A Conversation with Francis Doughty
Administrative Assistant to Associate Dept. Head Bill Freeman

Q How did you manage to be such a nature lover though you grew up in the Boston area near the city?
A I grew up in Roslindale, not far from the Arnold Arboretum — the word arboretum is Latin for “tree place” — a place that attuned me to the natural world, and shaped me as a person. I went there as a young kid to play and explore and roam, and over the years growing up and into adulthood I frequently returned to the Arboretum in all sorts of weather and all seasons.

I also started birdwatching as a very young kid, and that is still an important activity in my life. Birds – listening to them, watching them, and identifying their songs – I love being in the presence of wild birds.

Not well-known or observed is a residence within the confines of the Arnold Arboretum — a house near Peters’ Hill located in the dark shade of overhanging white pines and Douglas firs. To me it was “a house in the woods” and when I was young I thought it was the neatest concept, the idea of living in the woods. That planted the seed of an idea that enchanted me and shaped my life. This idea was strengthened in my mind and heart upon reading two influential books: “Walden” by H.D. Thoreau, and a book by homesteading pioneers Helen and Scott Nearing, called “Living the Good Life.” Years later, I married Laura, who also works at MIT, and we bought a piece of land on a gravel road in a rural hill-town; we saved, planned, designed and finally built and moved into our house, fulfilling my youthful dream — my house in the woods.

Q Are there things about MIT, that like your connection with nature as you were growing up, have shaped you during your more than 25 years at the Institute?
A Putting aside the many interactions and great experiences with people at MIT, what I perhaps enjoy the most about the campus has to be the sculpture, the landscaping including some particularly beautiful trees, and also the breath-taking architecture. Planted throughout MIT are a wide variety of trees, shrubs, grasses and flowering plants. The Arnold Arboretum engendered in me a love of trees – and, familiarity with trees, like anything, teaches the eye and brain to see nuance, changes, and individuality.

To me beautiful architecture and landscaping are a kind of sculpture – certainly they are art. And, best of all, we are able to inhabit them! While arguably MIT’s most dynamic architectural entity is the Stata Center — some dislike it — it continues to thrill me, and seems to constantly offer new interior viewpoints and surprises.
A Conversation with Francis Doughty

Q So you have chosen to follow your life-long dream of living close to nature. Can you describe how and why this works for you?

A Actually, my home life is in many respects completely opposite from the worlds of MIT and Cambridge. I live in a heavily forested, small, rural “hill-town” which has a population of about 850 people and our house in the woods is on a quiet, dirt road abutting a 2,000-acre wildlife sanctuary.

Now here’s the part that’s going to sound really alien, probably especially to anybody at MIT: I don’t use or have (or really want) a whole slew of modern things, like high-speed Internet, an iPod or a smart-phone. So I don’t do web-streaming video or the like. I’ve never “texted” anyone, or used Skype, or Facebook or Twitter. I don’t own a GPS device. Moreover I stopped watching television 25 years ago. I am just personally happy to live without these things.

I want to be careful here so as to not to be misunderstood that I’m in some way, “anti-science”… Much to the contrary. I’m a rather passionate defender of science and the scientific method, which continue to widen our understanding of the world, and provide amazing life-improving advances in medicine and technology.

Laura and I balance our time with vegetable gardens and firewood heating, and also spending precious time with the two cats we love so much, and all of the lovely distractions of the natural world around us.

Q You are a musician and apparently have many other pastimes. Please describe how you balance everything!

A I play a folk guitar: it’s a steel-string acoustic guitar, and I play both 6- and 12-string. I’m an instrumental guitar-player and song-writer. My own song-writing and style of playing is strongly influenced by Leo Kottke. I have recorded 2 CD’s and I’d love to produce a third CD, it’s kind of been in the works off and on for about 7 years. Guitar playing and composing songs is an integral part of my daily life and how I define myself — it’s sort of like a healthy addiction. Overall, my interest in music starts and ends with Johann Sebastian Bach. His music is food for the brain! But after Bach, I listen on a weekly, if not daily basis to the music of Leo Kottke—my secret mentor in terms of his inventive playing style and compositions for guitar.

Sometimes I think that I have too many interests. I realize that I’m a curious person, and I love learning! (I am particularly interested in geology and meteorology). So, as a slow but avid reader, I end up reading several books concurrently. Over the recent months I’ve been [slowly] reading Jonathan Franzen’s “ Corrections”, “ The Swerve” by Stephen Greenblatt, and, “The Divine Wind – the History and Science of Hurricanes” by MIT professor Kerry Emanuel.

