

Interviews of the Margaret MacVicar Memorial AMITA Oral History Project, MC 356
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Institute Archives and Distinctive Collections

Susan E. Schur – class of 1960

Interviewed by Kira Buttrey, class of 2023

September 10, 2021

Margaret MacVicar Memorial AMITA Oral History Project

Susan E. Schur (SB and SM Metallurgy, 1960) was interviewed by phone on September 10, 2021 by undergraduate Kira Buttrey (SB Biological Engineering, 2023). Ms. Schur was at her home in Somerville, Massachusetts, and Ms. Buttrey was at her apartment in Cambridge.

Ms. Schur was raised in New York City, where she attended a public high school and was involved in both the sciences and arts. In her senior year, she earned an honorable mention in the 1956 Westinghouse Science Talent Search and was the recipient of the prestigious Saint-Gaudens Medal awarded annually to a New York City high school student for artistic achievement. She received her undergraduate and master's degrees from MIT in four years, graduating in 1960, when she was 20 years old.

After graduating, Ms. Schur worked as a research metallurgist for slightly less than two years, responsible for analysis programs for commercial and government organizations. Concurrently, she was engaged in entrepreneurial activities. Those included founding a publishing company and reformatting, editing, and expanding a professional society's national publication. Then, in 1962, she accepted a position as the full-time, in-house technical consultant for a major U.S. 4A advertising agency. Here she was involved in a variety of creative and media activities, such as developing recruitment advertising campaigns. Ms. Schur returned to Boston in mid-1963 to found her own advertising/marketing communications firm. In the 1970s, she established the pioneering, award-winning international journal *Technology & Conservation of Art, Architecture, & Antiquities*. Around the same time, she was featured in a film produced by Purdue University to highlight the diverse career paths open to men and women who studied engineering. Her own career path also included acting as an independent curator for a number of exhibitions and undertaking various entrepreneurial activities, including founding The Sculptors Workshop (an organization that taught metallurgy for artistic work) and a professional society focused on cultural/historic conservation.

Ms. Schur has contributed to MIT in numerous ways, including serving: as president of the Association of MIT Alumnae (AMITA, which funds this oral history project), for two terms; as a Vice-President of the MIT Alumni Association (the first woman elected to the Alumni Association's Board of Directors, and believed to be the youngest person, as of that time, to serve on the Board); as a Founding Member of the MIT Enterprise Forum; and as an original member of the MIT Museum's Advisory Board.

Ms. Schur also played an important part in promoting the accomplishments and activities of the women who attended MIT during its first 10 decades. She developed and chaired the 1973 Centennial Convocation, Focus on the Future: The Challenges and The Opportunities, which celebrated 100 years of women at MIT. As part of the year-long event, she organized and co-produced the three-part exhibition, "100 Years of the "New" Woman: M.I.T. Alumnae – A Century of Creative Contributions in Technology, The Sciences, and The Arts," which was on display at the Institute in 1973-74. In 1976, she produced an alphabetical and geographical alumnae directory. Ms. Schur has remained active in

acquainting others with MIT and this area of women's history. Today, in addition to operating her two businesses, Ms. Schur continues to paint and to have solo exhibitions of her work.

BUTTREY: Thank you for the opportunity to interview you. To start off, I was wondering if we could talk about your current work. I know that as a professional journal publisher and owner, you organize conferences and seminars. How have you adapted this work for the current COVID-19 pandemic?

SCHUR: Well, actually, the emphasis has switched from the publication (more about this journal later in the interview) to more on conferences. I and my committee had organized a conference on architectural plastics and polymer composites that was scheduled for March of 2020, which, a week before it actually was to occur, we had to cancel due to the worsening Covid-19 situation.

BUTTREY: Terrible timing for the pandemic.

SCHUR: Oh, yes. As a precaution, there were all sorts of things that MIT, where the conference was going to be held, was closing down. By the beginning of March, we already had fairly decided that holding an in-person meeting was not a safe thing to do. And most of the people that had registered, when we notified them, agreed that it wasn't a good idea to hold the conference.

So, we rescheduled it. I thought at that time, being optimistic, that it would be OK a year from then. I had gotten in touch with all of the speakers—almost 40 men and women—and they all agreed that canceling the 2020 event and holding it instead in 2021 was a good idea. They all said that would be fine with them.

I then made new arrangements for hotel rooms, for luncheons at the Samberg Center, and for other food service during the event, as well as reserved the Wang Center's auditorium and adjacent poster display/coffee break area. Then April/May came, and things began to look really iffy. And by the beginning of July, with the pandemic continuing to worsen, I contacted the other people who were on my committee and said, "You know, I don't think we should go ahead with this."

Instead of going with the idea of postponing the conference again, I came up with a new idea. Since most of the speakers probably had all their information prepared, because the conference was canceled just two weeks before they were actually going to give their presentations, I said, "Why don't we see if the speakers would agree to writing a paper on what they

were going to talk about instead of giving an oral presentation.” A few of the speakers, as part of their normal preparation procedure, do that, so some of them had a written rough draft on hand.

So I contacted them, and a good portion said, “Fine, that sounds like a good idea.” Zoom meetings were just starting, but I thought, “We really can't easily and economically set up for Zoom. We have speakers from around the world—from Korea, from Australia, from England—” And to coordinate a Zoom presentation for a conference program that would have taken three days, and would be full days, starting at 7:30 in the morning and going until 6:00ish in the evening, that's an awful lot of setup.

Having a printed version of the conference, on the other hand, would provide a permanent record of the meeting's material and would also allow additional content to be included—or, to say this another way, I believed that this would be a publication that would be a valuable, fairly unique compendium of information on plastics in architecture and in artistic works.

I gave speakers a deadline of late-December, which I hoped would enable the book to be published in the latter part of March of 2021. So this is what we did. Of course, there were delays—problems with the mail, with getting approvals of some of the supplemental info, and so on.

The “package” was issued as a two-volume publication – *Architectural Plastics & Polymer Composites Conference Proceedings Plus*. I handled the entire operation—working with all the speakers, editing and getting the papers and posters organized, arranging for some other posters, and other additional supplemental material. The book came out in May 2021 and was then shipped to people who had registered for the cancelled conference. Now I'm promoting it to other possibly interested parties. A few universities have started ordering the book, because prior to this publication, there really hasn't been much on plastics and its use in architecture and in artistic works, and plastics are getting to be quite popular in these applications.

Maybe this approach is how future events will occur. There are still organizations that are having normal in-person annual meetings this Fall. However, many of them have now gone on to say that they originally were going to do that, but now they're only planning to do it starting in 2022. Others have switched to mostly Zoom-type events, which is a way that allows them to reach more of an audience. But I think producing a printed publication—a well-thought-out book—has its advantages, as far as offering a relatively permanent source of information as compared to organizing and

holding a conference, especially if you are running conferences on a limited budget and with limited help, as I have been.

A rather long answer of what has kept me busy during COVID.

BUTTREY: That sounds like a good adaptation, going from conference to publication. It sounds like you handled a challenging situation very successfully.

SCHUR: Thank you. I was very happy with how it turned out. I probably should add that a further benefit of this approach was that there was the capability to include information that could not be presented at the meeting. For example, some people, who were potential speakers who I had contracted back when we were first organizing the conference, couldn't accept the invitation, either because of other commitments or they didn't want to do the travel. But, for the book, they were very willing to present one or two pages either as a written short paper, or as a "poster."

I set a format for calling a two-page item for the publication a poster. One page would have an image of what would usually be considered a poster. We always had posters at the conferences from different organizations. So this would be one page; then the facing page would be a detailed explanation of the poster's content, since a person wouldn't be standing by the poster, as he or she would have been at the conference explaining to anyone coming by what the poster meant.

To reiterate what I mentioned before, having this variety of content in the book worked out very well. The people that have received the publication package have been very happy with it, and are finding it very valuable in use, especially since there really wasn't anything comparable. And I also put in some basic things, such as trademarks and brand names, data that often turn out to be critical in conservation/preservation work.

You may have encountered this "name confusion" situation in some of the work that you're doing, in the job you have with the medical field. That is, over the years, companies may have kept the same name for a product but have changed the product's composition and/or processing, thereby altering its function. Say that you're trying to restore an item made in the early 1900s, and you think you are really fortunate because you find that a material of the same name as that used in the item's original fabrication is currently available. But many times that's not to be. The name may be identical, but the performance obtained may be adverse. Obviously, a source, such as this plastics publication, that identifies any such changes associated with a specific name is an excellent tool.

In carrying out this project, there were lots of stimulation and interesting things that I learned about—and, I think, for the people that received the publication, this also has been true. So, I think it's been a successful idea.

BUTTREY: It's great to hear of a success story coming out of COVID. It sounds like a good project to have worked on in quarantine.

