

The Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship, 1999

**A Report to the Literature Board of the Australia Council,
and the Australian Book Publishers Association**

by

Erica Irving

Introduction 2

Preparations 3

- **Bologna 5**
- **Vancouver 6**

The Publishers:

- **Front Street Books 8**
- **St Martin's Press 19**
- **Greenwillow/Morrow Junior Books 37**

Other Meetings in New York/LA 41

A Report on Editorial Training 54

Conclusion 58

Financial Report 63

Erica Irving, Silverfish - an imprint of Duffy & Snellgrove
PO Box 384 • Healesville • Victoria 3777
Ph: (03) 5962 3729 • Fax: (03) 5962 4857 • Email:
eirving@mpx.com.au

Introduction

When I applied for the Beatrice Davis Fellowship in 1998, I knew that I needed to broaden my publishing knowledge beyond my Australian experience. I also knew that I was craving time to recharge, to rethink how I was doing things, to be inspired and intellectually challenged.

The Fellowship provided all the above and more. I can now draw on a rich store of new experiences, friends and contacts with confidence and a more defined sense of purpose. I have a new regard for US publishing, a sense of humility regarding Australia's place in the publishing universe and an awareness that we must be mindful and protective of our uniqueness as we race to succeed internationally.

I want this report to demonstrate my deep gratitude to the organisers and supporters of the Fellowship: the APA, the Literature Board and all the sponsors. By adding to the wealth of information in the previous five reports, I hope it is clear how beneficial the Fellowship is not only to the individuals involved but to the wider publishing community. The Fellowship is about the sharing of information, the sense of unity and strength we can all gain by linking up with like-minded people and organisations around the world. These links start with personal contact, and can continue for as long as we regard the nurturing of these relationships as important. Editors around the world are not so very different, and we can go a long way if we are generous with our skills and information.

The report covers the period of April 5 to July 15, 1999 and includes a brief reference to my time spent at the Bologna Book Fair and as a guest of Russ MacMath (a Canadian school teacher and advocate for Australian authors) in Vancouver. Although this period was not part of the Fellowship proper, it was the perfect preparation for my time in the US and was integral to the whole experience.

The Fellowship was the most intense learning experience I've had for years – it was demanding, confronting, exhilarating and exhausting. And it is really only now, as I sift through the experiences, deciding what to leave in and leave out, that I fully realise what an enriching time it was for me, and how the effects of such a time of immersion are often subtle and far-reaching. I'm pleased to share this report with you. Feedback would be most welcome and I'll gladly respond to any queries or requests for more information.

Preparations

While thinking about the publishers I wished to approach for the formal placement part of the Fellowship, I realised I wanted variety – the experience of small and large companies – not necessarily all in New York. While New York is still the publishing capital of the world, it is not the only place where innovative, exciting publishing takes place. Somewhat selfishly, I also wanted to experience the ‘real’ America as well as the idiosyncratic New York.

I had long admired Susan Hirschman as an editor and publisher, particularly after reading *Dear Genius, The Letters of Ursula Nordstrom*, collected and edited by Leonard Marcus (HarperCollins, 1998). (Ursula was the publisher of *Where the Wild Things are*, *Charlotte’s Web* and many other loved classics. Susan had been trained by Ursula, and worked with her at Harper for many years.) So Greenwillow, Susan’s imprint at Morrow, was at the top of my list, along with Holiday House and Farrar, Straus and Giroux (both of whom I had also long respected).

Then, at a CBC conference early in 1998, I found myself discussing my wish-list with Katherine Paterson (author of *The Bridge to Terabithia* and other wonderful novels for children). She mentioned that I might like to consider Stephen Roxburgh and the innovative YA publishing he was doing single-handedly ‘in the South’ at Front Street Books. Immediately my curiosity was kindled. Stephen’s name was legendary from his time as children’s publisher at FSG (working with many top authors, including Madeline L’Engle and, famously, Roald Dahl) and I was intrigued to find out how he’d managed to give Front Street such a high profile within the huge and competitive US market.

So that’s where we started. The APA made the initial approach to Susan in New York and to Stephen in Asheville, North Carolina. Stephen’s response was swift, exhibiting his characteristically sardonic humour and sharp intellect. After we’d tentatively suggested that I spend three weeks in Asheville, Stephen wrote: ‘Frankly, the appeal of a large corporation escapes me, but I certainly understand the allure of Manhattan where I lived and worked for most of my career.’ Later, when we’d settled for the final five-week placement, he wrote: ‘That should allow us enough time to give you a taste of how a tiny publisher on the lunatic fringe of the far side of the world functions in these parlous times.’ Susan’s response took a little longer, but it was also encouraging, suggesting that I might also spend time with Barbara Lalicki at Morrow Junior Books as she was just down the corridor.

Then Patrick Gallagher arranged a placement for me at St Martin’s Press through Sally Richardson, Publisher, thus giving me the opportunity to experience the world of a large trade

publisher with many different divisions. So, the program was set in place: 5 weeks at Front Street, 3 weeks with St Martin's, 3 weeks with Greenwillow/Morrow and a stopover in LA on the way back to Australia.

As the previous Fellows have pointed out, the choice of placement is critical to the success of the Fellowship. But sometimes it is a case of potluck. I was fortunate to strike up an e-mail relationship with Stephen Roxburgh, which enabled me to have a much clearer sense of the kind of environment I was heading into. Similarly, with St Martin's, Patrick was able to give me a good idea what to expect. But none of us could have known that HarperCollins would announce that they would be buying Morrow, including Greenwillow, on my second day there!

The role of the host publisher can also be tricky. Again it seems critical that some dialogue takes place prior to the placement, so that both parties understand each other's expectations. Stephen understood that I wanted 'immersion' and that worked well. At St Martin's there were lots of meetings but not a lot of time for any editorial work. At Morrow, the disruption of the news of the takeover and the fact that there was some confusion over my role meant that my time there was less satisfying than I'd anticipated.

In hindsight, I wish I'd allowed a bit more free time in New York – not to rage and see the sights, though that would have been nice – but to allow more space for other appointments. I became much more assertive towards the end of the trip and knew what I wanted to find out before my time ran out. The people with whom I had appointments often suggested others I should meet, and in the end I just couldn't see them all. As it was, the weeks in Asheville were quietly intense and reflective, an opportunity for meaningful editorial interchanges. In New York, everything was *loudly* intense – an assault on all the senses, requiring boundless energy and flexibility. I was meeting new people every day and found that digesting all the information, adjusting to the different personalities, and presenting myself over and over again was very demanding. I did find the pace overwhelming towards the end when I finally succumbed to an infection that forced me to lay low for the last week and cancel my final appointments.

But, ultimately, I came away feeling I'd successfully investigated the areas I'd set out to explore, as outlined in my application (see 'Conclusion'), and I felt lucky to have had the freedom to use the Fellowship in a way that was right for me.

Bologna

On April 5, 1999, I left Melbourne headed for Bologna, Italy, and the Children's Book Fair. I attended the fair representing Duffy & Snellgrove and sponsored by the APA.

The Bologna experience was invaluable for me as an editor and a terrific boost for my new role as publisher of Silverfish, the children's imprint of Duffy & Snellgrove. It was wonderful to finally meet the people I had corresponded with over the years and to see for myself the amazing range of work being published for children right around the world. I came away feeling inspired and stimulated. (Just a thought: the APA might like to consider funding a children's book editor or rights person to attend Bologna every couple of years or so. The long-term benefits of these personal contacts seem to me to be immeasurable.)

Prior to the fair, I had arranged about 20 appointments with American, English and European publishers. My primary aim was to identify like-minded editors with whom I might establish co-publishing partnerships in the future. I also wanted to attract feedback and interest in my early projects with D & S. Both aims were fulfilled as I connected with many people during the official appointments as well as through impromptu meetings at the various stands.

Through Camilla Sanderson of International Horizons, I was invited to the Random House cocktail party prior to the commencement of the fair. This was a real 'who's who' of children's publishing. I met Regina Hayes from Viking USA and spotted Phyllis Fogelmann (previously from Dial and now with her own imprint within the Penguin Group) and the illustrator John Birmingham. I had longer chats with Mary Cash from Holiday House, Beverly Horowitz from Bantam, Doubleday, Dell (the publisher of Adeline Yen Mah's *Chinese Cinderella*, which I'd edited for Penguin Australia), and Simon Broughton and Pam White from Random.

My official fair appointments included Regina Griffin (Holiday House, US), Matt Williams (Kids Can Press, Canada), Laura Beckwith (Pan, UK), Colleen MacMillan (Annick Press, Canada), Rosamund de la Hay (Bloomsbury, UK), Craig Virden (Random House, US), Stephen Roxburgh (Front Street Books, US) and his colleagues from Lemniscaat Publishers (The Netherlands), Charlotte Larat (Beltz & Gelberg, Germany), Nicole Geiger (Tricycle Press, US), Peter Osborn (Belitha Press and David Bennett Books, UK), Caroline English (Barefoot Books, UK), Janette Young (Simon & Schuster, US), Susanne Stark (Arena Verlag, Germany), Karen Coeman (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, US), Sabine Fette (Bertelsmann, Germany) and Lisa Simmons (Henry Holt, US).

I also popped in to see Barry Goldblatt at Orchard (US – publishers of Melina Marchetta's *Looking for Alibrandi*), Andrea Cavallero at Harcourt Brace (US), Arthur Levine (the very

happy US publisher of the Harry Potter books), and spent time looking through the various halls. I found the European halls particularly inspiring, as was the illustrators' exhibition, which included work by Roland Harvey and Robert Ingpen.

I came away from Bologna with a much clearer idea of the character of the US houses I planned to visit in New York, as well as a better insight into the world of rights' buying and selling. The feedback I'd received for my own projects was invaluable and the personal connection with many publishers was to stand me in good stead when making appointments in New York.

Vancouver

This interlude, from April 12 to 17, was arranged by Russ MacMath, a Canadian school teacher, who has single-handedly raised the profile of Australian writers and illustrators in Vancouver at least. Caroline Macdonald, Gillian Rubinstein, David and Christine Harris, and Peter McFarlane have all experienced the benefits of Russ's hospitality and enthusiasm for their work. Sonya Hartnett will be a guest at this year's Vancouver International Writers' Festival due to the Russ factor also.

After the whirlwind of Bologna, my time in Vancouver was truly relaxing. It was a gentle introduction to North America as well as an opportunity for some sightseeing.

On Tuesday, April 13, we visited Robert McCullough at Whitecap Books. Whitecap publish very attractive coffee-table books about Canada and Canadian wildlife and are now also publishing a small number of lively and interesting children's books. They are publishing Gretel Killeen's *My Life is a Toilet* this year and are supportive of Australian writers. Robert was very charming and animated, and his comments about the Canadian publishing scene were pertinent to Australia's experience. Like us, Canada must deal with the huge influx of titles from the US, and the geographical difficulties of a small population in a vast country. We clearly share many issues, such as the economic difficulties of publishing in hardback, and the limited opportunities for promotion and reviewing of books – particularly in the children's area. We also share a similar bouncy, cheeky, 'have a go' feel in our publishing.

In central Vancouver, we met with Phyllis and Kelly, the owners of Kidsbooks, a large, well-stocked children's bookshop. The staff there are required to read five books a week and their handwritten recommendations appear on the shelves.

Craig Smith and I spoke together at the Children's Literature Roundtable Group at the Vancouver Library on April 14. This was fun and interesting. I talked about my experiences

of editing and publishing in Australia and then Craig and I were 'in conversation'. The audience – teachers, librarians and writers – gradually loosened up and asked a lot of interesting questions. Canadians seem to be as puzzled by stringent US requirements as we are. One person pointed out the risqué nature of Australian books (as a compliment), and an author/illustrator in the audience also mentioned the fact that it was normal in their experience for there to be no or very little author consultation once a ms was accepted.

So after a most enjoyable few days in Vancouver it was time to journey to the States and take up the Fellowship proper.

The Publishers

Front Street Books, Asheville, North Carolina

April 17 – May 21

Arriving

The journey from Vancouver to North Carolina involved a spectacular flight over the mountains of Montana and vast plains with interesting rocky outcrops, and great rivers winding their way through it all. At Chicago airport I experienced my first contact with US culture. A snack at the airport involved a gigantic slurpie and a plate of food sufficient for at least five adults.

The descent into Charlotte airport involved the most unstable landing I'd ever experienced, so it was with some relief that I recognised Stephen Roxburgh (who I'd met in Bologna) waiting outside the arrival lounge with his 6-year-old daughter, Lily.

The 2-hour car journey to Asheville strangely echoed Australia; we drove through miles of farmland and small towns, and the backdrop of the Blue Ridge Mountains could have been the Great Dividing Range on the way home to Healesville! Stephen and I discussed what my expectations were and what he'd planned for me at Front Street. Basically I was to ask questions of everyone there and become as involved as I wanted to be with day-to-day activities.

After spending the first night at Stephen's beautiful home in Arden (also uncannily like the Dandenongs), Stephen introduced me to Asheville. We visited the Front Street office situated in Asheville's own flatiron building (which I would later compare with the groovy and historic New York version). Small, light and comfortable, it reminded me of Duffy & Snellgrove's Sydney office. In Asheville, Stephen pointed out bookshops, coffee shops and local points of interest before leaving me to settle in to the apartment. I had found this through the Internet so really had no idea what to expect. It ended up being perfect, part of a gorgeous old mansion that had once been used as a hospital for TB sufferers. The apartment was spacious, if a little oddly decorated in 'Parisian' style, which included mannequins draped in exotic lingerie. Stephen very generously lent me one of his cars for the duration of the stay. This was enormously helpful and allowed me (once I got used to driving on the wrong side of the road) to explore the local area much more easily than would have been possible by public transport.

Front Street Books

On my first day in the office I met the other members of Front Street: Nancy Zimmerman, Associate Publisher; Helen Robinson, Art Director; and Joy Neaves, Editorial Assistant. Stephen had recently employed them after running the company on his own for the first 3 years from a converted shed in his garden.

I very quickly felt comfortable with everyone at Front Street. It was such a warm and welcoming environment that I could happily have stayed much longer. I seemed to learn a lot in a short time – from practical short cuts to editorial direction – all of which I am already putting into practice.

