

INTERVIEWER: Today is December 2, 2010. I am Karen Arenson. This interview is part of the MIT 150 Oral History Project.

We are speaking this morning with Priscilla King Gray, a former first lady of MIT, and still a warm presence and leader in her own right at the Institute. Except for two years in the military, her husband, Paul Gray, who was MIT's 14th president from 1980 to 1990, has been at MIT since he enrolled as a freshman in 1950.

Priscilla has been at his side for most of those years. She has helped guide and shape MIT's Public Service Center, and the organization now known as the Women's League, taught crewel embroidery, raised four children, served as a hospital volunteer, and provided aide, comfort, food, and guidance not only to her husband, but to generations of students, faculty, staff, and others in the MIT community.

She is an honorary member of the MIT Alumni Association and was awarded the Bronze Beaver, the association's highest honor.

Priscilla, thank you for talking with us this morning. How did you and Paul meet?

GRAY: We met on a blind date. Let's see, October 27th of 1951. I was at Wheaton. I was a freshman at Wheaton, and a junior in my dormitory came to me and said, "Would you like to go to MIT Saturday? There's a field day, and then there'll be a dinner back at the fraternity." That was it.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have a sixth sense that told you that you would spend the rest of your lives together after you met? What was that first day like?

GRAY: Well, he disappeared into a crowd of -- he met me at the train station. Then he went and changed his clothes, came out in shorts, he had two gloves. He disappeared into a crowd of the freshman class and the sophomore class. The idea was to see who could gather the most number of gloves. So I thought I knew him when he went in, but when he came back really roughed up and dirty with all those gloves, I wasn't sure it was the same person.

It was a fun day, and it was the beginning of a great friendship. I don't think we knew right off, but we certainly knew that winter that--

INTERVIEWER: So you were on the sidelines through the day as the freshman and sophomore class battled with each other? He was a sophomore and you were--

GRAY: Yes. There was a rope.

INTERVIEWER: A tug of war.

GRAY: Yes. They did that.

INTERVIEWER: Over a mud pit I think.

GRAY: Something like that. It was a messy day. The only thing that was nice was the weather.

INTERVIEWER: Then he cleaned up for dinner?

GRAY: Yes. He cleans up well.

INTERVIEWER: Did you even have a chance to talk before he dashed off into this melee?

GRAY: Not really. But I was so impressed because he walked on the outside on the edge of the sidewalk. In the high school where I went, we didn't have very many sidewalks, but certainly I know he had been taught to do that. I noticed that.

INTERVIEWER: Were you with other women from Wheaton? Were there classmates or friends - the junior?

GRAY: The woman who asked me, she was not with me but she came up on the train and met her fiance.

INTERVIEWER: Who was in Paul's fraternity?

GRAY: Yes. So we saw them at dinner.

INTERVIEWER: Did you know her well or was she just looking for a likely freshman to take?

GRAY: We were five weeks into the term. So I knew her as well as probably I knew anybody, except my roommates and some friends in my own class.

INTERVIEWER: So a bit of chance there.

GRAY: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: What were you like when you first met him?

GRAY: I don't know. Of course, I thought I was all grown up. But I look back and think I was very young - very young. It was a trip. I'd grown up in a small town. Wheaton was not a big college, and to come up here and see those two classes and that melee together, that was a lot of people.

INTERVIEWER: Did you wonder what you were getting into? It's an interesting introduction.

GRAY: Yes. It was an introduction. It was not at all my picture of MIT.

INTERVIEWER: What were your first impressions of him, besides the fact that he knew manners - he walked on the outside on the sidewalk, and he met you at the train station?

GRAY: I'd been told that he was very bright. Again, I was so green. I don't know what I thought "very bright" was going to mean. But he really seemed very normal and very nice.

INTERVIEWER: What did you think of that MIT or MIT men at that time? You were pretty new to the college, but did women at Wheaton have any notions that men from one college or another were better to date or to marry?

GRAY: I think Wheaton's link at that time was Brown. It was so much closer. There was a Pembroke then. Pembroke and Wheaton were very alike in numbers, in the liberal arts. So people often went to Brown to a mixer, but I had never done that and I never did do that.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any sense of Paul's leadership qualities as you got to know him? Did he?

GRAY: Certainly in the fraternity it was clear that he held a place of affection but great respect. It was interesting. When I met him he had very good friends older than he was and younger, and it was interesting to see that interaction.

INTERVIEWER: You started dating pretty regularly after that first meeting?

GRAY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Has he changed much since you met him?

GRAY: I don't suppose so. I think probably I've just gotten to know him better.

INTERVIEWER: What other impressions of MIT did you have beyond that first field day as you began dating?

GRAY: Well, I came up again shortly after that and we went sailing. That was lots of fun, and it turned out that I sailed for Wheaton, and so that was my first introduction to sailing on the Charles. That was fun. Sailing was one of my passions so it was nice to know that he enjoyed sailing.

INTERVIEWER: Had you sailed before you went to college or was that the first time you had ever been in a sailboat?

GRAY: I sailed since I was 12 years old. So it was just wonderful to be out on the water again.

INTERVIEWER: He was a sailor too?

GRAY: He learned to sail his freshman year and loved it, and we sailed up and down, took a picnic and had a lovely time.

INTERVIEWER: So that was one of the things you found you had in common pretty quickly.

GRAY: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: What other kinds of things do you share?

GRAY: We both enjoy the MFA.

INTERVIEWER: The Museum of Fine Arts.

GRAY: Yes. We didn't have any money but we loved symphony. So we'd get in the line for the cheap tickets and sit way up. You used to be able to go to Amalfi for a one dollar pasta dinner, and then we'd go on to symphony. We could afford that.

INTERVIEWER: Was he very engaged with MIT when you met him, other than with his classes and his fraternity?

GRAY: His fraternity was just very important to him. He was an only child, older parents, and those fraternity brothers were brothers in many respects. Very special friends - to this day are special friends. As we grew older and I saw more of the fraternity, I understood how important they were.

INTERVIEWER: Did you become close to those fraternity guys too?

GRAY: Oh yes. Yes, I did. They were very special - in our wedding. They've kept up with us. In fact, just this morning we were talking about one of them. We invited a group of them that were around Boston after we got married, and we had finished dinner and I think I'd made a pie, and yeah, we were having coffee. One of his fraternity brothers got up and went out to the kitchen and came back in holding his cup and said, your cream's sour.

I didn't have any cream in the refrigerator, and I thought I knew what had happened, so I said, come on, Dick, let's fix this up. We went out and he showed me what he'd taken, and he'd put buttermilk in it. Of course, it tasted awful, but it looked even worse. We were throwing out a buttermilk jar this morning and said, remember -- those things just pop in.

We've just been blessed with those friendships.

INTERVIEWER: Did he go down to Wheaton much or did you mostly come up to MIT?

GRAY: No, it was kind of even. I had an absolutely wonderful professor for American literature, and it met -- we went to school on Saturday morning. He would often -- he got to MIT by hitchhiking, and he would come down for that class. He just loved that class. The professor had a terrible stutter, and so I got permission for Paul to sit in. He fortunately gave that permission. He often, on Sunday's he came with a minister who had three or four churches and traveled from one church to another. He would go stand in Kenmore Square, and the fellow would pick him up and take him to Wheaton on his way--

INTERVIEWER: To church?

