



Devil Mountain Views

January/February 2000

STC Society for Technical Communication
East Bay Chapter (Northern California)

Stranger in Paradigm

by Lenore Weiss

The Prelude

I sat at my desk for four months waiting to be transferred to another department, and because none of my superiors exactly knew when that was going to happen and since I no longer belonged to them as a real resource who could be counted upon as a full-time equivalent, the best they could do was to ignore me. Of course, every so often they requested I format a letter or design a brochure drawing me into the verbal world of doing things, but it was with such infrequency that I saw these occasions as mere anomalies in my otherwise unscheduled time. The truth of the matter is that no one gave a good triplicate form what I did during the day, and this, more than the fact that I had no work to do, came close to corrupting my spirit. Instead, I decided to become a desk. Not a real desk, but a piece of furniture quiet with drawers I could retreat into, where no one could give me the latest gossip about which department was being dismembered or who was on the cut list. I counted the number of push pins residing in my stationery tray. I arranged my paper clips so that they all faced in the same direction. Sometimes I worked on my computer, but I'd been through the tutorials so many times before that I chose to turn on the screen saver and remain inside my desk. Comparisons with the womb are obvious, but it was the construction of the drawers that really fascinated me. I've always been a person who likes to know how things are made.

Rabbit joints are common enough but it's the fit between two planes of wood that's crucial to the futurity of a piece—for example, if the wood was originally sanded with several grades of paper, and whether the glue was

allowed to set. These things take time; you can't hurry them. Slowly, I begin to see that the drawers of my desk are of medium quality, the wood a kind of composition board with walnut veneer. I want to endow it with more dignity, even though the handle of one has been totally lost in its last reorganization, and the handle of another is coming loose, its screw reveals spirals of pink paint underneath. Any contribution I can make has to be made from the inside. Cosmetically, the desk is a wreck.

Each day I review the progress I make in organizing the insides, move the paper clips closer to the front of the drawer and decide that I really don't need to save copies of all my time sheets as long as I have copies of my pay check stubs. This frees up more room. The push pins stick out like miniature daggers and I know what to do: retrieve my time slips from the trash and tear them into confetti-size pieces, throw them at whomever cares to listen. I am bestowing membership on a new order where our days are not divided into REG hours, a piece of paper which has no meaning other than to give our time the exact names of the week.

I gather parts of the grid into my hands and release them over my head. They settle around my waist and orbit, a meteor shower. This makes it difficult for me to sit in my chair. Hornets whirl around my torso, a Van Allen Belt. I reach for my purse so I can grab a cup of coffee. I barely fit inside the elevator. Everyone is looking at me. I drink my coffee decaf with low-fat milk. I arrive back to the cubicle after my coffee break and I see that someone has swept up the time sheets from the rug to hide my indiscretion. Who?

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STC Seeks Exemplar
Nominations
Calling New Members

East Bay Meetings

Meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month at Tony Roma's in Danville. See the back cover for more information.

Views from the mountain

From the top of our mountain, we can see six active Northern California STC chapters. Each chapter meets on a different Wednesday or Thursday so you can attend them all. See the STC website at stc.org for more information:

Wednesday

Week 1—Sacramento: 916.658.9602

Week 2—Berkeley: 510.466.5464

Week 3—San Francisco: 415.985.7121

Week 4—EB Independent & Contractor
SIG: 925.426.9755

Thursday

Week 2—East Bay: 925.443.4514

Week 3—North Bay: 707.483.4152

Week 4—Silicon Valley:
kaye@informix.com

Resources on the Web

The Internet is a valuable resource for information of interest to technical communicators. Here are some useful websites:

East Bay Chapter Discussion Forum
lists.SKYLIST.net/ebstc-talk/

East Bay Chapter home page
stc.org/region8/ebc/www/index.html

Bay Area Computerwork.com
bayarea.computerwork.com

NASA Tech Writing Guide
sti.larc.nasa.gov/html

Professional Association of Computer Educators (PACE)
www.pacenetwork.com

Strunk's Elements of Style
www.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/strunk

Online job leads

STC can assist with your job search or job announcement posting via e-mail.