Some Background

Front Street Books is a small independent publisher of books for children and young adults. Established five years ago, it has received considerable attention for its young adult fiction, but the list includes books for all age groups. Carolyn Coman's *What Jamie Saw* was a Newbery Honor Book and Front Street's authors include the much acclaimed Brock Cole, Barbara Snow Gilbert and Adam Rapp. Front Street has 30 titles now in print, 13 of which are Dutch translations published under a joint imprint with Lemniscaat.

Front Street has also entered into an alliance with the Cricket Magazine Group to develop a new imprint, Front Street/Cricket Books. The list will begin with 3–6 titles and by the year 2000 expand to 12 titles annually, doubling Front Street's current output. Marianne Carus, Founder and Editor-in-Chief of all the Cricket Magazines, will be Editor-in-Chief of the book line. Stephen will be the publisher. Stephen describes it as 'a strategic alliance, giving us critical mass and allowing each entry into markets that neither had the necessary expertise to exploit previously.' He says, 'In the 25 years since Cricket was founded, Marianne Carus has made it – and the other titles offered by the Cricket group – into the premier magazines for children in this country. The profile of the book line will match that of the magazines: good, clean fun for young readers.'

Front Street's publishing philosophy comes through in the catalogue. Stephen writes: 'Our goal is to publish authors (not just books) and it gives me great satisfaction to watch these authors' careers evolve. Approximately one third of our books are by previously unpublished authors. This too is our goal – to find new voices.'

How Front Street Operates

Stephen has set up a comprehensive database and website for Front Street (www.frontstreetbooks.com). All advance copy and information about the books is first generated for the website. Immediately it is working to publicise new titles, and this process forces Stephen to write copy that can be used for sales material and catalogues down the track. The book pages include CIP data, review quotes, a catchy line and blurb, and the facility to e-mail the author. Each single page is linked to 10 pages. There is also an on-line catalogue largely used by reviewers and librarians. Books can be ordered through Amazon or Barnes & Noble. If a book is bought through Amazon or Barnes & Noble through the Front Street link to the website, Front Street makes 10% on the sale.

The database is the backbone for everything, and it is Nancy's job to control it and keep it up-to-date. Everyone in the office is networked to her computer. Over 300 names are on spreadsheet programs, with their addresses, titles, category (publisher, author, reviewer, agent, paperback buyers, rights people, librarians, bookclubs). All these categories have sub-categories so that specialist lists can be made easily. For example, when a new book arrives, it is whizzed immediately to the 24 people on the first-class reviewers' list. These people receive bound galleys and finished books. The Library B-list includes 419 names. All these people receive finished books. While I was at Front Street, Nancy was following up a questionnaire she'd instigated to find out how the review copies were used and whether they were reaching the right people. It was immediately apparent to me how critical librarians and reviewers are to the business of children's books in the US.

Book evaluation groups, which could be representing, say, 30 schools in a district, select titles that will be bought in bulk. If a book already has positive reviews, it will be accepted immediately. Negative reviews result in an uphill battle with a far smaller chance of success.

The main review journals are as follows (the descriptions are Stephen's):

- *Booklist*

This is the best journal. The reviews are signed, and a review in *Booklist* is a recommendation to buy. If a review is boxed, it is still a recommendation, but it is a way of alerting readers that there are issues they need to consider before purchasing the book.

- *The Horn Book*

This is the largest review magazine. Can be slow, but the level of reviewing is intelligent.

- *The New York Times*

The most important, but has the fewest reviews. Its function is to help parents with their buying, so will often feature reviews of Christmas books etc.

- *School Library Journal*

Reviews everything, so quality is debatable. Reviews range from the good to the hideously stupid.

- *Kirkus*

Is one of two pre-publication journals, the other one is *Publishers' Weekly*. Stephen doesn't regard this journal highly. If a review is good, it is starred. The books are reviewed very early, but not many people read them.

- *Children's Literature and Forward Magazine*

Both new. Unknown quality at the moment.

- *Newspapers*

Most authoritative are the *Miami Herald*, *Chicago Tribune*, *LA Times*, *Washington Post*, *San Francisco Chronicle*. Local papers aren't hugely supportive unless the author lives in the area.

Front Street subscribes to all the journals and asks for tear sheets of the reviews. They don't use a clipping service and ask friends etc to send in any reviews they may spot.

Sales

I asked Stephen where his main sales were. The answer was libraries; this is particularly so because Front Street publishes only hardbacks. Library suppliers are companies such as Baker & Taylor and Ingrams. They sell to libraries and bookstores. The main trade chain, Barnes & Noble, buys centrally and sells to the public.

In Stephen's experience, the sales reps might subscribe 500 copies of his titles, and sell 200. Reviews account for sales of 2–3000. Not surprisingly, as for a larger publishing house, 20% of his list brings in 80% of the profit. A large portion of Front Street's income comes from paperback sales – for example, Puffin USA has paid large sums of money for some Front Street titles.

Stephen's philosophy is to publish the best of a kind. He also talks about publishing as 'smoke in mirrors' – ie, so much of it is illusion. For example, Felicia Bond's *Tumblebumble*

has sold over 40,000 copies, subsidising other books that don't sell as well. But Front Street's image is that of a 'lunatic fringe' publisher, and so is not as well known for its commercial picture books.

Stephen says a common publishing mistake is to turn a modest commercial success into a failure by reprinting at the wrong time. Good publishing is knowing when to stop. With regard to the Dutch translations on the Front Street list, Stephen says his expectations are minimal. The US market is very resistant to multicultural issues – if it's not American, it is not interesting ... But Stephen is committed to supplying books that offer a wider view of the world, even if only a small number end up going into libraries.

Print runs are usually in the region of 5–7000 copies, at a US price of \$15.95.

After a Newbery nomination, sales can jump from 2000 to 22,000 copies. Front Street publishes their books when they are ready – for example, if Stephen knows that the book will sell better from finished copies he will delay publication until the books are ready. Allowing time for advance reviews can also be critical.

Stephen is very excited by the potential of E-books (or Rocket books). He has always thought that books would become available in digital form. He sees the prime market not as adults, but as teenagers who will find the gadgets 'cool'. He feels E-books could reintroduce boys, in particular, to the joys of reading (albeit on a small hand-held screen!). E-books and electronic rights are hot issues with publishers. In an article in the *New York Times* (May 10, 1999), publishers and agents debate the complex issues involved, with the Authors Guild saying they expect savings from lowered paper and printing costs. The guild's director, Paul Aiken says, 'the result seems clear: authors should receive a significantly higher royalty for E-books than they do for physical books'.

Marketing

Stephen doesn't do author tours – he has yet to see one that is profitable. He does see the difference when authors work the schools and library circuit. He doesn't do list ads. The ads might cost \$10,000, which could produce 2 new books! He produces print catalogues when required but prefers to rely on the website. He regards profit calculations as artificial. Profit margins are calculated on selling the maximum print run, but you might sell only 3000 copies. The only way for small publishers to survive is to sacrifice profit for cash flow.

Editorial Training and Other Editorial Matters

When I asked Stephen about his views regarding the training of editors, we began by discussing his own background. Stephen started off as an academic, working with words and teaching writing. Then, after a brief stint as a librarian, he got the job of editorial assistant at Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Given his background, he started working with writers fairly quickly and realised he needed to learn some new techniques. Evaluating a manuscript is not the same as evaluating *The Great Gatsby*. An editor is making suggestions to a living writer and dealing with an infinitely malleable thing – the manuscript. So, for Stephen, it was a case of learning to be critical while creatively engaging in a dialogue that would aid the development of the book. He says he at least had the advantage of years of talking and learning to articulate his thoughts. Experience in the classroom had taught him to say the same thing in twelve different ways. So, for him, the apprenticeship was learning about the author–editor relationship and the editor–publisher dynamic: not just the mechanics of the business, but how vital the personal aspects are. There were dark days, of course, of learning to call a spade a spade and becoming aware of one’s ability to manipulate someone. As well as the power play between editors and authors there is the requirement in a publishing house to manipulate others into feeling passionate about your book. That inside knowledge of finding out who you need on your side remains essential to an editor’s success. Skills in marketing and rights are also terribly important.

Stephen became Editor-in-Chief in 1981, and worked at FSG for 17 years in total. (In 1980 he was also director of marketing in library sales, but continued editing throughout that period.)

He believes that Joy, editorial assistant at Front Street, has an extraordinary opportunity. She has access to everything. As Stephen put it, in large companies editorial assistants are often working for people who are busy clawing out their own domain. In this hugely competitive environment there is often no room for the assistant and their job is to deal with the mail and the slush pile, reducing their avenues of advancement.

Stephen has taught at the Radcliffe Publishing Course for 12 years, where 90% of the students receive publishing placements at entry-level positions. The course is a 6-week program, with 3 weeks spent on book publishing and 3 weeks on magazines. The book part consists of visits from lecturers with different publishing backgrounds, including marketing people. The students then do a project that involves establishing and promoting their own list. (See also *A Report on Editorial Training*.)

Stephen became quite animated when I asked whether US editors are more interventionist than Australian and English editors. He has no patience with strident proponents of this view,

nor with authors who can't see the need to alter 'pavement' (for example) to 'sidewalk'. His argument is that US children just don't know what these things are, and that their books must reflect the world as they know it. At the same time he agreed that teenage readers are much more capable of deducing meaning from context and that some publishers go overboard in trying to second-guess their requirements.

I suggested to Stephen that editors may be sometimes too easily satisfied with a ms (or rushed into having to finalise it too early). He agreed, and also pointed out that 'pure' doesn't necessarily mean 'good'. His belief is that manuscripts can be significantly improved through editorial input. The editor's job is not to rewrite, but to prompt the author into looking at a draft again. The editor doesn't do anything the author couldn't do if he/she had sufficient time and energy. In other words, the editor steps in when the author is tired (ie, editors don't get tired!). Often authors will say, 'I knew that' – they just didn't have the strength to address the issue at the time.

During this conversation I realised I had on several occasions (talks, seminars etc) quoted from Stephen's article, 'Call Me Editor' which appeared in the *Horn Book* a couple of years ago. That article says in part:

An editor's role is to be the ideal reader, just and patient. An editor's skill involves communicating to an author the meaning a reader takes from a manuscript, and the precise way the manuscript affects the reader. The author must then assess how well he or she has written and revise accordingly. I have observed a prevalent misconception that editors "fix" manuscripts. This is not what an editor does, and to the extent that it is practised, it is a violation of a fundamental and essential aspect of the author–editor relationship. I'll explain.

There are no new stories to be told, only new ways of telling the old ones. All that an author has to offer is a unique vision, expressed in a unique telling – what I will call "voice". To this end, authors must be totally self indulgent, find their own voice. Editors must be self-effacing. If they are to give a just hearing, they must humble themselves to the manuscript, put aside their own vision, deny their own voice, and receive what the manuscript has to offer. Both efforts require discipline and concentration. As a result, the manuscript assumes absolute authority, and that is as it should be.

And also:

Despite the current emphasis on the business of publishing – the how to – it is important not to forget the why. Erik Haugaard, a brilliant and underappreciated writer, explained what drives him precisely: "I write my books because birds must sing, as dogs are meant to bark."

Reflecting on editorial standards in the US, Stephen's view is that they are dropping, probably because people aren't rewarded for line-editing. Editors are rewarded for acquisition and sales, for buying books that sell; the bottom line is paramount. Quiet, good editors in the back room are not rewarded and the new generation of editors realise this, turning their focus instead to what we would call commissioning skills.

Front Street uses a trusted copy-editor at the final stages of the editorial process. It is not done on computer; Stephen will send the copy-editor a hard copy of the ms, the copy-editor edits it (with ink on paper, the old-fashioned way), the author responds and then the changes are keyed into the disk at Front Street.

Design and Production

I talked with Helen about design and production procedures at Front Street.

Helen handles all the design work involved with the novels and picture books. Stephen will ask her to roughly format a manuscript (in Quark) when it arrives, usually on a disk or as an attachment to an e-mail. This roughly formatted draft is used throughout the structural editing phases, but once the manuscript is finalised, the rest of the editing is done on a hard copy. The final changes after copy-editing are keyed into the Quark document by Joy or Nancy.

Covers are started early, of course, because rough designs are often required for pre-publicity, catalogues etc. Usually the concept will start with a casual office discussion of the book. Helen will read the ms or at least parts of it. Stephen participates a lot during the developmental stage and Helen respects his eye highly. She says he will often spot what is missing and make perceptive suggestions that respect Helen's role.

Production matters – placing the jobs at printers, and general tracking work – are handled by a production controller at Cricket.

Agents

I had come to the US aware that agents have enormous power and I was curious to know whether they played a role in what was being produced at Front Street. Stephen doesn't actively pursue agents, and feels that while good agents can be valuable, bad agents can be seriously detrimental for authors. He knows that agents are looking for big money and that Front Street, being small, will be at the bottom of their lists, unless the work is a 'difficult YA'. Front Street does accept unsolicited manuscripts and most of the books under serious

consideration have come through author recommendations or from meetings on the conference/seminar circuit.

The Vexed YA vs Adult Issue

This topic is hot in Australia and also in the US. There is still much debate about the suitability of various topics, and a tendency for critics to focus on issues rather than the quality of the writing itself. Stephen has written many articles on this topic and believes that there is a unique, distinct, identifiable genre called YA literature. The readers are 12/13 year olds. This is a summary of our discussion.

The New York Times suggests that the average adult reader has the ability of an 8th Grader, so it's not language difficulty that sets the standard: it is whether kids have the life experience to comprehend what the book is about.

Prior to the 1970s, not much was written from the point of view of adolescents. Of course there were notable exceptions, including *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. But then suddenly a bunch of writers appeared, writing from an adolescent point of view: Judy Blume, Robert Cormier, Paul Zindel.

Stephen says to authors, write for adults if you want to, but if you are writing for teenagers, the work needs to be true to the adolescent experience: ie, the protagonist is not looking back, the 17 year old is writing as a 17 year old.

YA literature explores the narrow window of experience that is unique to adolescence: the first time things happen. There is something particular about 'first times', a freshness and intensity that is no longer there the second time. Writing for YAs needs to be true to this experience – it is quite different to looking back with the benefit of hindsight.

