

Karen Carleton

Research Associate Professor in Zoology,
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Class of 1976



Dr. Carleton has achieved several professional life cycles in her career. After germinating out of Needham High School, Dr. Carleton spent years as an undergraduate and graduate caterpillar, first receiving a B.S. in Chemical Engineering from Yale University, then her Ph. D. in Physical Chemistry from the University of Colorado. She came out of her professional chrysalis when she finished her post doctoral fellowship at U.C. Berkeley. She spent the next six years working as Principal Scientist for Physical Sciences Inc.. After eight years as a chemist, Dr. Carleton completely changed her career and became a biologist, starting back again at the larval stage of her early education at Needham High School not having taken a Biology course since then.

Continuing the professional life cycle, Dr. Carleton recently received the distinguished Mentor of the Year Award from the New England Board of Higher Education for her work with one of her graduate students, the first in his family to go to college, who will soon graduate with a Ph. D. in Biology and start a prestigious NIH fellowship this fall.

Dr. Carleton's great success typifies the power of the great learning and teaching cycles that began for her at Needham High School. As she states, "The teachers at NHS made me what I am today." She specifically remembers Marie Baroni and Mohammed Aziz who taught her Chemistry and made her the chemistry stock room assistant which, along with her senior year independent study, fueled her burgeoning love of that subject. She also fondly recollects learning calculus backwards and forwards from Mr.

Almquist, learning biology from Mr. Laughlin and physics from Mr. Nevarauskis. The confidence her teachers showed in her helped her to become the highly accomplished scientist she is today, having published *thirty* scientific papers so far in her career.

Life not being all work, or in her case, all science, Dr. Carleton lives in Durham, New Hampshire with her husband Tom Kocher and her two daughters, Acadia (12) and Erica (9). Balancing her busy career and being a mother has been a great challenge, a challenge that was not readily available to women before the 1970s, Dr. Carleton reflects. Graduating in 1976, she remembers this as a particularly exciting time in history to be a young woman. The openness to new possibilities that typified the 1970s has carried Dr. Carleton through many different phases of her life and if there is one piece of wisdom she would like to share with students today at Needham High School, it would be that we are not just one thing in life, that there are many changing roles we will have in life, and such is the richness of life-- the *diversity of life!*

M.H.