

The Art of Engineering with Denise McIntosh

Episode 014: Jean Ann Groves, retired Business Continuity expert

In this episode, Jean Ann Groves, a retired Business Continuity expert, talks about how the civil rights movements of the 60s and 70s sparked a major change for women in the workplace. Jean Ann was one of only three women in her business class in college and went on to a successful career in leadership with companies like Exxon before becoming an entrepreneur and going out on her own. You'll hear how to counter people who undermine you, how we can close the gender and wage gaps, plus a candid discussion about abuse.

Denise McIntosh *So welcome Jean Ann Groves to our podcast called the Art of Engineering that has expanded to include lots of things that happen in the engineering and manufacturing and all lots of different industries. Jean Ann and I have been friends since college. And what I want to hear today is Jean Ann's journey in not just the corporate world and in a non-traditional part of that world and then to entrepreneurship, and then back to corporate and finally to retirement, which I'm very envious of. But Jean Anne. Welcome.*

Jean Ann Groves *Thank you. Very pleased to be here.*

Denise McIntosh *So this is a question I've never asked you, as long as I've known you. I don't believe I've ever asked this question. How did you choose the industry? How did you choose the major when it wasn't really even a thing then?*

Jean Ann Groves *Oh, are you talking about the business continuity? Or that it wasn't a thing that women were in the workplace?*

Denise McIntosh *The ladder...But even the beginning at [K State](#) and [Oklahoma State](#).*

Jean Ann Groves *Right. Well, you know, I moved from a small town, you grew up in an even smaller town in Kansas. And my dad was a businessman in many different facets, you know, a lot of different things that he had going, but primarily in the oil industry. That's the area that we lived in, but just education in school was really very much my focus. And it was really my salvation with the education and, and I actively wanting to be the teacher's pet for that. And I was good at the, I know you guys have been focusing on the sciences, I loved the sciences, the physics, the chemistry, but math was my strongest suit. So going forward into university, I started off as a math major.*

Denise McIntosh *Did not know that*

Jean Ann Groves *It was my first year and to this day... it was the toughest curriculum most challenging academia activity that I ever had, but I was not sure what to do after a year. I said, what do you do with this degree? And what I heard was not encouraging. So I transitioned over to business content, excuse me, I into the business administration school because I became a finance major. So I still had the math angle going, but it was not going to be the pure science of math.*

Denise McIntosh *Okay. So then you went to Oklahoma State for a master's in...*

Jean Ann Groves *Again in finance and an MBA, but focus on finance. I really, I finished up the four years at Kansas State and looked at it and thought, I don't think this was quite worth four years of my life. Now, maybe I could have applied myself more vigorously. I had some good times in college too, but I decided I needed to... I was willing to invest the time for at the business school to focus and make more valuable what I had done to that point. And it seemed to work out that way.*

Denise McIntosh *So I was amazed when you took your first job at where you were going and how much you were making. I was in awe.*

Jean Ann Groves *Yes. Well, that was Exxon. Understand why, why it was 1974. So this is kind of like a history lesson. I would not have been offered and I had other offers but I would not have been offered the the job I got with Exxon had not been 10 years before that the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#), the EEOC, which actually came out of the ...and I had to write it down...so I remember what it was. It came out of the [Civil Rights Act in 1964](#). So it wasn't focused specifically on women, but it was for overall, we were just part of the bucket of all of that. And for 10 years, the corporations just ignored it. We're going to go on business as usual. And finally, they, some of the bigger corporations said, "well, this is not going to go away. And if this is the way the world is going to be, then let's get in there and get the talent that we can try for." So yeah, the sound my father said, "they shouldn't be paying me that." Nice guy.*

But I had to fill out in the career center, we had to fill out a postcard looking thing. And because they wanted to keep track of where people were going and they had a checklist of what your salary range was. And I had to write mine in, cause it didn't go that high.