After the first flush of YA authors, there was a flowering of great novels, followed closely by the imitators, and the advent of the problem novel. The blush went off the rose. Now, 20 years later, the YA genre is in handcuffs, constrained. Agents are finding it hard to sell. This pattern can only go down, not up. So the challenge is how to make YA writing fresh again. Is it clever marketing? Changing the size of books to B-format or to adult trade sizes? Is it the packaging? Demographically there is about to be a new wave of adolescents, but are they readers? Are they more interested in computers/software/E-books? With so much competing for their dollars, does this mean the end of hardcover books?

Given this uncertainty, Stephen says he is a lunatic, but YA publishing is all he wants to do. He is happy to go under publishing difficult YA novels. If he can sell his paperback rights well

and continue to receive good reviews and awards, Front Street will remain viable. The success of YA novels depends on winning the Newbery, and gaining institutional sales. Apparently, as in Australia, there is talk of instigating a new YA award, but Stephen believes this may be detrimental, with people striving for similarity. How many books would be serious contenders? The YA area is as susceptible to fads as any other, and the market is skittish about difficult YAs. The US is the land of happy endings ...

So we left the vexed question right there, and I asked Stephen what his perceptions were of Australian publishing. Though not as knowledgeable as he'd like to be, he does see it as a thriving, independent publishing world. Ten years ago, he was aware only of 5–6 publishers, linked by an umbilical cord to British publishers. In the last 10 years he has been dealing with many new publishers and sees our fiction as vigorous and healthy. There is no longer a perception that Australia is an appendage of the UK (whose publishing Stephen sees as moribund).

My Life at Front Street

My work area was a desk in Stephen's office, which allowed me to listen to his phone conversations (when appropriate!), be involved with his discussions with Helen, Nancy and Joy, and generally absorb the atmosphere. Surrounding me were signs saying: 'The fact that yours is better than anyone else's is not a guarantee that it's any good', 'Indecision is the key to flexibility', and 'In achieving excellence it is not always possible to be comfortable. The reverse is also true'.

My time was spent reading the books on the Front Street list, looking at early drafts of particular novels (to track the editorial process), studying reviews and reading unsolicited manuscripts. For a mad few days, I helped to fold, collate and paste together 60 picture-book dummies for the sales reps (a bonding experience for all concerned). I also did reader's reports for a number of manuscripts in production and read a German novel that Stephen was considering as a result of Bologna.

I was well aware how busy everyone was and tried not to make my presence intrusive in any way. It was odd to feel like a work-experience person, although Stephen never made me feel subordinate. Mainly, I felt like a student – a somewhat disorienting feeling after so many years of relative autonomy! But gradually the days started to fall into a pattern. In the mornings I would read manuscripts, do my own correspondence or reading, and in the afternoon, Stephen would sometimes lean back in his chair and tell me some amazing anecdote of his editorial past. He told me how he had read Carolyn Coman's first novel, *Tell Me Everything*, at FSG, rung her and told her it was brilliant. She burst into tears. Apparently

an agent had kept it for 4 months before returning it, saying he couldn't 'access' it. Another day he showed me a gift Roald Dahl had given him of a bound proof of Ernest Hemingway's short stories with EH's markings on it. I glimpsed some of the correspondence Stephen and Roald had had on the *BFG*. (The unhappy ending of this editorial partnership remains a low point in Stephen's career.)

I immersed myself in the work of Front Street authors, Carolyn Coman and Brock Cole. I talked to Stephen about Carolyn's compelling and controversial novel for teenagers, *Bee and Jacky*. Laden with symbolism, it explores an incestuous relationship between a brother and sister.

Stephen gave me the first draft of *Bee and Jacky* to look at and compare, and I read all the reviews. I was particularly interested in a review that compared it to *Sleeping Dogs* (Sonya Hartnett). I could see that in the first draft all the punch lines were given away in the first chapter, and the symbolism was much more explicit. Part of the book's strength is its spell-like surreal qualities. One line gave the draft particular strength ('She was the bear.'). Interestingly the author apparently really fought for that line, submitting only reluctantly to Stephen's argument that it was flagging the book too much and introducing the author's voice when the reader wanted to stay with the character Bee.

I felt very in tune with Stephen's editorial methods. He would always read a manuscript extremely carefully and make meticulous editorial notes. Then he would write the author a long letter saying, 'This is the book I think I'm reading. Let me know if I'm right before you look at the editorial notes.' Stephen had been told, prior to working with Roald Dahl: 'You don't edit Dahl'. But when Stephen sent Dahl 12 pages of single-spaced notes on *The BFG*, Dahl was delighted to at last find an editor who read him closely.

Extra-curricula Activities in Asheville

Asheville is a small and scenic town in the Blue Ridge Mountains, and it was great to be able to explore the spectacular countryside on weekends. Joy was an excellent tour guide and we particularly enjoyed a weekend together in Charleston. This experience of the South kindled my interest in finding out more about American history – particularly the civil rights movement, slavery and the Civil War. We also visited the real Cold Mountain, Cherokee (with a most moving museum detailing the region's Native American history) and Chimney Rock Park – a really stunning place with incredible waterfalls and rock formations, famous for the climactic moments in the movie *The Last of the Mohicans*. Possibly the biggest highlight was experiencing a church service with a small all-black congregation in Charleston.

St Martin's Press, New York

May 22 – June 11

New York

For some reason, even though everyone had assured me that New York was safe and wonderful, I was quite petrified of it. I clung stubbornly to my stereotypical idea of the city as it appeared in *Escape from New York* – a grey fortress, inhabited by chain-wielding ferals ... I was almost sick with terror as the plane came in to land at La Guardia. But then I saw a large sign: *Welcome to the Big Apple!* and I was suddenly filled with a euphoria that didn't wane for the next two weeks!

New York is everything everyone says – loud, brash, dirty, frenetic. But the most stunning thing for me was to realise what a human city it was – every aspect of humanity is on display. The colour of so many people was completely beguiling: the vigour, the poverty, the obscene wealth, the ease of getting around, the life on every street corner. I couldn't walk enough, see enough.

The apartment on West 14th Street was perfect. A small studio, it was located on the 4th floor. I never once felt unsafe or threatened. In fact, the kindly neighbours assisted on my first day as I was struggling to get the keys to unlock the door! With subway entrances conveniently situated nearby, and St Martin's, my first work placement, a 20-minute walk away, the location was ideal. Lower Manhattan became home for the next 6.5 weeks.

St Martin's Press

I had approached my placement at St Martin's with some trepidation. My entire publishing background was in children's and YA books and I felt out of my depth; I wondered if there would be any common ground. But I was proved wrong. If anything, I was made more aware of the similarities between editors rather than the differences. St Martin's was a big, busy organisation, but everyone was friendly and hospitable and I was thrilled to be working in the famous flatiron building, with my own office on the 18th floor!

Chris Holder, Sally Richardson's assistant, and Abi Rose (assistant to Bob Wallace, Editor-in-Chief) had organised a formidable itinerary for me that included a program of meetings, lunches and appointments with editors and publishers, sales, marketing and rights people. I couldn't have had a more thorough exposure to every aspect of the company. There was a

constant feeling of activity (some might say overwork) in the building and everywhere I looked there were people in close-knit teams producing a quite remarkable variety of books. The building itself seemed to foster this atmosphere. There were interesting angular offices and nooks and crannies on every level. As Bernadette Foley so clearly defines the roles of publishers, editors and assistants in her report I won't repeat that information here. Suffice to say, the 700+ books published by St Martin's comprise several lists, each headed by an editor (read 'Publisher' or 'Commissioning Editor') and supported by one or two assistants. The editor is responsible for the commissioning of all projects, structural editing, liaison with marketing and sales and the overseeing of the copyediting process. Copy-editors are allocated to projects via the production department and are invariably freelancers.

St Martin's has historically operated with the principle of publishing lots of 'small' books. Tom McCormack, the former CEO, was an editor who built the company by publishing lots of titles on a shoestring with small print runs. His formula was to focus on mid-list books and mysteries, and publish them with strict contracts and cheap covers. He found he could make money on print runs of 3-5000. SMP launched many bestselling authors this way, including James Herriott. This approach also allowed editors to take a punt on authors they felt showed promise and made for an interesting and varied list. Now, since the takeover by Holtzbrinck and under the leadership of John Sargent, there is more pressure to focus on big authors, blockbuster novels and advances that were mind-boggling to me. However, it seemed that the St Martin's editors were still dedicated to nurturing and building authors in the traditional way, and that this was still supported by management. Tom Dunne, for example, who now has his own imprint within St Martin's, seems to foster both styles of publishing – he nurtured Rosamund Pilcher through 11 novels before she produced the hugely successful *The Shell Seekers*.

What follows is a summary of the meetings I attended and the various conversations I had with different editors. I have included this degree of detail because I think it is useful in terms of understanding the pressures and practicalities of working in a competitive New York publishing house.

The Meetings

Obviously communication within a big company is critical, and meetings – although time-consuming and sometimes of questionable productivity – are as necessary an evil in New York as in Sydney or Melbourne. I found it absolutely fascinating to be a fly on the wall and to be able to observe the body language and power play at work from a safe distance!

Mass-market meeting

At 9.30am on my first day I attended a mass-market meeting. This took place in Matthew Shear's (title unknown) office and all the editors and assistant editors gathered to talk about manuscripts they'd read. Some ideas were shot down straight away while others went on to the next stage. Jen Weiss (Executive Editor/Commercial Fiction & Romance) talked about a manuscript she liked and a Doubleday book she was keen to buy. I heard the words 'buy' and 'sell' many times in the next 3 weeks.

In this meeting, all proposals and outlines were discussed in comparison to what was already on the market – mass-market publishing is all about positioning. Editors were asked to look around for themes and books that 'felt' popular.

Trade meeting

This meeting was for books that required a fanfare – titles with print runs of 300–600,000 copies. There was a brief discussion about the teenage book market. Apparently it is no longer called YA – the terminology is back to 'teen'. Pocket Plus is a brand-new imprint with media tie-ins and teen biographies. It was agreed that books had to be paperback for this market.

Discussion centred around a book called *Room to Grow* – a collection of literary short stories. It was felt that the support for this book should be via local stores that could send out flyers – any more effort would just be throwing away money.

Picador Meeting

Picador exists within the SMP empire but has publishing autonomy. George Witte is the Publisher and he struck me as highly intelligent, organised and professional.

Picador is now in its fifth year. Picador UK started the imprint, followed by Picador Australia. It is of course famous for its literary fiction and non-fiction. Picador publishes a lot of first novels: 25 hardcovers a year and 40–50 paperbacks, also in partnership with FSG.

The editorial meeting was an opportunity for people to report any news. Publicists were present informing everyone of what was going on and circulating reviews.

Trade Staff meeting

This was quite a big meeting, with lots of editors and assistants present. Manuscripts were handed out for assessment/response. Bob Wallace chaired the meeting and called for volunteers for various projects; he also selected editors specifically to handle certain kinds of manuscripts.

Editorial Meeting

I attended this weekly meeting three times. It was very eye-opening. All editors were present, discussing the books they wanted to buy. Decisions were made, and support given to editors in the middle of auctions (one editor kept having to run in and out, juggling remarkably high figures). In the second half of the meeting, P&L statements were tabled.

Again I found it fascinating watching the way people presented themselves and their books. There were often most interesting discussions about negotiations with agents and whether or not to proceed with an author's weaker book in the interest of their long-term career. There were some tense moments, and people were evidently under pressure to make decisions quickly.

Bestseller Meeting

In this meeting there was much talk about how to create the right kind of buzz for certain books.

Print & Bind meeting

This was an interesting weekly meeting in which print runs and prices were confirmed. Print runs are not set until after the initial 'laydown' (or sub-in) figure is known. This can often be disappointing, necessitating strategies such as increasing the RRP until the desired profit margin is reached.

Editors were not present at this efficient meeting and it interested me that such a very small group was deciding the fate of so many titles.

Pre-marketing Meetings

I attended two of these meetings in which editors discussed ideas and author requirements/talents with their sales and marketing colleagues. Unfortunately I didn't hear of any miraculous marketing ideas that could be applied to Australia ...

Appointments with St Martin's Staff

During these many appointments and lunches I was curious to find out where people had come from, what their jobs entailed and any views they might have about publishing in general and what the future held.

Jen Weiss – Executive Editor/Commercial Fiction and Romance

Jen has been at SMP for 10 years. In 1981, she started to work in publishing and worked her way up the ladder by accepting more and more responsible jobs in any area, at many different houses. She now reports to Sally Richardson in the mass-market division, and seeks to acquire hardcover 'list leaders' in women's fiction and thrillers.

Jen tries to buy world rights for all formats. (The three main imprints at St Martin's are SMP hardback, SMP paperback, and Griffin, the trade paperback imprint.) She often feels like 'The Player' – wheeling and dealing. Her job has two main aspects: 1) being an acquisitions person and dealing with authors and agents, and 2) liaising in-house and dealing with schedules and time frames.

As an editor, she is involved with the shaping of the book, its pacing and ideas. She uses a copy-editor (as did all the editors I spoke to) organised through the production department (mostly freelancers). Non-fiction requires more of a line-by-line approach, but Jen will specify whether a manuscript needs a heavy or light copy-edit. She oversees the copy-editor's work – checks the flavour of the comments, reads the different drafts. Her own passion is fiction.

Jen publishes a lot of health/parenting/non-fiction titles. A book on Viagra earned \$90,000 in foreign sales. Of the initial 150,000 copy print run 120,000 sold. This was all with an advance of \$15,000. Sometimes sales of 5000 copies are seen as a success, depending on what was paid for the book.

She uses scouts from movie and foreign rights' fields. She says that what's special at St Martin's is that editors aren't pigeon-holed for doing one kind of book. This flexibility keeps

editors fresh and motivated. Virtually all Jen's manuscripts arrive through agents. Because of the speed of modern publishing, manuscripts need to be in better shape to be contracted and there is a reluctance to take on books that need a lot of work. Jen commented that agents are very powerful and can be wilful and difficult.

Editorial assistants read the thousands of unsolicited manuscripts but it is very rare for one to be published and this method of submission is definitely being discouraged.

Editors have to demand attention for their books within the company and with the marketing department. Jen feels there must be more efficient ways to market books. At the same time it is important that the editor doesn't raise the author's expectations. Some authors therefore hire independent publicists.

The editor attends every marketing meeting and comes up with ideas. How it all works depends on the book and the editor. It's important for editors to direct publicity, to be project managers.

