Interviews of the Margaret MacVicar Memorial AMITA Oral History Project, MC 356
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Stephanie Wingfield – classes of 1982 and 1987

Interviewed by Callie Kunz, class of 2023

May 2 and June 27, 2022

MIT Libraries

Margaret MacVicar Memorial AMITA Oral History Project

Stephanie Wingfield (SB Design 1982; MAR Architecture 1987) was interviewed on May 2 and June 27, 2022 by undergraduate Callie Kunz (SB Computer Science 2023) via a teleconferencing app. They were in their homes in and near Boston, Massachusetts.

Stephanie was born and raised in Los Angeles, California, an only child who went to public schools. She had an early interest in music and in STEM topics, including math and physics. As she notes in this oral history, Stephaniewelcomed a significant change when it came time to go to college, and thought that MIT and Cambridge would fit the bill. An Art and Design major (formerly Course 4, now Course 4-B), she developed an interest in architecture, staying at MIT to study for a master's in Architecture after earning her undergraduate degree. Her focus was on housing design.

After graduation, Stephanie worked as an architect at the Boston Housing Authority, and the Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt). She then decided to study law, and earned a JD from Northeastern Law School. She worked at a major law firm—but also launched an audio recording device company. Making one more career pivot, she earned a Master of Education degree at UMass Boston and set out to teach math, which she has done for several years. She also teaches students to play string instruments.

Throughout the twists and turns of her professional life, Stephanie has remained deeply involved in music, especially cello playing. While at MIT, she played in chamber groups and took private lessons at the New England Conservatory of Music. She also spent a summer performing with an orchestra in Rome, an opportunity supported by the Peter J. Eloranta Undergraduate Research Fellowship Program. She has played for many years with the Brookline Symphony and is currently the group's principal cellist.

KUNZ: Thank you again for meeting with me. Would you like to talk about where you grew up and then talk a little bit about your background, your high school years, etc.? I noticed that you have a lot of background in both STEM-related subjects and artistic pursuits, and that you've excelled in many areas. What did all of this look like when you were growing up?

WINGFIELD: Well, I grew up in Los Angeles, California, the only child of two parents who are now deceased. Both of my parents were from Atlanta, Georgia, so they were part of that tail-end of the Great Migration, coming from the South to anywhere else but the South. And, like so many who went West, they were college-educated. They left Georgia to look for jobs, and they found something more palatable than hanging out in Atlanta.

I think for them, they really wanted something better than what they had. My mother was a teacher. She was a reading specialist—elementary. Going back through their things I found that, well, my father's mother was a teacher. She ran a one-room schoolhouse in Georgia, and she was a graduate of Spelman College. And her mother was a teacher. It was a long line of teachers that I didn't even know about until fairly recently.

There was a standard; there was an expectation that I was going to do well. I don't even think they cared what I did, so long as I did something and that I was not going to hang around the house when I turned 18. You know?

KUNZ: Yes.

WINGFIELD: It was very clear. “No, no. You're leaving.” And the standard was high. I guess I'm thinking back now. I went to my neighborhood schools, had a reasonably OK time of it. And then came, I think, around third grade. I brought home a paper that got an A-plus, and I was so proud. I showed it to my mother, and she was not pleased. She said, “Well, there's mistakes on here. It's not an A-plus.” So she took me out of that school. The short story version of that is: no more neighborhood schools for me. I was bused outside of my neighborhood, something akin to the METCO [Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity] program now that's here. I don't know if you know about that here in Boston. Basically, a lot of the extremely wealthy communities around Los Angeles agreed to some kind of limited integration in order to avoid being ordered by the court to bus and integrate. I wound up going to schools in West L.A. and Beverly Hills and all that, and the standard was high. I mean, the upshot was it had a lot of other issues.

KUNZ: Were these private schools or charter schools?

WINGFIELD: No, no. They were public schools. Like night and day, the resources available at these schools versus the ones in my neighborhood. They're all public.

KUNZ: Wow.

WINGFIELD: The first private school I went to was MIT.

KUNZ: It's the same for me.

WINGFIELD: It was astonishing, in many ways. I got a class education before my time, and race and culture—all of that—I had to learn about from a very early age; how people are going to judge you a certain way based on what you look like, and you just have to keep going on.

And then, let's see. Things really started to change in middle school. I got put into a beginning strings class. No idea why. To this day, I have no idea. I was just put into it randomly. I loved the guy who taught orchestra. He could play every instrument in the orchestra, not very well, but he knew how to navigate every instrument. He just pulled out all this stuff and said, "This is how you play this. This is how to play that." I tried to do violin, but by the time they got to my last name, [those instruments] were all gone. So I did viola for a while, and I didn't like the whole--

KUNZ: The chin rest and holding it?

WINGFIELD: I didn't like any of that.

KUNZ: Right.

WINGFIELD: So I switched to cello, and I was like, "Oh." You know, it kind of clicked. But then I did trombone. I did French horn. I did clarinet, all this stuff. But I kept coming back to the cello. Then it turned out someone in the orchestra at that time was a very accomplished—he was a student, but he was an extremely accomplished cellist. He was, if not a prodigy, close to it. So I feel like I learned a ton just from sitting next to this guy. And then I had lessons, and then I just kind of ran with it.

KUNZ: Were the lessons through the school or through the neighborhood?

WINGFIELD: No. My parents realized that, "Oh, she's interested in that." I think they saw that other friends of theirs had kids who were interested in playing an instrument, so they went along with it. I think they were like, "Why is she practicing so much?" And [they asked me], "What is that? What are you doing?" Because it was all classical. My parents were jazz and R&B. They were like, "Why are you doing that?" [LAUGHS] So I was obsessed. I was totally into it.

I became very proficient in a fairly short amount of time. But then when it came time to go to college, it was pretty clear that they were not going to pay for music school.

KUNZ: Was that something you had considered?

WINGFIELD: Oh yeah. Yeah. And the teacher I had at the time was like, “You need to go to music school.” Actually, back then my desire was just to be a middle-school music teacher like the guy I had met. I had thoroughly planned on going to USC [the University of Southern California], which had a good music department, and that's just what I was going to do. But then I started getting all these letters from colleges saying, “Apply.” I guess because my PSAT [score] or something was high.

KUNZ: Right.

WINGFIELD: I just started getting all these letters, and I just didn't know anything about this. [LAUGHS] I remember I only had two Black teachers. You know, it's very interesting you raise this question about, “Oh, there's arts and STEM.” In high school, I had two Black teachers. One of them was the orchestra teacher, and one was AP physics.

KUNZ: Wow.

WINGFIELD: Yeah. And the AP physics guy, he was a character. He had gone to Yale. I don't know what his deal was, otherwise, but I did really well on the AP Physics exam, so I assume he knew what he was talking about. And the other guy—the orchestra teacher—I just learned a lot of other stuff about all classical music [from him]. He was a jazzer, too, so I learned a lot from him. So it's interesting you say that [about my focus on both STEM and the arts], because we've been talking, in the Boston public schools, where I teach now, a lot about “Does the identity of one's teacher matter?”

I can't say at the time that it did [for me], but I guess in hindsight it did. [LAUGHS]

I remember I got these letters from all these colleges, Harvard and MIT being among them. Of course I had heard of Harvard, because everybody has heard of Harvard. My mother was just so set on me going to Harvard, and I got into Harvard. But I also got into MIT. I think even before I applied, I asked Mr. Hale, the physics guy [at my school in Los Angeles], “Have you heard of this place?” I took the brochure and asked him if he had heard of it. And he just looked at me with an absolutely straight face, and he said, “Yeah. Yeah.”

KUNZ: “I've heard of it once or twice…”

WINGFIELD: Right. And I asked him, “Do you think it's worth applying?” And he said, “Yeah. I think you should apply.” That's all he would say. “Yeah, apply.” I wound up taking a trip out back East, as they call it, and so I visited Harvard and MIT at the same time.

KUNZ: Was that your first time going to Boston?

WINGFIELD: That was my first time on a plane going—no, probably not on a plane, but certainly to the Northeast. I had never been in the Northeast.

I thought that was thrilling, you know: subways, cold weather. I mean, all of that was just new. It was thrilling. But also, for me, the impression I got at Harvard was that it was going to be like a repeat of Beverly Hills High. It's a ton of privilege. I can't tell you how many people said, “Oh yeah, the hardest thing about it is getting in, and you can just coast and do this and that.” And I was so not interested in that, after all that time spent in the, I don't know, in the image-making environment.

And then everyone at MIT seemed to be authentic, you know? It was weird. Back then, I think the ratio was something like 7 to 1, male to female. There were issues. But I didn't feel like anyone was pretending to be anything that they weren't. And they all seemed so happy to finally be around other nerds, around other strange people.

KUNZ: Yeah. [LAUGHS]

WINGFIELD: And I liked that. So I decided to go to MIT. Yeah. And in many ways it was a kind of a contrarian thing to do. I guess if someone knew me back then, I was probably more of an arts person [to them]. I sang. I played in the orchestra. I wrote. And I was fine with science, but I can't say it was like my--

KUNZ: Your number one.

WINGFIELD: My number one. It wasn't. But I liked the idea of me going there.

KUNZ: Yeah. [LAUGHS]

WINGFIELD: I know that probably sounds very strange, but I liked the idea of being able to go even though I wasn't supposed to go.

KUNZ: Was the thought of moving across the country, L.A. to Boston—was that a concern, to be so far from your family?

WINGFIELD: No. I couldn't wait to do it. I mean, there were personal things. But I wanted to move as far away as possible without leaving the country, and I found it. Those two places were Harvard and MIT, and that's clear. So I knew. I got into all kinds of other places, but I chose between those two schools because they were as far away as possible, and it was a relief.

KUNZ: When you an MIT undergrad, I see you majored in art and design. Was it called 4-B when you when you were an undergrad?

WINGFIELD: No. It was just Course 4.

KUNZ: OK.

