

### In This Issue...

#### **Leadership for Media Literacy: Elizabeth Thoman** **02**

*This issue pays tribute to the leadership and vision of Elizabeth Thoman, CML Founder and media literacy pioneer. Media literacy colleagues expressed their gratitude for Thoman's courage and commitment to the field of media literacy, and expressed optimism in building upon her vision and legacy.*

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*Dr. Henry Jenkins, University of Southern California (USC), and Dr. Bobbie Eisenstock, California State University, Northridge (CSUN), reflect on the contributions of Elizabeth Thoman as a media literacy pioneer and scholar.*

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*Videos of speakers at the Los Angeles memorial gathering honoring Elizabeth Thoman are now posted on CML's YouTube channel: Renee Hobbs, Bobbie Eisenstock, Frank Dawson, Jeff Share, Michael Robb Grieco, Erin Reilly, Sr. Rose Pacatte, and Tessa Jolls with introductions by Michael Danielson.*

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## Leadership for Media Literacy: Elizabeth Thoman

### Leadership for Media Literacy

#### In Memoriam: Elizabeth Thoman, Visionary, Pioneer, Leader

By Ann McMullan

True leaders – in any capacity – strive to make those around them successful. When they do that, they serve the people they are leading. Throughout her life, Elizabeth Thoman embodied the essence of servant leadership.

On Sunday, February 12, 2017, friends and colleagues of Elizabeth (“Liz”) gathered to remember and celebrate the life of this extraordinary woman at St. Augustine’s Church in Culver City, CA. Though I was never fortunate to know Liz during her life, I was honored to be present at the memorial.

On that day, I came to know Liz through the memories shared by those who loved her. (*Editor’s Note: Videos and Transcripts of Commentary by all Speakers at the Memorial Gathering for Liz can be accessed on CML’s web site.*) Recently, I co-authored a book titled *Life Lessons in Leadership: The Way of the Wallaby*. Each chapter in that book explores skills that are critical to effective leadership: Listen, Learn, Love, Leverage and Luck. Here is how I saw Liz’s life exemplify this framework, with examples cited by the speakers who honored her:

**LISTEN** – One of the recurring themes in the comments made by those who knew and worked with Liz was how she truly listened to them and they responded to her in kind. Liz would follow up with inquiries and actively listen again. In fact, it was because Liz was truly listening to what she was hearing and seeing in multiple media outlets in the late ‘80s that she decided to create the Center for Media Literacy. Liz recognized - years before the public as a whole - that knowing how to listen critically and truly comprehend the messages that are communicated in multiple media formats is a skill set desperately needed in this new age of media beyond the printed word.

**Michael Robb Grieco, Media Literacy Historian, Director of Curriculum & Technology Integration at Windham Southwest Supervisory Union, said:**

*“She was listening, employing the voices from all over the world, and that ambition and belief was something that stuck with me, and that I think is really beautiful and important.”*

**LEARN** – Liz was the ultimate life-long learner, long before many of us came to understand that life-long learning is the most important skill for thriving and surviving in the 21st century. The paths for Liz included both formal and informal strategies for learning. Liz received her Masters in Communications at the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Southern California, and also from Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles. It was clear from the comments of all who spoke at her memorial that any conversation with Liz was always an event of mutual learning...the give and take that is essential in any collegial or mentoring relationship.

**Bobbie Eisenstock, Journalism Faculty, California State University, Northridge, and Syracuse University's Newhouse School, said** (see p.6 for complete remarks):

*“Our graduate education was a unique experience. Liz and I were part of the first masters in PhD program at Annenberg. Since Annenberg was in the process of becoming accredited, the dean invited distinguished scholars from all over the world to be visiting faculty for a semester or year-long appointment. We were taught media theory by the theorists themselves. Some of you will know their names, some not, but I want to tell you how grounded in scholarship she was.”*

**LOVE** – Passion for your work, your people and your process is essential to leading new ideas and programs. The passion that Liz Thoman felt for her work in media literacy as well as for all the other pathways in her life was a universal theme from all who shared their memories of Liz. It was her passion and love that brought so many others to follow her, not only those who were privileged to know her personally, but those whose lives she touched through her teaching, writing and speaking. I can attest to the fact that I was impacted by Liz's passion as I listened to the stories of her life. Liz Thoman will continue to affect so many in multiple ways even though she is no longer with us on this earth. Her passion and love for humanity lives on.

