

Anything but Peripheral: Coediting *The ALAN Review*

TAR Coeditor (with Robert Smalls) 1990–1992

From 1989 through the early 1990s (Vol. 17, No. 3 through Vol. 20, No. 3), I served as coeditor of *The ALAN Review* with Robert C. Small, Jr. During those years, Bob and I coedited 10 issues totaling 560 printed pages. Over that time, the Newbery Award was given to *Joyful Noise* (Paul Fleishman), *Number the Stars* (Lois Lowry), *Maniac Magee* (Jerry Spinelli), *Shiloh* (Phyllis Reynolds Naylor), and *Missing May* (Cynthia Rylant). The Donelson and Nilsen Honor list for those years included *Shabanu* (Suzanne Fisher Staples), *The Silver Kiss* (Annette Curtis Klause), *Lyddie* (Katherine Paterson), *Somewhere in the Darkness* (Walter Dean Myers), and *Missing Angel Juan* (Francesca Lia Block). The yearly ALAN workshop was held at the annual fall National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) convention, and we met in Baltimore, Atlanta, Seattle, Louisville, and Pittsburg. It was also, in the industry, an era when publishing companies were capitalizing on a renewed interest in horror, printing dozens of YA books in the genre; in English education, it was a time when debate over cultural literacy, thanks to E. D. Hirsch and fellow social conservatives, was loud and contentious. There was much going on in the field, and my selection as coeditor of *The ALAN Review* was, for me, a welcome one.

During my years as coeditor, Bob and I rather neatly divided the work, although the editing itself was always a joint venture. In the early 1990s, computers were not widely used nor were electronic files; computer-driven advances in the printing industry

were some years off. Odd as it may seem, Bob and I dealt with paper manuscripts, paper galley proofs, and hard copy letters to and from contributors. All manuscripts were re-keyboarded by an assistant who worked with Bob; I arranged the layout of the journal by hand using waxed galleys and art-board templates, and I sized and placed all photographs and drawings to indicate where they would be in the final issue. Because he was at Virginia Tech and I was across the state at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), Bob and I also spent a great deal of time on the phone, and for occasional face-to-face consultations, I made the four-hour trip to Tech. At the time, support for this kind of scholarship/service was not forthcoming at VCU, and there was no editorial assistance, no release time, and no funding. From the administration's perspective, my work on the journal was largely unacknowledged and rather peripheral.

Peripheral it assuredly was not. Before our first issue was at press, I had handled the redesign of the journal's cover and interior, and as Bob and I started our editorial terms, I assumed the advertising correspondence, placement, and billing. The bulk of the work, of course, was the manuscript (columns, reviews, and articles) solicitation, acceptance, and editing, making *The ALAN Review* exciting, but also highly time-intensive. Bob and I wanted to be creative and responsive to the trends in the field; highlighting authors, issues, and dealing with perennial censorship battles were all part of our ongoing work.

What do I recall of those years? As I have writ-

ten in the NCTE volume, *Two Decades of The ALAN Review* (Kelly & Small, 1999), I have my own list of favorites:

Most Generous Authors: As I recall from those years, Norma Fox Mazer and Julian Thompson were tops, and the then-reclusive Judy Blume allowed an interview to be conducted and printed.

Funniest Article: To this day I still love Susan Beth Pfeffer's "Basic Rules of Teenage Life," which hilariously and accurately identified just who was the "one, true outsider" (hint: every teenager who ever lived).

Most Impressive Research: *The ALAN Review* showcased wonderful scholarship, and in my years as coeditor, favorites were Lois Stover's work on cultural diversity, Don Kenney's on references, and Suzanne Reid's essay on wood, music, and sailing in the novels of Cynthia Voigt.

Favorite Focus Issues: Bob's Sue Ellen Bridgers issue was wonderful, and mine on science fiction worked out well, also.

Articles That Influenced Me for Years to Come: Margaret Mackey's "Derek's Story" was my first close encounter with the topic of aliteracy, and Rickey Cotton's piece on religion has resonated over the years.

And, finally, **My Most Startling Moment:** The famed author Madeleine L'Engle was interviewed for one of our winter issues, and in that piece, L'Engle clearly and unmistakably cited her belief that she could, as a child, walk above the ground. I read the passage, reread it, and then, during one of Bob's and my marathon proofreading sessions over the phone, I just had to ask. The conversation, reproduced from memory, does not sound very erudite, but it's pretty much how it went:

"Uh, Bob, just one last thing."

"Sure. What is it?"

"Did you actually read *that part* of the L'Engle interview?"

"What part?"

"You know, *that part*."

"You mean the part where she recalls being able to walk above the ground?"

"Yes. Wow—do you think she really means it?"

"Yes. I think she really does."

"Wow."

L'Engle had written that her theory was that "whatever Jesus did while he was alive, we should be able to do too, but we've forgotten." Interviewer Gary D. Schmidt had prompted, "You speak of this also in one of your journals, when you recall that you used to be able to float down stairs as a very young child," and L'Engle had cheerfully responded: "Oh yes, and I cannot tell you how many letters I have had that say, 'I've never dared tell anybody this before. I did it, too'" (Winter 1991, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 13–14).

Coediting *The ALAN Review* was a privilege as well as an excellent preparation for work in the years to come. I went on to edit NCTE's secondary booklist, *Books for You* (Christenbury, 1995), and then for five years served as editor of *English Journal*. But I never dealt with advertising, never cut up galleys again, never did marathon proofreading sessions over the phone, and never had an editorial partner the equal of Bob Small. I also never, as a matter of fact, understood Madeleine L'Engle and floating above the ground, but surely some things are best left unquestioned.

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