

Itchy feet: editing overseas

Jo Jarrah, Margaret Malone and Shelley Kenigsberg shared their international experiences of editing—the trials, tribulations and successes—at the society's October meeting.

Jo Jarrah

Jo Jarrah is a recent recipient of the Beatrice Davis Fellowship. Now freelance, she was an in-house editor at Allen & Unwin for many years, was managing editor at Transworld and a senior editor at Random House.

I feel like a bit of an imposter tonight because I didn't really work overseas—everyone knows that the Beatrice Davis is a grand paid holiday. It's not actually, but it's not working in the normal sense that one would think of working overseas. I was in the United States on the Fellowship from March to June last year,

and I had a very specific and difficult project in mind. I wanted to work with American editors who specialise in memoirs, and in particular, memoirs of people whose lives have been grittier than most. I wanted to understand better how one assists in that process.

I'm not talking about celebrities or people who've overcome major physical health problems, but people who've had a very difficult life in some other way. I wanted to work very intensively with American editors because Americans are very good at those gritty, real-life memoirs of people who've been abused or suffered significantly in some other way. I wanted to work very intensively with somebody in-house rather than looking broadly at general issues of how

publishing in the United States works and what editors do there. So, I was buttonholing everybody I could to tell me how they work with these authors, most of whom may never write another book.

Often these writers have issues that they haven't resolved themselves, which can impact greatly on the story they're telling, so I was interested in things like how, as an editor, you can suddenly find yourself becoming a pseudo-therapist in working with these people on their life story. I spent my time passionately trying to get this stuff out of the Americans I met and worked with rather than anything else, and it was quite difficult.

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Tuesday, 3 December 2002

Annual dinner

Come and celebrate the festive season with Spanish/Portuguese food, wine, great conversation and raffles and prizes.

The \$45 cost includes drinks (wine and soft drink). Partners and guests, as always, are welcome.

Venue and time: Don Quixote Restaurant, 545 Kent St (Cnr Liverpool St), Sydney, 7 p.m. for 7.30 p.m.

Even though the deadline has past, please post your form and payment to: Society of Editors (NSW) Inc., PO Box 254, Broadway 2007, but also please leave a voicemail message at 9294 4999 or email Bruce Howarth at <brhed@pnc.com.au> to let us know that you will be there.

Itchy feet

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I had two placements in the United States. The first was a month in Boston with Beacon Press, which is little-known, but their backlist is awesome. (Among others they published James *Go Tell It on the Mountain* Baldwin and Gandhi's autobiography, and they were 1993 US Publisher of the Year.) They're a very serious social justice publisher, and I wanted to work with them because they have a fantastic list in that kind of gritty 'ordinary' person's memoir genre. After Boston I spent two months at The Feminist Press in New York because they had a strong focus on cross-cultural memoirs.

What actually happened was that the people in both places who had all this fabulous experience in this kind of writing and publishing left just before I arrived. In Boston, the executive editor who'd been there for 10 years and done this fantastic work left two weeks before I arrived. I had her office—big deal (walls don't talk).

For very different reasons, The Feminist Press in New York had undergone a total staff change. Apart from the director, who had no time to spare, no one had had any experience in this area. So, what I had to do was try to drum up meetings with editors and publishers in other companies. It was from this that I'm able to say a few things about what it might be like to work in the United States, and in New York in particular. It's very tough, it's very competitive, they're all very cautious and work extremely hard.

I think the obstacles to working in the United States break down into three broad groups. The first one is the obvious—you need a green card. To get a green card you have to win one in the lottery or have a *rellie*, so the first step for anyone interested in working in the United States is to put in for the lottery. And research your family tree—if you've got a *rellie* there, you're in.

The second and biggest group of obstacles relates to the fact that it's very difficult to get a job in publishing in the United States, and particularly in New York. We all know how hard it is to get a job in a trade house here. Anyone who's worked in-house knows about the letters that come in virtually every week

from highly educated, obviously talented people saying, 'I will work for nothing; just give me a go'. It's the same, if not worse, in New York. It's very competitive.

It's also hard for an Aussie to break in to publishing there because of how insular the Americans are. I was staggered. I think the epitome of it, for me, was when the acquisitions editor for an extremely prestigious house—she was the acquisitions editor for anthropology, no less, and a very intense, intelligent woman—actually said to me, 'Which hemisphere is Australia in?' Generally their attitude to anyone who isn't American is that you're probably not quite human. Accents contribute to this. Culturally Americans are quite naïve, and if you sound different, it follows that you must be a different species of human being from them.

I think the epitome of it was when the acquisitions editor for an extremely prestigious house actually said to me, 'Which hemisphere is Australia in?'

I found they often don't 'hear' what you're saying because they are too engrossed in your non-American accent to actually listen to you. I understand this, having fallen for it myself. I had a colleague in publishing years ago who was Irish. She could talk non-stop for six hours and she had the most beautiful accent. She could pin me to the wall for 45 minutes before I even knew it. What was embarrassing was that at the end of it, I didn't know what she'd said because I'd been listening to the music of her voice, not her words.

Mostly I experienced this with store attendants, and trying to get the telephone connected, and so on, but publishers are not immune to it. They seem to become somewhat hypnotised by the fact that your accent's not American, therefore you couldn't possibly understand what an American book might be about or how to fix it.

People in both of my placements were so delighted when they could offer me something to do that was connected with Australia. For example, I was asked to write a report on a book about genetic engineering. That is way out of my field, but the author was Australian. It was irrelevant that she'd lived in Canada for 30 years—she's Australian, like me, so their view was that I'd have some special expertise in assessing the text.

Another reason it's very hard to get a job there is that it is so competitive even once you're 'in', particularly in New York. I was very lucky to be invited to an editorial meeting at one of the big three multinational publishers. There were 22 editors and one rights manager at this weekly meeting, and beforehand I was told by a senior executive in the company, who I knew briefly in Australia, not to expect them to talk about any 'important' book in this meeting.

