

How did you get your start in Assistive Technology?

January 8th, 2007 Joy Zabala, Penny Reed, and Gayl Bowser posed this question to everyone on the QIAT list: "How did you get your start in Assistive Technology?" This question resulted in an outpouring of testimonials that Gayl and Chauncy Rucker have assembled here. Apple Computer and Dolores and Bud Hagen were often mentioned, but other heroes were also included. It's a very positive history! We thank Joy Zabala, Penny Reed and our Gayl Bowser for coming up with the question and the QIAT list for providing a place where such conversations can flourish.

Date: January 08, 2007 12:40:43 PM EST
From: Joy <joy@JOYZABALA.COM>
Subject: How did you get your start in AT???
Date: January 07, 2007 03:25:22 PM EST
To: QIAT@LSV.UKY.EDU

Dear QIAT People,

Penny Reed, Gayl Bowser, and I are sitting here in Oregon talking about this and that related to AT. It came up in our conversation that each of us got our initial "start" in AT through some sort of involvement in the initial Apple grants many years ago.

We then wondered how many of you all developed your initial interest/knowledge/skills/etc. in the uses of technology in education through participation in one of those Apple grants.

Let us know.

Best to all,
Joy

Joy Smiley Zabala, Ed.D, ATP
Assistive Technology & Leadership
PO Box 3130
Lake Jackson, TX 77566
Preferred email: joy@joyzabala.com
WWW: <http://www.joyzabala.com>

From: Chauncy Rucker

Date: January 07, 2007 04:08:19 PM EST

I didn't get an official Apple grant, but I did receive 10 Apple computers from Alan Brightman in the early 1980's to use with a group of bright youngsters with cerebral palsy. It's a long story, but the success of these youngsters propelled me into assistive technology.

I've seen Alan at two CSUN conferences and have been able to express how much I owed him for his support!

Regards,
Chauncy

Chauncy N. Rucker, Ph.D., Publisher

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From: Andrea <andi@ELP.RR.COM>

Date: January 07, 2007 04:15:28 PM EST

Do not work in the schools: Lately do work with a growing number of severely involved kiddos whose parents are not happy with what is going on in the schools and some of the decisions that are being made....equipment for which they are not trained... etc. Do have Private Practice with large number of adult neurogenic...SPANISH speakers... Have been a computer nerd since the original Osborne portable computers (size of a large suitcase, 3.5 X 5 inch screen... weight 40+ lbs... limited software...we learned to do our own DOS programming in those days.)

By the time I was diagnosed w/MS in the mid 90s & went back to school to change careers...with severe dysgraphia.... I was carrying an Apple Powerbook OS 4.0 later 5.0.

Once out in practice I began exploring software and hardware that could be adapted for my ALS, Aphasia, Parkinsons clients.... so I came into all of this through the side door, I guess...

Andrea Pn "andi" Curl MS CCC-SLP .

From: Magi D. Shepley <magid@CONCENTRIC.NET>

Date: January 07, 2007 04:25:09 PM EST

I'm probably one of the youngest people here, and used Apple computers in my middle school as a student. However, my mother was a computer programmer from 60s through 2004, when she retired. We had a computer at home from the time I was 8 (a Vic-20 that we had to go to New York City and buy at Macy's). I was one of 2 people my college dormitory in 1991 with a personal computer; the education department building had Macintosh computers).

As for educational technology: I brought in the old Vic-20 when I was a student teacher's aide in a special education class during high school, and after that most of the classes I worked in had Apple computers. I usually worked with the kids on the computer when I was there.

When I started teaching, I wound up with all 4 Dynavox users in my class because I wasn't scared of computers. I remember, not too fondly, having to program the devices because individually by hand... 2 of my students had the old black and white machines, and 2 students had brand-new color machines. The SLP handed me a disk with Boardmaker on it, and I guess that's history. I started writing grants to get stuff for my students a few years later.

From: kathy howery <howerys@SHAW.CA>

Date: January 07, 2007 04:30:05 PM EST

I got my first job just fresh with a Master's degree in Psycholinguistics at a school for children with severe and profound disabilities in 1982. I didn't have much of an idea of what to do with all these non-speaking kids, but was eager and willing to think about "communication" rather than "speech" . Then I had the great luck of hearing Al Cook speak about the new possibilities offered by computers for people with disabilities. I was inspired! and was again lucky enough to be sent to a workshop lead by Greg Vanderheiden on the Adaptive Firmware Card and then to Boston (I think) for what was to be the first ISAAC conference. I was hooked.

The kids at this school had been basically "written off" in terms of educational potential, but with the AFC, the Echo and the Apple II we were able to show that many of them could in fact learn to communicate with symbols, some could even learn to read and write. It was an amazing time. Other "powerful" technologies we used were the Zygo 16 and Zygo 100, and of course the photocopier to photocopy, cut and paste PCS symbols. People were dazzled by what this kids could do.

Thanks for asking this question Joy - it is fun to think back! And you know although much has changed, it is also interesting to reflect on how much those old Apples with the AFCs and Echos could in fact do!

Kathy Howery

From: Freda Caufield <FredaC@NWRES.D.K12.OR.US>

Date: January 07, 2007 04:41:03 PM EST

It all started with a Lighttalker.....I had moved to Oregon from New York where I had worked in the BOCES system and been told by a principle that I shouldn't be using pictures with a severe dyspraxic student that as a "speech therapist" my job was to get kids to "Tawk" as they say back there.

The first student I worked with (here in Oregon) had just received a Light Talker and I spent many quality hours on the tech support line learning about that - Our state had a grant to "train the trainers" in AC. I got in on it about half way through and was lucky enough to have Gayl as a mentor. I still remember adaptive firmare cards, echo cards, the stepper, power pads....Oh the Good old days ;-)

Freda Caufield
NWRES.D
Hillsboro Oregon

From: Jeannette F. Van Houten <jvanhouten@OPTONLINE.NET>

Date: January 07, 2007 07:34:34 PM EST

I had a Commodore 64 at home. About the only thing I learned on the Commodore 64 was how to make the monster move across the screen and make the dog chase the rainbow. So the Commodore 64 taught me how to do some basic programming. I can still make the dog chase the rainbow. When I entered High School, I found that computers helped me to be more productive than when I was manually writing. Ideas and concepts just made more sense. Of course the games and the cute teenage boys didn't hurt when you were the only girl in computer class.

