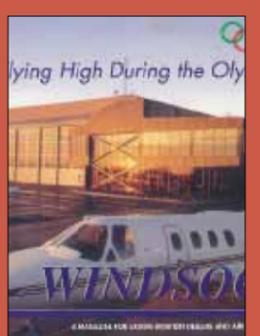
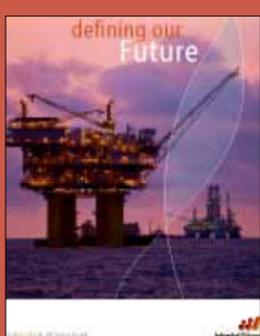
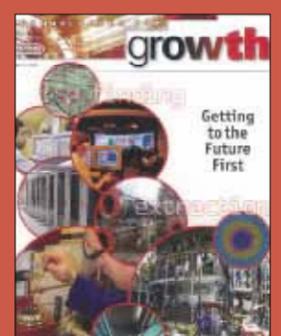
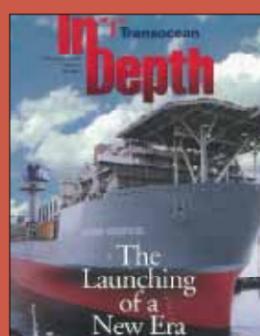
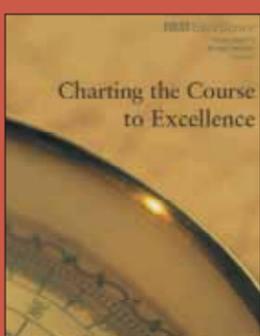
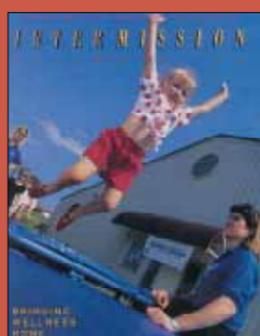
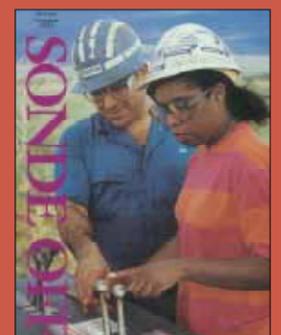
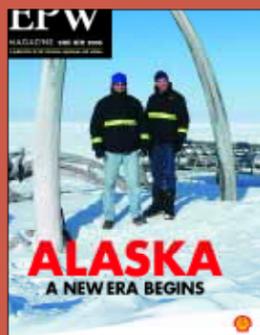
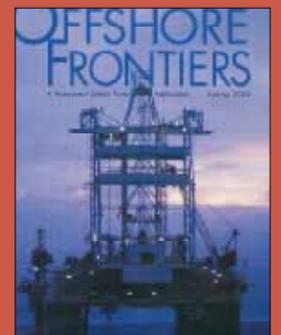
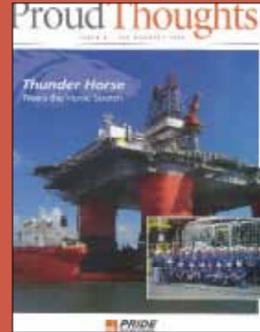
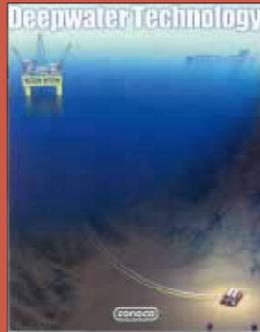
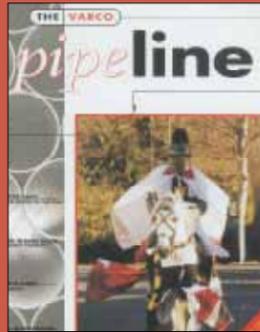
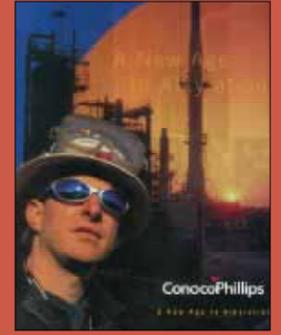
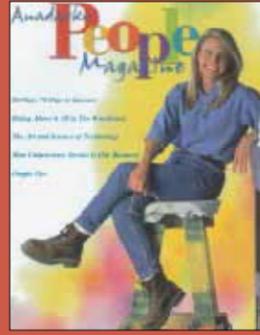
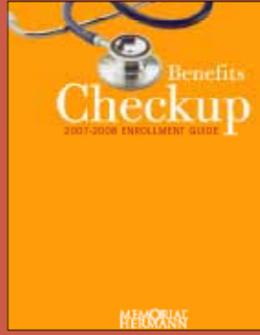
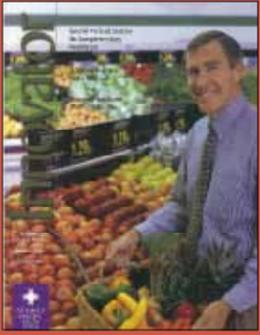


