

Anne Poschmann

Introduction to Geotechnique?

I chose engineering at the urging of my brothers (neither of whom had pursued engineering) because they told me that there was no use in attending university unless I took engineering. Perhaps that was their way of telling me that I was good at math and science! I chose geological/geotechnical engineering because it had the least physics and chemistry, subjects I had to acknowledge that I struggled with greatly. Besides, I had always loved dirt, particularly clay, because my father was a potter and because loved the outdoors!

Other women in your classes?

As an undergraduate at Queen's, there were three of us in Geological Engineering, several more in Civil Engineering with whom we shared many courses, and even more in Geological Sciences with whom we also shared courses.

Difficulty getting your first job?

I was fortunate. Bob Mitchell at Queen's had recommended me to Dr. Mike Klugman for summer jobs with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and that eventually led to contract work. After graduation, my father wanted me to work with him in the pottery clay supply business at his clay mine in the Musquodoboit Valley in Nova Scotia. When that venture failed, due to the lack of Provincial Government funding and permits, I got an interview with Golder Associates Ltd. for a position in its Mississauga office, where I worked for the next 34 years.

Career focus?

I focused on soil mechanics associated with landslides, foundations engineering and tunneling, with an emphasis on transportation and infrastructure.

I had many memorable projects. A ravine rehabilitation project where I met the great artist Dorothy McCarthy. A landslide project where, in my early days, I gained respect by modelling the failure correctly. A design-build highway project where I was humbled by an embankment failure (a result of inadequate checks on my part). A major bridge project where I learnt the joy of a wonderful, almost problem free, project. A tunnel project in San Diego, CA, where I learnt that engineers were actually treated with great respect in California.

Education

- 1978 BSc (Eng) from Queen's University; Geological/Geotechnical Engineering; 4th-Year Project was "Leda Clay Landslides"
- 1986 MASc from University of Waterloo; Civil Engineering; thesis was "Reinforced Earth Failure Surfaces"

Employment

- 1976-1983 contract work with Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, studying Leda clay landslides in Eastern Ontario
- 1979-1981 Pottery Supply House, where I explored for, and investigated the geotechnical aspects of a Nova Scotia commercial-grade pottery clay
- 1982-2016 Golder Associates, based in the Mississauga, ON office, and worked primarily in Ontario, but elsewhere as well

Notable Achievements

- 1989 appointed the first female Associate of Golder Associates Ltd.
- 1994 appointed Principal of Golder Associates Ltd. (second female Principal)
- 1999-2000 served as CGS VP Finance; one of the first two women to serve on the CGS Executive Committee
- 2001 CGS Stermac Award
- 2006 Fellow Canadian Society for Civil Engineers
- 2009 Fellow Engineers Canada
- 2008-2014 Member, then Chair, of the Golder Associates Ltd. (Canada) Board
- 2014 Woman's Executive Network (WXN) Top 100 Trailblazers and Trendsetters Award
- 2015-2016 Chair of the Association of Consulting Engineering Companies-Canada (first woman chair in its 89-year history)
- 2016 happily retired 😊

Involvement with CGS and other organizations?

I was a member of the CGS for many years until I retired in 2016. I volunteered for years with the CGS Southern Ontario Section and was VP Finance for the CGS national body in 1999-2000.

I have been involved with a number of other organizations as well. For 25 years I volunteered on a number of committees with Professional Engineers Ontario; two board terms with Consulting Engineers of Ontario (Chair in 2005); on the board with the Association of Consulting Engineering Companies-Canada (Chair 2014-2015); and I served on the Board of WTS Canada – a group focused on advancing women in the transportation field.

Who were your mentors?

While at Queen's, Professors Bob Mitchell, Grant Barlett and Al Gorman were my mentors; at Waterloo, Professors Leo Rothenburg and Brian Le Lievre. At Golder, I had many very caring mentors. I refer to them fondly as the "John" team – John Busbridge, John Seychuk and John Davis. As well there was Vic Milligan and Jack Crooks, in the Mississauga office, and then Gerry Webb, Terry Nicholas and Paul Smolkin, in the Ottawa office.

On being a woman in a man-dominated profession?

It was fun.....a challenge at times, but generally a good challenge. I always felt welcomed, and treated with respect, by my male colleagues at Golder, both at work and outside work. Although there were a couple of times when my participation outside work was less welcomed. In retaliation, as a prank, the "Golder Girls" (some of the secretarial and administrative staff and me) organized our own outing to a traditional male venue – and we invited the "guys" along, but only the bravest attended!

Advice to other women?

Be yourself; be honest about your weaknesses; understand your strengths; have fun; and treat everyone with respect. Dive into the mud – that is, don't shy away from challenges, but rather jump on them because they are opportunities. Don't stand for situations you feel are inappropriate – either walk away from them or do something to change the inappropriateness. Remember that the geotechnical profession is a wonderful inexact science that requires both imagination and passion – let the excitement for the profession shine.

Photographs



Anne (centre front row) with the Consulting Engineers of Ontario Board Member, 2005



Anne Poschmann, 2012