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E-Newsletter | October 2010

How Modern Women Innovators Changed The World

Last month we shared stories of some earlier women inventors. This month's column continues that theme as we share the stories of two women who are important to the continuing story of women changing America. When **Stephanie Kwolek** was inducted into the National Inventor's Hall of Fame, a police officer escorted her to the stage. It was not because her life was threatened. Rather, it was because his life had been endangered and the bulletproof vest that had saved his life contained Kevlar®.

Kwolek invented Kevlar while she was searching for a fiber that could be used to reinforce radial tires. Today, Kevlar is used in over 200 products including the protective gear used by American soldiers around the world. Kevlar is one of the 16 patents that Kwolek obtained during her distinguished career with DuPont. Her work also led to Lycra and Nomex - a fire-resistant fabric used in protective gear for firefighters.



Chemist Stephanie Kwolek, inventor of Kevlar. (photo by Michael Brascom)

Gertrude Elion was also inducted into the National Inventor's Hall of Fame - after she had received the 1988 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. The Nobel Prize recognized her efforts in developing the first effective childhood leukemia drug. Because of her efforts, childhood leukemia is now a treatable disease with a very high cure rate. Elion had decided that she would develop drugs to cure diseases after watching her beloved grandfather die very slowly and painfully from stomach cancer. She was one of the few drug researchers without a doctorate - 15 graduate schools rejected her application because she was a woman. This discrimination was not that long ago!



Gertrude Elion, Nobel Prize Winner in Physiology and Medicine

Elion also developed the immunosuppressant drug that made organ transplants possible. In addition, she developed the first drug that attacked viruses, enabling the drug AZT for the treatment of the HIV virus in AIDS patients. Elion helped change the way in which pharmaceuticals are discovered. She and her colleagues

developed drugs to interrupt the life cycle of abnormal cells while leaving healthy cells unharmed.

Stephanie Kwolek and Gertrude Elion are among the many examples of modern women innovators in science and engineering who have changed our world for the better. We are proud to share their inspirational stories.

Next Month: **Women Writers & Journalists**

Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America
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