

# The Slice

A Potomac Indexing Quarterly eNewsletter

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 1, MARCH 2010

## CELEBRATING COMMUNITY

by Richard Shrout



The theme of this first issue of *The Slice* for 2010 and our first-ever PI Day (3.14) issue is “community.” Each article is focused in some way on how we can work together to help each other via our community of talents and interests. This aspect of Potomac

Indexing (PI) was first articulated by Myrna Faulds, our brilliant layout designer. See her article in this issue ([page 5](#)) on the origins of her design for *The Slice*.

Spotlighting Beth Palmer is very fitting for this issue. She needed help urgently just after this company was formed. To my joy, because of the willingness of one of our most able and generous associates—you know who you are and I won’t embarrass you—we were able to help her immediately.

So far, 2010 is starting out as a very strong year. We have many projects on the books and are working to plan how to deal with plenty, not scarcity. We intend to continue to emphasize our strengths, including medical, accounting, school textbook, and computer book indexing.

I am actually writing this article from my cabin on the Caribbean Princess, the largest of the Princess fleet, an 18-story floating building with capacity for 3,100 passengers. The voyage is nearly over, we are on our way back to Puerto Rico. This trip reminds me that we live in a world of utter contrast coupled with rapid change. Right now, I am living in a fantasy world of super-abundance with the devastation of Haiti not that far away. I came on the cruise primarily to be with a group of people who graduated from my high school in Kansas City. This is the second cruise with this group. We have a lot of fun and maintain friendships between cruises. My friend Judi Adams, who came to the PI dinner in Denver, was on this cruise. She remembers many of you.

I think that we can best cope with our world of stark contrasts and rapid change by working together. Remember to recommend us or pass along to us information on big projects—or just work that doesn’t fit your schedule ... [page 2](#)

## ASSOCIATE SPOTLIGHT

Beth Palmer, Palmer Publishing Services



What’s a nanowrimo? No, it’s not the microscopic submarine that took Raquel Welch and a crew on a “Fantastic Voyage” in the campy 1966 film. NaNoWriMo is short for National Novel Writing

Month, a voluntary challenge that tens of thousands of people undertake every year on Nov. 1, in which the goal is to write a 175-page (50,000-word) novel by midnight, Nov. 30.

“It’s a great exercise for people who get stuck on writing the perfect text because you don’t have time, you just have to write,” says PI associate Beth Palmer, who plunged in last year for the first time. “I heard about it on NPR, and for a month, I devoted an hour and a half to two hours every day to it, just spewing, like they suggest, about 1,667 words a day.”

Fewer than 20 percent of participants cross the finish line with the full 50,000 words, but she was one of them, with a first draft of a memoir. That’s one more thing she can cross off her “cancer list.” Beth doesn’t bring up her breast cancer experience with new acquaintances, she says, but the diagnosis and treatment three years ago “changed everything in my life, not only the lingering effects of the treatment, but also my outlook.”

She’s happy to talk about it because hers was a very dangerous and rare type, known as “inflammatory,” which is often misdiagnosed as an infection. She wants to help raise awareness, as it represents only 3 percent of all breast cancers. “The really scary part is that a mammogram a month earlier had totally missed it,” she warns. “Most doctors have never seen inflammatory breast cancer before, and patients tend to dismiss the early symptoms as an insect bite.”

Fortunately, Beth has responded well to the treatment, though the chemotherapy and radiation were hard on her body. She has been pronounced clear in subsequent check-ups. Throughout her experience, she’s comforted to know that PI is there for her when she needs it.

### How did you choose indexing as a career?

I grew up in southern Oregon, and ... [page 4](#)

## “FRESH FROM THE OVEN”



*A group is a community only when its members contribute. This feature is a forum for sharing news and anecdotes from our associates. Have something to share? Send an email to [info@potomacindexing.com](mailto:info@potomacindexing.com). We’ll try to include as many as possible, space permitting. Submissions may be edited for length and clarity.*

**Denise Carlson:** For indexers, most client contact is limited to words on a screen or on a page. We rarely find out what our clients look or sound like, how old they are, what kind of families they have, etc. Our contacts with them don’t often last beyond the end of a project, unless we have the good fortune to get repeat business from them. And I’ll bet not many indexers have had the experience of seeing a client portrayed on the big screen by an A-list actor.

