MADELEINE JACOBS

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by
Hilary Domush

at
American Chemical Society
Washington, D.C.

on
28 May 2009

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)
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MADELEINE JACOBS

1946 Born in Washington, D.C., on 11 November

Education

1968 B.S., Chemistry, George Washington University
2003 D.Sc. (*Honoris causa*), George Washington University

Professional Experience

*Chemical & Engineering News*, American Chemical Society
1969-1973 Assistant Editor
1993-1995 Managing Editor
1995-2003 Editor-in-Chief

Public Information Office, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
1972-1974 Writer, Editor

National Bureau of Standards
1974-1979 Writer, Editor
1978-1979 Chief, Media Liaison & General Publications

Office of Public Affairs, Smithsonian Institution
1979-1986 Assistant Director and Chief Science Writer
1986-1987 Acting Director
1987-1993 Director

American Chemical Society
2004-present Executive Director & Chief Executive Officer

Honors

1993 Smithsonian Institution Gold Medal for Exceptional Service
1999 Abbott Laboratories Distinguished Scientists Speaker, Abbott Park, Illinois
2001 Ruth Evelyn Sanders Distinguished Lectureship, Texas Christian University
2001 16th Annual William S. Johnson Symposium in Organic Chemistry Keynote Speaker, Stanford University
2002 New York Academy of Sciences Women’s History Month Award
2002 75th Canadian Society for Chemistry Lecturer, Edmonton, Alberta
2002 UOP Invitational Lectureship, Des Plaines, Illinois
2003 Samuel R. Scholes Jr. Lecturer, Alfred University, Alfred, New York
2003 Jack A. Gerster Memorial Lecturer, University of Delaware, Newark
2003 ADVANCE Lecturer, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
2003 ACS Award for Encouraging Women into Careers in the Chemical Sciences
2004 George M. Braude Memorial Lecturer, ACS Maryland Section
2004 Award for Executive Excellence, sponsored by Commercial Development and Marketing Association and the Chemical Heritage Foundation
2004 American Crystallographic Association Public Service Award
2005 William E. Mahoney Annual Lecture in Chemistry, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
2006 Pittsburgh Chemical Day Keynote Speaker
2006 Distinguished Laboratory for Molecular Sciences Lectureship on Science and Education, California Institute for Technology
2007 Trustees Council of Penn Women Lecturer, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
2007 Sylvia M. Stoesser Lecture in Chemistry, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
2008 Moses Passer Lecturer, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York
2009 Invited Panelist, Innovation Economy Conference, Washington, D.C.
2011 Edith Kreeger Wolf Visiting Professor, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois
ABSTRACT

Madeleine Jacobs grew up in Washington, D.C., the younger of two children. Her father was a musician, her mother a secretary. The television program Watch Mr. Wizard convinced her she wanted to be a scientist, in particular a chemist. Jacobs went to school in the wake of Sputnik, during which time there was much more support and better resources for education generally, and science education specifically. Jacobs feels that she had very good teachers and classes throughout junior and senior high school. Her parents were supportive of her ambition to pursue science, and she always earned top grades in all her subjects.

Jacobs submitted a limited number of college applications, largely because the cost of applying to colleges put a strain on her middle class family. She matriculated into George Washington University with a full scholarship. She found the professors involved and engaging and loved her experiences there; her summer work to earn money at a government agency involved studying lipid transport in cockroaches. She married after college, planning to enter Stanford University’s PhD program in chemistry, but her husband had been drafted, and they had to spend two years in Washington, D.C. Jacobs began a master’s program at the University of Maryland, but she quit after a year. She had always loved writing and wrote extremely well, so she applied for a job with Chemical & Engineering News (C&EN). At C&EN, she became interested in gender equality of chemists, in particular the disparity between the salaries of women and men chemists. This interest in gender equality has lasted her entire life.