WINGFIELD: I got there, and I realized, “Wow, everyone else here is super hardcore into science, and I'm not, so I might be in a little bit of trouble here. I have to find something I can do.” And I thought, “Well, that would be really stupid to go there and major in music,” although I knew people who did that. It would be a waste of the resources of the Institute, to me, to do that.

So I spent a while looking for something I could do. I did some management classes. I bounced around. And then I just wandered into the Course 4, the studios and all that. And I was like, “Oh, this is cool. I can do that.” And so that's how I got into it.

KUNZ: Did you have any specific concentration? Or was there a specific topic that you really focused on in your undergrad experience?

WINGFIELD: With respect to architecture, probably housing. They didn't have a strict concentration about that, but most of the teachers I worked with were definitely into housing, solving the global housing crisis—not just the one here in Boston. It wasn't even as bad as it is now, back then.

But I would say overall, beyond the Institute requirements and my course requirements, I just did music. I was in the MIT Symphony. I was in the Chamber Music Society. And I took lessons at NEC [New England Conservatory] while I was at MIT.

KUNZ: Oh, you were able to do that? That's really exciting.

WINGFIELD: Yes. I got some money from MIT to go study with people at NEC. That was extremely stressful, but it just felt what I needed to do.

KUNZ: Do you remember how many hours a week you were spending on your music, as opposed to coursework?

WINGFIELD: It was probably 50-50. There were lots of times when I just didn't sleep—and I can't do that anymore. But yeah, just working, playing, practicing, and then go into studio and work until the sun comes up. And then you go across the street to get a bagel and wash your face. I'm sure everyone's done that. Wash your face and then present your project.

KUNZ: Right.

WINGFIELD: That's kind of how it was.

KUNZ: Were there other women in your architecture studio classes? What was the makeup of the people that you took classes with?

WINGFIELD: Well, that was tough. There were some women. There were hardly any people of color, except a few Asians.

KUNZ: Ah.

WINGFIELD: Yeah. It was like that at MIT back then. I think it was, in many ways, more challenging to be a woman in that environment than a person of color. It was just every little—what do they call it now?—microaggression, and this and that. Oh, my god, it was just endless. But I think one did have to work more to be taken seriously.

KUNZ: Mm-hmm.

WINGFIELD: Yeah. Or, I found that it was hard to get real, legit, constructive criticism. I think some of the almost invariably male teachers we're either afraid of being mean or afraid of being racist, so they would tend to avoid talking to me. And I was kind of a head case back then, too. So I didn't necessarily have the wherewithal to take care of myself in that way and self-advocate.

KUNZ: I see.

WINGFIELD: So that was too bad. But I still think I did OK. But most of the, say, approbation or little awards I got and all that stuff while I was at MIT were all arising out of music.

KUNZ: OK.

WINGFIELD: Yeah.

KUNZ: And you were part of the Women's Independent Living Group. What made you choose to go with WILG instead of a dorm?

WINGFIELD: I was an only child. Also, I could read the environment at MIT. I wasn't that sophisticated socially, but I knew enough that I was going to need some support. You cannot go into that kind of snake pit or cesspool, or whatever you want to call it, without any kind of camaraderie or anything. I noticed even during—what was it, rush week—going to some of the frat parties and seeing that these fraternities into the smaller groups tended to be a little more normal. You know, personally they had a few more social skills. And I noticed, to a T, most of those places had their own library of problem sets and notes that people had just taken over the decades, so they were able to help the freshmen survive that first year.

WINGFIELD: And it seemed like there was a lot more going on in the living groups than the dorms. Even then, we were hearing about people killing themselves and this and that, and it seemed like most of that was happening out in the dorms. Also, I met people I liked [at WILG], so I just went there.

KUNZ: Were there sororities on campus at this time?

WINGFIELD: No. No. And I probably would not have chosen a sorority. [LAUGHS]

KUNZ: Yeah.

WINGFIELD: But, yeah. I think part of the appeal was that WILG was the only one. They had the audacity to be all women in this crazy place! And they had some support of the administration, too. So I think Dottie Bowe and old-time folks who've probably long since gone. [Dorothy Bowe, an administrator at MIT, helped to guide female students, including during the period between 1964 and 1986, when she helped to run the Office of the Dean for Student Affairs.]

KUNZ: Well, WILG is still around today. It's one of the bigger independent living groups on campus.

WINGFIELD: They called me a while ago; there was some issue about the building. But I haven't practiced architecture in a while, and I did not even want to drum that up again [LAUGHS], so I wasn't very much help to them. It seems like it's different now, but they're still surviving, which is amazing to me.

KUNZ: Besides some of your in the school-year pursuits, I saw that you participated in the Peter J. Eloranta Undergraduate Research Fellowship Program [an undergraduate Fellowship fund that supports novel research by students]. What was that program like? What kind of research did you do?

WINGFIELD: The Eloranta—that was the travel one. I went to Rome. I played in an orchestra in Rome.

KUNZ: Wow!

WINGFIELD: That was my research. [LAUGHS]

KUNZ: What was that experience like? That's incredible.

WINGFIELD: Oh, it was fantastic. It was. It was fantastic. And it was kind of weird. I had auditioned for Tanglewood and didn't get in, but then somebody called me and said, “Well, I heard you didn't get into Tanglewood. But do you want to come to Rome?

WINGFIELD: We'll take care of this and this and this, but you have to get yourself there and all that." And I'm like, "Yeah, why the heck not?" I just started asking around, "How can I do this? Is there some kind of grant or something I can get?" So I applied for the Eloranta Fellowship. This was the one funded by Polaroid.

I think it was Polaroid, at the time, that as funding it. I think the Elorantas worked at Polaroid. Their son died, and so Edwin Land [the inventor of inexpensive filters that polarized light who co-founded Polaroid] started this fund. I actually met Edwin Land, the guy who started Polaroid, after that. Basically, I was playing music, and it was kind of what you would characterize as soft. I think it was the first time I went back to Europe as an adult. I had been on one of those bus tours with my mother when I was 12. She always wanted to see Paris and this and that, so I went with her. But then I got this chance to go to Europe as a young adult, and that was fantastic. I was on my own. I went with a friend. We landed in London, and she went to Scandinavia to do some research on the health care system there. I took the train—which went through France, Germany, Switzerland—down to Rome. It was the beginning of my research for my thesis, my architecture thesis. I designed a chamber music hall, and my focus was on fostering intimacy between performer and audience in a space, and what can you do.

The trip was mostly that, and seeing in person all the stuff I had seen in my art and architecture history classes. It was basically what a lot of people say, especially for designers: you have to have your Italian experience to understand Western design. All that Renaissance and Greek design, it's all arising out of there. You need to see it firsthand before you can take off and do your own thing. So that was mostly it.

KUNZ: How long were you there?

WINGFIELD: I was there the whole summer, a few months.

KUNZ: OK.

WINGFIELD: Two or three months.

KUNZ: What was your experience like being a woman of color in Italy? One reason I ask is that I had the opportunity to visit Italy. Also, one of my best friends is living in Milan right now, and she's in a cohort of students where there are a lot of people of color. They spoke very, very animatedly about their experience in Europe—about facing a significantly larger amount of discrimination there than they had ever felt in the United States. I'm curious to see how that experience was for you.

WINGFIELD: Well, Germany was just a freaking nightmare. That was just unbelievable. Especially northern Germany. Southern Germany, it was all right. You know, Munich, they have their beer halls. They're a little easier to take than the Northerners. Oh my gosh.

In Austria and all that, I remember being on a train in Vienna—it was like a streetcar. We were just standing there, and I was holding onto a hook. The train stopped abruptly, and I kind of bumped into someone. And this lady just started screaming at me in German. You know, I'm pretty sure-- I recognized the *schwarze* [an often derogatory term for Black people] this and all that, so I knew it wasn't being nice.

It's fascinating to me, one, because being Black, no matter where I went, the people presumed that I spoke their language—I think because all of those places owned or colonized someplace in Africa, and they just presumed I was from there. And then it was either being held in contempt-- Like, I remember in Belgium, some guy looked like he was going to spit on me or something. He was so disgusted that I had the nerve to sit at this bar where he was sitting. Or complete objectification, especially by other subjugated people. I can't tell you how many marriage proposals I got from Africans and Turks and this and that. Ugh. It was a lot.

I had endured all this stuff getting to Rome. It was exhausting. But what I did was, I went to the haymarket and I bought all Italian clothes. I got all Italian shoes. I had the dresses, this and that. I was just all linen and espadrilles for the rest of my time there. And I would say 70% of the harassment went away, when I just started dressing and looking more like what they expected. If you walk around there in a t-shirt and jeans, you scream 'American,' and they just-- And I guess a lot of American women go there to get laid and have their experience, and this and that. I saw it happen, so I know. It brings out a lot of guys looking to help them out.

So yeah, especially if you're young. And that's the thing: you attract a lot of attention when you're young. When I went back as an older adult and after I started getting gray hair, no one said anything to me at all. It's just one of those things. It's what women have to endure everywhere, still. Right?

Back then—this was 1980—I guess it was taken for granted that this is what you had to deal with. And I remember finally meeting up with the administrators and they saw me and they were like, "Oh my God. How did you even make it here unscathed?

WINGFIELD: Relatively unscathed." I just kind of blanked it out. But, yeah. It was pretty rough. There were a lot of women in the orchestra, and I'm pretty sure-- They didn't talk about it. I'm pretty sure some of them were sexually assaulted by their mentors and teachers, that probably went farther than they wanted it to. But they didn't speak of it because it was just something you had to put up with in Italy.

KUNZ: Wow.

WINGFIELD: Yeah.

KUNZ: It sounds like a bittersweet experience.

I played the violin throughout high school, and I think that getting to play, as you did, in a foreign country, would be such a cool thing to be able to do, apart from the downsides, of course.

WINGFIELD: It was fantastic, and I have some acquaintances and friends still from that time. It's had an indelible effect on me, definitely. Just being able to get out in the world and, you see that there's provincial and parochial people everywhere, and then there's open-minded people everywhere. And you never know who it's going to be. You can't predict. [LAUGHS]

KUNZ: Getting back to our discussion of MIT, when did you decide that you were going to pursue a master's, that you would continue with your architecture education?

