

The Chautauquan Daily

Chautauqua conversations: For Goldman, a life of politics, service and Chautauqua summers

John Fordon August 21, 2013

There would be no relaxed porch conversation this time. A meatloaf was needed for a Chautauqua neighborhood potluck that night, so multi-tasking was necessary. In her cozy kitchen on the grounds, longtime women's rights activist Pat Goldman reflected on a distinguished public career which has been punctuated and complemented by her long association with Chautauqua. Goldman was brought to Chautauqua Institution by her first husband, Charles Goodell. After his death, she introduced Chautauqua to her present husband, Steve Kurzman. Among her many links to the Institution are terms served on the Chautauqua Foundation Board of Directors and the Institution's board of trustees. When they're not in Chautauqua, she and her husband live in Washington, D.C.

I'm a typical Washingtonian. I went there in 1964 — for one year. I guess you could say I caught Potomac fever. I had had an internship during my senior year at Goucher College with the Joint Economic Committee in Congress, and a Goucher graduate was there. She went off for a year to graduate school and said, "Why don't you take my job for a year?" So I did. The ranking Senate minority leader was Jacob Javits of New York, and the majority leader was Paul Douglas of Illinois. Those were giants. An opportunity opened on the House committee spearheading the war on poverty. So I went there for a couple of years. I became kind of an expert on poverty programs. Then I was off to the [U.S.] Chamber of Commerce for several years, working on chamber social programs which were concerned with cities. This was partly in response to the social unrest and riots in the cities in the late 1960s. So I was following a typical Washington pattern of working in government for a while, then out of government for a while. Then I wrote for the *National Journal* for a bit, then back to Capitol Hill to head something called the House Wednesday Group ... with the likes of John Lindsay and Bradford Morse and Peter Frelinghuysen, mostly forgotten now, but very influential at the time. Then I went to the [National Transportation] Safety Board, and I was there for nine years.

I had through these years become very involved in the feminist movement and the Equal Rights Amendment. In those days, Republicans and Democrats did talk to each other, and I had a lot of friends across the aisle, particularly in the women's movement. And when [Jimmy] Carter was elected president, one of the women in the [White House] personnel office would call me when they had a vacancy. Many of the commissions and boards in Washington require that no more than a simple majority of the members be from one party so there is a balance. Because I had headed a Republican group in the party caucus, they would call and ask if I knew, say, a woman from a Western state who knew about agriculture. And I did, because of my connections. At one point, an opening came up on the NTSB, so they called me for a referral to replace Kay Bailey, who was going back home to Texas to get married and later became Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison. The discussion went on, and then they asked, "What about you?" I said I didn't know that much about transportation issues, and they said you don't have to know about transportation in detail; you have to know about public policy. The NTSB had about 350 "tin kickers," as we called them — people in the field who knew the technical side of things. They would bring back their findings, and the responsible NTSB board member needed to oversee the investigation from a management standpoint and decide what might be the appropriate public policy and remedy. The NTSB members needed connections on both sides of the political aisle. I had worked with the likes of [Sen.] Barbara Mikulski and [Sen.] Nancy Kassebaum, and so I could deliver on that.

It was a fascinating period in my life. You know, it is fashionable to bash Washington and the bureaucrats, but people don't understand how many people work really hard trying to do the right and appropriate things. There is no Democratic or Republican reason for a plane crash or when a train carrying dangerous materials derails. With automobiles, you look for trends — not specific incidents — to investigate. I spent a lot of time working on child safety seats. We held hearings around the country and heard testimony from parents about tragedies from holding kids in their arms during a crash, and the kids were thrown through the windshield. We could create the conditions for change as we made the public aware of the inadequacy of existing regulations. In Washington, serving on the NTSB was a "white hat" job; you were doing good things. You could see the results of what you were doing. That was interesting and gratifying.

In my nine years at NTSB I never investigated an air crash. But after the NTSB, I moved on to US Airways as a vice president. And then not so long after that, I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. I knew little about it, knew [actress] Gilda Radner died from it. Anyway, a friend from the women's movement also was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, and while breast cancer awareness was well underway at that time, there was nothing on ovarian cancer, so my friend and I started a little organization in

1997. ... It's called the Ovarian Cancer National Alliance. I know just enough now about cancer to become really dangerous. And I hit the 20-year mark cancer-free last month, but who's counting?

The first time I came up here to Chautauqua County was in the late 1970s to attend a high school reunion of [Charles, her first husband]. It was Jamestown High School, so I guess it was more an introduction to Jamestown [N.Y.] than to the Institution. Charlie came up to Chautauqua all the time, but he was really from Jamestown; his family was there. His father was a doctor in Jamestown. There is lots of the extended family still here ... I guess to the extent that there was a family house; it was down by the park, up from University Beach. Charlie and his first wife had it, and when she died, he and the boys stayed there. Then he and I were there, and when he died in January 1987, I spent part of a summer there. As time passed, Charlie's kids have grown and made their money and own their own houses, and I bought my current house in "midtown," as we like to say.

People come here to Chautauqua primarily for religion, or for cultural or educational pursuits; for recreation, too, or what have you. When I first was coming here, Charlie and I were both working and we'd come for a couple of weeks in the summer, but that would be it. When I was here then, my time was totally absorbed with family. I'd get to a few lectures as I could find the time to do so. When I bought my current house, I guess about 26 years ago, I found this was a very tight neighborhood. I met whole bunches of people I hadn't known before with different interests, and then I went on the board of the [Chautauqua] Foundation ... and that was a whole other group and another aspect. And then eventually I was on the board of trustees. I married Steve in 1990 and brought him up here. He had not been here before, but he is a tennis player and a sailor. And that opened up other new communities.

Meantime, I'm still out there. Remember when Toyota had the problem several years ago with unintended acceleration on some of their vehicles? A panel was appointed ... to investigate and report. I was named to that panel. So there are still things to do. As you get older, maybe you're not out there as much, but it's like they say here: It's lifelong learning.