

Blue Pencil

Newsletter of
the Society
of Editors
(NSW)

Patron: Hazel Hawke

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January/February 1997

Changing directions in publishing and the role of the editor

Richard Smart

As I was pondering what on earth I could say to a roomful of experienced book editors which was in any way illuminating, I fell to thinking of Shakespeare's *Seven Ages of Man*. This line of thought was brought to my attention a few days ago while listening to a very witty speech by Humphrey Tilling. In it he likened Shakespeare's seven ages of man to the four ages of cricket. Now, fear not, I'm not about to bore you with cricket, which happens to be one of my passions, but I'll borrow Mr Tilling's analogy and relate it to the industry that nurtures all of us here, book publishing.

After more than 35 years in book publishing, dating back to the early 1960s, and having enjoyed every minute — even in the face of those inevitable political black spots — I'm still not too sure how I found myself engaged in such an impecunious industry. I think I wanted to be a journalist until I realised that knocking on distressed relatives' doors and asking for a photograph of an accident victim wasn't my strength. I'm sure you all have interesting stories about your entry into the book world — some by accident, others dedicated to books and utterly determined to 'get into publishing'. Mine was probably a tablespoon of each of those ingredients. And so to my four ages of publishing.

The first is the Age of Innocence

and Youth, when on the morning of your first day in that coveted editorial assistant role you arrive punctually at 9, eager to meet the senior editor and the publisher, to impress them with your creativity and drive, only to find that they're not in the office until lunchtime — if then. You long to meet authors, to lay hands on your first man-

uscript, to re-write, re-structure, mould it into a bestseller. But for the first six months the nearest you get to an author is organising their free copies, or to a manuscript logging in the daily submissions and wrapping up the rejects. You marvel at the doggedness of the not-a-hope-in-Hell authors who send in thousands of words on *Bee-keeping in Bega*

Next meeting: Tuesday 4 February, 1997

Annual General Meeting

Committee reports, the election of new committee members and a friendly free-for-all on what the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. is all about (yes, note that 'Inc'; this is our first meeting as an *incorporated* body).

- What function does the society perform for members?
- How best can it serve them?
- What are the issues it should be dealing with, or helping members deal with?

Wine, food, conviviality, conversation — and a couple of door prizes too. All welcome, but only financial members can vote. If you haven't renewed yet, you can do so at the meeting (please bring your renewal form with you). You can also join on the night if you'd like to.

6.30 pm for 7 pm in the Rooftop Function Centre,
4th floor, Australian Museum (enter from William St).
Drinks and light refreshments provided.

Please RSVP by Friday 31 January to (02) 9552 0039 (voicemail).
NO CHARGE for people who RSVP; \$10 for those who don't.

or even *The Sex Life of an Editorial Assistant*. You badger all in sight for a chance to try your hand at something — production, PR, marketing, sales, finance — for that's the best way to learn. After what seems forever — although it's probably only a couple of years — comes that break. The senior editor asks you to copy-edit — nothing more — the new edition of a fishing manual. Not the most riveting start, but you're on your way at last to the second age.

This I have called the Age of the Middle and Glorious Years when you scale what appear glorious heights. Enconced in your own office, with your own editorial assistant, you have a fleet car and a corporate credit card that invites you to the world of 'lunch with author/agent', that ubiquitous entry in every senior editor or publisher's diary at least twice a week. From such lofty heights you manage and cultivate your own list, have the power to make an impression on the literary scene. Daily you create new ideas, keeping voraciously up to date with current affairs, fads and trends — what people are eating, wearing, watching or listening to. You produce books aimed at improving anything and everything in readers' lives, and the longer the title the better. You persuade 'personalities' from all walks of life to 'tell it all' in explosive biographies, or if they can't write, no matter, engage a journalist to ghost a far more racy version. Life's a-buzz as sales and marketing report that your latest how-to title — *Create a Garden against the Odds* (subtitled *Peaks and Valleys*) is simply racing out of the shops, and that the author, Channel 13's garden guru, is *New Idea's* lead story of the week. Can it get any better than this?