Sally Richardson – Publisher

After meeting Sally informally on my first day and being struck by her energy, enthusiasm and sense of humour, I had a more formal meeting in which we talked about SMP and her own career, which had started in rights.

St Martin's Press used to be just one list. Then Picador was introduced, representing a high literary line, then Minotaur and Farrar, Straus and Giroux titles. Then the large conglomerate Holtzbrinck bought SMP. It had purchased FSG some years ago, then Holt and now SMP. This resulted in many changes, including the merging of the legal, personnel and warehouse departments. Editorial, marketing and advertising for the different companies remains separate.

With a list of over 700 titles a year, Sally's job is to sign up books and help the editors to buy books. The 700+ books per year are produced by a staff of 200. Sally helps to sort out the marketing (is the book a big, medium or category book?). She supervises the buying and packaging and believes that the packaging is 95% of the battle, the rest advertising and promotion.

Every editor has a P&L on their performance each year. This takes into account what they paid for a book, what was spent on promotion, advertising, art, and whether the book earned out its advance.

I asked Sally about training for editors. It is clearly a case of learning on the job. Most assistants come straight out of college and earn \$21,000 pa. Sally is aware that a good boss should teach and give, and then the assistants will learn by watching and doing.

Bob Wallace – Editor-in-Chief

Bob had only recently started at SMP and had worked for *Rolling Stone* magazine in San Francisco, then in NY, had a stint in Denver and was now back in NY.

I observed Bob talking to all the staff, and taking a personal interest in them. His job is to oversee the 700+ books a year. He did feel this was too many and was concerned about over-publishing. We had an interesting conversation about the art of management and the difficulties of balancing life and work commitments.

Heather Jackson – Senior Editor, Health Books

Heather has been a mass-market editor for 4.5 years, mainly working with non-fiction. In the last 3 years, the list's profitability has increased 1000%. *The Arthritis Cure* has sold one million copies. Heather publishes 15–20 health titles per year, many with very high print runs. The market is hugely competitive with other publishers trying to copy SMP's success.

SMP's main competitor in this area is Bantam. Anything herbal ('erbal) apparently does well here. A lot of Heather's books are the result of her own ideas, for which she's found writers. She thinks the secret to success is luck, instinct and timing. She also thinks that no one else is treating health seriously.

Natural healing is big as is anything to do with kids, or reference books about drugs. Authors do well if they are well known in newspapers, have columns or are involved with the People's Pharmacy.

Heather suggested that when dealing with agents it is very important to get support in-house. Auctions are a standard event. They seemed to me quite mysterious, with unspoken rules broken at one's peril. She explained that paperback rights come with a 'floor' – generally from the house that usually buys the pb rights. The floor holder waits while the auction takes place. When the final offer has come in, the agent returns to the floor-holder, who has topping privilege of 10% (meaning that they can bid 10% more than highest other offer). End of auction.

As well as cutting deals, Heather likes to edit her 20–25 books per year. She publishes originals only, not many imports. It normally takes ten months from receipt of the manuscript to a finished book.

The shelf life for fiction is 2 months, and slightly longer for non-fiction. Most books don't get any marketing. The amount of marketing depends very much on the print run (ie, the difference between 100,000 and 5000 copies).

Diane Higgins – Senior Editor, Literary Fiction and Non-fiction, Picador

I had lunch with Diane and immediately felt a rapport with her. Very sensitive, very intelligent, she has also been a strong supporter of the Fellowship. We started talking about books (adults' and children's) straight away. She has three children and lives in Brooklyn.

Diane edits 10 books a year for Picador. She worked on Joyce Maynard's memoir (in which Joyce controversially dissects her relationship with JD Salinger) and a book by Gottfried Wagner called *Twilight of the Wagners* (in which Gottfried exposes his family's association with Hitler).

Diane is clearly a very fine line editor and seemed to take her books to a much further stage than some of the other editors I spoke with. We talked about assistant editors. Their job is demanding but there appears to be a degree of diffidence – often they don't read enough and don't speak up in meetings. We talked about the need to learn the craft of editing the hard way.

Keith Kahla – Senior Editor, Gay and Lesbian Interest and Mysteries

I had been looking forward to meeting Keith as the publisher of Penguin Australia's *Glove Puppet* by Neil Drinnan, and it was nice to meet someone who liked Australian authors (and children's books) and was very down-to-earth. He has been at SMP since 1988. He publishes 50 books a year, and of these 35 are originals. He is Robert Ludlum's editor (who obviously commands a large advance), but Keith buys most of his books for less than \$10,000.

Keith's career ranges from working in a bookshop to being a rights assistant at Putnam before becoming an assistant editor at SMP. He had targeted 3 editors he wanted to work with when

the job at SMP came up. He had done a publishing course but felt it didn't help at all except in terms of providing contacts.

Keith has a very nice style and humorous manner. He likes being tucked away in a corner office, guarded by his assistant (who had come to him through a mutual hairdresser).

Keith's list is very interesting and he has his own website – so is quite autonomous. He explained to me that for a book to be published at the same time all around the US, the company needs to allow 3–4 weeks shipping time, hence very long lead times are required.

We visited Different Lights (a gay and lesbian bookshop) with a good range of stock. Commenting on Australian publishing in general, Keith said he found it lively and interesting, though sometimes felt the books weren't being pushed quite far enough.

Keith feels that niche publishing is the way of the future, plus niche bookselling, and consequently spends a lot of time with booksellers, talking to readers, and attending conferences etc.

Marian Lizzi – Editor, Illustrated Non-fiction

Marian said that most editors come from the big colleges and rarely include people from less privileged backgrounds. The ad for her job was in the *NY Times*.

Marian publishes a lot of cookbooks, and is definitely interested in Australian cookbooks, because of the Olympics! As is standard at SMP, she publishes for three seasons with 8–10 titles in each season: Winter (Sept–Dec), Spring (Jan–April) and Summer (May–Aug).

She leaves checking weights and measurements to the copyeditor, and sees her job as the shaping of the book.

Greg Cohn – Editor, Travel Books

Greg's list comprises niche travel publishing and broad commercial series, for example the *Let's Go* range. Competition from the Internet and CD Roms has affected his publishing decisions. Nice middle-of-the-road publishing just doesn't work any more – eg Bed and Breakfast guides. Packaging is critical.

The main marketing thrust is to send out review copies, resulting in some press coverage. The marketing team is answerable to Greg and to the Director of Marketing – this works well.

Occasionally they will try things like bookmarks and backlist catalogues. Greg also publishes literary travel books as well.

He has also done co-promotional stuff with a record company, producing 50,000 CDs to give away with *Let's Go*.

Michael Flamini – Senior Editor, Scholarly & Reference

Michael compared his job at SMP to that of editor at an in-house university press. He buys a lot of books from Australia which do very well in the US – for example Allen & Unwin's *Quest for the Southern Land*.

He produces 100 books per year in the domestic program. Many of the books have high retail prices and are sold at a low discount.

He classes his books in A,B and C categories: C = books with very low print runs (in the 100s) such as a book about the Kurdish language, B = something like the *Selected Prose of Cristina Rossetti* and A = something like *Dreams and Destinies*, which can sell 20,000 copies.

The Scholarly program is very varied and includes titles dealing with politics, history, literary criticism, religion, education, anthropology and gender/cultural issues.

Seventy per cent of manuscripts require feedback from outside referees before they can be considered seriously. The referees provide detailed reports that are used by the editor and author when revising the ms. Careful line editing is required in history books, for example, to make sure the prose flows and is sequential, so that the reader can grasp the sweep of information. Approximately 50-60% of submissions come from conferences, or from people referred to Michael. There are some agented submissions.

Competition is carefully investigated before a book is taken on. The department uses the resources of the College Marketing Group, which can tell them what courses are scheduled in certain areas and what kinds of books are required. Books are sometimes published simultaneously in hb and pb – for example *21st Century Economics* – \$49.95 for library copies and \$25.00 for students.

Hardcover is standard for the trade. It is very rare for SMP to publish trade pb originals. They also need reviews to bolster sales, the *NY Times* being the most important plus academic journals and smaller specialist organisations.

Michael has two editors working for him and two assistants as well as a specialist economics editor.

Jenna Felice – Editor, Tor Books

It was great to meet Jenna, who is publishing Isobelle Carmody's *Obernewtyn* series in the US. She is energetic, committed and cluey.

Tor started in 1981, and was founded by Tom Doherty. Originally it focussed purely on the mass market, buying pb rights from other houses. When Tor hit hard times, SMP bought the list but allowed it to remain autonomous and stay together as a whole. All production and sales work is done by SMP but the editorial process remains quite separate. Tor does its own publicity and advertising in-house.

Jenna started in 1992 as an intern, part time. It was her lucky break. She loves being in the flatiron building. Jenna also spends a lot of time talking to readers and booksellers. Most of the Australian work she sees is from small presses. She feels they are well intentioned, but don't know enough.

Like many editors, Jenna does freelance proofreading for other publishers to earn extra money (to be able to live in NY ...).

Gordon Van Gelder – Editor, Sci Fi and Popular Culture

Gordon sought me out because Lucy Sussex had told him I was coming. He was planning to visit Australia in September for the World Sci-fi convention. We discussed Ian Irvine's *View from the Mirror* series, which I'd published at Penguin.

Gordon told me a bit more about Tom McCormack. He was apparently a great trainer – very tough on editors, but very good. He would push editors to really explain why a book had to be published – sometimes resulting in people leaving editorial meetings in tears. At the same time, he would also gather assistant editors in his office and impart some of the anecdotal wisdom he had gained over the years.

Barry Neville and Melissa Jacobs – Editors, Thomas Dunne Books

I had breakfast with Barry and Melissa who both work for Tom Dunne.

Tom writes (in the Thomas Dunne catalogue):

I've been at St Martin's Press for over 28 years, so it's safe to say that at one time or another I've published almost every kind of book. My imprint has existed since 1986 and is best characterised as eclectic, roughly 50/50 fiction/non-fiction. Of the books I personally acquire and edit, some of my "biggest" authors come from Britain – Rosamunde Pilcher, Wilbur Smith, and Frederick Forsyth, for example – while the non-fiction is much more heavily American. Of particular interest are history, thrillers, commercial women's fiction, biography, politics, current events, humour and philosophy. But this listing should not exclude most other trade books. The last 15 years, for example, has seen us sell over 1 million copies of various incarnations of The Book of Runes. With something new coming out of our group every other day, and with a wide variety of tastes, backgrounds, even ages (from early twenties to early eighties), I like to think almost any book of commercial or literary merit will be of interest here.

(I've included the above because it summarises so neatly my impression of St Martin's overall.)

Tom's department consists of 3 assistants, Barry, Melissa, and Ruth Cavin. Ruth is Associate Publisher and has been at SMP for 10 years and is 80 years old. Ruth came from Walker where she was known for her mysteries. Ruth operates almost like a freelancer and is very autonomous. Melissa buys her titles through Tom and doesn't have to go through the editorial meeting process. Tom is not afraid of small books, but the library market is now dropping off, making things more difficult.

Melissa works on 25 books per year and the department produces 150 titles per year. Ruth does 12 books.

We talked about what makes a good editor and discussed Jonathan Glassier at FSG. He has a great reputation and has edited 2 national book award winners recently. In an article in the *NY Times*, one author – Tom Wolfe – said he was a very hands-on editor, then another author – a poet – said the exact opposite. Clearly it all depends on the book in question.

We also discussed the future of books and publishing. Both Barry and Melissa were positive, believing that there will always be readers and that publishing shouldn't try to compete with the Hollywood style for film and tv – people read books for different reasons.

Ruth Cavin – Associate Publisher, Thomas Dunne Books

After hearing about Ruth from Melissa and Barry I was very curious to meet her. I'd noticed her in the editorial meetings and found her quite inspiring. Ruth had worked for many years as a freelance editor and writer and as a children's book editor. At SMP she is an editor of mysteries, but also does non-fiction, thrillers, novels, memoirs, and has published a biography of John D Macdonald.

Ruth receives hundreds of manuscripts and not just through agents. Many aren't bad, they're just the same as everything else. Ruth looks for books that are out of the ordinary, that are offering something fresh and different. Sometimes she will publish books that are similar to others, if they are well done and well crafted, but she is mainly looking for original voices.

Joe Rinaldi and Joan Higgins – Publicity Dept

Joe and Joan seemed a little jaded. Clearly publicity is one of the most stressful jobs. The Advertising and Promotion Department has a budget and can spend money, whereas publicity is run on personal energy: setting up reviews, tv appearances, radio interviews, author tours and book signings.

They both agreed it was virtually impossible to interest anyone in a first-time novelist.

Julia Pastore – Editorial Assistant to Tim Bent (in office next to me – biogs, literary non-fiction)

After speaking to so many editors who had been doing the job for years it was interesting to speak to Julia, who has been at SMP for only one year. Her initial job was as Bob Weil's assistant. Bob had come from Norton and had been at SMP for 10 years, publishing serious non-fiction such as *All on Fire*, Jewish books, Henry Roth, Joseph Roth and the bizarre and very serious *Knitting with Dog Hair!*

When Bob left at the end of November, Julia's job was to complete his last three books – a collection of poetry, essays by Arthur C Clarke, a biography of Marian Fry - and look after the backlist.

In college, Julia worked on a newspaper, so felt she had a good grasp of the general editorial process. She did a summer internship at *17* (a teen magazine) and at the *Boston Review*.

To obtain the internship, she approached magazines asking if they needed help and offering to work for no pay. When I asked her how she survived during this period she explained that most people do their internship for, say, three days a week and spend the rest of the week doing paid work. Some people use internships to gain college credits. Publishers like it because it's free labour. The interns like it because it's a good way of getting experience.

As an intern Julia did things like fact-checking, preliminary research, and brainstorming story ideas. She felt very involved in the team at 17 and gained confidence as she worked with 2–3 editors involved with features and tv.

After the internship Julia sent her resumé to magazines that she read and liked. In the last couple of months of college she was increasingly desperately seeking work. Unlike other careers there is no recruiting in publishing. Although she had intended to work with magazines, she is enjoying book publishing, but is sometimes frustrated by the slowness of it.

Her training consisted of trial by fire, but Bob Weil was a great teacher who basically told her to take herself seriously from the beginning. Bob's associate – Andrew Miller (in whose office I was sitting) – was also helpful. It took her about six months to get the hang of things.