However, professionally I started in the AT field because of Donna Waldman. She was the PSH teacher where I was newly employed and she insisted that I use these tools with my students. Man I put up a fight however the story is that if it wasn't for Donna I wouldn't be in the AT field. I am not sure if I should thank her for kick her.

So Donna Waldman here is to you. THANKS for helping me in my career!

Jeannette Van Houten, M.ED, ATP
Curriculum/Assistive Technology Specialist

From: bryan ayres <ayresfamily@ALLTEL.NET>

Date: January 07, 2007 09:34:14 PM EST

Apple C, Apple IIE and the notorious AFC card, that was where I started while working with students with severe profound disabilities.

Bryan Ayres, Arkansas

From: Faith Paradis

Date: January 08, 2007 06:58:47 AM EST

As far as AT most of us who have been involved in AT since the 80's were involved with Apple Computers because PCs did not support any AT as I recall. I didn't have an Apple grant but worked with Apple computers back then.

Faith

From: Magi D. Shepley <magid@CONCENTRIC.NET>

Date: January 08, 2007 07:37:37 AM EST

You're probably correct, because one of the first grants I received I used to purchase a Macintosh for my classroom. That was in 1999. The computer never made it to the classroom though, because I worked in an inner city district and it was stolen off the loading dock at the warehouse. We had 2 other older Macs in the room, though, which I received through a grant from the Penn State University recycling program. That, and the IntelliTools software. The only thing that my PC would do was run Boardmaker.

Magi

From: Suzanne Feit <suzfeit@AOL.COM>

Date: January 08, 2007 08:55:13 AM EST

I had a son with Down Syndrome whom I needed to educate and promote his independence. He became my teacher and inspiration but that is another story. I then started an AT non-profit resource center which was part of the current ATA and partially supported by Apple who gave us a MAC. This was my way of figuring out what would work for us as well as many other people in my community. My son is now 28 and will be volunteering at ATIA so be sure to stop by and say hello to David if you are attending. He loves to chat.

Suzanne

Wendy Homlish <homlishw@CLIU.ORG>

Date: January 08, 2007 09:18:47 AM EST

Lord, all this brings back memories! In the late 80's I was working with some wonderful Apple IIs – I learned to open the case, install the AFC (remember the BIG blue book for programming???) and speech cards – I was so cool! Then, 1988 and a grant for a IIGs – I was in heaven. As an SLP in the schools working with kids with severe disabilities, it was heaven. The Unicorn, the Zygo, the IntroTalker and TouchTalker, cutting and pasting (literally) from those big Mayer Johnson binders of symbols – these young 'uns don't know how good they have it!!! I am still learning, and still LOVING AT! (I should mention that I also had a great mentor in my colleague who has been in this field for even longer than I have!).

Wendy

Breslin-Larson, Joan <Joan.Breslin-Larson@STATE.MN.US>

Date: January 08, 2007 09:55:00 AM EST

Wow- what cool stories folks are telling. Since I did not work in schools, I did not have an Apple grant. I did use Apples (what else was there?) with the AFC (mine was old enough to have batteries...) the Echo, Dunamis Powerpad and a Koala touchpad. I got my training from CTG, when they held workshops in the upstairs of the Henderson MN highschool.

Joan

From: Carmichael Andrea <acarmichael@HAYS489.K12.KS.US>

Date: January 08, 2007 10:20:50 AM EST

My first year out of college, I went to a conference and when I came home requisitioned for the huge Unicorn, AFC, and Echo back in the mid-80's. I couldn't believe my administrator approved it! Ever since that time, they gave all the severe speech kids to me knowing how interested I was in helping them communicate with this "wonderful" "state-of-the-art" technology! When I moved to Wyoming, a student there used a Prentke-Romich device and they sent me to Denver for a week's training. After that, I knew I'd never be able to go back to doing traditional speech/language therapy and, as fast as everything's changing, I never get bored with it, learning every single day!!

From: Eileen Haddon

Subject: Re: How did you get your start in AT???

Date: January 08, 2007 10:26:26 AM EST

I was always interested in OT, and along the way worked in the business world where I fell in love with computers. There was an article in the Philadelphia Inquirer newspaper about a program at Temple University that was teaching word processing to people with disabilities. I wrote to the program, and they said "Come visit!" I remember being blown away that there was actually a name for what I wanted to do – "Assistive Technology." The people at the program were thrilled to have a convert! It still amazes me how much people took time to care and help me to learn – the team at the PIAT center at Temple, Beth Mineo, Barry Romich. It still amazes me how generous people in this field are with time and ideas. And I remember being at a PC Users meeting in 1985 where we heard about this new idea of "electronic mail."

Eileen H.

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Eileen C. Haddon, ATP  
Assistive Technology Access Specialist  
VermontAssistive Technology Program  
VermontTechnical College  
Randolph Center, VT 05061  
phone 802-728-1520 / fax 802-728-1390

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From: Grob, Cindy <CGrob@WSWHEBOCES.ORG>

Date: January 08, 2007 10:46:25 AM EST

It is SO nice to hear from another group of folks that can actually look back with happy memories at mastering the AFC card, the PowerPad, and our giant blue Unicorn board. And what about the Muppet Learning Keys, and UCLA software, and the support of people like Ed Zuromski??... I got my start in the early 80s because, as an only child, I considered all this "stuff" to be part of my entry in the whoever-has-the-most-toys-at-the-end-wins lifestyle. And, btw, my class at that time REALLY needed this type of support. Between Apple and a NYS learning grant that let me buy all manner of things to make switches and a variety of sensory activities, I was hooked. About the only thing that I don't miss these days is soldering my own switches – and I have the scars to prove it.

