhead traction and basement traction, and geared and gearless and all the ... all the different types; the anatomy of elevators pretty much. And then this semester I'm just finished Intro Electric ... Intro To Electric Theory. so ...

J.L. And how are you finding the work in ... classroom? It's accessible?

M.S. In the classroom?

J.L. I mean, it's ...

M.S. It is accessible, yes. In fact,--you know--I could ... I could see that if I stuck with this trade and moved up,--you know--I would have some ideas for improving the curriculum even. And it's al--it's always tough because really I'd say eighty-five to ninety percent of the learning that I'm doing is on the job, but there is really valuable stuff like safety thing ... We have a couple of safety classes every semester, and just learning the names for things in a structured way. People learn in different ways. I'm really good at classroom learning so, of course, I have all these ideas of making the classroom learning

a lot lighter. But a lot ... a lot of the learning is really done outside the classroom as well.

J.L. Now, how do you find the instructor or instructors so far?

M.S. Mixed. You know? I think different instructors bring different enthusiasm, different skills. You know? I've had both kinds, actually. But I ... I have to say even the act of showing up at school and seeing your classmates and then talking to your teacher who works in the industry, even if it has nothing to do with the textbook, that's really valuable and so--you know--I really find it valuable to go to school.

J.L. Tell me about the other females in the program? How many are ...

M.S. Well, I know of at least one female mechanic out there. And in the other union, the Elevator Constructors Union, I think there's a handful as well.

J.L. Is that Local 1?

M.S. Local 1 of the Elevator Constructors Union, and this is Local 3, Elevator Division.

J.L. And you do the same work?

M.S. We don't exactly do the same work, although there are ... I'm in the Maintenance Department so there's installation, maintenance repair and modernization. We don't do installation. So if it's a new building that doesn't have an elevator or if it's an old building that never had an elevator, that's Local 1's jurisdiction.

J.L. Okay.

M.S. And then we can do repair or modernization. So as long as we're not laying new rails, we can totally tear out an elevator and put a new one in, so that would be modernization. Repair is the big machines and big parts that some ... generator and hoist motors that have to be yanked out and pulled to the shop. And I'm in maintenance so that means cleaning, oiling, lubricating, maintaining but also trouble shooting.

J.L. Okay. Are you going to have a chance to learn the full range of skills that the people in your Local do during your apprenticeship?

M.S. Theoretically you can. You can do it through a number of ways. You can do it through the official ways which is in the union book, which says each apprentice shall have the opportunity to try maintenance, which, I think, implies that, for the most part, it's hard to get into maintenance; that they would--you know,--you could be doing repair or modernization for your entire career if it didn't have that clause that said you should be given a chance to try maintenance. Maintenance mechanics don't get laid off as much as modernization crews 'cause modernization crews go in, do a project,--you know--modernize these three elevators, and then, if there's no work right after that, they get paid off. So they get paid a tiny bit more per hour. But maintenance people tend to work year round and with all the overtime and everything, and the, I guess, the promotion structure, you can actually end up actually end up making more money through maintenance. So I think that's why that clause is there. Now, from my point of view, I'm sure they put me in maintenance because of my educational background and I think a lot of other women and smaller men

are put into maintenance because some--frankly, some of the other trades are just really heavy. And it's not that I don't think I could do it, but I don't know if I ... if I personally would be interested in lifting and heaving and hoisting all day, and--you know--that .. that would be fun for somebody else but I don't think that would be the best use of my skills. So that being said, at the facility where I'm working now there are modernization crews working and repair crews that come in, and when the repair crews come in I often have to show them where they're going and then I end up staying with them and helping them or watching them. And the same with the modernization crews. You know? Sometimes I get to put a screw driver in there, but a lot of times I ... I'm just observing what they're doing. And I'm sure if I really asked,--you know--can I spend three days in mod I think that would be possible. So ... Now, for ... for other ... for other students that I've met, other apprentices, I've heard them complaining,--you know--they don't put me in ... You know, I want to go try maintenance but I'm this big guy and they think that I'm only good for repair. So,--you know--it's a struggle for the guys as well. You know? maybe for the women it's a struggle just to be taken seriously as far as physical abilities go.

J.L. Now tell me about the work experience. How many years is this program ...

#### Tape Two

J.L. Okay. So this is Tape Two, on December 26, 2004, interviewing Margarita Suarez.

Margarita, you were telling me about the apprentice program, the length and ...

M.S. Yeah. It's four years. You have to attend eight semesters, and only after that are you eligible to get a journey card. but to be promoted to journeyperson it's at the discretion of your employer. So these are things that probably could be improved in the next contract, although in practice employers, at least the employers that I'm familiar with--tend to want to accelerate you to mechanic status because they need people to cover routes. So, yeah, four ... four years at school but I guess the ... the union contract provides the minimum scale for that you should be making.

J.L. And so do you work for one contractor or does the union find you the job? How does that work?

