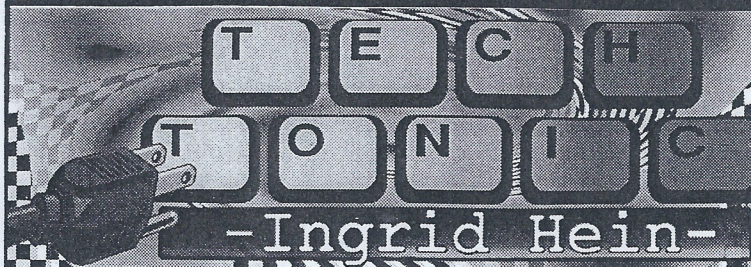


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XX CHROMOSOMES AND TECH

In the last few years, I've learned how to deal with my computer without feeling frustrated or hopeless when it comes to glitches.

A lot of that came from hanging out with geeky boys who were "in the know" and asking a lot of questions that made me sound dumb and awkward – and sometimes downright stupid. I've often been told "you wouldn't understand, don't worry, I'll fix it," and I've had to argue for it to be explained to me.

The truth is, computers are not hard to deal with; they're just about logic and getting over the fear of "screwing up." And I'm not the only one.

Wired writer Paulina Borsook notes that while women take up about half of Internet accounts they only take up about a third of the bandwidth. That means women don't spend as much time on the Net, and if you've ever been harassed – especially in IRC (Inter-Relay Chat) and newsgroups – you begin to understand why.

My peers and role models in the computer world have almost all been men. While that hasn't kept me from learning, it has left an empty space in the experience; with no female role models, I wasn't sure how I fit into the world of bytes and bandwidth... until I discovered Studio XX.

Founded last fall, Studio XX aims to demystify technology for women by providing a learning environment free of intimidation.

It's a place where women can talk tech – without becoming someone they're not simply to get "in with the geeks." And they put those skills to use: with little funding, a multitude of projects have come to life.

The most marked XX event is "Femmes Branchées," held every three weeks, which are casual evenings of women "showing and telling" their experience in technology-related arts and science fields of work.

For example, while Femmes Branchées speaker Janet Norman explains her role in the Quebec recording industry as it changes from analog to digital, a Femmes Branchées host – Kathy Kennedy or Katarina Soukup – will scream out "what does analog mean?" to make sure that nobody feels overwhelmed or intimidated by the language. It makes for a comfortable learning atmosphere.

Double X, an electronic 'zine that will be launched Friday during a Femmes Branchées, is a collaborative effort of 15 women who taught one another HTML and edited technology-related texts together.

While Studio XX doesn't discourage men from getting involved, encouraging women is more of a priority. I would definitely urge women to get into XX. For myself, the group has helped cultivate friendships with women who are into technology in RL (Real Life, as opposed to electronic conversation) that I otherwise would have had a hard time finding. And their slogan is quite encouraging, too: "Everything in moderation except XX!" ♦

Femmes Branchées happens at 4001 Berri, June 21 at 5 pm, when Studio XX launch their web site and Double X 'zine. Their web page can be found at: <<http://www.odyssee.net/~studioxx>>

Hour June 20-27

1996