Now as assistant to Tim Bent, her average week consists of fielding phone calls, organising books for authors, reading manuscripts, distributing manuscripts and getting feedback, dealing with contracts, dealing with production, and organising photographs when required. In the department, she is the point of contact and can often spare Tim from small queries.

In addition to assisting Tim with his work, Julia still has her own areas of responsibility – Bob's old books and two books she has acquired. It is usual at SMP for editors to start acquiring books earlier than at other houses. Assistant editors need to be keen, interested, on top of things. Hiding in the office won't get them anywhere – initiative is critical.

The general career path for editors goes like this: Editorial Assistant – Assistant Editor – Associate Editor – Editor – Senior Editor – Executive Editor. It is usual to move from the first to second stage in one year but thereafter the journey is unclear. Editors generally have to move houses to be promoted. Promotion is granted according to how well you deal with agents and other editors, and whether your books sell well.

Julia explained that copy-editors are almost always freelancers who are doing other things. She regards it as a skill and an art, but can't imagine doing it in-house.

Mike Curro – Marketing Manager/Internet

Mike has been in this job since August. Before August there was no one person in charge of the Internet. But now he already needs an assistant. Mike's job has two main functions: to market SMP books and sell them. He approaches this by putting information about the books on the Amazon and B&N web-sites, and by seeking to place ads on other relevant websites.

Mike made the point that, in Germany, publishers are brand names and people visit their sites, whereas in the US no one knows who the publishers are, so it's important to find the sites readers *do* visit. For example, for mysteries, there are various club websites for people passionate about the genre. Mike sends books and galleys to these sites. It's important that he gets the tone right – it's not a sales pitch, more of a gentle, soft sell. The ads are appealing to people who are passionate about books, and who will respond to the quality of the book. Empty hype doesn't work with this knowledgeable audience.

Mike wants to make it easier to buy books on-line. He feels this won't necessarily stop people going to bookstores. Of course it's impossible to tell where the sales come from; sometimes it appears as if very few books are sold on the Net. But Mike feels it is like advertising: who knows if the person saw the book on a website and then went and bought it some other way?

Mike feels the Internet has enormous potential: women represent 40% of Internet users, soon to overtake men. Another big audience is pre-12-year-old kids who use the computer for school, games and chat. The Internet can be used for bookselling, book marketing and author relationships

Regarding E-books, Mike is withholding judgement. For professional books, there may be a market, but he feels they are not commercial yet. Companies will need to accept losses to get this technology started, to lower the price point. Presently publishers are charging the same price for an E-book as the cheapest edition of the book – so there is no benefit to the buyer if that cheapest edition is a \$30 hardback.

Val Barocas – VP/Director of Subsidiary Rights/British Rights

Val has been at SMP for 25 years, and deals with lots of Australians. She is a formidable fount of knowledge and seemed the archetypal NY businesswoman. We talked about the changes in publishing over the last 25 years. Frankfurt is no longer the place to do deals – it is primarily a chance to catch up with editors and work on deals that are finalised before or after the actual fair.

Mark Kohout – Sales Director

Mark has been looking after the national accounts for more than a decade and has also worked at Simon & Schuster and Morrow. He feels there have been big changes in sales – particularly the phenomenon of ‘just in time’ buying. 10-15 years ago there was much more speculative buying. Selling was less efficient. Now buyers bring in the essential amount, have better tracking systems than ever, and reorder with staggered buying. He gave the example of *Mr White’s Confession* which was published in Picador as literary fiction even though it is a murder/mystery. Then it won the Edgar Award for the best mystery and now everyone wants it – literary and mainstream markets.

The US retail market falls into 3 categories – Independents and two types of National accounts: mall chainstores and the superstores (which are like the best Independents) Barnes & Noble and Borders/Walden. The superstore phenomenon started 7-8 years ago and got into full gear 5 years ago. Everyone was scared they would put the Independents out of business and to some extent that is true. It is hard for the Independents to hold the same kind of stock and so inevitably they will disappoint customers.

Buyers find it easier to buy for large numbers of stores – around 4000-6000 copies initially. If further stock is required they will then buy from wholesalers, who are required to replenish stock speedily. Ingrams have 7 warehouses and deliver stock within 48 hours. Wholesale accounts have no territorial rights and can sell to anywhere in the country. For example, Anderson Merchandise have their own retail outlets, too.

Mark suggested that the shelf life for most books is 4–6 weeks, maybe only 2 weeks for mass-market books, but some big books can do well for the whole season. He believes that Australian/foreign books don’t do so well because of US parochialism. Americans like to read other Americans. Foreign authors have a much harder time. They know Robert Hughes and Germaine Greer, but that’s it (ex-pats ...)

Regarding children’s books, Mark feels the market is dominated by lower price point titles – the chains dictate this. Lots of old favourites still do well – *Goodnight Moon*, for example, is still selling 40 years on. Word of mouth is very important and of course children’s books rely heavily on reviews in library journals. He does feel that the library market has become healthier and is pretty strong.

One Christmas as a young book buyer, Mark learned this about children’s books – just fill the store with ones and twos and the books will melt away. The books found buyers just by being

there. That is a fundamental difference between children's books and the adult market. Buyers will read the books and people are looking for quality.

Regarding E-books Mark has 2 opinions: 1) They will stay marginal as hi-tech toys appealing to a small percentage of the market; 2) They will become hugely popular as the world moves towards wireless communication. Mark thinks the price will settle around \$12–14.

On another tack we talked about bookshops printing and binding books on demand. Mark felt that books produced in this way might even look better than most books, as the colour separations come direct from the computer. The books could be produced on whatever paper the customer desires. The technology is there ...

Mark does feel that the relationship between the author and the editor will still be an essential part of the process. But the question will be, does the publisher print or does the market print? For small reprints, lightning print could be the answer.

John Cunningham – Associate Publisher

John feels the world is changing rapidly and that we can't continue to publish the way it's always been done: the world is a different place. He thinks E-books will definitely have a big impact and that publishers should start to see themselves as producing 'text' rather than books. John had a very interesting theory that Barnes & Noble, by setting up like big Independents, are influencing reading patterns, with bestsellers now more literary than they were in the past. John says SMP is publishing many more titles in trade paperback. Everyone likes this format because you make more money. There is not the same degree of price difference between trade pb and mass-market pb editions, so people tend to pay those few extra dollars to get a better edition. John thinks E-books may eventually take over mass-market publishing.

Regarding children's books, John feels that too much publishing is geared for adult buyers. We need to be careful not to lose the kids, as they are still receptive to seeing books as one of many ways to get information and entertainment.

Tim Bent – Editor for SMP/Griffin, Literary Fiction/Non-fiction

Tim was in the office next door to me and we discussed publishing courses. He had done the Radcliffe course in 1990. Tim had come from an academic background. He has a PhD and had taught in Winston Salem, North Carolina, before deciding that he wanted to be editor.

A job fair is held after the course and Tim was eventually hired as Peter Mayer's assistant at Penguin. He then worked at Arcade (publisher of literary fiction, non-fiction, and distributed by Little Brown) as assistant editor and eventually senior editor.

Tim found the course useful because it gave him the chance to meet potential employers informally (he met Sally Richardson there). The course provides a network. One disadvantage is the cost (US\$2500) and the fact that people gain false expectations of the job market and what the actual jobs entail. Radcliffe now provides scholarships to admit applicants from minority groups.

Other editorial courses include those at RICE University in Texas (a private college), the Denver Publishing Course run by Elizabeth Geiser, NYC University's Masters program in publishing, and Stanford's course for mid-career publishing. This is a seminar held over two weeks. Companies normally send young executives to give them an overview of the publishing industry.

Students just out of college tend to go to Radcliffe, RICE or Denver. Most editors are English majors.

Greenwillow/Morrow Junior Books, New York

June 14 – July 2

Morrow Junior Books

I spent two weeks at Morrow Junior Books with Barbara Lalicki, and one week with Susan Hirschman at Greenwillow. During this last period in New York, I also arranged many other appointments with children's editors, publishers, critics and librarians. Because I was constantly popping in and out of the office, and Barbara and Susan were away for a short time at the ALA conference in New Orleans, I felt as if I didn't fully immerse myself in the day-to-day life in the office. It was also slightly awkward as on my second day there was an announcement that News Corporation had decided to expand HarperCollins with the purchase of the Hearst Corporation's Avon Books and William Morrow & Company. This seemed to come as a shock to everyone I came in contact with, though there had been rumours that a takeover was imminent.

As Morrow has seven children's imprints (Beech Tree Books, Greenwillow Books, Lothrop, Lee & Shepherd Books, Morrow Junior Books, Mulberry Books and Tupelo Books), clearly a merger with HarperCollins, who have a similar number of imprints, implies big changes for everyone.

I did enjoy being in a children's book environment again and was delighted to spend time browsing the library shelves, which included old favourites like the *Ramona* books by Beverley Cleary and the work of Maurice Sendak, Kevin Henkes, Stephen Kellogg and Jerry Pinkney. There was great excitement because the new Ramona book for 15 years was about to be published: *Ramona's World*. The focus is on solid, traditional children's publishing, predominantly for an institutional market. Over the years, Greenwillow has also published a lot of Australian writers and illustrators such as Emily Rodda and Jeannie Baker.

The midtown environment was quite different to downtown Manhattan (which I now regarded as home). Full of high-rise buildings, the pace seemed faster in this centre for business. Daily I would walk past the imposing buildings, which housed the offices of Simon & Schuster, Random House and McGraw Hill, on the way to join the crowds on the peak-hour subway trains. I also spent a lot of time in the Donnell Centre branch of the NY library, just round the corner from the office.

Morrow Junior Books

On my first day, I met Barbara Lalicki, Senior Vice President and Editor-in-Chief of Morrow Junior Books, and was introduced to her assistant Rachel Orr, who I sat next to during my time there. It was interesting to attend my first editorial meeting in a children's environment. I also met Susan Hirschman and Virginia Duncan from Greenwillow and we all had lunch together. Barbara and Susan were very interested to hear all about my time at Front Street with Stephen's publishing engendering a lot of healthy discussion!

I spent my time at Morrow helping to deal with unsolicited manuscripts, preparing reader's reports for various manuscripts, familiarising myself with the list, researching the story of Santa Claus to assist an author. I was asked to comment on a book in production that was based on an Aboriginal Dreamtime story. This was a good opportunity to discuss issues particularly pertinent to Australian children's publishing. It was interesting to compare this project with the controversy generated by the African American picture book, *Nappy Hair*, by Carolivia Herron, and illustrated by Joe Cepeda. This book had been deemed racist by the black parents at one NY school, leading to the resignation of the teacher who had introduced it to her 3rd Grade class.

I was also asked to comment on the Americanisation of a UK novel being purchased for the Morrow list. This was not just a question of the odd word here and there, it was also an opportunity for the author to revisit the book editorially.

Greenwillow

I ended up spending about a week with Susan at Greenwillow. I occupied the office of Ava Weiss, the Art Director, who was on leave. I liked Susan enormously, but was also aware that she was under a lot of pressure with the negotiations taking place regarding the merger with HarperCollins.

I did some reader's reports for Susan and it was great to immerse myself in some real editorial work. I also checked final pages of some picture books in production and spent a lot of time reading Greenwillow picture books and trying to identify the qualities that made them so child-friendly.

I was glad to have the chance to hear Susan speak at the New York Publishing Course organised by Norma Jean Sawicki. This is where I ended up hearing the most about her background and her publishing philosophy.

In 1974, Susan resigned as Editor-in-Chief at Macmillan and moved to Morrow where she started the Greenwillow imprint. Greenwillow is now legendary, with many awards under its belt.

But Susan's publishing career really started in 1953, when she was first out of college and started at Knopf in a secretarial position. There she attended the New England Library Association Conference and met Ursula Nordstrom and Maurice Sendak. A short time later, through a set of fortuitous circumstances, Susan started at Harper.

In those days, the present 15,000 unsolicited manuscripts received at Greenwillow each year numbered 'only' 2000 and Susan's first job at Harper was to read them all and write a report for Ursula. Ursula would say that if there was one good line in the manuscript, she wanted to see it, to encourage the author. This approach was designed to keep everyone alert to the fact that all authors start with a first book.

Ursula published what she believed in and was backed in her endeavours by librarians who supported the books. Now the main buyers are parents in bookstores who don't use the same criteria as librarians when selecting books. This phenomenon has led to the inflated picture book – books that look wonderful, but don't deliver in terms of their content. People judge books by their covers but don't realise they aren't satisfying until it's too late.

The test used by Greenwillow staff is whether or not children will finish a book and want to read it again. Books need to be read again, not just once. A picture book should be like an onion – with layers. What is the under-story? A story is good if you don't get everything on the first reading. What is not said is so important. Susan analysed Tomi Ungerer's *CriCTOR*, *the Boa Constrictor* at this point. The subtleties of the illustrations make the child feel clever, and yet the book never breaks the boundaries of what could happen. The story shape is satisfying, leading us into the author's logical world, where we are able to suspend our disbelief due to the believable logic of the characters.

Ursula taught Susan the importance of not breaking phrases in books for beginner readers, to assist young children with their reading. So in 1957, the *I can read* series was launched. As good ideas seem to occur synchronistically, the *Cat in the Hat* series was launched at the same time – but both series helped each other's success.

Regarding fiction, Susan believes this comes from the inside out. If novels are commissioned, somehow they are like cardboard. Non-fiction can be commissioned, however.

Susan sees her role as publisher to build authors, to help them make their second book better than the first, and believes that a good publishing list includes authors of all ages.

Greenwillow doesn't run a P&L before it acquires ... though obviously the trend is now to be much more commercial.

Susan believes there are intrinsic differences in marketing books for children. It must be on a smaller scale than adult marketing. It needs to be more local, involving author travel, readings, speaking engagements, magazine interviews, radio shows, postcards, school visits.

I wished I'd had more time to really tap into Susan's vast store of anecdotes and publishing wisdom. But I did glean something from my time there, and probably, sadly, it was that middle-sized companies like Morrow are the ones that are most likely to be squeezed to their death in this present climate.

Other Meetings in NY and LA

Through my contacts in Bologna and recommendations of friends and colleagues, I had a huge list of people I wanted to meet in New York and also on the West Coast. It was quite an organisational feat to fit everyone in but it was great to have an excuse to visit so many different publishing environments. Here is a brief summary of the people I met.