It really can be hard to balance it all, especially when the work responsibilities crank up. But I have no complaints, and I enjoy living the partial-home-reading lifestyle we’ve chosen. I feel very grateful towards MIT and the people here who have made so much of my lifestyle possible — I’m grateful for everything!

Meet some EECS Staff members

A Conversation with Alicia Duarte

Administrative Assistant to Graduate Officer Leslie Kolodziejski

Q Where did you grow up and what kind of influence has that had on your life?

A Growing up in the small seacoast town of Truro, MA on Cape Cod, I enjoyed the benefits of a tight knit community with the added year-round vacation feel — even when the summer tourists were home for the winter! During our summer vacations, my sister and I helped our parents with their businesses. Also I have such great memories of swimming and hiking along Cape Cod Bay and taking pottery and photography classes at the Castle Hill Center of the Arts.

To this day I enjoy visiting extended family and friends.

Q Did you have any memorable experiences as a student?

A The summer of 1989, before my freshman year of college, I was selected for and traveled with the People to People American-Soviet Youth Exchange Program, in which 32 high school students from Massachusetts and Vermont toured throughout Russia meeting with local teens and learning about their culture and art in addition to practicing our Russian and English translations. For nearly a month, we visited some of the major cities including Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Tallinn, Estonia in the Baltics and Novosibirsk, Siberia. Despite our great distance geographically and culturally, we shared many interests including pop culture and music — and hopes for closer relations between our countries.

Q Have you had other international experiences?

A In fact, while I was attending Endicott College in Beverly, MA, where I received my Associate Degree in Liberal Arts/Humanities in June 1991, I had two internships. In January, 1991, I interned at the American Chamber of Commerce in London (England). Working with a former Member of Parliament, I learned a lot about international commerce and relations—a heightened area since this was during the Gulf War. We worked closely with the US Embassy helping a team to organize security briefings for U.S. businesses working overseas during the crisis. The workshops included dealing with bomb threats, kidnapping by terrorists and general safety measures for U.S. company employees in worst-case scenarios. Luckily, there were no major troubles while I was there.
A Conversation with Alicia Duarte

continued

Q How did you find your way to working at MIT – eventually here in EECS?
A At Roger Williams University in Bristol, RI, I majored in political science, graduating in May 1993. I was quite interested in US and international studies, town administration and was a member and then president of the Model United Nations Club. We participated in the Harvard Model UN Clubs debates.

Based on this background and my earlier internships while at Endicott – one at the Provincetown Town Hall where I worked with the Town Manager, learning about many aspects of local government and the other at the Provincetown Tax Collector’s office – I decided to continue in graduate school at Emerson College in Political Communications and Public Relations. There my studies explored the various aspects of local, state and international business and communication studies.

Q What other positions have you held before coming to MIT?
A I interned for two years at Goldman & Associates in Boston, MA, a private consulting firm, which provides private and public sector clients with a wide range of public relations, and media relations. After graduating from Emerson College, I worked for DeeDee Chereton & Associates, a Boston-based public relations firm, which promotes Broadway show performances to the Boston theater districts. It was exciting to work with Andrew Lloyd Webber’s production team and local media outlets to promote “The Phantom of the Opera” to the Wang Theater in Boston.

Q Your experience is so varied but definitely not in the academic realm. How did you decide to work at MIT?
A Through my college networks, I learned about a position for Course Manager in the Physics Department (1997-2006). Working with many talented administrators including the late Professor George Koster, the Physics Department Education Officer and Course Administrator of 8.01 and 8.02 was a great way to start out my MIT career. Despite the tremendous pressures of overseeing 1,000 students and 26 recitation sections, Prof. Koster’s patience and approachable personality was remarkable. I also worked with fifteen other undergraduate and graduate level physics courses each term giving me the opportunity to work closely with many professors within the Physics Department.

Q Since you joined the EECS Department Graduate Office in Fall 2006, how has your work evolved?
A This has been a positive move for me – to be exposed to new skill sets since I work primarily with current SM and PhD EECS graduate students. At the same time, my previous MIT knowledge and experiences blend well. For example, having maintained the Physics Undergraduate Majors database, I am quite comfortable with my current responsibilities that include maintaining multiple database qualifier requirements with the faculty and students. I also oversee the SM and PhD thesis submissions for the three degree levels each year, which satisfy the requirements for the Institute Archives Library. What I particularly enjoy here is being involved in special event projects – particularly the new graduate admitted students – Visit Days in beginning of March. Arranging the welcome bags and other special touches that we collaboratively create in advance, I am impressed with the way these occasions are orchestrated by EECS Graduate Officer Professor Leslie Kolodziejski, Graduate Office Administrator Janet Fischer and colleagues in the Graduate Office Claire Benoit, Joyce Lynn Thompson, and Kathy McCay. I was also privileged to have worked with Marilyn Pierce, who retired in 2008, Professor Terry Orlando and with the late Professor Arthur Smith.

