

An Interview with

BETH EDDY

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Conducted by Thomas J. Misa

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By Telephone

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Abstract

Beth Eddy grew up in rural New York state then graduated with a math degree from Elmhurst College (outside Chicago). She accepted a job in 1966 at Western Electric working on the pioneering ESS, initially in downtown Chicago and then relocating to the Bell Labs Indian Hill facility in Naperville. Her work involved assembly or machine language programming, eventually COBOL, supporting large databases for the ESS project. After three years, she moved into installation engineering for ESS. She describes tactics for women's "voice" to be effectively heard in meetings. She led a protest against a men-only 'Stag Picnic' (described also in Lois Herr's *Women, Power and AT&T* [2002]). With a promotion to department chief, she became the earliest women in Western Electric management. To achieve salary parity, she arranged a transfer to AT&T headquarters and worked in maintenance engineering, another male-dominated area, returning to Indian Hill (around 1980) as assistant manager of the data center and a development group. She then took on supervisory positions in Human Relations, building construction, software development, and switching installation. She discusses strategies for attracting women and African-American staff as well as managing a diverse workforce. She shares observations on the 1970s women's movement and its subsequent evolution.

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Misa: My name is Tom Misa. It's the 10th of December 2015, and I'm talking with Beth Eddy. This is part of a Sloan Foundation project to investigate the perspectives and experiences of women who were working in the computing industry between the 1960s and the 1990s. Beth, could you take us back a bit to your background and school days, junior high or high school years? Were there any activities, or hobbies, or things that particularly attracted your attention and that might have led you toward the later pursuit of a technical career?

Eddy: I absolutely loved math. I used to question my teachers early on, why does $2+2=4$? Why? How does that work? They kept saying no, we can't tell you, you'll have to wait longer. My first encounter, the first time we started to do algebra, I bullied my dad all summer long. He finally agreed to give me five equations every day to solve. I mean I was just so enthralled with algebra, and geometry [I] just loved finding solutions. I went to high school in western New York — south of Buffalo, in a small rural community. Being in a rural community, we did not have access to advanced math programs or advanced science programs. This was during the Regents Examinations, in New York state — this is in the late 1950s, early 1960s. I'm pleased I was there because even though we didn't have access to calculus, there was a set curriculum that *had* to be covered. The entire state's students were all tested state wide on this curriculum. It ensured that everyone got a very good background in the various subjects, math as well as all the subjects taught.

Misa: Did you have a math teacher that was particularly supportive or encouraging?

Eddy: Not that I can remember. As I said it was a small farming community. I remember teachers, but not necessarily a math teacher in particular. I did have math teachers when I went to college that I remember.

Misa: You mentioned that you were bothering your dad about getting some math equations. Did he work in a field that had math as a background for him?

Eddy: My dad was a minister. He had an undergraduate degree in math from Franklin and Marshall. But yes, he had a background in it, although it was not his professional field.

Misa: When you were finishing up high school what options did you consider for what you would do after high school?

Eddy: During high school, I took as many courses as I possibly could, which irked the counselors in the school because they said you need to have a study period. I said well I study after school at home, I don't feel like I should waste my time at school, I'd just as soon take another course. So I majored in both math and art, and [studied] languages. I took as much as I possibly could. So when I graduated I had the option to pursue my math or go into an art field. My dad was a pastor for internal mission church or other small, small churches that were needing to be grown. Being the oldest, I felt I needed to do something so that I could support not only myself, but also my family if they need it

once they got older. I decided that with math, I would have more options rather than art — because I didn't want to be a starving artist. I felt that I could pick up the art afterwards, which I have done.

Misa: Okay.

Eddy: So I went on to college and received a degree in math. I finished up in January of 1966. Everything was prepared to graduate in June, not in January so I was pretty much on my own looking for jobs. I went to the newspaper, and at this time the newspaper ads were “Men Only” and “Women Only.” I had none of the skills that were required for the women only — typing and shorthand. I had the skills that were for the men's only [jobs]. So I pounded the streets. It was just the beginning of computers. Computers were not in many schools yet. You could not get a computer science degree at that time.

Misa: What was the college that you had just graduated from?

