

27/08/2016 - hello, an introduction to Beatrice Davis and thank you

Hello! I'm Annabel Blay and I'm so pleased to be guest blogging here on the APA's blog. Some of you will know that I was recently awarded the Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship and I'll be keeping in touch here during my research trip to the US.

But before I actually DO anything I just wanted to introduce the legendary Beatrice Davis. She's probably best known for being Australia's first full-time book editor, first at Angus and Robertson from 1937 to 1974, and later at Thomas Nelson. Most importantly – and inspiringly – to me and so many editors and others involved in Australian publishing or writing, Beatrice was passionate about Australian writing, Australian writers, Australian publishing, about working with her authors to bring out their absolute best, and about having true and unfiltered Australian voices in our literature. (It's hard to believe we're still having to argue about the value of this for us as a nation...) It's quite a name to live up to!

The Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship has been awarded biennially since 1992, and I'm honoured (and still astounded) to follow in the rather impressive footsteps of the thirteen previous Fellows. The Fellowship allows one extremely lucky (and in this case, truly humbled) editor to travel to and live in New York for ten weeks, interviewing and working with editors, publishers, literary agents and others. Specifically, I'll be exploring the role of the editor in the development of an author's work: has the role of developmental editor changed? Are there strategies can we adopt (or adapt) from US publishers and their editorial teams to better develop our books – and our authors – at an editorial level? And are there new strategies we might pursue for developing our own skills in the art of developmental and structural editing, and to better teach them to junior and emerging editors, and others across the Australian editing community? And I look forward to sharing my findings through this blog and upon my return to Australia via reports and presentations.

I can't sign off on this first instalment without noting that this unique professional development opportunity could never happen without the financial and advisory assistance of the Australian Government in the agency of the Australia Council for the Arts; the Australian Publishers Association and its publisher members; the wonderful BDEF organising committee; and the support and advice of the Institute of Professional Editors. And I am extremely grateful to all these organisations and individuals for their contribution to making the Fellowship happen in 2016.

So what now? I would love to have had some fab pics to include but have just woken up on my first day in a very hot and muggy New York so stand by for (hopefully!) more interesting updates ... Meanwhile, here is a view of the inside my cave, er, I mean luxurious* Manhattan studio apartment, by daylight:

Cheers!

Annabel

* a note to our sponsors: not luxurious.



04/09/2016 - An editor conference, my fangirl moment, and pencils and things...



Hello! It's already the end of my first week in New York – an inspiring, fascinating and, well, sometimes baffling experience.



On Monday and Tuesday I attended the [Editorial Freelancers of America National Conference](#). This was the first time this event has been held for ten years, and it attracted editors from all over North America (plus one little Aussie!), working in all facets of editorial and on all kinds of texts at all levels. Not unexpectedly, there were also many people looking to break into editing or freelancing, or both. The US, like Australia but on a much larger scale (natch), has seen many media and other organisations lay off full-time staff and turn to contractors and freelancers to service their editorial and content needs. Many of the freelancers attending weren't book editors, instead they were editors, proofreaders and writers for print and online publications; education, medical, technical and scientific writers and editors; and writing 'coaches' and book doctors. What was

so interesting about the conference (apart from the view of the Empire State Building on the way!) in terms of this project was how passionate the attendees were about professional development, marketing and networking – and the level of resources available to them to do so.

[Jane Friedman](#) opened the conference with a wide-ranging talk on the rapid changes in our industry and an emphasis on the necessity for freelancers working in creative industries to question the myths surrounding art and creative work because 'art and business can dance together', and the notion of untangling 'net worth and self-worth'. Everyone's probably seen these 'Shift Happens' videos by now (and given this one is from 2014 it's already laughably out of date, somewhat proving its own point) but Jane [also highlighted some startling statistics here about the pace of change we all face](#). Also noteworthy is that as long ago as 2013 (the most recent statistics available), in the US as many ISBNs were sold to self-publishers as were to 'traditional' publishers.



Other sessions were more hands-on, including an introduction to editing for self-publishers and sessions on editing for the web, copyediting and developmental editing, as well as a natural focus on building a business, marketing and networking.