To receive the Silicon Valley Chapter's job listing, send an e-mail to majordomo@stc.org with the following message:

subscribe svc-jobs-list

username@domain.name

Note: Replace *username@domain.name* with **your** e-mail address.

To receive the San Francisco Chapter's job listing, send an e-mail to majordomo@stc.org with the following message:

subscribe StcJobsBa-L

To post a job, see the instructions on the Silicon Valley Chapter home page (<http://es54198.easystreet.com/region8/svc/www/>) or the San Francisco Chapter home page (<http://es54198.easystreet.com/region8/sfc/www/jobs.html>).



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About Devil Mountain Views

The East Bay Chapter newsletter is named after a local landmark, Mount Diablo, in Northern California. With a few exceptions, all distances in California are measured from that point, called the Mount Diablo Meridian.

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Artwork by Carl Dennis Buell from *The East Bay Out* (Heyday Books, 1988, pp. 23 and 82).

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full page 5.75" w x 9.50" h \$250

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1/4 page 2.75" w x 4.0" h \$ 40

bus. card 4.5" w x 2.25" h \$ 35

Editor's Pen

In This Issue...

The holiday season is often a hectic time, and trying to focus on our careers can be a challenging task. In this issue, we offer you some help in getting started on those New

I'm excited about the upcoming challenges of 2000, and I celebrate what we as a chapter have accomplished in 1999. The hard work and dedication of our members is evident, and I'm certain we can continue our success well in to the next millennium and beyond.

Year's resolutions. In Education Corner, Rosalind Rogoff offers some advice regarding instructor-led courses and self-conducted training. Which is best for you?

In her President's Column, Judith Herr gives us a status report on our East Bay Chapter, and some of the tasks we have yet to face in 2000.

Guest contributor and STC Fellow T.R. Girill has submitted the third in his series of four book reviews. In this issue, he reviews *The Mythical Man-Month*, in which he discusses the author's view of the role of documentation in software engineering, the parallels between technical writing and programming, and the author's general management insights.

Lenore Weiss offers you some creative flair in this issue. Lenore has graciously submitted an excerpt of her writing, which will be published next summer in a book titled *Imagining Technical Communication*, one of a series with contributions from U.S. technical writers. Lenore's submission is the only creative writing piece in the book.

In addition, we have information on the exciting Pan-Pacific Conference being held in Hawaii this year.

I'm excited about the upcoming challenges of 2000, and I celebrate what we as a chapter have accomplished in 1999. It's not easy to have a successful volunteer organization, and that's what the East Bay Chapter is. The hard work and dedication of our members is evident, and I'm certain we can continue our success well into the next millennium and beyond.

Teresa Washburn



Teresa Washburn
Managing Editor

Introducing...

Jane Sheldon has joined our newsletter staff as associate editor. Jane holds a degree in English from CSUSF, and was most recently employed as a Marcom writer at Pacific Bell, writing and publishing offers and promotions for the statewide Business Markets organization.

She has extensive writing and editing experience, including several years with the California Hospital Association, where she wrote, edited, and disseminated statewide reports and other media pertaining to healthcare and health legislation for California's member hospitals.



Jane Sheldon
Associate Editor



Between the Lines

The Mythical Man-Month

Frederick Brooks, Jr., Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1975. (20th anniversary edition with four new chapters, 1995, 322 pages, \$24.95)

In 1975 Frederick P. Brooks published a collection of 15 essays on software engineering to pass along the experience he had gained as a senior project manager at IBM. His book was well received, selling 250,000 copies and remaining in print for 20 years. In 1995 the publisher issued an anniversary edition with four new retrospective chapters, in which Brooks speculates on the impact and broad appeal of his earlier writing. Three aspects of this unusual book, all valid concerns of STC members, are of interest to technical communicators:

