

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

**CATHERINE T. HUNT**

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

Hilary Domush

at

Rohm and Haas Corporate Headquarters and The Chemical Heritage Foundation  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

on

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(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

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## CATHERINE T. HUNT

1955 Born in Bronxville, New York on June 29

### Education

1977 AB, Smith College, *cum laude* with High Honors in Chemistry  
1981 PhD, University of California, Davis, Chemistry, under Alan Balch

### Professional Experience

1982-1984 Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut  
Postdoctorate, NIH Postdoctoral Fellow, Molecular Biophysics  
and Biochemistry, under Ian M. Armitage

1984-1988 Rohm and Haas Company  
Senior Scientist, NMR Spectroscopist, Spring House, PA  
1988-1990 Project Leader/Process Chemist, Monomers Research, Spring  
House, PA  
1990-1996 Laboratory Manager, Philadelphia Plant, Bridesburg, PA  
1996-1998 Group Leader, Special Projects, Spring House, PA  
1998-1999 Section Manager, Central Analytical Research, Bristol, PA  
1999-2002 Director of Worldwide Analytical and Computational  
Competency Network (ACNET) and Analytical Technology  
Development Leader  
2002-2009 Leader, Technology Partnerships, Spring House, PA  
2008-2009 Corporate Sustainability Director

2009-present Dow Chemical Company

### Honors

1996 S. J. Talucci Quality Team Award  
1997 Best Paper Award, Association of Nonwoven Fabrics Industry  
(INDATEC)  
2001 Women in Science Delegation to Cuba (one of 25 women chosen),  
People to People  
2006 Rohm and Haas Vice President's Award  
2007 Award of Accomplishments, The School of Pharmacy, Howard  
University, Washington, D.C.

- 2007 Fellow, American Association for the Advancement of Science
- 2007 Best 50 Women in Business Award in Pennsylvania
- 2007 Elected President of the American Chemical Society
- 2008 Smith College Medal, Smith College Board of Trustees
- 2008 Charles D. Hurd Lecturer, Northwestern University
- 2009 Outstanding Alumnus(-a) of the Year Award, University of California,  
Davis
- 2009 Fellow, Inaugural Class, American Chemical Society

## ABSTRACT

**Catherine T. Hunt** grew up in Bronxville, New York, one of seven children. Her father was a chemist at Allied Chemical Company, and Katie often went to work with him and always had questions for him about why things are the way they are. A good chemistry teacher in high school only strengthened her determination to be a chemist. To that end she entered Smith College. She loved her classes and her professors, with whom she remains in close contact. During her summers she worked at Stauffer Chemical Company. She realized she needed a PhD, so she applied to the University of California system, choosing Davis. There she worked with Alan Balch and nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR). She met Linda Benner there, her lifelong friend.

Hunt accepted a National Institutes of Health postdoctoral fellowship at Yale University, studying with Drs. Ian Armitage, Robert Shulman, and James Prestegard. She also joined a bicycle club, where she met her future husband. When she began to interview for jobs she found Linda Benner and several others from Davis at Rohm and Haas; she also found a friendly and supportive atmosphere there, and took the job. She later became a process chemist and then lab manager of the Bridesburg plant. In 1991, she gave birth to her son during her assignment at the plant. When downsized from Rohm and Haas in 1995 she moved back to Spring House in Analytical Research, ultimately becoming the director of the Analytical and Computational Competency Network.

Persuaded to run for president of American Chemical Society (ACS), Hunt developed a platform emphasizing education in science, including legislators, the media, the public, and the next generation. ACS also increased its emphasis on outreach, collaboration, and innovation. After her year in office, Hunt returned to Rohm and Haas as the first Corporate Sustainability Director, as well as resuming her former role in Technology Partnerships. When Dow acquired Rohm and Haas on April 1, 2009, Hunt move into an expanded role in their External Technologies Group (ET); soon to be renamed: Innovation Sourcing and Sustainable Technologies. She has swapped management for leadership, finding excitement in new ways of thinking and in communicating to different audiences.

Hunt discusses balancing her career and home life; keeping healthy and fit with her bicycling and yoga; and the many changes she has experienced in her life at Rohm and Haas, now Dow. She talks about mentoring and the importance of reaching out. She regards this latest transition as a time to reevaluate goals, strengths, possibilities.

Hunt has been awarded many honors but feels especially proud of the Smith Medal. As the first ACS president from the University of California, Davis, she won the Outstanding Alumna award, of which she is also extremely proud, especially as it is a very large school.

## INTERVIEWER

**Hilary L. Domush** was a Program Associate in the Center for Oral History at CHF from 2007-2015. Previously, she earned a BS in chemistry from Bates College in Lewiston, Maine in 2003. She then completed an MS in chemistry and an MA in history of science both from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her graduate work in the history of science focused on early nineteenth-century chemistry in the city of Edinburgh, while her work in the chemistry was in a total synthesis laboratory. At CHF, she worked on projects such as the Pew Biomedical Scholars, Women in Chemistry, Atmospheric Science, and Catalysis.