Well, yes and no. For we now move into the third age, that of the Age of Acceptance. After some 20 years successfully engaging the glories of the middle years there comes that inevitable day, or defining moment, when all that 'glory', those lunches and overseas jaunts, seem to lose their allure; when chasing, yet again, another fad or foible or pollicie's life story seems somewhat ridiculous, even tedious. Suddenly the notion of compiling a worthy anthology has calming appeal. There's a feeling that a new 'first-age' generation is coming through with a pace, wit and energy that's hard to match and much to be admired. So, now the elder statesman's role comes into play when past glories can be recounted with much exaggeration and some little regret. And it leads you, readily, into the fourth age, the Age of Retirement, or self-employment, perhaps.

Now, with your hopefully well-garnered superannuation providing some security, you gather up all that experience and plunge headlong into your own small publishing company. With an excitement not unlike that felt way back on day one of the first age, you invest in ventures you would scarcely have noticed in the world of 'big' publishing. You re-discover the joys and realities of working hands-on with writers and designers, printers, distributors and booksellers. You enjoy far less the bank's monthly monitoring, the constant cash-flow conundrum, and watch with more than passing interest the movements of those rates. But there's perverse pleasure in knowing that whatever pain you inflict on your bank account is entirely self-inflicted.

Conversely there's special joy in success — sales of 2000 or more! The creation and production of the first book via your own dollars is rather like your first experience of sex: 'hectic, strenuous, memorable, pleasant and over before you

know it' (a quote borrowed from writer Bill Bryson who, aptly enough today, was comparing a first experience of sex to winning a horse race).

In this elder statesman's role you offer advice, consult, give worthy talks, even buy a computer, and hope to come to terms with 'a publisher's irrational fear of life' as writer Cyril Connelly so described it. A far more down-to-earth view of 'retirement' came from that irascible, lovable and champion Australian bowler of the 1920s and '30s, Bill O'Reilly: 'I have three baskets on my desk — one marked IN, another marked OUT, and the third marked LBW. That stands for LET THE BUGGERS WAIT.'

In one of his early radio broadcasts, that brilliant but troubled comedian, Peter Sellers, memorably mimicked a pompous Conservative MP telling workers what he thought was good for them. One disaffected worker yelled out 'And what the ...'s that got to do with ...' and you can imagine the rest. Perhaps some of you are similarly wondering what the ... my stroll through the four ages has got to do with the role and readiness of editors for the 21st century. Indirectly, quite a lot. But let me end by spending a few minutes addressing that question directly.

I believe that editors are a book publishing company's engine room: the higher the quality of the company's editors the better the books. In the *New York Times* in 1986 George Plimpton said of sports books 'the smaller the ball, the better the book'. And so with editors, quality before quantity.

As I said, editors are the engine room; they provide the manuscripts that keep production and design departments ticking over, give sales, marketing and publicity something to sell and promote, the accounts department something to add up, the warehouse something to pack, the booksellers something to sell and lastly, and rather centrally, the consumer something to read. But this important and essential role comes at a price as we head towards the 21st century.

For many years, particularly overseas, and perhaps in London most of all, book publishing tended to be an occupation for the 'privileged', an attitude most prevalent in editorial departments. Editors spent their days in ivory towers dreaming up marvellous ideas before handing them down to lesser mortals to magically transform into books. It is doubtful such editors knew where the production department was, let alone visited it.

Nowadays editors must be all-rounders, must keep acquiring new publishing skills. And I'm not referring to updating their obvious editorial knowledge but rather a willingness to understand the role of the other publishing departments. Money is expensive, whatever the interest rate, so advances must be judiciously negotiated; contracts must be carefully understood, particularly in these days of ever-expanding technological spin-offs; all subsidiary, book club and overseas rights have to be exploited; budgets and costings must be second nature; schedules understood and kept; balance sheets mustn't blow the mind; authors must be found, bullied, cosseted and loved.

