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NAVIGATING A MAN'S WORLD

The male-dominated professional world I inhabited for years had a powerful impact on my career, my performance and my sense of self at different times and in different ways.

Perhaps the stage was set in college **at a debate between Barnard and Harvard in 1958.**
I was a sophomore and new on the debating team, but was being pressed by the coach to go to the Harvard tournament. "We need your help, Roberta. Our star player had a family emergency and others with experience are unavailable."

"But I've never been to a tournament before, coach, and I'm certainly not up to the Harvard one." At Harvard, you had to argue both sides of the issue, switching back and forth in each debate. The topic was labor unions: should union membership be compulsory or were open shops preferable? My partner and I would have to support union membership in the first debate, oppose it in the second and then go back to arguing for it in the third debate and opposing it in the fourth. "You'll see," said the coach. "It's going to be a great learning experience for you."

So there I was on the train to Boston, boning up on the arguments on both sides of the issue, with tips from the coach and from my thick eye-glassed partner on how to hold my own in a debate. But the real jolt came upon arrival. We learned that our first debate was going to be with the Harvard team itself. Even the coach seemed unnerved. He had told me we would likely be paired off with less competitive schools for starters, which would give me my bearings.

On entering the empty classroom, our two Harvard opponents came forward. The senior one, paired off with my partner, looked like my vision of a Harvard debater – self-confident, well-mannered, and blue blazered. But the other, to face off with me, had a rakish grin and looked me up and down when we met as if women were meant to party, not debate with. I was wearing a dark green sweater with a string of pearls, a navy skirt and heels. When he went up to the lectern to present his case, he ogled me all the while addressing the judges at the back of the room.

Clearly, the debating skills taught me on the train by my coach and partner were not going to help me here. So I slipped instead into a playing field with which I was more familiar -- the streets of New York. Growing up in the city, I had to learn by age 15 how to deal with boys who whistled and men who made passes. And by age 18, I had developed a few tricks of my own. So I flashed a coy smile at my opponent as he continued to stare at my legs from the lectern. And then, slowly, very slowly I began to hike up my skirt one half inch at a time (in NY it's called showing a little leg). He got so flustered, he contradicted his own argument, and when it was my turn at the lectern, I was able to trounce him, and Barnard won the debate.

"First time out, and you beat Harvard," said the coach as he ran up to the front of the room. "It was nothing," I replied, with a slight smile, knowing full well that he would never know why

Barnard won that debate; nor would my partner, who though sitting next to me, could hardly have noticed the slight movement of my skirt.

But then I felt a twinge of regret. When we said our goodbyes, my Harvard opponent turned away from me, which brought back what my mother used to say: “A man needs to feel important” and “a woman has to make him feel that way.” Well, the Harvard debate made me realize that I wasn’t going to diminish myself so easily. But I needed to feel more comfortable with the price I was going to pay to be my own woman. I would require more experience in how to assert myself with the opposite sex without the relationship having to end.

The United Nations press section in 1962

Having earned a Master’s degree in international affairs from Johns Hopkins SAIS, and spent one grad school year in Italy, it was time to get a research/writing job on world affairs. But they were not so easy to find because women were regularly sidelined in those days and assigned to secretarial work. One prospective employer even offered to pay for my enrollment at Kathryn Gibbs secretarial school, after which I could be given “an appropriate” place at the company.

But I turned instead to the New York phone book, known as The Book, scrolled down to “International,” and called every single listing. There were so many that I began to believe there had to be a company, magazine or institution right for me if only I could find it. It took me two days to get to IR -- the International Review Service (IRS), an independent publication located in the United Nations press section. They were actually looking for someone to do research and writing on world affairs. I sent in my resume, was interviewed by the Editor, and landed the job.

It was the fall of 1962 and I had a front row seat at the Cuban missile crisis. My assignment was to write a Chronology of US-Cuban Relations but not just list events. Instead, identify the features of the US-Cuban relationship, the role the Soviet Union played, and how US missiles in Turkey could affect the outcome. I was ecstatic.

