

# **BOOK WORM**

**NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS (WA) INC.**

**October 2005**

## **From the Chair**

**Do you, our members, agree that a national organisation of editors is necessary?**

Our October meeting will be most important, as it will provide the perfect opportunity for members to put forward their views and, in doing so, contribute to the national discussion on the necessity for a national organisation, and the possible gains for editors.

The change of name from Council of Australian Societies of Editors (CASE) to Institute of Professional Editors is interesting, as it immediately shifts the focus of the national organisation from the structure (the societies), to the tangible (the members), and this can only be positive for editors.

Please come to the meeting so that we can have a lively debate, which will enable us to put forward a range of views to the National Conference of Editors in Melbourne, 13 to 15 October. Amanda Curtin will be attending the conference and has offered to represent WA, so let's provide her with enough information to form a valuable contribution. Many thanks...

***Betty Durston***

## **Editorial**

Hello everyone—what a bumper issue we have this month! Thanks to all who have contributed. Since Rhonda's presentation last month (see report below) I have downloaded the new web-browser 'Firefox' and its complementary e-mail program 'Thunderbird'. Whilst it all seemed to load OK, I've had trouble with the latter in so far as I can't see my 'sent' messages, so have abandoned it in favour of the old Netscape program. Nevertheless, I am now using the Firefox browser application and am just amazed at how much 'stuff' is out there that I don't know about—whether it's software or hardware. Who knows, I might even figure out how to go broad-band soon! All this technology makes me feel quite prehistoric at times, but I'm sure I'm not Robinson Crusoe in this!

***Tanya Marwood***

## **Forthcoming Meetings**

### **October Meeting**

#### **Tour of the *West Australian* (afternoon) and discussion of Issues Paper (evening)**

A group will tour the offices of the *West Australian* on the afternoon of October 4 (this event is already fully subscribed), then in the evening there will be a discussion of the important Issues Paper drawn up by CASE.

The evening meeting is your opportunity to contribute to the shape of the national organisation of editors. The CASE National Organisation Working Group has drawn up an issues paper, which outlines the various ways in which a national organisation can be legally registered, structured and managed. Please bring your copy of the Issues Paper with you to the meeting and have your opinions and questions ready to put forward for discussion. The Issues Paper will also be posted on the CASE website, at <http://www.case-editors.org>

The organisation, to be named Institute of Professional Editors, will serve all editors at a national level. Our October meeting will take the form of a workshop, which will provide a forum for you to have input into its registration choice, its function and objectives as your national representative, and its internal management structure for the best possible ways in which to serve its membership.

**When:** October 4, 7.30pm

**Where:** Tresillian Centre, 21 Tyrell St, Nedlands

**Cost:** \$2 (refreshments will be served)

**RSVP to:** Anne Surma at [asurma@central.murdoch.edu.au](mailto:asurma@central.murdoch.edu.au)

### **Report on September Meeting—From Paper to Pixel: dealing with digital content**

RHONDA BRACEY had an audience of over 30 for her excellent presentation “From Paper to Pixel: dealing with digital content” at the September meeting in CWA House. The numbers were boosted by a lively contingent from the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance.

Using a laptop and projector, Rhonda explored the tasks, software and skills involved in editing digital material such as website content. It quickly became evident that, just as websites are more complex structures than print documents, so some of the software used for editing and testing them is remarkably capable. For example:

The “Web Accessibility Toolbar” of MS Internet Explorer will test whether a website design or feature will work for a viewer who is colour blind. It will speed

up checking of links, even redirects and, as Rhonda said, “take away the drudgery”. It will check if the site will work on a low-resolution monitor.

“Stylewriter” is a word-processing tool that will check style and grammar, making global changes to spelling if required. For example, if it suggests “pre-requisite” be spelled without a hyphen and that is accepted, all occurrences of the word in the document will change. It uses several style models, describing one bureaucratic text as “dreadful” when tested.

“Mind Manager” will create mind maps, if you like to use them for brainstorming, and export them into word-processing, presentation, e-mail and other forms.

“Fine Print” enables you to print 2,4 or 8 pages to a page (saving paper in the process), or to a booklet.

“SnagIt” is a screen capture tool with which you can “snag” any part or all of a computer screen in a more sophisticated way than “screenshots.”

Rhonda also dealt with the building blocks of websites—graphics and fonts. She showed how fonts need not be a fixed point-size, so that they can be enlarged by visually-impaired people. This, like other features of good websites, is driven by the knowledge that once out on the world-wide web, a site may be used by anyone, anywhere.

