

**SWE STORYCORPS INTERVIEWS**

**Renee Weisman, Bernice Brody, and Marge Inden Interview**

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**Renee Weisman, Bernice Brody, and Marge Inden**

Renee Weisman retired from IBM in 2007 as a distinguished engineer and director of engineering after nearly 30 years with the company. After leaving IBM she started a leadership consulting firm, wrote three leadership books targeted to women, and taught chemistry at Marist College for four years. Weisman received a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Rutgers University in 1969 and a master's degree in electrochemistry from Vassar College in 1971. Renee is a founding member of the SWE Mid-Hudson Section.

Bernice Brody retired from IBM in 2016 as an infrastructure delivery project executive at IBM, where she had worked since 1979. Brody spent the first seventeen years of her career in hardware manufacturing and development of multilayer ceramic chip carriers. In 1998 she moved into IBM's Global Services Organization as a project manager. She received a degree in chemistry from St. Joseph's College in 1979, and received PMP certification in 2000 from the Project Management Institute. Bernice is a Fellow of the Society of Women Engineers and a founding member of the SWE Mid-Hudson Section, in which she held numerous leadership positions. She served on numerous SWE national committees and on the board of directors, including as

the Society's first speaker of the senate. She was also the founding co-chair of the IBM East Fishkill Women's Network Group.

Marge Inden is a senior registered associate with Morgan Stanley. Prior to her long career in the financial services industry, Inden worked thirteen years as an engineer and manager at IBM. Additionally, from 2001 through 2004 she was the executive director of the Frederick County Humane Society. Inden received a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Columbia University in 1980, and a master's degree in business administration from New York University in 1986. A Fellow and senior life member of the Society of Women Engineers, she joined the Society while a student at Columbia and has served on SWE's board of trustees since 1996.

In their 2008 SWE StoryCorps interview, Weisman, Brody, and Inden discuss their difficult first days at IBM and later company support; starting the SWE Mid-Hudson Section; and the important role SWE has played in their careers.

- July 2016

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**RENEE WEISMAN:** My name is Renee Weisman. I'm 60 years old. Today is November 7th, 2008. We're in the SWE [Society of Women Engineers] conference in Baltimore, Maryland. And I'm an engineer. I had been an engineer—distinguished engineer, actually—at a Fortune 100 company. And I'm here with two other engineers—female engineers—who started at about the same time, a little bit after me. And we want to talk about some of our early experiences as engineers in a world of men.

**BERNICE BRODY:** Hi. My name is Bernice Brody, and I'm 52 years old. And today's date is November 7th, 2008. We're here in Baltimore, Maryland for the Society of Women Engineers national conference. And I'm here with two coworkers, and we started around the same time at a large Fortune 100 company. [01:00] And we're going to talk about our early years together.

**MARGE INDEN:** Hi, my name is Marge Inden. I am the baby of the group, 49 years old. Today is Friday, November 7th, 2008, and we're in Baltimore, Maryland, at the Society of Women Engineers' national conference. And I'm here with two former coworkers from a large Fortune 100 company.

**RW:** So what we thought we would begin with was talking a little

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bit about some of our early experiences as female engineers, and each of us talk about why we needed to get together and form an organization like SWE. Because we needed some way for us to connect in a world that was largely male.

When I started, I was actually the first woman. There were probably 400-plus men, and me. And I remember within the first month working in my little cubicle, and someone came over and dropped a piece of paper on my desk, hand-written. [02:00] And I looked at it, and I said, "What is this?" And he said, "Could you type it for me?" And that was a typical behavioral pattern back in 1969, when I started in engineering. It's certainly changed over time, but I've lived a lot of interesting experiences.

When you walk into a roomful of men who are busily using four letter words in a smoke-filled room, and a woman arrives and suddenly it just gets quieter and quieter and quieter as they realize you're there, you realize that women did bring a major change to industry. And the fact that we could get together and help each other was a key part of our success.

**BB:** This is Bernice. And I remember going to my first day at

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work and the manager that I was working for was a male, and it was an all male department. [03:00] And, as a matter of fact, I was like one of two. In 200 engineers there were two women working in the area. And they were like, "Oh, you should go to lunch with the secretaries, right?" So the secretaries weren't leaving at a convenient time, so I said to my boss, I said, "Well, do you go to lunch?" (laughs) You know? And he said, "Yeah." And I said, "What time do you go to lunch?" And so finally I said, "Why don't I go with you?" "Oh, you want to go with us?" And I'm like, "Yeah, I'll go with you." So then when we got together to go together, one of the guys come out of the office, and they go, "Oh, she's going?" (laughs) And I said, "Yes, I'm going." And I just smiled and I thought, "And I'm going to keep on going." And it turned out that all those people turned out to be lifelong friends and mentors. [04:00]

**RW:** My first lunch at IBM my manager took me to he promptly introduced me to everybody at the table. We had—I sat down, and the conversation very rapidly turned to fishing and hunting, two things which I really have no interest and no desire to talk about. And that was my introduction to lunch with the men at IBM.

