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How I Got Into Histology By Beverly Braswell



I, Beverly Braswell, first discovered Histology when I was 17 years old and a junior in high school. Back in my day Histology was not a career the average soon to be high school graduate would know about. I had signed up for the co-op program at my high school, so I could attend class part of the day and leave early to go to a part time job. One day my high school counselor called me into her office and told me she had found a job opportunity that might would work for me.

It was a job at a local private lab. The job consisted of logging specimens in journals, manual staining of pap smears, and preparing cytology specimens and then manually staining them with a Non-Gyn stain. I was also asked to assist with staining and coverslipping of Histology slides.

There was a non-registered Histology technician that would show me what they were doing and explained why the tissues had to go through an overnight process. I admit at the time it seemed very complex, but I was intrigued because a piece of wet tissue was processed in a manner that allowed the tissue sample to be placed on a slide and then it could be used to diagnose a patient for various diseases.

The lab I was working at was partnered with a local hospital, so I visited the local hospital that had a histology laboratory. The hospital had “state of art” technology. There was a linear stainer for staining of slides! The microtome was not cast iron like the one at my lab. There was also an embedder that actually had an embedding platform and cold plate! At my lab we had a paraffin pot that the histo tech embedded from and placed the blocks on ice. I was amazed most by the stainer because it was set up to provide the perfect stain and didn’t require someone to stain the slides. The histology tech at the hospital was a registered tech, so I inquired as to what I would need to do to become a histologist.

They told me about the ASCP website and explained that with a high school diploma and two years of on the job training I could take a practical and written exam and receive a certification. This interested me a great deal because I knew I could not afford to attend college. I decided I would like to pursue this as a career, so I moved to a large urban area to get a job at a lab that had enough staff and was able to train me. Lucky for me I was hired as a lab aid at a county hospital and was exposed to all types of tissues and body fluids.

Within two years I was ready to take my exam. I recall measuring my tissue to assure it did not shrink too much during processing so that it would meet the practical requirements. I also remember going to the medical examiners and asking for spinal cord. Yes, I had spinal cord on my practical, which was difficult to get unless you worked for the ME. I worked hard to make sure everything was as perfect as possible and let the pathologist review my work before submitting it to ASCP. Once that was completed



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and sent in, I sat for my written exam. I waited I believe two weeks maybe longer, before getting my results in the mail showing I had passed both practical and written exams.

It was a journey I still appreciate today. I have been in a lab for 32 years and have always been proud of my career choice. I am now a supervisor of a wonderful histology lab and I get the opportunity to train college students that are attending our local Histotechnology program. The amount of knowledge and experience that I have obtained from starting without automation and premade reagents provides a great foundation for those that are entering the field and are not exposed to the way histology used to be.