

## Acceptance of the Distinguished Public Service Medal for 2003

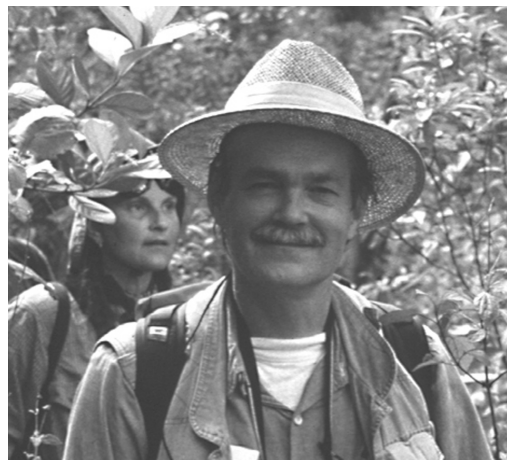
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Mr. President, Colleagues, and Friends:

It is a great honor to receive the Distinguished Public Service Medal of the Mineralogical Society of America, particularly in the presence of people I respect so much: President Doug Rumble, President-elect Mike Carpenter, and Charlie Prewitt, a guiding spirit and mentor for years—it is a real pleasure to be here while you are receiving the Roebling medal, and all of you out there at the tables. Jeff has been very kind in his citation (at least I assumed he would be when I wrote this, and he was) which shows the true Wisconsin gentleman he is at heart, when you consider he is talking of a New Yorker at that “other institution” from the vantage point of Washington and the Smithsonian. All kidding aside, I value Jeff’s views as his position and experience parallel mine, and we have been buddies and friendly competitors for a long time. Thanks, Jeff.

To what do I owe receiving this honor and recognition? Obviously, it has been my career and activities as Curator of Minerals and Gems at the American Museum of Natural History, with perhaps the exhibition “The Nature of Diamonds” as the cherry on the sundae. For the most part, it is a case of extraordinary luck, combined with a modicum of ability to take advantage of the great opportunities lying before me. I fundamentally thank my lucky stars for having been in the job market when the American Museum of Natural History was looking for a mineralogist to curate the mineral and gem collections. The Museum had a grand collection and a history of excellence in research in systematic biology and paleontology, but mineralogy got somewhat left behind by the 1970s. But the Museum decided to rectify that, so Marty Prinz was brought in to start a new beginning for the mineral sciences, and he soon hired me. Extraordinary! I had not been looking for a museum career or even recognized it as an option in graduate school, but this one brief opening of the door changed my life, and what a life. My wife often tells people it is the most interesting and amazing job she knows. I am the keeper of incredible baubles and specimens that inspire curiosity, appreciation, and occasionally a little drool. I travel the world chasing minerals, rubies, spinels, and jade. I get into the Hermitage, the Kremlin, the Topkapi Palace, and endless museums seeking diamonds. And I get to tell the stories of the minerals and stones to a vast public audience while stoking my furnace for research projects. What I have learned is that connecting the underlying science about minerals and gems to their roles in culture, technology, archaeology, and even fashion is a precious hook for educating about geoscience. Humans are narcissistic, so appealing to vanity as the bait for getting to deeper meanings is a ploy we in the museum biz have learned to employ. It works! Moreover, the questions underlying things like the value of dia-



monds, the color of beryl, the sources of jade really require some research—so, we should embrace these possibilities.

Enough for perspective, now I would like to thank those who have enabled what may be considered my accomplishments. We all thank our parents, for otherwise we wouldn’t be here. From my father I received acumen and some Yankee stiffness, so maybe I only show my “warm and cuddly side” to those who get to know me. From my mother I received an appreciation for culture and class, which is an important sensibility in the Museum world. I thank Marty Prinz for hiring me at the AMNH, conspiring in our early days there, and being a most valued friend and colleague—as he is no longer with us, I dearly miss his not being able to share this moment. I thank many colleagues at the Museum, both inside the department and outside, like Gerhard Schlanzy, a designer, and Joel Sweimler, an exhibition developer, who globe trotted with me chasing diamonds. I thank them all for collegiality, inspiration, assistance, and hope, as well as many grand moments and opportunities to give my ideas scope and substance. I thank the Museum and its administration for providing a beacon of excellence, so that while I may grumble from time to time, as we all do, I am extremely proud to be a curator and scientist there. However, most of all, I thank Carole Slade, my wife, lover, and best friend, for always being there, listening, talking, and encouraging me to grasp the ring on this merry-go-round of life. However, the ride is hardly over; there’s plenty more in store because without plans and aspirations for the future, what is life? For example, first, I have secretarial duties to attend to, and I think the word “jade” lies on the horizon of major activities, with a number of co-conspirators in the audience to join in the fun.

Thank you again for this great and appreciated honor.