

2011 MEDALS & AWARDS

SUBARU OUTSTANDING WOMAN IN SCIENCE AWARD

Presented to
Naomi E. Levin



Naomi E. Levin
Johns Hopkins University

Citation by Jay Quade

Naomi Levin is an outstanding choice for the 2011 Subaru Outstanding Woman in Science Award. Naomi has a background in both anthropology and geology, which ideally positioned her to study several aspects of the geology of early hominids in East Africa for her dissertation. She started down that road with a Master's degree focused on the geology of fossil sites in central Ethiopia, and broadened her scope for her Ph.D. under Thure Cerling (University of Utah) to include other parts of Ethiopia and Kenya. The main theme of Naomi's dissertation research was to establish through isotopic analysis the paleoenvironmental context of our early human ancestors, including the Pliocene *Ardipithecus ramidus*. Considerable controversy surrounds the question of whether this earliest of bipeds was a savanna or

forest dweller. For her dissertation, Naomi produced an impressive isotopic dataset from several geologic archives associated with these hominids, including fossil soils, and teeth from the fossil and modern mammals. Assembling these datasets proved a daunting task. Naomi claims she capitalized on her experiences growing up in New York to overcome the many logistical challenges posed by sub-Saharan Africa. Among other things, Naomi applied this data to a paleoaridity index newly developed with her advisor to reconstruct changes in aridity over time in East Africa. Isotopic analysis of soils and fossil teeth is a powerful means of reconstructing paleoenvironments, and in a short time Naomi has emerged as a leader in this field in East Africa. Naomi's story is a nice example of how bridging disciplinary boundaries—in her case, isotope geochemistry, anthropology, and paleoclimatology—yields really great science.

Response by Naomi E. Levin

I feel very honored by this award. I foremost want to thank pioneering geologists, like Doris M. Curtis, who have brought the field to the point where it is today. I am grateful to GSA for its broad and steady support of student research.

I have been fortunate to have many encouraging advisors throughout my education. Among them, Jay Quade and Thure Cerling have provided me with opportunities, taught me to be a solid colleague, and pushed me to go big. They are still doing these things.

I also thank Gail Ashley for her guidance over the years and the nomination for this award.

I am grateful to my parents, Carol and Jack, who have been a constant well of support as I leave for Africa, year after year. And to my husband Ben, who gives me that much more incentive to get the work done, and come home.

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