With a press pass, I had access to UN documents, UN meetings and foreign correspondents. I even managed to exchange words with key players, like Adlai Stevenson, the US Ambassador to the UN. On turning around at a reception at which I must have been gaping at him, he smiled and said, “Yes I am.” He then agreed to talk to me about my Chronology and introduced me to the Soviet Ambassador, Nikolai Fedorenko. “Do you know any Russian?” Federenko asked. “Well, I studied the language for a year, and can say, Ya rabotahu kak machina v kolkhoze,” which in English means “I work like a machine on a collective farm.” Both of them laughed, realizing that the Cold War had embedded itself even in Russian language training.

But there were some downsides to this job. I also had to take dictation from the Editor, type up his letters and go to speedwriting school at night, which extended into my evenings and weekends. And each morning before his arrival, I was expected to empty the dirty water from a vase on his desk containing red rosebuds and replace it with fresh water. Furthermore, I had no lunch hour. None of the staff did. We could buy or bring a sandwich to our desks but had to keep working.

The most disturbing feature was yet to come. Some nine or ten months into the job, after I managed to get two chronologies published, one on Cuba and the other on the Congo and the UN, the Editor said to me: "Let's get out of the building tonight." It was near publication time and we usually had a working dinner in the UN cafeteria before going to press. This time he led me to the UN garage from which we drove uptown to a Hungarian restaurant on the upper east side. There were flowers on the tables, starched white table cloths and violinists strolling by. While ordering some wine he pointed to chicken paprikash and goulash on the menu, and toasted me, telling me how pleased he was with my work.

"In fact," he said, "I would like to help you advance your career. You are talented, you just need more entrée." He then told me he had earlier taken under his wing another woman who had previously worked in the office, and who now, as a result, was going up the rungs in the publishing world. In my case, he said, "I would introduce you to the UN Secretary-General, U Thant, in a one-on-one meeting, bring you together with other top UN officials and also with diplomats from government missions at the UN. And you would accompany me of course to high scale receptions and dinners."

And then he added with a twinkle in his eye, "You and I would have a special relationship." If I wondered what that meant, he spelled it out: "You would become my mistress."

The Editor had a black curled moustache, a bald head, a protruding stomach, a wife, and was in his 60s. I was 23. Nevertheless, I responded, "I'll have to think about it," because it hit me like a bolt that my job was on the line and for all its downsides, it was a job I couldn't afford to lose. Not only did it pay for my Manhattan apartment but I was gaining so much knowledge of the workings of the UN. I was monitoring international crises, developing sources of information both within the building and outside at UN missions, and was being given a chance to write.

My hope was that the Editor was under the influence and in 24 hours would forget what he said. He did not. About a month later, in the UN Delegate's Lounge, he asked if I'd given some thought to his "proposal," and when I told him "this arrangement was not one I could be part of," he responded angrily: "I should have known you were a bourgeois!" That was about the worst thing he could have said to me, and he knew it, because I was trying so hard to outgrow the Bronx and be worldly.

When I made known in a few weeks my decision to leave, the Editor quickly put forward a counter-proposal. He would promote me to the most senior position in the office, which was coming vacant where I would be responsible not only for chronologies but for analytic reports, and would no longer have to take dictation from him. And he assured me, "you'll be left alone." But then, with a lewd twinkle in his eye, he added, "Of course when you move up, you'll have to hire a replacement for yourself, and when you do, I'll expect you to choose someone *attractive* to me."

Since there were no laws or policies to protect women in 1963 or at least that I was aware of, I contacted a news reference service that had earlier offered me a job and accepted, although it held little appeal. I felt profound regret when I departed the green glass building on 42nd Street and First Avenue, which had become the center of my world and of the entire world for thirteen days.

