*The following is a speech delivered to the Rotary  District 5870 District Assembly at the Sheraton*

*Resort in Bastrop, Texas in 2012 at the request of District Governor Suresh Pahwa.  The purpose*

*was to observe the twenty-fifth anniversary of women in Rotary.*

Thanks, Suresh.

 I didn't expect to be before a district meeting twenty-five years later discussing the event of brining women into Rotary.  The expectations might have been either to be expelled from organization or, if not, that  the occurrence be long  forgotten.

But, now we are here, remembering history; and, that is good. But, remember, it is HIS Story, one person's account told from a single viewpoint.  However, I have checked the facts with others who were there.

The advent of women in Rotary is noteworthy.  Let me say this to the many women who registered for this meeting: Possibly, you saved Rotary by increasing our membership to a number that would sustain us through the periods of economic troubles that were to come. You  brought  varied viewpoints toward the services we offer,  You have brought a to our previously all=male organization a depth  to  the Rotary experience.

Finally and perhaps most important,  it is noteworthy because, it simply had to be done. It was a step that, in the names justice and decency,  had to be taken. Females had not excluded from presenting programs; as visitors, they sat at the same table and shared good conversation. To many of us, it just seemed weird that the president of a bank or owner of a business should  prohibited from filling out a membership application

because of gender..

We all--well, perhaps most of us-- understand that now. The thirty-two members of the University Rotary Club of Austin knew on the fall day twenty-five years ago that the time had come.  We understood that Rotary would need half the world's  professional and business community  to be represented and contribute. We knew that it was the right thing to do.

There was no self satisfaction or pride in that act. It occurred because someone, someplace had to step up . It was done as a matter of course.

In 1985, Texas, in many ways was,  still emerging from a frontier mind-set. Austin was, as now, a  progressive town; however, in 1985,  the business cadre was more socially  conservative . That was a decade when even the Rotary Club of Austin struggled  through heated discussions and resignations, each time racial integration was put to a vote. The idea of women in Rotary was not a consideration.

Had it not been for that,  University Rotary would not be, then or now. This is how that club was formed, how we took that step twenty-five years ago.

 I had. a few years earlier been president of The Rotary Club of South Austin. Because I had some understanding of occuring social movements, I  suggested that we conduct a debate on the topic of Rotary allowing female members. In a few weeks, I inquired again about the program.

 I was told,  "the board thinks it would  be a good topic to discuss, but let's get into this *other thing*. It's never going to happen."  I understood what *this* *other thing* was.

Driving back with two friends, Dr. David Edwards, a UT Professor of Government, and The Reverend Doctor Seth Deleery, of All Saints Episcopal Church, the debate that was not to be, our topic of discussion was not the failed debate request. . By the time we arrived  at the campus, the concept of The University Rotary Club had been formed as well as both its immediate and long range goals.  We would form a Rotary Club of half faculty and half townspeople.  Our goals  would be taking enlightened, prudential stands on issues while practicing the ideal of *service above self.*That sounds idealistic, but...we were young and perhaps even now the three of us have retained that attitude..

 Development was  fast and coplex over the next weeks.  We added Dr. Jim Daniel, Chair of the Math Department and recently head of the Bureau of Naval Research, Dr. John Boston, a psychiatrist, Doyne Bailey, the county Sheriff, George Phiffer,  the assistant chief of police, Don Doyle, APD's Chief of Detectives, Dr. Bob Cooper, the Dean of The Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest, Drs. Fred Hansen and Clift Price, both physicians and others. Some of them were members of other Rotary Clubs, some were friends and associates.

Organizational  meetings were  in All Saints library and coffee room. Application was made to Rotary International for a charter. RI took a long look at our application because so many of our proposed members were from one institution, The University of Texas,  Apparently, the idea of vertical representation in Rotary,that is, members from varied segments of the same institution, was novel at that time. It required that RI take a new step.  Before, there might have been the university president and, perhaps the football coach or a dean representing the entire institution.

A charter to a club with more than one or two representatives from one organization. apparently had not been previously granted. Apparently, in the three months that followed (by then we had begun meeting for dinner and drinks at night.). Night meetings and drinks  too were considered unusual and a bit suspect..

