

Blue Pencil

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

July 1989

Next meeting 2 August 1989

Who wants to be a book editor?

To Robyn Appleton it seems that people from all walks of life – aspiring “writers”, honours graduates, pedantic readers, and journalists – want to be book editors. Finding the gifted few is rewarding, but the difficulties in assessing potential in short-term courses are great. The nature of an editor’s responsibilities to the author, publisher and reader is seldom understood. Editing skills are refined through experience and not through formal instruction.

Join Robyn Appleton on Wednesday 2 August and hear about the kinds of courses

available for editors. You will also be able to give your views on the value of training editors through formal institutions.

We look forward to discussing this topic with Robyn and hope you can join us at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, 16 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli on 2 August 1989 at 7.30 pm. Wine, soft drinks and eats will be served at a cost of \$3 if you telephone and book by Tuesday 1 August and \$5 if you come along without booking.

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

Constitution change – more proxy votes needed

We were unable to vote on the proposed changes to the Society’s constitution at the July meeting because we did not have a quorum. We will try again at the August meeting.

If you do not plan to attend this meeting, please send in your proxy vote. If you have mislaid your proxy form, telephone a committee member and ask for a new one. Proxy votes must be received at least 48 hours before the meeting.

The proposed changes are described in detail on page 7 of the April *Blue Pencil*. Briefly, the existing constitution restricts membership to book editors and former book editors; it is proposed that this be changed to allow, in addition, “any person interested in promoting the purposes of the Society of Editors (NSW)” to join. The second proposed amendment is the substitution of “print editors” for “book editors” in Clause 2, which describes the purposes of the Society: “...to discuss subjects of particular interest to book editors: to promote the exchange and dissemination of information and ideas among book editors”.

Please send in those proxy forms *as soon as possible*.

Last meeting – Nancy Keesing

Nancy Keesing was our guest speaker at the last meeting of the Society of Editors. Nancy enjoys a busy and stimulating career as a writer, editor, poet and critic. She spoke to us about her experiences as a book reviewer and how she felt that editors can benefit from hearing about the literary problems that are picked up by reviewers.

Having reviewed books for many years for journals and newspapers such as *The Age*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Canberra Times* and *The Australian Book Review*, Nancy directs her articles to the general reader. She does not regard herself as an academic and so avoids scholarly works, believing these should be reviewed in a scholarly manner. She only reviews works that she feels are within her competence. For example, in the 1960s, Nancy enjoyed reviewing poetry, but now

she lacks sympathy with contemporary poetry even though she still reads it for her own interest and, indeed, writes poetry herself.

In reviewing for the general reader, she does not attempt "judgment by peers" as scholarly reviewers do. Instead she concentrates on being constructive in her criticism, pointing out both good and bad aspects of a work so that the general reader can form an accurate idea of a book's appeal and its value for money. In fact, Nancy avoids reviewing works about which nothing good can be said.

Even though she finds particular works annoying at times, Nancy does not believe in nit-picking. Criticism can be delivered in a diplomatic way and Nancy thinks that a professional reviewer should perfect the art of balancing on fences!

Society of Editors (NSW), PO Box 254, Broadway 2007 Committee 1989

Kim Anderson (President). Ph 406 9222 (Weldon-Hardie) or 969 6853 (Impresa)

Anne Sahlin (Treasurer). Ph 660 2425 (freelance)

Christine Mackinnon (Minutes). Ph 419 6867 (freelance)

Jeane Balcombe (Newsletter). Ph 212 4600 (Community Child Care) or 713 9696

Jill Wilson (Catering). Ph 439 3307 (freelance)

Michael Wyatt. Ph 699 9491 (Keyword Editorial Services)

Ken McGuire (Freelance Register). Ph 449 4255 or 44 6192

Anyone wishing to know more about the Society may write to PO Box 254, Broadway 2007 or telephone any committee member.

Copyright 1989 by *Blue Pencil* and individual contributors. Reproduction in whole or in part is permitted if acknowledgment is made to *Blue Pencil*. Views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the editor and views expressed by the editor are not necessarily those of the Society.