**Michael Danielson, High School Teacher, Seattle Preparatory School, said:**

*“Speaking of phone calls, I remember some of the messages she would leave on my answering machine. Liz would just leave a whole ton of information on the answering machine. It's like she got so passionate...The passion came through even over the telephone.”*

**LEVERAGE** – Before the concept of “networking” became the business strategy of the new millennia, Liz Thoman knew and understood the value of leveraging the talents of others. Her road to making media literacy a skill for all was filled with conversations and calls to action. Nearly all who spoke at her memorial service shared stories about getting phone calls from Liz at all times of the day or night, with “directions” on what they must do next to advance their mutual

cause. Liz was also a conscientious collector of magazines, books and other artifacts. A recurring theme from her friends was to get a call from Liz only to be told that she was shipping “a box” of items to them. Today those boxes are treasures that remind the lucky owners of how their relationship with Liz was one that leveraged everyone’s talents.

***Renee Hobbs, Professor of Communication Studies, University of Rhode Island; Founder and Director, Media Education Lab, said:***

*“I said to Liz, ‘Wow, Liz, I sure wish I had a Felton Scholars Program,’ and low and behold, Liz said, “Oh, yeah. We need a Boston version,” and she made it so. “*

**LUCK** – It was Liz’s “luck” to come up with the idea that media literacy was something everyone needed to know. Today in our hyper-connected world, this concept seems obvious. However, because Liz spent her life, listening, learning, loving and leveraging the talents of other, she saw and was ready for this communications phenomenon long before it took over the rest of us.

***Tessa Jolls, President and CEO, Center for Media Literacy and Director, Consortium for Media Literacy, said:***

*“Liz always said, ‘We’re hopeaholics.’ I think that captured a lot because we kept going no matter what and we really hung on to that sense of optimism, and hope, and confidence in the rightness of our cause. In today’s world, I don’t think there’s any denying that media literacy makes total sense in terms of what we need as a society, and how we can move forward, and have dialogue, and have some methodology on how we discuss, relate, and build bridges to each other.”*

Each of us must continue the march toward media literacy for all – and I am sure if any one of us drops the ball, we can expect a phone call from Liz! Her Life Lessons in Leadership are her legacy to all of us.

About the author:

Ann McMullan is the founder and lead consultant of her firm, Ann McMullan Education Consultant, based in Los Angeles, CA. Ann works nationally and internationally as a speaker, writer and consultant, focused on leadership, visioning and planning. Learn more at <http://www.annmcmullan.com> and [Life Lessons in Leadership: The Way of the Wallaby](#).

## Personal Highlights

**Henry Jenkins, Ph.D., Provost Professor of Communication, Journalism and Cinematic Arts, a joint professorship at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and the USC School of Cinematic Arts**

*(Henry Jenkins was unable to attend the Memorial Gathering for Liz Thoman, but these are the remarks he intended to make that day and that we are grateful to share.)*

I have struggled a bit to know what to say on this occasion. Unlike so many of you, I did not know Elizabeth Thoman well. We met only a few times and exchanged relatively few words. She fixed me dinner at her house once and shared something of her struggles. For that reason, writing these reflections forced me to do a little homework and I stumbled upon the rich oral history [interview](#) with Elizabeth that Tessa Jolls has shared online. What a treasure!

