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## My First College Demonstration in the Donna Reed Era

Tuesday, March 02, 2021



My last blog triggered a memory of my first youthful “rebellion” I was a freshman in 1964 at Queens College of the City University of New York, the first of my family to attend college. Tuition was free except for a \$24 per semester student activity fee. My college wardrobe looked like this, traditional for the day



All campuses of the City University were “commuter schools.” Students used public transportation every day. My commute required 2 different buses.

I was a quiet, serious student and very appreciative of the opportunity I was given. I did all of the required reading assignments, not even using Cliff Notes.

I never EVER even cut a class except for one winter week when I was COLD. Women were all cold.

Temperatures were in the single digits. The snow was deep. There were long waits at the bus stops.

This footwear, helped somewhat. They were marketed as “Combat Boots” and we added thin cotton tights to ward off frostbite.

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That fashion prompted a New York Daily News Editorial denouncing the boots because they made women look like “Communists.” I am not kidding. It was the Cold War after all.

Why not just wear warm pants? Because the college dress code imposed on women stated no shorts, slacks, or “similar attire.” The weather didn’t matter.

There were several attempts by the student government to get some leeway. OK, no jeans but surely this look would be acceptable.



Nope, the administration was adamant. The rules stand as is, no exceptions.

So one brisk winter day along with hundreds of others we female student “rebels” wore pants. We gathered in the quad in early morning and heard speeches by student leaders. Lots of male students were there to support us as well.

The student newspaper, which promoted our act of disobedience, included in their editorial the understanding that some women wouldn’t be participating because “they didn’t look good in pants.” Again, I am not making this up.

Then off we went to class. Some professors, more interested in education than checking out our knees, ignored our flaunting of the rules and class proceeded as usual. Others, defenders of the status quo, refused admittance to any woman not wearing a skirt.

Did we succeed in changing the rules? No, they stayed in place officially until 1967. But we did gradually make a difference as fewer and fewer professors enforced the antiquated requirements. We also adapted by carrying wrap around skirts in our backpacks for those classes run by the “old guard.” As far as I know, no professor ever demanded a woman remove her pants from under the “skirt.”

There were plenty of serious issues resulting in demonstrations during my college years. One directly affected our student body. In the summer of 64 Andrew Goodman, a QC student, had been murdered

along with 2 other civil rights workers in Mississippi.

Looking back, I remember the serious issues of the 60s and student involvement, especially the "teach ins" with invited speakers on important topics of the day. I remember listening to Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy.

So, in the grand order of things my little rebellion was rather insignificant, but it represented one small step forward.

As we know on our Spark journey, each step in the right direction eventually makes a big difference.

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**MARTHA324**

Any rebellion is good rebellion and when you were in college American was getting its eyes

opened. So much has changed and so much hasn't changed. 🤔

I went to college with gorgeous wool skirts that my mother had made....she almost cried when she heard I had a friend cut them all and hem them so they'd be shorter! About a month or so into my freshman year the college abolished the dress code and we started wearing pants and jeans!

My grandmother was so upset to see me in torn jeans; always said that her children never wore torn clothes during the depression.

So many change in the 60's and 70's.  
89 days ago



**ALICIA363**

Very cool!

Thank you for your efforts to move things in a good direction!

94 days ago



**LGRI22**

Oh yes! I remember those days. I also was a freshman in College in '64. We had to wear skirts. Actually, our student rebellion started in High school. The principal had a rule that skirts had to touch the floor if we were kneeling. The boys couldn't wear tab collar shirts unless they wore a tie. No shorts or pants for girls. Some students bought mice at the pet store and let them go in an assembly. It was utter chaos! Eventually, some of the rules were relaxed a bit, but it took several years for pants to be allowed.

A few years later, the big fashion statement was "mini skirts" and "hot pants". They were so short, most underwear could be seen. It went from one extreme to another.

Your pictures remind me of when I was on the College Board the summer after my freshman college year, of a local Dept. store..."Muir's" in East Orange NJ. If I knew how, I'd post the pictures of me modeling some clothes for the local magazine. What memories you've unearthed!

94 days ago



**OVERWORKEDJANET**

I remember wearing pants to walk the mile to school then having to change into a skirt before class.

94 days ago



**JULIJULINN**

Me too

94 days ago



**DONNA\_CPS2**

Progress for sure! 🌍 one boss in the 70s did not want jean suits! 🙄 🤔

94 days ago



**SUSANYOUNGER**

I try to tell my grandkids about the no pants rules and that we didn't do sports. It was really so stupid.

94 days ago



**1CRAZYDOG**

Oh such memories. I went to an all-girls college in 1972 and they'd JUST changed the rules that if you went into town you had to wear white gloves. Guess it was in fashion at one time, but totally impractical in 1972. Glad I didn't have to done the white gloves to go to town.

Same w/pants. We were to wear a dress or skirt, had to be AT LEAST to the knee. BUT being as it got to -20F or more in MN where I went to school, we were allowed to wear pants and it was eventually allowed full time.