**MI:** I can't believe, Bernice, that we never talked about our

lunches at IBM when we started. But the exact same thing happened to me. I was introduced to a secretary, and told that I could go to lunch with her. And I remember looking at the engineer who told me this and saying, "But I don't understand. Don't you go to lunch?" And his eyes started shifting from left to right, and he got this really uncomfortable look on his face. And it turned out that he was kind of a loner who liked to eat lunch at his desk.

But I eventually fell in with a group of people who did like to lunch together, and was able to feel part of a mixed gender group that went to lunch. But that took a lot of time. [05:00] And social conversations amongst the men were very much limited to fishing, hunting, and sports; with fishing and hunting being number one and number two—depending on the season of the year, of course.

When I started, I was not given any work to do. I was not given an assignment. I was put at a desk with a phone on it, and told, "Here's your desk. Call me if you need anything," and my boss disappeared around the corner. He told me where his office was. He didn't tell me where my coworkers sat. He didn't introduce me to anyone. He didn't tell me how to get anywhere in the building. So I just made my own way and forged my own path.

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And when I met some of the engineers in the department, it was pretty clear that he hired me because somebody decided in a Fortune 100 company, we needed more women. So they went out and hired a few women. They didn't have particular assignments in mind for us. They sat us at desks. And I sat at the desk and thought, "Well, this is going to be really boring if I don't get something to do." So I went across the hall, and asked one of the engineers for an assignment. And he gave me a purchase requisition that needed six signatures, and asked me to run around the building to get the signatures. [06:00] Which was probably one step from typing, but not a very big step from typing. (laughs) And I looked at him and said, "I don't understand. Is this something engineers usually do?" And I got that very uncomfortable, shifting from side to side look again. And basically I put it back down on his desk.

**BB:** Hmm. Yeah, I remember that when I was hired at IBM, the manager that I was supposed to work for literally would not even talk to me, and was gone within two weeks. But he would not even be introduced to me. I was introduced to him, and he had nothing to say to me. It was very clear that he was not exactly happy that I had showed up on the scene. (laughs) But I will say that I had—the guy that



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actually did the hiring, who was eventually my team lead was a wonderful mentor, and they sat me with him, and he helped me get oriented, and gave me some good things to do. He's an African-American engineer, and he was—is a wonderful lifetime friend. [07:00]

**RW:** I have to answer to Marge: at least you had a desk. The day I arrived, they didn't have a desk. Apparently, they hadn't set anything up yet for me, so I had to use the desk of people who were on vacation, and a different desk each time. But there were no keys, of course, because those people were on vacation. And when I said, "Well, what am I supposed to do with my purse?" my manager looked at me and said, "You have a purse?" You know, it was a little bit unusual. And so by day two I realized I'd better not bring my pocketbook in. I'd better have things with pockets, and learn to behave a little bit differently while I'm in the work place. So I just thought that was an interesting—you were a step ahead, because you were hired a little bit later. You actually had a desk.

The other thing that I think turned things around immediately for me, because I remember leaving my first day, saying to my husband, "If I have another day like

that, I'm leaving, and going to teaching." [08:00] It was horrible, my first day. My second day, they had a major line bust, and the line went under engineering control. And my manager came and asked me if I would work from 8:00 in the morning to 8:00 at night because they were putting the line under engineering control and they needed 12-hour shifts. I said to him, "What am I going to do? I know nothing. I've only been here one day." He said, "Well, we need the bodies." Okay. So I went out there. And because there was so much trouble everything was being taken apart and put back together. All the engineers were out on the line. In that week I learned more than I would have learned in a month if things were going well.

So the message that I learned out of that is, Don't be afraid of a crisis. Welcome it, because it's a great opportunity to learn at a rate and pace that is much more accelerated than it ever could have been. And by the end of that week I was answering the questions when people asked.

[09:00] And within two weeks we had formed a task force, and they put me as the leader of one of the areas. So I could never have moved that quickly if we hadn't had a crisis. And I probably wouldn't even have stayed with the company if we hadn't had a crisis.

