

BOOK WORM

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS (WA) INC.

June 2006

From the chair

Members of the Society have done a good job of deciding on the training and development program for the year ahead.

These monthly meetings give us an opportunity to reflect on our own performance and direction as editors in both a broad and specific way. Editing, especially freelance editing, is often a solitary occupation and the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas is welcome. I think we all go through periods where we need some new stimulus to redirect our focus and I am grateful we have so many distinguished members who are willing to share their expertise and knowledge with us. I would like to thank our speakers for their generosity in sharing with us their experience and encouragement.

Kerry Coyle

Editorial

We have a new section in this edition, the 'Member's Notice' and I invite you all to send in news of your events, publications, awards, etc. and we will publish one each edition. The committee recently decided it would be most appropriate to use the newsletter to celebrate the array of talented members we have in our Society. So come on, blow your trumpet! And remember, it's 'first in best dressed', so be quick!

Now please, everyone—once again—could we think about our e-mail habits regarding the Yahoogroups forum and only reply to the person who really needs to hear from us? Everyone else in the group is likely to see our message as spam! Thanks!

Tanya Marwood

Forthcoming meetings

June Meeting: Working with self-published authors

Tom Jenkins will share his experience in editing and designing books for self-published authors, from encouraging the (often uncertain) author, through creation of text, gathering illustrations, design of pages and cover, to overseeing digital printing and helping to organise the launch party! Tom will also consider the question: And how does all this relate to accreditation?

When: Tuesday 6 June 2006, 7.30–9.00 pm

Where: CWA House, 1174 Hay Street, West Perth, third-floor Boardroom. (Enter via back door and take the elevator. Free parking is available at the rear of the building.)

Cost: \$2 members, \$5 non-members

RSVP to Kerry Coyle, phone 9482 3143, e-mail kcoyle@westnet.com.au

More great meetings for the rest of the year:

On the 4th of July, Janet Blagg will ask: What do you understand by the term 'political correctness'? When the Prime Minister says education authorities are 'succumbing to political correctness' how do you think he intends you to feel about these authorities? Roll up your sleeves and pitch into this political minefield in a discussion led by Janet, who will argue (amongst other things) that the expression has made a 180-degree turn since its inception, so that it is now used almost exclusively by the old power base.

August is our mid-winter break: no meeting.

On September 5, three WA book designers: Robyn Mundy, John Douglass and Becky Chilcott will be our guests, showing examples of their work and focusing on their interaction with editors.

The October 3 meeting will be a workshop on English usage facilitated by James Hansen. Last year we looked in detail at sentence structure, and at the optimum placement of verbs and adverbs. The October theme, for the moment, is open. James would appreciate suggestions on topics which he may prepare for group discussion. Examples from the work of clients (suitably disguised) would be welcome. Please email your ideas to jehansen@westnet.com.au with the word TOPIC in the subject line.

Report on May Meeting: Talk by Anne Surma

Anne opened by noting that, as with many present, she had “fallen upon” her work as an editor, rather than having entered it through formal paths. In the late 1980s, nearing the end of her doctoral thesis on British journalist and feminist activist, Rebecca West, Anne decided it was time for “some proper work and some proper money”.

This work took the form of a production editor in the Design, Production and Publishing unit of the British Council, located in central London. Anne’s tasks ranged from writing letters for staff and editing internal documents (“the mundane”) to project managing the British Council’s stand design and catalogue for the Frankfurt Book Fair and then attending the Fair as a Council

representative, and overseeing an exhibition on the history of British fashion, opened by Princess Diana (“the exotic”).

At the Council, Anne worked closely with experienced, talented editors, from whom she learnt a lot. The Council’s in-house designers, editors, printers and printing press also taught Anne the ins-and-outs of publishing. However, top of the list of job benefits for Anne was working in downtown London, which, for a recent graduate, was “very cool and terribly exciting”.