This year, I had the unique and pleasant opportunity to get to know a client on a much more personable level. In May, I was hired to write the index for *Against All Odds: The Mark Whitacre Story*. Some of you might recognize the name. Mark Whitacre is the subject of *The Informant*, a movie that opened in September 2009, starring Matt Damon in the title role. The true story revolves around Mark’s almost three years of undercover work for the FBI in the mid-1990s, which led to the prosecution of Archer-Daniels-Midland for price fixing. It was the largest anti-trust case in U.S. history up to that time.

*The Informant* is based on a book of the same name by Kurt Eichenwald. (I didn’t index that book, but I’ll bet whoever did is equally excited about the movie.) Since the Eichenwald book focuses in detail on the undercover work and antitrust case, Mark and his wife Ginger decided that they wanted to publish a book that dealt with how those events affected them, their relationship and their family. They hired Floyd Perry to write the book and he hired me to write the index. Mark and Ginger also reviewed the index, so I corresponded with them almost as much as with Floyd.

That correspondence has continued since *Against All Odds* was published. Both Mark and Floyd have sent me links to TV and ... [page 2](#)

right now. PI pledges to do a good job for you and keep track of your referrals in our database so that if that client comes back to us again, we will contact you first. You won't risk losing a client by recommending us. And if you direct us to a big project, we will work with you to ensure that you have as much or as little involvement as you want in that project.

Also be sure to let us know if some emergency situation interferes with your work.

## TOOLBOX

### LEARNING ABOUT HARD DRIVES: THE HARD WAY



Several weeks ago, my computer contracted a virus due to my own stupidity. I downloaded software from a site that I did not understand. The virus was very nasty. It took over

Internet Explorer completely, rewriting all the normal entries for most sites, including those sites having anything to do with security. I could no longer access the Internet.

We are here to help in those situations. Just last week, I helped one of our associates with a project that she was struggling with because she was caring for an ailing parent in a distant city.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *The Slice*. The delay in its publication was entirely my fault. Kay Schlembach is eagerly working away on articles for the next issue, which is scheduled to appear just before the ASI Conference. ■

All this is very interesting—I hope—but my main point is in regard to disk fragmentation. I started paying real attention to this subject when the Walling Data Systems analyst told me that one reason the virus could not be cured by Avast was that my C disk drive was extremely fragmented. So the little sucker could hide in little pieces in the dust created by my total lack of digital housecleaning.

Now, sorting is a subject that all indexers can easily understand. Imagine a mailroom guy or even an indexer doing the fastest possible sort to put everything away and go

**“If you do experience a hard disk crash, it is much harder to reconstitute the data on a badly fragmented drive.”**

Fortunately, I had recently changed to Avast as my antivirus package. Part of the reason I chose that software package (there is no obvious choice of antivirus suites these days) was their statement that, by purchasing through their U.S. vendor, I would have access to online and telephone help from someone in the U.S. if I needed it.

The company is Walling Data Systems, Inc., located in Newton, N.C. (828-459-7340). This company sells other antivirus suites in addition to Avast. I needed Avast on a weekend so I ordered it totally online.

An analyst was able to access my machine over the Internet with some help from me. It wasn't easy because the virus was fighting back at every step. The analyst said that it was a very sophisticated virus. There was an additional charge of \$130 for this virus eradication, but I didn't care. I also, of course, had an index due the next day and had to work in the virus-infected environment. Fortunately, the bug didn't go after SKY or Word. And Outlook continued to function. I didn't know how long that would last so I was very nervous. But the index did get completed and sent out on time.

home for the evening. How would that work? There are files and files of stuff to be put away. The very fastest way to file is to find an empty spot and throw some of the file into it—write down a link to the next spot—throw some more into the next empty space and so on. Each file could be then found in many different spaces with many different links necessary to pull together each file. Being good indexers, we would then go in and put the files together at some later time. Files that have been put together are called contiguous files in defrag lingo. Also, it would really be nice if the files that were most used were also in the most easily accessible place to find them.

