

Hi everyone, and thank you very much to all of you, and particularly my dear, generous nominators and friends. I don't think any of us got into this line of work because we seek the limelight, and if did we probably chose the wrong profession. Therefore, I am honored, humbled, and by virtue of the fact that I am somewhat shy, just a little bit embarrassed at having your attention for the next couple of minutes.

I do have a few remarks, starting with when I received a cryptic message from Margaret Webster asking to arrange a phone conversation with her at my earliest convenience. I don't know when I got conditioned to feel like the other shoe is about to drop every time someone wants me to call them as soon as possible. Margaret cannot fire me or give me bad news about test results. But when I called, I was still somehow expecting bad news. Instead, Margaret told me I was the recipient of the VRA Distinguished Service Award. It took me a minute to believe the news and respond with the appropriate and true level of excitement, but I did and I may have even gotten a little weepy (which I'm going to try not to do today because I ugly cry). And then I got off the phone, and my first far more ungrateful thought was "Wait a second. I am WAY too young to be getting my lifetime achievement award." That thought was followed by: At the Oscars, many of the recipients of their lifetime achievement award need to be propped up on the stage. Am I like this and don't know it? I went spinning this morning! Then I remembered that in order to go spinning I basically had to use an oil can on my joints to get out of bed, and I thought "Yep, you're definitely old enough."

It turns out that time has flown by. As of August, I will have been the Curator of Visual Resources at Washington University in Saint Louis for 23 years. I began in the profession immediately after graduate school, after deciding an art history Ph.D. wasn't for me. I intended to stay in this field only for a year or two. And yet here I am. I spent my first few years trying to figure out how to manage a huge collection of slides, which is often like trying to find hundreds of thousands of needles in haystacks. I learned how to handle smack downs between faculty members warring over the last slide of Raphael's School of Athens, which happened the first day of the year, every year. We started to digitize and we did it all completely wrong. I then realized I had no idea what I was doing! So, I decided to attend the VRA Conference in New York City.

The year was 1997. My Gen X game was strong then. My hair color was probably maroon. I'm sure plaid clothing and combat boots were involved. Susan Jane Williams blew my mind when she introduced me to relational databases in Filemaker Pro and then shared her template with all of us in the characteristic generosity of our professionals. It was all great, except I'm an extroverted introvert, or an introverted extrovert depending on the day, and spent the entire conference with a desperate looping voice in my head. And that voice said "Talk to me. Don't talk to me. Please someone talk to me." And with the exception of a few conversational breadcrumbs here and there, no one did. I ate a lot of bowls of ramen alone in Hell's kitchen, and I left that conference knowing important new things to bring back to my job, but still lacking a professional network with whom to communicate, collaborate, and commiserate. I'm

a firm believer you're missing out if you don't take the golden opportunity to use alliteration at least one time in a speech.

My next conference was in San Francisco (and don't worry, this one's important, but after that I promise I won't regale you with tales about the next 20 of them). That conference looked like it was going to be a repeat of the last. I'd learn something and otherwise be a wallflower, but at least it was San Francisco, which was an even better place than NYC to eat ramen alone. That is when I was approached by Ann Whiteside, former VRA President. Now, Ann is great, and known for cultivating the talents of her fellow professionals, but frankly, I think she first talked to me because she needed me. The VRA was planning on having their first joint conference with ARLIS/NA in Saint Louis. They needed someone from the VRA to help co-chair local arrangements. That person needed to be from Saint Louis. I was the only VR professional in Saint Louis. So, jackpot! That's when my professional career and participation in VRA really took off. It wasn't because someone magically recognized all of the awesome potential hidden under my ever-shifting hair color. It wasn't because I put myself out there, though in retrospect I wish I had. It was simple, serendipitous need of a living, breathing human to do something that got me started on my path. And when I got my chance to shine in the VRA, I decided I was going to work hard and try not to blow it.

And from there, it was like a domino tipped. I was co-chair for local arrangements for the 2001 ARLIS/NA-VRA Joint conference in Saint Louis. Through that, I got to know a fellow co-chair for that conference Margaret Webster, who asked me to represent the interests of newer

professionals on the first VRA Strategic Plan Task Force. That's where I met Kathe Albrecht, who encouraged and mentored me on the VRA Board and later, with along with my colleague Elizabeth Schaub, asked me to serve as the incoming co-chair of SEI. My work on SEI gave me the know-how to implement the VRAF Regional Workshop Program after many years of simmering in my mind, Maureen Burns' mind, Meghan Musolff's mind, Beth Haas' mind, and pretty much everyone else's mind. This is just one row of a maze of dominos that have tipped in relationship to my professional service in the VRA. What started with a single point of contact became an entire professional ecosystem that has enriched me far more than I believe I have enriched it.

And everything I've done for the VRA has provided me with new types of expertise to bring to my professional role at Washington University in Saint Louis. At 26 years old, I was creating slide records in a DOS operating system and refereeing those cage matches between faculty members. Now I am the instructor of record for a graduate level course in digital art history and developing a new center for the same; leading the implementation of a campus-wide strategic plan on student online speech; and chairing a staff council that represents several thousand people. I get to mentor and more importantly, learn from ten or so undergraduate and graduate student assistants at a time (my favorite part of my job), and work closely with librarians, IT staff, and faculty to develop digital collections and implement new technologically-enabled pedagogies. It's not all perfect. Like many of you, I am also therapist-troubleshooter-jack-of-all-trades-in-chief for my department (this, my friends, is job security), and on the regular find myself crawling around on the floor in front of 300 students in large lecture classes

trying to find out why a podium isn't working. Therefore, I rarely wear skirts. But from the leadership skills I needed to the technology acumen I sometimes wish I didn't have, I much of what I use in my job I can attribute to the VRA.