# “TORMA TIMES”

Torma Communications...the writing team for Houston businesses since 1983

2008 Issue



# 25 YEARS

Thanks, Houston!

# Thanks, Houston, for 25 Fantastic Years!

By Tracy Torma

**T**wenty-five years. I really can't tell you where all the time has gone. I guess this lends credence to the old saying about time flying when you're having fun. It may be hokie, but it's true! That's the main thing I love about my job – it's fun. I get to work with some of the best communications professionals in the industry. I meet interesting people and relish learning new things – from heart surgery to drilling

for oil! In thinking back over my 32-year career – the past 25 with Torma Communications – I've come up with my Top 10 most memorable assignments (not in any particular order). The clients I mention (along with countless others) have made my career truly exciting, and I'm proud to call many of you good friends. After all, in the end, it's the relationships that make my job so enjoyable. Thanks again to all of you!

1

My first job after graduating from the University of Texas at Austin with a journalism degree was as a newspaper reporter for the *Longview Morning Journal* in my native northeast Texas. All reporters had to come up with a weekly feature story for the Sunday edition. I was told about a man from Gladewater who had wild nutria eating out of his hand at a local lake and I arranged to meet him there. He drove up, honked his horn and



40 pairs of eyes came swimming across the lake to eat apple slices. Did I mention I'm not fond of big, hairy rat-like creatures!

2

Eagles drummer Don Henley is a fellow Cass County native who grew up 15 miles away from me in northeast Texas. I was a newspaper reporter in Longview at the height of the Eagles' success in 1976. One of my mother's best friends was his mother's dear friend and she scored me an interview during one of his visits home. An interesting side note, when Henley was in high school he formed his first band called the Four Speeds. They played at my sister's eighth-grade graduation party at our home in Avinger, population 400, in the mid 1960s. In a recent interview with the *Houston Chronicle*, Henley said he still has his late mother's home in Linden, where this inter-



view took place 32 years ago. Besides the gold records on the wall, he said his Grammys are kept "in the display cabinet with the ceramic chickens and the statuette of the Blue Boy." Classic northeast Texas!!

3

I got my first corporate communications assignment in 1977 with Houston Lighting & Power as editor of the company's biweekly newsletter. Later, as a PR rep, I worked with Steve Gonzalez to produce the company's 100<sup>th</sup>-year anniversary annual report. Here I'm serving as the photographer's stand-in for CEO Don Jordan, whose photo was taken at the company's first power plant near downtown Houston.



4

After leaving the Light Company in 1983, I began freelance writing. One of my first assignments was with a former HL&P colleague, Regina Reis, who moved back to her native Boston to work with Raytheon. She wanted

me to write a feature for *Raytheon Magazine* about a Wyoming rancher who had bought his 60<sup>th</sup> Beech aircraft. The assignment involved a flight to Wyoming followed by a two-hour aerial tour of the Rocksprings, Wyoming, area, where my interview subject used his wing tip to point out highlights of his ranching operations. Did I mention my fear of flying?



