

# The Story of the Starfish

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If you have joined or decide to join the Special Needs SIG, it won't be long before you hear one of us rambling on about starfish—at which point you will no doubt scratch your head and wonder “What in blue blazes do starfish have to do with special needs?”

It's not that we are ichthyologically inclined. The reason we have adopted the humble starfish as a “mascot” for our SIG is that it provides a perfect metaphor for the unique challenge of our mission. Providing information, advocacy, and support for technical communicators and users of communication products who have disabilities can be truly inspiring, but it can also be discouraging. Try as we might, we cannot possibly provide solutions for all the challenges faced by millions of people with disabilities. We can't even do that within our own profession.

But we sure as hell can try.

And it was to capture this “never-say-die” attitude that my predecessor as manager of the Special Needs Committee, Judy Skinner, created the starfish metaphor in the conclusion of her landmark article, “My Brain Works, My Legs Don't: Let's Take the ‘Dis’ out of ‘Disabilities’,” published in the *Proceedings* to the 47<sup>th</sup> STC conference:

“I'm reminded of the story about the beach strewn with starfish and the little girl picking them up and throwing them back in the ocean.

‘Little girl,’ a passer-by said, ‘what are you doing?’

‘I'm saving starfish,’ she replied.

‘But there are so many! Your efforts can't possibly make a difference.’

As she picked up another starfish, the little girl said, ‘It makes a difference to that one.’

We ask you to help us make a difference.”

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