

Girls Just Can't Get Enough Science

CAGIS is a terrific way to supplement girls' science education.

By Cathy Cove

Before our daughter Leigh started school, we could tell that she was drawn to all things scientific. Her natural curiosity resulted in many 'snowball' preservations in our fridge, as well as worms in jars, collections of rocks and sticks, and a virtual zoo of stuffed animals.

By grade 3, our 'science sponge' daughter needed more than the science curriculum was providing. We attempted to scout out summer camps and organizations but, because we were living in rural Ontario, geography presented a problem.

Through an article in a national children's magazine, we learned about an organization called the Canadian Association for Girls in Science (CAGIS).

Inspired by the dream of Larissa Vingilis-Jaremko when she was just 9 years old, CAGIS is a network of girls aged 7-16 who like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics — and want to learn more about them.

"When I was 9 years old, the girls in my class always hated science class. They thought that scientists were geeky old men with crazy hair and glasses. They also thought that science was difficult and boring. We rarely did experiments and, when we did, the boys in the class would do the experimenting, while the girls quite often took on the secretary role and wrote down the results."

Larissa continues, "Luckily, I had been exposed to the fun and discovery side of science ever since I can remember. My mom, who is a scientist, and my dad, who is an engineer, would do experiments with me every day. We even had a microscope on the

kitchen table. I wanted other girls to also experience how fun and interesting science can be and to realize that they too could be scientists."

CAGIS chapter members meet regularly to explore science with women who have chosen careers in science and technology fields. There

are opportunities to talk about school, career choices, and other issues that concern girls when they think about their futures. There is also lots of time for fun.

According to Leigh, my 11-year-old daughter, "I think it's nice that girls can have a group like CAGIS so that they can have more of a

chance to explore and learn how they can be good at stuff like math and science."

Members keep in touch through a quarterly newsletter and the regular feature "What's UP at CAGIS" in *YES Magazine*.

Larissa's initiative was recognized in 1995 by the Canadian government when she was given an Honourable Mention at the Michael Smith Awards for Science Promotion.

In addition, Larissa was recently awarded the Toronto Dominion Canada Trust Scholarship for Outstanding Community Leadership. This honour pays full tuition at the university of her choice, along with a generous living allowance. Larissa will enrol in a science program at the University of Toronto this fall.

Since 1995, Larissa has been working with partner organizations to

bring CAGIS to girls across Canada. As a result, CAGIS has expanded and now has 12 chapters and 700 members in PEI, New Brunswick, Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia.

CAGIS partners include the University of Calgary, Science North, the Ontario Science Centre, the National Museum of Science and Technology, Holland College, and the Association of Professional Engineers of New Brunswick.

The CAGIS Club House, an interactive website, is a new feature that brings members together from all over Canada. The website features regularly-changing science topics and a password-protected feature through which members can pose questions to guest scientists and discuss science issues of interest with other members. Check out the site at www.uwo.ca/letstalkscience/cagis.html.

Individual membership is \$20 per year and includes a one-year subscription to *YES* magazine, a quarterly newsletter and notice of events (eight to ten per year).

For girls who do not live near a chapter, a virtual membership is avail-

able for a cost of \$15 per year. Full access to the Internet Club House, a subscription to *YES* magazine, and the quarterly CAGIS newsletter are included in this membership.

For more information, contact: CAGIS National, 6519-B Mississauga Road, Mississauga, Ontario L5N 1A6, or e-mail cagis@julian.uwo.ca.

(Mrs. Cove is a new OQE director and parent of two children in the Avon-Maitland District School Board.)

One recent CAGIS adventure took place in Mount Hope where the Toronto, Oakville and London chapters held a sleepover at the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum. Besides getting to sleep in the middle of a fleet of vintage airplanes, the girls built hot air balloons and gliders and later took a midnight museum walk.

Another fun outing planned for the fall will see members of the London chapter visiting the Shahnah-Doht Iroquois Village to learn about native communities 1000 years ago. CAGIS members will be challenged to games of math and hunting skills, learn to use a mortar and pestle, and participate in tool-making using items found in a typical village.