

ASIS&T 2014 Award of Merit Acceptance Speech

by Marge Hlava

2014 Annual Meeting Coverage

EDITOR'S SUMMARY

Accepting ASIS&T's Award of Merit for 2014, Marge Hlava retraced numerous influences on her information science career, starting with the radio broadcast of the launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik propelling science education. She applied her master's degree in biology to information science and beta testing of early telecommunications systems. In 1978 Hlava started her own company, Access Innovations, and has provided information services for over 2,000 projects over the course of 36 years, despite earthquakes, hurricanes and collapsed roofs. The company develops controlled vocabularies and enriches data with metadata to enhance search and retrieval. Through her years with ASIS&T, Hlava has observed academics, managers and entrepreneurs at Association meetings, each with distinct goals, but notes an increasingly academic focus with real-life applications more likely to be seen at ASIS&T's IA Summit. She urged more pure research as well as work on practical applications with large-scale data sets. In closing Hlava thanked the many individuals who supported her along the way

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Wow! For a girl raised on a chicken farm in the middle of America's dairy land, there is a feeling of history re-imagined in receiving this award. In Wisconsin, the dairy cow is important. People eat eggs and poultry, but it is not the focus of the region. So it is with ASIS&T, I think. Yes, we are interested in the creation and use of

databases, web connections and the like, but that is not the main focus of this organization. It once was – there was a strong connection between research and application when I joined ASIS&T in 1976. The luminaries had one foot firmly in each camp. They wanted to know if the application of their theory would work, if it was scalable, if it was transferable. The connection times were slow – moving from the teletype at 150 baud to an acoustic coupler of 300 baud was incredible. Now the connection is in megabits per second, and some complain it is much too slow.

I was fortunate to attend a one-room grade school, sort of like today's Montessori schools. While I was there, we listened to a radio broadcast about the launch of the Sputnik satellite from Russia. It was thrilling to think that one could actually shoot a man into space and he could survive! The space race was on, and it gave rise to a huge spurt in educational support. The bookmobile, which arrived every two weeks, started bringing two long boxes of books to devour each time, instead of one. The BSCS [Editor's note: Biological Sciences Curriculum Study] and other programs to get more kids into science were launched as I arrived at high school.

I did not start out to be an information scientist. I actually decided on nine different majors my first semester in college. I took two jobs that year to pay my way through school; one was as a cashier in the student union,

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and the other was working in the biology library. I became a botany major and then certified in secondary education. My husband and I moved to New Mexico to continue our studies. I pursued a master's degree in botany and worked on a NASA contract as an information engineer.

Over the next five years, I abandoned my master's degree work and became an information scientist. Well, actually I was information director first for a NASA Industrial Applications Center called the Technology Application Center, or TAC, as well as for the National Energy Information Center and its Albuquerque affiliate. I logged more than 20 hours per week on the new online systems in the early 1970s.

The developers of those systems were open to comments and suggestions but also shared how the systems really worked. I was a beta tester of the Lockheed Dialog system, NASA recon, SDC Orbit and the emerging BRS. Roger Summit and Carlos Cuadra were generous with their time and information and launched me in an excellent career direction. I was the only woman on the team and later the only woman in management, so I helped them girl watch on the coffee breaks.

A government contract at a university was not my cup of tea, so in 1978, I started Access Innovations and took five of my staff with me. Jay Ven Eman joined us in December of that year as the first full-time employee, and in 1980, Jay and I bought the other five out. So started the voyage I continue on today. I do not have a particular destination in mind. It is an adventure. Each new project (and we start about three per month) is a new puzzle. Everyone's data is unique. Some are big projects; others are small.

An adventure it has been too! I have walked through snowdrifts in high heels to meet foreign dignitaries. The earthquake in Mexico City in 1985 made our eight-story building into one and a half stories of rubble. When the landlord took the roof off our building in Albuquerque, a cloudburst caused all computers to fill with water, and the rain soaked everything and everyone in the building. Hurricane Kate put four feet of water in the server room in Jamaica. In Russia, we were taken to a lonely dirt field with much fresh digging and a steel shack in the middle. I was sure we were going to be shot and buried, but it was the entrance to the old KGB subway and an excellent keying facility. After my passport was taken in France for "study"

while I sat for more than two hours on a stopped express train, I began to call myself an electronic publisher when traveling abroad. Information scientist sounds too much like a spy to border officials.

