SWE GRASSROOTS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Denise Griffin Interview

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Society Of Women Engineers National Conference

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Denise Griffin received a degree in electrical engineering from Tufts University in 1991. Following graduation, she worked as a systems engineer at GTE Government Systems for six years, after which she worked in several dot-com companies and as a technology partner program manager at a company acquired by Cisco. Griffin went on maternity leave in 2001 with the intent to return to work part-time. The dot-com economy faltered during her leave, however, and her part-time arrangement disappeared. She paused her career to stay home with her children, and became actively involved in the Society of Women Engineers and IEEE to maintain her professional identity until her return to work in 2011.

In her 2009 Society of Women Engineers Grassroots Oral History Project interview, Griffin discussed her experience at Tufts University; her decisions to move from a large corporate environment to dot-coms and startups and back again; and the personal importance of her professional volunteer work during her unplanned time as a stay-at-home mother.

- July 2016

TROY ELLER: Okay. Today is October 16th, 2009. This is an oral history interview with Denise Griffin for the Society of Women Engineers Grassroots Oral History Project. Denise is a member of the Boston Section of SWE, and has served as its president. The interviewer is Troy Eller, and we are at the Society of Women Engineers National Conference in Long Beach, California. Thank you for joining me.

DENISE GRIFFIN: You're welcome.

TE: To begin with, can you tell me how—where and when you were born, and a little bit about your childhood?

DG: Sure. I was born in 1969 in Medford, Massachusetts, and had a pretty basic childhood. But neither parent was anything close to an engineer. Neither parent actually went to college or anything like that. No aunts, uncles. It was kind of—. [01:00] So, but I loved school, and that kind of just kept going. And I loved math and science. I think that just kind of kept going until I got to, you know, college.

TE: Okay. Okay. And did you have any siblings?

DG: I did. I have a younger brother. He's just a couple years younger than me. And he's kind of like the polar opposite, no engineering, and no—. (laughs)

TE: Right. Okay. So your parents were not engineers. Did you know any engineers? Did you know what engineering was?

DG: No. I mean, not at all. Zero, until high school, early high school. We had someone come and speak from Tufts University—at the time, dean of engineering. Now he's not the dean, but he came and talked to us, just as kind of an outreach effort. And basically just said it was easier to explain engineering by what it isn't than by what it is, because it is so many things. [02:00] And that just kind of caught me as, "Oh, I don't have to sit and sit behind a desk, or I don't have to just sit and put things together. I can do, you know, a million other things with my math and science interests." And that just stuck with me. But prior to that, nope.

TE: Not at all. Okay. So when did you make the decision that you wanted to study engineering?

DG: I would say, like, sophomore year of high school. It took me a year after that to just kind of solidify it, but I would say sophomore.

TE: Okay. And how did you prepare yourself, or to head off to college? Did you tailor your classes specifically? Did you take more—extra science classes? Or—.

DG: We didn't really have the option to take extra or different, per se, but if you were—. The accelerated classes—if you were doing, you know, getting good grades—were just like sort of a further-along level of science, or further-along level of math. [03:00] But I suppose there was a couple places where I could have maybe not taken something. Maybe back as early as, like, eighth or ninth grade I took a computer class that maybe some other kids wouldn't have taken. But we didn't really have a ton of computer classes, per se, back then. You know,

I mean, email wasn't even around. (laughs) So it was more just an advanced level.

TE: Right. Okay. When did you go to Tufts?

DG: I graduated in '91. So '87, I graduated high school, so '87 to '91.

TE: Okay. Okay. And why did you choose electrical engineering?

DG: Partly because it sounded like the one that I would use math the most. And it sounded—the way it was portrayed to me at the time, anyways, it sounded like almost, you know, the hardest, which kind of made it sound like maybe that would be more exciting, and be helpful to get a job. But it wasn't—I didn't know really a ton about the differences at the time. [04:00] I was kind of going in a little—based on the excitement of it, you know? I knew a lot more coming out than I did going in.

TE: Sure, sure. So how did you learn that—you know, that more information? Did you have any mentors while you were in college, or advisors who have particularly helped you?

DG: My Tufts advisor was pretty nice and pretty helpful. But I got to SWE early, and they—. Raytheon and some other companies like that are really good about coming to the school when you belong to SWE. Same for IEEE. I joined that, and they'll send representatives to do the outreach efforts with the college. And I think, honestly, when I saw them, that's kind of when I started to realize what you

could do with it. So it wasn't—it was really more from the outside people. Not so much from the professors. It was more—

TE: Okay. Okay.