Cindy Grob, ATP  
Assistive Technology Department  
WSWHE BOCES  
Saratoga Springs, NY

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From: Terry Miller <temiller@WSD.K12.CA.US>

Date: January 08, 2007 11:58:54 AM EST

We are going back many, many years . . . my entry into AT/AAC is definitely different. In college, I was always interested in the medical aspect of speech-language pathology, so developed some skill in Head and Neck. When I began work professionally in the mid 70s, because I was a rare bird (everyone else hated this area), I was attached to the Head and Neck division of a teaching university hospital. It was there that I began to work with alaryngeal devices for laryngectomees. Then came the Canon Communicator . . . how I hated that device, but it still excited me because I could see the possibilities. I also worked with people with acquired neurological impairments and found my way to the old Apple computers with very basic learning software. All of this before 1985! When I changed from the medical field to the school system in the mid 90s, I was hired in a high school that had 150 severely impaired special ed students . . . my background targeted me for AT/AAC and that's what I have been doing since. I have to admit, I never get bored in this field . . . so many changes and advancements, so much to learn. It is exciting. I tell people I get paid to shop . . . among other things.

-Terry

From: Joan Green <Jgreenslp@AOL.COM>

Date: January 08, 2007 12:15:44 PM EST

I got started using technology to help clients in the mid-80s. I worked in rehab with adults and tried to use programs to help them improve reading and writing. I always loved computers and thought that they were the perfect match for helping people learn to communicate better. It was very frustrating with the Apple 11es. They were slow and broke down. Parrot and Bungalow were all that I was aware of, and they weren't very interesting or interactive at that time. Software and Hardware were also very expensive. Things have sure come a long way. After working in acute care, home care, and a few outpatient programs I became increasingly disillusioned with having to discharge clients prior to them reaching their potential. I also couldn't help people enough with the short amount of time and attention I could give each person in order to reach my "billable units" and be sure that the home care companies and hospitals would be reimbursed. Group therapy and the use of technology seemed to be the answer to continued affordable treatment.

In the early 90s I formed my own practice and was fortunate to be able to pour the money I made back into the practice so that I could have at my disposal all the software and devices to help clients. I found that as the years went by, it all became so much more affordable, interactive, therapeutically beneficial and fun. Software made to teach English as a second language, text readers for people with low vision and the drill and practice software with the multi-sensory stimulation was very well received by my clients and made my job so much more fun. It also helped that my 4 children loved going on the computer so they helped me explore software.

As time went on, word spread about my use of technology- so it became most of what I did. Other professionals at nearby hospitals and schools provided the "traditional therapy" and they referred to me to I supplement the treatment with software etc. I think it was by this total immersion with the software with a wide variety of clients that convinced me it was totally the way to go to help me do more effective treatment and helped me empower clients to help themselves once their therapy ended or increase the intensity of their rehab efforts while therapy was still being provided. It's hard to keep on top of all the options and choices when caseloads are consistent and time is limited. My sessions are two- four hours a day with one client for a week. I only provide short-term intensive treatment so I have a new client each week to focus on and try new resources with. It keeps me using a lot of the different programs and trying all the options since everyone has different goals and learning styles.

Sorry for the extended response. I must be in a "talkative" mood:)

Joan L. Green, M.A. CCC\_SLP  
301-602-2899/ 1-800-IST-2550  
Joan@innovativespeech.com  
[www.innovativespeech.com](http://www.innovativespeech.com)

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**From:** Richard A. King <rkkki2@AOL.COM>

**Date:** January 08, 2007 12:35:53 PM EST

My start in AT evolved after our Special Ed. administration decided to form a segregated classroom for "Physically Disabled" students in a segregated Special Ed facility. We had 13 students, aged 6 to 21, all using wheelchairs, 2 instructional assistants ["aides"], and an available male teacher who had the strength to transfer these children to the toilet. My back still hurts. We had no specialized equipment. I spent all of my time taking care of the physical needs of my "kids". No one cared [except the kids] if they learned to read. I did not know what to do until I was invited to attend a workshop sponsored by the State DOE featuring Bud and Delores Hagen from Closing The Gap. I returned, talked the PTA into buying an Apple IIe, Adaptive Firmware card, Echo Speech Synthesizer, Unicorn Board, PowerPad, Muppet Learning Keys, Marblesoft Software, and a Prentke-Romich switch, and I was on my way. In two weeks I was the new Guru of AT, because there was no one else. I actually took 7 of my students into a semi inclusive setting two years later in an elementary school with a great deal of AT quickly accumulated through grants, fund raisers, and donations. Thank you Hagens!

Richard A. King  
Disability Services Coordinator  
Roanoke Valley Regional Board  
540-793-3424  
rkkki22@aol.com

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**From:** Press, Matthew <Matthew.Press@AZED.GOV>

**Date:** January 08, 2007 12:40:43 PM EST

WOW. I am in company of many people with so much experience. I am almost embarrassed to say I grew up with a model 100 (old Tandy laptop) and some other electronic toys from Radio Shack, but no Apple IIs or the like.

You guys are so awesome!

Wet behind the ears,  
Matthew Press, MHS, OTR/L, ATP, DAD  
[matthew.press@azed.gov](mailto:matthew.press@azed.gov) 602-364-2442

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**From:** Lynne Deese <Ideese@NCATP.ORG>

**Date:** January 08, 2007 12:45:44 PM EST

My first experience with computers goes all the way back to the Commodore. I started using Apples with my students in the mid to late 80's and I believe the machines we used were part of the grant process.

A. Lynne Deese  
NC Assistive Technology Program  
1110 Navaho Dr.  
Raleigh, NC 27609  
Phone: 919-850-2787  
Fax: 919-850-2792  
Ideese@ncatp.org

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**From:** Russ Holland <russholland@ATACCESS.ORG>

**Date:** January 08, 2007 12:57:09 PM EST

Great question and fascinating responses... the breadth and depth of this field is quite something.

My start was pretty humble. Not an Apple grant, but still Apple based ... the stereotypical segregated "Trainable Mentally Handicapped" class in the basement of the elementary school next to the furnace room. Somewhere in the late 70s we came across a black Bell & Howell labled computer (Apple II upper case only I was to later determine) no one wanted stuck in the storage room on the other side of the furnace room. I took it home to play, found out that we could make it talk with an "Echo", and that alone motivated the kids to demonstrate that "trainable" could have new meaning. From there it was on to "Emotionally Disturbed and Socially Maldjusted" junior high students who used the same computer, synthesizer and Bank Street Writer to describe their pride in both their label and their accomplishments.

