

**THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY ORAL HISTORY
PRESENTATION PROGRAM**

OAK RIDGE, TENNESSEE

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALICE P. MAXWELL

FOR THE

**OAK RIDGE NATIONAL LABORATORY
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

INTERVIEWED BY

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STOW: Today, we're going to be talking with Alice Maxwell. Alice ran the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, or MIT, Practice School here at ORNL for over twenty-five years, and she has some really fascinating stories to tell about her involvement and her interactions with students and ORNL staff. So, we look forward to an hour of talking with Alice.

Alice, good to have you here today to talk with us.

MAXWELL: Thank you.

STOW: Where are you from?

MAXWELL: I'm a Georgia girl -- North Georgia.

STOW: North Georgia.

MAXWELL: A Georgia peach.

STOW: I could tell that wasn't a Boston accent that you had there.

MAXWELL: (laughs) It's funny that my accent was terribly slow, but after working with those northerners for so long, nobody really can guess that I am from Georgia, because it's been speeded up just a little bit.

STOW: (laughs) Well, let's talk about some of those northerners that you worked with.

MAXWELL: All right.

STOW: You started with the MIT Practice School in, I think, 1951. Is that right?

MAXWELL: Well, they started in '51, but I didn't come along until '54. There was another girl that worked for them a couple of years...and then, me. So I started in '54.

STOW: I thought they actually started the MIT school here in 1948.

MAXWELL: I don't think so. They started them other places, but not at K-25. That's where it started in Oak Ridge -- at K-25.

STOW: Well, let's go back and start with you. What was it that brought you to the MIT Practice School in '54 then?

MAXWELL: It's so funny, because I actually started to work at Y-12.

STOW: Okay.

MAXWELL: Y-12 at that time would have a project, and when the project was over six or eight or ten or twelve months later, everybody was laid off. I got in on one of those.

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: And, when the project was over after eighteen months, I didn't have a job. And, they acted like they didn't want me to have one. So, I got busy and went to K-25 and asked about

a job. And, I got one in the computing section, so I transferred to K-25. Well, at that point in time, they had a project, and they were working around the clock. So, whenever that project was over, I was sitting without a place. So, they put me in the engineering building. I did anything for anybody that needed to be done, and at that point in time, they were typing the Portsmouth manuals. So, I typed Portsmouth manuals, and, one day, they came to me and said, "We need somebody over at the MIT Practice School." And I said, "What's MIT?"

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: You know, this Georgia girl knew nothing about the North whatsoever --MIT. So, they told me, and I said, "Well, where is it?" "Well, it's in 1008-C." And I said, "That's over in the boonies! I don't want over there!"

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: "Well, you're just the right one, because we need a liaison. You will be reporting to Carbide, and you'll be reporting to MIT. So, we need a go-between. We need somebody with a good personality who can get along with people." And, frankly, I thought it was a snow job, but it sounded good.

STOW: And, it was a job anyway.

MAXWELL: So, I went with the Practice School, and I have not been sorry.

STOW: Why did they call it a Practice School?

MAXWELL: Because everything was practice. The director was practicing being a supervisor. The associate director was also practicing being a supervisor, and he was probably working on his master's degree or had gotten his master's, and he was going on for his doctorate. So, he was practicing leadership skills. The students were practicing the things that they had learned in school. "How do I apply what I have learned?"

STOW: All right.

MAXWELL: And, in the meantime, they had to learn how to write reports and give an oral presentation. So, for everyone who came, learning [was important], even to me. I had to learn how to do technical typing. And, I felt so dumb. I would go to Jim Bresee -- he was the first person under whom I worked -- and ask, "What is this? What does it mean?" Of course, what he would tell me didn't mean anything in the world to me, but it would help my feelings. And, believe me, I had to learn how to type all those equations.

STOW: Well, you were located at K-25 at that early stage.

MAXWELL: Yes.

STOW: How long was the Practice School over there before coming to X-10?

MAXWELL: They closed in '62, because some of the foreign students wanted to come, and they had to have a Q clearance. And, nobody, at the last minute, could ask to come.

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: So, the Q clearance was a problem. They closed the school, and then when ORSORT at ORNL closed down, the school's director wanted to move the school to ORNL in '62. But there was no place.

STOW: All right.

MAXWELL: There was no room at ORNL. At K-25 the Practice School had a laboratory and a machine shop. We had an auditorium. We had a drawing room. We had a library. We had three offices. We had a whole building.

STOW: So, what you're telling me then is that prior to the Practice School transferring to X-10...

MAXWELL: It was closed for four years. So, I came to ORNL and worked in the I&C Division for four years. I didn't like my supervisor, so I called Jim Bresee and said, "Jim, if you ever hear of any opening that you think I would fit into, let me know." So, he called me one day and said, "Alice, MIT is coming to ORNL." "Hallelujah -- can I get my job back?"