WINGFIELD: That was after I had been out for a while, freelancing as a musician, and it became very clear that there wasn't much money in it. Not just that, but there were certain things that I wasn't prepared to do. It wasn't terribly dignified, you know? You couldn't just, I don't know, have your pride and do your work and go home. It seemed to be a lot of grief involved with being a musician. Maybe if I had just gone to conservatory and gotten to a higher level at the beginning, it would have been different. But I don't know. I just realized I don't want to have to work that hard to survive—"I do have a degree from MIT, and I don't have to do this."

I remember I was visiting a friend at MIT. She was the administrative assistant in the music office, and I was telling her about my travails. She just picked up the phone and dialed my old counselor, and she handed me the phone, and I said, "Leo." And he says, "You're coming back." [LAUGHS] And that was it. And they gave me a scholarship.

KUNZ: Wow.

How long did your master's take?

WINGFIELD: About two years.

KUNZ: OK.

WINGFIELD: It wasn't that long.

KUNZ: What was the experience of being an undergrad student versus being a grad student? Were there significant differences?

WINGFIELD: I actually think I enjoyed myself more being an undergrad. I think being an undergrad was just more intellectually stimulating. You have to do more stuff. There was all the design stuff, and then the history and sociology stuff, and the urban planning, and then all the Institute Requirements: the math, the physics, the chemistry, da-da-da-da. I realized I liked that. I like having to do a lot of different things.

At the master's level in the architecture department, I would say that most of the people coming in just for graduate work in that department weren't as sharp as the people I had been undergrads with, so it was just less stimulating. But, on the other hand, some of them were absolutely beautiful technicians. The drawings, the imagination, the model-building, the technique around that—some of it was amazing, and that I had not seen at the undergrad level. So that was something.

Back then there was no such thing as CAD [computer-assisted design software]; it was just in its infancy. It was at the point where it would take people three hours to draw a little stick figure of a house. It's nothing like what it is now. So it was mostly, what could you do with your hands?

MIT had a bit of a chip on its shoulder in the Architecture Department, because we're always being compared to the GSD [Harvard University's Graduate School of Design]. The GSD was very slick and very polished and just had a very different point of view about design than what was going on at MIT at the time. If you went to a studio at MIT and a studio at the GSD you would say, "Oh, the GSD people are ready to be published." And at MIT, it was just a lot of tracing paper everywhere because people were still hashing out ideas.

Now personally, politically, I was more interested in finding ways to house people. And because the basic gist of what was going on at MIT at the time is,

how do you make people's lives better through built form, through the built environment? How do you make it easier for the average person to get through the day? And I would say, in a nutshell, that the GSD was about making monuments and objects, and not necessarily being concerned with the day-to-day experience of a person walking around it.

I first went to MIT not even thinking about architecture. But then I realized, "Oh, this means a lot." But even then it was basically a bunch of old white guys teaching this stuff. It took me a long time to realize that they were clueless in their judgment of me and what I thought was valuable.
On another trip, I went to Senegal and Mali in West Africa. I went down, I think it was, the Niger River.

And I went to this whole city, called Mopti, and it was made out of mud. But there were mid-rises [too]. It was extraordinary, really. I was trying to tell one of my professors about it, and he was like, "Oh, in Africa all they do is just mud huts and stuff." I mean, really profoundly ignorant. I was stunned that this guy that I kind of revered and was in awe of, he was completely clueless about what had happened in this gigantic part of the world.

So I would say MIT was a funny place. I was just having a conversation with someone the other day. I think if I had been in my right mind as a high school person, I probably should have gone to Yale or Oberlin, a place that was more used to everything happening. Each of those places has a phenomenal music department as well as everything else at a high level. Perhaps I would have been happier there. I don't know.

KUNZ: Overall, do you think you would say you were happy with your MIT experience and what you were able to make of it?

WINGFIELD: Yes. I feel like, given where I was at and where the Institute was at, I was able to exploit the resources made available to me. And I graduated early. My high school experience was such that, my last year or it was all APs. So I went to MIT with something like 36 units of credit. I finished everything with a semester to spare. So I considered myself fortunate, even though it was kind of weird. [LAUGHS]

KUNZ: After you kind of got through undergrad and your master's, both in architecture, you worked a couple of architecture firms.

WINGFIELD: Right.

KUNZ: I saw that a lot of these you spent usually only like two to three years per each role.

WINGFIELD: Right.

KUNZ: Would you like to share a bit about these experiences? Were you moving around by choice? Were you working on short-term projects? What were those work environments like?

WINGFIELD: [LAUGHS] Well, that was another totally exploitive, ridiculous-- I didn't have perhaps, sufficient self-awareness to realize that that kind of stuff wasn't for me. Like, being subjugated by some guy and filling in toilets and this and that on the drawings.

Some people were willing to put up with a lot of abuse in that situation, but I would talk back. At one of the places [where I worked] I've found out, just through talking with someone, that I was getting paid practically half what a colleague of mine was making, and we were doing the same job. I think I just blurted something out. And he asked me, "Why, are you getting paid so much less than me?" And I said, "Well, I don't know." And he told me [what he was being paid], and I was like, "Holy shit." So I went around the office and asked everybody, and it turned out all the women, no matter what level, were getting substantially less than their male counterparts. I just blasted all of that out there, so that was kind of the beginning of the end of me. [LAUGHS] They didn't really like that.

That job was at Ellenzweig Associates, and the ones before Ellenzweig were [while I was still in] school [at MIT]. I was still a student, so it was project-based. Did it, went back to school.

After that--

KUNZ: You worked for the Boston Housing Authority for a couple years.

WINGFIELD: The Housing Authority. Right. The Housing Authority was actually good for me. That was after working as a Campus Architect at the Mass College of Art, which was also good for me. I was granted more independence.

I got to see some projects through to completion. I got to manage things. I got experience managing large projects. I think it was a good experience in that I was a young woman of color, basically managing a lot of old white guys. And I had to figure out a way to get the job done without stoking a lot of animosity. People get so triggered, and this and that.

There were times where I was enforcing some minority participation clause, and I'd have a contractor literally—veins popping, screaming at the top of their lungs, getting on tables. "You people," da-da-da. And it was like another

grad school. I learned how to keep my cool: very valuable. But then I think that maybe it was just too much, or they didn't like it. I never did get a real answer from Mass Art. They just cut the funding for my job.

The Housing Authority, it was kind of fun. But then I was getting kind of bored. It's like, “OK, we have this contract. We know somebody is going to do it. And if there's a hole in the contract, well, either I'm going to pay for it or you're going to pay for it.” It just wasn't that interesting to me.
And it seemed that the people—I was wrong about this, too. But it seemed that the people who were having more fun and had more control were the lawyers, and those were the people I enjoyed talking to, say, more than the contractor who is screaming at me about who's going to paint the wall or fill up the hole or something. That's when I decided, “I'm going to law school.”

KUNZ: That brings us to the law school chapter.

WINGFIELD: Yes, and that was very interesting because I was also very frustrated, because I was a registered architect by then. But the pay was such that I couldn't afford to buy a house. I was ready to buy a house, and just couldn't do it.

That was when it was much harder to get financing than it is now. Every bank I spoke to—and perhaps it's because I was a single Black woman—they just said, “You need to make $60,000 to qualify for a mortgage, and you only make $45,000.” You know? And [the Housing Authority] would never give me a raise that I thought was commensurate with what I was doing, so I just said, “I'm going to law school. Forget this.”

KUNZ: Right.

WINGFIELD: And then they said, “Oh, we were just going to give you a raise.” And I said, “Yeah, yeah, yeah.” And so I just went to law school.

KUNZ: Did you say that you think one of the reasons why they maybe didn't want to give you a raise is because you were a single woman?

WINGFIELD: Probably. Oh, yeah. I heard that even at my first job, the DCPO [Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Division of Capital Planning and Operations], there was another woman there who had gone to MIT. She was [an] Economics and Architecture [major], and she wound up working for the World Bank. But we were told explicitly-- There was this guy who was not as educated as either one of us who was making 25% more. The rationale was, “Oh, he's married and they're having a baby.”

KUNZ: I've interviewed several women who had heard the same thing and then we're told that, if they were to get married though they would be fired, because then they would get pregnant and have their own children.

WINGFIELD: Exactly. Exactly. So that was tough. Anybody my age and older who made it somewhere, I have deep respect for whatever they did because they had to put up with a lot of nonsense. And boy, was that a lot of nonsense.

At Mass Art, I got paid more than my previous position because at the time, the president of the college was too dumb to do multiplication. He said, "Well, I'm going to pay you the same rate as your previous position. He didn't realize paying me at the same rate that I was going to get $50,000 a year rather than the $35,000 that I was currently being paid. He didn't get it. And then by the time he figured it out, it was too late. But again, they cut off the money, and I just went to law school.

KUNZ: Did you do a lot of prep in applying to law school? And once you were in law school at Northeastern [in Boston], did you like it?

WINGFIELD: I loved law school. I loved it, because it was history, right? A lot of the cases, well, it was fun. And it was about everything I had done in other parts of my life, like the first property classes. The law of property, finders keepers, right? *Pierson v. Post* and all this stuff. And then all the contract classes. I had already administrated contracts, so I knew more than I realized going in. And then the Constitutional Law stuff was stuff I had lived, and my parents had lived through. I remember some of the incidences depicted in the cases. Oh, I loved it. And I liked writing. I liked most of the people I met. I liked feeling comfortable in a school environment, because Northeastern was kind of groovy at the time. [LAUGHS] More groovy than MIT. But the practice was just horrific. Practicing law is just awful! But I loved law school.

KUNZ: When you're in law school, do you tailor your experience for the law that you want to practice? Or do you not know then, and is that something you do after you graduate?