At editorial meetings in Australia, you look at all serious submissions and talk about whether to publish them and what the print run might be and so forth. But there, if it's a 'big' book, all of that will be done behind closed doors and the title will only appear on the editorial meeting agenda once the book's been bought. That's how competitive it is—even between colleagues in the same company. With that level of competition, if you've got a funny accent, they're probably not going to let you in easily.

Another reason it would be hard for an Australian editor to get into a publishing company in New York is the structure of publishing companies. What we generally have in Australia, and I guess to some extent England, is a fairly clear division between acquisitions/commissioning people and manuscript/project editors, and you can happily have a career in either without ever thinking that you had to 'cross over'. But certainly in New York, there's a very clear trajectory. While there are copy editors who only ever line edit, who deal with the nitty-gritty words, they're usually freelance.

While one or two US trade companies have line edit departments, basically you come into publishing as an editor's assistant—you're their personal assistant, photocopier, correspondence manager—and you're then mentored up through actual manuscript editing,

structural editing and commissioning. All of those tasks are streamed into one small team.

You would rarely start as an editor in a trade house in the United States and expect to stay as a manuscript or project editor. They'd think you were mad. The path is that you're aiming to commission. It would be hard to find a place for editors like us. We are too experienced to come in at the usual level, so it would be hard for us to 'fit', and we'd generally have to have commissioning in our sights.

The most likely way for an Aussie to get in is probably through contacts. Any industry operates to a degree on contacts. If I'm looking for someone to do a job and someone who I know and respect tells me someone they know and respect would be good for it, I'm probably going to give that person a go rather than someone I don't know from a bar of soap. But New York, the United States, operates almost exclusively on contacts. Every single appointment that I managed to get, and I must have had 40 or more, only ever happened because I knew someone who they respected, or to whom they owed a favour.

The third group of obstacles relates to whether you'd want to work in American publishing. When you start in an American publishing house, you're barely paid anything. Most people start as interns, and in fact at one place I went to, that's what I was treated as. As an intern, you sit in a corner, you shut up and you don't make phone calls and you do what you're told—basically you're grateful because you're working in publishing.

You start off getting virtually no pay even once you get onto the company's books as an assistant to some editor. You have to work a couple of years before you can have a week's leave every year, and you might have to go a few more years to get two weeks leave a year. If you get to senior levels, you can have six or eight, but when you start, the conditions are appalling.

At the top end the pay is better, but what you have to do for it is pretty phenomenal. It's not a job being an editor in New York; it's your whole life. You don't have publishers or commissioning editors acquiring things and then passing them on to editors to be edited. They actually do the whole thing

in their small intense teams, and they have to spend so much time networking and talking and arguing and going in for auctions and doing all those sorts of things, when do they actually edit? At night. On the weekend. When do they have a life?

Having said all this, I have to admit that I absolutely loved it, and had I been younger I would be applying for a green card. There was a passion and an excitement in the publishing industry in New York that I have never experienced in Australia. I expected it to be full of hype and bullshit, but it wasn't. The enthusiasm was really genuine (I actually saw a sales and marketing manager with tears in his eyes as a result of a book's content, not its sales figures), and I found that totally inspiring and head-stretching. It was just so lovely to be allowed to be excited without being made to feel a little bit foolish, which I think tends to happen too often in Australia.

I sometimes think that our obsession with sticking to Aussie English . . . is in its own way every bit as insular as we think Americans are.

There are some really good people in spite of Americans generally being so insular. Some of the agents, like Jill Grinberg and Jane Starr, who have an interest in Australia, are just fantastic. If anyone was thinking seriously about working in the United States, rather than trying to get a job in a publishing company straight off, a really good way to do it would be to work for one of these agents who is working on behalf of Australians, or who has a particular interest in Australia. That would give you credibility in New York

A small but important point for me is that my US experience has really expanded my head in terms of looking at what we do in Australia. I sometimes think that our obsession with sticking to Aussie English—for example, our '-ise' spellings—is in its own way every bit as insular as we think Americans are. They

publish 50 000 new titles every year (that's 961.5 every week of the year!), so it's a whole different kind of market, and I thought, 'God, there we are in Australia, where we're not going to use "sidewalk" because it's a "pavement".' Maybe we get stuck on things that don't matter all that much, especially if we want our stories to reach some-where like the United States. It made me really think, and as an Australian editor, I look at what I do now quite a lot differently.

Margaret Malone

Margaret Malone worked for Doubleday Book and Music Clubs before going to the UK for six years. She had a very interesting range of experiences in the UK with Anness Publishing. During those six years she worked her way up from junior to deputy managing editor, which gave her a very broad and rich experience.

She's been back in Australia for only a month and is managing to stay afloat as a freelancer. She considers it the highlight of her career that as a commissioning editor she's actually been able to take on the role of seeing a book from the gleam in the author's eye—or perhaps the gleam in the commissioning editor's eye—through to the final publication, a very fulfilling experience.

Before leaving for London I worked for the Doubleday Book and Music Clubs as a buyer, and it was through that that I got some contacts in London when publishers came out to sell books to us. When I went to London, it was initially on the two-year visa that you can get up to 30 years of age. I was 26. It was those contacts that got me the job at Anness Publishing, a non-fiction illustrated trade publisher. In the end, I stayed with them for about four-and-a-half years in two batches, so my experience in London is only broad within that one company.

I started as a junior assisting a senior editor and it was very hands-on, everything from photocopying, filing, making phone calls to learning how to edit, proofread, index and work through the layers. This is a small company, so if you wanted to, you could learn a lot across a wide range. In the last couple of years, I was really doing a lot of commissioning—being given a book title,

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number of pages, and the due date and having to take it from there. I really enjoyed commissioning everyone, from author, designer, photographer, stylist, editor, to proofreader, and indexer, then overseeing each one to get the book done on time, on budget and to desired quality levels. It was very creative, very demanding, with lots of time and budget pressures, but that was my role.

In terms of working there as an Australian, I found that both being Australian and having my experience as a buyer was highly regarded. In some ways, the English trade market is quite similar to Australia's.

The pay at the junior level was low, but it did improve. It was probably better than what you get here at the high levels.

