

**MY FIRST  
(REAL)  
INDEXING JOB**

**PACIFIC NORTHWEST CHAPTER  
AMERICAN SOCIETY OF INDEXERS  
2010**

<http://www.pnwasi.org/index.htm>

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

*My First (real) Indexing Job* is a set of stories from practicing members of the Pacific Northwest Chapter of The American Society of Indexers, to encourage and help new indexers find their first job. My hope is that it will also be used to remind experienced indexers of how we got started when we run out of steam facing a challenging market. The stories also give a good feel for the wide variety of backgrounds and personalities that fuel the life of our chapter.

I have never worked with a group of people who are so willing to share and are so joyful in what they are doing professionally. They are just, well, *nice*. Nevertheless, I almost fell out of my chair at one of the first meetings I attended, when someone suggested that we all send our business contacts into a central database. Now, granted, that never actually happened. Nevertheless, it was accepted by the group as a reasonable thing to consider.

And it *is* reasonable. In my long experience marketing several small businesses the only clear conclusion I have been able to draw is that the more we communicate with each other and *the more we promote each other and indexing in general*, the better off we are individually.

This is a lesson that we cannot learn from large corporations, who jealously guard their every move, their every byte of information. The corporate model is neither appropriate nor appealing for freelancers.. Instead, let's keep talking to anyone who will listen.

This booklet is intended to give beginners a feel for how indexing is perceived by those who practice it, and how we present it to those who are clueless as to what we do. If we can get it into the hands of people outside our narrow circle, all the better. The booklet is posted on our website. Feel free to download and distribute it.

As president of your chapter in 2010, I want to see us take the first steps to achieving our marketing dreams. Let's hold hands and jump!

Nancy C. Gerth, Ph.D.  
February 16, 2010  
Sagle Idaho



## VICTORIA AGEЕ

Once upon a time there was a librarian on a year's sabbatical in Hawaii from her job as Reference Librarian for the Urban Institute Library. She was an expert in federal regulatory and legislative research, Census statistical data, and research support for social policy research. Upon returning to the Washington, D.C. area and before returning to her job she discovered that a little prince would be joining the family in the next year. At this time of transition, the full-time librarian decided to look around for careers that would allow her to spend time with her little prince. First she thought she would like to be an Information Broker. Personal computers were emerging and the technology was rapidly moving towards being able to provide information and reference materials remotely (such as the "home office"). But, this still required much travel for document delivery because there was still nothing like the electronic transmissions and search capabilities of today.

So the librarian went in search of other careers. She attended in 1979 the annual conference of the American Society of Indexers in Washington, D.C. where she encountered Bev Anne Ross who was president of the local D.C. Chapter of ASI and a colleague Caroline Backlund, reference librarian for the National Gallery of Art. Victoria was taking the USDA Basic Course in Indexing onsite from Bev Anne Ross and initially worked on some indexing projects with her. She had met Caroline Backlund previously at a space planning workshop for librarians when the new wing of the National Gallery of Art was being constructed and Caroline and Victoria were planning the moves of their respective libraries into new spaces. While chatting, Caroline mentioned that she "moonlighted" indexing the



Smithsonian magazine, but needed help with this project and thus began "Queen" Victoria's indexing career and she never looked back. She didn't return to her position at the Urban Institute. She instead worked with Caroline Backlund to index the first ten years of the Smithsonian magazine and began building her business as a freelance indexer one indexing assignment at a time, while taking care of Prince Forrest and later Princess Amber. She continued to work on library-related cataloging and bibliographic projects as a consultant while she built her indexing business.

## PACIFIC NORTHWEST CHAPTER ASI 2010

I established my business in 1980 and have rarely missed an ASI annual conference since that time. One year I had to miss for the grand arrival of my daughter, Princess Amber. As we moved about the country, I have been active in Washington, D.C., A to Zia (New Mexico) Chapter, and now the South Central Chapter. I've also been a frequent visitor to the Kansas Group, the PNW Chapter, and the Southern California and Arizona Chapters. My skills in indexing and my business were built through the networking and continuing education opportunities that I had through those I met and the workshops I attended at these local and national meetings. Looking back over 30 years now it all began with those first indexing assignments from the class that I took and the ASI annual meeting that I attended. So get out and get involved! Although we work alone, it is all about building relationships and networking with others who are passionate about what we do.

Victoria Agee

Agee Indexing Services, Houston, Texas

P.S. So why am I a PNW Chapter member? Well because I have a daughter (that's Princess Amber) who works for the Statesman's Journal in Salem, Oregon and you folks are where it is happening these days in ASI.

**LORI BELL**

"Networking" is not a word that makes me feel warm and fuzzy. I dread the chitchat and forced smiles that are expected at cocktail parties, business meetings and even sometimes family gatherings. While I do have people with whom I love to have long conversations, I've never mastered the art of maneuvering in crowds or felicitous responses that manage to avoid conversational discomfort. My self-consciousness genes are so pronounced, I believe I can even make a good conversation turn bad simply with my own expectation of discomfort. So getting to work intensively with a text, by myself, is for me one of the advantages of being an indexer...except when it isn't. A freelancer has to start by contacting people, some of them strangers, before the work comes.

Email is my friend. I market primarily using this medium. But I have to admit my first job came from networking, and it wasn't that painful. Before I had even begun to send emails to publishers on a regular basis, I simply told my friends and family about my new indexing business. A job can come from the most unexpected place. My brother worked at a software development company employing outside-the-box thinkers. One of his coworkers, who was writing a book, agreed to send an email introducing me to his editor. The next thing I knew, the editor asked me to write the index for the book. Both the editor and author were pleased with my index, so I thought, "Here I go! It's all starting, and there will be more work coming."



Yes and no. Although the author tells me he'd like me to index his next book, his publisher deals mainly in subjects outside my expertise. Four months after my first job I got another project from a packager who found my name in the ASI Indexer Locator, and my third job was a result of emails to editors and publishers. I am still building clientele for my new business. While I am most comfortable with email marketing, my first job is a reminder that a little networking can pay off and can be a small effort that is a natural part of my normal conversations.

