



# The Quill

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SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

## Tough Times Ahead or Cautious Optimism?

by Ted Edwins, Chapter President

As President of this chapter, it is my good fortune to converse with diverse people in person, on the phone, or by email. Most of my time is spent working with other members of council to plan and carry out the different activities of the chapter. From time to time, I get to talk to people considering technical communication as a career.

I recently received an email from a woman who has become a naturalized Canadian. She has a graduate degree and has worked for years as an educator. Can she find a job as technical communicator?

My answer to the woman was yes, jobs are available. I'm an optimist when it comes to employment matters. I like to think that anyone can find the job they want, eventually. She would have to take some courses and do some research to find out where in the spectrum of technical communication she might fit but jobs were available.

As I clicked the Send button, I felt a pang of doubt. Was my optimism justified or were my glasses just rose-tinted? Two bits of information that crossed my radar screen confirm my optimism.

In the Spring of this year, Canada's Technology Triangle (CTT) published a report on the financial characteristics of the technology sector in this area. Using figures from 1993 to 1999 for 295 companies with local headquarters, CTT concluded that these companies generated over \$6 billion in revenue. The CTT believed that the economic picture was even better because there were approximately 800 technology companies in the area, many of which were not included in the study.

Recent events since the report's study period might suggest the local economy is shrinking instead of growing. The purchase and closure of PixStream by Cisco and the job loss of our colleagues at CheckFree, amongst other events, could be seen as indicators of such shrinkage.

I would argue that this area is expanding and the fortunes of technical communicators will rise with it. The greatest reason for good hope for is the construction of the Waterloo Research and Technology building on the north side of Columbia opposite the University of Waterloo. This 100-acre park is planned to contain over 1.2 million square feet of office space and is expected to employ about 6000 people.

One of the features planned for the new park is a centre that will encourage the growth of new high-tech firms, and act as a catalyst for innovation, new products and services in the information sector. The park will also accommodate technology firms needing room to grow, expand, and relocate thereby adding to the vitality of this industry in the region.

With such good news for our area, I could relax, knowing that I had given this new Canadian the right information. \*

It's hard to believe that September has already passed as we move into the brisk days of autumn. October is one of my favourite months, and why shouldn't it be? There's so much to look forward to!

First, we fatten ourselves up with roasted turkey, dressing and cranberries. Spending time with friends and family gives us a warm feeling that will help us face the cold winter ahead.

Then, we partake in the annual harvest celebration of Oktoberfest - watching parades, listening to polka, and indulging in sausages, sourkraut, and other interesting foods like pickled eggs.

And last, but not least, we gear up for Halloween - buying, then eating, then rebuying delicious treats to give away to trick-or-treaters. I can almost smell the fresh pumpkin seeds roasting in the oven!

Send your submissions for the November issue of The Quill to [acb@campana.com](mailto:acb@campana.com).

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## The Big Picture

In 1959, the satellite Explorer VI transmitted the first ever picture of Earth from space. To put this event in perspective, only for the past forty-three years have humans been able to view a likeness of our planet that is more than a hypothetical projection.

We were captured by this question of perspective—of stepping back and taking a look at the big picture—and today we're looking at some terms that developed during the era when humans first headed into space for an outsider's look at our home planet.

We begin with *big picture*. We don't know which came first, the picture of Earth taken from 17,000 miles away or that expression naming "the entire perspective on a situation or issue," but we do know *the big picture* first appeared in print around 1960. Coincidentally or not, the adjective *chicken-and-egg* is only one year older; dating to 1959.

Plenty of terms born in or around '59 are associated with space or technology: there's *splashdown*, the landing of a manned spacecraft in the ocean; *A-OK*, long associated with aviation, and *moondust*, naming the fine dry particles of the moon's soil. But our favorite coinage from that year of exploration and discovery has more to do with ocean depths than atmospheric reaches: the adjective *hadal* (from "Hades") refers to the "parts of the ocean below 6,000 meters," the very deepest regions of the ocean.

# Putting Laughter in Your Life

## September general meeting recap

by Leo Petipas, Hospitality Manager

The September meeting began with Shannon Hilker (Program Manager) introducing the individual Council members who were present at the meeting.