What was different was that the big names have such a prominence in England. If you think of food, the big names just dominate. There's Nigella Lawson, Jamie Oliver, Floyd, Delia Smith. For the rest of the food books to get anywhere, they really had to be very precise visually and the subject needed to be really timely and appropriate, with excellent design, really fresh and contemporary.

They hold Australian books quite highly, I think, perhaps because in Australia we don't have so many big authors or, if they are, they don't mean anything overseas anyway. I think they recognise that we've honed those skills of getting very strong designs and very good photography to produce really contemporary fresh books.

There's a feeling that Australians will have that skill, or certainly will be able to approach books in that way, and for a company of the size of Anness doing illustrated books without any name authors, that's exactly how we were trying to position our books. You've got

two seconds with a buyer; you've got to get their attention or otherwise Delia will mean a lot more to them.

Everyone who I worked with there was freelance. We didn't have any in-house editors. There are a number of professional societies and groups there, which is great if you are heading over there and looking for contacts or places to start. There was an institute for indexers, and I did a lot of cold calling to members. I would have a chat and if it didn't sound right, then that was that. I did a lot of commissioning by looking through the Guild of Food Writers book to seeing who specialised in what.

While networking and having contacts makes it easier, it's not out of the question just to ring and search out the people that you need. There's incredible specialisation, especially in food.

There are also two dedicated publishing recruitment agencies, which are both very good and quite active. And the publishing monthly in the UK is also a very good place to find jobs and find out who's doing what. Here, it's much more just knowing people, and maybe getting your hands on a blue newsletter.

In trade, England is still able to produce books solely for the English market, but the company I was working with did a lot in terms of trying to sell foreign rights into Europe. Our main focus, however, was the American market, with the UK very much a distant second. As well, we sold into all the English markets—South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

On the question of English and American languages, we always went with English; that was just the policy, although for a while for food books we would do two texts so there would be an English run and an American run. We did try putting the American measurements in brackets, but towards the end we pretty much deleted all the brackets and just thought they're going to have to live with this. There were certain words we still needed brackets for, but every time we looked at it, we would knock a few more words out. Unless we got an order that was of a size that made it worthwhile, we would stick with the one, English, print run.

I think to a great degree publishing there is very similar to publishing here. It is larger, but it works in very similar ways. There's a mix of networking and

institutions, and similar problems with a flat market. It's very competitive, with more people than there are jobs.

As an Australian you'd certainly be welcomed and respected. I don't think there's any sort of reluctance or concern over your cultural background or your ability. I think they think Australians are publishing very strong books. In terms of those books that are having to make their way without a strong author, Australians are doing things that they wish they could, or are trying to do the same thing, certainly in gardening and food and things like that.

The pay at the junior level was low, but it did improve. It was probably better than what you get here at the high levels. And as for holidays, I started with four weeks. Then there was an extra day for every year that you were there, with a maximum of 25 days. We started work at 9.30 in the morning and technically finished at six. Lunch was at the desk generally.

Shelley Kenigsberg

Shelley Kenigsberg has worked as an editor and a trainer, both in-house and freelance, in Australia, Africa and Indonesia. She teaches editing at Macleay College and is the current president of the society.

The locations of Jo's, Margaret's and my overseas postings may seem, at first, utterly different. Nevertheless, consider some few similarities:

New York—vast, bustling city, the cultural hub of North America (some say the world) on the crowded, but some say exotic island of Manhattan, with Jo pitched into the competitive and exciting world of trade publishing. London—vast bustling city, the putative cultural hub of Europe on the less than exotic island of England in the bustling and competitive world of trade publishing. Then, Jakarta—vast, bustling city, the putative cultural hub of this Asian region (certainly many say of Indonesia), on the crowded and definitely exotic island of Java, pitched into the esoteric, often confounding but exhilarating world of aid projects in overseas countries. Same, same!

My role was rather different from anything I had experienced before. While it is true that I worked in Jakarta, I was not what you might consider a

'standard' editor, nor did I work with a mainstream publisher or even in the mainstream publishing industry. I did manage to meet local mainstream publishers, and continue to pursue possibilities of further work, but that is another story.

I was contracted to this project by IDP, a Canberra-based agency which resources contracts for a wide variety of aid projects in developing countries around the world. IDP had successfully tendered for the jointly-funded Asian Development Bank/GOI (Government of Indonesia aid project) called the Senior Secondary Education (SSE) Project. It was to be administered 'in country' with a local agency in Jakarta.

I was one of six international and 40 local consultants on the project. We worked on the project at different stages (some simultaneously) and all of us worked with the Ministry of Education and Culture, Jakarta. I'd been nominated and encouraged to apply by a colleague at Macquarie University, so Jakarta it was to be from April to November 1998 for two three-month stints. Little did I know there was to be a rather dramatic interruption to the proceedings, but more of that later.

The SSE project was housed within the Ministry of Education and Culture and executed by the Department of Secondary Education. Its stated goals, framed in rather formal language, were:

'to assist the Government in improving the quality of general senior secondary education ... aims to reform the existing philosophy and approach to the teaching/learning process [thankfully not MY job description!] because it is recognised that without such reform, project inputs such as curriculum improvement, teacher training, improved instructional materials and facilities will not be fully effective.'

This lofty language is typical of the statements made at the start of most 'aid' projects—intended as inspiring, broad-ranging, optimistic and forward-thinking. The mission statement contained terms such as 'paradigm shift' and 'quantum improvements in the general quality of SSE ...' (I like to think that, to a significant degree, we achieved some of that, though I'm not naive enough to assume we accomplished enough).

There was a great focus on protocol, plans, project targets and Gantt charts and many other charts and tools to plot outcomes against stated objectives—and much reporting.

Some of the essential skills I think one needs to have to work in a developing country on an aid project are cultural sensitivity, ability to speak the local language, cultural information and a healthy dollop of the thing that keeps most of us more or less sane in the publishing industry—a sense of humour.

One broad aim of the GOI and the representatives from the Ministry of Education and Culture in the design of the project was to increase, streamline, and enhance communication and collaboration among the three (aptly named) divisions within the ministry known as Curriculum Development and Evaluation, Textbook Production, and Examinations/Evaluation.