Lori Bell

Bell Book & Index

[www.bellindex.com](http://www.bellindex.com)

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Lori has a diverse background which includes IT support, university catalog production and teaching as a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya. She has an MA in English and Linguistics and an MS in Library and Information Science. She feels indexing is, at last, the right job for her. She has been indexing for pay since her first job early in 2009, specializing in cookbooks, crafts and social history. When not indexing she is busy with her two sons, and in the few moments between the two she cooks, and makes stained glass lamps, quilts and lace.

## MELODY ENGLUND

My story comes from an e-mail I wrote to my neighbor (unemployed teacher) after he asked me, "Do you ever get more books than you can handle, because I'd like to try indexing sometime and see if I like it?" Hmmmmmm. I have some encyclopedias coming up so I told him if he downloaded the Cindex sample and figured out how it works, I'd see if I could give him so entry work to do. Subsequently, I wrote him this e-mail to bring him up to speed:

MY STORY: I became an indexer partly because I indexed sermons at my church for several years and partly because I wanted to work for myself. Either way, I was absolutely determined to succeed and it's a good thing because it takes time to learn indexing and it takes time to build up a business. It never occurred to me how hard it would be to create a usable, appropriate index within the time frame and space allowed by the publisher.

I remember when I finally felt ready to index, after taking a 10-week course in Bend and writing some practice indexes which I had reviewed on IndexPeers listserv. It was Christmas time and I sent cards to lots of indexers letting them know I was ready to go. I heard from my first fellow indexer 4-5 months later; she needed help with an encyclopedia of music artists; it was all very basic entering with no analysis of text involved.

Indexers do get more books than they can handle and do refer clients to other indexers, but back in 2001, and now in 2010, we don't refer to newbie indexers unless it's an uncomplicated job, and then it's only to people whom we know are dedicated to succeeding as indexers. Our clients are precious and when we can't take one of their books, we get busy and find a well-qualified indexer who can. It was about 4-5 years before one of those indexers I sent a Christmas card to in 2001 referred a client to me.



would fit into an 8 1/2 x 11 file. I worked really hard on the presentation,

During my first year in business, I volunteered for ASI (American Society for Indexers) and marketed myself to over 100 publishers, sending out very professional marketing packets with a cover letter, a bio, a sample index, a recommendation from a former job, a preprinted rolodex card, and a business card---all in a clear plastic binder that

and I got a few nibbles.

I chose one of my first regular clients and marketed to them by purchasing one of their books and writing a sample index as well as a critique of the index that was in the book. I indexed about 150 books for them in the next five years before they were sold to another publisher. The first four books they sent me I made \$11/hour. They were literary critiques and they paid \$2.50/page for them. It took a long time for me to inch my way up to \$40/hour, which is just about a living wage when paying for one's own benefits and both sides of the FICA taxes.

My first full year (2002) I made \$15.40/hour and \$9,800. for the entire year. The second year I made \$19.38/hour and \$25,100 for the year. The third year I made \$25.51/hour and \$37,200 for the year. This year I finally made it to \$50/hour. In all the time I've been an indexer I haven't included the hours I've spent volunteering, marketing, answering client questions, or attending training sessions.

I'm telling you this so you will have an idea of what you'd be getting into if you decided you did like indexing. I have no doubt that you have the mental capacity and skills to complete the job, but do you really want to?

I'm attaching a list of sources about indexing that I compiled early in my career and updated a few years ago, and a list that was compiled by one of my fellow indexers. I suggest you sign up for index-l where you can be exposed to other indexers and their dilemmas. There is also a Peer Review meeting in Portland once a month and I'd be happy to take you to one.

The bottom line is that I'm not going to just give you one of my books and let you have at it. It's probable that the encyclopedias I mentioned will be rote work, in which case I'd be happy to have you make some entries from the pages. I will still have to check your work and integrate it into mine, but at least that would give you a start.

My neighbor downloaded Cindex, looked at the ASI website, and thanked me for my thorough explanation. He also said he's got some work from one of his clients (he writes online lesson plans) and is too busy to learn indexing at this time.

Whew!

Melody Englund  
Songbird Indexing Services  
Rainier, OR 97048

503-245-3009  
melody@songbirdindex.com  
[www.songbirdindex.com](http://www.songbirdindex.com)

## MY FIRST INDEXING JOB

### NANCY GERTH

The spring after I learned how to index, I decided to go and visit my friend Chris, who owns a *very* small publishing company in our rural town. I didn't go in to ask him for a job. I just wanted his advice: do his books have indexes? Who writes them? How much does he pay? Where could I go to find other small publishers? I had hardly gotten the first question out of my mouth, when he said, "Whoa, I can't believe this. I've been getting complaints about our indexes, which we write ourselves. Tell me more." So



I told him everything I knew. That took about three minutes. But I also told him that I would give him a flat rate on the first index (I didn't know how long it would take me to do it), and that I would have it reviewed by Index Peers before submitting it. About a month later, I had my first job. Since then I've done a half a dozen indexes for this company at a good page rate. Sounds too easy, right? Right. I got my second job by sending 587 cold e-mails. I only got one client, but....well, that's a story for another time.

Nancy C. Gerth  
Idaho  
208-473-4717  
dochangee@nancygerth.com  
[www.nancygerth.com](http://www.nancygerth.com)

\* \* \*

After teaching philosophy at the college level for ten years, Nancy produced an accounting software package for architects. She has written, edited, published and indexed books, manuals, grants, instructional material, magazine and newspaper articles and stories.

A B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania and a Ph.D. from Cornell University helped her master several different professions, but her indexing proclivities were apparent early on. In the fourth grade she indexed ten years of National Geographic Magazine (on index cards) by subject, title, author, location and issue. She created a photographic catalog of her mother's collection of over 500 dolls, indexed by country of origin, costume, height, hair, color, eye color, source, and purchase price. Perhaps there is a genetic component to indexing?