DG: —it was more the other organizations.

TE: Sure. [05:00] And when did you join SWE at Tufts?

DG: Freshman year.

TE: Freshman year. Okay. Do you remember any other—you said in high school that, you know, someone came from Tufts, was it?

DG: Yeah.

TE: Do you remember any presence of SWE or any other engineering society when you were in high school doing outreach?

DG: Well, no. I mean, that was actually something—his son went to our high school, and I think the only reason he came is because he had high hopes that he could get his son to go to engineering like he did, which he didn't. But it wasn't really—it was really more just him, his own personal thing. I don't remember having groups like that.

TE: Okay. Okay. So why did you decide to join SWE in college? What did you hope that it could provide you then? [06:00]

DG: I just felt like I needed a network of people that were women, number one, and that would, you know, help me better understand who they were, and who I was, and what we could do with our backgrounds. And try to almost figure out if I really liked it as much as I thought I did. I mean, it was hard. It was a hard major. And there were times when I was, you know, really stressed out. But it was nice to have some people that weren't just in my classes. Especially electrical engineering. It was very—it was just a few girls. So that's kind of what I hoped. Just to make some friends, really.

TE: Right. Was it discouraging being one of the few women in your program? Or was it something that you were used to?

DG: No. It was discouraging the first year because in high school it's not like that. And then all of the sudden, you know, you're away from home for the first time and, you know, it's a lot harder than high school. And, I mean, I made male friends, but it just wasn't the same. And all my friends that were in my dorm weren't engineers.

TE: Right. Right. Okay. So what were some of the projects that you worked on when you—as a student, when you were in SWE? [07:00] What kinds of projects were important to you, or activities?

DG: SWE project?

TE: Yeah. Yeah.

DG: We did—like I said, we did a lot. We didn't really do so much outreach with kids because, you know, we weren't doing as much going to the younger kids as much as we were having people come to us, some more professional development. So I would say we had a lot of sort of meet-and-greet type things, informational nights where companies would come. I guess that Raytheon was one of the ones that came every year. So it was more those sorts of things that I liked to try to expose myself to some people that might be able to help me figure out what I was going to do with my degree when I got out.

TE: Okay. Okay. And when you were a student, did you have any women professors?

DG: Yes.

TE: You did.

DG: Not many, but I had a couple of really good ones, and one in particular that was, you know, very dynamic. [08:00] But, you know, definitely. Like 30 percent maybe, at the most.

TE: Right. Okay. So what was it like to be a woman engineering student at that time at Tufts? I've heard from women who were woman engineering students in the 1960s. What was it like in the 1980s and the early 1990s?

DG: It still felt a little bit like when I would tell people—like at a party or something—I was an engineer, they would sort of react like, Oh, wow. You know, You must be smart. When of course, obviously, they're smart. I mean, if they're at Tufts they

are. But you definitely got that reaction, and especially in electrical for some reason, you got that reaction. So it felt a little bit of an anomaly. And in certain classes, it was almost like a little intimidating because the guys would sort of stick together.

TE: Okay. Okay. [09:00] Did you do any internships while you were at college? Or—?

DG: I did. Well, they were paid, I mean. But I worked on campus in an employment office, just as part of my work-study thing. But Tufts doesn't have co-op, so in the summers, you know, rather than—. And I lived in the Medford area, so when I went home, which was right down the street, I didn't really want to work in, you know, the mall or whatever. So I contacted some companies, trying to find out if they had any just summer jobs. And I ended up getting really lucky. I worked for GE the summer between sophomore and junior year, and for MITRE sophomore—between junior and senior year. So I was able to make some decent money, but most of all just to see some things that were in engineering. And I didn't love either of the jobs, so it was good because it taught me some environments that I didn't necessarily want to be in. You know, it kind of helped to weed things out a little bit for me.

TE: Sure. Okay. And can you tell me about your first job after college, and how you got that? [10:00]

DG: I applied—we had a career counseling center, you know, like most schools have. And they would have companies come to the school and interview you. And one of them was GTE Government Systems, which is now General Dynamics. And

that sounded like a good, solid company. And I think I was attracted to the big company for the security and all that kind of stuff. And so I actually interviewed with them first semester of my senior year, and luckily I think the fact that I had had the two summer jobs put me at an advantage. I know there were some other students that interviewed for the same positions and had, I think, actually better grades but not that internship, if you will, stuff on their resume. And I got the job first semester. So I knew going into the second semester that I had a job, which was nice.