- The role of documentation in software engineering
- The parallels between technical writing and programming
- Brooks's general management insights

The Role of Documentation

Technical writers and human-factors psychologists clearly endorse the importance of documentation. None, however, can rival engineer Brooks in his enthusiasm. Good documentation, he writes, "is fully as important" as algorithmic success, noting how it "focuses thought and crystallizes discussion" along with answering questions. He is thoroughly anti-minimalist in his support of the value of background passages and overviews. He expresses the belief that the most useful manual is the one written BEFORE the program it describes is launched. This seemingly paradoxical advice is valid; I have seen it applied successfully myself.

Writing/Programming Parallels

Throughout the book, Brooks draws revealing conceptual parallels between technical writing and software engineering. Only professional writers would notice many of these parallels, but others are obvious, testifying to Brooks's sophisticated awareness of his field. For example, he argues that clear purpose and conceptual integrity are crucial to success,

claiming that 80% of project planning is intellectual, not clerical, work. In these customer-driven times his advice on interacting well with clients is remarkably pragmatic: since clients "do not know what they want" and always change their minds as a project progresses, he argues for active leadership rather than passive listening. Iteratively improving a rapidly prepared draft (in engineering terms, "rapid prototyping") is a key part of how Brooks actively and reliably recruits useful client feedback.

And finally, Brooks notes that during the past two decades the appropriate metaphor for competent software engineering has gradually changed. For a period of time the term we used was "writing," an obvious parallel to what we do. Later, we began to use the term "building," analogous to the fashion for information architecture. Most recently, the word "growing" has been in vogue. This new descriptive term may seem a little New Age to some, but in Brooks's hands it describes a specific, testable technique.

Management Insights

Much of the book generalizes from managing software projects to managing anything, and Brooks's fatherly advice here undoubtedly accounts for why his book has been in print for so long. He devotes many pages to explaining why "managing large . . . projects is qualitatively different from managing small ones." He finds many places to apply the 80/20 rule with good results. The title topic, the alleged (and according to Brooks, spurious) interchangeability of people and time, reappears as a unifying theme across the essays. His critique of "the mythical man-month" with data, diagrams, footnotes, and aphorisms is very entertaining. One example—"adding manpower to a late software project (only) makes it later"—is as dead-on accurate as it is psychologically revealing.

Every manager or prospective manager at every level should read this book.

T.R. Girill
Fellow, East Bay Chapter member

Note: This is the third in a series of book reviews that T. R. Girill prepared as part of his celebration of his twentieth anniversary at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. DMV is pleased to reprint the book review here.

Is It Live or Is It Memorex?

I'm frequently asked about FrameMaker or RoboHelp training. The question usually refers to what classes are available. This seems ironic, coming from a group of professionals whose

We are now in the midst of an information revolution. You don't have to wait for a class to become available. You can make it happen whenever you like. You choose what to learn, when to learn, how much to learn, and how much time to spend on it.

main job is writing manuals and reference materials to be used by others in some form of self-directed learning.

I often recommend Computer-Based Training (CBT), Web-Based Training (WBT), Video/Workbook courseware, or how-to books such as the Dummies series. Some people still prefer a classroom with a live instructor. What are the benefits of, and differences between, instructor-led courses and self-conducted training?

Instructor-Led Courses

The most obvious difference between an instructor-led class and self-paced learning is the presence of an instructor. Although some distance learning and WBT classes have instructors who communicate with students via e-mail, chat, telephone, or snail mail, many people want personal contact with an on-the-spot expert. The instructor can give immediate feedback to questions, structure lectures and demos to fit the needs and responses of the students, and encourage interaction among students for synergistic effect.

The presence of other students is another benefit of attending a class. Diverse students bring fresh viewpoints to the material—alternative experiences and applications. Students attending a class are separated from potential distractions at work or home. This establishes an environment specifically designed for learning. Students know they must set aside a given amount of time for attending the class. It's more difficult to make that level of commitment when you are learning on your own time.

