

Unforgettable

by Harry Zirkelbach 04-02-2013

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 1960s and 70s, wife Barbara was Democratic District Captain for the Cheesman/Congress Park neighborhoods 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 baby-sat for the Schroeder children, allowing Jim's' wife Pat, to attend.

In 1972 the U.S Congress Representative for Denver was Republican Mike McKeivitt. Before, McKeivitt had been Denver District Attorney, was popular.

The Democratic District Captains looked for a candidate to oppose McKeivitt.

When no candidate stepped forward,

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.

The first Colorado woman 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 their State's Princess for the Annual Washington Cherry Blossom Festival, commemorating the gift of 3000 Cherry trees from Japan in 1912.

The Colorado Society rotated the choice to Colorado's members of Congress.

There were six then, two Senators, four Representatives.

The 1979 selection fell to Pat Schroeder. She called Barbara Zirkelbach, asking if one of her daughters would like to be Colorado's Cherry Blossom Princess. Barbara called back, saying that Josephine would be delighted. Barbara, son Tom, accompanied Jo to Washington.

**It is a rare privilege to be chosen Princess . No one is unhappy.
The Princess not chosen from a gathering, the others envious.**

**Each Colorado Congressman and Senator takes time to greet
that years' State Princess. No politics here.
The President poses with the Princesses.
Plus a week of gala events, gifts, photos, treasured in memory.**

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

**That evening they ate at the Schroeder home, where Pat went to the grocery
for part of 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 by their patron, 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, a husband, brother,
father of the Senator or Representative, escorted.**

Pat insisted. The Committee was firm.

**Pat Schroeder decided it was time for a policy change.
She wore a large Bunny Suit, Jo Zirkelbach on that soft left arm.
Their photo, highlighted by the National Press, only Jo recognizable,
with a smile that wouldn't quit.
And her name spelled correctly.**

The rest is history.

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



