

MEMBER MUSINGS

MEMBER PROFILE | Betty J. B. Cohen, PhD

By Bettijane Eisenpreis

By the time Dr Betty Cohen obtained her first job as a medical writer, she had married, earned a master's degree in biology and education from Brooklyn College, worked as a researcher in biochemistry at Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research and Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, lived in France, earned a National Institutes of Health (NIH)-sponsored PhD in Epidemiologic Science/Virology from the University of Michigan, had 2 children, cared for an ailing mother, and conducted postdoctoral research in genetics at Stanford University.

During her NIH fellowship in genetics, Betty realized that she no longer enjoyed being a bench scientist. After completing her postdoc, she accompanied her musicologist husband to Paris, where she obtained a certificate in spoken French from the Alliance Française.

Upon her return to Northern California, Betty began job hunting. "Although my bachelor's degree was in biology, I had taken many humanities courses as an undergraduate," she says. "Later, I edited my husband's PhD dissertation and early papers, which proved to be an invaluable experience. I realized that I had skills in writing and editing and wanted a position that would combine these with science."

In 1977, 3 months after her job search had begun, Betty obtained a position at ALZA Corp. in Palo Alto as a Medical Literature Research Scientist. Her duties were soon expanded to include writing, and a career in medical writing was born.

Betty promptly joined AMWA and became active in the Northern California Chapter. She held 2-year terms as Chair of the Membership Committee, Vice President and Chair of the Program Committee, and President. For 7 years, she and Della Mundy took turns organizing monthly meetings. In 1982, Betty was Workshop Director for the Asilomar Western Regional Conference, and twice she was a member of the conference's Program Committee. She also served as a chapter delegate to the AMWA Board of Directors 3 times. She received AMWA Fellowship in 1986 and the President's Award in 1988.

At the national level, Betty served on the AMWA Board of Directors and Executive Committee for 5 years in several capacities. She was Annual Conference (AC)



Workshop Leader (4 terms), AC Editors Section Chair and moderator of the Editorial Plenary Session, Administrator for Sections (2 terms), and a member of various AMWA award committees. In 1991, she was President-Elect and the following year served as President, during which time she was a member of the *AMWA Journal* Search Committee. In 1994, she held the post of Administrator of the 54th Annual Conference.

During this time, Betty's professional activities continued unabated. In 1981, she joined Syntex Corporation as Senior Medical Writer for International Clinical Studies. From 1986 to 1992, she established, developed, and led the Syntex Development Research Writing Group. She then managed Medical Education and Medical Information for Syntex Laboratories, Inc. In 1995, when Roche absorbed Syntex, she struck out on her own and, until recently, did clinical, medical, and regulatory communications and consulting, primarily for pharmaceutical and biotech companies, while serving as Medical Editor of *Physician's Forum*.

Although she no longer accepts professional assignments, she can hardly be called "retired." Her current activities include babysitting 2 grandsons, acting as co-steward with her husband for her block's emergency preparedness response, participating in yoga and Tai Chi, and attending all manner of arts events, especially those in music.

"Through my activities in AMWA, I experienced enormous rewards and an exhilarating sense of accomplishment that accompanied successful service," she says.

“Interaction with others from all over the nation and from other countries broadened and deepened my understanding of many topics pertaining to writing, editing, and managing people and projects. Influenced by the generosity of others, I continue to mentor those striving to enter or rise in the field. My most precious AMWA memories are of the warm and sincere camaraderie at work sessions and social functions, from which cherished and abiding relationships have resulted.”

One of those friendships is with Past President and long-time AMWA member Jim Yuen. “I met Betty when she joined my company as an information scientist,”

Jim recalls. “As a matter of fact, only about a month or so after joining the company, she volunteered to host a baby shower for my wife and me. She always gave generously of her time to the local chapter and to the national organization. The local chapter enjoyed many of its social events at Betty’s home, as well as in the Stanford Faculty Club. She was an active participant on many AMWA committees, and as Immediate Past President even agreed to tackle the annual conference in Phoenix the year I was president! Betty epitomizes what AMWA is all about: giving generously of her time and knowledge, and reaping the benefits of participation and friendship.”