SCHUR: Yes, it certainly was. And, speaking about the conference attendees/book recipients, over the years, we have had a very loyal audience for *Technology and Conservation*. And a lot of those T&C readers came to the meeting. And a sizeable percentage of the people that came to the conferences came to all the conferences. So they obviously found that the conferences were worthwhile. As with the events, I got really top-notch people to write for the magazine and to give the talks at the conferences.

In some cases, these were people who I had not had any personal contact with prior to asking them to give a talk, but most of them were intrigued by the idea of reaching this audience and having their work known in the community and readily accepted my invitation to speak.

BUTTREY: What backgrounds do most of these people come from? Do you have to serve as kind of a cultural liaison between worlds of art, architecture, and archaeology at these conferences?

SCHUR: Well, usually the people that go into conservation have a fairly good background in dealing with a wide range of people, from enumerable professions. If you're involved in conservation for a museum, you would need to know an artifact's history, including its composition and fabrication, as well as its care over time and prior treatments. In acquiring this knowledge, you probably have contact with a variety of people within your organization, and also with whoever has contributed the work that you are doing.

In other words, these colleagues could include architects, engineers, materials specialists, government officials, chemists, physicists, planners, legal experts—and they could be employed by commercial companies, government agencies, educational institutions, consulting firms, cultural or historic organizations, and/or some type of non-profit group.

Simply put, you deal with all sorts of people. I think that the people who have gone into conservation generally have a broader—I don't want to say "acquaintanceship," but a broader knowledge of the people or organizations

that come into play in dealing with their work. I don't know if that makes sense to you...

BUTTREY: Yes, that does. It seems that they're more well-rounded than people in other fields might be.

SCHUR: Yes. And that might be why they often just can't focus on one little thing. It's more likely to be the big picture view. And, in fact—I think I probably have said this before—but restoring, conserving, preserving, or adaptively reusing buildings, and structures, or conserving or treating artistic/historic/cultural objects really involves so many different aspects of endeavor. If you're a structural engineer, say doing seismic stabilization upgrading, you're not just doing restoration work, you're not just dealing with structures. You're dealing with history, utilizing a knowledge of how other people worked, the tradespeople that were involved—A vast array of talents, backgrounds, and capabilities are usually involved. This might not be true in all cases, but I think it's a fair representation.

If you look at any of the conferences that are now being held by professional organizations, such as the Association for Preservation of Technology, they are being attended by a range of people from many different fields who are members of the organization, who not just come to the conferences but who also are yearlong participants in activities.

The same diversity of membership occurred with the American Institute for Conservation. It started out with people that basically were dealing with art, sculpture, books, and archival material—and then they added architectural people. Now there are groups that are interested in photography, in textiles, and so on.

So there's a nice mixing of people, which I find quite interesting. And you're alert to undertakings and advances in all different fields of endeavor, which is a beneficial aspect.

BUTTREY: It sounds like a very interesting community to be a part of. I also see how you ended up in this niche knowing what I do about your life and career, and the many different interests you have had.

Would you mind if we went back to the story of your childhood? I'm wondering if you could talk about growing up in New York City.

SCHUR: OK. What was it like? I don't think I had a very unusual growing up. I went to public schools, which were quite good. Granted, at the time that I was in

elementary and high school the majority of public schools in New York City were among the top schools in the country. And a lot of these schools were innovative and tried out new educational programs.

I think at that time they were equivalent to what would be considered excellent private schools now. So I think it was a good time to grow up in New York City and go to public schools. Of course, not all the public schools were great, but generally there was a fairly high standard for what was being taught.

And I did the usual pre-teen and teen things, such as Girl Scouts.

When I was in high school, I did tutor people in math and some other subjects. [Forest Hills High School, in Queens, New York]. So I guess you could say I had some entrepreneurial background when I was in high school. That is, essentially running a tutoring program. That was a relatively simple thing to do and occupied only a few hours of my time during a week.

There were so many activities that Forest Hills High School offered. My afternoons were consumed with programs, such as the math team and the science club. And there was a theater group. Our plays were not great theatrical performances, but it was something I and other students did.

With these and other after-school programs, there was a vast array of activities that were at the high school. My time was pretty well spent in doing these things, and, of course, socializing with friends.

BUTTREY: Right. In my own high school, I felt as if there was a false dichotomy drawn between science and art. I was one of few people who continued onto higher level classes in both, which I found strange.

SCHUR: So you can understand that it's not so different.

BUTTREY: Yes, exactly. I'm wondering if doing both science and art activities was seen as an oddity in your high school as well?

SCHUR: No, Forest Hills High School had always been a high-achieving high school for a good portion of the kids. There were a number of the young people that were at the school that were concentration camps survivors. And, generally, those kids had a desire to strive and put in the background what their early life had been like during World War II, in camps or in occupied cities like Paris.

So we had a mix of students who had backgrounds that were very varied. And there was also a diversity in backgrounds of students attending the elementary school that I went to from sixth grade through eighth grade. It was near a housing development, undertaken by the United Nations for UN personnel and representatives of its member nations, called Parkway Village [in Queens]. Families who were from around the world were living there, so their kids were enrolled in the elementary school I was attending. You weren't isolated as far as meeting people from other environments and other backgrounds, and who also had reasons for wanting a good education.

BUTTREY: That sounds like another interesting community to be a part of.

SCHUR: Yes, there were some friendships formed. But, since this elementary school was a fair distance away from my home, my after-school pals were usually those in my immediate neighborhood, within walking distance.

When my parents moved to Queens from the Bronx, they thought they were moving nearby where a new public elementary school had just been built and was to open that fall, with classes going through to the sixth grade.

However, the first year that it was open, which was when I would have been in the sixth grade, school officials decided that they wanted the kids to be there for at least two years. So when we moved to Queens, to get to the elementary school I attended for three years required taking a city bus—operating on its normal route—to get there, instead of just walking across the street, which was all I had to do to reach the school I attended when we lived in the Bronx. I expect that was good for building self-reliance.

Now, I'm across from Somerville High School, and I see how many people drive their kids to school. And, thinking back to elementary school, we took the city buses to get to school without a second thought. A very different growing up from what I think many kids might have to deal with now.

BUTTREY: Moving on to your high school experience, why did you consider applying to MIT?

SCHUR: Oh, a few simple reasons. It was one of the few schools that had a program in metallurgy, it was relatively nearby to where we were living, and it offered a wide range of courses in other fields.

BUTTREY: What got you interested in metallurgy?

SCHUR: Basically, my high school had a series of speakers come in to the school and give a talk in the auditorium to juniors and seniors about what they taught,

what their work was, and so on. And the professor that came to talk about metallurgy was really interesting. His remarks opened up to me a field that you normally didn't hear much about. It just seemed fascinating, and I started looking into it.

MIT not only had metallurgy, but it also had a number of different courses in humanities, architecture, international affairs, and other subjects that were very appealing.

Well, MIT just seemed to be a logical place to apply. You could get a good education in science. And they also had business courses. And they had courses on literature for freshman year and everything; there was a course on Russian literature which had been an interest of mine. In high school, I had done a biographical presentation on Dostoevsky. When this was mentioned, someone usually would sarcastically comment to me saying, "Wasn't that depressing?" And I would reply, "No, it was quite revealing, you could even say fascinating."

So, I was interested in MIT as it offered a combination of sort of any type of subject that you conceivably want to get some more information on. My parents didn't object to my going—

BUTTREY: Were they supportive?

SCHUR: Yes. They, however, did want me to select a college that was within 200 miles of our homes in Queens. I didn't want to be at home for college. I wanted to have a different living experience. My older sister had gone to Queens College for her undergraduate work and stayed at home, and I really wanted to go and see something else, not just go to school right around the corner. Well, not right around the corner, but not in the nearby neighborhood.

I applied for and was awarded a General Motors National Scholarship; therefore, I could go to MIT without any financial worries.

BUTTREY: That's amazing. A scholarship can really open doors.

SCHUR: Well, I did well in high school.

I applied for lots of scholarships. With the GM Scholarship, there was the condition that you couldn't accept any other scholarship. If you got the GM, you supposedly wouldn't have to do anything else, except they assumed you were going to work in the summer. It was nice to be awarded other

scholarships—I did get other ones, but had to turn them down—but nothing could compare to the GM. It was really wonderful to receive.

BUTTREY: Your scholarship was the “GM”—?

SCHUR: General Motors. It was called General Motors National Scholarships. (Sorry, for abbreviating the name.) If I remember correctly, they gave out 100 scholarships throughout the United States. It was very nice.

BUTTREY: Did you work for them in the summers?

SCHUR: No. They didn't provide employment. You went and got your own job.

However, they kept tabs on you and made sure that you were doing well. And once a year, a representative came around and took you and other GM scholarship awardees to dinner. At MIT, as I recall, there were two other people in other years that had that scholarship. Those dinners were quite enjoyable.

I understand that some people, both men and women, had trouble attending MIT with getting scholarships and dealing with the scholarship operation at Tech. But apparently MIT's financial aid office had no control over what GM did. So, I was set as far as meeting MIT's financial demands on me.

