

Daria Gasparini

I started working for the Save Outdoor Sculpture program in 1997 when Heritage Preservation was the National Institute for Conservation. It was my first job right out of college. I had studied art history and knew I wanted to go into the preservation field. I did learn a lot about outdoor sculpture and conservation on the job, but my art history background was helpful.

I was happy to get the job. I started out working as a Program Associate on the Assessment Awards. There were five or six Associates working under Susan Nichols when I was there. She was really a terrific first boss to have as a young person entering the work field. There were a lot of young people working as program associates. That would come and stay like I did for two or three or four years. We were really given a lot of opportunity to learn a lot about preservation and interact with conservators and Board members at Board meetings, so it was really a wonderful place to kind of start out a career.

I helped with promotion. But it wasn't only promoting the Assessment Awards. Whenever we were doing promotion, we were promoting all, all of the awards and programs of SOS! I do remember that we had kind of a large booth that we would take to various annual meetings and events and set up. We would bring all of our brochures and pamphlets and put up the booth for however long the convention was. I don't remember doing that very often. We would take turns because it did require travel and time away from home. But I do remember going out to Portland for a week and setting up the booth out there.

We were periodically asked to talk at meetings, at museums, and things. I remember being sent down to, I think it was Birmingham and giving a talk there at a museum on something along the lines of designing public art so that it could be maintained well. Susan developed all of the materials working Susan wasn't able to go to Birmingham to give the talk and it was very flattering to be asked to do it.

Most of the time I was managing the Award program-- helping to promote it and then making sure all of the application materials got sent out when requests came in. And then, of course, reviewing the applications when they came in, and managing the award after that. If an applicant received an award, they would often come back to us asking for advice on a conservator to contact. So SOS! always had a list of conservators organized by region that we could provide to them. And they would reach out to the conservators. I made sure that the award monies were sent out and that all of the final reports came back to us. We always asked for photographs-- before and after photographs--and copies of the final condition assessment that the conservator prepared. The Assessment Award was always presented as the first step in preservation because SOS! had --if I remember correctly--treatment awards which usually helped cover the cost of the conservation treatment. Seeing the successful Assessment Award applicants proceed to the Conservation Treatment Awards was always very satisfying. And Those always got much more publicity.

If there was something substantial missing from an application, we would go back and kind of assist the municipality or the community that was applying to make sure that they filled that part in. I remember that sometimes applicants didn't meet the applicant requirements. There were rules for cemeteries, for example. We wouldn't fund the assessment of headstones and grave markers and things like that.

Memorial statues within cemeteries, yes-- but not individual headstones. I think there were a few other award requirements. If an applicant simply didn't meet those requirements, then they couldn't get the award. But, I do remember that most applicants, if they were able to work through the application process with us, were able to receive awards. If I remember, they were matching grants, so the applicant had to put up a certain amount of funding.

After three years, I went on to graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania. I got my degree in historic preservation and I still work in the preservation field. What's funny is that I still go places today for work and personal travel and I see sculptures that I remember: "Oh I think we gave an award for this." I had a project at Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn and I met a historian there. I said, "You know, my first job out of college was with Save Outdoor Sculpture." And he said, "Oh, I remember SOS!. You guys helped us do this and that and that." It's so rewarding when I come across those sculptures and people. I was with SOS! for a very short time in the grand scheme of things, but it was a really rewarding job.

I do remember it was a big deal the day that Hilary Clinton as part of the Save America's Treasures tour gave a talk at a memorial in Baltimore that SOS! had funded with a Conservation Treatment Award and I remember all the staff got to go. It was such an exciting day.

When I graduated from grad school, I worked in Ohio briefly and then, around 2005, I moved back to Washington, DC. When I was looking for a job when I moved back, Larry Reger gave me a job working with Jane Long on the Emergency Response Program. And that's another project of Heritage Preservation that I still come across today. I find the Emergency Response Wheels hanging up on walls of organizations that I visit.