

# Walking Memory Lane with a Who's Who of ALAN

TAR Editor 1998–2003

**T**hen: Associate Professor and Professor of English Education at Florida State University. Now: Dean and Stella V. Andersen Endowed Professor of Education, College of Education, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK

Looking back over my relationship with ALAN thus far, I have some very clear memories. I recall how eager I was to serve as editor of *The ALAN Review*; I had three main reasons: 1) I have loved young adult literature since I discovered, as a teacher of 8th, 9th, and 11th graders, the power of the right book at the right time for a particular reader; 2) I was a faculty member at Florida State University, in an English Education program that had a long history of leadership within NCTE (including Dwight L. Burton and John S. Simmons), and I wanted to continue that tradition, and to also pass forward the joy of YA literature that my Auburn University doctoral advisor and guardian angel mentor, Dr. Terry C. Ley, had introduced to me; 3) I wanted to participate fully with the group of scholars who were working with teachers, librarians, students, and authors to engage in serious study of YAL as an academic endeavor, and to encourage others to recognize YAL as a legitimate site for academic scholarship.

With the energetic help of my assistant editor and friend Gail Gregg and FSU graduate assistant Randall Withers, I assembled a team of colleagues from across the nation who served as a peer review board. We balanced articles to focus on classroom practices, research in YAL, author interviews, and always included

the popular Clip and File book reviews, staying true to the notecard format long after computer files made the format itself an anachronism. I determined that regardless of my other goals as editor, the focus of the journal must remain on the literature itself, the authors of YAL, and the relationship between teenagers and the literary works. That focus was communicated in the annual covers between Fall 1998 and Summer 2003: always a teen reader in an outdoors setting reading a recently published YA book—a subtle signal that the reader had chosen to read during a free moment.

My early memories of editing are not about victories but about terrible gaffes: misspelling “Newbery” in two places in volume number one, inexplicably misrepresenting my friend Joyce Stallworth’s name as “Jean” Stallworth in the byline of her article a few issues later, and other ugly errors. But no error was as daunting as the reality that, as editor, I would have to “work” every ALAN Workshop, tracking and approaching authors to ask them for an interview for the journal. That meant that I had to conquer my timidity and a life-long fear of imposing on someone’s time or privacy.

The saving grace for me was Sue Ellen Bridgers, whom I had met years earlier while completing my dissertation on her works as Southern literature for adolescents. We continued to communicate across the years, and, though she had won multiple awards as an author, she was gentle, witty, and human. I loved talking with her and hearing her speak with her soft North Carolina twists; I always felt immediately

soothed whenever in her presence. I asked her advice about my own writing. I told her about my wedding plans. We discussed food. Gail and I visited her at her home for an interview one summer. I knew that if I could talk with someone whose books were as beautiful as Sue Ellen's, I could talk with anyone. I had opportunities to exchange emails and cards, hold phone conversations, and conduct electronic interviews with wonderful authors who were making their mark at the time. A tiny sampling include these:

Laurie Halse Anderson, who surprised me with a handwritten note shortly after *Speak* was published and celebrated;

John H. Ritter, whose passion for writing and for kids was kinetic and joyous as he reached out in talks and in books;

David Klass, who made his mark as a Hollywood screen writer as well as in YAL, but who, in my book, is one of the kindest people on the planet;

Graham "Sandy" Salisbury, whose family grew to include a daughter from another country while we exchanged notes across a few years;

Nancy Garden, whose quiet grace compelled me to listen hard to her always wise and strong—but gentle—words;

Anne C. LeMieux, whose books of fairies and teen friends poured from an incredible intellect that I was privileged to know;

Helen Frost, whose elegant, beautiful poetry so stunned me with its intricacies that I found myself assuming she was only beginning to reach her stride;

Virginia Euwer Wolff, perhaps the most generous author of all, who invited a group of Oregon-area writers whom she mentored, and those of us who love books, to her music-filled home, and laughed when she told me that I looked nothing like the round-collared and dainty "Pamela" she had conjured;

T.A. Barron, who reminded me that writing is a vocation but life is broader even than written words, and we have an obligation to help others that extends beyond the farthest reaches of our perceived abilities;

Christopher Paul Curtis, tall, too handsome to be

anything but an actor on the big screen or television, spending time to talk about The Watsons, and how he sat in small chairs of an elementary school library to write his first book;

Will Hobbs, who, with his wife Jean, made writing seem as natural as taking a hike and finding stories on the trails, and who shares his imagination with children—and those of us who ask questions—with more patience than any teacher I have ever seen.

