Interviews of the Margaret MacVicar Memorial AMITA Oral History Project, MC 356
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Christina Huk Jansen – class of 1963

Interviewed by Kira Buttrey, class of 2023

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MIT Libraries

Margaret MacVicar Memorial AMITA Oral History Project

Christina Huk Jansen (SB, SM and PhD Materials Science and Engineering 1963, 1966 and 1971, respectively) was interviewed on May 31, 2021 by undergraduate Kira Buttrey (SB Biological Engineering 2023) via a videoconferencing app. Dr. Jansen was at her summer home in New Hampshire and Ms. Buttrey was in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Dr. Jansen grew up in Freemansburg, Pennsylvania, in a hotel owned by her father. Her time spent working in the hotel's bar exposed her to local steelworkers, which motivated her interest in metallurgy and engineering. Both Dr. Jansen and her parents were thrilled for her to pursue these interests at MIT.

As noted above, Dr. Jansen completed an SB, SM and PhD at MIT, all in Materials Science and Engineering. Her graduate work included the remarkable finding that air pollution affects the creation of aluminum alloys. Upon graduating, Dr. Jansen was elected to the MIT Corporation's board of directors, where she worked to allow more women admittance to the Institute.

After a few years of industry experience working at Millipore and Digital Equipment Corporation, Dr. Jansen returned to MIT to work in the Institute's Technology Licensing Office (TLO) with a friend from her undergraduate years, Lita Nelsen. (Ms. Nelsen went on to serve as the TLO's director for most of her 30-year career there.) The two friends, having each experienced first-hand some of the challenges of being women in the working world during the 1960s and early 1970s—before anti-discriminatory protections became law—previously co-taught a course during IAP (MIT's Independent Activities Period, held each January) to help undergraduate women prepare for such realities. "The Guerilla Guide to the Pinstriped World" ran as a big success for several years.

Dr. Jansen played a noteworthy role in the field of technology licensing during an important period, one that coincided with the onset of both the computing and biotech revolutions. In addition to working for MIT's TLO, she directed the technology transfer office at the University of Utah and founded her own technology consulting firm, Chris Jansen Associates. She has used this work as an opportunity to actively mentor other women. Today, Dr. Jansen splits her time between homes in North Carolina and New Hampshire. She was recently able to see her granddaughter, Kristine (Kasey) Drake, just two days after Kasey completed hiking the Appalachian Trail.

BUTTREY: I want to thank you again for the opportunity to interview you, especially having spoken a few times this past year. There's a lot I want to ask you.

I was hoping we could start with your childhood. Could you talk about where you grew up and what that was like?

JANSEN: Sure. I was born in Freemansburg, Pennsylvania. It's a town of 1,000 people. Neither of my parents finished high school. They had to go to work; they could not afford to go to school. Both of them were very intelligent, they just didn't get the chance. My mother started high school and had to drop out to go to work in the silk mill. And she was sewing women's slips and underwear and things like that.

My father's father had a speakeasy called The Majestic, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. It was written up by one of the great writers, whose name I can't remember right now. It was in a story in one of his books. So, my father, instead of going to high school, spent his time making bootleg whiskey. That's what he did. His father had him making the whiskey that was sold in The Majestic.

Eventually, my father did get to go to what was called business college. Basically, it was a typing school. He learned to type, and because he knew how to type, he got a job at the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, in an office job. It was during the war [WWII], but his office job in the steel mill was such that he didn't get drafted because they felt that he was doing necessary work. The steel company, of course, was producing all this metal for the war.

My grandfather, who, in addition to selling his bootleg whiskey had The Majestic, was very successful with his business, so my father, after the war, bought a hotel in Freemansburg that I ended up growing up in.

BUTTREY: What was that like?

JANSEN: Well, the ground floor was a barroom, with the juke box and sawdust on the floors, some pinball machines and a card-playing area. My brother and I on Sundays got to help restock the bar.

We'd go into the concrete basement where all the liquor and things were stored. We'd have to see what had to be refilled in the barroom and carry things in and out.