I'm glad we're all still playing, and still trying to get it right,

Russ

Russ Holland  
Program Director  
Alliance for Technology Access - the network of grassroots organizations, companies and individuals enhancing the lives of people with disabilities through technology.

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**From:** Lisa Yoder <lyoder@AEA267.K12.IA.US>

**Date:** January 08, 2007 01:01:15 PM EST

I kind of fell into the world of AT. I didn't have an AAC class in college until Graduate School at NE Missouri State with Dr. Paula Cochran and I learned a lot. Then, the first job I had (and still have) was in a school and they had just received an apple grant. We had a bunch of macintosh computers from the grant. So all of our teachers and support staff were required to attend trainings several times per week to learn different programs. It really made the staff go in a new direction as far as technology and using a computer with their students in general.

My whole caseload being students with moderate-severe/profound special needs. So, my very experienced co-workers (SLP, consultants, etc.) would hand me a manual of Sp. Dyn., Boardmaker, Hyperstudio, Wolf, Zygo, etc. and say "Learn this" which was the BEST way for me to truly LEARN about each of them. I didn't really have a specific interest in AAC which gravitated me towards a job, it just happened that way and after 11 years with it, I still love it! I'm sure people who've been in it since the 80s have seen an incredible change in AT! And it was people like you who gave me a good solid start! Thanks!  
Lisa

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**From:** Kirsten Haugen <haugen@4J.LANE.EDU>

**Date:** January 08, 2007 01:47:11 PM EST

Not an Apple Grant, but my first exposure to AT was paying my way through grad school as a 1:1 aide for a student with CP, severe learning and behavior challenges, AND an Apple IIe with an Echo speech synthesizer and a Unicorn board. "A what???" I asked, and that was it. Luckily, the Disabled Children's Computer Group (now the Center for Accessible Technology, in Berkeley, CA) was down the street, and we made frequent and very productive visits.

When our school was ready to throw away seven non-working Apple IIe's, I took them in to DCCG, and the amazing people there dug into them with me and I walked out with 5 working computers for our students.

I began volunteering at DCCG, and I think pestered them enough until they hired me. What got me hooked was all these folks who were MUCH more interested in kids (and people of all stripes) than they were about technology, and technology there was never about flash and splash, but how to solve problems and help people discover new opportunities, whether that meant using the latest software or a roll of duct tape and leftover styrofoam.

I also got to know numerous developers and vendors at the time. That's another crew of people with amazing stories about how they entered the field, started their companies, and developed their products.

Kirsten Haugen  
Eugene, OR

PS - The Unicorn board, as some of you remember, was the predecessor to IntelliKeys, only we drew and glued together overlays by hand. That and the Echo plugged into the AFC from Don Johnston, which enabled us to run Dr. Peet's TalkWriter software, among other things. I think of that set up as the "VW Beetle" of AT.

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**From:** Karen Neill <kneill@VSB.BC.CA>

**Date:** January 08, 2007 01:51:57 PM EST

Unlike many of you, who grew into AT, or 'fell' into it as the case may be- I had intended this all along. I knew I was going to go into AAC and AT before I started university. I was a lifeguard and adapted aquatics instructor, and met my first AAC user at the ripe age of 16! (She was 4 ½- and as an adult has become a great friend). When I headed off for my undergrad I decided to take linguistics so that I could go into speech pathology to work in the field of AAC. One of my first externships was with SET BC. What a great start!

Okay, I'm showing my age here, but my first computer was a PC with Peachtext- and I was in grade 9 at the time. I don't know how to work without a computer (as anyone who has seen my handwriting can attest).

It's so fun to hear everyone's story!

Karen Neill AAC SLP-  
Vancouver School Board

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**From:** Cedelman@AUSTINISD.ORG

**Date:** January 08, 2007 02:23:26 PM EST

Without those Apple IIe's, the Echo, the Adaptive Firmware Card and the Unicorn board, what would we have done?

My first experience was about my 5th year of teaching when our district got an Apple Grant and my classroom was chosen as one that would get an Apple IIe. My assistant and I stayed after school one day and decided to set it up ourselves instead of waiting for someone to come. Within a few days, I received software that allowed us to "type" on the computer! WOW that was cool. Within a year, I was offered training opportunities to learn about software and different types of adaptive equipment. Then came to IIGs's....what a step up and sooooo much faster. It made the adaptive firmware a virtual speed demon!

That really takes me back...I still have a mother board from an Apple IIe, an old floppy drive and an echo card. I keep them just for reminders of a much simpler time when Apple dominated!

Carye Edelman, ATP  
Special Education Tech. Facilitator  
Assistive Technology/ATSTAR  
Austin ISD  
(512)414-3093

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**From:** JOSEPH BENAMATI <JFBENAMA@WCBOE.ORG>

**Date:** January 08, 2007 02:40:30 PM EST

I never dealt with the Apple grants....

I guess I started in AT in the mid 80's when I started working at a residence camp for physically and mentally challenged youth and adults (Camp Orenda - if any of you are from Western PA)

In our oldest session we had one young lady that used a dryboard, (alphabet and keywords only.) She pointed to letters to spell words and form sentences (she spells better than I do.) Another young lady had much more involved CP and couldn't point. She used eye's up for 'yes' and straight down for 'no' and we basically played 20 questions but with letters.

"First letter before M?", "Yes", "Before H?", "No", "Before K?", (she stares right at you, not yes or no), "Is it K?", "Yes", the word starts with K, next letter... One word at a time we'd spell an entire sentence or enough that we could guess the rest. Finally we realized that we could run our finger over the other campers letter board and she would holler or give us a yes when we got to the right letter.

Why did I get into AT, because some of our campers came to us without their AT. I was forever bending spoons, making letter boards, whatever it took. At the time I didn't realize I could make a living at it, it was just what needed to be done. I did that for 12 summers. It's the only job I ever missed when I left it.