Children's Publishers

- *Holiday House*

I had read a book about the history of Holiday House and was keen to see what the offices of this small independent publisher were like. My meeting was with editor Mary Cash, who I'd met in Bologna. Although John and Kate Briggs were not there, I was introduced to the other staff members, including Regina Griffin and Claire Counihan, the Art Director, in the beautiful open-plan loft environment. Holiday House publish very much for the institutional market with a great range of picture books, fiction and non-fiction. One of their specialities is to develop new illustrators. Original artwork lined the walls, and bookshelves contained copies of all their books, from 1935 to the present. All departments shared this space, including editorial, orders, customer service, marketing and sales.

Mary Cash

Mary has been in publishing for 20 years. She had worked on a newspaper in college and discovered that she enjoyed the editorial process. When she applied for the Radcliffe course, she was required to write an essay about the kind of editorial work she'd like to do. Although she hadn't really thought about this, she realised that one of her main interests was illustration. Then, at the interview, she was asked whether she'd be prepared to move to New York and was told that FSG were looking for an assistant. So she went to work at FSG, for Stephen, as it happened! She eventually moved to BDD (Bantam, Doubleday, Dell) where she was editorial director for children's hardcovers. Three years ago she moved to Holiday House. She enjoys working at HH very much and feels it offers her a lot of scope. If she really loves a book and can put up a convincing argument, she will be able to do it, though John Briggs does have the last word. Holiday House publish 50 books a year, with a staff of 13.

Mary was about to attend the ALA conference in New Orleans. This conference provides publishers with direct feedback from librarians and teachers and is where the Newbery and Caldicott medals are presented. The library market (schools and public libraries) is the biggest market for the books Holiday House produce. One librarian at a previous conference

had suggested to Mary that there was a need for a definitive biography of Helen Keller, which seemed surprising to Mary as there is quite a lot of material available. However, this feedback resulted in a book being commissioned.

On the role of editors, Mary had an interesting perspective. She felt that the famous 'maternal' role was unhealthy and that some NY editors had built their careers by making authors dependent on them. She prefers to work with authors in a way that allows them to stand on their own two feet!

- *Farrar, Straus and Giroux*

After my meeting with Subsidiary Rights Associate, Karen Coeman, in Bologna, and because of Stephen Roxburgh's association with FSG, I was very pleased to visit the offices of the company, with its solid literary reputation and 50 years of history. This was an archetypal publisher's office – like a rabbit warren! I met with Karen to discuss the FSG list, and Kendra Poster, Director of International Rights. I was also introduced to Wes Adams (editor) and Frances Foster and arranged a longer meeting with Frances for a later date.

Frances Foster

After recently leaving Knopf, Frances now has her own imprint at FSG. All her books are produced with great care and attention to detail. Frances works 3 days a week and has a list 12 books per year, ranging from picture books to young adult fiction. Her titles, such as Louis Sacher's *Holes*, frequently win awards and were an inspiration to me. Frances' books are in hardback, and she said paperback is where the trade sales are. Rights sales account for a large chunk of income.

Kendra Poster

FSG publish Les Murray in the US. He is well reviewed but hasn't taken off sales-wise yet. She made the interesting comment that Australian books can do well in the US, but are most successful if they look as if they are produced locally. She sees no gain in emphasising novelty value, as the books are judged for their literary qualities.

Kendra believes that kids aren't buying their books in bookstores. They might have \$5 per month to spend on books and generally choose to do so through Scholastic bookclubs.

- *HarperCollins*

Alix Reid, Executive Editor

Alix is Bruce Whatley's editor and she was extremely friendly and charming. Over dinner we talked about the state of US publishing. Alix feels the days of multiple-book contracts and

huge advances are over. In fact advances are comparable to those in Australia. Of course, some illustrators in huge demand (as potential award-winners) command much higher fees.

- *Viking Penguin*

I really enjoyed my visit to the Penguin offices. It was like meeting old friends, as I'd corresponded with so many of them over the years. My meeting was with Sharyn November, Senior Editor for Puffin and Viking. Her job is clearly enormous and her chaotic office reflected this. I found it interesting that she regularly visits schools and invites kids and teenagers to respond to books and covers on her website. She is a wonderfully vibrant, eccentric person, and I was only sorry that her workload prevented us from spending more time together. I also had lunch with Melanie Cecka and her colleague, Cathy (both Viking editors).

- *Henry Holt*

Laura Godwin is Judith Clarke's editor in the US. I immediately felt as if we were on the same wavelength. She showed me books she had bought in from overseas publishers and told me why she felt they would work in the US. She imports only those books they can't do for themselves, with print runs of about 5000 copies. We talked about the editorial process and she said for her it was a question of letting people do what they know how to do and to be patient. 'Don't try to control everything!' She gave the example of a talented illustrator who needed help to develop a storyline for an exquisite character he'd created. Laura knew he could draw, and she knew about books and publishing, so she sat with him and showed him *Goodnight Moon*, *Harold and the Purple Crayon* and *The Runaway Bunny*. She said to him, 'You've got 14 spreads, now you have to tell a story.' The illustrator sat there staring and finally said, 'I know what you mean', and was able to go away and develop a storyline for his character.

Laura was disturbed by the mergers. She felt it reflected short-term thinking from management – the idea of making a profit over 4 years, then moving on. Holt is an independent company with decentralised management.

The 70/30 ratio of library/trade sales is still true for Holt. They do publish books for schools, but endeavour to make them look 'cool'. Average print runs used to be 10,000 copies, now they are 7500 or 8500. Picture books are now \$17 or \$18.95 (one with a CD was \$19.95). They used to be \$15.00, but sales haven't dropped. The Holt list is 60% picture books, 40% middle grade and YA. They publish only exceptional YAs.

- *Simon & Schuster*

Rebecca Davis, Editor

Rebecca has worked closely with Gary Crew, Gillian Rubinstein, Caroline Macdonald and Patricia Mullins. When we met, Rebecca had just resigned from S&S to start work at Orchard Books. Rebecca had famously asked Gary Crew to rewrite the ending of *Angel's Gate* for the US market. She said that librarians say that 'foreign' words and concepts get in the way of kids' enjoyment of Australian books, though kids themselves disagree. Overall she thinks too many books are being published. S&S publish 200–300 books per year with 3 hardback imprints, in essence competing with each other. She also feels that superstores are having a profound effect. Barnes & Noble have one buyer for the whole country and are killing the Independents.

Judith Curr, President, Pocket Books

At S&S I also met with Judith who is clearly in a high-powered management role at S&S. She introduced me to Patricia MacDonald, Vice-President and Editorial Director of Pocket Children's Books. Pocket have a huge and fascinating list in all areas.

- *Random House*

Pam White

It was good to see Pam again in her office habitat. She has a huge job in rights, part of which includes finding ways to exploit existing copyright.

Anne Mah

Anne is Adeline Yen Mah's daughter (I'd worked with Adeline on *Chinese Cinderella*). She works in the Rights department at Random House and we enjoyed a general chat about publishing over lunch.

- *Orchard*

Orchard are the publishers of *Looking for Alibrandi*. Judy Wilson, President and Publisher, is lovely and I also enjoyed meeting their marketing manager, Debbie Hochman. We discussed their wonderful new picture book, *Arlene Sardine*, written and illustrated by Chris Raschka, and I met Sarah Caguit, Jen McVeity's editor, and Rebecca Davis, who had just started there. I would have happily spent more time at Orchard. The office was small but the atmosphere very pleasant.

- *Scholastic*

I arranged to meet Craig Walker on Jacquie Kent's recommendation. We had a terrific meeting and I gained an insight into the amazing machine that is Scholastic. Craig is good friends with Stephen and he joked that he and Stephen represent the opposite ends of the spectrum in children's publishing (Stephen being the Eric Clapton of the industry!).

We talked about series, covers, and the vagaries of marketing. As we ran out of time, we arranged to meet the following week, but unfortunately this meeting became a casualty of my illness, to my great disappointment.

Agents

- *Liv Blumer, Karpfinger Agency*

I contacted Liv on Patrick's recommendation and visited her at her spacious Central Park West apartment for a drink. We talked in general about the NY publishing scene. Her view was that in this huge market some books are simply very big while others sink without trace. As she owned two quite eccentric cats, I gave her copies of Leigh Hobbs' *Old Tom* series. She liked them but commented that they didn't look like children's books. She felt the illustrations would be seen as too scary but offered that 'we protect our children too much'.

- *Laura Paterson (ICM)*

It was great to catch up with Laura in her high-powered office environment. We had drinks in the rooftop bar at the Peninsula (hideously expensive, but a great view). Laura sells foreign rights at ICM. As a Canadian who spent several years working in Australia, her perspective on Australian publishers was interesting. We do operate in a small environment and I had the thought that really what we need as training for editors is a greater variety of role models. People seem to learn the most when they are able to work alongside someone who inspires them to do their best. Maybe we should look at the possibilities of exchange programs.

We also talked about the danger of publishers dramatically cutting their lists and thereby cutting back the vitality of their publishing ... As an agent, Laura was worried by the recent mergers, which have created a shrinking market for authors.

- *Liz Fried (Scout)*

Nancy Zimmerman suggested I contact Liz (an old employee of hers) who works as a scout for German, Italian, Israeli and Norwegian publishers. Her job involves reading lots of US and Canadian books and showing them to editors. Her role is somewhere between that of an agent and a publisher: she knows all the rights' people and editors. Liz's background is interesting too. She has worked in advertising and did some research for Levi's that involved interviewing teenage girls in New York and London. The UK girls seemed to have more traditional concerns whereas the NY kids were spouting the views of their analysts! The kids' fears were not of massacres or nuclear war, but aliens!

- *George Nicholson – Sterling Lord Literistic Inc*

Julie Watts and Agnes Nieuwenhuizen had suggested I visit George and I found him charming and informative. He is a big fan of Nicole Plüss's *Beach Baby* (which I'd edited) and we speculated why this wonderful book has yet to find a US publisher. I asked him lots of questions about librarians and their role in the publishing process. He explained that editors were librarians from 1918 to the 1940s, and their audience was trained teachers and librarians. In 1967, under President Johnson, money was poured into libraries and schools, for systems and books. The money had to be spent and there was no discrimination in the buying. But then there were the cutbacks of the 80s. Library schools at universities closed – there weren't enough students, and graduates weren't rich enough to support programs with no corporate support. So the actual training of children's librarians was reduced. People are now coming through the system without the history. Public education is at the mercy of cost-cutting. Publishers are producing books to fit the curriculum. Big houses are all into niches. Holiday House, for example, concentrates largely on illustrated books.

Authors/Illustrators

- *Matthew Martin (Australian illustrator)*

It was great to catch up with Matthew. He has now lived in New York for about 10 years and wouldn't live anywhere else. He was producing cartoons for *The Village Voice* and *The New York Times*. Matthew and his partner, Rachel, photography editor at *Rolling Stone* magazine, were great fun to socialise with and we particularly enjoyed a game of baseball at Yankee Stadium! We also visited the Society of Illustrators Museum of American Illustration which was holding an exhibition which included one of Matthew's pieces. The range of work and styles was very inspiring.

- *Bruce Whatley (Australian illustrator)*

Bruce invited us to visit his family in New Hampshire. He relocated to the US four years ago after being offered a multiple-book contract by HarperCollins. His work is very popular in the US and he has just completed several books, including *Twelve Days of Christmas* and a *Teddy Bears Picnic* book which includes a cassette by Jerry Garcia.

- *Brigid Lowry (Australian author of Guitar Highway Rose)*

Brigid was in town with her partner Paul and we met up at the Algonquin. It was great to compare travel stories!

- *Leonard Marcus*

Leonard is an historian, biographer, and critic who has written many books (including *Dear Genius*, and *Margaret Wise Brown: Awakening the Moon*) and is also the chief children's books reviewer at *Parenting* magazine. We talked about the state of children's publishing in the US and the job of reviewers. He talked about how interesting it is to interview authors and illustrators regarding their working habits. His interest in children's books arose when he was researching for a PhD in history regarding 19th century children's books in Europe and the US, and how they reflected social values. He feels the tensions remain very much the same today as they were then. There are two camps: 1) those who say that it is good to develop children's imaginations, and 2) those who say imagination is dangerous and that literature should educate and have a moral dimension.

- *Adeline Yen Mah*

It was great to meet Adeline, author of *Falling Leaves* and *Chinese Cinderella*, and her husband Bob in LA, after conducting our author–editor relationship by phone and fax. We had dinner at her home and felt some triumph in successfully navigating our way through the LA freeway system. *Falling Leaves* was still on the best-seller lists in the US.

Magazine Editors

- *Roger Sutton – Editor of The Horn Book*

Although I wasn't able to meet Roger in person, we had a long chat on the phone.

A large percentage (about 70%) of *The Horn Book's* readership consists of librarians – public and school. The magazine has a circulation of 15,000. It is seen as the leading journal in the US, and has broader appeal than *School Library Journal* and *Booklist* which each have a circulation of 30,000. Lots of parents buy it (who don't know about *Booklist* and *SLJ*), as *The Horn Book* is the only journal available in bookstores. These sales number 1000 copies, so name recognition is definitely a factor.

The magazine was founded 75 years ago by Bertha Mahony Miller who had run the Bookshop for Girls and Boys (see history on website: www.hbook.com). It was begun as a magazine to suggest the purchase of books – and that is still its ethic today.

Roger's role as editor is to organise reviews and solicit articles; he also has two senior editors. Very little useful stuff comes in the mail. People tend to submit term papers, or sentimental pieces about childhood.

Reviewers come from a variety of backgrounds: some are working librarians, one is a professor of children's literature, others are staff members and people with immense experience who have been associated with *The Horn Book* for many years. Roger matches books to reviewers but likes to swap them around to avoid the same people reviewing the same kinds of books and writers.

The general review philosophy is still to provide a recommendation to buy, but Roger has instigated a less generous reviewing style in keeping with his background as editor of *The Bulletin*. He isn't sure about the impact of reviews on sales. Obviously it depends on the book. For example, Roger was asked to comment on the *Little House* books being now available in a board book format. Of course, *The Horn Book* hates this kind of publishing, but that opinion won't have any effect on sales. With a literary novel, however, that sells only in institutions, reviews can have a profound impact and can make or break a book.

