

# Barbara N. Beeton: TUG Board Member for 20 Years

Christina Thiele, Proceedings Editor

## Abstract

Barbara Beeton has been a board member for twenty years, since 1989/90, when she was listed as ‘Wizard of Format Modules’ on the TUG Steering Committee — the info’s on cover 2 of the very first *TUGboat* issue, 1(1).

As the only board member to have ‘been there’ since the beginning, Barbara has seen TUG presidents come and go — seven in all. And so the idea came to me that surely some of us would have something to say about attending board meetings with Barbara every summer (and one winter — Cincinnati 1982) for the past twenty years. Barbara, these pages, for a change, are about you!

### Pierre MacKay (1983–1985)

Is it possible that there was a time before I could count Barbara as a friend? The calendar tells me that there has to have been such a time, but the calendar is oddly unconvincing. When I first arrived at a meeting of the T<sub>E</sub>X Users Group (only a couple of sessions after Barbara had led the initiative to create it) I was surely the most naïve and inexperienced of all the attendees who were to become site-coordinators, but I seem to remember that when I talked to Barbara I came away with the impression that I knew what I was talking about. There not many people with the talent for instant and lasting friendship that Barbara offers to those who make the effort to recognize it. My earliest specific memory is a discussion, by mail, of the virtues of an old Corona typewriter with misaligned punctuation, on which I submitted my first, rather irrelevant, contribution to *TUGboat*. In that correspondence it already seemed as if I had always been a member of TUG, and the feeling has remained, although the calendar again tells me it cannot quite be the case.

I can’t imagine what my term of office as president of TUG would have been without Barbara. As everyone knows who has filled the office since, it is partly a sinecure as long as Barbara is there. And after the business is over there is the time spent talking of everything that friends can talk of. That

conversation never ends; it only adjourns, ready to be picked up again at the next meeting.

### Nelson Beebe (1990–91)

I’ve been meeting Barbara Beeton for almost 20 years now at TUG gatherings, and I never cease to marvel at her dedication to T<sub>E</sub>X, to TUG and its Board, to *TUGboat*, and to all things typographic. She has my deepest thanks for all her work; it has always been a great pleasure to work with her.

Barbara has been with *TUGboat* right from the beginning, succeeding Robert Welland as Editor-in-Chief with Vol. 4, No. 2 (Sept. 1983). In March 1999, *TUGboat* Vol. 19, No. 1, reached a milestone of 2,000 published articles. More than 1,900 of them have appeared since she took the helm, and the inky waters have been typographically rough and challenging: I don’t know of any other journal which has published articles with so many different fonts, and from so many output devices. There are 100 *TUGboat* articles that bear her name, 96 of them with her as the sole author. There are also 674 short articles credited to Anonymous, the bulk of which I believe are her creations as well. *TUGboat* is always interesting, and I look forward to every issue.

Barbara has made, and continues to make, important contributions beyond the TUG community, with her long involvement as a representative of the American Mathematical Society in the international standardization of mathematical character sets.

### Past Presidents

Richard Palais	(1980–1983)
Pierre MacKay	(1983–1985)
Bart Childs	(1985–1990)
Nelson Beebe	(1990–1991)
Malcolm Clark	(1991–1992)
Christina Thiele	(1992–1995)
Michel Goossens	(1995–1997)
Mimi Jett	(1997–2003)

She is also the sole channel for reports to Don Knuth on T<sub>E</sub>X and METAFONT bugs, problems, and suggestions, thereby helping to shield him from distractions that would further delay *The Art of Computer Programming* series that, we should remember, was the reason that T<sub>E</sub>X and METAFONT were written in the first place.

Barbara has probably attended more TUG and T<sub>E</sub>X conferences than anyone, and as a result, is probably the world's expert on what new things people around the world are doing with T<sub>E</sub>X and METAFONT.

Don't ever retire, Barbara! We need you.

### Christina Thiele (1992–95)

I don't remember when I first met Barbara. In fact, my first meeting in Seattle (1987) was somewhat of a blur once I gave the opening talk (some 10 minutes faster than I'd clocked it). But I must have met her.

The following year, in Montreal, I joined the TUG board (Bart was president), and over time I learned a great many things I'd never have learned anywhere else. For me, moving up from 'just a board member' to member of various committees, and then on to the executive—Barbara's been the best constant factor I could ever have imagined.

She remembers things. She knows the right things to do. As much as she knows T<sub>E</sub>X, she's knows procedure! And while I still can't seem to take in much of what she tells me about T<sub>E</sub>X, I most certainly have taken in an awful lot about procedure: how to work within procedures, how to be very careful when adopting procedures, how to suggest when procedure is useful and when it's just a constraint.

