

My Moonshot: Journeys Back to the Future

by Linda Travis Macomber



" **What will be your moonshot?** As a young child, I remember Walter Cronkite's words as Apollo 11 took off for the moon, "**Man embarks today on history's greatest adventure.**" I had thought history was only in the past. News flash, I suddenly realized we could create history today. So, I decided I wanted to do just that. Little did I know then that I would meet my future standing next to that very same Apollo 11 Command Module.

Back to the Future - My historic quest would ultimately help launch not rockets into space but propel new digital technologies into the vast unknown, complex, and dynamic frontiers of human health. When the Covid pandemic hit, the world turned to digital health for solutions. Suddenly, All I worked on for decades hit Mainstreet across the globe. But, as Shakespeare said, the past is prologue.

- My start - My mom was a research pharmacist who invented Caladryl lotion working with Benadryl. My dad was a Naval Officer and engineering executive that helped power Michigan - when it was a global industrial capital.
- College/Nursing - After college life at the University of Michigan and global travel, I started my RN BSN career in pediatrics and ICU clinical experience in Boston in the Harvard Medical world.
- HealthTech Consulting - After grad school in business, leadership, and economics, while with a health IT consulting firm/software developer, I designed, programmed, sold, documented, led, and deployed digital health systems across Boston and New England. This included lab, pharmacy, radiology, billing, records, nursing, IT, cost accounting, finance, spreadsheets, and more. This background served as a general internship/residency in the wild west of healthcare apps - before we called them apps. I taught myself a computer language then called Mumps and am grateful for these experiences all before age 26.

One party can change a life – ready for take-off

- While participating in the international healthtech symposium Medinfo/SCAMC, (now known as AMIA and IMIA) I went to a reception at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC. I gazed up at the inspiring Wright Brothers' first flight airplane and the actual Apollo 11 command module.
- Dr. Don Lindberg from the National Library of Medicine had just discussed visions for the future. Full of new hope and possibilities for health and technology and in line for a glass of wine, I spoke with a stranger about connecting digital medical libraries and healthcare delivery systems to make better decisions.
- Upon reflection, this moment would become my moonshot. I was on a plane to a new career and life. I moved from the heart of Boston and my previous life in the Cambridge, Massachusetts, area to the Pacific Ocean beaches of La Jolla and Del Mar, California.

California Dreaming – millions of people and billions of dollars

- I felt like Alice in Wonderland in a new world - imagine working in the headquarters of a significant Defense contractor in the Regan years. This path was not a typical career at the time for a nurse from Birmingham, MI
- I knew not one human soul, yet I bought a new suit and new white Mustang convertible and drove to my window office in the corporate headquarters of SAIC (now Leidos). I worked with wise men with doctoral degrees in medicine and even engineers who had put the first men on the moon working on Apollo 11.
- As I just turned 29, I may have been the youngest person named key personnel for a billion-dollar CHCS award.
- What we created helped to launch a new multi-billion dollar health-tech design and development initiative – this also propelled and scaled digital health forward globally - decades before the terms health informatics and digital health were born. Before there is an evidence-based practice, someone must first create practice-based evidence. Oh, the stories those walls can tell.

Gold, Trials, Tech, and Tanks - HealthTech history happened at the Army Hospital in Fort Knox, Kentucky. I started my civilian defense contractor tour of duty and American Airlines frequent flyer miles.



- Imagine walking fast to the pharmacy from the clinic to see if that first e-prescription safely arrived. It was 1987.
- I had the privilege to show the first Dept of Defense (DOD) physicians to use the first software entering electronic prescriptions and plans of care into a new person-centered connected system.
- We did electronic health records (EHRs) and much more for several decades before this was popular. I helped with the demonstration project that enabled SAIC to win over a billion-dollar award. We all may be just a tiny puzzle piece in a much larger, grander interconnected puzzle. Yet, without each piece, might life for many have been different?
- For all those who started with electronic health records in the 2010s and 2020s, imagine trying in the 1980s.

Billions of dollars and millions of people

- A small handful of people designed and launched the Composite Health Care System (CHCS) - in a few short months. It has lasted the test of time, serving all who have served since 1988. Since then, subsequent billion-dollar projects followed, yet, more importantly, CHCS touched the lives of over 10 million people, times 34 years estimated to reach 350 million today.
- Many technologies and wars have since come and gone, yet all these decades later, the CHCS system as the mother ship still works 24/7 as the behind-the-scenes pulse of military health across the globe.
- The lesson I learned back then is sometimes, a handful of people do extraordinary things and have an incredible lasting impact. Only through the test of time is the value realized.
- I was able to help the economic multiple effects by taking all I learned with military systems and in Boston to the VA, University of California, Kaiser Permanente, IBM, Children's Hospitals and Health Centers, many Community Health Centers, IBM, and many startups. I had the fortunate opportunity to share ideas, research, and innovations globally from Finland to South Africa, Brazil, and across the country to expand impact.

Travels and Journeys - My health tech career and life have taken me to all 50 states and five continents multiple times.

- Today, I hope to pay it forward and pass on the rich collective wisdom of the baby boomer generation to others. So, I founded MS Health Informatics degree and other programs and created www.HealthTechDiscovery.com.
- After sharing my stories on digital health frontiers, one student shared I was a grandmother of CHCS. Another added – no, she is "Yoda." So many grads now have flourishing careers, and history is repeating itself. The DOD and VA are modernizing and investing around 20-to, likely over 30 billion dollars, in the next few years.
- In my role later as Chair of the prestigious HIMSS Davies Award, I advocated in Washington DC for health tech and had the privilege to thank Dr. Don Lindberg for inspiring my career. I am extremely grateful to Dr. Peter Geerlofs, George Timson, Marty Ivers, and Walter Metcalf for hiring me into my moonshot and new life.
- As more significant disruptions grow and progress faster, I am to provide perspective. So many learn history; some never learn from history, yet even fewer get to create what contributes to the lives of millions.
- I hope you find your moonshot of new opportunities to create memories that last a lifetime as you embark on history's next-generation great adventure.



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