Good Morning. What a blustery winter we’ve had so far. And we all know Oregon is nowhere near done letting us know it’s winter in Oregon.

Thank you for braving the elements to be here with us this morning. Typically I talk a bit before we present grant awards and I’m going to do that again today.

But today, in addition to acknowledging the great work all of you do, I want to share my history with the Cow Creek Umpqua Indian Foundation.

I first became a board member in 2001. I was the youngest board member by far and I was surrounded by people who had far more non-profit and life experience than I did. I wasn’t sure I could meet muster. But I was sure going to try.

Because those more mature board members took me under their wings, I became comfortable and contributed. I had the unique opportunity to listen to the stories of those board members and understand the values and virtues on which they created the Cow Creek Umpqua Indian Foundation. It was a learning time.

Then, tragedy struck our Board in 2006 as Martha Young, our executive director, died of cancer. She had been a guiding light for all of us and her absence was keenly felt for a long time. It still is.

I became the Foundation’s next executive director in 2007. Let me assure you I was overwhelmed. What had I gotten in to?

I knew the title meant I was expected to lead and guide. Again, those more mature board members took me under their wings and supported my growth. I was mentored by Kathie Olsen, who had been on our staff since before Martha passed away. It was a learning time.

But, the growth of the Foundation’s vision – expanding to include basic needs as feeding people became critical– as well as the strong continuation of supporting families and education became part of who I am today.

The Foundation can’t grant every request. We work hard to grant as many as we can. And the work that is reported back to us by the many non-profits the Foundation grants is astounding and unbelievably rewarding.

It has been, for me, sixteen years of learning. A learning time. I am so grateful for those years and for all of you…this board as well as the many agencies the Cow Creek Umpqua Indian Foundation supports.

I wouldn’t trade one minute to have been anywhere else. To my mind, to put it simply, I have the best job in the world.

Thank you.

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January 10, 2016

Susan Ferris for Carma Mornarich