

Blue Pencil

Newsletter of
the Society
of Editors
(NSW)

Patron: Hazel Hawke

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May 1997

Quality counts at State Library Press

Judith Kelly, publishing manager of the State Library of NSW Press, spoke at the society's April meeting about the extraordinary opportunities, as well as the day-to-day realities, that she faces in her unique position.

Editors, where would we be without you? Manuscripts come to us in any state, from some that the author has had an editor friend go through and they're almost ready to go, to others on scraps of paper with no structure, no chronological order, and the author saying, 'I don't know what to do with all this stuff.'

But, to begin at the beginning, the State Library Press is just one of the library's small businesses. We all have to make our own way; there's no government funding behind us.

The Press sits in a little office at the back of a book stack. We have six-and-a-half foot ceilings, and authors like Richard Neville have to come in stooped over, so they're coming to their publisher on bended knees (which is really nice). But the air conditioning is absolutely frightful.

There are three of us there now; there were five, which included a sales person on the road. The cost of keeping someone on the road, compared to the distance they could cover and the number of books they could sell, unfortunately did not work out, and for two years now we've had a distributor who has 15 agents in Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea. They do very well on our new books, not so well with our backlist, but that I think is every publisher's story.

The three staff are myself (I look after the general management and the book publishing); the production controller, who looks after most of the greeting card

production, plus keeping an eye on the book production schedules and chasing things up, and the customer service person, who looks after order fulfilment.

We've also given up having someone on the ground selling cards. We sell our cards through a direct mail catalogue, and we send a special Christmas catalogue out to companies around July. Our

catalogue is on the Internet on the library's home page, and I want to develop that more for overseas sales.

We have some volunteers who come and help us from time to time, and a part-timer and a temporary who come in at moments of stress.

continued on page 2

Next meeting: Tuesday 6 May 1997

External editors in public sector publishing

Peter Frankis, Publications Manager
NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning

Nearly all of the more than 100 NSW government agencies have substantial publishing programs, and most use external editors at one time or another. Peter Frankis, whose 15+ years experience in the public sector includes working in health and urban planning and as a researcher for a member of parliament, will address such topics as:

- How to tap into the public sector market
- Expectations of external editors
- Working in government publishing
- Is government publishing a growth area for external editors?

6.30 for 7.00 pm in the Rooftop Function Centre, 4th floor, Australian Museum (enter from William Street). Drinks and light refreshments provided. RSVP by Friday 2 May to (02) 9552 0039 (voicemail). Members, \$10; non-members and those who don't RSVP, \$12.

Coming meetings:

- 3 June: Alison Pressley, Belladonna Books, on the editor and publishing success
- 1 July: Lynne Collingwood, on picture research

Quality counts

continued from page 1

Apart from that, we contract out a lot. We may have a reader expert advise on whether a manuscript is appropriate for us to publish or whether it's worth publishing at all. We contract editors. I might use two editors—a structural editor and a copy editor. I find if a structural editor is working closely with an author to develop a manuscript, they start not seeing the fine detail, so it's better if a fresh eye looks at it.

We do a lot of proofreading. An extra proofreading will add two weeks and probably a dollar to two dollars to the price of the book, but it really has to happen. And, especially if we're dealing with a collection publication, we'll get a research librarian to check every collection reference in a book to make sure they're accurate.

Then we have indexers, designers, and occasionally illustrators. I prefer to use the same designer for the whole book rather than an interior designer and a jacket designer, particularly for the books which are related to art. Otherwise you tend to have a rather pedestrian inside and a glamorous cover and it doesn't quite work. And printing is also contracted out. On one book I might have four or five contractors.

The lead time on our books can be huge; it can be two or three years. For a big book, particularly on an area of the collection that hasn't been investigated before, it can take the researcher a year to get into it, a year to write the book, and then nine months to a year in production for a very complex work.

Up until last year we had seven to nine books in progress; at the moment I have two, possibly three. So the world is changing.

What do we publish?

Everything from photocopied research guides printed on demand and sold through the library shop for a cost-recovery fee, up to a limited edition which sells for \$3750. In between are the high-quality collection publications and some other works which are mainly related to history.