Next, Ted Edwins (President) presented a Best of Show award, from last year's technical publication competition, to a representative from OMAFRA in Guelph.

My duties as hospitality coordinator aside, my predisposition for things humorous attracted me to this evening's topic without a second thought. Of course I had to be there for Patsy Marshall, President of Train on Track, and her joyful inspirations about things humorous - Put Laughter in Your Life.

Drawing from her education and work experience in education and health services, she easily made a believable and compelling case for putting more laughter in our lives. Starting with a quote from Erma Bombeck, "Humour is a spontaneous, wonderful bit of an outburst that just comes. It's unbridled, it's unplanned, it's full of surprises," set us up for a brief analysis of, "What are the sources of humour in our lives?"

As it turns out, there are quite a few verbal and physical (and combination of the two) means of expressing humour:

- remarks
- magic
- clowning
- jokes
- stories
- anecdotes
- quips
- magic
- puppetry
- physical gestures
- games



Further examination of humour, and a general feeling of well being, is manifested in animals (pets) as well as humans. The benefits of laughter are borne out in a relaxing effect on our bodies - both muscular and nervous systems. Patsy equates a good belly laugh to some pretty serious relaxation: "You can't be tense and laugh at the same time."

Moving into the work place, Patsy shared some experiences she has had, and some practices she follows relating to injecting humour and fun into various settings ranging from healthcare/patient services to manufacturing/assembly lines to office-staff dynamics. The positive effect of humour to boost morale among terminal patients can also be realized in business settings as well.

Humour can foster a positive, happy atmosphere wherever it is used. Some of the "happy things" about the use of humour in business environments include improvements in: customer service; business/manufacturing practices; productivity; company loyalty; job satisfaction; self-esteem; energy level and



### Humble Pie

The term humble pie (or alternatively umble pie) dates from the 17th century. It comes from umbles or numbles, which mean the internal organs of an animal. An umble pie was therefore originally a pie made from the organ meat of an animal.

Sometime in the 19th century the term acquired the modern sense of submission or humility. This sense is certainly a play on the earlier sense of a meat dish coupled with the sense of humble meaning humility.

Humble, meaning dismissive of one's abilities, derives from the Old French umble meaning the same and eventually traces back to the Latin humilem and humus (earth).

Umbles, the meat, derives from the Old French numbles which in turn comes from the Latin lumbus meaning loin. Its English usage dates to the 15th century.

## Putting laughter in your life, continued

attitude. For times in our personal or professional lives that are especially difficult, we can use laughter as a step in the healing process and in bringing joy back into our lives.

One remaining consideration raised by Patsy, in all of the humorous anecdotes she related, was the need for laughter to be shared - not something to be enjoyed at the expense of others. It is something that enhances our "connection" and makes us memorable to others.

"You can't be tense and laugh at the same time."

When Patsy's presentation was over, most of the audience participated in a few humour exercises that included a hilarious water-snake throwing competition and a survey of what we thought were the most powerful and meaningful benefits of humour in our lives.

Patsy closed out her portion of the meeting with a video of a series of quotes that were "spiritual" in nature and evocative of healthy, wholesome living.

The meeting closed with the traditional door prizes (which seem to be getting better all the time) and lots of networking. See you next month. \*

## Volunteers Urgently Needed

### Your chance to gain some experience

by Lori Shantz, Vounteer Coordinator

The House of Friendship Food Hamper Program is looking for a volunteer editor to help with the Fall edition of their newsletter.

The goal of the Food Hamper Program is to alleviate the immediacy of hunger, and to provide resources and sustainable opportunities within the community to cooperatively solve food (in)security issues. Last year they distributed 20,311 food hampers in Waterloo Region.

The program is looking for a volunteer to be responsible for the layout of content written by Program staff for a newsletter published twice a year. The staff are currently using a template in Microsoft Publisher, but they are willing to give their editor full creative licence to design a new template in any software application.