My highlight was the opportunity to spend time with the other keynote speaker, the iconic Mary Norris, ‘comma queen’ of the New Yorker. I know a lot of you met Mary when she was in Australia – her book *Between You and Me: Confessions of a Comma Queen* was published in Australia by Text (Mary says to say hi to all her friends there!) but somehow I missed my chance then. And meeting her was all the result of a wonderful bit of serendipity: I made a friend on a night walking tour of Central Park, put on as a pre-conference networking activity by the conference organisers, and she turned out to be a proofreader from Vancouver who KNOWS MARY NORRIS. So when I landed at the

pre-conference reception, I soon found myself organised onto a table and sharing a cheese plate with the delightful Mary, along with another New York local editor-type and all-round font of information, as well as my new Canadian friend. And thanks to, well, wine, I even got a photo.

A delightful quirk of the conference (well, to me anyway – you may have come across it at other conferences) was the organisers providing sign-up sheets for locals to lead groups to a favourite restaurant or other venue or activity each evening. On the first night this included a bar in Williamsburg or dinner at a nearby vegetarian Indian restaurant. (Some of us couldn’t make it on the first night after being whacked quite hard with the jetlag stick in the afternoon. Found out later I’d been drinking DECAFFEINATED TEA all day, so no wonder. How can this even be a thing!) And after mentioning the pencil shop where she filmed some of her New Yorker ‘Comma Queen’ videos (you can catch up here <http://video.newyorker.com/series/comma-queen>), Mary offered to lead an excursion to CW Pencil Enterprise (100 Forsyth St <http://cwpencils.com/>).

So ten of us editorial types from all over trooped dutifully behind Mary onto the subway and down to the Lower East Side – a true New York experience as Mary ducked and weaved through the commuters and we scurried along as best we could in her wake.



Despite having really only a very tangential link to how most of us actually edit these days, the pencil shop is a remarkable little business built on a fascinating product – who knew pencils were so complicated to make? I have become slightly obsessed now – you too can read or listen to more on the pencil shop and the intriguing manufacturing process for your typical pencil here <http://freakonomics.com/podcast/i-pencil/> (also worth it for the toaster story. And toast is vital to editing, right? RIGHT?!)

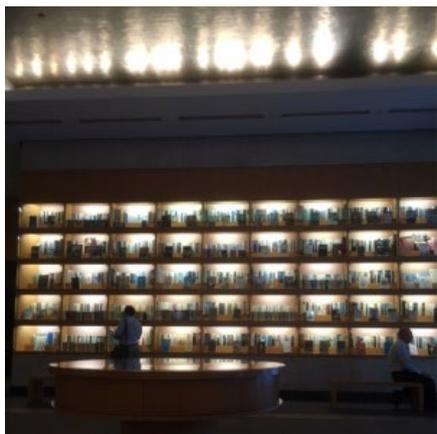


After my first week here, I find I'm getting used to some things: walking on the other side of the footpath, sorry, 'sidewalk'; putting my rubbish in the 'trash can' instead of the bin; the crowds (!!); being able to buy beer just about everywhere including chemist shops, but needing to go to a special shop for wine; the fact that you're all asleep while I'm awake. But I'm not sure I will ever get used to some things: the scale of this city, the multitudes it contains, and how much it can change within a block or two; the way their toilets flush, ahem; or the tipping culture (and all the reasons why it's compulsory that hurt my heart every time).

Until next time...

Annabel

11/09/2016 - A week of contrasts



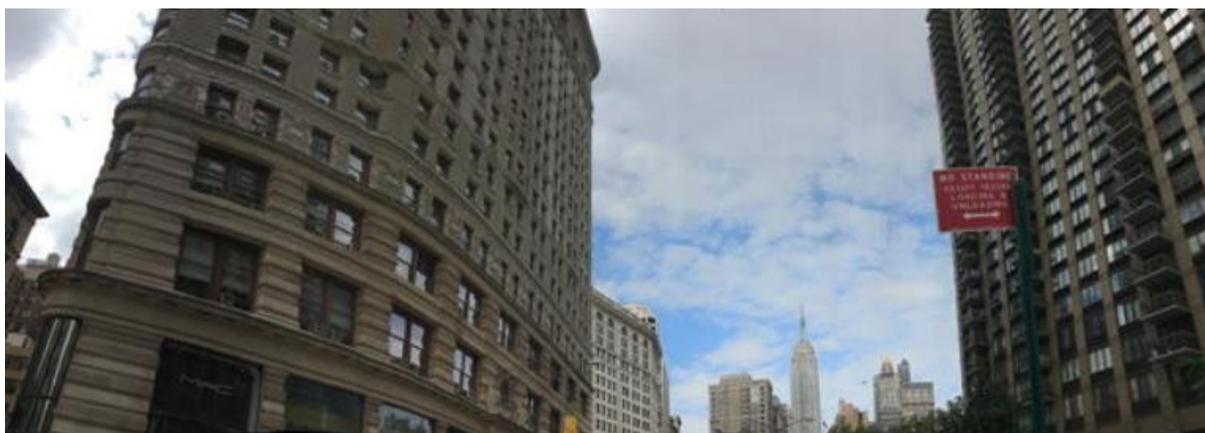
This has been a fascinating week of contrasts, with a series of interviews with editors and publishers and the first day of my first placement. I've visited one of the world's largest literary agencies, a small imprint of a big publisher, a big imprint of a huge publisher and a tiny independent publisher. I've also taken on the important task of visiting as many bookshops as I can, something I know you'll appreciate is only in the name of research.