M.S. So when you finish the application process you get a letter from the union saying com down and get a referral. Once you've been accepted they say: Okay, you've been accepted; come down and get your referral. And you go down there and they have a computer system and the referrals are handed out in the order that they arrived at the union, and if more than one person was requested they're split up so that one--you know--if one company can take twenty employees they don't take the top twenty people. And you're assigned in order of rank. So you go down there, you get your referral paper, and then you go to the place where you're supposed to work and they're supposed to give you a job. Now, I don't know what conclusions I should draw,--and I didn't make an issue of it at the time,--but my first ... My first referral I turned down because I needed time to finish up what I was doing at NEW, finish my ... my work, my reports and everything. The second referral I got they didn't give me work and so I went back to the ... the Joint Employment Office and they said,--you know--that

wasn't supposed to happen. So,--you know--I ... I guess I could have made an issue of it but--you know--who wants to work for an employer that doesn't want you.

J.L. ... doesn't want you. Right.

M.S. Right. So they gave me another referral right away and that's where I am now. There's about forty, I believe,--I think it could be twenty,--I think there's forty employers in my union.

J.L. Okay. And this employer ... who ... who is this employer?

M.S. It's Nouveau Elevator Industries and--or Nouveau, a lot of the guys say Nuvo so that's how I say it too, but ....

J.L. But it's like a French nouveau ...

M.S. It's like the French word for new. And it's a family business. It's the largest privately held company in Local 3, Elevator Division, so it's not--you know--Otis, which is Unitec. It's not Mainco which does Macy's. You know? It's not ... I think those companies are either smaller and/or public stock companies. It's a family business. It's run by the father, the mother and four sons and it's--you know--it's pretty quirky but I ... I'm enjoying working there, for the most part.

J.L. And how ... do you work with a ... a journeyman or ... How does that work?

M.S. I do. Well, what happens is, especially in maintenance, a little bit different than modernization, I think, because I think you have pairs of ... of mechanic/helper, mechanic/helper, mechanic/helper, and then you'll have a mod team of eight people which is four mechanics and four helpers, and then they go to do the work on fixing---you know--changing four elevators. But in maintenance there ... there's, I think, forty or fifty mechanics who cover Manhattan, lets say, in my division and there's maybe four or five helpers. So the helpers tend to rove around and help however needs help. Now needing help might mean paint that, clean that, but it also might mean run the car while I do something to the controller, or it also might mean help me hold this big, heavy thing. And so I started out ... My first day on the job was running parts so I got to get familiar with some of the jobs around the City and meet some of the mechanics by handing them a part. And probably the ... by the ... by the first complete week that I was on the job,--I started on a Thursday,--so by the Monday they had met sitting with a mechanic in a resident situation. And I didn't know it at the time but afterwards he told me that that was my test; that the boss had said take this girl helper and--we're called girl helpers,--and see that she's made of. See if we're going to keep her or not.

J.L. Um-hum.

M.S. And he said that I passed the test that they're going to keep me. So that was ... that was kind of nice, in ... in hindsight, to see that that was a test. And I didn't even know it was so I wasn't nervous and I was just being myself.

J.L. Yeah, wonderful.

M.S. So that ... that ... that boded well. And currently ... And I spent another couple of days running around and then I ended up at another resident situation ... resident means it's a big building that has a number of elevators and they want a mechanic on site at all times and sometimes also a helper. So I went to another resident job and these were both in Midtown, big corporate buildings, and I was there for about a month and a half and that's where I sort of learned how to operate a certain type of equipment and maintain this other type of equipment, and I also had a little experience working on changing light bulbs and things like that which---you know--seems like it would be pretty simple, but sometimes it's the circuitry that's broken and the holder that's broken, or whatever. So I did that for a month and a half and then I bounced around a little bit more, and then I landed ... they placed me in a resident job that opened up at NYU Medical Center. It's on 30th Street and First Avenue. And I have two mechanics there that the University pays for, or I guess the Medical Center pays for,--two mechanics and a helper at all times, Monday through Friday, and a mechanic--one mechanic on Saturday. And so I've been there since March or April, I believe, and I'll be completing my first year January 22nd. So ... The big thing that just happened yesterday, I covered the hospital by myself and I actually worked on three elevators and--you know--didn't break anything, didn't hurt myself, didn't hurt anybody else, and so--you know--it feels kind of good. I'll get paid for B Mechanic,--that's junior mechanic--for a day overtime and ...

J.L. And how much about is that rate, I mean?

M.S. That rate is ... I think it's about forty dollars an hour with the overtime. But the interesting thing about ... Like, we're in the Electricians Union. Electricians, construction electricians, make a lot more than us per hour. I think the top mechanic rate is like, thirty-five dollars an hour, thirty-three dollars an hour. But we don't ever get laid off so that's the ... the explanation. It's a maintenance trade, not a construction trade. But, yeah, my mechanic was joking with me a lot about how this is more money than I pretty much make in a week. It's not really true but ... but it's ... it's close.

J.L. So how do you find the reaction of the men to you ?? help on the job and--you know--stuff like that?

M.S. Well, what I ... Unbeknownst to me, before I even showed up, my boss had put out the word that if anyone screwed up in front of me there would be hell to pay. And actually, when I went ...

