

Distinguished Service Award, 2017 Acceptance Remarks, Allan T. Kohl

When the Awards Committee informed me that I had been selected as this year's Distinguished Service Award recipient, I naturally felt a rush of emotions: surprise, delight, gratitude . . . followed immediately by the thought that I'd need to prepare suitable acceptance remarks. I was then in rehearsal for my first-time-in-a-decade return to the stage – as luck would have it, in a Shakespeare play. So as I began sorting through a quarter-century of VRA memories -- starting with my first year as a member, and my first conference -- my recap soon began to resemble that well-known "Seven Ages of Man" speech from the Bard's play *As You Like It*. You remember . . .

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.*

As blank verse phrases started chasing one another around in my head, the good angel hovering over one shoulder said: "Oh, Allan, that's so self-indulgent!" -- while the bad angel perched on the opposite shoulder whispered: "Do it: it'll be fun, and you'll probably get a laugh . . ."

Well, you can guess which one I listened to.

Let's see: seven ages . . .

- 1) First the **Newbie**,
*confused alike by acronym and jargon,
and pondering the concept: "metadata"?*
- 2) Then, Second could be . . . **Session speaker**,
- 3) Third could be . . . **Committee member**,
- 4) Fourth could be . . . **Task Force chair**,
- 5) Fifth? Ah - then **President**, *the gavel-wielding chief,
Pouring oil on troubled waters, herding cats,
Twixt past and future steering through the shoals.*

6) Then **Treasurer**, the budget-crafting drudge,
With weary eye each Quickbooks entry pond'ring,
And pinching every penny 'till it screams.

7) Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history:
Retirement, and mere oblivion,
Sans job, sans office, title, colleagues ... everything.

Oh, please! Not for a while just yet – even if I am a sexagenarian (which is not nearly as exciting as it sounds).

“All right”, sighed the good angel, “now you’d had your fun; but don’t you forget: no one gets here on his own. You had a lot of encouragement and support along the way.”

True. So now, let’s pull the focus of this spotlight outward a bit:

. . . to include the 22 dedicated fellow-members with whom I had the privilege of serving on 8 different Executive Boards. We enjoyed moments of wonderful camaraderie, along with the satisfaction of doing challenging but rewarding work together, and I am fortunate to count several of you now among my dearest friends. Thanks guys!

. . . to include my mother and late father, who when I told them that I had been elected VRA President, said “We’re proud of you,” and then went on to ask, “what can we do to help your organization?” and worked with me to plan, and to fund, the New Horizons travel awards. Thanks, Mom.

Many of us are fortunate to share our lives with someone special, who keeps the home fires burning and the companion animals fed while we’re off at conference, and who listens patiently to our stories when we return at some ungodly hour.

For me, that’s been my companion and spouse of 48 years, Kathy Kohl, who today is finally getting to participate in a VRA event after years of working for us behind the scenes in so many ways: like serving as the unofficial costumer for those Raffle skits of bygone years, rising to the challenge of each outrageous request:

We're meeting in Miami, and I need to be King Neptune!

I can do that.

We're meeting in Baltimore, and I need to be Edgar Allan Poe!

I can do that, but you'll have to shave your beard – and you're gonna need a wig . . .

We're meeting in Toronto, and I need a full Mountie uniform!

I can do that, but you'd better have a good story ready when they stop you at Canadian customs . . .

We're meeting in Atlanta, and I need to be Rhett Butler and Empress Patti needs to be Scarlet O'Hara as channeled by Carol Burnett with the green curtain dress and a curtain rod through her shoulders, and we'll need Civil War era bonnets and shawls for a dozen Raffle Rousers!

(sigh) I can do that, but you're gonna have to pay to ship it all to Atlanta 'cause it won't fit in your carry-on . . .

And then there was that fine summer evening, a few months after I'd finally stepped off the Board after my term as President, followed by an intense Past-Presidential year helping to prepare for the 2011 Joint Conference in my home city of Minneapolis. Just when life was returning to normal, I came home one night and said "Nominating Committee still can't find anyone to run for Treasurer. I think I'll have to tackle it myself." Kathy shook her head and said, "Oh, Allan, not again" – and then, seeing my crestfallen face, came over and gave me a big hug and said "Well, who better." And I knew I could take on that task too because she had my back.

Thanks, Kath.

Recalling once more those steps in my own Seven Ages, I'm reminded that each one happened because a fellow member extended an invitation:

. . . will you speak in my session?

. . . will you join our committee?

. . . would you accept a nomination for an Executive Board office?

So now let's pull the spotlight out to include everyone here: all of you.

Those of us who have been with VRA for many years know that this special organization has always offered its members the opportunity to network and grow professionally, but also for colleagues to bond socially; so that we bring fresh ideas and skills to our own workplaces, all the while knowing that our community will be there for us, in times good, and not so good.

For you newcomers to VRA, perhaps attending your first conference, I hope you're already getting a sense that this is an organization long on opportunity, and short on hierarchy. Younger professionals are moving up through the ranks far more quickly than was the case when I joined VRA in 1993 – not just because we're losing so many of our older members to retirement, but also because the visual resources field is changing so rapidly. You newcomers are closer to today's job market than is true of us Silver Foxes. You have a lot to bring to the table; you are the future of this profession.

So as you've attended sessions, listened to speakers, sat in on committees, heard the reports from our Executive Board officers, I hope that you have felt welcome to share your ideas and insights. And that perhaps you've found yourselves thinking: "How can I be part of this? How can I help?"

So that, when someone asks you:

- . . . will you speak in my session?
- . . . will you join our committee?
- . . . would you consider accepting a nomination for an Executive Board office?

You'll be ready to say: "I can do that," knowing that we will have your back, as you undertake your own journey.

I thank you for this honor, and my good angel thanks you for your patience. If I could, I'd give you all a big hug and say to you:

"Well, who better?"