Eddy: I went to a small liberal arts college called Elmhurst College, outside of Chicago in Illinois. I always claim my parents wanted me to be three states away. [Laughs.] You have to leave home.

Misa: Okay. And at Elmhurst you probably had limited contact with computers, if at all. Is that correct?

Eddy: That's correct, but really nobody else did either, at that time.

Misa: Nobody did, yes.

Eddy: At that time, in the early 1960s there just weren't any. Commercially IBM was just coming out with the 360. In my junior year, one of the students — one of the fellow math students — had gone to work at McDonnell Douglas outside of St. Louis, and there they had just the beginning of the world's beginning [IBM 360] computer. And he came back to our Set Theory class and said, 'Wow, this is really cool! We used all this theory!' And that was my first introduction to computers. When I went to look for a job, I wanted to put my degree in math [to work]. I found a job because they were looking for people who had math skills and could be taught to do programming. And at that time, when companies bought IBM computers, IBM would be giving training in the basic machine language to their customers. I answered an ad in the paper from Western Electric and was hired by Western Electric. I went to train and fell in love with machine language. Bell Systems [Bell Labs and Western Electric] were beginning to build their own — we couldn't call it a computer — but for all intents and purposes it was a special purpose computer, just for switching and telecommunications.

Misa: That's the ESS series.

Eddy: Right. And so I was involved in the ESS from really the beginning, before we even had a commercial system out in the field. I helped put the first ones out and then the updates for the first one, and next one, over the next three, five, 10 years.

Misa: So it was sometime in 1966 that you started work at Western Electric?

Eddy: February, right.

Misa: And in one of the large Chicago facilities?

Eddy: We were due to go to the Indian Hill facility outside of Chicago and Naperville, but at that time the building was being constructed, so we were in a rented space in downtown Chicago on Canal Street across from the Merchandise Mart.

Misa: Oh, Canal Street, yes.

Eddy: So I worked on Canal Street I guess it was about eight months maybe nine months, before the building was in a condition where they could move a few of us in there out from Chicago to Naperville.

Misa: Can you say anything about the working environment, the size of the teams? Were there other women involved at either Canal Street or the early Indian Hill facility?

Eddy: At the Canal Street group there was probably about 300 engineers, and there were maybe 10 women besides myself. In fact when we moved out to Indian Hill at that time, within what we called the Canal Street Gang, there were 12 of us women. We would band together because we were in this group of all men. All of us had come up through math. When we were going to school it was a combination of men and women in the classroom, it was not just men in the classroom. But once we got to the workforce it was basically all male.

Misa: So the math classes in college were actually more gender balanced than your early work experience?

Eddy: Correct, and in fact I'd say they probably were a little bit heavier in the women.

Misa: Heavier with women.

Eddy: Right, more women in the math classes.

Misa: Just a point to clarify, my understanding had been that Indian Hill was a Bell Laboratories facility, but were there also Western Electric employees?

Eddy: Yes, Bell Labs was part of Western Electric. [Western Electric engineers worked along with Bell Labs to take the designs and make them useable and implementable by the operating company as well as manufacturable. The Western Electric engineers built

and installed the systems, putting the ESS design out in the field and operational. They also provided technical support to the systems in the field.]

Misa: The key point —

Eddy: The Western Electric engineering group, we were still doing engineering alongside the Bell Labs, but trying to take from the research angle and put it out into the field. We were involved with the how do I get it into production once functional?

Misa: Right.

Eddy: How do I get it out to the field? So it really was a joint effort between the two. There was tension between the two at times, but it still was a joint effort.

Misa: Could you describe a bit about some of your early projects? What kind of work were you doing?

Eddy: The first projects were basically doing work in assembly language, or machine language, and then in COBOL. And it was building databases to try to pull together the informational databases for the central office switch, to be able to handle the call volume, and to make sure that when you call me, does it really come to my central office from your central office? And then does it get down to me, and how do they understand all of those details? The need to keep track of a lot of in-depth data and detail. Every single

wire, every single frame has its own unique number, numbering scheme, so it's a huge database and that's basically what I was working on. After three years I wanted to move into installation, where I could get involved with the hardware and software. At that point, installation engineering was really the male bastion. It was all male, period.