WINGFIELD: You can. You can. And in hindsight there, I realized I'd probably still be a lawyer now if I had done litigation. But to do that I should have taken one of the big clinical courses they have. There's one on criminal law, and one on housing and this and that, where you just go in to a court and practice. And you get practice. It's like an internship. And I didn't do that. I just decided I wanted to make a lot of money, and so I worked for corporate places. I clerked for judges. There was one little curiosity I allowed myself. Maybe it's

on there. The Lindesmith Center. That was a drug policy reform firm. They were working on legalizing marijuana in California.

KUNZ: Oh, interesting.

WINGFIELD: Yeah. I'm not even a big drug person, but I thought, “Oh, that's interesting.” It was a George Soros-funded thing. It was all interesting.

KUNZ: So alongside a lot of this, while you were doing all of this, you also had your own audio equipment company? That’s so many things to do at once!

WINGFIELD: Yeah. [LAUGHS]

KUNZ: Did you have that business while you were still a lawyer? Where did that come into the picture, and what got you into becoming an entrepreneur?

WINGFIELD: Well, basically, getting laid off as a lawyer and realizing, “Oh, I can't even do it anyway.” I couldn't even pretend to want to do what I had been doing in law. And, in the meantime, I was really getting into playing cello again and realizing that a lot of the audio devices that were coming out at that time were extraordinary. Like, you could do CD-quality or better with some little thing that you could hold in your hand. I guess because I was a lawyer, I wound up just buying all of them and trying them all out. Then I published my thoughts on a website. And then, to my surprise, people were reading it. I looked at the web statistics and I had something like 7,000 people come through. So that business just kind of arose organically. But now most people just use their phones—so it kind of died organically, too, but it was very interesting.

KUNZ: Did you design audio equipment? Were you kind of selling equipment that was already on the market?

WINGFIELD: I was selling equipment. If the Great Recession of 2008 had not occurred, that was my next step, designing my own device. But I realized that, to make sure it comes out OK, especially electronics, you need some good connection in Southeast Asia somewhere, and I certainly did not have that. I guess I could have persisted, but I did decide to just punt on that. Because the margins on electronic retail are just terrible. You have to have a lot of money put aside in order to last. And I didn't have that. But I learned a lot from it.

KUNZ: So you went back to school and got your master's for teaching, and became an educator—which Is what you do now and have been doing for a number of years?

WINGFIELD: Yes.

KUNZ: You mentioned before how your mother was a teacher, and that you have a lot of teachers in your family. You also talked about how much you've enjoyed your own schooling, at least most of the time. Did those factors propel you toward education?

WINGFIELD: Yes. I realized that my first avocational desire was to be a music teacher in middle school or high school. That was the one thing I hadn't done. And during the recession, people were not spending $500 on a little recording toy [like the kind I sold], because they were terrified of losing their job or their house. And so I thought, "Wow. Maybe I could do it now."

I looked up some programs, and sure enough there were these programs where you could spend a year and you'd get a master's, some credentials, and a year of teaching experience. I found one, the Boston Teacher Residency, and one of my law school professors graciously agreed to write me a recommendation on something like three days' notice. And I got in.

That's been a mixed bag as well. I had very high, lofty ideals about what I would do after becoming a teacher. When I was a lawyer, I volunteered at Citizen Schools. I don't even know if they're still around, but they helped middle schoolers, specifically 7th and 8th grades, with their homework, trying to keep them on the straight and narrow. And when I was [a summer associate] at the well-known U.S. law firm based in Boston, Ropes & Gray, I agreed to mentor some kids. During that session, I met this girl. She was in BPS, a Boston public school. She was probably 14. Seemed to have trouble writing her name. Couldn't do some basic math. And filling out a job application for CVS—she had problems with that. I remember going to the director of the program and saying, "You know, this child needs a lot more intervention than I can give her in two hours every other week or whatever." And they just said, "Oh, don't worry about it. It'll be OK." And I was like, "No. You don't understand. It's not OK to be semi-literate and Black and 14." You know? Because it's almost too late, in many ways. That's just like giving someone a jail sentence without putting them in jail.

So there was that spur as well, that maybe I could make a difference. Maybe I have made a difference. But you know, BPS [the Boston Public School system]—woo, it's tough.

KUNZ: I know that Boston has many private schools. Did you ever consider working at any of them, or were you set on staying in the public school system?

WINGFIELD: I have mixed feelings about them. Because one, the private schools don't pay as much. There I am…

KUNZ: Interesting.

WINGFIELD: …venal to the core. [LAUGHS] And I honestly just didn't want to teach a bunch of white kids. I wanted to teach kids who look more like me, or who I think would benefit from at least dealing with someone who looks like me. So I really didn't want that. But I have thought about it lately, just because I know people who have made that leap, or just gone to a suburban district because they just didn't want the mess.

KUNZ: Including the post-pandemic mess?

WINGFIELD: Well, just everything. I mean, it's so dysfunctional on so many levels. But if you go anywhere else, it will be a pay cut. I mean, it's combat pay, that extra 30%. But if you go anywhere else to teach-- I think the only districts that are comparable [to Boston] with respect to teacher pay are Concord and, I think, Nantucket.

KUNZ: Oh. [LAUGHS] That'd be a move.

WINGFIELD: Everyplace else—even Brookline, Newton—the pay is substantially less, and I just didn't want to teach a bunch of entitled kids. Because even in the school district I'm in-- I've had parents who presumed that I didn't know enough math to teach their child, just by the way I look.

KUNZ: Wow.

WINGFIELD: And I was like, "Are you kidding me?"

KUNZ: You're like, "Let me tell you how many degrees I've got!" [LAUGHS]

WINGFIELD: Thankfully, most of them have gotten over it. I don't run into that too much. But at the beginning it was like, "What the hell?"

I can't say that I regret anything I've done, but it could have been easier if I had just perhaps just done what I liked. But I think I was too afraid to do what I liked.

KUNZ: Which brings us back to teaching music: do you do that alongside teaching math? Do you do one or the other? What does that look like for you right now?

WINGFIELD: Oh, right now it's kind of fun because I was strictly math for many years, and then I was talking to the then-headmaster and I said, “Well, you know, I have a music cert. I never told anybody. But I have a license to teach music. And so if you let me teach half music, half math, I could help you out.” And they're like, “You could do that?” And I said, “Yes.” And so I teach half beginning strings and half geometry this year, and it's fun.

I love geometry because it's my two other lives: the law, with the logic and the geometric reasoning, and the shapes and the structures and the spatial reasoning. I love that, probably more than the other math teachers who want to just turn it into algebra with shapes. And there is that, too. I know that a lot of kids-- Oh my gosh, their algebraic fluency is just atrocious. So they need that, too.

KUNZ: Have you seen a big shift over the last two or three years in the kids who are coming into your classroom as a result of the lost time from the pandemic?

WINGFIELD: Yes. There's a lot more, what would we say, ennui. A lot more kids hurting themselves or threatening to hurt themselves, or some who have killed themselves. And, I would say, just a lot more attendance issues, depression, and just plain, “Oh my god, you don't know this?” I don't say it out loud because that's my job as the teacher. If they don't know, I have to teach them. But they’re still at a fifth-grade, sixth-grade level, and they're supposed to be ninth graders with me. So that's shocking.

Part of me also has discerned that some of this is just plain racism of low expectations, because some of the teachers tell me, “Oh, I'm tutoring out in the suburbs, or I'm tutoring kids at BLS, and they're already on chapter 11.” They didn't stop. They didn't slow down because of the pandemic. [With those children] it’s “No. You keep working. You work at home if you're not coming in here.” And then there's all this coddling, and indulging of all the problems. And yes, of course it was hard. I know students who [became] orphans [as a result of COVID-19]. Some had to leave the city because they just lost their housing. They lost the adults who were making the money. I don't even know where they are. It was terrible. It was traumatic. But we're in school [now], and they need to keep learning stuff. That's the frustration I have.

KUNZ: I like your use of the word "coddling." I think I was very lucky in that I was a freshman at MIT when the pandemic started, so I had gotten through high school and I had a sense of what it meant to be independent when it comes to studying. Coming back now full-time, as a junior, the difference that I see between our junior and senior class who understood collegiate life prior to the pandemic, and our freshman class who just came in, is like night and day in regard to what they expect to be provided for them, and in the hand-holding that's expected.

WINGFIELD: Yes.

KUNZ: It's like there's a disconnect between understanding that, as an adult, you're not always going to get things that you want, that MIT is not always going to make adjustments. I'm sure that's even more exacerbated with younger students.

WINGFIELD: Absolutely.

KUNZ: It's very curious to see the difference in just social expectations, school expectations, and the way that they react to problem-solving.

WINGFIELD: Yes—and the passivity just drives me up the wall.

Some people said that they would give me ninth graders because they knew I would kind of toughen them up for high school. I was like, "I don't accept late work. I don't do retakes. Learn it the first time. I don't care if you don't like me. It's your job to learn the material. I'm not the first person to teach geometry. I'm not the last. So if you find some resource that's better for you, use it, because your job is to learn." And that's shocking to most of them.

I guess there's this expectation now that we develop these relationships with students. But in my high school experience I can think of maybe two or three teachers who cared at all. Most of the teachers thought, "Oh, you're one of those Black kids being bused." Most of them just didn't even know that I was bright, and didn't care to find out. One of them actually said to me, "Oh, it took me three months to realize that you were actually bright." [LAUGHS] So I was basically ignored in high school—and now I'm being asked to be a special adult in my students' lives, and that's ridiculous. Most 15 or 16-year-olds are not looking to their geometry teacher for a relationship. They're trying to get their first kiss or whatever! So that's what's happening at the secondary level now. I'm at the point where I'm trying to think of how can I retire and stop this, because I'm tired. [LAUGHS]

KUNZ: Right.

