

## Acceptance of the Dana Medal of the Mineralogical Society of America for 2019

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Hello. There are many things I would like to say, but the most important is “Thank you.” The Dana medal means more to me than I can perhaps express. This is a very great honor.

I also want to say that when I thank you, I mean—you. Each one of you. The success of an individual—myself, or really anybody else—stands on the contributions of other scientists. And, like it or not, each of you has contributed to my being here. Some more than others, to be sure. But some of you trained me, or worked with me, or helped me get a job, or recommended one of my proposals to be funded, or provided samples or a really thoughtful review. Well, most of them were thoughtful. Even if you didn’t do it for me, you did it for someone else in the society. And in those ways, you supported me. One of the reasons I’m here is because of all your dedication.

I’ve been reading the children’s series of books by Lemony Snicket (pseudonym of Daniel Handler), called “A Series of Unfortunate Events.” In these stories, three children undergo an unrelenting series of misfortune after misfortune after misfortune. I can assure you that I’m also here because of a series of *fortunate* events. Heather, if I hadn’t met you, and you hadn’t agreed to marry me (through some miracle), I wouldn’t be here. You manage everything in our household, especially in raising our kids, Tavi and Asa, all while you run your own business. Heather, it’s really because of all your efforts that I have had the bandwidth to sink so much time and energy into science. I’ve been really fortunate.

Mark Harrison, Rick Ryerson, John Valley, Bruce Watson, and of course Frank Spear (who gave up dry chicken so he could be at his son’s wedding): you’ve done more than anybody else. You’ve taught me almost everything I know, from being able to collect meaningful data to being able to think critically. I’ve been very fortunate to have you. And, of course, I’ve had some tremendous students and postdocs. They have helped me to learn everything else I know. Again, I’ve been fortunate.

Now one thing that I think some of you know, but not all of you, is that when I was a post-doc, I came *that* close to leaving geology. And when I say I came close, I don’t mean once, or even twice. I actually counted it up, and there were 6 times I almost left geology. Some of them were things that just happened to me; others were from becoming discouraged. To give you an idea, at the front end, when I was first finishing up as a graduate student, I received an NSF post-doctoral fellowship. It was my only option. If the people who served on the panel of the post-doctoral program at NSF hadn’t recommended my proposal, I don’t know where I would be, but I wouldn’t be



here. Every year, I thank NSF. And at the back end, Rick, if you hadn’t offered me a job at Livermore, I’d be in the Tech industry. But there were lots of other things that kept me going. Lots of them were people expressing enthusiasm for what I was doing, or, like I said, providing samples or good reviews that made it seem like my work mattered. Or letting me bounce ideas off of them. That kept me enthusiastic.

Perhaps it seems like I’m just trying to deflect some of the honor that you have presented to me. And there might be a little truth to that. I’m a fairly introverted person, as many of you probably know, and attention is difficult for me. But I actually have a reason for saying all this. I’ve been thinking about someone’s career. You go through different steps, and some of the steps are pretty heavy lifts. It’s hard to go from a beginning graduate student to someone who finishes a Ph.D. It’s hard to start out as a faculty member and work your way to simultaneously teach and do research to attain tenure. But while it’s fun and exhilarating to be a post-doc, it’s also hard. You started out having the help and support of your graduate advisor, but now you have to raise your own research money and build your own independent program to the point where you can get hired at another institution. There are times when it can be discouraging.

So, what I would ask of you is that, if you know a post-doc at another institution, please invite them out to give a talk. Anyone can do that—just talk to whoever organizes your seminars. That would be *very* encouraging—it would show them that their science matters. At Boise State, a couple times we’ve offered visiting post-docs the opportunity to engage in a mock interview with critical feedback. The idea is that they get some experience with going through the whole interview process, and then when they have a real interview, maybe things go a little

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easier for them. That's what we hope, anyway. Or, if you're more senior, and you know a younger scientist who's applying for a position, you could offer to read their application, maybe give them a few pointers that might improve their application. Even if they turn you down, they know that their science and their career matter. And always be critical of their science—in a good way. No one succeeds otherwise. It may surprise you that Frank Spear has been hands down my longest-standing and overall sharpest critic. But he's also one of my best friends, for

many reasons, but in part because his criticism of my work has helped me to succeed.

Now, if you do all of this, maybe all you get is a scientific society that's a little bit stronger and people who are a little bit better scientists. I think that's a good thing, even if it's a little nebulous. But, maybe, if you're fortunate, one day you'll see someone you supported standing up to receive an award, just as, when I stand here to receive the Dana medal, I see so many friends and colleagues who supported me. Thank you.