The bar would open at 7:00 a.m. because that's when the steelworkers' first shifts ended. Steelworkers would show up in the bar at 7:00 a.m., and then the next shift would come out of the steel mill at 3:00 p.m. And then there was an 11:00 p.m. shift. So the bar had steelworkers coming after each shift. It was a busy place.

BUTTREY: Did you hang out there a lot?

JANSEN: Well, I was cooking in the kitchen. I was making the pizzas and the Philly steak sandwiches and steaming the clams and cleaning the clams and preparing the food and carrying it up and down. Up and down the stairs to serve it to the people.

BUTTREY: How often did you work there?

JANSEN: Every night.

BUTTREY: After school?

JANSEN: After school, I'd work in the kitchen preparing food. And then business would get busy downstairs around 8:00 at night. So then I'd be preparing food and carrying it down to the bar.

BUTTREY: Oh, wow.

JANSEN: Yes—so I was a cook and a waitress. My Aunt Lucy, my mother's sister, was working in the kitchen with me, and my mother was working behind the bar serving drinks. My father was a very congenial person. He had a very outgoing personality.

It was the kind of bar that the townspeople came to. People knew each other. It was very cordial. And of course, there were the steelworkers, too—so that's how I got interested in metallurgy.

BUTTREY: I've been trying to make the connection—trying to figure out how this might have affected your later life. That's really interesting.

JANSEN: Yes. In the bar, the steelworkers would complain about the engineers who were their bosses, so I thought, "That's what I'd like to be. I'd like to be the boss."

There was a research center at the steelworks in Bethlehem. And my Aunt Lucy's son, my mother's sister, who was there with me every day, got a job in the research center in the steelworks. I would get to go visit him and see what research projects he was working on. It gets very clear, how I became a metallurgist.

BUTTREY: Did you find your cousin's projects interesting when you went to see them?

JANSEN: Yes, and he was very happy to see me, explain things to me, and show me things. Then, Lehigh University was located on the same hill where the steelworks had its research lab.

One of the men in town had a connection with Lehigh University, so he tried to get Lehigh University to admit me as their first woman student. Because, after all, I was interested in steel and everything is there, and why not? Lehigh University went to their board of directors and they considered whether they were going to do this. But they decided they were not going to admit any women.

BUTTREY: Outside of Lehigh, what was the attitude toward young women who did well in math and science in your community?

JANSEN: You were a freak, a geek. I think the town referred to me as screwball.

BUTTREY: Really?

JANSEN: Some people. Because I was different.

BUTTREY: I see.

JANSEN: I had different ideas. There was a faction that thought that I just wasn't playing the woman's role well enough or whatever. I was noticeably different from most of the other kids in town.

BUTTREY: Why did you consider applying to MIT?

JANSEN: Because it was said to be the best school.

BUTTREY: I love that. Would you have gone to Lehigh if they had—

JANSEN: I would probably have felt obliged to because it was near home. It was much more affordable. It was a real strain on my parents to pay for my MIT tuition.

I'm really glad I didn't have to do that [go to Lehigh] because I think MIT was a much better experience than I would have gotten there.

BUTTREY: Were your parents supportive of you attending MIT?

JANSEN: Absolutely. Again, my parents did not have a chance to get an education. I once asked my father when he decided I was going to go to college, and his answer was, “Before you were born.”

BUTTREY: That's very nice.

JANSEN: Yes. He started saving for me to go to college before I was born.

BUTTREY: You must have made them very proud.

JANSEN: Oh, yes. Yes. They were. Yes, I mean obviously, I got elected to the board of directors [of the MIT Corporation] and all that stuff. Also, they got to come to campus—my parents were just really thrilled.

They got to celebrate, too. They were as good as parents could possibly be. They were both entirely self-educated. They were incredibly hardworking. They were ethical. They were just fine human beings. I feel very fortunate to have had such good parents.

BUTTREY: That's really nice.

JANSEN: Yes.

BUTTREY: What was your freshman year at MIT like?

JANSEN: Well, they admitted 12 women. The quota for women at that time was 12. [Some years, however, a few additional women students were admitted after they found other living arrangements.]

BUTTREY: Do you know, roughly, how many men were admitted?

JANSEN: 750… or more.

