

Elizabeth M. Hidalgo

Interview:

Nov. 5, 2005 – Haytown, CA

Elizabeth M. Hidalgo has worked in a variety of media, from leather-making, haiku writing, cross-stitch sewing, jewelry making and precious stone cutting. She was one of the few earlier female Park Rangers who rode horses in King's Canyon for the National Park Service. Currently she is a computer programmer for IBM in Silicone Valley.

OSA: Okay sis, how did you get into computers and computer technology?

ELIZABETH: I was a plumber, and I got hurt on the job. And since I couldn't work for a living anymore, I went into computer science.

OSA: That's amazing, was it hard to learn any of the languages?

ELIZABETH: Not really, it was fun.

OSA: I feel that you've been a multi-media maker.

ELIZABETH: One thing I did was make leather goods for about six years. They went all over the world. It was called InTWO Leather.

OSA: Recently you also make jewelry, right?

ELIZABETH: Well I like to cut all types of stones and do inlay, and cast precious metals. So I've worked with just about every stone there is. I've done all types of different setting and casting and making patterns to cast.

OSA: What are some of the more difficult stones to work with?

ELIZABETH: The softer ones, when you set them, they have a tendency to splinter, break, or chip. For example, emeralds are really hard to set because they're softer. Ruby is the second hardest stone next to diamond, which is the hardest stone - making



it the easiest to work with.

OSA: How about haiku?

ELIZABETH: I used to write it a lot. But now come to think... I hardly do it at all.

OSA: When did you publish your book of poetry?

ELIZABETH: When I was seventeen. It was called *Phoenix* and I self-published it. I was also co-editor of a small newspaper, *Mama Sappho* from '73 to '75, and I did the cartoons for the magazine. We had about 150 subscribers.

OSA: Other kinds of art?

ELIZABETH: I worked with a member of *Teatro Campesino* a bit, doing *Los Benditos*. I took classes from one of the teachers from there.

OSA: With your computer work, have you produced media?

ELIZABETH: Well, I write a lot of technical manuals for a large company and for large DB management Tools, mostly mainframe and mainframe-related tools that are front-ended on PCs – really the gamut of computer software. And I've done a lot of different kinds of software coding and writing.

OSA: What are some of the languages that you've worked with?

ELIZABETH: Many of the big languages: DL/I, PL/I, Cobol, Fortran, PASCAL, ADF, SQL, DTL...Lots of different types of Assembler languages, from PC assembler all the way to mainframe assembler languages, which are really right on the metal... and C, C++, Java, you know, lots. Just about any language...in fact a lot of proprietary languages that only certain organizations use, like Jovial. Slobol,

Snobol...little-known languages that people don't really use much.

OSA: How did you learn all these different languages?

ELIZABETH: Really, I just learn them because they're all so similar. For me, once you know two or three of the major languages it's really easy to pick up others because they're all related and built off each other. That's why you'll see languages like a 4GL or a 5GL language – that means it's a fourth generation of fifth generation language – so it's built on all these different generations of languages. So, for instance, literally every word processing program on the market today is based on DCF, which I think was IBM's original data tagging language. So it was actually the first one and everything else is based on it, including HTML, XHTML, SGML, and so on. So, knowing the basis of languages, it's fairly easy to build on new the bells and whistles.

OSA: I think your work has been instrumental in linking forms of media-making, with language, access, and entrance into these technological and digital worlds. You've worked in Silicon Valley for almost twenty years. Do you see many Chicanas working in positions like yours?

ELIZABETH: No. More so now than in past years, but not very many at all. I think, especially in California, Mexicans, Latinos, and Latinas are really looked upon as a slave class economically, politically; socially, you know, we're just not as accepted as, say, African Americans. There are not a lot of African Americans in my field, but much more so than Latinos. I mean, comparatively speaking. It's obviously not equitable in numbers for the entire population. There are a lot of Asians. I mean probably 30 percent of the site I work at is Asian. And

most of the rest are Anglo. There are a few scattered Native Americans, Latinos, and Latinas.

