THOUGHTS FROM A SECOND-GENERATION NTA MEMBER

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In this session entitled "Reflections on 100 Years of NTA," I was given the task of providing a perspective from a second-generation NTA member. Since the professional benefits of membership in the NTA are obvious and not unique to me, I took this to mean that I should share my personal experiences – how I became a second generation NTA member. So, I must apologize in advance for so many personal remembrances. I will touch on two points today: How do you grow your own NTA member? And, isn't there an easier (cheaper) way?

My father, Jim Papke, has been a devoted NTA member since 1953, when Harvey Brazer at the University of Michigan required all his graduate students to join. Of course, once my father became a member, he was determined to increase membership.

It wasn't until I entered kindergarten that I realized that children's books had pictures as well as graphs. I learned to read with the usual books of that generation – Dick and Jane, I believe, but I was also given important phrases to memorize at home like, "Taxes are the price we pay for civilization."

My Dad made some close friends through the NTA and my family often met them unexpectedly on trips. My first recollection of meeting some NTA friends was at an airport when I was 9 or 10. Art Lynn from Ohio State and Dan Holland from MIT were there. I was being delivered, against my will, to a French Language camp in Minnesota and my Dad and I were waiting for our flight. Art was also a lawyer, and he and Dan co-edited the *Journal* for several years – at the time the NTA board was concerned about the *National Tax Journal* becoming too specialized. I remember being impressed that they were sympathetic listeners and advocated for me. I still had to go to camp, but that began a friendship with Dan Holland that would be a source of comfort to me in college and graduate school.

In 1970, the NTA meetings were in Honolulu, Hawaii and my entire family went. We all got moo-moos. Art Lynn was program director that year, and he had planned far ahead for Honolulu. In those days, the Association had a spousal program and a glamorous dinner dance with a live band – not just a reception. It was at the board meeting that year that my Dad proposed the doctoral dissertation award, and they approved it. Following that meeting, the annual dissertation competition became a summer ritual for my family. My sisters and I would get out of school for the summer, and large stacks of dissertations would pile up on the floor of my Dad's study. Only six or seven would make it back out to the reading committee. I heard the names Mike Boskin, Dan Rubinfeld, Sunny Ladd, and Rick Mount, and I had some vague notion that they were all equally important people.

A major field at Wellesley College required only one course per semester, so it was straightforward to fulfill both college and parental requirements for a major. On one visit to the campus, my father took me to Dan and Jeanne Holland's house for dinner – a welcome respite from the dormitory. I attended a couple of NTA meetings while in college as a way to meet up with my parents. Several of Dad's current and former graduate students were usually there. For graduation, I received a subscription to the *National Tax Journal*. My friends and I were quite excited about that.

In graduate school, I tried to be interested in other fields, but none was as interesting as the price being paid for civilization. During graduate school, I submitted my second-year paper to the *National Tax Journal*. The referees were a bit nasty – nothing out of the ordinary, but Dan Holland wrote me a nice cover letter explaining that sometimes referees get a bit carried away, but not to be upset by it. I was very fortunate to have Jim Poterba as my thesis advisor, who will be President of the NTA a year from now and who has done more than his fair share in guiding successful NTA doctoral dissertation award winners.

Of course every child has his or her rebellious period. Mine came after graduate school when I married outside the field of public finance. Eventually my father came around to the idea that my husband would never be an NTA member. However, I think my husband would be happy to attend a spousal program and dinner dance.

While the NTA has played an important role in my professional life, thinking back on these experiences reminded me that its influence on my personal life was just as important in fostering an affection for the Association and its mission. I also have several close friends that I have made through NTA activities, and I look forward to the annual meeting as a social event as well as a professional one.

As you can see from my experience, raising a second-generation NTA member may require a full-time commitment. While that's a worthwhile goal, there must be an easier way to increase membership. I'm doing my bit with my children, but there is no guarantee.

My suggestion to increase second, and first, generation NTA members is to use the Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award competition. The back cover from the oldest *NTJ* I have (part of my graduation present) lists all the winners from 1971 (Michael J. Boskin, U.C. –Berkeley) to 1981 (Jane G. Gravelle, George Washington University). This list of winners appeared on every issue until 1993 and has always fascinated me. Every year a new name joined the winners, and the oldest winner moved off – so each person stayed on every issue for about 10 years. I checked this list against a list of current members – almost all of them became NTA members. I believe that the back cover of the *NTJ* gave the doctoral dissertation award its distinction (as well as being a terrific predictor of future success).

I propose that, in addition to increasing the size of the monetary award, the *NTJ* back cover should once again list former dissertation winners. Perhaps a successful former winner would endow the prize and any extra cost of printing the names on the glossy cover. Second, we should redouble our efforts to make sure that non-economics but public policy related graduate programs also receive notice of the competition. There are many fields that overlap with federal or state and local budget policy: sociology, medicine, public health, and, of course, business schools and political science programs. These efforts may attract researchers in these fields, and later, their children, to topics in public finance.