

## Editor Letter to Randal Jelks

from Sherrie Tucker

Randal Jelks

Thank you for your service to *AMSJ*.

Co-editing with you for the past 13 years has been a joy. I thank you for each and every one of those 13 years you have devoted to *AMSJ*, especially this last one, as you were ready to cycle off at 12 and I begged you to stay for one more year and you did. *Don't worry, this isn't another plea for just one more year (four more issues and a webinar!!!!)* I won't push my luck! I am writing this letter because I want to thank you—out loud and in print—for everything you have given to this journal that has made it what it is today, and all you have done to point it toward its bright future. I thank you for all of the creativity, vision, generosity, brilliance, and kindness that you brought to the journal, and to our partnership, as we worked together across these many years.

You already know everything that follows, but these are some of the things I want people to know about your contributions to the journal:

When you agreed to join me and David Katzman as co-editor, you didn't know I would get a fellowship and disappear for a year and David would go on a boating trip without communication equipment. Now, this is your story, and you tell it well. I only retell it here, because what I want people to know on top of that, is that you held off telling it until it was a funny story, and that before it could possibly have been very amusing, you jumped into the fray and edited beautiful issues. You just did it. I hereby symbolically scrub my by-line from those mastheads when I left my new co-editor in the lurch!

## 8 Sherrie Tucker

You came on as co-editor in 2009. We were running behind in those years, though, so first issue in which your name appears in the masthead is Spring/Summer 2008, the gorgeous Aaron Douglas Special Issue, guest-edited by William J. Harris—still one of my very favorite issues.

When I got back from my research year, and David returned from sea, you and I worked for a while in a kind of apprenticeship to David, trying to learn all the things that he did that were only recorded in his head (after “retiring” in 2010, he continued to give us notes---AMSJ is hard to quit). Then one day, I think we were in a car, probably headed for a MAASA board meeting, you said you felt like the journal was ours. I felt it too. We were hitting our stride and it was starting to look like something else. Literally, it *looked* different. You brought design and branding sense—with the “AMSJ” tagline, and soliciting Carla Tilghman’s color splash in the logo, starting with issue 52.1. We liked each other’s ideas. The whole “it’s a quarterly, let’s do 4 issues a year!” was a revelation and we made it happen. The OMG, what can we do about being a year behind—let’s skip a year—got us up to date! The “Summer Reading Issue” helped us stay there. You got us on social media back when I still thought Instagram was a breakfast cereal. Webinars, for Pete’s sake. You instituted the blog, now so beautifully curated by Chris Perreira, and soon to be edited by Nishani Frazier.

Sometimes when I think about what I have treasured about working with you, I think about this kid in high school, who always had these ideas that I liked but I didn’t back him up. Like once, a bunch of us were standing in front of Arcata High, bored as hell. This kid said, “Let’s have a parade!” And he marched off. None of us joined him, but my heart ached. I identified with him and felt guilty at the same time. I wanted to be the kind of person who would join the parade, or even start one. What I am trying to say is, Randal, you and I have joined each other’s parades. I said, “Let’s ask the editorial board to submit photos of themselves for the summer reading issue.” You said, “Yes!” You said, “Let’s do a special issue every Fall,” and I said, “Um, that sounds really hard, but, um, okay...” And we did it, and those annual special issues, with the fanfare of ASA launches, webinars, panels, is my favorite thing. Space does not permit me to list all my favorite things for which you are responsible, so just one more:

“The Funk Issue”—guest edited by Tony Bolden—and the “Funk Issue” reception at Busboys and Poets!

It isn’t all parades. It can’t be, when the work entails biweekly meetings, 11 months a year, over a 13-year (I’m not great at math, but I think that’s like 286 meetings). We have co-edited 33 journal issues (as of January, 2022). Anyone thinking, that’s not so much work, I want to remind you that we have a 25% acceptance rate and that we read and respond to all of those submissions! Not complaining, just wanting to say, that I am grateful and humbled for the times when the parade would get a little wobbly and we didn’t walk away. We worked on it. That’s something that hasn’t come easy to me in life, and I’ve learned so much from you about balance, about respect, about when to reach out, when to leave space, about trying to stay tuned to what matters. I have learned from you the

many times you have checked in with me and the wonderful graduate student members of the editorial staff. I'd be ready to dive into the agenda, and you'd say something holistic and caring, and I would be like, jeeze, I suck. No I don't. Breathe. Of all the things we have done together, I am most proud, and most grateful, of the collaborative journal editing culture that has provided such humane and creative space in a profession that should be better at this overall. I am so grateful for all of our years of working together on the journal, treasure your friendship, and wish you all the best with your new books and film!

With respect, friendship, and love,  
Sherrie Tucker, co-editor with Randal M. Jelks since 2009.

