I n case you were wondering how carefully our peer reviewers scrutinize the manuscripts we send them, consider this excerpt from a manuscript that neurologist Bruce R. Ransom reviewed for us several years ago:

Wow, where to start. This is a horrible paper. I know of no conventional peer-reviewed journal that would take it—not even the bottom feeders.

To be a little more specific: Who are these guys? Are they neurologists? (I doubt it) Medical–legal trained seals? (maybe) Epidemiologists? (most certainly not) This is a valid question because of the possibility of conflict of interest.

Where did these patients come from? Not even mentioned!!!! Lots of opportunity for bias here (even though they comically say they have tried to avoid bias). They must have a control group (but they don’t) to make sure that they validate their ‘findings’ using notoriously subjective assessment tools (i.e., the neurological examination). How long after taking the drug were the patients studied? When they say “loss of reflexes,” what do they mean? All reflexes, some reflexes, etc.? What were their “criteria for myopathy”? I could go on, but I think you get the picture. Beyond the fatal methodological problems, I would think this might be controversial for your journal. They are implying (mainly out of thin air, at this point) that a drug causes long-term problems and are explicitly inviting legal consequences. No one would come right out and say this but, in my opinion, this is DOA!

P.S. I have to go take a shower now.

That review led to the easiest decision I ever had to make on the status of a manuscript—it was, as they say, a “no-brainer.” The authors did not even protest or attempt to resubmit the manuscript at a later date, as sometimes happens when I send my more polite rejection letters.

The review is a good example of one of the things I enjoy most about working with Dr. Ransom, or Bruce, as I call him. He can be painfully blunt at times, but whether he’s reviewing an article or writing one of his own, the result is always a thorough, first-rate job. And no matter what the situation, Bruce will find a way to inject some humor into it. He has extremely high standards for himself and others, and it shows. Fortunately, most of the manuscripts I send him to review are of a much higher quality than the one discussed here, so his reviews are usually much milder and less colorful than the one you saw.

In fact, Bruce usually is not painfully blunt. He is generally diplomatic, gentle, considerate, witty, and—dare I use this adjective to describe a neuroscientist?—smart! He also has a calm, reassuring doctor’s voice, along with an infectious laugh and a disarming, mischievous grin.

Bruce is our only editorial board member whom I knew in my pre-P&T life; we worked together in the 1990s on a journal he co-founded some 17 years ago called Glia—a highly specialized, prestigious neurology journal published by John Wiley & Sons. There are some great Glia stories, as I discovered one night at a neuroscience conference in Los Angeles, and Bruce would be happy to regale you with them sometime over a glass of Rombauer—if you’re lucky enough to be able to pin him down long enough, that is. (And if you’re lucky enough to be in an establishment that serves Rombauer or a Chardonnay of comparable quality.)

He’s rather busy, you see, as the chairman of the neurology department at the University of Washington in Seattle; and seeing patients in his clinic; teaching and mentoring students; meeting regularly with directors at the National Institutes of Health (NIH); editing Glia; and working on numerous research articles and the latest edition of his classic Neuroglia textbook with his Glia co-editor and good friend, Helmut Kettenmann (all of which would be considerably easier if he didn’t travel so darn much).

Well, the man can’t help it if Helmut happens to live in Berlin (Germany, not New Jersey) and if another colleague and long-time friend happens to live in Tokyo—right? And it’s certainly not his fault that the NIH is in Bethesda; or that the Winter Conference on Brain Research takes place in Denver every year (did I mention that Bruce is a skier?); or that the Society for Neuroscience meets regularly in one of the society’s half dozen or so favorite locations (these include New Orleans, San Diego, Orlando, and Los Angeles in recent years; it will be in Washington, DC, this coming fall).

So how does he accomplish all of his work when he’s out of the country an average of once a month and away from Seattle another three times a month? Much of the credit for that goes to his equally charming and unfappable assistant of nearly seven years, Kass Klemz. I spent a few minutes on the phone with Kass recently, trying to get a better understanding of how she keeps things running in Bruce’s absence and how she copes with (fends off) all of the people making demands on his time.

“Dr. Ransom checks in with me a lot,” she cheerily assured me, “and he does his best work at the last minute.”

“Yes, but how do you get him to do all the things he needs to do when he’s in town?” I asked.

“Lock him in his office,” she deadpanned. “Locks on the outside of the door.”

Still, even with The Amazing Kass helping him out, I often wonder: How does Bruce have the energy to keep it all going? Many have asked that question, but I suspect the fact that he is an exer-

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cise fanatic (well, an avid runner and skier, primarily) has something to do with it. Or maybe it’s all those espressos he consumes at the coffee shops in Seattle (and on the road).

Normally, in an Editorial Board Spotlight like this, I would interview the board member and then try to give you more information about where he was born and grew up and where he obtained his MD/PhD (or other academic degrees). I would probably supply his spouse’s name and occupation and the names of his children, and list a recent major award and some significant publications. In Bruce’s case, I assumed that you wouldn’t need all that (mostly because I’ve already babbled on past the allotted word count, but also because this information doesn’t begin to do justice to his career), so I’ll just give you abbreviated answers to those questions: New Mexico; Minnesota; Washington University; Joann (a physician); Christopher (“Chris”), Rebecca (“Becky”), and Nicholas (“Cole”); the Alexander von Humboldt Research Award; look in PubMed. There! Glad we got that taken care of.

In July of 2004, Bruce and I started discussing the article on movement disorders that he was to write for P&T along with his coauthor, Ali Samii (see page 228). Even though this was one of about 800 things Bruce had going on at the time, it turned out to be perhaps our longest, most thoroughly referenced CE/CME article we have ever published. I think you’ll agree that it’s also a first-class review and well worth reading.

So when and how did Bruce join the editorial board, you ask? It wasn’t until after I had been working on P&T for a while and after Bruce had reviewed a neurological supplement for us, in addition to the “horrible/fatal/bottom-feeding” manuscript discussed earlier. And that’s when it hit me, in 2003, that we should invite Bruce to join the board of P&T.

It was, after all, a no-brainer.