What emerged there for me was a portrait of a woman determined to make a difference in the world, someone who recognized early on the urgency of integrating media literacy into U.S. education, who valued positively and negatively the impact that television in particular could have on American life. We get a glimpse there of the many influences on her thinking -- her time at the Annenberg School with its commitment to public policy and community engagement, her exposure to Marshall McLuhan with his expansive understanding of why media mattered, and her reading of Paolo Friere with his student-centered approach to education.

What emerged there is a portrait not only of a woman but of a movement, one that came to involve large numbers of educators who had the courage and commitment to integrate media literacy into their pedagogy even when it was not yet valued by parents and school administrators, even in some cases where doing so put their jobs at risk.

This interview gives us a sense of her core commitments and values – her recognition that media literacy education must move beyond protectionism and empower students to engage in critical inquiry about the place of media in their own lives. We do not as adults need to know the right answers as long as we recognize the right questions and initiate reflection.

As I read the interview, I get a sense of some of the opposition she and others of her generation faced and yet also the optimism that such a battle could still be won, that media literacy can and must become part of the education of every child in the country. Thoman helped to build the institutions that would make such a movement sustainable, the development of journals, professional organizations, distribution systems for resources, and peer to peer mentoring.

Near the end of the interview, we get a sense of the ways media literacy educators have sought to reinvent themselves and reframe their arguments in the face of the digital revolution. This is where I've entered the story, my focus has been on network communication and participatory culture, my emphasis has been on the importance of giving young people the skills necessary to

meaningfully engage and participate in emerging forms of public expression. I speak as someone who has been part of the leadership of the Digital Media and Learning community and what I want to express more than anything else is the enormous debt that we owe to Elizabeth Thoman and the others of her generation who lay the foundations for our contemporary understanding of media literacy.

I see our work is building upon the foundation they lay as we carry with us that strong emphasis on in the empowered learner and critical inquiry -- different times, different battles, but the same core commitments.

Recent events suggest we need media literacy now more than ever, as we confront a world of "alternative facts" and "fake news", of filter bubbles and information enclaves, of #gamergate and online hate speech. As we confront such a world, we will need to find within ourselves the determination, courage and commitment that empowered Thoman and others of her generation. Such a movement cannot be led by fear but must contain within it optimism for the future, hopes for the emerging generation, and recognition that media power can be used constructively as well as destructively. The media literacy movement should be led by skepticism but never cynicism.

I often find myself reflecting on the advice that Uncle Ben gave to Peter Parker -- With great power comes great responsibility. The generation of American youth today has access to more media power than we could only have imagined decades ago, and we see evidence that many of them want to use that power to build a better world together. But for that to happen, we need to reflect often upon our ethical responsibilities within a world where there is much greater access to the means of media production and circulation. How do we take ownership over the information we share with each other? What values will guide the choices we make? As we as educators both make such choices in our own lives and mentor young people about the choices they are making, I hope we will carry some of the spirit and vision that animated Elizabeth Thoman's life with us.

**Dr. Bobbie Eisenstock is on the Journalism Faculty, California State University, Northridge; and Syracuse University's Newhouse School in Los Angeles.**

Passionate and compassionate. Committed and dedicated. A lifelong learner and educator. That's Liz. I met Liz when we were graduate students at the Annenberg School for Communications at USC in the mid-1970s.

Liz and I were perhaps the unlikeliest of friends. Different in so many ways, we quickly became friends and close colleagues brought together by two commonalities: Catholic education and media literacy.

I am not Catholic but I was taught by Mercy nuns. I graduated from a Catholic girls' high school in West Hartford, CT, where I was the editor of the newspaper and became actively involved in civic projects. Liz found that intriguing and that bonded us in a certain way.

When Liz and I met at Annenberg, we immediately realized our common interest in studying media's role in young people's lives and that, independent of each other, we were on the same media literacy path. We both had an instinct about the need for children and adolescents to be media literate as well as print literate. At that time, the field of media literacy was beginning to emerge in the United States. The Singers -- Dorothy at Fairfield University ([see Voices interview](#)) and her husband Jerome at Yale -- were at the forefront, along with Aimee Dorr at Harvard who was in the process of joining the faculty at Annenberg just in time to chair my PhD thesis committee.