It was ironic that the publication I resigned from was not one that turned women away or failed to promote them. The Editor intentionally hired educated women with professional ambitions and went out of his way to give them a chance to blossom professionally. It was the sexual price he slapped on the deal, from which I recoiled, yet I did consider this price to be his prerogative. Some women in the media paid up and moved forward in their careers, although some felt ashamed and wouldn't admit it for decades. My refusal delayed my professional movement for at least three to four years.

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My last encounter with the Editor came two years after my departure. The US Labor Department got wind of his 'no lunch' policy, conducted an investigation and calculated the amount he owed each staff member. Each of us had to come to the office separately and at night to meet with him and his lawyer. When I arrived, his face flushed red and he said to his attorney, "Meet Judas!" Although it was the father of one of his female employees who made the complaint, he blamed me, which probably had to do with my rejection of him. But once again I suppressed my feelings, this time wanting to collect without difficulty the hundreds of dollars of unpaid lunch hours due me. I did find satisfaction in seeing that times were changing for unpaid labor. As for the harassment of women in the workplace, that would take much longer. More than a half a century would pass before the Me Too movement.

Turning a vote at the UN, 1969

After two years of 9 to 5 boredom at the news reference service, I returned to the UN in the mid/late-1960s, this time to represent two international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) accredited to the UN in the human rights field. Relying again on the New York phone book, I called just about every listing under the heading, World, and was hired by the World Jewish Congress to report on and analyze debates taking place at the UN on international human rights standards.

I was also asked by the Paris-based Federation Internationale des Droits de l'Homme to represent them at an upcoming hearing at the UN on the activities of NGOs accredited to the world organization. The Soviet Union had issued a warning to the Federation and other NGOs that they could be expelled from their "consultative status" at the UN if found to be engaged in "unsubstantiated and politically motivated attacks" against member states.

Called before the UN Committee on NGOs, a body of 12 states, I was grilled for two hours about the Federation, most notably by the Soviet delegate who sat catty cornered from me. He banged his fist on the table when he accused the Federation of "slandering" his government.

And he asked me to read out the Federation's statement on Soviet intellectuals. I was glad to because it gave me the chance to publicize to all governments on the Committee and to others listening how the Soviet Union was violating freedom of expression. I also took the opportunity to explain that promoting implementation of UN standards was not, as the USSR insisted, interference in a state's internal affairs but rather a dedicated effort to carry out the UN's human rights objectives set forth in the Charter. Rene Cassin, I pointed out, the 'father' of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was one of the Federation's founders.

The Soviet Union did not in the end propose the expulsion of the Federation from the UN, which it did in the case of other NGOs. But it did propose the lowering of its status, which would reduce its access to UN meetings and its issuance of oral and written statements.

Supporting its proposal was the government of Libya which objected to what it called the Federation's failure to criticize Israel's occupation of Arab lands. When the vote was called, the majority of the Committee, however, voted to maintain the Federation in its current status: 7 in favor (France, US, UK, Turkey, Uruguay, Sierra Leone, Tanzania); 3 opposed (Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Libya); and 2 abstentions (India and Indonesia).

But the job was only half done. The Federation now had to gain a majority of the 27 members of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Committee's parent body. I would have to win over Asian states (two of which abstained in the Committee) and if possible, persuade Libya to change its vote to an abstention, which might also affect the position of the other Arab states.

At the suggestion of France, I put together for Libya detailed information on the Federation's call for Israeli-Palestinian peace talks and its support of Algerian independence and decolonization.

After receiving the material, Libya's delegate called me – not at my office, but rather at my home in the evening at around 8 PM. "I would like to get to know you better," he said, and told me he enjoyed meeting me at the Committee. Although he had voted against the Federation, he was reading through the material. He then said "I would like to invite you to dinner any evening of your choice" and added, "I like how you look."

Hanging up would certainly have guaranteed his no vote, so I tried to deflect his unwanted proposition without making him feel personally rejected. Maybe I was beginning to learn how to navigate a man's world.

I thanked him for his invitation, but suggested that "a dinner might not be wise. I'm Jewish, you know, and I also work for a Jewish organization. I'm not one of its principal representatives but I'm on the staff."

