

LISP – An Historical Reminiscence

By Heather Simmons

Four houses and five jobs ago, and before my hair turned grey, I chaired LISP-SIS (for the first time) from 1993 to 1994. The world was a very different place then. AALL did not have a website as the World-Wide Web was a brand-new idea. I didn't know what Portable Document Format was. I had a rotary-dial phone on my desk. Laptop computers existed, but they were heavy and expensive. Law students had to take notes by hand, but they could get special permission to type their exams. The hot new technology was the CD-ROM. The Law-Lib Listserv (not affiliated with AALL) was our main method of electronic communication.

In those days, the AALL Annual Meeting Program arrived in the mail in print. I fondly remember spending a snowy evening reference shift in February poring over the program descriptions and planning my trip to wherever it was that year. Most of the work of the SISs and Committees was done in person at the annual meeting.

Back then LISP issued a print newsletter that was snail-mailed to our members. As stated in the Fall 1992 newsletter: "Articles written by E-Mail or WP5.1 on 5.25" disks are gratefully received." <https://www.aallnet.org/lispsis/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2018/05/LISPNewsletter-Vol5No1-Fall1992.pdf> (<https://www.aallnet.org/lispsis/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2018/05/LISPNewsletter-Vol5No1-Fall1992.pdf>). I still miss WordPerfect to this day.

My main memory of this LISP Presidency is based entirely on guilt, as I got credit for something I had nothing to do with. LISP had spent a couple of years creating a tri-fold, double-sided brochure called *How to Research a Legal Problem*. The print run was funded by an AALL grant. Lee Warthen chaired the LISP Brochure Committee, and many people contributed to it, but because it was published during my time as Chair, I was the one to benefit from all the publicity. I wish I had kept a copy, but I fear it was lost when my Michigan house basement flooded some years ago. It eventually morphed into our current publication, *How to Research a Legal Problem: A Guide for Non-Lawyers*, which is now six pages long. https://www.aallnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/HowToResearchLegalProblemFinal_032022.pdf (https://www.aallnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/HowToResearchLegalProblemFinal_032022.pdf).

LISP also maintained a Clearing House of print materials to help pro se and self-represented litigants. This work eventually morphed into the 50-State Toolkit collection.

I don't know who came up with the name Legal Information Services to the Public, as it was well established by the time I joined AALL in 1986. The term Access to Justice had not come into common use yet. I'm still convinced that if we had known that phrase, it would have been part of our title.

I've been thinking about what advice I would give to newer members of the profession, and this SIS. Here is a list of the things that worked for me. It boils down to a pretty simple idea: get involved.

1. Show up to things, whether live or virtual.
2. Speak up. Whether in MyCommunities or at meetings. This leads to name recognition within the profession. You don't have to be an expert; every voice and perspective has value.
3. Write a blog post or newsletter article. AALL is always looking for *New Voices* essays.
<https://www.aallnet.org/community/membership/meet-our-members/newvoices/>
(<https://www.aallnet.org/community/membership/meet-our-members/newvoices/>).
4. Get over your fear of public speaking. Or coordinate a program behind the scenes.
5. Volunteer. Start small, at the local or regional level. Every SIS/Committee/Chapter needs help. Contact the chair and ask if there is something you can do to contribute—they will be thrilled to hear from you.
6. Run for office. Nominating committees are always looking for candidates.



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