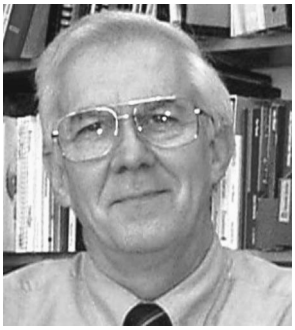

The Left Drawer

I have a folder in my left desk drawer. It contains a false color record of an irradiance pattern that illustrates beautifully the transition of a wave diffracted by a phase grating from the Fresnel region to the Fraunhofer limit. I have on occasion pulled it out and worked on digging up the references needed to organize a paper on the results of my efforts. But then other things intervene, including my ultrafast research. One of these days I am going to finish that paper waiting in the left drawer. I wonder how many unwritten or unfinished papers are sitting in the desks of optical designers.

If you wonder why I wonder, it is because one comment about the content of *Optical Engineering* that I get on a regular basis is that there is little optical engineering in this journal. The commentator is usually referring to the small number of the papers on the classic topics of optical design and lens design plus instrumentation, including spectrometers and scanners. The charge is partly true, but there are two mitigating explanations. First, the world has changed and researchers must report on the new topics in the field. Second, the First Law of Journals is operating: ''Authors may send their papers to any journal they choose.''

But what about optical designers? Where do they send their papers? Perhaps some results are too specialized or esoteric to be of interest to others in the field; in other cases their work may be proprietary. But there are various aspects of optical design that might be called classic optical engineering that are not addressed in the current journals. How do I know? Every four years, the community cranks up the International Optical Design Conference and practitioners convene to tell each other what they are doing. But if you look at this journal and the Optics Technology issues of *Applied Optics*, it would appear that nothing much happens in the four years between conferences...with one exception.

In the July 2000 issue of this journal there was a special section entitled ''Pushing the Envelope in Optical Design Software,'' edited by Mary Turner of Focus Software. The premise of the section was that 90% of the features of most software programs are never used. The 15 papers in this section described some of the ways designers were using the current software beyond the standard specify-optimize-tolerance pattern. If you haven't seen it, it is a solid special section that you should take a look at. But the papers in this section represented the majority of papers in the field in a year when over 400 papers were published in the pages of *Optical Engineering*.

This year in an attempt to show our readers another part of the field and because of the success of the previous effort, a special section on illumination was planned. But, as will happen with some initiatives, it didn't go well. The number of contributed papers was way down from the previous special, so they will be folded in with the regular papers as we finish the editorial process. Still, I can't help wondering why the call for papers failed to generate more interest. Are the illumination packages too new to be useful for enough people to generate interesting results? Are the topics so proprietary that there was nothing to say? I don't know. But I do care.

If you are in optical design and have done some good work, you needn't wait for a special section to cause you to write up what you have done. Insights into the evolving design programs, work on gradient index materials, special lenses, zoom systems, displays, illumination systems—all may assist your colleagues in understanding our field a little better. So, what do you have in that left desk drawer?

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Editor