Letter from the Chair

Welcome to the Fall 2009 edition of The CSWM Communicator, newsletter of the Committee on the Status of Women in Microbiology (CSWM)!

Were you at the 2009 ASM General Meeting in Philadelphia? Unfortunately, the economic crisis impacted ASM attendees and many were not able to attend this meeting, including some members of the CSWM. All of our events were held in the Philadelphia Marriott, adjacent to the convention center.

Our Open Meeting was held on Tuesday, May 19. This was our traditional open forum where participants were able to voice their issues and concerns confronting women in Microbiology. At the prior general meeting in Boston in 2008, a panel of experts was convened to address audience questions. As this appeared to be a well received addition to the Open Meeting, we continued presenting a panel. Dr. Hazel Barton, Northern Kentucky University, served as moderator of the panel and accepted audience questions. Members of the panel included Micah Krichevsky, Bionomics International; Susan Bagley, Michigan Technological University; Tamara Lewis-Johnson, Women’s Health Coordinator, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, NIH; and Erica B. Gray, President of DiputEd, Dispute Management Services, a dispute resolution service. We plan to continue the presentation of a panel for future meetings.

The Open Meeting is always stimulating and enlightening for me. As Chair of the CSWM, I have no doubt that women face many issues in pursuing a career in Microbiology. However, this Open Meeting always seems to drive home certain points for me. For one, it emphasizes to me how much our committee is needed. There are many who believe that women do not have any gender issues in their career any longer. However, at the Open Meeting, women spoke about being asked to leave the laboratory of a mentor because the graduate student became pregnant. It is hard to believe that in 2009, there can be mentors who have these illegal attitudes. At ASM, women have fought for and attained recognition at every level of the organization, including serving as society president. Hence, it is easy to assume that this is the norm outside of the society; sadly, it is not. There are many issues that confront women as they whittle their careers in science: how do women juggle the responsibilities of their families and their careers; how do women establish support networks; how do women gain recognition in a career that is still male oriented. We attempt to address these issues at our Open Meetings. If you are attending the ASM General Meeting in San Diego in 2010, we hope that you will come to our very important Open Meeting.

The Open Meeting was immediately followed by our Special Interest Session, “Global Clean Water: The World Cup.” The session was designed to address the issue of available clean water and how it impacts health. Our speakers were Rita Colwell, Distinguished Professor, University of Maryland; Mark LeChevallier, American Water; Pamela Barr, EPA; Isha Ray, University of California; and Jennifer Clancy, Clancy Environmental Consultants. We are pleased that our Special Interest Session was, once again, informative and well received.

This session was followed by our reception, a social event that gave everyone an opportunity to meet and network with fellow microbiologists. Dr. Millicent

Attendees meet and greet at the CSWM Open Reception
Goldschmidt, University of Texas, 2009 Roche Diagnostics Alice C. Evans Award Laureate, was honored. Millicent gave a stimulating and entertaining speech.

The topic in planning for our 2010 Special Interest Session is "The Human Microbiome Across the Lifespan." We hope to see you next year at the General Meeting in San Diego!

Lorraine Findlay, Ph.D.
CSWM Chairperson

Each year, we are pleased to present a commentary from the recipient of the Roche Diagnostics Alice C. Evans Award which is given in memory of Alice C. Evans, the first woman to be elected ASM President in 1928. This award is given to an ASM member who has made major contributions toward fostering the inclusion, development, and advancement of women in careers in microbiology. Awardees have often demonstrated a commitment to women in science, through mentorship and advocacy and by setting an example through scientific and professional achievement.

In 2009 the Alice C. Evans award was presented to Dr. Millicent C. Goldschmidt obtained her Ph.D. in microbiology, mycology and biochemistry from Purdue University in 1953. She is currently a Professor of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics, University of Texas Health Sciences Center at Houston, where her research aims to understand oral, clinical and medical microbiology, including the role of nutrition in host-parasite interactions. Dr. 'Mimi' Goldschmidt gave her award speech wearing a helmet, given to her by ASM during a construction project, as a metaphor for the hard work toward equality for women in microbiology.

Dr. Goldschmidt’s Comments to Members of ASM’s CSWM

Knowing the special women who have been laureates for this Roche Diagnostics Alice C. Evans Award, I was really in awe to have been chosen as the 2009 recipient. The ASM meeting in Philadelphia and especially the CSWM reception was like a big “Love In”. I thank my colleagues and students that nominated me and wrote letters in my behalf.

Lorraine Findlay, the chair of the CSWM, asked me to write this brief sketch of some of my experiences for the Newsletter. They say that a pioneer/scout searches ahead to find the best possible route and returns with his/her rear end full of arrows. I have sometimes felt, not only like that pioneer, but like a survivor the equality wars.

As an undergraduate, I attended a women’s college within a large university. The Dean was a women, women held class presidencies, edited the school newspaper and year book, and were capable of “running things on campus” very efficiently. It never occurred to us that we were second class citizens in the “real world”. The second world war also showed that women, when given the opportunity, could serve and cope very well. It was the start of more opportunities for women scientists.