MEMBER NEWS

AMWA Members Earning BELS Certification

The following AMWA members passed the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS) certification examination earlier this year.

Barbara Goodheart Lincolnshire, IL	Gillian E. Ngola, MA Indianapolis, IN	Stefan Schuber, PhD Gaithersburg, MD
Mary Kennedy, PhD Seattle, WA	Teresa Odle Albuquerque, NM	Kristine B. Simmons Chicago, IL
Jacque Klesing Rochester Hills, MI	Belinda E. Peace, PhD Erlanger, KY	Patrick Stone Philadelphia, PA
Janet Baar, MS Oak Brook, IL	Melissa Lewis Philadelphia, PA	Catharine Polacek, MFA Columbia, MD
Julie Beyrer, MTSC Whiteland, IN	Catherine Macek, PhD, RAC Chapel Hill, NC	Karen Poole Seattle, WA
Mary B. Corrado Chicago, IL	Thela L. McMillen Portland, OR	Alyssa Biorn Quiggle, PhD Rochester, MN
Matthew Ferris, MA, TESL Schaumburg, IL	Archana Monie, MS Owings Mills, MD	Sharon Rogers, PhD Abbott Park, IL
Roderick Gedey, MS Chicago, IL	Margaret Anne Newell, MBA Houston, TX	Scott A. Saunders, DDS Royersford, PA
		Carolyn A. Strecker Jersey City, NJ
		Ann Tennier Cedar Grove, WI
		Donald Tessier Rutherford, NJ
		Scott C. Thompson Cordova, TN
		Sarah Toombs Smith, PhD Friendswood, TX

AMWA extends its sympathy to Melanie Fridl Ross,
AMWA President-Elect, who lost her mother,
Harriet Fridl, on Nov. 2, 2009.

MEMBER AWARDS

Swanberg Award : Art Gertel

By Marianne Mallia, ELS

2008-2009 Swanberg Award Committee

Art Gertel is the 2009 recipient of the Harold Swanberg Distinguished Service Award. The Award recognizes an active member of AMWA for distinguished contributions to medical communications.

Art joined AMWA in 1978 and has been contributing ever since. Soon after joining AMWA, Art was asked to chair the Pharmaceutical Section for the annual conference. That assignment started him on a path that has seen him tackle something major for AMWA in each subsequent year.

Art's AMWA biography has 90 official entries from all walks of AMWA life. He served on the Executive Committee from 1992-1999 (Administrator of Sections, Administrator of Regional Conferences, Administrator of Development, Secretary, President-Elect, and Immediate Past President). He was AMWA's President in 1997-98. Art has chaired or served on all of AMWA's major committees at least once, has been part of AMWA's long-range planning process, and has served on numerous task forces, including the Task Force on Ethical Standards—one of his passions. He always believed the profession should become more globally unified, and he continues to work hard to foster relationships with other groups of medical writers, including the European Medical Writers Association, which elected him to fellowship in 2001. In addition to his administrative work, Art has been a regular participant in AMWA's education program—from leading regulatory workshops (since 1991) and a variety of roundtables (since 1989) to being a “klatch” leader (since 2007). He has been the Sessions Coordinator for the annual conference and regularly organizes and moderates session on ethics.

For his tireless efforts, Art received the President's Award in 1989 and was elected to AMWA fellowship in 1993.

However, the Swanberg award is given for more than just service to AMWA, and Art is highly deserving. He has spent his career not just working, but working to improve ethical



and professional standards in medical communications. The scope of his work has been wide-ranging—from the ethical publication of clinical trial results to addressing acknowledgment of medical writers and transparency in the medical literature, and the relationship of the pharmaceutical industry to contract research organizations. He is on the Editorial Board of Good Publications Practices, the Issues and Actions Committee for the International Society for Medical Publications Professionals, and the Advisory Board of TIPPA (The International Publication Planning Association). As evidenced by the sessions he coordinates, his interests include medical ethics, quality-of-life issues, and public health policy. He truly enjoys the intellectual challenge inherent in any ethics dialogue, and he has lectured extensively on these topics. A bit of a rabble rouser, Art continues to challenge AMWA to do more to promote ethics in medical publications and to enforce ethical standards.

