

Interview



ICG's Lifetime Achievement Award

Carole Parker*

with Kevin Roche*, Betsy Delaney*, and Bruce & Dana MacDermott*

The Lifetime Achievement Award is the highest honor conferred by the International Costumers' Guild. Four Silicon Web Costumers' Guild recipients offer their perspectives on what it means.

The Lifetime Achievement Award (LAA) recognizes, "a body of achievement in the costuming art and service to the costuming community." Candidates for the award have:

- been active in the costuming community for at least 10 years.
- achieved significant recognition for their costuming skills, which may be in the form of but not restricted to competitive awards, professional accomplishments, teaching of skills, and/or media recognition.
- made significant contributions in service to the costuming community.

The [International Costumers' Guild](#) (ICG) Board of Directors presents this award no more frequently than once per year. Any member or chapter may nominate a candidate. Chapter presidents and ICG

officers vote on candidates, and a majority of votes determines the winner. The results are kept secret until the award is presented at Costume-Con.

Photos and profiles of the twenty six people who have received this award since it's inception in 1990 are featured on the [LAA page](#) of the ICG website.

Four talented members of the Silicon Web Costumers' Guild (SiW) have received the LAA. The first was Kevin Roche in 2007. According to his citation:



Kevin Roche, 2007.
Photo by Richard Man.

This year we honor another of our founders who was there at the very beginning and has continued to serve the ICG ever since. That continuing service includes working behind the scenes, doing outreach to other communities, letting us know about these other communities, working on the ICG Fairness Guidelines Committee, and having parties to promote costuming.

In 1982, he was already a well-known costumer, and he seemed godlike to some of us newbies. Not that he asked to be considered that way: he's down-to-earth and

very willing to answer questions. Where others would roll their eyes at some questions, Kevin was always patient with newbies who didn't quite get "it."

The second SiW member to receive an LAA was Betsy Marks Delaney in 2008. According to her citation:



Betsy Marks Delaney.
2008. Photo by John Upton.

Betsy has been supporting costuming since 1985, before the ICG was formed. She filled several positions within the ICG board as well as serving as an officer for three different chapters. The two biggest items of note were launching the ICG newsletter, and creation and maintenance of the Costume-Con website with its gallery of costume history.

Betsy held true to form by being one of SiW's earliest vice presidents and a very strong voice for opening up the ICG board of directors list to the membership. She pushed for ideas that others did not, so she's a bit of a risk-taker when she believes strongly in something.

The third and fourth SiW members to receive an LAA were Bruce and Dana MacDermott in 2009. According to their citations:

Long time costumers, Bruce and Dana



Bruce and Dana MacDermott, 2009. Photo by Richard Man, ConJose, 2004.

specialize in aliens and other bizarre creatures. Together they have helped form two chapters of the ICG,

and have served multiple terms as ICG officers. Bruce brought the ICG finances into a professional accounting program. They've also been active panel participants, masquerade judges, and have served on the staffs of several Costume-Cons.

SiW was one of the chapters that Bruce and Dana helped start. They have both remained active with the chapter. In their costuming, the two of them generally work as a team. Their usual division of labor is that Bruce sews and does the engineering, while Dana designs, does crafts, handwork and fabric manipulation.

I recently conducted a virtual interview with our four LAA recipients, and asked them the questions that most everyone would like to ask if they had the chance.

When did you realize you were a costumer?

Kevin: I've been making and wearing



Kevin -- Spectral Sorcerer. Photo by Frank Schellenberg.

costumes since I was eight years old. My parents always encouraged making our own costumes, however simple, over store-bought costumes. I really started to get more serious about it in high school.

Betsy: Holy cow, that's hard to answer! I started sketching costumes (princess dresses, mostly) when I was in fourth grade or so. I received a sewing machine in 1972 (at the tender age of 9), but didn't understand how to use it until MUCH later.

My high school Halloween costumes



Betsy -- Dark Elf. Costume-Con 3, 1985.

were "out there." One year I went as a "Pink Lady" (the cocktail, not the character from Grease). My senior year I dressed as a character in the novel I've been working on since then. I called it an *extraterrestrial* before the movie *ET* came out. Had to explain to everyone what it meant.