"Oh, I know that," he said, and pointed out that even though his government had to express "official positions" against Israel and its occupation, "I have nothing personal against Jews or

Jewish people." When I suggested a possible lunch instead, he made clear the invitation was for dinner only.

I then raised the "complication" of being a single woman while he was married. "I noticed a ring on your finger," and assumed that a Muslim would understand my concern. "Will your wife be joining us for dinner?" At this, he laughed out loud and said, "We're separated."

"You mean she's in Tripoli and you're here for the meeting?" I even suggested that in Arabic, the word, separated, might have a different connotation than in English. We both laughed.

"Oh, won't you have dinner with me?" he repeated.

I did want a shot at changing his vote to an abstention, but told him the circumstances are "far too abnormal" to spend an evening together. "But even without dinner," I added, "I hope you will *not* vote against the Federation. You will see the organization's positions are reasonably good from the perspective of Arab countries." "I'll think about it," he said.

A week or two later, just moments before the vote, the Libyan delegate got up from his seat, walked out of the room and headed for the men's room. Instead of casting a no vote, he offered a non-vote. The tally for the Federation turned out to be high: 20 to 5 with 1 abstention (and 1 absent). The no votes came from Arab League countries and the Soviet bloc. Had I accepted the Libyan's dinner invitation, I wondered if I would have been able to persuade him to ask his government to abstain and encourage other Arab states to do likewise. I'll never know, but his stepping out before the vote so as to avoid rejecting the Federation helped our vote and our cause.

Not long after the hearing, I was offered the position of executive director of the International League for Human Rights, a US-based human rights group which the Soviet Union also had challenged. A letter of recommendation from France to the chair of the International League observed:

> …She knew how to answer with so much sang-froid and skill the attacks which had been launched against her organization by the delegations of the USSR and of Libya, and she always kept excellent contact with all delegations, even the most opposed like that of Libya…I can tell you that in the course of this difficult and memorable session, Mlle Cohen has been judged by the members of the Committee as one of the best representatives of non-governmental organizations.

While the note warmed me, I was keenly aware that no male NGO representative at the hearing had to deal with, or learn how to deal with, the liberties male government delegates felt they could take with NGO representatives who were female.

<u>Standing up for equal pay at the State Department in 1980</u>

It was not until 1980 at the State Department that the slogan, “Equal pay for equal work,” awakened me as if from a lengthy slumber. A decade earlier, I had accepted without question the payment of a higher salary to a male employee who did work similar to mine. “He has a wife to support,” my boss at the time explained. “Of course,” I responded, and didn’t think twice about it.

Nor did I strongly object when the State Department offered me a low salary when inviting me to join its first human rights bureau in 1977. The amount was based on what I was paid in the nonprofit world where human rights work was often seen as a charitable undertaking rather than involving professional skills. That I had 25 pro bono attorneys engaged in human rights cases, sent investigatory missions abroad, released well-researched reports, engaged a Board of Directors of prominent lawyers, book publishers, writers and scholars not to mention worldwide affiliates, and managed endless volunteers and interns --- counted for nothing much in the Department’s definition of managerial experience. Although my photograph appeared on page 2 of the *New York Times* and I was the Quotation of the Day, it also cut no ice with the State Department’s human resource management team.

It was only when I was promoted to deputy assistant secretary and told that my salary would not increase much that I decided to step into the ring. The male lawyer I was succeeding earned a good deal more than what was being offered to me. The management personnel with whom I had to deal were all men which led me to canvass the few women in the building who were deputy assistant secretaries, and found that their salaries too were lower than their male counterparts. When I asked about that, one of the women told me she was “part of a lawsuit against the Department” and asked if I wanted to join. Another did not want “to make any waves,” fearing that even talking about the subject could hurt her career. A third coldly said, “get used to it; that’s the way things are.”

