



# Bookworm

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS (WA) INC.

April 2008

## From the Chair

Last week, I got a phone call from a young man who wanted to speak to me about his poetry. He had seven love sonnets that he wanted to publish, and Writers WA had put him onto me. It turned out that he was living up at Graylands, and after an aborted meeting in the city, he rang again and I said I would come up and meet him there.

Yesterday I drove up there and looked for the right ward. I've never been there before, and I was struck by the prettiness of the place. Of course, it was a sunny day, and I was only walking across the grass, but the vista was enough to make me forget for a moment that it probably looks quite different from the other side of the windows.

After walking around the building looking for the entrance, I eventually found the right door and person, and we went to sit on the grass to talk. He was heavily medicated, and every now and then had to stop and deliberately breathe in and out, as if it wouldn't happen if he didn't make a conscious effort to pull and push the oxygen. He read me the sonnets, as well as some others, and explained that this was how he was going to get his life together. With the proceeds of this first book, he was going to get out of there, buy a house and find a girlfriend. Maybe buy some recording equipment for his music.

As I talked to him, trying to explain gently how publishing worked, I realised that the usual flippant spiels whenever the writing is basically not very good – about publishing as a business, and market fluctuations, slush piles and poetry readership – weren't going to work. I saw that the shapes of my words, the subtle inference and tact, only fit when the listener has the corresponding connectors. Mostly, people have at least some of the right shapes, and you have the ones that fit theirs, so communication is possible.

Here, the rules were different. Across the grass and wandering along the paths were people whose connectors were stripped away, leaving only the raw needs behind them. Social niceties had no place to go, and fell flat and sad on the ground.

I love words, and like many of you am fascinated by the inherent playfulness in language. I love the rules and the exceptions, and how there are always new metaphors to delight. But now I was in a world where words had been stripped down too. Words had the ability to control every aspect of a life when written down by doctors. They isolated people inside an invisible shell with only the voices in their heads, or fled, leaving behind crying or laughing without context as the only communication. Words ran on in endless loops, where any meaning had been worn away by overuse, or bore an intensity and gravitas that I found distinctly unnerving.

Being English, my natural reaction to any display of emotion is to make a joke, but there wasn't any point here. The mood was impervious to my lightening of it. I tried to dance around a direct answer; afraid of giving the wrong one, but he refused to be sidetracked. I tried to explain that there wasn't always a direct equation at work in publishing, where good writing = publishing contracts. It is the best start of course, but I'm not sure how to explain to this person the other elements at play.

*'Yes,' I told him. 'These are very good. You are a great writer. Keep writing, and keep trying.'*

Perhaps a more eloquent person may have managed it, or someone with more experience, or more ability to speak of such things with anything close to insider knowledge, but I couldn't. Maybe I took the easy way out, but I felt my good fortune in a way that I haven't for a long time. Words are playthings to me, friends and solace. They give me an income and a pastime; I have all my connectors firmly in place, and I saw what it would be like to be otherwise.

***Emma Pearmain***

### Celebrating the semicolon in a most unlikely location

Thanks to Janet Blagg for submitting the following interesting online article. (And note the amusing correction at the foot of the article!)

[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/18/nyregion/18semicolon.html?\\_r=2&oref=slogin&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/18/nyregion/18semicolon.html?_r=2&oref=slogin&oref=slogin) (viewed 20 March 2008)

## Your 2008 committee

Welcome to the 2008 committee:

**President** Emma Pearmain

**Treasurer** Carla Morris

**Secretary** *Position vacant*

**Vice-President** *Position vacant*

### **General committee members:**

Jo Smith

Anne Surma

Amanda Curtin

Tanya Marwood

Robin Bower

Tanja Dusseldorp (Membership Officer)

Thanks also to Katie Lennerts who will be the new *Bookworm* distributor and Yahoo moderator. **Please contact a committee member ASAP if you can take on the role of Secretary or Vice-President.**

## Forthcoming meeting

*April: 'How the hell do I use Word (07)?' information evening*

**Date:** Tuesday 1 April 2008

**Time:** 7.30 pm

**Venue:** CWA House, Boardroom (3rd Floor)

1174 Hay Street, West Perth

Parking at rear of building; enter via door from car park

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

**RSVP:** to <[emma007@amnet.net.au](mailto:emma007@amnet.net.au)>

Have your Word questions answered! Polly Delany will be running the evening and requests that you email your questions to [pollyevans@inet.net.au](mailto:pollyevans@inet.net.au). You are also welcome to ask questions at the meeting. As many of us have already made the move to Word 07, most of the help will be based on this version.

