

The B E L S Letter

Published by the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

August 2008 • No. 39

BELS Members Meeting in Vancouver

By Donna Tilton, ELS, BELS Secretary

The 2008 BELS meeting was held in historic Gastown in Vancouver. Gastown is the oldest part of Vancouver and was settled in the 1860s. It was originally called Gastown after "Gassy Jack" Deighton, who apparently liked to talk a lot (although history could be sanitizing the real reason for his nickname).

We met on the second floor of the Water Street Café, with a wonderful view of the famous steam-powered clock on the corner of Cambie and Water Streets. During our dinner meeting we watched tourists gathering around the clock, waiting for the steam whistles that marked the hour and half hour.

The gathering was small but lively. We enjoyed a good meal and excellent company.

The business part of the evening included our registrar's report. Leslie Neistadt reported



Photos by John Wachter, CPS Media

that 7 BELS examinations were given in the past year, with 68 people taking the test. Excluding the 6 people who had just taken the examination in Vancouver (and thus for whom test results were not available), 40 people passed the test, creating a passing rate of 59%. There are currently 147 candidates eligible to take the examination; upcoming exams are scheduled for Sydney, Princeton, and Louisville.

Treasurer Nancy Wachter gave the treasurer's report. BELS is doing well financially and was able to fund one of the CSE scholarships for editors from developing countries. The new Web site is now running well and we are able to accept membership dues and advertising fees through that site.

Meeting with your fellow BELS members at CSE and AMWA is a wonderful opportunity, and one that should not be missed.



Mary Ann Schmidt, ELS, current BELS President and Norman Grossblatt, ELS(D).

BELS: Is There Life after the Exam?

by E. Ann Donaldson, ELS

Why did you take the BELS exam? Choose one (or more, if applicable):

- My company required it
- My company didn't require it but paid for it
- I was promised a raise (or bonus or flowers or lunch) from my company if I passed this test
- I wanted to impress my employer (or colleagues or friends or family)
- I wanted to put some letters behind my name
- I wanted to see if I could pass the exam
- I wanted to see what the exam was all about
- I like the challenge of tests
- I am thankful there is such a certification program
- I take pride in what I do and am proud to be a member of BELS

Is there indeed life after the BELS exam, for the test-taker and for the organization? What happens in such an esoteric group when the sole purpose is to create/present a test for certification in a specialty? The test-taker pays the fee and, upon successful passing of the exam, becomes a member of BELS, complete with ELS following his or her name. Then what? What is the impetus to keep paying your \$25 annual dues? Or even to attend the annual

meeting? There are no regional divisions with regular meetings wherein members may meet and commiserate. The annual meeting follows that of CSE so if you want to attend the annual meeting of BELS, you must go to wherever CSE is having its annual meeting in order to see your fellow BELSmates. Actually, even if you go to CSE for CSE alone, you're still very likely to see those BELSmates, so why bother to go to the BELS dinner?

There are probably as many different answers to that last question as there are BELS members. Your answer will likely be related to your bullet selection at the beginning of this message. My own answer relates to the last bullet point: I do take pride in what I do and I am proud to be a member of BELS, even though I am unable to get to the annual meetings of late.

Case Report

I took, and passed, the BELS exam in the fall of 1991, the first year it was administered. If I recall, that test was given in Denver. At the time I took the test I was managing editor of *The American Journal of Sports Medicine*. Our staff was a small one, with an M.D. editor (not full time), an administrative assistant, two full-time copy editors, and myself. My favorite

part of my job had always been copy editing, but I'd had to give up most of that when I became managing editor. I made sure I did some of that work, to keep my hand in and to do what I considered the fun part of my job. I joined the staff of that journal (AJSM) in the fall of 1985 when I was hired away from what was then Waverly Press, sort of the printing arm of Williams & Wilkins (now Lippincott W&W; WP was sold to Cadmus and is no longer its own entity) to become copy editor for AJSM, which was getting ready to self-publish. I was responsible for training other copy editors that eventually joined our staff. I had the good fortune of becoming employed by WP in 1982, in the days when it had a large redactory and neophytes went through a training period before being assigned to a journal.