OSA: You've mentioned that you belong to a gay and lesbian organization at your company. Does the company recognize the organization?

ELIZABETH: As far as diversity goes, it's an incredibly progressive company. It was actually the first – I believe the first – major corporation in the United States, if not the world, to give equal pay for equal work, regardless of sex. Which is huge because many, many companies to this day are still really off balance. They were the first in a lot of areas as far as diversity, and they really do seem to honor diversity a lot. But in the area of recruiting Latinas they have a long way to go. There is an organization within the company called "La Red" that's a Latina organization but it's actually based out of New York, so it's not really Chicana oriented per se, and it's really geared more toward the upper echelons, so it's working its way down but it's still in its formative stage. The good news is it's there and it's forming. The bad news is it's not really there yet.

OSA: Where do you see the positives in technological development?

ELIZABETH: I've worked on lots of communication stuff. I've done a lot of Air Force satellite control stuff for communication satellites – that area really pioneered the commercial communication satellite area, which enables the mobile phones we use and all that. All of our TV and media are really intrinsically tied to all that. I think in that respect, that's kind of a positive.

Other stuff I've worked on, like IMS makes instantaneous transactions possible. For instance most people don't know they use this product every day to make

phone calls, transactions that happen instantaneously like bank deposits, credits, any ATM stuff, any time you call the banks and do any transactions. Any online transactions are handled by IMS. Any online and point-in-time ordering and things like airline reservations, cash register systems, which also keep track of ordering information and inventory. Any kind of things like online reservations that are instantaneous – it's all run on IMS.

OSA: What are some of the drawbacks, both locally and globally?

ELIZABETH: Well, obviously everyone can't be online because a lot of places don't have electricity, let alone clean enough electricity to be able to support the type of controlled electrical environment that machines require. Because of language barriers I think, for instance, IMS for thirty-five years – maybe thirty years – was not really translated. We've only started translating it to different languages than English in the last five years, and if you didn't read or write English you were pretty much out of luck. You either had to learn or have someone come in who knew your language, and of course English. So in many ways English is the language of computing and data processing. Many, many products are not translated. Even though my company has developed most of the best translation programs in the world, some of the stuff wasn't really cost-effective to translate. It actually is cheaper to train someone to learn our language than to translate all the documentation, because for many years that particular set of programs had so much documentation – it was ten or twenty-thousand pages of information.

OSA: So you find the English-centric nature of computer systems to be restrictive?

ELIZABETH: To me, it's not a negative

because I like the language. I was raised with the language, so of course I'm English-centric. I write in it constantly and it's the language I think in. So, of course I would think that it's the best language. Now we're able to do a lot of things pictographically, so things are getting better in that respect. But there's still a long way to go, a lot of money to be spent to develop things to be more user-friendly so that anyone can use them.

OSA: As a Chicana *lesbiana*, what are some of your thoughts on where diversity stands in contemporary society?

ELIZABETH: I think I still have hope that we'll try to go down some more positive paths for humanity as a whole. Right now – I was talking about this with other people – I think the politics in this country are at one of the lowest points ever. And as far as equality and diversity and all that stuff, we've gone back to the 1920's. We've got a long hard road ahead of us

to get back on the positive side. But you know I still have hope and I think there are a lot of people who are committed to those things and we have to keep our shoulders to the wheel and keep working.

OSA: Do you ever come across prejudice at work, either because you're a lesbian or a Latina?

ELIZABETH: Sure...I've come across people whom I've told that I'm Mexican or gay – that I have that background. Some of them have just shut me down at that point. People who were supposedly good friends of mine just totally turned their backs on me. It's like a wall comes down. And it's happened so many times now it really doesn't even faze me anymore. I think, well, they have issues. And sometimes I still have to work with people like that. And it does strain a working relationship, but I'm not there to be liked, I'm there to do a job. So, I try to do it despite those types.