

# Tales of ISAAC

## Memories of the Beginnings of ISAAC

Compiled by **Judy Seligman-Wine**

With the support of **Penny Parnes** and **Melanie Fried-Oken**

June 2018



International Society for  
Augmentative and Alternative Communication



## Introduction

Here's how the concept for the Tales of ISAAC originated. In 2016 I was invited to present a Workshop on Communication for Children with Rett Syndrome in Warsaw, Poland. I had the privilege to be the guest of Aldona Mysakowska Adamczyk in her home for several days. Aldona is currently the Chair of the ISAAC Council and as such is very involved in the current activities of ISAAC. Each night Aldona and I stayed up until the small hours of the morning talking and talking. Aldona was very interested in the beginnings of ISAAC and regaled me with question after question. In response, I recounted more and more of my personal stories related to my experiences in those early days of ISAAC when the numbers of people were much smaller and everyone knew each other. Aldona was an eager audience and kept asking for one more story – after several nights of this with almost no sleep and me with almost no voice left, she suggested I write down these stories so that future generations of ISAAC members could also have access to our early beginnings.

I mulled this over for a while and then presented the idea to my good friend Penny Parnes who played a most active role in the beginnings of ISAAC. I did not give her the opportunity to say “no”. Then, by chance Melanie Fried-Oken, another good personal friend (our friendship also originated through ISAAC) was invited to speak in Israel. The two of us went off to Eilat, a six hour drive from my home; on the drive back I presented the idea to Melanie – by the time we got home she had already crafted the title “Tales of ISAAC” and drafted a list of all those early ISAAC people who we thought should be asked to contribute. I should point out that many years

ago when I was appointed to be the first Chair of the ISAAC Board of Directors (now called the Council) I managed to talk an extremely reluctant Melanie into being the Vice-Chair of the Board – if I could manage that, how could she refuse me on this!

I wrote letters requesting contributions from the ISAAC Founding members and other “Oldies”; many responded – some did not. Some sent written memories, some sent photos – it was interesting for me to receive the notes that others had written and to note that although each person expressed it somewhat differently we were all saying essentially the same thing. I leave you to read the “Tales” and to come to your own conclusions as to the overriding message. I hope you get as much enjoyment out of reading these long ago memories of the beginnings of ISAAC as I have had in compiling them.

I am including a list of past Biennial Conference sites - just note all the places where we have been - and a list of Past ISAAC Presidents – these people need to be applauded for donating so much of their personal time with so much devotion to the goal of enabling non-speaking persons to let their voices be heard!

My many thanks to Aldona for pushing me into this and to Penny and Melanie for their valued support along the way. And a very special thanks to my son-in-law Ofer Kahana who has done all the graphic and production work – in true ISAAC spirit – at no cost!! How lucky we are! I would also like to thank those people who supported the concept of the Tales of ISAAC but did not send personal contributions – because of lack of time and/or fading memories.

These include Gregg Vanderheiden - USA, Arlene Kraat - USA, Luis Azevedo - Portugal, Janet Larcher - U.K., Elaine Heaton-Siemans - Canada, and Barbara Collier - Canada. I trust I have not forgotten anyone. A big thank you to you all!

Judy Seligman-Wine, ISAAC Fellow



## **ISAAC Presidents**

1983 – 1986	Shirley McNaughton, Canada
1986 – 1988	Gunnar Fagerberg, Sweden
1988 – 1990	Penny Parnes, Canada
1990 – 1992	Margita Lundman, Sweden
1992 – 1994	Arlene Kraat, USA
1994 – 1996	Betty Jean Findlay, Canada
1996 – 1998	Sarah Blackstone, USA
1998 – 2000	Prue Fuller, United Kingdom
2000 – 2002	Susan Balandin, Australia
2002 – 2004	Filip Loncke, Belgium / USA
2004 – 2006	Martine Smith, Ireland
2006 – 2008	Sudha Kaul, India
2008 – 2010	Mary Blake Huer, USA
2010 – 2012	Erna Alant, South Africa / USA
2012 – 2015	Jeff Riley, Canada
2015 – 2018	Gregor Renner, Germany

Coming up:

2018 –2020	Meredith Allen, Australia
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## **ISAAC Conferences**

- 1980 - first non-speech conference, Toronto, Canada
- 1982 - second non-speech conference, Toronto, Canada
- 1984 - first ISAAC conference, Boston, USA
- 1986 - Cardiff, Wales
- 1988 - Anaheim, California, USA (Disneyland)
- 1990 - Stockholm, Sweden
- 1992 - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA
- 1994 - Maastricht, The Netherlands
- 1996 - Vancouver, Canada
- 1998 - Dublin, Ireland
- 2000 - Washington, D.C. USA
- 2002 - Odense, Denmark
- 2004 - Natal, Brazil
- 2006 - Düsseldorf, Germany
- 2008- Montreal, Canada
- 2010 - Barcelona, Spain
- 2012 - Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania USA
- 2014 - Lisbon, Portugal
- 2016 - Toronto, Canada
- 2018 - The Gold Coast, Australia



# Recollections of the Early Days of ISAAC

Shirley McNaughton, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

My recollections of the early days of ISAAC are filled with many “firsts”! I remember the pre-birth events. The “first” International multi-disciplinary conference, related to assisted communication held in 1980 in Toronto at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). Its participants were a collection of professionals, advocates, distributors of equipment, researchers - all excited about this pioneering work in which we were involved.

It was at this conference that **Larry Weiss** of ZYGO challenged the Toronto folk to hold a second conference with its purpose to form a new organization. His second challenge was to give more consideration to distributors - giving them more and better time to display their technology. We did both!

In 1982, our second conference was held, again at OISE. It was preceded by a meeting of the emerging leaders in this new field, held at the Halton Hills Conference Centre, just west of Toronto. Our goal for this preliminary meeting was to develop the framework for an organization that could be presented at the upcoming OISE conference. The organization was to have a structure and leadership that would be international, multi-disciplinary, and inclusive of persons who used assisted communication. Halton Hills is memorable for me for the cold showers and **Gunner Fagerberg** running the two to three miles from his hotel in Milton to the Halton Hills Centre - up hill all the way. True dedication!

I also remember Halton Hills for the suggestion for me to serve as the first president. I'm sure it was supported and encouraged by the Americans, as a Canadian option to avoid the competition between all the many strong American participants. For me, this responsibility was a huge "first". Both my first and second terms as president gave me many challenges and responsibilities that I had never had before. Developing the Blissymbolics Communication Institute (BCI) throughout the seventies seemed easy in comparison! Without the strong support of **Penny Parnes**, **Peter Lindsay** and my many international Blissymbolics associates, I never would have survived. I remember using a gavel for the first time (in my own special way) and of advocating strongly to ensure that the interests of AAC users be upheld. This required my insisting that a family representative, **Pat Cashdollar**, have a place on the executive, among the professional members.

I remember, the East Lansing meeting in 1983, hosted by **John Eulenberg**, Michigan State University, at which 'wee' ISAAC was born. The words "alternative", "augmentative", "augmented" were much debated, and eventually, with the combined creativity of **Gregg Vanderheiden** and **David Yoder**, urged on by many others, the infant ISAAC, (International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication) was named. I remember **Howard Shane**, **George Karlan**, **David Beukelman**, and **Lyle Lloyd** being vigorously involved in the discussion regarding the upbringing of this new offspring. Terminology was a key issue.