STOW: And so, if I take 1962, and add four years to it, that makes 1966.

MAXWELL: '66. That's when the Practice School came to ORNL.

STOW: Now, I understand that that's partially a result of Alvin Weinberg, isn't it?

MAXWELL: Whoever it was, I'm mighty happy.

STOW: I think Alvin Weinberg was at MIT...

MAXWELL: Okay.

STOW: ... and he was visiting there and talking to a fellow by the name of Gilliland, who was head of the Chemical Engineering Department.

MAXWELL: Yes, yes.

STOW: And, he said, "Hey, we could use the school down at Oak Ridge National Lab, and we don't have to work on classified projects anymore, and therefore, we can use some foreign students, too.

MAXWELL: Good. I didn't know that.

STOW: So, there you are. What were your thoughts when you came back in 1966? You must have been pleased about being able to restart the school.

MAXWELL: Very much. I tell you, they were young enough that I told everybody during that period that the MIT students kept me young. They had new ideas, they were up on everything, and they were happy. They hadn't learned to complain yet. And, it was just a wonderful relationship. Because just about everybody you see, and, this is a strong statement, I know, they didn't like their job, or they didn't like their supervisor, or they didn't ... everybody seemed to be unhappy but me.

STOW: Something must have been wrong, right?

MAXWELL: I was the happy one. I loved it.

STOW: Good.

MAXWELL: And, they depended on me. You know, I did everything that Carbide required, and they knew that I was familiar with the procedures. And so, I just started in where I left off.

STOW: I want to talk more about Carbide's involvement in the Practice School in a minute, but let's go back. Tell us how the students were selected and what the motivation was for them to come down here.

MAXWELL: Well, nobody ever told me -- a lot of this stuff I learned with practice. But, they were all curious about atomic energy...

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: Now, that's the main thing. And, a little bit later one of the directors managed to get the students a small stipend that covered their expenses while they were down here. Well, okay, they liked part of it...

STOW: Now, did Carbide pay the stipend?

MAXWELL: Yes.

STOW: Okay, so, there actually was corporate money that was put into the school then, right?

MAXWELL: Later ... not in '66.

STOW: Okay.

MAXWELL: But, I think the students were curious about the South, curious about learning about the country, and curious about Oak Ridge National Laboratory. I think they wanted to learn something about this nuclear business.

STOW: Well, I would hope so. They were master's students and Ph.D. students, right?

MAXWELL: No Ph.D.s. They all had master's degrees. And, it's interesting that they didn't get a degree in chemical engineering. They got one in chemical engineering "practice."

STOW: All right.

MAXWELL: And then, the MIT people that were already out in the world knew about the school, and they loved to hire the students. They realized the [students who had been at the Practice School] knew how to present information and how to write reports. They had to do their own drawings. One student one time here said, "I am not going to do my own drawings." Well, the reply was, "Oh yes, you are." He said, "I'm going to get a job where I don't have to do my own drawings. There are people in the drawing division to do that." He was very incensed to have to do his own drawings. So, they got experience in so many things.

STOW: And, they would be down here for how long a time?

MAXWELL: Half a semester.

STOW: Half a semester. About eight weeks?

MAXWELL: Yes. And, they were given two different projects while they were here.

STOW: All right.

MAXWELL: And, every student had a chance to be a good leader. That was another bit of the practice.

STOW: Oh, did the students have a chance to pick the projects that they worked on, or were they assigned?

MAXWELL: They were assigned.

STOW: By whom?

MAXWELL: By the director.

STOW: And, did the director work closely with ORNL staff to select projects? How did that operate?

MAXWELL: Well, as the word got around, and as they gave their talks in the auditorium, people could see that they were doing things. And, they learned that if they wanted a quick look at a certain aspect now, these guys were working themselves ... on projects. But, if they wanted a quick look on something, they would ask the students to do it, because they knew these students worked so hard. And, one director told me that the students were deliberately given more to do than they had time to do.

STOW: Why was that?

MAXWELL: Some more practice, you know.

STOW: Well, I meant some deadlines and...

MAXWELL: Oh, yes. Everything was practice. Whenever they were given an assignment, the first thing they did was to go to the library and look up some background stuff. Well, okay, one time they looked up background stuff, and somebody had already done what the students were assigned to do. So, they had to give up that project, and get another one.

STOW: How many students a year would there be down here?

MAXWELL: They were set up to handle twelve to fifteen.

STOW: All right.

MAXWELL: But, we never got a full complement. We never did.

STOW: Why do you think that we never got a full slate of students?

MAXWELL: Well, if a student had a girlfriend, he didn't want to live for eight weeks here and eight weeks at another practice school, so he wouldn't come.

STOW: Okay.

MAXWELL: Or, if they didn't care what they saw down here, if they didn't care anything about the South, or if they were pretty much at the end of getting their master's degree, they didn't want to take the time to do it.