Well, when was the last time that you cleaned and defragmented your disk drives? My answer was never. The analyst told me that cleaning—which mainly gets rid of temporary files—and defragging should be performed at least once a month. Something else to keep in mind here is that the bigger your files are, the worse the fragmentation can get. Now that we are all working with bigger and bigger files, this problem can only get worse. [page 3](#)

## “FRESH FROM THE OVEN”

*... continued from page 1*

print interviews done in conjunction with the movie and the book. (Alas, Mark does not look anything like Matt Damon.) Mark also sent photos of him and Ginger on the red carpet with Matt and his wife at the movie premiere. Floyd emails me once in a while about the book's promotion and has shared some of his personal story as well.

Both Mark and Floyd have new books in the works and have already mentioned my working for them again. So, it looks like I have made clients, and friends, for life. Who says indexing is a solitary job?

**Ray Earl:** After a dry summer and a slow fall, I'm finally getting my fill of indexing work. I hope that it's a sign of good times to come for all of us—at the very least, it's been a great way to start the new year. Speaking of the new year, are you a “twenty-ten” or a “two thousand and ten” kind of person? Isn't it funny how we can create conversations out of just about anything? Boy, do I miss Seinfeld.

On a personal note, I've had my hand in urban farming and have installed my first backyard vegetable garden. It's certainly a learning, and dare I say it, growing experience for me. I know, I know, many of you probably have had vegetable gardens for many years, but in Arizona, we're taught that it's just not possible due to the long, hot summers. What about a winter garden you ask? Duh! So far, my fall/winter garden is doing well. I had several pumpkins for Halloween and I'm currently eating plenty of lettuce. Still waiting for the carrots, broccoli, cauliflower, celery, and cabbage. This spring we'll put in a different variety of vegetables. Along with the garden, the apple, apricot, plum, and peach trees should be bearing fruit in late spring. By the time conference rolls around in May, I hope to report that I'm getting 30–50 percent of my produce from my backyard. Wish me luck. ■

### Skype Us!

All of the PI partners are available via Skype as well as email or phone. Here are our Skype handles, if you would like to add us to your contacts list:

**Richard Shrout:** rshrout

**Seth Maislin:** seth.maislin

**Kay Schlembach:** kay.schlembach

**Mary Coe:** mary4065



Reasons to Defrag

Your disk drive operations eventually will slow down to a crawl, as the disk drive needs to look in more and more places for pieces of the same file. Losing track of the links that pull files together is a common source of system problems. If you do experience a hard disk crash, it is much harder to reconstitute the data on a badly fragmented drive. Plus, your hard drive will last much longer and be much less likely to fail if you keep data defragmented. And viruses and other nasty software will be much easier to find. Housecleaning is not my forte—but here it is a necessity and a win-win situation.

The Walling Data analyst had noticed that I had a serious fragmentation problem when he discovered that my slower, less-used disk drive was running twice as fast in his cleanup programs. So he went the extra mile and defragged my disk drives for me. In standard disk drive graphics, red is bad and blue is good (please no analogies to politics). Red shows fragmented files; blue shows contiguous files; white is the color for empty space. The analyst told me that I should not settle for anything less than blue and then white. He used the defrag tool found in Accessories for Windows XP to make my disk drive blue and then white.

He warned me, however, that the defrag tool that comes with Windows XP can be quirky. The tool will work for a while and sort of decide on its own that its current shift is over, leaving some fragmentation. So this tool's standard is "good enough." (Again, please, no analogies to government.) I could not get that tool to give me blue and then white, and it would tell me only part of the name of the fragmented files that were causing problems.

There is yet another wrinkle. External USB drives also usually need to be defragged. Of the three that I have, two require defragging also. One does not. It has its own software apparently to solve the problem. It's a Seagate FreeAgent[Desk.

They come in various sizes. Mine is 1.5 terabytes or 1,500 gigabytes. That sort of disk space is just incredible to imagine—for around \$200.

