

# Blue Pencil

August 1988

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

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## Next meeting 7 September 1988

The guest at the next meeting of the Society of Editors, on Wednesday 7 September, will be Jacqueline Kent, who will discuss 'Being a writer versus being an editor'.

Jacqueline Kent is currently Fiction Editor for Corgi and Bantam Books. She is an established editor and author and has made a major contribution to Australian letters for more than a decade through her work as an editor.

She has written a history of Australian radio entitled *Out of the Bakelite Box* (Angus and Robertson, 1983) and more recently, published a book about growing up in Australia in the 1960s and 1970s entitled *In the Half Light* (Angus and Robertson, 1988).

We look forward to hearing Jacqueline speak and hope you can join us at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, 16 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli, on 7 September 1988 at 7.30 pm. Wine, soft drinks and eats will be served at a cost of \$3 if you ring and book by Tuesday 6 September, or \$5 if you turn up without booking.

RSVP by phoning Shirley Jones on (02) 86 3927. Please leave a message on her answering service if she is not in.

## One Crowded Hour

At our last meeting at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre Mr Tim Bowden described the gestation and birth of his biography of Neil Davis. This was an interesting opportunity to look behind the scenes at how the book evolved; but perhaps even more, it was a moving experience to catch some glimpses of the real Neil Davis, an easy-going, compassionate man as well as an outstanding war photographer, from the source materials that Tim Bowden brought to the meeting.

The experience of transforming raw facts and impressions into sequential narrative was obviously still very fresh in Bowden's mind, as he described homely practical details like sorting and laying out around him all the source materials for a new chapter, before he set to work at the computer screen; described too, the trauma of having his interview with Gary Burns, the man who'd shared the last hours of Davis's life, crassly interrupted by the roar of a Victa mower.

Society of Editors (NSW), PO Box 254,  
Broadway 2007

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Bowden first thought of doing a life of  
Davis in 1984; it would be an  
autobiography in the 'as told to'  
convention of *Changi Photographer*,  
which he'd just finished. 'Now you,  
you bastard' he wrote to Davis.  
'You're a better story.' Davis  
concurred, and they secured a joint  
contract with Collins. Davis was to  
tape material and post it back to  
Bowden.

But progress was slow. After the fifth  
90-minute tape, Davis was still  
reminiscing about his childhood and  
youth in Tasmania - in fact, he still  
hadn't managed to get across the  
Derwent from Sorell to Hobart!

In July 1985, on one of Davis's Sydney  
leaves, Bowden hijacked him to a hut  
in the bush and together they blocked  
out the book - the structure and the  
chapters to be included. Back at his  
house, Bowden got Davis to write  
names and details on all his still  
photos, and indicate if they were clear  
for publication.

Then, on 9 September 1985, came the  
devastating news that Neil Davis had  
been killed in Bangkok, pinned down  
by tank fire during an attempted  
coup. Bowden was forced to wonder  
if the book could ever now be  
completed; at first he thought,  
probably not.

But then the source material started to  
come in; much of it was excellent. For  
example, among Davis's papers sent  
on from his apartment in Bangkok  
was a complete set of work diaries,  
covering the time from his first arrival  
in Asia until his death; Davis had kept  
an orderly record for every day of his  
working life, of where he went and  
what he did, together with his  
expenses. Though they contained no  
personal details, the diaries provided  
an invaluable framework for the

book, and incidentally showed him to have been an indefatigable worker. There were also letters, his personal correspondence, and clippings from newspapers and magazines. Copies of original articles Davis had submitted - more valuable than the printed results - enabled a check on his remembered impressions, which Bowden had recorded on tape.

Files from his NBC office produced more articles, and also 'backgrounders' which at first puzzled Bowden. They resembled intelligence briefings; 'But I refused to believe that Neil was a spook. He had contempt for journalists who played those games'. Eventually Bowden concluded they were briefings requested by the NBC chief in Tokyo - Davis's reading of the situation in the theatre of action he was covering, and his forecast of events in the forthcoming month.

Bowden approached other possible sources. An appeal to fellow journalists yielded the normal low response rate, but the reminiscences they did share with him were apt and helpful. Barbara Davis, Neil's sister, proffered a bag full of letters; they turned out to be the correspondence with his Aunt Lillian, which was to add another dimension to the book. And Bowden recorded talks with his wife Julie Davis, with Tony Ferguson and Don Simmons, and a painful interview with Gary Burns, taking him through the experience of Neil's death only a few weeks after it happened.

When all the material was assembled, the transcribing and summarising done, Bowden knew he could still produce a book, even though different from the one he and Davis had planned.

How to make sense of it all, and where to start? Cleaving to his training as a maker of radio documentaries, Bowden decided to treat this material with the same sort of immediacy, using excerpts of direct speech linked by narration; 'I wanted Neil to tell his own story with minimal intrusion from me'. After some false starts, he realised that the right way to begin was with the death of his hero, and after that the story could proceed chronologically from Neil's childhood, ending where it began.