Self-Conducted Training

Self-conducted training, like books, WBT, and CBT classes, is generally less expensive than instructor-led classes. Instructor-led classes tend to cost \$300–400 a day, and often run several days. The same amount of information can be gleaned from a book for under \$40, or a video or CBT package for under \$200. Not only that, but once purchased, the book or CBT can be reused by fellow employees (if purchased by a company), or by yourself whenever you need to refresh your knowledge.

We are now in the midst of an information revolution, with courses available for downloading from the Internet or renting from the neighborhood video store. You don't have to wait for a class to become available. You can make it happen whenever you like. You choose what to learn, when to learn, how much to learn, and how much time to spend on it.

Check out the Career Enhancement links under Employment Resources/ Useful Web Links on the EBSTC website (<http://www.stc.org/region8/ebc/www/index.html>). There are links to purveyors of traditional instruction as well as online training resources. Many colleges are also offering courses for credit, even degree programs, over the Web. The opportunities are there, for a wide range of prices.

For those of you still looking for RoboHelp training, go to Barnesandnoble.com or Amazon.com and type RoboHelp into the search window. Barnes and Noble has seven books, including one from the Dummies series. Amazon.com has 12 listings, plus links to RoboHelp training websites. Remember—it doesn't matter if it's live or if it's Memorex, as long as it shatters the glass.

Rosalind Rogoff
Council Member at Large





Judith M. Herr
President, East Bay Chapter

President's Column

Prognostications for Technical Communicators: What's Next?

As an amateur predictor of the future of technical communications, I have been brazen in my prognostications and on target some of the time. But, writing this column in 1999 and knowing it will be published the other side of 2000 is intimidating even for a foolhardy soul. Anyway, here goes. What's up for technical communicators? For the discipline of technical communications? For members of STC? How are we doing as a chapter compared to the vision developed a couple of years ago?

Continue to enlarge our niche

I have focused lately on the potentially larger role of technical communicators and on gaining recognition of our extraordinary contributions. At the Region 8 Conference in Long Beach, Gwaltney Mountford and I presented a workshop on "Enlarging the Niche."

In a point/counterpoint dialogue, Gwaltney and I shared concrete suggestions for technical communicators working toward expanding into new, challenging tasks. To market our broad capabilities, technical communicators must demonstrate both cost-effective synergies and how each activity dovetails into the next to ensure value-added project success. From task beginning, we know how to contribute to the development and integration of strategic project processes; information design and development; team motivation and workgroup facilitation; documentation management; training material development and delivery, planning, and coordination; and team communications.

With our skill at audience analysis, in the next few years we will expand further into training material design, human factors analyses, usability testing, retention and motivation of diverse teams, and, of course, intranet/Internet-enabled communications. Among the lessons learned that Gwaltney and I shared were:

- *Services provided can overlap* with those provided by other organizations or consulting groups. Mitigation: Find opportunities to work with others doing similar or related tasks to avoid redundant efforts, or one group will be eliminated. Build it, train someone, and pass it on.
- *Out of sight, out of mind.* Mitigation: Figure out where the action is—be represented there!
- *Do it once successfully and you can own it.* Corollary: Own it and you may not want it—the evils of being a production/reproduction shop—the old days of Tech Pubs. "I don't take meeting minutes; I don't want to replace Kinko's." But nobody else can manage it at all, so tag we're it. Mitigation: Not sure yet.
- *It's harder to be a revenue producer when you are playing with Baltic and Mediterranean and others have Park Place and Boardwalk.* Corollary: You can own the railroads and the utilities and survive.

Vision for the East Bay Chapter in 2000 and beyond

For the East Bay Chapter, the immediate future is bright. When I ran for chapter president, I was asked to draft my chapter vision for the ballot. Resurrected here, the statement still provides a yardstick for progress and challenges in the year 2000 and beyond.

