

A TRIBUTE TO TERRANCE L. TOMER, CRA, FOPS

Friend, Volunteer, Mentor

October 22, 2004 marked the end of an era for the OPS, an era that showed tremendous growth and maturation of our professional society. It marked the end of 35 years of continuous service by Terry Tomer, a founding member, pioneer and leader in certification and dedicated advocate for ophthalmic photographers world wide. Terry's association with the OPS has been unique in many ways, and his service and influence on the society and its members can perhaps best be appreciated through the perspectives of some of those who have worked with him throughout the years.



Terrance L. Tomer, CRA, FOPS at the OPS Board of Certification (BOC) meeting, March, 2003.

Best Friends

*As told by Johnny Justice, Jr.,
CRA, FOPS*

Born, April 10, 1939, Terry Tomer and his younger sister, Kathy, enjoyed a fairly typical childhood in Monessen, PA, a small steel town southwest of Pittsburgh. His father, William (Bill), was a career steelworker. His mother, Ruth, was a truly beautiful woman who insisted that the children apply themselves at school and in the pursuit of music. Terry was also an accomplished roller skater, practicing seven days a week at the Piggly Wiggly skating rink.

In the summer of 1954, at age 15, he took a part-time job as a pinsetter at Pete's Place, a combination bowling alley and poolroom. As fate would have it, I became a pinsetter a few days later. Re-setting flying pins that have been struck by a fast moving ball was a tough job, and we quickly became best friends, spending our free time shooting pool, bowling and going to the skating rink where he taught me how to roller skate. Little did Terry and I know that those part-time jobs and our resulting close friendship would indirectly lead both of us to inter-connecting careers in photography of the eye.

In 1958, Terry graduated at the head of his class at Monessen's Vocational School. Terry decided that he should try to get into the Army's photography school, for with formal training he would have a much better

chance of finding a position as a medical photographer after his service. He enlisted to insure that he could get in the photography program. It was a prudent move on his part because he did, indeed, receive excellent training in the Army. Starting out as a darkroom technician, he advanced to photographer, working with both motion and still cameras and earning several commendations during his service career.

Terry trained with me at the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute (BPEI) in Miami, in fluorescein angiography and other eye related photographic techniques. In 1965, Terry began his career as a full-time medical photographer in Indianapolis, IN. The equipment that he used during his two and a half years at the university was the Zeiss fundus camera used by Novotny and Alvis when they performed the

first successful fluorescein angiogram on a human subject! Terry made a few improvements to that now famous camera including adding a Bussey fast-recycle unit to the power supply and installing the original Allen dot and improved filters for fluorescein angiography.

In 1968, I resigned my position at Wills Eye Hospital (WEH) in Philadelphia, PA and recommended Terry to be my replacement. Terry then became directly involved in the training of the retinal fellows and the production of multiple scientific publications. In 1969, Terry was appointed Assistant Instructor in Ophthalmology at Temple University and in 1973, as an Instructor. In 1980, he designed the Diagnostic Photography Department for the new Wills Eye Hospital, where he worked for 30 years before his retirement in 1998.

Shortly after returning to the BPEI, I began discussing the idea of establishing a society of medical photographers specializing in photography of the eye with Terry, Earl Choromokos and Don Wong. Lee Allen joined the discussions and with the help of these founders, and especially with the help of my secretary, Jessica (Pixie) Eichrodt, the Ophthalmic Photographers Society (OPS) soon became a reality. At the 1969 ARVO meeting in

Sarasota, Fl., we agreed to refer to our profession as ophthalmic photography and call ourselves ophthalmic photographers. Later that year, during the AAO meeting,



Terry Addressing the OPS Eastern Regional Meeting, 1976.