Finally, there was another female computer engineer with Western Electric who also was interested in installation engineering. At that time, since there were two females they said okay, if two of you that want to go into installation, we'll let you *both* go in. So the two of us joined and became part of installation engineering, where we designed and developed, using software machine language, programs so machines could self-diagnose themselves, self-test themselves as they're being installed. A lot of the early testing of the big switches — I mean you're talking about buildings full. Huge buildings full of equipment and they had to be all tested manually with your installer testing to make sure there's connectivity, and they've power going through it, etcetera. We were able to get inside with the software and do all that connectivity, plus also take a look at the internal — later as things got more advanced — internally into the circuitry itself.

Misa: You probably understood the phone system better than the average person from doing that work. [Laughs.]

Eddy: Yes.

Misa: You said that the installation engineering was heavily male dominated, [but] they made special room for women. Can you recall anything about relations with coworkers or your supervisors during those years?

Eddy: Elton Monken was my supervisor. He was extremely supportive. Elton Monken, he was very, very supportive of the two of us. We both thoroughly enjoyed being in installation. It was working with logic, it was working with detail, working with internals of the machines, so you had to understand the hardware and the software and how it all fit together into a system. I'm not going to say everybody else was. There were a lot of people that were not supportive at all. Quite often you'd walk down the hall and you'd hear oh there she goes. So you just brushed it off and kept on. However there was a group of engineers that used to provide support for the entire country for the switches, diagnosing any problems that come up with the switches. There was one roomful, one room, one cubicle of four of those engineers whom I became very close friends with while I was still working on databases. They supported me tremendously. I would share with them the software linkages and they would share with me the hardware linkages, and together the five of us would pull together how the whole system could work. Their support continued into my move into installation engineer. So I did have some male engineers that were very supportive of me but I'm not going to say it was easy. I did find out later on, because I was also very active then when we first upgraded from the first ESS system, which was number one, and then to the 1A system. [I] was active in the installation of that first office. We were located next to the labs, where Western Electric had a manufacturing facility that was just in support of new hardware. While there was a

strike going on during the time we were installing this new system up online. I had a big purse, I mean it was a huge purse. And I think I gained some credence because they would call me and they'd ask me to get this such-and-such piece of circuitry. So I'd walk into the manufacturing plant and walk out with whatever piece of such-and-such in my purse. [Laughter.] Past the picket lines, and then take it down to Chicago to the first offices.

Misa: A little in-house espionage, or something like that.

Eddy: Yes, something like that, to keep the system moving forward.

Misa: Fun time, I suppose.

Eddy: Yes. As I said, there were two of us. In fact, the two of us still communicate at Christmas time, keep in touch.

Misa: Was there a natural career path, at that point in time? Men may have been moving up, or maybe women might've been moving up, doing different kinds of projects or thinking about a career trajectory. Was that hard to see?

Eddy: The men were moving up. There were the normal corporate rules or regulations, or processes, procedures that they had to allow people to move around. Although you found that the women were not. They were sort of on a staid point. You could not move

around as rapidly as you saw the men. There was a lot of other jobs that you could apply for but it was more the men were the ones that got the assignments, for example foreign assignments. And you're talking about the late 1960s at this time. Why can't I have an assignment to some other location? Some of it was due to the culture that you'd be placed into, those situations. I understand it now but I didn't understand it then. We rebelled about it. Later on, once the lab people started moving into Indian Hill, there'd be more women finally in the late 1960s, early 1970s. We'd get together, band together and come up with techniques to try to get our voices heard. You'd go into a meeting and there'd be discussion about a problem. You would raise the solution, and just receive no response. Later, a guy would come up with the same thing that you just said and oh, this is the best thing since sliced bread.

Misa: The same content but with a male voice.

Eddy: Right. So we developed some techniques that if there were two of us women in these meetings we would then immediately say, 'Oh, I thought I heard Jane just say that.' And take it back to the person who originally said it, or provide support for each other in the meetings. So we banded together, helped each other out in those types of situations.