The only recourse I saw was bringing my case to the Deputy Secretary of State, a consummate lawyer known for his ability to listen to and make fair judgements on complex human rights and political issues. When I informed senior management of my plan, the officer I dealt with, a former ambassador, got hot under the collar: “We will kick your ass out of this building if you try to see Warren Christopher,” he warned. And then sarcastically added, “And in case you don’t know it, the Deputy Secretary doesn’t deal with personnel cases.” He then yelled after me down the hall, “Ever hear of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan?”

After agonizing some 48 hours, I decided to risk it and wrote a note to the Deputy Secretary. Despite his workload, he agreed to see me.

When I arrived at his office, he had the Under Secretary of State for Management, one of the most powerful figures in the building, sit on one side of the table, and me on the other. Like in a debate, management presented its facts and figures on why the salary decided for me was appropriate. And I explained why it was discriminatory. And management rebutted my views and I rebutted theirs and finally Christopher, looking rather weary, said to the head of management, “I want Roberta paid the same salary as the majority of the other DAS’ in this

building and immediately." I'll never forget those words, because when justice is done, it's glorious.

Senior management, however, stalled. It said it first had to request an opinion from the Office of Personnel and Management (OPM), a government oversight agency. But after mulling over the case, OPM ruled that its opinion was not necessary. Yet, management still failed to move, so I went back to Christopher's office, which had no idea his earlier decision had not been carried out. This time, the Deputy Secretary laid down the law, and I formally became DAS with an acceptable salary – although not as high as the male who proceeded me.

Thirteen years later, the issue came flooding back to me while in Mexico. Asked by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to evaluate how its policies were being applied to refugee women, I went to Chiapas on one of my visits to interview Guatemalan refugee women. Taken to a classroom where the women were being instructed in human rights, I randomly asked a colorfully dressed indigenous woman during the break, "How do you think human rights standards will assist you?" Much to my surprise, she answered, "When I lived in Guatemala, I worked on a *finca* and was paid less money than the men doing the same job. I've now learned I have human rights. When I go back to my country, I will ask for the same pay." When a UN staffer close by whispered in my ear, "these women don't know these basic things," I responded, "Neither did I," and to the Guatemalan woman I said, "You know I had the same problem in the United States." At which point, her eyes lit up: "What happened?" "Nothing at first," I replied, "because I didn't know anything was wrong. But when I finally did, I fought it out and won the case." She grabbed my hand, and I took hers in mine and we stood smiling at one another. I think the earth moved.

<u>At a State Department interagency meeting in 1980</u>

Humor, I discovered, can at times help increase male awareness. Scheduled to speak to an inter-agency gathering at the State Department on US exchange programs with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, I arrived early, some 25 minutes before my segment began. When I found that all the seats were taken around the table and the side of the room, I headed for the only unoccupied place near the Chair, who was a senior official from the European bureau. As soon as I sat down, he whispered, "Could you get me a few pencils?" When I looked surprised, he pointed to an anteroom nearby, and I thought to myself this is going to be interesting. So I went into the side alcove, and brought him back some pencils. Not much later he asked for more paper, so I got up and brought him a pad. At which point he looked at the agenda and announced, "Now we're going to hear from Roberta Cohen, Deputy Assistant Secretary from the Human Rights Bureau who is going to brief us on the human rights aspects of the exchanges. Is she here yet?" "Yes she is" I responded. "That's me," and when I smiled, his face turned redder than a beet. I'd like to think he learned something that day.

<u>A State Department dinner at the Cosmos Club</u>

When a delegation from Japan arrived in Washington DC in 1980, my boss, the assistant secretary of state for human rights, called me into her office. The Japanese were here to review, together with the State Department's Inter-American Affairs Bureau, policies toward

the Americas. She was invited to the opening dinner and working sessions, but she said: "I've decided *not* to go to the dinner tonight. I see its being held at the Cosmos Club which doesn't allow women to be members. But we do need to be represented, Roberta, so I'd like you to go. I'd also like you to give them a hard time."