HUGS

94 days ago

**MJZHERE**

Looking back...Kent State was 30 minute drive from my family home. So many of us had decided to "drop out" but never thought beyond that. I rejected cultural norms - and was rejected in turn. Lots of confusion at such a young age. Eventually I made my way back to school, starting with community college, moving on to university, and ending up with a career in teaching. Teachers who cared about me had suggested teaching as a career since I was little - I had vehemently rejected that course only to later learn I loved it!

94 days ago

**WANT2BTRIM**

Time flies

95 days ago

**CHERYLHURT**

We were not allowed pants in high school in 1971! In college in Los Angeles, we could wear them.

95 days ago

**MANGO1960**

Great memory! Thanks for sharing!

95 days ago

**THINCPL2004**

Thanks for the trip!

95 days ago

**GRALAN**

Thanks for the trip, and I enjoyed your narrative. Our State Governor just continued bonehead decisions releasing folks from public wearing of masks. No one needs those petty boneheads.

We still need folks with courage to stand up, and it is the journey and not the destination that inspires others. So keep on truckin.

95 days ago

**2DAWN4**

I loved your blast from the past blog!

95 days ago

**SUSANNAH31**

This is a fun blog, bringing back lots of memories. Thanks for that.

I also attended a city college which was a commuter school: Baruch School at 23rd and Lexington Ave in Manhattan.

We did wear pants and jeans and skirts and tops a lot like the photos you show.

My big breakthrough with wearing pants at work came when a bunch of us women were working overtime at a NY bank during the winter months of 1970. Our boss, a young man, went to the higher ups at the bank to get permission for us all to wear pants during those days.

It was only a temporary permission, of course.

95 days ago

**NANCYPAULINE**

I happen to love dresses and skirts, but agree that the code was antiquated. There are still many houses of worship in the U.S where women in pants are not allowed to enter. In the 2010's, my principal in Utah forbade teachers to wear sleeveless shirts or dresses no matter how dressy, even though we taught on a year round schedule in July and August, but she encouraged us to wear "School Spirit" t-shirts that looked only fit for painting the garage. Go figure.

95 days ago

**HARRIETT14**

By 1964 I was pretty being a mother of 6 wearing jeans ever day. It was easier to hide the sticky hand prints. I'm sorry to say that I never thought of what other women were going through at the time. My girls went to school in dresses, came home and put pants on to play in.

I give you and all the women who went through all that you did to give us the freedom to dress as we wish without banning us.  
95 days ago



**THOMS1**

Back in the day going to high school we had to wear dresses or skirts and the skirts and dresses had to touch the floor when you kneeled on the floor so they could measure the length.. It was very cold walking to the bus or to school. I for one am glad things changed and we girls could



wear pants.  
95 days ago



**RACHNACH**



95 days ago



**SCDALYNCH**

Thank yu for sharing the memories. I remember those years too. It brings back many good times and some that were a bit hard to deal wiht.

Enjoy the good march weather.  
95 days ago



**DONNALEE-53**

We had to wear pants under our dresses and skirts when we were in grade school. We had to war dresses and skirts until the 70s.



95 days ago



**KITTYHAWK1949**

Thanks for the memories. I remember the first pants allowed were the awful pant suits but thought they were great at the time.



95 days ago



**PATRICIAAK**

The sex discrimination act passed in July, 1967. I was one of the first female mail carriers in the country. The first in the nation was in California in March, 1967. I started in June. The local post office wouldn't hire me due to my being female despite having 100% on the test! I took a Greyhound to Rocky River, transferred to the local bus which took me to the Rapid Transit which I took to Cleveland then transferred to the Puritas bus which took me to the post office branch! I did refuse to work on days that I wasn't given at least 4 hours.

95 days ago



**NANCY-**

Thank you for standing up. Yes it was just a skirt issue, but it was part of a foundation.

95 days ago



**FRITZYS\_MAMA**

I was a huge rebel in college and caused a lot of rows. For me it was crinoline mini skirts and fishnet stockings and "drive-thru" pants which were pleather pants that had a zipper all around the crotch. I made plenty of waves. I think it's typical of freethinking women to make a splash wherever they go.

95 days ago



**SILVERNANCY**

This dug up a memory...All Female Catholic College students being bussed to a mixer (dance) at USMA at West Point on a frigid winter night in 1970. Several of us were in the pant suits. We were 35 miles away from our campus with nowhere to go and denied admittance because we were wearing pants. I suggested aloud that we all remove the pants, as our tunics were longer than some of the skirts and dresses being worn by others. That did the trick. We were allowed to enter. The rest of the night was unremarkable, but I never attended another dance at West Point.

95 days ago



**DRUMMERCHK**

I remember schools in Chicago with the same dress code. We would wait for the bus with freezing legs - knee socks sometimes helped. In my last year of high school we moved to NC and lo and behold - my new school actually allowed wearing pants - nirvana! I'm afraid our big rebellion in Chicago was a sit-in we held to be allowed to have a smoking patio. I didn't really smoke, but found the sit-in eye-opening. I felt like if we were in a big enough group, we were invincible and actually had some power. No one got expelled and no smoking patio resulted either - ah well, win/win.