Roger is depressed about the current state of US publishing. He feels it is less adventurous than it's been. He is glad that places like Front Street exist, publishers who are committed to books that may not sell a lot of copies but are still making an important contribution to the nation's body of work. He feels that dedication to an author's body of work is missing in the present climate.

Roger loses patience with picture books that are trying to appeal to older kids and adults because he feels the child audience is the one being short-changed. For example, he felt that Raymond Briggs's *Tin Pot General and the Iron Lady* was too didactic and was seen as 'deep' for kids but too simplistic for adults. Interestingly, though, Roger doesn't feel that

Sonya Hartnett's work falls between two stools. He sees her audience as YA and gave *Sleeping Dogs* a starred review in *The Bulletin*.

Roger sees important similarities between the US and Australia, due to the fact that we are both ex-colonies of the 'Mother Country'. He loved *Looking for Alibrandi* for this reason.

Academics/Children's Literati

- *Barbara Kiefer – Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum and Teaching, Teacher's College, Columbia State University*

Barbara was great and terrifically interesting. She is the author of *The Potential of Picturebooks* (1995, Prentice-Hall), a fascinating study aimed at teachers, librarians, art educators and parents. Barbara has been on the Caldicott Committee and runs courses in children's literature at Columbia.

Barbara gave me an overview of children's publishing in the US. Prior to the 90s, approximately 2000 children's books were published annually in the US. Now that figure is around 6000. Obviously it is impossible for librarians to read all these books, let alone the classics of the past, so they rely on children's review journals for guidance: 1) *The Horn Book*, 2) *School Library Journal*, 3) *Booklist*, 4) *The Bulletin* (not as good as it was, in Barbara's opinion), 5) *Kirkus*, 6) *Publishers Weekly*. Barbara is concerned that the effect of the mergers will mean less adventurous books. She really admires Stephen Roxburgh and Susan Hirschman and feels that librarians on the whole are very receptive to interesting, original books.

I was interested to hear about the Caldicott Medal, which is presented annually to an illustrator for the quality of their illustrations in a children's picture book. There are fourteen people on the committee, all librarians. The award is announced in January and presented at a banquet during the American Library Association conference in June.

I was also interested to find out more about librarians, given their enormous influence. In the 60s and 70s there was active government support for libraries, which led to an increase in the number of books being published. Funds were cut in the 80s, just as the whole language movement and literature based learning gained momentum and teachers' interest in books increased. Now the trend is back to phonics.

- *Paula Quint – Children’s Book Council*

Paula was immensely energetic and imparted masses of information in our one-hour meeting. The US Children’s Book Council has a different role to the CBC in Australia. It is a trade organisation that endeavours to support and facilitate growth activities for its members, who are publishers.

Here is an extract from a flyer:

The Children’s Book Council (CBC) is a non-profit trade association of children’s book publishers and producers of related literacy materials. The purpose of the CBC is to promote the use and enjoyment of children’s trade books and related materials, and to disseminate information about books for young people and about trade book publishing. Working with our members and outside educational organisations, we create programs, publications and reading-encouragement materials that promote literacy among young people. Much of our work is accomplished through our liasons with librarians, booksellers, and educators, which bring children and books together by encouraging reading through the creation of strong, quality collections in libraries, classrooms and bookstores.

Paula is concerned that five conglomerates now control 80% of publishing – Bertelsmann, Murdoch, Pearson, Von Holtzbrinck and Disney. The library at the CBC offices was fantastic – including the last two years’ crop of new books as well as all the journals. Paula explained the awards system to me. In short, every state has its own awards which can be enormously influential on sales. The only national awards that have a corresponding effect are the Newbery and the Caldicott.

I came away with a bundle of material produced by the CBC, including *Not Just for Children Anymore!* (162 Children’s Books, including 41 classics, that adults will enjoy and buy for themselves), a book listing all national and international awards, and other resource materials that may be of interest to our own children’s organisations.

- *Norma Jean Sawicki, Coordinator of NYU Publishing Course*

After years of hearing Norma Jean spoken of affectionately in publishing circles, it was great to talk at length over dinner after meeting her briefly at the NY University Publishing Course (when Susan Hirschman was speaking). She has enormous knowledge of the publishing industry and is concerned about the current developments. She feels the wheel will keep turning full circle, however, and believes that quality and dedication will win out in the end!

- Julie Cummins, NY Children's Librarian, Donnell Centre, NY Public Library

This was a meeting I had to cancel, but Julie and I managed to speak on the phone instead. I asked her about the influence of librarians on children's publishing. She told me that the library market used to be 85–95% of all children's book sales. This number went down as children's books were merchandised with increasing vigour and superstores introduced activity programs. But when the bookstores' right of return started to have a negative impact, library sales started to go up again, as publishers again recognised the importance of nurturing this market.

Julie observes lots of books being published under small imprints and believes many won't last. She also sees trade publishers recognising that the children's backlist is its underpinning, something the bean-counters have ignored until now. More attention is being directed to the maintenance of the backlist: publishers are bringing books back into print, and adapting standard picture books into different formats, such as board books. Sometimes this strategy doesn't work. Merchandising, a la *Curious George*, is phenomenal. Julie thinks if plush toys lead the kids back to classics, that's a good thing, but the trend to Disneyfy everything is depressing when kids no longer know the original story.

Libraries don't buy everything. Julie, for example, receives thousands of gratis and review copies of new books from publishers. To assess the books, staff rely on reviews from colleagues or those in published journals. As children's material specialist, her office is the centre for this. Staff order on-line with their major business going through Baker & Taylor.

Julie thinks the quality of new books coming out is excellent. There has been an increase in the number of series books and non-fiction to serve curriculum needs. There has also been an increase in 'bad' books, people out for fast bucks. In bookstores, customers need to know what they want as the staff can't help them. Grandparents are caught by advertising, or by a well-known name, or an award citation – any seal at all is seen as a good thing. Libraries make lists of recommendations, as people require guidance. The NY Public Library list of 100 titles is very influential as a buying guide for the general public. Lists from different sources tend to only partially overlap, giving a broader number of books a chance to be recognised. Regarding the *Harry Potter* phenomenon – a children's book appearing on adult bestseller lists – Julie wasn't aware of it being marketed as an adult book but she does feel it has crossover appeal (obviously proven by its commercial success).

Julie feels there is a lack of support for experimental work. New staff are often more conservative than older staff. She thinks it's sad that the younger generation is Internet-focussed in terms of information, to the detriment of reading. At the same time she believes

books will always exist and has no interest in Rocket or E-books. We concluded our conversation by agreeing that children's literature is the best written literature around today!

- *Patty Campbell*

I was delighted to meet Patty, whose articles I'd read with great interest over the years. She is kind of a US equivalent of Agnes Nieuwenhuizen – enthusiastic, energetic and influential. I met her and her husband David in their glorious home near San Diego. Patty was originally a librarian and that's when she became passionately interested in YA books. She has written many books herself, about teen sex issues, and travel books with David – Europe and NZ by minivan – as well as critical books about authors such as Robert Cormier (*Presenting Robert Cormier* by Patricia J Campbell, Twayne Publishers, Boston, Mass.). She has also edited a number of books about other authors in this series (and teaches belly-dancing!). In a conversation that ended all too quickly (but was to be continued via e-mail) she recommended that I read: *French Town Summer* – Robert Cormier, *Vanishing* – Bruce Brooks, *Monster* – Walter Dean Myers, *The Contender* – Robert Lipsyte, *When she was good* – Norma Fox Mazer, *Crazy Jack* – Donna Jo Napoli, *Soldier's Heart* – Gary Paulsen and *Running Loose* – Chris Crutcher.

She is very familiar with the work of John Marsden and Sonya Hartnett and is looking forward to hearing about more Australian authors.

- *Society of Children's Books Writers and Illustrators*

Jen McVeity, the Australian contact for SCBWI, provided me with masses of information about this organisation for writers and illustrators. Many publishers mentioned the good work of SCBWI, which has single-handedly raised the professionalism of children's book writers and illustrators in the US through a network of state-based groups that organise conferences, talks, seminars, and fantastic support material.

- *The Small Press Centre (20 West 44th Street)*

Leonard Marcus suggested I visit the Small Press Centre. It is located in an historic midtown Manhattan building on the ground floor of the General Society Library of Mechanics and Tradesmen. It is a non-profit organisation that supports books published by small independent presses. It is a place for independent publishers to promote their books and to learn more about their craft. The Small Press Centre maintains a Reference Centre with over 400 books on writing, publishing and updated resource materials. Annual programs include the Small Press Fair, a year-round display of books, workshops on all aspects of publishing,

lectures, reading and thematic book exhibits. Karin Taylor, Executive Director, was extremely nice and helpful.

Extra-curricula activities

Highlights in New York included visiting the galleries and museums – the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan, the Frick, the Whitney, the Museum of Natural History. It was just fantastic to see so many familiar works of art in the flesh and to feel so visually stimulated. *Death of a Salesman*, which was playing in the Eugene O'Neill theatre, had to be the major highlight. This was a profoundly moving experience – Brian Dennehy and Elizabeth Franz were quite brilliant and I was ecstatic to get their autographs later, outside the stage door. It was also fascinating being almost crushed to death in the Puerto Rican parade on 5th Avenue on Puerto Rican day (à la *Seinfeld*) and to experience two extreme New York heatwaves.

Obviously I enjoyed the bookshops immensely, from the amazing range of stock in The Strand and Barnes & Noble, as well as the children's specialist stores, the wonderful Bank Street Bookstore and Books of Wonder. All shops produce catalogues to assist buyers. The Barnes & Noble *Guide to Children's Books* seemed particularly comprehensive, and Books of Wonder produce a series of tantalising catalogues of *Collectible Children's Books*.

On the West Coast it was great to experience Disneyland (!), the tourist sights and the fabulous San Diego zoo.

A Report on Editorial Training

The information contained in previous Fellowship reports – particularly the course information in Bernadette Foley’s report – is still applicable, according to the editors I spoke to. So rather than repeat it all here, I have added my own observations and thoughts about editorial training in general.

On-the-job training is still seen by most editors and management as the only way to learn the craft of editing. Courses provide a good general background, but nothing beats hands-on experience. However, as workloads have increased across the board, the kind of direct supervision that is required is simply not possible for most organisations. This is a concern. The fact that so much copy-editing occurs on a freelance basis means that these basic skills are not being passed on. More and more books are produced on tighter schedules, squeezing out the time required for thoughtful, creative editing. This is not always a bad thing, but I think we are at a crossroads now where many editors feel frustrated because they don’t feel they have the time and support to give books and authors the best editorial attention.

Most young editors are thrown into the job and are expected to pick up skills as they go. But what are these skills? Do we need to prioritise what editors do? Where do marketing and interpersonal skills fit with the discussion of ideas and structure and finer points of language usage and literary qualities? What is publishing all about now? And how do editors fit into the scheme of things?

Elizabeth Geiser, who runs the Denver Publishing Institute (see below), believes it is more important now than ever before to equip editors with proper training. As more publishing houses are bought out by big business, it is time for us to view ourselves more professionally. Personally, I think no course can equal the one-to-one experience of working with a senior editor who inspires you to do your best. There are so many different kinds of editors and the skills they bring seem to depend largely on their personalities. Like writers, editors develop their own style. This style will not work for all authors and may not be appropriate to all publishing houses. Sometimes speed is the main criteria. For literary houses, a much higher value is placed on making the book the best it can be editorially, in the hope that it will survive for longer than 2 months.

So what is the answer? At Front Street, Stephen takes the approach of involving all his staff in everything that is going on. At the same time, he expects them to learn quickly and to have a certain amount of initiative. It is the individual’s responsibility to acquire background training. In children’s books, for example, it is absolutely vital that editors know the classics

and try to keep up-to-date with the current crop of award-winners and bestsellers. It was clear at St Martin's that the 'small team' approach was also favoured. Editorial assistants are teamed with editors who take responsibility for on-the-job training. But the form this takes depends very much on the senior editors involved and on the assistants' commitment to the job. The fact that assistants almost invariably have to move houses to gain promotion means that some senior editors may be reluctant to invest vast amounts of time in their training. So again it falls back on the individual.

But there are basic standards that we need to be mindful of. For myself, I felt quite challenged doing the editorial work at Front Street and Morrow/Greenwillow and found I enjoyed being in an environment where an author's ideas and intent were carefully analysed. I know it sounds ridiculous, but the best thing for me was literally having time to read! I read so many novels, and rediscovered the joy of reading. I also spent ages looking at picture books (an area I have felt less comfortable with in the past) and thinking about what made them work and not work. A basic standard would have to be making books that people want to read, and own, and read again. In the rush to produce more and more books, I think we do need to remember that. Young editors should read about 'old' editors. The best book for the training of children's editors that I've ever come across is *Dear Genius, the Letters of Ursula Nordstrom*.

We talk a lot about editors as 'project managers', as needing to be multi-skilled. This is true to a degree, but I think what is often missed is the commitment to nurturing a young editor's strengths. We simply can't be all things to all people, so our special skills need to be acknowledged and valued. We might have a clear analytical brain when it comes to the manuscript, but be less comfortable in a marketing meeting. We might have perfect copy-editing skills but be less confident with the big picture. I really think it is a case of helping people build on their strengths and supporting them if and when additional, different skills are required. It's finding a balance between pushing people to extend themselves, without taking them over the edge!

So, if we accept that the best training is by example, then we should look at how we are providing mentors in large companies for less experienced staff. Other initiatives like the APA's Residential Training Courses for Editors and indeed the Beatrice Davis Fellowship are a good start. The value of international exchange programs or the sponsoring of editors to attend bookfairs could also be investigated. So much of our industry depends on personal contact and the opportunity to meet colleagues in person can be hugely beneficial. Virtually everyone I spoke to was keen to keep up the contact with Australia – Barbara Kiefer, Patty Campbell, Leonard Marcus and Roger Sutton, especially.

I guess it all boils down to how important we as an industry feel editors are to the process of book publishing.

The Courses

*The Publishing Institute, University of Denver,
Division of Arts and Humanities, Department of English*

Elizabeth Geiser (Director of the Publishing Institute) is a wonderfully warm woman who had clearly enjoyed meeting Bryony and Bernadette. She emphatically said to 'send the next recipient to her!' Over lunch, I found myself opening up a lot about the Fellowship and how the various placements had worked for me.