GRAY: --on his way to his next church. He came with State Troopers fairly often too. It's not a mode of transportation we wanted to see our kids use or our grandkids, but for him it worked very well.

INTERVIEWER: It was a different era, too.

GRAY: Totally different.

INTERVIEWER: So, Paul was engaged with this fraternity, he was active in this field day competition.

GRAY: Very much into the activities of his department. His work study program was in the library. So he was well-versed in library affairs.

INTERVIEWER: Then he stayed to do a Master's because you were a year behind him and--.

GRAY: He had a grant that he could not have carried over.

INTERVIEWER: At least one professor wanted him then to stay on and do his PhD, but by that time after the Master's he wanted to leave the Institute and complete his military service. He said he wanted to become a captain of industry. Did you think you were marrying someone who would be the head of a company some day?

GRAY: I didn't really, but his father wanted him to be a captain of industry. I didn't think that would come to pass.

INTERVIEWER: What did you think he would be when you were talking about getting married?

GRAY: When he finished his Master's degree, he really had deferred the army service as long as he could. He was ready for a break. He wanted out of here for a while. I guess I thought that someday he'd come back for a PhD.

INTERVIEWER: You did think that?

GRAY: Yes. I always thought that.

INTERVIEWER: So when he found out in the army that he actually liked teaching and wanted to return to MIT for more education, what was your reaction?

GRAY: Fine.

INTERVIEWER: You say, gee, I thought you might come to that.

GRAY: Our first child was born at Fort Devens, born in Groton, Mass, actually. We had a fraternity brother who was in the service with us who had a child that was severely damaged - should really have died in those first two or three days, and they thought he would. He lingered on. They couldn't take care of him. His mind was that of a day old infant, but his body grew a pace. It was such a stunning blow - we all felt it because we were such a close group. So Paul made no commitment. The seed had been planted and we wanted to be sure that our baby was all right and OK.

INTERVIEWER: So you had the first baby when he was in the military.

GRAY: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: Two years at Fort Devens. Then another was on the way by the time he finished, I believe.

GRAY: No. She came when he was partway done with graduate school.

INTERVIEWER: Money was pretty tight. So he got done with the army and he had been teaching in the army showing people how to use machines or keep them up--.

GRAY: I taught the first year, second grade, and then I substituted until Virginia came.

INTERVIEWER: Did you think you would keep teaching? Was that what you were interested in, or did you think it was a temporary thing?

GRAY: No. I have always loved teaching, and I particularly love the little ones. Second grade was just perfect. I thought maybe I'd get back to it.

INTERVIEWER: When he did return for his doctoral work, you already had the one daughter, another on the way, money was tight. Did you think about the standard of living you might be losing by his going back to school? Was that ever an issue?

GRAY: No, it wasn't. I think it was for his parents, but it wasn't for us. We were lucky. My father had inherited a dairy, which he ran, -- in those days coolers and things that kept things cold that needed to be cold were not what they are today. He discovered that if he wrapped the glass milk bottles in layers of newspaper that he could bring them. So they'd come for dinner that ostensibly I was putting on, but they would bring milk and buttermilk and eggs and all those things. We got to be real pros at vegetarian things and dairy things. So we always had a good meal to put on the table.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think Paul has been so attached to MIT? What was the passion? In other words, even though he thought he wasn't going to come back when he left the first time, he did and then never left really.

GRAY: No. Well, he came back more of a grown-up. I'm sure anybody from the outside watching him, watching me, would have said that that was a great growth period in our lives. He loved being back. He loved being a graduate student, and he was a TA so he had a chance to teach.

INTERVIEWER: But there was a fit between man and institution it seemed.

GRAY: There was. There was.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever tried to analyze it?

GRAY: No.

INTERVIEWER: Think about what it is.

GRAY: It just was always there. I think he fell in love with this place, Karen, his freshman year. As you say, the fit was there. Everything about that first year of graduate school just reinforced the positive feelings he had in the four years before that.

INTERVIEWER: You've had your own relationship with the Institute. Was there any particular point at which you recognized that it was your Institute too, and that it represented more than just the place where your husband went to school and where he worked?

GRAY: Yes. The answer may sound strange, but my peers in those days were into social affairs that sponsored big occasions, fetes, whatever, and supported -- the one in Winchester supported and paid for all the laundry that Winchester hospital used for a whole year. A very nice thing and very wonderful thing, but it wasn't my cup of tea. So I did Brownies and Cub Scouts with Andrew. More like second grade kinds of activities. I think that it just happened.

Jean Brown -- do you remember Jean Brown, Gordon Brown's wife? Jean Brown called me and said, how do we feed students and get faculty to ask students into their homes and make it possible for it not to be an expensive, high-intensity work production. I worked on a committee -- developed recipes.

I think times were different than they are now, and there were many women at home who were quite willing to take this on. It was a fun job, it was a fun assignment to stir up some interest and enthusiasm among the young faculty. From there on, Jean just made sure that I was involved and then I began to find things that I really wanted a part of.

So I did things that I enjoyed, but I came to MIT to do them, rather than to do them in Winchester.

INTERVIEWER: How would you describe the role you've played at MIT over the years?

GRAY: Well, I teasingly -- you said I was the den mother. I don't have an axe to grind. I'm tight with discussions that shouldn't go any further than me. I love students. So I suspect that wraps into some kind of a ball that was helpful around here.

INTERVIEWER: In an interview not too long ago, Paul said that what surprised him most about the presidency was that it was hard to find people to talk to. That all of a sudden you really had no one else you could turn to. There were trustees for certain things, or the chairman for certain things. But that there was a kind of loneliness that he hadn't anticipated, and that you were someone he could talk with about anything. Not only that, but he said that you provided him with another set of eyes and ears and sometimes learned things that he wasn't aware of that were helpful. Were you conscious of those roles at that time through the years or of their importance?

GRAY: Yes. Well, I knew it was important for the two of us to talk about things. There were things that he just needed to bounce around. Too often, a president says something and then it's gospel. That idea he needs to try out, he needs to think about it. I could react, and then he could gauge how the community or how whoever he was thinking about would react. I think that was very helpful.

I think being eyes and ears fell into two categories. In the embroidery classes there was great diversity and there was a wide range of people, and as people stitched they talked about things. I just had a feeling about the wellness of the Institute, or if something was off -- my rule was that if I heard about it three times maybe I ought to say something. But then there were other times when I think that I was used -- information was placed to be transmitted to him that I thought was perhaps not useful, perhaps just stirring the pot.

So we kind of worked around those things. If I said to him, I think this was said to stir the pot, he knew that I was not comfortable with it and that I thought that I was being a little bit used. By having that kind of guideline to go by, then he could do with it what he wanted to do.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember any issues in particular that you brought to his attention or that you went to bat on?

GRAY: There was a tenure position, in fact, there were two. One, I felt as if I was kind of being used. The second one had some really legitimate points and I went to bat on those points.

INTERVIEWER: Other issues? I think you've had a role in the student center renovation?

GRAY: I think probably that was -- there's something at MIT called the Clients Team, and I was on the Client Team for the student center and for the Edgerton Hall. That's probably among the most interesting work that I did in those 10 years. It was out of the usual, but it was a real learning situation, very interesting - working with construction people and architects. I think in both cases wonderful committees - a real diversity of knowledge and interest.