## Report on March 2008 meeting

### AGM and book launch

*Note: as this report was written by the completely unbiased President, translations have been included in italics after certain statements to restore some semblance of objectivity.*

March's Society meeting was our AGM. Apart from the usual administrative elements, there were several more social elements, particularly James Hansen's book launch and a stunning technologically mind-bending presentation (*Emma played with PowerPoint and Google Images when she should have been doing grown-up things*) on the new website by the beautiful and talented President.

The committee presented several reports on the Society's movements and progress through 2007, which saw our bank balance in a healthy state, our membership remain steady at over 100 members, the first round of Accreditation-sitters scheduled for late July 2008, and *Bookworm* gain official spelling (*we stopped using Book worm, bookworm, Book Worm and BookWorm*).

The amazing and mystical powers of the committee (*Emma's infatuation with conspiracy theories*) and its roles have come to light recently, and may have been behind the recent changes to the group.

The fertility-promoting powers of the Secretary position were proven again when Jo announced her resignation from the role (*this is the second year running that coincidentally the Secretary has left to grow teeny people and Emma is claiming credit*). Jo is happy to continue in the interim until a new Secretary can be found. If anyone out there would like to get pregnant, the President strongly recommends taking on the role (*Emma has no ability to make this happen and should probably ask her mum a few questions if she thinks there is a correlation*).

A mysterious ability to transform book-balancing into something interesting saw a fight for the role of Treasurer break out (*Linda calmly stated she was resigning after an impressive run*), with Carla crowned the eventual winner (*the one we stared at without blinking*) after a highly illegal headlock was applied (*staring and awkward silence proved too much for Carla and she accepted the role*).

James and Janet also resigned their positions on the Committee, two decisions that were maturely received by the rest of us (*we cried shamelessly*). Their hard work and commitment to editing will be missed, but the fabulous President will be able to carry the workload (*the Society may be in serious trouble*) after being unanimously re-elected (*no one else wanted the job*) on a wave of popular support (*everyone knew they may be asked instead, so kept quiet*).

Once this part was over, Dr Carmen Lawrence gave an excellent and thought provoking (*Emma thought about how great it would be to be that clever*) speech on the vital relationship between reading well and writing well to launch James's book, *Take Charge!*, and Amanda gave a heartfelt introduction to James before he gave a short insight into the trials and triumphs of bringing a project like this to fruition.

As members mingled and bought copies of James's book, we feasted on a supper provided by **Jack in the Box Catering**, and tried to think of intelligent things to say to Dr Lawrence (*only Emma and her brother were the slightest bit star-struck – but at least Emma didn't have dip on her hand when she went to shake hands, unlike some Pearmain*).

Overall, it can be summed up as an interesting and enjoyable meeting, and thank you to all the organisers and those who attended who made it just that.

*\*If you would like better reports on future meetings, please raise your hand at the next meeting and offer to write it instead of the busy-and-important-and-not-terribly-good-at-these-but-someone-had-to-do-it President. For the sake of your fellow Bookworm readers, I implore you!*

**Emma Pearmain**

### Anne who?

The proposition I suggested last month, that it is almost a law of the universe that anyone in the mainstream media who picks on someone else's poor spelling will make a spelling error in the same article, has been borne out yet again.

In a film review in the *West Australian* (Tuesday, 19 February 2008, Today section, pp. 6–7), Helen Barlow attempted to ridicule Madonna: 'And it might have helped if she could pass a spelling test. When referring to the directors she admires in a press release, she is quoted as saying: "I have always been inspired by the films of Goddard, Visconti, Passolini and Fellini and hope that I may one day make something that comes close to their genius." Godard and Pasolini are misspelt.'