STOW: All right.

MAXWELL: And, like I say, it just depended on their life and livelihood.

STOW: Well, now you mentioned another practice school ... MIT had had a number of them around the country, didn't they?

MAXWELL: Yes. They had one at Boundbrook, New Jersey, in the beginning. Then, they had another one at Dow Chemical. So, like I say, the students spent two half semesters in research and two in regular companies. So, this one was for research. They got practice in both types of practice, so they could decide when they went out into the world which they wanted, which they liked...

STOW: All right. That makes sense, doesn't it?

MAXWELL: Yes, which type of work would suit their personality. Like I say, I cannot stress enough that everything was experience. Everything was learning.

STOW: Well, now I understand MIT also set up practice schools at DOE's Los Alamos National Laboratory and Brookhaven National Laboratory, and then, more recently, at the Solar Energy Research Institute in Colorado. [SERI is now called the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, or NREL.]

MAXWELL: None of those were connected with us. None of those were going on at the time that they were here.

STOW: Okay. Those others came later then, is that right?

MAXWELL: Yes.

STOW: What was your job like on a daily basis? I mean, you must have tended to everything, right?

MAXWELL: (laughs) Everything.

STOW: Well, just run us through a typical day.

MAXWELL: Well, first of all, I had to find apartments for the students to live in.

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: And, then, of course, whenever they left, a messed-up apartment was there. So, we would hire somebody to clean it. And, in the end, I wound up cleaning it, and they paid me. And, I would take care of the library work. Most of it was typing, because at that time, electric typewriters came along later. I had to use the old manual typewriters.

STOW: I remember them.

MAXWELL: The only thing each one could do is handwrite his report. Then, I would type a draft of it. And, each student would take that draft and change it. Then, I would type another copy of it. And, when each of their reports was twenty-five to fifty pages...

STOW: Whew!

MAXWELL: ... that was a lot of typing.

STOW: And a lot of the students were foreign students, right?

MAXWELL: Yes.

STOW: So, I guess you had to translate their words into English, and so on?

MAXWELL: (laughs) Had to guess at what they were saying. And, by that time, I knew the words.

STOW: All right.

MAXWELL: And, even if their handwriting was sloppy, I could still manage to figure out what they were saying.

STOW: Well, did you report to MIT staff, or did you report to ORNL management as to what was going on, and how well things were going?

MAXWELL: Frankly, I didn't do either one.

STOW: Pretty much on your own?

MAXWELL: We were such an autonomous group. And, of course, the director and assistant director, they had contact with MIT. And, if MIT needed something, they would talk to me. If I was the only one in the office, they had to talk to me and ask me to relay this kind of information to my supervisor. And, the directors would get reports from the library that they wanted to see, so we kept the mail system busy. And, as far as the students went, anything that they wanted out of Carbide, usually they would come and ask me how, where, whom, and these kind of things.

STOW: All right.

MAXWELL: So, there was just a lot of information, and all of it passed through me.

STOW: Where were you physically located -- here at ORNL?

MAXWELL: Yes. We had to have quite a bit of space, so Carbide would fix it like we needed it. And, when somebody would come and visit us, "Hmm ..." They liked that. And, the next thing you know, we were moved to some other place that nobody wanted. And so, we were in Building 1000 up on the hill . . .

STOW: Probably in those quonset huts, maybe?

MAXWELL: No, we were up there where the old reactor was. And, then we were out in the boonies, somewhere out there, at one point in time.

STOW: You were in 1505 when I came here in 1980, I think.

MAXWELL: That's where we were. And, somebody came along and wanted that space, so we would get moved. Am I making sense? (laughs?)

STOW: Yes, it was an embarrassment of riches, and that's not an unusual story during the 1970s and '80s when this place was growing.

MAXWELL: So, when we had a library, we had a roomful of books. I mean, all four walls were full of books. And, we had a lot of packing up to do.

STOW: So, that was all supplied by MIT...not by ORNL, right?

MAXWELL: ORNL furnished desks for us, but the library books belonged to MIT.

STOW: Do you think the MIT Practice School was generally accepted by ORNL staff?

MAXWELL: Yes, very much so.

STOW: Can you give me some examples of why you're so definite in saying that?

MAXWELL: Well, I'm saying that because they did the greater part of their work in the Chemistry Division or the Chemical Technology Division. And so, those guys knew the students well if they got them to stay. So many of these students, if they were foreign or from up north where they had girlfriends, wanted to go back where they came from.