INTERVIEWER: I had the impression that you ended up on the committee, though, because maybe you were one of the people who said, gee, this isn't working, we should do something about it. That you brought it to Paul's attention and pushed a little?

GRAY: Well, I certainly was pushing once I was on the committee. I don't think that I initiated being on the committee, but--.

INTERVIEWER: Were you saying that the student center really ought to be looked at again and maybe reworked?

GRAY: I probably murmured that to somebody and then they picked me up on it. I think it was Steve Immerman who invited me to be on it. It was a real lesson. There were three architects, as I remember, who came in and gave their ideas about how to redo it. It was a very interesting project. It really was like taking a class for a year. It was great fun.

INTERVIEWER: Did you and he ever disagree over MIT issues?

GRAY: Oh yes, and over some Wheaton issues. We've disagreed through the years. Every once in a while somebody will say to me, I just don't understand where we fell apart, we never disagreed. I guess the two of us kind of thought that it was good to get it out in the open - air it out and not go to bed mad.

INTERVIEWER: Despite the enormous time that both you and Paul have devoted to MIT, you seem to have carved out at least a little time for yourselves and your family. How did you manage that?

GRAY: Well, we started out by going through the calendar and picking out nights where we would really like to do something, and we wrote in what that something was. Well, then you would come to one of -- you being figurative -- would come to one of the secretaries and you would say, I want to see Priscilla and Paul and I want them to attend thus and so on Thursday night. Then you would lean right over her shoulder and look at the calendar and it said, "Grays out." So immediately you were on it. What were they going to do? Could it be canceled? Could it be changed? It just became terribly difficult.

So I think it was Paul's administrative assistant who decided that she would put "N/S" with a star - the star was a bonus, "not scheduled." So when you looked over her shoulder she'd say to you, oh, that's N/S and it's starred, I can't do anything with that. We did perhaps two of those a month. We tried very hard to keep Sundays, because that was the one day that we could see our children and do things with the family.

INTERVIEWER: An article in *Technology Review* not too long ago said that Paul reads aloud to you every night.

GRAY: He does.

INTERVIEWER: It's true?

GRAY: It's true.

INTERVIEWER: What do you read?

GRAY: Oh, you name it. Right now we're reading *Mister Roberts*. The book is quite different from the movie - very well written. I'm glad we've seen the movie because it's interesting to see what they changed and distorted and so forth.

INTERVIEWER: So do you pick these books together, or does he choose them and surprise you, or do you take turns?

GRAY: We're always on the lookout, and I'd pick some and he'd pick some. This one turned out to be one that our son sent us in October. He had just read it and said it was such a good read, said wouldn't we enjoy it.

INTERVIEWER: Over the years it's a mix of fiction and non-fiction, biography. Have you had any favorites?

GRAY: Yes. We've loved the David McCullough, the historian.

INTERVIEWER: Historian.

GRAY: Every once in a while we have a wonderful novel. We've read about a woman who tried to row across the Atlantic and I think would have made it except she ran into a hurricane. But that really was a flushing-out of a diary into a book, but fascinating. We've read classics, we've read mysteries.

INTERVIEWER: It's every night or a couple of nights a week?

GRAY: My daughter gave us last Christmas the obituaries from *The Economist*, and if you read *The Economist*, some of those obituaries are just lovely, even if you don't know the people. So if we run out of a book, it's all done, and we don't have another one to go, we read those for a couple of nights.

INTERVIEWER: This is pretty much every night?

GRAY: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: When the MIT Alumni Association made you an honorary member in 1977, were you surprised?

GRAY: Yes. I couldn't believe it.

INTERVIEWER: Did it make you feel any differently about MIT or your role at the Institute?

GRAY: Well, you know that's such an honor, and it was nice to think that I'd made a difference and was worthy of it. Nice, solid feeling.

INTERVIEWER: Which was reinforced I guess when you were given the Lobdell Award, subsequently, for significant service to the Alumni Association and MIT. Then still later, the Bronze Beaver, the highest award. I don't know if you were the first wife of a president to be honored that way, do you? The Bronze Beaver?

GRAY: I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel then? I mean this was your third time up at bat?

GRAY: That one was really exciting. Virginia had just had twins, they had come early. She had developed a pulmonary embolism and was very sick. I was in Connecticut and Paul knew what was going on and said, you've got to come back just for that one day. I was exhausted. I thought I've been to every single alumni officers' conference - maybe I should skip this one. He said, "No." - You come home. When I walked in, it was at Walker Memorial, and it just -- it was just overwhelming.

INTERVIEWER: Let's back up and talk about your early years some more. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

GRAY: I was born in Providence, Rhode Island. My father was a banker - had survived the Depression. His father dropped dead on my first birthday, and my grandmother wanted him to go home and run this family dairy. Looking back on it, we were too young, one. Even growing up, I didn't really understand all the ins and outs. I don't think he wanted to do that, but he was such a good sport and a kind man that he did.

INTERVIEWER: So he gave up a career in banking to be a dairyman.

GRAY: We were amazed when he died. He really had understood the stock market, and he had done very well to keep Mum at home with caregivers. He used that knowledge.

INTERVIEWER: You were one of three daughters?

GRAY: Yes. I was the oldest.

INTERVIEWER: What were you like as a child?

GRAY: Sick. Just had some very nasty health problems that probably would have been a one event kind of thing had we had antibiotics, but we didn't. Sulfa came along and they thought mmm, here we go. I was wildly allergic to it - about died from the sulfa. So long about 12 or 13, I suddenly was me again, and have been fine ever since.

INTERVIEWER: Did you read a lot or sew a lot?

GRAY: Read constantly. My maternal grandmother was a beautiful embroiderer. I had to be in a certain position sometimes because of my ears. She taught me what she knew. She was left-handed which was a blessing. She taught me to crochet and to knit and to sew.

INTERVIEWER: It made it easier because you were left-handed too, and she could show you.

GRAY: Yes. I can take my girls' knitting and fix their mistake and hand it back to them. But I can't knit on it because I go in the opposite direction from them. She knew that, and so when she taught me to knit, it was a natural.

INTERVIEWER: Were you involved in public service while you were growing up?

GRAY: Well, I was part of a Girl Scout, a senior scout, Mariner group, and the woman turned out to be the leader of that that troop, Louise Strongman, turned out to be a real mentor in my life and a role model. She taught us all how to sail. She took us all over the place. She took us on two-week cruises on a Brigantine -- you know, a four-master. We just had wonderful times.

In the process, we did a lot of community service, and we did street fairs in the summer, which paid for our cruises. She believed everybody should go, and so we all worked all through the winter to get material, learned how to silk screen to make skirt material and curtain material and so forth, and people bought it by the yard. We learned how to play games in a safe, big way - had food stands. We made a lot of money on those street sales. That paid for the cruises.

INTERVIEWER: Where were the cruises to?

GRAY: The very first one, before the skipper knew that we really knew what we were about, was to Nantucket and the Vineyard, and back again -- Woods Hole, and back again. From then on it was a two-week cruise and we went all the way up into Canada. We did the Reversible Falls in St. John's -- had to take down the tops of the mast. That was an exciting night because you had to wait until the tides reversed. He had to hit it just right, and there was a thunderstorm. I was on watch and they had to lower the main mast, and I got rolled up in it. It came down and they just lashed it down and tied it with stocks.

