



Sharon D'Orsie came to the University of Pittsburgh in 1966 following the completion of her junior year in high school in York, Pennsylvania. There weren't many women chemistry majors. "I think about 300 people indicated during freshman year that they intended to graduate with a degree in chemistry. We graduated about 30; three were women." Following her graduation, Sharon earned her master's degree and doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health with an emphasis on municipal and industrial pollution control and environmental health. Today, these programs in pollution control are housed in Environmental Engineering Departments, but her studies preceded and paralleled Earth Day, and the birth of the environmental movement. Her graduate studies were funded by federal grants after she wrote a compelling essay on why she wanted a career in sewage treatment.

In 1973 Sharon took a job in Texas because "Texas had jobs and I needed one." She was hired by Exxon Corporation to do environmental engineering assignments. Sharon moved through a succession of technical supervisory and staff jobs, leaving environmental engineering behind as she fast-tracked in the petroleum business. She was the first woman hired by Exxon in a technical role. "Fortunately, I don't take myself too seriously and I have a totally outrageous sense of humor. Otherwise, I would have never survived being not only a Yankee, but a woman, taking a 'man's' job in Baytown, Texas." Then, she began to realize that projecting gasoline demands was work while measuring air pollutants was fun. In 1989, on her fortieth birthday, Sharon opened Eagle Environmental Health, a Houston-based full-service industrial hygiene and safety-consulting firm, with specialization in air monitoring. The business did exceptionally well, generating profits for Sharon and her partners while earning a reputation of succeeding at assignments that were technically too complicated for the average practitioner. It is important to note that the success of the business to a great extent rested on her solid and well-founded roots in chemistry. Some places that the business took Sharon included England, Singapore, Brazil, Oman and the Arctic Circle.

On her fiftieth birthday, in 1999, Sharon decided that she had proved to herself that she was an excellent businesswoman; she had earned enough awards, plaques and certificates to sink a boat, but she was tired of sleeping on airplanes. She was so busy meeting the needs of her clients that she reluctantly paid someone to put up her Christmas tree. Recalling her love of teaching part-time at the University of Texas School of Public Health, she enrolled at night school at the University of St. Thomas, a small, private, Catholic college in Houston, and began working in a teacher's certification and a master's degree in education with an eye to teaching high school chemistry, her first love. Eventually, Sharon sold her company to a London-based environmental consultancy, and finished her last year of teacher preparation and student teaching as a full-time student.

Seeking to relocate, Sharon resolved to move anywhere in the country where she found a job she thought she would like, and landed in Maine. She spent four years teaching environmental science and safety at the University of Southern Maine. This year, she moved to a first-class school district to teach chemistry in high school. "Although I loved my students at the college, the passion for science has to start earlier in the educational process," she found. She plans to continue teaching one course at the University or Community College in some aspect of environmental health.

Today, Sharon D'Orsie, "Dr. D." to her students, lives in Southern Maine with her 80 year-old Mother, Adrienne. She continues her now forty-year old love affair with the University of Pittsburgh, which she supports with her talents and resources. The most important people in her world are daughter Laura, an accountant in Washington, D.C.; son Charlie, a computer scientist in Texas with a specialty in computer forensics and digital evidence; son Will, a last-term civil engineering major at Texas Tech University; niece Sarah, a congressional staffer in Washington D.C., and nephew Joe, a journalism major and football starter for Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Although she loves to kayak and snow-shoe, her most time-consuming hobby is developing an environmentally sustainable landscape; this year her front yard featured strawberries, daisies and pumpkins. "It's a form of prayer: a way of loving the Earth and stewarding our resources. Best of all, it gives the neighbors something to talk about...that eccentric yet delightful person 'from away'."