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: So, the company did not get as many of the students as they would have liked. But, the ones that they did get were in Chem Tech. And, Kurt Kraus and Josh Johnson, who were in the Chemistry Division, loved those students. They gave them every project that they possibly could. They would invite them over to their homes for a dinner or cookout. They had a wonderful association with them. From time to time, I would run across some of the guys in Chem Tech, but, I didn't have a chance to meet them. I didn't go to their talks. I was busy. I was typing. I never had the chance to meet their mentors who gave them the projects, as I would have liked. And then, whenever the reports were finished, I would send them out to whomever, and their project managers wanted to get a copy of each report.

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: I knew the names, but I never had a face to go with the name. And, from time to time, someone might say something to me like, "I had a student from the Practice School, and we had a lot of fun with him."

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: They gave us ideas, because they [liked the novelty of what the students] were doing. And, to get a new idea out of some of these students -- they liked that.

STOW: But, you had to get some satisfaction out of that, too. I'm sure you did.

MAXWELL: Oh, by all means. I tell you, I felt like they were bragging on me, because I was such a great part of MIT. And, everybody knew me by name. They might not have seen me, but they knew Alice Maxwell. And, when I would tell somebody I was Alice Maxwell, that person would say, "Oh! You were with MIT."

STOW: Carbide paid a stipend to these students...

MAXWELL: In the latter years, yes.

STOW: And, of course, Carbide and the Laboratory gave up space. What was in it for Union Carbide or the Laboratory? I mean, what was the motivation?

MAXWELL: Well, I'll have to say I don't have an answer to that. The division under which we operated took it out of their budget.

MAXWELL: And frankly, they did not like that.

STOW: But, it really wasn't Carbide money. It was DOE research money. Or, AEC research money.

MAXWELL: (laughs) True, but it came out of their division, and they felt like they didn't get to do enough in their division. They were thrown up to me once, whenever I had my yearly talk with my supervisor.

STOW: With your ORNL supervisor, right?

MAXWELL: Yes.

STOW: And, who was your ORNL supervisor during those years.

MAXWELL: I'm not going to name one of them.

STOW: Okay.

MAXWELL: One [I will name] was Dan Robbins. And, Dan was a super guy. Dan and I got along fine. It took a time or two before we got to that. But, basically, I didn't have any trouble out of Union Carbide simply because I was doing a job that somebody would have to do as long as the students were here. And, they knew that the job was done well. And, whenever the directors would go in and talk to our supervisor, they would tell them that. And, the whole time that I worked with MTT, they tried to get me an upper rating.

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: But, I never got it ... because, they told me, the job itself did not call for the upper rating. The job didn't make me. I made the job.

STOW: I understand.

MAXWELL: So, you know, I was between a rock and a hard place at times.

STOW: Well, sometimes, when a person is rather unique in one's job, it's very hard for personnel to understand that and to rate it.

MAXWELL: They never did.

STOW: I understand. Some of the students ended up coming to work here at ORNL.

MAXWELL: Not many.

STOW: Not many?

MAXWELL: Because of where they lived and what their circumstances were. Many of them wanted to go on for their Ph.D.

STOW: Sure.

MAXWELL: So, the supervisor I don't want to name complained that, "We don't get these students. They come down here, and they learn all of this stuff, and we don't get [to hire] them." Well, of course, we didn't get the foreigners. And, of course, we didn't get the ones that went on for their Ph.D. degrees. So, a minority was left.

STOW: Okay.

MAXWELL: And, again, it depended on if they had already been interviewed by people that wanted jobs here, if they had already promised certain things, or if they were going to get married and move somewhere else. You know, it just depended on a lot of things.

STOW: Well, did the Lab do anything that was proactive in order to encourage students to hire on to the payroll here?

MAXWELL: I'll have to say, I really don't have a good answer for that. But, I do know that their Chem Tech [mentors for] whom they had worked would talk to them a lot.

STOW: Individually.

MAXWELL: Yes.

STOW: Well, the Laboratory has a very long history of staff from MIT.

MAXWELL: Yes, they do. And, in the "long-ago" they did.

STOW: I mean, we've got, among others, Murray Rosenthal, John Bigelow, Clifford Shull, Roger Carlsmith, and a whole bunch of others. Was there interaction between MIT graduates and any of these students?

MAXWELL: Not as much as you might think.

STOW: Okay.

MAXWELL: And, those that you have named -- between none of those to my knowledge.

STOW: Okay. I came across George Jasny's name.

MAXWELL: Now, George Jasny was a fan from a way back.

STOW: Okay.

MAXWELL: Because, he was in one of the first classes at K-25.

STOW: He was in the class of '51, I think.

MAXWELL: Yes. And, so every time I would see him, the two of us would light up.

MAXWELL: Even though he was there before I came there.

MAXWELL: And, then when I first introduced myself to him, and I knew who he was, I told him who I was, and he said, "Oh!" So, from then on, it was a neat relationship, but there wasn't a relationship. It's hard to describe.

STOW: Well, I thought he had an affiliation with the class.

MAXWELL: Yes, yes. And, if I'm not mistaken, I think John Bigelow was in one of those early classes at K-25.

