Introduction
Robert Fischer: CALICO Rescuer and Language Technology Advocate

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In 1997, the CALICO organization was almost a lost cause. The then executive director had come into conflict with the executive board and subsequently departed, leaving CALICO with no direction and no home. Robert Fischer was a member of the executive board at the time. He worried over CALICO’s fate the rest of that summer while it lingered in limbo with one institution and then another not willing to take it in. Finally, not wanting to see such a vital piece of the field of CALL die, Fischer approached the administration at Southwest Texas State University. They graciously agreed to host and partially fund the organization. Fischer then, as CALICO’s executive director, faced a tangled batch of records from its previous home and a negative balance in its bank accounts. Not one to let that stop him, he went searching for ways to help CALICO regain its stability. An angel named Clara Yu gave him money from her life’s savings to shore up the organization and Fischer was able to secure a grant from the Andrew Mellon Foundation which together put CALICO back on its feet and going strong.

Since saving the organization from certain doom, Fischer has encountered some interesting times as its executive director. For example, in 1999 for the Miami of Ohio conference, we found out very shortly before the conference was to begin that the CALICO technology coordinator would not be at the conference at all. Fortuitously, Miami’s language lab director, Dan Meyers, stepped up with the help of Marc Siskin and the conference was saved. Through it all, Fischer never panicked (he left that to me).

Then in 2000, even though we had people dropping like flies in the heat in Tucson, one of our collective favorite memories of Fischer was made. He got up (protesting) with our after-dinner entertainment and danced. Was it the tango? The mambo? Either way, it was fun and he was such a good sport about it.
Later that same year, at EUROCALL in Dundee, Scotland, Fischer saved my life. We were on the way back from campus to the hotel and about to cross a street. I looked the wrong way for traffic and moved to step off the curb. Fischer quickly put his arm in front to stop me and not three seconds later a car zoomed right past. I couldn’t believe I’d been so stupid, but when I said so he just smiled and said, “It happens all the time.”

In 2002, just two weeks before the conference was to begin at the University of California, Davis, I entered the hospital with a ruptured aneurysm. Fischer was forced to take on all the last minute details for the conference himself. When I got relatively back to normal, he was my biggest supporter for taking rest time and visiting doctors and all the hundreds of things I had to do to get well which kept me away from the office.

In 2005 the two of us learned of a conference attendee who had gotten sick and gone to the emergency room. All the way to the hospital he protested that I should be back in my room getting some sleep. He said that he wasn’t so important as me. I hope you’re rolling your eyes like I did. I’m happy to say our sick attendee only had food poisoning (from a venue other than the conference) and she turned out to be fine the next day.
The point of all this reminiscing is to illustrate that for almost fifteen years, Fischer has really been the heart and soul of this organization as well as its savior during his tenure as executive director. While language learning and technology is his field and promoting CALICO promoted his field, for Dr. Fischer it has always been more than that. He cares about the people, the people impacted by CALICO being a strong, supportive professional organization. He knows how important it is for language technologists to be recognized for their work for tenure and promotion. He’s spent endless hours writing recommendation letters and attending conferences to represent CALICO and the field. He didn’t have to do half of what he’s done for all of us.

He’s leaving it to us now. I doubt he’ll stop and get some rest. He’ll keep helping whomever he can without fail. I hope we can at least make him proud as I doubt we will ever fill his shoes.

Here, in this volume you’re holding, is a mix of personal and professional which we hope reflects the best of what Dr. Fischer is for all of us.