BUTTREY: That’s quite a ratio. So different than today.

JANSEN: Right.

There was a dorm that was donated by a woman who lived on Baystate Road [in Boston], and it was lined with fraternity houses with MIT students. She

bought the house that was adjacent to hers and donated it to MIT so we 12 women could have a dorm.

BUTTREY: Did all 12 of you live there?

JANSEN: Well, MIT admitted 18 women, expecting 12 to accept, but all 18 accepted. I was one of the lucky 12 who got to live in the dorm. The 'overflow women' had to live in dormitories at nearby colleges with women students.

BUTTREY: What was the social life like? Did you have a community within the dorm?

JANSEN: The 12 of us who got to live there, it was sudden heaven. We were with 'like' women. A bunch of us had all made dodecahedrons. I'd made mine out of toothpicks. Someone else brought one made of matchsticks. And someone else made it of other things.

We were all techies, and for the first time in our lives, we were in with our peers. We had a wonderful time getting to know each other. Since we there was an overflow, I got to live in the basement with my roommate. They made a room. They created an extra room.

We had lead pipes on the ceiling, and a concrete portal that looked out onto the grass. But I was in heaven being there, anyway. For all of us in the dorm, we were just suddenly, for the first time, in with a group of women who were our peers. We just had a wonderful time with each other. We got along very well. We helped each other out. When people had needs, coaching, or some extra help with learning this or that, everybody pitched in for everybody else.

We had to take turns serving dinner and making breakfast and things like that.

BUTTREY: What was housing like after freshman year?

JANSEN: Suddenly, they had this incoming class [of women students]. We were going to need a place to live the next year, and there was a married student's housing facility right across the street from the entrance to MIT's main entrance. They decided to take part of that married student housing facility and make it the upper-class women's dorm. I think there were 12 of us. We had doubles or triples. And it was really conveniently located. And again, we got to live together. It was absolute heaven.

BUTTREY: Did you ever feel excluded for being a woman in study groups or by professors? Or was there little difference between how you and your male classmates were treated?

JANSEN: Yes. Some professors went out of their way. One professor invited me and wanted to talk to me. He wanted to know why I didn't go to Vassar. He basically was saying, “You don't belong here.”

BUTTREY: Right.

JANSEN: I said, “They don't teach engineering at Vassar.” So there were faculty— Well, there were so few women. They really did admit 12. The faculty set the number of women to be admitted. So, it was by vote of the faculty meeting that 12 women got admitted. The faculty were not at all supportive. It's just that some faculty members had wives who wanted to go to MIT.

BUTTREY: I definitely want to come back to this later, when we get to your being on MIT’s board and changing the quota for women. It is a very good story that I've heard a bit of, but I'm looking forward to hearing the whole thing.

Just to stick with your undergrad experience at MIT for now, though, was there anything you found surprising?

JANSEN: What MIT did, since there were 12 women, was that it put two women in each class that they put women in, so that we wouldn't be alone.

BUTTREY: So if you wanted to take a class that no other women wanted to take, what happened?

JANSEN: I got to be alone.

BUTTREY: OK. That's strange, because it was kind of a recognition by the Institute that women might feel more supported if they're not the only one there, but it still kept the 12-women quota.

JANSEN: Well, yes, the faculty as a whole was enforcing the 12-women quota, but individual faculty members were more humane.

BUTTREY: If I'm not mistaken, you were the third woman to graduate from MIT's Materials Science and Engineering Department. Did you know, going in, that

you for sure wanted to do metallurgy, after your experience growing up in Pennsylvania? Or did you think about other majors as well?

JANSEN: No, I didn't think about other subjects. I thought about metallurgy because every male I knew worked in the steelworks. Because I was interested, I would talk to them about what they did. Again, I literally would ask all of them who were in the bar drinking what they did in the steelworks. I got to have a pretty good idea of what a real metallurgy job would be like. The kinds of things you did if you were making steel.

BUTTREY: Were any of your classes particularly memorable?

JANSEN: There were classes with really good teachers and classes with mediocre teachers, so. There were several of large section teachers who are really, really good. We went through the whole lecture hall and then there'd be these two or three women sitting in the front row.