Misa: That sounds like a very effective strategy. You'd [need] at least two women in a given meeting, I suppose, to do a bit of tag team support. Were there any other issues or techniques that you were developing during the late 1960s and early 1970s?

Eddy: We would say wait a second, you're having something that's just for the men only? You're having a picnic just for the men only? Let's go up through the line, request that it be open for everybody. If that failed, then you would provide some form of radical demonstration, I guess, would be the word for it, saying wait a second, that doesn't make sense. Until you finally got it open.

Misa: If I understood correctly, there was some picnic that was labeled in typical male terms as a 'Stag Picnic' and I think that the Indian Hill women protested that. Do you remember that episode?

Eddy: Yes I remember it because I led the protest on it.

Misa: Please tell me about it.

Eddy: I said this is ridiculous. At that time I thought that what was going on was that it gave my [male] coworkers access to the management people, so that they could learn more and be seen more, and have more access to these other jobs that were available or maybe come available. So I said this is ridiculous, we need to be part of that. So I looked at the term 'stag' in the dictionary, and one of them is a castrated red deer. So I then proceeded to make a bulletin board. [Laughs.] After I requested that we be allowed in and got turned down flat. I did a couple requests and then made this bulletin board saying 'Do you really want to become part of this? Do you think you are a castrated male deer?' Eventually then what happened was the head man took everyone into the auditorium and

proceeded to say, ‘Okay, we have some people’ — me — ‘who are really upset about this so we will open it.’ Well, so they opened it. There was a lot of vehemence, a lot of anger by the men. How can you do this? How can you open it? How can you allow these — so it was pretty daunting. I received a lot of hate mail. I don’t have any of it anymore. I’ve given it all to Lois Herr, and Lois Herr documented it all.

Misa: I think it was probably in her book that I read that.

Eddy: Yes it was.

Misa: So your sources may have informed her book, which now informs our conversation, so there’s a nice little circle here.

Eddy: Right. So yes, it was Lois Herr. So another Sue Moore, who was also a computer engineer at that time at Indian Hill with me, and the two of us said alright —

Misa: I’m sorry, what was her name?

Eddy: Her name was Sue Moore.

Misa: Sue Moore.

Eddy: We said we need to attend or at least show up because we made this fuss. But I didn't want to go alone. She didn't want to go alone. So we said we'll go together and we'll just show our faces and then turn around and leave; high tail it out real fast before we get into any physical trouble. I mean literally we were afraid of physical reaction.

Misa: Men had expressed this level of anger in very pointed terms.

Eddy: Right. So we went for a brief time. But from then on, the women became an integral part because the men said wait a second, these women know how to cook and how to organize things a little bit better than we can. [Laughs.] And so it became a full Western Electric engineering picnic, but it took a couple years. A lot of women were hired so the number of women in the workforce increased. I was eventually promoted into my first management position of supervisor of a group, called department chief, leading a group of engineers working on specific projects. At that time I was the only female in that position. I did have, as I said, my one manager who was supportive of me as an engineer and as a computer programmer, as well as supportive of me as a manager. Also I had two other male managers who were supportive. They would give me counsel. But very few. That was one or two out of hundreds, because by this time the amount of engineering people at the Indian Hill location had just grown from the earliest 1960s, mid-1960s, to the mid-1970s from 400 to 1,000.

Misa: It was a brand new facility, is my understanding, really getting off the ground and turning into a large and sizeable facility, so there was a lot of hiring.

Eddy: Yes. I'm sorting losing my thoughts about where do I want to go with this.

Misa: I'd like to explore, if you wouldn't mind, your reflections on being that first woman promoted into a supervisory position. You said that there were a couple of male colleagues who were supportive. Were there any challenges that you felt specifically as a woman being promoted into management? Lots of new skills to learn, of course.

Eddy: Well yes, because when you go into performance appraisals, or even meetings, which I said you would be questioned and double questioned. So I always felt — and I know that the other women did, too, just from our rap groups that we would have — we felt that we had to be as good, we actually had to better. We had to be the best around that we could possibly be just because they questioned oh, you're a woman. The feeling that we're being judged; you're a woman, you really don't know what's going on. You have to really double prove yourself. [Shortly after I was promoted to department chief, a female technical supervisor at Bell Labs was brought into Indian Hill.]

