

# Austin woman studied pill that 'changed everything' 305 E 32

Early adopter wrote a '60s thesis on arrival of revolutionary drug



Laura Skelding AMERICAN-STATESMAN

ENLARGE PHOTO

Laura Skelding AMERICAN-STATESMAN Carol Fredericks was one of the first women in Central Texas to get permission to take birth control pills. That was in 1962, just two years after the pill got federal approval.

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AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

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Just two years after the Food and Drug Administration approved the birth control pill, Carol Fredericks convinced her doctor in Waco to put her on the revolutionary drug. She was among the first Central Texas women to obtain permission to take it, even when its efficacy and side effects weren't fully understood.

As a communications graduate student at the University of Texas and an early adopter of oral contraceptives, Fredericks published her master's thesis in 1966 about how mass communications affected the development and public perception of the pill.

"A revolution more changing than the industrial revolution, more significant than any political revolution and more meaningful than the first crude wheel to humanity is in progress," she wrote. "Mass communications have been essential in recruiting men and women, governments and scientists to the movement and in the dissemination of information and the formation of social attitudes which make the new freedom possible."

Fredericks, 82, is now retired from a long career in academia. Fifty years after the pill's approval, in May 1960, we talked with her about the early days of the pill and the long-term effects she's seen.

### How did you get interested in birth control research?

You have no idea how bad it was for women. It wasn't just discrimination; it was harassment. People would ask you when you applied for a job, "How do you know you won't get pregnant?" You didn't know, not until the pill. The discrimination was insulting.

When I did get a job — and I worked all through college — I was paid less. "It's not customary to pay women the same," they told me, even though I told them I had children to support. When I was at UT, I was working at the genetics department.

I was very excited about the pill. I had three children by the time I was 24, and I didn't want any more. They had rudimentary forms of birth control, but they didn't work all the time.

Certain gynecologists had been authorized to select clients for the trial test because they weren't sure of the total aftereffects of this pill. In Waco in 1962, I got a doctor to prescribe the pill. I was so enamored with the fact that it was supposed to be foolproof.