

From the Editor-in-Chief

Letting Go

This is a story: More than 10 years ago, a congenial group held a meeting over lunch in the Peking Restaurant on 15th Street, N.W., in Washington, D.C. Chopsticks in one hand, they made notes with the other; truth to tell, some even talked with their mouths full. They were still talking long after the food was gone and everyone else had gone forth to face whatever fates the cookies had foretold. In due course, the Peking's management kicked them out unceremoniously.

By then, however, it was too late. The group had already done its work, which this column, my valedictory, contemplates. I was at that meeting when, even without benefit of cookies, the editorial committee of *Roundtable Reports* (RR) did some serious thinking about the future. I expect I ate—probably quite a lot—but I have no recall of what. Even my dating of the event is approximate. Perhaps the Peking stands as a synecdoche for all editorial committee meetings, which have melted down in memory and become MEETING.

Still, I see clearly in my mind's eye that remarkable group—Barbara Fertig, Sue Robinson, Suzanne Schell, Leni Buff, Judy Herman—who for so long formed the core of the editorial committee. Lately that inner vision has been much with me as I have been going through my files. Just now I came across what may have been the

memo to the Museum Education Roundtable board of directors that came out of that meeting, or perhaps a draft of it. It is undated and not at all the way I remembered it. For one thing, its voice is angry, the tone frustrated committees often use when they address slow-moving boards of directors.

For another, much of it is very mundane, housekeeping really, and rather a lot of it never quite happened the way we envisaged. It might, nevertheless, be worth quoting at length:

The Editorial Board (EB) intends to make a number of changes in the appearance, content, and operations of RR designed to clarify its nature, to serve its readership better, and to make it run more smoothly. . . . A new front-page logo will stress more emphatically RR's relationship to MER. The masthead will be redesigned and moved to the inside second page. Greater attention will be paid to graphics and illustrations. . . .

The EB is being expanded. This will make it possible to plan two issues at a time by, in effect, leapfrogging co-editors. . . . [W]e hope [to] encourage others around the country to submit articles, news, illustrations, and ideas on a regular basis.

Indeed, we have noted a tendency for RR to become more national in its scope and more diverse in subject matter. More-

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Readers interested in submitting manuscripts to the *Journal of Museum Education* should write to the Editor-in-Chief, Museum Education Roundtable, P.O. Box 8561, Rockville, Md. 20856. Responses to articles published in the journal are also encouraged.

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over, people interested in museum education seem to feel a need for a forum for ideas, issues, and information. We feel we can help meet this need and foster this broadening tendency in a number of ways: provocative essays . . . will become a staple . . . ; we will increasingly solicit articles from museum people outside the Washington area, museum people who are not educators, and people not in the museum field at all; and we hope questions of education, psychology, philosophy, and the like, which have implications for museum education, will more and more surface in our pages.

Not exactly "I Have a Dream," is it? The steps I think of as having been initiated at the Peking are only implicit here—the devotion of whole issues to themes, audiences, regions, or subjects ranging from the practical how-to variety to the research-oriented to the philosophical or theoretical; the involvement of guest editors with special expertise to organize issues; the movement toward longer, more in-depth articles drawn from a wider representation of contributors both within and outside the profession, as well as toward longer issues, multiple issues, and double issues on important topics; the change of title to the *Journal of Museum Education* and the aspirations that renaming signified.

Perhaps these changes loom larger in retrospect than they seemed when first contemplated or even when they were implemented in stages over many issues. In fact, while we announced our intentions to the board, we said little about them to our readers; they, presumably, would figure it out for themselves. Had they but seen the memo, however, the readers' hearts would have been warmed by the fire with which the committee scorched the board for wanting to raise subscription rates before the quality of the product justified it.

With the journal's small readership base, no advertising, and no outside source of funding, reconciling reasonable rates with MER's solvency has remained a constant struggle. This struggle partly accounts for the journal's slow rate of improvement in appearance and heft. While we could minister to the contents and editing without spending much money, the physical package proved intractable sans cash.

Now the all-volunteer editorial committee, which at its height allowed us to have as many as eight issues in various stages of development at one time, has been superseded by a setup with professionals at its core. It is time. The former system went to its limits and broke down. There is no *turning* back, but we can *look* back.

You, of course, are the best judges of whether that committee has made the *Journal of Museum Education* the unique—and uniquely useful—publication we meant it to be. We have, I hope, enabled museum educators to teach each other and to learn from other sources as well. We have, I hope, responded to the needs expressed to us by colleagues around the country. We have, I hope, presented you with lucid, informed, unpretentious, insightful, helpful, and occasionally even witty prose, well-

edited and as free of solecisms and typos as one could reasonably expect from harassed editors who had learned their grammar on the fly. We have, I hope, given each issue internal coherence, presenting you with both a conceptual framework and the resources to build upon it, a magazine to be read from cover to cover. We have, I hope, provoked you—and helped you—to think.

We have also, I hope, done our part to attain for museum education the professional status to which so many of us aspire. Museum education has always seemed to me a preference trying to be a profession, much as *Roundtable Reports/The Journal of Museum Education* has been a newsletter trying to be a journal. The limited success of the latter to date foreshadows the difficulties the former faces. Those who wish it are well advised to be patient.