WINGFIELD: But what keeps you going [as a public school teach] is, you hear about the kid who did realize that they could think; they learn how to think. Or, I remember a girl who never did anything. She always failed math. And I said, “What on Earth?” And she said, “Well, everybody's good at it except me.” I said, “No. They're good at it because they actually do it. You're not going to get good just sitting there crying about how bad you are at math. You have to do it.” So yes, there is passivity. This student would show up after school for help, but then just sit there. It took a month for her to come up with a question. This is how disempowered they can become. I’d said to her, “It begins with you coming up with a question. If you haven't done enough work to come up with a question, that means you simply have not done enough work.”

KUNZ: Yeah.

WINGFIELD: Right. That's how it begins, with a question. And then you go to the next question. Something went off in her mind after months of this. And then she realized she could do well on a quiz or a test if she actually bothered to think about it. [LAUGHS] And then I didn't have to give her a passing grade; she just passed on her own. And she got into college. She's doing something she wants to do. So, that's very gratifying.

KUNZ: You remind me a lot of my high school calculus teacher, who I think approached teaching in the same way, or very similar way. He's like, “I don't care if you do the work or you don't, but I won't help you if you don't do it.”

WINGFIELD: Exactly. That's true.

A lot of these ninth graders are coming from this extreme coddling in middle school, and it's actually a disservice. They they’re pretty much left to their own devices in high school. But, you know, they have to take responsibility for their own learning.

KUNZ: Right.

WINGFIELD: Right.

KUNZ: Well, outside of teaching math and music to Boston ninth graders, you're still playing the cello at the Brookline Symphony, right?

WINGFIELD: Yes.

KUNZ: What is that like, being principal cellist? Congratulations!

WINGFIELD: It's fun.

KUNZ: That's incredibly impressive.

WINGFIELD: Thank you. It's fun. I like it. I can send you a clip of our Beethoven's Fifth.

KUNZ: I'd love that.

WINGFIELD: It was fun. You can see me now and then behind the conductor.

[Playing has] kept me sane. I realized that's the one thing I know I'll be doing until I take my last breath. I'll be doing something with music.

It's what's helped me get by this far. There's a huge, highly-skilled amateur music community here in Boston. And I think probably more than anywhere, even in New York, people just willing to just up and play for hours on end, just because they love it. That's probably what keeps me in Boston and not moving back to LA. I mean, there's no one left in LA. I'm an only child; I don't have any siblings. I still have the house out there, but I rent it out.

KUNZ: Did you ever feel the need to leave Boston? I see that you spent basically your whole life here after coming to MIT.

WINGFIELD: Yes. I was with a partner for 20-odd years, and she almost got a job in San Diego. I was willing to go back [to California] then because my parents were alive. I thought, “Oh, that would be fantastic to be near them and be able to check on them and this and that.” But it didn't come through. And I thought about moving to Seattle after grad school, but that didn't work out either. I think it was just easier to stay here. It was easier to find a job here. It was easier to find a place to live here. Other people seem to move more readily, but I guess having grown up an only child and fairly isolated, pretty lonely for most of my childhood, I was not big on just uprooting myself and starting all over because I know that's what it would involve. And if I did go somewhere else at this point it would be because I knew people there. But I can't think of any other place right now that I would move to.

KUNZ: I see.

WINGFIELD: People say, “Oh god, it's so racist [in Boston] and so this and that. And it is. [LAUGHS] But I've been a lot of other places in the U.S. I've got tons of relatives still in Atlanta. Atlanta's terribly racist, even though there's more Black people who reach the middle class. They're basically disenfranchised. They lost the right to vote the way it's set up in Georgia. I don't know. New York is pretty racist. San Francisco, very racist. Chicago, of course.

KUNZ: I come from the Midwest, from the Twin Cities, so you get--

WINGFIELD: Oh, Minneapolis.

KUNZ: When you're in the Twin Cities, it depends on where you're at. I think they like to advertise Minneapolis as being a sanctuary city. We have a huge Somali population, the huge Hmong population. But then, obviously, Minneapolis has been through the wringer.

WINGFIELD: There's a lot of problems.

KUNZ: It's really obvious how even in these places that advertise themselves as being so welcoming, it's not always the case. Almost never the case.

WINGFIELD: Never the case. Yeah. I didn't know how bad Minneapolis was because I had always heard, "Oh, the people are nice there." Oh my goodness. And now I hear that, what is it, Milwaukee and Minneapolis are worse than the places in the South in terms of that stuff.

KUNZ: Right.

WINGFIELD: So, I mean, I think it's naive of people to say, "Oh, there's some place I could go to avoid the American condition." And so I just stay here.

We finally elected Michelle Wu [as mayor of Boston], someone who was not an Irish man. [LAUGHS] Though it took, what, 40 years? But, finally! I gave money to Sam Yoon, and he got run out of town

It's changing very, very, very, very slowly [in Boston].

KUNZ: Is there anything else that you wanted to add? Anything we didn't touch on that you think would be important to include?

WINGFIELD: Well, I think I said that I thought majoring in music would not have been the greatest use of MIT's resources. I still believe that. But I did want to say it was pretty powerful when I was there. We had John Harbison [Princeton MFA '93; American composer best known for his symphonies, operas, and large choral works], and Marcus Thompson [Julliard PhD; MIT Professor and founder of the MIT Chamber Music Society and of the Emerson/Harris private study program] was my chamber music coach. It was quite something. I think I got a better music experience there than if I had gone to a conservatory because, you know, I'm good, but I wouldn't have been the fanciest player at a conservatory—I wouldn't have gotten all the opportunities to play that I did it at MIT. I'm grateful for that. And the MIT experience—I tell kids this, too: it's not about the actual thing you're studying at the time, because I'll guarantee anything I learned there is obsolete. It's done. It's toast. But what you do learn is how to learn, how to ask questions, how to approach solving a problem. There are going to be all kinds of things coming up in the world that you don't even know about.

KUNZ: Right.

WINGFIELD: But you still have to think critically about it. So I'm deeply appreciative of that, being able to do that. I see even now they're still talking about women at MIT-- [LAUGHS]

KUNZ: I think the Institute has realized that that definitely has not always been their strongest suit, and so interviewing alumnae for this oral history project has been quite interesting. I was introduced to it by my Spanish professor, Margery Resnick. She has been in MIT's Literature Department, and has been involved with women and gender studies for several decades. She started this project. I've spoken with women as old as 92 who had gone to MIT, and probably as young as their early 60s.

WINGFIELD: Wow.

KUNZ: It's been really interesting to see how the experience of MIT's women students has changed, because it really has.

WINGFIELD: Yes.

KUNZ: Obviously, improvements are still needed, but what I experience as an undergrad today is nowhere near the tribulations that some of the older women went through. I'm a computer science major, and my classes are 50/50 men and women. I almost never have to think about outright discrimination or being in an extreme minority. Whereas--

WINGFIELD: That was not the case back then.

KUNZ: Right.

WINGFIELD: Definitely not.

KUNZ: I'll talk with some women who are in their first year post-grad jobs, and they say that it's a slap in the face when you get to your first project and you're the only female engineer. But on campus, I think MIT is improving every single year in providing opportunities for women, students of color, and underrepresented groups.

WINGFIELD: That's good to hear. [When I was an MIT student], the 'being a woman' experience was harder than being Black. And when I was there, most of the other Black students, it seemed like they were all into Jesus. I don't have a problem with Jesus, per se, but that just wasn't my thing. And I was struggling with coming out. I didn't come out until I was in grad school, so that was like kind of the polar opposite experience.

KUNZ: Right.

WINGFIELD: Yes. So that's what informed a lot of my sense of isolation, not really knowing or feeling like I had that many people to talk to about it, about anything. So that was a little problematic. But, oh my God, MIT is a special place.

KUNZ: It is. I just want to thank you again for your time, and for sharing a bit about yourself.

WINGFIELD: Thank you, Callie.

Second interview, conducted on June 27th, 2022

KUNZ: During our previous conversation, you mentioned that being a woman at MIT was more difficult than being Black. Can you elaborate?

WINGFIELD: Back then, it was—I'll just be kind of blunt—it was more acceptable in that environment back then, the environment being MIT in particular, to find women contemptible more than people of color. I mean, keep in mind that even back then the demographic at MIT was about 20% to 25% immigrant, or international. That was people from Asia, South Asia, and Africa. So it was not that unusual for, say, a regular white male at MIT to encounter someone who was Black or Brown, but women were really unusual. We were still kind of the curios, freakazoids. This was also around the time that the Equal Rights Amendment (this is way before your time)—the proposed amendment to the Constitution that just said women have the same rights as men—had failed.

KUNZ: And it still has never been passed.

WINGFIELD: And it has never passed. And hey, surprise, surprise, these are the ramifications we just saw on the [Supreme] Court [for example, in the Court's overruling of *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022]. It was around that time that just asking for basic rights, it seemed to inspire a lot more, say-- I don't know-- what do they call it-- chauvinist, Neanderthal-ish behavior on the part of students and, to a lesser extent, faculty.

Say you go to a party. Some guy would just up and start talking about, "You women. You're never going to be the equal of us. You're never going to have this. You're never going do that. You shouldn't do that." Dah-dah-dah-dah-dah.

KUNZ: They would openly approach you and start--

WINGFIELD: Oh, yeah.

KUNZ: Wow.

WINGFIELD: Yeah. Sometimes that would be the opening thing. Not “Hi, my name is x, who are you?” You're identified as someone who's not male, so they'd just start blathering away. There was a lot of that back then. It was at that time that Ronald Reagan had been elected president. It was rough. If you had any kind of sentiment that was egalitarian, and if you went along with civil rights and equal rights and women's rights, it was very, very unclear what was going to happen.

KUNZ: Yeah.

WINGFIELD: And that was the beginning of the time where I really did think about, “Well, should I leave the country? Should I try to move to Canada?” Because it does seem like the whole country is a hostile environment. And I guess, anecdotally, I would have people-- OK, there was the [failure to pass the] ERA. That was bad enough. But then people would try to tell me, would pull me aside and try to explain to me that Ronald Reagan really was OK—he wasn't racist, and his policies weren't racist, and this and that. And I was like, “Oh, no, no, no, no.”