STOW: I think he was in one of the classes, yes.

STOW: Anybody else come to mind, that stands out by name that you feel you want to mention?

MAXWELL: Right now the names are not coming to me.

STOW: Okay. What were the greatest challenges you faced being the secretary or the manager of the ORNL MIT Practice School?

MAXWELL: The first one was technical typing.

MAXWELL: I labored. Believe me, I labored at technical typing. And, a lot of times, when I couldn't half read their handwriting, and I knew what they were trying to say, but I didn't know how to spell it - and I would use my dictionary - but as far as getting along with the students, I don't know if they were prompted before they came here, [but apparently they were] told, "You give Alice every bit of your respect."

STOW: Is that right?

MAXWELL: Because I got it. I attributed a lot of it to their upbringing, because MIT students were the cream of the crop.

STOW: Oh, yes.

MAXWELL: And, they came from good families, and when they came, I said, "Now, I'm going to be your mother while you're here. And, if I feel like you need fussing at, I'm going to fuss at you." This kid spoke up and said, "Oh, Alice. You could never be my mother." And, I said, "Well, why not?" And, he said, "Because my mother screams, and if you don't scream at me, I probably won't do a thing you say." And, I said, "I am not going to scream at you."

STOW: Did he do what you asked of him?

MAXWELL: Yes, he did.

STOW: Okay.

MAXWELL: Sure did. And, when I would tell them that this is government property, so you don't do certain things, they listened. They respected me all the way.

MAXWELL: I cannot give you the name of anyone who did not respect me.

STOW: You served in this role starting when?

MAXWELL: '66.

STOW: '66. But, you'd been in that role earlier.

MAXWELL: Yes. In all, I was with the MIT Practice School twenty-five years at Union Carbide.

STOW: Okay.

MAXWELL: And, then, when they moved to Bethlehem Steel, I went and stayed another year, so I was actually with MIT itself for twenty-six years.

STOW: And, they moved from here in 1982, is that right?

MAXWELL: Yes.

STOW: Was that hard for you to see that transition in '82?

MAXWELL: Oh my. I tell you, it was like a death in the family. That was my life.

STOW: Well, I can imagine.

MAXWELL: And, then, when you put me out there in the world, I felt lost. I really felt lost. For twenty-six years I answered the phone by saying "MIT." After I left my MIT position, every time I would start to answer a phone, "MIT" was in my head, and I would have to stop and think. That's how awful it was. When I went to work for Mr. Robert McNees in town ten years later, I was busy doing something, the phone rang, and I picked it up and said, "MIT."

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: And, this woman on the other end of the line said, "Oh, I got the wrong number." And, when she said that, I said, "No, you didn't. I just forgot where I was." That was embarrassing, I tell you.

STOW: Well, old habits die hard, don't they?

MAXWELL: They did for me. And, not working for them, I actually felt left out in the goings on in the world. I felt like I wasn't learning. It's a hard feeling to describe.

STOW: Well, in the twenty-five years that you were employed, what are you most proud of with regard to your handling of the MIT Practice School?

MAXWELL: I felt like I was wanted, I was needed, I was loved, I was appreciated, and as much as they were learning, it gave me the impetus to go to college.

STOW: Is that right?

MAXWELL: And, at forty-five, I started taking night courses, and I got my degree when I was fifty-nine years old.

STOW: My goodness! A degree in what, Alice?

MAXWELL: (laughs) Started out in office administration. I wanted a degree so badly.

MAXWELL: ... that I thought, "Okay, that's going to be easy, because I'll know half of the stuff I'm going to learn."

STOW: Yeah.

MAXWELL: So after I had to take some other courses besides my office administration courses, I took a religious course.

MAXWELL: Since I'm a Bible teacher at church, and have been for fifty years, I loved it. So, I went to my advisor -- my night school advisor -- and I said, "Can I change my degree from office administration to religious studies?" And, he went through everything and said, "No, you'll have to take too many extra courses." Well, I was talking to a friend that was getting her master's degree and told her about it, and she said, "I don't believe that. You go see Dean thus and so." So, I did. And, he punched my little things in, and he said, "Sure you can." So, I changed to religious studies, and that's what I got my degree in. Okay, at that point in time, Union Carbide quit paying half of my fees, because they had been paying it as long as I was...

STOW: As long as you were in a business-related curriculum.

MAXWELL: Yes. So, that was okay. I loved my religious studies. I made an A in every course I took, because I can think religion. I can't think geology, I can't think psychology. I think I probably made Bs in those courses. But, I can think religion.

STOW: But, the impetus to get you to college to begin with was a result of the exposure to the MIT Practice School.