J.L. Meaning what?

M.S. Meaning take the porn down; be nice to her. You know? I don't want to hear any bull shit kind of thing. And actually, when I went in to sign up for the job I had to fill out paperwork, then I had to get my picture taken for my ID. Then I had to pick up my uniforms. I had to get my safety bag and have a lecture from the Safety Director about what everything in the bag was for, which--you know--is a nice thing that we have a safety program and a safety class at my job, but you also ... you also have to keep in mind that one's own safety is one's own responsibility because the boss is not going to support you if you hurt yourself. They're going to say you didn't put that on, or why did you touch that? You know? And then the next thing was to talk to my boss, my future supervisor, and so he took me into a room, closed the door, lit up a cigarette, which is something that you kind of have to get used to in this trade. You know? Again, you say choose your own battles and--you know,--I ... I guess I've chosen to put up with the passive smoke rather than to make an issue

of it at this point. But he just said: Look. I'll talk to you frankly. You're the first woman I've ever had in my department;--the first woman ever in this Department,--and I'm not really sure some of the guys are going to be good and I don't know about the rest of them. So if anything should happen whatsoever, this is my cell phone number. I want you to call me right away. So I took that as a good faith effort for him to support my success. And he also said that he would like to say when he retires that he had a couple of women mechanics under him. So that ... that felt really good, especially after being turned down for that first job and wondering what the real reason was. He said: Oh, it's an error. We really didn't want apprentices, and then, of course, other people ended up working there so ...

J.L. He really is nouveau.

M.S. Yeah. It was nouveau. So here I am starting out and-you know-I had a little ... Nobody was really overtly not nice to me and in fact, I'd say I only know one mechanic who doesn't really like me that I know doesn't really like me. But he doesn't like anybody,--you know?--and he's very difficult to work with but-you know--from everyone's point of view. But I remember my current mechanic that I'm working with, who's actually going to be leaving in the beginning of the year and I'll have another mechanic moving in so that's always ... you've got to get used to change again,-but he's ... he's a really smart guy and kind of ... kind of nerdy and kind of quirky, but I like it--you know?--and I get along with ... He's ... he's kind of got a very obsessive personality so when he's talking about something to you he'll just ... he'll just talk to you about and talk to you about it and talk to you about it-

J.L. Give you a lot of information ...

M.S. Give you a lot of information,--ask you a lot of questions about, even if it's clear that you don't really want to talk about it. So--you know,--he's ... he's right out there. I like him a lot. And after the first day--

J.L. What's his name?

M.S. His name's Kevin,--after the first day Kevin said to me: So--you know--when they told me that you were going to come down where I didn't really know what to think. I was a little bit nervous, a little bit anxious. I didn't know what was going to happen. But we're doing okay. Right? It's ... it's okay. Right? It's working out. Right? And it was really earnest and really sweet of him to even admit to me that he was feeling anxious. You know? It just felt really nice and close. You know? And, like, yeah, familiar or something. and so I ... I had a pretty good idea that it would work out well. And my other mechanic, Scott, I think he was a lot more nervous about me to begin with, 'cause now that I know his personality a little better he ... he tends to ... he tends to assume that worst before--you know-kind of calming down about something, so I think he was probably thinking: Oh, they're sticking the girl helper here. I don't know what that's going to mean,--you know?--more work for me. But I've been pulling my weight and learning and I think they've been happy with how I've been doing. You know? They'll ... they'll actually openly say in front of me, which I think is funny,--you know----that other helper, he's lazy and a waste of time. You know? When he comes here we're actually counterproductive kind of thing. So even though they haven't said we like you; you're a good helper, they'll say: we don't want him; he's not a good helper, so--you know--I take that as positive--

J.L. ??

M.S. Yeah, positive feedback. And ... and the guys are young,--they're in their early thirties,-and ... but they've been in the field for fifteen and ten years respectively and they--you know--they know a lot about the field. But they're also young enough to imagine a girl doing this, even though they've never seen one before. He said: You know, I've never had a girl working with me before. I didn't know what it was going to be like, but--you know-it's okay. Right? It's all right. Right? On the other hand, now and then we get into these conversations where--with them or with other mechanics, where--and maybe it's partially true; I don't know; I don't like to think so,-but someone will sort of say: Well, I think the only reason why they put you here in this resident job,--which is a mint placement; like, you really want a resident job 'cause you can put your stuff there. I mean, I play softball in the summer and I have to carry my gear around. Can you imagine if I was bouncing around all of Manhattan trying ... Where would I put my gear? How would I get to my game by six o'clock. You know? It's just nice. And ... and you work with the same elevators all the time,--you're not bouncing around,-so you can sort of get to know their personalities and see their recurring problems in stead of being hit with something new every few months. Anyway, it's a mint, mint placement. But the perception is that I was put there so they could hide me from the guys. You know?

J.L. So you wouldn't be circulating all through Manhattan or ...