I didn't start making costumes for competition until my senior year of college, in 1985. Carol Salemi gets the credit for introducing me to the world of sci-fi costuming. I attended my second Balticon, entered my first masquerade and won Best Novice that year (BaltiCon 19), graduated, then came back down to Maryland for Costume-Con 3. The rest is history.

Dana and Bruce: I have played with costumes from the time I began costuming my kid brother for Halloween, which puts it back to when I was about 14; approximately 50 years ago. (Gasp!) And I put together costumes whenever there was an occasion from then on.

It wasn't until the early 1980's that I discovered there were consistent venues for which to do this. It was only a couple of years after Bruce and I began to attend Cons that I



Dana - First competition costume. Westercon 36, 1983.

returned to school for my Master's in Costume Design. This made me a professional, although I have never made much money at it.

Actually, this might be the wrong question. I think that the personal revelation was to accept that I might consider myself an artist. Sometimes, I still have difficulty with this. The traditional concept of an artist is someone who works alone in a studio and turns out work solely conceived of and executed by themselves. As someone who enlists others to assist bring into reality the concepts that have been lurking in my mind, I do not fit that mold.

Additionally, my art form is ephemeral, including the presentation (part of the concept). My image of an artist seems to include the resulting thing to hang on a wall, or display.

Bruce was taught how to sew by his mother, Bea.



Bruce – Humpty-Dumpty as done by Yves St. Laurent (one of six in a group entry) in *Off the Wall*, Costume-Con 9, 1991.

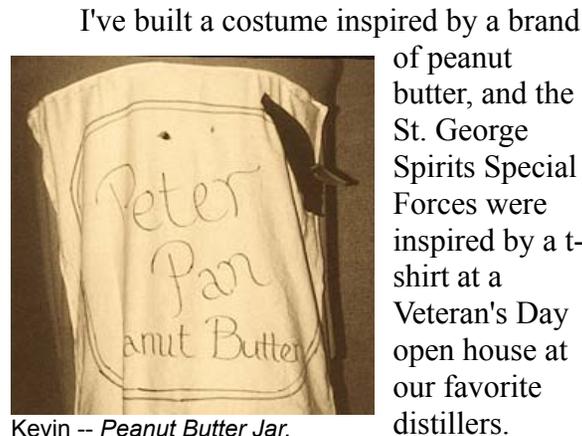
She worked with him to make a dress shirt while he was in grammar school. Bruce also remembers making his own costumes for Halloween, including a robot from a cardboard box and aluminum foil.

His first major costume was for the Bicentennial (1976) where he took a Simplicity Uncle Sam pattern and further complicated it by making the vest reversible and improvising welt pockets. He considers himself the engineer of our team, and is still unsure of being a "Costumer."

He does admit he loves doing it, solving the inherent problems, participating in the community and wearing costumes. I keep telling him neither of us can do this alone. It's a team, guys. So, maybe the two of us make one costumer/artist.

Where do you find your costuming inspiration?

Kevin: Everywhere! Books, films, art, sometimes just a piece of fabric. I'll also admit to an overgrown sense of mischief: school costumes deliberately pervert the theme of a "spirit day" -- a costume that was a giant top hat for Mad Hatter day, or a giant Smiley button (complete with bent coat-hanger safety pin back) for Crazy Button and Tie day.



Kevin -- Peanut Butter Jar.

I've built a costume inspired by a brand of peanut butter, and the St. George Spirits Special Forces were inspired by a t-shirt at a Veteran's Day open house at our favorite distillers.

Betsy: All over the place. Sometimes it's the fabric. Sometimes it's the music. Twice it was my book. (The Creation of Agalla, at CC11 is the creation myth from the novel. Of course, I didn't say that during the competition. I took Best Journeyman with that one.)

Dana and Bruce: Everywhere and anywhere.