MAXWELL: MIT. Yes. It's hard to describe my feeling about them, because I saw things that I never had the chance to get because I never had the opportunity. I saw culture. I saw arts. I saw things that a little Georgia girl had never had the opportunity to see. And, I loved every bit of it. And, they were so gracious to me. I typed a Ph.D. thesis for one director after he got here, and he had to go back to MIT and give a report on his thesis topic. And, he bought me a round-trip plane ticket and took me to MIT with him. That's what he gave me for typing it, even though I had been paid by Union Carbide for my services.

STOW: Sure.

MAXWELL: Another time, after six or eight years, a student from Miami was flabbergasted that I had never been to MIT. He couldn't understand that. I just had to go to MIT. So, when he went back to MIT, he went around to all the students that had been to MIT and collected enough money to buy me a round trip ticket to MIT.

STOW: My goodness.

MAXWELL: And, he had a whole schedule for me: who I was going to eat with today, who I was going to eat with tonight, and he took me to see a play and different students. He had my whole schedule planned out for me. And, that's what he did, because he couldn't take it, that I had not been to MIT and entertained by MIT. And, I stayed in the women's dorm, where visitors stayed. And, every time I went, they gave me flowers. Like I say, they appreciated me. And, that was something I hadn't been used to. You know, you do your job and nobody [seems to] care. But, at the end of the year, you get your merit raise.

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: And, the one year in which I did have trouble with a director, I went to my supervisor (that I'm not going to name) and told him about it. And, I got the worst raise that year that I ever got. Well, when I went out the door, I thought, "He doesn't care what I say, and it's not going to matter, and I'm not going to get demerits for it." So, I told him about it. And, he said, "Well, I didn't believe what you said." Now, wasn't that nice for a Carbide supervisor who had done a job like that for thirty-one years?

STOW: Not good at all. Not good at all.

MAXWELL: That stung me.

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: Well, I told MIT, and they believed me, and they did something about it. I got respect from MIT.

STOW: Well, let's hope you got respect from other people at ORNL too, right?

MAXWELL: (laughs) Dan Robbins was the neatest one. For some reason, I could not talk to Dan at first. And, he said, "Alice, you never come and talk to me." "Why?" I replied, "Because you talk down to me." I was honest.

STOW: And, what was his reaction?

MAXWELL: He said, "I'll see about that." So, the next time I came, we started talking. And, Dan and I got along fine.

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: Because I was honest with him, and I try to be. I was a person of integrity and MIT knew that. And so, whenever I got my degree, Dan Robbins was the first one to call me and congratulate me. My own supervisor never acted like I was in existence.

STOW: That speaks well for Dan, though.

MAXWELL: So, ever after that, Dan and I got along beautifully.

STOW: Have you maintained contact with any of the students?

MAXWELL: Not with the students, but with the directors and the assistant directors. The students were scattered so far and wide. And, whenever they left, I got a forwarding address for them at MIT. Well, from MIT, I had no idea where they went.

STOW: Sure.

MAXWELL: Except, that in my travels, I saw one MIT student in Paris who took me all around and showed me this and that, and made sure that I went to the Louvre Museum to see the Mona Lisa. He wanted me to see that. And, it was so funny, because he took (my friend and I - my traveling buddy) to this very special place, to eat this very special food. Well, okay, we started eating, and I said, "What am I eating?" And, he said, "Pig feet."

STOW: Well, that's perfectly appropriate for a lady from Georgia, right?

MAXWELL: It was so funny. Even after they left, I still continued to learn. And, I visited two MIT students in India. I ate something that looked like and tasted like beef. But, I had sense enough to realize that it wasn't beef. So I asked the student, "What am I eating?" She said, "Goat." But, it was good.

STOW: Well, over your years here, how many students do you estimate you had interactions with?

MAXWELL: Before I left, I counted them. And, I think it was in the five or six hundreds.

STOW: My goodness. Okay.

MAXWELL: I didn't make a list, or list it. And, I also counted the number of theses and reports that I had typed.

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: And, that was in the seven or eight hundreds.

STOW: All on a manual typewriter, too?

MAXWELL: In the beginning, it was manual. And, then it was an electric typewriter. In business school, I was taught, "Put your hands on the keys." Well, every time I would put my hands on the keys, it would type things I didn't want. Then, my mind balked at all of these changes that occurred over the years. But I knew I had to do it, so I would just do it.

STOW: Well, technology's changing more rapidly now than ever.

MAXWELL: Still, yes.

STOW: Well, it's obvious that the MIT practice school was good for you.

MAXWELL: Oh, yes.

STOW: Yeah, you benefited. I think it's apparent that the Practice School was good for the students. Do you think, in retrospect, that it was good for Oak Ridge National Laboratory?

MAXWELL: I would say yes, based on the fact that the students were up on the new stuff in technology. I don't know how many of them ever came out of the energy lab at MIT, but many new things came out of MIT. And, I feel that their new ideas, freshness, and enthusiasm couldn't help but have rubbed off on those for whom they did projects.