## JUDI GIBBS

My transition into indexing came after a long career in other fields. I got my MLS when I was 23. That was in the days before the UW library school curriculum included indexing, so indexing never entered my mind as a career.

Over the next couple of decades--we won't say how long--I worked as a librarian in special and university libraries, as a studio potter, and as a technical and medical writer.

One day I saw an announcement for a UW extension course in indexing. The course was only four weeks, and I thought it would be a good idea to invest that amount of time and at least get a feel for the field so that I would have it as background for writing and for any future library work I might do. Another librarian, Kari Kells, was teaching the course.

At the time, my brother, Danny, was half way through a 2-year terminal illness. He had Down Syndrome, and I was his guardian. It was like having a terminally ill toddler, and after I finished the course, I didn't do anything with indexing--until a year later, when I received a call indicating that Microsoft was hiring indexers on contract for the Encarta products. I submitted my resume, and the indexing lead, Mark Stumpf, hired me. A short time after the job started, Danny died.

After his death, I felt like I had lost my own child. I finished the contract, but I didn't do anything more with indexing--until a year later, when I received a call from a publisher asking if I could index a book. She called at noon on Easter Sunday. I told her to come over, and that was the first of a number of books I indexed for her. She was from a vanity press, and she had unusual and sometimes interesting author-clients, but they always paid promptly, and I was happy.



In late 2000, I saw a posting for indexers to index for a pharmaceutical company. Anyone applying had to take a two-hour test. As I mailed in my answers, I said, "Well, that's that. I'm history."

To my amazement, I passed the test. I gather I was the only one in the PNW who passed that round--but somehow I got through--and for about a year, I indexed esoteric articles from medical and pharmaceutical sources.

As the years passed, I picked up other clients. I also developed contacts within ASI, contacts who proved to be extremely generous and caring. They were wonderful when I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2005.

I continue to index. The work is either "feast or famine." An important component through either dry or busy periods is the network I have with other indexers. The discussion lists are my life blood. They keep me sane as I work alone. They also give me a place to send questions that I still come up with even after this many years in the field.

I suspect I will be indexing the rest of my life. I don't think I will ever retire and give up my network. That would be like cutting off an arm.

Judi Gibbs

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Judi Gibbs live in Seattle. When she's not indexing, she's busy checking out art and folk music.

## MY FIRST INDEXING JOB

### LYDIA JUNEWICK

My first job came out of chatting at Starbucks! I had taken an indexing course in library school, and followed up with more training with Kari Kells. I decided to try indexing part-time. I ran into an old friend in the coffee line and mentioned my plans in the course of catching up. His girlfriend's boss was finishing a book and looking for an indexer! My name was passed, and boy was I surprised when the editor on the project left me a phone message. I nervously put together the most professional looking quote I could muster. I need not have worried, because the whole team was new to producing books and seemed pleased and relieved that I knew anything at all.

You just never know! It pays to tell everyone you've ever met about what you do.

Lydia Junewick  
Portland, OR  
503-236-3997  
ljunewick@yahoo.com



MY FIRST INDEXING JOB  
**JULIE KAWABATA**

My first real indexing job was in 1986 and was completely unexpected.

I already had a career. I had been a technical librarian in special libraries for over 15 years in about 1985 when I first became interested in knowing more about indexing. I had taught myself enough to write a couple of small indexes, on request, for publications in other departments where I worked. I found that I liked how it felt to write an index. So I joined ASI to learn more. I did not have a career change in mind. I did not know any other indexers. (This was 25 years ago, long before PNWASI.) I didn't even have a goal; I think I was more curious than anything else.

ASI was a much smaller, volunteer-run organization then, but they published something called the "Register of Indexers" every year. It was the printed-directory forerunner of today's "Indexer Locator" online. ASI members paid for a listing, then the directory was mailed out, gratis, to publishers. Experience as an indexer was not required for a Register listing.

I had only a liberal arts education (and an MLS). But as a special librarian, I had been thrown into the deep end of the pool so to speak, and had worked with numerous arcane subjects in the physical sciences and engineering for a long time. Also, I had been repeatedly frustrated trying to use some very bad indexes in technical books and had been heard to mutter in the library stacks "I could write something better than this index myself." That frustration was probably at the heart of my curiosity: Who's indexing these books, anyway? So, I presumptuously sent a Register blurb to ASI that emphasized my technical library experience and said I would index books in engineering and electronics.

I then forgot all about it and went on with my life as a librarian. Until one day in September of 1986 when I got a phone call out of the blue from a major New York publisher. The editor had seen my listing in the Register and had a 770-page engineering book on radio-wave propagation that needed an index. In retrospect, I think she must have been anxious to find someone for the job, because she did not ask me any hard questions like "Have you ever done this before?" Lucky for me. I breezily threw into the conversation a tech-sounding phrase or two that I had absorbed from my library work, and the next day all 770 pages and a modest indexing style guide were in a FedEx package on my doorstep.

I was thrilled. (I probably should have been terrified, but I was spared that.) I borrowed a copy of Knight's *Indexing, The Art of* from the library (this was years before Mulvany's book), bought a bunch of 3x5 cards, and went to work. A month later (time was on my side), I sent in the typed-up index.

The editor said, "It looks good, would you like to do another one?" And I was off and running. I soon owned a PC at home and a copy of Cindex. Four years later, after considerable marketing that emphasized my experience with technical subjects, I had plenty of work from several publishers, plus a severe case of moonlit sleep deprivation. So I quit my perfectly good library job. I have never been sorry.

For the record, I have not had abundant good luck getting further work from the Register of Indexers/Indexer Locator over the years. But that first job was a doozy... For that reason, I have continued to be a supporter of the Locator.