I remember that ISAAC would have had immense difficulties in functioning as an international organization without Confer.

Thanks to **Penny Parnes**, who helped the formation of ISAAC in so many ways, we had, from the beginning, the use of an innovative communication program developed by her brother-in-law, **Bob Parnes** at University of Michigan. Confer was in its prototype phase, but it served us very well. **Katherine Seybold** administered our use of Confer and, in 1983, the ISAAC Executive and Board were messaging and conferencing using the internet, well before we even thought of google, skype and zoom!

The first conferences in Boston (1984) and Cardiff (1986), were very exciting and very different. I would describe Boston as focused and functional - getting our new organization started! In Cardiff, we experienced the enhancements that come as an organization becomes established - social event at the Cardiff Castle, formal dinner with the Mayor and his wife, scores of assistants with blue ISAAC t-shirts ensuring that everyone was in the right place at the right time. Especially memorable for me was the first President's Reception at which we had performances by ISAAC members. I accompanied **Clive Thursfield** singing "Memories" from Cats, and to my mind, it has never been performed more beautifully! In Cardiff, we were beginning to see the benefit to be derived from alternating conferences between North America and other parts of the world. It was exciting to see more Americans beginning to attend meetings outside North America and witness the increased European participation. Our international heritage from Bliss was showing its value.

Lastly, I remember Communicating Together beginning at the same time as ISAAC. Our first issue highlighted ISAAC's beginning in 1983,

and we continued producing the quarterly magazine as an ISAAC associated publication until 2001 - first under the editorship of **Ann Kennedy**, BCI and then, beginning in 1992, under the independent joint editorship of **Peter Lindsay** and myself. “ComTog” was a wonderful “first” that provided a forum for AAC users and their supporters for many years - a loyal companion to ISAAC as it moved through its formative years!

I appreciate the opportunity for this random reminiscing. Thanks, Judy, Melanie and Penny for organizing this! The early years of ISAAC are always to be treasured!

# My Tales of ISAAC

Penny Parnes, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

ISAAC was a big part of my life for much of the 1980s and 1990s. It was an exciting and energizing time to be involved.

Together with **Peter Lindsay** I co-chaired the Non-speech conferences held in Toronto in 1980 and 1982. We didn't have the term AAC at that time so Non-speech was the name of choice. At the 1982 meeting there was a move to get a group together to contemplate the future of non-speech communication and to develop a structure for it to continue. This in turn led to the meeting in East Lansing in 1983 hosted by **John Eulenberg** of the Artificial Language Lab. It was then that the name ISAAC was coined and term AAC adopted.

For much of the next 10 years I was involved in the leadership of ISAAC. In 1984 as one of the Vice Presidents for Conferences and along with **Howard Shane** we organized the first ISAAC Conference in Boston in October 1984. It was heady time to be involved and such fun. I held many executive positions and in 1990 found myself in Sweden at ISAAC's 4th conference as the President. It is this event that holds one of my funniest ISAAC memories.

Our funding was very limited so whenever possible when travelling on behalf of ISAAC, we shared rooms. So even as President I agreed to share a room with my good friend **Judy Seligman-Wine**. This of course was before the days of thumb drives when all the information and materials you need can be transported in on a device the size of

your thumb!! Not me....I had a large suitcase full of slides, overhead transparencies, handouts, notes, agendas, files, etc. etc. for my 2 weeks in Stockholm. One week would be executive and Board meetings and one week for the actual conference itself. Besides my suitcase full of materials I had an equally large suitcase filled with my “wardrobe”. In those days we dressed more formally than now and I was going to be giving the President’s address in the Nobel Hall!!!

So I knew that Judy was due to arrive a day before me and was glad to have the transatlantic flight behind me. I arrived at the hotel and was given a room key. I entered and looked around. A VERY small room indeed and clearly not meant for 2 people. The room was about 8 ft by 10 feet. Along one wall was a small single bed, the width of the room. The washroom/shower was a small corner of the room separated by a door. You basically sat on the toilet and let the shower run over you. There was no closet for my “wardrobe” just a few hooks on the wall. Oh dear I thought how was I going to survive this and be able to access the many materials in my one suitcase and the clothing in my other. Suddenly the door opens and there is Judy ready to welcome me to Sweden with flowers for the President in her hands. I ask her where her room is relative to mine. She slyly proceeds to the large picture which is perpendicular to the bed and unhooks it. It falls down and exhibits the second bed.

So here we are. Judy graciously gives me the existing (non -hinged) bed, but points out that she will have to climb onto my bed to reach hers. We then note that for me to open my suitcase she has to step into the bathroom and sit on the toilet. Oh dear!! Gradually the



rest of the executive assemble and we all share our dismay at this arrangement. We are used to having impromptu meetings in our room, access to materials, etc. This is not going to work.

So a small group goes out to see what they can find. They come back very excited to have found a place nearby. To give you a sense of how classy this new place is it usually rents by the hour. But we are ecstatic. The rooms have closets, they have 2 real beds each and although the lighting is a bulb hanging unadorned from the ceiling it will permit us to unpack!! So off we go to our house of ill repute to take up residence. At that point it seemed like a palace and did indeed serve us well for the next 2 weeks.

I still laugh when I realize that after that the President of ISAAC usually had a suite at whatever venue was chosen. For the next several conferences I was always invited to make myself at home in the Presidential Suite in sympathy for my experiences.

So ISAAC was a very important part of my life. I learned so much. I laughed until my sides hurt. I also faced some major challenges such as the unsuccessful movement to bar South Africans from ISAAC during the days of Apartheid. I blush when I think of our whole executive being asked to vacate a bed and breakfast establishment in Asheville, North Carolina because we were “too disruptive” although we were the only ones there. I made lifelong friends (Judy and I recently shared a very comfortable room in Berlin). Most of all I got to work and support a movement which was and continues to be so important for so many people throughout the world.

# Reflections on ISAAC's Beginnings

Howard C. Shane, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

My reflections on ISAAC's beginnings brought me back to a time when its founders were discovering others who were pursuing a similar professional path.

By the late 70's - early 80's, a growing number of people around the world were being pulled to a line of work that for the most part hadn't existed before in human history. The common denominator was the allure of uncovering a way for individuals to express themselves through Aphonic Communication<sup>1</sup>. As we know today, the explanations for speechless conditions are numerous; but at that time, by and large, the early focus of AAC was on children and teenagers who evidenced cerebral palsy. Importantly, those who were becoming absorbed in this effort were unknown to one another, yet we were pursuing identical goals. We were parents, teachers, engineers, speech pathologists, students, and tinkerers. Some were inspired by personal contact with someone unable to communicate symbolically. Others were drawn into this growing movement by determined parents who pursued nascent engineers, believing they could find a solution to their child's communication difficulties.

To this day I cannot recall how this band of people interested in this common cause all came together. I know that **Shirley McNaughton**,

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1 I have intentionally used the term "aphonic communication" to commemorate what I believe is the first publication in our field - Aphonic Communication for those with Cerebral Palsy: a guide for the development of a conversation board. J. Fenton, and H. Goldberg, 1960; Printed by the United Cerebral Palsy Association of New York.