Then jump ahead a few years. I was teaching science at a local middle school and had just applied for (but not gotten) a position as the new technology trainer for the county. I was asked if I could help teach computer skills to a young girl who had been injured in an accident and left paralyzed from the chin down. They had gotten the equipment, but someone needed to figure out how to teach her to use a word processor. I jumped at the chance. The next year they split the technology trainer position in to the Technology Training Coordinator and the Assistive Technology Coordinator. I finally realized I could get paid for this!! I got the job and the rest is history.

Some days I still can't believe they pay me to do this, but I don't tell them. :)

BTW the girl from the accident... She graduated from the University of Maryland with honors and is working on a another degree, this one in Journalism.

Joseph Benamati  
Coordinator of Assistive Technology  
joseph.benamati@wcboe.org  
W-410-677-4551  
P-410-334-9669

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**From:** Carolann Cormier

**Date:** January 08, 2007 05:33:55 PM EST

It is so interesting reading all these messages. One of my first jobs was with the department of mental retardation, where all my clients were nonverbal, so that involved lots of cutting and pasting with magazine pictures and the PCS books. After that, I started in computer related AT at my next job, in the mid 80's when I inherited all the computer related goals in my classrooms of students with multiple disabilities (our OT had done it but left). I was lucky as we already had the AFC's, Ile's, Echo's, PowerPads, and TouchWindows. I went to a user group run by a wonderful woman (Irene Watson) in CT and told her all I wanted to do initially was learn how to making talking communication boards using the Unicorn. I left that day being able to do so, and went on from there. I was then lucky to become involved with ConnSense in Connecticut and met Chauncy Rucker who encouraged me and offered me my first opportunity to present on AT (I still have the wonderful note he sent me after the presentation). Since then it's been more conferences and more learning. Today it amazes me the wealth of information as well as attitudinal changes as when I started there was very little information out there and I still remember reading records were it said next to Speech Therapy not applicable person mentally retarded. What I love about AT is the people involved with it, seeing light bulbs go off with children and knowing that I will be forever learning because technology will be forever changing, how exciting is that.

Carolann

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**From:** Magi D. Shepley <magid@CONCENTRIC.NET>

**Date:** January 08, 2007 07:28:03 PM EST

I did my share of cutting and pasting from the Boardmaker books... My inner city district didn't have the software, and of course, I had to turn in my copy when I left Baltimore City after my first year. Nobody at my district knew what I was talking about the first year and a half, but fortunately, the OT assigned to my classroom worked for the Intermediate Unit locally, and knew about it. She sent me over there, where I had to stand and copy each symbol I needed. They couldn't give me the books because it was a copyright violation... so, once or twice a month, I'd go over and copy, cut, paste, and enlarge. I was positively thrilled when, later that year, a parent from another on-line list sold me her copy for \$10. ;) She didn't want it anymore because her son had gotten a Dynavox, and she wanted him to only use the dynasyms. They weren't available in Boardmaker yet, so she just printed pages from his device.

Magi

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**From:** Chauncy Rucker

**Date:** January 08, 2007 07:33:13 PM EST

Carolann:

Thanks so much for your very positive comments about me and ConnSENSE in this fascinating thread!

You certainly deserve praise for the major professional AT contribution you have made in Connecticut and beyond. You need to know that articles by you continue to show up in the top ten of articles (out of literally hundreds of articles) receiving visits on the ConnSENSE Bulletin website. Two examples, in the week of 12/24/06, your article entitled "Adaptations Across the Curriculum" and in the week of 12/10/06, your article "Points to Consider for an Assistive Technology Evaluation".

I'm proud to know you Carolann.

Regards,  
Chauncy

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**From:** Magi D. Shepley <magid@CONCENTRIC.NET>

**Date:** January 08, 2007 07:38:33 PM EST

The people at Temple are wonderful... the PA assistive tech loan group out of there gave me my first hand's on access to a Dynamyte and to an IntelliKeys! I was also able to try some software. I did an independent study class to take the place of the Computers for Educators class that my undergraduate university required (The first day of class was how to turn on the computer and format a disk, so the professor made me drop the class because she said it was too basic for me and I was going to wind up being her teaching assistant if I stayed). I looked at 5 or 6 different pieces of educational software, and am really sad that those wonderful programs aren't available for my students to use now... a program that let you design Garfield cartoons or Teddy Bear cartoons, the MECC software, CBS (I think that was the company name... they produced things like Dreamhouse, and a railroad game that was very like Railroad Tycoon, but for children). Those programs would just benefit my students so much in terms of exploring writing and other concepts, and they weren't babyish... they just were... any age group could use it.

As for email... I played Hunt the Wampus on a 50 baud acoustic-coupled modem when I was 4 or 5. I did it at my mom's work, and had a blast. She used to give me the green and white bar paper for my students to color on, and use for activities. I received letters written on the backs of blank keypunch cards. My first year of college, I had to explain the computer modem and what I was doing (I worked for the Byte Information Exchange, aka BIX by that point) to other students by referencing the movie War Games.

Magi

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**From:** nancy hogan

**Date:** January 08, 2007 07:51:36 PM EST

Hi,

I was introduced to AT at a summer camp for kids with disabilities when I was in college. I think it was in '81 when a camper arrived with her training crew - a teacher and SLP. They showed me how to use her communication boards and adapted books. The team was from NYC, and had obviously worked with Carole Goossens's.

By '85 I was teaching kids with communication disorders. From my camp experience, I knew more could be done to help my students. I began searching for more info, then learned about ConnSense. After going to ConnSense several summers, I decided I might as well enter their post grad program. While involved with UCONN I met Carolann Cormier, Irene Watson, and had the good fortune to be mentored by Chauncy Rucker.

We used choice clocks, adapted switches, made loop tapes. I was so excited when the programable Wolf hit the market! Yup, we finally graduated to the Apple 2GS, the Unicorn Board, Adapted firmware card, and Echo. For some reason that darn computer would not work if the humidity was too high.

I worked as an AT consultant for awhile (10 years) and then returned to the classroom. Of course I only interviewed for jobs with nonverbal kids. Fortunately, not many teachers make that demand, so I got a job in the school system I wanted!