Over the years I've been pleased to be associated with the Australian Publishers Association training seminars and I've always stressed — no doubt to the point of boredom — the importance of an editor's global view of the industry. Particularly in our country where we face such enormous competition from the best of the world's books. It's really marvellous

Society of Editors (NSW) Inc.
NOMINATION FORM

For the Annual General Meeting on Tuesday, 4 February 1997

I hereby nominate
(Please print full name of nominee)

for the committee position of

Signed:

Name:
(Please print)

Address

..... Postcode

I accept nomination:
(Nominee to sign if nominated by another person)

Scientific and Technical Editing

a one-day training course

8.30 to 4.30, 15 March 1997 at the Australian Museum, College Street, Sydney

Cost: \$75 members, \$90 non-members (includes lunch)

The society is pleased to be able to present this workshop on the challenges and strategies in scientific and technical editing.

In scientific and technical editing, the primary aim is clarity of expression. We also have to minimise ambiguity and shrink verbose meanderings to concise messages. Often, readers want their information as quickly and painlessly as possible, so much good published work in this field is presented in predictable formats by editors who have followed particular conventions. Finished work that's predictable without being dull is a challenge!

Whatever your experience (or lack of experience) in the scientific field, there will be something for you to learn from the workshop.

In this all-day workshop, there will be sessions on:

- **Text:** What are the special style conventions used in scientific text? What is biological nomenclature? How do you deal with a noun stack? What are the differences between *homoeologous*, *homologous* and *analogous*? Are *incidence* and *prevalence* the same? What are the main referencing systems in scientific work?
- **Pictorial elements:** What is the difference between a table and a graph? When do you use them and when should they be deleted? What are the essential elements of a table? How do you simplify a graph?
- **On-screen editing:** How does editing on-screen make the editor more efficient? What are the short-cuts? What software do you use, and how are documents translated between software programs?
- **Journals and peer review:** An overview of academic journal publishing. How does the system work and what is the editor's role in it? What are the common problems?
- **Multi-author projects:** Many science publications have several authors; the editor is in middle, trying to come up with a coherent work. How is this achieved, and what are the obstacles?

Speakers for this workshop will be Gregory Heard, Julian McAllan, Jill Nicholson, Anita Phillips and Juliet Richters. For further information, contact Rhana Pike on 9569 7831 or rhanap@ozemail.com.au.

To reserve a place at the Scientific and Technical Editing workshop, send this form with your cheque for \$75 (members of the Society of Editors (NSW) or \$90 (non-members) by 8 March to

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

Name

Address

Telephone

We want to make sure that the workshop is useful for people working in the field and those who would like to. What do you hope to learn from the workshop?

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to see how our local publishing has developed over the past 25 years. Our writing, editing, design and production are the equal of the USA and the UK; we market, sell and promote with a vigour and individuality that visiting authors and publishers regard with awe. As I and others of my generation wind down somewhat, it's heartening to see the new generation take on the publishing world with professionalism and enthusiasm that augers well for the 2000s. We have the editors, we have the quality, but we must keep learning and improving our all-round skills so that collectively the Australian book publishing industry maintains its hard won and recognised high status in world publishing.

After a 35-year publishing career, Richard Smart has now entered the Fourth Age, reaching, as he says, 'the calmer though relatively impecunious waters of publishing consultancy'. Unfortunately, technology let us down at the end of Richard's talk and little of the discussion that followed made it onto tape. Several messages particularly relevant to editors did emerge, however. It is important that:

- editors have a global view of their industry;
- editors sell themselves and their skills;
- publishing companies be managed by people with editorial backgrounds (rather than purely financial skills, for example).

