

All this year I looked forward to when we could be together and I could tell you how much the VRA means to me, and how much all of you mean to me. Alas, we are not yet together in the ways we had hoped, but at least we are somewhat face to face. We are making the best of our present circumstances, as we always do in in the VRA.

First, I want to thank you Brian, from the bottom of my heart for this nomination. I am incredibly grateful for all those who took the time to write letters that I am sure will make me cry – in a good way. Thanks also to the VRA Board for supporting this nomination. Thank you to my husband Chris, and my daughter Eleanor, who have encouraged me and supported me even though every spring they have to endure my procrastination and resulting panic as I prepare for another VRA. Of course, thanks are also in order to all my precious kitty cats, past and present, who were disturbed by countless rehearsals when all they wanted was a good nap.

My first VR boss, Peter Dulan, told me joining VRA was a good idea. Sure enough, in my interview at Binghamton University back in 1986, the search committee mentioned that they were impressed I was a member of the VRA. I was offered generous travel and membership support because the University valued professional association and activity. My subsequent involvement with VRA conferences began in Boston 1987. I attended sessions and helped Peter down in the Vendor hall with that early VR database “Sliderun/Imagerun”. I’ve attended almost every year since then. I was invited to join the Membership committee, which expanded into my role with the Mentor program. During that time I was truly in awe of what I saw going on around me; all those smart people sharing their expertise.

It was hard, but I took up the challenge to push myself to grow as a professional; helping form a local chapter, publishing papers, presenting, serving on committees and task forces, and running for a place on the Executive Board. It only took me 3 tries! Perseverance is another virtue honed in the VRA, as anyone who has worked with embedded metadata, data standards, or Digital Humanities tools understands.

Each experience gave me skills I had not possessed before, *and* the confidence to use them, with rewards in both my professional life through promotion and merit increases, and in my personal life. In the past 35+ years, I have been so fortunate to develop deep and long-lasting friendships in the association. Working hard together on a goal for a committee such as Travel Awards, late evenings finishing up the details of a workshop, the work of getting together a panel or presenting in a session is a shared effort and experience that forms a bond. This is even more pronounced and long lasting when serving together on the Executive Board. You get close, and talking about close I can't help but remember the time in Rhode Island where we took a jaunt to the beach in a car that was so small -too small – that some of us had to lay down side by side in the trunk, and I remember all our spirited cut-throat Scrabble games. I was really lucky to have such fun colleagues during my two terms as Secretary. The many laughs we enjoyed and the exhilaration we shared when the conference had been pulled off is unforgettable.

The contacts I made at VRA helped me connect with and experience other enriching groups, people, places, and ideas such as the excellent Keystone DH conferences, SUNY CIT, CaVraCon, (thank you California chapters for accepting me so fully), the Guelph Digital Humanities workshops, ARLIS, CAA, and includes presenting on Embedded Metadata at EVA in Florence, Italy. One good experience invariably leads to another!

VRA offers so many opportunities, but you must take them. So step up, reach out, ask for help, or lend a hand. Over time, you will find that opportunities are connected via people along the way. VRA is a good environment for these connections to be made. Let me tell you why:

VRA is characterized by generosity and congeniality. We are small enough to get to know each other. We all have individual passions (which makes us interesting), and expertise to share, (which makes us useful), and thus our community is enriched when we build on coming together and learning a little bit more each time we do. That's what I call the VRA way!

Here's to sticking together, being supportive, cultivating the best in others and in ourselves, and to bringing out the leader that is in the heart of each of us. Here's to remaining committed to high standards and innovation, generous in our knowledge and skill sets, making the most of what we have, and to changing, learning, and growing in times both good and bad. We have the chance to flourish in our professional lives, and our chances are always better if we take this challenge on together.

Throughout my many years as a member of this organization, I have learned so much from so many of you. I would love to name you all, but we don't have time. Know that at every turn, I've valued your work and your company. Thank you for being by my side in this journey, and for this great honor. Here's to the VRA, and to all of you!