On the way over to the club, I was trying to figure out how I could give them a hard time, but the taxi driver made it easy for me. As soon as I said 2121 Massachusetts Avenue, he said: "Oh, that's the Cosmos Club. You know I may not be able to drop you at the front door. Women have to go through a side entrance; we'll have to see if that's still the case." I felt myself beginning to stiffen, but on arrival, found that the club now allowed women to enter the front door. It was when I headed toward the stairway that I was stopped. It was a rather majestic stairway located in the lobby and a Cosmos staff member blocked my ascent: "Women are not allowed to use the staircase, Madam, you will have to take the elevator."

By the time I reached the private dining room, I was able to say without any hesitation to the Inter-American Assistant Secretary and his Japanese counterpart standing at the door:

> "The human rights assistant Secretary Patricia Derian regrets not being here. She would have liked very much to attend but chose *not* to because women are not allowed to be members of this club."

"Oh, I didn't know that," responded the Assistant Secretary. "Please tell Ms. Derian." He then looked around the room wistfully and added, "We could of course go somewhere else, if you prefer." Given that the room was all set up, and elegantly at that, I replied, "That won't be necessary," which this skilled diplomat of course anticipated. But the expression on my face said something different and prompted the Japanese to step in to save face and provide a solution. "At the dinner, you will sit with me," he said. I was probably going to be assigned a seat by the door or some other inconsequential place, but being placed next to the guest of honor would highlight not only women but the human rights issue. At this, I looked satisfied and the Assistant Secretary looked visibly relieved, even though the difficulty of rearranging the seating chart at the last minute could not have been easy.

My new seat enabled me to raise another matter with the Japanese guest of honor. "Allow me to mention that no one from the human rights office has been invited to speak at the conference tomorrow. Our bureau was hoping that the human rights issue would be given some priority." Without skipping a beat, he told me "I will change that." And he did; overnight the human rights bureau was added to the agenda. When I told my boss about the goings on the next morning, and added that the Inter-American Assistant Secretary drove me home, she grinned and said, "I knew we'd make waves."

<u>Private Clubs and Social Occasions</u>

Private clubs, I found, were a good measure of a woman's place in a man's world. While on a trip to London four years earlier (1976), I was invited to lunch at the East India Club, a historic and elegant townhouse on St. James's Square. Eagerly crossing the square, I noticed a man in

topcoat, tails and hat at the door, casting fiery, disapproving eyes at me. I wondered if my slip was showing, but continued in the direction of the small steps. As I climbed them, he bellowed:

> "Women's liberation has not yet come here, Madam."
>
> "Well, what's that have to do with me?" I asked.
>
> "YOU," he clearly enunciated, "may not go through the front door; you must go around the side to the back entrance. That is where the women enter."

As I headed down the stairs, hiding my humiliation in that place deep inside where we store miserable moments, he looked triumphant. He had single-handedly defended his revered institution against a clear and present danger -- a woman entering the front door.

Some thirty years later, I became a member of the Cosmos Club, and discovered that East India was one of its reciprocal clubs. Assuming this meant that women could now walk through the front door and also stay overnight, I signed up. But no sooner did I arrive in 2005, and go through the main door, I was given a printed list of rooms from which women were barred entry. Off limits were the business center, the gym and the smoking room. As for the dining room and bar, I could only frequent them at certain times.

Incredulous, I went to see the manager. "Could you please tell me what year this is?" I asked. He understood immediately and responded,

> "Madam, we have come a long way. There was a time when women couldn't come in the front door."
>
> "Yes, I know, I was one of those women. But it just so happens that I have medical reasons for using the gym, not feminist ones."

So he agreed to set me up for exercise across the square at the army/navy club, which he said, with a slight sneer, was "multi." He also added, "you will have to pay to use their facilities." As soon as I entered army/navy, I made a point of telling them that East India would be covering the costs, and being polite Englishmen, no one questioned that. As for the use of the East India business center, I decided to walk in and sit down at a computer reserved for men, inspired by the thought of black Americans sitting down at whites only lunch counters in the USA. But, unlike in America, no one stopped me.