Usually, something gets me thinking and images and concepts percolate up from the odd recesses of my mind. I do whatever research I need, mostly building up the relevant visual vocabulary and once I have enough to go on, we have to determine how to proceed. I find I interact with the materials, have a sort of a dialog with them as I learn how to use them, trying things and compromising with them when I begin to understand how they want to work. I leave the fine sewing to Bruce, and do everything that is more free form. My inability to draw a finished product drives Bruce crazy sometimes.

What appeals to you about costuming?



Betsy – *The Creation of Agalla*, Costume-Con 11. Photo by John Upton.



Sentient Species, ConJose (WorldCon, 2002). All but the human were designed and primarily created by Bruce and Dana.

Kevin: Several things... one is the ability to make a bit of fantasy or art come to life in three dimensions, and by so doing, to draw the audience/onlookers/passersby into that artistic vision with you.

Another is the opportunity to explore and indulge in a style that is not appropriate in my everyday work life. And sometimes, I just feel like dressing up.

Betsy: The art of costume gives me a place to try out techniques, for good or ill. There's also the opportunity to act (however briefly) as well. I've got the acting bug, but am terrified of learning lines. The no-microphone rule has been my friend for years.

Dana and Bruce: The best and worst part of costuming is the constant dabbling with new and varied materials as we try to get an approximation of the ideas bubbling in my head. Best, because it is a constant discovery, and I get to try so many things.

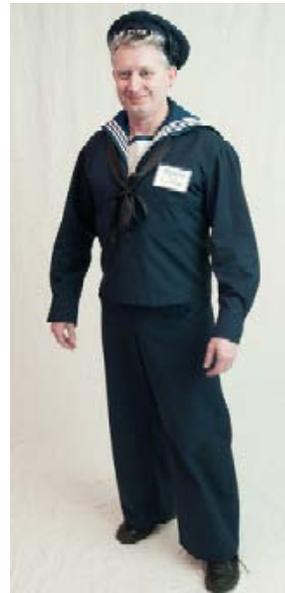
Worst, because I never get really good at anything.

I go to craft shows and look at the wonderful work by the artists, and despair because I have never concentrated fully on one set of materials, and have nothing that can be sold or traded for the things I would love to have in my life. For Bruce, the best is the satisfaction he gets from solving a design problem and seeing the results. The

worst is the arguing that comes from our different approaches to accomplish a given goal.

What was your reaction to receiving your Lifetime Achievement Award (LAA)?

Kevin: I was very pleased. I can't say that I was completely surprised, as folks had told me they'd started suggesting me as a possible recipient a couple years earlier, but I had no idea that I would receive it that year. I suddenly felt like Sally Fields in her "You really like me!" Oscar speech.



Kevin – Costume-Con 28
Photo by Andy Trembley.

Betsy: There are still so many folks whose service has gone unrecognized. I was (and am) honored to be a part of the growing list of folks who have worked so hard to create the art form. I'm also proud to say that the work I've done has a shot at outliving me.

I have my mother and grandmother to thank for inspiring me to do what I do, Carol for getting me into it in the first place, and any number of people for thinking the work I've done was worthy of recognition.

Dana and Bruce: We were amazed. I had hoped that someday we would be recognized this way, but I thought we weren't ...how can I say this... politically acceptable.

Service to the costuming community is one of the criteria for an LAA. What would you suggest to others on how they could serve the costuming community?

Kevin: Share what you've learned, but don't be a diva. Pitch in and help with events, especially new events, leading by



Betsy – Turnabout. Costume-Con 27. Photo by Andy Trembley.

example rather than by lecturing, so groups new to costuming (and especially costume competition production) can see the value of the lessons we've learned over the last 30 years. Nothing works like success, so helping someone do something successfully goes light years further than telling them the "right way."

Betsy: See a need and fill it. That's what I've done over the last 24 years. Volunteer. It's what's needed most!

Dana and Bruce: The costuming



Bruce & Dana – Alien and Space Port Worker. British Airways Ride the Rocket Competition, 1998.

community is of major importance to us. It just figures that having learned so much from everyone, we should participate whenever we can in sharing what we have learned in panels and in talking with people. We

also work backstage a lot, when we are not in a masquerade.