It wasn't until the storm was over--. My big worry -- I was safe except if it petered out and they needed that sail to get them across, my big worry was that they'd unfurl it, and I was well above the deck. Then people -- but they didn't until later on. I was standing watch, and when the fury was over, there were only four on the watch. Of course, their big fear was that I was overboard. So as soon as I could I began to yell, but the noise had to subside, and somebody finally heard me.

INTERVIEWER: You kept sailing anyway.

GRAY: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you sail as an adult at MIT? Did you and Paul?

GRAY: Well, I sailed for Wheaton and I came up -- then they had intercollegiate races, and I came up and sailed in those each year. Paul and I sailed. It's the only thing that I really regret. None of our kids have enjoyed it. Only two of the grandchildren have enjoyed it through MIT day camp. It's just one of those things.

INTERVIEWER: As you were growing up did you think about having a career? Was that something that ran through your head, or did you expect to marry and have children and raise your children?

GRAY: Well, I don't know how to put that, because I had started out as a biology major. Biology was changing very quickly in those years. I could see that rapid change. I knew I wanted children. I thought even if I take three or four years out, it could flip-flop to the point where I'm not there anymore. So I switched to English and early childhood education, which was a good fit. So I guess I taught that year, almost two years, and I loved it. When you look back, the next thing I did was Girl Scouts, which was the same kind of thing - Brownies first then Girl Scouts then Cubs. Then I went on and did the embroidery here at MIT - I went off and got my certification.

INTERVIEWER: You went to college at a time when it was far less common for women to attend college. Was it always obvious to you that you would go? Did your family -- were your parents college educated?

GRAY: Yes, they were. There was no question. A nice story about my family. My mother was one of 10, and three of them had died of smallpox. Those that were left, the first one went to Radcliffe, and when she got out, she helped the second one to go, and they did it right down the line for everyone. Then when the last one was done, all of them chipped in together and sent my grandmother to BU for a degree in English. She commuted from New Bedford for four years to do that. A lovely story. So education was very important.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother go to Radcliffe too?

GRAY: She went to Simmons. She really wanted to be a certified public accountant. She did all of my father's books, she settled estates. She was a certified public accountant, but they wouldn't make a woman a certified public accountant. By the time they would, her three daughters said, "Come on, let's do that." There was an exam and she was in her 70s, and she just didn't have the courage to try it.

INTERVIEWER: But you were focused on issues like that as you were growing up.

GRAY: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: How did you choose where to go to college? What drew you to Wheaton?

GRAY: It was going to be Wheaton or Radcliffe. My mom and dad had great concerns about Radcliffe because they pulled me through -- I think they felt as if they'd pulled me through 12, 13 years of bad health. There were those that thought it was silly to send me off at all. So, in the end, Wheaton turned out to be the perfect compromise. I loved it. I wasn't sent off to the wilds of Cambridge, but it was a wonderful place for me.

INTERVIEWER: When did you get married and how old were you?

GRAY: I guess I was 22. We got married on June 18th in 1955.

INTERVIEWER: Right after graduation?

GRAY: The week after I graduated.

INTERVIEWER: I guess Paul had just gotten his Master's.

GRAY: Yes. We had that summer and we lived in the Princeton University Housing Project, and then went into the service Labor Day.

INTERVIEWER: Because Paul was working at Princeton that summer or studying at Princeton?

GRAY: Well, he had a job with RCA, and that was the cheapest temporary housing we could find. RCA knew that he was going in the service and just was going to hold the job for him.

INTERVIEWER: What was that summer like?

GRAY: It was interesting. The housing project was Quonset huts all lined up. We pulled in on a Sunday afternoon and we finally found our little section, and we marked it, foolishly, by riding boots on the back porch of the first unit. Well, of course, the next day the riding boots were taken in, so we had to go through the whole thing all over again. We were in a row of philosophers and our key to that group of people was that Paul was an engineer. Everybody in those days wanted to buy an old bathtub and fit it in to a metal shower so that their kids could have real baths. Here was this fellow that seemed to know how to do everything.

INTERVIEWER: But he wasn't a mechanical engineer.

GRAY: But he kind of knew how things went together. Then there was a little boy who lived across the street who kept saying to me, where are your children? You don't have any children? So he'd come over with an apple for me and an apple for him, and he was my child for the summer.

INTERVIEWER: What were the army years like?

GRAY: Again, we were so lucky. It was the Army Security Agency, and they took in a group from Texas A&M, Michigan and MIT. I believe that was the mix. They made up a class. We'd all just graduated. We all happened to be married. No children. I was teaching, one other was teaching. Several had jobs in outlying communities. But it was just a natural peer group, and we did all kinds of things together. Came in town at Christmas time for *The Messiah*. We took them to the Cape. We did a lot of things. The Texas people had never been this far north.

INTERVIEWER: You were basically at home.

GRAY: We were. We were basically at home.

INTERVIEWER: Did you live on a base or you lived in civilian type housing?

GRAY: No. There was a long line for the base. We had gone and found an apartment and it was in the town of Lancaster, and the base was in Ayer. So we were about 15, 20 minutes from the base. But that turned out for us to be a good thing.

INTERVIEWER: Following that pull, and you came back to MIT first as a grad student -- you said he loved that period. For you, what was that period like?

GRAY: Well, I had Virginia and settled into a duplex house in Belmont. Had lovely neighbors. Got acquainted with the neighborhood, and I was at a place where I could walk to everything, and we thrived there. It was good.

INTERVIEWER: You became pretty absorbed in having two young children?

GRAY: Yes. Doc and Esther Edgerton were two or three blocks away.

INTERVIEWER: Paul was working closely with Doc at that point.

GRAY: That's right. Every once in a while they'd invite us for dinner. When Amy was born they came and brought a tape recorder for Virginia to speak into. They had asked Paul, I think, beforehand if she'd ever heard her own voice. He said no, and she was just delighted. She thought that was a wonderful idea.

INTERVIEWER: Were you surprised when Paul got asked to stay on as a faculty member, or did it just sort of seg very naturally?

GRAY: I was delighted, because by that time we realized that that's what he really wanted to do. Paul never counts his chickens till they hatch. So once he had been asked to stay on, we were delighted and relieved.

INTERVIEWER: Life as a young faculty couple, did it feel much different from life as a graduate student couple or as an army couple?

GRAY: I think it was a little more even. But some nights, he had experiments going. That was the only part of graduate school that was a little bit tough. He could easily be gone 18 hours or so because he had an experiment running. So once he had the faculty appointment, we saw more of him. He was gone all day, but we saw more of him in the evening.

INTERVIEWER: As Paul started being promoted into administrative jobs, did you and he think about how far he might go and whether the administrative track was something he and you wanted to do?

GRAY: I don't think in those early days we did. Again, it's almost too simple to say we just went along. But he loved what he was doing. Ken Wadleigh was very persuasive. As long as he could teach and do these jobs it was all right.

INTERVIEWER: Several of them were part-time, half time jobs. Let's talk about some of those different posts and what they meant for him and for you and for your family. Was his life or yours very different when he became associate dean for student affairs, or was the rhythm still pretty much like when he was a full-time professor?