Initially, Jacobs worked in Washington, D.C., and continued working for C&EN when she moved to California with her husband. After six months in California, she left to return to D.C., where she worked for C&EN for two more years. After a short stint as a writer at National Institutes of Health, she spent five years as a science writer, and then became head of media relations and publications at the National Bureau of Standards. From that position, Jacobs’ career took her to the Smithsonian Institution’s Office of Public Affairs, beginning as science writer and ending as its Director. At this job, she became interested in attracting diverse audiences to the museums. During her time at the Smithsonian, the slogan, “The Smithsonian is for everyone” was coined. When she left there, she was awarded the Secretary’s Gold Medal for her efforts in outreach, especially to underrepresented peoples.

After fourteen years at the Smithsonian, Jacobs returned to C&EN to become managing editor. After one and a half years, she became editor-in-chief, a title she held for eight and a half additional years. At C&EN, she reawakened her interest in women in chemistry. She initiated “The Scorecard” to document the progress of women on chemistry faculties. Finding this scorecard effective in making faculties sit up and take notice on the disparity between the number of male and female professors, she began a scorecard for industry.

After ten years at C&EN, Jacobs became the first woman and first person without a PhD to become Chief Executive Officer of the American Chemical Society (ACS), the position she holds today. Her responsibilities include running a staff of two thousand people, including the ACS scientific publishing operations, Chemical Abstracts Service and ACS Publications; serving on the ACS Board of Directors; fundraising; and outreach to universities, government, industry, and the nonprofit world. She continues her interest in promoting gender equality and minority representation. She sees science education and literacy as a path to improvement of everyone’s life.
Throughout the interview, Jacobs discusses the need for self-confidence, especially among women. She firmly believes that a science education provides an important analytical way of thinking, one that is useful for everyone. She discusses the change in her perspective of life due to her breast cancer and extols her second marriage and husband.

INTERVIEWER

Hilary Domush completed a B.S. in chemistry at Bates College before earning an M.S. in organic chemistry and an M.A. in the history of science at the University of Wisconsin. As a graduate student, her research focused on 19th-century chemistry in Edinburgh. As program associate for the oral history program, Domush helps manage the program and conducts oral histories for the Women in Chemistry project.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Early Years


George Washington University

Enough money to apply to four colleges only. Offered full-tuition scholarship to George Washington University. Older brother studying computer science at University of Maryland. Summer jobs: camp counselor; biology assistant; studying lipid transport in female cockroaches. Naval Research Laboratory. Did extremely well in all subjects. Loved writing.

Life after College

Engaged to physics student from high school class. Married after college. Accepted to Stanford University. Husband drafted; return to D.C. for two years. Began master’s degree at University of Maryland, working in Bruce Jarvis’s lab. Quit after only one year. Renewed interest in helping women. Project Seed.

*Chemical & Engineering News* and Other Work

Looking for one-year job, accepted editorial assistant position at *Chemical & Engineering News*. Continued working for *C&EN* when she returned to Stanford with her husband. After six months left husband to return to D.C. After three years left *C&EN* for National Institutes of Health; then Bureau of Standards. Head of media relations and publications.

Smithsonian Institution

Becomes science writer, then assistant director, in Office of Public Affairs. Discusses responsibilities. Museum of the American Indian. Heye Foundation. “The Smithsonian is for everyone.” Secretary’s Gold Medal for her accomplishments. Promoted to Acting Director, then Director of Smithsonian.

Back to *C&EN*

Returns as managing editor of *C&EN*. Revives interest in women in chemistry. Invents “The Scorecard” first for academia and then for industry. Discusses importance of life outside work; promotion of women scientists with such programs as National Science Foundation’s Advance grant; her struggle with breast cancer; loss and regaining of self-confidence. Becomes editor-in-chief.

American Chemical Society

First woman and first person without PhD to become Chief Executive Officer.
Discusses accomplishments and challenges of job; president’s functions vis-à-vis CEO; testifying before the U.S. Congress; fundraising; meetings; overseeing publications.

General Thoughts
Science trains certain style of thinking, effective in most walks of life. Wants to improve science education and literacy in order to improve living for all. Describes some of her favorite things from her travels. Extols her second marriage.

