

LOUISE KENNEDY CONVERSE

JOHN CROMPTON MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

THANK YOU ESSAY

I'm so grateful to the committee for selecting me as one of the recipients of the John Crompton Retail Scholarships. I knew it was an honor to have been chosen, but it wasn't until Peter Lovis from The Cheese Shop in Concord sought me out to congratulate me, and told me how admired and loved John Crompton was by so many in the cheese industry, that I realized just how privileged I was to be there. John Crompton was not just a title attached to a scholarship, but rather he was a man whose zealously and passion might be something I would want to try to embody as I go out there and steer my cheese shop in Sarasota, FL. Being at ACS 2014 renewed my conviction that not only was I right in opening a cheese shop in an untested market, but that I have found my true self in doing so.

I attended my first ACS conference in Raleigh, in 2012. So in many ways I knew what to expect when I set out for the ACS2014 conference in Sacramento. I knew that I had to take full advantage of every moment, no matter how scary, or intimidating. When I drove away from that first ACS conference I made a mental note to remember the "I should have done this..." or "Why didn't I talk to" so that if/when I came to another conference I'd make sure that I packed in as much as I possibly could, and I hoped that that at the end of it I could look back and be proud that those "should have" or "why didn't I" questions were fewer. I was very fortunate that one of my cheese mongers, Angela, was able to join me on this trip, (our customers raised the entire \$ to send her to Sacramento!!) so we were able to learn and do together. We were able to share in the excitement of being at the conference and get truly jazzed about bringing new ideas and practices back to the shop. But perhaps one of my biggest joys as owner of a shop was to see Angela interact at the conference as she realized that she is not just a gal selling cheese in a shop in the far flung region of Florida, but that she/we are members of an industry of cheese professionals. And we were proud to count ourselves as members of ACS.

When I opened my shop I knew that I was going to get to know people, but I did not fully fathom the extent of the relationships that I would create and come to rely on every day as I stand behind the counter many of whom before the conference were just known to me by email, social media, or the telephone. So my biggest thrill was that I got to say hello to these fellow mongers, and cheese makers, the very same folks who encourage me to do my best, who tell me not to give up, and to keep on doing what I love to do so much. I got to feel as though I'm part of a large movement where people connect food to place.

On a practical level I sat in session after session and got schooled on microbes and new FDA and FSMA regulations. I got to taste some cheeses that I can only pray will grace my counters one day (Florida is hard to ship to) and that made me even more determined to try to open new channels of distribution. I got

to ask questions of my fellow retailers, and I got answers for some of the vexing problems that challenge me every day. I picked up new skills. I listened rapt as icons in the industry encouraged people like me from behind the microphone. I found areas where I need to grow. I met new friends. I instagrammed. I embraced ACS 2014 and Sacramento. I am grateful to all the members of ACS who take the time out of their busy lives to attend the conference. For a cheese retailer/monger in the infant stage of her career, it means so much that I am walk in the paths you have created. I am so grateful to have been given this opportunity.

Thank you.

Louise Kennedy Converse

Owner – *Cheesemonger*

Artisan Cheese Company

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Ps. The very first thing I did when I returned home was unwrap three California cheeses that I carefully carried back with me (Andante – Piccolo; Burrough Farm - Grass to Gold, Fat Bottom Girl - Bleating Heart.) Just to say that even after eating so much cheese, there is always room for more.