Denise McIntosh *Awesome! Well, so I also want to know about your first experience with [Exxon](#) in Wyoming.*

Jean Ann Groves *Ah. Well, I'd been in Houston for a few years and then they were tapping me on the head and said, we want you to move in to being a supervisor. And as de-centralized as Exxon is, that means you're headed for the hinterlands somewhere. And it's kind of like a foreign assignment to do that and come away from at first, they tried to send me to Southern Illinois to underground coal. Deadly boring, not a good place to be. And I hurried back and talked to my boss and he said, "we can't just come say no, we have to go find somebody who says they desperately need you." And that's where Exxon minerals, uranium mining in Wyoming came and it was a westerner. And I had a horse I could fit into Wyoming for a few years. And so I that's what I did.*

Denise McIntosh *So I don't know that I've ever asked you this. What encounters did you have being a woman in where there weren't many women in finance in corporate America? And particularly in that industry?*

Jean Ann Groves *Well, it was, it, it, let me step back to the MBA school on that for a second. And there were 150 of us in a school and three of us were women. Two of my professors call me "Mr. Groves." Now the first one just kind of did it accidentally cause he was taking role one day and he was reading from the list and he said, "Mr. Groves" and I spoke up and said, "my father couldn't make it today. I came instead." About two weeks later... he came out and he said, your father reminded me of out mass. It was a joke. It was a joke, but I had another professor. And by God was not going to have one in her, his class." And he called me Mr. Groves the entire semester.*

But by the time I was with Exxon, there were a number of, uh, we were a minority, but there were women in our group. And I was the first woman in our group to make the first grade increase. However, every one of the guys had already gotten it.

Denise McIntosh *Well, of course.*

Jean Ann Groves *Yeah. So, I eventually get to Wyoming and I'm doing budgeting and planning and cost analysis and capital improvement. And we're doing, we have modularize how to dig away or define the uranium. And so we put all these pieces together, the cost of digging and, and excavating. And so I'm really pretty much enjoying it. And it was, you know, underground mining at the time I finished with Exxon, I had three different styles of hardhats.*

I'd been in a refinery or, or an underground. And one of the things about underground that you don't know is it's windy, very windy, underground. And you'll pass through a drift and you have to grab your light and helmet because it'll blow off. Radon levels are

so dangerous down there. And they keep a very strong ventilation system going on, in their. Exxon, typically home grew all of their people, but they didn't have miners. So they had to go out and bring in mine managers and employees mainly from coal in Appalachia. And these are the most cussedly independent people that you've ever met. And I just loved it. And the mining engineers, I loved all that group of people.

Denise McIntosh *You made it easy for yourself.*

Jean Ann Groves: *Well, I needed to, because I had my boss, his boss was out to ruin me. He was a guy who was kind of gone beyond his level of expertise or capabilities. And he was trying to undermine me every step of the way. And the mine managers, whether it was open pit or underground really liked me because I brought a lot of information to him, but I realized I was in trouble. And I would tell anyone that if you encounter somebody who's trying to undermine you, you can't change people. And for women. And then it was in, that was the kind of thing it was for him. And he was quite nasty about it, but he'd always do it only face-to-face nobody else would ever, he didn't mess up one time and do it right in front of my boss. And I turned to him and I said, "this is what I've been telling you." But the headhunter came in on the white horse charging and I was primed for it because this guy was really going to cause me grief. So headhunter came along and I went off to [Phillips Petroleum Company](#).*

Denise McIntosh *So my description of those people... Are empty suits.*

Jean Ann Groves: *Yeah. Yeah. Oh, well, you move on. Well, and the other thing is for women at that time period, just getting into 1980 at this time, is they w they were so careful to watch you and make sure you weren't going to go crazy on them, that to progress because the progressions came more slowly to the women, the way to, to improve your position was to jump companies. Yes. Yes. We move on to another one. New, fresh start and Phillips had homegrown everyone. And they had decided they needed to actually bring people in who had a depth of experience elsewhere. And I came, I got swept up in that search. There were three of us, two guys, and me*

Denise McIntosh *I've said all along that, and you were exactly the same. It's hard not to like us. Because we engage people and we listen and we build relationships because that has smoothed the path.*

Jean Ann Groves *Yeah*

Denise McIntosh *Yeah. A good thing to learn early as women in non-traditional roles.*

