

EILEEN DOYLE

b. 1955. Eileen has a Masters Degreee and a Phd in Applied Mathematics. She has worked as BHP's Principal Systems Engineer and as the Technical Assistant to the General Manager of the Rod and Bar Products Division of BHP. She is now the Manager Strategic Planning and Policy Development with the Hunter District Water Board.

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Women at Work in the Hunter (1900-1988) was a joint project of Hunter TAFE's Equal Opportunity Training Programme and Women's Co-ordination Unit.

Edited Transcript of Interview with Eileen Doyle

Carrie: I understand that you were the Technical Assistant to the General Manager of BHP.

Eileen: That's right. For 1985/86 I was the Technical Assistant to the General Manager of the Rod and Bar Products Division which is based at the Newcastle Steel Works. In 1982/83 I was a Systems Engineer and then a Senior Systems Engineer in Operations Research. That's in the Management Services area, which looks at modelling systems such as production or transportation to make management decisions more professional and cost effective. In 1984/5 I was Principal Systems Engineer in the Information Centre at BHP which was responsible for promoting end-user computing and the understanding of computer technology throughout the company.

Carrie: You have a degree in engineering?

Eileen: I have a maths/science degree and I'm a member of the Institution of Engineers of Australia. And I have a Masters degree and a Phd in Applied Mathematics. The Masters is in Mathematical Modelling of Road Traffic and the Phd is in Applied Mathematics statistics using computer modelling. It's in the area of health - smoking and lung cancer.

Carrie: Did you find that you were in a minority group being a woman doing a maths degree?

Eileen: In maths and science degrees there is a fairly equal proportion of men and women but as you move into higher degrees there is a smaller proportion of women.

Carrie: When did you finish your Phd?

Eileen: I did it part-time and it took over 5 years to complete but I finally finished it in 1985.

Carrie: Did you come here to the Hunter District Water Board straight from BHP?

Eileen: Yes.

Carrie: What is your job here?

Eileen: I'm called Manager Strategic Planning and Policy Development. I am basically establishing a business planning framework for the Board and examining medium to long term business strategies.

Carrie: In your jobs here and at BHP were you the only professional woman amongst the people who you worked with?

Eileen: Not the only one but there are very few senior women. It's mainly because the industries are mature industries which means there hasn't been much growth in terms of employment. When you are a mature industry and there is very little turn over of staff it's extremely hard for women to be employed up through the organisation when the traditional employees have been men. At BHP I was the most senior woman in the Rod and

Bar Products Division and here it's the same case. That reflects the history of the industries, of not having a lot of women in the lower ranks and so they're not coming up through the ranks now.

Carrie: Did you find there were any grudges held against you because you are a woman taking a traditionally male position? Or were you harassed at all?

Eileen: No. Personally I have not had any major problems at all. In terms of discrimination of any sort, I've never had a problem. I always felt very much encouraged at BHP and that's certainly been the same here.

Carrie: Did you find that the men felt threatened by you at all?

Eileen: No. But I think that often people in general feel threatened by people with qualifications. I think that both BHP and the Water Board are trying very hard, in constrained circumstances, to encourage women.

Carrie: What influenced you to do a maths degree and get into industry?

Eileen: At school I was very good at maths and science. I prefer the practical aspects of the subject and enjoy the production environment in industry.

Carrie: Did you move up through the ranks when you got your job at BHP?

Eileen: Yes. First of all I was a tutor at the university while doing my Masters degree. When I finished my Masters I took on a full-time position with the Medical Faculty as a consultant statistician. At that stage I decided to get out of the university side of things because I felt that it was very insular. I had always been interested in the business world. And I guess the opportunity came just as I was interested in looking around. There was a position of Systems Engineer advertised for BHP. It was in the area of Operations Research and Management Sciences which is basically the use of applied maths and statistics to look at problems in management and come up with sound solutions whether it's with managing people or managing equipment. I was a Phd student at the time. I feel the combination of good work and the right opportunities allowed me to move up through the ranks.

Carrie: How did your family - parents and husband - feel about you doing a higher degree in maths and working in a predominantly male position?

Eileen: I wouldn't be where I am now if I didn't have the support from my husband and the rest of my family. I wouldn't have had the Phd because I would have given up long before. So I think that anybody, male or female, only achieves these sort of things through the support of their family.

Carrie: What were the wages and conditions like in comparison with the men?

Eileen: Exactly the same in my case.

Carrie: Were there any differences between how you were treated by the unions and how the men were treated?

Eileen: Never.

Carrie: What arrangements did you make for child-care?

Eileen: I was a student when my two boys were very young so I could be flexible in my hours. I used the university child-care facility which was excellent and I have always had support from my family and friends.

Carrie: Do you have any regrets?

Eileen: No. Certainly not. In terms of study, I'm glad it's over.

Carrie: Any particularly good times?

Eileen: It's always been good. There're always characters you can remember that you've worked with who are very interesting.

Carrie: If you had your time again would anything be different?

Eileen: No. I have always been a person who planned things so I have been able to target myself into what I want to do in the future.