

SUMMARY

- ◆ **Our profession includes many people whose voices and visions make our professional journey collegial as well as exciting.**
- ◆ **In honoring these five, we honor all STC exemplars whose friendship and support have made the difference to us.**

Interviews with STC Exemplars

Technical communication has evolved, reshaping itself many times in the last half century, and STC has grown with its membership, adapting to represent and support members and chapters. And certainly we are the profession that meets change, that manages it. But this is demanding and increasingly fast-paced work, and we are busy, sometimes so busy that we don't stop to see how we ourselves have changed, to admire the real and virtual distances we have covered, or to recognize the people who have supported us and our profession along the way.

At every level, STC is more than an organization to its members. It's an important source of connection with colleagues, leaders, mentors, innovators, and generous friends. These are the people whose voices and visions make the professional journey collegial as well as exciting. At the 46th STC Annual Conference, the Voices and Visions stem sought to recognize all our technical communication mentors by honoring five of them. A nominating committee, made up of David Armbruster, George Hayhoe, and Ken Rainey, and chaired by Karen Schriver, developed these criteria for STC exemplars.

An STC exemplar is:

- ◆ *A mentor and inspiration to other technical communicators, either in professional matters or in service to STC or other professional organizations*
- ◆ *A person who embodies what it means to be a professional in our field—someone who paves the way for future generations*
- ◆ *A participant in a range of professional activities both within and outside of STC, including such things as conference presentations, publications, and corporate or academic in-service activities*
- ◆ *A professional with broad knowledge of the field who uses that knowledge in support of the field's growth*
- ◆ *A member of the field who helps us recognize and embrace the interrelations among various parts of the field (as among research, practice, history, and education, for example)*
- ◆ *A member of STC and/or other technical communication organizations whose voice and vision have inspired newcomers to the field through publication, experience, or other contributions*

Selecting a few exemplars from many was no easy task. The nominating committee put forward dozens of names before coming to agreement. In honoring five, we honor all the STC exemplars whose friendship and support

have made the difference to us. Our five STC exemplars are Lottie Applewhite, Virginia Book, Ernest Mazzatenta, Thomas Pearsall, and Lola Zook.

Lottie Applewhite has spent her technical communication career as writer, editor, and educator. An STC fellow as well as a distinguished member of the American Medical Writers' Association, Lottie has supported those entering the profession as author, presenter, mentor, and friend. Most recently she has developed a mentoring program for new contributors to STC's journal, *Technical communication*.

Virginia Book's extraordinary career as technical communication educator has led her to active participation in over 20 communication organizations. A fellow of the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (as well as one its most active members), Virginia helped establish technical communication as a discipline. An author and consultant as well as an educator, Virginia has supported educators and communicators in our profession.

Ernest Mazzatenta is an innovator and mentor who continues to support technical communicators in STC and in his own community. A former STC president and winner of the 1995 president's award for his many years of leadership, vision, and innovation, Ernie cofounded the STC publications contest (which became the International Technical Publications Competition) and has served in many STC leadership roles. Ernie just completed a decade of service as manager of the STC fellows nominating committee and teaches technical communication classes.

Thomas Pearsall, like Virginia Book, is one of the founders of technical communication education as we know it today. An STC fellow, author, and holder of many honors, Tom also chaired the Department of Rhetoric at the University of Minnesota, which developed undergraduate and master's degree programs in technical communication. He is also a founder of the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing and of the Council of Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication.

Lola Zook has for nearly 50 years been a leader and innovator in technical editing in a career that has taken her around the world. Her experience as educator, consultant, author, and editor is reflected in her many publications. An STC fellow, Lola has supported and mentored countless new communication professionals in her many STC presentations and in her warm presence.

At the 46th Annual Conference, each of the five exemplars shared their insights into the Society and the profes-



Ernie Mazzatenta, Lola Zook, Virginia Book, Tom Pearsall, and Lottie Applewhite were the exemplars honored in the 46th STC Annual Conference's Voices and Visions stem.

sion in a series of interviews. The following excerpts from those videotaped interviews indicate why these exemplars are five of the many whose voices and visions make a lasting difference to us all.

Katherine Staples

LOTTIE APPLEWHITE

You've devoted so much of your energy to mentoring less experienced technical communicators. Tell us why you find that work so rewarding.