Once the beginning was in order, the rest of the book almost wrote itself. Well, almost! It actually took about eighteen months of hard labour, working mainly in the evening and at weekends. During this time his wife Ros Bowden was inclined to dub him 'The Cranky Lodger'. The book's title came very late, though it was there awaiting use all the time, in the lines Davis wrote on the flyleaf of each of his work diaries.

The project weathered two changes of boss at Collins but never lost the publishers' support, even when the length of the manuscript went over 100 000 words; the interest of the subject (plus, one feels sure, Bowden's fine track-record) ensured a worthwhile outcome. Of the people who helped to turn the manuscript into a well-finished book, Bowden mentioned particularly Hank Nelson as background adviser, the book's editor Jacqui Kent and its designer Trevor Hood, with both of whom Bowden enjoyed very good working relations. He finished his talk with a short cautionary tale pointing the moral that cover blurbs should always, always, be checked by the author.

Bowden summed up: '*One Crowded Hour* is essentially a work of oral

history. It was my aim to bring the intimacy of anecdote to the printed page: I wanted the reader to hear Neil's voice talking in the head'.

Asked during question time if he felt Davis's personality did come through, Bowden replied 'Certainly. And yet...' And yet Davis was a very secretive fellow; it was almost impossible to get at all the wellsprings of his nature. Probably one key to his lifestyle was his intense personal competitiveness. His letters to his Aunt Lillian disclosed an unexpected and strong element in his life; without them the character as portrayed might indeed have been something of a cardboard cut-out.

Was his death a casual accident, or the outcome of some sinister plot? Probably the answer lay somewhere between the two: not premeditated but certainly deliberate - a case of ill-disciplined, trigger-happy gunners acting out their dislike of foreigners.

And a final question: how did Davis himself look upon his future? Did he even think he had a future? Did he expect death to come early; or was he contemplating a return, however distant, to the peace of Tasmania? Bowden was adamant that the boy from Tassie would never have gone back home; he was much more drawn to the Asians, in sympathy with their pliant strength, their fatalism. Had his remarkable run of luck lasted, in a few more years he might have been ready to slow down; his great desire was to get back into Cambodia and live in Pnomh Penh, alongside the Cambodian people he thought so wonderful.

Josephine Bastian

## Gremlins attack

My contributions to the newsletter last month sustained some injuries from the gremlins that flourish upon printers' ink. In particular, they made nonsense of the piece in which I argued for the use of 'freelance' in preference to the neologism 'freelancer'. The third and fourth sentences should have read,

'I am a freelancer' sounds daggy to me - amateurish and 'made up'; you might as well say, 'I am a go-it-aloner'. Whether *The Macquarie Dictionary* is advocating the usage or is merely sitting inscrutably on the fence, that work of reference is neither so venerable nor so felicitous in its choices as to deserve our unswerving support. (I hope the text comes out unaltered this time!) And it just added insult to injury to find that a clumsy, two-bob-each-way form, 'freelances/ers', had somehow crept into my report on 'Taxing matters'.

Furthermore, in this same report, where I digressed briefly to discuss the title of our newsletter, I was not expressing puzzlement at the title itself, which is a very good one, but simply at the colour of the pencil: Why *BLUE Pencil*? Why not *RED Pencil* or *GREEN Pencil*? (Hands off the capitals, you gremlins!) See? Phew! Correction is more strenuous than composition.

After this experience, I had lots of sympathy for one Graeme Harper, author of a first novel entitled *Black Cat, Green Field*, when I saw that the gremlins had shot a well-aimed barb into the blurb of his book:

*Black Cat, Green Field* is the saga of a time of turmoil - mirrored in the anguish of a young man battling memories of an unfinished war, embroiled in the conflict between imagination and reality, searching for his true royalties.

(*Fellowship of Australian Writers: Members' Bulletin*, 100, Aug. 1988, p.1.)

Josephine Bastian

**Gremlin's reply.** Sorry, Josephine. I take full responsibility for the typing errors in your piece on the word 'freelance'. Unfortunately, both the typing and checking of this contribution were done at the last minute and under difficult conditions (at work in my lunch hour). But now that you are sending your copy in on disc this problem should not recur.

The use of 'freelances/ers' was an editorial decision and raises the question of whether *Blue Pencil* should have an editorial style of its own or accept the different styles of individual contributors. I would be interested to hear readers' views.

As for the loss of capitals, that was a computer/editor problem. I had intended putting 'Blue' in bold italics while in Ventura (the desktop publishing program). Unfortunately, the computer I was working on was not connected to a printer, so I did not have an opportunity to see page proofs. I should have picked it up on the screen but I didn't. However, I now know how to pre-tag words requiring italics while I am in the word processing program, which means I can check they are tagged before I go into Ventura. Previously I have tagged with a mouse while in Ventura, which is a somewhat hit-and-miss affair, especially when

screen definition and/or mouse performance are poor.

