

Women in Advanced Computing
Tuesday June 12
Boston, MA

By Clea Zolotow

I was privileged to be invited as a guest speaker to the Women in Advanced Computing (WiAC) Summit on Tuesday, June 12. This was a day that ran parallel to the 2012 USENIX Federated Conferences Week, running June 12 through the 15th and sponsored by Google (thanks for all the nice swag!).

It was a very interesting day as usually in conferences I am either part of a very small minority of women (less than 10%) or the only technical female in the room. The turnout for the conference was much like seeing Denise Kalm speak at the National Computer Measurement Group (CMG), namely a fantastic turnout of most of the women attending USENIX (30+ women!) and a sprinkling of very brave men. The conference organizers were Nicole Forsgren Velasquez, Utah State University and formerly at IBM, and Carolyn Rowland, National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). This was the first WiAC conference, of hopefully many to come.

Leslie Lambert started the talks with a fascinating history of her career. It was interesting to see that she has changed roles so many times in computer science throughout her career and usually supplemented those role changes with education. It was also great to see that her undergraduate degrees were not in engineering or computer science, but in psychology. Liberal arts students can bring much needed breadth to the computer science field! Ms. Lambert is currently Vice President of Information Technology and Chief Information Security Officer (CISO) at Juniper Networks and has some hilarious stories about imposing security restrictions on a previously security-free office environment!

Emily Gladstone Cole gave the next talk on Staying Happy in System Administration. Her talk was interesting to me as she has not encountered much of the sexism that used to be prevalent in this all male club. Check out her slides on the link below, she has great insights on how men and women are conditioned differently by the type of behavior we reward. We have come a long way! She had the funniest slide in the entire conference (pictured to the left).

**We are all superheroes for sticking it
out in technology**



Ms. Cole is currently lead Operations Architect for Cloud Security Applications and Email Security back-end functionality at Cisco.

I spoke next, for my first talk about my career. Having started in data processing in the late 80's, I had a very different perspective than the women starting later. I spoke about women's issues that I had as a mainframe computer scientist and how many of those issues went away once I joined IBM. IBM is a great company to work for and they really do follow their diversity policy. IBM has made diversity a part of its business strategy. "By addressing internal diversity at IBM, you increased your capacity to respond to the diversity in your customer base and your labor pool. (http://www-03.ibm.com/employment/us/diverse/feature_thomas.shtml). I currently work as a Senior Technical Staff Member (STSM) in the Transition and Transformation (T&T) Specialty Service Area (SSA).

The next session was a highly engaging panel on Strategies for a Successful Career in Computing, moderated by Rikki Endsley, USENIX. There was almost a full hour allotted to questions. There was an array of panel members, from engineers to networking to open source to academia. The viewpoints, however, were not as diverse. Most women had the same advice and the same experiences! Ms. Endsley is the Editor of Ubuntu User magazine and contributes to NetworkWorld.com.

There was then a short workshop on how to "change the shape of computing to make it more supportive of women who desire a career in a computing profession. How can we support the up-and-comers, change the landscape to reduce or remove barriers to women, and engage the other gender to aid in improving the culture?" Of course, I offered up IBM as a poster child for diversity. This workshop was chaired by Cat Allman. Ms. Allman is a free and open source community participant.

The last talk was given by Sabrina Farmer on Invited Talk: Overcoming My Biggest Roadblock, Myself. This talk emphasized how women can juggle house, family, kids, and a very high powered career. She emphasized to not to be scared of taking that promotion or change in responsibility because you have to trust yourself to figure it out. It was nice to see other women having the same challenges! Ms. Farmer is a Site Reliability Engineer at Google.

While the talks and the day was great, what was more fun was meeting everyone and networking on LinkedIn and Twitter. I am now subscribed to the Systers email list. "Systers is a private email forum for women who are university students or working in the technical side of computing" and located here: <http://systers.org/mailman/listinfo/systers>. Also, I am planning on taking Margo Seltzer's advice and buying Women Don't Ask. As she said, "Go get it. Read it now. Prepare for your review." It was a great day!