KUNZ: Was this mostly in social settings, or did this kind of behavior also trickle into classroom, engagement with peers?

WINGFIELD: No, mostly social. Now, institution-wise, the biggest theme around this period was in health services, coincidentally enough, and women at the Institute trying to get contraceptive care. That was a huge, huge issue. You're going to college. For a lot of people, it was their first time having sex, and they wanted contraception. And the shaming, judging, conditioning, and equivocating that people received-- Basically, the outright hostility at the campus health services was extraordinary, just to get contraception. Practically everyone I know, every woman I know at MIT, had some heinous interaction with a health care professional in MIT health services. Really? They would ask, “Well, why do you want contraception? Are you ready for this? Do you really want—" All that stuff that's probably happening at these so-called abortion counseling places now. It was like that. I'm assuming and hoping that's no longer the case.

KUNZ: I think that MIT has definitely done a good job of rebranding, instead of the idea of preaching abstinence-only education, they definitely support safe and healthy informed decisions based on your own life choices.

WINGFIELD: Exactly. “If this is what you're going to do, then you need to do x, y or z. OK, you want to be abstinent, great. If you don't, OK. Here's what you need to do.” So institutionally, it was mostly around health care that I heard about problems [for women students]. And anecdotally, I think was freshman year when I was struggling with physics or something, and I got a tutor. And that was the other thing—if you wanted a tutor, you were probably going to be propositioned by any male tutor at the Institute.

KUNZ: Wow.

WINGFIELD: You had to deal with that. But the tutoring works, notwithstanding that. And it was like, “Oh, that's all you need to do?” And then I started doing really well. And then the professor basically accused me of cheating.

KUNZ: Because you had to improved your scores.

WINGFIELD: Because I did well, after not doing well. The presumption is, you don't belong there. You're not capable of being there. And any success you do have is probably due to some bad behavior.

KUNZ: Wow.

WINGFIELD: Yeah. Now, I mean, that was me. There were a couple of people at WILG who I think were just straight-up geniuses. One woman used to walk around WILG just saying she was bored—and she was a double major in chemE (Chemical Engineering) and something else. I heard fairly soon after that she went back to MIT to teach. So it wasn't always the case. There were people like that who were clearly exceptional.

KUNZ: Yeah.

WINGFIELD: And there was another one-- Laura Kiessling [Yale Chemistry PhD ’89; Novartis Professor of Chemistry at MIT] I think-- I think she got one of those Genius Grants [MacArthur Fellowship]. She was in Materials Science. And yeah, there were a couple of people that you could tell were just off-the-charts gifted, because they'd just be sitting there doing their problem set and just laugh and telling jokes, making some brownies. But they were getting straight A's, and this and that, so clearly they were on it. They just were super casual, and the rest of us had to work.

KUNZ: So it was basically only the women who you could not deny the fact that they were that intelligent who were able to escape patronization from male peers?

WINGFIELD: Exactly.

And on the flip side, I knew Black and Brown males who were also extremely gifted. They were not held to that level of suspicion, and they were actually admired. I knew one guy—he literally looked like he was falling asleep in calculus or whatever the heck we were doing. And he would just maybe write something down on a piece of paper every five minutes or so. And yeah, he was knocking it out of the park too. But he looked bored out of his mind. But he was praised and lauded. And a woman who had the same approach would not be, definitely.

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This is outrageous stuff. And so there were all these indignities people had to just put up with as a matter of course.

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KUNZ: You're more of the exotic "other."

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KUNZ: With you designing this campus, and people are now using it every single day.

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KUNZ: It sounds like you had a decent amount of power and a lot of authority when you were doing this design. But you had mentioned how in previous projects you were given a lot of grunt work--

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KUNZ: Drawing in toilets on blueprints.

WINGFIELD: Right, right.

KUNZ: Were you drawing in little circles for the toilets, or--

WINGFIELD: Yes. Well, I assume this is still true. Basically, the first five years of any profession sucks, right?

KUNZ: Right.

WINGFIELD: You don't know anything. You're doing the scut work. And remember, this is pre-CAD. And really, building design, architecture, is 5% fun. The design is like, “Oh, let's conceive it!” And then the rest of it is nailing down the details. And at the very end, before they start construction, you're doing the contract documents, construction documents.

You have to have a schedule for the windows, meaning you have to list every single window that's going to be in the building, where is it going to be, what size is it, what's the manufacturer, and how many toilets, what faucets, what flushometers are going to be used—all that, everything—doors. And so there's door schedules, toilet schedules, window schedules.

And who does that? The person who is bottom on the totem pole. And so yes, I filled in toilets. I did toilet schedules and door schedules and window schedules. And I noticed, particularly at Ellenzweig, like I mentioned before, women were not given pride of place. Very, very rarely. They didn't care much about mentoring or grooming people for upward mobility. In fact, there was another girl—she was much younger than me—who had been there longer. She was white. All they had her do was make models. They never said, “OK, you got really good at making models. How about doing some drafting or this and that?” Never. They just had her do this one thing

over and over again. It was just this corporate, mechanistic approach to work.

In hindsight, I realize it was probably one of the worst places to work in the city with respect to that, even though they did very high-quality detailing. Their projects were very high-quality institutional projects. They did a lot of lab buildings for Harvard and MIT. And you can see, all the Ivy League schools have some type of lab building designed by Ellenzweig. So you learned that it wasn't schlock they were doing, but they were just treating people pretty shabbily.

KUNZ: When you say that it was one of the worst experiences in the city, did you have female classmates who had gone to different firms and who had better experiences?

WINGFIELD: Yes, or at least they'd found people who were willing to mentor them. And they actually got a chance to do projects. Most of the people I know who had the best mentoring experience left the city, though. They went away.

KUNZ: Do you think if you had had a better mentoring experience you would have stuck with architecture for longer?

WINGFIELD: Probably.

I was thinking, in general, that my professional experience is most likely tied to not only being Black and female but having inadequate mentoring. Because I was reasonably bright and energetic, and then I would find myself in the situation where it's just at a logjam. It's stuck. It's static. And it's like, “Oh, this isn't changing fast enough for me,” so I left.

And then at DCPO, well, that was a layoff. But then I think I was at the Housing Authority—I worked there in that job managing the renovation of public housing. My main developments were Bromley Heath and Maverick in East Boston, Orient Heights, and a couple of elderly developments, like Amory, and there was another one, Pond Street. At the Housing Authority at that time, you were assigned a development and then you had to assess what they needed and then make it happen: apply for the funding (usually from the feds and the state), hire designers, hire contractors, and this and that. So it was basically project management.

In every instance, I was just hitting a wall, getting bored, and moving on.

Even changing careers, it's like, “OK, I figured this out.” And in general, there's not a lot of places where Black designers were allowed to design. Most people of color I know who are still in the profession are doing something, say, technically related, like specifications or even construction administration. Very few people being allowed to design and make affirmative artistic decisions, unless they're controlling their own firm.

Today, the Museum of African-American History, in D.C. [the National Museum of African American History and Culture]—a Black-owned firm did that. And there's a couple of other ones. But you will rarely see that. I'm thinking of my best friend at MIT. He's a Black guy, and he's one of the most talented architects I've ever met. He's in a huge corporate architecture firm, and it took them 20 years to make him a partner. That's outrageous to me.

KUNZ: That’s crazy.

WINGFIELD: But he said, “I don't know how to do anything else, so I'm just staying.” So yes, I guess for me it was a curse being able to do a lot of different things. Because I just said, “Enough, I'm out of here. I'm going to do something else.” And I went to law school. As I said, I loved law school. But the practice of law-- In many ways, lawyers are even worse than architects, because they're not very creative. Especially in those [big law] firms. They're very rigid in their beliefs. At some of the firms I worked in, some people would not speak to me unless there was another partner in the room. I would say “Good morning” or “Hi,” or “That's a gorgeous suit you're wearing.” Nothing. But if they were talking to a client or something else, then they would engage.

KUNZ: Respond.

WINGFIELD: Yes. And even to this day, one of the firms I left, there are no Black partners. They did make a South Asian person partner in the past two years.

KUNZ: So slow progress within the design field, in architecture.

WINGFIELD: And law. And it's kind of classic in this country that, for many, many generations, the place where, say, people of color could, more or less, have some longevity and decent living circumstances was working for the public sector. I was running projects when I was working at the Housing Authority, but I couldn't manage to move up and get a raise without leaving.

KUNZ: You were stuck.

WINGFIELD: And so basically, that was the main reason, in hindsight, for me going to law school. I wanted to make more money—and I did. And then, after that, I went back to teaching, which was actually something I had planned to do. And I guess it's a lesson: you do something that you actually want to do and, chances are, you'll be more successful at it.

Chances are. But I'm proof that you could actually do anything you want if you put your mind to it. But better off doing something you want to do.

KUNZ: You want to do.

WINGFIELD: Yeah.

KUNZ: Well, I guess jumping on the things that you enjoy doing, finishing up with the music conversation, and going back to the lessons and the opportunities you had at the New England Conservatory, as a result of funding you got from MIT.

You said that that experience was really demanding and exhausting for you. Would you say that was more due to the workload and the timing of commuting [from Cambridge to Boston] and fitting that in? Or were there any other factors that contributed to making that such a difficult experience?

WINGFIELD: Basically, that was happening over my first two years at MIT. I don't know what the first year was like for you at MIT—the first semester, oh, my God, it was an adjustment. The time, the managing. And I was better off than most, because I had been bussed to an excellent high school and taken mostly AP classes there.

So I wasn't even hearing this stuff for the first time. But, for example, my calculus class at MIT, they went through everything I did in calc BC by Thanksgiving. And I was like, “Oh, my goodness.” So yes, it was the pace of it. And then I had to take the bus to NEC with my cello on my back. Or when I was taking lessons, I studied with Laurence Lesser [cellist and educator, president of the New England Conservatory from 1983 to 1996] initially, I had to go to his house in Newton.

KUNZ: Oh, wow. That's so out of the way.