Misa: So that extended not only to the technical issues, but also then to the managerial or supervisory issues as well.

Eddy: Yes, right. And your pay was still under what the males were being paid. We all knew that if you wanted to get your pay up you had to go do a stint at AT&T General Departments. If you wanted your salary up to something that was sort of the low male

equivalent, but at least not the low low low side, but on the low side of the male equivalent, you had to go to General Departments. So I was able to get a transfer in late 1976 to the General Departments of AT&T headquarters in maintenance engineering. I was there for four years. And again, maintenance engineering was male dominated, totally male dominated, so the same as installation engineering. While there I led a group doing some research and development of temperature testing for switching, to weed out the early failures of the hardware. I was giving a presentation of the report of the information that we discovered to a group of maintenance engineers from all the operating companies around the United States, all 48 or whatever there were at that time. So here's this room of 500 male maintenance engineers, and me giving a presentation. My boss stood in the wings, he was so afraid that I wouldn't be able to get through. But afterwards, they were so impressed about the report. I knew my stuff. I received standing applause.

Misa: Really? That's great.

Eddy: Yes, and one of the building engineers gave me a special award, says, you did this really great stuff for us. [Laughs.] So I made many male friends in the field just knowing my stuff.

Misa: Can you help me understand why this tour of duty in the General Departments was quite so crucial? Was it something about getting exposure to the company as a whole that was valuable or did you see different things technically, or from a personnel or

managerial point of view? Why was the General Departments such an important touchstone to peoples' careers?

Eddy: Basically getting a feel for the overall magnitude of the Bell System at that time — how it all worked together, how it flowed together — and to gain contacts around the country. You had contacts that you developed with someone at Pacific Bell or New England Tel or New York Tel or Southern Bell. So you gained contacts that you could use for whatever problems you were faced with in the future, or issues. Or you could share, I found this, have you seen this? Can we do some more research on this? So you were able to keep the overall system nationwide, worldwide, flowing smoothly. From a female point of view, it was a way to get your salary up just because AT&T headquarters paid a little bit better. They did not seem to discriminate male/female as much as the individual operating companies. I don't think they intended to discriminate they just thought — and I heard them say this during some of the performance reviews over when we were doing salary administration — oh, she has a husband, she doesn't need to get paid, etc.

Misa: That's a classic line that's used against women.

Eddy: Yes. Another one is you'll get pregnant and leave.

Misa: Was it also the case that once you'd received a certain higher salary then the next position you would take would need to match that salary, so there was a bit of ratcheting upward?

Eddy: Yes. You got paid into the same point where say, I was a department chief and there was a male department chief I would be paid equally. If I made a promotion I would be able to be ratcheted up to that next level easier. I also, when I was at General Departments, made contacts and then was recruited by an executive director or vice president to come join them at Bell Labs in one of their deals. So I then went from General Departments down to Bell Labs in Holmdel. Again in a supervisor mode, and then went from there back to Indian Hill and again at the next level up. So I just gradually would make ups and eventually I ended back at Indian Hill.

Misa: I think you said you were at General Departments for four years, 1976 to 1980?

Eddy: Yes, I think of that era as being four years but one-and-a-half of those four years was spent at Bell Laboratories. So I went from General Departments and then went down to Bell Labs for about a year-and-a-half, maybe just a year. By that time, Western Electric and Bell Labs had become one because of all the litigation that was going on. And there was much more crossover between the two.

Misa: So from that point in time, say, 1980 for sure, then you'd be part of the regular Bell Labs.

Eddy: Western Electric, Bell Labs, Lucent, yes.

Misa: When you returned to Indian Hill, you said you came back as a department leader?

Eddy: Yes, I came back as an assistant manager, which is like — within Bell Labs because they equate between supervisor, department chief, department head, and assistant manager — just the levels as you continue on up.

Misa: And what were your responsibilities when you returned to Indian Hill?