I enjoy being a mentor because there are these young people who have such tremendous potential. Also, I need a lot of help with the volume of work that I have! And mentoring them gives me a chance to work with them so as to help them, not with hypothetical classroom assignments but with what comes into my office every day of the week. There are calls that come all week long, because those whom I am mentoring are not always able to come to the house. They have been from Indiana, Virginia, many other states. Sometimes I have even received in my home young people from other countries who have spent a month or two with me for the sole purpose of learning how to help

their bosses prepare papers to submit for publication in English language journals.

I just get a joy out of it. It is such a joy to see these young people develop. It is such a joy to see them learn to ask questions, to see them analyze the different parts of the journal article. The time just flies when we are doing this. So what can I say except that it's just a joy?

Why have you continued your education throughout your career, and how has this assisted you as an author's editor?

The big thing that I have done is that I've taken degrees that have not been directly relevant to my professional goals. These degrees have been enriching degrees. I think probably the most enriching degree is the one I just finished in 1997. That was a master of arts in liberal studies, so we had everything from the organization of organisms in biological sciences, to cultural anthropology, to personal narrative, to literature, music—and so it was the whole gamut that enriched me.

I work all day long with other peoples' thoughts and working in line with that person's target audience. I have to blank out all of Lottie while I'm working. I can't even think



Lottie Applewhite has distinguished herself as an author's editor in the medical field for more than 30 years and has been a valued friend and mentor to many in our profession.

about what paper is on my right or what paper is on my left. My attention has to be on the one paper I am working on.

To stay in that mode day after day after day makes Lottie a dull girl. And that's not Lottie. I have to keep Lottie alive!

How has your membership in other organizations enriched your professional career?

Oh, I think that for me the enrichment that has come from the other societies is similar to the way that STC has enriched my giving to those other societies.

I have to consider that the American Medical Writers' Association is my "home team" because I've been in the medical field all my life, and these other groups are different groups. I think it's too bad to think that one society or one association can give us everything we need professionally. So consequently it is a matter that I came into STC because I needed STC because these were the people who knew technology and I could see how publishing was going, technologically.

I didn't need medicine; the doctors knew that. What I needed was the editorial, the technological aspect, and so I say that STC enriched my giving to the American Medical Writers' Association. At the same time, being in the American Medical Writers' Association I had the privilege of cocreating with Gerry McKee the core curriculum and that has been a tremendous success for 20 years now, based on the same criteria that we established in 1979.

The Council of Biology Editors I found to be much more enriching in the early years when the council was made up of journal editors, and I sort of sat in the back and listened to these marvelous people giving their concepts of policy, discussing the ethics and the peer review process. And it became a glorious experience because I would lift up the telephone and dial up the editor because I had a question or an author had a question, and I could just say, "Dr. So-and-so, this is Lottie," and they know who Lottie was, and this was such a help to the authors with whom I was working. Because remember, I am an author's editor.

What exactly does an author's editor do?

Number one, I hope that everyone knows that the apostrophe is before the s. It's author's editor not authors' editor; that is, I work one-to-one. It's that author's message that needs to reach that author's audience.

Since I've been working so long in orthopedics, I usually know the subject matter when papers come in to me now because I have been to their conferences, I have heard them speak, I get the flavor of what they're doing. I know the message they're sending. But that wasn't always the case. And there are still times when there are things I don't understand, and it takes a lot of reading of the references to even formulate the questions.

The first thing that happens after I have tried to understand a manuscript is to get with the author and ask leading questions or simply ask them to please clarify for Lottie and then listen. And listen and listen and listen. Well two things happen at that time. One is that the author, who probably had begun the research 15 years before and has completely forgotten how enthusiastic he or she was when that study design was created and how enthusiastic he or she was when certain results came out or the analysis was done, that my enthusiasm in encouraging them to relate their enthusiasm during the creative process have brought forth all kinds of things that are probably not even in the paper. But by listening and taking notes, I not only get their flavor, I get their insights, I'm able to understand their concepts better, and then we proceed to develop this paper, and their enthusiasm is restored. Probably right from the beginning of the origin through the whole process. And of course there's tremendous enthusiasm when the article comes out in published form and I get a reprint!

What is the bottom line in what you have tried to say to the authors with whom you've worked and to your colleagues?

That bottom line statement is whatever you do, do the best that you can, whether it be work or play, and have fun.