WINGFIELD: I don't even remember how I got there. But it was just the time sink. And then he said, “I don't usually do this, take people who are not planning on being professional cellist.” But Miss Schoenfeld, the teacher I had in L.A., wrote me a letter, and he said, “I'll do it for as long as you want.” And I went for it. He pretty much held me to the standard I think he was holding his other students to, which was high and it was a lot. And he was a weird dude. He really was.

KUNZ: Weird in the sense of like quirky music teacher or weird in--

WINGFIELD: A quirky music teacher. I think one of the other reasons he decided to take me was that he was not a music major. Even though he was a world-class cellist and a professor and, maybe soon thereafter, Dean of New England Conservatory, he actually had gone to Harvard and was a Fulbright in math.

KUNZ: Wow.

WINGFIELD: Yeah.

KUNZ: But I guess there is a decent amount of overlap between--

WINGFIELD: Oh, absolutely.

KUNZ: --understanding music and understanding math.

WINGFIELD: Absolutely. Just last night, I was playing chamber music with people at a very high level. One of them was a math major at Rochester, one of them is a doctor, and the other is a PhD, working on a cure for melanoma. So they're inextricably linked.

I think that that's why he took me. But he was an old white guy. And he was married to an Asian woman. And there were just little things he would say that freaked me out. Like, “So-and-so and I are friends because we both have Asian wives, and we compare—" It was like, “We both have stamp collections.”

KUNZ: Right.

WINGFIELD: That was the feeling I got from him. And the way he taught, this is just personal, I thought made me more tight as a player. He was extremely proficient at offering shortcuts for enhancing technique, but I think at the expense of making me a more tense, uncomfortable player. It took me a while to unlearn that tension.

Even at the time he would say, “Oh, I'm in pain after playing for three hours.” That's not--

KUNZ: It's not what you would expect a string player to--

WINGFIELD: Right, right.

KUNZ: --say if they're loose and they're enjoying themselves.

WINGFIELD: Right, right. That's not right. It took a long time to reverse all that, so I could play all day. I need to stretch out a little, but I'm OK. You have to learn that and be mindful of it.

Anyway, I didn't have a car back then, so the time [involved getting back and forth] was just overwhelming. Time management was overwhelming. This was even after I switched teachers; I found someone who was not as fancy as Larry Lesser, a cellist in the BSO [Boston Symphony Orchestra]. At least I got to take lessons at Symphony Hall, which was a lot easier to get to.

KUNZ: Yes. Very easy to get to there from the MIT campus.

WINGFIELD: So that was easier. But even then, he was trying to get me to do more music while I was trying to take care of business at school. After a while I just stopped, because I couldn't do it.

KUNZ: You had to make a choice for the four years at school.

WINGFIELD: Right. And hey, I'm going to MIT and paying all this money. I got to get it together.

I liked it, but it was too much. I think now there are still people who do that, but maybe it's a little easier, or maybe they have cars. And it's a little more acceptable to major in music now.

KUNZ: I know people who double major, or do a minor in music.

WINGFIELD: Essentially, I had a minor in music, even though they didn't call it that at the time.

I think at the time it was kind of ironic. Architecture had the reputation—especially in this extremely male, testosterone-saturated environment—architecture had the reputation of being soft and for people. I guess couldn't hack it in the real subjects, like computer science and this and that. But ironically, we were working all the time coming up with designs.

It was just the same-- people walk around with that little circuit box. Do they still do that?

KUNZ: Yeah, in the robotics classes, people will have their suitcases full of details.

WINGFIELD: Right, right. So there was that. But then we were in studio. You didn't see us because we had all our junk in the studio, but it was kind of the same thing. But we were, in hindsight, I think a little more foolish or idealistic. In school, they tell you, “Well, if you're an architect, you can change the world. You can make people's lives better by changing the built environment and making it easier to get through the day.” I loved that. I liked helping people. But, of course, when you get out in the world, you realize, well, that's kind of a lie. And you're at the mercy of--

KUNZ: Whoever is paying you.

WINGFIELD: Exactly. And you have to do what they want.

[Second interview on next page]

Second interview, conducted on June 27th, 2022

KUNZ: During our previous conversation, you mentioned that being a woman at MIT was more difficult than being Black. Can you elaborate?

WINGFIELD: Back then, it was—I'll just be kind of blunt—it was more acceptable in that environment back then, the environment being MIT in particular, to find women contemptible more than people of color. I mean, keep in mind that even back then the demographic at MIT was about 20% to 25% immigrant, or international. That was people from Asia, South Asia, and Africa. So it was not that unusual for, say, a regular white male at MIT to encounter someone who was Black or Brown, but women were really unusual. We were still kind of the curios, freakazoids. This was also around the time that the Equal Rights Amendment (this is way before your time)—the proposed amendment to the Constitution that just said women have the same rights as men—had failed.

KUNZ: And it still has never been passed.

WINGFIELD: And it has never passed. And hey, surprise, surprise, these are the ramifications we just saw on the [Supreme] Court [for example, in the Court's overruling of *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022]. It was around that time that just asking for basic rights, it seemed to inspire a lot more, say-- I don't know-- what do they call it-- chauvinist, Neanderthal-ish behavior on the part of students and, to a lesser extent, faculty.

Say you go to a party. Some guy would just up and start talking about, "You women. You're never going to be the equal of us. You're never going to have this. You're never going do that. You shouldn't do that." Dah-dah-dah-dah-dah.

KUNZ: They would openly approach you and start--

WINGFIELD: Oh, yeah.

KUNZ: Wow.

WINGFIELD: Yeah. Sometimes that would be the opening thing. Not “Hi, my name is x, who are you?” You're identified as someone who's not male, so they'd just start blathering away. There was a lot of that back then. It was at that time that Ronald Reagan had been elected president. It was rough. If you had any kind of sentiment that was egalitarian, and if you went along with civil rights and equal rights and women's rights, it was very, very unclear what was going to happen.

KUNZ: Yeah.

WINGFIELD: And that was the beginning of the time where I really did think about, “Well, should I leave the country? Should I try to move to Canada?” Because it does seem like the whole country is a hostile environment. And I guess, anecdotally, I would have people-- OK, there was the [failure to pass the] ERA. That was bad enough. But then people would try to tell me, would pull me aside and try to explain to me that Ronald Reagan really was OK—he wasn't racist, and his policies weren't racist, and this and that. And I was like, “Oh, no, no, no, no.”

KUNZ: Was this mostly in social settings, or did this kind of behavior also trickle into classroom, engagement with peers?

WINGFIELD: No, mostly social. Now, institution-wise, the biggest theme around this period was in health services, coincidentally enough, and women at the Institute trying to get contraceptive care. That was a huge, huge issue. You're going to college. For a lot of people, it was their first time having sex, and they wanted contraception. And the shaming, judging, conditioning, and equivocating that people received-- Basically, the outright hostility at the campus health services was extraordinary, just to get contraception. Practically everyone I know, every woman I know at MIT, had some heinous interaction with a health care professional in MIT health services. Really? They would ask, “Well, why do you want contraception? Are you ready for this? Do you really want—" All that stuff that's probably happening at these so-called abortion counseling places now. It was like that. I'm assuming and hoping that's no longer the case.

KUNZ: I think that MIT has definitely done a good job of rebranding, instead of the idea of preaching abstinence-only education, they definitely support safe and healthy informed decisions based on your own life choices.

WINGFIELD: Exactly. “If this is what you're going to do, then you need to do x, y or z. OK, you want to be abstinent, great. If you don't, OK. Here's what you need to do.” So institutionally, it was mostly around health care that I heard about problems [for women students]. And anecdotally, I think was freshman year when I was struggling with physics or something, and I got a tutor. And that was the other thing—if you wanted a tutor, you were probably going to be propositioned by any male tutor at the Institute.

KUNZ: Wow.

WINGFIELD: You had to deal with that. But the tutoring works, notwithstanding that. And it was like, “Oh, that's all you need to do?” And then I started doing really well. And then the professor basically accused me of cheating.

KUNZ: Because you had to improved your scores.

WINGFIELD: Because I did well, after not doing well. The presumption is, you don't belong there. You're not capable of being there. And any success you do have is probably due to some bad behavior.

KUNZ: Wow.

WINGFIELD: Yeah. Now, I mean, that was me. There were a couple of people at WILG who I think were just straight-up geniuses. One woman used to walk around WILG just saying she was bored—and she was a double major in chemE (Chemical Engineering) and something else. I heard fairly soon after that she went back to MIT to teach. So it wasn't always the case. There were people like that who were clearly exceptional.

KUNZ: Yeah.

WINGFIELD: And there was another one-- Laura Kiessling [Yale Chemistry PhD ’89; Novartis Professor of Chemistry at MIT] I think-- I think she got one of those Genius Grants [MacArthur Fellowship]. She was in Materials Science. And yeah, there were a couple of people that you could tell were just off-the-charts gifted, because they'd just be sitting there doing their problem set and just laugh and telling jokes, making some brownies. But they were getting straight A's, and this and that, so clearly they were on it. They just were super casual, and the rest of us had to work.

KUNZ: So it was basically only the women who you could not deny the fact that they were that intelligent who were able to escape patronization from male peers?

WINGFIELD: Exactly.

And on the flip side, I knew Black and Brown males who were also extremely gifted. They were not held to that level of suspicion, and they were actually admired. I knew one guy—he literally looked like he was falling asleep in calculus or whatever the heck we were doing. And he would just maybe write something down on a piece of paper every five minutes or so. And yeah, he was knocking it out of the park too. But he looked bored out of his mind. But he was praised and lauded. And a woman who had the same approach would not be, definitely.

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WINGFIELD: Oh, the toilet, yeah, the--

KUNZ: Drawing in toilets on blueprints.

WINGFIELD: Right, right.

KUNZ: Were you drawing in little circles for the toilets, or--

WINGFIELD: Yes. Well, I assume this is still true. Basically, the first five years of any profession sucks, right?

KUNZ: Right.