Before I offer a few closing thoughts, I'd like to give some thank yous. Noting, of course, like countless award recipients before me, I will probably miss someone really, really important, and for that I'm sorry and I owe you a drink. To make sure I don't leave out my nearest and dearest, I'd like to start by thanking my super cool, very handsome and supportive husband Dave, my first and forever cheerleaders Mom and Dad, and my three delightful fur children Jocko the wise old pitbull, Benny the golden pitbull boxer hound (a.k.a the honey badger), and Walter the very shy cat for making me feel smart, pretty, and capable on days when all I wanted to do is shuffle around in my slippers eating ice cream from the carton.

More gratitude than can fit in this room goes to Maureen Burns, Marlene Gordon, and Meghan Musolff for taking your time and energy to apply for this award on my behalf. Maureen, you may not know that you were the second person to talk to me at the San Francisco conference. Your kindness and generosity provided the fuel I needed to put my first foot in front of the other in regard to my participation in VRA, and you've helped me do that many times since. Marlene cannot be here with us, but I am so grateful for your calm, tireless teamwork in so many areas, including our work on the Publishing Advisory Group and for the key role you played in the development and launch of the VRAF Regional Workshop program. Last but not least, Meghan, we've teamed up as co-chairs of the VRA Education committee, co-chairs of SEI,

and for our five fun years organizing and presenting Engaging New Technologies, among many other shared endeavors. To turn your favorite phrase back at you, you are awesome.

Also, a huge thank you to the rest of my nominators for being major sources of inspiration and support for me over the years. You know who you are. I now know who you are, and you're getting a hug from me later. I'd like to give particular shout-outs to just a few other people: Ann Whiteside, for giving me my first chance to shine. Margaret Webster, for giving me many chances to shine. Kathe Albrecht and Macie Hall, who are not interchangeable except in this regard, because they both showed me how to lead a meeting and set an incredible example for how women can lead in general; Christine Hilker, for infusing so many of my VRA experiences with her dry wit and southern charm; Marsha Taichman, an inspiring younger colleague and collaborator extraordinaire who always helps me come up with new ideas and perspectives; Jackie Spafford, my sometimes roommate who taught me about Korean sheet masks (which are very hydrating) and who helps make everything feel like home away from home; my other wonderful conference roommate, workshop collaborator, and SEI co-chair Elizabeth Schaub, who literally jumped in front of me to protect me from a speeding car at the Milwaukee conference and therefore without whom I would likely not be standing here today; Rina Vecchiola, head of the Art Library at Washington University, who serves as a my daily professional dose of sanity and fierce workout partner so that I still fit my skinny jeans; my colleague Ashley Ray for being my smart, consistently delightful teammate in the VRC; the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Washington University in Saint Louis for letting me go places professionally where typical staff members like me usually aren't allowed to

tread; the VRA Boards, VRAF Boards, and SEI Implementation Teams on which I have served; and to everyone I've collaborated with on committees, panels, and workshops. I've so much from all of you.

I guess now is when I'm probably supposed to give some sage advice based on my many years of experience. I'm not sure I'm the right person for this, since I regularly show up at work accidentally wearing clothing that is inside out or backwards. But I do have just a few minor words of encouragement.

The first is please to contribute your time and energy to this great organization. Start by doing just one thing: working at the registration desk, joining a committee, proposing a session, or even running for the VRA Board. I believe firmly that everything we have to do expands or contracts to fit the amount of time available to us. Therefore, even if you think you're pressed for time, I promise that you have the time. And don't think what you currently know is insufficient to the task. You know more than you think you do, and the rest you will learn as go. I promise that when you look up after a year, or five, or twenty, you will not be sorry that you stepped up to the plate time and time again.

Also, be fearless and innovative. One of the things I love most about the people in the VRA is that in our centers, I think that most of us are weird, wonderful originals with minds full of great ideas, hacks, and approaches. For those of you who may be a bit young to remember, somewhere on the road between slide collections and digital everything came the 2008

financial crisis, which to more than a certain extent upended our profession as we then knew it. At best, many people lost funding for professional participation, and at worst, many VR professionals lost their jobs. The rest of us felt like we were holding our careers together with duct tape. It turns out you can do anything with duct tape. Ten years later, we're still here because lots of dedicated people refused to go down in flames. Like Ben Affleck, we should all get bad back tattoos of the Phoenix rising from the ashes because we identified what we could do to shift direction, expand our roles, and not only protect our future but thrive in it. Maybe anymore we are not exactly a profession bound together by name or title, but we are professionals who work with cultural heritage information, technology and so many other things that provide us a common bond. As such we're nimble, adaptable, and in my mind capable of anything we set our minds to, both as individuals and as an organization. Again, be fearless. Be innovative. There really is nothing to lose.

And finally, if you see someone here at this conference and their face is saying "Talk to me, wait, don't talk to me," assume they are saying "please talk to me" and walk right over even if you're feeling the exact same way. Find out their story. It's probably both remarkably similar and also very different than yours. Within those similarities and differences, there's a lot you can learn that will enrich what you do, and who you bring to this organization. And if you are in a position to help that person grow within the VRA, do everything you can to encourage them. That's the most amazing thing about this group. Twenty-three years ago, I was managing a slide collection, and trying to figure out what I really wanted to do with my life. With the help of the VRA, I've had a terrific and terrifically diverse career. In retrospect, all it took to get it off the

ground was a conversation or two. So after I'm done speaking, which will be in ten more seconds, turn to someone new and say hello. Like me looking back over the last twenty years, you might be amazed at what happens next.