Indexing in the Electronic Age: Correction

Glenda Browne's Web Site address as it appeared in the October 1996 issue of *Blue Pencil* was incorrect. It should have been:

<http://www.zeta.org.au/~aussi/browneg.htm>

Other articles from *Indexing in the Electronic Age* are available from the directory page:

<http://www.zeta.org.au/~aussi/ixelpapr.htm>

- Tony Barry, What contribution can indexing make to the Internet?
- Glenda Browne, Automatic Indexing and Abstracting
- Garry Cousins, Conceptual indexing for CD-ROMs:

beyond free text searching

- Sandra Henderson, Future indexing developments in WORLD1
- Roxanne Missingham, Indexing the Internet: pinning jelly to the wall?
- Geraldine Triffitt, *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*: how is it indexed?
- Dwight Walker, Web indexing: an exercise in hypertext navigation

~ Dwight Walker, Newsletter Editor/Webmaster, Australian Society of Indexers

The Ethics Conference

For a while now the Society of Editors (NSW) has been canvassing the idea that it host a national (and perhaps international) Ethics Conference towards the end of 1998 or early 1999. Some ideas have been received from other societies as to the nature and scope of the conference. At the moment it looks like the conference will focus on Ethics in Publishing and the Community.

This conference has enormous potential to address pressing ethical issues facing publishers, authors, editors and readers in a rapidly changing world. It would also be a major contribution of the society to the publishing industry in Australia.

A sub-committee has been formed to look at the conference more closely. It consists of: Michael Giffin, John Fleming, Robin Appleton, Terry Johnston and Catherine

Hockings. A draft program has been produced for discussion, but now the sub-committee needs other 'ideas' people to help fill the program with *content*; to determine the shape of the program, the definition of key themes and selection of speakers.

Later in the year, once the content of the conference is planned, we will be looking for the organisational skills of other members to assist with registrations, childcare, publicity, workshop scheduling, catering and other hands-on aspects of the conference.

If you would like to be involved with the Ethics Conference, in any capacity, please contact Michael Giffin on (02) 9360 9985 phone or (02) 9331 4653 fax.

The sub-committee needs the support of members to make this important conference work!

Escapism

'I suppose I fulfilled the secret fantasy of every editor in the world of publishing the day I killed a writer.'

So begins *A Turn of the Blade*, by Veronica Sweeney (HarperCollins, 1996).

Great holiday reading.

Annual General Meeting

Agenda

The agenda for the first Annual General Meeting of the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. is as follows:

1. Opening and apologies
2. Correspondence
3. Minutes of the 1996 AGM of the unincorporated society (printed in *Blue Pencil*, March 1996)
4. Committee reports, including financial reports
5. Report on incorporation
6. Election of 1997 committee
7. Any other business.

1997 committee nominations

Nominations have been received for the following positions:

President: Catherine Gray

Secretary: Michael Giffin

Membership Secretary: Rhana Pike

Publicity Officer: Terry Johnston

General members: Isabel Partridge, Robin Appleton (past President)

Catherine Gray is also willing to continue on the role of Treasurer if necessary.

No nominations have been received for: Vice-President, Newsletter Editor(s), Catering Officer. A nomination form has been included with this issue of *Blue Pencil*. You may nominate yourself for any position, but if someone else nominates you, you must sign the form to indicate your acceptance. You can give the form to the secretary on the night, preferably before the start of the meeting.

Here's a list of the duties associated with the positions.

President

Oversee the management of the society in accordance with the constitution; chair general and committee meetings; represent the society.

Vice-President

In the absence of the president, chair general and committee meetings and assume duties of the president.

Secretary

Maintain the records of the society; take minutes of general and committee meetings; distribute them to committee members; draft, send and receive all society postal correspondence and answer voice mail.

Treasurer

Manage all monies, accounts, receipts, and bookkeeping for the society and prepare a financial statement for the auditor and the annual general meeting.

Membership Secretary

Receive and process membership applications and subscriptions; maintain a database of members' names and addresses; print labels for newsletter or other mailouts; draft any membership surveys the society may conduct, receive the returns and process the information received.

Catering Officer

Arrange catering for all society meetings, workshops and functions.