WINGFIELD: You don't know anything. You're doing the scut work. And remember, this is pre-CAD. And really, building design, architecture, is 5% fun. The design is like, “Oh, let's conceive it!” And then the rest of it is nailing down the details. And at the very end, before they start construction, you're doing the contract documents, construction documents.

You have to have a schedule for the windows, meaning you have to list every single window that's going to be in the building, where is it going to be, what size is it, what's the manufacturer, and how many toilets, what faucets, what flushometers are going to be used—all that, everything—doors. And so there's door schedules, toilet schedules, window schedules.

And who does that? The person who is bottom on the totem pole. And so yes, I filled in toilets. I did toilet schedules and door schedules and window schedules. And I noticed, particularly at Ellenzweig, like I mentioned before, women were not given pride of place. Very, very rarely. They didn't care much about mentoring or grooming people for upward mobility. In fact, there was another girl—she was much younger than me—who had been there longer. She was white. All they had her do was make models. They never said, “OK, you got really good at making models. How about doing some drafting or this and that?” Never. They just had her do this one thing

over and over again. It was just this corporate, mechanistic approach to work.

In hindsight, I realize it was probably one of the worst places to work in the city with respect to that, even though they did very high-quality detailing. Their projects were very high-quality institutional projects. They did a lot of lab buildings for Harvard and MIT. And you can see, all the Ivy League schools have some type of lab building designed by Ellenzweig. So you learned that it wasn't schlock they were doing, but they were just treating people pretty shabbily.

KUNZ: When you say that it was one of the worst experiences in the city, did you have female classmates who had gone to different firms and who had better experiences?

WINGFIELD: Yes, or at least they'd found people who were willing to mentor them. And they actually got a chance to do projects. Most of the people I know who had the best mentoring experience left the city, though. They went away.

KUNZ: Do you think if you had had a better mentoring experience you would have stuck with architecture for longer?

WINGFIELD: Probably.

I was thinking, in general, that my professional experience is most likely tied to not only being Black and female but having inadequate mentoring. Because I was reasonably bright and energetic, and then I would find myself in the situation where it's just at a logjam. It's stuck. It's static. And it's like, “Oh, this isn't changing fast enough for me,” so I left.

And then at DCPO, well, that was a layoff. But then I think I was at the Housing Authority—I worked there in that job managing the renovation of public housing. My main developments were Bromley Heath and Maverick in East Boston, Orient Heights, and a couple of elderly developments, like Amory, and there was another one, Pond Street. At the Housing Authority at that time, you were assigned a development and then you had to assess what they needed and then make it happen: apply for the funding (usually from the feds and the state), hire designers, hire contractors, and this and that. So it was basically project management.

In every instance, I was just hitting a wall, getting bored, and moving on.

Even changing careers, it's like, “OK, I figured this out.” And in general, there's not a lot of places where Black designers were allowed to design. Most people of color I know who are still in the profession are doing something, say, technically related, like specifications or even construction administration. Very few people being allowed to design and make affirmative artistic decisions, unless they're controlling their own firm.

Today, the Museum of African-American History, in D.C. [the National Museum of African American History and Culture]—a Black-owned firm did that. And there's a couple of other ones. But you will rarely see that. I'm thinking of my best friend at MIT. He's a Black guy, and he's one of the most talented architects I've ever met. He's in a huge corporate architecture firm, and it took them 20 years to make him a partner. That's outrageous to me.

KUNZ: That’s crazy.

WINGFIELD: But he said, “I don't know how to do anything else, so I'm just staying.” So yes, I guess for me it was a curse being able to do a lot of different things. Because I just said, “Enough, I'm out of here. I'm going to do something else.” And I went to law school. As I said, I loved law school. But the practice of law-- In many ways, lawyers are even worse than architects, because they're not very creative. Especially in those [big law] firms. They're very rigid in their beliefs. At some of the firms I worked in, some people would not speak to me unless there was another partner in the room. I would say “Good morning” or “Hi,” or “That's a gorgeous suit you're wearing.” Nothing. But if they were talking to a client or something else, then they would engage.

KUNZ: Respond.

WINGFIELD: Yes. And even to this day, one of the firms I left, there are no Black partners. They did make a South Asian person partner in the past two years.

KUNZ: So slow progress within the design field, in architecture.

WINGFIELD: And law. And it's kind of classic in this country that, for many, many generations, the place where, say, people of color could, more or less, have some longevity and decent living circumstances was working for the public sector. I was running projects when I was working at the Housing Authority, but I couldn't manage to move up and get a raise without leaving.

KUNZ: You were stuck.

WINGFIELD: And so basically, that was the main reason, in hindsight, for me going to law school. I wanted to make more money—and I did. And then, after that, I went back to teaching, which was actually something I had planned to do. And I guess it's a lesson: you do something that you actually want to do and, chances are, you'll be more successful at it.

Chances are. But I'm proof that you could actually do anything you want if you put your mind to it. But better off doing something you want to do.

KUNZ: You want to do.

WINGFIELD: Yeah.

KUNZ: Well, I guess jumping on the things that you enjoy doing, finishing up with the music conversation, and going back to the lessons and the opportunities you had at the New England Conservatory, as a result of funding you got from MIT.

You said that that experience was really demanding and exhausting for you. Would you say that was more due to the workload and the timing of commuting [from Cambridge to Boston] and fitting that in? Or were there any other factors that contributed to making that such a difficult experience?

WINGFIELD: Basically, that was happening over my first two years at MIT. I don't know what the first year was like for you at MIT—the first semester, oh, my God, it was an adjustment. The time, the managing. And I was better off than most, because I had been bussed to an excellent high school and taken mostly AP classes there.

So I wasn't even hearing this stuff for the first time. But, for example, my calculus class at MIT, they went through everything I did in calc BC by Thanksgiving. And I was like, “Oh, my goodness.” So yes, it was the pace of it. And then I had to take the bus to NEC with my cello on my back. Or when I was taking lessons, I studied with Laurence Lesser [cellist and educator, president of the New England Conservatory from 1983 to 1996] initially, I had to go to his house in Newton.

KUNZ: Oh, wow. That's so out of the way.

WINGFIELD: I don't even remember how I got there. But it was just the time sink. And then he said, “I don't usually do this, take people who are not planning on being professional cellist.” But Miss Schoenfeld, the teacher I had in L.A., wrote me a letter, and he said, “I'll do it for as long as you want.” And I went for it. He pretty much held me to the standard I think he was holding his other students to, which was high and it was a lot. And he was a weird dude. He really was.

KUNZ: Weird in the sense of like quirky music teacher or weird in--

WINGFIELD: A quirky music teacher. I think one of the other reasons he decided to take me was that he was not a music major. Even though he was a world-class cellist and a professor and, maybe soon thereafter, Dean of New England Conservatory, he actually had gone to Harvard and was a Fulbright in math.

KUNZ: Wow.

WINGFIELD: Yeah.

KUNZ: But I guess there is a decent amount of overlap between--

WINGFIELD: Oh, absolutely.

KUNZ: --understanding music and understanding math.

WINGFIELD: Absolutely. Just last night, I was playing chamber music with people at a very high level. One of them was a math major at Rochester, one of them is a doctor, and the other is a PhD, working on a cure for melanoma. So they're inextricably linked.

I think that that's why he took me. But he was an old white guy. And he was married to an Asian woman. And there were just little things he would say that freaked me out. Like, “So-and-so and I are friends because we both have Asian wives, and we compare—" It was like, “We both have stamp collections.”

KUNZ: Right.

WINGFIELD: That was the feeling I got from him. And the way he taught, this is just personal, I thought made me more tight as a player. He was extremely proficient at offering shortcuts for enhancing technique, but I think at the expense of making me a more tense, uncomfortable player. It took me a while to unlearn that tension.

Even at the time he would say, “Oh, I'm in pain after playing for three hours.” That's not--

KUNZ: It's not what you would expect a string player to--

WINGFIELD: Right, right.

KUNZ: --say if they're loose and they're enjoying themselves.

WINGFIELD: Right, right. That's not right. It took a long time to reverse all that, so I could play all day. I need to stretch out a little, but I'm OK. You have to learn that and be mindful of it.

Anyway, I didn't have a car back then, so the time [involved getting back and forth] was just overwhelming. Time management was overwhelming. This was even after I switched teachers; I found someone who was not as fancy as Larry Lesser, a cellist in the BSO [Boston Symphony Orchestra]. At least I got to take lessons at Symphony Hall, which was a lot easier to get to.

KUNZ: Yes. Very easy to get to there from the MIT campus.

WINGFIELD: So that was easier. But even then, he was trying to get me to do more music while I was trying to take care of business at school. After a while I just stopped, because I couldn't do it.

KUNZ: You had to make a choice for the four years at school.

WINGFIELD: Right. And hey, I'm going to MIT and paying all this money. I got to get it together.

I liked it, but it was too much. I think now there are still people who do that, but maybe it's a little easier, or maybe they have cars. And it's a little more acceptable to major in music now.

KUNZ: I know people who double major, or do a minor in music.

WINGFIELD: Essentially, I had a minor in music, even though they didn't call it that at the time.

I think at the time it was kind of ironic. Architecture had the reputation—especially in this extremely male, testosterone-saturated environment—architecture had the reputation of being soft and for people. I guess couldn't hack it in the real subjects, like computer science and this and that. But ironically, we were working all the time coming up with designs.

It was just the same-- people walk around with that little circuit box. Do they still do that?

KUNZ: Yeah, in the robotics classes, people will have their suitcases full of details.

WINGFIELD: Right, right. So there was that. But then we were in studio. You didn't see us because we had all our junk in the studio, but it was kind of the same thing. But we were, in hindsight, I think a little more foolish or idealistic. In school, they tell you, “Well, if you're an architect, you can change the world. You can make people's lives better by changing the built environment and making it easier to get through the day.” I loved that. I liked helping people. But, of course, when you get out in the world, you realize, well, that's kind of a lie. And you're at the mercy of--

KUNZ: Whoever is paying you.

WINGFIELD: Exactly. And you have to do what they want.