On return to Washington, I reported the experience to the Cosmos committee member to whom the club referred me. And I made the proposal that an asterisk be placed next to the reciprocal clubs on the Cosmos list where women could not be members. In that way, Cosmos women would know where they might run into difficulties when overnighting. But following some consultation at Cosmos, the idea was rejected, its goal being "congeniality." Such action would arouse "controversy" and also target a "favorite" club.

That East India would be a favorite of women at Cosmos if they experienced what I did, I doubted. Yet, the male attitude exhibited didn't entirely surprise me. When being considered for membership at Cosmos in 2003, I was invited to a reception for prospective nominees. One admission committee member with a big button in his lapel bee-lined over to tell me: "I want you to know that I was one of the Cosmos members opposed to women joining this club, but you should know I changed my mind. You see, the food is so much better now." Another came around to say: "I understand you're in the human rights field; can you tell me whether it's a man's human right to take more than one wife?"

Whether misogyny cloaked in humor or simply sophomoric social skills, I did not know but it helped prepare me for how the 25th anniversary of women's membership in the club was dealt with. I am told a few women in 2013, including one of my sponsors, proposed a formal celebration but the word came down that this might arouse "controversy." So a crowd of interested women instead (including myself), plus supportive men, *informally* gathered in the bar and adjoining garden and saluted women's entry into the club.

Sometimes there have been tipping points for me, particularly at private dinner parties. One took place in Addis Ababa in 1985 where I had accompanied my husband then chief of mission at the US Embassy. Invited to a dinner at the Canadian Ambassador's residence, and coming from different places, David and I arrived at different times. When I reached the door, the Canadian envoy said to me: "I'm glad to see you; I wasn't sure your husband was bringing you tonight."

The idea of David's "bringing me" to this residence or anywhere else for that matter opened the floodgate. "I'm glad to be here," I told him, "and thank you for the invitation, but I must clarify that I'm not a laundry bag my husband brings along or doesn't. I come when I choose to."

The phrase then made its way into my graduation speech at the International Community School. In commenting on the roles to which women were often assigned, I told the audience about my experience without specifying the embassy. But no sooner did I say the words, "laundry bag," the women in the audience leapt from their seats. They came from different parts of the world, and they all began cheering, even shouting. Seems to me we broke a ceiling that day in Addis. (I'm told the all-male Rotary Club even began inviting women to their meetings.)

And then there was a dinner we hosted in London in 1986 where my husband, a visiting fellow at Chatham House (the Royal Institute of International Affairs), invited to our home a number of the Institute's senior officers and writers. Having myself become Honorary Secretary of the all-party Parliamentary Human Rights Group, I was looking forward to hearing their views on foreign policy issues. Yet, when the group assembled at South Eaton Place, they asked me "how I found grocery shopping in London" and my other supposed chores, turning me into the little lady of the house assisting her husband as cook and bottlewasher too. It was David who

reacted. He told them about my human rights background, and slipped in that I had been a deputy assistant secretary. This led one of the male guests to fixate his eyes on me and ask: "And how did YOU get that?" It felt so cutting, even demeaning, I replied,

"Easy, I slept with the assistant secretary," at which point the guests choked and then I added with a smile, "and you know she also was a woman." Not knowing what to say, all of them moved with lightning speed to another topic but not without first complimenting my tomato and thyme soup --- which actually was rather good.

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Many women bear scars, having had to withstand, as historian Barbara Tuchman put it, the "ridiculous bias against half the human race." Navigating a man's world has meant to remain alert and versatile in response. Just look at Cosmos, where by 2023 a big formal celebration was held to usher in the 35th anniversary of women's joining the club. And at East India, restrictions have been lifted on women even though gentlemen alone can become members. Sometimes one hears only a tinkle when glass is shattered but when there is an alignment of women with men who have vision, and the timing is right, the breakage can be heard around the world.