SIG-III's 30th Anniversary Interviews: Cofounders' Reflections

"If I have seen farther it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." - Sir Issac Newton

It is very fitting to open our interview (our "Cofounders Reflections") with Sir Issac Newton's famous saying. In preparation of the 75th ASIS&T Anniversary and 30th Anniversary of SIG_III in 2012, we interview our co-founders, Toni Carbo and Michel Menou.

It is true that leadership qualities are instilled in almost every individual when they are born. But, opportunities for developing leadership skills are provided to everyone as they grow and mature. Taking advantage of these opportunities and learning from the experiences are truly what makes leaders in almost any field. In this regard, the interviews are really an opportunity to visit with the two SIG-III Co-founders, learn from their experiences, and capture their reflections, and make a lasting contribution to SIG-III and ASIS&T history.

Responses from Toni Carbo

- **How did you first become involved in ASIS&T?**

  When I entered the master of science program at Drexel, in the fall of 1971, I learned about ASIS from Belver Griffith and Carl Drott and decided to run for chair of the student chapter. I was delighted to be elected and to attend local chapter meetings and the annual conference. Several members, including Tefko Saracevic, Michael Buckland, and Stella Keenan, were especially kind and helpful during my years as a student member and over the past decades. There are many other individuals who have helped me tremendously since I first joined, some of whom, sadly, are no longer with us.

- **Throughout your career, was there a particular person whom you admire and tried to emulate? Why/how?**

  While there are many people I admired and whose work I have followed closely, I have never really tried to emulate anyone. Through my education and work experience, I have had very exciting and unexpected opportunities to develop a career path that is unique. I think that, as the fifth of seven daughters (with no brothers), I have always been encouraged to be independent and carve out my own path.

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- **What prompted you and other founders of SIG-III to start the SIG?**

  I have been very fortunate to travel outside the country many times, primarily for work-related projects and international conferences and workshops, and to live in the U.K. for 3 years. I have been on all continents except for Antarctica, and I plan to get there some day. My favorite city in the world is Paris, and I have been there 21 times. Through this work and these travels, I have made many friends and colleagues -- all of whom have helped me learn about our multicultural and diverse information communities. Working on international information ethics and policy projects, information literacy programs, and other activities, as well as participating actively in groups like IFLA and the International Federation for Information and Documentation (FID), made me realize how much I didn't know and that we all need to expand our perspectives beyond our familiar national and cultural boundaries. For example, organizing a workshop for UNESCO on indexing and abstracting back in the 1970s, and working with NATO AGARD, the British Library and other groups helped me realize how much I didn't know. I realized that I was not alone, and I thought that ASIS, my own primary professional association, could expand its programs and activities to help all of us increase our awareness and understanding.

  Then I did the easy part. I told my dear friend, Michel Menou, that we really needed to do this and I suggested that **he** should start the SIG. He did the hard part and the vast majority of the work. I assisted as much as I could by helping to get others involved and doing some tasks to help with the process.

- **Was there a specific objective, goal, or reason to start SIG-III?**

  The broad goals were to help all of us expand our awareness and understanding of our increasingly global village and to find ways that we could harness information and appropriate technologies to improve the quality of life for people around the world. More specific objectives included: recognizing the many contributions of members outside the U.S.; increasing international membership; conducting programs and developing publications to share information and provide continuous education for all of us; building and strengthening networks among information professionals around the world; expanding ASIS&T programs and activities around the world through chapters, programs, co-sponsorship of meetings and workshops; bringing in support to help individuals from countries and areas with fewer resources to become members and, if possible, participate in conferences; and providing opportunities for us to have fun, such as at our international receptions.

- **As one of the founders of SIG-III, what achievement(s) are you most proud of?**

  First, I'm most proud of getting Michel to take the lead in starting the SIG! I am also pleased that I have been able to help SIG III get selected articles from the International Paper Contest published in the *International Information and Library Review* (IILR), which I edited for many year. This also helped several authors get helpful feedback from reviewers, so they could improve their scholarly work. I'm also happy that I have been able to help bring in some outside resources to support our activities, such as the donations from Elsevier and also the contribution provided through my service on the Elsevier Foundation Board.

- **What were the challenges/obstacles to these achievements? How did you overcome them?**

  I don't think that we really had any major obstacles, although getting sufficient funding and encouraging more people to get involved with activities are always challenges. Working with members, including many fine students, and a good dose of patience and enthusiasm always seem to help in meeting challenges. We have certainly used these as we built the SIG over the years.

- **What do you think are the most critical issues facing ASIS&T and SIG-III today?**

  The critical issues I see are: 1) budget restrictions limiting individuals' abilities to participate more actively in events like the annual conference and SIG activities; 2) increased competition among the many professional organizations with more demands on individuals' time; and 3) our ongoing challenges of getting people to understand what we do and why it is important and valuable. Personally, I think that reducing the length of time for our annual conferences was a big mistake. We are trying to cram far too much into too little time, resulting in fewer high quality programs being accepted, competition among concurrent sessions, and too little time for key networking opportunities. I have heard from many colleagues that taking the time and using the funding to travel to such a short event is very hard to justify. This is especially true for those who have to travel long distances, especially from other continents.

- **What is your vision for SIG-III?**

  That we will continue to provide high quality programs, webinars, sessions and publications to benefit members and the wider global information community, and that we will bring in more active members to lead us in the future as our fine SIG leaders have done this year and in previous years. SIG III is an extremely valuable asset to ASIS&T and to the global information community, and I expect that it will become even more valuable in the future. I am excited about continuing to do whatever I can to help make this vision a reality.

- **How has being active in ASIS&T helped you in your professional life?**

  I could write a 10-volume work to respond to this question. First of all, I have made many outstanding friends around the world, with Michel Menou at the top of that list. I have learned so much from all of them, and their energy and enthusiasm have kept me excited about our field and our future. I have also had many wonderful and fun experiences with them, including exploring new places, different foods, learning about different cultures, and even getting some dancing lessons. The energy and enthusiasm of this amazing community are contagious and invigorating. Secondly, I have explored and learned about new technologies, practices, issues, developments, changes, types of knowledge (including Traditional Knowledge), cultures, and traditions. The knowledge, skills, and attitudes I have learned have expanded my competencies tremendously. Thirdly, I have gained a lot of experience in chairing and serving on different committees and groups, starting with my first responsibility when I became a member, as chair of the Committee on Intersociety Cooperation (CISCO). I learned a lot about many of the other organizations in our field and their different perspectives and experiences. Serving as president and a member of the board provided another very helpful set of experiences in working with society leadership and our wonderful ASIS&T staff. I think there is no question that without my involvement in ASIS&T over the 40+ years, I never would have had such a successful or fulfilling career -- and life -- as I have had.

- **What advice would you give to young ASIS&T members with respect to their careers?**

  Get involved as fully as you can in ASIS&T. Build your network in part through active participation in ASIS&T and also in other groups within your local area and globally through social networks and other online activities. Travel and explore new places as often as you can. Reach out to others; don't wait for them to come to you. Ask for help -- go up to that individual whose work you have admired and introduce yourself. (That's how I first met Tekfo Saracevic.) Take risks; don't take the job for which you are fully qualified, because that's one you should have had years ago. Have fun -- socialize and, if possible, dance!

- **Why should they become involved with ASIS&T?**

  I've answered this in the earlier responses. In summary: because 1) you will learn a lot and grow in your career; 2) you will expand your horizons and learn about new opportunities, ideas and perspectives; 3) you will meet outstanding leaders in our field, as well as many individuals who are up and coming leaders and others who are just starting out; and 4) you will have fun and make friends.

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