Where’s Jared? Thanks to Ward’s Natural Science, there were a couple of folks who identified Jared in Atlanta and walked away with a very nice prize. So who is Jared and what was he doing in Atlanta anyway? Jared is a colleague of mine in his fourth year of teaching. A member of that all important group of teachers in their first five years we need to encourage and support. He decided to attend the NABT Conference in Atlanta with me and thought that he would probably find something to help his teaching. Actually, I was sure my accolades of an NABT Conference and its impact on my teaching and professional growth had conveyed the very essence of the experience. Based on his reaction in Atlanta, I apparently missed the mark.

Jared could not believe how energized and empowered he felt each day. He was blown away by Ken Miller and intrigued by Erich Jarvis. He was amazed that after receiving the Distinguished Service Award, Sean Carroll would strike up a conversation and continue a discussion with him outside of the hotel lobby. He was shocked that the presenters gave him software and DVDs so that he could adapt and adopt upon returning to campus. He was able to experience the power of teaching approaches from a student’s perspective and could see straight away how they might improve student engagement and learning in his own courses. Then there was the rejuvenation of spirit that takes place when sharing in a community of like-minded individuals which resulted in a new friendship with a colleague from Canada.

As Jared and I returned home, he made a comment that was conformational of the experience and yet disconcerting when it comes to communicating the NABT experience to another biology teacher. He told me that he had high expectations based on what I had shared prior to the Conference, but his experience, the energy and empowerment, went well beyond what he envisioned. So there lies the conundrum. We have this organization that provides powerful learning experiences in an engaging and supportive community, yet it is very difficult to communicate what that feels like to someone who has never experienced it.

While in Atlanta I had the opportunity to visit with teachers at all levels. There was a first year high school teacher having to deal with underprepared students in a high gang activity environment, a two-year college faculty member charged with preparing adult students for allied health programs and acclimating first-generation students to science as a way of knowing, and four-year college and university faculty struggling with engaging a class of 400 students in inquiry and deep learning. What do these teachers have in common? They are all dedicated professionals who realize the individual impact they have on biological literacy is on a much larger scale than just a particular class. They intuitively know the importance of their work and find great satisfaction in designing learning experiences that engage students with the science and connect students to common themes on a deep level. They are leaders and they tend to buck the system when the system does not support good teaching practice. They are NABT members and they are part of the community and the energy you will find in Memphis next October. We hope you and a colleague can join us.

Todd Carter  
NABT President - 2008