

Interviewing in Computer Field

By Chris Hirschhorn

My interviewing started in the 1950's. After college I, a math major, called a family get-together and asked my lawyer parents and my businessman uncle about where in the business would my skills best be used. My uncle gave me the best advice. He said: "Apply to an insurance company. They always need mathematicians and insurance companies have money."

So, I applied and was interviewed at Equitable Life Insurance Company in New York City. Don't know how many persons were interviewed. The interviewer was only interested in my math background and I, who was entering the business world, was learning about interviewing.

I was hired by this insurance company and coded for the IBM's first business computer, the IBM 650. I coded the work that the boss designed and observed that I was the second female in this department of three coders. The boss was doing the design work. Soon, I wanted to do design work too. The male department head refused my request. I thought long and hard and decided that I knew how to use all the ancillary IBM equipment and I knew how to code a successful program. I told myself that it was time to move on to another company rather than stay and stagnate. I didn't know that the head of my group was, himself, planning to take his new knowledge of design and coding and move on too. He was hired by IBM.

When the IBM salesman learned of my pending resignation, he gave me names of two of his other client companies that needed a person of my proven skill set. In the 1950s and 60s, the computer field was a new business field and I was not only a skilled coder but also an application designer.

I applied to other insurance companies and the *men* interviewing me were amazed when asked what salary I wanted. In their own words, they said, "I don't even make that much!" Of course, I left and they probably asked to be sent to IBM computer school. They recognized that this field of computers was here to stay.

Then my IBM sales rep referred me to a new client of his. UCBWM was in the building known as 'The God Box' because so many religious organizations were housed there. It was adjacent to Columbia University.

After I'd been working there a few weeks, UCBWM fired their current computer designer group and hired me as their Computer Consultant. I designed their programs and recommended programmers to code their program set.

Our relationship lasted for several years.