Firstly, there is no evidence that Madonna actually wrote this. It reads like an off-the-cuff comment made verbally to a journalist and used by a publicist for Madonna. *The Australian* printed the same quote with correct spellings. Secondly, I have seen no reputable spelling test that asks people to be able to spell the names of people in languages other than the one being tested. Accidental doubling of consonants in two foreign surnames is hardly evidence of bad spelling, especially when one of them has been spelt to conform to a common English spelling. Thirdly, Barlow is supposedly talking about a film Madonna has just directed. How is a spelling error in a press release a guide to the quality of the film? If it were, just about every film ever made would have to be deemed worthless.

All this would be silly enough, and silly snobbery on Barlow's part, but she then digs herself into a very embarrassing hole by referring to Eric Bana, who '... entertained the press by admitting that his Henry VIII in *The Other Boylen Girl* ...' Ooops! No redeeming excuses here. The name of one of the most famous queens of England, completely mangled, and let through by movie editor Mark Naglazas and everyone else at the *West* who should have picked that one up.

It would be much better if people who think they can spell stopped being snobs about it. There are far worse language crimes than not being able to spell. Shakespeare signed his name with at least three spellings of his surname in his lifetime. So he's a bad writer?

*Mar Bucknell*

IPeD Notes

*News from the Institute of Professional Editors*

*March 2008*

Over the past two months the work of IPeD has intensified as the new organisation takes shape and begins to implement its accreditation scheme. More than two dozen volunteers across the country are donating their time and expertise to write and review briefs and budgets, prepare agendas and minutes, attend teleconferences, and keep up with relentless email. We are grateful to all those who put so much effort into advancing the profession.

Following the incorporation of IPeD, the interim council is in the process of handing over to the duly constituted council that will govern the institute's affairs. The council consists of one delegate from each member society of editors, and it will have a part-time, paid secretary. The position description for the secretary and other working arrangements are under consideration. Plans are being made for the inaugural meeting of the council, which will appoint an honorary treasurer and approve a budget.

Meanwhile, it's full steam ahead on accreditation. The Accreditation Board has set itself a tight schedule, because it believes that members want to see action on this matter; it expects to hold the first accreditation examination at the end of July. After considerable discussion the board has decided that this exam will be conducted on paper, using traditional mark-up. The board recognises that the online and onscreen proposals offer the possibility of reduced costs and easier delivery – and reflect the way more and more editors work – but has concluded that additional time is needed to research these proposals in detail to determine the best option, accurately cost it and then trial it.

The board has drafted a budget, and it is also compiling a procedures manual to guide candidates and assessors in the conduct of the exam, which will be posted on the IPeD website by the end of April. The members of the Assessors Forum are contributing sample exam questions to a database and discussing arrangements for marking and moderation. For a full description of the exam, see CredAbility 7 in society newsletters and on the website.

The board has written a brief for developing the first exam, and it will appoint a team – a lead writer, three reviewers and a proofreader – to develop the exam paper and marking scheme. Editors who have at least five years' experience are invited to apply for these positions. Key selection criteria and application forms

may be obtained from your Accreditation Board delegate or the website; the closing date for applications is 14 March 2008.

*Janet Mackenzie*

IPed Liaison Officer <<http://www.iped-editors.org>

### Becoming an editor

Thanks to Elizabeth Flann and the Society of Editors (NSW) for permission to reprint this article, which originally appeared in that Society's *Blue Pencil* in January 2008. Elizabeth Flann is a co-author of *The Australian Editing Handbook*. She has worked as a commissioning editor, training editor and publisher, and as a freelance general, technical and script editor. She has lectured in editing and scriptwriting at Deakin University, the University of Melbourne and the Victorian College of the Arts.

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**What makes an editor? Is it a matter of training? Luck? Good word skills? Dr Elizabeth Flann, making a special trip to Sydney to speak at our November meeting, entertained the audience with an account of her life as an editor and of co-writing *The Australian Editing Handbook*.**

I'll begin with a quote from Anita Nelson – 'Editing is a kind of travel in itself'.\* This has certainly been true for me. In pondering the question 'What makes an editor?' I realised that my own journey serves as a kind of eerie history of Australian editing. So for once in my life I am going to abandon my notorious reserve and take you on a short history of my life in editing which will, I think, reveal that what made me an editor was, almost entirely, luck.

My journey began with travel when I set off, aged seventeen, on my own to the UK. I was looking for a path in life, equipped with nothing more than a good general knowledge, excellent typing skills and a smattering of shorthand, French and German. I joined an agency and the first job they sent me to was as a technical assistant, part of a team mapping the London Underground on the new wonder tool, the computer.