STOW: Okay.

MAXWELL: You know, at that point in time. Now, the lasting effect, I can't say.

STOW: Well, I guess it's safe to say, that ORNL as an institution didn't put a lot into this -- they put some money and some time, and you would think that we, as an institution, benefited from that investment in the students and in the school...

MAXWELL: The long lasting effect, I cannot comment on, because, basically, my mind doesn't have the capacity to soak in everything that happened.

STOW: Anything else that you think we need to touch on? We've got a few minutes left. Have we hit most of the issues that come to mind?

MAXWELL: Well, another thing...

STOW: Okay.

MAXWELL: ... in the book that I gave you to read...

STOW: Which is right here.

MAXWELL: The social life...

STOW: Okay.

MAXWELL: I was in on that.

STOW: Tell us a little bit about that.

MAXWELL: Okay, the social life was ... They were here for so short a time, and they worked so hard that they didn't have time for very much social life. So, in the beginning, at K-25 where we started, I would go around and, again, I didn't have that much contact with the other offices within the plant.

STOW: All right.

MAXWELL: But, I had enough that I would call this secretary that I knew, and I said, "We've got some new students and we want to plan a welcoming party for them." I said, "Do you have any single girls in your division that might like to meet some MIT students?"

MAXWELL: So, I had a list. Everything you do, list it and file it away for the future. So, I had a list that I would call, and do you know, we did have some marriages out of those? And, one that was so startling to me was a new assistant director. He came a couple of weeks ahead of the students.

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: He was a Jewish fellow from New York, a very nice guy who had been raised by his mother and grandmother.

MAXWELL: And so when he came, he said, "Alice, I want to meet somebody." I said, "Okay, I know where there's a good one." She worked over at the engineering building ... computer ... that's where I had met her .It was in the computer section when I was there. And, she was on my heart, simply because her story was sad. Her dad had sent her brother to college, but would not send the girl to college.

STOW: Okay.

MAXWELL: And, she wanted to go. I've got a heart, and whenever a story hits me like that, she was on my heart. So, she was the one that I thought of. They met the first part of September. By Thanksgiving, they were married. Scared...

STOW: Didn't mess around, did they? (laughs)

MAXWELL: That scared me. I thought, "Alice, what have you done?" You introduced a Jewish boy to a Methodist girl. Do you know, they're still together?

STOW: Well, you must have done it right then.

MAXWELL: They were still . . . they're still together. I get a Christmas card from them every Christmas. And, after he'd finished his Ph.D. degree, he sent her to school. She got a degree in computer science. She formed her own company, they have two boys, and he went to Washington University in St. Louis as a professor. Now, he is in Washington, doing something for the government, after he retired from that. They travel, they send me pictures of them made in England, and they compromised and went to the Unitarian Church. But, like I say, whenever you do something, you have no idea what the end result is going to be.

STOW: Well, maybe we ought to send you to the Middle East and let you see if you can solve those problems there.

MAXWELL: (laughs) I'm another Jimmy Carter. I like to smooth things up if I can. The man at K-25 who interviewed me for the job with MIT said, "You have the personality" and, I sat there thinking, "That man knows nothing about my personality."

STOW: Maybe he did.

MAXWELL: Word does get around, but there was never a time when I really had to smooth over anything between Carbide and MIT.

STOW: What if and we can't do this obviously, but if we were to send out a questionnaire to the five or six hundred students that had come through the school, saying, "What do you remember about Alice Maxwell?" What do you think we'd hear back? Or, what would you like them to remember you as?

MAXWELL: Well, I was a representative of the South. Slower moving. Loved everybody. Kind. Did everything they asked me to. Never failed them in anything. I got many Thank You's. I glanced quickly at a stack of stuff that I had before I came. I have saved those Thank You notes.

STOW: Have you?

MAXWELL: And, appreciated things. But, it was, you know, it was right after they left, and there's no way that that address would be any good now. But, I got many a Thank You note for whatever I might have done. And, the most of it was a welcoming. If we only had one girl out of a bunch of students, she stayed with me. I was a part of them. I was not standoffish...

STOW: I can understand that, and I can see that.

MAXWELL: I planned socials for the students, I would have the foreign students over for Thanksgiving or for Christmas [when the American students went home]. I always saved two weeks' vacation for Christmas time.

MAXWELL: And, I got to be with my family at Christmas. And, it's interesting that a Carbide supervisor always wanted me to work somewhere else during the summer. I had reports to type. I didn't have time to go over here and work somewhere else. They never understood that. Most of the reports would have been left [unfinished]. And, I had to do it. I had to do everything.

STOW: It was a full, year-round job, and no one else filled in for you, did they?

MAXWELL: No. Nobody ever filled in for me, ever. But, I had to spend ... I might have had a week...