So, from redactor to copy editor/advertising coordinator (my degree is in advertising; don't ask) to managing editor in 1982, 1985, 1989, respectively. Then we moved office from Columbus, Georgia, to Boston at the end of 1990 (Thanksgiving week, to be specific). It was in that location that I had to forego most of my copy editing responsibilities because I had to take on more management responsibilities. But I did not

give up my love for that part of the job! When I learned about the BELS exam I thought it was a wonderful thing and wanted to put my own experience to the test. When I received word that I had passed the exam, my life did not change in any way. My editor congratulated me, as did the staff. My family and friends (who really didn't know what it was all about or why I was so taken with the strange letters behind my name on my business cards) thought it was nice, especially if it made me so happy. But I was very proud of myself. I knew the grueling three hours I'd spent at that test location trying to remember everything I'd ever encountered in this business. I was proud to be able to say I was among an elite few (particularly few in those early days of the organization just beginning to do its thing!) who had proved herself worthy of calling herself a certified editor in the life sciences. I am also proud that today this number has enlarged and the organization is widely known and respected.

I did not, as some places do, *require* that our copy editors take the BELS exam and gain certification, but I am very happy that most of them did. And I made sure there was some recognition for that accomplishment. After all, for those of us in this business, it is indeed a wonderful accomplishment, although I have come to realize that not all BELS members necessarily share this feeling.

My life is now changed. I lost that managing editor job at the end of 2003. Since then I have been self-employed as a freelance medical editor (with the exception of a couple of totally nonmedical-related clients that help me see how much more comfortable I am in my chosen field!). My former employer/journal used to pay my expenses when I attended the annual meetings of AMWA and CSE/BELS. These are important groups for those of us in this field and I greatly appreciated their acknowledgment of this fact by their support of staff attendance at these educational-

enrichment—and opportunity for colleague interaction/networking/socializing—occasions. However, now that I am self-employed I find it difficult financially to attend the annual meetings. But I will not give up my membership in BELS because I believe in what the organization stands for; I believe that a certification group enhances all of us.

For those of you who took the BELS exam for any of the reasons listed in the top bullets at the beginning of this message, remember that there *is* life for you after the exam—and sometimes a far better one, from what I understand—but the life of the organization depends on your support of it. Pay your dues; the rate is a fantastic deal these days. Encourage coworkers to take the exam. If you can, attend the meetings to meet and get to know your BELSmates; there are some wonderful folks in this group. Wave the flag. Take pride in your accomplishment, for it is truly that.

Nota Bene

Patricia D. Wolf, PhD, ELS, is now Assistant Dean of Graduate Business and Internship Programs at Shippensburg University, in Shippensburg, PA. She lives in Chambersburg, PA.

Robert E. Johnson, ELS, was the manuscript editor for an about-to-be-released (August 31) book: *Is It You, Me, or Adult A.D.D.? Stopping the Roller Coaster When Someone You Love Has Attention Deficit Disorder* (1201 Alarm Press, San Francisco).

Gayle Nicholas Scott, PharmD, BCPS, ELS, recently started a new job as a medical writer at Envision Pharma in Southport, CT. Gayle lives in Virginia and is a 100% telecommuter, and she loves it!

Ann Conti Morcos, MA, ELS is writing a book on eating disorders for a New York publisher. It is one volume of a six-part library series on health for teens.

Claire Leving, MS, ELS, has been promoted to Manager of Editorial Services for the Department of Anesthesiology & Critical Care Medicine at Johns Hopkins University.

BELS Members Recommend

Kim Berman, ELS

The Most Secret Quintessence of Life: Sex, Glands, and Hormones, 1850-1950, by Chandak Sengoopta, 2006 (University of Chicago Press).

Coming from a clinical science background focusing on reproductive physiology, I am finding this book absolutely amazing, both in scope (presenting a discussion of how the notion of sex hormones changed how scientists thought of the workings of the human body) and in depth (lots of case studies from around the world). This is a very accessible book for both the specialist and general science reader.

Annie Almstedt, MA, ELS

The deliberate dumbing down of America: A chronological paper trail, by Charlotte Thomson Iserbyt

Just an amazing book; if you have school-aged children, gosh, it's worth a read! I wouldn't say it's completely "just for fun" for me, as I'm a parent and am interested in "education" in general. "Schooling" for us (say, those of us born before 1970) was quite different than it is for today's children, especially in public school systems; although certain paths had been started many years before 1970, with the

public school concept in general, the last 30+ years have seen more radical changes. Very interesting – definitely worth my time!

Devora Krischer, ELS

The Great Influenza, by John M. Barry

This book is about the influenza epidemic of 1918. That's the year both of my parents were born, so I have a personal interest in that time. The book is so well written that it's a joy to read, and the possibility of a coming avian flu pandemic makes the topic relevant today.