Art Gertel is a multitasking guy with a vision. Besides his volunteer work for AMWA and other professional associations, he plays a great game of soccer, restores old homes, and gives an incredible Tarot card reading. He also manages to hold down a full-time job. He is Vice President of Strategic Regulatory Consulting, Medical Writing and Quality Assurance, for Beardsworth, a contract research organization. He has 30 years of experience in the pharmaceutical industry.

Like most of us, Art did not grow up thinking he wanted to be a medical writer. He wanted to be a scientist. However, once he graduated, he quickly moved from the lab to the world of medical communications. He has never looked back.

➤ Look for Art's Swanberg Address in the March issue of the Journal.

Golden Apple Award: Lawrence Liberti, RPh, RAC

By Susan Aiello

2008-2009 Annual Conference Workshop Coordinator

AMWA workshop leaders are the heart of AMWA's education program. To formally recognize excellence in teaching, AMWA established the Golden Apple Award in 1986. This year's recipient of the esteemed Golden Apple is **Larry Liberti, RPh, RAC**.

The Golden Apple Award recipient is selected by the Education Committee after a review of the credentials of the eligible workshop leaders. Eligibility criteria include having taught at least 12 workshops at AMWA annual or chapter conferences, while maintaining an average rating score of 4.4 (on a scale of 1 to 5) on workshop evaluations completed by the participants. Other criteria considered by the Committee include the diversity of workshops taught,

the number of new workshops the leader has developed, and the difficulty of the content of the workshops taught.

Since 1994, Larry has taught more than 35 workshops at the chapter and national level to which he has brought his experience in the regulatory arena and his trademark



Susan Aiello presented Lawrence Liberti with the Golden Apple Award at the Sablack Dinner.

enthusiasm. As a 25+ year member of AMWA, he has supported the education activities of the organization by traveling throughout the United States teaching at chapter and annual conferences, mentoring new workshop leaders, and developing new

workshops. Some may remember Larry's first public presentation, given at an AMWA Delaware Valley Chapter din-

ner in 1985, where he captivated the audience with a novel technology—projected slides he created by photographing green text on his highly pixilated dot-matrix computer screen! Today he continues the tradition of using innovative visual technologies in his workshops, which include Introduction to Writing Clinical Study Reports, Writing the Final Report of a Clinical Trial, and Investigational New Drug Applications. The Education Committee commends Larry for his long record of dedication to the workshop program, including his activities at the national level to make AMWA's education program premier in its field.

Because Larry was the 2008-2009 Administrator of Education, he recused himself from the selection process. When informed of the Committee's decision, Larry was thrilled, saying "I'm so proud to have been selected for this real honor and happy to know that all those years serving as a graduate teaching assistant really did help me become a better teacher!" The Education Committee bestows this prestigious award with sincerest thanks and gratitude to Larry for upholding the excellence of the AMWA workshop program.

AMWA Fellowships: Jessica Ancker, PhD, ELS; Robert Bonk, PhD; Bart Harvey, MD, PhD

By Faith Reidenbach, ELS

2008-2009 Administrator of Awards

AMWA awards fellowships to members who have made important contributions to our organization and to the profession of medical communication. With our congratulations, we introduce the newest AMWA Fellows.

Jessica Ancker, PhD, ELS, joined AMWA in 1998 and immediately began leading workshops at the annual conference. She has also taught at chapter conferences and through the onsite training that AMWA offers to corporations. In 2002, Jessica was appointed to the Executive Committee, where she served as the Annual Conference Workshop Administrator. In 2003, she received the Golden Apple Award for her excellence in teaching statistics, epidemiology, and writing, as rated by workshop participants. Jessica has also served the organization as Ohio Valley Chapter President, as a member of the Editorial Board of the *AMWA Journal*, as a roundtable leader, and as a member of the Education Committee. For the Council of Science Editors, she organized a 2003 conference on "The Journal's Role in Scientific Misconduct" and a 2004 conference on "Conflict of Interest in Scientific Publication." She earned an MPH, as well as an MA, an MPhil, and a PhD in biomedical informatics, all from Columbia University.

