

Women in Radio Science



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This time I present Patricia Doherty, Director at the Institute for Scientific Research at Boston College, Massachusetts. Pat is the only female Commission Chair of the ten Commissions of URSI. Pat's Commission G comprises Ionospheric Radio and Propagation, in line with her interests in space weather and global navigation satellite systems with applications.

Pat's story is similar to those of several other female scientists of her generation. Due to talent in mathematics and technology, she chose at that time what was still an unusual career way for a woman. She did not continue directly in scientific research, and stayed a few years at home with kids. This prepared her well to go over to space research and make a wonderful career there. Here comes her story

Oh the Places You Will Go...

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When asked to write this article, I thought whatever will I write? As a child, I did not have long-term goals of being a scientist. My goals were more immediate: get good grades, finish homework early to be able to go out to play, and generally have fun. My family was close – perhaps a little too close, as I grew up in a three-family home, with my grandparents on the first floor; my aunt, uncle, and cousins on the third floor; and my family sandwiched in the middle, on the second floor. My immediate family included my parents and my two brothers. Together with my brothers and cousins, we walked to the neighborhood Polish Catholic School; we worshipped at the neighborhood Polish church; and we played within a four-block radius of our home, in an ethnic part of Boston. Although Boston was a big city, we lived in a very small part of it: a very nice small part, by my recollection, but quite limited in its view of the world.

Ours was largely a blue-collar family, and it was my generation that was deemed to be the first college graduates in the family. At the time, it seemed to be a heavy expectation, starting with *whatever will I be?* The common goals among girls I knew at that time included becoming teachers, nurses, and secretaries. All noble careers, for sure, but nothing that interested me. It wasn't until I was at the University of Massachusetts that I appreciated a strong aptitude for mathematics and statistics, and an interest in physical science. Here is where I started my career: not as a scientist, but as a statistician for the insurance industry, and later for the US Internal Revenue Service. This path seemed like a good idea at the time, and it broadened my view of the world just a little bit more – but still generally limited to New England.

Just a few years into my professional career, I married a wonderful man (also from Boston). We soon had a daughter, and then a son. With this young family, I felt that I was needed more at home, and decided to take eight years out of the workforce. Those were memorable years, and I enjoyed them immensely. It did put a gap in my career, but it also gave me more time to think about the future, as I was sure that I wanted to professionally follow a different path.

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