There's quite a range. For instance, *Growing Up Italian in Australia* was a collection of 14 essays selected through a literary competition run by the Italian-Australian Women's Association. This

was made possible by a presale to the association of 1500 copies; otherwise we wouldn't have been able to do it. It's just a paperback, but it's one of our greatest success stories. It sold very well; it's been reprinted, and it's still selling.

We published the story of the Tin Sheds Gallery, called *Under a Hot Tin Roof*. The Power Institute helped to fund that. We recently published Shirley Fitzgerald's *Red Tape, Gold Scissors*. It's the story of Sydney's Chinese, published in conjunction with the Sydney City Council. *Making the Railways*, was published with the State Rail Authority. Often another organisation will help to fund a publication. They'll take a given number of copies; we send the rest out through our distributor.

Another collaboration with the Italian-Australian Women's Association was *Buon Appetito*, a dual-language Italian-Australian recipe book. The traditional family recipes were all in Italian, but it was printed in English and Italian. It actually has proved to be our best-selling book.

We've also had quite a bit of success with a book by Warren Fahey called *When Mabel Laid the Table*, which is the story of eating and drinking in Australia—actually, eating, drinking, carousing and telling jokes. That book was a fairly successful one for us too.

The library's been publishing post-cards since about 1965 and greeting cards since the late 1980s. They were selling increasingly well, and about three years ago we made a concerted effort to develop the card range and increase the distribution.

The cards have increased in the last five years from 20 per cent to over 70 per cent of our business in income, so the cards are now paying for the collection publishing. This is why cards are important to editors, you see. It's a bit ironic that you put 80 per cent of your effort into books which generate 20 per cent of the income, and 20 per cent of the effort into cards that generate 80 per cent of the income. But that is how we're surviving now, and I think most small publishers are having to find ways other than publishing books to stay in business.

List is unique

I have to say I've never seen a publisher with such a mixture of books in sizes, shapes and subject matter anywhere, but

I think it's just a symptom of working in that sort of environment. For instance, the library contains the largest collection, about 300, of Conrad Martens' works. A great number of them are in Elizabeth Ellis' book *Conrad Martens: Life & Art*. He was extremely accurate in the way he portrayed the landscapes, so the collection gives us one of the few records of what Sydney Harbour really looked like around 1860. We also had a CD-ROM produced for that exhibition, as well as cards, and transcripts of things like his lecture on landscape painting and the diary of his voyage from England.

It's more difficult with a short-term exhibition or to finance a book for a less specific exhibition like, for instance, *The Natural Art of Louisa Atkinson*. The library has almost all of her extant works. She was not just an artist. She was also a writer and a natural historian, and she wrote columns for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Sydney Illustrated News* in the 1800s and illustrated them in minute detail. She has faded almost into total oblivion, apart from the library's collection. Her paintings can't be put out on public display and handled. They're little watercolours; they're really quite delicate and they're getting very old. But producing a book such as *The Natural Art of Louisa Atkinson* means that everybody has access to her work.

I have no idea how many manuscripts—floors and floors of them—have been collected over the last 200 years. So if you're ever at a loose end or you're thinking of initiating a book or publication of your own, that's a place to start. There's a lot of potential for editors because there are many, many unpublished manuscripts, by both unknown and quite well-known authors just sitting there (some probably for good reason—they're dreadful). But it's possible that there may be a brilliant one that nobody has had a chance to read.

How a book starts

A book can arrive in several ways. One of the curators preparing an exhibition or researching a particular area might approach me about a book. For instance, Stephen Martin thought that since the library has a lot of original Antarctic material and 1997 celebrates 50 years of Australia in the Antarctic, we should publish some of the material. But the more we talked about it, the more it seemed there was room for a fairly de-

tailed history of the Antarctic that would include more than the Australian material. Stephen took it on as his personal project for the next two years. He made two trips to the Antarctic at his own expense. He took a host of wonderful photos, some of which are in the book. He interviewed people from all over and solicited information over the Internet.