Elizabeth is passionate about the Denver course and feels it is the most thorough of the editorial courses as it focuses on book publishing, but not just trade publishing, like Radcliffe does. The following is an extract from information Elizabeth gave me about the aims of the Publishing Institute.

The Publishing Institute combines workshops in editing and marketing with lecture/teaching sessions conducted by leading experts from all areas of publishing. The Institute provides a concentrated, four-week, full-time course for six quarter hours of graduate credit and devotes itself to book publishing, with a career session on magazine publishing and a yearbook project that allows the students to work in a magazine format and time frame.

The Program. During the morning workshops, students learn about the various stages of editing and marketing by working on an actual manuscript from a leading publisher. In the editing workshop, students learn such editorial skills as preparation of a reader's report, substantive manuscript editing, copyediting and proofreading. In the marketing workshops, students get practical experience in writing sales copy, including publicity releases and advertisements, and developing a total marketing plan. Special sessions on production and design teach students the basic principles of designing and manufacturing a book.

Morning workshops are complemented by lecture/teaching sessions conducted by eminent publishing specialists. Prior to the Institute, students are sent advance reading and writing assignments to prepare them for the workshops and lecture sessions. This work includes the reading of a complete manuscript and several books as well as research and preparation of eight or nine special assignments. Completion of this advance work is critical to preparation for the Institute, and it is essential that the assignments be completed before opening day.

Field trips to nationally known bookshops and local publishers round out the intensive course of instruction.

The Institute is designed for recent college graduates who are seeking careers in book publishing, for those presently employed in publishing or related fields who want a broad overview of the whole industry, as well as an introduction to techniques of editing, marketing and production, and for career-changers seeking opportunities in the field. Those employed must submit a letter of recommendation from their department heads, outlining on-the-job accomplishments. Admission is highly selective and competitive, with Institute enrolment limited to 90 students.

Cost: Tuition = \$2950, Housing and Meals = \$800

The course concludes with a job fair and career counselling.

The New York University Publishing Course

Through Susan Hirschman I was able to attend her session at the NYU Publishing Course which is coordinated by Norma Jean Sawicki. This was absolutely fascinating and reminded me of the classes I'm involved with at RMIT. The students seemed well prepared and asked many intelligent questions.

The Radcliffe Course

I obtained copies of the 1990 Radcliffe Course program through Tim Bent at St Martin's. This is a useful compendium of the practical assignments that the students were required to complete as part of the course. Again, several people commented that the most useful part of this course was the job fair at its end, which provided the opportunity to meet prospective employers.

Conclusion

In my application I outlined various areas I wished to investigate. My whole trip in a sense was geared around these issues. Some points I wasn't able to investigate fully, and with others my preconceptions were turned on their head ...

- How different publishers are handling the age-old dilemma of commercial values versus enduring values and how US publishers approach the issue of quality control and children's books as an art form in the era of the 15-second grab.

The US is the land of excess, in every direction. It would appear that everything has a price and that commercial values are paramount. But what are enduring values anyway? Something ephemeral and subtle related to wanting to leave our mark on the world, to give our lives meaning? The clash between 'enduring' and 'commercial' seems central to US society, and to publishing in general. There are quite clearly many publishers throughout the spectrum, with infinite variations and combinations in between.

I met many dedicated editors and publishers who were striving for perfection in their craft – who believed in nurturing writers and writing because that is how we contribute to our culture. The high level of competition in the US means that standards are ignored at one's peril, and I do think this leads to better books and a more rigorous environment for authors.

Most big publishers seem to be suffering from the overload of too many books and too little time. There was, as there is here sometimes, a sense of books just being churned out for the sake of it. Editors complained of having less and less time to actually edit. So much energy now seems to go into marketing, into carving out a little window for your book. At the same time, within the big companies there are lots of little units, different imprints, which are trying to preserve their character under enormous pressure. Through the ages we hear 'cut the mid-list' at regular nervous intervals, 'focus on the big books and big authors'. But what happens when the big authors start going downhill, when their market realises the hype is empty? The ubiquitous 'mid-list' is where future talent lies fallow until it is pushed and prodded to fulfil its potential, usually by editors who believe in those writers and are prepared to put in the work and patience and support that is required.

I realise I have veered off the issue, somewhat. Within the big companies and within many smaller houses too are editors doing interesting innovative publishing and who are quietly fighting the notion that books invariably have a shelf life of less than 2 months.

The problems in US publishing are the same as in Australia – but magnified: too many mediocre books are being produced. The changing market reflects a customer base that no longer predominantly consists of the passionate advocate of children’s literature, it is the busy parent who is more easily seduced by glamour and glitz. I believe there is a place for clever marketing of non-superficial books. Kids like and will read the thought-provoking hardbacks but these books often don’t find their way into the more readily accessible paperback format. The biggest difference I observed between Australia and the US in terms of children’s books, is that in the US books need to be published in hardcover to be reviewed. Unable to publish in a more economical format, publishers are less likely to take a punt on new authors or quirky ideas. Original paperbacks just don’t receive the review attention and therefore die a sad death. I really think our ability to produce quirky, unusual or difficult novels and picture books straight into paperback is the reason why our publishing appears so fresh and vigorous to the outside world. Several people said to me, ‘Your books are more fun than ours’. In a sense, it is the St Martin’s philosophy at work: lots of ‘small’ books produced economically allow for vibrant, interesting, unpredictable publishing and are the path to success for many authors and illustrators who would otherwise struggle to get a foot in the door.

- To find out the truth behind the generalisation that US editors are more interventionist than their Australian counterparts. What form does this take, structurally and at the copyediting stage? What is the role of agents? Does a more rigorous approach improve standards, sales, reviews – and who decides? What form does control, censorship, correctness take?

I had set out believing that it was true that US editors intervened much more aggressively in the writing and editorial process. It is true that this impression was confirmed, but I am now much more sympathetic to the reasons why. I do feel, personally, that I may not always have pushed a book far enough. Maybe because of time constraints, or because it was just too hard. I think we should look much more closely at the books we work on, and truly keep asking, ‘is it as good as it can be’. It’s not a question of going too far, it’s making sure we go as far as we need to go, as far as that book and that author need to go to fulfil their potential.

Of course, there is still unintelligent, clumsy editing disguised as being wise. But that’s the nature of the craft. Agents do have a powerful shaping role, in the US possibly more than in Australia. That can be dangerous, but depending on the agent it may also be beneficial.

I guess the area that worries me the most is the insidious and concealed censorship that takes place, which has nothing to do with literary values. That is the power of the librarians and teachers who rely only on reviews and may not give themselves the chance to form their own opinions.

- To explore the perception of US markets as being highly conservative and yet capable of producing innovative work as part of the mainstream.

In every children's bookshop there were hundreds of books about love, imitating the success of *Guess How Much I Love You*. I found this quite sickening, but also fascinating. Why were so many books being produced for children telling them that their parents love them no matter what? The most revolting example had to be Dr Laura Schlessinger's (hypocritical radio-talk-show-keeper-of-the-public-morals) version of the 'I love you unconditionally' picture book. At the same time, I was in the US during the war in Kosovo and during the horrific school shootings in Denver and elsewhere. There was something horribly discordant about this. But we are talking about a country with a population of 250 million people, and so it is inevitable that the cycle of innovation–imitation–new innovation exists in the US just as it does elsewhere.

In the large chainstores there was always a well-stocked children's section. But on close inspection, most of this stock consisted of classics, or the well-hyped current crop of hopefuls. Down on shelves near the ground, spine out, were ones and twos of books that reflected the vibrant publishing that I knew existed from the CBC library. That was somewhat disheartening and again brought home the point that the conduit between book and child has to be the experienced, knowledgeable bookseller, teacher or librarian. For the adult buyers in between there needs to be lots of support to help them understand that there are other books, in addition to the classics they grew up with, that their children will enjoy.

Market forces contribute to the conservative picture, but there are battlers on every front endeavouring to educate the public and allow the innovative work, that definitely does exist, to find the light of day.

- To research the differences between US and Australian definitions and requirements of YA fiction. Who are the readers anyway? Are we doing our writers a disservice by publishing them under the YA label? Should we be promoting our YA authors more vigorously as adult writers?

I've talked about this a lot already, so will keep this brief. YA publishing is alive and well in the US, and some great work is being produced. I'd say the readers are the same as they are here: 12–15 year olds. I do think we should examine why we are publishing some sophisticated work specifically for teenagers when its appeal is clearly broader. We should carefully consider an author's body of work, and where they are heading, before we relegate them to a lifetime under the YA label. Clearly the success of *Harry Potter* shows that there is an adult audience out there ready to read books that previously were seen as

'only' children's or YA. So maybe it is up to us, who keep saying how fantastic this writing is, to put our marketing dollars where our mouths are ...!

- To explore management trends within US publishing culture. Is there a shift to a more team-based structure, or something new beyond that? How does this work? What are the results? What models could work for Australia (especially in terms of editorial training and career paths).

Having read quite a number of books about management, I'd been expecting more evidence of the latest techniques in action. This wasn't so, but that is not to say the structures I observed were archaic. The same kinds of struggles and tensions within big companies seem to exist world-wide. There is enormous financial pressure to produce ever-increasing profits and individuals come up with different strategies. There did seem to be evidence of a more pyramidal structure in larger companies and more of a team-based egalitarian approach in smaller companies.

(See also 'A Report on Editorial Training.)

- To gain an insight into editing for a new generation of products – CD Roms etc. – story translated into forms other than books.

I came away thinking that CD Roms were old news. Rocket or E-books are definitely the latest thing. Editing for 'text' only, rather than the tactile object, the book, will be interesting. I suspect that in the end no matter what form it takes, the story will need to be worth telling and then it will find its market.

- To prepare the groundwork for a comprehensive study into the reading patterns of US and Australian children and young adults.

I haven't done this (!), but I've discovered lots of people who are. What became clear is that there are so many small organisations with similar aims and different areas of expertise. The task will be to find and link up with these groups and share our information to gain a comprehensive picture. Overall, it seemed clear that children are reading (thankfully!) and that books continue to be seen as the main vehicle for a literate society.

- To gain an understanding of why humour doesn't travel readily, particularly with regard to particular styles of illustration. What can we learn? Where is the common ground?

I was told that anthropologists say that humour is the most idiosyncratic of human qualities. It is so culturally specific that it is rare for someone in Iceland to find the same thing funny in Fiji. It is so personal, but I think I could generalise and say that subtle humour would struggle in the US. Many people said our humour was too crude and would be frowned upon. Bruce Whatley said his editors didn't 'get' his written humour, though his visual humour was okay. At the same time, it was clear that the old problem of children's humour vs adult humour remains a stumbling block for many.

- To explore how US publishers handle the marketing and publicity for children's and young adult books, and how this ties in with editorial practices.

It is impossible and undesirable for an editor not to take into account marketing strategies when taking on a new book. Clearly there are very similar difficulties in the US as there are in Australia. There is a reluctance for major newspapers to run reviews of children's books, as well as the perennial problem of how to reach the kids themselves. At Scholastic, a huge amount of research and market testing takes place with their series publishing. Big campaigns require big dollars and need to be thought through carefully right from the start. Covers are done and redone until they are just right, and when the series is launched, point-of-sale material is designed to hook the kids in. Merchandising of characters is huge too. Radio and tv appearances of course have an enormous impact on sales.

So, marketing needs to be smart and specific. For literary novels, good reviews and awards are critical for their success, as is influencing the right critics, book selection committees and librarians. Rather than inundating people with piles of books, many publishers are taking a more personal approach – sending one book at a time with a note, rather than a stack of new releases. And then, rarely and thankfully, there continue to be the special 'small' books that take everyone by surprise.

And finally

Thanks again to the APA, the Literature Board, the sponsors, and especially to my dear colleagues at Penguin Australia, who so wonderfully supported my application, and to Duffy & Snellgrove who granted me leave in my new job, after only three months. The Fellowship is a fantastic program that deserves continued support, and I am enormously grateful to have benefited from it.

Financial Report

The 1999 Fellowship totalled AUS\$28,000. \$26,000 covered my income, fares, and a living and accommodation allowance for 12 weeks, leaving \$2000 to cover travel costs on my return. The following is a breakdown of my expenses in Australian dollars based on an exchange rate of US\$1 = AUS \$1.54. Receipts are available.

Income (\$8400)

\$700 per week for 12 weeks

TOTAL: **\$8400.00**

Travel Allowance (\$3200)

Round-the-World ticket \$2854.00,

(less \$1200.00 [claimed as Bologna expense]) \$1654.00

Travel Insurance \$ 410.00

Passport \$ 126.00

International licence \$ 22.50

Subway fares

(7 weeks @ \$15US per week = \$105.00) \$ 161.70

Car hire (LA, San Diego) (US\$220.00) \$ 338.80

TOTAL: **\$ 2713.00**

Living and Accommodation Allowance (\$14400)

New York Accommodation (US\$4001.73) \$ 6395.17

Asheville Accommodation (US\$2026.20) \$ 3120.35

Rent and water/electricity bills

in Australia for 12 weeks \$ 1807.60

Phone calls/Internet fees \$ 743.62

Books (US\$374.61) \$ 576.90

General Living Expenses:

- Postage (US\$255.10)=\$392.85
- Entertaining (US\$436.15)=\$671.67
- Food (US\$889.03)=\$1369.10
- Chemist/Medical (US\$148.97)=\$229.41
- Gifts/Miscellaneous (US\$206.66)=\$366.86
- Taxis(US\$175)=\$269.50

Sub-total: \$3299.39

TOTAL: **\$15,943.03**

GRAND TOTAL: **\$27,056.03**

Travel Costs on return (\$2000)

Talks/seminars arranged to date include:

- APA Editing Masterclass in Melbourne and Sydney – Oct 5 and Oct 14
- Meet the Publishers Seminar in Adelaide – Oct 10
- ALIA Children's and Youth Services Section Literature Weekend in Sorrento – Oct 23/24
- Galley Club and Society of Editors talk in Sydney – Oct 27
- Victorian Writer's Centre talk on Children's Publishing – Nov 17
- Australian Centre for Youth Literature seminar – Dec 3

A comment about finances

Due to my personal circumstances and commitments, I left virtually all of my salary component in Australia to cover expenses during my absence. I found the living and accommodation allowance adequate, but careful budgeting was required given the poor exchange rate. Costs in NY were substantially higher than in Asheville.