M.S. Yeah. So I wouldn't encounter any trouble. Because if they put me with two decent guys at one place and kind of tuck me away in a corner, I can't say this guy said that to me or put that up on the wall, or--you know--did this to me. You know? And in a way, yeah, maybe it is nice to have to avoid that. On the other hand, then the next conclusion that some of the guys ... it's because I'm not as capable or something like that. Or maybe that's what I'm reading into it. You know? It's not that I deserved this mint placement from being interested, on time--you know?--proactive and that kind of thing. It's because I'm a girl.

J.L. Right. And they say that ... I mean, that's a continuing theme, women in non-traditional ...

M.S. Well, yeah. I guess it's ... it comes up every now and then. Like, I ... I realize that some guys think it, and maybe that's just the way that they choose to understand it. You know? They ... they assume: Oh, it must be because of that. But then, on the other hand, we just had our holiday party and I met a lot of the mechanics that I had worked with just once or twice in the beginning, before I got put on the resident jobs, and others that I know from talking to on the phone ...

J.L. You say the holiday party. Was it for the union or the company?

M.S. Just for the ... an informal party among the mechanics and helpers.

J.L. Okay.

M.S. And I'd say maybe thirty of them were there;--at least maybe half of them were there,--and ... and two of them, at least to my face anyway, they're very friendly and supportive and ... and it seems like they do want me to succeed. It's like I'm the novelty.

J.L. Yeah.

M.S. So I didn't really know what to expect going in and I was entering a culture where no girls had ever gone before. And maybe, yeah, tucked away in this resident job I'm not a threat to anyone because they haven't had to work with me and feel that their job was threatened by me. On the other hand, I think they do--a lot of them do like me,--you know--as a person, or I like them. so ...

J.L. Now, how is it working in this blue collar envir-- ... Like you said, it's not construction, but still it's ...

M.S. It's definitely blue collar. We wear uniforms that look like--you know---repair person uniforms. It's a grey set of dickies. And every now and then it hits me,--you know--because, of course, my ... My Mom, who's learned to just kind of roll with my changing careers and whims instead of saying: don't you think you should have gone to medical school? They never really pressured me like that, but they ... they were a little bit wondering, like, Oh, you're going to Nicaragua to build houses? Like what about your career? Like, you can always go back to computers. Right? And ... and I think they realize that money ... the money is not what's important to me and that I'm doing well for myself and that I'm happy. You know? So my Mom will say stuff like: well, is your education going to waste? and that kind of thing. So I think about that kind of thing every now and then but ... and then ... and then once in a while, at the hospital where I work, let's say I'll be walking down the hall and someone's approaching me and they'll say: Hi! good morning! How are you? And I'll kind of answer, but they're talking to the person right behind me and just totally ignoring the fact that I'm there.

J.L. Yeah.

M.S. And it's because, in this uniform, I'm visible to others in uniform: Hey, how's it going? what's going on, man?--you know-- Have a good holiday? But to the ones ... and the doctors and the nurses uniforms and the med student uniforms,

J.L. Background ...

M.S. Just background, part of the furniture. You know? So that's kind of interesting.

J.L. Well, I'm interested ... As a member of Local 3, you have to attend apprenticeship meetings or ... 'cause you're in this ... this certain Division, the Elevator Division?

M.S. We're in the division so we have Division Helper meetings.

J.L. Um-hum.

M.S. And they're once every two months except in the summer, so I think there's five or six meetings per year. And it's really good to go to those meetings. Not everybody does and we just had a big pep talk by Chris Erikson who's, I believe, the Business Agent of our Division [currently Business Manager, Local 3]. He handles also the other kind of maintenance divisions and other odd Divisions of the Local 3, like the people who work at the Javits Center,--you know--and that kind of thing; people who work for the MTA, I think. And he was just saying,--you know,--You've got to ... everyone promised to bring another person. You've got to ... You've got to show up 'cause in our industry it seems to be very employer heavy. You know? It's a Joint ... It's a Joint Industry Board is supposed to balance the interests of the union and the



employers. But in the kind of work that we do, for some reason it seems really easy to ... to kind of cave in to the employers because the employers offer us more money. They're ... I mean, the ... the union scale is ... is a recommendation of the minimum pay. So what will happen is the employers will offer more money and all of a sudden you're sort of beholden to them. And so if someone's doing your brother wrong, well, I ... I'm going to lose my expense.

J.L. Um-hum.

M.S. They don't actually up your salary, 'cause that would be official and they'd have to pay payroll taxes and put in a percentage for your pension. They pay you car expenses. So some guys were getting hundreds of dollars a week--excuse me,--in car expenses and the ... the employers hold that over them as a way to make them not want to speak up.

J.L. How do you experience the union meetings and the level of support of the union towards you?

M.S. Excuse me. I'm going ??and get some water.

J.L. So when you attend union meetings, what kind of response do you get from your--the brothers?

M.S. It's pretty good.

J.L. Um-hum.