5

While I was at HL&P, a tragic event happened in Daingerfield, Texas, the town where I attended junior high and high school. A gunman entered the First Baptist Church, declared "This is war!" and opened fire on the congregation. Three of the town's leading citizens, a grandmother and a six-year-old child were killed; 10 people were wounded. The gunman turned out to be Al King, my high school algebra teacher who was set to go on trial for incest the next day. Many believed the professed atheist targeted the largest church in town because no one in the town of 3,000 would agree to testify on his behalf as a character witness. Two months after the shootings, I took a week's vacation and interviewed more than 20 people in the town for an in-depth article that eventually ran in the *Houston Chronicle* on the one-year anniversary of the tragedy. Although I interviewed family members of the five people killed (two of my high school classmates lost their fathers in the attack), my most surprising interview was with the local undertaker

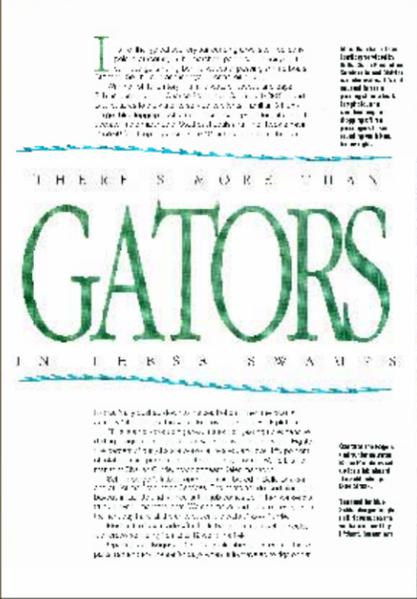
and mayor of Daingerfield at the time. He was the only person who lost composure, sobbing during the entire interview. Six months after the *Houston Chronicle* article was published, I was subpoenaed by Al King's defense attorneys, Percy Foreman and Dick DeGuerin, to testify at a change-of-venue hearing, which I did. The next day, jail officials found Al King hanging in his jail cell!



6

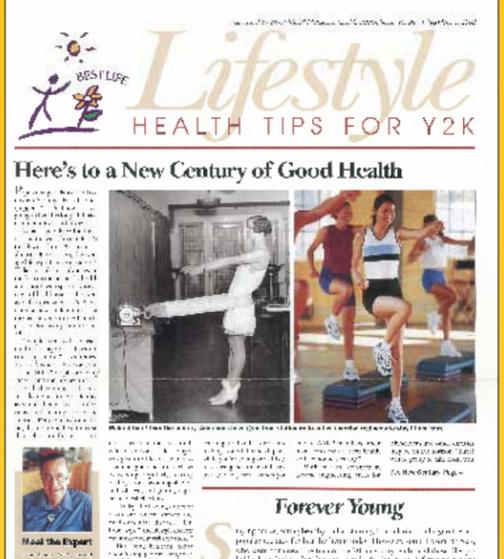
Another exciting assignment involved a feature story on lift-boat operations in the Louisiana swamps for Schlumberger's internal magazine, *Sonde Off*. Editor Karin Knapp, another

white-knuckle flyer, gave me the assignment which involved taking a pontoon aircraft and landing in the swamps of Louisiana. Besides writing for the magazine, I went on to write, edit and design three newsletters for Schlumberger during the early to mid 1990s. It was my first foray into desktop design and I loved it!



8

One of my all-time favorite newsletter projects was developing a health and wellness quarterly publication called *Lifestyle* with ExxonMobil client Leba Shallenberger. Our Y2K issue featured interviews with retirees in their 90s about their secrets to living long lives. Leba and I had a memorable weekend in the Hill Country, traveling from Houston to Kerrville to Austin in my Mustang convertible to conduct the interviews with three of the retirees. Our favorite was the 98-year-old Austinite whose wife would answer after every question, "Honey, you need to tell her about this," and then she would go on and