**MI:** Well, I learned that it's not a bad thing to put your female skills to work in a male environment pretty early. First thing I learned was that I couldn't tell the men they were wrong because they didn't believe me—even when I knew they were wrong. It was a difficult thing for me to understand, but when I figured out that I needed to make them think it was their idea, it all turned around for me. So I learned to play stupid, and it's not something I'm proud of. But I think we've all been in a place where we've had to say, "Help me understand how that works," when you know exactly how it works. And you figure the person you're talking to may not know how it works. But all of a sudden they have to figure it out because you asked them to. And when they have to start explaining it to you, just like they were talking to a child, their own thought process will get them where they needed to go. [10:00]

I also one time—oh, the looks on their faces. I used a very good female skill of knowing how to thread a needle, out on the manufacturing line. The men were trying to thread a plumb bob to shoot some lines installing equipment. They had this frayed piece of rope that they could not get into the plumb, which had an eye that was a little bit tight. Now, could they have gone and gotten another piece of rope?

Sure. But was there one handy? No. They wanted to use this piece of rope. They didn't want to cut it because it wasn't particularly long enough, and they wanted to get this through. So I said, "This is simple. This is threading a needle. I know how to thread a needle. All we need is a needle threader. So we need to make a needle threader."

So I pulled one of the maintenance guys and said, "You got a really thin piece of wire?" He said, "Well, I've got a wire brush I can pluck a wire out of." I said, "Perfect. You got a vise-grip?" [11:00] He said, "Oh, yeah, I've got a vise-grip." So I took the wire, I folded it in half. I put it in the vise-grip. I made a needle threader. I plucked it through the hole in the plumb bob, I pulled the string back through. And they all stood there and looked in amazement. And I just smiled and then said, "It's just a needle threader." None of them had ever seen a needle threader before. Just a basic engineering problem solved.

**RW:** Right. Which shows the new ideas women bring. I think we could talk a bit more about things that happened early on, but one of the things all of our experiences taught us is we needed to work together. And Bernice and Marge were really instrumental in getting a Society of Women Engineers section going. And then I came in a little bit later. And I

think we ought to get into some of how that happened, because it was filling a critical need for us at the time.

**MI:** So I should probably start, because I got the first phone call. I was friends in another women's organization with a woman named Bonnie. [12:00] And Bonnie is no longer with us, and I miss her greatly. She was a good friend. Bonnie called me one day and said, "I'm involved with—," and she named another women's organization that I was not involved with, "—and we need a keynote speaker for our banquet and we would like it to be you." And I said, "Me? Well, why me?" She said, "Well, because you're a great speaker, and you're funny, and we want to have you." And I'm thinking, "Holy cow!" I have no idea what I'm going to talk about. "Well, well what do you want me to talk about?" She said, "Anything you want." And I thought, "Holy cow. What do I talk about?"

So I decided to talk about women entering nontraditional professions. I expanded it a little beyond engineering, and looked at some others. And I was trying to answer for myself the question that had plagued me in the early eighties, which was: Why is it that the medical schools are now 50% women, when that was a nontraditional profession,

but the engineering schools are still 10 or 15% women, at that time? [13:00] Why such a difference in the penetration? And so I did some research on that topic, and prepared a talk on it.

And the group dutifully did what nonprofit groups do, and they sent out their press releases. And one of their press releases got picked up by our local fish wrapper, the *Spackenkill Sentinel*. And one of our members saw it. I hadn't mentioned this to anyone at IBM. I just said it. (laughs) I hadn't mentioned this to anyone at our company, mentioned this to any of my coworkers. Hadn't really thought it was worthy of mentioning to my coworkers. And then I got told, "Oh, we're coming to hear you talk." "What do you mean we're coming to hear me talk?" So that's how I found out I had a fan club. And all of a sudden, three other women—was it three, Bernice, or was it four?

**BB:** Could have been four. I don't remember.

**MI:** Showed up at this dinner, with this women's group that none of us were involved with, and none of us knew the members of, because I was the speaker. [14:00] And I was beyond flattered. I was really flabbergasted that people felt that strongly about hearing this talk. Well, it was a beautiful

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night in the spring. It was probably May or June, and the weather was ideal. It was one of those nights you just want to linger outside, and we did that.

**BB:** It was April.

**MI:** And we stood in the parking lot. It was April.

**BB:** It was April.

**MI:** And we stood in the parking lot of the restaurant for a very long time and watched the stars, and talked, and talked, and talked, and talked. And then, finally, Bernice said something that made us all say, "Yeah."