M.S. I mean, I'd say there's a handful,--you know--ten people who will be very friendly and shake my hand, and then there's some that don't really--that I don't really greet or they don't greet me,--and I guess that's ... that's the nature of attending any meeting. And the Shop Steward of my company is actually the chairman of the elevator division so he knows me. And the interesting thing is that before they knew that I had quit NEW, the Office Of Apprenticeship Training and Employer Labor Services, OATELS, with whom I had done some work at NEW, doing a ... it was a pilot initiative to offer technical assistance to the employers and unions that was actually kind of successful because the climate had changed and the employers and unions were actually seeking it,--they ... one of the women who works with OATELS, from Boston, I believe, she contacted me and said would you like to speak about recruitment practices of women at the Eastern State Apprenticeship Con--Eastern States Apprenticeship Conference, so ESAC conference up in ... it was in Maine ...

J.L. It's from the Department Of Labor?

M.S. State Department Of Labor, yeah; I guess all the states of the Eastern States. And I guess it's states. It might be the national thing.

J.L. Yeah.

M.S. I don't know. It's a ... it's a big official apprenticeship conference and all the Apprenticeship Directors go there. And I know a bunch of Apprenticeship directors because of my work at NEW:

J.L. Right.

M.S.,. The Painters, the Laborers,---you know,--Elevator Division. So I wrote back and I said--you know--I'd love to come and talk at your conference

but--you know--I've left NEW and I'm working as an apprentice now and I'll see if I can get the time off. She said: Well, that would be lovely if you could come and talk about the recruitment for the Elevator Project and your work at NEW and talk about TNT. So I actually arranged to get the time off with my boss, got a ride with the Apprentice Director of the Catering Union and--who's a friend of mine,--and ... and we drove up to Portland. And when ... when I went to register the first person that I saw was my Shop Steward who is the Chairman of my Division. And he didn't know I was going there. I didn't assume that he was going. I just totally forget that there would be people from my ... My Division is sixteen hundred people out of the thirty-three thousand in Local 3 so I wasn't really thinking that we would be there in such force. There were about five people from the Elevator Division there. So he said: What are you doing here? I said: Oh, I'm ... I'm speaking. He was like: Oh, okay. And I ended up meeting the Business Representative [for the Elevator Division] Rob Olenick and there was the guy who works on the Apprenticeship ... he's like the Apprentice School coordinator, and the Apprentice Director was there, Nick LaGuardia. And is that all from my union? Yeah, and then others from Local 3: Chris Erikson who's the Business Agent was there, but I didn't get to meet him. And they actually attended my talk. That was really nerve-racking.

J.L. Uh-huh.

M.S. Because--you know,--first,--you know--I'm ... I'm supposed to be the peon and then I'm ... I'm giving a talk at this conference that they're paying to attend.

J.L. Yeah.

M.S. So that was interesting and it was nerve-racking. And there's always a little bit of distance that they put between me and them, maybe because they're shy because I'm a woman; maybe because I'm a woman who spoke at ESAC; who worked on the Apprenticeship Program. You know? They ... Maybe if they see women as a threat, as, like, a sexual harassment threat, I'm the biggest type there can be because I come from the agency that would, in their eyes, get them in trouble for that. So after I gave my talk I was kind of hanging around with some of my friends from the other apprenticeships and some people from NEW, and then they came out to smoke and they were kind of standing nearby and kind of shuffling around so I kind of shuffled a little bit nearer. And then my ... my Shop Steward,--his name is Joe Licato, [now management at Nouveau] --just --came up to me ... He didn't say great talk or I hated your talk or--you know-how's it going? He just said: do you have a lapel pin? And I said: No, I don't and he said: Here. Take one. You need one of these. And it's an Elevator Division, IBEW, Local 3, lapel pin. And so I took that as the sign that ... that I did good.

J.L. Yeah.

M.S. You know? And then, of course, they ... they went out and did their drinking on their own and I'm sure they were talking about me, or whatever, but--you know-whatever they were talking about, but--you know?-so we didn't really socialize a lot. But that gesture of handing me a pin, I think, was like, Okay, you can kind of be one of us 'cause we're the delegates who go to the conferences kind of thing.

J.L. Well, I ... I have a couple of question. I wanted to ask you about your ideas on recruitment strategy. But maybe before we go there we'll just conclude with ... I mean, even though you say that you don't plan ahead, but

when you think about your future do you have some dreams or goals that you think-in ... in this field and ... speak about that first, and then we'll talk about advocacy?

M.S. Yeah. well, I guess--you know--I know the things that I've been good at in the past and things that I can imagine that I would be good at, at there's the things that really scare me but that I could probably do that somebody needs to do, and I guess if I were to guess at what I would do with all of this and where I would be going, is that I ... I would like to continue advocacy in some way, shape or form. And,--you know--advocacy involves talking to people that you don't know, which is always very stress-inducing for many people, including myself, and it ... it means being well-spoken and a lot of times it's easy to get tongue tied or not have your thoughts collected in a way to present to people in an understandable way. And it also involves mingling in an environment that doesn't necessarily inspire a lot of comfort for me. So, for example, when I took the job at NEW, coming from the casual environment at Columbia and also being a construction worker in Nicaragua, and then going to NEW where I was going to be--you know--giving speeches in Washington, D.C. and also--you know---talking to Apprentice Directors and this and that, it's a ... it's a whole other culture to enter and--you know--especially--you know--not being a typically feminine woman, not knowing where I would fit into that culture. And remember Martha Baker, who's the woman who hired me, the former Executive director of ... of NEW, she must have had questions, too, 'cause she was like:--you know--Do you think you can do this? You think you can talk to Apprentice Directors? This was after she had attended a meeting in D.C. about the grant and I had just started ... I was my first day of work we went down to the grantees meeting. And I said: yeah. I think I can do it? She's like, You're going to have to get a suit. You know? and I ... that was ... that was really mind blowing for me 'cause it was just like, I'm going where I don't really necessarily want to hang out,- -you know?--

J.L. Um-hum.