Since I work with large files, and I have several USB drives requiring defragmentation, I decided to look at other tools. I chose Diskeeper, which is available at various levels and prices. It seems to be doing a fine job. It disappeared into the background for around 20 hours before finally emerging to show me what it was doing. It tells me a lot more about what is going on and what needs to be done than the XP defrag tool.

If you are not constantly working with a lot of huge files, then using the tool that comes with XP may be sufficient. It is possible to schedule the XP defrag tool, but it didn't look like an easy process to me.

Room to Breathe

Another rule of thumb that is very important to consider in disk drive management is reserving some open space. I still have one disk drive that has only 9 percent available for free space. That is not enough. The XP defrag tool would just shut down and not do anything with that drive. Diskeeper is working away on it but also is suggesting nicely that there is not really enough space to do a good job. The rule of thumb is to keep at least 15 percent of free available space. 30 percent is probably much better.

If, like me, you want ongoing peace of mind, be prepared to spend \$30 to \$80 for a commercial tool like Diskeeper. This tool continuously defrags in the background, utilizing system resources that are not being used for anything else. It will do the required housekeeping and not get in your way. The XP defrag tool does affect system performance, but it's free. I can't speak to Vista or Windows 7, but they also offer embedded tools.

So, the bottom line is that you need to do something. Doing nothing is not an option. Your productivity depends on it. ■

FEEDBACK LOOP: PROS AND CONS OF PRO BONO INDEXES

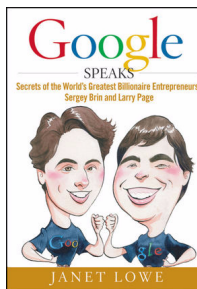
The PI partners (PIPs) are considering an idea. We would like to know what you think about posting indexes on the PI Web site for books that did not have an index originally. There are at least three reasons for not having an index. (1) The author could not afford one. (2) The author did not think an index was necessary. (3) The publisher did not want to go to the expense. I have prepared two indexes that highlight the first two reasons. Mary Coe is going to index a book that we believe falls into the third category.

Last year, at the Society for Technical Communications Conference, I discovered their AccessAbility SIG (special interest group). Shawn Henry is one of the leaders of that very small but very dedicated group. I found out shortly after the STC Conference that Shawn's book, *Just Ask*, published in 2007, does not have an index. The entire book is available online.

I will meet with Shawn and her friends at the STC conference at the beginning of May.

I am going to propose that the index I prepared be placed on her Web site and also on the PI Web site. Let me know if you are interested in working with me to assist the accessibility community. I think we are going to need a team. I have promised her that we will find an indexer for any future books on accessibility. I also want to provide assistance for the indexing of accessibility standards on the Web, in order to increase our visibility with the standards community on the Web.

The other book that I indexed pro bono is an entirely different situation. The book is *Google Speaks*. This book contains a lot of useful information on the origins and current state of Google, arguably the most powerful company in the world right now. Many names are mentioned in the book along with ... page 4



Calendar

May 13 – 1: ASI "Indexing Central" Conference Minneapolis, Minnesota

From Frances S. Lennie, President-Elect and Chair, 2010 Conference Committee: "The aim of the 2010 ASI national conference is threefold: provide opportunities for experienced indexers to learn new skills that better equip them to remain competitive in a rapidly changing publishing environment; build upon established practical and theoretical foundations for

newly practicing indexers; and introduce prospective indexers to this intellectually rewarding profession."

Visit <http://www.asindexing.org> for more information.



majored in English at the University of Oregon because I love to read. I didn't really focus on what I would do once I graduated, as long as it wasn't teaching, so I wound up doing administrative work. I didn't enjoy that, so I went to California State University, Chico, and got my master's degree in computer science, and then worked in software development for a while. The two fields are so disparate, but it worked in my favor, as there was a growing demand for technical writers and most engineers had trouble writing. I made some good money, but it was very stressful, and I knew I needed to do something different.

I never really had a plan for my career, but I heard about indexing at some point in 1995, completed the USDA course in 1996, and something just clicked. I liked that it meant getting paid to read and that I could learn about new fields and work from home.

