

# WANTING, BELIEVING, DOING

“NO ONE CAN MAKE YOU FEEL INFERIOR  
WITHOUT YOUR CONSENT.”

—ELEANOR ROOSEVELT, REFORMER, JOURNALIST, DIPLOMAT (1884 - 1962)

In many countries, young women considering science or engineering as a profession today can look forward to increased awareness of discrimination in the workplace and real efforts to ensure their rights to pursue the career path of their choosing. But this has not always been so and is certainly not true in all countries around the globe.

Many women over the past century have worked hard to gain equal representation, equitable advancement, and fair recognition for their work in the male-dominated scientific world. They have had the courage to quietly—and sometimes not so quietly!—challenge those who told them that they could not do science because they were not clever enough ... or because they were not men. It is on the shoulders of these women that the next generation of women scientists now stands.

In this booklet, we bring you the stories and advice of some of these exceptional women. They are not necessarily famous, but rather are women who have been true to themselves and followed their passions. They have achieved in spite of adversity... and sometimes because of it. Many have been balancing a successful career with raising a family; some have had to overcome physical disabilities. They may have faced discrimination or come up against cultural restrictions that prevented them from taking certain jobs. Whatever the hurdles, these women demonstrate to us all how to be strong, and determined yet collegial, when challenged, how to work with the system to make changes from the inside, and how to be both active and unintentional role models to those around them. They are from all over the world, from all levels of society, and from very different backgrounds. But what they all have in common, besides their

gender, is a passion for their work and the inner strength to never take “no” for an answer and to show the world, their peers, themselves that they can do whatever they set their minds to.

The year 2008 marks the 10th anniversary of the L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science awards. The development of this program has helped women all over the world to pursue excellence in research and conquer gender discrimination at a grass roots level. Although this decade of generosity is to be celebrated, we should at the same time strive for the day when, as one of our interviewees, Vijayalakshmi Ravindranath, so perfectly puts it, women who devote their lives to research are known and accepted simply as *scientists*, rather than as *women scientists*.

My personal hope is that the stories and words of wisdom contained in these pages will inspire you, the future thinkers and achievers, to take on the exciting challenges that science and engineering have to offer. And that the day will come there will be nothing unusual about women entering and succeeding in these fields, leading subsequent generations to wonder why we ever found it necessary to focus on efforts specifically for women in science.

Sean Sanders, Ph.D.  
Commercial Editor, *Science*