GRAY: I think the rhythm, there were occasional problems that kept him in at night.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember any of the issues he faced in the dean's office? Did he ever bounce any of those problems from the office off of you?

GRAY: Once in a while. There was a very tragic situation that was very disturbing that he hadn't encountered before. He hadn't realized how rough it could be. He also was doing freshman seminars in those years, and had some really sad experiences with a freshman, who had mental problems that nobody had disclosed. One young man was very homesick, and Paul brought him home.

He was going to stay overnight and go back with Paul the next day, and I said to him -- he just had relaxed and had a lovely evening, we were all set to all go to bed. I said to him, would you like to call home, because he really had been dreadfully unhappy and I thought it might do well. His father, who was a local physician, walked through the door as he called his mother and dropped dead in the hall. It was a good lesson for our children -- you just never know what's around the corner. He left us and did not return, and that was a sorrow.

INTERVIEWER: As painful as that was, Paul didn't run the other way and say back to the classroom, who needs this?

GRAY: No. No. It was still about students.

INTERVIEWER: He had a two-year break between the time he left the dean's office and the time he became associate provost. Was that a more peaceful period in any way, or did he miss the administrative work?

GRAY: Well, you know by that time we had four children, with my involvement with schools and scouts and all, I can't remember that as being peaceful. But the one thing I can tell you is that after that period when he became involved as associate provost, we did have to re-think how we were going to be sure that we sat down all together with the children as a family. Sometimes that meant everybody getting up at 6:00 and having breakfast together. But we really tried to do that every single day, but sometimes it was at one end of the day and sometimes it was very early.

INTERVIEWER: How did the kids react to that?

GRAY: I think they were young enough so as long as he was there, they didn't mind getting up a little bit earlier.

INTERVIEWER: But that implies that he wasn't always home evenings anymore, which then fell to you to carry the day and the evening and four kids. How rough was that?

GRAY: We've chuckled. The only time it was really awful was when he went to India for six weeks. They had strep throats, and they had earaches, and we had ice storms. He was gone all through January into February. I must have been nuts to say that that was a great idea.

INTERVIEWER: You didn't have a mother or an aunt who moved in and helped you in that period?

GRAY: Well, my mother was taking care of our grandmother, and they would come up. They came quite regularly each week during that time, but they couldn't just come and stay because they had responsibilities.

INTERVIEWER: The associate provost job I think was still a part-time job. But then his next promotion was to dean of engineering, which is a huge job. Did you and he think that would change your lives much? Were you at the point where you knew enough about the administrative post to say this is going to be different?

GRAY: We thought it was going to be different. But he looked forward to it. He was very excited about it. He didn't have that job very long.

INTERVIEWER: Because he next got made chancellor.

GRAY: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: Which is, I mean dean of engineering is a very big position at MIT, and chancellor, you're up at the top. Were you both surprised by these promotions, or had you gotten used to his being plucked and crowned?

GRAY: You kind of rolled with it. I guess the one thing, the one consistent thing for me, was to be sure that we carved out enough time so he wasn't an absent father. During the demonstrations--

INTERVIEWER: In the late '60s and--

GRAY: --and early '70s, he and Constantine Simonides literally lived in here. I would bring clothes in, take clothes out, but it would be that kind of time. He was on the news at night, and so the older kids saw him. But it was Weezy's first year in kindergarten, and she was just worn out. So I'd pop her into bed just not really realizing. One Friday night we could sleep late the next morning and I said to Weezy, I think you would like to stay up tonight and see daddy. She said, "Daddy?"

So the five of us were lined up and he came on, and she looked at Andrew and she said, "Andrew, he's not dead." I tell you, that really threw the two of us for a loop. That little girl had thought he was dead and had not said anything so nobody could help. I never should have been putting her to bed. I should have kept her up.

INTERVIEWER: Did that prompt you to do anything differently? Was there anything differently that you could do at that point?

GRAY: Yes. He came home on Sundays faithfully, and that made a huge difference, because nobody was in school and the kids were remarkable about not planning anything on Sundays. It wasn't until Virginia got into high school and was working on her high school yearbook, and she simply brought the whole crowd home to us, rather than be gone on a Sunday. So they were quite remarkable at keeping Sunday for the family.

INTERVIEWER: When he was chancellor, the two of you used to run dinners out at your house. I think you were in Winchester in a big Victorian house.

GRAY: Yes. **INTERVIEWER:** What was the idea behind those dinners? I think you had a lot of people and a lot of dinners.

GRAY: Yes. We could seat 36, and so that was the maximum. We did them back-to-back. We did them Friday night and Saturday night, because you get all those dishes out and you do all that cooking, it really is just as easy to do it for two nights and then have it done for a month than to put it into two weekends. The kids helped us serving beforehand. They really were fun. The children took part in something where they met people that they wouldn't have met any other way. It was a good thing to do. Paul just wanted groups of people to sit down, I think, Karen, and know each other in a different way than around the department activities and so forth.

INTERVIEWER: This was the entire administrative council I think that you were running through--

GRAY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: --which was 100 people or so plus maybe spouses and friends.

GRAY: Yes, we always did spouses. We felt they shouldn't be left out. We did a farewell party for Emily Wick. That turned into a fiasco because I did the meal, but MIT cooked the meat because I didn't have enough ovens. We had decided as a real treat we'd do a rack of lamb. They did a beautiful job on the lamb but they forgot to cut the bone. So Ken Wadleigh and Paul were downstairs with a saw cutting lamb chops apart one at a time. I'll tell you, to this day there are people in that department that say, do you still serve lamb?

INTERVIEWER: How did your children feel about MIT? Do you think they felt any part of it themselves? As they've grown up have they said, "Gee, there was a real trade-off between his working and the time he had to spend, and that might have been more of our time?"

GRAY: I've never heard them say that. They thought there were real benefits. They came in here for swimming lessons on Friday afternoons. Then we went and gathered Paul and we went over to Regina's in the north end and had pizza. Then we went bowling in the old bowling alley in the student center. So those were very precious nights. Then the faculty club, when it used to be open all the time, used to have By The Pound night. The kids would hop on this great big medical scale and we paid what they weighed, and they thought that was incredible. The two older ones ate enough to cover what the younger ones didn't. But they couldn't help but feel part of this.

At one point Paul was being considered for another position and it had gotten to the point where they wanted to take us to this other campus and we were talking about it at breakfast time. It was Andrew who said, "How many bathrooms are there where we're going to live?" Paul said, "I have no idea." Andrew said, "Well, we have one on each floor and one under the stairs and one in the cellar. Unless they have four I don't think you should go."

The next night -- that same night, this was in the morning. That next morning one of them said, I don't know whether you called yet to say what you're going to do, but if we're going to live this way we'd rather live this way for MIT than for some other place. So Paul called and said that we would not be pursuing that.

INTERVIEWER: So MIT could thank your children for saving him.

GRAY: It tells you probably that they did feel a part of this.

INTERVIEWER: When he was being considered for the presidency here, did he and you give any serious consideration to the possibility of not taking on such an enormous job?

GRAY: No, I guess we sort of thought that if it happened that was the way it was meant to be. We did think a lot about the move, and how it had moved out of the house.

INTERVIEWER: Of the president's house.

GRAY: Yeah. Laya and Jerry had never lived there. We felt strongly that they needed to be a family in that house, but whether it should be our family was another question.