Jean Ann Groves *Here's another good thing that I learned is my Exxon experience was varied and it was good. And I worked with really smart people. I also worked with people and Exxon who were more interested in moving up through the organization. And if that took treating other people badly or trying to shine a bad light on them to eliminate the competition, I was surprised because if you come into a company from college, you know, it kind of just rewarding you for what you can do and to have somebody be you know, somebody who's negative for what I called an "upward mobility type" who only wanted to do the job to move to the next increase in their rank, as opposed to doing best by the job. That wasn't true at Phillips. And I had, they had such a deep bench at Exxon that the interesting stuff didn't come along as often, but at Philips, I got far better work experience, much better exposure, and much more, just had a really good work life career there.*

Denise McIntosh *Then you transitioned and became an entrepreneur.*

Jean Ann Groves *Well, I did that. I had some change of life that went on that took me out of the country. And I had a change of life in my personal life. And when that restarted and I'm still in that life, I had to step back and look and say, well, now what do I want to do? Because I've done these big corporations and the person that I was restarting my life with was also wanting to do that. Wanted to go out on his own, wanting to be a consultant. And he was just absolutely perfect for that type of environment. And I thought, well, I think I'll do that too. So he ended up going in different directions, meaning we were in the same consulting firm, but I found through a client pushing me in that direction. And that was Symantec software company, security software, is business continuity planning. If I found something that I just ate, that was a spoon. Fit me down to my toes and completely engaged me like no other work had before.*

Denise McIntosh *So give us a thirty second description of business continuity.*

Jean Ann Groves *Okay. Is the idea that you have to be resilient. A business has to be resilient. Your clients require that of you. And so you have to identify the most critical processes that your company depends upon in order to deliver the product to the client and identify those, try to eliminate risks that will disrupt them, but then also have incident management teams in place so that when the inevitable disruption does come, you can mitigate its impact and also make a fast recovery.*

Denise McIntosh *Tell me about the most challenging event in business continuity that you experienced.*

Jean Ann Groves *Yeah, we did pandemic preparedness planning, and I don't think it, but we didn't come even close to being ready for this. We, we did the, some of the*

SARS and stuff and it worked all right. But when the volcano in Iceland blackened the sky and made jet travel be impossible, and therefore we couldn't move our product, products were being manufactured. And actually I didn't even say who this was with. This was [Hitachi Data Systems](#), which was the last company I worked for in the Silicon Valley. And so they made storage equipment and now you couldn't ship it. And so we had to do, and I work, you know, I was a facilitator. I was a person who said, okay, I know how you run your business day to day, but you're not used to having to put it back together again, that's a completely different activity.

And so I had to make them think from the disaster point of view and be able to formulate new ways, we hadn't planned for this. You plan for a lot of commons, you're gonna lose power. You're going to lose the resources in IT. But then the one comes out that you don't plan for. And what we ended up doing was taking trucks and shipping everything to Turkey, to an airfield that was not impacted. The team came up with that. I just had already a structure in place for them to address problems and be able to, and then their brains would go to work and go, yeah. The ones that, some of the ones that haven't are so out of left field that, but you just have to have a structure in place it's ready. And the people already identified it and the tools are there. And then they can go to work and solve the problems.

Denise McIntosh *At this point, Jean, I'd like to address a topic that we have not addressed in these podcasts, but we know, and we know that it impacts lots of people's lives because we learned in 2010 that there are probably one in three women and probably one in four or five men who have been impacted in some way by abuse.*

Jean Ann Groves *Yes.*

Denise McIntosh *And you and I share stories. Yes,*

Jean Ann Groves *Yes. We have. We have, are this is the, has that impacted within our own families.*

Denise McIntosh *Yes.*

Jean Ann Groves *Well, this is our PSA portion. Our announcement, you know, I really feel fulfilled by my work life. My personal life is very good, but it was also very important to get to a place of safety. And so my successful career has allowed me to have a, you know, a, a secure retirement, but it wasn't always like that. I was lifted up by my family because they provided me the opportunity of education. And that was the base that I could spring off of. And because my home life was literally dangerous. I mean, severely*

dangerous, threatening and undermining. That's why I focused on education and school so much. That was a separate life. I could leave the home and I could be valued in that. So the flip side of being impacted that way is you become very self-sufficient. And also you developed survival skills. So even though my family is no longer, you know, on this earth and who knows what drove them to be the kind of people that they were, I was able to build a strong and independent life. And I think it's important to realize for anyone who listens to these podcasts, nobody gets through this life without trauma. At some stage, it will always come in and hit you. And to know that I had it really bad as a child, that I was able to build a successful life and be happy.