BUTTREY: What was your freshman year at MIT like?

SCHUR: It was fine. I got into 120 Bay State Road, which was at that time a MIT women's dormitory—not a freshmen dormitory, but a dormitory for MIT women students. [A brownstone in Boston, across the Charles River from MIT.] My entering year, there was supposed to be a second dorm that would be available to house more freshmen women, as MIT was interested in expanding its women's population. Tech had no objection to women coming. It may seem strange to youngsters today, but at that time, almost all the colleges throughout the U.S., including MIT, had this requirement that women live in dormitories on campus, or else live with their family or some other relative.

The idea was that the educational institutions were taking on parental responsibility. So having you live in a university or college-owned facility or with their parents or other relations meant that they met that requirement... I was fortunate that I got into 120. The entering women for whom there was no space left in 120 were not as fortunate. They—about one-third of the entering women—were housed at the start of the term in what was going to be the second dormitory facility for Tech coeds, but the woman who owned

that brownstone kicked them out during their second week there. They ended up living in a BU facility, which was over a block away from 120. A portion of these gals generally walked over to MIT with me and others from 120.

BUTTREY: Did you have a social community with the other women in 120?

SCHUR: I was fairly friendly with most of the freshmen women as well as with many upper classmates. There were seven freshman women in 120, myself and six others, so you knew most of the women. Some may have been good friends. Some you may have just said hello, or you sort of nod to. But the women students gathered in Cheney Room and utilized the facility at all hours. [A suite of rooms located in the main MIT building and founded in 1884 at the original MIT in Boston; named for Margaret Swan Cheney, one of the women admitted to MIT in its early days.]

The Cheney Room was almost like a sorority house. You could relax there. It had lockers. It had toilet facilities. I recall that there were three beds in one of the rooms, so you could stay overnight if you wanted to. Plus, it had a kitchen so you could prepare snacks or meals.

BUTTREY: Could you talk more about what the Cheney Room was at that time? I don't know much about it.

SCHUR: It was on the third floor, about halfway down the hall of Building 3. [Entered by opening the green-painted door to Room 310 of Building 3.] If it was on the second floor, it would be located between the Mass Avenue entrance and 10-250. So, on the third floor, it was essentially in the middle of that section of the main building.

The Cheney Room, at that time, was a fairly large facility. When MIT was over in Boston, there was a Cheney Room, named after Margaret Cheney, who would have been one of the early women studying at Tech. But she, unfortunately, died quite young, in her early 20s. A fund was set up to create a facility to enhance the time women spent studying at the Institute.

There was a Cheney facility in the old MIT in Boston. And when Tech moved across to the river, there was an architectural design requirement that the principal building have a Cheney Room, which was really not a single room, but a five-room suite of rooms.

BUTTREY: Oh, wow.

SCHUR: Yes. There was a living room, in which there was a piano and couches, and other furnishings. You came in there, and you could read, you could talk to other people, play the piano, et cetera, et cetera. On one side of the living room there was a completely furnished kitchen with equipment and a couple of small tables and chairs. And then on the other side there was a room where there were several desks, so you could work in there. And you could close the door to this room to get a quieter environment.

Then you went down the suite's interior hall, as if you were going toward 10-250, and you would find a series of lockers. And then, all the way at the end were several toilet facilities. It was like having a huge apartment or a huge flat.

BUTTREY: I was just going to say, it sounds like a house.

SCHUR: Yes. The Cheney Room wasn't to isolate you from the rest of the world. It was so that the women had a convenient, accessible place where they could go to relax or socialize, rather than going to what would have been their home with parents or relatives, or walking across the bridge and down Beacon Street to 120 or travelling to wherever they were living during the school year. So, it was very nice.

And, having this place available, I got to enjoy meeting women classmates of all ages. I had no regrets about social community. At least, I had no regrets. Some of the students that I became acquainted with may have had problems in getting acclimated to the environment.

BUTTREY: Which aspect of the environment? Being a woman at MIT? Or just being an MIT student?

SCHUR: For some women, or girls, whatever name you want to use, they had very different high school environments. I had a roommate that went to an all-girls' Catholic school. Her experience was very different than that of Sheila Widnall—Sheila Evans at the time—who also went to an all-girls' Catholic school. [Sheila Widnall, SB 1960, SM 1961, and ScD 1964, Aeronautics and Astronautics; MIT's Associate Provost from 1991-1993; MIT Institute Professor Emerita; trailblazer in aerospace engineering who was appointed in 1993 as Secretary of the Air Force, becoming the first woman to lead a branch of the U.S. military.] They had very different experiences in those schools, and with their parents. And, as a result, I believe that might have been why their reaction to the MIT environment was so different.

Everyone brings her own background into a situation. For instance, in high school, I had a lot of male friends. Many of them were older. And, usually, every year there were four or six guys from my high school that went to MIT, so I knew somewhat about what was happening at MIT before I arrived there, while I was still in high school. And functioning well with a group of guys would not have been a strange situation.

It's hard to say how different people will react to a situation. A bunch of guys left at the end of freshman year. A few left in the middle of the spring term, because they just couldn't stand it anymore, and a few went off to New York and did some other things. Another guy, who was my classmate from high school, actually left at the end of freshman year, maybe because he flunked out, and he then went to Columbia and graduated the top of his class.

BUTTREY: Well, there you go!

SCHUR: So, you can't predict how you are going to be doing in a particular situation. I generally was perfectly pleased with what I was doing. Although at times I was bored, actually, and, therefore, I did a lot of non-academic stuff.

BUTTREY: How did you fill your time outside of classes? Were you involved with any extracurriculars?

SCHUR: I was involved with *Tech Engineering News*, Tech Show, Technique, the Student Metallurgical Society, the Society of Women Engineers, and other activities. Do they still have Tech Show?

BUTTREY: Tech Show, I'm not sure. What was it? Did you perform in it or help write it?

SCHUR: It was a yearly theatrical performance written and performed by the students. I didn't perform. I did the advertising, and for a couple of years I helped out with the costumes. So, my role, essentially was doing the business and backstage stuff.

BUTTREY: Oh, cool. Did you see that as a potential career option for you? Or was it just something you were doing for fun?

SCHUR: I just thought it was an enjoyable activity... And because of one of the performers—Gus Solomons—the shows were riveting events. [Gus Solomons received his Bachelor in Architecture 1961 and went on to become an accomplished figure in postmodern and experimental dance.]

Gus Solomons was an absolutely fantastic dancer and was the star of the Tech Show for a few years. After graduation, he did not practice

architecture; rather, he danced with Merce Cunningham and some other noted artists, and then founded his own company and became world renowned.

BUTTREY: What were your other extra-curriculars like?

SCHUR: Working on *Technique*—the yearbook—was fun. And there was a surprise when I first joined the staff. It turned out that the yearbook printer was the same one we had used in high school. And actually, the sales rep was the same one that I had dealt with in high school. So, it wasn't 10 degrees of separation, it was one degree.

Another interesting thing that I did was to get involved in sophomore year with the Student Metallurgical Society. It had all sorts of activities, many fun programs. There's no more foundry facility at Tech now, but we used to have steak dinners in the foundry, using the foundry furnaces to cook the steaks. In other words, there were a lot of fun things that could be done, a lot of activities at Tech and also elsewhere in Cambridge and in Boston.

Of course, MIT kept you busy. Normally it was courses. And I took a couple of extra courses every term.

BUTTREY: Were any courses particularly memorable?

SCHUR: Freshman year, I took Prof. Preusser's graphics course, which was given by the architecture department. [Professor Robert Preusser, director of education at the MIT Center for Advanced Visual Studies 1974-1985; professor of visual design in the Architecture Department 1957-1976; practiced painting and visual design.] It covered all types of graphic arts as well as model construction. Over Thanksgiving, we had to design a cloverleaf interchange and build a model of it. Nothing like going back on the train from New York to Boston with a 3-foot by 4-foot board having a glued-on model that rose up several inches, and carrying that, along with all the stuff that you took home for Thanksgiving to work on, but you never did.

BUTTREY: That's how Thanksgiving goes in my experience as well.

SCHUR: Although there were lots of interesting things to do, there were some things that I probably would have preferred not to have encountered. Take the dorm. Well, your meals at 120 were included in your room fee. That was the first time I've ever had marshmallow fluff sandwiches for lunch. There were, at least for me, some other very strange food concoctions.

And dinner on Fridays were rather unusual. It was still mandated for Catholics to have fish on Fridays. So, of the Catholic girls in the dorm, Linda Greiner, another freshman, just sat there not eating the usual tuna fish casserole as she couldn't stand fish. Sheila Evans would normally have a dinner date on Fridays. And Patricia Clogher, an architect student, was usually on charrette in a drafting room over at Tech. None of those girls really ate dinner in the dorm on Fridays, while the rest of us had to endure eating Friday's "blankety-blank stuff." So, the food was "interesting." And that was the one thing I would have happily changed.

