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# A Letter from the Editor: The Long and Winding Road

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With this issue, my journey as Editor of the MONTHLY comes to a close. It began over 6 years ago in a McDonald's. While I was eating something that both my wife and physician would tell me is bad for my cholesterol, my cell phone rang. John Ewing was on the other end with the news that I would be the next Editor of the MONTHLY. At the time, it was impossible for me to know how life altering that phone call was. This became much more apparent several weeks later when I met with John in New York City. From across a table in a very Seinfeldian coffee shop, John told me that the job of editing the MONTHLY was perhaps one of the most difficult in all of mathematics. Anyone who has held this position would quickly agree with John, but hard work has its rewards. I have learned that such rewards at the MONTHLY are almost countless.

Six years (1 as Editor-Elect and 5 as Editor) is a long period, and yes, the road has been not only long but winding:

- Over 25,000 miles in travel to both Sectional and National meetings;
- 4,669 submissions (as of the writing of this letter, all but 2 have received a final decision);
- 5,319 reviewers invited;
- 2,942 reviews received;
- 1,406 revisions received (and yes, on one paper we requested 7 revisions);
- During this period, our Editorial Manager System handled over 80,000 electronic mail messages.

I am happy to report 2 positive statistics related to this dizzying list of numbers:

- For our 4,669 submissions, the average number of days between the receipt of the manuscript and our first decision was 37.6 days;
- For our 2,942 reviews received, the average number of days between the date that the reviewer agreed to the review and date that the review was submitted was 28.4 days.

The terms of every past MONTHLY Editor have wound through challenges. I am lucky; my challenges have paled in comparison to some of my predecessors. A quick review of [3] (and its cited references) shows that our founder Benjamin Finkel spent a great deal of his time during the years 1894–1909 looking for funding to keep this publication afloat. In 1912, Hebert Slaughter was so distressed about the current state of the MONTHLY that he wrote to a colleague “I cannot long stand the pressure. I must either put the MONTHLY on a different basis or stand from under.” [3]. I was particularly struck by a parting letter from Lester Ford [2] which describes an attempt by the government during World War II to cut from 2 to 1 the number of staples holding each issue together.

My first challenge was to assemble an Editorial Board that could not only handle papers throughout the breadth of the Mathematical Sciences Classification Index, but

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also reflect the diversity of the MAA membership. I cannot say enough good things about my Editorial Board. Their devotion, patience, and hard work (above and beyond the call of duty) have led us to whatever success we have enjoyed. While space does not allow me to thank each one individually, there are several that deserve special thanks: Sergei Tabachnikov (Notes Editor), Jeff Nunemacher (Book Reviews Editor), and Doug Hensley, Doug West, and Gerald Edgar (Problem Section Editors). I am happy to see that Editor-Elect Susan Colley has retained a large portion of my Board for the 2017–2021 Editorial Board, and I am also happy to accept her invitation to remain on the Board myself.

My second challenge was to pull the MONTHLY into the 21st century and move submissions and all major editorial processes to a web based system. Our use of Aries Systems *Editorial Manager* began on January 1, 2012. While the end result was successful, the road was not without bumps—I distinctly remember during the first two months of my editorship receiving an email that began “Chapman, turn off your robot.”

My third challenge involved the MAA’s adoption of “double-blind” reviewing. After much general discussion within the MAA, I appointed a subcommittee of the Editorial Board to examine the possible adoption of the double-blind system for the MONTHLY. The committee’s report, forwarded to the Board of Governors on June 29, 2012, recommended against the adoption of the double-blind system for the MONTHLY, and the MONTHLY Editorial Board voted 33-2 (with 3 abstentions) to support the report. At the August 2012 Board of Governors meeting, the Governors voted overwhelmingly to move all MAA journals to the double-blind system. The wording of the actual proposal passed by the Governors allowed the current MAA journal editors to keep their current refereeing system, and hence double-blind was not actually mandated until there was a change in Editor. During 2013 and 2014, I kept the MONTHLY on a traditional manuscript reviewing system. While I was under no obligation to do so, I did move the MONTHLY during 2015 to the double-blind platform. My hope was that this would make the transition to a new Editor-Elect (and eventually Editor) a much smoother process. While I found that many of the theorized problems with moving to double-blind were actually easy to solve, others raised ethical issues which require much more thought and debate. I am happy to report that my predecessor Dan Velleman is chairing an MAA Taskforce which will consider policies designed to resolve such ethical matters. While one year of data surrounding the MONTHLY’s double-blind excursion is likely not enough to draw any hard conclusions, I do note that submission and acceptance statistics from 2015 are completely in line with what we saw in 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014.