INTERVIEWER: Were any of the children living at home when you moved into the house as president?

GRAY: No. No. Andrew was a freshman at Middlebury. Weezy and Andrew were very dyslexic, and we had found Weezy a wonderful school which had a dyslexic program. So that decision had been made long before there were any questions about moving in here. So they didn't feel removed from the nest, so to speak.

INTERVIEWER: Paul had been chancellor for many years and both of you had worked closely with the Wiesners. Were there any surprises when he became president, including for you?

GRAY: Well, Jerry was wonderful, and we had such a close relationship with Jerry all through those years. Paul was on sabbatical in Wales, and I'm not sure whether it was a sabbatical year or two years later when we went back in the summer. But Jerry and Laya came all that way and came to see us and we had a lovely time together. When the children went to MIT day camp, after day camp they didn't go back to Paul's office, they went back to Jerry's office. For a long time I didn't know that was happening, and then when I did I didn't get very clear answers. Jerry told me later that he had orange juice and fruit and fudgesicles and all kinds of nice things in his refrigerator. So he was just waiting for them. Of course, Paul was right across the hall.

Jerry sat down with Paul and me and he was the one that said, sell the Winchester house. You don't need to be absentee landlord and landlady. You will be halfway around the world when a toilet breaks out there and it's going to be Priscilla's headache to fix it up. He said, don't do it. The other thing he said, whether on any given night, you're going to have four or five invitations, and all kinds of things were going to dictate when you said yes. The ones you should do for the Institute, ones you should do for a trustee or Corporation member. There would be a varying number of things you really had to do. But every once in a while he said, back off, and there's something you really want to do, do it. You'll always leave three or four feeling annoyed with you anyhow. Once in a while do something you really want to do. That was very good advice.

INTERVIEWER: Did Laya give you any particular advice as you came in?

GRAY: Oh, Laya was such a lovely lady. No, but she held my hand that first year. We talked on the phone often. I got into a conflict with a group on campus and the fire department about how many people the house could hold. I really felt between the rock and a hard place, and it was Laya who helped me work it through and she was wonderful on the phone.

INTERVIEWER: What kinds of trade-offs were there in taking on the presidency in terms of loss of privacy and the time, obviously, was considerable, much more even than the chancellor's job, which was pretty hefty.

GRAY: You live over the store. Most of it is wonderful, and every once in a while it's really hard. But we were very lucky. We had a wonderful group of people that lived with us. I called them the PH gang. But they were very special.

INTERVIEWER: For president's house?

GRAY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What was it like to suddenly inherit a staff for your house? Did that seem odd or feel uncomfortable in any way?

GRAY: It seemed a little bizarre at first. But again, it was who it was. One or two were not a good match, but we ended up -- we had eight years where it just worked together so smoothly.

INTERVIEWER: At some point you probably were used to working with these people. Not only had you chosen who you were working with, but you fell into a rhythm of knowing each other.

GRAY: We really were a family.

INTERVIEWER: You've stayed close to some of these people like family?

GRAY: Yes, yes, we have.

INTERVIEWER: How would you describe your responsibilities as first lady of MIT and what did you call yourself? Did you think of yourself as the first lady, or did you have a different name?

GRAY: You sort of hit a sore point. I would periodically have to respond and fill out the blanks. The one that really caught me was did I work or was I just a housewife or--? After the last "or," I put partner to whatever he was at the time.

INTERVIEWER: Was it a full-time job for you or even more than full-time?

GRAY: Oh yes. I worked easily 16-hour, 17-hour days some days.

INTERVIEWER: Over the years there's been discussion in the higher education community about whether spouses or presidents should be given formal titles and paid for their services. I think some campuses have moved to doing that. Did you receive any kind of pay ever?

GRAY: No.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think of the idea?

GRAY: I'm not sure that -- I was part of the bargain. I came with Paul. But I think, and I know there's a great deal of unease about paying a first lady for the job she does. I think probably it shouldn't be as pay, but perhaps a monetary gift at the end that's in her name for her to use as she wants. Nothing commensurate with how many years they were in the job.

INTERVIEWER: I guess it's a type of issue that gained more attention with the White House having Hillary Clinton who had a full-time career.

GRAY: It's a tough one, it really is. But I think there are too many side issues for a straight salary. Yet I don't think there's a single first lady that I've known that's put her heart and soul into it that would not have appreciated a gift at the end.

INTERVIEWER: There were certainly honors after you moved out. At some point the house was named for you and Paul - it's now the Gray House, Paul and Priscilla, Priscilla and Paul Gray House. What was your reaction to that?

GRAY: Blew us away.

INTERVIEWER: How much entertaining did you do in the house when you lived there?

GRAY: Oh, a lot. I was astounded when they totaled up the numbers, because we had kept all of our calendars. I just couldn't believe how many people we fed.

INTERVIEWER: How many, do you remember?

GRAY: Oh, yes, it was in the thousands. It was just a lot of people.

INTERVIEWER: Who came to the house? Was there anyone in particular that you recall or particular events that stick in your mind?

GRAY: There were dignitaries, there were families and mourners after MIT professors' funerals. We had started out with Doc Edgerton, and we carried on because you've got everybody here and then where were they going to go to gather, and they needed to gather. So we did that. There were faculty, there were department things, there were housemasters, there was students, there was senior dinners, there was a kindergarten group that visited me spring and fall. Let's see, who else.

INTERVIEWER: Senior dinners. I think you had a hand in creating that.

GRAY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What was--?

GRAY: Well, it was Joe Martori. Do you remember Joe Martori in the alumni office?

INTERVIEWER: No.

GRAY: He and I sat in the back seat of a tour bus in Mexico with an alumni group. I wanted somehow to make sure that every MIT student had been in the president's house once. It's very easy for student leaders to be in the president's house, and the freshman do or don't come with the freshman reception, but a lot don't. So I was looking for a way, and February seemed the natural month. IAP was over, and Joe thought the Alumni Association would be glad to be a part of this because they wanted a way to put forth the Alumni Association information.

INTERVIEWER: For the senior class.

GRAY: That's right. So we got together, and we did it for the month of February. The first February I had a favorite lasagna recipe. We ate lasagna for the month of February.

INTERVIEWER: So that everybody would have the same dish.

GRAY: After the last one, Paul said, well, I don't want lasagna again for at least a year. Can we mix it up? Well, then the next year I said to dining, what do you want to do? Well, they did chicken 10 different ways. We clucked at the end of the time. By the third year we had it -- we had lasagna and chicken and we had a variety. But we had a wonderful time. Each student got up and said where they came from, what their major was, and what they thought they were going to do next. There were some pranksters.

One night we had cockroaches in plastic tubes that looked -- blocks that looked like ice cubes. There were about four of them in the dining room. One of the waiters just as we called the kids in had spotted one and he just did a quick cruise around the room, got all four -- they're over at the museum now.

Downstairs in the president's house there are lovely antique faucets. I don't know they're still there, but that was a very stealable thing. So physical plant bought us regular, normal, whatever you bought in 1980 faucets and handles, and we put them in the first of February, took them out the first of March, and that put an end to losing the valuable antiques. But it was a real education. I think we probably kept up with them pretty well.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any weddings in the house when you were there?

GRAY: Yes. A graduate student who had been a roommate of our oldest daughter at Wesleyan. Charlotte Gibbs, who lived with us all those years at the house was married our last year there. Two of our children were married in the chapel and the reception was at the house.