Eddy: I took over a group that had both data center responsibilities as well as a development group. Continuing development in the databases that I had worked on 20 years prior for the new systems, the latest digital switch. Then after a year, I was moved into an organization — they tended to move managers around once you were in middle management to give you a broader perspective in the inner workings of the company. So then I did a stint of about three years, in human resources. I had separate teams, each one responsible for a different function. Functions of accounting, security, labor relations, health and safety, secretarial services, personnel, plant [management] — oh boy, I can't remember every detail — I had about eight organizations working for me. I initially moved my office from the Indian Hill location over to the plant location, the research plant just down the road. Later I moved my office back into the new building. We were building a new software engineering center for Western Electric. So I moved back in as

part of the new plant. Since I had HR, I had all of the stuff for that going on at the same time in multiple locations. I moved back into this building under construction, to try and make sure that all the construction was done completely and correctly, as well as all of the other support functions were relocated.

Misa: So you were supervising construction of the building, okay. This is a very wide portfolio of responsibilities.

Eddy: Yes, extremely wide. In fact, I feel like I am very, very fortunate because at that time I closed a manufacturing plant, and opened up a technical laboratory facility. So I had the responsibility of closing a plant and then opening up the new one. Now, I had an excellent team of people who were wonderful and talented people, wonderful supervisors, wonderful engineers, wonderful resources that helped pull that all together. And as we were closing the plant we recognized that we've a lot of highly skilled people in the factory. They worked on the first manufacturing of computers, basically the central office. They really had a lot of skills and would be a help in other industries. So we called around to other manufacturing plants, provided job resumes for all of our people in the factory, offered them the time and facility to interview at these other plants. The other companies could hardly wait to hire our people — they all said, 'Oh yes, we'd love to have some of your people.' So we were able to find jobs for all of our people when we closed. We worked with the local community college to develop courses on some basic skills at that time in computer science. We were able to take some of the people who were in the plant and who wanted to transition into the software, into the technical

design, and give them basic skills training. so they could join a group of developers in the new facility. And so as we closed one and opened the other, [we] made the transition as painless as possible.

Misa: Sounds like a huge job.

Eddy: It was. I loved it. I loved every minute of it. As I said previously I had highly skilled people who worked for me, just excellent, excellent people who made it all function.

Misa: Did you like that range of issues to deal with? Was that something you found stimulating?

Eddy: Yes, and I enjoyed the different groups of people to deal with it, and being constantly busy. I mean okay, where am I? What's on next? Then I went from there back to managing multiple groups again that were doing software development and installation for the new digital switch, new local digital switch. So it was again, a wide range of responsibilities with people doing installation engineering work, software database work, as well as merging some of the designs that were coming out from the people at Indian Hill and making the design into something that's usable and could be put out to the field.

Misa: With software development I suppose you ended up thinking quite carefully about the type of people that would be useful for your responsibilities. Can you say anything

about the type of people that you'd be interested in either hiring or identifying somewhere else within the Bell System?

Eddy: I was part of recruiting while I was in Holmdel, New Jersey, at the labs. I recruited at Brown University to give scholarships for female doctorate candidates. Then when I was at Indian Hill again, in the mid-1980s, I recruited at some black universities to bring in some male and female minority students into the computer world. Once we got one or two individuals that came north — basically there were two wonderful women who were from Alabama, who were great, great software engineers. They helped provide a core to bring more people in, females and males, from the Southern schools, where you had more of your minorities enrolled to bring them in. Plus, moving from a warm climate to a very cold climate. [Laughs.] And prove to them that they were not going to get killed in the big city of Chicago, that they could live on the outskirts and we had open housing out there. You don't have to live in a townhouse in Chicago, you don't have to commute out, unless you want to. There are places that you can live in the suburb; places you can live half a mile from work, and there's no in your face discrimination. So they provided a core that began to integrate and bring these new students into the workforce.

Misa: You said there were two women that came from Alabama?

Eddy: Yes.

Misa: Do you recall what school they came from?

Eddy: Alabama A&M in Huntsville.

Misa: Oh, Huntsville, too, so University of Alabama?

