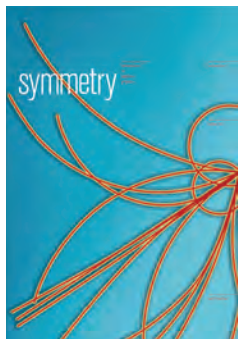


## Reflections at 50 (issues)

How a little girl and a stuffed bear helped set the course for *symmetry*.

Inaugural cover, Oct/Nov '04



Third cover, February '05



Two score and ten issues ago, Fermilab and SLAC brought forth a new publication, conceived in optimism and dedicated to the proposition that the excitement of particle physics could be—*should* be—shared with readers who didn't know a quark from a lepton.

The need was clear: To survive and thrive, the field must build relationships beyond the world of particle physics insiders. It was also clear that two laboratories together could achieve more than either one alone.

The magazine began with a team of physics communicators from SLAC and Fermilab. It should be noted at the outset that we had very little idea what we were doing. We had a vision—"Not your father's physics magazine!"—considerable market research, and a list of adjectives. Our new magazine would be clean, stylish, approachable, alive, novel, engaging, and credible. (Had we added "likes walks on the beach," we'd have described a promising blind date.)

We hired a talented young editor, David Harris, a skillful science writer who quickly grasped and embraced our goal. We located a design team, Sandbox Studio, who luckily had more experience than we did. They not only understood the magazine we wanted but showed us how it would look. We chose a name, "*symmetry*."

In October 2004, somewhat to our amazement, we published our first issue. The cover was colorful, arguably stylish, and of course—our first!—we all loved it. Still, it showed a recognizable particle track—not exactly wild and crazy for a physics magazine. It was only with our third issue, in February 2005, that we made a choice that established—for us and for our readers—*symmetry*'s unique personality.

For the 2005 centennial of Einstein's *annus mirabilis*, we wanted an Einstein-themed cover that would stand out from the myriad other Einstein-themed covers appearing in the physics press. The *symmetry* designers presented two choices. Both had their points, but one, a little girl in pajamas dragging an Einstein teddy bear, stood out. It was definitely not the cover of your father's physics magazine. But was it too unorthodox? Too far from the mainstream? Would we look silly? Reader, we went with the bear.

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A few days later, a message came from the then-director of the Department of Energy's Office of Science, the major funding agency for US particle physics. "Please call to talk about the new issue of *symmetry* magazine." With trepidation, we called Dr. Ray Orbach. He had just received his copy of *symmetry*, the one with the teddy bear on the cover, and... he wanted 500 extra copies to distribute to young scientists at the upcoming meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, to illustrate the importance of science communication.

Fortunately, he wasn't the only one who liked it. The huge response from readers told us we had made the right choice.

With that breakthrough, 47 issues ago, *symmetry* set off on the unique path that we've followed ever since. Subsequent covers have included knitting projects, jelly beans, a radial tire, and another stuffed toy in the form of Babar the elephant. We loved them all, but perhaps none has quite the same place in our heart as the girl with the Einstein bear.

Hanah Abualhaj was four when she headed upstairs with the bear on our cover. For our 50th issue, we caught up with Hanah to see what she's up to these days. She sent us a photo and a nice note (below).

Like Hanah, *symmetry* magazine is moving on, but the spirit that put her and her bear on the cover remains.

**Judy Jackson, *Editor-in-chief***

Dear *symmetry* readers,

As you might not know, I am the little girl that was on the cover of the *symmetry* magazine with the Einstein bear.

I want to tell you a little bit about me. I am part Chinese and Middle-eastern. I can speak a little Arabic but not much Chinese. Now, I am nine years old, and will be going into fourth grade at Thompson Elementary School. Math is my favorite subject. I love math because I love to do fractions.

Math is challenging and a brain teaser for me. In my spare time, I love to read and write short stories. Blue and green are my favorite colors and I love to eat saucy spaghetti.

YUM! My favorite sports are soccer, dance, and swimming.

In the future, I hope to be a marine biologist and a dancer.

I had a lot of fun doing the photo shoot, but I wished I could have kept Einstein Bear. He was so cute. Well, now you know a little bit about me.

Yours truly,

Hanah

Hanah Abualhaj, 2011