BUTTREY: Hey, that's pretty good if the worst thing is the food.

SCHUR: True. And, here, let me mention one thing that was nice: MIT's athletic policies. You do a lot of athletics?

BUTTREY: Yes.

SCHUR: What appealed to me was that athletics were not required for the women at that point in time. But you could do anything in athletics that you wanted. One of the gals, Betsy Schumacker, one of the freshmen gals, who I later roomed with, swam, and she was a contender for the Olympics. [Elizabeth Schumacker, SB Mathematics 1960; MIT lecturer in civil engineering and urban systems 1968-1983.] She made the cover of *Sports Illustrated* at one point during her undergrad days.

BUTTREY: Wow.

SCHUR: Yes. And here's a further tidbit on athletics. Another freshman, Patricia Andre, and I wanted to do some fencing, so the Athletic Department people set up fencing lessons for us with the fencing maestro. And we fenced with the fencing team guys.

BUTTREY: How did you decide on fencing?

SCHUR: It was what I wanted to do. It was nothing that had been offered in high school. Basketball was the big thing in my high school. We didn't have a football team, which at that time, MIT didn't have either, except for intramural. Football was not a reason to come to MIT, which it is for a lot of Midwestern schools.

BUTTREY: I think it's still not.

SCHUR: I was going to say, I thought it might be fun to fence (or try to fence, was more likely), although fencing with the guys on the team was not

anticipated. I don't think they were normally thrilled with that, but they enjoyed, you know, laughing at us. Which didn't bother me, because I knew we were pretty awful. But, it was fun.

Going back to MIT's policies regarding women and athletics, there were a lot of schools where you had outdoor athletics classes until after Thanksgiving, even if there was snow on the ground, you'd still have it. And at MIT, even for the boys, they didn't have a stupid requirement like that. With U.S. colleges, I found out the reason for this was that there was an outcry in the 1800s about women going to college as that supposedly made them ill, and that having them participate in sports classes in all types of weather became a thing that showed that the women still stayed healthy.

So there can be a lot of incidental things that, in the long run, aren't major but can contribute to your evaluation of where you're going to spend part of your life, or at least four or five years of your life.

BUTTREY: The daily life experience considerations are important. Thank you for that.

I've read that within your four years at MIT, you received both your SB and your SM in metallurgy. What motivated you to pursue a master's?

SCHUR: Why not?

BUTTREY: Good answer.

SCHUR: Obviously, there were a lot of interesting courses. So, why not get as much out of their availability at my time at Tech as I could? Because I figured that my time there was going to be the four years where I didn't have to worry about any financial stuff, so why not go for it? And since at MIT, you were not limited to the number of courses you could take in a term, I was able to get both my SB and SM in that four-year period.

BUTTREY: Did you have an end goal in mind, such as working in the metallurgy industry after graduating from MIT?

SCHUR: I used to kid that I wanted to be president of U.S. Steel.

BUTTREY: And did you want that?

SCHUR: No. I always thought that I would like to get into some technical aspects of what I was studying, but eventually concentrate more on the business side. And to get as much background as possible, why not go for the SM? Going for a PhD would probably have meant I was really committed to staying

more in the research end, although at that time, the materials field was not one that had super requirements for research undertakings or even for obtaining a business position. There was a period where you had to have a PhD if you even wanted to apply for anything in engineering or science. Now, it's become more often a case of you have to have a postdoc to apply for anything. But I thought that even though an advanced degree would not be that critical for me, why not get as much out of MIT as possible?

BUTTREY: Yes, makes sense. Would you mind talking about the work you did for your thesis?

SCHUR: My thesis was an interesting project, in that it opened up for me an aspect of seeing how analytical and comparative things could work in, say, in the museum environment, in the analysis of objects that are housed in collections there, and that people should not just assume from aesthetic appearance that the object must contain such and such materials. So, the thesis's results provided a way of clarifying how you can evaluate materials not just on an aesthetic sense but on a scientific sense. Viewed in that light, the thesis work was fairly valuable.

BUTTREY: Did your advisor know that you had an interest in art before starting this project?

SCHUR: Oh, probably to some degree. He knew I had some of my artwork in the coed run art sales. Once a year the women students ran an art sale.

BUTTREY: What kind of art did you sell?

SCHUR: Paintings, drawings, and other items. Some of my works were included. It was in the Building 10 lobby by the Great Court, where they now have four or five tables set up for student activities.

BUTTREY: Was making art a big part of the culture of the woman undergraduates?

SCHUR: Not generally. However, I did do artwork and art-related things, such as for the yearbook — doing *Technique's* layouts as well as the cover designs and artwork for the inside pages. The art-related stuff had more of a commercial art character, as were the advertising things I did for Tech Shows. The contributions I made to TEN—Tech Engineering News—dealt more with the written contents. [Tech Engineering News and The Tech were two different student publications.]

BUTTREY: Were the women students known for other activities in addition to the annual art show event?

SCHUR: Well, the women students ran or managed many of the undergraduate organizations. Linda Greiner ran The Tech, I ran the yearbook, et cetera, et cetera. [Linda Sprague, BA Management 1960; became an academic in the fields of Industrial Management and Executive Education.] And, of course, as would be expected, coeds were officers of the Association of Women Students. I was.

BUTTREY: What was running the yearbook like?

SCHUR: Oh, it was rather enjoyable. In senior year I was the General Manager and Bob Sprich was the editor-in-chief, and we worked as a team. [Robert Sprich, MIT B.S. Humanities, 1961; went on to become a Professor of English at Bentley College.] No problems there, or with the staff meeting schedules we had set, et cetera. And most of the people that were involved in activities were involved because they wanted to be. If you had to do something, you did it.

All in all, there usually were very congenial groups of people in the activities I was in. And everyone got along. If you had to do something, you did it. That sounds sort of simple-minded. But in many organizations, there's a lot of infighting. Fortunately, this did not occur in anything that I was involved with.

BUTTREY: That makes everything much easier.

SCHUR: Much easier. Yes. And that carried on through to most of my other MIT activities after graduation. I was very involved in the MIT Club of Boston, where I served as president for several terms. And everyone on the Board worked together smoothly. We ran it with about four or five people and had a wide variety of really interesting programs. (Now the organization has about 30 or 40 people on its board of directors.) These programs included monthly luncheon meetings, several dinner meetings during the year, and monthly plant visits. We also initiated something that has become a delightful tradition—galas to welcome incoming MIT presidents as well as to honor other distinguished MIT leaders and important MIT activities. People from all age groups attended these events.

Interestingly, we once did a survey on the monthly luncheon meeting that we held in downtown Boston to see whether it was convenient for people to attend. Not the results you might expect—the people who said it was inconvenient, who were working out in Waltham or Burlington, they came to all the meetings. The ones that said, “Oh, it's great. You know, the location is

only a couple blocks from where I work,” very rarely came to meetings. So you can't tell with surveys how people react.

In short, it was things like the MIT Club of Boston where you met an awful lot of people of all different backgrounds and ages. And the people that were involved in running it over the years, at least the years that I was very actively involved, all got along well and became friends. And a lot of friendships that I formed then are lasting to this day.

BUTTREY: Do you think that happiness to work, and just general friendliness, is an MIT trait?

SCHUR: Oh, I don't know if it's an MIT trait, but maybe it's a trait that I gravitated toward. And I feel that if it's something that I don't find enjoyable, why waste time doing it? Even if it's something I really love doing, if I'm not enjoying being with or working with the other people that are involved, it takes the enjoyment out of it, so why bother?

I guess I would say a good portion of my life has been very fortunate in that I haven't encountered overt discrimination or a lack of friendly work colleagues. Also, that over the years I have been able to have many good, lasting friendships.

BUTTREY: That's great to hear. Now after graduating from MIT, how did you end up working for AMRAY? [AMRAY, Inc., initially known as Advanced Metals Research Corp., was a company located in Somerville, Massachusetts, that initially worked on government contracts and commercial consulting and gradually converted to a manufacturing firm.]

SCHUR: Well, it's very simple, actually. And I really didn't have to strain myself looking, because Dr. John Norton, who was in charge of the graduate program in metallurgy, and Dr. Robert Ogilvie, who was my thesis advisor, were founders of the company—a startup at that point—and they both wanted me to work there. They offered me a job. [Dr. John Norton, MIT SB Physics 1918 and ScD Physics 1932; appointed assistant professor of physics in 1926; cofounded AMRAY, Inc. in 1964.] [Dr. Robert Ogilvie came to MIT for graduate school in 1950 and studied x-ray absorption analysis with Professor Norton; he then taught metallurgy in the Institute's Department of Materials Science and Engineering and eventually was named Professor Emeritus.]

Before I accepted, I went out there—it was in Somerville at the time—and spoke to the people there. I came back and said, “OK.” I had previously

spoken to two of the guys in the lab that I was in who had done some work for the company. They just said, "Yeah, good guys. Go for it."