VIRGINIA BOOK

What were early technical communication courses like, and how did the curriculum change?

The technical writing courses in the beginning now seem so elementary. I didn't know anything at all about teaching technical writing. My experience, my indoctrination into it was a 3-hour conversation with a woman who had taught it part time before me, and that's all I knew about it. She recommended a textbook, gave me what materials she had, and I was on my own.

She had taught it as a lecture course, which now seems totally outdated—a writing course as a lecture course makes not too much sense it seems to me. We talked about such very basic, such elementary kinds of writing. But over the years, the fact that the title has changed tells you a great deal, I think. We don't talk about technical writing as much as we do about technical communication—*communication* being a much more inclusive term.

Technical writing is only part of it, so we're talking about theory and philosophy, we're talking about graphics, we're talking about document design, talking about editing. There are so many things involved in technical communication; all that has changed a great, great deal. And has led to different kinds of programs, for example, so there are service programs that are taught in the majority of schools where you're dealing more with people in sciences and technology who want to become better communicators. So it has a different objective, that kind of program. Service programs are different from certificate programs and degree programs because both the certificate and the degree programs are intended for people who will become technical communicators—it will be their profession, their career.

So that's quite a different matter, and that has led over the years to all sorts of changes. The relationship between academia and industry for example, so we've set up internships for people. It's led to consulting opportunities for people in academia who in my opinion are much better informed if they can have some consulting opportunities because then they know better what people in industry need, and they can incorporate that into the classroom, at the same time dealing with some of the more theoretical aspects of communication. And the certificate programs also lead to careers.

I think it's also affected the kind of methodology we use in the classroom. For example, when I talked earlier about a lecture course in technical writing, we don't do that kind of thing anymore. Instructors are facilitators, moderators. There's a great deal of collaborative writing on projects of all sorts because in industry we know there's a lot of team work, and so there's a lot of team work in the classroom as well. The changes have been enormous, ac-



Virginia Book instituted the technical communication program at the University of Nebraska and cofounded the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing and the Council of Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication.

tually. The profession has simply expanded beyond anybody's initial imagination. It's a wonderful, wonderful opportunity for many many people—a great career.

What were professional technical communication organizations like for women in your early days in them?

The professional societies at the very beginning were male-dominated as might be expected. The people in technical writing were all men. When I learned that I was going to be teaching technical writing, I had to find a way of learning something about it other than my 3-hour indoctrination.

So the first thing I did was go off to the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 1968 in Miami. I located I think one or two sessions on technical writing, and I went to one. There was a handful of people, no women. I met a fellow there, and he and I talked because we discovered that we were both housed in colleges of agriculture so we had something in common. But no women at all.

Tom Pearsall has talked about being at the same conference and talked about it being all male. I said "No, it wasn't all male; I was there." I became dubbed the invisible woman for the first few years because there were no other women who were attending these conferences. I think that the men didn't exactly know what to think about this. I don't think they thought actively about my going away. They weren't hostile. They simply weren't inclusive; they simply looked through me.

So I decided at one point that I'd had enough of this, and went to one of the sessions a few years later, and I saw the row of men whom I'd seen every year and to whom I'd been introduced every year, but they never remembered my name. And I saw them sitting in a row, and I decided to sit behind them.

And I saw one of that group coming down the aisle, and I decided it was time to assert myself, so I rose up in my seat and said, "Hello, John!" And John looked through me, but then he looked very quickly at my name tag, and he said, "Virginia!" and came over and gave me a big hug. And the men in the row ahead of me turned around and said, "Oh Virginia, how nice to see you; come sit with us."

That was the beginning of my being included, and I knew it was really important. As I said, they weren't hostile; I was just kind of a presence there that they finally acknowledged, and this was really important to me because these were the people who really did become very supportive and very helpful. And I became active then in the Association for Teachers of Technical Writing and also another organization, the Council of Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication, of which I was one of the founders. And so that became a very important activity to me over the years.

But that whole experience contributed strongly to my feelings about helping other people who were new to the profession, especially, in the beginning, to young women.

Tell us about your experiences as a mentor.

My own early experiences have really had a strong influence on the direction that I went then in becoming a mentor, especially for young women who were new to the profession who didn't know what to do—who were kind of thrust into the situation, and I wanted to help them. But that expanded to helping anyone new to the profession. It didn't matter whether they were women or men but simply people who needed help. I think that's a very important responsibility actually for those of us in the profession to help other people. We can learn from our experiences, so let's pass that knowledge on and see what we can do for other people.

