

# Creating Role Models, Motivating Young Women Scientists

**W**hy aren't there more women scientists? How can we encourage more women to be interested in science? How can we create visible role models and mentors? Sara Lee Schupf has long been dedicated to finding answers to these questions.

A member of the Presidents' Circle of the National Academies, which is a non-member advisory and philanthropic group, Schupf is committed to gaining recognition for women scientists and supporting programs that encourage more women and girls to be interested in science. She hopes her collaboration with the National Academy of Sciences will motivate young women to enjoy science and learn about the vast opportunities and rewards associated with careers in science.

In the fall of 2005, Joseph Henry Press and Scholastic Library Publishing released the *Women's Adventures in Science* biography series for middle-school-aged students. The series—funded by Schupf with additional support from the NAS—chronicles the careers of

10 contemporary, working women scientists. Each woman's story conveys a positive message to young women about putting aside stereotypes and finding fulfillment in the fields of science and technology.

Schupf's awareness of the need for more resources for and about women scientists was heightened when she returned to Skidmore College in the 1990s to complete her degree. In need of a topic for her final research paper, Schupf was urged by her advisor to write about her work, philanthropy, and academic interests. At the time she was majoring in women's studies, chairing the American Committee for the Weizmann Institute of Science (where she established the Weizmann Women and Science Award in 1994), and serving as spokeswoman for the Bakery Division of Sara Lee Corporation, named for her by her father. The resulting paper focused on women in science and their relationships to their fathers.

The *Women's Adventures in Science* series offers a creative



A subject of the *Women's Adventures in Science* biographies, planetary geologist Adriana Ocampo leads middle school students in a hands-on demonstration at an event celebrating the paperback release of the book series.

approach to recognizing women in science and providing mentors by focusing on a middle-school-aged audience where exposure to role models can be most effective.

"There were few biographies on scientists and even fewer on women scientists. The series is unique because we used living women scientists with interesting stories so that young women can relate," said Schupf. She hopes that the books will have a wide

distribution to schools and libraries across the country, and feels strongly that they have the potential to increase young girls' interest in science, math, and technology.

"[Former NAS president] Bruce Alberts and I both remembered the orange *Childhood of Famous Americans* biography series that we read when we were young. We aspired to be like many of the people we read about," she said. "We wanted the *Women's Adventures in Science* series to have the same effect. The NAS brings credibility to the series and the partnership has truly fulfilled all expectations." ■

**LIA CRUZ**

**BIRTHPLACE:** San Jose, California  
**EDUCATION:** Now in Jr. high. But by 2020 she'll have her Ph.D. in media, art, and technology from Stellar University and Shopping Mall on the Lunar Space Station. (A 'tween can dream, right?)

**BIG ACCOMPLISHMENT:** Inspiring everyone around her to ask questions about their world and to wonder how and why things work.

**IMPACT ON THE WORLD:** Ridding the world of the crazy idea that science is geeky and just for boys. Getting girls to realize they have the potential to change the world!

**WOW!** In the Lia world, she is a member of GLO (Global Light Organization), a think tank made up of scientists and kids from all over the world who work together to solve problems with science and technology.

**HOBBIES:** Building contraptions, gadgets, and gizmos; drawing; blogging; composing original ring-tones for her cell phone.

**QUOTE:** "I wonder what would happen if...."

**ARE YOU WONDERING...why Lia loves science? Find the answer at [www.iwaswondering.org](http://www.iwaswondering.org).**

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**NANCY WEXLER**  
Gene Hunter



**HURLEY ANN JACKSON**  
Atomic Explorer



**MIMI KOEHL**  
Nature Mechanic



**A TIENDA**  
Social Scientist

Trading cards are used as promotional tools at conferences and author events to spread the word about the *Women's Adventures in Science* series and accompanying Web site, [www.iwaswondering.org](http://www.iwaswondering.org), which provides interactive adventures for aspiring scientists and a parent-teacher guide.