Why did you choose astronomy for a career?
My choice of astronomy was truly accidental. My liberal arts college, Wellesley College, required that every student take a laboratory science course.

To me, college was the time to try out new fields. Looking through the Wellesley College course catalog, I found only two unfamiliar laboratory science subjects that fulfilled the laboratory requirement: astronomy and geology.

So the summer before my freshman year, I flipped a coin to make the choice — and it came up astronomy. At Wellesley, I discovered that astronomy is a "practical" combination of both physics and math applied to the universe — and I loved it!

What's going on in your research of cool stars?
Cool-star research is now bubbling with new ideas. This includes discoveries of planets — sometimes many planets — around cool stars.

These systems are vastly different from our solar system and stretch our concepts of systems of stars and planets. How did the stars form? Where and when did the planets form? How did their sizes and arrangements come to be? How does the stellar history affect the planets? How do the planets affect their host stars? All of these questions impact our understanding of Earth's history, including the evolution of life on it.

What was a challenge you faced in your career, and how did you respond?
In the late 1970s, issues of salary inequality began to emerge in scientific communities. I discovered that my salary was substantially less than a male colleague of about the same status. Before bringing this inequity up with my supervisor, I gathered data. How many papers had he published? How many talks had he given? I clearly had more accomplishments than my colleague. So why was my salary 30 percent lower?

I went to see my supervisor and showed him what I had found. He smiled kindly and offered an explanation: I had a husband to support me, so I did not need the money. Obviously, not a satisfactory answer. So I went to see the Division Director, who found my comparison interesting and said he would be happy to look into this the following year when the annual salary reviews were scheduled.

A year is a long time for inequities, so I spoke with the Observatory Director. He reviewed the situation and increased my salary immediately. In this case, factual evidence coupled with persistence led to a satisfactory conclusion.