

Speaker: Do I just talk or does Mike interview or?

Interviewer: Mike will interview. Right now the first thing I want to get on tape for the record is just your full name and your affiliation.

Speaker: Okay. Do I have to say my title or anything?

Interviewer: You can. Whatever affiliation you want to say ... Any time you're ready.

Speaker: Okay. It's a professional affiliation.

Interviewer: Any affiliation you'd like is fine with us. Whatever you think is appropriate. But professional is what we generally get. Any time you're ready, we're rolling right now.

Speaker: All right. Well my name is Eleanor Chin. And I've worked professionally at the Children's Museum in Boston for about 17 years. And I think the other affiliation I most find relevant is that I'm a mom and (end side A, begin side B) I'm the mother of a seven year-old and I think I learn just as much from her as I do from all of the other children that I come into contact with at the Children's Museum.

Interviewer: You may want to actually have the conversation with him.

Speaker: Okay.

Interviewer: Any time you're ready it's fine.

We're rolling.

Speaker: Oh you don't start with a question?

Interviewer: Do you know the general question that we're working on?

Speaker: Why don't you restate it.

Interviewer: Basically we're asking people to just relate any typical learning experience they've either had or witnessed or read or heard about. Possibly -- learning about anything but it could be ... a museum or not.

Speaker: Well I guess when you asked me this question I really had a hard time because I kept thinking about, you know, an anecdote of a child's learning. And it wasn't coming that easily to me as my own learning. And then when I started to just allow myself to think about that I realized that what sticks the most in my mind is when I first started working at the museum and I was being trained as an intern, I didn't really understand what experiential learning was, or discovery learning. I had really -- I guess I was about 24 or so and I had grown up in Boston Public Schools and gone to girl's Latin School, had a very classical education, learned by rote.

Memorized poems and formulas and everything. And I had come so far away from -- if I ever, I'm sure I was at that place when I was a toddler or a young child. But in school learning I had just come so far away from experiential learning that as I was being trained to be an intern at the museum a lot of it was training just like you would get in school. You know, the mode

of it was lecturing and reading and I was taking all this in intellectually. I thought oh this is great. I really understand this. And I remember the moment when I really understood it was one day I was lying under the turtle pond. It was really quiet. This is a slightly embarrassing story. I was lying under the turtle pond just watching the turtle swim. And I saw a little turd come out of the turtle's tail. And I discovered the turtle's rectum was. And you know it didn't have to be that -- it didn't have to be such a bodily experience. But that was the thing that really crystallized for me, "Oh, this is the discovery. I get it." And very shortly afterwards we had training by Bernie Zabrowski who only did his training experientially. And then I got it reinforced. So I think it's important when we think about being museum professionals to try to get back to that really basic discovery and personal experience ourselves. We tend to teach ourselves as adults a lot by reading, by listening. You know, all these sessions are examples of that. And likewise we tend to teach others that way. You know, when I think of all of the interpreters that we've trained at the museum over the years. It is the easiest, quickest way to get a whole bunch of information in. And you have to struggle to balance that with process learning. So that's the main lesson I've learned from children's museums and it's the lesson. It's that little poop coming out of the turtle's rectum that I keep as a visual in my mind. It's unfortunate that that's the visual but as I think about my own daughter's growth and I

watch her play and I watch her in school. That's the learning, that's the learning picture that comes to my mind and reinforces the whole process for me.

Interviewer: That happened to you or your daughter ... whatever.

Speaker: Well I remember being in play space with Emma. And you know it was another seminal moment.

Interviewer: Just mention the institution this time. At least once in these stories ...

Speaker: Okay. Well I remember being at my museum, the Boston Children's Museum, in play space, which is a really wonderful early childhood space. And again it was one of those seminal experiences that took me a step back from being an administrator and a museum professional. I was there as a parent. And she was playing. She was a toddler. She was just playing and I was doing the parental thing: talking to other parents, getting engaged about what they did as parents. And I guess I wasn't noticing you know that she was doing this -- walking on this ramp about 100 times. And you know as a typical parent you know I was looking at my watch and I said to myself, okay, it's time to go and then Jerry Robinson came over to me and said, "Look, in the past five minutes she's just learned to navigate this little ramp." And then I was reminded to sit and watch what is a very simple learning process. But it was a real moment where she learned a real skill within the course of, you know, 15 minutes. And parents I think tend to miss those moments

because they think this is boring behavior, this repetition that kids need to learn. And then from then on I just really looked at repetitive behaviors differently. I began to really watch them for their progression rather -- and their little changes over time rather than for that boring moment that I can't stand to watch.

Interviewer: inaudible remarks

Speaker: Well I don't have a lot to say about my own learning. You know I just -- I had a very classical upbringing in Boston Public Schools, as I said. And I can remember in fact that when I went to college my very first English class was a literature class. I had done so well that I placed out of freshman English and I found myself in a sophomore literature class. And this was how bad my education was. The book had been assigned. I went home and I read the book you know. I know how to do homework. I went to Latin School. And at class the teacher said, okay, so what did you think? And people were raising their hands, saying oh I think the author meant this and I was honest to God, at 18 I was just dumbfounded. Where did they get these ideas from? But I -- you know I picked up very quickly what the point was and I learned to have an opinion very fast. But I guess that was -- that stays with me as a memory of what was lacking in my education you know. Latin School. I don't know if you know a lot about it but Girl's Latin School and Boy's Latin School were kind of anomalies even in their own time. They're single sex -- they were single sex public high schools

and really the best that you could get academically in Boston at the time. Now they're co-educational and I'm sure they've caught up with the times. But at the time they really were the best that you could get and even given that, that's what I came out with.

Interviewer: inaudible remarks

Speaker: Right. Close to the source. No I can't -- I can't really think of any right now. Yeah, I didn't know I had those other two before you asked me.

Interviewer: That happens to almost everybody. That's why we keep asking. But we were dumb enough to say when a person said stop, okay. Then some people as we were winding up started to talk some more and then we realized we had to ...

TAPE INTERRUPTION

Speaker: Yeah, I've become a structure freak. I want it to get real structured so we can really know we've accomplished something by the end of the day.

Interviewer: Will you just state your full name
and your affiliation.

Speaker: I'm Debbie Edward. I'm from the
Austin Children's Museum in Austin, TX. Is that good enough?
All right.

Interviewer: We're rolling. The basic idea, as I've been saying, pass this on to other folks too. Keep promoting it. Is that you can talk about program but think of it mostly as -- or exhibits or things like that. But think of it