Australia: the land of warmer weather

Yet, cool and exciting could not make up for a meagre entrance salary, the rainy weather and the confines of a London flat. So, in 1991, after two years at the Council, Anne decided she would “go where the weather was warmer: Australia”. While Anne was in Hong Kong airport waiting to board a flight to Perth, a chance meeting with a professor from Edith Cowan University led to her first job in Australia: teaching English to professional migrants at Edith Cowan’s Claremont campus. After two years of combining this with casual tutoring in the English Department at Murdoch University, it was time for Anne to enter the “other world” (which she claims is a better term for life outside of university than the often-heard *real world*).

She secured a position as in-house editor for the Western Australian office of a national engineering company – a high-pressure role in an environment that was very corporate and very ‘blokey’. Tight deadlines loomed regularly for Anne, exacerbated by the fact that “it was impossible to get others to believe [these deadlines] were real until five minutes before documents were due!”

The other challenge she faced was engineers who were highly competent with numbers, yet often lacked basic literacy. ‘Cut-and-paste’ was a common method of composing documents. Anne edited proposals, tenders, and environmental management reports, which exposed her to technical writing and the style and tone of the corporate world, as well as to that most important of all editor’s skills – diplomacy.

The highs and lows of Academia

The desire to have children prompted Anne to leave the engineering firm. While raising her children, she took on freelance editorial work, and presented writing skills workshops to companies. She commented that these workshops were very financially lucrative, and that editors looking to find new sources of income might consider them. At this time, Murdoch University asked Anne to develop some units in writing for professional and PR purposes.

In 2000, Anne gained a permanent position at Murdoch, teaching English and Professional Writing. As well as lecturing undergraduates in literature, literary theory, professional writing, and PR writing, Anne supervises honours and postgraduate students, and, when time permits – far too rarely, according to

Anne—she pursues her own research and writing. On top of this, she bears the ever-increasing administration load of the modern academic.

Anne's discussion of her teaching at Murdoch focussed on the professional writing unit. In this unit she aims to give students the 'ABCs' of writing—a grasp of basic grammar, the traditional elements of the sentence and the paragraph, punctuation, and the like—and to make them aware of the conceptual and ethical aspects of writing, namely how the written word works and can be made to work on its readers, and the responsibilities this entails. All this in a twelve-week semester!

Along with this time restriction, Anne suggested that the number of students able to write well had declined since she began at Murdoch. Further, that there is an intellectual component to this, in that many students struggle to think critically and sustain their reasoning in writing for more than one or two sentences. Add to this that many students are working full-time, studying full-time, and pursuing a full-time social-life, and it's clear that Anne's task is onerous.

One member asked about the cause of this decline in student literacy: Was it the result of an identifiable change in educational policy? Or was it a function of the ubiquity of the Internet and our visually saturated society? Some Society members who are parents lamented that WA primary schools had gone through a 'grammar-free' period, the results of which were the semi-literate school-leavers of the last few years. They noted the policy has recently been reversed. Anne said that a number of factors were likely at work: education, technology, and the commercial and economic pressures upon students.

"What about PR writing—isn't that teaching people how to tell lies?" one member asked. Anne replied that one of her goals in the PR writing unit was to challenge dubious practices that are endemic in this field, to instil the idea "that writing is a communication process rather than propaganda".

Part of Anne's contribution to this task has been her recently published book, *Public and Professional Writing: Ethics, Imagination and Rhetoric*. This academic text presents writing as an important social activity, and draws attention to its political, corporate, legal, and ethical responsibilities and constraints. (Anne said that Amazon is the best place to obtain her book.) The motivation for the book, as with all of Anne's work, is the conviction that "we need to take account of the fact that writing matters."

It's a conviction to which Anne's presentation testified.

Chris Walker

IPed notes

News from the Institute of Professional Editors

Please note there were no notes for May 2006, as the date of the teleconference was too late to meet the publication deadline.

See the website at www.iped-editors.org for any recent developments.

The Occasional Series on Australian Editors

Victorian Update - May 2006

We can't believe that winter is almost upon us and it's been more than six months since the national editors' conference was hosted in Melbourne in glorious spring weather!

The Occasional Series working group worked tirelessly in the conference lead-up to organise a panel presentation, 'Some of the finest: honorary life members'; one of many conference highlights. Renée Otmar capably chaired a lively and entertaining panel of honorary life members featuring Sheila Allison (Tasmania), Loma Snooks (Canberra), Lee White (Victoria) and Pamela Ball (South Australia). This panel session was recorded by the working group for the Occasional Series archives and will be published with other conference presentations in the conference proceedings.