As we race into the high-tech 21st century, the variety of opportunities and demands for technical communications professionals explodes. Preparation for our changing professional roles in the year 2000 and the next 10, 20, 30 years demands continuous professional growth and the ability to apply unique skills, experience, and talents to new tasks. Participation in STC activities is one of the best ways I have found for attaining the professional goals and opportunities we seek. For me, STC provides:

- Professional (and social) networking
- Opportunities to acquire new skills and discover hidden talents
- Visibility and recognition for the profession among managers, peers, and the general public through competitions, community involvement, and public recognition of our members
- Tools for predicting and planning for future innovations and for new jobs that should be ours

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Come for the Conference, Stay for a Tan!

Year 2000 Pan-Pacific Conference in Hawaii

STC members from chapters in the United States, Canada, and the Pacific Rim will gather in Waikiki Beach, Honolulu, Hawaii, on October 19–21, 2000, for the first-ever Pan-Pacific Conference on technical communication. Regions 7 and 8 are collaborating to produce this exciting opportunity to develop your career path, learn new technologies, and invest in yourself in the millennium.

Take advantage of an early-registration discount by registering before January 31st. For details and a registration form, visit the conference website at www.pan-pacific.org. Reserve your hotel room by January 31st and receive an ocean view room at the city view rate.

You can also be a speaker at the conference. Download the Call for Papers from the conference website. Requested topics are:

- Best writing practices
- State-of-the-art publishing technology
- Career development
- Tools and technology
- Internationalization
- Management

The deadline for submitting a proposal is March 1, 2000.

Volunteers are also welcome to produce the conference. Contact Conference Chair Jack Molisani at jm@claritytechnical.com for volunteer opportunities. For sponsorship and vendor opportunities, contact Michelle Maurer at michelle@tecstandards.com.

Pam Coca, PR Committee Co-Chair
cocapf@earthlink.net



Prognostications

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How are we doing? What's next?

How are we doing as an STC chapter?

Great! With the recognition we have received as a Pacesetter chapter; with an award-winning newsletter; with our recently adopted chapter bylaws; with our President-elect in position and chapter leaders working hard; and with our community literacy and corporate outreach activities, we are doing very well indeed.

Of course, we have more to do! Responsibility for the Northern California Technical Communication Competition comes to the East Bay Chapter in 2000–2001; our work on visibility and professional recognition continues; and we know we have a lot to offer technical communicators who have not joined us yet, and may not even know we exist. Publicity, membership services, and growth activities call for our attention.

How are we doing as a recognized profession? The jury is still out. In demand and well paid, we technical communicators still disagree over our core competencies and appropriate tools. Debates regarding the best training for communicators continue. Technical communicators who work in industries not

related to the computer sometimes feel underserved by STC.

Some provocative questions to consider in the year 2000 and beyond include:

- Is it feasible and cost-effective to form blended technical communications teams consisting of professional writers and editors, graphics specialists, desktop publishers, production specialists, and technicians?
- As we provide training, lead strategic planning sessions or proposals, design Internet-enabled training materials, and create marketing communications materials, do we remain technical communicators, or have we changed professions?
- Should future technical communicators study a specific discipline—such as computer science, organizational behavior, physical science, or education—or is a communications degree or certificate the way to go?
- Is there room for both professionals and vocationally trained technicians in the field?

Judith M. Herr



Around the Region

The 1999 Region 8 Conference

Many thanks to Christine Stevens for providing the details of her volunteers' efforts for this article.

Christine Stevens, 1999 Region 8 Conference manager, her band of merry volunteers, and the LASTC Chapter provided yet another in a stellar line-up of Region 8 conferences! Held at the Long Beach Hilton November 11-14, the conference, themed "Driving Forces in Technical Communication," was an invaluable event for the 280 attendees, according to the overwhelmingly positive remarks on the conference evaluations. Another sign of success: The conference earned a whopping \$21,000 for the LA Chapter.