**Penny Parnes** and others were instrumental in pulling others from around the world together to form ISAAC, but how they learned of who was doing what I cannot recall. I became involved after I had created the “communicator,” a device used by my students at the Belchertown State School in Massachusetts. I learned that **Rick Foulds**, an engineering student at Tufts University in Massachusetts was developing the TIC (The Tufts Interactive Communicator). His inspiration was **Judy Hoyt**, who convinced Rick Foulds to build a system for her son **Rick**. I continue to see Rick on a regular basis. He is best known for his Marathon adventures that he shares with his dad, **Dick Hoyt**.

In reflecting back to that time over forty years ago, I am convinced that two powerful forces were responsible for this group of unconnected people to gradually come together and start the AAC movement. The first important zeitgeist was the ideological shift in western society that brought about deinstitutionalization. After years of warehousing humans, there was an international realization that what was done in an institution could be done better in the community. The second potent influence was the digital revolution. The closing of institutions created a need for better treatment options, and the digital age made it possible to create digital options that had never before been possible.

I remember a particular meeting that occurred before ISAAC existed; it took place at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan, and was hosted by **John Eulenberg**. The details of this gathering are a bit fuzzy now, given it occurred almost 40 years ago, but I recall most participants were from Canada and the US,

with some other international guests also present. My most vivid memory is of the discussion about what to call the field itself. The prevailing terms at the time were “alternative communication,” “augmentative communication,” “Non-vocal communication,” and “non-speech communication.” Without going into the deliberations that followed, it was finally agreed that combining terms were appropriate in certain circumstances and both augmentative and alternative needed to be adopted – Augmentative and Alternative Communication it is!

## I WAS THERE!

Aurelia Rivarola, Milan, Italy

Yes! I was there in East Lansing, Michigan, in May 1983, at the time of the founding of ISAAC. Now, 35 years later I am very proud about it. I have to admit though, that I wasn't fully aware of what was going to happen due to my language difficulties in understanding the purpose of that conference, that, I found out later, was also an organizing meeting.

For me, it wasn't the first time I was participating in a meeting related to communication disabilities. I had been in Toronto at Blissymbolics Communication Institute (BCI) for reconnaissance in 1980. Back then, I felt the urge to provide a way to communicate for all the children with severe speech impairments who I used to meet at work, considering that by law, from 1975, all Italian children, no matter the degree of disability, had to be included in regular schools. After that, in 1981 I did an internship at Blissymbolics Communication Institute (BCI) where, not only did I learn Blissymbolics, but also techniques, strategies and devices to support children with expressive language delays to use Blissymbols to communicate. In 1982, I attended the second International Conference on Non-speech Communication in Toronto and when **Shirley McNaughton** and **Penny Parnes** invited me to participate to the meeting that was going to be held in May 1983, I thought I was going to attend another conference. I realized when I get there that I was participating in the development of a new international organization.

At that meeting, many things struck me. First the energy the people had in sharing their opinions. There were professionals focused on the clinical aspects of communication, participation and relationship development, although they were interested in communication techniques and systems. On the other hand, there were professionals focused primarily on high tech communication aids and devices development probably due to the leading social trends at that time. In addition to that, the non-speaking individuals that participated to the meeting, took an equal and active role in the discussion by sharing their views and needs about communication. I was pleasantly surprised in seeing that despite the different visions of what people believed would meet the needs of this emerging field, the professionals and individuals with communication needs were able to agree with each other and founded an International Society, ISAAC, comprehensive of everyone's opinions.

Another thing I clearly remember is the discussion related to the name of the field and the reasons that led to the decision to name it Augmentative and Alternative Communication. When the decision was made, we were asked to translate the name in our own language so that it would have the same meaning. This because everyone believed that the name carried the real purpose of the field. At that moment, I started to wonder how to translate the term Augmentative into Italian as it did not exist as adjective. I told **John B. Eulenberg**, professor of linguistics at the Artificial Language Laboratory (Michigan State University in East Lansing), about my doubts and I asked him if I could create an adjective starting from a verb. John told me that I would have all the rights if I used the root of the verb and changed just the ending of it. With this reassurance,

I returned to Italy and I proposed the adjective “Aumentativa”. Not many people accepted the new adjective, and some wanted to use a different one. Until one day, by chance I was reading Boccaccio (Florence, 1313 – 1375), one of the greatest writers and poets of Italian Literature, and I found out he used the term “Aumentativa” in one of his writings. In front of Boccaccio, Italians could no longer object to anything and everyone agreed to name the field “Comunicazione Aumentativa Alternativa”.

Since 1983, I have participated in most of the ISAAC International conferences as, to me, they were opportunities to build a deeper knowledge on a variety of topics in the field such as clinical practices, services, equipment, products, new categories of individuals with communication needs (e.g. early communicators, individuals with autism, adults with temporary and acquired communication disabilities, and so on), research and so on. At the ISAAC conferences I could also see the direct involvement and active participation of individuals who use AAC at the table where decisions are made, as well as the generosity of professionals in sharing their knowledge and in opening the AAC field to many “developing countries” (also by going there personally). ISAAC conferences were also a great opportunity, for me, to make new friends. With many of these friends I developed a long-term friendship. Many of them came, and are still coming every year, to Italy to keep spreading the culture of AAC.

After 35 years of involvement, my active participation with ISAAC is coming to an end. Still, ISAAC will always continue to live in my heart.





## Visual Memories of Early ISAAC Conferences and Equipment

Larry Weiss and Melanie Fried-Oken, U.S.A.

Check out these early devices – photos taken randomly at conferences.



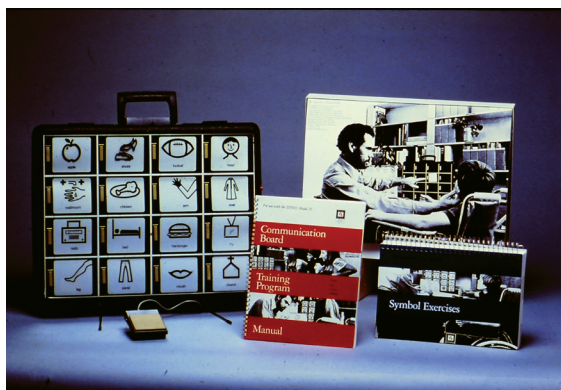
1983



1983



1983



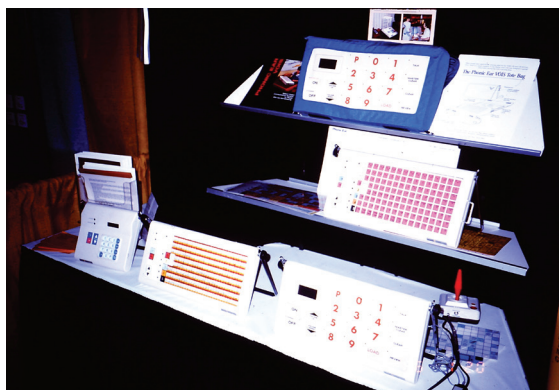
1983



1983



1984



Phonic Ear Vois 1986



1986



Person with ALS  
scanning with  
Lightwriter

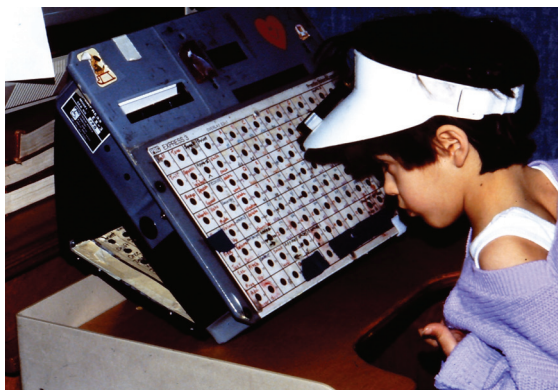


Apple II



Canon  
Communicator





Express III



HandiVoice



Scan Writer 1986

## Reflections on the Early History of ISAAC

Al Cook, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada / Sacramento,  
California, USA

My history with ISAAC actually began a year before ISAAC did. In 1982 I was a professor of biomedical engineering at California State University Sacramento, California. I was on a sabbatical at the TRACE Center at the University of Wisconsin.