Some faculty members really went out of their way to be helpful to some of us women. They offered us extra help, tried to make us comfortable in the classroom. And then there were the others who really were jerks.

BUTTREY: Do you have an example of what a professor might have done to make you feel more comfortable in the classroom?

JANSEN: If we raised our hands to ask a question, they went out of their way to give us the chance to get an answer. Once I was having some trouble in one class and the professor called me in and offered to personally tutor me. Most of the women felt well treated by the faculty. There were so few of us.

BUTTREY: How about your treatment by male students?

JANSEN: There were the fraternity guys, who treated us as a joke. If you look back in the old humor magazines, jokes about women students were standard fare. So, it was the fraternities that went out of their way to make us uncomfortable. Not all of them, of course. But some really tried to treat us as if we were a joke that didn't belong there.

BUTTREY: Did that ever get to you?

JANSEN: No. The women in the dorm were so supportive of each other that it just made up for everything else that was going on.

BUTTREY: That is so nice.

JANSEN: Yes, it was. It was an extraordinary experience, to be with women, with that group of women. I'm still really good friends with a bunch of them now.

BUTTREY: What did you want to do after graduating? Did you plan to go straight into industry? How did you end up back at MIT to earn a master's in metallurgy?

JANSEN: After I graduated, I did go right into a metallurgy job, and I quickly saw that I was really getting the dregs of the work. So, I figured that to get better work assignments, I probably had to get more education. I was a woman, and I had all this extra baggage— There were people who took women students seriously, and there were employers who took women seriously. But there were also people who thought women shouldn't be working in those jobs.

BUTTREY: I understand that you also went on to earn a PhD in Materials Science from MIT.

JANSEN: Yes.

BUTTREY: What motivated your work toward that degree?

JANSEN: As I mentioned, I did go to work after the bachelor's degree and had a hard time getting myself taken seriously. There was one female professional who really made all the difference in the world for me, in terms of providing support in the job. I just figured that, if I'm going to get taken seriously, I guess I have to get another degree.

BUTTREY: Why did you choose to return to MIT for your graduate work?

JANSEN: I really liked it.

BUTTREY: That's a good reason!

JANSEN: Yes, I liked the women students. I liked the classes. It was everything I had hoped for in a college.

BUTTREY: Could you talk a bit about the work you did for your Ph.D. thesis?

JANSEN: Yes. I was working on trying to come up with an improved aluminum alloy that would make a better combination so that it would be stronger, all those other things. And I kept getting strange results and strange results and strange results.

It turned out, after many, many months of just nothing ever coming out the way it was supposed to, that the metal that I was working with actually was changing in the lab. It turned out that air pollution in Boston was interacting with my metal alloys and giving me all these strange results.

BUTTREY: Oh, wow.

JANSEN: People didn't believe that aluminum would interact with air.

BUTTREY: That seems like a huge finding.

JANSEN: It was.

BUTTREY: Did that become your thesis? How air pollution affects the formation of aluminum alloys?

JANSEN: Yes.

BUTTREY: Wow.

JANSEN: Yes. Aluminum was not known to do this, but it did. And then it turned out other metals did, too. So there was this whole behavior that— People weren't aware of the effects of air pollution back then at all. It was causing things that nobody understood.

BUTTREY: How did you figure out that it was the air pollution?

JANSEN: How did I figure out? One day, it was just exceedingly bad, and it was happening, it was changing in front of my eyes. I don't know. I think I looked out the window and saw that it looked like a really bad day out there, so I analyzed what it was changing to. And then the only source could have been the outside air. Then I got some data on the outside air and how bad the air pollution was. It was before people were becoming aware of air pollution. This was one of the first papers about how air pollution is interacting with people's daily lives.

BUTTREY: It's incredibly impressive that you were able to make that connection.

JANSEN: Thank you. I couldn't figure it out at first. I had this little container in a lab where this metal was actually changing while I was working with it. It was getting these dark spots on it, and I had no idea where these dark spots were

coming from. It was the air pollution. So one of my first papers was about air pollution.

BUTTREY: That sounds like an amazing first paper.