Denise McIntosh *Yes. And I can tell you, Jean Ann, that there are two conversations that we've had in our lifetimes that are the most meaningful to me. The first one was when you trusted me enough to share your experience. And the second one was when I called you to tell you that the same incident had happened in my family, with my son, that I knew there was a missing puzzle piece. You were the first one that I thought to call. And my first and my question was Jean Ann, how do I, what do I say? What do I do? And your question back to me was "what did you say?" And I said, the only thing I could say was, I am so sorry, because I was to be the protector and I was not. And then you said these three words... you believed him. Well, I did not realize, I mean, it took me back to our conversation of how, if you aren't believed that that's another victimization, that's another form of abuse.*

Jean Ann Groves *Yeah. Yeah. I'm glad you were up to the task when it, to paying face-to-face in your family*

Denise McIntosh *And you have been an inspiration. You still are an inspiration to both myself and my son, because we had such a connection of what the value of and what [Brené Brown](#) says is vulnerability. And being able to share our life experiences and what that support does for people.*

Jean Ann Groves *Well, thank you. Because I noticed that other abuse victims can spot each other. I've been spotted by another one and gotten, gotten called out. How did you figure out that I went through something like that? And it's, it's sad that there's this kind of thing in the world. And I think for people who've not suffered anything like that, to understand that maybe their coworker did and to be tolerant. And to know that there may be things going on behind the scenes that have formed them, change them, isolated them and, and, you know, be compassionate.*

Denise McIntosh *We had a just as, as a part of that, because of the pandemic, we've been doing a lot of, of team meetings, even within our own group, because it's just more*

comfortable. You don't have to wear your mask and you can be where you are. About a month ago. I was at a low point. I mean, I've been through most of this year being a pretty bright spot because I'm so capable of working by myself. And I like that. But one day I just reached out and said, can we just go around the room around, around and just say how you're feeling today? Well, I don't know why I was feeling down and low, but at the end of 30 minutes of everybody just coming forward and saying what they felt, whether it was good, bad, or, or in the middle, whatever my dark cloud was, was gone. So the whole communication, listening, vulnerability so important.

Jean Ann Groves *And who brings that to the table better than anybody else? A woman!*

Denise McIntosh *So past that, thank you for sharing, because it's a topic that doesn't get addressed enough, but what would you share with young people at this point in your life to encourage A) closing the gender gap and B) closing the wage gap for exploring what all the possibilities are in all the industries that are out there?*

Jean Ann Groves *I think you have to consider yourself your own corporation and that'll make you get out of bad situations pretty quickly if you look at yourself that way. I'm not a fan of, of you're the brand, that sort of thing. I think you've got to really do hard work. You've got build real skills. You have to have developed an expertise. And if you could be in love, like I was, with your expertise, then you're going to rule your work life. And that's what you have to focus on. And I've never had to have a, maybe I've never known if I've been an underpaid, I've never had to go challenge someone on like that. Thank goodness. I wouldn't enjoy that conversation at all. Because you come begger in hand almost for something like, so, you know, be your best self be as talented and well read, join the professional societies, be active within them. They'll help you tremendously, especially if you're kind of in a niche type position, then you have your family within the business world and rule your life.*

Denise McIntosh *You've done well.*

Jean Ann Groves *Thank you. I feel pretty good.*

Denise McIntosh *Well, Jean Ann, thank you for joining me today on this podcast and exploring some interesting things and an interesting life.*

Jean Ann Groves *Well, thank you. And this was I was fearful of this cause I thought I would just not be able to handle the pressure, but it's, it's been very enjoyable.*

Denise McIntosh *Thank you.*

Jean Ann Groves *Thank you.*