

**Pat Schroeder and a Princess  
nudge a Glass Ceiling**

**by Harry Zirkelbach 07-27-2009**

**My family and friends tended to be Political Junkies. We knew all elected officials from Colorado, personally. They were all likable. Both parties sheltered idiots, but they too could be delightful. Citizens said so every election.**

**In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Barbara Zirkelbach was Democratic District Captain for the Cheesman/Congress Park area of Denver.**

**Both parties held frequent citywide meetings and brawls.  
Then as now all participated without monetary compensation.**

**To conserve dollars, a friendly District Captain from Park Hill, Jim Schroeder, would drive Barbara to meetings. And not infrequently, one Zirkelbach daughter would baby-sat for the Schroeder son and daughter, allowing Jim's' Pat wife, to attend too.**

**In 1972 Denver Representative was Republican Mike McKeVitt. Before elected to Congress, McKeVitt had been Denver District Attorney, was popular.**

**The Democratic District Captains began looking for a candidate to oppose McKeVitt. When no candidate stepped forward throughout the city, Jim Schroeder suggested the committee speak to his wife.**

**In brief, they did, she accepted, ran, won by 7000 votes, beginning twelve consecutive terms representing the Mile High City 1973-1997.**

**She was the first woman to Represent Colorado in Congress.**

**In Washington D.C., each State and Territory has an active State Society, monthly meetings, members from all political stripes. One Society duty, beginning in 1935, select a**

**their State Princess for the Annual Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, commemorating the gift of 3000 Cherry trees, 12 varieties. from the Japanese, planted in 1912.**

**The Colorado Society in turn rotated the choice to our members of Congress.  
There were six then.  
two Senators, four Representatives.**

**In spring of 1979 that selection fell to Pat Schroeder. She called Barbara Zirkelbach, asking if one of her daughters would like to be Cherry Blossom Princess. In a few days Barbara called back, saying that Josephine would be delighted. Mother Barbara, brother Tom, accompanied daughter Jo to Washington where many their relatives already lived.**

**It is a rare privilege to be chosen. No one is unhappy.  
The Princess isn't chosen from a gathering, all later envious.**

**Each Congressman and Senator takes time to greet that year's Princess.  
No politics here.**

**The President poses with the Princesses.**

**Plus a week of gala events, gifts, photos. A Memory highlight.**

**Pat Schroeder spent time with Jo Zirkelbach and her family, even climbing the Capitol building. This is restricted to designated Capitol employees, and members of Congress, and those who accompanying them. Most elected to Congress have never been to that roof view of Washington. That is a serious climb. As Representative Schroeder had never been there, she suggested the group make the trip.**

**That night they ate at the Schroeder home, where Pat went to the grocery for some part so the dinner, ordered the remainder, Pizza delivery.  
Husband Jim had worked late.**

**Of many high lights, the Congressional reception. The Princesses are escorted into the great hall, alphabetically by State, Colorado an early entry, after California.**

**This caused trouble. A glass ceiling "tradition". Only men had introduced Cherry Blossom Princesses. In the few times this had been considered in the past, a husband, brother, father of the Senator or Representative, had been escort.**

**Pat insisted. The Committee was firm. There was to be no compromise.**

**Pat Schroeder decided it was time for a change.  
She bought a large Bunny Suit, introduced Jo Zirkelbach on her bunny suit  
soft arm. Their photo highlighted the National Press, only Jo recognizable  
because she had a smile that wouldn't quit. And her name spelled correctly.**

**The rest is history. Now Representative/Senators introduce their Princess,  
without the fanfare because of Pat Schroeder,  
and the forgotten role accepted by Jo Zirkelbach,  
Colorado's Cherry Blossom Princess 1979.**