Some of the essential skills one needs to have to work in a developing country are cultural sensitivity . . . and a healthy sense of humour.

The SSE project had three prongs: curriculum evaluation, delivery improvement (which was a large portion of the project and fed into what I was working on, which was called: Textbook and Instructional Materials Development) and the SMU Examinations Project (Schooling in Indonesia is compulsory to Year 9, and years 9–12 are called the senior secondary years, or SMU).

The official titles for my two consultancies were Instructional Materials Design Consultant and Publishing and Book Quality Control Consultant. I was to work in collaboration with local counterparts to achieve project 'outputs'—meaning books, training manuals, prototype materials, design manuals, a style manual—and outcomes—which were more conceptual and framed as improved processes, greater articulation etc.

My counterparts were generally former teachers who had at least one, but usually two, degrees. They were working in the Book Centre for a relative pittance (compared with the generous pay for us consultants); they had limited freedom and flexibility but the advantage, over a great many of their teaching fraternity, of being at the hub. And of being seconded to work with projects in an advisory and sometimes supervisory capacity. So I worked with editors, designers and production staff, and with the writers hired by the project.

My consultancies were designed to contribute to the quality of senior secondary education by assisting in the development and production of better quality textbooks (for the three years of senior secondary schooling across a several 'non-core' subjects: economics, history, art and handicrafts, geography and sociology/social science) for the then-new 'Curriculum 1994'. The institutional strengthening of the Book Centre, responsible for developing, producing and evaluating textbooks and instructional materials, was linked in.

I was asked to assist in:

- managing textbook development in key operational areas, including manuscript preparation, editing, instructional materials design and illustration
- producing specifications for writing and evaluating textbooks and instructional materials in six non-core subjects
- improving the quality and timely production of instructional materials
- improving staff capabilities in conducting in-house editorial training.

Curriculum, textbook production and exams (or evaluation) were located in two buildings and the little contact between the three jealously guarded domains made it difficult to establish IMD (Instructional Materials Design) teams which we had determined should comprise at least a curriculum adviser, a writer (academic), an editor and a designer.

My team achieved three major outputs:

- a series of manuals providing guidelines for improving the process of manuscript preparation, editing, instructional materials design and illustration
- prototype textbook instructional materials, writing manuals and

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Guardian of English learns a lesson

I was going to write this column about what I had long seen as an egregious error of usage. News items often refer to 'Joe Brown, and his cohort Bill Green'. Surely, everyone (well, nearly everyone) knows that an individual can't be a cohort.

Alas, I was wrong. A quick check in the third edition of the *Macquarie Dictionary* suggested that this use of cohort was unexceptionable. 'Pish', sez I, rolling out the heavy artillery.

Alas again. The *OED* records this use of 'cohort' as early as 1952. At least it says 'chiefly U.S.', but that isn't quite the same as 'erroneous'.

As a former (and admittedly still not entirely reconstructed) self-appointed guardian of the purity of English, I try very hard to adapt to changes in the language. (I have often said that, if language didn't change, we wouldn't be speaking like Dickens, or Shakespeare, or even Chaucer; we'd still be grunting.) But this one slipped under my guard.

There's a lesson to be learnt from this, and I learnt it very well: there are hundreds of millions of English speakers out there, and they—not I—make the rules.

Thank goodness for good dictionaries.

Michael Lewis

NOTICEBOARD

Conferences for 2003

28th Biennial Conference

Commonwealth Press Union
Colombo, Sri Lanka, 25–28 February, 2003

<http://www.cpu.org.uk/conf_srilanka_2003.html>

The Book Conference

Cairns, 22–24 April, 2003

The conference will address a range of critically important themes about the future of the book, as well as its past and the state of the book industry, books and reading today. Main speakers will include some of the world's leading thinkers and innovators in the areas of publishing, editing, librarianship, printing, authoring and information technologies, as well as numerous papers and workshop presentations by researchers and practitioners.

But what is the book's future, as a creature of and conduit for human invention? Do the new media (the Internet, multimedia texts and new delivery formats) represent a threat or an opportunity?

<<http://book-conference.com/Background/index.html>>

After Gutenberg and Gates—gazing into the e-future

National Editors Conference 2003
Bardon Centre, Brisbane, 18–19 July; optional workshops on 20 July.

The conference will focus on the changing nature and demands of the market for editors in terms of opportunities and skill requirements, including Internet, multimedia and electronic publishing. It will also focus on major issues facing the profession, in particular, accreditation and marketing the editing profession.

See Call for Papers on page 10.

<<http://www.editorscanberra.org/call.htm>>

Indexing the World of Information: an international indexing conference

Australian Society of Indexers
Sydney, Carleton Crest Hotel
12–13 September, 2003

Delegates from throughout the world are invited to come and share their experience and expertise with Australian and New Zealand indexers.

Technical communicators get personal

A report on the annual conference of the Australian Society for Technical Communication (NSW), held 25–26 October at the Carlton Crest Hotel, Sydney.

I've been thinking about what made this conference different from previous ones. To me the main reason, in addition to having relevant content, was that the conference seemed to have a more personal touch—possibly due to the reduced attendance this year.

Several of the sessions came from a personal point of view, for example, 'Books that changed my life', 'Using relationships to redefine our communication role', and of course the really interesting talks about their past years by Lynette Twigg (redundancy) and Rebecca Gracie (graduate unable to find work in her chosen profession). This was a great idea, even though it was probably very daunting for Lynette and Rebecca, who showed great courage in agreeing to participate.

I also really liked 'Applying your writing skills to email marketing'. It looked at email writing/communication from a perspective that I hadn't thought about at all. I had originally thought 'spam, this couldn't be relevant', but changed my mind pretty quickly.

I'm very involved in single-sourcing, so the sessions on graduating from HDK to XDK (from an HTML to XML online conversion tool) and the three variations on single-sourcing were very practical and useful. 'Thank God it's not a PDF' gave me a completely different perspective on how to use PDFs. It's probably not relevant to me in my job right now, but good to keep in mind for the future.

