

Editorial

As readers will know, we do not publish many editorials in *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord*. In fact, this is only the second one we have ever run, and the first since the inaugural issue in January 1991. This is because we decided at the outset that we would rather devote all the space available to the articles and book reviews that provided the rationale for this journal; we would editorialize only in extraordinary circumstances. Although a lot has happened since 1991, we have consistently followed this guideline. But for the first time in thirty-five issues we are going to make an exception. Or perhaps it would be more honest to say that I am going to do so, since unlike the last editorial, which was signed by the founding co-editors of *The Mariner* - the late Gerry Panting, Olaf Janzen and myself - this one is an individual production. And it has a single purpose: to discuss in a very limited space the contributions that Olaf has made to this publication over the last nine years and to try to convey the deep gratitude that I, and all readers of *The Mariner*, owe to this quite remarkable man. Now that he has stepped down as an editor, it is time to assess his role in building this journal and to pay tribute to almost a decade of unstinting effort.

Let's start at the beginning. The number of people who with some justification might claim paternity for this journal is large. But with no disrespect to Ken Mackenzie, Steve Salmon, Alec Douglas, Gerry Panting and a host of others, if I had to pick a single person on whom to bestow this honour it would be Olaf. It's not that he was the first to come up with the idea. Nor was he the one who kept it alive through the 1980s while CNRS matured. And he did not name the journal or raise the funds that enabled it to begin publication. But he was the person who at a critical juncture transformed the idea into reality by agreeing to edit it. That we began with three editors was an accident: Gerry came on board because it proved impossible to raise the necessary funds in Corner Brook, and I was drafted because once it became apparent that the journal could only be produced in St. John's, the Society needed someone with previous editorial experience. But make no mistake about it: had Olaf not accepted a draft to edit this journal in the first place, the project would almost certainly have been stillborn.

Olaf, of course, brought a lot to the editorial troika. From the start it was agreed that he would have responsibility for the book review section, a decision that made sense given that he was already acting in this capacity for *Argonauta*. To say that he was the best book review editor the newsletter ever had is indisputable, and I speak as the only other person to hold the post. Those readers with access to back issues of *Argonauta* before 1991 will be able to see what I mean merely by scanning the reviews. Olaf brought a new dedication to this section of the newsletter, a dedication that can be measured quantitatively but which is better judged qualitatively. If you look at the reviews he edited you will see two things without too much difficulty. First, there is his broad and inclusive vision both of what comprised maritime studies and of who might make a contribution by lending their expertise to the review of books. Second, it is also apparent that Olaf was a natural editor. If you ask him about his editorial skills, he will tell you modestly that he is a "light editor." Perhaps he

is, but what is apparent even in the *Argonauta* days is his gift of helping authors communicate their ideas clearly and engagingly. I have talked with many of the reviewers who have written for Olaf, and they all agree on one thing - Olaf makes you want to be better than you ever thought you could be. Don't ask me how he does it - if I knew, I'd shamelessly steal it myself - but if you have ever written for Olaf, you'll know what I mean.

If Olaf's book review section in *Argonauta* was a promising work in progress, his crowning achievement came in the section he crafted in *The Mariner*. His friends like to kid him that for the last nine years he has edited "the best book review section in the maritime world." But this is no joke; it is the truth. If you doubt my judgement, compare his book review section with any other maritime journal in the world in any language. If you find a better one, I will cheerfully refund your subscription money out of my own pocket. This, of course, is a gratuitous offer, because I know that none comes close. And if you make the comparison, ask yourself how much more he could have done had we not been forced from the outset to limit the space available for reviews.

But as important as Olaf's work has been to the book review section, in key ways his contributions elsewhere have been even more crucial. No decision about the direction that this journal has ever taken has been made without his input, and frequently he has taken the lead in devising policy. He was probably the person most responsible for the decision to make *The Mariner* a fully-refereed publication, and he was jointly responsible for its shift into a journal of North Atlantic and North Pacific maritime studies. He has read and commented on virtually every manuscript ever published in this journal, and in recent years has edited an increasing proportion of them. In particular, he has done almost all the editing on a couple of issues of *The Mariner* when I was ill.

Much of what I have written about above - and especially Olaf's immense dedication and capacity for work - will be apparent to most readers of *The Mariner*. What will be less obvious, perhaps, are the intangibles: the collegiality, the willingness to pitch in wherever he was needed, and the simple good sense and judgement that he has always brought to the task at hand. What is good about this journal is almost certainly due to Olaf. If readers could have attended our regular editorial meetings they would know how many hair-brained ideas from his fellow editors (especially this one) never saw the light of day because of Olaf. Moreover, if I had to pick one characteristic that has made this endeavour work it would be the persuasive feeling of friendship that Olaf brought to all our dealings. I have worked with many colleagues over the years on a variety of projects, but what has made this one so special has been having a friend who was always there when he was needed.

How can we thank Olaf for all that he has done for this publication over the last nine years? Any way that I could devise would certainly be inadequate, and I know that I have already offended his innate modesty. But perhaps the best way to honour Olaf is to keep reading *The Mariner*, which stands as eloquent testimony to what he has accomplished. When Olaf decided to step down, he said to me that the hardest part of the decision was that he had become quite proud of what *The Mariner* had become. The quality of this journal is what he bequeaths to all of us, and the challenge for Greg Kennedy and me is to try to build upon what he has begun so well. We pledge to do our best to try to live up to the exceptionally high standards he has set.

Lewis R. Fischer