The book grew from being a nice little paperback into something that was really going to be quite stupendous. At that stage we decided to mount an exhibition, which happened last year between August and the end of November. The book wasn't delivered to us until nearly the end of November, and we managed to launch it only four days before the exhibition closed. It is unique. I'm very glad we didn't just use the images and make it a picture book because the market is swamped at the moment with Antarctic picture books, but there are very few in-depth works. We're fortunate that Tim Bowden liked this book very much and devoted a whole page to it in the *Weekend Australian*, after which we received orders from all over the place.

Another way an author might come to us is by being commissioned by a body to write a particular piece of work. For instance, David Burke was commissioned by the State Rail Authority to write *Making the Railways*, and Shirley Fitzgerald was commissioned by the Sydney City Council to do a series of histories. We're just looking at a history of the Central Synagogue, which is also a commissioned story. That book won't be sold in the trade; the Central Synagogue will buy all the copies. This is another direction publishing is taking; all the books are pre-sold, there may be no trade copies and no marketing.

Sometimes I get unsolicited manuscripts, and they're a bit of a nightmare because there is never time to read them. That's particularly so when entire books arrive without any sort of summary or guide to contents or any introduction of who they are and where they've come from and why they've done it and why they might have expertise in that particular area.

I've developed a fairly intimidating form for this sort of person with all those questions on it. And if they can answer why was the book done, who it is for, how should it be marketed, what new areas it covers, how it adds to our knowledge of life on earth and that sort of

thing, it might be worth looking at.

I also get a lot of letters from freelancers and others offering their services. I do try to respond to all these eventually. I keep the details on file, and when a new job comes up, particularly if it's a subject area we haven't published in before, I go through them looking for people who have experience in that particular subject area.

The problem is with editors who ring up and say, 'Do you have any work?' and I say, 'Well from time to time we do and I need your details.' I ask what area they specialise in, but they always say, 'Oh, I do everything.' This just makes it very awkward for me. It's better to develop expertise in a particular area.

One of the challenges in publishing is putting together a team of people who can work well together. I think it's very important for the author and the editor to work fairly closely together, if at all possible. Sometimes it's just not physically possible for the two to meet, but I think it is very beneficial for the two to be at least acquaintances, if not friends. I also like the designer to work with the author. The designer and editor may not meet unless there's a need to develop a visual way of presenting the information.

And the proofreader really doesn't need to meet anyone because it's better if they haven't seen it before and know nothing about it. I've found. That way they will ask more questions. You can get very jaded working on a book. For instance, I'll read a book when it first comes in, read it after it's edited, and then I'm lost. I can't see anything wrong with it after that. But I know this now, so I have to have other people look at it.

Question: I'd like to know what your print runs might be on such a thing as Atkinson.

When you're working out the figures for what's going to break even, it always seems to settle on about 3000 copies. I've talked to other publishers who have this same magic figure. Usually I will get quotes on anything from 1500 to 5000 and look at whether the reduced retail price we can achieve by printing 5000 will translate into extra sales. It's a bit of a juggling act.

Question: How did you get to be where you are?

I happened to be on the spot when the previous publisher resigned. In 1992 I

was at the library in a temporary capacity looking after their corporate publishing because their corporate publisher had gone on maternity leave, and the publisher retired. I offered to look at what needed to be done, and I'm still there.

Question: What prepared you to fill in for the person on maternity leave?

I have a degree in journalism and did post-graduate work in communications theory and research. I also did some courses in public administration and that sort of thing. I worked in Canberra from 1979 to 1990; I went to Canberra to produce a weekly community affairs television program. But producing a book I suppose is very similar to producing a television program; you've got to get a team of creative people together to produce things for deadlines and budgets.

I've worked as a journalist. I would like to say I've worked as an editor, but knowing what you people do I would say I haven't really worked as an editor. I've subedited material, and rewritten a lot of technical stuff into plain English. I did a lot of freelance writing in preparing government reports and working with committees which comprised five or six different organisations getting their thoughts together on how something should be presented to the general public. And some of those reports I would have taken home and laid out on computer, produced the original, and looked after the printing for them too. But really I would call that desktop publishing, compared to book publishing.

I've always been interested in art. I did art in school and I've always painted in my spare time, and because of that I'm particular about how art works are reproduced.

Question: There's such a wide range of co-producers and customers you produce books for, who either buy the whole run or part of the run. Why do you think they come to you to produce those books?

