

Blue Pencil

April 1988

Newsletter of the Society of Editors (NSW) ISSN 1030-2557

Next meeting 6 July 1988

The guest at the next meeting of the Society of Editors, on Wednesday 6 July, will be Peter Eastway, who will discuss editors and tax.

Peter Eastway is a man of many professional caps. He is a photographer, an accountant, and Group Managing Editor of Iris Publishing.

He will be talking to us about the way in which editors, especially freelance editors, can organise their tax files. This will include tax deductions, superannuation, business versus PAYE tax, and travel concessions.

While Peter cannot give specific advice to individuals, he will be able to answer many of your questions and provide you

with guidelines for making your own enquiries.

We look forward to Peter's revelations and hope you can join us in the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, 16 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli, on 6 July 1988 at 7.30 pm. Wine, soft drinks and eats will be served at a cost of \$3 if you ring and book by Monday 4 July, or \$5 if you turn up without booking.

RSVP by ringing Shirley Jones on 86 3927. Please leave a message on her answering service if she isn't in.

Society of Editors (NSW), PO Box
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Committee 1988

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Editorial

This is the first issue of *Blue Pencil* I
have seen to press, and I look for-
ward to doing many more. Unfor-
tunately I will not have much time
for writing articles myself, so
please don't hang back with writ-
ing in or phoning through any-
thing you think might be suitable.
We need your contributions.

I'd like to thank Adriaan for
his patience in teaching me how to
use the computer and to congratu-
late him on the excellent job he's
done on the newsletter in the past.
I hope he has a very enjoyable
holiday and returns full of zest,
and ideas for articles.

Jeane Balcombe



Blue Pencil copy deadlines 1988

8 July, 12 August, 9 September, 2
November.

Power to the ... editors

Peter Spearritt assured those present that he had not come to attack editors but to convince them they needed more power, and that they should have more influence on the products they are working on.

Authors tend to view editors as having just a technical role - mopping up, copy editing and sorting out style. There are now various computer programs available that supposedly assist authors and do away with the need for editors. Such programs can, for example, count the number of times you use a word in a piece of text and offer you substitutes from the computer thesaurus. What the computer companies don't realise is that very few authors can type, let alone handle a computer. But this, of course, is changing. The younger generation is learning these skills.

Even if computers are used by future authors, we know that such things cannot replace the author: that the new technology will not make editors redundant. But it will help editors if they broaden the range of their activities so that they have a greater role in shaping a book and are concerned with structure and presentation and not just surface detail.

Peter cited the dismal failure of the Sunshine diaries as a case where an editor was needed. Sunshine diaries put in a bid for the Bicentennial logo and won the contract. They had something like a 750 000 print run. The retail price was initially \$44.95. You would have thought that with that sort of money at stake they would have spent something on the content of the diaries. Instead they produced something that was so full of errors that in three months it was selling at \$9.95.

Peter felt that he could discern two categories of books that worried him - the non-book and the almost book.

The non-book was conceptually a mistake, as it had no real content. A number of these floated in on the tide of Australiana fervour, and were often quite expensive productions selling initially at a high retail price, but then remaindered at next to nothing. Indeed the remainder price seemed to be the first real assessment of the true value of a book.

As an example of a non-book Peter mentioned *The Great Australian Annual*. Conceptually it was a mess because it was neither a book nor a magazine. It did not add up to some kind of statement about the year in which it was

published (the articles were much too general for that) and so had no lasting value as a record of that year. The pictures were good but lacked any commentary in the captions and so were not as meaningful as they should have been. And there was no relation between the text and the pictures.

Peter maintained that publishing was about money, standards and power. In the publishing world there was not a great deal of money to be made and so there was precious little to spend on origination. If standards were to be maintained then editors needed more power over the total product.

From this Peter went on to the almost book. Here he produced as evidence a series published by McPhee Gribble that he had been asked to review. It was called *Australians Today*. His basic complaint was that although the series was produced in four volumes with titles that led you to believe that each volume followed a particular theme, in fact the essays that comprised each book were thrown together without any thought being given to the structure of the work. It needed editorial intervention on a grand scale. For example, in the volume *Making a Life*, which dealt with different kinds of work, there was a chapter on fashion, which obviously belonged to *Making a Culture*. But really no one had made

any concessions to themes and the books looked like a set of academic journals with pretty covers.

The illustrations looked as if they had been chose at the last moment, were very badly reproduced and had appalling captions. 'From horse-drawn to airborne' was the caption for a picture of a horse and buggy in front of an early aeroplane, where there should have been some sensible comment about changes in means of transport and the effect on people's lives. All too often publishers seemed to subscribe to the belief that a picture speaks for itself. Or else they thought of the pictures as decorations, not as pieces of information when properly used.

Finally Peter commented on the practice of hiring good journo's to churn out text. This is fine, but what they write ought to be checked. Peter commented on a book produced by Time Life. The writer was Peter Porter and the subject, Sydney. The choice of writer was curious since Porter had lived in Sydney for a very short space of times many years previously. As a result there were several errors in his text. But more importantly, the Sydney he presented consisted of a few suburbs in which he happened to have gone to parties.