Under Christine's superior guidance and leadership, the conference was a model volunteer effort of more than 25 people; on time and under budget with every deliverable, they experienced almost no staff turnover.

By all accounts the conference was a huge success, due wholly to the selfless efforts of the 60 expert speakers and a dedicated volunteer staff. I'd especially like to recognize and thank the conference committee.

Christine Stevens, Conference Manager, assembled an exceptional committee and led them to plan and execute an exceptional conference. Although this was her first experience managing a regional conference, Christine was as organized, professional, and savvy as a manager with many conferences to her credit. She took full responsibility for all conference activities, and she deserves multiple kudos for her tireless dedication and the many sacrifices she made for the conference.

Suzanne Ferrell, Finance Manager, coordinated a complex budget and helped pick out a site. She also entertained volunteers and speakers at the Thursday evening reception with her great stories and a few cartwheels!

Amy Russell, Assistant Finance Manager, researched credit card vendors and processed all credit card transactions. (Two-thirds of our attendees chose to pay by credit card.) And although it was not in her job description, she drove across town during rush hour to pick up the CD-ROMs so we would have them in time for the conference.

Sarah Lee Hauslinger, Program Manager, led the effort to find high-quality speakers to present at the conference. She also played a huge role in publishing the preliminary and final programs and the CD-ROM. Sarah came up with the conference theme.

Stem Coordinators **Yvonne DeGraw**, **Frederic Mead**, and **Michael Meyer** were instrumental in communicating with the dozens of speakers. They processed audiovisual requests, reminded speakers of approaching deadlines, and coached them on how many handouts to bring.

Jim Desmond, Resume/Portfolio Review Coordinator, and his bevy of expert consultants dispensed valuable advice to dozens of attendees on how to enhance their resumes and portfolios. Doubtless some of this advice has helped land jobs throughout Region 8.

Emmah Smyth, Networking Lunch Coordinator, was responsible for developing the list of table topics, finding table hosts, and selling raffle tickets. Many attendees ranked the networking lunch the "best part of the conference" on their evaluations.

Karen Bergen, Publications Manager, had the mighty task of producing the call for papers, speaker application, preliminary program, registration form, welcome banner, name badges, VIP ribbons, final program, pad holder, meal tickets, tour tickets, conference brochure, tote bag, speaker evaluation, conference evaluation form, and CD ROM! In her spare time, she also convinced her company, Epson America, to donate the use of some much-needed audiovisual equipment, which saved the conference a huge sum. (Sadly, Karen's father passed away while the preliminary program was in the final stages of production. Nonetheless, Karen and Sarah Lee Hauslinger sent it to print on time, and Karen approved the blueines. A truly dedicated volunteer!)

Karen was not alone in these endeavors, however. She wisely chose publications coordinators **Pat Carson**, **Nancy Adams**, **Susanna Cawley**, and **Leslie Wolf** to print the badges and to design and produce the various conference publications (programs, brochure, and that stunning welcome banner). The conference logo

(the Region 8 license plate) was the product of **Will Soper** of the LA Chapter.

CD-ROM coordinators **Pat Soriano** and **Major Johnson** worked furiously under an extremely tight deadline to get the CD-ROM produced in time for the conference. We are all in debt to Pat and Major.

Virginia Beecher, Web Master and Silicon Valley Chapter Liaison, was solely responsible for posting regular updates to the official conference website. Two of our official sponsors and many, many attendees found us through our website, meaning Virginia's efforts helped to contribute many thousands of dollars to our bottom line.

Cheryl Freeman, Publicity Coordinator, published bimonthly news releases to a media list of more than 100 local magazine and newspaper publishers and many national professional organizations. Because of Cheryl's and Virginia's efforts, more than 10% of the conference attendees were nonmembers. Twenty-six nonmembers joined STC while at the conference.

Michelle Maurer, Registration Manager, was the bright smiling face who cheerfully greeted you early in the morning at the registration desk. Michelle was the model of efficiency and organization at the conference. She single-handedly confirmed registration and checked in almost 300 attendees!

