

BOOK WORM

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS (WA) INC.

February 2006

From the Chair

Members all, welcome to 2006. I trust your year will be filled with new contacts and an excess of rewarding editing work.

With the New Year, our thoughts turn to the Annual General Meeting (AGM), to be held in March, which will come around all too quickly. As you know, all committee positions become vacant at an AGM and, although committee membership of any association or society is not usually greeted with open arms by most members, your committee would like to encourage you to nominate for any one of the vacant positions.

In general, a committee is formed for the purpose of servicing and supporting the membership and, ideally, getting the membership excited about their organisation. It is also responsible for implementing change and carrying out proposed activities. In turn, the committee relies on members to generate energy and interest and to provide new ideas for change.

The aim of any committee is the survival of the organisation it serves, and the key ingredient for its success is a strong partnership with members. To achieve this, a committee needs to encourage direct involvement of members with its work, and the most effective way to achieve this is to encourage members to take an active role in matters relating to the management needs of the organisation.

The rewards for taking a role on the committee are many, not the least being the opportunity to work with talented and committed colleagues and to gain experience in ongoing issues such the one that occupies our thoughts and energies just now, accreditation for editors.

Please feel free to contact me or any member of the committee if you would like to know more about the work of the committee and procedures for nomination. You will also receive information about the AGM before the event, which will include a nomination form.

We look forward to your positive response.

Betty Durston

Editorial

A happy New Year to you all! I haven't much to say this edition, other than that I'm sorry to have missed such a great Christmas function! (Ah, the frailties of the human body!)

Having said that, there is one thing, though: I hope that some of our members who have not had an active role in the Society so far may consider nominating for either the SOEWA committee, or for one of the IPed Working Groups (see Anne's item below). The duties for these positions are not onerous and you get to influence the direction of the editing profession in Australia—so “let's be 'aving you!”

Tanya Marwood

Forthcoming Meetings

February Committee Meeting (to discuss AGM format etc):

Date: Tuesday 7th February (time TBA)

Venue: Tresillian Centre, 21 Tyrell St, Nedlands

The meeting this month is not intended for the general membership, but you are nevertheless most welcome. If you would like to attend, e-mail any of the committee members for further details.

The next general meeting will be the March AGM.

A Report on IPed Working Groups

On Sunday, 11 December 2005, I took part in a teleconference with other IPed Interim Council delegates from around Australia. A significant area of discussion centred on the various working groups currently active on behalf of the national organisation. These include the Communications Working Group, the Education, Training and Mentoring Working Group, the National Organisation Working Group and the Standards Revision Working Group.

Each of these groups is playing a vital role in developing IPed as a significant and influential professional body, one with an enhanced public profile for editors in our community. (For further details of the purpose and aims of each of these groups, please see http://www.iped-editors.org/files/About_IPed.pdf)

Unfortunately, however, Western Australia is, as yet, not represented on any one of these working groups. This in turn means that not only is West Australian talent not making a contribution to the development of IPed, but also the voice of West Australian professionals working in the field is not being heard nationally.

So do you think you could join one of the working groups listed above and share your expertise with other group members for a limited time? The responsibilities are generally not onerous (much of the work is done on-line and via e-mail exchange), and the opportunities to develop as a professional as well as to get to know your colleagues from around Australia are truly rewarding.

If you'd like to find out more about a particular working group and if you're perhaps considering putting your hand up, please contact me or Betty Durston as soon as possible.

Anne Surma a.surma@murdoch.edu.au

A nice example of how technology can change the way we work

I am editing a book about a distinguished Anglican churchman who died in Perth in 1996. Though Australian, he was ordained in Wakefield Cathedral in Yorkshire, England, in 1934 and served three years as an assistant priest at another place in Yorkshire called Birstall before coming back to WA.

On the World-Wide Web, I found a photo of the church in Birstall he had served, and of the grand inside of Wakefield Cathedral. But at 72 dpi, they were useless for printing and anyway I needed permission to use them.

