



CELEBRATING  
55 YEARS

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## **Opportunities for women are available for those willing to make the commitment and the effort**

November 25, 2008 - Spotlights

During my tenure in appraisal, I have witnessed a quantum shift in the role of women in the industry. My career in appraisal began 25 years ago in November of 1983 when I was hired as support staff by an appraiser with the MAI designation. At the time, I was not aware that the appraisal field even existed. My youngest child was ten months old, I was a stay at home mom, and I was still nursing. I had wanted to wait until my son started nursery school before returning to work, but a family financial crisis destroyed that notion. The support staff job was the first one that was offered to me, and I jumped at it.

I grew up in the age of pre-feminism, the days when the most likely career for a woman - if she was to have a career other than homemaker -- was as a nurse or a school teacher. The popular prime time television shows during my childhood were Leave It To Beaver, the Donna Reed Show (in which Donna Reed vacuumed her immaculate suburban house wearing high-heeled shoes), Father Knows Best, and I Love Lucy - none of which included a major female character in a professional job. I attended a women's college, the sister school of a men's college where some members of the community doubted the ability of women to take academics seriously. When I applied at an employment agency for my first job out of school, my interviewer stated, "I certainly hope you can type," implying that the only job I could get was a typist position for the insurance company whose headquarters was in the area. Despite a dubious attitude on some people's part, women started to make significant inroads into various professions, including real estate appraisal.

Up until 1983 my work experience was in PR and the performing arts, neither of which were particularly relevant to appraisal but both of which honed my writing skills. My initial duties as support staff included research, preliminary analysis, bookkeeping and, of course, word processing (the modern day term for typing). Once introduced to appraisal, I was hooked. I hadn't taken a math class since high school but thoroughly enjoyed math. Getting involved in the mathematics of appraisal was like becoming reacquainted with an old friend. I found myself critiquing my boss's appraisal reports and reviewing them for mathematical accuracy. I asked questions and wanted explanations for why this or that adjustment was made. Why is it important to confirm a sale with more than one source? What is an equity dividend rate? What is an annual constant? What is a monitor roof?

Fortunately, my employer was patient and willing both to explain and to allow me to take on more and more responsibility. Those were the pre-licensing days when anyone could be an appraiser by simply performing appraisals, no experience, no education needed. About a year and a half into my new job, my employer went on a two week vacation out of town. On the first day of vacation, as I sat all alone in the office, a call came in from a premiere client who needed an appraisal performed right away. In retrospect, I can't believe that I actually said, "No problem. When do you need the report

delivered?" And I actually did the appraisal from start to finish and delivered the report before my employer returned.

Immediately upon my boss's return, I said, "There is something you need to know," and I proceeded to relate my activities during the prior two weeks. His face turned ashen, but after he reviewed the job, he became more comfortable with the situation and even continued to employ me.

I began taking Appraisal Institute courses in 1985. At that time, women made up about 25% of the students in the lower level courses. In the upper level courses, the number of women students decreased to as low as 10% in some classes. The most challenging requirement on the path to my MAI designation was the demonstration report which in my mind is comparable to a master's thesis. All in all, it took 300 hours and two years to jump over that hurdle. Fortunately, I have a very supportive spouse and children who cheered me on and tolerated late nights and weekends at the office as well as weeks away from home various courses that were taught around the country.

When I was ready to register for the comprehensive exam, the last step in fulfilling the requirements for my MAI designation, I had to fill out a number of forms as well as submit a passport size photograph of myself to the Appraisal Institute. My MAI comprehensive exam took place in Boston in August of 1991. This event will forever stick in my mind for two reasons. First, it was given during Hurricane Bob, the weekend my husband Bob took our children and some friends from Hawaii on a very wet and miserable camping trip. Second, when the proctor for the exam called out the names of the people who were to take the test, my name was called out as Patrick Amidon and was listed on a page right next to my photo complete with the long dangling earrings I wore the day the photo was taken.

Today, the appraisal industry remains a field with more men than women, particularly in the commercial arena; however, opportunities for women are definitely available for those willing to make the commitment and the effort.

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