Pam Wilkes, Hospitality Manager, was in charge of planning the lively dinner/dance, the hospitality tours, and overseeing the networking lunch. Her efforts made our conference experience more enjoyable. Acting on a referral from another STC member, Pam located the rock band *Obscure Cover*—one of the highlights of the conference, according to many attendees.

Esther Spachner, Hospitality Coordinator—Tours/Carpools, was in charge of scouting out tour locations and coordinating carpools from all around the state. Well, that was the idea anyway—Angelenos love their cars and no one carpooled to the conference, so far as we know. But what a bang-up job on those tours, ha?

Bonni Graham, Hospitality Coordinator—Banquets, was an excellent emcee, but she also served as the voice of wisdom to the LA Chapter, offering sage advice and sound

guidance wherever input was sought. And if anyone can make 40 flashlights sound exciting, it's Bonni.

Amy Dolcourt, Facilities Manager, was Christine's most loyal volunteer. She and her husband planned their pregnancy around the conference dates. When she found out she would be having twins, and that she was due the week after the conference, she did not drop out. She created a hotel registration form (without being asked), helped write the exhibitor registration form, ordered the food and audiovisual equipment, negotiated the finer points of the hotel contract, and made sure everyone was in the right place at the right time during the conference. (Amy gave birth at 4 a.m., December 4, to a boy, Liam, and a girl, Zafina, who both weighed nearly 7 pounds! Congratulations to Amy, Charles, and Kalinda!)

Audiovisual coordinators **Brian McGovney**, **Amy Dorsett**, and **Randy Davidson** moved equipment from room to room, set it all up, and tore it down each night. Many attendees noted in their evaluations how smoothly everything went, which is true. Not even an LCD light bulb burned out!

Bob Courtney was underemployed as Exhibit Hall Coordinator: What a dancer! He and Patti Booher did a swing that made us all want to take dancing lessons. He also handled the competition winners' exhibit, directed exhibitors to their reserved spaces, and co-wrote a very thorough exhibitor registration form.

Room monitor **Terri "123" Avizienis** assisted Amy Dolcourt to get things done between sessions: collecting session evaluations, moving equipment, and making sure the hotel staff refreshed the water and mints (very important). Many thanks for pitching in!

Thanks also to the many others who contributed to the conference: **Jack Molisani** and the LA Chapter council; **Bill Stolgitis** for his advice during hotel negotiations; **Mary Wise** for her lively, inspired keynote address; and our official sponsors who made the conference more affordable and provided valuable information on new tools and technology that make our jobs easier.

*Andrea Ames
Director-Sponsor, Region 8*





Lenore Weiss
Contributing Editor

Imagining Technical Communication, edited by Gerald Savage and Dale Sullivan and scheduled for publication in summer 2000 by Allyn & Bacon, is one of a series of academic books with contributions by technical writers from throughout the country. The book is divided into three sections:

- **Initiation Stories** (narratives about the first year on the job)
- **Process** (narratives about life on the job throughout a major project)
- **Life On and Beyond the Job** (narratives about the ways personal and professional life intertwine)

Lenore Weiss's narrative, the only creative writing narrative in the book, is contained in the third section. *Stranger in Paradigm* is part of a larger work by the same name that Lenore wrote as a senior technical writer for the City of Oakland.

Stranger in Paradigm

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Alarm Clock

Today I am an entrepreneur, and do whatever I want. I innovate my own meaning. I am building my own business and encourage people to call me at work. My voice mail system answers messages perfectly. I am building my own business. I am being an

Instead, I decided to become a desk. Not a real desk, but a piece of furniture quiet with drawers I could retreat into, where no one could give me the latest gossip about which department was being dismembered or who was on the cut list.

entrepreneur and listening to my own inner voice. Somewhere there is bliss. I am lost, left without instruction, trying to find you at the amusement park and all I see is the tattooed man and the fat lady, have this really sick feeling in my stomach knowing that I'm going to dissolve the way cotton candy does in my cousin's mouth. I want to be an entrepreneur but I know we came to the park together and that we're supposed to go home.

