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Liz Lam, QA Lead Engineer ([@p4liz](#))

This is part of a [blog series](#) designed to explore the stories of our Women in Tech at Perforce. It's been fun and inspiring talking to each one of these women. As they share where they've been and how they came to where they are now, it is my hope that others will be encouraged and inspired too.

Jen Bottom is part of our Tech Support organization. When she isn't taking calls, she's enjoying table top games (such as Dungeons and Dragons) or playing music on the [melodeon](#).

What was your first tech job?

Working at Perforce.

Before that I did some voluntary work at school helping people at the CAB (last two years of high school) learn to use Microsoft Word and writing spreadsheets for them.

What were some of your first challenges as a woman on that team?

I am lucky - I can't say that I have encountered any yet.

You are also in the unique position of overcoming additional challenges as a visually impaired person. How did you do it?

I think this is mostly down to having a good upbringing and a strong work ethic. During job interviews I've always tried to use my visual impairment as a selling point and explain that companies don't need to spend lots of money to get me the tech I need. Most Operating Systems these days come with a good screen-reader out of the box, and there are good free Open Source solutions that can be downloaded and installed easily. Perforce has been incredibly supportive and helped me find additional solutions and technologies. They recently bought me an alternative Softphone, which has been great.

Jenn and Archie

When did you realize you loved working with software?

When I started to take an interest in how screen-readers and speech synthesizers worked. As a child, my Dad used to bring home all the old computers from his work. We tried to get a 386 machine talking with a Power Pack and external speech synthesizer. We never got it working but I found the process really interesting. When I finally got a computer with speech, I wanted to use it for as much as possible.

What was your first programming language?

VB at college, though I tried 'hello world' in Java when I was about 14.

Did you have any mentors that helped you along the way?

One of my learning assistants at college was a female who was into computers. I found her very inspiring.

How did you get started with Perforce and version control?

When I came to work here as an intern, I realized how important version control was.

When I went back to university I used it to version my final year project. The change list descriptions, code diffs and jobs were all very useful in helping me to write the report, and made for a good appendix.

What is your role now at Perforce?

Technical Support engineer.

What language do you code in today?

Ruby is my favorite, but I am currently taking a Java module with the Open University.

What resources would you recommend for people interested in accessibility software?

If you have a Mac then play with VoiceOver (command F5 to start) and actually read the quick start guide, especially if you are sighted. This will give you an idea of how the screen-reader sits in-between the output from the machine and the input that the blind user hears. You will also get a look into how a blind user views the world, especially on the web, but playing is the best way to understand and experience this.

Also try NVDA for Windows and Orca for Linux.

If you live on the command line, then Speakup is the best console screen-reader for Linux, assuming it's already in your kernel (Debian). You can also get it to compile and work with your sound server.

What advice would you give to women getting into the software industry?

Try not to think about the fact that you are a woman and that it sets you apart. You might have some issues/problems/challenges because of it at some point, but don't automatically assume you will. At the end of the day, before gender is even a factor, we are all just people.

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About the author:

Liz Lam plays on Team QA at Perforce Software. She loves breaking software, contributing ideas to new features and apparently writing blogs while consuming large amounts of coffee.

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