Julie Kawabata, Indexer  
Tigard, Oregon  
[jkawa@teleport.com](mailto:jkawa@teleport.com)  
503-524-1192

\* \* \*

Julie Kawabata is a lifelong resident of the Pacific Northwest. She was born in Portland, and has lived in the Portland area since graduating from Willamette University in the 1960s. In between, she grew up in Richland, Washington, where her high school team was the Bombers ("And we're not talking about an airplane," she says of Richland's unique environment at that time.) She earned an MLS degree at the University of Portland and worked as a special librarian for over 20 years, first for Tektronix, Inc., then for Tri-Met, Portland's transit agency. Since 1990, she has worked full-time as a freelance indexer. She was a founding member of the PNW chapter of ASI, and served on the ASI Board of Directors from 2004-2007. She has a grown son who lives in Dallas, Texas.

## CHERYL LANDES

Throughout my career, I've fallen into just about everything I'm doing today. The same happened with indexing.

In 1986, I received a journalism degree from the University of Oregon. A new graduate breaking into journalism in the Northwest is next to impossible, so I got a job as a secretary for the State of Oregon in Salem in hopes of working myself into a writing job. Two and one-half years later, a series of events led me to Seattle, where I was hired as a secretary for the accounting department of Crowley Marine Services, a marine transportation company serving customers worldwide.

A year after starting at Crowley, my supervisor's boss stole me from the accounting department. He wanted me to work in the administrative assistant pool for the company's five vice presidents and the president. My primary support was to the Vice President of Sales, and I backed up the other three administrative assistants in the pool when they needed help. In the meantime, another vice president noticed my writing skills and started giving me small editing and writing projects.

Another year later, the other vice president, who was in charge of the Occupational Health and Safety and Environmental programs, created my first position as a technical writer. I helped write, edit, and publish emergency response plans, contingency plans, training materials, and policies and procedures required to obtain and maintain our ISO 9002 certification. I discovered that I actually liked working as a technical writer, despite the dryness of the material. It was challenging, and I was always learning something new. I decided to follow technical writing as a career path and continue writing magazine articles on the side (which began in 1985).



When I was first promoted into the technical writing position, I noticed in old documents that employees called a table of contents an index! I knew the difference and would correct this error while updating these manuals. I also started attempting to create indexes for these manuals. I had an idea of what should be in a good index from all of the research I'd done in college and for my freelance magazine articles, but no formal training. Back then, I didn't know ASI or indexing as a profession existed.

Four years later, I signed up for a FrameMaker class in San Jose to improve

my skills. Halfway through the class, we learned how to use the embedded indexing feature. At the end of that session, someone asked if anyone did indexing full-time for a living. Another student, a technical writing instructor at a local community college, said “yes” and recommended joining ASI. After returning to Seattle, I found ASI’s address in the library and wrote a letter for more information. I joined after receiving the packet and have been a member since. That was in 1995.

A few months later, Crowley went through a major restructure and laid off half of its personnel. I was one of the casualties. I started marketing my indexing services as an independent, sending my resume and index samples from Crowley’s manuals to potential clients. I picked up my first independent job two months after my layoff, indexing a history book for an art museum. Three months later, I got my first contract at Microsoft as a clip art indexer. I indexed clip art for two different teams there for two years. In the meantime, more publishers contacted me for indexing jobs. For the rest of the decade, I contracted full-time at Microsoft, primarily as an indexer, and indexed an average of 50 books a year for publishers (mostly technical manuals).

Today, I still index, but my clientele has changed. Most of my work is technical writing and editing, but I index all of my work. I still have a few publisher clients from the 1990s, those who have not been bought out and absorbed into a bigger entity or closed.

## MY FIRST INDEXING JOB

### LEE LAWTON

My first paid job came from my colleague, friend, and mentor, Karen Winget. She gave me a big project from her own schedule, right after I "graduated" from Sherry Smith's class, a technical manual for standpipe and other fire suppression systems. Well, I broke out in a sweat when she



asked me to do that. I knew nada about fire suppression systems, I'd never indexed anything over 200 pages long, and this was a really big book, maybe 600 pages. By the end of the book, I was quite the expert, doncha know, but I'll never forget how she walked me through it, helping when I just knew the book needed 4 layers of subs, and letting me sink or swim when she knew that was the best thing to do. That experience is firmly planted in my brain as one of the best things anyone has ever done for me! Since then, I've indexed many technical books like that (books I knew squat about), and it is because of her that I now take on whatever comes my way. Namaste, Karen!

Lee Lawton  
Right to the Point Indexing  
Philomath, Oregon  
llami@peak.org

20,000 pages in 2009!

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Never being able to decide what I wanted to do when I grew up has proven to be a real boon to my indexing abilities. Who knew there really was a perfect job for a Renaissance woman? I've been a medical librarian, a secretary, a legal assistant, a house painter, a farmer and nursery operator, a chef, a landscaper, writer and poet. I have degrees in psychology and health services administration, and certifications in aromatherapy, gardening, entomology, and herbalism. I will index almost anything as long as there are no equations involved!



MY FIRST INDEXING JOB

**TERI JURGENS LEFEVER**

I had done some practice indexes and some pro bono work, but my first paid job was from a referral. I had taken a local experienced indexer to



lunch and "picked her brains" about the profession. Later, when she got a query for a job indexing a series of oral histories, she was busy with other work and didn't want to do them for the offered rate, so she referred them to me. I have done about 15 of them so far. They don't make me a lot of money, but they are interesting and they keep coming!

Teri Jurgens Lefever  
Nimble Index

www.nimbleindex.com  
teri@nimbleindex.com  
303.775.0298  
6851 West County Rd. 24  
Loveland, Colorado 80538

\* \* \*

It has taken a long time for Teri to come to the career of indexer, and she wishes she had discovered it twenty years ago. A stay-at-home mom when her kids were growing up, she later managed a one-hour photo finishing shop (remember those?), and finally went back to college at the age of 38.