In the three months that followed, RI recognized the benefits  and agreed to grant a charter, If we would charter with thirty members rather than the generally required twenty. At this point, we already had twenty-six or so. We found a three more, then on the last day, Dr. Fred Hansen called me to attend our fraternity's alumni meeting. We traded and each joined  both groups. Fred had previously been a member of West Austin.  Fred's application tipped  the scale. We submitted our application the next day. The charter was granted with the understanding that we would bring in a member of their choice from another club. The district organization  understood that we were doing something different.

I can say in humor--as  someone later said, *we knew you were*, *up to something, but  we don't  know what*.

The charter was granted provided we bring in a PDG from the Houston area, apparently as an observer.  We brought in their candidate, a past assistant DG from Pasadena, TexasTwo months later, he announced that he would be in Europe for the next several  weeks.

I don't recall the idea of women members even being a spoken plan.We assumed that we would find a way to do it.  During the next few days, we contacted several female who had both visited and spoken to the club. They applied and were voted into membership. Those three first female members in Texas  were Betty Sue Flowers, at the time director of UT's Honors Program, Sandi Lupucci, Professor of Government, and Colleen Aycock, a State Farm Insurance agent. All three held doctorates. Betty Sue later became Director of UT's  LBJ Library, Sandi is retired and living in Mexico. Colleen later became Austin's first female Rotary president (The Rotary Club of West Austin).

We felt that we were taking the next, logical step. Rotary International had recently withdrawn the charter of   The Rotary Club of Duarte, California. The Durarte Club had been sued by Rotary International and had prevailed all the way to the Supreme Court.. The Court voted six to zero in favor of The Rotary Club of Durarte's right to bring in female members. The vote was six to zero. Because two members of The Court were Rotarians and Justice Saundra Day O'Conner's husband was a Rotarian, all three recused themselves, leaving only six members to vote.

Rotary took the position that the decision applied narrowly to that one Rotary Club.  Our club's action

challenged this.

The day before we were to bring them in, I called our DG in Belton. I still recall the exact words of the conversation.

"Governor, we are going to bring in three new members tomorrow."

"That's good Howard, It's good to see your new club growing. The tone of his is voice suggested,*why are you  calling me long distance to tell me that.*

"They are all Ph.Ds, two are professors, one in private business.".

"That's good too, but why are you calling me long distance." (in those days, long distance was expensive.)

"Governor, they are all women. This will be an occasion, tomorrow when be bring them in. We want to invite

 you to attend."

Silence...for what seemed to be five minutes.

"You can't do that!"

"Yes, we can. We voted a hundred percent to bring them in,  I'm calling to invite you to the event."

A very long silence again.

"I'm going to have to sue you. That decision applied only to a club in California, no place else!'".

"If you have to, you have to. We have a judge and another attorney as members. We'll be prepared,

but, Governor,   you are president of Mary Harden Baylor Women's College. You are going to look strange, sueing me for this."

I heard the phone being replaced  with some force.

The next day, we brought the following members into University  Rotary: Drs. Betty Sue Flowers, whose (unapproving)  father was a member of the Rotary Club of Waco.. Colleen Aycock, who later became the first female president of an Austin Rotary Club, West Austin, and Sandi Lepucci, from UT's Government Department.

 The next few weeks and the next few months were a tense, angry time, at moments  bordering on threatened violence. We were surprised that much of the anger came from wives of Rotarians.  As an aside, I'll recount a phone call  from the wife of a PDG, ''We know what you're doing. You're divorced. You just want to do that so you can hug up on those women."

I assured her that I had no intention of that, and that any hugging up would be by her husband, not me. By then, I'd become accustomed to having the phone slammed down.

Perhaps, that's why in twenty-five years, I've not hugged one of our women members.---So, Past District Governor Ruth, if I'm the only male Rotarian not to greet you a with a hug after this meeting, you'll understand.

During these months,  our  members remained calm and explained to all who asked, that what was happening was Rotary evolving.  (Apparently, the reference to evolution was also a trigger with some people, but we didn't know that at the time.)  They commented that in a few weeks, male and female Rotarians would share the tables; they would talk about business, sports and Rotary projects in normal discourse.

We wanted them to know that after those few months, it would be normal to share a table with females, and they would be proud of Rotary for going through this process. . And, this is what happened.