What advice do you have for students in technical communication today?

I suspect it depends on the level at which they're entering. If you're talking about someone who's entering the university as a freshman, I would strongly advise liberal arts—a good strong liberal arts background, meaning considerable work with language and with communication studies, and certainly a background in the sciences, no question about that, computer science and so on. And then they should get

themselves into a program so they can develop the broad background that would allow them to look into the many opportunities that are in technical communication.

But if you're talking about someone who has experience, who maybe has a degree or doesn't have a degree but would like to retrain, would like to change directions, then that person ought to consider a community college, for example. Community colleges have wonderful programs available for people who are thinking of a different profession or who are wanting to do something a little bit different. And you don't have to have a degree to be able to get into this profession, it's a wonderful career, and it has many possibilities; you're not limited.

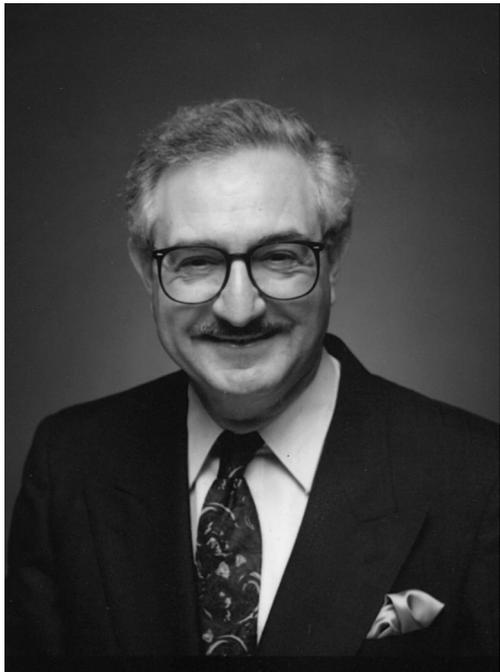
ERNEST MAZZATENTA

If you had to pick just one idea as the best you've ever had, what would it be?

The best idea I've ever had has come out of my STC experiences. It was the creation of a chapter publications competition. This was an idea that came to me during a chapter spring seminar. It came because at that seminar, I found very few people in attendance, and that bothered me. The speakers were excellent; they offered a great deal of information that we could use; but as I looked about me in that audience, I only saw a few people, and that really disturbed me. So as I left the meeting that day and looked around one last time, and I saw this handful of people, I thought, we've got to do something here.

And then it came to me. We ought to have a publications competition. I thought that a competition would be an excellent way to bring people to the seminar because

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Ernie Mazzatenta was a cofounder of the International Technical Publications Competition, served as STC president in 1983–84, and has taught technical communication in both industry and academe.

we would have all the winners attend and receive their recognition at the seminar.

I took this idea to the chapter board and they were interested in it, but they attached one condition. They said, “Ernie, you’ve got to become a member first.” And I said, “Oh yes, maybe I’d better join.” At this point I’d been going to meetings but hadn’t gotten around to joining. So I said “Certainly, I’d be glad to join.” And we were off and running.

We got the competition off the ground, and it worked out very successfully. The one big benefit, the one that was immediately apparent, was the fact that we did draw people to the seminar. We got the winners to come forward to receive their awards at the seminar luncheon; we got a good many of their managers to come along; in addition, we got a good number of members who were interested in looking at the prize-winning publications. So we got three new groups to come aboard for our seminar, and that was very satisfying.

There were other benefits that I learned about later. The winners told us that they gained new respect at work from their peers as well as from their managements. They were given new and challenging assignments in some cases, and some told me that they were even promoted. I can’t say that the competition was the only reason, but

certainly their communication skills had a great deal to do with their advancement.

I must say that I also gained from this. As a result of that chapter-level competition, I moved into other areas. Almost immediately I got involved in helping start the first Society-level publications competition, and from that point I moved into other positions, which eventually resulted in my becoming president of the Society in 1983.

You’ve spoken about the importance of versatility in our field. How can technical communicators become more versatile?