Armed with a chemistry degree and teaching qualifications, her first job was managing the quality control lab for a food processing plant, and after that she started teaching. It didn't take her long to realize that: (1) she hated spending her days in a windowless lab; and (2) classrooms full of exuberant teenagers sucked every bit of energy out of her by the end of a day. Then when her wonderful husband suddenly passed away she really didn't have the emotional energy to be an effective teacher. With enough insurance money to support herself for a couple of years, she decided to try making a living at something that would actually make her happy, and she became a faux finisher.

That career was very fulfilling, beautifying other people's spaces, being creative and doing physical work at the same time, and she thought she had finally figured out what she wanted to be when she grew up! When the economy started to fall apart though, the business dropped to almost nothing.

That was when her sister-in-law the librarian told her about indexing. She had explored it for herself and decided it was a little too isolating for her, but it sounded like the perfect thing for Teri. With the faux finishing, Teri had become very fond of setting her own schedule. She likes being her own taskmaster, arranging her work day around the weather if she wants to go out and ride her horse, then working until midnight or beyond if necessary to meet a deadline. She loves reading and learning, and her son says she will become

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MY FIRST INDEXING JOB

**ELIZABETH MACFIE**

My first paid index (in 1998) was for a book on effective use of email. I was already providing the author with copy editing services, and when I got the job to edit that book, I suggested that I index it too. He agreed.



Quite a few of my indexing jobs continue to arrive through editing-job connections. It's an effective promotion combination.

Beth Macfie  
Indexer; Certified Copy Editor and  
Proofreader  
24 Ojai Road  
Chelsea, Quebec J9B 1Y7  
macfie@editors.ca  
819-827-4237  
<http://ode.editors.ca/profile/135/elizabeth-macfie>

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Elizabeth Macfie has been a freelance editor, proofreader and indexer since 1997. After working as a coordinator of provincial park visitor services and then as a manager of adult education, she chose a career clarifying written communication. Her clients include federal government departments and agencies, research organizations, universities and publishers in the National Capital Region and abroad. Her indexing clients include museums, university presses (Ottawa and Alberta), Elections Canada, and the Canadian Automobile Association. Elizabeth is certified as a proofreader and copy editor by the Editors' Association of Canada. She is a past chair of EAC's National Capital Region branch and past president of the Indexing Society of Canada.



MY FIRST INDEXING JOB

**BETH NAUMAN-MONTANA**

I've been indexing for about eight years now. While I was in the MLIS program at UW, I took Kari Kells' "Step One Indexing" course and immediately knew that indexing was going to be the path I took after graduating. I kept in touch with Kari, and she later referred me to my first client. Three editors later, I am still indexing for them today. I am so grateful to have been given the chance to get my foot in the door that way. Since then, I have referred another client to another newbie indexer as her first client. Got to keep the good indexer karma going!



Thank you, Kari!

Beth Nauman-Montana  
Salmon Bay Indexing  
[www.salmonbayindexing.com](http://www.salmonbayindexing.com)

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Beth has been indexing professionally since 2002. She received my MLIS from UW and my B.A. in Liberal Arts from Sarah Lawrence College. She lives in the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle and welcomes questions, inquiries and referrals from other indexers - new and old alike.



## TAMI ROBINSON

About 15 years ago I had a colleague who had taken the USDA course from Nancy Mulvaney and was indexing books for professors she knew through her library work. Indexing and Abstracting had been the one course I wanted to take in library school that I missed because it was never offered when I could take it. So what she was doing intrigued me. She got me to a couple of meetings of the local chapter of ASI and shared with me her long range plan - when she retired she wanted to become an indexer. I thought that sounded like a good idea and filed in the back of my mind.

About 5 years ago, I was casting about for a sabbatical project, and came upon an opportunity to index something for a professional association. But I needed to learn to index. I began attending PNWASI meetings and getting acquainted with indexers in the Pacific NW. I also took the UC Berkeley class from Sylvia Coates to prepare for the sabbatical project, at Nancy Mulvaney's recommendation. It was in the middle of taking the indexing class that my first opportunity to index a book presented itself.

It came in the form of a conversation with one of the indexers I met through PNWASI, Nancy Gerth. She knew a man, who lived not far from her, who had written a couple of books on local history of transportation in the North Idaho Panhandle, and had an idea for a third book. The books were. He had taken his second book, recently completed, to a small press in Sandpoint, ID that was Nancy's first client Nancy had convinced him that the index to his first book, which he'd done himself with no clue as to what an index is, needed a professional touch. She had given him a quote to do the index for his second book and he had nearly choked on the cost. So she offered that she knew a student learning to index who might do it cheaper, although it may not turn out as polished. He liked that idea, so Nancy referred him to me.



Luckily for me, I had completed enough of the indexing course by then to be able to index his book. Unfortunately for him, I had not yet learned how to edit an index. So I managed to figure out the bigger obvious editing tasks, but not the fine points. It wasn't as polished as it should have been. But it cost him half as much. And that was my first indexing job.

Tami Robinson, Associate Professor/Librarian

Tami Robinson, Associate Professor/Librarian

PACIFIC NORTHWEST CHAPTER ASI 2010

Whitworth University Library  
300 W. Hawthorne Rd.  
Spokane, WA 99251  
Phone: (509)777-4483 Fax: (509)777-3221  
E-mail: [trobinson@whitworth.edu](mailto:trobinson@whitworth.edu)

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Tami Robinson has been an academic librarian at universities in California, Louisiana and Washington for the past 25 years. With a B.S., M.S. in International Agricultural Development/Plant Sciences and an M.L.S. in Library & Information Science, she currently is Associate Professor/Librarian at Whitworth University. She graduated from the UC Berkeley indexing course in 2006 and has indexed local history and library science texts. Additional subject areas of expertise include Christian and Judaic studies, and environmental studies.

## MY FIRST INDEXING JOB

### SHERRY L. SMITH

My first paid indexing job resulted from a synergy of traditional marketing and a dash of serendipity. In the ancient days of pre-email marketing, I approached publishers by sending a letter that included a self-addressed, stamped postcard. On the postcard, I printed a yes/no option for "Do you use freelance indexers?" and provided space for contact information.

