

## Marge Porter – ACS Post-Conference Essay 2016

Fun. Educational. Emotional. Meaningful. Outstanding. These are all adjectives that describe my experience attending the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual ACS Conference in Des Moines, thanks to the John Crompton Memorial Scholarship. I am so grateful to have had this experience.

What a blast it was to meet so many wonderful cheese people whom I have followed through their cheese, social media, webinars, and magazine articles. My friend Elizabeth Nerud said it best. For a turophile, attending the ACS conference is akin to viewing the recording of "We Are the World" for an 80's pop music lover. All of the rock star cheese makers that we cheesemongers idolize are present! On my first trip to the conference center to register, I ran into three warm and friendly women who turned out to be Sue Conley, Mary Quicke, and Alison Hooper. They were so friendly and supportive. There I was walking with and shaking the hands of cheese royalty! I will always remember that walk and the lovely people they are. Another highlight for me was meeting Cathy Strange for the second time. I admire her and what she has accomplished for the industry and for my employer, Whole Foods Market.

I attended just about every reception. All were fun and informative and great tools to casually network with my fellow cheesemongers, makers, and vendors. I attended the La Quercia reception, the Emmi Roth CCP reception, the Sartori New Member Reception, the Cheese Crawl and the Maytag Cheese reception. It's hard to pick a favorite, but La Quercia and Maytag were outstanding. It was great to be at their locations, tour, and the food and entertainment were excellent.

I really put myself out there for Trivia Night, as loud pubs are not my thing. But boy, was I glad to be there when Chris Roelli arrived and gave such a warm and humble speech to the group. It brings so much more to the story behind the great cheese. Our team came in second in the trivia competition, I might add, and that was a fun surprise!

Through this scholarship opportunity, I was able to arrive early and attend the ANCO review session for the CCP Exam. It was fun and informative and helped to break the pre-exam jitters. The amount of support from fellow test takers and CCPs is remarkable. In fact, the amount of support, accessibility, and generosity of spirit and knowledge among the cheese community is truly something of which I am proud. This aspect of the industry is much different than the culinary/chef industry from where I started.

In picking the seminars I would attend, I tried to pick a wide range of topics I felt would benefit me in my job, which were certainly available. I experienced topics ranging from educating my taste buds and the nutritional value of cheese and butter, to driving profits and business beliefs, to technical questions for cheesemongers and the FDA status of raw milk, and then addressing repetitive stress injuries, and the story of Maytag. I learned sooooo much. Each seminar was so informative and interesting. I gathered tons of useful information for myself and for my team at work. Truly, by Saturday, I thought my brain would explode!

There were moments within the conference where my heart was truly touched. I feel so fortunate to have been present for Mike Gingrich's Lifetime Achievement acceptance speech and to hear his story and the story of Upland's. The ACS Competition awards presentation was also poignant to witness in person. It brings home the hard work and dedication of the people who make cheese so wonderful for us all.

I always learn a lot from networking with cheese vendors. I tried to spend at least a part of every day connecting with the different people and products available in the salons. I met up with people I knew and people I met for the first time. I learned a lot about the products I sell and the products I may sell in the future and traveling educational opportunities to learn more about cheese in their birthplaces. The "Meet the Maker" and "Festival of Cheese" events were also great opportunities to taste and talk with people about their products. All were such great resources.

The bookstore got me more than once! It was wonderful to have such a great selection of cheese related books all in one place and I was surprised, after CCP preparation, there were some I still didn't own. It was fun to get Ari Weinzweig's signature on a copy of a book that I bought.

Receiving this scholarship and attending the conference has already helped me as a cheesemonger. Shortly after returning home, I used the information I gained to help me through an interview for a promotion at my job. I got the promotion and am now the cheese buyer for St. Paul Whole Foods!

In closing, I learned a lot, met a lot of cool cheese people, and had a lot of fun, and I have already reaped the benefits of attending! I'm so happy to have attended this year's conference. I am hoping to attend future conferences and maybe one day volunteer on a committee. To the ACS scholarship committee, I extend my sincere and heartfelt thanks for this opportunity to attend.