

RENDERING COMPUTERESE INTO  
PLAIN ENGLISH – AND SPANISH

# Translator of Geek

I first met Elizabeth Castro, C'86, at Van Pelt College House, which had a reputation for being where the geeks and artists hung out. We had a wonderful year discussing everything under the sun and concocting banana pancakes for the house brunch. Liz posed for my first attempts at portrait painting, and I proofread some of her papers.

Over the last 20 years, we have remained in touch. But because Liz is modest about her accomplishments, I never knew much about her impressive resume until a Penn friend asked about her at a dinner party. Catching on to my ignorance, he gently clued me in: “She’s famous now, didn’t you know?” I knew she did *something* with computers, but she and I mostly talk about raising our children and cats, and home renovation.

Turns out that Liz is the editor of the *Macintosh Bible*, 5th edition, the version many still claim is the best for clarity and ease of use. She has written seven books for Peachpit Press, a leading publisher of Web and computer books, including *Publishing a Blog with Blogger*. The step-by-step guidebooks translate technobabble into useful prose. Her *HTML for the World Wide Web* is the best-selling book about HTML in the world. In the universe of computer manuals, she’s the closest thing there is to a celebrity writer.

At Penn, Liz created her own major in Spanish studies. After graduation, she traveled to Barcelona to figure out what she wanted to do with her burning interest in all things Catalan. Wandering the city and worrying about money, she spotted a job notice: Wanted: Native English speaker who knows the Macintosh. All a delighted Liz could think was, “Yes! Now I can stay in Barcelona!”

For her first assignment, instead of simply translating a computer manual into English, she rewrote it. A delighted Apple Spain invited her to take on another project that used material from the *Macintosh Bible*. “Being the goody-two-shoes that I was, I wrote the folks who published the *Macintosh Bible* and asked if they’d mind if we used some of their material. Peachpit Press wrote back with a



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very friendly note saying they would be very happy to let us – thank you for asking – and also would we like to translate the *Macintosh Bible* into Spanish?” “Yes, please,” she told them.

She translated 14 more books, and Peachpit asked her to move back to the States to edit the 5th English edition of the *Macintosh Bible*. She returned with her Catalan husband, Andreu Cabré, in 1993. Today they live on a small New England farm with their three children.

Life on “the farmstead” is a heady brew of chores, computers and homeschooling. Liz once sent me a letter that described writing a new book while leaping up every 20 minutes to check the sap level in the maple-sugaring pan. They had tapped their trees, and she was tending the sap while writing to deadline. Another letter recounted how she had to stop at every page to check a box of baby chicks and make sure none had tumbled into the water dish.

When I last chatted with Liz, I asked what she was working on. She described with enthusiasm how she and her daughter had mixed a beautiful shade of blue paint for the dining-room walls. “How about computer projects?” I now knew to ask. “Oh, yes, and I am writing another book too!” ■

—NANCY BEA MILLER, C'85