Umpteen zillion letters were mailed and about 20% of the postcards were returned. Some of those were a "no" response but most included the contact information and I moved to the next step of marketing, the dreaded phone call to an unknown editor from a beginning indexer.

One of my first was to an east coast publisher. The serendipity: her son had just moved to the Pacific Northwest. I know that my query materials created a larger impression because of this change in her life. An indexing project was offered during that first phone call. I did an excellent job and still work for them some 12 years later. That editor has retired but we still correspond with one another.

Serendipity, combined with a small bit of networking, placed another first project on my desk. The serendipity was a hurricane that tossed the author's index into the unknown and the networking was meeting someone at an ASI conference who also indexed public policy books. When she didn't have room in her schedule for the hurricane-delayed index, she referred it to me. This publisher is still a regular client and when my primary editor from it moved to another press, I immediately had a new client.

Referrals continue to provide most of my indexing projects. Some come from friends and colleagues and others arrive via satisfied authors who talk to their colleagues. Most come from long-time editor relationships. The moral of my stories: meet your fellow indexers at regional and national meetings and develop friendships; volunteer your skills and demonstrate your capabilities; nurture a positive and warm human relationship with your editors. Be good in your work and kind to those you work with.



Sherry L Smith INDEXING SERVICES  
63505 Bridle Lane, Bend, OR 97701  
541-382-6414 (voice & fax)  
indexer@sherrysmithindexing.com  
[www.sherrysmithindexing.com](http://www.sherrysmithindexing.com)



## MY FIRST INDEXING JOB

### MARIA SOSNOWSKI

My first job came about 2-3 months after I started marketing myself. I researched each publisher I sent to, rather than sending out a blitz of hundreds of letters, and tailored each letter to the publisher. In my research, I stumbled across a link for jobs on the publisher's website, and found that they were looking for copyeditors and indexers. I submitted the materials they asked for, along with a short sample index. A couple of months later they emailed me with a job, and seemed to assume I had lots of experience (obviously they didn't read my materials THAT closely) and I took that project. They are still a regular client.

My most interesting job came when I was at a conference of the American Association of Law Librarians. I was heading to a session, cutting through the booth of a publisher, when I heard someone say my name. I turned and met a guy who worked at that publisher, who introduced himself and asked where he would know my name. I had never heard of him, so was clueless. However, when he said that he was the head of their indexing department, I told him that I did some legal indexing. Turns out he was trying to add to their pool of contract legal indexers, and had obviously run across my name somewhere (we never did figure out where) and he was planning to contact me to see if I would be a good fit for them. Well, we exchanged some emails after the conference, and now I do regular work for them too. My best guess is that he got my name from the ASI Indexer Locator, although it's possible he saw it somewhere else. I only had that ad for one year, but if it got me this client it's paid off 100 times already. Carolyn Weaver makes a good point - I've gotten several jobs by networking, and going to meetings, and seeing and being seen. An overworked indexer called me for help with



a couple of projects, and I ended up with a new client from that who I also work for fairly regularly. I've also done projects here and there for other indexers, and aside from the potential clients from that, you're building goodwill by helping someone out in a pinch. That's someone who might be able to cover your back when you are too busy.

Maria Sosnowski

Index Plus

[maria@index-plus.com](mailto:maria@index-plus.com)   [www.index-plus.com](http://www.index-plus.com)

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Maria Sosnowski started Index Plus in 2006 after completing training with Kari Kells. She is a former practicing attorney and current law librarian who spends most of her indexing time working with legal materials, but also works with other subjects. She is an officer in the Legal Indexing SIG and former officer of PNW/ASI.

## DAWNEY SPENCER

My first index came about through a slightly different approach. I called publishers, but not to actually talk to the person to "sell them" on using me. I merely asked the receptionist if they USE indexers (not HIRE), and for the name and proper mailing address of the person who takes care of that.

I then mailed my marketing package to that person (who's name I had correctly spelled thanks to the receptionist!). Because of relying on my marketing package to "sell" myself, it was very thorough.

Only once or twice did I actually get transferred TO that person. My first index came about because I DID get transferred. (Side note: The rest of my clients came about because of my marketing package.)

After I was transferred, I learned he was the new guy in the department and was taking all phone calls so he could get to know the vendors and subcontractors he was working with. He was unhappy with how the indexes were done, and just that morning had thrown away all the names in the indexing pool.

And, there I was.

Luck?

Divine Intervention?

Contrary to how some might have reacted, I wasn't intent on "selling" him on my services at that moment. Instead, I focused on my marketing package. When he asked a question, I just pulled the answer from my marketing package. I didn't have to "think" about how to answer. Although I didn't read it word-for-word, I could see the phraseology and go from there. After perhaps only a minute or two of conversation about indexing, I acknowledged his limited time and asked if I could send him my marketing package. He was thrilled I had one because it meant he didn't have to interview me at that moment.

I called back several days later to make sure my package contained all the information he needed. It did, and he assured me he'd look for a book that he could assign a new-to-him indexer to see how it would go. That first book came just a few weeks later. We continued a wonderful working relationship until he left the publishing industry several years later.

I don't think it was just a matter of simply being in the right place, at the right time—though that did help immensely! A thorough marketing package also played a major role because I was able to look at it during our

conversation. I didn't have to speak "off-the-cuff" and pull answers out of thin air like a magician—this is what makes new indexers nervous about calling. Because I had already thought about these conversation topics to create a marketing package, I was able to confidently talk with him.

Contents of my marketing package at that time can be found at:

<http://dawneyspencer.blogspot.com/2010/01/marketing-package.html>

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Dawney Spencer writes indexes for the back of nonfiction books, specializing in hard science. She has been a dedicated contributor of free content about the business aspects of freelance indexing since 1998 and hopes her articles help other new indexers achieve their dreams.

Her blog is at: <http://dawneyspencer.blogspot.com/>

Dawney's personal hobbies and interests include cooking, photography, scrapbooking, travel, and lots of naps. She can be reached at: [indexlady@aol.com](mailto:indexlady@aol.com).