This was in the early 1960s. Armed with this arcane new skill, I went off travelling and when I returned the agency sent me to one of the centres of the new computer technology – ICT Computers in Putney. It was in their publications unit that I had the good fortune to become a trainee of Mr Lala (I don't remember his first name, if I ever knew it), BA (Delhi) and trained in editing practice at Oxford University Press in both Delhi and London.

Although I was only employed for three months to assist him to produce an in-house magazine, Mr Lala treated me as an official trainee and over the two and a half years I worked there (always as a temporary assistant), he managed to teach me much of what he knew about editing and publishing.

It was probably the best training available in the UK – on a par with my friend and colleague Beryl Hill's training by the redoubtable Barbara Ramsden in

Australia. My training had an added bonus – because we were editing a journal, I learned to liaise with photographers, designers and graphic artists and also to work closely with the person doing the typesetting and layout on what was a slow and complex early version of desktop publishing.

I came home to find that my foreign computer skills were much in demand. In Australia computers were still mainly the domain of science, so I found myself in the unusual position of being a young woman in a sea of men – mineral chemists, engineers and research biochemists (I moved around a lot). Not surprisingly, it was not long before I married one of them.

I had a child and, as most women did in those days, I stopped work – or so I thought. Somehow people knew that I was not afraid of the still-mysterious computers (this was the early 1970s) and that I had editing skills. Thus began my time as a voluntary worker, mainly in the environment movement (yes, there was one back then), but also with Sugar and Snails Press.

Sugar and Snails was a small press, run on cooperative lines by a group of women, mainly mothers but some teachers, appalled at the sexual stereotypes in the books available to children at that time. A friend who was a designer for education department magazines did a lot of voluntary work with them, and she suggested they needed someone to help with the editing process and that I should come along.

What she didn't tell me was that the cooperative ethos extended to everything, and my first experience of editing was conducted with twelve women, all with an equal say in the process. It worked out remarkably well, the group producing an average of four picture books, four information books and other publications such as a nursery frieze and a suggested reading list for worried parents, teachers and librarians. I found the collaborative process not only surprisingly successful, but also a lesson in teamwork that has been enormously valuable throughout my working life. I acquired new experience in old-fashioned cut-and-paste layout, which I have always enjoyed.

This meant that when I began to seek work again, having also obtained a BA in the at-home years, I had two different types of editorial training under my belt – in-house training and voluntary experience. Until the early 1980s these were the most common, in fact really the only, paths into a career in editing. By the time I became a full-time editor in Australia this was beginning to change.

With the newly acquired degree in history and English language I applied for every job I could find that I felt was remotely within my capabilities, vowing to take the first one I was offered. Only a small number of applications were for editing-related jobs but the first offer came from Pitman Publishing and I took up employment as their science editor. When the senior editor left, I took his place and became the training editor as well, and tried to turn myself into a worthy successor to Mr Lala.

But the days of in-house training were coming to an end and my daughter was growing beyond the after-school care age, so I took the plunge and set myself up



as a freelance editor. At the same time, worried about what would happen to trainee editors with no-one available to give them any guidance, I joined the committee of the Victorian Society of Editors and met another training editor with the same worries – Beryl Hill. We became joint training officers for the committee, and were also asked to develop a copy-editing course – two hours one night a week for six weeks.

The first course booked out within a day. We were persuaded to do another and that immediately booked out.

Obviously there was a need not being filled. The committee decided that a textbook was needed. In 1990 they obtained a grant from the Victorian Ministry for the Arts to develop an editing text suitable for Australian users and a publications committee was formed. The first thing they did was to ask Beryl and myself if we would be willing to expand the copy-editing course into a book. Not having any idea of what we were getting ourselves into, we said we would have a go.

The *Australian Editing Handbook* took us two years to write with an enormous amount of input from the committee and many other editors, designers and publishers, who gave generously of their time. We did manage to avoid one problem that commonly occurs with co-authors. We each took the outline that had been devised by the committee after much debate – and took it home separately to list the sections we would prefer to write. Imagine our surprise when we found we had an almost perfect division. The one of us who did not want to write about structure and style was eager to write about the intricacies of indexing and compiling bibliographies. One of us was interested in the section on science and technology, one in the sections on children's and fiction editing.