Well, we're only one of many small publishers doing that sort of thing. Sometimes they're interested in images the library might have or they want books to a particular quality. I don't always give them the lowest price, and they tell me so quite often, but they are look-

continued on page 5

L e t t e r s

Bureaucratese is plainly mystifying

To the editor:

Paul Bennett's article 'Unplain English is just plain rude', reprinted in *Blue Pencil* from our Queensland counterpart *Offpress*, really made me feel good.

I spent four years as (re)writer and editor at TAFE NSW. My job was to rewrite TAFE *bureaucratese* into plain English and to produce plain English text myself for TAFE Handbooks and other publications, e.g., *Producing Quality Publications*.

One of my jobs was to edit and proof-read text for a newsletter, *TAFETALK*, supposedly explaining to teachers what the restructuring was all about and how it would affect them. One line didn't mean anything, just confusion for the poor teachers, so I wielded my blue pencil (i.e., pressed delete) and cut the line out.

When I took the edited copy to the PR manager who had produced the copy, I got into terrible trouble. 'How *dare* you change my words,' she fumed. I explained that I didn't change her words, I merely took out one line because it didn't add anything to the sense of the text except confusion.

Well, did I get hauled over the coals for that! My manager tried to stand up for me, producing a letter they'd both agreed to, re plain-Englishing. Needless to say, the PR manager had the D-G's authority behind her and the expunged words went back in!

Other unsatisfying experiences caused me to rethink my full-time position at TAFE, and when the opportunity of redundancy presented itself, I took the (modest amount of) money and ran.

In answer to Paul's question at the end of his article, '...why do so many other public figures try so valiantly to be misunderstood?' I would say that, in my experience, unplain English is often used to mystify the target audience into silence.

An editor who seeks to unravel the truth is often not appreciated!

Jane Hinton

Disparately defining 'editor'

To the editor:

What an indefinable word 'editing' is, almost as confounding as 'culture'. It is a word that is constantly used in telephone inquiries to society committee members; it is a word that is discussed in society meetings, and it is a word that is used by writers who are confused about its meaning. It is a word we editors use in many different ways. And it is the subject of a number of courses nationwide, and yet we beg to differ on what the process is, and how extensive or limiting the tasks in editing might be.

From the *Macquarie Dictionary* (2nd edn), 1995 reprint comes:

edit, *v.t.* 1. to supervise or direct the preparation of (a newspaper, magazine, etc.); act as editor of, direct the policies of. 2. to collect, prepare, and arrange (materials) for publication. 3. to revise and correct. 4. to make (a cinema or television film, sound recording, or any part of a film or recording) from rushes, by cutting and arranging them, synchronising soundtrack, etc. 5. edit in, to include (material) in a book, film, etc., at the editing stage. 6. edit out, to exclude (material) from a book, film, etc., at the editing stage.

Another way of describing **edit**, used in crossword clues, is 'to garble'. This

seems unflattering if the dictionary's description is to be taken seriously:

'garble, *v. -bled, -bling, n. -v.t.* 1. to make unfair or misleading selections from (facts, statements, writings, etc.); corrupt. 2. to make incomprehensible. -*n* 3. the process of garbling. . . -**garbler** -*n*.

I have to wonder at the use of 'garble' for edit in this example as it would appear that, over time, the meaning has suffered a reversal and the archaic meaning is being used by the maker of the crosswords. Or is it that those creative people have had rejection slips from publishers, with 'not suitable for our list' stamped across them?

The dictionary leaves the question of what is 'editing' open to anyone's interpretation, and the question of 'how long is a piece of string' applies as roundly to what the restrictions, or the freedom, of an editor might be. This is especially so when the client's brief is not clearly stated.

If anyone can enlighten editors on other interpretations, or descriptions of 'editing' that might be available, please do. The society is preparing a publication on 'What is an editor?', and all thoughts are welcome.

Robin Appleton

New members

A warm welcome to all those who joined the society from 1 January to 15 April 1997.

Darri Adamson
Karen Barrett
Sue Brown
Diane Calder
Sandra Chalk
Terry Cheshier
Doug Cooper
Bronwyn Doldissen
Joanne Gould
Bryan Havenhand
Catherine Hurley
Lyndall Kimondi
Simon Lancaster
Kylie Lawson
Elspeth Parker
Anne-Christine Parr
Jessica Perini
Geoff Robertson
Bob Thompson

And welcome back to Greg Heard.