The Pacific and Other Stories, by Mark Helprin

A work of his that I happened upon recently, it was so stunning that I had to read each story separately and then put the book down to absorb its impact. He is a superb literary stylist as well. I have also just finished his most recent novel, *Freddy and Fredericka*, a wry, funny, erudite picaresque look at British royalty and American democracy. A "fun" book indeed.

Christina Stile, ELS

Fermin: Adventures of a Metropolitan Lowlife, by Sam Savage

This odd tale about a rat who learns to read and spends his days living in the basement of a book store is quite fun. It's heart-warming to read about someone – and I use the term loosely – learning to enjoy what he is reading and take it into himself. That he is a rat is probably a reflection on bibliophiles, but I didn't take it personally. An interesting yarn, to be sure.

The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic--and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World, by Steven Johnson

My background is in biology and writing, but I've been working in public health for nearly a decade. This is the first book I've read that combines all of these specialties into one great read. If you can get past the descriptions of cholera, which even for a masterful author is still not a "pretty" subject, the tale is richly told and entertaining, especially from a solving-the-puzzle perspective. The story and the context are not only relevant for the 1800s, but also for today, as we are faced with one "epidemic" after another.

Jan Jerrells, AA, RN, BA, ELS

THE BLOOD NOTES OF PETER MALLOW, by Paul Boor, MD

This is the debut novel of Paul Boor, MD, of Galveston Island, Texas!—friend; physician, researcher, and teacher; Harvard-trained pathologist and toxicologist; already accomplished and published author of more than 100 poems (since 1976) and short stories (since 1990); self-taught and accomplished fiddle, guitar, and mandolin player; home brewer; and chef (to name a few areas of expertise and interest).

As noted by Jonathan Handel

(Marketing and Publicity, SterlingHouse Publisher, Inc.), "Dr. Paul Boor brings something unique to [this] biomedical thriller—a lifetime's experience as an accomplished scientist. He understands the inner workings of laboratories, the quirky people who inhabit them, and where the dangers lie. *THE BLOOD NOTES OF PETER MALLOW* is not science fiction—it's a real-science thriller, told by a card-carrying scientist."

And, did I mention two other novels are nearing completion as we speak? As gleaned from Dr. Boor's website biography, "*THE ICE MERCHANT*, set in 1890s Galveston, is a tale of trafficking

in body parts, and the discovery of a cure for yellow fever. In ... *BIOPSY*, a young Boston pathologist uncovers a heinous assassination plot that involves Harvard professors, a deadly worm, and a blowgun. These upcoming Novels were 1st-place winners in the 2007 Texas Writers' League Novel Contest, in separate Historical and Thriller categories. This is a feat never before accomplished in the League's twenty-six-year history."



Marketing BELS

At its May meeting, the BELS Executive Council voted to direct some serious energy toward marketing and communicating the organization's mission—to provide editors a way to demonstrate their skills, to provide employers a way to identify those editors, and to establish the standard for life science editing. The BELS Web site (www.bels.org) has been spruced up and is open and ready for visitors. We would like to find a member or two (or three) interested in developing a bold, creative, and aggressive marketing/communication plan, one that reaches far and wide to editors and employers alike. President-elect Carol Kakalec Kohn will work with you and will be Council liaison. Carol sees this as a critical project for BELS, one that she has committed to continue into her presidency.

Does this challenge interest you? Is it even a little bit intriguing? Help us communicate BELS's reputation nationally and internationally. Help us help each other be recognized. Help us hold BELS certification as the standard to which life science editors aspire.

Contact Carol Kakalec Kohn (ckkohn@intrex.net) by e-mail so we can get started!

BELS Welcomes Our Newest Members !

Exam #91

July 13, 2007

North Wales, PA

**Barclay Cunningham ELS
(2007)**

Lansdale, PA

Susan C. Short ELS (2007)

Drexel Hill, PA

**Michelle A. Steigerwald ELS
(2007)**

West Chester, PA

Exam #92

July 14, 2007

Boston, MA

**Samantha Cappuccino ELS
(2007)**

Summit, NJ

**Alexis Khalil (MPH) ELS
(2007)**

Cambridge, MA

**Ravishankar Murugesan ELS
(2007)**

Madison, WI

Daisy Ouya (MS) ELS (2007)

Nairobi, Kenya

**Hilary Selby Polk, MA, ELS
(2007)**

Reading, MA

Stacey A. Wasta ELS (2007)

