



Carol Freihaut was a dedicated AOSA Executive Director for many years (Photo courtesy of AOSA).

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE AOSA IN 1985-86

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A TIME OF CHANGE - 1985

In 1985, the world was changing. The Food and Drug Administration had just approved the first blood test for AIDS, Microsoft released Windows 1.0 and the average price of a new home was \$89,000, but more importantly for students, the average rent was \$375 per month. And for sports fans, in 1985, Michael Jordan was named, "Rookie of the Year!"

The American Optometric Student Association (AOSA) was about to change too, and elect their first all-female Executive Board. By 1985, women made up a good percentage of the optometry classrooms and our numbers were growing, but few women held leadership positions in any profession. The American Medical

Association was seeing that same growth, with female admittance to medical school up over 500%. In 1997, the American Medical Association elected its first female president. The American Optometric Association (AOA) elected its first female president in 2011, Dori Carlson. Although things were changing in 1985, looking back now, the speed of change was slow.

In January 1985, the AOSA was about four thousand members strong and held its convention in St. Louis, Missouri. Ten inches of snow and bitter cold didn't stop the swell of enthusiasm. The AOSA had just elected an all-female executive team with Michelle Staarman from The Ohio State University (TOSU), Jari Frazier from Northeastern State University (NSU), Linda Ching from State University of New York (SUNY), and myself as president, from the Southern California College of Optometry (SCCO, now Marshall B. Ketchum University). It was a year of firsts for most of our schools and definitely for us as students.

We celebrated the victory and final night of the convention at the St. Louis Arch. The AOSA rented the lobby/museum area on the first floor for a reception and small groups of students took turns, riding the elevators to the spectacular view at the top. Although it was very cold, larger groups of students ventured outside from where we could hear school chants and laughter. As the evening came to an end, I rode with one of the last groups to the top of the Arch. I finally saw what the groups had been doing outside, as there in the snow, each school had stamped out their college and university letters, each trying to make theirs bigger than the first no matter how cold their feet got. Their school spirit, AOSA pride



Beth Kneib became the first female AOSA President in 1986 and at the same time she also had the first all-female Executive Council. They are from left to right Michelle Staarman (TOSU), Beth Kneib (SCCO), Linda Ching (SUNY), and Jari Frazier of NSU (Photo courtesy of AOSA).

and collegiate enthusiasm was clearly spelled out!

NOT QUITE SO FAST

At that time, the pace of change was not as fast as it is today. There were no cell phones, no email, no texting, and communication was by telephone or postal mail. I clearly remember several times a week, standing along a wall of pay phones, so the AOSA Executive Director, Carol Freihaut, and I could discuss AOSA business. I would balance my notes on the cubicle shelf outside of the SCCO Bookstore and both of us would routinely pause for the student traffic noise to subside. The AOSA landline calls between the two of us became our routine.

A TIME OF PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND RESPONSIBILITY

In 1985, optometrists were still fighting for better care and access for their patients. The first diagnostic pharmaceutical law was passed in 1971 by Rhode Island, and many states had followed. Therapeutic prescribing privileges, first passed in 1976 by West Virginia, were coming along as well, but it would not be until 1998 that all states would have some level of prescribing rights. The AOA Advocacy State and Federal Committees were assisting optometrists in their fight to change the legislated scope of practice one state at a time, and each was celebrated. Students were aware as each state passed laws, watchful to see if their state would have the prescribing privileges to practice the knowledge learned in school.

As progressive as things were, our new all-female executive team was a bit worried about how the AOA Board of Trustees and other doctors might recognize us, or more worrisome, not recognize us. Our fears were unfounded and quickly put to rest.

AOSA broke the glass ceiling and females had taken leadership roles. The AOA Board welcomed us as young colleagues, just as they had the AOSA Boards before us. The AOA President, Gerald Easton, was gracious, kind, and respectful to each of us. The AOA Board went out of their way to ask our opinions of the future directions of the profession and asked what we might do together to advance optometry. We were all one team, ready to roll up our sleeves to promote the best eye care possible for patients and wishful to advance the profession forward.

To solidify it all, in 1986 the Optometric Oath, written by Richard Hopping, President of SCCO, was adopted by the AOA and the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO), emphasizing that doctors of optometry will always do what is right for every patient. It is still the cornerstone of our optometric ethics today.

A TIME OF GRATITUDE

Our optometry school leaders supported the AOSA and each of us with the same enthusiasm as the AOA Board. Established doctors like Richard Hopping, Morris Berman, and Lorraine Voorhees, from SCCO, generously gave of their time to listen and coach us along the way. Edward Johnston and Norman Haffner, from SUNY, encouraged us to speak up and be heard. Frederick Hebbard, Dean at TOSU, and Chester Pheiffer from NSU, reminded us to keep looking forward to what we might offer our patients and future graduates as technology changed. They were there to mentor us, to encourage us, and they treated us with dignity and respect. The four women elected to AOSA leadership roles in 1985 will always be grateful.

Our strongest advocate, who befriended us all and worked diligently

on our behalf, was Carol Freihaut, AOSA Executive Director. She always treated us as equals, although we know we could not have survived without her guidance. When the AOSA challenged the National Board of Examiners in Optometry, or prepared for presentations to the AOA House of Delegates or ASCO, her guidance was ever present. She arranged each AOSA meeting, with or without the help of the Hosting Committee. She embraced and sometimes tolerated our “extra school spirit,” and made sure each of us felt confident that we were contributing to the work, the association, and the profession. She continues to give and stays in touch with the current AOSA Executive Director. Ms. Freihaut will always have our deepest gratitude, admiration and friendship.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Michelle Staarman graduated from Ohio State University in 1986, completed a residency in Children’s Vision Care and practices with her husband in Fairfield, Ohio. Jari Frazier graduated from the Northeastern State University College of Optometry in 1986 and gives back to future generations of optometrists as an Assistant Professor at NSU. Linda Ching graduated from the State University, New York in 1986 and is a hospital and health care professional and life coach in Sacramento, California. Beth Kneib graduated from the Southern California College of Optometry in 1986, completed a VA residency in hospital based care, and serves as the director of Clinical Resources Group for the American Optometric Association. Carol Freihaut is retired, living a wonderful life with her family in the St. Louis area, and stays in touch with most of our past leaders.