Eddy: Huntsville, Alabama. [Not the University of Alabama but Alabama A&M, a black college.] Then there was another group that went out — another woman who came from a Texas black university, which I do not remember the name of that one. But yes, these early recruits would provide support, which was great in our recruiting effort. By that time we also had more female managers, department chiefs, and female senior engineers. It took a while because you would be an engineer or a computer scientist, as a female you could not still get the juicy jobs like lead engineer. Finally we started changing that and we got more of the women into those positions, and they would then also provide support for recruiting, provide support for both the new women and the new minority males that were coming in. I did a lot of work on recruiting, as I said, of minorities as well as making sure there were equal amount of women and men. I had the help of Georgina, who was one of our engineers, technical engineers, [and] just full of energy. She's from Uganda, had studied overseas, and then joined us as a lead engineer, as lead computer scientist. She was extremely helpful in recruiting and helpful in providing a mother figure almost to a lot of these young students straight out of college, which was good.

Misa: It's interesting, it's almost like you have to have a bit of an incremental strategy. You need somebody to get a toehold, and then the next person comes in and says oh well,

here's a staff that looks like me, there's people here that look like me and that facilitates that second round. But that first round is probably really the challenge to try to nail down.

Eddy: One of the other things I always made sure I had was a lot of age differences.

There were some women who were senior women, women over 50. I don't like to use the word elderly because I'm old. [Laughs.] They were older than the normal 20-year-olds; they were like in their 50s and 60s, and I liked to have them in the mix. They had gone back after they raised their kids, gone back to school, received their degree, went out to work. I liked to hire them because they provided a stability. I know that as I was coming in as a youngster, you had nobody. You needed some stability, somehow, because you're out trying to find your way out in the world and by having one or two women, in particular, who provided that stability, they would provide a listening ear, and they would provide help to the young 20-somethings that were just out of school, joining the company. And I found that really a big help.

Misa: This is an argument for a different kind of diversity than we sometimes think, but you're saying age diversity can be valuable.

Eddy: Very, very valuable. Extremely valuable.

Misa: Beth, at some point you described some of your advocacy efforts in the 1970s. How important was the women's movement to your experience? That was, of course, the major development for many women in the 1970s.

Eddy: I think it was very, very valuable because it provided impetus to say yes we can do something, yes we can move on, and yes we should not just assume second class citizenship. It gave us the support that we all needed to move, [and] it helped us band together, come up with strategies. I also was active outside of the Bell System in the women's movement, but also external in some more radical groups, radical in the form of — this is in the 1970s — of trying to be a little bit more radical, bit more outspoken, and active especially in the abortion area.

Misa: And that's something you did outside of your Bell Labs responsibilities, then?

Eddy: Right.

Misa: So it sounds like it was a pretty important part of your life and experience during at least that decade of the 1970s, and maybe beyond, too.

Eddy: I think even beyond, because then it was what can we do to continue on the growth of women in the workplace, and the women developing their skills? [Actually I started in the late 60s.]

Misa: What do you think some of the main lessons might be?

Eddy: The main lessons I think are working together, supporting each other, recognizing the history of where you've come from. Right now I'm seeing a lot of women who think of the word feminist as a very negative word. I think they need to realize that yes, they may have [the] ability to do things, and move around, and get their jobs, etcetera, but there's still this underlying crack of backlash, if you want to call it, angst about we don't want a woman in there. That's still very prevalent.

Misa: I think maybe in the 1970s, there were so many quite pressing and concrete concerns that women had, say within the workforce, but also in society. Do you think that the women's movement evolved or changed in the 1980s and 1990s? Again, your perspective.

Eddy: I think some of us who were very active in the women's movement became — I know I, for one became very — I've always been very active and put a lot of my energy, 90 percent of my energy into work, and I think because we gained more and more responsibility, it took more and more time, that we backed away from being active. I mean we were active, but in a different position, different way than rabble rousing, *per se*. We were active trying to do what support we could within our positions of power, but we were not out there leading the charge any more, and I think there was almost a sense that we had backed away. We didn't have the energy anymore because our energy was going elsewhere because we had more and more responsibility. And I think at that time that the women who were coming up through said, 'Oh, I've got it, I don't have to worry anymore.' It's like if I take a look at some of these people, when people talk about the

quote/unquote, New Millennium, groups that want everything to be done, completed, handed to them on a silver platter. I think that was the beginning of it as things were easier, that therefore there's no need to struggle anymore. And I think that those of us who struggled said, 'Wait a second.' At least I felt and I think some of the other women felt like you still have to struggle, you still have to be out there. But I think we know that we have made some progress, a lot of progress, there's still progress yet to be made though. And people are thinking hey listen, I've got it all, why should I have to work on that? I'd just as soon take it and go with what I have.

