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How I got into Histology



My very first introduction into histology was in high school during my senior year (1983). I was taking “Advanced Biology” and we had to make slides from tissues. We were supplied with little chunks of fixed tissues and we had to process them by hand and embed them into paraffin, using little paper boxes that we had made by hand. We also got to cut them on a microtome and stain them by hand as well. Almost all the tissues fell off the slides during staining, since we didn’t know enough to put gelatin into the water bath or use any type of adhesive on the slides. I was intrigued but didn’t think much about histology again until college.

Four years later, as a second-semester senior in college (1987), I once again took a histology class. The professor performed a necropsy on a rat and collected tissues and placed them into fixative. He handed each of us some known tissues in vials and a couple of unknown tissues. We needed to make slides of all the tissues and to figure out what the unknown tissue was. This time, we actually had a tissue processor (an autotechnicon). We also had to cut the slides, stain the slides and review them under the microscope. This lab portion was coupled with a regular histology course, in which we learned all the cell types and general tissue structures.

I graduated that May with a B.A. in Biology and no clue what I wanted to do with this degree. The job market was pretty bad, and I was working as a Loan Clerk in a bank that I had worked at during my summer and winter breaks. I was applying to every lab position that I could find but was not having much luck. I happened to apply for a histotech position and, I suppose, I got the interview because I had taken Histology in college. I was hired right during the interview because I was able to name the equipment that was in the lab (tissue processor, embedding center and microtome)! I was thrilled! This was a basic histotech position at a CRO that did toxpath studies for the government. My career was on its way.

Throughout the past 30 years of my career, I have been working in and managing various preclinical research histology labs, in CROs, Biotech and Pharma. I’ve done my share of necropsies, sectioning and staining. I have been doing IHC and IF for over 20 years. My latest job does not even involve working in a lab; I am working with external vendors that are performing the IHC staining and analysis on clinical trials. You just never know where histology will lead you.