When I started graduate school at Purdue in 1947, there were very few women graduate Ph.D. students. The campus, as a whole, had about 20 men to one woman. A few years later, after eventually marrying another graduate student in the department, I was accused by one of the (male) faculty members of coming to Purdue just to get a “Mrs” Degree. After getting my Ph.D. degree (1953), we decided to have our children right away. This raised much wrath and indignation from most of the department faculty. Comments like, “You see, SHE will just become an educated mother at OUR expense and will never work in the field again”. Even worse and even more worrisome," You SEE,
we shouldn’t accept and train women graduate students THEY only get married, have children and THEY take the “slots” away from MEN who will continue to be productive after they leave the University”. A few years ago, this same department named me as one of their first “Outstanding Alumna”. I invited my two grown “children” (son a Ph.D., daughter a CPA and in Law School) to come with me for the award ceremony. In brief, I discussed the possibilities of a “Golden Triangle” consisting of a willing and involved university, the faculty/or student in question, and MOST IMPORTANTLY, a knowledgeable, helpful MENTOR. This triangle, of course, also applies to new male faculty, but women still need more help when bumping up against that glass ceiling. It is also applicable to other fields than academia.

In the late 1960’s, I spoke at my first national ASM large symposium. I was the only woman on the podium. My introduction by the chair of the session was, “Dr. Millicent Goldschmidt will now speak on rapid physical methods of identifying bacterial pathogens. She is not only our token woman, but she really knows the subject matter that she will be talking about”. One time, early on, one chairman refused to sign out on a grant I submitted saying that since my husband was a tenured faculty member, I didn’t need to make the requested salary ($12,000). I accepted a position at a different institution for $15,000. When I gave my resignation to that first chair, he told me that I was not worth the added money.

When the CSWM held its first session in 1972, I was privileged to be one of the speakers. At that meeting, several of the women speakers cried as they discussed the frustrations in finding positions at or near where their husbands were located (many nepotism clauses in universities). Some were only hired at places where they promised to either not get married (if single) or not to have children if married. Those fortunate to be hired still received less salary than a man and very little startup money. UNFORTUNATELY, this is (illegally) still occurring. When women at one of our major universities recently complained to the administration about, salary, tenure, and promotion inequalities, they were told to just “Stop Whining”. So, things are somewhat better in general but we are still bumping up against that glass ceiling in many respects.

What advice do I wish to offer young women microbiologists today? Let me first share a poem that my mother made me learn as a child

“When a job is first begun
Never leave it till it is done:
Be the matter great or small
Do it well, or not at all “

I have tried to use this poem as my “lodestone” If I accept a responsibility whether in teaching, performing research, or doing committee assignments, I try to do my best. I do my homework. I suggest that “young” women interested in careers in microbiology, spend some quality time volunteering for ASM committees, university committees, and community projects and do their best. IN ADDITION, FIND A MENTOR!! Attend and support your ASM and its Branches. I suggest that “older” women do likewise and also MENTOR younger women. Start getting girls in grades K-12 interested in science in general and in microbiology in particular. Microbiology is an excellent area for women and its umbrella opens many doors for research projects and interesting positions.

By now the atmosphere... had changed... They asked me to speak on the ways a department could retain young faculty women and assist women graduate students.

My wonderful husband died suddenly in 1980. With children in school, a mortgage, and other responsibilities, I was thankful to be a tenured faculty member, having the added bonus of enjoying my research and teaching. I will
never be a poor widow. I tell women students that they should be able to support themselves, not only because microbiology is such fun but they may have to become the sole support of their family somewhere along the way. It also allows the wonderful opportunity to leave the world a better place than when you entered it. You can tell that I am still a happy camper 😊. Join me and the many other contributing women microbiologists in being part of the CSWM community.

If one looks critically at present “civilizations” in our world today, the really successful nations are those that do not keep one half of their population (their women) shrouded and behind doors, not permitting them to add their good minds to help solve problems of city, country and humanity.

It is apparent that, across the overall membership of ASM, the number of women receiving ASM awards is below expectation. It’s certainly not for lack of suitable candidates, but because of a lack of nominations. Remember no one can receive an award without being nominated! Please consider nominating appropriate candidates for future awards. Details on the various ASM awards can be found at:

http://www.asm.org/Academy/index.asp?bid=2099

CSWM has compiled a list of Helpful Websites for Women Scientists Interested in Fellowships, Scholarships and Funding Opportunities. The URL for this information is:


ASM also has a new website that posts ASM sponsored graduate and post-doc opportunities. The URL is:

http://www.asmgap.org

Funding : Awards

Career Development Grants for Postdoctoral Women

The Membership Board is pleased to announce that the Career Development Grants for Postdoctoral Women Committee is accepting applications for its 2010 grant program.

Three grants ($1200 each) are given annually to enhance the careers of postdoctoral women with outstanding scientific accomplishments and potential for significant research in the area of microbiology. The fields covered by the award are any of those represented by the scientific divisions of the American Society for Microbiology. The grants support the career development of the winning candidates by providing funds to attend a meeting (other than the ASM General Meeting or ICAAC), to visit another laboratory, to take a course in a geographically distant place, or for other purposes to advance the candidate's career.

To be eligible for this program, a woman scientist must hold a doctoral degree and have no more than five years of relevant research experience since receipt of her most recent doctoral degree. Candidates must currently be performing postdoctoral work in microbiology, at an institution in the United States. The candidate must be a member of ASM. A letter of support must be provided by a nominator, who should be the candidate's mentor, Department Chair, or Center Director. The nominator must be a member of ASM and may only support one candidate for this award per year. Deadline for applications is February 1, 2010, one month earlier than in previous years. For more information on the program and the application process, go to http://www.asm.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=37857&Itemid=199 on the ASM website.

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