She said, "You know, the men have their golf league. What are we doing for each other? We women at our company are not doing enough for each other." So I said, "Well, you know, when I was in college, and right out of college I was involved with this group called the Society of Women Engineers. And, you know, they're an—"

**BB:** I don't—

**MI:** "—IBM-approved—"

**BB:** —that did not come up at that point. It did not come up.

**MI:** Not come up at that point?

**BB:** It was later.

**MI:** Okay. Okay, that's fair.

**BB:** But at that point, we were there, and it was Marge who said—because, you know, we were all like, “Yeah, we don't do enough for each other.” [15:00] But Marge was like, “Okay. Everybody brings one more person to lunch.” And we picked a date. It was like Tuesday, next Tuesday, or something.

**MI:** Bring a friend.

**BB:** Bring a friend. And so we talked at that thing and we said, Is this worthy to continue? And everybody said, Yeah. And Marge was like, “Okay, everybody needs to bring a friend to the next meeting.” So we had, like, four meetings like that. And then you had a presentation on SWE, on the Society of Women Engineers, and about—. Yeah, and about how this organization was sanctioned—because, I mean, at that time you didn't want to be—some of us were managers. And you didn't want to be gathering groups of employees together, you know, because that was perceived that it might be IR [industrial relations] relationship issues. This is before the days of affinity groups. And so we



decided that we needed some sort of legitimate organization that was sanctioned by the company. So. [16:00]

**MI:** And it shows how far we've come that now we have women's networks in all these big companies. Whereas back then if we had gone to the top of our company and said, "We want a formal women's network," they would have thrown us out on our butts. Let's be honest.

**BB:** (laughs) Yeah, right.

**MI:** But because the Society of Women Engineers existed, and because it was an IBM-approved society—said it again. Because it was approved by the company we had no concerns that people would look askance at us doing this, and we could use company resources to publicize our meetings. And that was huge for us, because that let us reach out to other women in a very, very large company where we were pretty far-flung and a lot of us didn't know each other.

**RW:** Right. For me it was eye-opening. I went to that first meeting. It was at Pizzeria Uno's, as I recall. And I was probably—because I was 10 years older than most of the folks there, and had been kind of at least in the industry a little bit longer. I was a middle manager, I believe, at that time. [17:00] And I wasn't really thinking about

needing it for me, but as I sat there I was thinking, "Wow, they're all going through what I went through. How can I help them not have to learn it all over again?" And I really got involved, and wanted to make it succeed because I thought that that would help other women get to where I was and beyond.

But I didn't appreciate how much I was going to get out of it afterwards. It was really much more I was thinking I was this altruistic person, that I'm going to help women. But the reality was the organization helped me in a lot of ways as well. So I'm very glad that I was at that first meeting, and I recall we also stood in the parking lot after that one talking about how to get going and how to make this all happen. And today we have a very successful section. So I'm glad to have played my small part in it.

**BB:** So, Renee, how has SWE helped you?

**RW:** Many ways. [18:00] I think, in the first place, it's helped me recognize the skills and talents that I had and also that I lacked, and how to share them with others and learn from others. It's helped me in networking enormously. I'm now retired from that Fortune 100 company, and started my own consulting. And some of my best contacts have come

through people I've met from SWE. And some of my speaking engagements have come from people I've met with SWE.

But it's also just been very enjoyable. One of the first projects I did for the section—and Bernice got me into it after we went to some sort of conference—was actually doing training of teachers. Having come from teaching before I went into industry, I always felt that science got a bad name in the elementary schools and middle schools, and it was typically the thing they got to on Friday. And it was out of a book. [19:00] And—

**MI:** And that was because the teachers weren't trained in it, and still aren't. And one of the challenges we have as a society is that if the people who influence our children at the youngest ages aren't excited about math and science, then the kids aren't going to be excited about it.

**RW:** Exactly. And—

**MI:** So we wanted to bring that into the schools as best we could, by helping the teachers get excited about it.

**RW:** And SWE really did that. They set up a set of experiments, a kit that you could actually bring and give every teacher. And we taught it several times, in many different school

districts. And we'd give the teacher the kit, and the idea was to do hands-on science.

And the other comment I would make also is from a point of view of role model. Typically, that Friday afternoon—or in the middle school, if there was science, it was a man [teaching]. And what we really encouraged in these were women to learn how to teach science. And so that the grade school teachers, which were largely women, could get more comfortable with hands-on science. And it wasn't this dull thing you did on Friday afternoon, when everything else was done. [20:00] But it was a fun thing, where you really got your hands dirty and learned things. So it was Bernice's fault, but I had a great time with it.