TE: Very nice. (laughs)

DG: Yeah.

TE: What do you think best prepared you for that first job? Was it having done the internships? [11:00] Or was it taking—did your classes particularly prepare you? What was it that really helped you?

DG: I think it was probably the first, or more so, the second job that I had, because it was working among people that, you know, were professionals and had that background, and just seeing how they interacted with each other every day. I think way more than the classes did, because the classes were more theoretical. And I couldn't really understand the applications very well sometimes, in some of the classes. Even now, when I look back, I can't—unless I were into research or whatever—there's things I can't figure out what I would do with some of it. (laughs) But certainly the jobs helped a lot so that I wasn't so nervous.

TE: Okay. Okay. Did you have many women coworkers at your job?

DG: At the summer job? [12:00] Oh, you mean my first job after school?

TE: Yeah, your first job.

DG: I did, actually. GTE Government Systems is, you know, big and there were a lot of women. And I went to what's called systems engineering, and that has a pretty good population of women. I mean, again, it was still under 50%, probably under 40%. But specifically within the software department there was a lot of women. And so even though I might have been a little bit outnumbered in the systems engineering group, we interacted a lot with software. So my first boss was a woman, and she had climbed the ladder pretty quickly and she was really, you know, an inspiration to me when I first got the job.

TE: Okay. Okay. So would you have considered her a mentor then? Or—.

DG: Yeah, definitely, from day one. And even now, we're still friendly. And, you know, she's still there, believe it or not. She's left and gone, and left and gone. And, you know, she taught me some really good things at a young age.

TE: Okay. Okay. You were—at this point you joined the Boston section of SWE? [13:00]

DG: I did theoretically. I mean, I would pay my dues, but I wouldn't do that much for the first few years, because I was just focused on working a lot. But then once I was a little more settled working and I actually, you know, felt more comfortable, I

joined. And my company would pay, I remember, either half or all of my membership. And they really liked it. And in ’95 when SWE’s conference, national conference, was in Boston they wanted me to go and kind of represent the company. And that was great. So, but I still didn’t get super active in SWE until, believe it or not, until I stopped working and had kids, because then I felt like I really wanted to keep my networking going. And I could make all the meetings that were in Boston. I could get there. And I wasn’t so crazy working.

TE: Right. Stepping back to that first job, you left in ’97?

DG: [14:00] Right.

TE: Why did you decide to leave that job?

DG: Well, it was right when everything was—like, there was tons of opportunities then with dot-com things. And I just kept hearing about it. And I kind of felt like I’d almost outgrown the job I was in. And I had gotten awards and people were super nice to me, but I felt like I was getting a little too comfortable. And so, I mean, nobody there knew I was interviewing, and when I did leave it was kind of surprising to them. But I just was really excited about these small companies that were out there that would—sounded like you didn’t have to wear a badge. You didn’t have to have a security clearance. You didn’t have to sit in hundreds and hundreds of people. It sounded so different. You know? Like, you didn’t have timecards. Just everything was so different, and I couldn’t—I was just really excited about it. I wanted to try it.

TE: Okay. Is that why you left to go to the—. There were two places that you worked in Lowell?

DG: Yeah. Yeah.

TE: Okay. And so you left to go to work at those places because—.

DG: Right. Exactly. [15:00] So I went to LitleNet and, you know, they were—that first one was sort of unstable. And it was really exciting, but then it kind of started to fall apart. So I jumped ship really quickly and went to another place that I found out about. But it was still, in that short span of time, it was an incredible experience.

TE: Okay. What did you learn at these dot-coms?

DG: I learned to work a lot better under pressure and with a lot less guidance and with a lot less structure and with a lot less formality. Like, GTE was very clear what the rules were and how you interacted with people. But these startups were so chaotic at times that—. You know, I had never been in a place where I'd hear someone raise their voice, you know? Things like that. It's just a whole different atmosphere. And at first it was a little scary, but it made me feel like—. You know, you couldn't—there were no excuses. Like, people that didn't want to work a lot just didn't fit in, and it sort of felt like the people that weren't really willing to work super hard just sort of fell to the bottom. [16:00] And I think I kind of liked that because I did always work really hard. It felt like you got rewarded for working really hard. It was really nice.

