

Acceptance of Rossby Research Medal

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Thank you so very much, Mr. President, and AMS members, for your belief that my contributions to the topic of cumulus clouds put me somewhere in that class of modern meteorological lions of whom Carl Rossby was one of the first and—in my opinion—the greatest.

I have often told my students that Rossby was the Leonardo Da Vinci of meteorology—perhaps he was even more. He not only founded the science of dynamic meteorology, developing the fundamentals of large-scale circulations and thereby paving the way to numerical prediction, but, like Leonardo, he worked creatively on virtually all the frontiers across an incredible spectrum of the atmospheric and oceanic sciences. Again, like Leonardo, some of the frontiers he created, such as the geostrophic adjustment problem and acid rain, for just two examples, were so far ahead of his time that they are among the hottest topics that researchers are tackling now—a generation after his death.

To me, Rossby was more than a father. In an interview lasting less than 10 minutes in 1942, he moved me out of social sciences into meteorology. He was my inspired, beloved, and feared professor, both as an undergraduate and graduate student at the University of Chicago in the early 1940s.

Later we became close colleagues at Woods Hole and increasingly warm friends up through that last summer of 1957 in Stockholm—where he persuaded me I should try to simulate the birth of a cumulus cloud on his new high-speed computer. Rossby was ambivalent, often negative, about the potential and even the propriety of women remaining active in meteorology after World War II. Nor did even he have the perfect crystal ball regarding the science. When I persisted in trying to continue for a Ph.D., he said cumulus clouds were a perfect topic for a little girl to work on because no one else was interested in them and therefore I could stand out.

However, a decade later, his excitement about cumulus models showed that he possessed another trait of greatness, namely the ability to modify his position in the face of new

evidence.

I'm sure everyone expects me to conclude my thanks for this award with a brief statement about women in meteorology.

A short while ago, one of the distinguished male meteorologists (present tonight) perhaps thought he was complimenting me when he said that I am the exception that proves the rule.

That the facts overwhelmingly disprove that statement is the point with which I wish to conclude.

The facts show that the place of women in meteorology is not even a burning issue anymore. Women have *demonstrated their success* as distinguished contributors of seminal research to the journals and as effective sustained performers in responsible jobs. In the AMS, women have been selected as Fellows and for high offices. It is true that women remain an unfortunately small percentage of the total number of professional meteorologists and that they still have special sex-related problems for which the AMS Board on Women and Minorities must continue to play its vital role to help them cope with.

Nevertheless, women meteorologists can now stand on their own, without defensiveness—and soon without, I hope, the prefix “woman” preceding “meteorologist.” They no longer need, want, nor should expect special treatment or attention. For this alone I'm very glad I've survived to this day.

My receiving this wonderful, encouraging—though simultaneously humbling—recognition is not an anomaly, but on the contrary, is a harbinger. It says—loudly and clearly—to that increasing number of younger women contributing to our science that each of you can expect an opportunity comparable to that of your male colleagues to receive the recognition that you earn.

I am confident, in fact, if I am accorded a normal life span, that I will be here to cheer for the next several of you when one of these great honors comes your way. ●