JANSEN: Yes.

BUTTREY: Did you witness any changes in MIT's culture over your years as a student there?

JANSEN: Well, yes, I was there long enough!

BUTTREY: Right!

JANSEN: Well, the number of women started changing enough that they had to put in more ladies' rooms. Over the years I was there, women began to take a more active role because there were more of us in classes and in activities. It was an interesting time to be there because that was a big part of the change. But I think it's around 50-50 men to women, now. Before that, it was 12 women.

BUTTREY: Talking about bringing about that change, you mentioned to me that you were elected to MIT's board of directors in 1971, which is the same year you earned your Ph.D.—and around the time that the women's movement in the U.S. started to gain steam. During your first year serving, you proposed that the board of directors pass a resolution to eliminate the quota on women's admissions.

JANSEN: Yes.

BUTTREY: Can we talk about the history of that quota and how you helped bring about that change?

JANSEN: The history of the quota on women was that the all-male faculty at the time simply, every year, decided how many women they would admit. And for a long time that number was 12.

BUTTREY: Do you happen to know where that number came from? That seems not only backward, but just a very arbitrary number.

JANSEN: I don't know where it came from. At first, it was the wives of some faculty members who were the women students. And then the male faculty gave

themselves the authority to decide how many women would be admitted. I have no idea how they picked 12.

BUTTREY: Did you receive any pushback for lobbying to change the policy?

JANSEN: Yes, I did. There were two faculty members who chose to ask me to meet with them, for me to explain to them why I was doing this. And for them to express why this really wasn't a desirable change.

BUTTREY: And what did you say?

JANSEN: That, basically, women students were entitled to have the education they wanted and needed, as well as men. Basically, before my time, it was virtually an all-male school—and some people wanted it to stay that way.

There were a small number of faculty who actively supported women students. One registration day—I forget what year I was in—I went to register to be a student and the faculty member involved told me that he would not allow me to register because I was taking the place of a man.

BUTTREY: What did you say?

JANSEN: I said, “Well, I've been a student here for several years. I've finished my degree. I've done very well.”

And he just said, “You're taking the place of a man. You shouldn't be here. I'm not going to register you.”

I was in the Metallurgy Department, and there were no other women there. So, at lunchtime, I was across the hall from the head of the department's office. He had three female secretaries, so they invited me in to have lunch with them. I had lunch with the secretaries in the head of the Metallurgy Department's office for a long, long time. I got to know them, and the head of the department got to know me. He first thought I was another secretary, so one day he asked me, “Who do you work for?” Thinking I was going to tell him the name of a professor I was a secretary for. And then I explained that I was a Ph.D. student. So, when this professor told me that he wasn't going to register me, I went to the head of the department who had gotten to know me really well—

BUTTREY: Great.

JANSEN: —and he just went down to that other professor and told him that he was going to register me himself.

BUTTREY: It's great that you had the conviction that you belonged there and the resourcefulness to do things like go to the head of your department. It sounds like things like that needed to be done.

JANSEN: Oh, yeah. There were other faculty members along the way who weren't so cordial. There were students who really thought women shouldn't be there. As I said, the humor magazine basically made a lot of jokes about women students. And the fraternities were particularly bad about making fun of women students. But we did fine with each other. As I've said, the women were a great bunch.

BUTTREY: Something else I've looking forward to talking with you about is the IAP class you co-taught with Lita Nelsen, the Guerrilla Guide to the Pinstriped World, which was incredibly popular and successful. It's become something of a legend in the history of women at MIT. [IAP is the January intersession Independent Activities Period held each January at MIT, which enables students to travel abroad or take on studies outside the intense rigors of the core curriculum.]

JANSEN: Really?

BUTTREY: Yes. I first heard about it before I had worked with this oral history project, and before I knew who you were. It's also frequently come up in past oral history interviews of alumnae who had the opportunity to take the class or heard a lot about it. Some bring up the class as one of the highlights of their MIT undergrad experience. It seems to me that many women got a realistic sense from you and Lita Nelsen [MIT SB Chemical Engineering '64; SM Chemical Engineering '66; SM Sloan Fellow '79; worked at MIT's Technology Licensing Office from 1986 to 2016, serving as director from 1992 to 2016.] about how to approach some of the issues women face in the working world, after leaving MIT. How did your teaching the class come about?