It is also desirable to design sites so that people who need to print from them can do so. We were given insight into how searches, menus, pop-ups, indexes and embedded forms may be checked to work better. There was much more, summarised in six pages of a handout. Rhonda has put that on her website at [http://www.cybertext.com.au/services\\_edit.htm](http://www.cybertext.com.au/services_edit.htm) with clickable links to many resources.

She also recommended a book that enshrines a good philosophical approach to web design: “Don’t Make Me Think” by Steve Krug, published by Pearson Professional. Dymock’s lists this at \$75.95.

**Tom Jenkins**

### **IPed Notes: News from the Institute of Professional Editors (formerly CASE)**

IPed has had some changes of personnel. Our business manager/secretary Renée Otmar has resigned due to pressure of other commitments, and Janet Mackenzie is filling in for her until the next IPed meeting in October. The Canberra society has appointed its new president, Virginia Wilton, as IPed delegate, replacing Ed Highley. Ed will continue as webminder and as a member of the Accreditation Board for the time being.

The delegates have decided that they prefer IPEd for the shortened form of the Institute's name; it is more distinctive and memorable than IPE and also easier to pronounce.

### **Finance**

Earlier in the year IPEd presented a draft budget to the state and territory societies of editors. The budget is being developed in good faith in a fluid situation; it is necessarily imprecise because the organisation faces so many unknowns that both income and expenses are difficult to forecast. Once members have adopted a model of a national organisation we will have a clearer idea of our target income and the likely costs of activities. In the meantime Robin Bennett of Queensland is drawing up a revised budget which IPEd expects to present to the societies after its next meeting in October.

### **Plans for a national organisation**

IPEd delegates and the members of the Accreditation Board are busy preparing their presentations for the national conference to be held in Melbourne in October. All members should have received a copy of the Issues Paper prepared by the National Organisation Working Group, which sets out options for the structure and registration of a formal national body. If you've missed out, it is available on the website.

Janet Mackenzie of Victoria is collecting feedback on the Issues Paper. She will compile this and present it to a plenary session of the national conference, and the subsequent discussion should indicate how the profession wants to proceed in creating a national body. If you have not been able to attend a meeting on the Issues Paper, or if you have further thoughts, send them to your IPEd delegate who will forward them to Janet.

### **Communication with members**

The website [www.case-editors.org](http://www.case-editors.org) is worth a look to catch up on the latest on current projects or if you've forgotten who your IPEd delegate is. We are exploring the possibilities for a new domain name to match our new identity. Delegates have agreed that a national discussion list would improve communication, enabling IPEd both to answer questions promptly and to gather ideas from members nationwide.

### ***Janet Mackenzie***

IPEd Liaison Officer

### **National Conference**

The Editing in Context National Editors Conference is nearly upon us and the organising committee is delighted to report that it has already received over 200 registrations. With less than a month to go until opening day, we are looking forward to an event which should be both stimulating and challenging.

Just some of the highlights include:

- keynotes from leading practitioners in the editing and publishing industry
- a wide range of presentations and workshops on subjects covering the editing profession, training and mentoring, science editing and indexing
- launch of *At the Typeface: Selections from the Newsletter of the Victorian Society of Editors*
- the conference dinner at the Melbourne Aquarium, featuring guest Jane Clifton and an introduction to the new Institute of Professional Editors.

The final papers are being submitted now, the keynote speakers are raring to go, the trade fair is hotting up, and the committee is putting the finishing touches on all the arrangements.

So don't miss out! If you haven't registered yet, there's still time to do so—go to our website at [www.socedvic.org/editingincontext/](http://www.socedvic.org/editingincontext/) to view the program and download a registration form.

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### **Book Review: James Phelan, *Literati***

John Wiley & Sons, who are sponsoring our national conference in Melbourne this month (October), have produced a book with more than average interest for editors.

*Literati* is a collection of interviews with Australian authors by James Phelan, who works for *The Age*. A bookseller, a critic and a publisher are also included. Encouragingly, the index shows 22 references to editors — so we may not be as invisible as we thought!

Here is John Birmingham, author of *He Died With a Felafel in His Hand* and *Leviathan*: “In the editing process, you put your draft in and it goes to the big editor, your main editor, and they do a structural edit, and they go: ‘Your character can’t be acting this way,’ or ‘This isn’t making sense.’ That happened with *Leviathan* too. Having worked on it for four and a half years I would keep going back to the start of it and tinkering around. So when I gave it to my editor, I thought the first section was just a perfect piece of writing, there’s not a single word you could possibly change in here. Julie Styles, my editor, just cut into it,

some 17,000 words out of that chapter. I was wrong, she was right, because every one of these words needed to go. Revision is important. There are a lot of people who are precious about their copy, but no story worth reading hasn't been rewritten at least three times."