TE: Okay. Okay. And then you said that you left work to raise your children? Oh wait, no, you went to Cisco. (laughs)

DG: Yeah, no. Yeah. So then I went to a startup. And it was actually three places in Lowell. So, you know, those two places that I went to—LitleNet started to fall apart, so I said “Let’s get out of here.” And I was fortunate enough to hear about something else that was kind of through a friend. It was a woman that my husband had worked for at News Internet Services. And that was—I was there, only at that one about 11 months, because they fell apart. I wasn’t let go at either place, but I kind of saw the writing on the wall. But that was probably the best job I ever had. I got to travel to London all the time, and it was just great. But when they started to fall apart I said, "I think I need to be really careful this next time what kind of a startup I pick." [17:00] I had a little experience, and I had to really ask more financial-type questions when I interviewed. And, you know, I never thought of that stuff before. I felt like I had picked kind of two almost, like, bad companies in a row. It was great being there, but I just wasn’t sure how to read them. So by the time I got to GeoTel, I think I finally picked a winner, because they were a great place for a couple years, and then Cisco purchased them, so. And then it just was very solid and very big company again. But that was okay, because by then things were starting to be bad in the economy, and I kind of felt safe in there, you know. So it was just as well.

TE: Right. Okay. And what did you work on at GeoTel?

DG: GeoTel was the most—the job that I probably am the most suited for, and that's what I did the most of. I was a partner program manager. So we had some products that were really popular. And other companies wanted to connect their products to our products, per se. A lot of the companies did. [18:00] And so I was the one that would go out and find the right companies, and get the engineers to sit and talk to each other, and have the developers work together and meet the deadlines, and then educate the sales force on what this combined thing was, and work with marketing to advertise it. And so it was called a—I basically ran a program that didn't exist before. You know, salespeople would come back with these business cards from trade shows and say, So-and-so wants to work with this; I don't know what to do with this. And it sort of created itself, the program. And then when Cisco bought us they wanted to keep it going, so we just renamed everything and made it bigger. And just, you know, it worked out nice, so.

TE: Okay. Were you active at SWE at this point? Or more active—?

DG: Only—yeah. I mean, by then I was definitely going to a monthly meeting every few months. And I hadn't—. I guess when I say I wasn't really active, I wouldn't even dream at that time of going to a national conference and taking time off work for that. [19:00] Or going to a regional conference and driving, say, two or three hours. It was more just the local meetings that were just for me. The only thing I had dabbled in a bit was the speakers bureau had at SWE Boston, where you'd kind of go speak at a school. That was really it. That was probably still more than an average member, you know?

TE: Right. So you did go out to speak to schools?

DG: Yeah. Like high schools. Kind of like what that, you know, first dean did for us, you know, did for me. And we just had a laundry list of people that I could call on, that I would send to schools. Mostly upon request, but it started to be a little more proactive as I built it up a little bit more. And we would send people, you know, up to an hour away, whatever was close to their work or their home. And the kids would ask all kinds of questions, and we would keep it pretty informal.

TE: Right. Did you want to organize the speakers bureau because that was how you got interested in engineering? [20:00]

DG: Partly, yeah. And also, it was something that SWE Boston had wanted to do for a while. And it just didn't—it lacked sort of somebody to just kind of create it. There were people who were willing to go, but I don't think they wanted to be the same people who would, you know, do all the logistics and contact the schools and, you know, keep track of all the speakers and all that kind of stuff. So I think it was—it's sort of a traditional SWE position that SWE has. But it wasn't—it's not always active.

TE: Okay. Okay. So you left Cisco after a change from—or after it changed to Cisco—you left it to raise your children?

DG: Well, I was still there and I was planning to go back part time. And then the economy sort of tanked while I was home, and they had their first layoffs in, I think, ten or twenty years, which was almost unheard of at Cisco. [21:00] So I'd

heard rumors about it while I was on maternity leave, but I was so caught up in my first-time mom stuff that I still tried to black it out, block it out. And then the rumors started to get scarier and scarier, and because I was in a protected situation I couldn't myself be laid off, really. But I think I also wasn't sure if, when I went back, if I would get the part-time status that I had worked out with my managers. I didn't know if it would be there anymore. And there was really no way they could tell me.