JANSEN: I think someone at AMITA [the Association of MIT Alumnae, which funds this oral history project] at the time, said AMITA should offer more activities involving women at MIT and women alumnae. This person, whose name I can't recall, came to visit with me and Lita at Lita's house. Lita and I thought about it and teaching that course is what we came up with.

I mean, it wasn't only women at MIT who didn't get to know about the business world. The only thing that was provided for students who were going to go looking for a job was the office at MIT where they interviewed. MIT provided the interview space for employers to come interview students, and that office didn't do anything whatsoever. It didn't teach people about how to prepare a resume, for example. So when the president of AMITA said that AMITA needed more activities, they immediately came to Lita and I, saying that this was a big hole that should be plugged—that there really had to be somebody helping students know how to go about getting a job.

BUTTREY: Can you talk about the type of advice that you and Lita gave your students?

JANSEN: We did a pretty thorough job. We had actually gone out and been in the working world and we saw how unprepared we were for it. We didn't have a clue what it was like and what we should be doing. Because both of us were working, we had a good idea of what we wished we had learned, or wished that somebody had told us about before we got there. So, basically, we came up with the curriculum for the Guerrilla Guide from our own experience.

It was a very popular course, for a very long time, and I had a great time doing it.

BUTTREY: I think a lot of people had a great time taking it. According to Lita, one focus of the class was teaching students how to deal with what she called ‘women’s questions.’ What kind of questions does this refer to, and what was your advice?

JANSEN: What are you going to do when you want to have children? There wasn't enough experience with women in the working world, that the working world was ready to deal with women who were having families in addition to working there. We had a lot of experience answering those questions ourselves over the years.

BUTTREY: How did you answer and what was your advice to your students?

JANSEN: Not to be defensive, and to be matter of fact—the world is changing. Women are working full-time. There are daycare centers. There weren't daycare centers when we started. The facilities existed by that time. Just the practicalities of women in the working world, really, once the change was underway.

Then, people would ask you when you're interviewing for a job, “What if you get pregnant?” And you could say, “Well, we'll hire a childcare person to take care of the child while we're working.” All this stuff just had to be developed. Because that was just coming into being, having working women who were professionals.

BUTTREY: I would imagine it would be hard to teach women how to respond to those questions even then, because they're just inappropriate in the first place.

JANSEN: Yes, it was awkward. We had to come up with answers. How to do it without getting [potential bosses] so pissed off that they don't want to hire you?

BUTTREY: I know you worked in industry for a bit. What drew you back to campus to work at the MIT Technology Licensing Office?

JANSEN: Well, it was a new field. The idea that someone would have the responsibility of trying to find commercial uses for the faculty inventions. And we were aware that was an issue for faculty. There wasn't an existing system to get new ideas into the field.

Since both Lita and I had worked in industry, we knew how industry worked. We could imagine how to be the interface with industry that says, “Hey, this is a new invention. You’re a company, and you do x kinds of things, and you might be interested in y—we can sell you a license to do this.” It was the very beginning of licensing as a field. Actually, there was a person at Stanford who had begun to do it and someone at one other university.

Then we got started, and we basically built that field from scratch. [Dr. Jansen was a Senior Licensing Associate at the TLO for 10 years starting in 1987. Lita Nelsen started as an individual contributor in 1986, became the associate director, and then served as director from 1992-2016.]

BUTTREY: This job sounds a lot more focused on legal matters than your previous work in materials science. Was this a large shift for you?

JANSEN: Yes, I was writing legal agreements instead of—.

BUTTREY: How did you learn to do that?

JANSEN: Like I learned everything else—getting help, applying myself!

BUTTREY: Did materials science provide transferable skills, aside from just knowledge of industry?

JANSEN: In materials science, you learn to solve problems. Somebody comes and says, "We need something to be able to do this," and you figure out how you can make something that will do that. So it involved just extending that same process into another branch of work.