There are certainly numerous approaches. The most obvious is to look within your own work group and make sure that you know what the others in your group are responsible for and even more so be ready to step in to help if you have to. If you’re a writer, for example, you should know enough to understand where the graphics person is going with an illustration. Likewise, a graphics person should know enough about writing to be able to do at least the first draft of cutlines or sidebar material.

In addition, I think that the communicator has to know a great deal about the subject that he or she will be getting involved in. And that means research. Before approaching the subject matter expert, the writer, and the artist, and others involved in the publication must know what that specialty area is about. In that way, you’re much better prepared to ask intelligent questions of that expert and much better able to write something that will communicate effectively.

This kind of informal cross-training is essential to the education of a technical communicator. In our field, teams are becoming more and more prevalent, and so managements are asking writers, artists, programmers to work together more and more. Therefore, we can see informal cross-training working now.

It’s important that technical communicators expand their vision and reach out for new skills.

STC offers almost boundless opportunities to expand your skills. The annual conference of our Society is an education in itself. It’s almost amazing to think this, but we have within our conferences the geniuses of technical communication, the experts, coming from all parts of the world to bring us what they know. Our publications play a major role in educating our membership and helping them to become more versatile. Both *Technical communication* and *Intercom* are invaluable tools to increase one’s versatility. And of course there are our competitions, of which we now have 10, and our SIGs, our Special Interest Groups.

What have you done recently to expand your own versatility?

While I’m semiretired, I’m still looking for new and exciting things to do, and along with my consulting work and along

my teaching, I've found that what really stimulates me is mediation. I've become a mediator in my county's dispute mediation center. I trained to become a mediator, and now in the last 5 years I've conducted almost 100 mediations.

There are many things that a mediator does that would benefit a technical communicator. First, a mediator is one who must choose words very carefully. A mediator must be seen as one who is neutral, objective, not one who takes sides. And of course that bias can come through in the tone of your voice as well as the words you pick. And in your gestures and expressions. So you must be objective and you must always come through as someone who is not taking a side.

A mediator is also one who must draw forth from the reticent disputant what's on that person's mind and must also curb the noisy disputant, the one who just can't keep quiet. There has to be a balance.

A technical communicator is also one who has to choose words very carefully.

The mediator must also project coolness. Many times the mediator is in the middle of a very hot squabble with people, and so that mediator must be the one who maintains calm and poise, yet he must also be patient and tactful, and finally, that mediator must also be firm. After so much of this wrangling goes on, the mediator must say, "Let's get back to the table; let's get back to the issue that we're here to resolve."

I see technical communicators, supervisors, and instructors also having the need to remain cool.

Finally, the mediator must be a consensus builder, one who can help disputants see possible solutions to the dispute. So the mediator draws them out, asks them for alternatives, and then helps them arrive at the best possible solution. Mediators don't create solutions, they merely help move people toward what they want to do, and therefore the disputants can leave feeling that they have in fact resolved the issue and that they haven't lost, as they might do in a court settlement.

I feel that any communicator can gain by becoming one who tries to build consensus. So I believe you can move quite easily from the field of mediation to the field of technical communication.

THOMAS PEARSALL

How did you get started in technical communication?

I got started in technical communication quite accidentally, the way many people in my generation did. I was teaching at the Air Force Academy. I was in the Air Force, and I was at a meeting in Miami in the mid '60s of the Conference of College Composition and Communication, and I'd gone to a session on John Keats the poet, and it was cancelled for whatever reason. I was wandering around the halls looking for something to do, and I heard a lot of loud, raucous



Tom Pearsall chaired the Department of Rhetoric at the University of Minnesota and cofounded the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing and the Council of Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication.

laughter coming from one of the rooms, and I said, "That sounds like fun." So I went in there, and it was the meeting of technical communication educators. I had my uniform on, so one of them said, "Captain, would you tell us what's going on in technical writing at the Air Force Academy?" And I knew enough about it so that I was able to testify for a little while about what we were doing. And they were interested in that.

After the meeting was over, we went out for lunch, and we talked, and I thought, "These are a fine bunch of fellows." So when I went back to the Academy when the meeting was over, I went to the man who ran our tech comm program and said I wanted to teach a class in technical writing, and he was delighted to have me do it, and so I did, and I absolutely loved it. I was a kind of pragmatist by nature and it just fit who I was, and so there was no turning back.

Who were some of your mentors?

Well, first let me mention Herman Estrin; he was certainly a mentor of mine. Herman died on May the 5th of this year, full of years, after a good life, but all us owe him a great deal; he was a fine man.