**BB:** Yeah. I have to admit that that was one of the most satisfying things I've actually ever done with SWE, was doing that. And now with a lot of requirements for the type of people that provide that training, we can't—it's really hard for us to get in and do it again. But that was really exciting to see some really complex scientific experiments be embraced by middle school teachers, even in the Poughkeepsie school district, which was an inner city school district. So.

**RW:** We did it in Newburgh as well.

**BB:** And we did it in Newburgh, you're right. You're right. So I just wanted to say that, you know, I think I get a lot out of SWE. I have—Marge was reminding me that the first time I ever had to talk in public I was like a really—a wreck. [21:00] (laughs) My voice was shaking, I couldn't stand. I couldn't even stand up straight. My whole body was shaking, I think, and I couldn't even put two words together. And then after that first experience, every time I had to speak in public I would run to Marge and go, "Marge, I want to say this. How do I say this (laughs) and still sound intelligent?"

And from there, I mean, you know, I've grown a lot in my image of myself. I've been able to build a base of support that's really meaningful to me. In other words, I really have this, you know, a network of women that lift me up when I'm at the bottom. And I still remember at one SWE conference going, "I got this offer for this job. Do you think I should take it?" And there was like three people in the room. They said, What are you thinking about? Of course you should take this job. (laughs)

**MI:** As I recall, we drove across half of the southwestern

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desert—you, me, and Amy—trying to beat it into your head that it was okay to embrace the new, and leave the old behind. [22:00]

**BB:** Yeah.

**MI:** But the old was comfortable and familiar to you. And lucky for you, Amy and I both knew where you were. Because we'd been there, and we'd both left already. And we knew there were so many better places for you to go that you could grow more and do more. And I know that you've never looked back on that decision.

**BB:** Yes, that's true. That's true. And the biggest thing that I have is—I would have to say is this idea of thinking big and thinking strategically. If I wasn't working in SWE, I don't think I would have had those experiences. And then I was able to take it back to my work, and now I do that type of work at IBM, and then—. So it's a back and forth kind of thing. It helps me in my job, and it helps SWE grow. Okay, Renee.

**RW:** Okay. I think you're right on that SWE gave you skills, and experiences, and connections. And even a few days ago, Bernice said, "I want to talk to you about my career and my

job, just to have somebody to talk to about." And we're going to get together next week and do that. [23:00] And now that I'm retired I said, "Well, what are some good things I can do in SWE that I'm not doing?" And we're going to talk about that. Which gets enabled, really, by having organizations like this. So I think it's just the greatest type of thing.

The other thing is because I was part of SWE, we ended up forming a number of things within the company. Marge talked about today—network groups, women's network groups, diversity groups are very common. They weren't back then. And my attachment to SWE got me to be the executive sponsor to the first women's network group in our area. And I jumped right into it, having had the experience with SWE. And it's a very successful group. And then they formed an executive women's network group. And all of those things have helped other women find places to get answers and to realize they're not alone. [24:00]

I think one of the things that someone once told me was, "Just knowing you were there helped, because that felt like you could get there." And while maybe we haven't broken the glass ceiling completely yet, it's women helping women that are going to do it, not men bringing them up. It's really

got to be us helping each other, and SWE is the place that that will happen.

**MI:** You know, one of my most satisfying experiences in SWE was working directly with Girl Scouts, because it's just so amazing to see their faces. You know, you're not going to reach every girl, but if you can reach a couple of girls. Some of them are going through the paces, but some of them are really turned on by what we do with them when we work with them. And the demand out there for the services is almost unlimited.

I was absolutely amazed when I was walking through the grocery store and a woman that I did not recognize tapped me on the shoulder and said, "I know you. You're one of the women from SWE who came and did my daughter's Girl Scouts badge on science and technology." [25:00] And I didn't even recognize her, nor did I remember her daughter. But, boy, they sure remembered us. And all she wanted to know was: she had another daughter who was a year or two behind, and could we come again. And her neighbor had a daughter in another troop, and could we come again. And I saw that there's a real thirst out there for the things that we're able to do. And my fervent hope is that we can continue to replicate the programs until we can satisfy the demand.



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I also think that, in terms of what I learned from SWE, I probably did my earliest project management work as a SWE volunteer. Because I was still in more of a subordinate role at work, in terms of project teams, where someone else was leading the team and I was a member of the team.

[26:00] But at SWE I was given a ball to run with, and I had to learn to handle the budget, the schedule, the volunteers—you know, the staffing—all of the different aspects of success criteria, all the logistics of a project. And that's a huge growth experience because something always goes wrong, and how do you manage the thing that went wrong?