This position is a great opportunity for someone who wants to help out a great organization while adding some diversity to their portfolio. The program would like to publish the Fall edition of the newsletter by the end of October, so if you are interested in this position, please email [lori.shantz@sympatico.ca](mailto:lori.shantz@sympatico.ca) as soon as possible. Help make a difference in your community! \*



Halloween is an annual celebration, but just what is it actually a celebration of? And how did this peculiar custom originate? Is it, as some claim, a kind of demon worship? Or is it just a harmless vestige of some ancient pagan ritual?

The word itself, "Halloween," actually has its origins in the Catholic Church. It comes from a contracted corruption of All Hallows Eve. November 1, "All Hollows Day" (or "All Saints Day"), is a Catholic day of observance in honor of saints. But, in the 5th century BC, in Celtic Ireland, summer officially ended on October 31. The holiday was called Samhain (sow-en), the Celtic New year.

One story says that, on that day, the disembodied spirits of all those who had died throughout the preceding year would come back in search of living bodies to possess for the next year. It was believed to be their only hope for the afterlife. The Celts believed all laws of space and time were suspended during this time, allowing the spirit world to intermingle with the living.

Naturally, the still-living did not want to be possessed. So on the night of October 31, villagers would extinguish the fires in their homes, to make them cold and undesirable. They would then dress up in all manner of ghoulish costumes and noisily paraded around the neighborhood, being as destructive as possible in order to frighten away spirits looking for bodies to possess.

Probably a better explanation of why the Celts extinguished their fires was not to discourage spirit possession, but so that all the Celtic tribes could relight their fires from a common source, the Druidic fire that was kept burning in the Middle of Ireland, at Usinach.

## Ask an Expert

Sharing tips and tricks of the trade



As a technical writer, I spend a lot of time editing. What can I do to become a faster, better editor?

I know what you mean about the time-consuming nature of editing! Fortunately, I have two strategies that make editing more efficient.

1. Rewrite the sentence.

This tip comes from Judi Jewinski, English professor at Renison College. When you think about it, it really makes sense. If you can write yourself into a corner, surely you can write yourself out of it. The next time you struggle with a sentence and can't determine whether it's grammatically correct or not, just rewrite it. I think you'll discover that for every awkward construction you find yourself in, there's an equally elegant way out.

2. Find the answer in a minute or less.

This tip comes from a Career Track session on Mistake-free Grammar & Proofreading. Basically, the trick here is to know your resources well enough that when you encounter an issue, you can resolve it in a minute or less.

Not sure if "access" is a verb? With your dictionary on hand, the answer is seconds away. Can you get away with a dangling preposition? You should know which style guide to check.

Whether you're an independent writer or part of a team of communicators, it's important to know your resources and their order of precedence. Then, use those resources to edit with speed and confidence, and fall back on them the next time you encounter one of those time-consuming style debates that some writers seem to love.\*

Do you have a question or situation to share with our expert and the chapter? Email [quillexpert@yahoo.ca](mailto:quillexpert@yahoo.ca).

## Chapter Achievement Award Activities

Are you participating in any society level activities like judging in the international competition? Have you been published in "Technical Communication" or "Intercom"? Please contact Ted Edwins at [tjedwins@mgt.ca](mailto:tjedwins@mgt.ca). Your activity could help us meet our goals of winning a Chapter Achievement Award.



# Make an Impression

## Improving your portfolio

by Elaine Garnet, CIC SIG Manager

The Consulting and Independent Contracting Special Interest Group is pleased to announce that Carolyn Watt of Carolyn Watt & Associates will be presenting a three-hour workshop entitled "Make an Impression!" on Wednesday, October 9, 2002 from 6 to 9 pm in Room 1304 of the Davis Centre at the University of Waterloo.

The workshop will focus on portfolio development, a topic that should be of interest to all STC members and their guests. If you have a portfolio, please bring it (or bring whatever you have). If you don't have a portfolio, this will be an opportunity to determine what needs to go in it. Carolyn will focus primarily on paper portfolios. She will briefly cover electronic portfolios.