Who was the one person I would have liked to talk to whom I did not have the opportunity to meet during my time as editor of *The ALAN Review*? J. K. Rowling. During the early portion of my editorial tenure, she was just beginning to make many of us believe again: not in wizards, of course, but in the power of books to attract teens to print, to story, to fantasy. For some preteen and teen readers, she seems to have invented the written word. It was in June of 1997 that *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was published by Bloomsbury in the United Kingdom; in September of 1998, it was published by Scholastic as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in the United States. The novel was followed in June, 1999, by *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, and in September, 1999, by *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. In July, 2000, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* was published. To that point, the novels that told the story of the little wizard had sold approximately 200 million copies worldwide. Three more volumes remained: in June, 2003, the fifth novel, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* appeared, followed by *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* in July, 2005, and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* in July, 2007.

The books that started when she was a single mother on welfare have morphed into an industry that includes blockbuster movies, action figure toys, and even theme parks. To say that Harry Potter was the literary event of the period during which I served as editor of *The ALAN Review* is an understatement. Curiously, however, those of us who want to be open to the inclusion of YAL in order to encourage reading in classrooms, libraries, homes, and all places didn't have a lot to say, during that time, in *The ALAN Review*. Perhaps we were all busy reading the encyclopedic-length novels ourselves; more likely,

we just weren't sure what to do with books that were so clearly dominating our teens' and children's interests. Were we nervous about their popularity? Did they challenge our notions about what works for teen readers, in terms of length, theme, genre, age of protagonist, and so on? Why didn't those who write about YAL have much to say about Harry Potter in the classroom and in other educational settings? I don't know.

The other genre that began to appear as an important newcomer during my editorship was the graphic novel. Michael Cart, in an article in *Voices from the Middle* (2001), notes that Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith brought children's picturebooks to teen readers with *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* (1989) and *The Stinky Cheese Man* (1992) (p. 95). It may be possible that their fun works set the stage for acceptance and the success of graphic novels, beginning perhaps with Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (Pantheon, 1993)—an incredible, troubling homage to his father, a survivor of the Holocaust. I recall rejecting a manuscript about a reader's response to a graphic novel early in my editorial tenure, primarily because I was not sure that many readers would find the focus on graphic novels interesting or useful. The fact that seven publishers rejected J. K. Rowling's first Potter novel before it was accepted by Bloomsbury doesn't make me feel any better about that poor choice!

As a nation, we watched planes crash into the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. None of us, even the most talented of our writers, could make sense of that day or predict the changes to the confidence and zestfulness of the United States that it would bring. It was a national trial that left us holding our terrified breath for days, years. We responded in *The ALAN Review*, as did other NCTE publications, that winter and in the spring that followed, but the best literary responses would come later, and continue to come.

Through all of the time of my editorship, there were people in the ALAN organization to whom I turned for advice and direction and help. I can still see some of them putting flyers on the table at 6 a.m. prior to the ALAN Breakfast: Connie Zitlow and Teri Lesesne, Kathy Kelly, and Rick Williams. In a class of her own, Leila Christenbury always told me the truth. There was, whenever I needed help, Joan Kaywell, whom I have called "The Bolt" for years, given her

propensity to be as bright and quick and powerful as lightning, and if Joan is yin, Virginia Ginger Monseau is yang: calm, quiet, graceful, and purposeful. Both are incredible leaders to whom I have looked in the organization. Mike Angelotti, one of ALAN's first leaders, gave me encouragement and confidence from the start. Don Gallo led us in developing a fund for young ALAN attendees, and he helped open up opportunities for expanding our group. Gary Salvner was a backbone who provided strength and certainty. Jim Blasingame carries strength with humor. And chocolate. Chris Crowe was integrity.

Outside of the organization, I was extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to work, while editor, with representatives from publishing houses, including Terry Borzumato and Adrienne Waintraub from Random House, Lucy Delpriore at Penguin, John Mason at Scholastic, Jeanne McDermott at Farrar Straus and Giroux, and Wendy Lamb of Delacourt.

And finally, there was Ted Hipple at the helm as Executive Secretary of ALAN, in all of his sartorial, exuberant glory. He showed me that we could pave the way for our students, and in doing that, we would ensure the future of ALAN and the progress of young adult literature. As editors, each of us carries on and passes forward the gifts of YAL that authors have given us. The joy of editing a journal like *The ALAN Review* is determining how to share the gifts.

*Pamela Sissi Carroll became Dean of the Oklahoma State University College of Education and Stella V. Andersen Endowed Professor in the School of Teaching and Curriculum Leadership at Oklahoma State University in July, 2012. Before going to OSU, she spent 21 years as an administrator and faculty member in the College of Education at Florida State University, where she worked with many wonderful classroom teachers to introduce YA literature into classrooms. At FSU, she received four university teaching awards, including FSU's Distinguished University Teaching Award (2006). She credits her zest for YAL to the adolescents with whom she worked as a young teacher in middle and high school, and to her mentors: Terry C. Ley, at Auburn University, where she received her doctorate in English Education, and John S. Simmons, at Florida State, who welcomed her into the university faculty ranks.*

## Reference

Cart, M. (2001). From insider to outsider: The evolution of young adult literature. *Voices from the Middle*, 9(2), 95–99.