Beverly, NJ

Exam #93

October 10, 2007

Atlanta, GA

Jean S. Cain ELS (2007)

Roselle, IL

Lyn Camire, MA, ELS (2007)

Baltimore, MD

**Svetlana Dominguez ELS
(2007)**

Indianapolis, IN

Adi Ferrara ELS (2007)

Bellevue, WA

**Michael W. Friedman, MS,
ELS (2007)**

Chapel Hill, NC

**Ann Ryan Griswold, PhD,
ELS (2007)**

Gainesville, FL

**Monica McGee, MS, ELS
(2007)**

Wilmington, NC

**Kimberly McGhee, PhD,
ELS (2007)**

Rochester, MN

**Karen C. Moreau, MS, MD,
ELS (2007)**

Cary, NC

**Sharon Muldoon, PhD, ELS
(2007)**

Bozeman, MT

**Leslie Orfuss Tepper ELS
(2007)**

New York, NY

**April Reynolds, MS, ELS
(2007)**

Philadelphia, PA

**Kathleen Richter, MFA, MS,
ELS (2007)**

Allen, TX

**Joanne Rosenberg, MS, ELS
(2007)**

Highland Park, NJ

Peter D. Spain ELS (2007)

Fairfield, CT

**Kelli A. Miller Stacy ELS
(2007)**

Canton, GA

**Wendell Valdecantos, MD,
ELS (2007)**

Arlington Heights, IL

**Catherine M. Wernette, PhD,
ELS (2007)**

Auburn, AL

**Anne Wolka, PhD, ELS
(2007)**

Indianapolis, IN

Exam #94
February 29, 2008
 Orlando, FL

Anne B. Giordani, PhD, ELS
 (2007)
 Ann Arbor, MI

Exam #95
March 30, 2008
 Pacific Grove, CA

Virginia Julian, MD, ELS
 (2008)
 Irvine, CA

Diane Lattanzio, MPH, ELS
 (2008)
 Mountain View, CA

Carl Richmond ELS (2008)
 Pacific Grove, CA

Exam #96
May 2, 2008
 Chapel Hill, NC

Margaret Brenner, PhD, ELS
 (2008)
 Little Rock, AR

Ashley Collinsworth ELS
 (2008)
 Dallas, TX

Briget da Graca, MS, ELS
 (2008)
 Dallas, TX

Patricia A. Ennis ELS (2008)
 Wilmington, NC

Diane Feldman ELS (2008)
 Chapel Hill, NC

Janeen Free-McKee ELS
 (2008)
 Wilmington, NC

Robert Lande ELS (2008)
 Columbia, MD

Adele C. Monroe, DVM,
MSPH, ELS (2008)
 Durham, NC

Exam #97
May 17, 2008
 Vancouver, BC

Misty R. Bailey, MA, ELS
 (2008)
 Rutledge, TN

Steve Crow, MS, ELS (2008)
 Colorado Springs, CO

Sarah Howe, MA, ELS (2008)
 Burlington, VT

Areti Malapetsas ELS (2008)
 Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Karen R. Müller, PhD, ELS
 (2008)
 Silver Spring, MD

Share Your Thoughts on the BELS Listserv

The BELS listserv is one of the “supporting” member benefits and we are happy to see members use it for their grammar, writing ethics questions, and editing challenges.

Guidelines for use are as follows:

“The BELS listserv is

available to allow e-mail communication and an exchange of ideas between BELS members. Listserv access is restricted to supporting BELS members (i.e., dues-paying members of BELS) only. Postings are not to be distributed/shared outside the listserv community. E-mail postings on the BELS listserv must be related to our focus (i.e., editing). Listserv e-mail postings must not be promotional or commercial in nature, and they cannot

include employment or freelance opportunities. Inappropriate language and personal attacks are not allowed. Violations of these simple guidelines will result in removal from the BELS listserv. Please keep in mind that every posting you make to the listserv will appear as an e-mail for every subscriber to the list.”



Upcoming BELS Exams

Date	Location	Meeting	Register by
October 2, 2008	Bridgewater, New Jersey		September 13, 2008
October 22, 2008	Louisville, Kentucky	AMWA	October 1, 2008
November 15, 2008	Mumbai, India		July 15, 2008
November 16	Mumbai, India		July 15, 2008
May 2009	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	CSE	TBA
October 21, 2009	Dallas, Texas	AMWA	September 30, 2009
September 17, 2009	Pisa, Italy	EASE	August 27, 2009

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