For me, Barbara represents the collective memory of TUG; she is our most valuable resource and she is one of the best friends I have made during my own adventures in the T<sub>E</sub>X community.

### Michel Goossens (1995–97)

It was in July 1988 at the Third EuroT<sub>E</sub>X Conference in Exeter that I first met Barbara Beeton, that "funny American woman with the wide hat." When somewhat later I also met Joachim Schrod with his famous cowboy-like hat, I really started thinking that all those T<sub>E</sub>X people were weird indeed . . .<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the name of **bb** was not completely unknown, since I had seen it on the front cover—and in various other places—in *TUGboat*. So there I was, speaking to the living legend, the person who had a direct line to Knuth himself. And, although I myself and a lot of the other participants were only novices in T<sub>E</sub>X, Barbara took all her time to gently explain, with the necessary detail and with eternal patience, this or that trivial or not-so-trivial point about T<sub>E</sub>X. Quite an experience for my first T<sub>E</sub>X conference and without a doubt this helped convince me to get to know more T<sub>E</sub>X and friends.

Later, when I got more involved with the practical day-to-day support of T<sub>E</sub>X and became a board member of both GUTenberg and TUG, I had the occasion to meet Barbara more often and got the opportunity to appreciate other aspects of her multi-faceted personality. Barbara has a special sense for listening to what people have to say, and for trying to build a consensus. She draws on her many years of experience dealing with people in the T<sub>E</sub>X world, where she is well known and respected, but, more importantly, where she knows almost everybody personally.

As a Continental European, and probably the only non-native English-speaking president of TUG, I came to appreciate the importance that Barbara attached to contacts with T<sub>E</sub>X users all over the globe. Thus, she always did her best to attend T<sub>E</sub>X conferences in Europe or in North America, supported the creation of local user groups and promoted the exchange of information, publications, etc. I consider Barbara to be a genuine example

<sup>1</sup> I found out later that Barbara and Joachim shared another passion: gastronomical outings and visiting famous wine cellars.

### Past Meetings

1980	Stanford, Calif.
1981	San Francisco, Calif.; Stanford
1982	Cincinnati, Ohio; Stanford
1983	Stanford
1984	Stanford
1985	Stanford
1986	Medford, Mass.
1987	Seattle, Wash.
1988	Montreal, Canada
1989	Stanford
1990	College Station, Tex.; Cork, Ireland
1991	Dedham, Mass.
1992	Portland, Ore.
1993	Birmingham, UK
1994	Santa Barbara, Calif.
1995	St. Petersburg, Fla.
1996	Dubna, Russia
1997	San Francisco
1998	New York, NY; Toruń, Poland
1999	Vancouver, Canada

what an international collaborative effort could and should be.

To me, Barbara is the ideal safekeeper of the history of  $\TeX$  and TUG, one of the few who were present “from the very beginning” — and are still around to tell us the story. Thus, she is ideally placed to remain the Voice of TUG and  $\TeX$  well into the next century, and I look forward to her wise words in the Editor’s note: of *TUGboat* at least until the year 2010.

**Mimi Jett  
(1997–2003)**

There are some people in this world who are so unique, once you meet them you never forget. They have a particular style and demeanor that separates them from the crowd, subtle but brilliant. Barbara Beeton is just so unique. My guess is that most people who have met her will agree — something about that meeting is memorable, special.

I first saw Barbara at the 10th annual meeting in 1989 at Stanford; however, we did not meet until the following year in  $\TeX$ as, when I started becoming aware that this was not only a collection of some interesting characters, TUG was clearly an important organization. If people like Barbara, Bart Childs, and Pierre MacKay were willing to donate so much time and intellect to this, it must have extreme value. Within another

year, I was involved with the conference program committee and soon the board.

The importance of Barbara’s contributions during my years with board cannot be quantified. She is the voice of reason, sometimes our conscience, but always the expression of objective, non-judgemental truth. During the most heated discussions or the boring details of by-law semantics, Barbara is the one person who can consistently separate the wheat from the chaff and give us a sense of having accomplished something. There’ve been times of frustration when she has pulled me through with her patient friendship.

Knowing how many people share my appreciation for her friendship, it is a wonder she has time for any work at the AMS, with such a heavy schedule for support for all of us.

In Vancouver this summer, I was the fortunate driver of a busload of hungry TUGies; I looked in the rear-view mirror and realized I had some of my favorite characters on board: Barbara, Christina, Michael Doob, Pierre, Craig Platt, Don DeLand. It felt like all these

years had led us to that moment. Vancouver was our 20th annual meeting, and Barbara was recognized for her decades of service with a bottle of Russian Vodka, imported by Irina Makhovaya. There is no way to thank you, Barbara, for 20 years of service on the board, except to say “Thanks, and would you mind another 20?”



(Photo by Warren Leach, Blue Sky Research)