

Computing Educators Oral History Project (ceohp.org)

Fran Allen video snippet transcript

Recorded October 2, 2008 in Keystone, CO, USA

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<http://www.youtube.com/user/CEOHP#p/u/0/1xgPb7dYt00>

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We recommend that this video transcript be cited as follows:

Fran Allen, "Connections between CS professionalism and the glass ceiling", a video interview from 2008, Computing Educators Oral History Project. Online: ceohp.org.

Connections between CS professionalism and the glass ceiling

I'm Fran Allen and I have something I want to share with a lot of people because it's a theory that's mine and I'd be very interested in what people think about it. And it involves the change in the role of women from early days — in my case 1957 — to what was going on in the 1970s in which I observed that the role of women had changed. The specific way I observed it and the place where I observed it was, having joined IBM as a programmer at IBM Research in 1957 — I had worked there; been very successful; was a manager a few years; and I was on some fabulous projects. And ended up leaving the workplace there — the research laboratory — working on shipping projects ... shipping some products on the projects I'd been working on. And coming back in 1970-1971, that period, and finding an entirely changed workplace. And for years I puzzled about why the place I had left — which offered so many opportunities for women and there were so many women that had been hired in that early period — when I came back the opportunities were not there in the same way at all. And having wondered what had happened, I finally decided it was because computer science came into existence in the mid-1960s — in that period where I'd been away — and the advent of computer science (computing), professionalization of computing, many of the people that were being hired were coming out of the engineering schools, which had almost all men at that time. And it was the training that they were getting there, in the engineering school, that would enable them to fulfill the requirements that were now expected in order to join a company in computing. And so what I had kind of missed about that period was that it changed because of the professionalization. And the change meant that there were many more levels of structure, almost all of them filled by men whose qualifications I didn't have, really. So I had the experience, I had a great track record, but the qualifications weren't there.