My fourth challenge was completely unexpected, but consumed a great deal of the last two years of my editorship. Sometime during the Spring of 2014 our longtime typesetters, managed by Pearson Education, terminated their production agreement with the MAA. Not only did this end a long business relationship, but it forced us to quickly find a replacement. Early in the summer of 2014, the MAA reached an agreement with Cenveo Publishing Services to replace Pearson. Due to the unique nature of the MONTHLY, our production processes are much different than those of a traditional research journal, and needless to say, our transition to Cenveo has not exactly been smooth. The MONTHLY (as well as its two MAA sister journals) fell well behind our normal publication schedule. I was able in late 2015 to get the release dates for the usual issues of the MONTHLY back to normal, but Cenveo again fell behind and it was not until late this year that the MONTHLY started to arrive to its readers again on time.

My final challenge is one that I have shared with each of my recent predecessors—to not only keep the MONTHLY as the world’s preeminent source for mathematical expo-

sition, but to improve it and expand our reader base. Most of the new things I tried were well received. We produced 2 special issues. The first in March 2013 contained papers written by speakers at the 2011 International Summer School for Students at Jacobs University in Bremen, Germany. Three of this volume's papers were finalists for the 2013 Ford–Halmos Award. The second in November 2014 was dedicated to Mathematical Biology. The MONTHLY has traditionally published very few papers in applied mathematics, and with the almost explosive amount of interest in Mathematical Biology, I saw this as an opportunity for the MONTHLY to open new doors. To honor Lloyd Shapley's 2013 Nobel Prize in Economics, we reprinted in May of 2013 his classic MONTHLY paper (co-authored with David Gale) *College Admissions and the Stability of Marriage*, which had been cited by the Nobel Committee. As of the writing of this letter, the Shapley–Gale paper has been cited over 4,300 times. At the Centennial MathFest in Washington, I organized with the 4 other living MONTHLY Editors a special session titled “Generations of MONTHLY Gems,” which celebrated the MONTHLY's history and its impact on the development of our Association.

I have thanked my Editorial Board, but this only scratches the surface of the acknowledgments which I owe. I begin at the top and thank the 4 MAA Presidents under which I served: David Bressoud, Paul Zorn, Bob Devaney, and Francis Su. Special thanks go to Tina Straley and Michael Pearson, the MAA Executive Directors during my term. Ivars Peterson, Bev Ruedi, and the entire publications staff (past and present) at the MAA deserve special recognition for their tireless efforts to make the MAA journals so outstanding. Sam Houston State University was more than welcoming to the MONTHLY, and among those I should thank are Jaimie Hebert, John Pascarella, and Brian Loft. Due to her outstanding performance as my Editorial Assistant, Bonnie Ponce has been hired permanently by the MAA as Assistant Managing Editor for Journals. Thank you Bonnie, as I could not have done this without you. Last and certainly not least, I thank my wife Lenora and sons Jonathan and Cameron for putting up with everything associated with the scary list of numbers you saw on the first page.

Challenges have been a theme of this letter, and I part with a challenge to the MONTHLY, its readers, and the general membership of the MAA. I recently spoke at the Intermountain Section Spring meeting, and during a session of Math Jeopardy, the following question came up: How many issues a year does the American Mathematical MONTHLY publish? None of the contestants knew the answer (which is 10). With a little more digging, it became clear to me that many MAA members (especially our younger ones) know little about the MONTHLY. In many respects, the MONTHLY is the MAA; the Association was founded to run the MONTHLY. The MONTHLY is the crown jewel of the MAA—if you don't know much about it, then learn more. Go to your library and find a copy of John Ewing's tribute to the MONTHLY's first hundred years [1]. Revel in the history of the MONTHLY and its unique standing in the mathematical community. Its pages are filled with papers by not only Nobel Prize winners and Field's medalists, but faculty and students from every conceivable level of the educational spectrum.

I am excited about the future of the MONTHLY. I hand the baton off to Susan Colley, who has already demonstrated that she will be an outstanding editor. I look forward to working closely with her throughout the years of her term.

It has been an incredible ride and an honor for me to guide the reins of the MONTHLY. I guess one never knows what might start in a McDonald's.

## REFERENCES

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1. J. Ewing, *A Century of Mathematics: Through the Eyes of the MONTHLY*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.
2. L. R. Ford, Retrospect, *Amer. Math. MONTHLY* **53** (1946) 582–585.
3. T. H. Straley, A History of the American Mathematical MONTHLY, <http://www.maa.org/history-of-the-american-mathematical-monthly>.