7

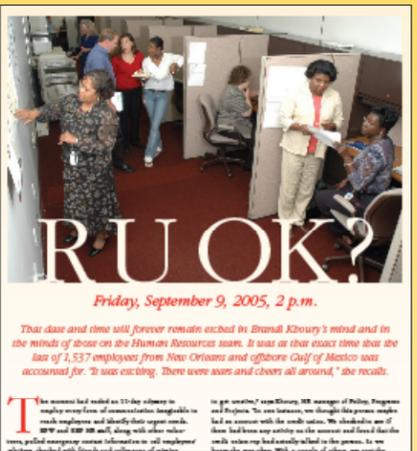
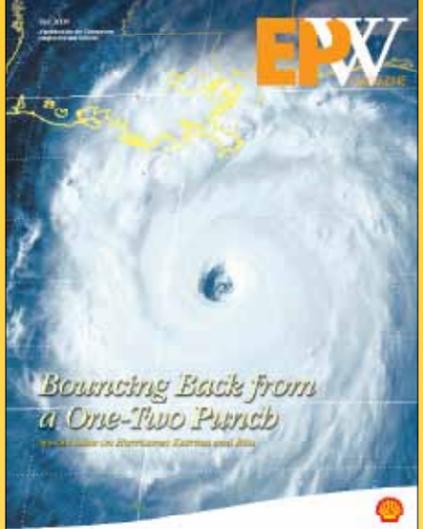
While staying at my grandparents' home in Avinger, my husband and I discovered a file of letters my late uncle had written during World War II. My grandmother kept them in chronological order from his days in officer training to the Western Union telegraph informing them of his death. He was on his 32<sup>nd</sup> combat mission over Germany when his plane was crippled by enemy fire. He managed to fly the mangled plane into allied territory so his crew could safely bail out. By then, it was too late for him. His last words were to his flight engineer, "I have nothing to regret, including this mission." His letters are poignant and share the hope and courage of a young fighter pilot from Texas. At

the suggestion of Karin Knapp, I sent them to the *Houston Chronicle*, which ran excerpts and photos in *Texas* magazine in 1986. My late grandmother was a packrat who saved everything. She was also a yellow dog Democrat. (We have a lot in common!) One day, I plan to publish these letters in some format. Stay tuned!



9

After Hurricane Katrina severely impacted Shell's Gulf Coast operations and the lives of its 4,000 employees in New Orleans, the Torma Team produced a special Katrina edition of Shell's *EPW Magazine* in only six weeks after the storm. The 30-page magazine detailed the heroic recovery efforts of employees. This was a class-action employee magazine for a first-rate company with a fantastic editor and communicator, **Melanie Kainer**, at the helm.



10

To celebrate Conoco's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we helped create 125 life-size employee cutouts, each dressed in period costume and holding a fact representing the years 1875 through 2000. The idea came to life thanks to the vision and creativity of long-time client and friend **Teresa Wong**, a costume historian from the University of Houston (UH) and the entire wardrobe from UH's theatre department. The photos of close to 150 employees dressed in period costumes were shot in a whirlwind two-day time frame.



# Tracy's Partners in Crime

For the last 10 years, Theresa Parker and Susan Diemont-Conwell have helped Tracy Torma pull off some spectacular communications capers for clients throughout the Houston area. How did they do it? Theresa and Susan spill the beans.

## How did you come to work for Tracy?

**Theresa:** I was a client of Tracy's when I was in charge of publications at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital. We became fast friends. As I learned more about the flexible schedule she had and diversity of clients, I begged her to hire me. It was the right time to make a change as I was about to become a single mom with two sons. Susan joined Torma a couple of months after I did. I continue to marvel at Susan's ability to always have her assignments completed way before deadline.



**Susan Diemont-Conwell breaks into Tracy's secret diary. We, of course, know it's Tracy's computer as she has always been a die-hard Mac fan.**

**Susan:** Maybe we shouldn't advertise that fact, Theresa. I myself was a corporate refugee, seeking an escape from long hours, fluorescent lighting, constricting pantyhose and bad bosses. When I toured our old office, a quaint house in the heart of West University, I saw the weathered hardwood floors, purple bathroom and an oak tree outside my office. I was sold! Not to mention that Tracy is a fantastic boss and Theresa is a great creative spirit.

