

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

**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)

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION  
Oral History Program  
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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 16<sup>th</sup> Annual William S. Johnson Symposium in Organic Chemistry  
Keynote Speaker, Stanford University
- 2002 New York Academy of Sciences Women's History Month Award
- 2002 75<sup>th</sup> 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.

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<p>Raised in Washington, D.C. Father musician; mother secretary. Musical brother. <i>Watch Mr. Wizard</i>. Always loved science, especially chemistry. Sputnik. Increase in government support for science education. Good science classes throughout junior high school and high school. National Science Foundation program at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research. Always got good grades. Parents supportive.</p>	
George Washington University	6
<p>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.</p>	
Life after College	15
<p>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.</p>	
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<p>Looking for one-year job, accepted editorial assistant position at <i>Chemical &amp; Engineering News</i>. Continued working for <i>C&amp;EN</i> when she returned to Stanford with her husband. After six months left husband to return to D.C. After three years left <i>C&amp;EN</i> for National Institutes of Health; then Bureau of Standards. Head of media relations and publications.</p>	
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<p>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.</p>	
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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.

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