## CHARLEE TRANTINO

Way back in the 1980s after I had walked out of a nice secure college professorship, thinking I was going to write the great American novel, I started freelancing for some New York publishers. I had to eat and pay the rent on my hole-in-the-wall Brooklyn apartment so I was willing to do anything, legal, that would bring in a paycheck without me having to work 9 to 5 and would let me hang out in the Village with other artists while I banged out artsy short stories for little literary magazines.

I started out writing cover copy for a zillion romance novels for several paperback houses, but it wasn't steady enough money. I made a lot, but not a lot every month. I needed another job to fill in the dead zones. So I learned how to rekey indexes from a copywriter working at Signet/NAL. It was dead boring, she said, but easy. She didn't really want to teach me, since I would then be a competitor, but I watched her do a few pages and figured it out. After that, Warner--where I had some friends--gave me steady work and I rekeyed (changed the locators) on hundreds of indexes.

After three years of this, I got a phone call one day from Diane, the pissed off and panicking Production Chief. "Charlee, I just received an index from a freelancer that's all wrong. I think the woman we gave it to passed in on to someone else. The page numbers don't match and it's awful in general. I need a new one by Monday. (It was Thursday when she called). You can do an original index as well as rekey them, can't you?" I knew the old show business rule: Always say yes you can. So I did. The book, I vaguely remember, was a paperback original on vitamins. I had looked at so many indexes by then, and bitched continuously about the ridiculous double/triple/quadruple postings and stupid entries, seen every mistake an indexer can make, and appreciated the good indexes which were so much easier to work on than the bad ones. I figured I could create an index. I never thought twice about it. I just did it...not knowing there were books on how to index, or courses on how to index, or indexing programs to use, or even other people doing it!



I guess I did just fine, and Warner started giving me ALL their books to index...me on my little Atari computer with the black screen and yellow type. I didn't even have spell-check. I remember one index I turned in with aggression spelled with one g... and got reamed out for that. But I

learned as I went and it worked out. So that's the story... and the rest is history.

Charlee Trantino

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Charlee Trantino is the 2006 Wilson Award winner for Joseph Campbell's *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*, and she currently serves on the national Board of ASI. She has been a full-time indexer since the early 1990s. She is also a novelist, CAGA certified antiques appraiser, owner of Big Red Barn Antiques, and caretaker for many cats/dogs. Her education includes a BA in English from Drew University; a Masters from Rutgers, and an NEH Post-Graduate Fellowship at Princeton. She is a member of PNW/ASI although she lives in Pennsylvania, because she enjoys the members and the region so much!

## MADGE WALLS

When I told my friend Nancy Mills of Pie in the Sky Publishing in Denver, that I was taking up a career in indexing after many years in real estate, I braced for a great guffaw.

Instead, she clapped her hands and said, “That’s just wonderful!”

I said, “It is?”

“Yes,” she said. “I’m preparing a book for publication right now that needs an index. I’ve got everything else covered, but I had no idea what to do about an index. You’ve saved my skin!”

Thus I got my very first professional indexing job in 2007: “Adoption: Stories of Lives Transformed” by Dr. Dixie Davis van der Flier, executive director of The Adoption Exchange in Denver. The book is a compilation of stories by and about the adoptions of children who were neglected or abused by their parents, many with severe emotional and physical challenges. Indexing the book was an unusually emotional experience. I kept a box of tissues handy. Among the stories was one of a multiply handicapped young man who had grown up in less-than-ideal foster care. Every few years he updated his biography for the Adoption Exchange in hopes of attracting his “forever” family. He never found one, but wanted to be included in the book so that everyone would know he was doing just fine anyway. Another heart-wrenching story was of a family who specialized in adopting infants who had very short life expectancies. They took the babies home to love them until they died.

“Adoption” received a first place EVVY award for nonfiction in 2008 from the Colorado Independent Publishers Association. A month later, Nancy called and invited me to join her and the book’s editor, Sue Hamilton of Dialogue Publishing, for dinner and Dixie’s book signing at Denver’s famous independent bookstore, the Tattered Cover. Driving north from



Colorado Springs, I thought it would be just a casual evening for the three of us, followed by a quick in and out of the bookstore to pay our respects.

When I reached the restaurant, everyone involved in the production of the book was at the table, including Dixie and her husband. I realized this was a dinner to

celebrate the entire publication team. Nancy presented us all with plaques commemorating our part in winning the EVVY award, including one for me. As indexers rarely get to share the glory, I was very touched.

After dinner we walked down the street to the Tattered Cover, where over 100 excited people were waiting for Dixie, including several “forever” families and their Adoption Exchange children. Having come to know these special folks while indexing the book, what a delight it was to actually meet them.

Not only Dixie, but the children and their families lined the long autograph table, pens poised. You should have seen their eyes light up every time they were asked to sign their special pages. And what a thrill for Nancy, Sue and I to leave with their precious autographs in our copies of the book and “forever” memories of their smiles.

For me as an indexer, this was probably a once-in-a-career experience. Who knew that such a bright light would shine into my quiet world in such a heartwarming way. I’m not sure how much the index had to do with the awards, other than contributing to the overall professionalism of the book, but I was delighted to have been part of the team.

After this one piece of great luck, my work has resulted from relentless cold calls to publishers out of Writers Market. It’s always a treasure hunt to find the person who deals with indexing, but I’ve learned to think of it as a game. When I “win” a job or a place on their recommended indexer’s list, I’m as high as when I sold a house in my former career.

Madge Walls  
All Sky Indexing

*This essay was first published in Key Words, the Journal of the American Society for Indexing.*

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Madge Walls came to indexing after a long career as a Realtor in Hawaii and in new home sales management in Colorado. She currently lives in Portland, Oregon, and is a member of ASI Pacific Northwest Chapter. Her first novel, “Paying the Price,” received a CIPA EVVY award for fiction in 2005, and the Hawaii Book Publishers Association’s Readers Choice Award in 2006. “Adoption” also received a bronze IPPY award in the Essay/Creative Non-Fiction category at the 2008 Independent Publisher Book Awards at Book Expo America in Los Angeles. “Recognizing Excellence in Independent Publishing,” the contest attracted 3,175 entries from all over the country.