## What do you love about this type of work?

**Susan:** I absolutely love the diversity of the work we do. One minute I'm writing about harnessing oil and gas reserves beneath the salt domes in the Gulf of Mexico, the next I'm relating the story of a trauma survivor or explaining the intricacies of fungi. There's nothing I love more than diving headlong into a subject and then taking a step back to make it understandable to a wider audience.

**Theresa:** For me, it's the people I have had the privilege of interviewing for stories. I've interviewed people in Angola, Nigeria, Brazil, Venezuela, Ecuador, Mexico, Canada, Italy, Vietnam, Scotland, Norway, France, Kazakhstan, Indonesia, India, Egypt, Singapore, Australia and of course all over Texas and the U.S., including a

whaling captain from a village on the North Slope of Alaska.

## Favorite assignment?

**Theresa:** There were a couple of assignments for the Harris County Hospital District. I worked with the district's foundation to create display panels chronicling the district's 40-year history. As a native Houstonian, it was great to research the city's role in medical history. I also had the opportunity to interview several trauma victims who were saved by the staff at Ben Taub's emergency room. Very humbling and inspiring.

**Susan:** I have two: covering a cardiac catheterization at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital and interviewing people who have benefited from the United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast. For the catheterization, I actually got to don scrubs and witness the procedure firsthand. And, for the United Way, I traveled all over Houston talking with the young and old about how the United Way was there for them during the most trying times in their lives. I felt privileged to be given the opportunity to tell their stories.

## What do you offer clients?

**Susan:** I think my experience in corporate life makes me especially



Photo by Ravi Arya

**Shhh! Theresa Parker takes diligent notes during a top-secret communications rendezvous.**

empathetic to the fast-paced existence many of our clients endure. We're there when you need us because we've been there before!

**Theresa:** We give our clients peace of mind that their communications projects will get done with a fresh approach on time and within budget. We have the greatest clients in the world and many have become personal friends as well.

## Meet the Prez

It may not be the Oval Office, but Theresa Parker has taken the helm as president of Houston's chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC). Theresa has a hot agenda, a top-notch cabinet and bold ideas for communicators in our City of Opportunity.

Her platform includes hurricane preparedness training, social media stress therapy and happy hour etiquette classes for all IABC Houston members.

"I may not be able to see Russia from my house, but gosh darn, I live

in a multi-cultural city, have talked to dozens of residents from India about my Dell computer and have met communicators from around the world through IABC," Theresa said in an interview with Katie Couric in response to a question about her foreign policy credentials.

For more information about Theresa's domestic agenda, her plan for peace in the Middle East or just for information on IABC, contact Theresa at [theresa@torma.com](mailto:theresa@torma.com) or visit [iabchouston.com](http://iabchouston.com). Also make sure to check out her blog at [www.iabchouston2008.wordpress.com](http://www.iabchouston2008.wordpress.com).

## What We Do

Feeling overworked and understaffed? Whether it's a one-time assignment or a communications project needing long-term care, Torma Communications provides communications solutions that meet your company's overall objectives. Here's what we can do for you.

### Writing and editing—one time or every time

We can gear the copy for your audience in styles to fit magazines, brochures, newsletters, advertisements, Web sites and news releases.

### Turnkey publishing

We can go the distance—plan the issue, conduct interviews, coordinate photography, produce a desktop layout and/or coordinate design, write, edit, get approvals and coordinate printing.

### Creating and implementing campaigns

From go figure to go live, we'll come up with the best way to communicate and promote your message to internal and external audiences—then do the detail work.

### Short-term, full-time consulting

A new service to help you get through a crunch—we can work onsite for an extended period of time to execute a project or fill in during a staffing absence.

Call Torma Communications at (713) 526-8509, or e-mail [tracy@torma.com](mailto:tracy@torma.com).