Donna Baxter by Dan Baxter

Donna and I have always wanted to support programs that would encourage girls and young women to study math and science. When Donna graduated from high school in 1966, the educational options for



bright young woman were very limited, especially since there were no financial resources available from her family. We hoped we could encourage young women like Donna to explore a career in math and science.

Donna grew up in a small town in southern Illinois, neither of her parents finished high school. Her mom finished 8^{th} grade and her dad was two months old when he arrived at Ellis Island from Italy. He was a factory worker and her mom stayed at home with Donna and her two brothers.

When Donna graduated from high school in 1966, the career paths available to young woman with few resources were very limited. Generally, nursing or teaching were the options. Donna chose nursing, I think, in part, because it was a practical decision. The tuition was only \$1,200 for the entire three years and that included room, board, uniforms, and books.

Donna received her diploma as a nurse in 1969 from Saint Luke's School of Nursing in Saint Louis and was soon licensed as a Registered Nurse. She did very well, receiving excellent reviews and eventually worked in the Surgical ICU unit at Denver General Hospital.



On her career path Donna decided to take a short break from nursing, and took a higher paying job as a city bus driver. I was also a bus driver for the city, and this is how we met. After a year of driving a bus, Donna was ready to return to nursing and decided to get a degree in it. Once she started her classes, though, she found she really liked the math aspect and told me she thought she might enjoy a career in accounting instead of continuing as a nurse.

This was a defining moment for Donna and her career. Once she discovered differential equations, calculus, and advanced physics, her future in accounting no longer had the same pull, and engineering became her focus. Indeed, she was ahead of her time and graduated from the University of Colorado in 1982 with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. In addition, Donna was a member of Tau Beta Pi, the engineering honor society.

Her training enabled her to use her nursing and engineering skills when she was offered a position at Cobe Labs, now Gambro, a medical device manufacturer. Eventually Donna received her certification as a Quality Engineer, a job she loved because it allowed her to use problem solving and analysis skills. It required her to use the all the math she loved. Her last position was Quality Manager for Maverick Enterprises in Ukiah, California.

Donna died suddenly in 2014 and I am excited to be able to honor her by funding participants in the Tech Trek program through the <u>Donna Baxter Memorial Fund for STEM Education</u>. The program aims to encourage young women to explore careers in math and science and this is exactly what Donna would have wanted.

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