Many of my mentors were kind of like myself—they'd been in the military, World War II most of them, and they had the technical training and that had somehow combined with their English backgrounds to get them into tech comm.

John Harris was most certainly one. John was so instrumental in situation analysis. He had devised a form that all us stole from that said what does your audience know, what does your audience experience, all that kind of thing.

Probably my best mentor was actually Ken Houpp who was the coauthor of my first book with me—and forever after book; it's going into its 10th edition soon. Ken really knew technical writing. He had done a lot of consulting, which at that time I had not done. He was a terrific mentor for me.

And certainly I would have to mention Jim Souther with his audience analysis, which I borrowed from later. I think those were the major influences on me.

What have been some of the major changes in the profession during your career?

There have been so many changes in technical communication that I've seen since the mid '60s. Certainly one of them has to be the inclusion of women. You know, when I talked about the people I saw at that first meeting—they were all men; there weren't any women there. Virginia Book showed up shortly after that, but not at that meeting.

Teaching tech writing in the beginning was a pretty primitive, easy thing to do. You had to know the difference between passive and active voice. You had to know a few report formats—the feasibility report, proposals, that kind of thing. And you needed a good textbook. My first textbook was Mills and Walter's *Technical writing*. It was a good basic book. It was a good start; it taught me a lot, and in a sense, John Walter was my mentor through his book.

But the most important change that has come about is a tremendous sophistication. For example, publications look so much better now than they did then, partly thanks to technology of course, partly thanks to research in things

I think the first thing I'd say is what I'd say to anyone starting out in any profession: make sure you really like it; make sure it's what you really want to do. And that doesn't mean that you enjoy every minute of the job but that basically it's something you want to do.

like page design. For example, Ginny Redish did so many wonderful things about how you devise a format to fit a situation. One of her examples is a great one. If you're making a sign to be read in a cafeteria line as people pass by, you can put all kinds of words on it. On the other hand, if you're devising a sign to be read on a billboard as you're driving down the Interstate, you have to get your message over in seven words. It's that kind of thinking that was not always there in the early days of tech comm.

Ginny Redish has also been a pioneer in usability testing. Here's a document; does it work with the user who intends to use it? Audience analysis is part of that, and I played a little role in that, I think. You really look at your audience: What are their needs? What are their objectives? What do they really want out of this report? All that has been a tremendous change.

Many changes. A growth in technology, a growth in sophistication. Technical writers and I hope technical writing teachers do a much better job today than they did when I started.

What advice do you have for those just beginning their careers as technical communicators?

I think the first thing I'd say is what I'd say to anyone starting out in any profession: make sure you really like it; make sure it's what you really want to do. And that doesn't mean that you enjoy every minute of the job but that basically it's something you want to do.

If I could relate an anecdote: When I graduated from Colgate in 1949, there was an executive training program for a large department store in New York City, and it sounded like a good deal to me. So I went in and applied for it and got through the preliminary interviews rather well and made it to the final interview with the vice president of the store. And after we chatted for a little while, he asked me, "What would you do if you had so much money that you didn't need this job and you could do anything you wanted to do?" And I said, "Well, I'd probably read a lot, and I think I'd write; I think I like writing. And I think I'd like to fly." And he turned to me and said, "You can't do any of those things here. You don't want this job." And I was disappointed, but I thought about what he said. Six months later I was in the Air Force and just as happy as a clam. It's the best advice I ever got from anybody. So first of all, enjoy what it is you're doing.

If you do enjoy technical communication and you want to stay with it, then obviously I would say you have to stay up with the technology and the research that people are doing.

And above all, as Lola Zook says, "Stay loose"; as Virginia Book says, "Have a sense of humor" because God knows that in technical communication there are going to be lots of times when you need a sense of humor.

LOLA ZOOK

What changes have you seen in technical communication during your career?

The changes have been on two levels. The obvious one that people think about first is that our tools have grown so much more complicated and versatile. But to me I think its more important that when technical communication was emerging as a field, there really wasn't any guidance in terms of how to go about it, what the principles were, what the booby traps were, and all that sort of thing. And there was a considerable period of time when that kind of guidance had to be worked out and crystallized and a body of literature developed.

