

Changing the Rules

By Chris Hirschhorn

All colleges have prerequisites to graduate. At Barnard, the women's undergraduate college of CU, students had to select a major field of study and also pass a foreign language Exit Exam. I chose Math and I was also a Pre-Med with many labs. My studies left little time for fun.

Barnard's requirement of passing a Foreign Language exam almost did me in. Most students took and passed the French Language exam as freshmen. I began to study German in my freshman year because my high school French teacher told me to never take a French class again. So I studied German and by the time I was a senior I could still never pass the German Exit Exam. So Barnard broke and changed their rule. The new rule: a student had to either pass the Exit Exam or pass high level courses. I passed their German courses, albeit with C's. I was graduated. It was 1950.

After spending a few years in Massachusetts teaching high school girls, I entered the business world and was accepted at an insurance company. A new department had recently formed called Computers. I was accepted and coded. At that time, we programmed using raw code. I also attended Actuarial classes and met the men who designed applications for the computer. I decided that I wanted to design like my compadres in the Actuary Department but I was informed that men designed applications; women key punched and wrote code. So I resigned. However, I informed a college friend, also a math major, who applied and took my position. She was also permitted to design applications like the men. ELAS broke and changed their rule. It was 1961.

The next weekend in the New York Times, I saw an ad looking for a person with my computer skills. I knew that I was probably the only person who was both qualified and hunting. So I met the President of JD&A. John listened and asked what I wanted for salary. I told him and he said "OK. You are hired plus all expenses." John said, "President Eisenhower wants an Interstate highway system designed and Kentucky is first state to sign up. You are going to Kentucky.

Next, I saw that the men assigned to the Kentucky account went home on weekends to visit their wives and children. That was part of the deal. I had no children or husband so asked John if I could use the same fare and go somewhere I wished to go on weekends. He said "Yes." So, I flew to Ohio to visit my brother, to Bermuda with a friend, to Florida to visit a friend, etc. Life was and is good.