Blue Pencil is published irregularly by the Society of Editors (NSW). Typesetting and layout are done on an Apple Macintosh computer by The Creative Computer Company, 117 York Street, Sydney. Printing is done by The Paper Plate, St. Martins Tower, Sydney.

Reviewers often draw attention to poor editing where this has affected the book's appeal. This does not mean just the pointing out of typographical errors, though these can be most irritating if numerous. An editor should pick up ignorant statements by authors; even in academic works these still occur.

Nancy believes that editors should be careful to retain the "voice" of the author where local colour and idiom are important to the purpose of the book. Even if an Australian book is also intended for the US market, it is important to remember why the book was written – deleting local colour may destroy its original significance.

Retaining local colour is pointless, however, if readers in other countries are unable to understand what is being said. Nancy quoted an instance of a book of short stories about South Africa by a significant black woman writer where no attempt at explanation of local terms had been made. The book made frequent use of African and Boer language that was not translated; neither was there a guide to pronunciation nor a glossary of terms. An important work, which could have aided greater understanding of the plight of Africans, was made extremely difficult, if not off-putting, by the lack of editorial intervention and a good introduction.

The index is often the weak point in a book. An index should enhance, not impede, one's reading of the work. It is unfortunate that the index is often treated as an afterthought rather than an integral part of the work.

Nancy has no set formula for reviewing books because every one is different. Her aim is to highlight the real worth of the book.

When asked, as a writer, how she responded to criticism of her own books, Nancy replied that Douglas Stewart had once told her: "Never respond! Ever!"

Help! Society needs librarian

In view of the large amount of work involved in maintaining and administering the Society of Editors' library, the committee has decided that the position of librarian is worthy of an honorarium.

We are seeking, therefore, a person who can devote at least three or four hours a week to maintaining the library, photocopying and sending out articles requested by members, and preparing library bulletins and summaries of selected articles for *Blue Pencil*. The librarian will be paid \$500 a year plus expenses.

Please telephone Kim Andersop on (02) 406 9222 if you are interested in this position.

Strategies for survival and growth

The Australian Book Publishers Association (ABPA) in association with Coopers & Lybrand is conducting a live-in workshop in Canberra from 13 to 15 August 1989.

Participants will be asked to complete a form that requests a brief description of the key problem faced by their business in each of four functional areas. The problems will then be addressed in workshops.

The program includes sessions on marketing, finance, personnel, focusing on goals, and product survival.

The cost is \$745 for ABPA members and \$845 for non-members. This covers course notes, morning and afternoon tea, and lunch. Freelance editors and designers may attend at ABPA member rates if their application form is signed by an ABPA member.

Telephone (02) 29 5422 or send a fax on (02) 262 1631 for further information.

The Writer's Guide to Tax

The Australian Society of Authors has recently published *The Writer's Guide to Tax*, which has been prepared by Howath & Howath, Chartered Accountants.

The guide costs \$11.50, which includes postage and handling, and is available from:

The Australian Society of Authors
PO Box 450
Milsons Point
NSW 2061

A Matter of Cultural Sovereignty

Government assistance to the arts and culture

The proceedings of the symposium entitled "A matter of cultural sovereignty – the role of government in encouraging a national repertoire in film and television drama", which was held in Sydney last September, are now available.

The symposium covered the arguments in favour of government assistance to the arts and culture, and looked at the various methods of assistance in operation around the English-speaking world.

The proceedings are published in paperback and cost \$10.50 to members of the Australian Writers Guild and \$12.00 to non-members, plus \$1.50 for postage and handling. Send your order to:

The Australian Writers Guild
60 Kellett Street
Kings Cross NSW 2011

Contributions Welcome

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

*Blue Pencil
58 Rickard Street
Five Dock NSW 2046.*

Future meetings

Please note that the September meeting of the Society of Editors will be held on Wednesday 6 September and the October meeting, on Wednesday 4 October.

Copy deadline

The deadline for contributions to the August *Blue Pencil* is Friday 5 August.