Like Renee said before, when you have that crisis, you probably get the most learning. But the truth is that that all applies to engineering, and that all flows back into engineering, and helps you be a better engineer and a better project manager going forward. And a lot of those are really skills I definitely got in SWE.

The other thing for me about SWE is it's a network of colleagues that's always there for me regardless of my job circumstances. If I change jobs, I may not have any kind of a professional network at my new job. But I know my colleagues in SWE are there for me to discuss the good, and

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the bad, and the challenging of whatever's going on with me. [27:00] And that's something you can't place a value on.

**RW:** That's right.

**BB:** That's true.

**BB:** You know, this is totally off-topic, but I do have to mention the one time—you know, we had formed the section. Of course, we had to have, you know, people to hold the positions. You know, section president. You know, treasurer, and all this other stuff. So Marge was our first president. She knew more about this than anybody else, so she stepped up to be president. And she actually did a lot of work for the chartering of the section. And so she did most of the legwork on chartering, and she created a lot of network with us with our HR teams and stuff. And then so she was president. I think she was president for like two years, going on three, and she finally just stood back and said, "Look, I am not—" what was, I don't know if it was Idi Amin, or the other guy, but—

**MI:** Papa Doc Duvalier.

**BB:** Duvalier.

**MI:** President for Life.

**BB:** President. "I am not President for Life." (laughs) So in that three words we created a succession plan for our organization. [28:00]

**MI:** Because I was a big believer in succession plans, and I still am. And you know what? In the world of volunteers—I don't care if you're an engineer or volunteering in some other capacity—if you don't want a job forever, you darn well better go find your own replacement, because that's the way it is pretty much everywhere. There are very few volunteer organizations that have people beating down the doors. The lucky few have more than one candidate for a position, and SWE is fortunate to be that lucky few in the more prestigious positions. But at the local grassroots level, boy, if you don't want to do a job for life, you better go out and identify the person who you think should do it next.

**RW:** You're exactly right. And I think the fact that we have had a whole succession of presidents—and our current one has probably been with the company maybe ten, eleven years—shows that you did a good job in succession planning, because the new generation of engineers is leading, and

taking over and seeing from what you folks established.

[29:00] So it's definitely working, and working very well. And a lot of them are here at this session and this conference to participate. And they're not just here, but they're teaching, they're leading groups, they have roles that go beyond just attending. And that's a real credit, because we're not that large a section either. So it's done a great deal.

I also remember in those early years we were always looking for good programs. I remember being tapped to come and talk about work-life balance, and raising children. And Bernice always tells me I coined the word "balancing the guilt," right? Because you felt guilty working, you felt guilty at home that you weren't at work. And I always said if you balance the guilt you manage through it. And a lot of folks came up to me afterwards and said, "You know, admitting that you feel guilty and knowing that other people feel guilty helps get some of the guilt off your shoulders."

[30:00] And that example is an example of just connecting and talking, and how realizing you're not alone, and other people are in the very same situation, is what organizations like this are all about.

**BB:** I remember that meeting. It was a great meeting, still one

of our best meetings ever. We had an auditorium with about 80 people, and we had the paper there and everything. And I remember one of the people that was on the panel said that she loved working, and although she had young children, she couldn't wait to get back to work, and that she was a better mother because she was working. And I felt so validated, because that's the way I felt. And I always saw these women that were like, "Oh, I can't spend time with my kids." And I'm like, "If I spent all my time with my kids I'd be a witch." I mean, I was just like I really loved having that career and being able to work. And there was a woman on the panel who said the same thing. And I was like, "Oh, there is more like me out there!" (laughs) [31:00]

**MI:** I was thrilled with that meeting because of the amazing coverage we got from the newspaper. Somehow I managed to tap into the business department at the *Poughkeepsie Journal*. And what really thrilled me—you know, this was back in the early nineties—was that not only that we were in the paper, but we weren't in the (clears throat) Style section. Which they all used to call the Women's section until they started to try to be more trendy about it. We were in the business section because this was a business story. And I believe I was the president when that

happened. I was certainly doing the publicity for that meeting. And I remember distinctly making the decision that I was calling the business department at the paper, because this was a business story. And that's how they ran it, and that made me really proud.

**BB:** Yeah, that was great. I do want to make sure that before we wrap up that we talk about what we would like to leave as our legacy in SWE. What are we really working for, towards the legacy in SWE? Did you have a comment first, Renee?