M.S. But maybe it's somewhere necessary for someone to go. And so,--you know--I 'm just sort of finding my way. so even though I can't really imagine what it would be like to do this function, I think that's where I would probably be heading because I think--you know--that when I'm--when I'm prepared and ?? feeling confident enough I can be pretty convincing. and I ... I think I feel pretty convicted about these issues. And ...

J.L. Just for the record, you inspire confidence in others.

M.S. Really?

J.L. You always have in me.

M>S. Oh, thank you. Thank you. I mean, I ... I mostly feel confident, like, about myself. But when it turns to having to interact with other people,- you know--of course, you ... you don't want to feel rejected or--you know--not included, or whatever. But I guess ... What were we talking about, like, where our dreams would go?

J.L. Your dreams, goals and how you can use all that you bring to this. Where you see yourself doing;-what you see yourself doing.

M.S. Oh yeah. So, like, in ... in the present time I can see that it's already starting to happen, that I'm a competent person. I know I can do this

trade. It might be different from a woman who entered who didn't know if she could do this trade. And so then, the guys who I work with, they know I can do this trade because I have that ... that confidence and that ability. So even changing minds on a very person level, starting now,--maybe in the future it'll be changing minds on a national level with policies,--but at the moment I'm putting in my time doing it on a person level and I'm finding out really interesting things, like, I wonder how you get the grease stains from the dirty, greasy machines out of your work pants. And,--you know--not a single mechanic that I've asked has been able to tell me because he doesn't do the laundry.

J.L. If you don't have to do it ... Yeah, not their problem.

M.S. Not only does he not do the laundry but he doesn't care about the laundry. And then I found out the other day that both my mechanics have never made a grilled cheese sandwich and didn't even know how they would go about it.

J.L. Interesting.

M.S. And I said: Grilled cheese is the easiest thing you can make. Well, how long do you have to cook it on the side? I don't know how I would do that, Which tells me that they've never ever cooked, not even like, macaroni and cheese or something like that from a box. You know? So remember, these are guys who can fix a very complicated elevator.

J.L. Different life style.

M.S. A very different lifestyle;--very different.

J.L. So now we want to talk a bit about ... you have this background in technology and now in the trades. And when you look at a field like electronics where women--you know--you don't have to lift heavy things. You don't ... It's ... it's in the head. I mean, it's ... But what is it that's keeping women out of this field? What are the things that could change to draw women in? I mean, you did talk about--you know--you have to get to girls when they're younger so they can play and see if it fits. But what ... what would change this? What are some strategies ...

M.S. I think ... I think the big thing is for women to have the experiences that would instill confidence in them. So,--you know--if you hand someone a hammer and a nail and they've never, ever, ever done it in their lives are they going to be confident about their ability to do it, 'cause it takes some learning curve,-- --some practice finessing it. You know?

J.L. Even ... They talk about the variances in females of spatial relations and things like this . And I mean, girls ...

#### Side Two

J.L. So we were talking about ...

M.S. Girls don't get blocks. Yeah. And ... and I think the problem is that a lot of people would like to say that girls don't get blocks because they don't want blocks or they don't need blocks or they can't do blocks. There's something inherently, biologically different about girls that makes them bad at blocks so you might as well not give them blocks. And--you know,--I ... I had to do a lot of thinking about these kinds of issues when I was studying for my gender studies degree, or I would have been thinking about it anyway but that

was a nice structured way to do it. And my personal philosophy is that, yes, there may be biological differences, just like there's tall people and short people and muscular people and flabby people, but even if there is some genetic disposition toward that, maybe correlated with gender or not, I think the realm of societal influences and those forces is so great that it will overcome the biological.

J.L. Right.

M.S. Forces, if they exist. I don't know if they do, but I tend to think that they don't. Maybe they do. It doesn't matter to me.

J.L. Right.

M.S. Because people can go to a class and learn how to be a public speaker and people can go to a class and learn how to lay blocks. And some of them will be better at it than others and some men will be worse than women, and vice versa. So you were saying what ... what can we do ...

J.L. That ... what would be some of the best strategies for change?

M.S. Well, this is ...

J.L. That's a pretty broad question.