95 days ago

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95 days ago

**JUNETTA2002**

I remember those times well. Having to wear pants under my skirt just to stay warm.

95 days ago

**UPTOIT59**

Wow- haven't thought of QC in some years- you've come a long way baby!



95 days ago

**DEE797**

I remember some of those things. Grew up on Long Island. Couldn't wear pants til I was in junior high. Wore pants to grade school under dresses or skirts in winter but had to remove them once got to school. Memories.....

95 days ago

**BECAUSEHELIVS**

Interesting.

95 days ago

**DESIREE672**

I went to college in 1969 and I remember wearing a skirt which only just covered my behind. My friend wore hot pants under a long coat. Most of the time I wore trousers but not jeans. Then I went on teaching practice in smart trousers and was quickly told to mend my ways. To me that was formal wear. The husband of a friend of my mother's let me know he didn't approve of my trousers. His wife never wore them in her life, as far as I know.

95 days ago

**AZMOMXTWO**

this is interesting that females were required to wear a dress or skirt and the males were not distracted by that but they are these days go figure

great blog

96 days ago

**RHOOK20047**

A walk down memory lane! I remember the school uniforms and how the girls would try and raise the hemlines and the nuns would address the situation in class. I went to a Catholic school and the nuns pretty much addressed these issues. I was glad I was a boy!

96 days ago

**PLCHAPPELL**

No jeans and Saturday classes at U of R, va

96 days ago

**LIS193**

I remember the itchy knitted tights and skirts.. not fun biking to school.



96 days ago

**ETHELMERZ**

I also remember the 1960's, had to wear skirts, nylons in the winter, when it was cold, and stupid Dean of Women, made you kneel on the floor to see how short your skirt was! So dumb. Made me sew crepe paper onto my skirt! So I showed my mother, I removed the strip of crepe paper, but never lengthened that skirt! Whenever I encountered that Dean of Women in school, wearing the same skirt, still the same length, she never said a word about it. Her job was something new at the high school, and she was fired the next year. Didn't need such a person at all. And we gals could wear pants. Yes, white male rules though!

96 days ago

**MARYJEANSL**

That's quite a story. I remember back in elementary school having to wear dresses every day. Up through seventh grade I had to wear a dress every day. I never minded. I always enjoyed going



school shopping with my mom in August, so I had pretty new dresses to wear in September. That was in Virginia. Then we moved to PA for my eighth grade year, and I found out that pants were allowed in the schools in my new town. I adapted very quickly - to that point that, by my junior year of high school, I don't think I ever wore anything but pants.

96 days ago



**GREYDOLPHIN**

I remember wearing only skirts in college and remember curfews--on female students only. Sometimes it just doesn't change. I was one of the first women in the St Louis area to enter a man's world--selling office equipment (copiers, computers, etc) to various government agencies. In my company I was the only woman. One time my boss asked me why I wasn't wearing "pretty dresses." I told him that I had lymphodema, which caused some swelling in my legs, so slacks were much more flattering. But I gave him a withering look and he never again bothered me.

96 days ago



**NANANANA**

You were quite the rebel. I went to a 'liberal' school. Jeans were permitted. My brothers girl friend helped me buy some skirts more suitable for college than what I wore in high school. Over 4 years, I got more comfortable wearing casual clothes.

My senior year I was a TA and on those days I wore a dress, nylons and pumps.

96 days ago



**SPEDED2**

I was in high school. If administration thought your skirt was too short, we had to get on our knees and the hem had to touch the floor. Wearing slacks under our skirts solved that problem. Winters in Illinois were snowy and cold. The high school was cold. As I recall, there wasn't much stink about trying to stay warm. Two years later, when my younger brother started high school, everyone wore jeans. Big changes in a short amount of time. Thanks for the trip down memory lane.

96 days ago



**DOVESEYES**

In the 70's in New Zealand we had winter skirts and summer dresses and little ties. I just wore mine :)

Loved your blog.

96 days ago



**WOOFERCOALBOY**

I am 2 years younger than you & remember the restrictions - my school allowed trousers only when the local public schools were closed by snow. When I started working post-college, trousers were not allowed for women for at least another 30 years

96 days ago



**MEADS BAY**

Omg!

Thank you girls for blazing the trail for us following shortly behind you.

I was in the HS class of 1970 and we were thrilled to reap the benefit of your rebellion.

No jeans but pants allowed.

Mostly I remember wearing Pendleton wool Bermuda shorts, with matching sweater, knee Sox and blouse with pixie collar.



96 days ago



**DARLENEK04**

You Rebel You.....laughing here.

Whoever made some of those rules had to be a male, because they sure would not want to be walking around in skirts in snow and ice.....

Glad you stood up for what you felt was right.

96 days ago



**RAZZOOZLE**

You are right every little step makes a difference. It is mind boggling how much the world has changed since the 60's.

96 days ago



**52BINCE**

Well written where girls were subdued into conforming to standards That were highly unreasonable! Good job in standing up to them!

96 days ago

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