

Blue Pencil

Newsletter of the Society of Editors (NSW)
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June 1989

Next meeting 5 July 1989

The speaker at the next meeting of the Society of Editors, on Wednesday 5 July, will be Nancy Keesing.

Nancy Keesing is a poet, editor, critic, and writer of both children's and adults' books. Some of her better known books are *Hails and Farewells* (a book of poetry), *The Golden Dream* (a children's book), *Garden Island People* (a biography), *Elsie Carew: Australian Primitive Poet*, and *Australian Bush Ballads*, which Nancy co-edited. As well as being a prolific writer, Nancy has worked on radio and been a director of the Literature Board.

We look forward to hearing Nancy talk and hope you can join us at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, 16 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli, on 5 July 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 4 July and \$5 if you turn up without booking.

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

Last meeting – Barbara Mobbs

At our last meeting at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, Barbara Mobbs, a literary agent, gave a lively talk on the role of an agent and how agents can foster better working relationships between editors and authors.

Barbara spent many years working with the international literary agency, Curtis Brown, before establishing her own business as an agent. She sees her main role that of an intermediary between authors and publishers – someone who can maintain communication throughout the sometimes lengthy publishing process. Because misunderstandings so often occur between author and publisher, usually over

minor details, it is important to clarify from the beginning just what the author and publisher expect from each other. Many authors are totally unconcerned about the publishing process, wanting only to be left alone to write. Others take a tedious interest in every detail – right down to the typeface, type of paper to be used and jacket design. Barbara feels that it is in the interests of all parties to establish at the beginning the type of communication that will be maintained. Be businesslike at all times; and avoid personal friendships as these can sour if the project runs off the rails.

Barbara pointed out that agents do far

more than merely negotiate contracts. They also save publishers time, by weeding out hopeless manuscripts. An agent can work closely with a writer, giving valuable advice on such things as cutting a manuscript to the desired length before publishers even see it. Because the agent is familiar with both the writer's work and the publishers' interests, he or she is able to match up the two fairly easily. Having done all the groundwork, it is usually only necessary to approach two or three publishers before gaining acceptance.

Negotiating contracts is an important aspect of an agent's work. Writers often have no interest in the fine print, or have no time to thoroughly investigate any apparent legal loopholes. An agent can be invaluable in ensuring that the author gains the best possible deal from the publisher. Agents are also in the best position to warn both parties of possible legal problems

with material – libel, for example. Legal advice should always be sought in these cases.

Agents also direct publishers to suitable writers for specific projects. As well, they find writers extra work such as reviewing and assessing manuscripts.

Agents know the publishing world very well. They know which publishers pay the best royalties and advances, which companies have the best or worst editorial departments, and which have the best distribution systems. So they are a valuable source of advice for writers. Magazine feature writers also gain useful advice from agents, who can direct them to the magazine most appropriate to their work.

As publishing is such a cut-throat business – the average exposure for new books in bookshops is 12 weeks – books are fighting for space and thus survival. If a bookseller

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Committee 1989**

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

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does not sell 50 per cent of their initial order for a book within the first 12 weeks, the remainder is invariably returned to the publisher rather than being assimilated into the permanent A-Z section of the shop. Barbara believes the agent has a vital role to play in ensuring that only the best manuscripts are published. Otherwise, the best are swamped by mediocre and trashy books vying for the same limited bookshop space.

A good agent also assists with publicity, which is essential if the book is to sell. It is difficult to gain a review or author interview on prestigious radio and television programs – and it is exposure on these programs that is the best publicity – so agents with the right contacts can be of great assistance in promoting a book.

Agents have the best interests of both authors and publishers at heart. Without authors, publishers and their employees would have no reason to work!

Technical communication seminar

The NSW Society for Technical Communication in association with Kuring-gai CAE has organised a major two-day seminar covering all aspects of technical communication.

Topics include:

- What does a technical writer do?
- Selling the communications solution
- Defining and addressing the audience
- Structure of a manual
- Typeface readability
- Desktop publishing (a hands-on workshop)
- Technical communications: the 21st century – a floor discussion led by

Robin Williams from the ABC “Science Show”*

The seminar will be held at Kuring-gai College, Lindfield, Sydney on Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 October 1989. Cost for non-members of the Society for Technical Communication is \$155 if booked before 21 September and \$170 if booked after that date. The prices for members are \$135 if they book early and \$150 if they book late. The cost includes lunches. For an additional \$25 you can attend the Saturday night dinner, to which guests are welcome.

If you are not already a member of the Society for Technical Communication, your booking fee will include your first year’s membership free. Normal cost – \$45. [Does this mean everyone pays members’ prices for the seminar, I wonder. Even if non-members are charged the higher prices, they still pay \$20 less (for membership plus the seminar) than members. Or is there a technical problem here? Ed.]

For further information telephone (02) 273437.

New journal for technical communicators

The NSW Society for Technical Communication is also launching a new journal. The first issue will appear in August 1989 and will be between 16 and 20 pages long. It will cover such topics as:

- Writing, editing and indexing
- Computer development and use
- Recruitment and training
- Reading/user comprehension
- Organisational communication
- Graphics, typography and printing

The Society of Technical Communication is keen to give the first issue the widest possible distribution and has offered to send it free to Society of Editors (NSW) members. [If you do not wish to receive a copy please contact me on (02) 212 4600. Ed.]

Library in limbo

Because of organisation problems, the Society of Editors' library is temporarily in limbo. As soon as the publications are again available for borrowing, a notice will appear in Blue Pencil.

We need a volunteer mail collector

Do you live or work near the Broadway General Post Office? We desperately need a volunteer to clear the Society's mail box and redistribute mail to the relevant committee members. It does not involve much work, but the box should be cleared at least twice a week. If you are willing to take on this task, please telephone Anne Sahlin on 660 2425.

Freelance keyboard editing available

Freelance editors are required for on-screen editing of a travel book. As much or as little work as you want. \$20 an hour.

Telephone Keyword Editorial Services on (02) 699 9491 and speak to Michael Wyatt.

We need your vote

At the next meeting of the NSW Society of Editors, members will be asked to vote on changes to the Society's constitution. The changes will make membership available to a wider range of people (previously the constitution restricted membership to book editors and former book editors).

We need votes from at least 33¹/₃ per cent of our membership to have a quorum, and proxy votes must reach us 48 hours before the meeting.

If you will not be able to attend the July Society of Editors meeting and have not yet sent in your proxy form, please do so as soon as possible.

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 August meeting of the Society of Editors will be held on Wednesday 2 August and the September meeting, on Wednesday 6 September.

Copy deadline

The deadline for contributions to the next (July) *Blue Pencil* is Friday 7 July.