Index

51

54
INDEX

A
Abbott Laboratories, 39
ACS. See American Chemical Society
Adams, Robert McCormick, Jr., 28, 29
American Chemical Society, 1, 6, 19, 22, 25, 33, 34, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 49
Green Chemical Institute, 46
Project Seed, 6, 21, 22
Scholars Program, 22, 23
Women Chemists Committee, 46
Ann Arbor, Michigan, 38

B
Bader, Alfred, 22
Bader, Isabel, 22
Baltimore, Maryland, 46
Baum, Rudy M., 31, 42
Bayer Corporation, 19
Beilstein, 11
Beltsville Area Agricultural Research Service, 7
Beltsville, Maryland, 7, 8
Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School, 6
Bronx, New York, 23, 45
Brown University, 5, 21
Burns, Stephanie A., 35

C
C&EN. See Chemical & Engineering News
California, 18, 31
California Institute of Technology, 13, 21
Caltech. See California Institute of Technology
Capitol Hill, 22, 45
Catholic University of America, 14
Chemical & Engineering News, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 24, 27, 30, 31, 35, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 47, 50, 51
Chemical Abstracts Service, 46
Chemical Heritage Foundation, 43
Chemistry & Industry, 51
Chesapeake Bay, 51
China, 34
Chu, Steven, 48
Columbus, Ohio, 44
Columbus, Robert, 10
Corcoran Gallery of Art, 28
Cornell University, 5, 13, 21, 45
CSI. See Society of Chemical Industry

D
Darwin, Charles R., 51
Djerassi, Carl, 13
DNA, 3
Door in The Dream, The, 34
Dow Corning, 35

E
England, 8
Erlenmeyer flask, 2
ethnicity, 22, 27, 28
African-American, 22, 27, 28
Asian-American, 27
Hispanic, 27, 28
Indian
see Native American, 13, 28
Latino, 27, 28
Native American, 27, 28

F
Fallwell, William F., 30
Forces for Good
The Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits], 49
Ford Foundation, 47
Free, Alfred, 19
Free, Helen M., 19
Freer Gallery, 12

G
Gaithersburg, Maryland, 25, 29
Presidential Mentoring Award, 21
Providence, Rhode Island, 5
Puerto Rico, 45

R
Reines, Joseph (father), 4, 34
Richmond, Geraldine L., 46
Ripley, S. Dillon, 29
Rodgers, Richard, 12
Rosenthal, Al, 26, 27
Rowland, Frank Sherwood, 26
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 36

S
Salt Lake City, Utah, 46
Schwartz, Brian, 27
Science, 24, 34
Serrano, Representative José E., 45
Smithsonian Institution, 12, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 45, 50, 51
Secretary’s Gold Medal, 28
Smithsonian Natural History Museum, 28
Society of Chemical Industry, 51
Solinger, Janet, 28
Sommerville, Brendan F., 17
Sotomayor, Justice Sonia M., 23
Sputnik, 2, 4
Stanford University, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 21, 23, 49
Starbucks Corporation, 39
Stockton, Bernard, 2
Stradivari, Antonio, 26
Suitland, Maryland, 30
Sweden, 15

T
Thackeray, William M., 5

U
U.S. Congress, 28
U.S. Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Center, 7
U.S. Navy Band Symphony Orchestra, 4
U.S. Supreme Court, 23
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 2
University of California, Berkeley, 13
University of California, Los Angeles, 13, 36
University of Kansas, 36
University of Manchester, 8
University of Maryland, 5, 14
University of Michigan, 38
University of Pennsylvania, 13, 21
University of Wisconsin, 13

V
Vietnam War, 13

W
Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, 4, 7
Washington, D.C., 1, 8, 12, 14, 19, 20, 27, 28, 29, 34, 44, 46
Wasserman, Elga, 34
Watch Mr. Wizard, 1
Women Chemists Committee. See American Chemical Society: Women Chemists Committee
World War II, 1

Y
Yale University, 5, 12, 13, 23