Alan Attwood, author of *Burke's Soldier*: "I think some authors are perhaps far too protective of what they've done. You hear these stories about authors resisting any editing at all and I think that's a terrible mistake. It's not a bad thing to appreciate that your editor may have insights or perspectives that you don't. It's a collaborative process... I've felt quite lucky with the editor I've had for the first two novels, Meredith Rose. I think there was only one occasion during the final editing of *Burke* where we got a bit terse with each other. One rather terse day in the scheme of things is probably a good outcome."

Jane Palfreyman, executive publisher at Random House, on the value of editing courses: "If taking a course can encourage an editor to develop an eye for detail, to be meticulous and to continually question everything that seems slightly off-centre or not quite right about a piece of writing, that's a good course. I'm not sure that an editing course can teach the kind of artistic sensibility that an editor needs to fully engage with a writer's work, to understand their intention, to enable them to get the trust of that writer and work most effectively with them, but I certainly think that those university-based editing courses are a great start for people who want to work as editors. They really hone their skills and sensitivities."

*...and in reply to the question: What should a good editor do?*

"An editor needs to be a good reader. You're the first, very important reader of the manuscript, so you have to approach it as you would a book you were reading on the beach or in your lounge room, and first off read it for pleasure. But you also need to take it in editorially as you are reading which is really hard as you'll just get carried away by the story and lost in it. You have to remember your reactions to things, notice when the pace slows down or something's not clear. Or it could be much more fundamental than that—perhaps a section's not working or a voice isn't right or a character's not plausible. You have to feel passion for a book, but also have the distance to be able to see what might be improved at all the levels of the manuscript. Then you have to have the tact and the skill to explain all that to the writer. So it's a job that involves diplomacy and an element of firmness, and it can be very daunting."

The book's ISBN is 1740 311 329 and it costs \$29.95.

***Tom Jenkins***

## **Book Review: William Zinsser, *On Writing Well***

Next to *The Elements of Style* on my bookcase is a volume not quite so slim, but no less valuable. It is William Zinsser's *On Writing Well*. For those who make their living by writing as well as editing, it is a must-buy.

Following a career as a journalist with the *New York Herald Tribune* and *Life* magazine, Zinsser lectured in writing at Yale University. His industry experience and time in the academy provide scores of relevant, entertaining anecdotes. The student whose sentences were like his room—full of clutter that he could not bring himself to throw out comes to mind. Zinsser “went on throwing away his duplicated and unnecessary words,” and notes that after a term of such discarding, the student's sentences were clean and then wryly suggests that perhaps his room looked better too!

The book's opening pages herald the tone of what follows: “two of the most important qualities this book will go in search of [are] humanity and warmth.” It finds both and more. Zinsser's writing is personal, vigorous and full of humour.

In chapter 5 Zinsser argues that the author should write primarily for him/herself, suggesting that doing this will allow them to relax, and produce material that is natural and vital. Not that relaxing is easy “telling a writer to relax is like telling a man to relax while being prodded for a possible hernia.” Pieces by E. B. White (on his fondness for hens) and Hunter S. Thompson (one of his typically crazy drug-seeking law-evading escapades) display the fruits of such apparent oblivion-to-the-reader.

But more than the work of others, Zinsser's own writing commends him as an author willing to bare his personality, which pulses through every page. There is his bluntness: “Minutes are minutes, physicians are physicians, friends are friends. The rest is clutter”. There is his broad-mindedness and breadth of knowledge. A chapter on criticism, for instance, in which he writes intelligently about classical music, television and film, is preceded by helpful chapters on travel, science and sports writing. And there is his droll sense of humour.

The humour begins on page one, as Zinsser recalls being on a panel addressing the topic ‘writing as vocation’. The description of his fellow panel-member a full-time surgeon, part-time writer he calls Dr Brock raised my eyebrows and the corners of my mouth. Asked whether it was important to re-write, Dr Brock replied, “absolutely not...let it all hang out,” and on what to do when the mood wasn't right he told the audience, “Go fishing. Take a walk.” Zinsser concludes with the suggestion that perhaps he should take up part-time surgery!

As for vigour, the book fulfils its own mandate of “an aliveness that keeps the reader reading from one paragraph to the next” (p. 5). Zinsser's sentences are

muscular; or, to switch metaphors slightly, they have hands and feet. They nudge, beckon, prod, guide and tickle the reader from one idea to the next.

*On Writing Well* is also practical and realistic. Chapters on the importance of a good lead, how to create a snappy ending (rather than the ‘therefore the main points are’ gruel of the high school essay), the ABCs of conducting an interview, and the need for unity in person, mood and tone give sharp definition to some of the writer’s important tasks.