Dr Helen McGregor's presentation on workplace relationships introduced us to the latest wave in US management techniques: the 'Human Moment'. (Remember, you read it here first!) This idea is so sensible it just might catch on—although how we telecommuters will manage our human moments remains to be seen.

John New
ASTC member

Freelance or in-house: for Deborah, it's been a yo-yo life

Deborah Singerman spoke to Pamela Hewitt about her work as a freelance writer in England, Hong Kong and Australia, and the evolution of her career to the world of in-house editing, where she learnt about the construction industry, deadlines, circulation and consistency.

People talk about career paths. Mine was certainly circuitous. But as I meet more people in publishing, I find it's typical to have an atypical background. They've travelled, and it all adds to our beautiful diversity. My background is in journalism. I became an editor quite late in my so-called career.

I went to the London School of Economics and did economics and sociology, which was the thing you did in the mid-seventies. I loved LSE with its mix of students from all over the world. Also, I was born in Liverpool and raised in Manchester and had always wanted to live in London.

I didn't do much student journalism. It was only in my third year that people started to say, 'I suppose you should think about work and the future'. I remember saying to someone at a first-year wine and cheese party, 'I'm curious about people'. And he said, 'So you don't like people, as such.' I said, 'You could say that, but it's more that I'm curious about them.' I think that feeds in to being a writer and an editor.

I wanted to travel. I did a Top Deck trip, London to Katmandu in 10 weeks. It's an Australian company and I met lots of Australians. We travelled on orange and white converted double-decker buses. I was either on Boobs or Snot. That's a good introduction to Australia, isn't it? Boobs and snot!

I took Top Deck because it went to the Middle East. I'm Jewish, so I thought, if I'm going to the Middle East and Arab countries as well as Israel, I should go on a group visa. Then I ended up in Hong Kong. It's exuberant and alive, I thought I'd love to work there. Also, for English language media in Asia, Hong Kong was an obvious place to aim for.

All the time I travelled, I made copious notes and I taught myself a bit of discipline. Back in England I started to freelance. I did a course, where I learnt about selling an idea, an outline. It isn't a case of sitting down and writing for the art of it; it's a business, and you have to learn how to play the game. I started to get a few things published. The very first line I ever got published in the *Observer* was: 'The Far East need not be so far these days'. Isn't that terrible? Now I live in Australia I'd never call it the 'far East'.

I wanted to go to somewhere different from England. It just so happened that it was Asia. It could have been South America. Having hit Asia, its vitality, I quite liked being different, a foreigner.

We travelled on converted double-decker buses. I was either on Boobs or Snot. That's a good introduction to Australia, isn't it?

When I first went to Hong Kong, I loved the anonymity and the fact that everything you see is different. I loved the street life, the food stalls and the feeling that everything was happening. It was just out there. You could wander round and soak it all up. I love walking through cities, anywhere. There was so much to see. Very different from the Anglo-Saxon closed-doors idea, which is of course a very exoticised view. I'm sure my ideas have changed over time, but when I first arrived, wow.

I also did some travelling in the United States and went to Japan, again, writing notes the whole time. I had a few things published in England, enough to make me think I really should give this a go. I don't think that happens these days. If you just submit an idea as an unknown writer, most editors won't give you the

time of day. It's sad; you lose a lot of voices.

In Hong Kong I had one contact, who put me in touch with a writer with *TV and Entertainment Times*, published by the *South China Morning Post*. She gave me a break. I worked there as a staff writer for eighteen months and I learnt a lot about the production process. Those were the days of manual typewriters. It was all sent through to the typesetters. They used bromides, which means Hong Kong might have been further ahead than other places.

Then I decided to freelance. For about two years, I wrote for anyone I possibly could. I also wrote a fortnightly arts column for the *South China Morning Post*. In 1982, it was the first time they had run that sort of regular coverage of the local arts scene. When people talk about Hong Kong, they say, 'It's all money money money', but actually there were some great Hong Kong Chinese, a lot of them overseas-educated, coming back, setting up experimental theatre, modern dance companies. It was quite a shift in the English language media.

Since then, Chinese media has blossomed. I wrote for a bilingual women's magazine, travel magazines, in-flight material, hotel brochures. It was hard to make a living—you had to do an enormous amount—but it was a great way to meet people. If you're curious about people, it's a great thing to do. I could pick and choose my topics. The only way to be well paid was to write advertising copy, which I did. I don't think I was particularly good at it, but with freelance, you have to keep on the ball. When you're in-house, the thought of doing that again is a bit exhausting.

I left Hong Kong because I didn't like being an expatriate. You join the Foreign Correspondents' Club, it's very nice, but I never felt comfortable as an expatriate. However hard you try, you're never going to be Chinese. I had a number of Chinese friends, but you become more and more drawn into the expatriate lifestyle. I thought, 'If I don't leave now,

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I'll be here till '97'. Professionally, it wasn't a great decision. My name was known there. But I'm much happier here. No question about it.

Before I came to Australia, I travelled in South-East Asia. I was interested in the work of women's groups and the sex tourism industry, which was very big in the mid-1980s. I tried to get something published in the *National Times*. They wanted the story of the poor down-trodden Filipino woman working in a bar, when I wanted to talk about the women's groups that were active and trying to change things. When I arrived in Australia, I freelanced again. I published a lot of stuff in Australia that wouldn't have been published in England at that time, articles about women writers in the Philippines and so on.

Back to England again. I got a job with the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding, doing promotional work. A lot of them were diehard Maoists. They were still full of idealism about Mao Zedong and the communes. When I worked for SACU in the mid- to late 1980s, all the home truths were coming out, including about the Cultural Revolution, so for a lot of the old-timers, it was a very difficult period. You'd have the diehards wanting one sort of article and the new people saying, 'No, we have to face the facts'. The mainstream press was starting to run articles on China so the need for a publication by SACU was diminishing.

The next move was back to Australia, where I got permanent residence. Mike Lewis was one of the very first people I met in the editing field. The other was Robin Appleton. I did her book editing course at Macleay College to broaden my skills. Initially I became a proof-reader at Fujitsu and then worked my way through as a trainee editor, assistant editor, technical editor.

