

AAM Acceptance  
11 May 2004

When I first heard the news that I would be the recipient of this year's Distinguished Service Award, I immediately felt like Sally Field when she lost all grip on her dignity at the academy award ceremony. "You like me, you really like me" she shouted much to the emotional embarrassment of the audience. I promise not to shout but would like to tell you with as much dignity as I can muster, that I am thrilled beyond measure.

I want to talk about family in its many and variegated meanings.

When I asked my son, Josef, then aged ten, what he thought of the umpteenth museum we were exiting, he said. "When your children grow up, you will need to rent other children to take to museums and give you advice." Well, he did grow up wonderfully and sits in the audience today with other equally wonderful children \* my daughter Eve, son-in-law, Aaron, stepson Matt, and Godson, David. Mercifully, I have not had to rent children because I have been graced with seven beautiful and willing museum-going grandchildren.

We, who have children, succeed in this business because they support us in our work, help run our domestic systems and, in my case, provide much better food for me to eat than I ever provided for them. It is my children, birthed or acquired, whose interest, sufferance, and pride in their parent's work, have created the foundation for any of my achievements.

To my beloved, retiring and retired husband, Dean Anderson, who travels with me, edits all my writings, believes in my success without envy, and continues to provide a Zen-like balance to our lives, I am profoundly grateful.

The most important pleasure of my professional life has been the created family, I have met during my museum activities. The family writ large, if you will. Museum work is an ensemble activity. And ensembles created with passion, care and commitment to each other, achieve more than the more formal ones focused on the strict separation between employment and friendship. Notwithstanding what we were taught about the more traditional work ethic, I recommend the blurring of vocational and personal life.

As an example of this permeable membrane, those who nominated and seconded me for this honor are among my dearest friends. Bonnie Pitman, who had enough faith in me to ask me to be the Godmother of her only son, David, applied that faith one more time and orchestrated the nomination. Joel Bloom, Rick West, Steve Weil, Michael Spock and Diane Frankel \* friends all, stepped up and said they too supported the nomination. A forceful group! I thank you all and bask in the light of your combined achievements in our field.

I entered this wonderful profession by accident in 1969 and progressed in it with the help of many. I am a woman of a time and age that needed men in higher places to voluntarily reach down and give me advice and an opportunity to succeed. In 1974, when I first came to AAM, I observed men of judicious power, political acumen, and social grace. I formally asked some if they would mentor me. I am grateful to each of them \* Joel Bloom, Kenn Starr, Stephen Weil, George Tressel, Joe Noble, Michael Botwinik, and Tom Leavitt -- who did not turn me down and who for the rest of my career carefully suggested strategies and ideas that I could use. These sometimes included how to dress and how to modulate my voice.

To illustrate the family blurring, I received a phone call from Joel Bloom before my impending marriage to Dean Anderson. He said that no marriage was to take place without Dean asking formally for my hand in marriage from the paterfamilias, himself. So dutifully, Dean went off to be looked over and only after an affirmative phone call, did the wedding planning commence.

I have been graced with bosses that I could learn from, whose humanity, belief in the equality of partnerships, and commitment to friendship exceeded even their enormous talent as directors. They are Andrew Hyde II, Michael Spock, Tom Freudenheim, Jeshajahu (Shaike) Weinberg, Rick West, and Bob Gavin.

Yet notwithstanding the generosity of these men, I am mindful that this award has been given to very few of my gender even though our field is primarily populated by women. Women have increasingly taken on roles of leadership, but their representation lags behind the reality of their contribution.

My museum siblings, soul mates and friends, too many to name, now in their fifties and sixties, grew in the profession with me, and have always been my anchors, guides and comfort. This is a field where important and engaging ideas can be discussed with intellectually curious, brave, and funny folk. The ideas debated at work, at conference sessions, over many meals and, in my youth, the dance floors, when acted on, moved the museum world forward. My gratitude for your company knows no bounds.

Just as it was critical to my growth to ask my senior mentors for help, I feel it is my obligation and privilege to help those gifted people, coming up behind me, by coaching them seriously. Mentoring is not a casual occurrence. I was mentored by men, and for the last few decades, my mentees have been only women. I feel I have come full circle to say that now I have men among my cherished group. And I would be disingenuous if I did not say how much I learn from them all.

Unlike the profile of my predecessors, I am neither retiring nor retired. And I have not held a paid museum position for ten years. I am a consultant, pure and simple. Over the years, AAM has struggled with the distinction between those who are salaried and those who work in for-profit museum-supporting businesses. There are young people in this audience -- designers and restorators, for example, who may never hold a museum position during their entire careers, but who provide services we cannot live without. I would like to believe that our most senior members, who choose independent work over retirement, bring invaluable historical memory and an unparalleled brain trust to the field. We are all integral to our messy museum family. It is time for the distinction based on our source of income to fade away.

As a career leit motif, I have been privileged to work with people who have felt marginalized and to help tell their story using museum language. I am the child of a German-Jewish immigrant mother who was afraid of museums because she felt they represented the potentially dangerous majority. So to me, the definition of marginalized covers not only people of color, not only the economically poor, but members of every group who feel left out in the official telling of our collective history. This broad definition of marginalized might cover almost everyone.

We, museum personnel hold the material of others in our hands. In keeping the stuff mostly safe, I believe we have taken that trust with utmost seriousness and for that we can be proud.

Nevertheless, I believe, more and more deeply, that we control too much, and give too little power to our users and the descendants of the material we hold. Everyone, the marginalized included, must see the museum as their own, choosing how they wish to use it. We must welcome more and teach less.

Finally I want to talk to the wonderful younger people in the audience, metaphorically my museum grandchildren. When I entered the museum world, the political climate of the nation included demonstrations and protests. Twenty six years ago, AAM committees were started by educators seizing the microphone at such a general session as this. Part of that rabble \* Bonnie Pitman and Linda Sweet \* sit in the audience today as two of our most respected museum colleagues. A few years later, but also at an AAM general assembly, we kept Governor Nelson Rockefeller cooling his heels, while the rank and file debated and then passed a non-nuclear proliferation policy on a voice vote from the floor. The vote was fueled by the fiery rhetoric of Malcolm Arth and John Kinard, two moral voices no longer with us.

I recount these two incidents because, to our new generation of museum practitioners, I fear AAM looks composed, well run, and a little stodgy, with no room for the novice, the unsettled, or the firebrand. I was once part of the young Turks. And now looking back I see that we were all enriched by the passionate dialogue of the times that brought changes to our thinking and our practices.

I urge the next generation of potential upstarts to vociferously take on those issues we are not yet thinking about but should be. You are the inheritors of our mantle. The AAM family needs you!

Thank you again for this wonderful honor and thank you for allowing me to speak my mind yet again.