Our graduate education was a unique experience. Liz and I were part of the first Master's and PhD classes. Since Annenberg was in the process of becoming accredited, the Dean invited distinguished scholars to be visiting faculty for a semester or year-long appointment. We were taught media theory by the theorists themselves:

- Elihu Katz and Jay Blumler taught us their uses and gratifications approach to understanding media's effects
- George Gerbner demonstrated how TV violence can cultivate real world violence and his new -- at that time - Cultural Indicators' Project
- Ev Rogers taught us the history of diffusion of innovations and applications to the emerging field of communication technology
- Ed Palmer from the Children's Television Workshop explained the principles for developing educational programming
- Wilson Bryan Key discussed his subliminal seduction thesis and had us holding print ads up to the light to find the word S-E-X spelled out and other subliminal messages.

And there were many more, as well as Rand Corporation researchers predicting how future technology and the emerging communications revolution would change society. It was an exhilarating time!

The faculty also provided opportunities for whatever we wanted to pursue. Liz developed the magazine *Media & Values* as a class project. And the Center for Media Literacy grew out of her vision for the role media literacy could play in education.

Liz lived in an apartment on South Shenandoah Street in West Los Angeles. It was a "garden-style" apartment building with a gated entrance into a tree-lined open atrium. Her apartment was on the far side. That's where she wrote, published, and distributed the early years of *Media & Values*. Depending on your expertise, she would invite you into her living room to brainstorm ideas for upcoming issues.

Ultimately, what started as a class project turned into a significant media literacy venture that outgrew her small apartment. She rented another apartment in the same complex. When she outgrew that space, she moved to an office building in mid-Wilshire with an actual conference room and then to a location in Santa Monica on Ocean Park.

Liz was a community bridge-builder. She organized local media literacy conferences and had the foresight to organize the first national Media Literacy Conference at UCLA, which was a success beyond her expectations. Everyone involved in media literacy - or who wanted to be involved - was there. It was inspiring and empowering. Then there was AMLA, establishing a national media literacy association.

Our shared passion for media literacy drove our relationship. One of my students became her intern. She and I developed a course for University Extension. We both were facilitating media literacy workshops for teachers and students, so we often referred one another or stepped in if one of us had a conflict for a speaking date.

Any time Liz called for something, it was hard to say no. When she asked me to be a founding member of AMLA, I couldn't because of family obligations. She understood. Then one day I got a different kind of call from Liz. She said we needed to meet for lunch. She and I did not meet *to lunch*. We always met *to work*. That's when she told me she was too ill and Tessa was stepping in.

Liz's life was filled with Aha! Moments. She knew the right questions to ask. And the answers were based on evidence. We are living in a time when asking the right questions is more critical than ever to shed light on misinformation and fake news and move us beyond post truths. Liz's relentless drive and dedication to spreading media literacy inspired us then and her legacy inspires us now.

She will truly be missed.





CML is grateful and awed by the outpouring of affection and recognition for Liz and her work, as well as the sympathy her death brought. Thank you, everyone.

### **Elizabeth Thoman**

(June 18, 1943 - December 22, 2016)

Elizabeth Thoman, CML Founder and media literacy pioneer was remembered at a Celebration of Life on February 12, 2017 in Los Angeles, CA.

Co-hosts were Tessa Jolls, Center for Media Literacy, Sr. Rose Pacatte, Pauline Center for Media Studies, and Michael Danielson, Seattle Preparatory School. We invite you to watch video tributes from media literacy professionals, advocates, and friends. Speakers included: Sr. Johanna Rickl, Sr. Lynn Mousel, Renee Hobbs, Bobbie Eisenstock, Frank Dawson, Jeff Share, Michael Robb Grieco, Erin Reilly, Sr. Rose Pacatte, Tessa Jolls, Ira Gorelick, Fr. Anthony Scanell, Elaine Scott, Clifford Cohen, Daine Olsen, Pam Dawson, Roselyn Silver and Beverly Feldman with introductions by Michael Danielson.

