Focus On: Judi Gibbs

by Siusan Moffat

How long have you been indexing?

Since 1999, but intermittently the first few years.

How long have you been a member of ISC/SCI?

Since 2017.

Where did you get your indexing training?

The University of Washington extension program. In 1998, Kari Kells offered a four-week course in indexing through the extension program. I had been working as a technical and medical writer for some time, and I thought that it would be helpful to know more about indexing. That four-week course plus my experience as a reference librarian are my training.

In the early days of my indexing career, I also had my work peer reviewed through Index Peers. Throughout my entire career, I have read the indexing discussion lists regularly, and I sometimes ask questions. I attend regional meetings and annual conferences. All of this is ongoing training and continuing education.

And indexing itself is ongoing training.

Which indexing software do you use?

SKY 7.0 plus Margaret Berson's macros.

What did you do before you started your indexing career?

I have been a reference librarian in university and special libraries, a studio potter, and an editor and writer in engineering and medical settings.

Do you see these things as having any relation to indexing?

Absolutely! Being a reference librarian taught me how users search for information. Being a potter—designing, building, and firing gas kilns and formulating clay and glazes—gave me technical and hands-on experience that I wouldn't otherwise have. Engineering writing gave me usability experience. I was intimately familiar with the industry usability documentation, and I drew on that background when I encountered usability problems in indexes.

What was it that attracted you to indexing? Why did you think it would be a good fit?

Photo provided by Judi Gibbs

Nothing attracted me to indexing, and I didn't think about fit. After I took Kari's course, somebody told me that Microsoft was looking for indexers for Encarta products. The Microsoft manager hired me for a short contract job, and I learned that I could get paid for reading. After I finished the job at Microsoft, I continued indexing. I am addicted to reading, and paying me to index is like paying an alcoholic to drink. That was a career-changing gig, but not one that received a lot of thought.

What is the craziest thing you have ever done in your life?

I like to travel. Many years ago, my then-husband and I spent an academic year as budget travelers in developing nations. We flew first to Australia, where we have friends. Along the way, our plane stopped in Fiji for refueling. We got off and spent a week there before going on to Australia. From there, it was on to Papua New Guinea, which does not have local transportation—or at least didn't back then—so we hitch-hiked from the lowlands into the highlands. From PNG, it was on to Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Egypt, and Morocco. Our last

stop was the United Kingdom, which included stops in London, Glasgow, and the Scottish countryside. The trip was nine months of eye-opening experiences.

What other sorts of things do you like to do?

I'm addicted to art. I like looking in art galleries and museums. Every spare dime goes to art. Before I was diagnosed with celiac, I was also very experimental about food. I like trying different cuisines, but now I have to be careful. As already noted, I like to travel. I've also traveled in Mexico, more than once. I LUV Mexico. I've traveled in the Southwest in the US. I love the Navajo Reservation and the pueblos, to the extent that I've been able to see them.

I also make it a point to get to ISC/SCI conferences. I go for seven to ten days. When I'm not at the conference, I explore the city. The first conference I attended was in Montreal. That was followed by Winnipeg—which has wonderful museums and is historically fascinating—and then Ottawa, with all the delights of that wonderful city. St. John's is next, COVID permitting.

What is the most interesting index you have ever worked on?

I've worked on many interesting indexes. A couple years ago, I indexed *Injury Impoverished*, which is the history of workplace injuries and workers' compensation. I'd always assumed that workers' comp evolved for the benefit of workers, when it in fact evolved to save employers the legal costs of being taken to court for worker injuries. The book won the Philip Taft Award (2020) for labor and working-class history. I was thrilled! The book won the award, not the index, but I like to think the award committee at least looks at the index—and labor history is one of my specialties. In spring 2022, I indexed a book for an exhibition at a small art gallery at a small college in Oregon. The book reflected the life's work of the museum director. I just heard from him.

> International Arts and Artists, a traveling exhibition service in Washington, DC, plans to travel the exhibition for three years beginning in 2025 or 2026, and books continue to fly off the shelves.

I'm thrilled! He and I spent several evenings on the phone fine tuning the index. I'm thrilled that an exhibition catalog for a small gallery is flying off the shelves.

Share a nightmare index experience, one where everything that could go wrong did.

I've had a couple of them. One was after I installed an indexing software upgrade. After I completed the first index with the upgrade, the software froze, and I couldn't generate the index. I had generated it at intermediate points, but I couldn't get the final index to generate—and the index was due the next morning. Before I could submit the index, I had to get the developer to unfreeze the software. That happened a second time. At the point, I went back to the earlier version of the software, which I've used ever since.

You've been indexing for quite a long time and seen the business on both sides of the US and Canadian borders—how have things changed since when you started? Where do you see the world of indexing going in the future?

When I first started indexing, many or most publishers were contacting indexers and paying for the indexes. Now many or most presses are telling authors they have to provide their own index. Some presses provide a list of indexers for authors, others leave it to the authors to find their own indexer. Some presses also give authors the option of indexing their own books.

One upside: The cost of publishing, including indexing, is often covered by research grants, if there is money left in the budget at that point.

Another change is that the quality of editing has declined markedly. I just received a book that the author said has had very little editing—because the press does very little editing—and it is a well-known press. A book that is poorly edited is more difficult to index. That is particularly true if the developmental editing is lacking.

At some point, the question arises about the role of the press. If it isn't providing editing or indexing, what is its role?

Can you briefly describe your work with the ANSI/NISO indexing standards working group? [https://groups. niso.org/higherlogic/ws/public/download/25816/ ANSI_NISO_Z39.94-2021_Criteria_for_Indexes.pdf]

This was not the first NISO attempt at an indexing standard. There was a 1984 standard, and in the 1990s a working group met to update it. When they could not agree on a standard, they issued a technical report. That report is what the recent working group started with.

In 2018–2019, NISO recruited a group that represented libraries, publishers, and indexers, and they became the working group for the 2021 standard. We split the working group into committees for open indexing, closed indexing, and algorithmic indexing, and we assigned different sections of the report to different committees. We assigned members to committees based on expertise.

Each committee updated their sections. We then reviewed each other's work. Then a group of three worked through the entire standard to make it as readable as possible. I was one of that group of three. The task was actually long and time-consuming.

The final step was when the draft standard went to the NISO organizational members to review and vote. Reviewers had very few comments. Members of the working committee looked at the reviewer comments and integrated those that seemed appropriate. The standard then went to ANSI for approval. It was finalized and became available for download in the summer of 2021.

Do you have any thoughts that you would like to share about ISC/SCI?

I love ISC/SCI! My first experience with ISC/SCI was the 2017 conference in Montreal. The keynote address was a panel of indexers who indexed the *Truth and Reconciliation Report*. That was the most meaningful presentation that I've experienced at any indexing conference. Other presentations were also good, and other conferences have been good.

ISC/SCI kept me sane during the pandemic in the days before the vaccine. Seattle and the Puget Sound area were the first region in North America to get COVID, and the situation was terrifying. I live alone, and the ISC/SCI monthly meetings were a welcome respite from the isolation of the early days. I attended everything. A couple of the Canadian members actually checked on me, which made me feel less isolated.

ISC/SCI is a warm and welcoming society. I LUV it!