Table 1. Terry’s OPS Milestones

OPS Founding Member, 1969
OPS Charter Member, 1969
OPS Board of Directors (3 terms), 1972-73, 1977-78, 1979-84
OPS Vice-President, 1975-76
OPS President, 1976-77
OPS Fellow (Founder), 1977
OPS Outstanding Contributions to Ophthalmic Photography Award, 1983
OPS Honorary Life Member, 2004-present

Table 2. Terry’s Contributions to the OPS

Chairman, OPS Instruction Course, 1973-76
Chairman, Constitution and Bylaws Committee, 1975
Chairman, Membership Committee, 1976
Chairman, Certification Committee, 1976
Chairman, CRA Committee, 1983-92
Chairman, Editorial Advisory Committee, 1982-86
Chairman, Honorary Life Committee, 1978-present
Chairman, Board of Certification, 1992-2004

Table 3. OPS Certification Milestones

1979 – First CRA examination held
1988 – Separation of Certification and Education
1989 – OPS/BOC becomes member of NOCA
1989 – COPRA Program introduced
1995 – Formal task analysis performed
1996 – New CRA examination developed
1999 – CRA Program accredited by NCCA
2003 – Digital imaging added to the CRA examination
2004 – New task analysis conducted
2004 – 1327 applicants, 748 successful CRA’s to date

Ogden Frazier’s room at the Palmer House in Chicago was the site of the first official meeting of the Ophthalmic Photographers’ Society. In attendance were; Lee Allen, Earl Choromokos, Ogden Frazier, Roger Lancaster, Yvonne Magli, Mary Mannella, Anna Wiley, Don Wong, Terry, and myself. There is great satisfaction in knowing that the evolution of my career and of the OPS has been shared with my best friend.

OPS Volunteer

As told by Timothy J. Bennett, CRA, FOPS

Following the inaugural meeting in Chicago, Terry took an active and influential role in the development of the Society he helped to found. Early on, he worked mostly behind the scenes, supporting Johnny and others in leading the fledgling professional organization. But after a few years Terry began to seek more demanding and visible positions in the society. His acceptance of these high profile positions coincided with an increasing professional confidence. It took a few years for Terry to escape the long shadow cast by his good friend, Johnny. Terry slowly began to realize that although he was following in his friend’s footsteps, he could never be another “Johnny”. He had to find his own way to make his mark, both professionally at WEH, and within the ranks of the OPS. With this realization his career really began to flourish.

Terry served in many official capacities in the OPS. The list of his contributions and milestones is staggering (Tables 1 and 2). He served a number of terms on the Board of Directors, was Chair of the first OPS Instructional Course, founded the Fellowship Committee, served as OPS Vice President and then President. In short, he served on just about every committee or board during the early formative years of the Society. Despite the high profile nature of all of these accomplishments, he is probably best known for his service as a member and Chairman, of the OPS Board of Certification (BOC).

The Board of Certification accomplished many great things during Terry’s tenure (Table 3). Terry will be the first to tell you that he didn’t accomplish all these things by himself. Over the years there were many members of the BOC who also contributed to the success of certification. His good friends Earl Choromokos CRA, FOPS, Bruce Busse, CRA, FOPS and Mac Timby, CRA, FOPS, all made great contributions as well. Terry often recruited, encouraged and, sometimes, even prodded others into being productive members of the BOC.

In my opinion, Terry’s greatest strength as leader of the BOC was his almost legendary attention to detail. I once had a phone conversation with him regarding the wording on new certificates we were designing for the Certified Ophthalmic Photographer and Retinal Angiographer (COPRA) Program. I sent some draft certificates to Terry that contained the exact wording that had been used on CRA certificates since inception. The plan was for Terry to approve one of the layouts so we could get them



Terry with Don Wong, CRA, FOPS, 1976.

printed and distributed to the waiting successful COPRA certificants. Terry phoned me to discuss the layout, but soon the discussion turned to the wording on the certificates. The certificates had wording that said: "The Ophthalmic Photographers' Society acknowledges that having filled all requirements as set forth by the Board of Certification is hereby declared a Certified Ophthalmic Photographer and Retinal Angiographer". After a brief exchange about the size and format of the layout, Terry asked about the wording. "What do you think about the wording, 'having fulfilled **all** requirements...'? Maybe it should say, 'having fulfilled **the** requirements...'. Or how about, 'having fulfilled **all the** requirements...'. No, maybe it should be, 'having fulfilled **all of the** requirements...'. Then he changed his focus, "What about, 'is hereby **declared**...'? Maybe it should say, 'is hereby **designated**...'. Or how about, 'is hereby **recognized as**...". After talking in circles like this for what seemed like an hour, we settled on the original wording.