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Early Years	1
<p>Grew up in Bronxville, New York. Middle child of seven. Father chemist at Allied Chemical Company. Always liked to figure out how things worked. Often went to father's workplace. Played bridge. Public high school. Good biology and chemistry teachers. Special project on soil analysis. Summer jobs in superintendent's office.</p>	
College Years	7
<p>Smith College, previously attended by mother, grandmother, aunt, and two sisters. Majored in chemistry, despite father's discouragement. Few women in chemistry. Initial difficulties and importance of communication. Helen Ruppe her lab partner. Milton Soffer and identifying unknowns; sniff test. Francis Via. Kenneth Hellman. Worked on flame retardants at Stauffer Chemical Company during summers. Thomas Hardy. One summer in Berkeley, California. Industry labs versus college labs. Choir; a capella singing. Other classes at Smith. German immersion. Love of Cézanne. Continued bicycling. Close and continuing relationships with professors.</p>	
Graduate School Years	12
<p>Wanted to be experiment designer, not technician; needed PhD. Attracted to University of California, especially Davis. Siblings' careers. Ronald Rusay. Worked with Alan Balch instead of Gerd LaMar. Teaching assistant for Sevgi Sumer Friedrich. Thought she would be professor. Teaching chemistry as a way of thinking applicable to all of life. Balch's lab; his personality and mentoring style. Marilyn Olmstead and x-ray crystallography. Nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) and nighttime experiments. Good ear on FID; sound of Chinese funeral gong. Linda Benner. Lab had more women than men; close group. Camping together.</p>	
Off to Yale University	22
<p>Benner went to Rohm and Haas. Importance of doing postdoc somewhere other than one's graduate school. Joined Ian Armitage's small lab; Stephen Fesik and David Dalgarno. Time of explosion in equipment development, money for biochemical work. Felt too isolated. No casual sports. Had to build network. Italian landlords. Wanted to return to Davis, but Balch persuaded her to persevere. "You don't ask, you don't get." Joined bike club. Met husband in club. More about Balch and Mrs. Balch, her "life mentor." Writing papers, then grants.</p>	
Job Hunting	32
<p>Interviewed at University of Wisconsin; Procter and Gamble; Rohm and Haas. Benner, Simon Yeh, and others from University of California, Davis, already at Rohm and Haas. Friendly, collaborative place. Job offer included building lab; buying</p>	



instruments; and having a technician and time for her own research. Ed Greer. Rebecca Smith also hired for NMR lab. Gradually increased size of lab, mostly with women. Had supportive structure; liked being in charge. Never left industry. Problem with polymers at Houston, Texas, plant. Went to process chemistry group with NMR. Fred Hirsekorn. Learned process from technician, to whom she taught NMR. Importance of safety. David Chalfant. Videocamera to watch reaction. Remained in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, area. Son born while she was working in Bridesburg plant. At first she was the only woman PhD and the lab boss there. Shared culture shock. Downsizing Rohm and Haas; sympathy for those losing jobs. Competing with new graduates for jobs inside Rohm. Vacation in Hawaii. Four-year-old son already recognizing gendered work roles. After six months had job in analytical research division; continuing to move up. Now writes grants for work with collaborators; spreading the risk.

#### American Chemical Society (ACS) Presidency

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Prank call from Valerie Kuck not a prank at all; asked her to run for president of ACS. Balch told her to come up with platform. Advice from Elsa Reichmanis, Mary Good. Still responsible for running technology group. Raj Gupta, CEO of Rohm and Haas, supportive. Provided for her group of four to continue work. Platform focused on science education, beginning with legislators, the public, the media, and the next generation. Twice testified before US Congress House Science Committee. ACS developing new strategic plan at same time: more outreach; emphasis on education in and promotion of chemistry. Getting involved with Geoff Hurwitz and government relations. Council for Chemical Research. Impossible Video. ACS leadership course: Passion, Competence, and Alignment. Found presidency caused “brain expansion.” Excitement of many creative ideas and communicating to different audiences.

#### Further Questions and Thoughts

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Balancing work with family. Maureen Caulfield’s experience at Wyeth, merging with Pfizer, similar to Hunt’s at Rohm and Haas, merging with Dow Chemical Company. Son off to college. Bicycle trips with husband. Son in day care when young. Husband ill, started working at home. Husband traveled United States with son for a year; Hunt occasionally met them. Became network parents for son’s junior high and high schools. Health issues when downsizing; took up yoga. Son hopes to study chemistry, at Franklin and Marshall College. Eliminating distractions when with family.

#### From ACS to Dow

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Learning to lead, not manage. Helping others realize their skills. “Dipping.” Importance of trust in relations; trust built on consistent behavior. VISTA program for leadership development. Mentoring, reaching out. “Walk-around” managers. Raj Gupta, Robert Naylor. Likes change and new things if they are self-initiated. Director of Technical Collaboration, tasked with building bridges between “heritage Rohm” and “legacy Dow.” New mentors from Dow and new means of communicating needed. Regards transition as time to reevaluate goals,

strengths, possibilities. Importance of new ideas, new perspectives, adaptations.

Smith Medal and University of California, Davis, Outstanding Alumna Award 69  
Feels honored by Smith Medal; connected to other winners. Anne Brower and Irene Baird from her year. Still feels connected with professors. First ACS president from Davis. Still has collaborations there. Niece in vet school. Son did science project with someone at Rohm and Haas; sparked his interest in chemistry. Importance of loving one's work.

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