

**Margaret-Ann Armour**

**Department of Chemistry**

**AWA Women of the Year -- April 4, 1995**

I am deeply honored by being given the Award of the Academic Women's Association and I want to especially thank my nominators, Anne Hall and Dorothy Tovell.

There are two major reasons why this award means so much to me. Firstly, belonging to the AWA has been very important in my life; many of you, its members, know me well, warts and all, and it is very special to be recognized by one's colleagues. Secondly, I know the people who have already received this award: they have had much influence on me and have been role models, supporters and motivators. What a wonderful tradition to be part of! This evening gives me the opportunity to celebrate these remarkable women and some of the others who have had an important effect on my thinking and the directions I have taken.

Linda Woodbridge, the first award winner in 1992, came to the second WISEST National Conference in 1986. It was held in conjunction with the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Science and there were a series of seminars on current scientific issues to which Linda brought her daughter. She was supportive of WISEST when we were struggling to find ways of effectively recruiting women into science. Linda's deep and active commitment to the recruitment of women to the academic staff was an inspiration to us.

It was Jean Lauber (award winner in 1993) who helped to deepen my understanding of the pressures on women in science. She organized a celebration of the research done by women in the sciences at the University of Alberta at the first WISEST National Conference in 1984. Ten women described their work in a mini-symposium. I look back on that symposium as one of the most important events of the conference. Not only did we talk about getting women into the sciences and about the problems and possible solutions, but we let those who were already there share what they were doing and excite the young women attendees about their science.

Doris Badir (1994 award winner along with the Faculty of Home Economics) was a wonderful role model: she was prepared to take on the establishment and act to change the situation for women here. I will never forget a talk Doris gave many years ago in which she spoke of what it was like to be a professor in Home Economics. It was acceptable for women to be in this field of course, but it was very hard to be respected as an academic researcher. This was an angle I had not thought about; it was quite a contrast to being in science.

One part of the journey which has led to me standing here this evening began back in 1973 when my mother and I were at a tea in Saretta Sparling's home. You may remember her as Dean of Women back in the sixties. I happened to sit with then Dean of Women

Isobel Munroe Smith who told me about the AWA and invited me to a meeting. I was a very green laboratory coordinator who lived in the Chemistry Department. If anyone needed the AWA, I did. It introduced me to women who became friends, who provided understanding and support, who broadened by understanding of feminism. The issues discussed at meetings and the talks given were often both disturbing, and motivating to do something to bring about change. Especially important for me was the chance to meet people from across disciplines. It also gave me the opportunity to hear women like Margrit Eichler and Rosalie Abella.

There is one woman whom I wish was here this evening. That is my mother. At a retreat recently, I was asked what strengths I brought to the group. I have always found questions like that difficult to answer, but on being forced to consider it, I realized that I do have determination and perseverance. I am sure I can thank my mother for these two characteristics. She had them in abundance and needed them when she had a young child and left her husband at a time when that was not socially acceptable. Also, my mother had high expectations of me and perhaps that is one of the things I now most appreciate. Implicitly, it meant she believed in me.

I have been talking of one or two of the people who have been part of the journey which has led me here. Being part of WISEST for the past thirteen years has had a major influence on that journey: it is a connection which has had just as much effect on me as I have had on it. Again, the people with whom I have worked in this group have given me so much. I remember the early days of brainstorming lunches at University House; Susan Jackel's statistics on the numbers of women in various faculties at the University of Alberta so that we knew what we were trying to change; Anne Marie Decore's paper 'Vive la difference' which showed that the grades of women in departments like Chemistry and Mathematics and the Faculty of Business, as well as in Music and Literature were as good as or better than those of their male peers. I cannot think of Women in Scholarship, Engineering, Science and Technology without thinking of Gordin Kaplan, one of the foresighted founders of the group and one of my mentors. Presently, the WISEST coordinator is Dorothy Tovell: she brings friendship, creativity, new ideas, and fresh research directions. WISEST's mandate is to increase the proportion of women in decision-making roles, especially in academic life. I like to think we are beginning to see a change, but the figures, especially in physics, show that we have a long way to go. Something that makes me believe WISEST has had success in its efforts is that some of its programs have been copied at other universities. I have always believed that science needs women and as women have slowly found their way into influential roles in the sciences and engineering, that belief has not diminished.

Through WISEST I have been fortunate enough to meet yet more of the women who have greatly influenced my thinking. One is Ursula Franklin. Conversations with her are precious. She has so many wonderful analogies which have helped me tremendously. Ursula has likened the work world of the scientist to a sand box and its tools, where little boys play. Gradually they accept girls to come and play with them in the sand box, but then the girls want to use different tools and finally they want a different sand box. I believe that as the number of women scientists increases and a critical mass is reached,

different questions will be asked and different processes used for reaching answers. As more women teach science in post-secondary institutions, I expect to see it put more into context, made more relevant to those studying it.

There is one more person that I must mention in tracing my journey here. That is the current Chair of the Chemistry Department, Ron Kratochvil. Like my mother, he had the audacity to believe in me. Not only that, he has allowed me, even supported me, not to fit the mold and for that I will always be grateful.

This award is shared with all those who have helped me make my journey an eventful, exhilarating, demanding and deeply rewarding one. Thank you so much for making another highlight on the road.