At this point, I have done over 2000 projects with fascinating clients and a wonderful team of professionals. We have built well over 200 controlled vocabularies from scratch and significantly augmented another 600 or so. To be successful, all of these projects need to be implemented or integrated with a larger whole. As the datasets are enriched with subject and other kinds of metadata, we have to keep an eye on the fact that the only reason to do this work is to improve access to the data. It needs to be coupled with search, retrieval and distribution platforms, new product creation, web portals and other data.

Early on, I observed stratification in the audience at ASIS&T talks. The academics were in the front row, studiously taking notes and discussing the concepts advanced by the speakers. The middle was the management layer, people who needed to listen closely so that they could take home the lessons learned and try to apply them to the challenges they had at hand. In the back of the room, either standing or diving for the aisle seats, were the entrepreneurial people. They did not want to be trapped in the middle and have to listen to the whole thing if it wasn't interesting to them. They also talked among themselves, having heated whispered discussions in the back about the topic at hand. The datasets were big, the code was compact and the challenges were tough puzzles to sort out. I would leave an ASIS&T meeting with my head nearly bursting with new thoughts and things to try. I can remember Ev Brenner and Gene Garfield having no hesitation about telling speakers exactly what was wrong with their theses (and then how to fix them as well) or arguing with others in the audience (like Tefko Saračević) about the finer points of a presentation. Listening closely, hanging around and not saying much, were those with the badges that said "U.S. Government." Where do they go for information now? The IA Summit seems to be where the rubber is hitting the road for ASIS&T now. It is a vibrant meeting, brimming with ideas and banter about how to implement those concepts.

ASIS&T has changed, and our focus has narrowed. I note now that we

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have become an almost purely academic membership. The talks at the Annual Meeting are often doctoral student showcases. The datasets are small: 5000, 50, even 7 records, really? What can you truly conclude from that? We need to encourage people with big datasets to share how theoretical implementations work. We need to try things out on hundreds of thousands of records to be sure the plan works and is scalable. There are lots of big and free datasets to use; the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, the National Library of Medicine, the Government Printing Office and other agencies love to have people massage their data. We need to reestablish the partnerships and be sure they are not dependencies.

We cannot assume that all government agencies and corporations are only sources of support. Nor should the organizations supported by tax dollars be in competition with those who pay those taxes. This competition has created an uneven playing field and therefore mistrust. Let those who pay the taxes create the products so that research can be pure and supportive. A couple of years ago I did a study with Kevin Boyack for a client to determine where the field is going. We found that library science is diminishing, information science is shrinking and computer science is growing quickly. We need to change that for the good of the field.

Enough of that. I have a few thank you's to give before my time is up.

It is good to continue to give to the Association, as it continues to give to me in more than equal measure. I am a past president of ASIS&T, and I chair the *Bulletin* Advisory Board, produce (not edit) the *Proceedings of the*

Annual Meeting, maintain the *ASIS&T Thesaurus*, index the works of ASIS&T, and I created the ASIS&T Digital Library. Working with Dick Hill, Vanessa Foss and Jan Hatzakos is always efficient and the tasks quickly accomplished, and the interaction along the way is fun! Among the ASIS&T community, I have made many friends and had adventures with them, as well as thoughtful technical and financial discussions. In particular, Bonnie Carroll, José Marie Griffiths, Candy Schwartz, Mike Koenig, Nolan Pope, Tom Hogan, Helen Atkins, Sam Hastings and Buzzy Basch come to mind. Business advisors include Steve Arnold, Kate Noerr and Dan Wilde. I am lucky to know them and have them spend time and thoughts with me.

My husband Paul has been a continuous and proud supporter through my entire career. My business partner Jay is a sounding board, encouraging me and pulling me out of my periodic messes reliably. Both of them occasionally roll their eyes at my ideas and antics. My mom taught me that you can have a career and a family, too. My daughters, both accomplished young women, have grown to be good friends and interested in conceptual topics as well as the regular personal matters. I am truly blessed to be surrounded by a professional and interesting team of innovative and creative people with an eye for detail at Access Innovations. To these specifically and to the ASIS&T community I give thanks and appreciation for a wonderful voyage, and I look forward to the next adventure together. I could not have done it without you, and it certainly would not have been as much fun!

Thank you. ■