We have never revealed who wrote what (though it might surprise you) but I can reveal that we are still friends after all this time and even go on holiday together occasionally. This is rare among co-authors, as many editors will have discovered to their cost.

The first edition was published by the Australian Government Publishing Service in Canberra. This was negotiated by the publications committee and they could not have chosen better. Although the book proved to be an enormous job that completely took over our lives, the support we received from the publishers and their editor, and the generosity of the many referees who checked the manuscript, helped to keep us going. The link to the AGPS Guide would also prove helpful with publicising the book.

The AGPS team took in all our corrections, and all our fussy insistence on consistency of full stops, accuracy of overlays, positioning of artwork, etc. was adhered to. The reward was that the result of all this combined effort and care was then taken up by the target audience with enthusiasm.

*AEH* reprinted and reprinted as editing courses proliferated around the country and set it for all their students. I joined Victoria College (Deakin University) to establish a postgraduate diploma in professional writing with a major editing

component. Courses in publishing, writing and editing became the main way for newcomers to enter the field of editing.

The book was still selling well, but parts of it were beginning to be out of date. We began to plan a second edition then suddenly the AGPS itself underwent changes and shed their educational line of books. Since there was now no publications committee the rights reverted to us – and also, fortunately, the film. Now began a sorry saga, which I won't give in any detail. We entered negotiations with another publisher, then the same thing happened – a takeover and the loss of the educational publications list.

We eventually found a new publisher but by then the book was not only out of date but out of print. They decided to do a quick reprint with minor updating while we worked on the new edition. Then they, too, gave up their educational list, and we were once more back on the market. By then we had a pretty complete outline for the new edition and had done much of the research and preliminary writing, but publishers were wary of any kind of educational text at this time. This was the period from the late 1990s to the early 2000s.

Then we were approached by John Wiley and Sons, who had taken over the AGPS Guide, and this time the sequence was successful – another quick reprint with a few minor updates, then a full second edition.

The second edition is almost twice the extent of the first, mainly because of the necessary inclusion of an extensive section on on-screen editing. We had, in fact, thought that this might comprise the whole of the second edition but the extensive feedback we had from the various state societies of editors while planning the second edition indicated that many people still worked on hard copy, at least some of the time. It will be interesting to see if this will still be the case if there is a third edition. I would expect not, but who knows?

My career after this can be summed up thus – left teaching to complete my PhD; never went back.

\* Kerry Biram, Dianne Brown & Jenny Craig (eds), *Editors in Conversation*, Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd, North Melbourne 2007, p 27.

Deadline for May 2008 *Bookworm*:  
Tuesday 22 April 2008

## Contacting SOEWA

**President:** Emma Pearmain, <[emma007@amnet.net.au](mailto:emma007@amnet.net.au)>

**Vice-President:** Position vacant

**Treasurer:** Carla Morris <[carlamorris@ozemail.com.au](mailto:carlamorris@ozemail.com.au)>

**Secretary:** Position vacant

### **General committee members:**

Tanja Dusseldorp (new member contact) <[tanja.dusseldorp@westnet.com.au](mailto:tanja.dusseldorp@westnet.com.au)>

Anne Surma <[a.surma@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:a.surma@murdoch.edu.au)>

Tanya Marwood <[tanya.m@globaldial.com](mailto:tanya.m@globaldial.com)>

Robin Bower <[robinb@westnet.com.au](mailto:robinb@westnet.com.au)>

Amanda Curtin <[acurtin@highway1.com.au](mailto:acurtin@highway1.com.au)>

Jo Smith <[josmith@wordsmithwa.com.au](mailto:josmith@wordsmithwa.com.au)>

**IPED delegate:** Anne Surma <[a.surma@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:a.surma@murdoch.edu.au)>

**IPEd Accreditation Board delegate:** Amanda Curtin <[acurtin@highway1.com.au](mailto:acurtin@highway1.com.au)>

**Newsletter editor:** Rebecca Newman <[rebecca.m.newman@gmail.com](mailto:rebecca.m.newman@gmail.com)>

**Proofreader:** Michèle Drouart <[drouart@webace.com.au](mailto:drouart@webace.com.au)>

**SOEWA Web Site:** <http://www.editorswa.com/>