And I did. At the time that the company was founded, it was the only commercial operation that did electron probe consulting work. They built one of the first electron probes that incorporated certain x-ray capabilities. A few years later, the company grew into the major U.S. manufacturer of scanning electron microscopes.

BUTTREY: Is the electron probe a type of microscope?

SCHUR: Yes. The electron probe, also called electron microprobe or electron probe microanalyzer, is a sophisticated tool for non-destructive analysis of extremely small samples of material—as small as 10 ppm. It is somewhat similar to scanning electron microscopes but also incorporating x-ray spectroscopy features; the SEM was developed in the late 1930s but wasn't commercially available until the late 1960s.

Back to the company—There was a split in the type of jobs I worked on. I had government contracts, and I had commercial consulting work. Most of the work involved probe or X-ray analysis.

So it was very interesting, especially considering the type of clients that came "in the door," and the scope of things that they wanted analyzed. They wanted to know what the composition of their products was. Clients would range anywhere from oil companies to the scientist that had responsibilities regarding the Corning Museum's collections who came with objects from the Corning Museum that the museum wanted to learn more about.

In that way, I got a "taste" of a variety of industries. For instance, I had a contract on analysis of what was retrieved from U-2 flights, probably to find out what the radiation on upper levels was—to see if there were radioactive particles.

That project actually provided an amusing response from some people quite a number of years later when I got an award for the historic preservation work that I had done. The guy that was introducing me to what was mostly a young audience at this event was one of the people in the armed forces that was at the base in Japan where the U-2 flights had taken off many years ago before. He introduced me as having worked with the U-2 people, which, for this audience at that point in time, had no memory of U-2 flights. Therefore, all they could think was that U2 was the musical group... Needless to say, I got a very interesting response.

[LAUGHTER]

SCHUR: So, it's the same thing, of names have different meanings to different people at different times.

BUTTREY: Yes.

SCHUR: Have you ever encountered anything like that?

BUTTREY: Oh, yes, I'm sure. Nothing is coming to mind right now. When you first said U-2, you continued on to say U-2 flights, so I had more context. I probably would have thought of the band otherwise.

Where you still doing science and metallurgy operations at this point? Or did your role also include business and other things at AMRAY?

SCHUR: Oh, was I doing other things for that company? No, it was basically the analytical work and the contracts for their various clients. I'm trying to think—Well, a couple of years later, when I had set up the ad agency, I did some advertising for them, both for their recruitment of personnel and for their products. (They ended up converting, oh, probably about five or so years after I left the company, to the manufacturing of scientific instruments.)

BUTTREY: I expect they were thrilled to have you doing their advertising after knowing the company well from working there.

SCHUR: Hard to tell. Dr. Norton—picture Hollywood casting a 60- or 70-year-old professor (which is what he was about the time that I was a student) projecting the image of the pipe-smoking, tweed-wearing individual—was a fairly reserved person, not given to effusive responses. But an absolutely fantastic person. Even though he'd been teaching for “x” number of years, before any lecture he would always review all the material and make sure it was up to date. So I really couldn't tell if he was thrilled with my doing the advertising.

Bob Ogilvy was much younger and much more outgoing, and I think that it is easier to think that he was happy to see that I was doing that sort of thing, and that I was doing well.

BUTTREY: Were you also working on entrepreneurial things during your time at AMRAY?

SCHUR: I was. One of my classmates—Richard Levine—and I decided right after graduation to do a book on “lab experiments for physics,” which, at that time, was a required MIT course for freshman with Saturday mornings in the lab. [Richard Levine, SB 1961, SM 1961, and ScD 1963, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science.]

Do you still have Saturday classes?

BUTTREY: Thankfully not.

SCHUR: Well, we did. And we thought, “Oh, this is great.” We'd have a built-in audience for the book.

BUTTREY: Was it a textbook, or what type of book?

SCHUR: Essentially a textbook. Dick and I worked on it. He did most of the writing. I did some writing and illustrations. I got all the printing done. The book was printed and ready for the fall semester. What happened then was that MIT decided to cut out physics lab courses as a requirement.

All was not lost, however. We did sell some. It became a required textbook for Gordon College, which for years ordered 20 books every year. It was a good experience. I did publish, through the publishing firm (The Schur Co.) that I had established, some other things, such as a nomograph and the book “Commercial Profits from Defense-Space Technology.”

Also right after I graduated, I became the editor of The Society of Women Engineers' publication, and expanded its scope. I did the formatting, started some advertising and did most of the writing. So I expect you can consider that another entrepreneurial effort. Incidentally, you might want to know that because of this activity, along with serving as the Chair of the SWE Boston Chapter, and being a member of the committee for the First International Conference of Women Engineers and Scientists, and a few other SWE things, I was elected to be a Fellow of the Society.

And there were a couple of other entrepreneurial ventures before I went down to New York and worked as the in-house full-time technical consultant for one of the major nationwide ad agencies. I joined it basically to get some 4A agency experience before I set up my own firm.

With that in mind, one of the people that I knew (both through him becoming acquainted with one of my roommates at that time and through being, as I was, a member of the MIT Alumni Council) told me I should

contact him when I'd move back to Boston about possibly doing some advertising work for his company.

The MIT Alumni Association no longer has what they called the Alumni Council, which held a dinner meeting once a month open to all the people that participated in leadership roles and volunteer organizations that were involved with MIT's Alumni Association. Here I got to meet a lot of other alums from classes other than my own. It was a wonderful way to get acquainted with a vast number of people. You usually had about 100 or so people that came to these dinners—alums as well as MIT faculty and administrators. In fact, Breene Kerr, who was president of the Alumni Association at that point, used to come up from Oklahoma City most months for these \$3.25 dinners. [Breene Kerr was a Life Member Emeritus of the MIT Corporation; a former Chair of the MIT Investment Committee and the EAPS Visiting Committee.]

BUTTREY: A monthly meeting, that's frequent.

SCHUR: Yes, it kept you aware of what was happening at MIT and really—we didn't use the word "networking" at that time—it was a nice way to meet other alums and get to be friends with them.

I also was able to meet alums through the MIT Quarter Century Club, which at that point was responsible for lovely alumni travel programs. The Alumni Association only began running it later on. I and many other alums and MIT employees took trips with the Quarter Century Club's travel. They were very well-run and very inexpensive. Several of the people that I met on these trips became lifelong friends. And they were of diverse ages. Not radically different, but perhaps 10, 15 years older.

A lot of the activities, I don't think, are still in effect or they have been modified greatly. And that's too bad. They certainly allowed you to meet people of all ages, of all backgrounds, and all capabilities, which was a very nice aspect of having gone to MIT.

BUTTREY: That is one of my favorite parts of being an undergrad—meeting many different people.

SCHUR: Yes, I agree.

BUTTREY: Is that what motivated you to stay so involved with MIT after you graduated? You've been a part of many different MIT organizations.

SCHUR: That was certainly a reason. I knew that I was going to be working with people that I liked and doing things that were of interest to me.

However, I also have been and am involved with lots of other organizations. As an example, take the Massachusetts Historical Society. I'm now on their facilities committee. I had been on that committee many years ago, and now am back on it. I've been involved in the Boston Athenaeum as well as several other groups. I believe I am being somewhat repetitious in saying that there are a lot of other activities that I've gotten involved with, either because they are doing interesting work or they have programs that are thought-provoking or entertaining. You don't want to live in isolation.

BUTTREY: Yes. It sounds like you're very good at time management; you certainly seem to take good advantage of your time.

SCHUR: I guess. By participating in different organizations, I met people that I might not have come in contact with had I just stayed within an MIT environment. I mean, nothing wrong with that. But it's great to know people that are engaged in doing a variety of things.

BUTTREY: I agree.

SCHUR: Of course, you never know what the directions your actions may end up taking. One thing leads to another, and some of the most interesting friends have been people that I would never have come across if I didn't get involved in these other activities.

BUTTREY: Does anything specific come to mind?

SCHUR: It's hard to say, but one example might be people that I met through my work on my preservation magazine, not only those locally or those visiting in the Greater Boston area. Plus, I can go to a number of cities in the U.S. and out of this country, and I can call someone and basically say, "I'm here, shall we get together?"

And it's a fine way of sort of having a no obligation type of enjoyable socializing wherever you're at. I guess that sounds sort of weird.

BUTTREY: No, I understand what you mean.

SCHUR: Good. It's not something that you're going to say, like—"I'm going to join this in order that I meet so-and-so." Instead, and this is a good example—I joined this discussion group, and there are two people in the group that I've become very friendly with, and one of these individuals hosts a terrific

Christmas dinner every year which he invites me to, and we have a splendid time. (This is not to say that I don't still like the other people in the group.) I never thought that this—a festive, old-fashioned English Christmas dinner—was something that I was going to experience. I always celebrated the holiday, but not by having a many-course Christmas dinner with friends, complete with pop-out crackers and other traditional holiday goodies—a sort of English Christmas type of celebration. You know what I mean?