Robert Bonk, PhD, a member of AMWA since 1986, hails from AMWA's largest chapter, Delaware Valley. Beginning in 1997, he accepted progressively

more responsibility in that chapter, serving on the Nominating Committee and later chairing the Certification Task Group, chairing the Education Committee, and serving as President. Bob is a professor of professional writing, currently at Widener University in PA, and he has led workshops and open sessions at the annual conference and chapter meetings. After helping to organize several annual conferences, including serving as coordinator of the educators section, coordinator of sections, and coordinator of short sessions, he was appointed to the Executive Committee in 2007 as Administrator of the Annual Conference in Louisville. Bob's doctorate is in pharmacy administration, and he is the author of 2 books: *Pharmacoeconomics in Perspective: A Primer on Research, Techniques, and Information* and *Medical Writing in Drug Development: A Practical Guide for Pharmaceutical Research*.



Left: Jessica Ancker. Middle: Robert Bonk receives his Fellowship award from Faith Reidenbach (left) and Marianne Mallia (right). Right: Bart Harvey.

Bart Harvey, MD, PhD, is a community medicine specialist and epidemiologist and an associate professor at the University of Toronto. He joined AMWA in 1994 and has served the organization on the Education, Chapters, and Membership Committees, and as coordinator of the educators section for the 2001 annual conference. He has led dozens of core and advanced workshops at chapter and annual conferences, and in 2006 he received the Golden Apple Award for his excellence in teaching, as rated by workshop participants. Besides his university teaching, research,

and publishing activities, Bart is a coroner for the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety. He has recently been honored with the President's Award from the Canadian National Specialty Society for Community Medicine and the creation of the Bart Harvey Community Medicine Resident Award (for activism and advocacy) at the University of Toronto. He is the author of "Charting our next decade: toward excellence in educating medical communicators" [*AMWA J.* 2002; 17(1): 8-9].

President's Award: Lori Alexander, MTPW, ELS

By Cindy W. Hamilton, PharmD, ELS
2008-2009 AMWA President

Lori Alexander, MTPW, ELS, is the recipient of the 2009 President's Award, which is given annually by the AMWA President to an AMWA member of 10 years or more who has made distinctive contributions at the chapter or national level, without having served on the Executive Committee. The most obvious reason for Lori's selection is her stewardship of the *AMWA Journal*. AMWA members consistently indicate that they are very satisfied with the Journal in membership surveys, and we aren't the only ones who are satisfied. Earlier this year, the Journal was honored with a Bronze EXCEL Award in the category of Scholarly (Peer-reviewed) Journals—General Excellence. These awards, sponsored by the Society of National Association Publications (SNAP), represent "the pinnacle of peerrecognition and the seal of excellence in association publishing."

In addition to being editor of the Journal, Lori is active at both the national and chapter levels. She first became active in the Mid-Atlantic Chapter almost immediately after joining AMWA. She organized 2 successful chapter conferences and was scheduled to become chapter president. Unfortunately for the chapter, she moved to Florida where she became even more active. She served first as president of the Florida Chapter and then as its Educational Coordinator, a position to which she has just been reappointed, and has organized the annual chapter conference for the past 4 years. At the national level, Lori has served on the Science Curriculum Task Force, the Nominating Committee, the Salary Survey Subcommittee, the Education Committee, the Membership Committee, the Eric W. Martin Award Committee, and the Long-Range Planning Committee. She has led workshops and, for the last 2 years, has coordinated breakfast roundtables for the annual conference.