See your name in lights!

Well, maybe just in a national publication that will be sent to members of each of the state editors' societies. We're all being called upon for contributions to help make a success of the new (yet unnamed) quarterly journal for editors that's been initiated by the Society of Editors (Vic).

They've received a development grant from the Victorian government that will cover part of the cost of two trial issues. Other state societies were asked to contribute \$300 to make up the shortfall. The Society of Editors (NSW) has sent its share, as approved by membership at the 1997 AGM. If the trial issues are successful, subsequent issues will be available by subscription.

Paul Bennett, of the Society of Editors (Queensland), has been appointed to the paid position of editor. There is also an editorial board that consists of a representative from each society's committee. As editor of *Blue Pencil*, that role on our committee has fallen to me.

Paul is now at work on the first issue, which he expects to publish as soon as technical details such as design (a competition was announced in the April *Blue Pencil*), name, advertising rates, and so on have been established. Not wanting the magazine to be top heavy with material from Queensland, he's asking for ideas and contributions from all of us.

His vision for the contents includes articles on changing English usage, new words and phrases, Australian editors societies to swap more information, evolution of literary editing, plain English, copyright, editing for electronic media, multimedia production methods, future trends, and overseas trends. There also will be letters to the editor, cartoons, photos, book reviews, trade gossip, interviews with editing personalities, production news, cameos of the state societies, and job ads (if the magazine is topical enough).

As subscription rates could be as high as \$40 per year, there's an obvious need to include advertising. And we need to contribute in this area as well. Help could be in the form of actually selling ads or suggesting companies to approach, preferably including contact information (name of individual, phone/fax numbers, address, whether we can use your name, etc.). Obvious targets are publish-

ers, computer hardware and software producers, service bureaus, and bookshops. We can't ask you to do anything serious until we get the rate card. More about this later.

Ideas and/or contributions can be directed either to me, at 55 Collins

Street, North Narrabeen, 2101; fax/phone (02) 9913 7799; E-mail: mmripear@ozemail.com.au, or to Paul Bennett at Unit 15 Highgate Court, 68 Gladstone Road, Highgate Hill, Qld 4101; phone/fax (07) 3255 0559.

Merry Pearson

Diverse groups seek editing skills

From some of my recent experiences, it appears to me that many people from many different groups are interested in editing and want to know more about the process. It is clear that editing does not 'belong' to people who work professionally as 'editors', or who call themselves 'editors'.

During 1996, I spoke about editing to several groups of quite different types. One was a group of 20 or so students at the University of Western Sydney who took 'editing' as an elective. At the other end of the spectrum, I also spoke to an Australian Booksellers Association monthly meeting on the editing process.

I have also worked with individuals from diverse backgrounds who had quite different reasons for wanting to learn about editing. This year I have worked with a highly intelligent, well-educated professional woman who is looking at a career change from auditing to proofreading. She has a degenerative disease that has led to her becoming profoundly deaf and will also eventually lead to blindness. At present she can read 12-point type and uses a magnifying glass for smaller type sizes. As a government department is considering employing her, I was asked to help in training her.

On the first day I was nervous as I thought communication would be difficult. The problem was mine. We managed well. By lip-reading, a skill she is still learning, and by my constant use of the whiteboard, we made great progress during the three-day course on the principles of editing and of proofreading.

I'd had another experience at the NSW Writers' Centre in 1994. One of the participants in a group had been blinded only a few years before as the result of a car accident. During the five-day course, this remarkable woman travelled some distance by ferry and bus, was never late,

and was always cheerful. As she was writing a book, she wanted to know how to edit it in preparation for submission to a publisher. She used a cassette recorder to tape the sessions to listen to at home.

A third I worked with is a professional woman (a society member) who does not live in Sydney. A sufferer of diabetes and arthritis, she is home-bound because of the family business. She edits, but wants the reassurance that her approach to editing and to negotiating with writers is sound. That was a case of true in-house training and advice.