**RW:** Well, actually, this does fit somewhat the legacy. [32:00] I've got two daughters who work in industry, who are mothers and full-time working. They kind of followed in their mom's footsteps. And part of my legacy and part of the things I've learned over the years with SWE has helped me help them as they're going through so many of the same things that I'm going through. And they would ask for advice, and I would tell them about what I went through. I would tell them about a story, and my daughter kept saying, "Ma, you have to write this down. Ma, you have to write this down. Ma, you've got to write this down." And I finally did, and it was really at her encouraging that I even wrote the book that I wrote.

But more than that, the advice, and the experiences I lived through have helped them go through it themselves, and leaving a legacy that says you can do it. My mother also worked full-time and she used to tell me, "You can have it all, just not at the same time." [33:00] And kind of tell my daughters, "You know, you have to prioritize, you have to balance, but you don't have to give up what you love in order to have." And I don't know if I would have had the perspective to do that if I hadn't been part of organizations like SWE.

**BB:** Well, for the people in this room I don't think it's a surprise that I really want to leave a legacy of a strong diversity and inclusion program within the society, that we really do a lot of culture change to be a validating organization that truly represents all women in engineering. And that the underrepresented groups get their voices heard, and that we really stand for a cross-cultural network, and discussion organization. [34:00]

**MI:** You know, I think our challenges going forward are in some ways easier and in some ways really a lot harder, as a Society of Women Engineers. Because it becomes a little more difficult to justify as the percentage of women in engineering grows, Well, why exactly do you need that? But

frankly, the discrimination's still out there; it's just more subtle. And the more subtle it is, the more difficult it is to identify, and the more difficult it is to explain, and the more difficult it is to support those who are enduring it.

And I watch the young women at this meeting, the ones who are going into the career fair here at our conference looking for positions. [35:00] And I think, Something's going to happen to you, because it will. It may be really horrible, and it may be kind of minor. But something's going to happen to you some point in your career, almost a guarantee, where you're going to need to talk to people who know what you're going through. And it's not going to be your male colleagues. They're not going to understand. You're going to need people who understand. And that's what SWE is there for.

I see young women coming along now—and thank God for this—who have lots of female colleagues at the university level. And they don't understand what it's going to be like for them. And they will stand there and say, Well, that's all old stuff that doesn't happen anymore. Well, you know what? I don't think too many young women entering the work



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force now are asked to type things for their boss. Maybe they are, but I doubt it. Who even has a typewriter anymore?

**BB:** Right.

**MI:** Yesterday—

**BB:** Who even writes longhand?

**MI:** Yesterday morning over—who even writes longhand? (laughs)  
Yesterday morning, over breakfast, a colleague of about my age told me that when she started her first job, the boss walked in, popped his head in her door and said, “Coffee?” and she said, “No, thanks.” [36:00] And after he left she realized he wanted her to get him coffee. But she was so flabbergasted by the request she didn’t even understand it.  
  
I don’t think those things are happening anymore. But the more subtle things that are happening require an even stronger support network, and that’s what I hope SWE will be.

**BB:** Great. Go ahead.

**RW:** I just want to add that we had the luxury of working in a company that valued diversity and worked with us. However,

if you're in a company, or anyone is in a company that doesn't or isn't of that nature, it's even more critical that you find an organization like this that can help you get the support, the advice, the guidance that you need. So no matter where you are—in a very large Fortune 100 company, or in a small little company, or doing it yourself—getting that connection is probably one of the most important things you can do for your success. [37:00]

**Facilitator:** I had a question about sort of that—you talked about the early stages of SWE. And just can you tell me like your kind of moment where you were like, "Wow, we have a group of women. There's such support for this." I mean, was there any moment, like a proud moment that you had?

**MI:** I can give you an amazing story like that. When our company was going through some tough times I had a good friend who was working in New York, lived in New York, but she was from the Chicago area. And work in the plant had slowed down to nearly a stop. And people's pretty much full-time job was to speculate about when the layoff was coming. It wasn't even an "if." It was the when, and how, and how many at that point. [38:00] And there was no—because there was no work, because almost all of our programs had been

cancelled. And as bad as being laid off is, standing around wondering if you're going to be laid off is worse. So we spent a lot of time behind closed doors doing nothing but speculating. And one day she said to me, "Boy, if I could get a job in Chicago—all my family's in Schaumburg, Illinois. I would so love to go back there." Well, she was a photolithography specialist, and I spun my mental wheels a couple of times and said, "Wait, I know somebody in SWE who could probably get her a job." And I made one phone call, and the person I called made one more phone call, and she had a job in Chicago. And I went, Wow. That's the power of a network that I never would have had had I not been in SWE.