MIT played a major role in getting all the universities to have departments like ours that would present the university's inventions to industry and try to get the inventions into use. Because that's not a skill faculty have either, although some faculty are very good at working with people from industry and getting them interested. But that was an uncommon skill among the faculty.

BUTTREY: Right.

JANSEN: So, we filled that role.

BUTTREY: This was happening during an amazing period. There was not only the biotech revolution and the computing revolution, but also, the growth of MIT's tech ecosystem and the development of Kendall Square that came along with it. What role did you and the TLO play in shaping these advancements?

JANSEN: Huge. Lita and I were really good at doing this. We ended up basically teaching all the colleges how to do this. Technology transfer became a field that people went into.

I had gone from MIT to a job at industry [Millipore; Digital Equipment Corporation], and in industry I had to figure out, "We want to be able to do this." I had to figure out what inventions to use and how to do it, so I had all the right background to understand from my own experience going into industry what was needed.

BUTTREY: That's amazing, to have played a role like that at a time like that. How did you end up helping the University of Utah with tech licensing?

JANSEN: I have a real taste for geology and travel, and Utah has the most spectacular geology in the country. I really loved traveling in Utah, and seeing geology and rocks and all of that. So, the reason I went to work at the University of Utah was so that I could play geologist.

BUTTREY: What kind of geology did you do? Was it largely going out and observing things?

JANSEN: Yes. And learning how to find metallurgical sites. Then I started going looking in old mines and then going to companies that were doing the geology.

BUTTREY: The University of Utah is lucky to have excellent geology nearby.

JANSEN: Yes. Definitely. And Utah is a very isolated state. The businesspeople in Utah understood that they had to have something special to be able to get companies to come to Utah. They were working hard to try to come up with ways to attract companies just to grow, to stay. Having me there, to be their real connection with these people—"Here, we have this convention, you can come here and learn about this and work and do this"—worked really well. Utah needed a person to do the job that I was doing. But Utah doesn't accept women very well in leadership roles because of the Mormon culture, so that got interesting.

BUTTREY: Did you mentor women to succeed in technology transfer-related positions, either at MIT or in Utah?

JANSEN: Well, I got a lot of women interested in this as a career. I hired more women than men. In Utah, culturally, that was a shock. The role of women is very different there.

BUTTREY: I understand that you served at AMITA's president from 1992 to 1993. What was the group's focus was at that time?

JANSEN: Mentoring other women, actually.

BUTTREY: How would that work?

JANSEN: One thing we did was give talks about mentoring.

BUTTREY: Did you have any particularly impactful mentors yourself?

JANSEN: Yes. My Ph.D. advisor was an excellent mentor. I learned, basically, about mentorship from him.

BUTTREY: What made him such a good mentor?

JANSEN: Well, he never told me what to do; he always asked me what I wanted to do. He wanted me to figure out what the problems were. He taught me to be a

researcher. It was in an active way, by guiding me, because I didn't know how to be a researcher. I got very lucky that way.

BUTTREY: Did you apply those lessons when you became a mentor? Guiding them, but not telling them where the problems were?

JANSEN: Right. I learned how to be a mentor from my mentor.

BUTTREY: How has the environment for women and minority students at MIT changed, do you think, and what additional changes would you like to see moving forward?

JANSEN: Well, of course, there were virtually no women faculty when I was a student. There was Millie Dresselhaus and one other, I think. [Professor Mildred Dresselhaus, a pioneer for women in science and engineering who was also a pioneer in carbon science and carbon nanostructures, was associated with MIT for 57 years. She held professorships in two departments, Electrical Engineering and Physics, and was MIT's first female Institute Professor. Among numerous other distinctions, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2014.]

All that had to change over years—and it did.

BUTTREY: On a more personal note, I've heard that your house in New Hampshire, which you live in part of the year, was designed by an old classmate of yours, Meg Hickey [Frances Margaret "Meg" Hickey, MIT B.S. Mechanical Engineering 1963, B. Arch. 1969]. What's the story behind the house's design and construction?