INTERVIEWER: How about the gardens? Did you get involved with them?

GRAY: Oh yes. I love gardens. When we hired Bill Flannery we went to work on the gardens. They really were just lovely. He's no longer at MIT, and I haven't seen the gardens in bloom. But they really were a thing of beauty.

INTERVIEWER: You got down on your hands and knees, I think, yes?

GRAY: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have favorite flowers that you put back there? Dahlias?

GRAY: Yes. He made me a wonderful rose garden along the wall there by the driveway, and I picked roses all summer. So did other people, but it didn't matter because they picked them because they were just too beautiful to leave there.

INTERVIEWER: Did Paul have to do much traveling as president, and did you accompany him on many trips?

GRAY: Yes, he did a lot of traveling. I usually went with him, not always because I was going to be part of the meetings he was going for, but I could do the alumni things. It was just nice to have somebody in the hotel that you knew at the end of the day.

INTERVIEWER: Do any trips stick in your mind as particularly fun or difficult or interesting?

GRAY: The two trips to Egypt I just thought were absolutely incredible. That was a time when I was invited to all of it. I loved the visits to Japan, and then it turned out that our son lived and worked there for seven years. So it was a nice introduction to what his life was going to be.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get to meet the emperor and the empress of Japan at one point, too?

GRAY: Yes, we did. That was an interesting story. Paul was being given an award and he couldn't go at the time that it was being given. So we went over and met with the emperor and empress and was given the award then. I called Masa Ayukawa and said, I know I have to take a gift, I have no idea what to take. She had been with us that summer when we made green tomato relish, and she said, bring a couple of bottles of relish. They love pickles. So I did. The only thing was that I was a great saver and recycler and they were in old mayonnaise jars. They weren't in proper jars.

She said don't worry about that. Well, lo and behold -- we had a lovely interview. We were taken back into a room that, if you had guessed, you would have thought came out of a Victorian castle - full of furniture and just more English than Japanese. They loved the pickles - could I send any more. So an MIT professor had the job to carry the pickles, and he was delighted because he got a chance to go into the palace.

INTERVIEWER: Did you send the recipe too?

GRAY: Well, I did but--.

INTERVIEWER: You can't get the green tomatoes in the same way?

GRAY: I think so, and the turmeric was unfamiliar. Then we shared grandchildren. The empress and emperor had a granddaughter one morning, and our first grandchild from that family, Marie, was born that night. I sent her a recipe for play dough when the child was about a year old, and they could not get cream of tartar -- it's one ingredient they couldn't get and I bought them several cans and sent it, and I got a sweet note back.

INTERVIEWER: You met some other dignitaries as you traveled on MIT business too, I think. Any of those that are particularly memorable?

GRAY: Margaret Thatcher. She was a very interesting lady. We went to 10 Downing Street for dinner on a night that was in the 90s in London - unheard of. Windows all locked tight, no fans. It was stifling. She decided that we ought to have ice water, which was a great idea. She got the glasses out and she elected me to help her dole out the water.

INTERVIEWER: This is Margaret Thatcher.

GRAY: This is Margaret Thatcher. It ended up that I put the ice in and she poured, but she was very unhappy with me because I put three or four ice cubes in, and she kept saying, "No!" I didn't understand what she was saying no about. Finally she said, "We only have enough ice for one cube per glass. Of course, it was gone before the people ever saw it. But she was kind of a -- one-on-one she was a very interesting lady.

INTERVIEWER: Paul did a lot of fund raising, and you mentioned that you did go along on many of those visits. Did you have a particular role or a pattern? What kind of--?

GRAY: Well, I came in if we took them out to dinner or out to lunch, if there was a social aspect to the ask. I think I just softened it a little bit.

INTERVIEWER: When Paul stepped down as president and became chairman of the MIT Corporation, what was that period like? Did he work any less or travel any less, or did he keep going at pretty much the same speed?

GRAY: Well, there's kind of two parts to that. You remember that we had a glitch there, and so we stayed on an extra I think it was five months.

INTERVIEWER: That's when Phil Sharp said he would become president and then changed his mind.

GRAY: That's right. I had planned the summer where we would be away from here. I really thought it was a good idea for us to get out of town and let the new people settle in and so forth and so on. After I made all the plans and reservations and so forth, it turned topsy-turvy. So when the change actually came on October 15th, it was a much, much harder change for Paul. Right up to midnight on the 15th he was worrying and working on things.

The morning of the 16th it was Chuck Vest's problem. Chuck was very kind and included him, but that was a truly hard period of time for Paul. It was hard, that five month extension was hard. We had to cancel some of the plans. We had twin granddaughters that arrived early -- I think I mentioned that earlier. So I was gone for a good part of the time, and Weezy stepped in and took my place. But it was hard. We were neither one thing nor the other.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Aside from that intermediate period, did you miss the days of the presidency at all, or was it mostly a relief not to be on call all the time?

GRAY: We missed the people. But we tried not to be pests and they came to see us quite often. I jokingly said I missed the flowers and the freezers and I did. We still get sent a big smoked turkey at Christmas. I have no place to put one now. The flowers were lovely. For the first year, Paul kind of signed up for a flower of the month arrangement and that eased me through that. But that last five or six months had been so hectic that it was good to slow down.

INTERVIEWER: During the presidency, I guess longer, you had a summer home or a weekend house in Rhode Island.

GRAY: When we sold the Winchester house, we put that money into building a home in Rhode Island, and it's year-round, and we had always thought that we would retire there. But my buddy is really flunking retirement, so we're trying hard to live there as much of a week as we can. We go down for long weekends.

INTERVIEWER: Have you been any better at retirement than he has?

GRAY: In a way I have. I've eliminated things that are just -- I don't work as fast as I used to. I don't have the stamina I used to. I used to have tremendous energy. I think it's called aging.

INTERVIEWER: Although you've become the honorary chair of the Women's League again, I understand, because Tom Byrne is now the spouse of the president, and so you've stepped up to do that.

GRAY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Talk about some of the activities that you were involved in. The Women's League, the Public Service Center.

GRAY: I'm still involved in the Public Service Center.

INTERVIEWER: You helped get that off the ground, and maybe dreamed it up?

GRAY: No, Shirley McBay dreamed it up, and asked if I would just kind of keep my mind on it and shepherd it along. I've been co-chair of the Steering Committee -- 23 years this November.

INTERVIEWER: So that was a good fit.

GRAY: It was.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do with the PSC? What was your role, besides being the co-chair, were there particular activities that you were involved with?

GRAY: We started with all the money we had in our pocket. Shirley McBay had it in her department, but the next year she was going to have it as a line item in their budget, and she left. The next dean of students wasn't sure there was any interest for him, but stuck with us and was very kind but there still was no money. So it was just plain hard work at the beginning.

INTERVIEWER: You did some fundraising for it I think? There's a Priscilla King Gray Public Service fund that I think was described as a mainstay of the Center's work. How did that come about?

GRAY: Well, we needed endowment. We needed something that would last over time. So if I was successful in raising money, I asked if it could go into the endowment. We've done pretty well. I think we could do better, but we're chugging along.

INTERVIEWER: The PSC does what kind of work? Is it student activities in the communities or what?