In the Fall of 1982 there was conference at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago and **Gregg Vanderheiden** finagled an invitation for me to present. He and several others from TRACE were driving to the conference and he invited me to ride along. I gave my presentation and after the session a woman approached me and “charged” me with being a “closet speech pathologist”. I thought that maybe I was beginning to understand AAC and was flattered by this. I also wondered if I had lost all my engineering skills. The woman was **Elaine Heaton** and that introduction led to over 30 years of collaboration, a major move for me to Edmonton, Alberta and a life long friendship.

It turned out that Gregg and the TRACE crew also had another meeting in Toronto. That meeting was by invitation only. I was not invited, but once again Gregg snuck me in. It turned out that the Toronto meeting included virtually all the major players in AAC in North America at the time. My new friend Elaine was one of them along with many people whose work I had read and admired. The discussion at that meeting was about how to advance

AAC internationally. As the meeting went on it was clear that the consensus was that an organization of some kind was needed. Within a year ISAAC was officially launched. It was exciting to be at the conception of ISAAC and to witness the passion for meeting the AAC needs of people.

That was the driving force from the beginning. A rewarding early “assignment” was serving as chair of the Scholarship Committee sponsored by **Prentke Romich**. We gave awards to students who later became leaders in our field. It was important to support young workers in AAC early in the development of the field. Many of those who received the early scholarships went on to make major contributions in AAC research and practice.

Other manufacturers also played important roles. **Larry Weiss** of **Zygo Industries** lobbied for an organization focused on AAC for years before ISAAC was founded and strongly supported it after its founding. In the early days, I learned a lot at the ISAAC conferences from manufactures who shared what they had sent at other places. They also sought feedback on new AAC technologies, and the discussion were lively and productive.

The ISAAC conferences have been unique for me from the beginning because of the international participation and the broad range of AAC issues, topics and challenges. The 1988 conference in Disneyland in California was the first at which I presented. Having worked in AAC for about ten years at that time, it was great to share information with others who were dealing with similar issues. Being surrounded by others with similar interests and a variety of approaches to

meeting the needs of people with complex communication needs was a wonderful experience.

As an engineer I value the SLP and special education contacts I made through ISAAC. The openness and willingness to share ideas has always been a hallmark of ISAAC for me. From the beginning, ISAAC provided the ideal vehicle for making my efforts in AAC more effective by coupling me to others through the conferences and the AAC journal. Thank you, Judy, Penny and Melanie, or including me in this recollection of ISAAC's beginnings.



# Building Bridges Beyond Boundaries

Sudha Kaul, Kolkata, India

The growth of AAC & ISAAC in India has been due to the collective work in sharing knowledge and networking; on building and nurturing relationships based on mutual trust and respect.

When I think of the early years of AAC the first person that comes to my mind is **Anne Warrick**. I met Anne in 1979, five years after I began my organization (West Bengal Spastics Society, as it was then called- currently known as Indian Institute of Cerebral Palsy- IICP). **Anne Warrick** arrived in Kolkata to teach us Blissymbolics! And **Shombhu Ghosh** became the first Bliss User in the Asian Continent!

From there started my personal journey of exploring and learning about Communication without Speech. I was very fortunate to meet a host of inspiring pioneers on my visit to Ottawa Crippled Children's Hospital, as it was then called, and the Hugh MacMillan Rehabilitation Centre, Toronto - **Shirley McNaughton, Penny Parnes, Barbara Collier, Lynnette Norris and Janice Light**. We formally joined ISAAC in 1985 and with the help of Anne we started Training workshops.

In 1984 we ran a workshop on AAC at the Institute of Speech and Hearing in Mysore, a first for Indian Speech and language pathologists. In 1986 **Judy Seligman-Wine** Chaired the Developing Countries Committee and at the ISAAC Conference in Cardiff set the road-map for AAC in the "Developing World". In 1991 **Barbara**

**Collier** and I, as Co-Chairs of the ISAAC Developing Countries Committee, were happy to report that ISAAC had set a footprint in South East Asia! Much of the awareness on AAC was made through personal networking of like-minded ISAAC members who were keen to support initiatives taken.

In 1989 we hosted the 1st ISAAC Regional Conference in Kolkata. AAC had finally “emerged“ in India! 2001 was a historic year for IICP & AAC in India We held an international conference on AAC Disability & Human Rights...”Silent Voices”. The Best of AAC Practitioners participating! Bringing to this conference the richness of their personal and professional experience... **Meredith Allan, Juliet Goldbart & Janice Murray, Mats Granlund, Prue Fuller, Janet Scott, Nicola Grove, Susan Balandin, Erna Alant, Hideo Itoh, Caroline Gray, Simon Churchill, Joan Murphy** and of course **Anne Warrick**. In the foreword to the conference proceedings publication, **Sue Balandin** summed up the essence of the Conference “As part of ISAAC I was honored to attend this conference and am equally honoured to commend this book to you. I hope as you read this book you will find it useful and that you will feel that you too, wherever you live, are part of an international community supporting AAC and the human right of communication”.

Some ISAAC Conferences were special because of the recognition my colleagues received. In Brazil in 2004 I was very proud to listen to my student **Den Mukherjee** deliver the WORDS + Award lecture. In 2006 at the ISAAC Dusseldorf conference, the AbleNet – ISAAC Remarkable Achievements Award (previously known as The AbleNet Literacy ISAAC Award) was given to **Reena Sen**, and in 2010 at the

Barcelona Conference to **Swati Chakraborty**.

It is interesting to see how over the years terminology within ISAAC changed as it became more Global in its Outlook- From Developing to Emerging Countries. We changed the nomenclatures of our main projects (and I have to admit it was due to my passion for acronyms!). Three Action Groups emerged:

Action Group 1: BUILD-AAC (Building AAC Communities Project)

Action Group 2: LEAD -AAC (Leadership Project by & for Persons using AAC)

Action Group 3: READAAC (Research.Education.Awareness. Documentation).

My journey with ISAAC, first as a Member, then as Chair of the Board and then later as its President, gave me an opportunity to travel across many countries and learn from this invaluable experience. It has been a pleasure to know so many members of this “Communicative community” that has collectively and singly contributed to this global initiative in augmenting AAC and inclusion of all people with disabilities into development practices and policies in their respective countries. I am privileged to be part of this membership and confident that ISAAC will continue to make a difference.

