

FIRST LADIES

*"Each one of us has a fire in our heart for something," said U.S. Olympic hero Mary Lou Retton, adding, "It's our goal in life to find it and keep it lit."
Here are some history-making women who found it and kept it lit.*

♀ First Female Athlete to Appear on a Wheaties Box: At the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, 16-year-old Mary Lou Retton made history as the first American of either sex to win the all-around gymnastics gold medal, along with four other medals (more than any other athlete in those games). Along with her fierce competitive streak came a sunny disposition that earned the 4' 9" Retton the title "America's Sweetheart," as well as a coveted spot on the front of a Wheaties cereal box. The tradition of putting athletes on the "Breakfast of Champions" packaging goes back to 1934, when baseball's Lou Gehrig appeared on the box front. On the back was the first woman ever to be on a Wheaties box: aviation pioneer Elinor Smith, who a decade earlier, at age 16, had become the youngest licensed pilot in the world. Although a few more women would appear on the back of boxes and on commemorative bowls, it would take Wheaties 50 years to put a woman on the front.

♀ First Mom in Space: Dr. Anna Lee Fisher, a physician and chemist, was eight and a half months pregnant when NASA selected her to be the sixth woman in space. (She helped NASA design a space suit that better fit the female anatomy.) She gave birth to her daughter, Kristin, in July 1983; 14 months later, Dr. Fisher flew on the space shuttle *Discovery*. Kristin Fisher grew up to be a national TV journalist. In 2019, she was raising a baby of her own when she told the *Washington Post*, "I always grew up thinking I could have a demanding full-time job and be a mom. The example that [my mom] set for me, it was never a question. It wasn't until I got pregnant...that I started thinking, 'How did she do this?'"

♀ First Female Comic Book Writer: In the early 1940s, the nascent comic book industry was run by men. There were some women staffers who contributed to storylines, but they were mostly uncredited. The female comic book writer from this era who had the most impact on pop culture was DC Comics editor Dorothy Woolfolk, who contributed to several early *Wonder Woman* and *Superman* storylines from 1942 to 1944. Her biggest contribution came after pointing out that Superman's invulnerability made him boring; she suggested adding a crippling metal from his home planet that would make it more of a fair fight. Result: Kryptonite. Unfortunately, she didn't last long at DC. According to comic book historian Sara Century, Woolfolk was fired for her outspoken feminist views. "Jarringly, the editor

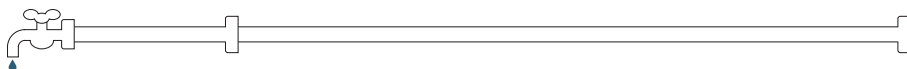
that replaced Dorothy on *Wonder Woman*, Robert Kanigher, immediately murdered an analog of her on-panel. ‘Dottie Cottonman, woman editor’ is shot by a sniper...in one of the most unquestionably tasteless scenes ever to appear in a comic, which is definitely saying something.” Woolfolk went on to be a successful novelist, penning the Donna Rockford Mystery series for Scholastic in the 1970s and ’80s.

♀ First Female College Football Players: At least four women have played college football at smaller colleges, the first being Oregon’s Willamette University soccer player Liz Heaston. In 1997, when all the football team’s placekickers were injured, Heaston suited up and kicked two field goals. The first (and so far, only) woman to play in the NCAA’s elite Power Five conferences is Vanderbilt University soccer goalkeeper Sarah Fuller. She suited up in 2020, when COVID-19 restrictions grounded all the football team’s placekickers. The team was 0-8 that year, and despite Fuller’s locker-room pep talk at halftime, the offense failed to give her the opportunity for a field goal or an extra point. She only got to kick off to start the second half. Nevertheless, that kickoff made history. A few games later, Fuller got another shot and became the first woman to score in Power Five game. “I just want to tell all the girls out there,” she said, “that you can do anything you set your mind to, you really can.”

♀ First African American Woman to Star in a Non-servant Role on a TV Show: That awkward headline was how most obituaries remembered Diahann Carroll upon her passing at age 84 in 2019, but she had many more firsts than that. Until Carroll (born Carol Diann Johnson in 1935) starred in the NBC sitcom *Julia* from 1968 to 1971, black women on TV had been subjugated to mammy, nanny, and servant roles. That’s why Nichelle Nichols made history in 1966 as Lt. Uhura, a female African American senior member of the bridge crew on CBS’s *Star Trek*, but her name didn’t even appear in the opening credits. Two years later, during the height of the civil rights movement, Carroll landed the lead role of Julia Baker, a widowed nurse whose husband was killed in Vietnam, leaving her to raise their son on her own. The role earned Carroll a Golden Globe, making her the first black actress to get one. Also a talented singer, Richard Rodgers (of Rodgers & Hammerstein fame) wrote a Broadway role especially for Carroll in 1962’s interracial romance musical *No Strings*, for which she became the first black woman to win a Tony Award. The barrier she was perhaps most proud of: In 1984, Carroll starred on the prime-time soap opera *Dynasty* as the diabolical nightclub singer Dominique Deveraux. Carroll had requested to join the hit show after noticing a general lack of racial integration in soap operas, so she told her manager, “I want to be the first black b*tch on television.”

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“The most effective way to do it, is to do it.” —**Amelia Earhart**



1980s car fact: Fewer than 9,000 DeLoreans were ever made.