There was Flatiron Books, an imprint of Macmillan, in their quirky, delightful offices looking up

5th Avenue in the 'prow' of the historic Flatiron Building, after which the imprint was named. Flatiron is a relatively new imprint of an old and established publishing house, so we were able to discuss the challenges and joys of what's effectively a 'start-up', albeit one under the umbrella of a well-structured parent. Congratulations and hurrah, they also publish our own Liane Moriarty, currently racing up the New York Times bestseller list with her new book *Truly Madly Guilty*.



**FLATIRON
BOOKS**
NEW YORK



I'm a bit obsessed by the Flatiron Building, which is very close to my little apartment, so here's another more historical view:





I also headed up to the bookishly corporate Broadway offices of the Ballantine imprint of Penguin Random House, where I had a fascinating discussion about the importance of developmental and structural editing as well as the joys of editing on paper (sigh).



The third publisher I visited in this short week – Monday was the Labor Day public holiday here – was **OR Books**, based in a, let's say, edgier, more vibrant part of town. They call themselves a 'new type of publishing company [embracing] progressive change in politics, culture and the way we do business'. Despite knowing what a huge challenge they have set themselves, they are attempting to disrupt the traditional distribution model by refusing to sell books on consignment (i.e. sale or return) and so, in many cases, dealing direct with readers.

I've also started my first placement, in the (to my little Australian eyes anyway) lavish offices of Writers House, one of the largest literary agencies in the world. Assuming I can ever stop gawping at the array of books and authors their agents have represented, and taking sneaky photos of their stairwells, I'll be talking with different agents about their experiences and asking them about their different ways of working with both authors and editors. What makes them pick up a client for representation? What strategies do they apply to build an author's career? How much development work do they do before submitting a book to an editor?

Each, in their way, opened my eyes to different facets of this big world of publishing we work in – although in many cases confirming what we already know, although perhaps practise on a smaller scale: the importance of 'platform' in building an author and maintaining their career; and that there is no such thing as a 'typical' book and therefore it's hard to talk about how long an editor may typically work on an edit, how deep they might typically go, or how many eyes and hands might typically be involved in producing a book the writer, editor and publisher can be proud to present to readers.



I also headed over to Brooklyn for the launch of a new picture book from Oliver Jeffers and Sam Winston, *A Child of Books*. The launch was held in the petite but beautiful [Stories Bookshop and Storytelling Lab](#) in Brooklyn – only opened a few months ago, this airy, cool space specialise in children’s and picture books, and also run various workshops and classes for young people.



What stands out for me is not the differences between them, but what all of these hardworking bookish types have in common: an immense passion for their books, for their authors and for their readers, and the great joy they take in their jobs. Being able to share their passion with you is something I’m very grateful for.

Cheers,
Annabel

20/09/2016 - No sleep till Brooklyn



It certainly has been an interesting week here in New York. Many of you will have heard about the 'explosive device' that went off at about 8.30pm on Saturday night New York time, in the busy neighbourhood of Chelsea – not far from where I'm staying, although, thankfully, a long way away in NYC terms too. Luckily I'd decided a low-key night was in order and had gone to see *Bridget Jones's Baby* at the movies – there's a vaguely literary connection there, right? – and only realised the seriousness after seeing dozens of police cars speeding towards 7th Avenue on my way home, and choppers with searchlights above.

While this is certainly not the place to talk politics, what's actually been most alarming about the whole thing is the way various factions immediately leapt on the event to gain political mileage. It is, as you know, an election year here, and every word from the mouths of certain presidential candidates gets wall-to-wall media coverage, no matter how ridiculous their statements. Yes, honestly, even more alarming than the blaring klaxon when receiving these [emergency alerts](#) on my phone:



So, after a bit of a sleepless, on-edge night of watching the news and, once it hit Australia, letting family at home know I really was ok, and then a large jackhammer starting up right outside my apartment block at 8am on Sunday morning, I thought it might be a good day to get out of Manhattan and headed over to the [Brooklyn Book Festival](#).