The Editor

## Name change

It seems that Methuen LBC Ltd have changed their name to The Law Book Company Ltd. Below is an extract from a letter from Methuen informing creditors of the change.

Methuen LBC Limited, a company incorporated in New South Wales, proposes to change its name to The Law Book Company Limited.

The Law Book Company Limited, a company incorporated in New South Wales, proposes to change its name to ABP Limited.

The name changes are proposed consequent upon the recent sale of the general book publishing business of Methuen LBC Limited. The principal activity which is now carried on by Methuen LBC Limited is the publication and sale of legal and technical books. Methuen LBC Limited has previously been registered under the name The Law Book Company Limited. The company presently registered under the name The Law Book Company Limited does not trade.

All clear now?

## Editing Workshop

The Society of Editors is running an editing workshop in mid-October.

The workshop is designed for editors who would like to sharpen their structural editing and copyediting skills.

In the first of two sessions, workshop participants will be given a mini-manuscript that they are required to structurally edit and copyedit. In the second session, they will be given an edited version of the same manuscript for comparison with theirs.

The cost is \$15.00 and numbers are restricted to 16.

For more information, please contact Kim Anderson on (02) 406 9222.

## Bestsellers

Week ending 12 August 1988

### Gleebooks, Glebe

1. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Milan Kundera, Faber and Faber, p/b.
  2. *My Place*, Sally Morgan, Fremantle Arts Press, p/b.
  3. *An Australian in America*, David Dale, Collins, p/b.
  4. *The Radiant Way*, Margaret Drabble, Penguin, p/b.
  5. *Oscar and Lucinda*, Peter Carey, UQP, p/b.
  6. *Spycatcher*, Peter Wright, Heinemann, p/b.
  7. *Perfume*, Patrick Susskind, Penguin, p/b.
  8. *One Crowded Hour*, Collins Imprint, p/b.
  9. *Shining the Wattle*, Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee, Penguin, p/b.
  10. *Life: A User's Manual*, George Perec, Collins, p/b.
2. *Wallace: Secret Lives of the Windsors*, Charles Higham, Macmillan, h/c.
  3. *Out of the Line of Fire*, Mark Henshaw, Penguin, p/b.
  4. *Spycatcher*, Peter Wright, Heinemann, p/b.
  5. *The Radiant Way*, Margaret Drabble, Penguin, p/b.
  6. *Garden of Shadows*, Virginia Andrews, Fontana, p/b.
  7. *Trump: The Art of the Deal*, Donald Trump, Century Hutchinson, h/c.
  8. *Babies*, Christopher Green, Simon & Schuster, p/b.
  9. *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, Tom Wolfe, Jonathan Cape, h/c.
  10. *Peace on Earth*, Gordon Stevens, Coronet, p/b.

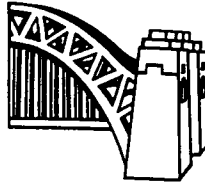
### Angus and Robertson, Imperial Arcade, City

1. *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*, Douglas Adams, Pan, p/b.

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## Northside Freelancers Club

(02) 419 2266



## Tapping into a network

The Northside Freelancers Club is now providing a valuable forum for freelance writers, artists, editors, photographers and other professionals to exchange ideas and experiences.

Since starting last October, the Club has attracted members from a wide range of occupations and now includes specialists in communications, computer programming, costume design, architecture, photography and journalism.

'The one thing we all have in common is the isolation of working freelance and the need for opportunities to discuss problems and ideas with people working on a similar level' said Associate Director, Eral Goulet.

'The most gratifying aspect of the Club is the way that networking is developing spontaneously.

'Through two special luncheons where members presented their work, other members have been able to make use of the pool of talent.'

Ultimately, the Club hopes to produce a freelance register.

The Club meets monthly for lunch and is open to full-time freelancers in any occupation.

Phone (02) 419 2266 for further information.

[Editor's note: No change was made to the words 'freelance' and 'freelancers' in the above extract from the NFC press release.]

## Publishing venture

Enterprising, ambitious person, maybe with editorial skills, wanted to form a marketable team with a graphic/book designer who has marketing, management and electronic publishing skills.

Contact Cumberland and Associates on (02) 816 3950 for further information.

## Contributions Welcome

Send letters, articles, reviews or cartoons about editing and publishing to:

Blue Pencil  
58 Rickard Street  
Five Dock NSW 2046.



# **Society of Editors (NSW)**

## **Membership application form**

**THE ANNUAL FEE IS \$20**

**Please note that membership runs from 1 February to 31 January.**

Name:

Home address:

Telephone:

**Are you working as an editor?**

- Yes/No

**If yes, are you working:**

- full-time freelance
- part-time freelance
- full-time for an employer
- part-time for an employer

(Please tick)

Employer's address:

Telephone:

Signature:

Date:

**Please make cheques payable to Society of Editors (NSW) and return to:  
The Treasurer, Society of Editors (NSW), PO Box 254, Broadway, NSW 2007.**

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