The point that Peter was making was that having hired a writer and sat them down to

produce the words, you can't just leave them to their own devices, however good a writer they might be.

While the mood of the meeting was all in favour of more power and more money, one person commented that since in the end improvements such as the ones Peter had recommended probably made no difference to the sale of the book, publishers were not likely to be influenced. And while everyone agreed that manuscripts should be checked and evaluated, there was a difficulty with finding the right person to do this. An objective and unbiased account was hard to obtain.

Sue Butler. (Josephine Bastian, our usual minute taker, was unable to attend the meeting)

Entries 1988/89

Freelance Register

Remember - deadline for receipt of entries is Friday 1 July 1988.

A last reminder!

Send stamped, self-addressed envelope for entry forms to

Shirley Jones

177 Norfolk Road

North Epping

NSW 2121

Phone: (02) 86 3927

Freelance vs freelancer

(Reply from Maureen Coleman to Shirley Jones's article, *Blue Pencil*, April 1988.)

I was interested to read your piece on freelance/freelancer in the April *Blue Pencil*.

Personally I always describe myself as a 'freelance' and I find the usage 'freelancer' irritating. Why add a totally superfluous and unnecessary syllable to a perfectly adequate word? Also 'lancer' has regimental connotations, as in the Bengal Lancers.

The -er agent ending is normally added to a verb but the word 'freelance' is, as you rightly say, a noun.

I don't think your etymology is quite right. *The Shorter Oxford* (I haven't got the big one with all its citations at home) gives 1820 as the earliest appearance of the word, and gives the following definition: 'A term used by recent writers to denote one of those military adventurers who in the Middle Ages offered their services as mercenaries...' (my emphasis). I believe, though I can't cite chapter and verse for it, that it was one of Sir Walter Scott's many coinages.

However, the historical aspect apart, the logical conclusion to be drawn from dictionary references is that 'freelancer' appears to be an Australianism. It is not British

usage and apparently not American either (my two-volume 1961 *Funk and Wagnall* doesn't give it, though we'd need to look up an up-to-date *Webster* to be sure). If 'freelancer' is Australian usage sanctioned by the *Macquarie*, then of course it is perfectly all right, nay, possibly obligatory to use the word in Australia. I'd better reform my ancient British habits immediately!

Maureen Coleman

Desktop publishing demonstration

Are you interested in attending a demonstration of desktop publishing equipment? If there is sufficient interest we could probably arrange one on the first or second Saturday in August. Phone Kim Anderson on 406 9222 with expressions of interest.

Computer for sale

Amstrad PC 1512, still in boxes

The Society has decided to buy a different computer so that it can use the Ventura desktop publishing system. As a result it is selling its nearly new Amstrad PC.

The Amstrad PC 1512 is described as 'a powerful 16 bit personal computer that can be used both to prepare letters and to carry out

routine office tasks'. It is supplied with:

- Microsoft MSDOS version 3.2
- Digital Research GEM version 2.0
- Locomotive Software's Basic 2
- Digital Research's DOS Plus version 1.2

The package consists of a monitor, computer, keyboard and mouse and is under guarantee until late August 1988.

Price: \$1800 o.n.o.

Phone Jeane Balcombe on 212 4600, or 713 9696 (a.h.)

Best sellers

Week ending 10 June 1988.

New Edition Bookshop, Paddington

1. Tom Wolfe, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, Cape, h/c
2. Peter Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, Picador, p/b
3. Peter Wright, *Spy Catcher*, Heinemann, p/b
4. Sally Morgan, *My Place*, Freemantle Arts Press, p/b
5. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Faber, p/b
6. Tim Bowden, *One Crowded Hour*, Collins Imprint, p/b
7. Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, Pan, p/b

8. Sorel Wilby, *Tibet*, out of stock

9. P.J. O'Rourke, *The Republican Reptile*, Pan, p/b

10. Glenda Adams, *Dancing on Coral*, out of stock

The Constant Reader, Crows Nest

1. Peter Wright, *Spy Catcher*, Heinemann, p/b

2. Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, Pan, p/b

3. Mark Henshaw, *Out of the Line of Fire*, Penguin, p/b

4. Tim Bowden, *One Crowded Hour*, Collins Imprint, p/b

5. R. Kowalski, *The Eight Week Cholesterol Cure*, Bantam, p/b

6. Lawrence Van der Post, *A Walk with a White Bushman*, Penguin, p/b

7. Tom Clancy, *Red Storm Rising*, Fontana

8. Glenda Adams, *Dancing on Coral*, Angus and Robertson, h/c

9. Tom Wolfe, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, Jonathon Cape, h/c.

10. Robert Ludlum, *The Icarus Agenda*, Grafton, h/b.

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Are you working as an editor? Yes

No

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part-time

employed full-time

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Employer:

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..... Telephone:

Date: Signature:

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The Treasurer, Society of Editors (NSW), PO Box 254, Broadway, NSW 2007.
NB: The accounting year is from 1 February to 31 January.