



My Allegiance to Gratitude

Colleagues,

I've loved books for most of my life. Reading provides an escape from the day's worries and lets me travel the world, learn amazing things and experience life from a different perspective.

In recent weeks I had the pleasure of reading *Stronghold* by Tucker Malarkey, which follows one man's quest to protect the world's "last best" salmon rivers. I was somewhat familiar with fly fishing for Pacific salmon from my undergraduate years in Portland, Ore., but this book took me to a completely different level of understanding. Malarkey weaves a compelling story not just about the passion of fly fishing for salmon and steelhead. She also describes how one person, Guido Rahr, was able to convince Russia, the United States and other countries to protect millions of acres of crucial salmon ecosystems, or strongholds. It's a remarkable book, and I highly recommend it.

The second book that made a big impression on me this month was *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. It's also about sustainability and protecting our planet and its habitants, but from the perspective of a Native American woman.

It was the chapter titled "Allegiance to Gratitude" that blew me away. In this chapter she shares the [Thanksgiving Address](#) used by the six nations of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) to begin and end gatherings and meetings. The Thanksgiving Address, or the "Words that Come Before All Else," is not a prayer but a recitation of things to be grateful for. The Haudenosaunee believe that peace requires gratitude.

In other words, they are "glass half full" people. Looking at life with a spirit of gratitude, taking an inventory of all the things that are right and good rather than those that are "wrong" or "bad," is amazing. Rather than being frustrated by being so far away from my family, I am grateful for Facetime that lets me see and hear my granddaughter and spend time with my family in a way that's more meaningful than phone calls.

The privilege of working in healthcare and being able to help others is a deeply-held part of who I am. It's why I work. It's probably why a lot of you chose a career in healthcare too. The seemingly endless battle against COVID makes it difficult to maintain the passion we once felt, but reading *Braiding*

Sweetgrass and the Thanksgiving Address shifted my perspective and really helped me look at things differently.

We get to heal people who are sick, and we get to administer vaccines and monoclonal antibody therapies that help prevent more serious illness. We have vaccines and masks and other PPE to keep us safe. We have people willing to give their all to help others. We live in a beautiful state with rivers, lakes and amazing sunsets. There are so many things to be grateful for.

In the book, Kimmerer shares that when her students complain that the Thanksgiving Address is so long and takes so much time to finish, her response is, "Poor you. What a pity that we have so much to be thankful for." We do indeed.

She also explains that the Thanksgiving Address reminds us that duties and gifts are two sides of the same coin. Asking "What is our responsibility" is the same as asking "What is our gift?" The capacity for gratitude is one of the gifts we have as humans. Here's my humble attempt at a personal expression of gratitude to you as an extension of the Thanksgiving Address:

The People of UAMS

We give thanks for your sacrifices and your willingness to share your knowledge and your skills to help and to heal others. You come together and work together to create a safer, healthier world where families can live and love one another for many years. You bring babies into the world, you care for the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the nice and the not-so-nice, and you gently usher the dying out of this world when their time has come. You are amazing. To all the people of UAMS, we send our heartfelt greetings and thanks.

Take care and be safe.

Please share your thoughts or send an e-mail to UAMSStrong@uams.edu.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steph'.