We were the go-betweens between the translators and the technical experts. Fujitsu was producing the mainframes and the manuals were for systems that weren't necessarily in Australia at that time. It was hard for the technical people to check the technical accuracy because they hadn't always worked on the systems. The translators and editors had to follow the structure of the Japanese

manual paragraph by paragraph and if you wanted to make structural changes, you had to submit a form: 'I would suggest ...'.

It was good training for writing instructions. It was a fantastic introduction to the negotiating that editors do. You're very much the middle person. You've got production screaming at you with one thing, you've got the translators saying, 'But this is what it says in the Japanese', and the systems engineer saying, 'Well, it may say this, but really, technically, that doesn't make sense' and the English is far too cumbersome. Technical Japanese is a nightmare. After about three years of casual work, things started to get tough, and I thought, 'Do I become a freelance writer again?' However, I saw an ad for an editor at Thomson Business Publishing and applying for this turned out to be a major decision.

. . . writing a story, even based on a press release—or maybe two or three and a phone call—still has to be edited to make a nice little story out of it.

Being an editor of a magazine is different. I was brought in at a time when the publishers were trying to change the magazine. It was a big format, press-release oriented building products magazine. The magazine had been going for about 20 years and was well established, but other, newer publications in the same field, all going for the same advertising dollar, were starting to encroach on the income.

It was a marvellous opportunity because for the first month or so we concentrated on market research. I read all the competitors' magazines, we went out and talked to architects, builders, clients and potential clients, and I got to know my sales reps. Talk about negotiating!

I also learnt about controlled circulation. You have to get the advertising dollar. You're not going to get that many

subscribers, because most people receive the magazine for free, so you need to be able to say to your advertisers, 'We're reaching a readership of so many thousand designers and architects, therefore you have to appear in our publication.'

After six months, the magazine did change. That was a big eye-opener, too, seeing just how long it takes between doing the research on what sort of new editorial you can run, then working out what's feasible to run in a monthly.

A monthly is really tough. Most editors burn out. You're choosing the stories and the pictures, and liaising with production and sales departments and doing virtually all of the subbing. I always tried to do an original article each issue. I had feature lists—doors and windows, roofing in November. I'd try and find a topic where the featured products were the major elements in the project, interview the main players and then write up the story. People didn't usually do that. They'd get the architect or the engineer to write about it. It was really quite unusual to do a journalistic job on it.

The building industry touches on everything. It's political, it's economic, it's industrial relations, it's design. I know this is drawing a long bow, but writing a building products story, even if it's based on a press release—or maybe two or three press releases and a phone call—still has to be edited to make a nice little story out of it. It's not that dissimilar to reviewing a play. You're trying to make something interesting. The audience was architects, of all descriptions. They get every building product magazine you can imagine. So you've got the biggest outfits down to a small person in a small town in Tasmania, building product manufacturers, who like to know what the competition's doing.

I did that job for three years, during which time I also studied for a Master of Arts, Australian Studies. I looked at Australia and Asia, and immigration, and completed a research paper comparing Australian imaginings of Asia in the late 1800 and late 1900s. During that time I called NATSPEC, publishers of Australia's national building specification. I really liked their newsletter because it was critical.

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Essay writing meets the New Age in this nevertheless useful guide

Essay Savvy, published by Purple Parrot Publications, (03) 5473 4473, email abook@purpleparrotpublications.com

Essay savvy is a small but useful general guide to essay writing. The author, Robin Taylor, states clearly that this is not meant to be an academic guide to essay writing and it is not. The style is chatty and the layout engaging.

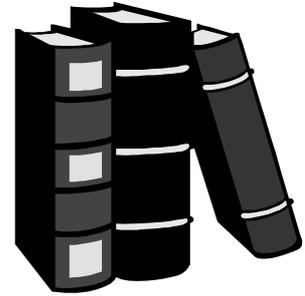
Taylor has taught in both academic and community environments. Her personal experience as a mature-age student is evident, resulting in a useful guide to researching and writing an essay. A welcome addition is an editing component. Although basic, it incorporates the most important editing elements.

The key words (compare, contrast, analyse) and glossary stand out. On the other hand, it might be useful to lead by example and include an exemplar, perhaps of the initial example question.

Taylor's experience as a vibrational healer is apparent in the sometimes 'new ageish' language which tends to deal with the mental state of the student, proposing affirmations and positive thought. Although constructive, this may

dismay some readers. Such phrases as 'If you mind, it matters' are explained, but can still jar the reader who is looking for a straightforward guide to grappling with this thing called essay writing. Attitude is important, but I'm not convinced it needs its own chapter. Later sections deal with other non-essential ideas such as how the right and left brain operate. While interesting, they run the risk of distracting the student.

Perhaps my greatest criticism is the language, which is often colloquial or 'cute'—with chapter headings such as 'Focus pocus' and 'Maps for cool cats'. The book markets itself as 'written with humour'; however, it also takes the book beyond the reach of many students for whom English is a second language. For example: '... that pulls us along Essay Road instead of pushing us down Depression Alley or Panic Street ...', while highly illustrative of one's sensations when faced with writing an essay, are possibly inaccessible or confusing for non-native English speakers. This is partially rescued by adding such words as 'lurky' (the author's word for a past hurt which hampers future efforts) to the glossary.



A major omission is the issue of plagiarism. Educational institutions are increasingly requiring students to sign declarations that the essay being submitted is their own work. Cultural differences mean that some students do not know what plagiarism is and are not aware of the sometimes severe penalties if they do not acknowledge others' work.

Overall, this is a good reference work for those needing some help in getting started with essay writing. It does not, nor is it designed to be, a complete guide to essay writing. It deserves a place in the library, if only because many essay-writing guide materials are available only in-house at an institution or on-line, putting them out of the reach of many students.

Carey Martin

THE DOCTOR IS IN

Per cent or percentage: the doctor says there's a difference?

Q: Why do television news items refer to 'percentage points'? What's wrong with 'percent'?