**When did you start your own business, and how did it grow?**

I started indexing full-time in 2003, after happily giving up a job that involved a one-hour commute each way. Starting up my own business, Palmer Publishing Services (<http://www.palmerpublishingservices.com>), was a real struggle; I couldn't bear to make cold calls. Instead, I tried marketing myself by email and regular mail. It took a long time. In the meantime, I took a class in starting up your own business and developing a business plan, which helped, as did the indexing listservs. I also joined ASI and was active in the Pacific Northwest chapter for a number of years, and participated in several activities including Web site management.

Once you get your first client, you're off and running. My first client was a reputable publisher with good editors. Gradually I added new clients through referrals and from fellow indexers. Eventually, I got to the point where I could pass along extra work myself. Perseverance is the main thing; if you get discouraged easily, you'll never last. Most people who get into this field are self-motivated. Deadlines are absolutely critical.

Now I'm teaching the USDA course myself. I wasn't sure I'd enjoy teaching, but I really do. I enjoy giving feedback and answering questions, because I get to see other people's thought processes. These days, it's called the Graduate School, and the course is conducted mostly by email, not in a classroom.

**How do you approach an indexing project?**

I'm a marker-upper. Some people just type right into the computer, but there's something about sitting with a pile of paper and a marker that's more satisfying for me. I start with table of contents to see structure, then go straight through from page one, with an eye out for big subjects from the TOC. I go through a manuscript pretty fast the first time. That's the phase that's the most interesting, the danger is sometimes you get so involved in reading that you forget to mark things up. You have to slow down and think about how to represent the material, not just absorbing it for yourself.

I love PDFs as well as the hard copy. You find words and concepts with the search function in PDFs. Once it's marked up, I use SKY software to create the index—it's very powerful, and if you get stuck, the company is very responsive—you can get help immediately.

I enjoy the creative part of marking up; inputting the data can be tedious, but you can finesse the index there. I also spend a lot of time in the editing phase, fine-tuning, making subheadings parallel, making even more connections, coming up with synonyms and thinking of ways users would look at things that the author may not have used (this is where my software background comes in handy). I spend 30 to 40 percent of my time editing.

Sometimes it's a drag, sometimes it's unexpectedly fun. Doing three statistics books in a row was the most painful experience; my favorite was a book on conspiracy theories—it was just fun. And craft books are among my favorite projects, they're easy and fun to read.

**What do you do when you're not indexing?**

My other activities include playing with my animals, gardening, and writing. I am passionate about animal welfare and the environment. I've been volunteering with a local cat rescue organization and I also help out with our local volunteer library. My pets are a shepherd mix named Freeman and a boxer mix named Joe, plus Shannon, the cat, who is 14 years old and also a cancer survivor. They provide the exercise I need. It's good to have them encouraging me to get out, even when I don't want to. All three are rescues.

**Why did you join Potomac Indexing?**

I met Richard Shroul at a conference four years ago in Pasadena, and kept in touch. I joined PI two years ago. I think the idea of filling in gaps is great, and having someone to fall back on is great. Plus it's really nice to have them for feedback and business advice, especially because the PI partners are very experienced. Listservs are great and ... [page 5](#)

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much important subject information gleaned from interviews with Google managers. No index is included in the book. I was astounded. The author wastes quite a few lines in the book with statements like, "for further information on this subject, see Section such and such." Of course that subject also appears in other places. I am hoping to demonstrate to the Google guys that a traditional index, in fact, is useful and just may be a necessary thing in a book. If you are interested in working with me on this project, let me know. I want someone else to review my index before we post it. My aim is to impress the leaders of Google.

I know that many of our associates have special areas of interest which may well have led you to do pro bono indexes of your own. If you want more exposure for your index, consider letting us know about it and posting it on or linking to it from the PI Web site. The way online search engines operate, linking our sites with references to indexes should improve our results in Web searches on the word "index" or even "indexer." And we will all get more traffic as we become known for providing indexes to books desperately needing them. ■

**ASI CONFERENCE PREVIEW**

ASI keynote speaker, **Katherine Barber**, will speak on some of the words that link us to our indexing origins. Always entertaining and informative, she was described in *Publishers Weekly* as "No matter what word she puts under the microscope, Barber clearly takes its history seriously, but her light, witty descriptions make each discovery a pleasure." Conference attendees will also receive a copy of her book *Six Words You Never Knew Had Something to do with Pigs*. ■



**REMINDER:  
SCHEDULE  
UPDATES**

Have space in your work schedule that you would like to fill? Send us an email. We share information weekly about who is available. We're always happy to hear from you, though we can't always promise to have work for you right away!