While a very full conference program unfolded downstairs at Eden on the Park, members of the working group were tucked away in quiet rooms at the conference venue facilitating interviews with honorary life members:

- Beryl Hill in conversation with Wendy Sutherland
- Loma Snooks in conversation with Renée Otmar¹
- Robyn Colman in conversation with Lee White
- Sheila Allison in conversation with Pamela Ball

This conversation format proved to be a great success once interview subjects settled in and forgot (well, almost) they were being recorded! Extracts from these interviews (with permission) will be loaded to the Society of Editors (Victoria) website on the OSAE page www.socedvic.org

The Occasional Series working group enjoyed a 'well-deserved' break over summer. We are currently planning our program of activities for 2006 and beyond. We will organise and host a follow-up event for the 2007 national editors' conference in Hobart. We will continue with our ongoing interviewing program with state and territory honorary life members in Victoria and hope to schedule some interviews at next year's conference. We will continue to pursue wider publication of Occasional Series oral, print, pictorial and digital material to increase the profile and visibility of Australian editors and promote the editing profession. We are also searching for a home for the Occasional Series archives

¹ An edited interview with Loma Snooks and Renée Otmar was first published in *The Fine Print* (issue 3), February 2006. 37-40.

and we would like to hear from state and territory society members if you have any suggestions.

The Victorian working group will continue to post updates about our activities on the OSAE page of the Society of Editors (Victoria) website; publish news of interest to state and territory members via your newsletters; seek wider publication of OSAE material; and vigorously promote the Occasional Series on Australian Editors (OSAE) project.

Diane Brown (convenor), T: +61 3 9718 1358, E: diane@netspace.net.au



Occasional Series on Australian Editors working group, left to right: Jenny Craig, Diane Brown (convenor), Renée Otmar and Kerry Biram.

Photo: Ron Thiele, Society of Editors (Victoria)

Book Review

***One of the First and One of the Finest: Beatrice Davis, Book Editor* by Anthony Barker**

In this article Jenny Craig¹ discusses Anthony Barker's monograph on one of Australia's first book editors and what we can learn from her.

Anthony Barker's biographical piece *One of the First and One of the Finest: Beatrice Davis, Book Editor* is a wonderful introduction for those who are not familiar with Australia's literary and publishing scene in the 1930s to the early 1970s, and Beatrice Davis's contribution to the editing profession.

Before reading 'One of the First', I knew virtually nothing of Beatrice Davis, other than that she was regarded as a doyenne, if not *the* doyenne, of Australia's book editors and that she had worked with many of Australia's eminent writers.

I was intrigued. What had made her 'one of the first and one of the finest'?

In this short work, skilfully interweaving Davis's personal and professional life, Barker provides the answers.

As for many editors after her, and in particular before the existence of editing and publishing courses, Davis's route to editing was via a number of fortuitous connections and choices.

Although her first love was music – she was a gifted piano player – Davis needed to earn a living, and on completing high school applied for a Teachers College scholarship. She soon discovered that teaching was not her forte and after graduating as a BA from Sydney University set about learning some commercial skills.

After working as a stenographer with the French Trade Commission, she moved to the *Medical Journal of Australia* following a conversation with an acquaintance, Mervyn Archdall, the Journal's then assistant editor.

From stenographer she became assistant to Archdall, by then the Journal's editor, who trained her in editing. While working for the Journal, Davis did some freelancing for publisher Angus and Robertson (A&R). In the late 1930s A&R appointed her as the company's first full-time editor.

Barker charts the thirty-six years of Davis's career at A&R, emphasising now and then, as did Davis herself, that she worked with a cross-section of authors and edited books on a wide range of subjects, not just literary ones.

Nevertheless, Barker makes very clear the importance of Davis's role in nurturing, and providing critical advice to, writers who became well-known literary figures. She was also responsible, with Douglas Stewart, for instigating publications of Australian literary works such as the poetry and short story anthologies *Australian Poetry* and *Coast to Coast*.