So it was a really, really stressful point in my life, because I really thought I had it all figured out. I was going to work part-time and then just have it all. But then eventually, after enough pushing, I was able to figure out that it would be good for me to go back, and if part-time wasn't an option to actually take their, you know, severance package, and do all that. And I did, and I still—I was grateful for it, but I was still kind of like—my balloon was sort of deflated because I thought I had it all figured out with the part-time thing. [22:00] So it took a good year before I could accept the fact that I wasn't going to look for another part-time job, and that I was actually going to be home. You know, I had to sort of—it was an extreme change. And, you know, my whole identity changed and I kind of went through this sort of midlife thing at, like, thirty. (laughs)

But all of the sudden I figured out, you know, instead of being—I figured out that I had to sort of live in the moment and do what I was doing, and worry about getting back in later instead of worrying about it every day. You know what I mean? So I was never really sure. And then as time went on—and I buried myself in SWE at that point. Like, every opportunity I had. And the more I did

that, the more I realized that this is going to be okay. You know, I'm going to—my brain is still there and I'm going to use it for other things right now. I don't want to do daycare full-time. I don't know who would want me part-time yet, and I don't know if I care. (laughs) You know, what I mean? [23:00] It was kind of—I just sort of fell in love with doing big SWE projects. And that's how it's been. And, you know, now I have two kids and I've been out, like, eight years. But now I'm starting to get the feeling like, Okay, kids are getting older. Like, time to start ramping up, you know? So I feel like SWE saved me during that time.

TE: Okay. So by becoming so involved in SWE, you were able to keep the networks and the contacts that you will need to reenter?

DG: Yeah, and I just—I mostly kept the respect from people that I felt that I had earned in my life and, you know, people that knew me as an engineer. And SWE didn't care if I was actually actively working as an engineer at that moment. They just knew I was Denise, and they just knew that if they gave me something to do I would do it. I like to be—you know what I mean? It was that. And I just needed that. And, you know, rather than a hobby or things that some moms can do, this was what I needed. [24:00] And there was no lack of projects you could take on at any size in SWE. No one's ever going to say no, because there's so much that you can—. And it's volunteer, so there's always a lot of work. There's no layoffs, you know. (laughs) So it made me feel like I was still—even now. I mean, I've been out eight years or so, almost nine. And people still don't—I don't feel like in SWE, anyways, has judged me as, Oh, you know, you're all rusty, or anything. I don't feel that way, because they know how much I've done for SWE. And I just

feel like they judge me more on my SWE capabilities. So how I'm going to push that all back together again and get a job I haven't quite figured out, but I'm not scared, you know? It's just going to be a big process.

TE: Okay. Can you tell me about some of the positions you've held in SWE Boston?

DG: Speakers bureau was the first sort of thing that mattered, I guess you could say. And then we have a professional development committee in every, you know, section that runs our monthly professional meetings. We bring in a company and have dinner, and have them talk to the members and all that, and recruit. [25:00] And so I started helping a little bit on that, just doing the check-in list and sitting at the desk when people came. And, you know, contacting the speaker, making sure she or he had everything they needed for that night, or little things like that. And I started to do more and more and find small ways to make it bigger.

So I eventually became the vice president of the Boston section so that I could run that group. And then that kind of naturally leads to the president position in Boston. So I did that for two years, the president. And it's kind of assumed, in SWE Boston anyways, that you don't do it for more than two years. But by then I had, you know, found someone that I thought would be a really good replacement, and we'd become real good friends. And so she did it for two years. And during that time I kind of moved more towards regional things, helping out regionally. But more importantly, I started helping out judging all the SWE awards. [26:00] And there's a lot of them up there. And so once I said yes to judging an award, I just started having all kinds of people emailing me, asking me

to judge more. And that just sort of grew. So now I took on a national role just, you know, a month ago, pretty much, to run one of the award groups. And it's great. So it just kind of—if you ask, you'll get it. (laughs)

TE: Can you tell me about some of the projects that you worked on when you were president of SWE?

