

Computing Educators Oral History Project

## Practice interview transcript

*Elizabeth Adams*

Interviewer: Nell Dale

Recorded Tuesday, June 28, 2005

Location: Lisbon, Portugal

Corresponding audio available on CEOHP's website, ceohp.org, under practice interviews.

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Conducted as a training session during the ITiCSE 2005 Working Group meeting in Lisbon, Portugal.

1 [0:00]

2 **Nell Dale: This is an interview with Liz Adams from James Madison University conducted**  
3 **by Nell Dale. This interview is being taped on June the 28<sup>th</sup>, 2005 in Lisbon. It is part of**  
4 **Building a Sense of History, Narratives and Pathways of Computing Educators, done in**  
5 **a workshop at the ITiCSE 2005 in Lisbon, Portugal.**

6

7 **Moving on to high school experience. Were you still in public schools?**

8

9 Elizabeth Adams: Yes, I was. But I was not in my local high school. My mother thought I should  
10 go outside of the community high school, I'm not sure why. So I took the exams for Hunter  
11 High School and for the High School for Performing Arts and got into both. And chose to go  
12 to the High School of Performing Arts, which as you know is the "Fame" school. I majored  
13 in music. I went in as a piano and clarinet major, and when they needed someone to learn the  
14 bassoon, I learned the bassoon. And I graduated as a bassoon major.

15

16 **N: Did you continue with music in college? This is fascinating.**

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17 E: I did. I actually had not made up my mind about what to major in in college. I auditioned ... I  
18 guess for a music scholarship, but that's not clear. And decided that I would never  
19 particularly enjoy performing as a soloist. I loved being in quartet, quintets, the band, the  
20 orchestra. I didn't particularly enjoy soloing and I decided during the auditions that I didn't  
21 want to go that route. And so I went to Syracuse University, I majored in mathematics, and I  
22 did play in the symphonic band or the orchestra (I'm not sure which it was at this point) for a  
23 number of years, and continued to take bassoon lessons there, at college, for a period of time.

24

25 Also at the time that I was in college, interestingly enough, I could not be in the marching  
26 band, because the marching band at Syracuse University at that time was a hundred men and  
27 a girl. The girl was the baton twirler. So you could not be in the marching band if you were  
28 female at that time, unfortunately.

29

30 **N: So you got through university at Syracuse University, what did you do next?**

31

32 E: Well, actually before I graduated from Syracuse, since my mother thought ... I like teaching,  
33 I used to tutor friends unofficially. My cousin says to this day she would never have  
34 graduated from Brooklyn College if I hadn't tutored her for the math exam she had to take to  
35 graduate. And so I wanted to be a teacher and my mother said. "Well, that's a great job  
36 because you can have vacations when your kids do and be home." She assumed I would  
37 marry and have a family, as that was the assumption at the time. And so, again, I'm not quite  
38 sure how it occurred, probably my mother -- she was a very interesting, very wonderful  
39 woman -- discovered I could take courses at the Yeshiva's Graduate School of Education  
40 before I graduated. So the summer between my junior and senior year, and the summer  
41 following my senior year, I took courses at Yeshiva's Graduate School of Education and I  
42 completed a Master's degree by the end of the first semester I was out of college, a Master's  
43 in education.

44

45 When I graduated, I was offered a job by IBM and a job by the New York City Schools. IBM  
46 at that point was only hiring women to travel with their mainframes and train the people who  
47 would use their mainframes. That was what they were interviewing for. And they would have  
48 paid me slightly less than the New York City School system for a 12-months job. And I took  
49 the New York City School System job and taught junior high school for 3 years.

50

51 In retrospect, 20 years later, I went back and got a computer science Master's and went on to  
52 earn my PhD, actually my DSC in computer science. {section omitted}

53

54 I was home off and on for a period of almost nine years. And then I was hired to teach  
55 remedial math at American University by a friend who was the wife of one of my husband's  
56 colleagues when we were at Berkeley. You know, this networking that men have also works  
57 for women. In fact I would never have been hired for the job but we used to play bridge  
58 together and she knew I was looking for something.

59

60 But I went through political action campaigns; I was in women's strike for peace. I was in a  
61 bowling league. I belonged to campus cross-needlework groups, which I still have  
62 connections with. We played bridge with the campus faculty wives of my husband's

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63 institution. But I really wasn't happy being home full-time. And so when I started teaching  
64 part-time at American, I started sitting in on classes ... and I took ... well, the second  
65 computer science ... I took a stat class first; I had never had any statistics. Then I took what  
66 was the second computer class in my career and I fell in love.

67

68 **N: What made you decide to take that computer class?**

69

70 E: I was in a math, stats, computer science department and I knew I didn't want math or stats. So  
71 I thought, "OK, I'll try the computer class 'cause I thought it would be really stupid to be on a  
72 college campus where I could access to further education and not do it.

73

74 **N: Did you then continue directly on for a PhD?**

75

76 E: What happened was at the time I was hired, I was teaching full time at American and they  
77 was an exchange program with GW -- I don't know if it still exists -- and people, you could  
78 go to GW for free. So this same woman who had hired me, her name was Mary Gray, said,  
79 "Why don't you go get a doctorate and we'll pay for it?" So I said, "Oh, OK!" So, I started  
80 taking classes at GW while I was going to school. The good news was I got it for free, I  
81 enjoyed everything but writing the dissertation, but I wouldn't advise people to do it my way.  
82 It took me 10 years, because I took a year off to go to Israel with my husband, and I only  
83 took 2 courses a semester, and I decided to go with breadth, so I took more courses than I  
84 needed. And so it took longer than it should have.

85 [7:56]