A: We are talking about two different animals here. The problem arises because we are talking about a change in something that is already expressed as a percentage. Changes in that 'percentage' can be expressed in two ways—as a change in the percentage, or as a change in the proportion that the percentage represents.

For example, let's suppose that the unemployment rate last month was

5 per cent. (Okay, I'm an optimist.) Suppose that this month it changes to 6 per cent. Then it has increased by one-fifth of the total, or 20 per cent. It has also increased by one of the 'units of measurement', or percentage points; the percentage has gone from 5 to 6.

Looking at it from the other side, so to speak, if a 5 per cent rate increases by 10 per cent, the new rate is 5.5 per cent. If a 5 per cent rate increases by 10 percentage points, the new rate is 15 per cent.

Michael Lewis

Internet humour

These are some of the winners of the "worst analogies ever written in a high school essay" contest in the Washington Post Style Invitational:

The hailstones leaped from the pavement, just like maggots when you fry them in hot grease.

The politician was gone but unnoticed, like the period after the Dr. on a Dr Pepper can.

McBride fell 12 stories, hitting the pavement like a Hefty Bag filled with vegetable soup.

She caught your eye like one of those pointy hook latches that used to dangle from screen doors and would fly up whenever you banged the door open again.

Yo-yo life

continued from page 8

I started as a temp (I always seem to do that) and eventually was made permanent. It's a non-traditional publishing house. We're not commercial, we're a not-for-profit organisation, and our *raison d'être* is different from a commercial publisher. We have a controlled circulation, subscribers to the national specification system.

My approach is one of the educated layperson. I don't have an agenda about the building industry. That helps me do my job. A lot of the time you're weighing being diplomatic and being firm. You need to be firm but fair, and consistent. Also you have to cajole people because they're not necessarily writers. I find that difficult sometimes.

I'm publications manager. My main responsibility is to put out the quarterly newsletter, which is part of the subscription package, and have editorial control over our guidebooks and general CD and website material. I also look after marketing of our publications.

Virtually everything in the newsletter is original. I rely a lot on the technical experts, but I know enough about Australian Standards and other staples to know where there may be a hole, and I know where to get the information from. You have to be reasonably cluey, even as a layperson.

There have been many changes over the years in industry publications. Colour, better paper quality, the relationship between advertising and text, the look of a publication, the headings. When I started at Fujitsu, we used Golfballs, and in the early 1990s we went on to word processors. It was fantastic. At Thomson's we used ZYWrite, and it was complex. It was a systems set-up—you had to tag for bold, italics. Then production went on to Quark.

Where I work, one of our big things is technology. We all have 21-inch screens and we're on 24-hour broadband Internet access. In that respect we're ahead of a lot of our subscribers. We deliver our packages on CD, our website has a tremendous number of links, and

we promote our publications on the web, but we don't have e-commerce facilities. The minute you say web, maintenance is the word. The web is not a one-off.

I do nearly all the Quark work on our newsletter now. I wanted to learn how to use it and suddenly I became the main DTP person for it. It gives you tremendous control as an editor, but it can drive you around the bend, especially as computers have given people a false sense of security—that you can change and change and change.

There's a difference between editing for corrections and editing because you don't like the sound of something. Being the in-house editor, very few people read just for corrections. They read for style and/or content, whereas I have to read for everything. There comes a point when you have to have the discipline to look only for typos and grammatical errors.

When I worked on the magazine, we had assistants, but they tended to be new to the job, so we ended up training them. Then when they were good, they'd leave. Part of being an editor is training people, and it saddens me greatly in my current job that I can't see myself getting an assistant to train. I think that's a big problem. I don't know about big publishers, but from what I read, in-house editors are more like project managers. A lot of the editors are freelancers. But where I work, the editing's done in house.

One thing with editors is that we're pedantic and picky. You have to say, 'Hey, this doesn't make sense.' It doesn't make you popular. One of the Thomson's sales reps said to me, 'Even if I don't agree with you, you have a reason for what you're doing.'

I've learnt a lot about consistency. And deadlines. So many publications at Thomsons were put out each month you really had to meet the deadlines. They set 20, 80 and 100 per cent copy deadlines. Now this may be seen as churning, but you know that if your publication's a day late, the publication following you is probably going to be two days late. And the Directory will be even later. There's tremendous pressure. You learn the difference between the ideal and the realistic if you ain't got much of a budget. There again, as a freelance writer you know all about juggling deadlines, and I'm sure that has helped me as an editor.

National Editors Conference 2003—Call for Papers

The national editors conference will be held in Brisbane in July next year with the theme After Gutenberg and Gates—Gazing into the e-future. For dates and other information, see Conferences for 2003 on page 6.

If you would like to present a paper or conduct a workshop at the national editors conference next year, please contact Robin Bennett at:

<beyondgutenberg@hotmail.com>. Please send a summary of your proposed content, approximately 250 words in length, to Robin Bennett at the address given, by 28 February 2003.

Draft conference program

- The long-term future of the book (opening plenary session)
- legal issues (panel session copyright, moral rights, plagiarism)
- developments in teaching, mentoring and training (panel session)
- the impact of the net on print (the future of design)
- editing magazines and journals, including e-zines (the role of future technology)

- the communication model of editing (plenary session)
- old languages for new audiences (editing indigenous writing)
- translation from one medium to another print, CD-ROM and Internet
- new tools for old editors
- editing biographies and autobiographies (panel session)
- editing fiction (panel session)
- the new grammar
- e-publishing
- working with self-publishers
- multicultural writing the implications for editors
- corporate publishing
- how to assess an index
- concluding plenary session.

Draft program for Sunday workshops

- Editing for the web and electronic publications
- developments in design
- children's picture book—the creative process (non-computer-generated art)
- setting up as a freelance editor or proofreader
- editing indigenous writing.

Itchy feet

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evaluation manuals for six subjects

- training materials and plans for Book Centre staff development and improved publishing procedures and practices.

