

Preface

For almost 40 years, I've said "I'm an engineer" when asked about my career. As to what I do, I explain: when I am traveling on an airplane and I look down and see the lights—that is what I do. I help ensure that this country has electricity. It has been a tremendously satisfying career choice for me.

Did I always know that I wanted to be an engineer? Absolutely not. I entered the University of Virginia (UVa) in the fall of 1972 as a Mathematics major. No one, not even my Ph.D. engineer father, had suggested engineering as a career for me. And there weren't very many female role models in my hometown of Hampton, Virginia, or at UVa. UVa had only admitted women as undergraduate students in the fall of 1970 (under court order). I was in the third class of women admitted and the first class that didn't have a cap on the number of women that could be admitted. Shortly after the start of my college career, however, I did discover engineering, and I transferred to the School of Engineering and Applied Science.

After I graduated I found out that there weren't very many women in the engineering field. Of course, there hadn't been many women engineering professors, undergraduate women engineering students, or graduate women engineering students at UVa, but I thought that was a function of the exclusion of women at the University prior to 1970. I didn't know it was a characteristic of the engineering field in general.

Fortunately for me, my first employer, Duke Power Company (today Duke Energy), sent me to do on-campus recruiting. At a card table in a gymnasium at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina, at a career fair, I found the Society of Women Engineers. Through that organization, I began to research historical women in engineering and science and nominate technical women for awards. One thing led to another led to another. Twice, I have been at the White House as my nominees received the National Medal of Technology and Innovation from the President. Today, I tell the stories of great women across all fields of endeavor, but my first love is telling the stories of technical women and, particularly, women in engineering.

This book provides an overview of the development of the engineering field and describes women's contributions. In most history books (not just history books

about engineering), women's accomplishments are invisible or marginalized. Not here. I firmly believe that a culture that values women and recognizes their accomplishments is a better society for all of its members.

Come join me and discover engineering history and women's engineering history.

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