Newsletter Editor(s)

Produce the society newsletter: assemble and edit copy; and arrange typesetting, printing, packaging and posting of each issue.

Publicity Officer

Promote the society; publicise its activities and the editing services offered by members; and liaise with the media.

General committee members

Attend and contribute to committee meetings; accept duties or act for another committee member as may be required. Someone interested in guiding the society's training activities would be particularly useful.

NOTICEBOARD

Scientific and Technical Editing Seminar

The Society of Editors (NSW) Inc will be holding a full-day seminar on scientific and technical editing at the Australian Museum on Saturday 15 March.

Not to be missed, whether you're a beginner or a long-term practitioner in the field.

Details in the enclosed brochure, or contact the convenor, Rhana Pike, ph (02) 9569 7831 (after hours), e-mail rhanap@ozemail.com.au

Workshops on principles of editing and publishing

The NSW Writers' Centre is again running its series of workshops, convened by Robin Appleton, on the publishing process and principles of editing. The workshops span three weekends from 8 February to 23 February, from 9.30 am to 5 pm each day, plus Practical Editing sessions on 1 and 2 March. For more information, please contact the NSW Writers' Centre on (02) 9555 9757.

SOCIETY OF EDITORS (NSW)

1996 COMMITTEE

President and Treasurer

Catherine Gray

Phone/fax: (02) 9130 8331 (w & h)

E-mail: cgray@mpx.com.au

Secretary

Michael Giffin

Phone: (02) 9360 9985 (w & h)

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Membership

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Catering

Josephine Bastian

Phone: (02) 9660 7107 (h)

Newsletter

Karen Young

Phone: (02) 9901 4088 (w)

Fax: (02) 9906 2218 (w)

Publicity

Terry Johnston

Phone/fax: (02) 9337 4126 (h)

Members

Robin Appleton

(Immediate Past President)

Phone/fax: (02) 9560 1017 (w & h)

John Fleming

Phone: (02) 9529 8638 (h)

Fax: (02) 9529 9764 (h)

Isabel Partridge

Phone: (02) 9523 7295

Fax: (02) 9544 4389

1997 Register

The 1997 *Register of Editorial Services* should be with the printer as you read this. People listed in this edition will receive their copies in the next few weeks, and a substantial direct mail campaign is being planned to maximise distribution throughout the publishing industry — and beyond.

National magazine for editors

The Society of Editors (Victoria) Inc. has reportedly hired an editor to put together two trial issues of a quarterly national magazine for editors, with the first issue due mid-1997. An editorial board will comprise representatives from all state societies.

Stay tuned for more details.

Techwriter Placements

Techwriter Placements, established in March 1992, is a recruitment agency specialising in supplying technical writers, editors and illustrators for permanent and contract positions. The company covers every area where technical information or complex business processes need to be explained simply, in fields such as software and hardware development, business procedures, electronics, telecommunications, engineering and defence. Contact:

Techwriter Placements

140 Arthur Street, North Sydney 2060

ph (02) 9955 5768, fax (02) 9955 5883.

Celebration of women writers

In conjunction with International Women's Week 1997, the Women Writers' Network is planning a celebration of women's writing at the NSW Writers' Centre, Rozelle, on Friday 7 March — the evening before the celebratory march. There will be readings from early Australian women's writings, and both established Australian women authors and representatives of the newer generation will read from their own works.

For more information, contact Mollie Shelley on (02) 9419 6419.

Writers' cricket match

As a finale to the Sydney Fringe Writers' Festival there will be a cricket match on Saturday 1 February, 2 to 6 pm, at Bondi Beach Parkland. The match will be followed by a presentation of a signed Don Bradman bat, poster and book at the Festival Club Bar. For further information or to register a team, contact the Sydney Fringe Festival on (02) 9365 2197.

Final note

McGraw-Hill Australia, Editorial and Production Services, closed on 17 January 1997. This significantly alters the employment environment both for those who had been employed by the company full-time and for local freelance editors.