M.S. It's a pretty broad question. Like, I'm hoping that what I'm doing now is ... is a good strategy. It's not a waste of my time. I mean, of course, I'm enjoying it along the way so of course it's not a waste of my time, but I think the guys who--even a couple of old timers that I've worked with who never imagined that a girl would want to do this, much less be able to do this,--are seeing that this girl is kind of doing it,--you know?--and better than some of the guys who come in to do it. So if we could find ten more women to do what I'm doing or twenty more women--you know--who would enjoy doing this, I think that that would be helpful. It's ... it's a different strategy than coming from the outside and trying to say I want to change your attitude about this.

J.L. Right. Tell me, since you have developed expertise in recruitment; you have ideas about recruit--what are the ... that are the best things ... What are the things that work? What are the things we should change?

M.S. Well, I think ... One of the problems with labor unions in the City is that the information is so tightly held. You don't even know when you're supposed to apply, much less how you're supposed to apply or what kind of things you would need. And that's why the elevator recruitment campaign was so different was because all that information was made open to us so we could try to open it up for the women. And out of ... You know, we submitted hundreds of applications and only got four women out of it, but I'd like to say that those four women were the ones that they wanted and they wouldn't have found those four women if we hadn't done the campaign. Now, others would say what a waste of time and effort and money. If you only got four, it wasn't worth it, but I ... I tend to see things on ... not in terms of economics ... I mean, economics ... Of course you need funding to do stuff. You've got to be practical about the amount of money that you're spending. But how do you put a price on what I'm doing or what those other three women are doing? Like, that was only worth five dollars to you, twenty dollars, fifty dollars, three thousand dollars? You know? How do you put a price on the effect that those women are having on their mechanics and the people that they're working with? And I also think that, beside sometimes

advanc--you know-we make advances and then they get taken away. And then we make advances again. Does that mean that it wasn't worth making that advance? I don't think so. And some people don't really have a vision like that so they would get discouraged or think it's not worth it. And it's kind of like the ... the mission of NEW. A lot of the hubbub and discussions that happened ...--you know--Well, if we're not getting placements, then we're failing. And I kind of see it as of course we want placements. Everybody wants placements. But if we've reached these thousands of women and changed their minds just a little bit about what a woman can do and what they, themselves, can do what's going to happen to their nieces or sisters or daughters,--you know?-it's ... it's ... it's kind of like .. It's a big project to get--to somehow get the word out when it's been assumed all this time that women can't do this or don't want to do it or shouldn't do it. And so,--you know--we have ... we have to get to the point where women just know that--or girls just know that they can. 'Cause right now we've in this awkward stage where the women know that they can and they want to but they've missed twenty years of experience holding a hammer or whatever,--you know--that boys have had, so of course they're going to be dis--disadvantaged in the work place. And then with the sexual harassment and all that on top of it, they're not likely to stay. And so a lot of people might conclude that women weren't suited for it. But I think it's just because we're not at the point where women come in prepared.

J.L. Dealing with the apprentice programs, it's interesting that they still ... that it's still a ... a mystery, a well kept secret about the programs and the ... it doesn't seem to me that the apprentice programs have ever had any funding withheld or been cited for lack of compliance or ... It's very easy for them to say--you know--they've made a good faith effort.

M.S. Right.

J.L. So what are what are the things you've learned about working with ... What ... what's the hold-up there and what ... what can change and what works?

M.S. Well, I ... in my work with NEW and with TNT I got to visit and hear about a lot of different programs. In Seattle,--now I think they're funding got threatened; it's another step back,--they have a really great relationship with their Sate Department of Labor or State Apprenticeship Council. In New York, you know, the ... the head of the Apprenticeship Council was just indicted, I think, so I think there are a lot of stumbling blocks in terms of who was in whose pocket on the local level. But in ... in an ideal world, in Seattle the Apprentice Council gave money for women and minorities to start jobs so you had a seven thousand dollars, I believe it was, per head I believe it was, of case management services, tools and uniforms and dues and transportation, whatever you needed to get yourself ...

J.L. Child care?

M.S. Child care,--whatever you needed to get yourself going. And then they had a mentorship program, a formal mentorship program, where not only would tradeswomen, I guess on their own time, mentor you and support you but tradesmen and women in the field would be paid two hours per week by the employer to sit down with you and see what the issues are. So it was actual put your money where your mouth is. I guess that's the big thing; that when you do put your money toward some of these programs, I think they have a really good effect, instead of just saying well, the women came in and then they left and we don't know why. And they wouldn't come; they never showed up,--you know--and it just seems like the state ... I'm .. I'm still trying to understand bureaucracies, but the

Federal government, the State government, there's ... there seem to be so many impassés toward making progress. But when you remove some of those impassés it seems like so much can be done because it's coming from above. So that ... that's ... that's the challenge. If you can't make it come from above, maybe you make it come from below at the same time. You work from both directions, from within and from without or ... You know?

J.L. It seems that there's a lot of exciting programs that both companies like IBM and Microsoft and government agencies like NASA and universities like Stanford and MIT ... I mean, there's all kinds of mentoring programs and support groups. And even ... I was reading about summer camps for girls to study technology and ... or math and science or ... so there ... there is ...

M.S. It's starting.

J.L. There's a lot of stuff out there.

M.S. Right.