BUTTREY: An English Christmas?

SCHUR: Yes, you know, with these crackers that you pull on and something comes out, and you can hold in your hand the little gift that was inside.

BUTTREY: OK, I've seen those crackers before.

SCHUR: And there are certain other aspects to this event. Nothing religious, but aspects that have made Christmas day for me more memorable than before.

BUTTREY: Getting back to when you returned to Boston to found your own advertising and marketing communication firm, were you working with anyone?

SCHUR: No, I started it mainly by myself. If I needed a consultant, it was easier to get things done on a freelance basis. The Boston area was very good for this.

BUTTREY: Did you eventually hire a staff?

SCHUR: At least at the time when I started the company, there were a tremendous number of freelancers around, so that you could get someone to do something special but not have them on a payroll. So it was very easy to continue to operate in this manner. And these freelancers were willing to recommend others who could provide a service that they could not provide.

Similarly, I knew people here who owned companies and contracted me to do work for them, while companies that I had already done work for would often recommend me to other people. As I indicated earlier, one of the people that I knew before I went to New York said, "When I come back, you can have my business." Which sort of meant, "Call me."

So I called him. And he asked where I was living. I told him. He said, "Oh, well, you know, you should contact so-and-so in the building. He works for such-and-such firm." Which I did. And that man said, "Oh, I can't do anything now, but let me give your name to so-and-so." Which he did. And so-and-so called me and said, "Come on out to the company. I'll put you in touch with the person in charge of the advertising." Which I did.

That company ended up being a client. And that led to a very funny story. I finally met the guy that made the contact with the company, and it seems that I became known in the company as "Irving's good friend."

For a lot of these things, you never realize how they're going to pan out and what's going to happen. The meeting at that firm could have resulted in absolutely nothing. But it did, and one nice result was that I became very friendly with both the friend of the friend and the friend of the friend of the friend.

And over the years, the first person that had told me to call him ended up having some other advertising and promotional material that he wanted done, because he had started yet another company. So these things sort of multiply. And the Boston area was a very good area at that time for that to happen.

So, I built up that business. I had one client for 50 years, a family-owned company, a leader in its field. I worked with three generations of the family. I worked for the man who founded the company, then his son. And then the son's son took over. A couple of years later, he wanted to turn the advertising over to one of his colleagues, which was fine with me. I had had a good run. And I sort of expected it.

BUTTREY: Fifty years is impressive.

SCHUR: Thanks. And I did expect a change to happen. There are some things you can count on, but maybe not in the way that, for instance, the advertising business has changed—which is drastically in the last 10 years.

BUTTREY: How so?

SCHUR: Oh, just look at what was a good portion of the advertising that I did—recruitment advertising—over the last half of the 55 or so years. The Sunday Boston Globe's Help Wanted Section, for instance, used to run 40 to 100 pages of "Help Wanted" ads every week. Now if you look, you see only three pages or two.

BUTTREY: Why has the change been so significant?

SCHUR: A very different environment. Even the scene for regular product advertising (which has been another part of my advertising services) is quite different. A lot of both types of ads have gone into internet advertising, which is a completely different bag and, shall we say, is subject to a lot of manipulation. And it's something I really haven't wanted to get involved with.

BUTTREY: Have you had any favorite projects from what you've worked on?

SCHUR: Well, there was the Pan Am campaign which I did when I was in the agency in New York. It was something that I became responsible for because the person at the agency that was supposed to do it never did start on it. I used to report in to the head of the company, the agency, every day. As the deadline for the project was rapidly approaching he said to me during the morning check-in, "Oh, this weekend can you do one or two things for Pan Am? We're going down there next Tuesday." And I ended up doing a series of five ads that they were able to get mockups done on before the agency team left for Florida—presentable mockups, rather than my rough sketches and typed copy. And when the agency took these down to Cape Canaveral, Pan Am approved all of them without any changes.

BUTTREY: Seems like a big compliment.

SCHUR: Thanks, it was. And what was even better was that the series continued to run for about a year and a half after I left the agency. I guess it was very successful for them in their recruiting efforts and other operations procedures. So, I am very proud of that work.

I'm also quite pleased with the ad campaigns that I ran for my magazine.

BUTTREY: Would you mind talking more about those?

SCHUR: They were essentially aimed at getting companies to realize that they were actually selling to this market. A lot of companies didn't realize that they were reaching this market.

I guess I would say that I'm sort of proud of most of the work I have done, which does sound very egotistical.

BUTTREY: Oh, I hope I can say the same.

SCHUR: There were a lot of interesting products that I worked on promoting, which, in a way, can make it easier to be successful, particularly true if you have a really good and innovative product that is offering something that maybe hasn't been offered to the user before, and works. I have been fortunate and pleased to have been dealing with those types of products. And I think most of the people that I worked with have been pleased with the results.

BUTTREY: Is the firm still working with contractors, as opposed to employees?

SCHUR: Yes. When I do stuff now, it's mostly either things that I can handle on my own or, if not, I will call on someone that I've worked with before. And

especially during COVID, essentially the last two years, my work has focused more on getting a conference publication—*Architectural Plastics and Polymer Composites Conference Proceedings Plus*—organized, edited, and published. As I previously mentioned, not too many organizations are doing much advertising, at least in what was the normal media. You can look at any of the trade magazines, and they're almost all slivers of what they were two years ago.

BUTTREY: Do you expect that to come back soon? Or do you think this is a shift in the field?

SCHUR: I think there's a shift. What many of the magazines that I normally had dealt with seem to be doing is printing a very small version of what used to be their usual amount of content and pages, and doing either weekly or daily emails. Some of them essentially put five or six items in an email, and then perhaps every weekday they send the email out with the order of the items rearranged. That is, each day a different one of the five or six items will be the top item, so that you're really getting the same information five times but without the content provider having to produce five different emails that week, just really producing one and just moving the thing around.

So I think this is going to be the situation for quite a while, unless things change, such as the economy starts booming. Unfortunately, some of these things seem they're going in the opposite direction—gloom and doom. But I hope I'm wrong. It's hard to predict how things are going to go.

BUTTREY: Seems like the internet has disrupted a lot.

SCHUR: Yes. However, I think for a lot of people, the internet is much more convenient. And having the post office in such bad shape hasn't helped.

BUTTREY: Oh, the post office, yes.

I was hoping we could also talk about your own art. How long have you been painting?

SCHUR: Forever, or so it seems. Since I was a youngster, I've painted and drawn. I took private art lessons with Giuseppe Trotta. [Giuseppi Trotta, noted portrait painter, 1884-1957.] Every Saturday when I was in elementary school in Queens, I went to Giuseppe's studio in Flushing, Queens, where I received instruction and criticism of my work, as well as met an interesting group of people. He also had a portrait class that I posed for. It was fascinating to see how 10 people look at you and produce very different images of you. The

only portrait that I ever liked that was produced by a member of that class was done by the guy who was the artist who had painted the Coca-Cola girls and was one of the savviest students in the class. He did a wonderful charcoal sketch of me.

Then in high school, Forest Hills offered a variety of art courses. I took probably three or four art courses. I also continued up until the end of high school taking the private lessons. And when I was at MIT, I drew and painted in my dorm room. Other than the graphic arts course I talked about earlier, there were no real art courses given at Tech at that time.

Once I got done with school, I did all types of artwork for enjoyment—for enjoyment, for fun and profit. I knew that I was not going to make a living at this unless I really gave up everything else and spent all my time doing it, and then I probably would not be able to live that well. So I continued painting and enjoying it and arranging shows. People liked what I did.

BUTTREY: What's your painting style like?

SCHUR: Oil on paper board, semi-abstract. People can see different things in my works. And the paintings, in a sense, become interactive. Depending on how you look at the painting—when you look at it, in what light you view it, what memories you hold in your mind, and other variables—you can see different images emerge.

There used to be at the faculty club—the old faculty club at MIT—a gallery that was run by an art critic who liked my work and he arranged shows for me there and also promoted the works during his radio shows on art. And I had several shows at the faculty club and elsewhere. Someone I knew that was at Harvard then arranged for me to have an exhibit at the Countway Library at Harvard Medical School, while an alum who I met on the Quarter Century Club tour to the Orient arranged for a solo exhibition for me at the Nashua Arts and Science Center. (If we have time, more about other of my one-person shows later.)

BUTTREY: How do you make time for painting given all the other work you do?

SCHUR: I don't sleep.

[LAUGHTER]

BUTTREY: How MIT of you!

SCHUR: There are times when I'll have an especially strong urge to paint, and know that there's not anything critical coming up in the next, say, week or so. And I'll spend, essentially, day and night working on a painting. And then if a work is not finished, I'll put it aside and come back to it later.