Q Are there any other experiences you’ve had at MIT that you couldn’t leave out?
A Over the years, I have enjoyed being a volunteer during Commencement Ceremonies. Graduation is a rewarding celebration culminating the educational journey at MIT of so many students — including those we have known in EECS. It is inspiring to think of the different roads they each will travel — leaving remarkable imprints on our society along the way.

Meet Some EECS Staff Members

A Conversation with Jessica Kraus
Outreach and Events Coordinator for Dept. Head, Anantha Chandrakasan

Q How did you find your way to working at MIT – eventually here in EECS?
A I came to MIT right after I graduated from college in 2006. Literally, I graduated on a Sunday, and Monday morning at 9am I was sitting at a desk, drinking coffee and responding to emails! I spent just over five years at the Sloan School of Management as a Global Engagement and Events Coordinator before making my way over to EECS. At this point, I’m a lifer here at MIT!

At the time I took my first job at MIT, I was just coming off of being rejected from about every law school to which I’d applied … and I was having a bit of an early twenties crisis. I didn’t know what I wanted to do, or what I was good at doing. Then, my boss went on maternity leave and asked me to coordinate a series of events in her absence. After a while I realized, hey! I’m pretty good at this! And, then I realized, hey, I really like planning events! And the rest is history.

Q How did you find your way to working at MIT – eventually here in EECS?
A I used to think that I’d never leave New York. Who leaves the best city in the world? However, as I got older, I realized that I wanted (and needed) to get away for a few years for college. That’s how I found myself at Boston University. I actually didn’t even visit BU before sending in my deposit. I just had a feeling that Boston could be right for me. Turns out that I was correct about that!

Q Now that you are in EECS, what are the fun (and unexpected) things that you find yourself doing?
A I love interacting with people. My favorite parts of my job are the amazing events that I get to plan for the students, faculty and my fellow colleagues. It’s really rewarding to coordinate the events that reinforce to our participants how valued they are here in EECS.

Q Was it difficult for you to leave New York City, where you grew up?
A I used to think that I’d never leave New York. Who leaves the best city in the world? However, as I got older, I realized that I wanted (and needed) to get away for a few years for college. That’s how I found myself at Boston University. I actually didn’t even visit BU before sending in my deposit. I just had a feeling that Boston could be right for me. Turns out that I was correct about that!

www.eecs.mit.edu
A Conversation with Jessica Kraus

continued

Q As a marathon runner, how does your work complement your running habit — or vice versa?

A Marathon training is time intensive — to say the least. It takes a lot of planning and multi-tasking to make sure that I’m prepared for race day. Working here at MIT is no different. There’s always something going on, and usually several things at one time!

Q Did you run a lot when you were growing up and how did you find that in comparison with the running you do around the Boston area?

A I never ran so much as a full mile before coming to Boston.

NYC had those yearly physical fitness tests and one of them involved “running” a mile in less than 15 minutes. Let’s just say that I didn’t even run that straight through. I wasn’t a runner growing up, but I was very active. I played a lot of sports, albeit not very well. From a young age I was on the swim team and also played soccer, basketball, and tennis, the latter of which I played through high school and into college.

The summer before my junior year of college, I managed to completely tear my ACL while working as a counselor at a tennis and sports camp. It was awful, and painful, though not as awful and painful as recovering from surgery.

I remember my checkup appointment where my surgeon told me that I’d probably never run without pain, a little by-product of the two screws that would forever be in my knee. I also remember thinking “Yea, sure, whatever.” Six months after surgery, I was running (mostly) pain free. Since then I’ve run so many races, including 11 half marathons, and 3 full marathons.

Q What are your favorite Boston things to do — as opposed to what you did in New York?

A I love exploring the city. New York City has always felt huge to me. But, in Boston you can literally walk from one side of the city to the other in one day. It’s pretty neat that I’ve started a run in Somerville and made my way through almost every neighborhood in the city.

Q If you got to do your wildest dream job, what would you be doing?

A In my wildest dreams, I’d be planning fundraising events for a non-profit organization. It wouldn’t hurt if I could also travel the world!