Acceptance Remarks – Sandra Barr (CFES Mentorship Medal, 2021)

Halifax, NS, May 15, 2022

When I was on the executive of the Canadian Federation of Earth Sciences, one of my responsibilities was to assist Shoufa Lin with the logistics of soliciting nominations for the Mentorship Medal, ordering the medals, and arranging the award presentations. At one point I also revised the design of the medal to incorporate the new CFES logo. During all that time, it simply never occurred to me that I might myself someday receive the award!

I am grateful to my former students who nominated me for this award. I know that it takes time to do award nominations, and I feel truly honoured that they care enough to do that for me.

I admit that I think of myself not so much a mentor but as a facilitator, or even a collaborator, trying to work with my students to reach mutually beneficial goals. But sometimes I admit to feeling more like the helmsperson on a four-masted schooner, trying to keep the ship on course through stormy weather and rough seas! It seems that no journey is smooth sailing throughout.

I enjoy geology and I enjoy working with others – whether students or colleagues – to try to better understand our science with its amazing combination of challenge and inspiration. I would never have been able to do what I have done during my geoscience career on my own – my students and colleagues have made it possible. For me, each project has been a scientific step forward. Indeed, I think that they have given me far more than I have given them, and I guess that is why I am still doing it after 46 years at Acadia University and 2.5 years at Chiang Mai University in Thailand before that.

Receiving this award causes me to think back with gratitude to those who mentored and encouraged me throughout my life, both in my school and university activities as an athlete and in academia – they were my role models in terms of how I have interacted with students over the years. I have always tried to give the same types of opportunities and help that I was given. It is interesting to reflect that when I began my geoscience career back in the early 1970s, I almost always worked with men. Now many of my students and my closest colleagues and collaborators are female – if I have contributed in some small way over the years to that systemic change, then I am indeed proud.

Finally, I thank Shoufa Lin and CFES for this great honour. I am glad that our patience paid off and that we were finally able to do this award live and in person!