Into this mix came revolution. It sounds dramatic, but in fact, that is precisely what happened in Indonesia in early 1998 only three weeks after I arrived. There was a great deal of 'student activity'—demonstrations against the corruption, nepotism and collusion of the Government and ruling elite (particularly Soeharto and his family). There was a level of anxiety among ex-pats (media coverage and briefings from our em-bassies) so for the first few days after the student demonstrations we were in regular contact with the Australian embassy staff, family at home and IDP. But it didn't seem necessary to leave.

Then, when three students were shot at Trisakti University, the atmosphere changed. The local SSE team—who had urged me to stay and carry on working on the project—were now urging me to safety at home. I was fortunate enough to be on a charter plane late one night, and came home via a short stay in Singapore. Scant hours, but worlds away.

When I returned a month later, the political scene was very different. Soeharto had been forced to step down. The political scene was still in some turmoil, but there was a general optimism about the new Indonesia—the New Order. Project participants had renewed energy; they felt much more enthusiastic about achieving our stated goals.

Working on an aid project involves a lot of political activity. The protocol involved in aid projects is rather daunting in the beginning, particularly when dealing with another culture that has formal channels of command. And one in which authority tends to work in a strictly top down manner.

So, what do I see as our team's real outputs? For training, there were workshops, funds and a break from routine;

capital expenditure was almost impossible so there was little new equipment that the project was able to provide, but there was some genuine success in forming linkages between the three 'divisions' through integrated workshops and conferences and ongoing IMD teams.

How was working on this project like mainstream publishing? There was lots of report writing, lots of juggling of schedules and lots of cajoling of authors and DTP/designers. How was it not like mainstream publishing? All those charts and meetings with ministry officials.

What are my final tips?

- learn the language, New Yorkese, English or Bahasa Indonesian
- speak the language
- bring a humble but strong presence to your work
- be culturally sensitive
- avoid revolutions where possible.

This is an edited version of an address to the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. on 1 October 2002. Views expressed are those of the contributor and not necessarily those of the Society of Editors.

Carolyn Bruyn transcribed the talk and Merry Pearson edited it.

Society of Editors (NSW) Inc.

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<http://www.users.bigpond.com/socednsw/>

Blue Pencil

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Assistants: Robin Appleton, Carolyn Bruyn, Meredith McGowan, Irene Sharpham, Keith Sutton.

Printer: Complete Design, Marrickville.

Published: 11 issues a year, combined Jan/Feb issue.

Your comments and contributions are welcome. Mail them to the Editor, *Blue Pencil*, Society of Editors (NSW) Inc., PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007. Deadline for the February issue is Monday, 13 January 2003.

The views expressed in the articles and letters, or the material contained in any advertisement or insert, are not the responsibility of The Society of Editors (NSW) Inc.

Advertising rates:

Full page, \$150; half page, \$80 (horizontal only); one-third page, \$50 (vertical or horizontal); quarter page \$40 (horizontal only); sixth page, \$30 (half of one column). Inserts: \$75 per hundred for DL-sized or A4 pre-folded to DL size. Circulation: approximately 375.

Membership

Membership of the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. is open to anyone working as an editor for publication (print or electronic documents), and anyone who supports the society's aims.

Membership runs for a calendar year. Fees for 2003 are under review.

For a membership application form, phone (02) 9294 4999, write to PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007, or download an application from the society's website at <http://www.users.bigpond.com/socednsw/>

Listing in the Editorial Services Directory

Listing costs \$40 and is available only to members of the society. The fee covers listing in both print and online versions. The online version is updated every three months. New entries should be submitted in .rtf format, using a template available from Cathy Gray at cgray@mpx.com.au. Updates can be made to contact details only for existing entries. Deadline for the next update is 31 December, 2002. Contact Cathy for more information. A new print edition is due to be published in 2003.

Committee meetings

All members are welcome to attend the society's committee meetings. Contact a committee member for details if you wish to attend the next meeting.

New members

Welcome to the new members for September/October 2002:

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Saul Lockhart

Wyn Diong

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NOTICEBOARD

Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. workshops for 2003

Onscreen editing

22 February, Chatswood High School; presented by Suzie Wynn-Jones

This is NOT a basic Word course. It teaches you how to use Word to make your task, as an editor in the digital age, much easier.

Freelance editing: Running a business

17 May, NSW Writers' Centre; presented by Kate Robinson, Ruth Green, Pamela Hewitt and Cathy Gray

This workshop will discuss setting up a business, finding work, quoting for work, and managing projects.

Pre-press: Skills and issues

5 April, Alpha Computers, Artarmon; presented by Pandy Dimitrios

This workshop will combine a seminar presentation and practical hands-on experience (where possible). The workshop will examine the stages of publishing, including pre-press and design, and colour management and printing techniques including:

- print requirements and specifications
- workflow procedure and techniques
- image capture, editing and manipulation
- page makeup
- layout output

Copyright

(date to be advised)

This course, tailored for publishers and editors, will be run by the Copyright Council.

Literary editing

12 July, NSW Writers' Centre; presented by Pamela Hewitt

Pamela will present the finer points of fiction and creative nonfiction, which will include voice, point of view, characterisation, and writing style.

Indexing

(date to be advised); presented by Caroline Colton and Michael Wyatt

Technical editing

16 August, City Tattersalls Club; presented by Greg Heard, Bruce Howarth, Matthew Stevens and Rhana Pike

This course will cover tables in scientific publications; technical editing with Word: setting up tables (as opposed to editing content), equation editor, plus general Word 'power user' stuff; substantive editing of scientific work and figures in scientific publications.

Grammar for writers and editors

September and October; presented by Robert Veel

This course will be presented as a two-day workshop, one day in September and another in October enabling the subject to be covered more comprehensively than is possible in a single day.

Structural editing: The essentials

15 November, NSW Writers' Centre; presented by Shelley Kenigsberg and Pamela Hewitt

Wired words: Writing and editing for the web

(date to be advised); presented by Pamela Hewitt

Writing for the web has challenges that are different from print-based writing. The workshop covers 'chunking', break-out text, pyramid writing, and linking techniques.

For more information about the Society's workshops, please send an email to Pauline Waugh at <paulinewaugh@ozemail.com.au>.