# Looking Backward

Sarah Blackstone, Monterey, California, USA

Looking backward is useful because it can enable us to see how far we've come. More importantly perhaps, it can suggest the way forward.

ISAAC was founded decades ago by a small cadre of educators, clinicians, researchers, developers, people with severe speech/language problems and their family members from Canada, the United States, Sweden and the United Kingdom. These unlikely pioneers rose up, reached out and found each other (Note: At the time, it was often hard to find local colleagues who shared our views). Collectively, we said "No more! Let's figure it out". We hated that children and adults who were unable to use their natural speech were being denied access to language and communication. We recognized the status quo as a gross violation of human rights. We understood that being unable to communicate prevented these individuals from participating actively in their families and communities. We began marching forward.

I was lucky. I got involved early in the "AAC movement" and I am deeply appreciative of the opportunities that have followed. Over the years, I have served on ISAAC's Board/Council, Executive Committee as VP of Scientific Meetings, President Elect and President. I was a founder of USSAAC and currently serve on its Board of Directors. I have attended all but two of ISAAC's Biennial Conferences. I am a speech-language pathologist and have been a clinician, done some

research, taught, and written about AAC-related topics. Along my journey of more than forty years, I have gained a far broader and deeper understanding of human communication and the value of language access than I could have imagined. And, I have worked with great people who share passions, are fun and quirky, are amazingly talented, skilled, creative and who have shown courage, resilience and persistence. ISAAC is my professional home base.

Today, ISAAC members continue to change the hearts, minds, laws, policies, opinions and attitudes of people around the world. Amongst them I have laughed, cried, screamed in frustration, celebrated our victories, and deepened in my understanding about what it means to be a “good” clinician, researcher, leader and teacher. I have learned to listen VERY carefully and to welcome and celebrate diversity and differences. ISAAC provides the world with a forum, a platform from which to insist that AAC be most of all about what matters in the “real world” to “real people”. Our job as professionals, researchers, policy makers, etc. is to help individuals with communication challenges to find their path, their unique path so they can communicate authentically with whomever, about whatever, and wherever they choose.

Looking forward, I continue to be guided by two questions “Does what I/we do matter? And to whom? In my opinion, AAC services are still WAY too patchy, AAC technologies/apps too difficult, our societies too resistant, and communication access too often denied. Together we must help individuals with communication challenges to access the communication tools, technologies and strategies they need so they can, as a result, access their human and civil rights

to education, employment, healthcare, community services, and ultimately self-determine the direction of their own lives.

## When ISAAC Became a Reality for Me

Sophia L. Kalman, Budapest, Hungary

My road to ISAAC just like my whole journey toward AAC led through BCI, or in other words, Blissymbolics paved my way. I heard about ISAAC from **Karoly Galyas** and I heard about Karoly from my friends and mentors at BCI. In 1983 when I left Toronto after almost one and a half years, besides books and an enthusiasm and determination to introduce Blissymbolics in Hungary, I also took a somewhat peculiar address with me. It was an address in Stockholm, but the name was definitely Hungarian. I was told that this person could help me with my endeavor. And he truly did. The way my life later turned out has been in fact that half of my family is Swedish: my son-in-law, his whole family, and my grandchildren. Because of this I happen to visit Sweden very often and keep meeting Swedish people all the time. But I have never met such a true Swede as the Hungarian born Karoly Galyas was, a tall, quiet and politely reserved engineer with Scandinavian blue eyes, committed to help and serve people with communication difficulties: in the eighties he was working on developing portable multilingual speech generating communication devices. He and I became good friends through our mutual love for AAC and music after meeting first in Hungary in 1984. Our intensive correspondence was worthy of our graphomania: we both loved to write 8-10 page long letters. I typed mine, but Karoly had a beautiful handwriting.

In 1986 the Hungarian Bliss Foundation – founded in that year – won a Soros scholarship and we were able to study the use and application

of AAC in Sweden. We visited different schools – e.g. the school in Göteborg where **Britt Ambertson** was working - kindergartens, AAC using university students in independent living settings etc., and Karoly organized a meeting with **Gunnar Fagerberg**. Gunnar was the first person who talked about ISAAC to me, about the ideas, dreams and efforts to pull together people from around the world to learn from each other and share their unique experiences. It might sound romanticizing but it was an uplifting experience. Don't forget that in 1986 we were still living behind the iron curtain in Hungary, and to hear about an international organization where people freely share the same knowledge, problems and successes sounded more like a fairy tale than a reality.

Thus in 1987 I became a member of ISAAC. The most difficult part of it was to pay the membership fee, because it was simply impossible to transfer money to a foreign organization from home. It looked suspicious to say the least. We could not buy foreign currency at all; we could only apply for a fixed, ridiculously small amount – 50 USD or its equivalent if I recall it correctly – every third year but only for traveling purposes and not membership fees. After having worked in Canada though we could keep a special bank account with our savings. But we had to apply for extra permission to use even a penny from our own account, and it could be used only for travels. It was issued in cash thus there was no way to transfer it as a membership fee. So I always had to find tricks to pay it, like to ask somebody to advance it, to pay two years ahead if there was an opportunity for that, or to ask somebody to smuggle it out of the country. Still it was worth the trouble because the world it opened up was wide and appealing.



The first ISAAC conference I could visit – and I say visit because I could spend there only a day – was in 1992 in Philadelphia. I am not a hundred percent sure but it might have been at that conference that a committee for emerging AAC countries was formed with **Erna Alant** as a chair. I had the opportunity to attend the full conference in 1994 in Maastricht (The Netherlands). At that time I had a small project with **Hans van Balkom**. I had two presentations, which meant happy, but challenging opportunities for me. I was sorry that I could not use them in their full worth, because the first day I got an awful cold with fever and a very stuffy nose. I cannot recall even the topics of my presentations, only the fact that at one of the sessions **Sarah Blackstone** was the chairperson. But I remember clearly that I saw bread and butter with ground chocolate on top for first time in my life. It was a shocking experience since in our culinary traditions this combination of sweet and salty was unknown, but my children highly appreciated when I treated them with the Dutch bread-and-butter.

It happened at that conference that at **Judy Wine**'s initiative I offered to host the actual ISAAC executive meeting in Budapest the coming autumn. At that time the Hungarian Bliss Foundation was renting an absolutely inaccessible apartment in downtown Budapest. We hardly had any equipment, maybe three computers and some home made toys and devices. In November 1994 the ISAAC EC arrived like Santa Claus with a load of toys and switches and beside their meetings they offered assessment sessions, lectures and counseling for teachers, therapists and families. I remember translating for **Judy Wine, Arlene Kraat, Hans van Balkom, John Costello** and others. This meeting had a tremendous impact on

our work; it meant a big leap in our emerging AAC knowledge and awareness. We still have some of the toys and switches which were donated at that time, and I have a dark picture of the event: it shows **Zozo** the first Hungarian Bliss-user, **Judy Wine** and myself.



In 1996 driving up from Los Angeles, I was able to spend again some time at the conference held in Vancouver, and attend a seminar. Besides running through the exhibitions we spent a lovely evening with Judy and **Penny Parnes** at the famous Salmon on the Hill restaurant. ISAAC meetings were not always and only about work, research and technologies, they were also about building and nurturing international friendships.