JANSEN: Well, Meg and I were roommates. She's a professional architect, so when I decided to build my own house, I asked her if she would come and consult. She came up and we picked the site. We did it together. She's a very good architect, so I have a great house. It was wonderful working with her. I had an interest in architecture, too. When I lived in D.C., I would visit homes that were architecturally distinguished.

BUTTREY: What were you doing when you l lived in D.C.?

JANSEN: The federal laboratories do a lot of sponsored research, and there was no link between the federal laboratories and the universities. I started linking the

universities and the federal labs [while working as a contractor for the Naval Research Labs].

BUTTREY: That sounds like a huge undertaking—very impressive.

I wanted to acknowledge that we're having this interview over Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. How has your life changed since we've gone into quarantine? How have you been doing?

JANSEN: It's been a very difficult period. I'm a very social person. I really like to get out and about, and normal life pretty much stopped. I was more connected before this all happened, as was everyone. Well, I've taken the time to do other things.

BUTTREY: What have you been doing?

JANSEN: I've been writing about my own life and spending time thinking about it and reviewing it. I've been making connections with people that have been in my life before, catching up with them. Because of the isolation that this has brought about, I've been spending more time trying to get less isolated in my own life by reaching out.

BUTTREY: Have you reconnected with anyone from MIT?

JANSEN: Yes, sure. A bunch of people.

BUTTREY: You spent a long time there.

What do you hope to get back to once it's safe to open up more and travel again?

JANSEN: Well, I love traveling and I am a skilled photographer, so I would like to go back to traveling and doing more photography.

BUTTREY: Do you have anywhere in mind?

JANSEN: I like really obscure places. I've been to Labrador. I would like to go back to Labrador.

Of course, I've always had an interest in metallurgy, I've had an interest in mines, so I've been to a lot of mines to see how they work. I like to do that.

BUTTREY: Is there anything else you'd like to go back to or add, from anything we've talked about today? Whether about your early life or your time at MIT, your personal life, or your current work?

JANSEN: Well, I thought I would never want to have children. I had no interest in dolls or anything. I made my husband promise that we wouldn't have to have children when we got married. And, fortunately, he convinced me that I really would like to have children.

My son lives in California, and I haven't seen much of him for a long time. I'd like to get some more family time soon.

BUTTREY: When your kids were young, how did you manage balancing your career and family life?

JANSEN: We hired the most incredible babysitter. We hired Anne-Marie, and she stayed with us for 13 years. She lived with us a lot of the time and became part of our family. She was incredible with the kids. She's still great. I'm still in touch.

I did it with one of my women classmates—two of us hired her. We'd have the kids at my house for one week and Anne-Marie would be there. Then they'd be at my friend Ann's house for the other week, and Anne-Marie would be there. You just find ways to make it all work.

BUTTREY: Did you find that the advice that you had given with the Guerrilla Guide was applicable to your own life, as well?

JANSEN: Indeed it was. I continued to learn about my own life.

BUTTREY: You've mentioned to me that you also have a daughter.

JANSEN: I do have a daughter, yes.

BUTTREY: Did you notice any differences in her experience as a college woman to the experience you'd had at MIT?

JANSEN: She went to Vassar. After graduating, she joined the Marine Corps. One day, I got a phone call: "Mom, I joined the Marines." That was a real shock. She lives here [in coastal North Carolina, near the Marine Corps base]. That's why I have a house here. We're very close. And my granddaughter is hiking from Georgia to Maine right now.

BUTTREY: You mentioned that she's hiking the whole Appalachian Trail. That's amazing.

It sounds like your whole family is adventurous and dedicated, with avid minds.

JANSEN: The day my daughter joined the Marine Corps was the biggest shock of my life. That had not been in my list of possibilities for her.

BUTTREY: How did you respond?

JANSEN: Well, the first thing she asked me, since I used to be a baseball pitcher, was could I teach her to throw baseballs—because she's going to have to learn how to throw grenades. So, the first thing we did, after she joined the Marine Corps, is I taught her to throw grenades.

BUTTREY: That’s quite something.

Thank you again, so much, for doing this interview. I’ve learned a lot today, and in our talks this past year.

JANSEN: Well, I have to say, I’ve enjoyed it too. This has been a real pleasure.