The advice to master the basics is also practical, and tellingly conveyed using the metaphor of carpentry: before a writer can “bevel the edges and add elegant finials” to their prose, they must build sturdy sentences with stable syntax and strong verbs.

And what could be more realistic (not to mention sobering) than the two heavily marked-up draft pages on pages ten and eleven, followed by the comment that although they look like a first draft, these pages “have already been rewritten and retyped like almost every other page four or five times.”? Zinsser knows that strong, fresh prose is hard work.

As well as sound instruction, this book brings great joy. Ask my wife. She has had large slabs read to her over the past three months! Next to Strunk and White on your bookshelf, another gap is begging to be filled.

**Chris Walker**

## **Book Worm and the Mailing List**

As James will be away till the end of the year, I will be maintaining the Yahoogroups Members list and making sure that all paid-up members receive their e-mailed copies of *Book Worm*.

Several members of SOEWA are striving to streamline the process of recording contact details and to maintain a system which ensures that everybody receives their *Book Worm* and information can be passed around the group with ease.

At present, the Yahoogroups list is separate from the SOEWA register. The Yahoogroups list contains names and e-mail addresses so that members can post messages to the group and receive their monthly *Book Worm*. The SOEWA register contains details of addresses, services provided, qualifications, experience and so on that members can alter themselves using a PIN number provided by Des Carne.

All of the information that is provided to Yahoogroups and SOEWA, and all the contents of all publications that are posted on the Internet, are available for worldwide scrutiny. It is important to think carefully about which e-mail address and which private address will be made public. Once it has been sent it cannot be retracted.



If you are unsure about the Yahoogroups list or the SOEWA register, please feel free to contact me and I'll do my best either to sort it out or to put you in touch with someone else who can.

**Anita Berryman**

### **Attention 'Editalk' Subscribers**

Hosted by the **Editors' Society SA**, Editalk has moved to a new forum-style format and is now available at [www.editors-sa.org.au/forum](http://www.editors-sa.org.au/forum). Please visit to sign up and watch out for an on-line launch with guest 'posters' coming up soon.

**Gina Inverarity**

*SA Editors' Society member and website host*

### **Erratum**

I recently received the following message from David Cohen of MEAA:

"I enjoyed reading the above issue of Bookworm on the Society's website.

May I point out that my name is David, not Greg?

Michael and I enjoyed speaking with Society members and trust they found our tips about debt collection useful.

regards

David Cohen (President, WA Branch, MEAA)"

Sincere apologies to David for this misnomer and, yes, I'm sure we all enjoyed the presentation that he and Michael gave and found it most useful.

### **Howler!**

As we all, regrettably, know, spelling errors in public notices are common. But here's a beauty, spotted on a board in a Willetton shopping centre. Some furniture is for sale and the table, we are told, has "rort iron features." A bit twisted, I guess.

### **More Writing Humour**

Q. How many mainstream publishers does it take to change a light bulb?

A. Two. One to change the bulb and one to issue a rejection slip to the old bulb.

Q. How many editors does it take to change a light bulb?

A. Do we have to get author's approval for this?

Q. How many copy editors does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A. I can't tell whether you mean 'change a light bulb' or have sex in a light bulb'. Can we reword it to remove the ambiguity?

Q. How many artwork designers does it take to change a light bulb?

A. Does it HAVE to be a light bulb?

Q. How many writers does it take to change a light bulb?

A. I don't see why it has to be changed.

Q. How many copy editors does it take to change a light bulb?

A. The last time this question was asked, it involved artwork designers. Is the difference intentional? Should one or the other instance be changed? It seems inconsistent.

Q. How many proofreaders does it take to change a light bulb?

A. Proofreaders aren't supposed to change light bulbs, just highlight the error.

Q. How many indexers does it take to change a light bulb?

A. See indexers.

Q. How many printers does it take to change a light bulb?

A. Three. One to wash the old bulb, one to check the colour match and one to call the client and explain the delay.

Q. How many cataloguers does it take to change a light bulb?

A. Only one, but first they have to wait to see how the Library of Congress has done it.

Q. How many literary critics does it take to change a light bulb?

A. Literary critics don't know how to change light bulbs, but rest assured they'll find something wrong with the way you do it.

### **Acknowledgment**

With thanks to Nena, Kate, Dave...sourced with permission from Jan-Feb 2005 edition of ...*the word*, the newsletter of the Society of Editors (SA).

### **Deadline for November 2005 Book Worm issue:**

Tuesday 18 October 2005.

***All submissions gratefully accepted.***

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