Nearly fifteen years later, I still kid Terry about this encounter. Some might call it micromanaging, but in reality, his attention to detail was an asset to the BOC. I am thoroughly convinced that Terry's uncompromising attention to detail led directly to the accreditation of the CRA program by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). For an organization to achieve this prestigious accreditation on the first attempt is almost unheard of in the credentialing community, especially for an organization as small and with such limited financial resources as the OPS! And, it was done almost entirely through the volunteer efforts of OPS members with Terry leading the way. NCCA accreditation is a tribute to the work of Terry and the many volunteers of the OPS and BOC.

Terry continues to use his attention to detail in volunteer efforts today. Upon retirement from WEH, Terry moved to Wilmington, NC, where he now volunteers many hours at a community senior citizens center. Terry is part of a team that provides free income tax preparation service for senior citizens. Even in retirement he continues to volunteer!



Bruce Busse, CRA, FOPS and Terry at their final OPS Board of Certification meeting, October 22, 2004.



Johnny Justice Jr., CRA, FOPS and Terry Tomer, celebrating their joint 60th birthdays.

When Terry retired from the OPS Board of Certification on October 22, 2004, it marked 25 years on the BOC and 35 years of continuous service to the OPS. This longevity is truly amazing. Long after other founding members had retired or stepped away from active service to the OPS, Terry continued to serve. It is clear that no OPS member has given more time, energy, and years of their life, in dedicated service to the Society. He set the standard for volunteerism for our professional society.

Mentor

As told by Paula F. Morris, CRA, FOPS

Terry's legacy isn't necessarily found only in the impressive lists of his personal accomplishments and milestones. His legacy can also be found in the lives and careers he's touched throughout the years. Three imagers come to mind: Dennis Orlock, Bob Curtin and Jamie Nicholl. Each of them has been recognized for their contributions to the profession through their efforts in education, publication and service to the OPS, and each benefited from Terry's tutelage and influence.

Terry has also served as mentor to a number of members who have benefited from his guidance during their service to the OPS. Sandra Anderson, CRA, Peter Hay, CRA, FOPS, Beth Ann Benetz, CRA, Timothy J. Bennett, CRA, FOPS, and myself, all consider Terry an important influence in our careers. "I was fortunate to have a couple of great mentors in my career" says Tim. "Bill Nyberg taught me the skills required to be a competent ophthalmic photographer, but Terry taught me what it takes to be a 'professional'. He encouraged and inspired me to volunteer for the OPS. I can honestly say that if it weren't for Terry's encouragement, I would not be where I am today".

Terry was instrumental in recruiting me to run for the BOC back in 1987. I watched how Terry served on that Board at that time; Earl Choromokos was the Chair, but Terry was the anchor. He was the detail guy; the one who covered all the bases; the answer man. As Terry and I each assumed the duties of Chair of the BOC and BOE respectively, Terry helped me find my way through Board of Directors' meetings, offering historical perspective to how the OPS evolved, and encouragement as the BOE developed its own programs and goals. His dedication and commitment to service was a shining example to me. Ophthalmic photography was Terry's vocation, but serving the OPS and mentoring other photographers was truly his avocation, as it obviously brought him great enjoyment.

Each of us mentored by Terry has made a mark on the profession in our own way, whether as educator, leader in the OPS, quietly working in the background for the our professional society, or through exceptional clinical photography. It is apparent that Terry imparted the wisdom he gained many years ago when he realized that he shouldn't be just like Johnny. He has inspired each of us to make our own unique contributions.
