

Different Veterans, Daddy & Me

By Chris Hirschhorn

My dad was a US Army Veteran from the First World War. Germany invented a new kind of warfare, Gas Warfare. Daddy's battalion was trained in the use of gas and gas masks. Before his battalion left for Europe in 1918, they were required to march from what is now called Long Island City in Queens, a borough of NYC, all the way down the Jersey shore to Lakewood. There were no highways and bridges were few then. So, their hike was longer and more difficult than if done in today's world. After they arrived, they erected their pup tents, supped and bedded down. In the morning, they were awakened by the ringing of church bells – the radio reported that the war was over! Daddy never saw war and returned to civilian life.

I was in a different kind of battle. I, a woman, did not realize my inequality with men specifically in business. After graduating college as a math major, I met my first battle when I applied at an Actuarial firm to be trained as an actuary. I was given a test and scored 100%. The partner who administered the test declared I cheated. He said that no one ever got 100%, not even him. I learned that a man ranked above an intelligent woman in the business world of 1957.

Next, I went to an insurance company that required a math major for their new department called Computers. I programmed applications in machine code (no programming languages had been invented yet) and joined the actuarial class. I, the lone woman, discovered that the young men designed applications for the company's computer and decided I wanted to design too. My male VP said it would be a good 20 years before a woman could design here. I immediately resigned.

The company's IBM rep sent me to an engineering company where two managers interviewed me, needed my skill set and asked what I wanted as salary. I told them \$1,000/month and they replied: "We don't even make that much." I thanked them for the interview and walked. They were pissed. I knew my worth. It was 1958.

In the NY Times 'Want Ad Section', a consulting firm needed my skills. The president didn't fear an intelligent and fearless woman warrior. I was given the salary I wanted plus all expenses and was sent to Frankfort, KY to train the State's engineering and business staff. The staff was in awe, being trained by a woman! A few years later, when the Highway Staff was trained, I resigned. The next many years saw me, a veteran programmer and application designer, moving from one company to another as I overlooked the male department heads' disbelief that a woman was teaching them. Indeed, I was a woman in a man's world. My battle plan was: Listen to the Company President, train staff, help code, test their applications, collect my fees and overlook them playing the SEX card.