DG: So we had—as president, you're responsible for running—you have two vice presidents, one of whom runs the professional development committee, so you don't have to worry about that too much, because that sort of runs itself. But the other half is the outreach committee, which used to be called career guidance. [27:00] And for that, we have enormous amounts of outreach things, such as the speakers bureau, Girl Scout workshops, science fair—you know, where we send people to judge science fairs—merit certificate programs where we send somebody back to their local high school, or any local high school, and give out an award to a math student and talk a little bit about SWE while you're there. So that was kind of nice. Other outreach things, let's see. You know, even like take your daughter to work day, those sorts of things. But lots and lots of outreach. I mean, pretty much all the funding we got in from the professional development group, and the money we raised through hanging out with companies, we would use to fund the K-12 stuff. And then we had a pretty strong membership group, too, that I would, as president kind of run, try to attract and retain members.

TE: Okay. Can you tell me why it's been important to you to volunteer on the awards committee? [28:00]

DG: I think I like the fact that the awards committee makes you—the people that get the awards feel like their contribution, you know, really matters. And not everybody's company that they work for recognizes SWE as being—you know, its sort of just something else on their resume. And people are so busy I don't think they, you know, pat themselves on the back, really. So I feel like it's a great way within SWE to really acknowledge somebody and have people know who they are and what they did. And there's definitely a lack of judges. And believe it or not, there's even a lack of people who sign up for the awards. So sometimes they have awards they want to give out and there aren't enough people applying, because they're either afraid they don't deserve it or too busy to write the papers or whatever. So I'm trying to help fix that. And it didn't need a lot of fixing. It just needed somebody to jump in, you know. So I really like that. [29:00] I felt like it's an area that needed some work, and that's—and the awards banquets are so nice, and they're so rewarding to see these people get their awards.

TE: You also volunteer for IEEE. Can you tell me about what you're currently working on with IEEE?

DG: Yeah. That's sort of a specific—there's a woman in SWE, again who I met through SWE, that was a professor at Tufts, but I didn't know at Tufts. She wasn't a professor then. And she—when I was leaving my presidency, I kind of approached her and had said, you know, "Thank you for the times that you've come and spoken as, like a—." She came to speak for SWE at one of the professional development meetings. And I just let her know that I wasn't going to be president anymore and I had some time to help on IEEE things. But I wasn't

sure where to start, because it's such a big organization. There's zillions of different subcommittees. [30:00] And she runs the Women in Engineering part of IEEE, and has a bi-yearly magazine that she gets articles submitted from all over the world that she gets inundated with and can't keep up with, and asked if I would help review them. So it sounded perfect to me, because it was nothing like I'd done in SWE. I'm by no means an editor, but—you know, by degree. I mean, I've done a lot of newsletters, but by degree. But I was—she just really needed someone to help her screen things out, and it's been great. And she desperately needs the help, so it's—I don't do much for IEEE as far as going to their meetings, really. But behind the scenes for them, I'm helping her a lot.

TE: Okay. I saw that you work—or that you volunteer with another organization called Mother To Mother. Can you talk a bit about that?

DG: Yeah. That's more people—it's like a Boston metro group that happened to start in the town where I live years ago, but is kind of several towns—. [31:00] It's about 200 families that plan and take part in events in and around town and do charity work, all revolving around, you know, being a parent. And I knew people in town and thought it would be something to connect with, but found that the positions in Mother To Mother that people never wanted to take were the ones like newsletter, web—things that weren't engineering, but probably were as close to it as I could get. And I started to, you know, offer my services, and everyone just kind of said yes. (laughs) So I've been doing that. And it's not a ton of work, but I think it's good for me to have. You know, it keeps me fresh and everybody appreciates it. And it makes me stay connected to some of the people in my town

and outside my town. You know, things that I might not know about otherwise, little events. So, and it's a mom thing. It's only real mom group that I belong to.

TE: Okay. Okay. [32:00] Can you tell me what you have gotten out of working with these groups? What skills you have gained, or abilities, or—.

DG: I think the most—the two most important things is, number one is when you're working and you're trying to learn how to do new things, and you're working and getting paid for it, you know, you're always afraid of doing the wrong thing. Or, you know, there's the risk of being fired. I mean, if you really mess up, you know. I've never worried about that, per se, but I think I always wasn't a huge risk taker at work. And with SWE, it's almost like because it's volunteer and because you're among friends who are in the same situation, we're all—I think it's really easy to take risks and say, "I'll run that. I don't know if I can do it, but nobody else will so I'm just going to do it." And you end up realizing you can. Or if you can't, you ask for more help. So that's number one. [33:00]