Nancy

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From Steven L. Hodges <slhwaverly@VOYAGER.NET>

**Date:** January 08, 2007 08:18:13 PM EST

**Joy and all QIAT'ers,**

**I am proud to say that I am a Techno Ranger, and always will be a Techno Ranger. I was fortunate to start in this AT field because of students who inspired me that life means never giving up. It amazes me that the little things that a person does for someone else has the potential to stay with you for a lifetime. To imagine that I could make someone feel good about themselves through some archaic scanning technique using the AFC just takes my breath away. One bright young man once typed the following when entering the first of many sarcastic messages through his AFC scanning setup: AFC=Americans for Cripples. He always made me promise never to take life too seriously. (At one time someone mentioned that he might be better off in a room downstairs) He is now a successful accountant telling others how to manage their money better, accessing his Dynavox through a single switch. I have never met a better human being in my life. A true gift from God, if there ever was one.**

**I am blessed in so many ways; good health, a great family, a QIAT member, and having the opportunity to be inspired by children every day. I hope that each and every one of you is off to a great start this New Year. Keep the ideas flowing! Oh, my friend says keep praying for Bush!**  
**Steve**

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**From:** Gayl Bowser

**Date:** January 08, 2007 11:53:47 PM EST

Wow! I went away for two days and look what happened. You have inspired me to add my Apple Grant story to this list. Especially since it involves Penny Reed too.

I was working in a self-contained classroom for children with physical disabilities and Penny Reed was my supervisor. She told me one day that we were going to write a grant for a computer. I was pretty resistant. I think I told her that I was NOT interested in computers and couldn't see how I could do that. Well, if you have ever worked with Penny, you'd suspect that we DID write the grant. We did and Apple funded it. I am so grateful that she nudged me, gently, into the field. Since it was so early in the development of technology, I had to write all the software we used. The computer we had didn't even have a disc drive. We had to get a cassette tape recorder to save the software we were writing. (REALLY-cassette tapes from Radio Shack) It was all pretty primitive.

But there was NOTHING primitive about what happened for the kids in that class. It turned out that Eric really did know all his numbers but hadn't been able to tell me what they were. Pauline learned colors in a week once we took the motor component out of the learning tasks we were giving her. It was magic.

I'll tell you a secret. I'm still not a "Geek". I love the results. But I'm not fond of learning new technology. I'm supposed to install a new piece of software on my computer tonight but I'm writing to the listserv because I think that's a LOT more fun.

Don't you think we ought to find some way to tell Apple Computer what they did for all of us? And the Hagens at CTG too? Wonder how we could let them know how much we appreciate the way they helped us start to change the world for people with disabilities. There have been thousands of contributors since those old, old (very old) days, but I'm so grateful that those people and companies had the vision of how it might be and let us experiment and learn.

I'm also grateful to the newest generation of innovators and supporters. Feels to me like we're about to take another big leap forward in this field. I can't wait to see what happens next!

Thanks for all the stories!

Gayl Bowser, Coordinator  
OTAP, RSOI, and Region3 EI/ECSE  
1871 NE Stephens  
Roseburg, OR 97470  
541-440-4791  
541-957-4808 (fax)  
gayl.bowser@douglasesd.k12.or.us

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From: Bridgett Perry <bridgett@CITTIPROJECT.ORG>

**Date:** January 09, 2007 02:08:03 AM EST

I got started in 1987 when I began working for the Disabled Children's Computer Group in Berkeley (now the Center for Accessible Technology.) Jackie Brand was the director then and had just made a commitment with Apple to start what was then called the National Special Education Alliance (NSEA). This is now the Alliance for Technology Access (ATA). Jackie somehow had faith that my experience as a wheelchair mechanic, adapting ways for folks to operate them more independently, would transfer to computers. Mary Lester, now the director of the ATA, taught me how to boot up my first Mac Plus. Alice Wershing taught me how to work magic with technology. I have always been grateful to all of them for taking me under their wings. I began working full time for the ATA as the vendor liaison, program coordinator, and the institute techie. My early years are full of fond memories. I think of Arjan Khalsa leading the first Unicorn User's Group. ATA Institute held at Harvard and the CAST crew as the trainers. Russ Holland paddled me around the Adirondacks in his canoe (this is AT related). And the grief I have endured all these years from Bob Keller (DJ Inc) ever since we held institute in French Lick Indiana. We actually blew out the electricity in the entire hotel by booting up a row of clunky "portable" IBMs. Awe, the memories!

Bridgett

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**From:** VernaAnn Kotansky <vernaann.kotansky@LAKEWOOD.K12.OH.US>

**Date:** January 09, 2007 08:16:28 AM EST

I started in this field as an SLP at an Easter Seals in Lancaster, PA. An OT and I decided it was time to get the ball rolling with technology in the center - 1992. Apples were the rage and we were considered oh so cutting edge. That year ISAAC was in Philadelphia and I got the opportunity to attend. Pretty much I was hooked for life. I loved being there as Dynavox was getting off its feet. I laugh now thinking of the tiny little preschooler that was using a Touch Talker that was the size of the kitchen sink.

I love how this field continually changes and how bit by bit we are becoming more main stream. I appreciate the information shared with this group and the support of knowing that we are not alone - though at times it might feel that way!

Take care to all and enjoy the day!  
VernaAnn

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**From:** Terri Martin <emmeritm@STCLAIR.K12.IL.US>

**Date:** January 09, 2007 10:00:33 AM EST

I feel very young and very green with the amount of experience on this board. I was first introduced to AT when my parents purchased an Apple IIe with Echo for my brother who has learning disabilities. We went to parochial school and my parents were trying anything to keep him there and not have to send only him (out of 5 of us) to public school. When they got it, they decided someone had to learn how to use the computer and sent the oldest child (me) down the street for "computer lessons" with a neighbor who worked with them. I learned Basic programming from him and was only in 6th grade. I think I was a little too young to truly grasp what the Echo card could do and we only had one spelling program that worked with it.