By that time it had become clear that these conferences were extremely important from the point of view of disseminating information and sharing, and they had a long lasting boosting effect as well. It had been also evident that participants from the Central and Eastern European countries could rarely attend these meetings because of the lack of financial resources. As a solution I figured out that it would be practical to have a biennial regional meeting in between two ISAAC conferences. Thus in 1997 we organized the first Eastern and Central European Regional AAC Conference in Budapest as a part of a European PHARE project. It was a tiny meeting with only 21 participants, but they came from 14 countries! Well-known and appreciated members of ISAAC honored the meeting with their presentations and lectures e.g. **Judy Wine** from Israel, **Martine Smith** from Ireland, **Stephen von Tetzchner** from Norway, **Janet Scott** from Scotland, **Penny Parnes** from Canada. Since 1997 we had 11 ECER AAC conferences in 9 cities of 8 countries, always with the morale and sometimes even with some financial support from ISAAC. The last one was held in Bucharest (Rumania) with almost 200 participants and a broad international presenters' group.

My first full participation at which I also attended the research seminar happened in Dublin in 1998. For many years being the only one who is considered „THE” AAC expert in a country is not a reason for pride, it is more of a burden and a constant thirst for feedback and for the possibility to learn and discuss new developments in the field. I learned a carload in Dublin and enjoyed taking away the extremely rich volume of the proceedings, but I also recall vividly the shock I felt when my whole money, my treasure of 300 USD was stolen from my closed bag from the locked closet from the locked

room. We were told that there was no use to be upset about such a trivia because stealing was an everyday experience on the campus.

In 2002 in Odense, Denmark I had a presentation, and it was the first time that two young colleagues could attend the meeting from our center. It was around this time that I was asked to work for the AAC Journal of ISAAC as a peer reviewer. For many years I did it with the best of my knowledge and with the extra joy caused by the fact that I could get a glimpse into the development of AAC around the world.

Our small Hungarian group participated in 2006 in Dusseldorf, Germany, in 2010 in Barcelona, Spain and in 2014 in Lisbon, Portugal. At this last time I had a little argument with the organizer of the professional program, since my abstract was accepted as a poster and not as an oral presentation. It made me upset because I am a pretty good talker but an awful one when it comes to visual arts... Since it seemed that it could be my last participation at an ISAAC conference – because the younger generation must become part of the ISAAC world and our organization doesn't have financial resources for supporting the attendance of more persons than one or two, I wanted to say a proper goodbye with a strong, impressionable presentation and not with a forgettable and not too ingenious poster. I felt I succeeded in conveying my message; the room was full despite the fact that **Shirley McNaughton** was speaking in the next room... The session was vivid, the reactions lively, and the questions and debate had to be continued outside the room in order to let the next speaker start.

To submit an abstract to an ISAAC conference has always been a

challenge in itself, since it is difficult to guess the result of an ongoing project or research. For me sometimes it happened that I submitted an abstract and I had to start my speech with an apology: Sorry, my presentation will be different from the abstract, simply because I got results contrary to my preliminary hypothesis. It has also been a real task to encourage and help the young teachers to gather their courage, submit a topic, and to stand up before an international audience. But I dare say that for a young colleague the opportunity to attend an ISAAC conference has a deep impact, it usually changes their view of AAC for life. The experience of meeting people from all over the world dealing with the same problems and working with very similar clients is an enriching experience, and studying the exhibitions in minuscule details always opens up a new perspective.

What can I add? I was a lucky person to have the opportunity to become involved with ISAAC. It gave me a reliable professional background, a source of knowledge, and a territory to find new international friends. I felt supported and could offer support. No matter where or how one lives these values are the evergreens of our lives.

## ISAAC and Friendship

John Costello, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

I've always believed that so many of us miss the opportunity to meet and develop friendships with wonderful people who are right under our nose because we are too busy, or too shy and reserved to say hello to strangers we encounter throughout the day.

Being a member of ISAAC has required me to modify that philosophy over the years. You see, there are extraordinary people not just under my nose but all over the world with whom I have had the honor and pleasure to interact only because of ISAAC. Our common interest in meeting the needs of individuals who are communication vulnerable has brought us all to the table, but a recognition of kindness, warmth, generosity of heart and soul and appreciation for diversity and formative life experiences we have each had, has bonded us.

There are so many ISAAC experiences I have had that make me smile. I think of dancing with friends (new and established) in Natal, Brazil during the social events of our biennial conference. I pinch myself in disbelief that I had so many opportunities such looking out at the vineyards from the Castle in Portugal where we had our executive meeting or looking out over the Danube as we drove through Budapest to have our council meetings. I am deeply grateful and proud to be invited to all corners on the earth to share information and learn from others at ISAAC chapter national conferences.

Because of ISAAC, there are people in my life who have welcomed me as part of their family, have become friends whom I cherish (even if I don't see or even communicate with them regularly) and have allowed me to celebrate their family events (grandchild's first communion services, family Shabbat dinner and prayer). Further, there are people whom I would never have known but for ISAAC and whose loss I mourn, whose memory I celebrate and whose friendship was a gift in my life (I cherish the memory of walking through the Old City of Jerusalem with **David Wine**; talking, laughing, observing and I hold dear the memory of the last time I saw him, knowing from his illness it would likely be the last).

ISAAC has also allowed me to repeatedly be part of a special event that represents the core of my beliefs regarding people who use AAC. Through the honor of helping with the biennial consumer lecture, I meet so many people whose talents, skills, expertise and lived-life lessons guide me in my belief that we are all the same at the core. The lecturers and I have laughed together, worked hard together, educated each other, inspired each other and shared in an experience that is always for someone in the audience, an eye-opening and life changing experience.

## ISAAC Memories

Karen Bloomberg and Hilary Johnson, Melbourne, Australia

We (Karen Bloomberg and Hilary Johnson) have attended all of ISAAC conferences between us – and have probably travelled the farthest of all the ISAAC members. It was so exciting that ISAAC finally got to Australia after previous failed bids. Woo Hoo! However, travel was never an issue as the joys of ISAAC far outweighed the jet lag. We planned our annual holidays around the ISAAC conferences so went to places we had never thought of before.

Our first meeting was Cardiff Wales in 1986. Karen knew a few people as she had done her masters in AAC with Lyle Lloyd at Purdue University and this helped us to develop collegial friendships that have lasted many years. Everyone was excited to be at ISAAC –an amazing opportunity to talk to people who were working in a field in its infancy. We learned so much – and thank you to Pat Mirenda, Carol Goossens', Caroline Musselwhite, Mats Granlund – and so many others who were so generous with their time. I will also never forget people like Caroline and Macalyn Fristoe knitting before they got up to speak – so cool!

Los Angeles Disneyland followed Wales and we encouraged several other Australians to come. About 8 of us shared a room! In those days ISAAC was fairly US centric and Australia was considered a developing country – and of course email/internet had not been developed so mail had to go by sea or air. We arrived a day late for our paper as the conference information was sent sea mail and we



had not received it in time.

However, Los Angeles was particularly exciting because we heard David Beukelman wanted to see us. OH my goodness we thought, he is so famous and so smart why he would want to see us? We, of course, discovered he wanted to publish a demographics paper that we had submitted to the AAC journal but it needed some changes. We resubmitted but when we were again asked for clarifications we took it as a reject. We were naïve and didn't realise all we needed to do was justify the content. David put us on the right path and we are very grateful.