To me that has probably been the biggest change, from the lack of guidance material as we were trying to formulate the field in the early years to what is now a very extensive body of literature and college courses of great complexity. So I feel that that change is actually a more important one than the to-be-expected development of more sophisticated tools, computers, and all the other things we use.

What do you think is the most important element of technical communication?

I think the most important element in technical communication is keeping our awareness that it is so terribly important for us to be accurate and precise and to protect the integrity of our material. That's the foundation on which we have to build when we're communicating scientific and technical materials. I think that's all important and will remain all important.

We need to protect the content that we're using and be aware of the specific audiences that we're working with. The two are tied together because you do work at different levels depending on the type of audience you have, whether it's technical or nontechnical, or educated or with little education. You have to make sure that the material you're preparing will both reach the people you want to reach and will still have the honesty and accuracy that it should have.

You've said that it's such a waste for people to retire. What are your views of retirement?

Well, I'll borrow Lee Iococca's line: I flunked retirement. Retirement for me was essentially an opportunity. I spent many years when my work was in publications management, and while I liked managing publications, I don't like budgets, and personnel evaluations, and buying equipment, and going to staff meetings.

So I retired from doing that kind of thing and became a consultant as an editor and writer.

As far as retirement is concerned in general, in the first place it depends very much indeed on the individual. Some



Lola Zook has been a leader and innovator in technical editing and has supported and mentored countless new communication professionals in her many STC presentations and in her warm presence.

people have so many ideas of what they're going to do, and they have plans that they can carry out, and they will do very well in retirement. But I think a lot of people are happier in retirement if they still are doing some kind of productive and useful and structured work.

It might still be in their field, or they might find it interesting to study some field that they have not worked in before, or work for nonprofit organizations or volunteer. But I think that by and large some sort of structured and useful activity is a very good attribute for retirement years, but it is something which varies for individuals, and it's hard for one person to advise another about what to do.

For me it's been wonderful to keep on working. I've been very fortunate in what I've been able to do. I've stayed in the field of editing and writing for research firms, both in behavioral science and information science, and I've been wonderfully lucky and have enjoyed it all.

What advice do you have for those who are beginning their careers?

Stay loose. I think they should recognize the breadth of what is available and not specialize too early. Do all they can to get acquainted with all the possibilities that there are. Stay open to some field that they might like to explore and get as broad a background as possible, not

just in our own field, but in a variety of areas. You can't tell what in the world you're going to be working on in the course of a lifetime. I wouldn't have believed the kinds of things that I've found myself working on over mine. And along with that, "stay loose" should include enjoying not only their own work but developing other interests and activities.

What advice do you have for students?

For students, the main advice I would have would be to get a broad basis for future work, and that means both learning the solid, basic skills of technical communication and the broadest possible background information—history and economics, and all that sort of thing. Everyone thinks in terms a lot of English courses, and yes, that's important, but you can fill that in a lot by your outside reading.

I think it's important for people who are going to work in this field to lay a broad base of general information so that they have this at least as a starting point for whatever kind of job they go into.

What about the need to develop a technical background?

An interesting development on that score, now that technical communication is much more of a recognized course of study in colleges and universities and so much is available, and if someone is really very interested in some field like chemistry or the environment, the dual major is something for them definitely to consider so that they get the technical background in this field that they want to work in

but get the technical communication skills so that they are also equipped to do that kind of thing.

And obviously, anyone starting in the field now should be computer literate. They certainly need to develop the basic computer skills and enough of the various specialized approaches, software and that sort of thing, to gain confidence that they can learn and show prospective employers that even if they don't know the system that the employer is using they have the ability in short order to pick up that information. There are so many seminars and short courses available now that it's not that difficult in most cases if someone has good basic computer skills to get whatever skills a firm may need—and those change about every 6 months!

What advice do you have for the leaders of STC?

The most important thing that they should do is keep in mind that what we are really engaged in is not the technical aspect of our work but the content of what we are trying to do. In other words, the main word in the name of our society is the noun *communication*, not the adjective *technical*. I think that the leaders need to keep constantly in mind what the basic purpose of the organization is. **TC**

EDITOR'S NOTE

The excerpts from the videotaped interviews reproduced here have been lightly edited for print publication.

On 30 July, while this article was in press, STC Fellow and exemplar Lola Zook passed away peacefully at her home. Her many friends in the Society—especially those she mentored—will miss both her warmth and her good counsel.