GRAY: Well, it's both now. We started out in the Cambridge Public Schools, math in the schools in Boston. We did a lot of the -- CASPAR, the facility here in Cambridge -- we did a lot of things locally. But we were saying just recently that we still do a tremendous amount locally, but the overseas things have taken the spotlight. They seem so much more glamorous--.

INTERVIEWER: In terms of student volunteering or student--.

GRAY: We had some publicity from the outside looking in. Those are the projects.

INTERVIEWER: How about the Women's League and its predecessor organizations? How important were they and what did you try to do with them?

GRAY: There was the element of service there - there's always been. They've done things for the core of MIT that probably no other group could really have done. For instance, we raised money and shepherded the reorganization of that hall.

INTERVIEWER: That is the Elizabeth Killian Hall?

GRAY: The music hall, yes.

INTERVIEWER: In building 14.

GRAY: Yes. Alumni supported that, but that was a league idea and pursued it. We're doing things in the community - we're supporting a homeless shelter. Now supporting children buying bunk beds and that kind of thing for the homeless shelter.

INTERVIEWER: But in your early years it was a way of getting some of MIT wives engaged with the Institute and with each other.

GRAY: That's right. In the early years, that's really how I got to know the Institute.

INTERVIEWER: Other than through Paul and the fraternity and Doc Edgerton?

GRAY: With Jean Brown. That's how I got involved in freshman, with Paul's freshman seminars. How we as a league tried to encourage young wives, tried to make it easier for young wives to ask students into their home.

INTERVIEWER: This initially was wives of faculty who were doing this and then you set up a wives of graduate student organization?

GRAY: Yes. They've been very good with the graduate student organizations. They also do the English classes, and now do the English classes for the--.

INTERVIEWER: Employees.

GRAY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Employees.

GRAY: I was going to say physical plant, but it isn't physical plant anymore.

INTERVIEWER: Facilities.

GRAY: Facilities.

INTERVIEWER: But it started as English classes for the--?

GRAY: For graduate student spouses.

INTERVIEWER: Because many of them were coming from other countries and weren't comfortable with English.

GRAY: That's right. I had met occasionally, when I'm in Japan, with those wives, and they continue to meet, practice their English, and they look back on the time here as a real joy.

INTERVIEWER: Because they got drawn in through those classes.

GRAY: That's right. But there was enough of their culture in the other members' -- you know there was that bond with other members, but they got pulled in.

INTERVIEWER: Did you teach English language?

GRAY: No, I never did. But I taught embroidery.

INTERVIEWER: How did that start?

GRAY: Well, the embroidery, a woman named Rene Fell had taught here at the Institute. Her husband was about to retire from Harvard. He was a very famous linguistics teacher, and they were going out to California. She said, "You go off to school and get your certification, and you take over after I leave." So her last year at MIT I went off and did my certification, and came back and I taught from '78 to '07.

INTERVIEWER: That's a long run. One of the -- well, and you volunteered at the hospital all those years too.

GRAY: That came about, Dr. Mel Avery graduated from Wheaton about six years before I did. But I had gotten to know her in a mentoring alumni program. She was chief pediatrician at Children's and she established the newborn, the neonatal clinic. She said to me one day at a meeting at Wheaton, "Do you have any time for you, yourself?" I said, "No, not a lot." She said, "I have something I think you'd like to do." She set it up, and they trained me, and that was in '82, and I've been doing it ever since.

INTERVIEWER: You're still doing it?

GRAY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: That special something was?

GRAY: Rocking babies. Wonderful.

INTERVIEWER: So you've carved out Wednesdays and you still--

GRAY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: --save your Wednesdays to go cuddle those babies that need cuddling.

GRAY: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: What are the biggest changes you've seen at MIT since you first came to know it?

GRAY: Well, the women are such a wholesome part and such a large part of this community. That's a great thing.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that having more women students and faculty and staff has changed it significantly, other than having them there?

GRAY: I'm not so sure. I'm not so sure that the culture doesn't embrace the woman and the woman adapts to the culture. We had a grandchild who graduated a year ago, last June, and we watched her. She certainly learned quickly, but she certainly was a full-blown MIT student within the first six months.

INTERVIEWER: She was at Sloan or undergrad?

GRAY: Undergrad - she was an undergrad.

INTERVIEWER: You and Paul have been involved in an effort to put together a retirement community for MIT and Harvard people in Kendall square near MIT. Can you tell us about that?

GRAY: It's an interesting project. We got approached by two people at Harvard. We put our hearts and souls into it for a long time. I don't know how to put it tactfully because I don't feel very tactful about it. But it really fell into the hands of -- well, realtors who took over from the developers.

INTERVIEWER: But initially you liked the idea of--.

GRAY: Oh, we liked the idea very much. We wanted it to be a whole community. We worked with the thought that there would be computers and business machines so that people who still wanted to be active could work in that room and would not have to have all that equipment in there.

INTERVIEWER: But it was an alternate to your place down in Rhode Island.

GRAY: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: It was a different vision of retirement.

GRAY: That's right. It was to be that we were going to have a little health facility there. There were going to be people with common interests who really hadn't cut the cords with MIT.

INTERVIEWER: Like you and Paul.

GRAY: We would have used it just as we use 100 Memorial Drive. We would have come and gone and been in Rhode Island as much as we could.

INTERVIEWER: So it may yet be evolve or it may not, whatever is going to happen.

GRAY: It unhappily ended in the courts, and it's not been a happy ending yet.

INTERVIEWER: But it's not over yet.

GRAY: No.

INTERVIEWER: Paul said it seemed to be moving finally.

GRAY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Paul got involved with Wheaton. Had you been involved? How did he get pulled it? Had you been an active alumna?

GRAY: I'd been an active alumna, and they were looking -- they had no representation on the board of anyone in higher education. They really felt that need. They were looking for someone. One day the president just happened to run into me and said, what's Paul doing now? I told him, and I think that night he called to see if Paul would like to be on the board. Paul is very careful about those things and made sure that that was all right with the people here. Larry Bacow has been on the Wheaton board, and he's just stepped down. Kirk Kolenbrander is on the board. So there's been an MIT presence.

INTERVIEWER: Interesting. An article about you and Paul said that his spare time Paul enjoyed making furniture. Have you many pieces? Has he had enough time to--?

GRAY: Well, he's just finished a beautiful dining room table for me that was to be for the new apartment. Wherever we are in the next six months, I hope the table is with us. It's all wrapped up in the cellar in Rhode Island and it's time to begin to use it.

INTERVIEWER: When Paul stepped down as chairman there was a big dinner to honor you and Paul. At the time you mentioned that you had heard Liz Killian talk about the people who are at MIT as the canvas of her sail, and you said you had thought initially it was a strange thing to say, but had come to embrace her choice of words. Do you have any favorite words to describe the experience that you've had for the past 60 years? Any metaphors, or is that the one that works in the end?

GRAY: Well, that certainly does work. It really has been a privilege to be part of this community. I call MIT a huge family, and there are layers and layers, but everyone is part of it. It's been a real privilege to get to know them.

INTERVIEWER: Well, and a privilege for MIT to have you, as well as Paul.

GRAY: Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: It's been a privilege for us to talk with you this morning. Thank you very much. Our time has run out, but it's been very interesting and fun. Thank you so much.

GRAY: Thank you.