First Cup of Coffee

I need to pick a server conveniently located at my nearest node, a place where I can dip into the well of the universe and taste the water, and wonder how so many Chinese women writing from inside the civil service system in the 18th century were shunted from one province to the next because their husbands fell out of favor with a certain official. Guess what my days are like.

Traffic

Radio countdown to destruction liquid cool underwear duck my head in traffic waiting for the red light too long while a driver meanders between lanes, doesn't he know, I swerve, use the blinker, something in the car's back trunk thuds, doesn't he know; there's a run down my tights, a check I have to write, a phone call to make, and who knows what are we going to eat for dinner? Thank God. I did take this month's new parking stub to hang on the dashboard. I can't fit into small spaces. That's why I dumped ice-water on the construction worker's lap in the Korean restaurant.

Save this Date!

Saturday, February 26, 2000

for the

**Awards Banquet for
Touchstone '99**

Time: 11:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

**Location: Red Lion's Sacramento
Inn**

**Speaker: Jared Spool,
Founding Principal of
User Interface
Engineering**

STC Seeks Exemplar Nominations

Do you know a technical communicator who has nurtured and guided others in the profession? Someone who has served as a mentor and a friend in the business?

STC is seeking nominations for STC exemplars—technical communicators who will be honored at STC's 47th Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida, May 21–24, 2000. An explanation of the exemplar program and the nomination process can be found on the STC website at <http://www.stc-va.org/2000exemplar.html>.

The website offers instructions on writing a nomination letter and gives the address to which the letter should be sent. Please help the exemplar program by nominating someone you think is worthy.

There are many giving people in our profession—it's time they were recognized!

STC thanks you for your help and support with this effort.

Teresa Washburn
Managing Editor, DMV



Calling New Members

The East Bay STC Chapter membership drive continues to gain momentum, thanks in great measure to the efforts of many STC members.

- In October, I had the opportunity to make a presentation at PeopleSoft Corporation about STC and to invite visitors to our meetings, thanks to Teresa Washburn, who arranged the visit.
- The November 1999 Visitor's Reception was well attended, thanks to the arrangements made by one of our colleagues, Kelly Mathews, and your encouragement by inviting guests.
- Some of you have helped boost our membership by inviting guests to various meetings throughout the year.

Future plans are in the works for more presentations at companies in the San Ramon, Pleasanton, and Livermore areas. Information packets are completed; however, updates may be needed to highlight the upcoming STC Region 7/8 Pan-Pacific Conference scheduled for October 19–21, 2000, in Hawaii. Information for any other new events will be added as needed.

If anyone has any other suggestions, please see me at the January meeting. I will give a follow-up report about visitors and new members we have acquired as soon as the data is available.

Again, I thank each of you for your support and encouragement in working toward our goal of increasing membership of the East Bay STC Chapter. Invite a colleague to our next meeting!

Maurice Martin
Communications Director, STC



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Managing Editor
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East Bay Chapter meetings

East Bay Chapter meetings are held on the **second** Thursday of each month at Tony Roma's, 200 Sycamore Valley Rd., Danville. Be sure to take advantage of our advance reservation discount (\$18 by reservation, \$22 at the door).

Directions to Tony Roma's

Take I-680 to Sycamore Valley Road in Danville. Drive west (a right turn at the off-ramp if you're coming from Walnut Creek; a left turn from Pleasanton), cross San Ramon Valley Boulevard, and make a right turn into the Danville Livery & Mercantile shopping center. Tony Roma's is on your left. Parking is plentiful and free!

Upcoming chapter meetings

- January 13: Writing System Design Specifications for Programmers
- February 10: Avoiding the 'Peanut Butter Theory': Usability and Documentation in the Real World