The workshop will be split into three sections. In the first section, Carolyn will talk about why portfolios are important, what they should include, and how to present yourself to a client with your portfolio. She will use her own portfolio for the demonstration. In the second section, we will break into groups and look at our own portfolios. Each group will do a self-assessment and a group assessment to help one another build a portfolio. In the third section, Carolyn will review the lessons learned.

Please mark your calendars and plan to attend! \*

## November Meeting: The Persona

### Taking your audience to a new level

by Shannon Hilker, Program Manager

Remember that technical communication mantra, "know your audience"? Do you know what it really means? Come to the General Meeting on Tuesday November 5<sup>th</sup> and find out! With our speaker Robert Barlow-Busch, we'll take a deep look into what that can really mean. You'll learn all about personas, a powerful tool for understanding and communicating about your audience. Personas are fictional representations of the people for whom you are designing a product or writing a help system. We'll explore the principles and parts of personas, how to create them, and how to use them in your work.

For about 12 years, Robert Barlow-Busch has been designing user interfaces for desktop and web applications, writing technical manuals and online help, developing information architectures, and advocating the importance of

"understanding our users' goals." He came to Quarry Integrated Communications in 1999 from Belgium, where he worked as a user-centered-design specialist for a Sony R&D lab. Earlier, back in Canada, Robert was a partner in an information design company that served the technology, healthcare, and pharmaceutical industries. He also founded the Information Development Team at Focus Automation Systems here in Waterloo.

Today, Robert is a team leader with the Interaction Design Group at Quarry Integrated Communications. In this role, Robert directs projects and develops models, processes, and techniques for Quarry's Design Builder™ methodology – a UCD-inspired approach to product design that connects people, technology, and brand. \*

The Romans adopted the Celtic practices as their own. But in the first century AD, Samhain was assimilated into celebrations of some of the other Roman traditions that took place in October, such as their day to honor Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruit and trees. The symbol of Pomona is the apple, which might explain the origin of our modern tradition of bobbing for apples on Halloween.

The custom of Halloween was brought to America in the 1840's by Irish immigrants fleeing their country's potato famine. At that time, the favorite pranks in New England included tipping over outhouses and unhinging fence gates.

The custom of trick-or-treating is thought to have originated not with the Irish Celts, but with a ninth-century European custom called souling. On November 2, All Souls Day, early Christians would walk from village to village begging for "soul cakes," made out of square pieces of bread with currants. The more soul cakes the beggars would receive, the more prayers they would promise to say on behalf of the dead relatives of the donors. At the time, it was believed that the dead remained in limbo for a time after death, and that prayer, even by strangers, could expedite a soul's passage to heaven.

The Jack-o-lantern custom probably comes from Irish folklore. As the tale is told, a man named Jack, who was notorious as a drunkard and trickster, tricked Satan into climbing a tree. Jack then carved an image of a cross in the tree's trunk, trapping the devil up the tree. Jack made a deal with the devil that, if he would never tempt him again, he would promise to let him down the tree.



There are three traditions behind our Canadian Thanksgiving Day.

The first tradition, before the first Europeans arrived in North America, the farmers in Europe held celebrations at harvest time. To give thanks for their good fortune and the abundance of food, the farm workers filled a curved goat's horn with fruit and grain. This symbol was called a cornucopia or horn of plenty. When they came to Canada they brought this tradition with them.

The second tradition was hailed in the year 1578, the English navigator Martin Frobisher held a formal ceremony, in what is now called Newfoundland, to give thanks for surviving the long journey. He was later knighted and had an inlet of the Atlantic Ocean in northern Canada named after him - Frobisher Bay. Other settlers arrived and continued these ceremonies.

The third came in the year 1621, in what is now the United States, when the Pilgrims celebrated their harvest in the New World. The Pilgrims were English colonists who had founded a permanent European settlement at Plymouth Massachusetts. By the 1750's, this joyous celebration was brought to Nova Scotia by American settlers from the south.

At the same time, French settlers, having crossed the ocean and arrived in Canada with explorer Samuel de Champlain, also held huge feasts of thanks. They even formed "The Order of Good Cheer" and gladly shared their food with their Indian neighbours.