I do take time out to paint, and I do get revved up to do that, but not on a set schedule. So it's not like at 9 o'clock in the morning, every day, I say to myself, "I'm going to paint for 'x' number of hours." No, I'm fortunate that in my house I can keep one room set up as a studio, and it's a room that has north light. Therefore, whenever I want to, I can paint. I can really be concentrated for a short period of time and then do other things, and then sometime later come back and do more work on my paintings.

And sometimes I'll put uncompleted stuff away for a fairly long period. Especially on a larger painting, I might put it away, putting it out of sight for a while and come back, and then work on it some more, off and on, or maybe change some images completely in the interim. So it's hard to predict when and for how long I'm going to work on a painting.

BUTTREY: It's convenient that you have a home studio.

SCHUR: Yes. It was quite an endeavor. I spent 35 years looking for a house. Granted, it took me a while to find a house that met all of my requirements, but it is one that was ideal for me.

BUTTREY: Still speaking of art, could you talk about your work on the Centennial of Women Graduates Exhibit?

SCHUR: OK. Let's see. It was something that came into being when we were having an AMITA board meeting and it was mentioned that the hundredth anniversary of MIT's first woman graduate, Ellen Swallow Richards, was going to be in another couple of years. [Ellen Swallow Richards (her name when she was a student was Ellen Richards, and she was known professionally usually as Ellen H. Richards); S.B. Chemistry, 1873; MIT's first female graduate and first female professor; her work spanned numerous fields including chemistry, marine biology, nutrition, home economics, and ecology.]

The more the group of us discussed this, the more we concluded that probably a lot of people don't realize that MIT had women students for ages and ages, almost from the time the Institute started. [AMITA: the Association of MIT Alumnae, the organization that funds this oral history project; Ms. Schur served as its president for two terms, the maximum number of

consecutive terms for president that was permitted (1972-1976), and held other offices prior to that (1963-1969).]

So I said, “Well, let's do something to celebrate.” And I came up with the idea that it'd be nice to have a major convocation, and announce to the world what has been happening at Tech for over a hundred years. Plus, that generated my idea of maybe having something not only of past alumnae but also of current people. I thought that one way of doing that would be to have an exhibition of the work that the living alumnae were currently doing.

At that time, we had fairly decent records of who was an alumna. And this information eventually allowed me to generate the concept of what we might be able to do—a major convocation, a three part exhibition, and an alumnae directory. Of course, this led to the matter of how do you put on the proposed program.

Obviously, we wanted to get MIT's approval to do something like this. Therefore, I went and saw several of the MIT biggies—Jim Killian, Jerry Wiesner, and Howard Johnson, who would still be at MIT after his presidency term was over. [James Rhyne Killian Jr., MIT president 1948-1959; Jerome Wiesner, MIT president 1971-1980; Howard Johnson MIT president 1966-1971.] And they all said, “Great idea.” They didn't exactly come out and say, “I love it.” But they remarked, “We'll do anything we can to support you. You can use the MIT facilities, and we'll be able to arrange that.” There would be no problem there. “And did you have a date in mind for the convocation?” Summarizing, they said, “Sounds great, and you have our backing, but we can't provide any money.” I hadn't really expected them to say something like, “Here's 'x' thousands of dollars and go ahead—go for it.”

Anyway. That reaction seemed to indicate to me that there wasn't a problem with the MIT administration. Therefore, I said, “That's fine.” And with that, I formed a committee for the centennial event which I chaired and we started making plans—for workshops, for talks, for panel sessions, discussing what sort of things we wanted to cover. And I also thought we'd look ahead rather than look back for the convocation. For several of the workshops, it was fairly easy to figure out who would be good speakers.

For the featured speakers: One of my friends, Alice Donohue, a civilian employee with the Navy for years who was in charge of executive personnel for the Navy, hiring and managing them, thought that Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, who was the CNO (Chief of Naval Operations) at that time, might be a good person.

And my convocation committee thought, "Wouldn't it be nice to get a woman who's in charge of a major facility, a major operation?" And the name of Katharine Graham came up. So I saw Jerry Wiesner, and I said to him, "I have two suggestions for our speakers that maybe you could help us with. One is Admiral Zumwalt and the other is Katharine Graham.

And he said, "No problem. I'll give them a call," and he did, and they accepted. Which was great. Katharine Graham became our keynote speaker at the Saturday night dinner that we held in connection with the convocation, and it was a very fortunate selection. At that time, she was the publisher of *The Post*, and they had just broken the Watergate story.

BUTTREY: The *Washington Post*?

SCHUR: Yes. She took over when her husband died and ran a very successful operation.

Zumwalt was also very good. He gave a fantastic opening speech, talked about the world political situation, and brought out facts about the energy crisis that was then occurring. His talk and the convocation made the front page of the *Boston Globe*. At that point in time, reportedly, MIT in recent years had not made the newspaper's front page for a story that wasn't about a technological breakthrough.

The event was very successful not only in terms of media interest and coverage, but also in attendance and alumnae interest. I had contacted every living alumna, telling her about the convocation and exhibition that were forthcoming and asking each if she had anything from her professional activities for the hallway exhibits—any publications, patents, or other material.

BUTTREY: Do you recall how many living alums there were at the time?

SCHUR: It was several hundred.

BUTTREY: That's a lot of people to contact.

SCHUR: Of course. I would say 80% wrote back and either sent something in, or said, "Sorry, I haven't done anything recently." The work in the arts and architecture (including urban studies) were to be shown in McCormick Hall, in the very spacious first floor room. And we got some incredible things for this portion of the exhibition.

We had representative objects from one alumna—Adelaide Toombs Sundin, class of '47—who is known for her ceramic bas-relief porcelain portraits. There were all sorts of paintings, including a few of my works. Some alumnae showed their weavings. And a lot of project drawings and building models came from the alumnae who were architects or city planners. A couple of the world-famous women who were architects submitted photographs of what they had designed. There also were works from alumnae who had made names for themselves in other artistic fields. So it was really great, definitely an exciting show.

The conference drew men and women attendees from all over. Everyone felt that it was very, very well done. In addition to Zumwalt and Graham, we had the Assistant Secretary General from the UN, who spoke on women's affairs throughout the world—really fantastic people. People really loved the program since it also included workshops that dealt with problems that might be encountered if you were a woman—problems such as that of working with a husband who might be in the same field and what salary challenges there might be. It covered an immense range of things. There were 14 workshops in all, along with regular talks, already mentioned, and a couple of panel discussions and other speeches. Everyone who came for convocation seemed to have a good time.

BUTTREY: It sounds like a very comprehensive conference.

SCHUR: Yes. And, naturally, I'm prejudiced, the exhibits too, were great. They were in the main building all along the hall, all the way down to the Hayden Library. Now, the principal part of this sectional hallway is called the Infinite Corridor; it used to be known as the Main Corridor. That was where the works by living alumnae were displayed on 4-by-8 poster boards. There were never any displays along the hall before. The only things that were up in the hallways at that point in time were small posters attached on the bulletin boards that were fronting the stairwells. So this really enlivened up that whole hallway and also gave people a reason to stop and look at and read something interesting.

BUTTREY: That hallway is now known for having posters.

SCHUR: That's nice. Our panels were classified by what field was represented by the material on that board, such as biology or medicine. Each of these huge panels was devoted to one field of endeavor to show that the women who had gone to MIT were achieving in every conceivable discipline.

The ones that were found by the Hayden Library, in that area, were more historical. These panels were devoted to individual early women students, as well as to the history of the Women's Lab and to some of the early women student organizations such as Cleofan. [The Women's Lab was established and run by Ellen Swallow Richards from the time it was opened in 1876 until it closed in 1883; chemical analysis, industrial chemistry, mineralogy, and biology were taught to women interested in science.] [Cleofan was established in 1890 under the name Eta Sigma Mu, and its name was changed to Cleofan in 1897; it was the first club for women students at MIT, a social club with regular Friday teas for its members and receptions for the Institute more broadly.]

In this way, the three-part exhibition presented a whole range of 100 years of history, a history of women who attended MIT both past and present. So that was quite nice.

BUTTREY: That sounds amazing.

SCHUR: Yes, I like to think it was. And what made it even better in my mind was that the exhibition stayed up for about a year, allowing many more people to see it.

BUTTREY: Wow, I wish I could have seen it.

SCHUR: I have some very bad pictures of it.

BUTTREY: I would be interested in seeing them.

Have you worked on organizing other exhibitions as well?

SCHUR: Yes, an undertaking that I am quite proud of was a two-part exhibition—*New Lives in a New Land: Immigration in Somerville & the Greater Boston Area—The Greek Community*, and *Hope, Valor, and Inspiration: 1896-1918: The World of George Dilboy—Greek Immigrant and American Hero*—that I organized, curated, and produced in 2005-2007. This exhibition resulted in a better understanding of the role of immigration in the United States by the many people who attended the show. It furthermore helped both in reawakening, in Greek and other communities throughout the world, memories of a Greek-American hero of WWI, and in fostering an awareness in the general public of the horrific Greek genocide of the early 1900s.