We have some skills other than costuming we can share. Bruce has his MBA, and has been active in professional

organizations, so being treasurer for the chapters and for the ICG made sense.

I have a theatre background and some organizational skills, so helping run parts of cons made sense for me. We had a terrible time finding an ICG chapter where we felt at home, so working with others to create chapters felt logical. I edited the newsletter for a long time, as I write fairly well, and know Photoshop. I really enjoyed doing it.

Everyone has skills. It depends on what you can do to help. We considered putting together a bid to run a Costume-Con, but after seeing the toll it took on people we respected, seeing them become hurt, angry and even deeply irrational at times, we concluded that we were better off working on a lower level.

Was any one particular costumer an inspiration or mentor to you?

Kevin: Adrienne Martine-Barnes sat me down after my entry crashed and burned at the Phoenix Westercon in 1982, to say that she really liked my costume, but would I take some constructive criticism on the entry?



Kevin -- *Icarian Pilot*. Westercon 35, 1982. Photo by Frank Schellenberg.

"Auntie" Adrienne gave me some very good guidance not only on costuming but on life as well. This was all happening for me when "costuming became sentient," as the tradition has it.

Betsy: My introduction to the costuming world came from Carol Salemi, who I met while I was at SUNY New Paltz in between my junior and senior year there. Without her guidance, I would not have entered at Balticon 19, and I probably would not have met Marty Gear or the rest of the GCFCG. I attended CC3 with Carol.

Dana and Bruce: Inspiration, yes; mentor, no. We certainly got excited and inspired by many people's work. Jacqui Ward comes to mind immediately. Her work in fabric treatment is amazing, and is museum quality. I wish I could do what she does. Animal X's theatricality got me thinking, too. I have seen costumes that set my mind off many times; often I do not know the people who created the pieces. We learn from everyone.

Were there other costumers who encouraged or inspired you along the way?

Kevin: Adrian Butterfield and Victoria Ridenour, Karen and Kelly Turner (she is now Karen Dick), Rusty and Diane Dawe, Janet Wilson-Anderson, Bjo Trimble, Julian May, Kathy and Drew Sanders, Jennifer Tiff, Sally Fink, Adrienne Martine-Barnes, to name a few.

Betsy: I already mentioned Carol. Amanda Allen, Marty and Bobby Gear,

Pierre and Sandy Pettinger, Janet Wilson Anderson, Karen and Ricky Dick, Bruce and Nora Mai...so many people. Honestly, it's hard to say whether it was encouragement or the inspiration that made more of a difference. I've lost count at this point.

Dana and Bruce: I can't think of anyone who specifically encouraged us. I guess the positive reaction to our costumes certainly helped, but there really was no one who sat down and talked with us or provided constructive criticism.

What do you see as some of the trends and future developments in costuming?

Kevin: With the growing "maker" culture, we're going to see more people having fun making and assembling things; Steampunk costume trend is a reflection of that.



Kevin -- *Earth Magic*. WorldCon 1987.

I'd like to see the balkanization of fan costuming (the multiple costume tracks at Dragon*Con that ignore each other, for instance) decrease, but that depends on efforts of folks like us whose

costuming interests cross over beyond a single idea.

More really interesting applications of high technology will manifest in costuming, as the tools and materials become available to the home and hobby market. Sound, animatronics and illumination will continue to become more prevalent

Betsy: Unknown. There's a lot of creativity out there, with the Steampunk crowd, Anime, and more. Who knows where it will all lead? The most effective and beautiful costumes, though, will be ones that don't lose touch with the human form.



Betsy -- *Reality Bites*. Costume-Con 13, 1995.

Dana and Bruce: Hopefully, lots of surprises. This was not just a toss off answer. The only prognostications I am willing to make are fairly obvious.

Historical is historical. Hopefully, more attention will be paid to non-European garments and cultures, but I don't expect the largely Euro-centric focus to change.