J.L. But it's not exactly percolating yet. But it's the ...

M.S. Right. Well, definitely I think the girls of today have it a lot better than I did when I was a girl and maybe you did when you were a girl. They have Title IX, which is ...

J.L. Yeah. I think it's a big factor.

M.S. It's a big factor. They have ... Because of Title IX they have Mia Hamm to look up to,--you know?--

J.L. Um-hum. Right.

M.S. Whoever--you know--

J.L. Role models.

M.S. Role models. They ... But on the other hand, because of--you know--the gender roles are still being passed down by the parents or whoever, by the society, so there's a contradiction for these girls. I can do ... I can do anything but I've got to make grilled cheese for my husband and do the laundry. I have to have a husband. You know? And I think,--you know--more and more it is changing but for the most part, we're ... we're still struggling against those mor--mores, I guess. You know? I ... I've found ... I've found a little haven here in New York City where I can disregard a lot of those and feel very comfortable, but I know when I travel outside of New York City it's always like a big awakening. It'll be, like, Oh my goodness! The rest of the country is not like where I've chosen to live.

J.L. It's so traditional.

M.S. It's so traditional. And ... and then you look at those maps, the elec-election maps, and then you're just, like,--you know--what happened to the middle of the country? You know? What are they doing there? You know? What are they thinking about? What are they doing? So ...

J.L. So that's a good note to talk about ... Now we are in a period of, it seems, regression in terms of affirmative action, commitment to equality, despite the fact that it's almost 2005.

M.S. Yeah.

J.L. So as a young woman what are your thoughts on ... on that, I mean, aside from what you've already expressed, which is to the point?

M.S. Well, I have a little bit of experience in--you know--college activism and did some activism through the '80's and '90's. And,-you know--I've been around for the rise and fall of many activist organizations and starting of new ones. And what I learned as a young adult in college just learning-you know--for the first time how to run an organization and plan an event and plan a rally and get the word out about something is that when times are bad people will really and they'll show up and they'll complain and they'll work hard. And then you'll make some progress and times will be good for a little while and then people get complacent. And then things get taken away from them and then times are bad again ... so it's kind of like a cycle as I see it. And I think probably,-you know--civil rights has been that way; feminism has been that way. And I guess my ... my conclusion is that you just have to keep on plugging. You know? You've got to have people around who ... who are always working toward that ideal even in the times when everybody's still happy and not working very hard, and just know that pretty soon it's not going to be so happy--you know--might not be so happy and ... and--you know--people are going to need to have that momentum still there. You know, it would be nice that once you made a social advance it would stay and everybody would buy into it and then society would advance, but it's not the way it seems to work. So,--you know--it's ... this kind of thing,-you know ... Hardship is the ... is the inspiration for a lot of art and music, poetry. You know? It's, like, as our human predicament is that we need this stuff or we need ... we use it to get somewhere else, I guess. And so you just keep on working at it.

J.L. Do you write?

M.S. No, not really.

J.L. Do you still consider yourself a pioneer?

M.S. I consider myself a pioneer? Well, I didn't really consider myself a pioneer when I entered this ... this field 'cause I thought, Oh, two of my mentors were in this field twenty-five years ago. You know? It's ... Women have been going into trades for so many years. And then when I arrived and found out that I was the first one in the company and one of four in the ... in the school it made me feel a little bit like a pioneer. And just ... You know? I told my mechanics how to make grilled cheese the other day so that was kind of pioneering. On the other hand, I really feel the ... the work that was done before me because I'm in a position,-and it maybe has something to do with my training--that it tends to ... the best ... the hot shots in my trade are not the brawniest ones but the brainiest ones who can fix elevators that no one else can fix. And so maybe they're able to appreciate that in somebody whether they're a woman or a man, more than the brawniest person looking at the size of a woman and saying ...

J.L. She can't pull her weight.



M.S. She can't pull her weight. And, yeah, she can't pull as much as you but you .. if you're smart enough ... It's like—you know--using a tool.

J.L. Um-hum. Using a lever.

M.S. If you need a ... Yeah. If you need a four foot lever and you only got a two foot lever you ... you work with the two foot lever and you don't hurt yourself and you figure out a way to get the best advantage of ... out of what you've got. Or you use two two-foot levers. You know? You use two people. And I think it's harder in the physical realm than it is in the intellectual realm. And like you said, Ph.D. programs are getting more and more women and—you know--you see more and more women seeming to make it—you know--in ... in higher office like settings or government settings even. Now it doesn't mean that they're not experiencing hardship or discrimination, but it seems so much more visceral on this level, like, so much more obvious that they don't ... You know, they'll ... they'll tell you to your face what they're really thinking in this field. They ... they won't mask it. So ...

J.L. Just on a positive note here, in December, 2004, a woman is assuming the Presidency of MIT for the first time.

M.S. Wow!

J.L. A woman from the life sciences but still getting ??

M.S. Very good.

J.L. So it's progress.

M.S. Yeah.

J.L. Yeah.

M.S. It's happening.

J.L. Okay. I think also a woman is the head of RIT.