I took all of the computer classes I could in high school because I was fascinated with how fast things were changing. I was very scared to switch from Apple to Windows, though, because I already knew all of the keystrokes and would have to learn where everything was located with a mouse (that took way too long...I still use keystrokes when I'm typing), but I adjusted pretty quickly. I worked in an instructional materials center and computer lab in college and gained more experience with basic computer skills. Email came available sometime my freshman year in college (you had to actually request an email address and not everyone had one) through Telnet. I loved chatting with some of my friends at other universities simultaneously. Then the internet became available. I taught myself how to navigate it while working in the computer lab.

When I student taught in 1997, I was told by my cooperating teacher to teach our class of students with mental impairments how to use basic computer programs like Word and Publisher. When I took my first teaching job, I was the "up-to-date" teacher who utilized the computer in her classroom more than most. I came to the district I'm in now and joined some grant projects to get more computers in my classroom and really loved showing my students how to make projects look professional. The AT position was created here about 5 years ago and the person in it at the time really pushed for me to explore the software like Wynn and Kurzweil to use in my classroom. I've always looked for ways to adapt (mostly low tech I've come to learn) methods for helping all of my students learn. When she retired, she really thought I would be the best suited person for the job and pushed me to apply for it.

I feel so out-of-sorts sometimes on this board because my experience is more with students with milder disabilities. I haven't had to program switches or build communication boards. I'm sure that lies in the near future, though. I've really had to push people in my district to even learn about what AT means. Sometimes I think they think I'm just around to help with the computers.

Terri Martin

CASE Assistive Technology Facilitator -

[www.cahokia187.org/emmeritm/index.html](http://www.cahokia187.org/emmeritm/index.html)

emmeritm@stclair.k12.il.us

Office: 618-332-3820, ext. 364

District cell: 618-806-8925

**From:** Lee, Linnie - Curriculum Development <Linnie.Lee@EDUCATION.KY.GOV>

**Date:** January 09, 2007 12:23:24 PM EST

Ditto, Terri

I, too, have come to the QIAT list because of an emphasis on mild, high-incidence disabilities. I became interested when trying to meet the needs of a particular student while a resource teacher at the middle school level. This student was quite bright with a learning disability, but reading on a second grade level in the seventh grade. She refused to let me read to her, consequently failing science and social studies. She was quite shy and had few friends. When I discovered an early demo version of Read & Write, called Type 'n Talk, I was off and running, and so was my student. She went from failing, to making As and Bs, and also giving a presentation with me at our statewide technology conference. What a difference! After that success, I was constantly searching for other software demos that could help my students. That quest has led me to my current position.

Linnie Lee  
Exceptional Children Assistive Technology Consultant  
Kentucky Department of Education  
Office of Teaching and Learning  
(502) 564-2106

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**From:** a, Wendy <wstrobel@BUFFALO.EDU>

**Date:** January 09, 2007 11:41:50 AM EST

I got started in AT after working in vocational rehabilitation. I was frustrated by the gap between what the people I was working with to find jobs wanted to do and their functional limitations. So I started thinking of new ways to get things done – so they could better accomplish their dreams. I remember my first simple solution was working with a guy who had CP and MR who wanted to wash dishes. A simple adjustment to the process enabled him to get this portion of the job done and after that I was hooked. I went to work on a demonstration project out of the VCU-RRTC and learned from one of the best in job accommodation and the rest is history!

So many of us fall into this field, because of personnel experience or an effort to solve problems and increase independence. It is difficult to find a really good program that can train you in the practical application of AT across environments. I know I didn't have even 1 class dedicated to AT in my whole masters program. I hope that someone can take these stories and turn them into a book or an article that demonstrates how we come to the field and what needs to be done to ensure that people can become effective practitioners. I'd definitely want to read it!

Wendy Strobel, MS, CRC,ATP

Director of Training

Demand Pull Project Manager

T2RERC

3435 Main St., 322 Kimball Tower

Buffalo, NY 14214

716.829.3141 x 140

716.829.2420 Fax

[wstrobel@buffalo.edu](mailto:wstrobel@buffalo.edu)

<http://cosmos.ot.buffalo.edu/t2rerc/development/demandpull/index.htm>

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**From:** Linda Bastiani Wilson <bastiani@GMAIL.COM>

**Date:** January 15, 2007 10:09:09 PM EST

Wow, so many stories and so many memories. I think only one person so far said that she knew she wanted to do AT before college. I did too, but had no idea what it was called. My dad got us a computer in 1979 - an Atari 800, and like some of you mentioned, I learned how to program in basic. When I got to college at Northwester, I searched the work-study program offerings for something computer-based. I ended up in the sub-basement of the tech building as a "computer consultant" which meant that I answered questions that the programming students had (or anyone, really, but only programmers came to the sub-basement). These questions ranged from "where is my printout?" to "what is the correct syntax for an if-then statement in Fortran?" Within two years, the mainframe terminals were switched out for PC's and the questions expanded to things like, "what's the WordPerfect command for print?" "Shift-F10," I'd reply without needing a cheat sheet.

Similarly, for my undergraduate program, I figured out a way to combine technology with special education and designed my own concentration in using computers for special education. I met Jan Sefcik at Glencoe West School when I did my junior year practicum. I chose this practicum because she was the only person I could find who was doing anything with technology. By the end of the semester, the infant-toddler program in the building hired me as a consultant to set up Apples with cause/effect software for their mom and toddler sessions. I spent the rest of the time in preschool classes showing teachers how to use the Unicorn Board with their kids.

So, Jan Sefcik got me started - bless her. I bumped in to her years after I graduated at Closing the Gap. Jan, if you are reading this - send me an email. I've lost you since you retired to your island.

It is a pleasure to be able to collaborate with all you pioneers!

Linda

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Linda Bastiani Wilson  
AT Consultant, HIAT, Montgomery County Public Schools, MD  
<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/hiat/>

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**From:** Magi D. Shepley <magid@CONCENTRIC.NET>

**Date:** January 15, 2007 11:08:11 PM EST

That sounds so familiar, Linda, except I had a Commodore computer. I wrote an inventory program in Basic for my local Red Cross chapter to use to track food supplies for our canteen service. I was the student aide to the special education department chair my freshman year, and briefly worked for the special education department when I transferred to CW Post. I didn't remain in that job very long because I'd joined the school paper... intent on writing, but once the associate/layout editor discovered I knew how to use a computer, I was co-opted over there. They even offered to pay me what the special education department was paying. I later picked up another job running the residence hall computer lab overnight; the person who had been doing it never showed up, so I did it. I actually had one person in tears because she couldn't find the 'any key' in WordPerfect. I had an eclectic group of friends that year: the computer gamers who loved me, because I'd keep the lab open till nearly dawn on weekends, and the newspaper bunch.

