To absent friends

The Editors

It is a cold autumn night in Levi, just north of the Arctic Circle. Six editors, two graphic artists, a journal assistant and a punk are hunched around a fire in a reindeer-skin-clad wooden yurt, enjoying hearty Lappish fare to the throbbing beat of a Sami drum. The fire spits and cracks as soot antlers are daubed on our brows, odd hats are placed on our heads and slightly alcoholic milk is sipped from a reindeer hide bladder. We are taking part in a shamanistic fertility ritual, planting the seeds of prosperity for the coming spring. We are also making plans for *EMBO Reports*.

Five eventful years later, we find ourselves saying farewell to the punk who brought us to that yurt for an editorial retreat. It seems fitting in our post-Christmas recovery to begin the year with one more toast, to the journal's absent friends: former editors, Chief Editors and Board members. We are grateful to you all.

As regular readers are no doubt aware, and despite our best efforts to make him feel guilty for doing so, Howy Jacobs stepped down last year as Chief Editor of this journal. He will be missed by the team in Heidelberg. We had known for some time that he would leave to focus on his "proper" job as a research scientist, but these things still have a habit of creeping up on you. Howy's departure explains this sentimental editorial, which cannot aim to match his inimitable style; the maestro has left the building.

We want to use this opportunity to thank Howy for the huge amount of time and energy he has given to *EMBO Reports*, and reflect on his time at the journal.

The retreat in Levi referenced above came shortly after Howy began at *EMBO Reports*. He insisted that although he was not going to make any immediate changes to the journal, it would still be useful to retreat to the wintry north to discuss the changes he was not going to make. There are other stories from

that retreat, including the sampling of Finnish moonshine, derived from a hellish mixture of vodka and Fisherman's Friends. But the abiding memory is how excited the editorial team felt to have Howy onboard and the ideas he had for our journal, as well as the ideas that he encouraged us to have. That appreciation of his involvement and guidance has not waned and he is, like all good rock stars, leaving us wanting more.

As someone embedded in the research community, Howy brought with him the respect of his peers for his research, and he took seriously his mission to think independently for EMBO. His insight into the day-to-day realities of a laboratory has informed how *EMBO Reports*—indeed all four EMBO publications—aim to serve the community for which they were founded. In particular, Howy's unwavering interest and support for younger researchers and his interest in capturing the energy and innovation of early career researchers for the EMBO journals will remain a major aspect of future developments.

Over the past 6 years, we have gradually implemented many of the ideas from that first and other retreats. Howy has never pushed the editorial team, or authors, to go faster than we could manage, but his determination to improve our journal has been unwavering; driven by two important ideas: that scientific publishing is as important now as ever, and that it should be done properly. A core part of that approach has been that metrics, including the notorious Impact Factor, are not the ultimate measure of scientific worth: not of journals, nor papers, nor scientists. Hence, Howy, along with EMBO Press and EMBO, was one of the first signatories of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA; <http://www.ascb.org/dora-old/files/SFDeclarationFINAL.pdf>).

To echo Howy's farewell editorial [1], we feel we have matured the personality of

EMBO Reports during his tenure, building on its strengths and trimming away some of the old assumptions and habits that no longer make sense for authors, readers or editors. And even though Howy is bidding us farewell, he leaves us with a far keener sense of what does and does not constitute a "good" *EMBO Reports* paper; what our role is in the wider conversations that take place about science (its conduct, funding, publication and purpose), and where to go from here.

Howy's farewell was titled "No more Mr Nasty", but as anyone who has worked with him will know, this epithet could not be further from the truth. Over the past 6 years, both the editors and contributing authors to the journal have benefitted from his insight, his creativity and idealism, his sense of fair play and his support. We hope that authors and readers have also sensed the critical but fair tone he has set for the journal, as well as our continuing interest in "short and sweet" papers, as he called them.

Though Howy has moved on, the changes he initiated and the editorial team he honed remain. We will miss his regular visits to Heidelberg, but we are hopeful for another visit to that yurt with him someday. For now, the work of running a journal that we are proud to publish continues. As Howy wrote in 2009, a year into the job: "What *EMBO Reports* aims at is scientific lean cuisine at its finest: an entrée that is at once appetizing, intriguing and easily digested, accompanied by a glass of fine wine and an exquisite sweetmeat" [2].

As we write in our acceptance letters to authors: thank you, Howy, for your contribution to *EMBO Reports*. To you, our readers: please continue to send us your delicacies.

References

1. Jacobs H (2014) *EMBO Rep* 15: 1103
2. Jacobs H (2009) *EMBO Rep* 10: 935