I sent e-mails requesting better versions and permission the same day: October 26. *Before the day was out* I had received, as attachments to e-mails, excellent photos from both sources and the blessing of the people involved—both women, as it happened.

In the old days, this could have taken weeks. I have also found, again, that as I worked through the text, my first and best resource for research was the Web and Google. It helps that I have a broadband connection, of course.

Tom Jenkins

Recent Trends in the Editing Profession

Pamela Hewitt, of Emend Editing www.emendediting.com sent me the following note after the November *Book Worm* went out last year:

“Dear newsletter editors

As I do each time I conduct these surveys, I'm sending you the analysis of the most recent survey of editors, conducted at the October conference in Melbourne. I've written an article, also attached, that suggests reasons for some of these trends.”

Pamela publishes *The Fine Print*, an independent on-line journal dedicated to editing, which can be found at www.emendediting.com/ezone Her article follows and if there is sufficient interest I can publish the (rather lengthy) analysis in the next *Book Worm*.

Editors on the move

Editors are getting younger and richer.

Well, only a little bit younger and only a tiny bit richer, but progress is progress. The third national survey of editors found that hard work and organisation are showing results.

I've been conducting these surveys for four years. In 2001, I was writing a paper for 'Partnerships in Knowledge', a national conference of editors and indexers held in Canberra, and I was dismayed to discover that there was little useful quantitative or qualitative information about Australian editors. It seemed that the only way I could get reliable information on what editors did, thought and charged was to ask them myself.

The result was a survey that asked editors for standard statistical information on age, sex and residence. It went on to find out about their educational background and employment experience. The survey contained questions about the challenges editors face and their professional priorities. It also provided, for the first time, reliable data on the rates Australian editors charge.

It came as no surprise to me to find that the profession is both experienced and well qualified. As I said at the time, editors are:

- highly skilled, combining generalist and specialist knowledge
- highly qualified, usually with a first degree, often with one or more postgraduate qualifications
- highly experienced, often with a track record of ten or twenty years in the industry
- working in industries at the forefront of technological change, at the very heart of the information revolution.

This is looking promising. Surely here we have the cream of the knowledge society, highly prized specialists for the industries of the future. It should go without saying that, as employees, we should command high salaries, a company car and generous executive packages. As freelancers, the sky should be the limit. What wouldn't a corporate client pay for the services of such people?¹

Anyone in the trade will be rolling their eyes by this point. It's well known in the industry that editors are not at the top of the publishing tree in this country.

There have been enormous changes in the publishing industry worldwide, and editors work in a globalised economy, along with everyone else. Desktop publishing, e-mail and the Internet have transformed the way we work. Editors haven't been slow to see the possibilities technological change offers for

¹ 'Valuing our services, valuing ourselves' paper presented at 'Partnerships in Knowledge' conference, Canberra, April 2001.

freelancing. Many set up small businesses, typically one-woman shows, and publishers were also quick to take advantage of the cost benefits of outsourcing a large slice of the editorial role.

There has been sometimes heated discussion about declining editorial standards in Australian book publishing, with Frank Moorhouse, Hilary McPhee, Nikki Christer and others weighing in from different perspectives.² I won't revisit that debate here, except to consider the role of freelance editors, and to suggest some possibilities for cooperation.

For editors, the results of changes to the editorial function in publishing houses have been mixed. What they gained on the swings of autonomy, they often lost on the roundabout of running a micro-business, hunting for work, juggling deadlines and the flood and famine of publishing projects. All the same, there is a cadre of freelancers with experience of in-house production processes who make a mostly modest living by offering their skills on the market.

Education and training

Some of the gaps left by the reduction in in-house training have been taken up by the higher education and TAFE sectors. Most universities and many vocational colleges now run courses that include editing and publishing, sometimes as specialist qualifications and sometimes as components in communications, journalism and creative writing courses. The industry has stepped up its training, with the APA running courses and now offering accreditation to external providers. Societies of editors, writers' centres and private providers also offer a range of short courses.