As an editor, I was most interested in Thea Astley's comment on Davis's skills with authors:

'She had the capacity to advise without hurt, to correct without making the author feel ashamed or inadequate.' (Barker, p15)

I was also impressed by (and envied) writer Margaret Trist's comment that Davis's edited manuscript 'looked so beautiful' with its tiny, neat and unobtrusive handwriting. (Barker, p13)

Barker goes on to detail Davis's working life after she and other talented editors were dismissed from A&R in 1973, following a takeover. Davis worked for

Thomas Nelson (Australia) Ltd for a number of years and freelanced (still doing so in her late seventies).

The biography is full of interesting detail about Davis's way of working, her relationships with her writers and her colleagues (Barker worked in the editorial department at A&R when Davis was its head) and provides a fascinating glimpse into Australia's publishing world at that time. It is well worth reading.

Limited copies of *One of the First and One of the Finest: Beatrice Davis, Book Editor* by Anthony Barker, the Society of Editors (Vic) Inc, Carlton, Victoria, 1991 can be ordered through the Society's website: www.socedvic.org

1. Jenny Craig is a member of the Occasional Series on Australian Editors (OSAE) subcommittee of the Victorian Society of Editors. The committee is in the process of interviewing honorary members of the Society with a view to publishing these interviews in several forms over the coming year.

Member's Notice

Hidden Desires: Australian Women Writing, collected and edited by **Christina Houen** and Jena Woodhouse, will be published by Ginninderra Press this year. The anthology contains stories, poems and essays by Australian women from most states in Australia, including many from Western Australia. The project began when Christina received a small publishing grant from the Centre for Research for Women, WA in 2003. The theme of "Hidden Desires" evolved from Christina's studies for the degree of Master of Creative Arts at Curtin University (2002), and has continued to be the focus of her PhD at Curtin. Jena Woodhouse is a published and awarded Queensland poet and editor.

This is a literary collection which will appeal to the general public, as well as being a fertile text for students of creative writing and women's studies. Some of the authors are established writers, while for many this will be their first appearance in a national literary collection. These stories, poems and essays cover a range of genres, styles and moods that encompass the contradictions and affinities of women's infinite desires. **Enquiries may be made to Christina at farthestnorth1@westnet.com.au.**

West Australians in the industry news

How pleasing to find some West Australian names popping up in our industry's national 'trade journal', *Bookseller & Publisher*. The April 2006 issue reported that Dr Jenny Gregory was handing over her role as Director of UWA Press to Terri-Ann White. This year is study leave time for Jenny before she returns in 2007 to UWA History Department in a research role.

Congratulations to Amanda Curtin on winning a Literature Board scholarship to attend the 6th Residential Editorial Program at Varuna, The Writers House in Katoomba, NSW. Competition is very keen for the 12 places. "The participating

editors will work in intensive groups with three experienced mentors—Judith Lukin-Amundsen, Jacqueline Kent and Jo Jarrah—on an unpublished manuscript generously made available by its author and publisher.” (p 8)

Articles included a look at the London Book Fair; a jobs vacant analysis of our industry; conversations with Australia’s Indigenous publishers; a nifty review by Andrea Hanke ‘How much is that gizmo in the window’ about ‘other’ things on sale in bookshops; reviews and bestsellers lists (great to see Carla Van Raay’s *God’s Callgirl* at No. 6 on the Australian list (p 39); gossip and wheeling and dealing and news of who’s doing what.

I thoroughly enjoy my nine issues a year. Why not check it out? I gather that single copies are for sale at Dymocks in Claremont and Fremantle and at Angus and Robertson in Bunbury and Rockingham.

By the way, what I’d like to buy in a bookshop is a packet of elegant and preferably Australian bookplates—no luck yet. Any suggestions?

Jan Knight

New members

Welcome to:

Sarah Pike of 379 Davd Road, Waggrakine, WA 6530

E-mail: spike@wn.com.au

Felicity Lewis of 20 Christowe Drive, Swanview, WA 6056

E-mail: denaubasley@msn.com

Deadline for July 2006 *Book Worm* issue:

Tuesday 20 June

All submissions gratefully accepted.

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