Misa: Doesn't really recognize the tremendous effort [it took].

Eddy: Right.

Misa: And continuing need for effort in making sure that institutions are obeying not only the letter of the law but the spirit of it.

Eddy: Correct, the spirit.

Misa: This has really been a quite fascinating conversation, Beth. Are there any other topics that you'd like to speak to, or any other question that I might not have asked that you'd like to address?

Eddy: There's so much. [Laughs.] Right now my mind is more on — well, being in Charleston, and you're aware of the Mother Emanuel? There's a lot of dialogue still going on and I'm still very concerned that yes, we got rid of the flag, we took the flag down, but there's just so much dialogue and still so much work yet to be done in race relations in the country and here in Charleston. We just went to another dialogue and my mind is on that right now a lot more, of how do we go forward? And it's really digging deep and really understanding, and I think as one of the speakers last night said you know we have to understand that history just cycles and it repeats, and we have to understand and dig deep into it, and understand how do we go forward from here? I keep thinking I do not want us to lose what we already have, what we've gained. I'm so afraid of that.

Misa: Yes.

Eddy: Couple years ago, I bought a book. I wanted to find out how do you build a cathedral? But in doing that it's like I understand more about the Dark Ages and so in reading that I thought how do we all of a sudden lose all this knowledge? Just disappeared. Inside of a few years, it was just gone! We had all this knowledge, we had all this mathematics, and then we had nothing. Can that happen again? And yes, it's happening again. And I don't want that to happen with the women's movement. I don't want us to lose our ability to vote. I don't want us to lose our ability to speak out. Our ability to take things. And I do not understand, and it bothers me that women are not going back to the workforce in computers. Now, I do understand that it's hard work, and I do understand that you still are faced with some sexual resentment about women — oh,

you're taking my job? And again, I think, it's somebody with some of the backlash that goes on, even within the races, as the economy goes down people think I'm worried about my family, I'm worried about me, so therefore I don't want to share it with you. Whether you're black, male, or female, I don't want to share. I want to just make sure I get my share. So I just worry about it. I don't want to lose what we've gained, and we're beginning to lose it as I look at what's going on with the abortion rights. Some of the radical work I did was in that area, Chicago. I think if you read Lois' book you read some of the stuff that was what 'they call Sally.' And we are losing that. But I do want the women to realize that they have great opportunities, and I don't know how we can entice them to come back.

Misa: This puzzle about women in computing is one that I've been thinking about for five, six, seven years now, and the more I consider it, it just doesn't make any sense to me. You said something about getting the history right and I hope this isn't too self-serving, but I think that the history really matters. I think that both the history of women coming into computing, as well as the subsequent history when women were not so welcome or chose to do something else, both of those are really important to understand. I really appreciate your comment about the need for really active work, that the next generation can't just take for granted the things that have happened in the past. I mean it sounds to me like you've learned some lessons from history. [I] appreciate that perspective greatly.

Eddy: Thank you. I can't think of anything else right now.

Misa: Well, Beth, as part of our research process, we'll end up doing a transcription of our conversation and we'll pass that on to you. If there's anything in terms of making the account that we have a more complete one, that's something that we'd be very interested in doing, so really appreciate your time.

Eddy: I did forget to tell you one thing: that when I first went from AT&T General Departments to Bell Labs, I also organized the women down there.

Misa: Oh, okay.

Eddy: [Laughing.] So I didn't stop, it just continues on.

Misa: Well, you've been a force for constructive change in many different dimensions.

Eddy: As a footnote to a previous answer about why math after high school, I did go back into art. I went back, took art lessons in the evenings. And I retired early enough so I could go back and take some classes in an art school in New York City, and then join a gallery.

Misa: Well, art's a way of changing the world, too. Well, Beth, thanks so much for your time today.

Eddy: You're welcome.