MAXWELL: ... or two weeks. And, there was a summer project going on that I got to work on under John Michelle. And, another thing that was so funny, that I always thought of, if we have time...

STOW: We've got a few minutes left.

MAXWELL: This one student that was so funny -- his last name was Ogden Hammond, of the Hammond organ family.

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: His parents were divorced, and he told me a little bit about each one of his parents. Well, he worked on a project with other students, and they spilled something. So they had to get paper towels down here to clean up the spill. In his report, he told about the spill, how much it was, and how many paper towels it took to clean it up. It was a whole page of handwriting. I said, "Ogden, I'm not going to type this, because the director is not going to accept it. It's not needed." He said, "Oh, yes. I want it in there. Dr. Gilliland thinks my writing is good and he likes it." I said, "Okay, I'll put it in. But, I'll guarantee you, he's going to take it out." Well, when I got that report back, the first thing I did was turn to the second page. The director had put a little bracket right there that stated, "Who in the hell cares?" I laughed to myself. I couldn't laugh to him. I didn't want to. You know, I just never did anything to make them feel bad. I could have said, "I told you so, and you wouldn't believe me." Whenever somebody doesn't believe me, they're in for trouble, because I'll tell you the truth.

STOW: I suspect you will.

MAXWELL: So, anyway, that's one "for instance" that is absolutely funny. Another time I saw a student at the drawing table who looked so forlorn. I said, "Dennis, what in the world is the matter?" He said, "Well, my girl friend ..." He had left all of his music stuff with her in New York before he returned to Oak Ridge. He said, "She wants to get married." I said, "Well, do you want to get married?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, that settles that. What are you worried about?" You know, every once in a while, I would come along with this little sharp retort that didn't hurt their feelings, but it settled the problem. And, that one did.

STOW: Settled it pretty quickly.

MAXWELL: Lo and behold, he stayed in Oak Ridge, he married an Oak Ridge girl, and he went to work for TVA in Chattanooga. So, whatever I had to say, it wasn't all that bad. The last time I was at MIT the director gave me flowers and said, "Alice, I want to never forget something you said to me." Of course, my thoughts were, "What in the world did I say?"

STOW: Sure.

MAXWELL: So I said, "What did I say?" He said, "You said, 'Sam, you can have fun without smoking and drinking.'" And, I said, "Well...?" He didn't say anything. So I said, "Was I right?" He said, "Yes." Like I say, I cannot say enough good things. I could talk all day long and tell you other stories.

STOW: Well, I suspect if we talked to the students and to the directors, they'd have good stories to tell about you.

MAXWELL: I dare say they would because I did have their respect.

STOW: Yes. Well, you've enjoyed your tenure as director of the MIT Practice School in Oak Ridge.

MAXWELL: By all means. And, I would listen to the other girls complain about their job or their supervisor. And, they'd ask me and I'd say, "I don't have any complaints. I love my job." And, I'm the only person that I ever heard say that -- something good.

STOW: Obviously, the Laboratory benefited by having you do that for so many years.

MAXWELL: As they say, I made that job because somebody had to do it. We had new directors all the time, and they didn't know any of this stuff.

STOW: Yes, the directors came in for what, a year or two?

MAXWELL: Director two years and assistant director one year.

STOW: Okay.

MAXWELL: So, we went through a continuous learning experience. I taught them things that were new for them, so I was the whole cheese.

STOW: You had the corporate knowledge of how things went on.

MAXWELL: Yes.

STOW: Anything else we need to get in here?

MAXWELL: (laughs) Let's see, where do I start? In the case of one director, he and his wife wound up divorced. I still hear from him every Christmas.

STOW: Yes.

MAXWELL: He and his wife divorced, but he took up with one of the secretaries there at MIT, and they lived together for years. And, because he knew I was a Christian, he realized that this relationship did not sit well with me, but I never said one word. Later, the Christmas card said, "You will be happy to know that she and I married." So, it's funny how they knew what I would think and say, but I never said it. Because I worked with them so much, there were so many things left unsaid, but they knew where I stood.

STOW: Well, it sounds like your job has involved everything from being a mother, to a housekeeper, to a psychologist, psychiatrist, and marriage counselor.

MAXWELL: Anything.

STOW: ... a social organizer and a typist...

MAXWELL: Whatever they needed, I was there for them. Yes. And, I had fun doing it, enjoying it every step of the way.

STOW: Well, we're fortunate to have had you on the payroll for those years Alice.

MAXWELL: Well, I appreciate that.

STOW: Lots of people appreciate that.

MAXWELL: It's nice to get Thank You cards, even if it is a bit late. It's nice, and I appreciate it. And, I appreciate you letting me talk with you.

STOW: Well, thanks for taking the hour today, and it's been good chatting with you.

MAXWELL: Thank you. And, thank you, Marilyn.

MCLAUGHLIN: That's great. Thank you.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----