

AWA AWard

**Linda McCargar PhD RD
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Thank you very much to the Academic Women's Association for this honor. I am pleased to accept it, but also humbled when I see the list of amazing women who were previous recipients. I especially want to thank my colleagues Kim Raine and Helen Madill who generously took the time to nominate me. I also thank my graduate students and colleagues for joining me tonight; and my husband Larry who has been extremely supportive every step along the way.

The Academic Women's Association provides a forum for advocacy for women on campus and opportunities for networking and nurturing among women from different disciplines and at different levels of their academic careers. I hope that I can portray at least in a small way, some contributions that I have made in the spirit of these important goals.

It was suggested that I talk about my "journey" to this stage in my career; so as I thought about what stories I could highlight, I thought I would try to include in that journey a bit about me, for those whom I haven't had the opportunity to meet yet, a bit about my research and a bit about a celebration of women – all in 15 minutes! And I would like to dedicate this award to my mom who truly was the strongest female role model in my life – a very kind, generous, smart and fun woman.

So, the start of my journey was in Manitoba; I grew up in a small town called Hamiota, and then we moved to a small city – Brandon. I tried to think back as to what would have been my first significant experience of the unique camaraderie of women. What stood out very clearly in my mind was our high school Basketball Team. For four years together, we lived and breathed basketball. We shared common goals, a strong work ethic, highs and lows, tears and a whole lot of fun. We also worked very hard academically or we couldn't participate on the weekend trips and tournaments; and that entire team of girls have all gone on to wonderful successful careers.

In this picture I will just point out one person - Laurel Strain, who I went to school with from grade seven onward. Laurel is now the Director of the Alberta Centre on Aging. Who would have guessed that we would both be here at U of A thirty.....some years later?

After high school it was decision time. I had always been interested in nutrition and health and discovered that the University of Manitoba offered a Nutrition program in the Faculty of Home Economics. BUT I was also really interested in sports and physical activity. So, I had to decide, would I go into nutrition or physical education? I really agonized over this decision because both areas were really important to me. So, after much consideration I did what many young people in the early 70's did....

I went to Europe! I took a year off and for part of it backpacked, hitchhiked and road the trains through Britain and Europe. I always tell people that I have been trying to take another year off ever since! The following year I did enroll in Nutrition, at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, but stayed active and still played various sports.

In my fourth year, the week before the deadline to apply for a Dietetic Internship, one of my professors Dr. Vivian Bruce, asked me why I wasn't applying for an internship and encouraged me to do so. I hadn't really pursued that route and I didn't think I had the necessary courses, but it turned out I could apply for a Clinical internship (one such program just happened to be available in Edmonton).

So, my first move to Edmonton was in 1977.

At the "old" U of A hospital I completed the one year internship. At that time, we received a stipend of \$425 per month. Some of us stayed in residence rooms at Aberhart Hospital for \$85 per month. Again, a year of wonderful women friends – lots of highs and lots of lows, but together we were better! Interestingly – the clinical interns were allowed to take one University course during the internship; because it was suggested that we may want to start working towards a masters degree. So what did I choose to take? Exercise Physiology from - Dr. Art Quinney. (now Deputy Provost here at U of A). What fun! I could sneak away from the hospital to the Exercise Physiology lab 3 times per week! I did subsequently complete my masters degree in Nutrition here at U of A with Professor Margaret Gee and then moved to Red Deer to work as a Clinical Dietitian. After a couple of years I got the academic bug again and applied to various universities. But, the best fit for us at the time was the University of Alberta.

My second move to Edmonton was in 1984.

I did my PhD here in Nutrition and Metabolism in the Faculty of Home Economics with Dr. Tom Clandinin. My research included everything I could have hoped for. Research questions focused on Nutrition, Weight Management, Energy Metabolism and Expenditure, Body Composition, and Protein Metabolism. I learned methodologies in both nutrition and physical activity, including both animal and human work. After my PhD it was decision time again. Should I do a Post Doc or apply for faculty positions? I was encouraged to apply for a post doctoral position. But, there were also some faculty positions available too. And,...there were only certain locations where my husband could transfer with his work. And,... I wanted to do something a bit different.

We chose Vancouver. There was a faculty position in Nutrition at UBC which I applied for. I also applied for post-doctoral funding and proposed a project on Nutrition, Physical Activity and Diabetes also to be carried out at UBC but at the Sports Medicine Clinic. To make a long story short – I accepted the faculty position, my husband got a transfer two weeks later, I deferred the post doc one year and my department Chairman agreed to let me have the second year of my appointment to carry out the post doctoral project that I had proposed and obtain more experience in Sports Medicine. So, I was very fortunate that I was able to accept both! At the Sports Medicine Clinic I had the opportunity to work with different athlete groups who had challenges meeting weight categories for their sport and also meeting nutritional requirements for optimal health and performance.

That was also when I became very interested in the management of both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes. We also implemented a study on the determinants of weight maintenance; trying to determine what level of caloric intake and expenditure was required to maintain prior weight loss.

On a personal note, I had started running regularly during grad school, and in Vancouver it was just so much easier to run all year round, I decided to try a marathon. Soon, long runs starting from Stanley Park became a Saturday morning ritual. Initially this was myself, a post doctoral fellow and two of my graduate students. You can cover a lot of discussions on a 3 hour run! But, we actually didn't talk about work that much and gradually started doing marathons. Running is so good for fitness, for the social aspect and also for stress release! There was a joke at UBC that if you wanted to work with Linda you had to run marathons – which definitely wasn't true! – but a lot of my graduate students did ultimately do one. I loved Vancouver and I loved working at UBC,.....BUT there's something about Edmonton and the University of Alberta.....

My third move to Edmonton was in 1995.

An opportunity arose to return to the Nutrition department at the University of Alberta in a newly merged department of Agricultural Food and Nutritional Sciences where I have been ever since. I have a new women's running group here – so the Saturday morning ritual continues. This is made up of a small group of us who say we are a coffee club with a running problem. The marathons have continued, but Kim and Rhonda have raised the bar a bit high with their recent endeavors in Duathlons and Triathlons!

My current teaching is in the two areas I love – Clinical Nutrition and Sports Nutrition. Most of my current research focuses on the determinants of healthy body weights – specifically the impact of nutritional factors; but with the generous collaboration and expertise of colleagues in Physical Education, Health Promotion and Medicine I have been able to include the physical activity component in almost all of my studies.

Three of my students have been involved in a web-based survey assessing nutrition and physical activity behaviours of adolescents in Alberta. We currently have 6500 completed surveys. To do that, we at one time had 20,000 consent forms out to parents in Alberta! Also on the assessment side, another graduate student is determining the nutritional and functional status of patients with cancer to try to understand factors influencing weight loss and muscle loss. This is a joint study between our dept and the CCI. On the intervention side two of my students developed and implemented a wellness program in local schools to evaluate its impact on indicators of disordered eating. And another student has completed a school-based intervention in elementary schools promoting increased fruit and vegetable consumption and increased walking. We used pedometers as motivational tool; but very quickly found out that kids don't walk –they run! Either way, they tracked steps/day and servings/day in their own personal journals. That project could not have happened without an entire team of undergraduate project students and graduate students who went to the schools three days a week for almost five months!

So, really this award represents a team effort – not an individual. As we all know research takes many people, working long hours, committed to the goal but also committed to each other. I have always been involved with wonderful people and great teams in all aspects of my life! I wish I could thank everyone individually, but the list is very long. So thank you all for helping me get to this stage of my journey. Who knows where the next road will lead?

Thank you very much!