Lori continues to advance AMWA's interests in many ways, such as helping to connect AMWA members with Florida institutions of higher education interested in start-



Cindy Hamilton presented the President's Award to Lori Alexander at the Sablack Dinner.

ing an educational program for medical communicators, speaking to non-AMWA groups about medical writers and the good they do, explaining AMWA and its policies in her capacity as *AMWA Journal* Editor, coordinating chapter activities, and submitting the *AMWA Journal* to national competitions.

Lori has been in the medical communications field for more than 25 years, working first as an editor at Lahey Clinic in Burlington, MA, and then as a copyeditor at the *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*. Her passion for writing led her to the American Society of Clinical Oncology, where she worked for 6 years in the Publications Department, writing for a wide variety of the association's publications and ultimately providing oversight of a broad range of professional educational materials as assistant director of the department. She established Editorial Rx, Inc., a freelance medical writing and publishing company, in 2004.

As a member leader and as *AMWA Journal* Editor, Lori practices the advice she heard from Flo Witte at an AMWA workshop—that the best support an AMWA member can give to the profession of medical writing is to treat medical writing as a profession.

"AMWA has provided me with so many wonderful opportunities to meet new colleagues, learn from experts in various fields, network, and develop my professional skills. My involvement in the association is a way for me to give back to the people and the profession that mean so much to me. To be honored for that seems incredible," says Lori.

Eric W. Martin Award: Patricia McAdams and Laura Hale Brockway, ELS

By Lois Baker, MS

Chair, 2008-2009 Eric W. Martin Award Committee

The recipients of the 2009 Eric W. Martin Award come from opposite ends of the United States. **Patricia McAdams**, from the Delaware Valley Chapter, received the award in the Public or Healthcare Consumers category, for her article “Easing the Stigma of Disease,” which relates experiences of persons suffering from conditions the public perceives are caused by risky or unhealthy behavior. The story appeared in *AARP Bulletin Today*. **Laura Hale Brockway, ELS**, from the Southwest Chapter, received top honors in the Professional (Medical) Audience category for “The Diversion Dilemma,” a continuing medical education article presented by her employer, Texas Medical Liability Trust. The article discussed identifying and preventing the abuse of prescription drugs.

Patricia is a freelance in Kennett Square, PA, who researches and writes news and feature stories for medical centers and other nonprofit organizations. In addition to the *AARP Bulletin Today*, her work has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *Family Circle* magazine, local newspapers, and publications of The National Academies.



Patricia McAdams

Patricia said she wanted to write an article about the stigma of disease for some time and to address the stigma attached to mental illness, in particular. She pitched the story to a number of editors before AARP gave her an assignment. Although her editor requested a general approach

to the article, she considered this an opportunity to raise awareness about the social consequences of many diseases, and the heavy burden that stigma places on individuals and their families.

“I got a late start with my career,” said Patricia, “so being a successful medical writer is like living a fairy tale, in and of itself. Winning the Eric Martin Award, on top of that, is almost something I cannot believe. I am so appreciative of the kindness and support of so many people who have helped me to succeed in this field.”

Laura is the communications and advertising manager at Texas Medical Liability Trust in Austin, TX, where she also serves as the editor of the company’s publication, *The Reporter*. The idea for her article grew from physicians’ medical-legal questions submitted to the risk management department’s telephone and e-mail “help lines.”



Faith Reidenbach (left) presented the Eric W. Martin Award to Laura Hale Brockway at the Sablack Dinner. (Patricia McAdams was not in attendance.)

“These physicians ask for advice on a wide variety of issues, such as releasing of medical records, treatment of minors, and informed consent,” said Laura. “In 2008, the risk management staff reported that they had been receiving questions with increasing frequency on the topic of prescription drug diversion, or the use of licit drugs for illicit purposes.”

“Several physicians reported that they suspected patients were trying to divert drugs,” she continued, “while other physicians reported that they had caught staff members diverting drugs. Given these physician queries, we decided to publish an article on this topic to help physicians learn how to prevent this behavior. Researching this article was like opening a can of worms,” noted Laura. “In addition to the medical aspects, such as the statistics on prescription drug use and characteristics displayed by diverters, there was also legal information to review. Once the research was completed, I was able to write the article in a way that explained the controlled substance law to physicians in language they could understand. I also included practical risk management advice for physicians to follow to reduce their risks.”