Please see CML's YouTube channel for individual speaker commentary from the LA gathering.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/medialitkit>

**CONSORTIUM**  
for **MEDIA LITERACY**

*Uniting for Development*

### **About Us...**

The Consortium for Media Literacy addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents.

The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include nutrition and health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products. The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communication that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth.

<http://consortiumformedia literacy.org>

## Media Literacy Resources

### Resources for Media Literacy Leadership - Elizabeth (Liz) Thoman

CML has posted a [new subsite](#) honoring Elizabeth Thoman; the site features a comprehensive overview of Elizabeth Thoman's writing and impact upon the field. More commentary from people internationally will be forthcoming.

In addition to the Los Angeles gathering, the Northeast Media Literacy Conference, held Feb. 4th at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain, Connecticut, honored Elizabeth Thoman during a panel led by Renee Cherow-O'Leary, titled "Inspiration from a Unique Life: Remembering Elizabeth Thoman and Learning from her Legacy." Renee Hobbs, Sherri Hope Culver, Cyndy Scheibe, Michael Robb Grieco, and Tessa Jolls joined Dr. O'Leary on the panel. Video is forthcoming.

Elizabeth Thoman, In Memoriam. [Subsite devoted to life and career of Elizabeth Thoman](#)

Interview: [Voices of Media Literacy](#)

CML Reading Room: <http://www.medialit.org/reading-room/results?keys=elizabeth+thoman>

[Transcript of Memorial Gathering in LA](#)

[Videos of Memorial Gathering in LA](#)

[What is Media Literacy?](#) Video by Media Literacy Now and CML dedicated to Elizabeth Thoman

[Media & Values Archive](#)

## Med!aLit Moments

### Media Literacy in Action

At the Los Angeles Memorial Gathering for Elizabeth (Liz) Thoman, CML's Founder, on February 12, 2017, Jeff Share, from the Faculty of Education at UCLA, passed out "feminist money" and told a story about how Liz used this money in a way that exemplifies media literacy in action, living out the Empowerment Spiral of Awareness, Analysis, Reflection and Action. Liz took the "money" (shown below) when she attended church services and if she observed that the pastor used sexist language or that there was discrimination against women evidenced in the service, she would fill in the amount of a donation, and place it in the collection basket, then she would make the donation in real money to the Women's Ordination Conference, instead. After the service, Liz would approach the pastor, introduce herself, and inform the pastor that she had placed a special note in his collection plate.

*Have your students create their own currency.*

**AHA!:** I can value my own beliefs and create my own "currency."

**Grade Level:** 10-12

**Key Question #5** (Consumers): Why is this message being sent?

**Key Question #5** (Producers): Have I communicated my purpose effectively?

**Core Concept #5:** Most media messages are created for profit and/or power.

**Key Question #4** (Consumers): What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from this message?

**Key Question #4** (Producers): Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view in my content?

**Core Concept #4:** Media have embedded values and points of view.

**Materials:** "Feminist Money" and "My Own Currency" template. See examples on next page.

**Activity:** Break students into pairs. Hand out examples of the "feminist" currency for each pair of students to examine. Have students discuss Key Questions #5 and #4 for Consumers, and then share their observations. Next, hand out the templates for each student to create his/her own "money." What would they choose to feature on their money? Why? Have students answer Key Questions #5 and #4 for Producers, and then share their perspective with the class.

\*All Tributes to Elizabeth Thoman, including the one referenced here, are available on [CML's YouTube channel](#).

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, ©2002-2017, Center for Media Literacy, [www.medialit.com](http://www.medialit.com).

Elizabeth Thoman's feminist currency, and blank template for students to use in this month's MediaLit Moments activity.

