

**Marigold Linton**  
**Pomona College Commencement 2012**  
**May 13, 2012**

I am honored and my heart is full to be receiving this degree from Pomona College today. Thank you, President Oxtoby and the Board of Trustees for making this award possible. And because I know awards don't result from magic, I would also like to thank those who supported my receiving this award.

To the Pomona College graduates of 2012: Many of us, your faculty, parents and loved ones, have sat where you are today. One of the things about being older, we can look back over the decades. We have accomplished some but not all of the things that we wanted. And through the miracle of memory we can see ourselves where you are now. I hope through the miracle of words to help you see yourselves where we are now.

When I was some years younger than you, I began to dream; I was looking forward and I was planning. Although this was long ago, it was not far away: the Morongo Reservation near Banning California, just 50 miles from here. I had only a small plan. I have always described my early perspective and planning as being like standing in the branches of a small tree and stretching to see as far as I could.

As that young girl on the reservation my plan involved perhaps the most difficult action I have ever undertaken: To leave the reservation where my family has lived for more than 100 years to get an education. Apparently this was a very hard step; it appears that I was the first California reservation Indian to have ever made that jump: it was only a few miles to the University of California, Riverside but a world away. I know that some of you have made leaps that were as complex and as painful and I commend you for making those life changing transitions.

Now at the university I was standing on the branches of a taller tree and I could see further. Simply surviving was replaced by getting good grades. Eventually I could see a PhD, becoming a full professor and having a research career studying memory. By this time I was perched on a pretty tall tree and had a much broader view of the world. I had become successful, far beyond my wildest imagination. I had proved that I could succeed in White Man's world. I got married and have developed a thirty year partnership with someone who supports my ideas and teams with me to make them real. This is very important and something you should all do.

Then, to everyone's surprise I jumped. Just imagine me as a middle-aged Ms. Tarzan leaping from high in my secure tree to a second tree ululating as I swung – you know, Tarzan like.

I wish I could say that at the time I fully understood why I had done this. I wish I could say I landed gracefully on a high branch of my new tree. It was actually more like "splat." And not so high. As I slowly came to understand my actions I realized that I was moving to help my people and that I didn't exactly know how to do it. This was in part because I was charting territory where no man/woman had ever gone before. I ultimately developed collaborations between the University of Kansas and Haskell Indian Nations University where none had existed –



although they stood less than two miles apart for more than 100 years. I learned how to develop teams – big teams. I learned how to write grants that have yielded about 30 million dollars in federal funds for programs to assist American Indians and other minority students. I was blessed to be the president of SACNAS at a time I was needed. And I have done much of this at an age where most people have been long retired.

Happily, unlike being a professor which had its ups and downs, helping “my people” provides me joy every day. I have learned to do things that I thought were impossible for me (who am, in my heart of hearts, still the shy young girl from the reservation).

How is this relevant to you on your graduation day? What is it you see as you stand in the branches of your tree? What do you want to do? No matter where you start out, in today’s world you are going to be leaping between trees – perhaps several times – over the next 30, 40 or 50 years. You must plan so you are ready for these changes.

When our kid (she’s an anthropologist) said she was learning Vietnamese and going to Vietnam to study minorities there I wondered why she didn’t study “our” minorities. But the world is getting smaller. We must all think globally. If I were her age now, like her I would be worried about indigenous people around the world. I would be learning new languages. I would be finding new trees to leap to.

In the course of these satisfying problem-solving activities I acquired my adult Indian name: “She walks with purpose.” Miih ama’ qay mermerher’ nemey.

I am going to close with a Lin Yutang quote: “I have done my best.” That is about all the philosophy of living one needs.

Thank you and the very best of luck as you find your own tall tree to climb.

## **About Marigold Linton**

Marigold Linton is Cahuilla-Cupeño and an enrolled member of the Morongo Band of Mission Indians. She is the first California reservation Indian to have left the reservation to go to a university, starting at UC Riverside and ultimately earning a PhD in experimental psychology from UCLA. She taught at San Diego State University and the University of Utah. At Arizona State University, she was the director of American Indian Programs serving Arizona tribes through the Rural Systemic Initiative. Since 1998, she has served as director of American Indian Outreach at the University of Kansas, where she developed a consortium with Haskell Indian Nations University that obtained more than \$13 million to support research training opportunities for American Indian students and faculty at both institutions. She is a founder and former president of SACNAS (Society for Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science) and founder of the National Indian Education Association (NIEA). She serves on the Committee of Equality of Opportunity in Science and Engineering and the National Academies Policy and Global Affairs Division Committee, and received the 2009 Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics & Engineering Mentoring.