And the other thing is the ability to encourage other volunteers who aren't getting paid is, like, amazingly good to have. And it's hard to do. It's hard to get people who have jobs and families and whatever else to not only come to a meeting, but actually agree to take on something else that, you know, they don't get paid for, and they could just drop on the floor if they needed to, you know? And that ability has really helped me, because in some of my jobs that I've had in engineering—and especially like in product management type jobs I've had—I wasn't anybody's boss, but I needed them to do things for me. And it wasn't always

easy to get that. It was more like influencing them and gaining their trust and all that kind of stuff. And when you're trying to get people to help out on a volunteer project, like the only way you're going to get them to do it is through convincing them of the value and getting them to trust you and like you. And, you know, that's a skill that I think is hugely important, you know. [34:00] So those two things I don't think I would have been as good at if it weren't for SWE. Eventually would have got it, but not in the same way.

[DOORBELL]

TE: Right. Let's pause this for just a second.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

TE: Okay, we're back. So we were just talking about the things that you had learned from volunteering in all these groups. What do you hope that other members will learn? Or that newer members will learn by joining SWE or IEEE, or other volunteer groups?

DG: Well, I think I'd like to—I mean, some of the new people that come in, I'd like them to realize kind of how far we've come to get it to this point, you know. I mean, SWE's a pretty effectively running engine now. [35:00] And it has so much there. So I'd like them to first kind of always look back and realize how that started and how good that is and keep things going. But I would also hope that they aren't afraid to try completely new things, because now that all these new social networking sites and all this stuff is there, all this stuff that we didn't have.

You know, there's probably a million other ways they could reach out to K-12 people that we didn't do. I mean, we're like a hundred years old. But just, you know, just there's probably all kinds of new things that could happen. So I hope that people realize what they have there, and that they could use it to do really good things, and that the K-12 stuff continues to be the most important thing in SWE. Basically getting to the kids before they get old enough to decide they don't want to do engineering. Because now, you kind of do have to tell your classes a little bit. Like now there's so many. [36:00] Math and science class is offered so young, computer classes, that you kind of—. You had asked if I had tailored my classes, and I really didn't have that option back then. But now there's so much given to kids that if you don't take it when you can get it, you might sort of get pushed down another path and maybe away from engineering. So K-12 stuff is huge, because you have to get them, when they're like in sixth or seventh grade. Start approaching them, you know. So hopefully that'll continue.

TE: Okay. How old are your children now?

DG: Eight and three.

TE: Okay. And do you have any girls?

DG: A little one. Yeah, the little one.

TE: The three-year-old?

DG: Yeah.

TE: Okay. How do you plan on introducing both of your children to math and science?

DG: Well, my husband's an engineer too, so I think our brains tend to sort of work that way anyways, just in the way we live our lives. But I definitely talk about SWE to my eight-year-old. Even though he's a boy, he knows that I go to these meetings, and, you know, what I do and that I'm volunteering. [37:00] And I try to—like, he goes to my husband's work once in a while and just kind of sits there. My husband's at a startup that's pretty flexible and you can do those sorts of things. So every now and then, if I have a schedule conflict that I would normally maybe get a babysitter for an hour, I'll ask if he can just take him to work and let him just sit and play on the computer for an hour. And he's exposed to some of the stuff that's going on. And I think he, right now, has an image of, you know, us building great things and, you know, it's just because he's sat there and he's been in the environment. And we show him stuff on a laptop what his daddy does. And whenever I drive by that building in Lowell I always point it out and explain I had three jobs there, and this is what I did, and I used to go to these places. So it can't get too crazy, but I do explain to him that because I like math and science—you know, it was a good thing, because some people don't. [38:00] And it opened up doors for me to maybe do engineering. But that's kind of where I stop.

TE: Okay. Okay. That was it for my questions. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

DG: Probably the only the thing that I would suggest for young people—which they probably, hopefully know this already—is that I think it's really important to get internships and jobs as soon as they leave high school. You know, even between freshman and sophomore year, in a field that they think they might work in just to see if they like it. I think that's really important. And I think people should realize that being well-rounded is very important, because I didn't come out of Tufts with A's. I wasn't a top student, but I had a really well rounded resume because of SWE and IEEE and my jobs, and I was one of the first people to get a job in my grade. And I think that was why. You know, so I think you have to get past just—like just study, study, study. [39:00] Like, just, you know, reach out for these other things. And SWE is perfect if you can join and do something for the section at your school. That's probably what I would say. (laughs)

TE: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

DG: Oh, you're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]