With its limited resources, MER is doing its part. In the last year, the long-range plan prepared by Suzanne Schell and her task force has been considered, amended, and adopted by the MER board, as described by chair Michael Judd in the last issue. In addition, the board has taken the very great financial risk of hiring paid professionals to serve as managing editors.

MER has had some luck. An exceeding wonderful fortuity has contrived to make Susan Nichols available to succeed me as editor-in-chief at the same time that Ann Hofstra Grogg and Ellen Cochran Hirzy could be engaged to support her as managing editors. These are strong and dexterous hands, much more capable than one had a right to hope for, let alone expect.

Change is in the wind all right. With this issue, my resignation as editor-in-chief takes effect as I leave the National Portrait Gallery for Plimoth Plantation. I feel both serene and bereft, the way you are supposed to feel when you relinquish something you care about but cannot—and should not—hold on to. It is both a shocking and a shockingly easy transition to my new role as occasional contributor—no mean estate, but not what I'm used to.

But then I have my memories. It was a happy chance that made me a museum educator and led to my involvement in this publication. As a result of that chance, over the course of more than 10 years I have had a lot of fun doing this. Even the aggravation was fun. But my fellow editors were the most fun—too many to name, almost too many to remember. The effect of each, however short the tenure, on the journal was palpable and unique. Their effect on me, individually and cumulatively, I cannot calculate—and would not if I could. The richness they have added to my life, I will not relinquish—and could not if I would. To all of them, for helping in this ministry and for being my friends, and to all of you, for permitting me to be of service, thank you.

The theme of this issue did not leap off the page. Yet there is a theme, which emerged on reflection, and it is

close to my heart. It feels somehow fitting that it should be the subject of the last issue I honcho.

I have felt for some time that museum education was about to break out of the intellectual cul-de-sac in which it seemed to be trapped. There were a lot of good ideas and good programs out there, but what held them together was hard to discern; the superstructure of theory remained cloaked, if it was there at all. There had been a lot of highfalutin' philosophizing, a lot of rhetorical salvos, and a lot of visitor research of various kinds, but it remained fragmented. The midground theory that could impart coherence to how museums dealt with their visitors—and nonvisitors—remained elusive.

This issue supports other evidence that the breakthrough may now be taking place. Our authors range over a lot of ground: from Marian Martinello and Mauricio Gonzalez's carefully worked out, sophisticated approach to teacher training; to Valorie Beer's systematic consideration of the relevance of "curriculum" to museum settings; to Michael Spock's perspective on the relationship between museum organization and how museums discharge their educational missions, as reported by Lisa Falk; to Carol Stapp's panel's surprisingly cool and proactive responses to *The Uncertain Profession*; to Judith

Balfe's review of recent insights into the adult learner.

On one level, this issue is about clarifying what we know and evolving effective strategies for putting it into action. But on another level, it is equally about clarifying what we don't know and evolving strategies for filling those gaps. The questions educators, evaluators, and other museum people have been asking lately seem to be much sharper—our ignorance seems to be of a higher order.

Higher-order ignorance constitutes important progress. It has often seemed to me that educators were less guilty of reinventing the wheel than of spinning their wheels, but that may be changing. While the panel on "Silent Pedagogy" at the San Francisco AAM meeting added little to the ample documentation of art museum indifference to visitor needs, the equally well-attended and justly well-received two-part panel on "The Meaning of Things" was fresh and fertile. The next few years of thinking and writing about museum education seem full of promise. With this issue, the journal renews its commitment to remain on the cutting edge.

Ken Yellis

Director of Public Programs
Plimoth Plantation

The Uncertain Profession: Perceptions and Directions

Introduction by Carol B. Stapp

In the spring of 1986, the Getty Center for Education in the Arts published a report that has generated a good deal of interest—and controversy. The Elliot W. Eisner and Stephen M. Dobbs study, *The Uncertain Profession: Observations on the State of Museum Education in Twenty American Art Museums*, has been the subject of a number of articles, letters to the editor, and panel discussions in museum periodicals and at meetings. This spring, Museum Education Roundtable assembled a panel of museum professionals representing a variety of perspectives to weigh the merits of the study's findings and elicit the response of museum educators.

By way of background, Eisner and Dobbs (professor of education and art, Stanford University, and professor of creative arts, San Francisco State University, respectively) interviewed the director and the person in charge of museum education at 20 art museums across the country, from the Art Institute of Chicago to the New Orleans Museum of Art. The hour-long, tape-recorded interviews

—gathered over five months in 1984—were the basis for the authors' construction of "a picture of the views and attitudes" of the 36 interviewees and the authors' interpretation of "those views in light of their meaning for the field."

Eisner and Dobbs's eight recommendations range from a multiweek institute for museum educators, curators, and directors, to a small grant program to stimulate research, to the establishment of a refereed publication. The authors stress that these are not in order of priority.

To bring matters up to date, the interviewees' responses to the study's findings were solicited and made available. In the summer of 1986 the Getty Center sponsored a two-

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