Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

W. Boyd Rayward

at

Vienna, Austria

on

14 June 2000

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)
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Helga Schmid

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HELGA SCHMID

1941 Born in Marburg/Lahn, Germany, on 15 June

Education
1959-1964 Studies of mathematics and physics, Vienna University
1964 Ph.D., mathematics, Vienna University

Professional Experience
European Atomic Energy Community [Euratom], Belgium
1966-1968 Post-doctorate Fellowship
1966-1969 Scientific Programmer

International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA]
1969-1975 Programmer/Analyst for INIS

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], Vienna
1975-1981 Programmer/Analyst for AGRIS
1981-2000 Head of AGRIS Processing
ABSTRACT

Helga Schmid begins the interview by discussing the growth of her interest in the world of information. While attending the Vienna University, she studied mathematics and physics and also worked on gaining her teaching certification. However, after meeting her husband, she relocated to Belgium and worked for Euratom [European Atomic Energy Community], where she began training to be a computer programmer. In 1969 she and her family moved back to Vienna and she joined the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA]. While there, under the direction of Giampaolo Del Bigio, Schmid helped publish the first INIS [International Nuclear Information System] Atomindex. In 1975, she moved on to AGRIS [International Information System for the Agricultural Sciences and Technology] where she worked with varying software and helped the fledgling organization to organize and evolve its technological programs. In 2000, she retired, after rising through the organization to become the head of AGRIS Processing. Schmid concludes the interview by discussing briefly her knowledge of AGRIS in its present state and sharing some of the positive experiences she had throughout her career as a computer analyst.

INTERVIEWER

W. Boyd Rayward is a research professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He turned to librarianship after graduating in English literature from the University of Sydney. He received his Ph.D. from the Graduate Library School at the University of Chicago in 1973. He has held positions in the University of Chicago (where he became Dean of the Graduate Library School). He served as Professor and Head of the School of Information Library and Archive Studies and Dean of the University's Faculty of Professional Studies at the University of New South Wales in Sydney where he is now professor emeritus. He has published two books related to Paul Otlet, Belgian documentalist and internationalist, and a great many articles on history of national and international schemes for the organization and dissemination of information.
Early Interests in Mathematics and Physics
Interest in mathematics and physics lead towards a career in teaching. Meet husband at Vienna University. Relocate to Belgium and train to be a computer programmer at Euratom. Return to Vienna and accept position at the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Computer Programmer for IAEA
Work under the supervision of Giampaolo Del Bigio and help publish the first INIS Atomindex. Work with incoming INIS data, including checking and production of the INIS master file. Apply retrieval systems, such as IRMS [Information Retrieval and Management System].

Responsibilities at IAEA
Implement photocomposition method to IAEA indexes. Help to create IAEA Thesaurus by studying the first Thesaurus, created by Euratom. Input software and help launch system.

Transfer to FAO under AGRIS and Early Operational Glitches
Transfer to AGRIS for personal reasons. Handle the computer processing of the AGRIS data. Work on corrections for AGRIS data in Vienna and add numerous programs to system. Personally modify software to be multilingual.

Problems with AGRIS location and Retirement
Debate to move AGRIS to Rome. Motivation drops in Vienna at AGRIS headquarters. AGRIS processing unit closes. Retire due to AGRIS management changes.

Professional Recollections
Discuss positive and negative experiences during the time at AGRIS. Thoughts on changes in the information world. Anecdotes on encounters between executives and programmers.

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