I really wanted to do AT for my master's, but couldn't find anything. Hopkins had just started their AAC/AT program in 1996, but it wasn't a degree program yet, and I sure couldn't afford to go there on what Baltimore City was paying me as a 1st year teacher. I did eventually wind up at Hopkins, but not until 1999, and then in the transition program.

Magi

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**From:** Sharon Eilts <sharon.eilts@GMAIL.COM>

**Date:** January 15, 2007 10:22:49 PM EST

I came to AT in a very convoluted manner. I was a computer programmer in the late '60's on NCR NEAT2 systems. I then left that and went into education getting an OEO grant to become a special education teacher. My husband and I purchase an Apple II+ and we were off! My two daughters were in ACOT classrooms in elementary school so I began to see the benefits of technology for education. I became part of a pilot project for the state of California to see if public education could provide equal or better educational interventions with therapeutic support than the non-public placements. We found we could. I was provided 2 LC II Apple computers. I didn't even know how to load software (when you're used to reel-to-reel floppies are somewhat daunting). When one of my students was WAY more capable than I, I figured I needed to learn more. After all, you clean the crumbs out of your toaster, so I figured I needed to learn about how to take care of my LC II's. The grant continued to provide me with newer machines until we got the first iMac. That was too cool for words! Then, how I don't know, I was selected as an Apple Distinguished Educator and a whole new world opened up. My students were amazing and when one of them won the school science fair and went to Huntsville, AL for a week, the notion that technology could show what my students could do rather than what they couldn't was apparent. Plus, the computer was the ever patient tutor, the stress buster, a way for my students to excel. My district didn't believe me, so being the person I am, I got another masters in Instructional Technology. Macromedia and subsequently Adobe also selected me as a technology teacher. I went on to get an AT specialist certificate and was blessed to have a special ed. director for 2 years who actually understood the value of AT. She left and as many of you recall, I was placed back in the classroom only a different type of special ed. class. Google has now selected me as a technology teacher and I've come to realize that for the vast majority of education professionals, understanding and embracing technology in general is a dream and understanding and embracing assistive technology in all its iterations is incomprehensible.

So, for the last 40 years I have morphed myself into who I am today, a gruff old broad who only wants students to have a fighting chance and who will fight for them.

Sharon

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**From:** Bill Lynn

**Date:** January 23, 2007 05:20:33 PM EST

Oh, no! I'll have to come out of the shadows now because I do want to share my roots in AT. Actually, I started in AAC back in 1978 when we called it non-speech communication. Only one speech generating device back then that I can recall. It was the HandiVoice 120 from HC Electronics. It had a numeric keypad for input. Imagine having to memorize 3-digit sequences to access the speech output! Other communication devices were non-speaking and mainly involved ways to access your own pictures or symbols by scanning. The old Zygo 16 and Zygo 100 scanners are two examples.

My Masters project was writing a book on homemade technology, not unlike the several books that Linda Burkhart has written. Mine described how to make a number of switches, battery adapters, etc. It was never published.

I discovered the Apple II when I did an internship at the Ann Arbor VA Hospital. They were exploring the use of the Apple II for distance learning (via acoustic coupling) with stroke patients who had returned home and were unable to visit the hospital on a regular basis. Naturally, I fell in love with the computer and programming it.

I've been developing single switch software (officially) since 1991. I started by producing a number of programs for the Apple IIGS using HyperStudio and progressed to developing for Mac and Windows using Macromedia Director (now Adobe Director).

Developing software is my sideline, however. By day I'm a mild-mannered SLP who has worked with developmentally disabled children and adults, mostly in state-run facilities, for the past 27 years. I'm retiring from my day job in August in order to run my software business full-time. I can't wait.

Cheers... Bill Lynn  
Simtech Publications  
[www.hsj.com](http://www.hsj.com)

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**From:** Keeney, Mary <Mary.Keeney@AZED.GOV>

**Date:** January 23, 2007 06:24:31 PM EST

I'm glad you joined this thread belatedly, because now I can do the same thing! I really want to give credit (or maybe blame) to the person who introduced me to AAC, which led me to AT- Dr. Caroline Ramsey Musselwhite. Back in 1991 I was an SLP working at a school for the deaf. Caroline was hired as an AAC consultant to assist us with a student whose receptive language was ASL but who could not sign herself. The day I met Caroline changed my career path forever. We were trying out SDPro and I kept thinking, ("This would be so cool if only she could hear it!) I still can't believe my good fortune that my first (and continuing) mentor in AAC was Caroline.

Mary Keeney  
Assistive Technology Specialist  
Arizona Department of Education,  
Exceptional Student Services  
Mary.Keeney@azed.gov

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From: suzfeit@aol.com

Date: January 24, 2007 11:35:25 PM EDT

I am also working with a Laurie Brightman in Los Angeles who is a teacher at Lokrantz school and whom I had the privilege of working with her son at my NSEA/ATA center many years ago. My first conference was CTG and I was very, very new to the AT world and got to sit in all day with Richard Wanderman and learn from the MASTER!! It has been a wonderful journey and I have so much to be grateful for as I learn and grow each year. Pay it forward is my mantra.  
Suzanne

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From: Donna Broussard <bayougal@AOL.COM>

Date: February 01, 2007 09:05:16 AM EDT

Bill, I usually don't respond---just read, but I had to let you know that I was a big fan of your Hyperstudio Access features for switches and scanning (buttons) after moving from Hypercard (which I loved). I made a lot of stacks for many years that are now obsolete. I just wanted you to know that many of us are still around who remember and are thankful for your work. Thanks, Donna Broussard, LA Department of Ed (now)