In the early days of ISAAC conferences, there used to be a talent show so we joined in. Our contribution was somewhat refined (as we remember a line-up of bare male bums on stage one time?). For each show we wrote a song and used AAC to get it across. We did a Key Word Sign version of "Home among the Gum trees" and we co-opted any Australians we could find to join in. It was a lot of fun. In the early days, Australia was not a chapter (as we already had a national AAC group created before ISAAC called AGOSCI) but we attended board meetings. The meetings developed the underpinnings of how ISAAC works and the pedantic attention to detail by Lyle Lloyd was necessary – if not sometimes frustrating.

In 1990 we ventured to Stockholm, Sweden- it was soooooo expensive. We stayed in a youth hostel which had bread and cheese for breakfast and we packaged little rolls for lunch – and often dinner! The social events were amazing - one being a tour of the fiords and the islands in a boat. We bought Mats a beer as he was so wonderful to us –

and dropped it before we got it to him. (If you know Scandinavia, you would realise that was almost a day's pay!). There was an awe inspiring dinner at the Nobel peace prize hall – and it was there we had our first real meal in days!

1992 was Philadelphia and we met lots of Scandinavians and Scots. There was a fabulous hat shop there and we had lots of fun trying hats on with representatives from Iceland.

1994 was Maastricht a gorgeous little cobbled town. The research forum was held in a converted monastery with a wine cellar and crypt below. Coming from Australia it was a real sense of history for us as any building older than 100 years here is rare.

In 1996 we flew to Vancouver in Canada and happened to arrive in the middle of their gay pride march. It was a great start for us and we even had good weather! One of the social events was at the science museum which offered hours of interactive experiences. Also, we were lucky to meet Susan Blockberger, who took us to her lakeside retreat after the conference. It was a special bonus to be in Canadian woodlands only accessed by a ferry in the middle of nowhere.

1998 took us to Dublin and the beautiful cobbled city (a nightmare for anyone with a mobility issue). We stayed on campus as it was the summer vacation for Irish students. Unfortunately we got robbed the first day but Martine Smith was fantastic and so helpful. The research stream was held at Trinity College and it was excellent – one that really stands out of all the research forums. There were a range of speakers and it was focussing on multi-modal communication –

dealing with both a visual language and a spoken language and how those intersected. It also touched on communication for people with severe and multiple disabilities with interesting discussion on the use of object symbols. As tourists, we also got to see the Book of Kells and the fabulous library at Trinity College. By this time, ISAAC attendees were really changing and we met lots more people who were competent AAC users. This really added to the experience and to our knowledge.

Back to the US in 2000 and the wonderful sights and museums of Washington, a real treat.

2002 took us to Denmark to a conference centre outside Odense. It was great being altogether at the same venue as it allowed time to develop relationships with colleagues from other countries. We remember an interesting pizza party with a bunch of Scots. One morning Sue Balandin and Hilary went for a walk and got completely lost as it was so flat everywhere. They did however make it back for the plenary!

The 2004 conference in Natal, Brazil was probably our favourite conference. This was not because of the content (as lots of people pulled out of papers at the last minute) but because of the food, the location by the beach, dancing at lunch time, the wonderful side trips, camel rides and zip lines which were so much fun. We were very proud to win the award for the best workshop at the conference but very embarrassed that we were not present to accept it. Meredith Allen accepted on our behalf as we were busy riding a dune buggy. We also visited the Pantanal and Iguassu Falls and saw the real

Macaws (not the Zytec voice output ones).

In 2006 we went to Dusseldorf. Hilary was on the executive then so was busy with ISAAC matters. She did not get to attend many papers. One of our main memories was the transport challenges of a semi-accessible light rail system. Travelling with an electric wheelchair or mobility scooter meant moving alongside the carriage until it stopped and quickly doing a right-angle turn to get through the only accessible door before the train took off again. And then stopping before you hit the opposite door of the carriage – very stressful! This conference was the birth of bringing Diane Bryen to Australia and launching our own Dare to Dream program “Out of the Box”.

2008 we attended ISAAC in Montreal, 25 years of ISAAC and a memorable slide show had been put together.

Barcelona in 2010 saw the cementing of old friendships and the revival of others – and for Hilary a conference without executive tasks! They also had a semi-accessible rail system and travelling with a mobility scooter was an interesting challenge. One time the door opened and there was a significant drop to the platform – but a couple of burly Spaniards lifted the scooter out.

Hilary missed 2012 in Pittsburgh and went to IASSID in Halifax instead. But Karen went to Pittsburgh. A huge venue and without a mobility scooter it would not have been possible to get around. A conference where more unaided AAC had a presence.

2014 was Portugal and we followed the conference with a trip around

Portugal with a fabulous trip to the Duoro. Karen had attended every conference since 1986 (15 conferences). So was looking forward to having ISAAC in Australia in 2018 next time.

Due to ill health Karen did not attend the 2016 ISAAC conference in Toronto but Hilary was there waving the Aussie flag.

ISAAC has afforded us many international colleagues and friends. Each time we travelled to an ISAAC Conference more Aussies shared the journey. ISAAC widened our horizons in terms of travel and developing a broad international perspective. We could not have had the growth of AAC in Australia without the development of these international collegial relationships. Seeing ISAAC grow and change bodes well for the future.



## Visual Memories from Australia

Hilary Johnson and Karen Bloomberg, Australia



Hilary Johnson,  
Susan Balandin,  
Arlene Kraat and  
Karen Bloomberg



Mats Granlund,  
Karen Bloomberg,  
Eva Bjorck-Akesson,  
and Cecilia Ollson



Karen Bloomberg,  
Caroline  
Musselwhite and  
Hilary Johnson



Martine Smith,  
Sudha Kaul and  
Hilary Johnson



Pat Mirenda, Karen  
Bloomberg and  
Hilary Johnson



An ISAAC Board  
(Council) Meeting:  
Nadine Feldman,  
Teresa Iacono,  
Melinda Smith and  
Hilary Johnson





Ellen Kravitz,  
Nicola Grove, Karen  
Bloomberg, Susan  
Balandin and Hilary  
Johnson – Hmmm –  
who is that person  
in the corner?



An ISAAC  
Conference: Katie  
Lyon, Susan  
Balandin, Hilary  
Johnson and Karen  
Bloomberg

## A Short ISAAC Memory from Long Ago

Melanie Fried-Oken, Portland, Oregon, USA

It's 1984. A newly-formed group of AAC specialists in the United States, organized by **Sarah Blackstone**, is meeting at a hotel in Denver, Colorado. On the marquis of the hotel is a sign:

WELCOME ARGUMENTATIVE COMMUNICATION

To this day, I still laugh when I think of the sign, knowing that everyone at that meeting would argue passionately for AAC and still advocate strongly for people with complex communication needs who use AAC to share their stories and lives with us.