BUTTREY: To what extent, if any, do you think your experiences with MIT have influenced your work and life to this point?

SCHUR: It provided me with the education and background in a lot of fields. It provided me with friends and contacts. And it provided me with an interesting life.

It might not be the experience of everyone who goes to MIT. But it certainly is something that is available if you want to take advantage of it.

BUTTREY: It's great to hear that you had such a positive experience. And it seems like you have taken advantage of many opportunities at MIT and beyond.

SCHUR: I'm aware that a lot of people—well, maybe not a lot of people, but a fair number of people—had very bad experiences, either academically, or socially, or just generally. You can be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and things might not work out. But, as I said earlier, I really am lucky that I have been able to go through life relatively happy.

BUTTREY: Is there anything else you'd like to add to about your early life, your time at MIT, your personal life, or your career?

SCHUR: I think I've been very fortunate with what I've done and how I have lived. I believe I've been successful, and I did finally manage to find a home to buy and live in after 35 years of looking. There I was very fortunate, too. I managed to get a wonderful architect-designed house from 1895.

BUTTREY: What is your house like?

SCHUR: Oh, it's sort of a modified Queen Anne. I'm digging up information on the architect—George Loring—who designed this house for himself and his family. Two of his sons became noted architects as well as himself, and these two sons went to MIT.

BUTTREY: It's a lucky house.

SCHUR: It's a wonderful house that basically only was owned and lived in by his family and, after that, by a doctor's family. (There then was a young couple with babies, but they only lived in it for just about a year.) So it was in really pristine condition, and is very well-designed.

BUTTREY: Were you specifically looking for a preserved historical house?

SCHUR: No, but it certainly was, and remains, an attractive, well-built, and structurally sound property. It's on the National Register of Historic Places.

BUTTREY: Wow.

SCHUR: What makes it even more interesting is that the architect who designed the home actually had an in-home office here as well as having his firm's office downtown. The doctor, who bought the house after Loring died and his wife sold the house, also used the house similarly—he had his medical office here as well as his home. So in current days, it's my home and my office too. It's for both uses.

BUTTREY: That sounds like an amazing place to live.

SCHUR: Right. Other than the fact that it is across from Somerville High School, which is now undergoing years' worth of new construction and renovation, and therefore there is a minor change in the environment, but it's still wonderful.

BUTTREY: Hopefully that work will be completed soon.

SCHUR: It hasn't really been disruptive, fortunately. Let's see if I have anything else— Oh, my goodness, look at the time.

BUTTREY: Yes, I do want to be conscious of your time, but if there is anything else you'd like to talk about, I'd love to hear about it.

SCHUR: Oh—before we finish chatting, how about I make a few more comments about the other major business that I founded in the early 1970s and continue to operate—The Technology Organization, Inc., a company that focuses on the art and architectural conservation field.

BUTTREY: That would be fine.

SCHUR: That company began with my developing and publishing an international journal, *Technology & Conservation of Art, Architecture, & Antiquities*, which was essentially a ground-breaking magazine. Its initial primary circulation was around 15,000. I got the U.S. President's Award for *T&C*.

BUTTREY: Could you tell me about that?

SCHUR: OK. The award was something that was set up by the White House to be for the field of historic preservation, similar to what they had as the annual award for the arts. It was publicized as the highest award in historic preservation. I was one of the 10 original recipients of that.

BUTTREY: And this was for the journal *Technology and Conservation of Art, Architecture, and Antiquities*, right?

SCHUR: Yes, and particularly for the work that I did on it.

BUTTREY: Did you go to the White House for the ceremony?

SCHUR: The ceremony was in the Executive Office Building (across the street from the White House), and Ronald Reagan came down and chatted with us. And then there was a fire alarm, which was very exciting. So it was a memorable occasion.

BUTTREY: For many reasons!

SCHUR: And let's see. The National Trust for Historic Preservation gave me their Honor Award, as did the American Association for State and Local History. I have also gotten several other preservation and architecture awards. And the American Institute of Architects elected me as an honorary member, which is sometimes given to one or two people a year. In addition, as a result of my preservation business and related activities, I was elected to be a Fellow by the Royal Society of the Arts and by the Massachusetts Historical Society.

BUTTREY: It's all very impressive—

SCHUR: And these honors are appreciated. In addition, I have received awards for commercial ads and artwork that I've done which are not as prestigious as those for the historic preservation, but still nice to get.

BUTTREY: It's striking that you're able to excel in both fields. Do you see them as being separate things?

SCHUR: I think everything's really related, and, probably, much is dependent on what your attitude is and what amount of effort you want to put into the work.

Now that I've done all the ego stuff—

BUTTREY: I'm glad we got that in. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

SCHUR: OK, let's see. Perhaps a few other MIT-related things. I was one of the founders of the MIT Enterprise Forum, and have been quite involved in my MIT Class of 1960 activities, including being a Reunion Chair. And there has been my participation in other MIT committees. But I think the ones I already mentioned were the important ones. Oh, there is the fact that I was the first woman elected to the MIT Alumni Association Board. That was when the Alumni Association had "direct" elections. They would propose three or four people for an office like vice president, and then everyone would get a ballot. It didn't go through a selection committee. You voted directly for the

person. I believe that the association thought I was the youngest one that got on the board.

BUTTREY: Wow. What did you do while on the board?

SCHUR: We oversaw a lot of the things that the Alumni Association was doing— financial stuff and some of the activity stuff. This might have changed over the years. But that was when Luis Ferré was the Association's president— anyway, a long time ago. [Luis Alberto Ferré Aguayo, MIT SB 1924, SM 1925, Mechanical Engineering; governor of Puerto Rico 1969-1973, and a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom.] But it was a useful activity, and I got to work with the nice group of guys who were on the board.

BUTTREY: So it was one of many ways that you continued to contribute to and be associated with MIT.

SCHUR: Yes. And I probably should mention just one more thing—my association with the MIT Museum. This began when I worked on some aspects of organizing the historical aspects of the centennial exhibition with the MIT Museum's Director, Warren Seamans. [Seamans founded the MIT Historical Collections in 1971, which later became the MIT Museum.] A more formalized association occurred when their Advisory Board was established a few years after the founding of the Museum, and I was one of the initial members.

It's nice to see that the museum is going to have a nice new facility, opening in 2022 in Kendall Square. But it was quite different, the setup, when the Historical Collections/MIT Museum was established and was located a few blocks away from Tech's main building, down on Mass Avenue where it is now. [265 Massachusetts Avenue, Building N51, in Cambridge.] It was the site of a former electronics manufacturer. And the place was, I would say, to put it mildly, dusty and disheveled. The museum has changed over the years drastically, for the good.

It was fun working on the Museum's advisory board, making suggestions on things that they could do as well as a bunch of other stuff.

BUTTREY: Did you get to choose some of what was exhibited?

SCHUR: No. Warren did the planning with members of his staff. We just oversaw how certain things operated and what the workloads were for various operations, such as hosting and having food service for things. So it was really getting the

operations into gear and functioning well. The Museum's board, at least at that time, was more about oversight and fundraising activities.

BUTTREY: Have I read that your works, your paintings, were also shown in the MIT Museum?

SCHUR: Yes, they were shown there. And they were shown—as one-person exhibitions—at various Harvard facilities, including the Gutman Gallery at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, in addition to being shown at Merrimack College's McQuade Gallery and at the Nashua Arts and Science Center. They were also exhibited down in New York at the facility that MIT had at the Chemists' Club, a private club in Manhattan. And I have had solo shows in the New England area, including the Scollay Square Gallery in Boston City Hall and the Kennecott Copper Gallery. In addition, I have participated in group shows at the Boston Athenaeum and elsewhere.

BUTTREY: That's very impressive.

SCHUR: Well, it has been gratifying. I should mention that I've also shown my paintings in several libraries. Actually, one of the most interesting ones where I sold an awful lot was at the Somerville Public Library. I've had a few shows there. It's very convenient. And their auditorium gallery is nice. Usually, I can get about 60 or 70 paintings hung there.

BUTTREY: How many paintings do you make a year?

SCHUR: It depends.

BUTTREY: How about during 2020?

SCHUR: Oh, 2020, very few. I was busy doing other things. But anywhere from probably five or six larger-size paintings. And then many, many smaller ones. Which is not very definitive, but if I'm working on a 40-by-60 painting, I may work on it over several months, or I may do it very quickly and then do several small ones—so it's hard to really pinpoint how many I do a year. It varies so much.

BUTTREY: If there's not anything else, I just want to thank you again for taking so much time with this project.

SCHUR: Well, thank you for listening to me.

BUTTREY: It's been my pleasure.

SCHUR: And I enjoyed talking with you. Thank you for the opportunity. And hopefully we might be able to one day meet.