

Our work can feel like we're producing 'flowers for the void.' I think I'm paraphrasing from poet Gary Snyder but to the particular horror of this particular audience I'm not able to cite that with confidence but here's my personal interpretation of flowers for the void:

It means we are doing good work and we share that good work in concrete and abstract ways and often that's just it. Sometimes we don't know how far our work resonates or if it was simply something that occupied quite a lot of our energy. We sustain ourselves with the idea that someone will notice the flowers you lay out but we need to recognize the value in just setting them out. Which is why I was so utterly floored by the award. Especially so because VREPS was such an easy venture to grow.

Immediately, following library school I got a job I loved (in a department I'm still at today) and joined the Visual Resource Association. Well really I was guided to VRA by the warm Elaine Paul who told me all about the association and drove 2 hours to meet me. She was as great an ambassador as VRA could hope for and when I went to my first conference I learned her innate curiosity was matched by others within the association.

It was Elaine who first talked to me about the idea of VREPS. Unlike many of the other associations in the fields of visual and information management and education, VRA seemed truly encouraging of new and other voices. That students and emerging professionals would commit themselves to building kinship and exchanging ideas shouldn't surprise but the respect and elevation of individuals such as myself by the association and its leaders is remarkable. The blossoming of VREPS ought to be laid at the feet of the association.

I'm going to stretch this floral analogy one tiny bit further and then I'll quit. Jasmine emailed me in November and asked for my CV for a supposed past VREPS Chair profile. First, I was surprised. I believe the last time we saw each other was across a large stein of beer in Milwaukee. Second, I was embarrassed. I had my first child in 2017 and my second less than two years later. Pregnancy, long maternity leaves (which I'm forever thankful for) shuffled my priorities and I felt I was just getting my professional feet back under me. When Heather and I received the email telling us about the award, I was shocked but I was deeply grateful. To receive an award just as you reconnect to your professional life is a rare gift.

I did some 'productive procrastination' this week and read other Nancy DeLaurier acceptance speeches. This turned out to be more procrastination than production but in reading I was struck by the warmth, let's call it sunlight, recipients felt from VRA members. VRA was called a 'professional home' and I understand the meaning. What other professional association in our fast-moving, transactional world would remember seeds you planted years ago, gather the blooms up, and present them back to you?