Fantasy and Science Fiction costuming will use whatever new technologies and materials become available. I suspect there will be a lot in lighting effects. Whatever new big films or SF TV shows come out, there will be costumes from those. A number of long braids with wiggly translucent

tentacles in the near future, but there aren't very many of us who have the Pandora body type, so I expect it mainly in hall costumes, or silly puns or take offs.

We will continue to draw our most creative new participants from anime.

What I anticipate most is that there will be surprises:

new ideas, new techniques, new styles, new people. Creativity is surprising by definition. The constant flow of the unexpected is exactly why we specified in the guidelines that, "excellence



Dana -- *Cublings' Pageant*, Westercon 39, 1986.

deserves recognition." We expect not to know what is coming, and we cannot impose categories of awards in advance because we await the unanticipated - enthusiastically.

What do you think makes for a successful masquerade presentation?

Kevin: I've boiled my approach to presentation down to a very simple idea: sell your story to the audience. By "sell" I mean have the story or central idea of your costume in mind when you take it on stage, and let that inform the way you move it across the stage. Show off the costume, and let that story show *through* while you are doing it, to evoke a response from the

audience -- whether it's snickers, guffaws, astonishment, sighs, or groans. I find that basic goal informs my presentation designs far more reliably than complicated choreography or narration.

Betsy: The KISS principle, applied with skill, works wonders. So does a sense of drama. And humor.

Dana and Bruce: The most successful presentation has elegant simplicity. It is well timed, with new revelations every 15 to 20 seconds. It does not have intricate story line, or plot. It uses the fewest number of words possible to get the point across. It creates a mood consistent with the costume(s). I have called it a theatrical vignette. There are other excellent and appropriate types of presentation. The style I describe is what we generally aspire to.

What advice would you like to offer to costumers reading this article?



Kevin – *Tutbuck's*. 2009.
Photo by Jean Martin.

Kevin: Have fun! Make your costumes and show them off because you want to make them, not because you want to win a prize. Go places in costume where your presence makes the world a brighter place (that's how our SGSSF uniforms were born).

When you're in costume, remember to let other people have a chance to star as well. Don't be a diva, don't be afraid to try new things, and don't be afraid to fail. (Wait. This sounds like a commencement speech.)

Betsy: I've spent years dispensing advice. I've kind of run out lately. If you've got questions, ask. I might even be able to answer them.

Dana and Bruce: Develop your own style. Share. Talk to people.

Many new costumers are afraid to approach "big-name" costumers for help or advice. What would you say to them?

Kevin: Don't be afraid, but be polite. Pick an appropriate time to ask -- not backstage during a masquerade when stress levels are high, or when they are deep in conversation with someone else. Catch them after a panel, or when they are wandering around the event. If they are too busy, don't take offense, presume that they actually *are* too busy. Ask if there's another time you could chat. Basic courtesy goes a long way.

Oh, and because I have this problem -- don't be upset if they don't remember your name! I have a terrible time attaching names to faces (even at work, it can take me six months to get a new co-worker's name right), especially in crowded places.

And one simple practical suggestion for new costumers: buy a portable steamer! I've seen lots of costumes made (for budget reasons) out of inexpensive fabric that crushed down in transit. A few minutes with

a steamer will let all the good aspects of your work shine again so we can see them.

Betsy: Don't be afraid to ask. The only stupid question is the one you don't ask.

Dana and Bruce: Fear not. We all started from the beginning. We may have just been doing it longer. If you approach someone for advice, it helps to have a question that is answerable and appropriate to the person who you are asking.

Ask people how they did something, or just chat. As is always the case, some

people are more communicative than others. Please feel free to approach us. We love getting to know new people. We have ended up working with people that asked for suggestions, and learned a great deal.

Thank you Kevin, Betsy, Dana, and Bruce for sharing your thoughts about costuming and the ICG LAA with us.

Carole Parker is an amateur costumer and fabric experimenter with special interests in textiles, dyeing, and wearable art. Visit her [web site](#) for costuming tips.



Dana & Bruce -- *Your Ancestors*.
Costume-Con 6, 1988.