# Vocabulary Test

Looking for some new ways to refer to your co-workers?

by Meredith Ballaban, Puzzle Maker

## 1. Oleaginous

- a. marked by an offensively ingratiating manner or quality
- b. resembling or having the properties of oil
- c. demonstrating benevolence or geniality
- d. pertaining to the hours before dawn

## 2. Epigone

- a. divine inspiration or creative impulse
- b. indicator of future trends
- c. follower, disciple, an inferior imitator
- d. language that is foul and coarse

## 3. Thimberig

- a. to cheat by trickery
- b. an unnecessary activity or expenditure
- c. pertaining to woods
- d. a boring, tiresome person

## 4. Flagitious

- a. to speak or write pompously or windily
- b. marked by scandalous crime or vice: villainous
- c. pertaining to rumblings in one's intestines
- d. something outrageously insignificant; a trifle

## 5. Nescience

- a. moralizing censorship
- b. to sparkle, glitter
- c. pertaining to twilight
- d. lack of knowledge or awareness: ignorance

## 6. Palmary

- a. stingy
- b. outstanding, best
- c. a centre of attention
- d. lasting for a short period of time

Answers: 1.a and b (trick question!) 2.c, 3.a, 4.d, 5.d, 6.b



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# What are you doing on November 30th ?

Join the **STC London Ontario Student chapter for a meeting on:**



Writing for the Web: Design Tips and Tools  
when? November 30th  
time? 10:00 am  
where? Fanshawe College

For more information about the new STC London Ontario Student chapter, contact Deb Maskens [dmaskens@it3.uwaterloo.ca](mailto:dmaskens@it3.uwaterloo.ca) or Catherine Haycock [catherine\\_haycock@hotmail.com](mailto:catherine_haycock@hotmail.com).

After the Seven Year's War ended in 1763, the citizens of Halifax held a special day of Thanksgiving.

The Americans who remained faithful to the government in England were known as Loyalists. At the time of the American revolution, they moved to Canada and spread the Thanksgiving celebration to other parts of the country. Many of the new English settlers from Great Britain were also used to having a harvest celebration in their churches every autumn.

Eventually in 1879, Parliament declared November 6th a day of Thanksgiving and a national holiday. Over the years many dates were used for Thanksgiving, the most popular was the 3rd Monday in October. After World War I, both Armistice Day and Thanksgiving were celebrated on the Monday of the week in which November 11th occurred. Ten years later, in 1931, the two days became separate holidays and Armistice Day was renamed Remembrance Day. Finally, on January 31st, 1957, Parliament proclaimed....

"A Day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed... to be observed on the second Monday in October."

## Judge For Yourself

Finding out what it takes to be a winner

by Ted Edwins, President

If you haven't signed up yet to judge at this year's competition, you still have time. But, hurry, because spaces are filling up.

Judging is a great way to get to know other people in the field and to put what you know about technical writing to good use. You judge the same entries with two other judges, so you won't be alone, and you'll share ideas with them as you evaluate the entries you have received. And, you're not expected to know how to judge if you've never done it before. A judges' training session will be held to teach you what you need to know.

If you are interested, fill out the "I Want To Be A Judge" form at:  
<http://www.stc.waterloo.on.ca/competitions/judgeswanted.htm>  
and send or deliver it to: \*

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## What is the Quill?

The **Quill** is the official newsletter of the Southwestern Ontario chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC). The Quill is published in Waterloo, Ontario monthly, except in January, July, and August, and distributed free to all local STC members. Material in this publication may be reprinted, provided the author and the Southwestern Ontario chapter of the STC are acknowledged. All readers are welcome to submit short articles, letters, and other interesting items relevant to technical communication to the editor, [acb@campana.com](mailto:acb@campana.com). Please submit items by one week prior to the date of the general meeting.

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## Advertising

To submit advertising, please consult with the editor, [acb@campana.com](mailto:acb@campana.com). Advertising combining text and graphics *must* be supplied in graphic format.

**Business card** \$10

**1/4 page** \$30

(\$20 for 3 or more issues)

**1/2 page** \$40

(\$30 for 3 or more issues)

**Full page** \$80

(\$60 for 3 or more issues)

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