## CAROLYN WEAVER

I'm a self-taught indexer whose only formal training was as a database indexer (which is totally different from book indexing!) for the National Library of Medicine. In 1983 I was on duty as a reference librarian at the University of Nebraska Medical Center Library, when a patron asked me how to find an indexer for a 3-year run of a journal that he edited and published on campus. I hadn't the foggiest idea how to find an indexer, but did know the principles of medical indexing; so I agreed to do it for him. I did the cumulated index (using the shoebox system and typing the index up on my Apple IIc), which paid for Christmas that year, and I continued to write the annual index for another 3 years, before training one of my colleagues to take it over when I went back to graduate school. No thought at that point of making a career of it.

In 1991 I found myself with two daughters approaching college age and a need for additional income that didn't involve flipping hamburgers. I decided indexing just might be the solution. I checked out every book on indexing I could find in the University of Washington Libraries (where I was then employed) and taught myself to index, learning in the process that book indexing is *very different* from database indexing, and did a small snail mailing to publishers. Three months later I had a couple of nibbles, but no paying jobs. At that point, when I was feeling less than optimistic about my moonlighting career choice, I was attending an on-campus meeting of the UW Network of Writers and Editors. I started talking to another attendee, who happened to be the secretary of a doctor who was writing a book that needed an index. Her boss hired me to write my first paid book index; and with that one to offer as a sample, others followed.



About the same time, I wrote the editor of the magazine I had indexed before, telling him that I was now a professional indexer, and also contacted the editor of the *Bulletin* [now *Journal*] of the *Medical Library Association*, whom I knew personally, offering my services as the BMLA editor. Both hired me. I continued to index *Age* (my first journal index) for another 10 years, and continue to index JMLA 18 years later.

Bottom line: All of my early jobs came from networking, and a significant portion of my work continues to come from referrals and

networking relationships. OTOH, two years after I sent out my first 100 marketing letters, one of the recipients found my letter in his file, and hired me for a job that later led to two others. So you never know what seeds will take root.

Carolyn Weaver  
Weaver Indexing Service  
cgweaver@weaverindexing.com  
[www.weaverindexing.com](http://www.weaverindexing.com)

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Carolyn Weaver is a former medical librarian who has been indexing since 1991, specializing in health, behavioral, and social sciences materials. She was a moonlighter for nine years before transitioning to full-time freelancing in 2000. A past president of ASI (2007-2008), and two-time president of PNW/ASI, she is currently chair of the History-Archaeology SIG and a webmaster for ASI and the Business Indexing SIG. In the summer, she can often be found indexing on the road at one of her favorite Pacific Northwest campgrounds.

## TRACY WILSON-BURNS

I attended Seth Maislin's online indexing class. And then attended every conference or local meeting I could, to get a feel for the business from a social level. This included the ASI Conference in Portland, a three-hour drive to Missoula for a social get-together, a day trip from Spokane to Portland for a peer review (flying and rental car), a weekend trip to Denver (to attend the workshop by Enid Zafron with a Colorado chapter), a weekend in Tri-Cities for a conference, and an evening in Sandpoint. Expensive travel—but worth it!

I devoured the ASI publications (books on marketing, starting an indexing business, etc).

I met with my accountant to discuss pros and cons of incorporating (I decided to simply register my business instead); what I could deduct and not. He was incredibly helpful, to the point of almost filling out all the paperwork for me (for free!). I registered my business so I could get an EIN (Employee Identification Number) to use for invoicing, rather than using my SS number.

I launched a web site and included a professional photo on it. I like seeing people's photos on their business sites, so I wanted one on mine. It's not a great photo, but at least it appears business-like and professional.

I sent out 300 snail mail marketing queries, using a week's subscription to Literary Marketplace to create a spreadsheet of publishers/contacts. I automated the printing process with Word. I included my business card with the mailings.



Then, I got an offer to index a college textbook. The per page rate was quite low (from a production company in India), however I negotiated it up 0.25 (Go, me!). They were providing the previous version of the index, the previous version of the book, and the new version of the book—so I decided to take the job for the experience despite the low rate—kind of like indexing with training wheels!

Then I panicked. The previous version of the index looked lengthy and extremely academic! But the advice I'd gotten from all the social contacts at conferences, peer

review, and social gatherings gave me the confidence to tackle the project.

How I did get my second indexing job:

Two weeks after I completed the indexing job, I emailed the publisher asking for feedback on my work, and asking whether they had any other projects available.

They did. And I got my second indexing job.

How I got my third indexing job:

One of the editors I'd snail mailed emailed me asking for a sample cookbook index, which is an area I'd like to specialize in. I didn't have one, never having indexed a cookbook. I received the email request on a Friday. I replied that I would email her a sample on Monday morning. Then I bought a used cookbook I thought I'd like to try indexing (it already had an index, but I didn't look at it). And I worked like mad over the weekend to index it. I emailed it first thing on the Monday morning. The editor liked it. The per page rate was good. It was a very fun project--the editor was friendly and collaborative to work with, and she was pleased with my resulting index. I now have two more projects lined up with that company!

The challenge now is to continue marketing to get a steady stream of jobs.

Tracy Wilson-Burns  
509-413-8257  
Tracy@CascadeIndexing.com  
[www.CascadeIndexing.com](http://www.CascadeIndexing.com)

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Tracy Wilson-Burns is a writer, indexer, and former software engineer. She has published short romantic fiction in *Woman's World* magazine, and her first novel, *Under A Canyon Moon*, will be released by The Wild Rose Press in late 2010. She has an MA in Writing Popular Fiction from Seton Hill University, as well as an MA in Communication and a BS in Computer Science. She lives in Spokane, WA with her husband and three cats.