
Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

With this double issue of *Visitor Behavior*, Volume 12, Numbers 3 and 4, a significant chapter in the relatively short history of the formal study of visitors "in exhibition-type facilities" is coming to a close. If my math is correct, 12 X 4 issues per year is 48 issues, and at what soon became a standard 20-page-per-issue format, we have well over a total of 900 pages of information, ideas, controversies, summaries, reviews, reports, and bibliographies, all related to the study and understanding of what visitors do in museums and related institutions, and why they do it (or don't do it). And this singular achievement has a singular creator — Steve Bitgood. While Steve would be the first to point out that he "got a lot of help from the contributions of countless others," we all know full well that without his dedicated and intelligent editorial guidance, *Visitor Behavior* would simply not have been able to consistently provide such a high level of useful material over a period of 12 long years.

Not only has *Visitor Behavior* given us the "what" of visitor studies in a real-time format, but the "who" as well. A sampling of authors of articles over the years reveals the names of those we recognize along with many others who are not (as yet) "household" names. Steve's editorial posture was eclectic, democratic, and non-authoritarian — could I say that his editorial hand was sure-footed?

I know I speak for the worldwide community of those who are dedicated to the study of visitors and the improvement of the visitor experience when I express my sincere appreciation to Steve for creating this treasure-trove of historically and scientifically invaluable material. It will continue to uniquely serve both practitioners and scholars for many years to come.

Thanks Steve!

Harris H. Shettel
Rockville, MD

VSA

Visitor Studies Association

Yes You Can Go Home Again ... and We Did!

Years ago I read Thomas Wolfe's classic American novels, *Look Homeward Angel* and *You Can't Go Home Again*. Both novels were favorites of mine then, and they still are today. Wolfe successfully caught the bittersweet experience of homecoming. VSA did go home, to Alabama. We were treated to southern hospitality, Birmingham style. We saw familiar faces and experienced a VSA meeting as it has developed over the last ten years. There were also new faces and a sense that changes were coming to VSA. As the incoming president, I will be talking about changes in the months to come. For now, however, I want to talk about homecoming.

There would not have been a Birmingham meeting if it were not for our hosts, Steve Bitgood and Arlene Benefield. I don't just mean they organized and hosted the meeting this year. I mean without them there would be no Visitor Studies Conferences and no Visitor Studies Association. It took a lot of courage ten years ago to host a meeting in Anniston, Alabama devoted to visitor studies. As one who was in attendance at that meeting (I made one of the more ceremonial entrances... a story you will have to get Arlene to tell you) it is exciting to think on all that has transpired in the years since. The cities have slipped by, Dearborn, Washington, D.C., Ottawa, Saint Louis, Albuquerque, Raleigh, Saint Paul, Denver/Estes Park and then Birmingham. Those conferences add up to many different papers, symposia, keynote speakers, and workshops. There were lots of different faces ... but always Steve and Arlene.

We have also had twelve years of *Visitor Behavior* (Number 1, Volume 1 appeared in April, 1986). Added to that are the nine years of Proceedings. There were lots of different authors ... but always Steve and Arlene.

The bittersweet of coming home is to experience the familiar, but to also know that nothing remains the same. Life is always a matter of change. We had a homecoming in Birmingham and we have a heritage as an organization thanks to the work of many. However, right now my thoughts are towards two visionary and dedicated people who made it all possible.

Thank you, Steve and Arlene.

Ross Loomis
President, VSA