**BB:** Yeah, that's it. That's a good story. I don't have a similar story like that, but I do have to share that I'll never forget the feeling I had walking into the keynote breakfast for my first Society of Women Engineers conference. [39:00] I mean, I was literally in tears, because I walked into this room, and I saw a room full of women engineers. And I was like, "Oh, my God!" (laughs) And just there was this energy, and I was like ten feet off the ground. And it was just to me the most amazing thing. And then I watched with other people who have experienced that

same—I mean, it's never the same as the first time. But I've watched other women go, "Oh, my God, this is the first time I've been with 500 women engineers or 500 women in technology." And now we're here with 5,000 attendees at the SWE conference. So I had to say that.

**RW:** It's really hard to think about a defining moment. But I guess my piece of recognizing is how my daughters saw the organization. [40:00] They came with me to some meetings, and they realized that networking, and being connected really was one of the most important things for them. And right away, as soon as they got to college, they joined the appropriate organizations. They've taken leadership positions. They're not engineers. One is a mathematician, and one actually went into communication. But they're very involved in the appropriate organizations for their skills in technologies and businesses. And they realized how valuable this type of structure was for them. And as a result, they're all in it, just like I was. So I guess that the importance of it clearly shone through for them, because they didn't hesitate to jump right into it right away. [41:00]

So to me, that's it. That's where we came from—from being

all alone, and the only engineer, the one who [was] looked at differently. The one who had to find a place to put her purse. The one who had to figure out how to have a meaningful lunch conversation. The one who had to show, when they were doing something, that they could do it. And when they got something, it wasn't just because she was a woman. And having SWE has been that place where you realized that other people were in the same boat.

**F:** One more question about—

**BB:** Sure.

**F:** —how your male colleagues view SWE, and what have they—

**MI:** She should answer that.

**F:** Have they been—and we have about a minute or two left, but if there's something else you want to talk about. But I just want to—

**MI:** She should answer that.

**F:** —I was just curious.

**BB:** (laughs) Well, I have one male colleague who goes, "SWE!" every time I talk about it. [42:00] So and there's a lot of

perception about, Well, why isn't there an organization for men? But certainly I have—I'm married to a fellow engineer who, you know, who works for the same company. And he's very, very supportive. And now he's the first elected man to a national position in SWE. And so, you know, he really believes in what we do, and he's always been very supportive of the organization.

And he gets it because he's, you know—it's not just what he says, but he's recruited women into the industry. He's kept them engaged. They still love him; everybody loves Jeff. And so, you know, not only in what he says, but in what he does. And it comes through to the younger women engineers that, you know, he's one of the few that really get it. So.

[43:00]

**MI:** You know, in the seventies Society of Women Engineers had a men's auxiliary. In fact, we had a men's auxiliary from the beginning. But some of the people who formed SWE had incredibly supportive men in their lives. And Bernice's story is not the first story of an incredibly supportive spouse. But we've gone from supportive spouses who were on the sidelines, to supportive spouses who actually play leadership roles, which is a great transition. And it

doesn't make us any less a Society of Women Engineers. It makes us an inclusive Society of Women Engineers.

We give an award every year to a man who has supported women in our field, and that's something I'm really proud of. The award is named after the first president of SWE. Husband, excuse me. His name was Rod Chipp, and he was one of SWE's most ardent supporters when it was being formed. His wife was Bea Hicks. She was ahead of her time in having a different last name than her husband, back in the fifties. And her husband was incredibly supportive of this effort. [44:00] And a lot of SWE's early members felt they wanted to honor his legacy by giving this award. And it's become a coveted award in corporate America. And if you look at the history of who's won this thing, it's gone to the Who's Who of corporations in America. And when we can have corporations asking, What do I need to do to win this thing?—then we're doing something right.

**F:** Is there any last thing that you want to say to each other? Or anything that you wanted to—

**BB:** Oh, I'm really glad we're in this together. (laughs)

**RW:** Definitely. And it was a lot of fun. I enjoyed this. Thank you for getting us all together, Bernice, because this was

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really at your—

**MI:** Yes.

**RW:** —request. And so I thank you. It was fun, and I hope it will help others.

**MI:** Yes, I would have to agree. I never would have taken the initiative, and I'm glad that Bernice did. And I got the email and said, "Oh, that would be—yeah, we can squeeze that into our schedule." And somehow we managed to squeeze it into our schedule, and it was great, and I'll never forget it. [45:00] So thanks.

**F:** Great.

END OF INTERVIEW