

Reminiscence: Cynthia House

My formal professional career was rather brief...four years in the Wood Fiber Division of the United States Gypsum research center. I did earn two U.S. patents in that time for a chemically modified wood fiber product and process. Since then, I have been largely occupied with raising Anne (19), a junior at Northwestern University, Stephen (15) and Catherine(12), while being heavily involved in the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and Science Olympiad coaching. The latter, as well as IJAS Science Fair, bring us back to campus on a regular basis. I recently returned to paid employment as a part-time teaching/technical assistant at the nearby elementary school where my knowledge of things scientific is often called upon.

My memories of six years in the School of Chemical Sciences are for the most part fond ones. I cannot say that I'd relish a return to spending most evenings until midnight in the "old" chemistry library translating Bielstein or searching for obscure compounds in the Marvel Stockroom. How could I forget that first semester of organic chemistry lab in Noyes? The words had been largely obliterated from the utility knobs so we rookies often turned on the wrong thing. We had water shooting out of the Bunsen burners, steam coursing through the cold-water condensers, and one unfortunate young man cleared his bench of glassware when he attached his high-pressure vacuum hose to the compressed air. I well remember the thrill of being allowed to use the "big" (I cannot recall the actual designation) NMR machine after hours to run samples in liquid nitrogen to observe a rearrangement phenomenon. I still marvel that the school would entrust an undergraduate with such an expensive and important piece of equipment.

My best memories, though, revolve around Dr. Coates and his research group. As undergraduate senior research project students Roger Fujimoto and I were welcomed by all, and our inevitable mistakes were gently corrected and forgiven. As a graduate student I so appreciated Dr. Coates encouraging us to take a break during the day to take classes to rejuvenate our minds and bodies. Figure skating, synchronized swimming, and oil painting had little to do with chemistry but I know they helped my laboratory work. The training and practical experience I received in the group prepared me well for my industrial lab position.