

**The Reb Gregg Award
Acceptance Remarks
Lewis Glenn**

Does anyone remember driving into the field to a course start in the back of a cattle truck – one shoveled out for the occasion? Or when skinny-dipping on course was de rigueur? Remember when we didn't conduct background checks of our instructors and driver's background checks on our drivers? Remember when the lines between professional and personal relations with students were not as crisp as now? Or when field communication technology was non-existent and a runner had to be sent from the field for help?

Times have changed, haven't they?

Society's mores and expectations have changed; this is no longer the Age of Aquarius. We are now held more accountable for our behaviors and the behaviors of those that we hire – so background checks and drivers background checks are common. With advances in technology have come expectations that we will have that technology – so we now carry cell and satellite phones, and SPOT and similar location technology into the field.

Not surprisingly, these days, lawsuits seem to be more of a Pavlovian response than a reasoned response to an actual injustice. For some years now, we manager-types have to spend time with insurers, lawyers and crisis management experts, time that was spent in other ways back in the day.

We have adapted. We have become more professional. We have pushed the envelope for each other – one organization addressing one issue, field communication or background checks, for instance, and raising that bar, and another organization doing the same with another issue. And in this, we've bootstrapped our way along, getting better at taking people into the out-of-doors and bringing them back unscathed, yet happily altered.

This conference, the 18th WRMC, has served to coalesce an array of organizations and individuals around the value of understanding and managing the risks in our work. It provides a venue for sharing best practices, for asking good questions of people who may have good answers, and establishing supportive networks among us. For this we have to thank the conference steering committee, led by Liz Tuohy, the sponsoring organizations, NOLS, SCA and Outward Bound, and those of you that show up to speak, present workshops and share your expertise, and most of all, those of you that show up to learn and meet other practitioners. The community that has formed among us helps establish and support good risk management in this industry at large.

But, in all of this managing risk, have we gone too far? In responding to a litigious society, have we built too many fences around our adventures in an effort to not so much avoid mishap, as to avoid lawsuits? Is it really always somebody else's fault when things go awry? – A view all too common. When's the last time you heard someone say, "It's really my fault; I'm responsible for that"?

I ran across this quote from Helen Keller the other day: "Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing."

While our resident attorneys would have major heartburn if we blurted this out in a court of law, it does speak an existential truth, one that is at the heart of the work we do. And, I believe, a truth that is at the heart of the reason that most of us ended up in this business.

I suppose if we are to remain in business, and keep our insurance, we must attend to current realities – society's high expectation that no one gets hurt, and a quickness to sue when someone does. So, we work to professionalize our risk management, which for many of us includes yearly participation in this conference. Yet, our product, that transcendent experience that participants in our programs have after an arduous expedition with others in the middle of nowhere, must be protected. We can't let the adventure get thrown out as we manage risk.

The following narrative about Willi Unsoeld, mountaineer, philosopher, educator and Outward Bound instructor, speaks to the value of risk:

...He didn't climb a mountain merely "because it was there." His task was to know himself better, to test himself. Unsoeld was instrumental in establishing the Outward Bound program, premised on the notion of pushing beyond one's personal comfort zone to gain a deeper grasp of the soul. He was once asked by a fearful mother if he could guarantee her son's safety; no, he told her. But by sheltering her son from risk, he added, she would guarantee the death of his soul.

And so, it is this fine line that we walk. And we walk it in good company.

I have been hanging around long enough to know that there are many people in this room, and not in this room, who are deserving of the recognition that this award bestows. Knowing this, and knowing that some of these very people chose me as this year's recipient, is humbling. So, I accept this honor with some amazement, with deep humility, and great thanks.