My surveys show a continuing and growing interest in education and training. The greatest demand is for professional development programs. In 2001, 30% of respondents wanted to see more professional development programs as a matter of priority and this jumped to 79% in 2003. In the latest survey, 68% of editors rated the need for professional development highly, second only to the need to establish a national organisation for editors.³

An ageing profession?

Despite the fact that many people still come to editing after a career in areas such as teaching, librarianship and academia, there are now younger entrants with newly minted publishing and editing degrees and the intention of making a living as editors, not merely subsidising the production process. When I conducted the

² Frank Moorhouse, *Australian Author*, Hilary McPhee, interview with Ramona Koval, *Books and Writing*, broadcast 12 May 1999, For Nicki Christer's comments, see Jane Sullivan, 'Publish and be damned', *Age*, 14 December 2002.

³ The new Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd) was announced, to fanfare and song, at the Melbourne conference. See Jane Sullivan, 'Letters to the editors at the typeface', *Age*, 16 October 2005 and www.case-editors.org.

first survey, some people expressed concern at the ageing of the profession. In 2003, 63% were over 45 and this is now a slightly lower 58%.

As one survey respondent commented, 'We are not dowdy housewives filling in time while hubby's at work, but strong, committed, dynamic professionals with a specific view of publishing... not an "add on" but a specialised, powerful group with "insider knowledge".'

As editors with in-house experience leave the industry and younger people with professional qualifications take their places, the cottage industry model of freelance editing will be increasingly unsustainable. Lots of experienced book editors have moved into more viable areas—government and corporate work, website and electronic editing (fields where you make a lot more with the same essential skills by calling yourself a communications consultant, knowledge content provider or information architect).

Rates

The significant increase in reported average hourly rates in this year's survey is a pleasing development. The national average of \$61 an hour is a step up from the \$50 mark that the first two surveys reported. Even so, it masks huge variations. The lowest rate was a paltry \$25 an hour. Survey respondents made wry comments, including the words 'slave labour' and 'ridiculous undercharging' about the amounts that their work commanded. The highest reported rate in this survey was \$120 an hour, a rare outlier in the data but not too different from the recommended MEAA freelance rate for book editors.⁴

To run a small business, as freelancers do, this hourly rate needs to be raided for equipment and home office costs, including Internet and phone charges, software, holiday and sick leave, education and training, IT maintenance, supplies, the daily 'administrivia' of e-mails, phone calls, banking, postage and advertising. And this is without even thinking about superannuation or insurance. After all, most freelancers don't.

Too many freelancers don't charge enough to do much more than pay for their overheads. There are exceptions to this sad rule, but most of these people don't work as book editors but with more lucrative government and corporate clients.

Working together

I provide summaries of the survey findings to IPed and editors' societies. I'll also be making my findings available to the ASA and the MEAA. There are signs of a renewed phase of cooperation between editors and their union. Many former union members have drifted away from an organisation that they felt didn't understand or represent them, but there seems to be a new willingness on both sides to work together. As we move into a grimmer industrial relations era,

⁴ The current hourly freelance rate for book editors and proofreaders is \$189, and the daily rate is \$756.

everyone in publishing has much to gain from joining forces and finding common ground.

I'm aware that many professional writers would be glad to earn anything like \$60 an hour for their work. Before you frame retorts about relative value and wage justice for authors, let me say that I'd love to see writers properly paid for their work. I'd add that many writers engage in editing as their day job and, indeed, many editors are also published writers. We have a lot in common.

Both groups want the publication they're working on to be as good as possible. We also want publications to sell, giving us common cause with publishers. We all want to be part of an Australian publishing industry where good writing and good editing are valued and nurtured.

If my bookshop spending is anything to go on, paying editors properly might be the start of an editor-led recovery in the Australian publishing industry.

New Members

Welcome to:

Michelle Kelly of 14 Carinta Court, Ellenbrook, WA 6069.

E-mail: michelle@mkediting.com.au

Deborah Fitzpatrick of 15 Bailey St, Hamilton Hill, WA 6163

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Tuesday 21 February 2006.

All submissions gratefully accepted.

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