And on what I think is a very positive note for the society and for editors in general, some corporations that now prepare in-house copy and copy for a wider audience using desktop publishing have recognised that there is a need for some understanding of the editing process. I have been approached by three such corporations to present editing courses this year.

Robin Appleton

Quality counts

continued from page 3

ing for the quality of books we produce.

We published *From the Ground Up* last year, about Boral's first 50 years. We've sold a few copies of that into libraries, but Boral bought 35,000 copies and gave one to most of their employees, so we weren't concerned about it being a trade book. They also saw that they were doing something to help the library and the income from that type of publishing is then put into collection publishing or helps the library's collection in other ways.

1997 COMMITTEE

President and Treasurer

Catherine Gray

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

E-mail: cgray@mpx.com.au

Vice President

Robin Appleton

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

Secretary

Michael Giffin

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

Fax: (02) 9331 4653

Membership Secretary

Rhana Pike

Phone: (02) 9569 7831 (h)

Fax: (02) 9351 5687 (w)

E-mail: austinjnl@pub.health.su.oz.au

Catering

Tim Badgery-Parker (food)

Phone: (02) 9518 7225 (h)

(02) 9936 6334 (w)

Carey Martin (wine)

Phone: ((02) 9816 3684 (h)

Newsletter Editor

Merry Pearson

Phone/fax: (02) 9913 7799 (w & h)

E-mail: mmripear@ozemail.com.au

Newsletter Assistants

Kylie Lowson

Phone: (02) 9516 4753 (h)

(02) 9211 1266 (w)

Robert Stove

Phone: (046) 28 7189 (h)

Fax: (02) 9264 3906

Publicity Officer

Terry Johnston

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

Members

Isabel Partridge

Phone: (02) 9523 7295

Fax: (02) 9544 4389

Barbara Hasslacher

Phone: Phone/fax: (02) 9558 6131 (h)

Noticeboard

Basic grammar workshop

On Saturday 14 June, Anne Tarulli will present a jargon-free one-day guided workshop on grammar (the traditional kind) for writers, editors and all those who wish to improve their understanding and use of language. This is the same workshop Anne presented so successfully for the society last year. An understanding of the 'rules' of English grammar is particularly useful in negotiating editorial decisions with author, editor, and publisher.

Anne will cover such topics as control and support units in a sentence; commas, semicolons, and colons; active and passive voice; adjectives and adverbs; common word confusions; ambiguity; parallel construction; possessive apostrophes; verb-subject agreement; and parentheses.

Date: Saturday 14 June

Time: 9.00 am to 5.00 pm

Venue: Seminar Room 1
State Library of NSW
Macquarie Street

Cost: \$65 (Society of Editors members)
\$80 (non-members)

(includes lunch, morning and afternoon tea)

Registration deadline Friday 6 June. Numbers will be limited, so to secure a place please register early. Use the registration form included in this issue of *Blue Pencil*. To obtain extra registration forms, please leave your name and address on the society's voicemail on 9552 0039 or write to the secretary, Society of Editors (NSW), PO Box 234, Broadway 2007.

1997 Register

The Society of Editors (NSW) *Register of Editorial Services 1997* is now available. Please see the insert in this issue, or send \$10 to Register, PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007.

Byron Bay Writers' Festival

The Byron Bay Writers' Festival is set for 17-20 July at the Byron Bay Beach Club. Local, national, and international writers are invited to participate in events including panel debates, book discussions, interviews, and readings. The festival will feature a children's day, which will explore various themes pertinent to reading and writing for children and young adults.

Writers who have accepted invitations to the festival include Candida Baker, Robert Drewe, David Malouf, Helen Garner, Kate Grenville, Louis Nowra, Humphrey McQueen, John Marsden, Don Watson, Joanne Horniman, Nette Hilton, Jonathan Harlen, Jan McKemmish, and Sue Smith. Others who will participate as presenters and interviewers include Caroline Baum from the ABC's *Between the Lines*, Peter Castaldi from the ABC's *Review*, Lynne Spender from the Australian Society of Authors, and Priscilla Yates from the Australian Writers' Guild.

The cost for the full four days is \$135 for concessional members, \$165 for full members, and \$200 for non-members. Phone (066) 858000 for information.