## GUEST VIEWPOINT

### A DESIGNER REFLECTS ON COMMUNITY – Myrna Faulds

Following the devastation of World War I, Walter Gropius brought together a group of like-minded individuals in what has become known as the Bauhaus movement. This movement has impacted both architecture and publishing (specifically typography and book design) in ways that persist to this day. The pull-quote below speaks to the desire for community and the undertaking involved in the building of one. It does not presuppose success but does ennoble the



Walter Gropius in front of his competition entry for the Chicago Tribune Tower, 1922.

Melissa Abernathy), the idea came to me that this group exemplifies, in the act of coming together, a simplicity and power of spirit very reminiscent of the Bauhaus movement. In this sense, the newsletter designed itself: I visited <http://www.potomacindexing.com> and found that the site's design by Lanore Dixon spoke to me of a minimalist, clean beauty with its color choices and layout sense. The newsletter needed to harmonize with the Web site design

**"I dream of an attempt to create a small community here out of the isolation of individuals."**

–Walter Gropius, Bauhaus founder

builder and all involved for having tried. In this fashion did an artistic movement strive to create art through its technical awareness and expertise, and in such fashion do PI Associates come together under the indexing canopy.

In terms of quiet, sheer beauty, the Bauhaus movement's artistic results cannot be denied. In 1919, The Bauhaus School was founded in Weimar, Germany; with its novel, minimalist-industrial, function-integrated-within-form style, this movement enjoyed the trail-blazing vision of its foremost teachers.

In the fall of 2008, during discussions with Richard Shrouf about the business that is now Potomac Indexing, I came to view indexing as the tech-industrial rock-and-roll of the writing world. Therefore, it follows that Potomac Indexing is the gestalt community "created here out of the isolation of individuals." This insight was at once breathtaking and elevating.

In thinking about the design structure for the then-proposed newsletter, *The Slice* (named by writer/editor

in like fashion. Despite all of its special needs, the choice of FrameMaker as the design tool is one I would make today. With its industrial-strength content, I knew that *The Slice* newsletter would need an industrial-strength application for the true expression of its design. And that's how *The Slice* was born.

In speaking of the Bauhaus school/student and faculty members' housing complex in Dessau, Germany, Darlene Levy had this to say, "It was a radical structure populated by progressive minds touting a unique group-oriented approach to learning." (Darlene Levy. drawn from S. Giedion. Walter Gropius: Work and Teamwork. p54-56).

As a focal point for a range of expanding skill levels, the PI community's associates and partners encompass all aspects of indexing talents and experience in a unique business structure; making Potomac Indexing a force in the industry.

Together, you have tapped into the "source" code. May you drink from the strength of it. ■

## ASSOCIATE SPOTLIGHT

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very quick, but they don't always provide the most relevant advice.

### How do you view the future of indexing?

It's an interesting time to be indexing—I just did an index on a book about information retrieval. In online search, I learned that you need to use the right search terms in combination, but I was shocked to find that a 30 percent match rate is considered excellent. Indexes are an underrated feature and more important than people realize.

When Bill Clinton's book came out, I learned about "The Washington Read," where people don't actually read the book, they just go to the index and look up their names.

I find I don't really have to sell the value of an index, since I mostly work with good editors who appreciate a good index.

I think indexing will be around for a while, but it's hard to know if it'll be around forever. There's no way a computer can do what we do. People from outside the publishing industry always say to me, "Indexing, I thought computers did that." But it's an art—it's not suited to computers. Maybe someday, but not today. Multimedia content is a growing challenge—how to represent an image or graph, and file it for future reference. Indexers can do it, but computers can't even recognize and categorize a simple picture of kids playing in a yard with a dog. ■



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