## So Many Tales to Tell

Judy Seligman-Wine, Jerusalem / Karkur, Israel

I find it difficult to separate between my beginnings in Blissymbols and my beginnings in ISAAC. I was working in what was then called the Ontario Crippled Children's Center ( now Bloorview-Macmillan) in Toronto and found myself the SLP on a multidisciplinary team headed by **Shirley McNaughton**. The mandate of the team was to develop a tool for communication for kids at the Center who were non-speaking due to cerebral palsy. We fantasized about developing a logic-based symbol system that could provide a visual language tool and we even started to develop the symbols on our own. We quickly discovered that we could not both develop a comprehensive symbol based language system and provide them as a communication tool to the kids at the same time. A search of the literature indicated that Blissymbolics, a symbol system developed by **Charles Bliss** in Australia, already existed and was well suited to our needs - so we started to work with these and the rest is indeed history.

I wanted to attend the 1973 ASHA (American Speech Language Hearing Association) conference that was to take place in San Francisco (the big attraction) so I submitted an abstract telling about our use of Blissymbols as a communication tool for children with cerebral palsy - and my paper was accepted. So off I went. The conference organizers decided that a paper on this esoteric topic given by an unknown clinician should be delivered in a small lecture room - my strongest recollection of that conference was this small, out of the way room being filled to overflowing with so

many people who were genuinely interested in the challenge of finding a communication solution for this population of children. It was truly overwhelming. In discussions after the delivery of my paper I met so many people who wanted to collaborate with us on this project. And this was 10 years before ISAAC was formed. Shortly afterwards I had the good fortune to meet **Gregg Vanderheiden**, then a young engineering student, when he came to visit our team in Toronto. Gregg had at that time developed a communication device called the autocom - a true precursor to the computer. I truly regard Gregg as the grandfather of AAC and I am lucky to be able to consider him a lifelong friend.

Shortly afterwards I set out to travel the world and ended up living in Israel. I had family in Toronto and was able to travel back and forth and continue my liaison with **Shirley McNaughton** and others working in this area. I attended the second non-speech conference in Toronto in 1982 and was among the group of people - wonderful visionary people from around the world - who met together in a Toronto restaurant for the purpose of defining a new, as yet unnamed, field - this dinner was the precursor to the meeting in 1983 hosted by **John Eulenberg** (one of the greatest dreamers of them all) at the Artificial Language Laboratory in East Lansing Michigan at which the field was named and ISAAC was formed.

For six years I served on the ISAAC Executive Committee (now called the Board) - it was a lot of hard, serious work on a volunteer basis - all of which was offset by the wonderful people I met, all committed to the same cause and with so much to offer. I attended executive committee meetings and biennial conferences in all different parts

of the world and each place held its own special story. **Penny Parnes** who over the years has become one of my dearest friends has written her Tale of the hotel room we shared in Stockholm during the time of her ISAAC presidency.

And then there was the Executive Committee meeting that was held in Asheville, North Carolina hosted by **Caroline Musselwhite**. Caroline had arranged for us to hold our meetings in a lovely Bed and Breakfast in town. We were the only guests and the place was tastefully decorated with a different décor in each bedroom according to the ghost who resided there. Even before we arrived things did not go well – there was an unexpected snow storm and people were delayed. I, who came all the way from Israel, was the first to arrive. **Barry Romich** had to give up his idea of arriving in his private plane and others had to change flight plans. Once we were all together we decided to move around the furniture in the dining room of the B&B so that it would be better suited for a meeting. All went well until the day we were finishing when the young girl who was managing the place in the absence of the owners suddenly panicked at the havoc we had created, with her boss about to come home. In a move of desperation she threw us out of the house and there we were standing on the street with piles of papers in our arms and nowhere to go. We completed our meetings in the departure lounge of the airport, finally ending them as the last two people boarded their planes. I still have a clear visual memory of **Elaine Heaton** from Edmonton, Canada standing on the street desperately hanging on to piles and piles of papers.

Then there is the visual image of **Sarah Blackstone, Liz Baer** (then

the secretary of ISAAC), and myself making up our beds somewhere on the campus of the University of Delaware. And of my sleeping together in one bed with **Arlene Kraat**, then President of ISAAC, in her home on Fire Island in New York. And of **John Costello**, smartly dressed as usual, and **Liz Baer** singing “Edelweiss” in a restaurant in Budapest. The following day John got off a bus wearing shorts and a t-shirt. A woman approached him, clapped her hands, and said “Edelweiss”. And of being entertained before dinner by the Lord of the Manor in the Castle in northern Portugal which is pictured on the labels of the Mateus wine where our Executive committee meetings were held.

And then there was the long weekend in the mountains outside Bordeaux France. Six of us were invited to participate in a weekend work meeting to discuss the agenda for a possible conference on communication for the physically disabled to be held several months on in Paris. Well – the only ones naïve enough to think we were coming to a work meeting were us ISAAC folk. All the rest were European businessmen who had come for a weekend of eat and drink. I was picked up at the airport together with several others by a kamikaze driver – no one believed that we would get to our destination alive! The meeting was held in a castle and participants were billeted in homes in the area. I, along with **John Eulenberg** and **Bob Fawcus**, stayed in a home about an hour’s drive away – a literal Brigadoon – the house disappeared into the fog each evening and reappeared each morning. This was in the mid-eighties and each day on the ride to and back from the meetings **John Eulenberg** would entertain our fellow riders with his latest version of Russian synthesized speech. Each day would pass with excellent food, an

abundance of wine and a little bit of talk – no decisions made, of course – just discussion. On the last day we were taken by minibus to visit some local facilities for persons with disabilities – of course our minibus got stuck in the mud and there we were – us ISAAC folk – pushing it out of the mud. Of course, when the conference was final held, the dates made it impossible for me to attend – **Penny Parnes** who did attend had her wallet stolen from her bag on the Paris Metro! And so many more memorable ISAAC moments that blend into the whole of the ISAAC experience in the early days.

I am a hero worshipper – and I so admired all these outstanding people who were engaged in clinical practice and research in this new field called AAC who I had the opportunity of meeting and interacting with. Quite early on we formed an ISAAC chapter in Israel - and it became a tradition for me to invite very special people working in our field to speak at our annual summer conference, as a result of which the field grew and was always state of the art in Israel. Best of all for me, the visiting lecturers generally stayed with me and my family in our home - my kids met and interacted with some of the top who's who of ISAAC – my husband David was driver, chef and tour guide - with good times had by all.

To me ISAAC is about commitment to a common cause, making a difference in the lives of other people, very special and life-long friendships with other professionals, people who communicate using AAC, developers, and researchers, constant learning to always be on the cutting edge, and an on-going sense of excitement and stimulation as to what is waiting for us around the corner. How lucky I have been!!

## Tales of ISAAC

ISAAC has a 35-year history that started with dedicated professionals, parents, and users and creative encounters. In the early 1980's, two non-speech conferences were held in Toronto, Canada. At the 1982 conference, a meeting was held at an Indian restaurant in Toronto where the idea of forming a new “field” was discussed. At the invitation of Dr. John Eulenberg of the Artificial Language Laboratories in East Lansing, Michigan, USA, a group of international colleagues gathered in May, 1983 and the term Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) was born. A new organization – the International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication was launched. Happy 35th Birthday, ISAAC!

The *Tales of ISAAC* includes memories of the very beginnings of AAC and ISAAC, shared by some of the original Founding Members as well as some ISAAC members from the very early days of this very special organization. The message of commitment and inspiration comes through loud and clear! Come with us for a walk down Memory Lane. We hope you find the journey interesting and even inspiring!

Tales of ISAAC can be downloaded free of charge from the ISAAC website