Laura said she was extraordinarily grateful to receive the Eric Martin Award from AMWA, “not just because of the award itself but because I find myself in remarkably good company,” she said. “AMWA members are an impressive group of writers and editors, and to be honored by my peers with this award has been one of the highlights of my career.”

“I also would like to thank my boss, Dana Leidig, who is an AMWA member,” she added. “Dana has been an inspiration to me throughout the years and without her support and encouragement, I would not have received this award. Thank you, Dana.”

Student Scholarships: Jessica Osmond and Mark Weflen

By Karen Potvin Klein, MA, ELS

2008-2009 Student Scholarship Committee

Jessica M. Osmond, a student at Medical College of Georgia in Augusta, GA, and **Mark R. Weflen**, a student at Miami University in Oxford, OH, are the recipients of the 2009 Annual Conference Student Scholarship sponsored by Eli Lilly and Company. The Scholarship provided Jessica and Mark with funds to cover the cost of attending the conference in Dallas and participating in 3 workshops.

As an undergraduate, Jessica had a double major in chemistry and Spanish at Erskine College, where she graduated *summa cum laude*. She is currently a 4th-year graduate student in the biomedical sciences program at the Medical College of Georgia. To date, Jessica has a perfect 4.0 GPA in her graduate courses. Her thesis project centers on the cerebrovascular effects of obesity-induced hypertension.

Although Jessica has excelled in her scientific studies, she gradually realized, “It was not the actual experimental work that motivated me but the progression of my research toward a written product, something tangible that could be read by my colleagues and contribute to an overall understanding of human health and disease.” This realization led her to research ways to learn more about medical editing and writing—a search that led her to AMWA.

Jessica has already become an AMWA member. Not only that, she purchased and is working her way through the AMWA self-study module on punctuation. Jessica plans to take the test for credit once she has completed the module, but commented that she “has already learned a lot” about proper punctuation and “when to use what” in writing or editing scientific materials.

At the annual conference, Jessica signed up for the Proofreading, Essentials of Copyediting, and Interventional and Observational Research Design workshops. She also was enthusiastic about her breakfast roundtable session, “From Pipette to Pen: Navigating a Career From Bench Scientist to Medical Writer.”

Jessica says, “As I consider the next phase of my career, I realize the potential impact of my attending the AMWA annual conference. I am certain that being provided the opportunity to attend the annual conference will pave the way for the next step in my career path.”

Mark had a double major in English and physics at the University of Cincinnati. As he neared graduation, he found himself drawn to the field of English, but he was not drawn to a career in teaching at the high school or college levels. He was advised to look into medical writing by his English professors, and that mixture of his interests and background clicked. Mark decided that he was “eager

to help translate scientific information into a form that is usable and appropriate for its readers.” He adds, “People have a right as individuals to decide with their physicians how their physical health can be best maintained, and I hope to help them exercise that right by providing medical information that meets their needs.”

Mark is currently in his second year in the Master of Technical and Scientific Communication Program at Miami University. He has a particular interest in public health communication and pharmaceutical writing.

That interest is reflected in the annual conference workshops for which he registered: Medical Terminology, Drug Interactions, and Pharmacokinetics. He also registered for the breakfast roundtable “Job-Hunting Tips for Writers and Editors.”

Both of this year's scholarship winners mentioned the importance of networking when just beginning in the medical writing profession and emphasized their perception of the tremendous value of AMWA in their professional development. As Mark comments, “I have chosen to pursue work in the medical field because of its applicability and importance to every person.” AMWA, the medical writing profession, and the audience for our work will continue to benefit from the dedication of new and talented individuals like Jessica and Mark.



Julie Beyrer, MTSC, chair of the Student Scholarship Committee (middle), presented the awards to Jessica Osmond (left) and Mark Weflen (right) at the Sablack Dinner at the annual conference.