I arrived a little late and was disappointed to find a queue for the Margaret Atwood session that went for three entire blocks! I'd love to say I saw this as an opportunity to explore some of the other authors' work but honestly I was a little overtired and grouchy as I stomped back to the main part of the festival...making it all the more delightful to find such a diverse and interesting (and well-organised) event. There were almost 200 busy stalls with displays and items for sale from publishers, booksellers, authors and other bookish types of businesses

ranging from small and, to me, obscure like American Mental Health Foundation Books through the practical, like the Horror Writers Association, to the very mainstream HarperCollins's Perennial imprint, all offering products and services including children's books, university courses, self-published books, poetry, invitations to a 'literary cabaret', radio programs, literary journals, courses for writers, readings for writers, memberships, book-related T-shirts and so. many. tote bags. (I know you all feel the same way about book bags as I do!).



01/10/2016 - Breaking out?



My time here in the US is suddenly cracking along. The summer's finally wound up (goodbye 28-degree muggy nights, hurrah!), and it's definitely 'fall'.

Pumpkin-themed items abound – trust me, pumpkin-flavoured cereal is not the worst of it, and they tell me there will be even more as Halloween draws nearer – and I threw myself into the spirit of it on a weekend visit to Connecticut.

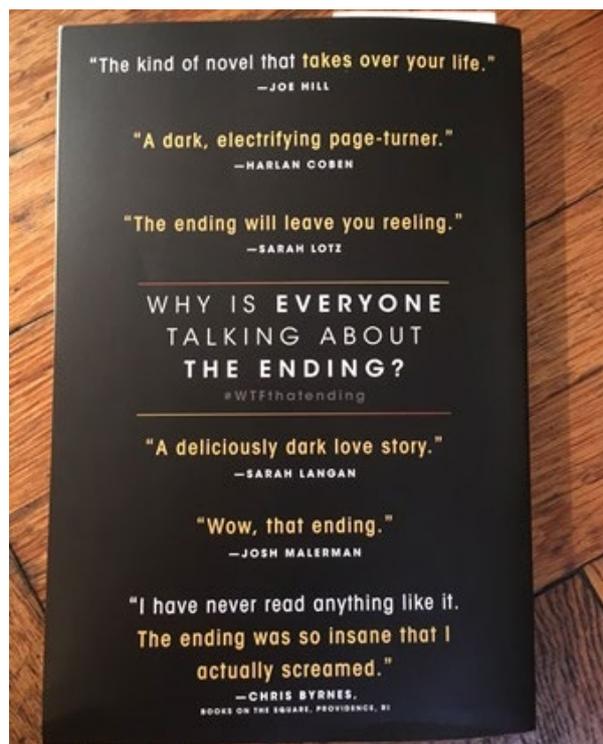
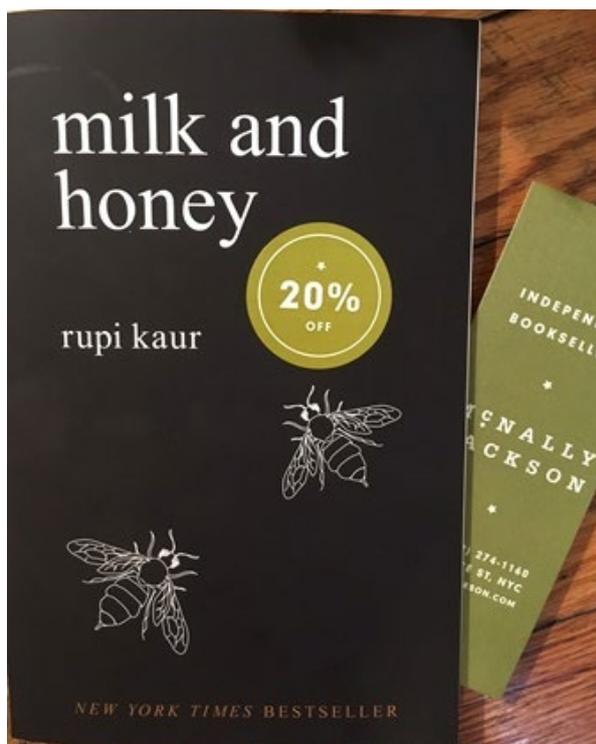


We've had the first presidential debate – you'll have either watched it or you won't have, so no need for comment from me, except to thank the New Yorker for putting an editor spin on that [here](#).



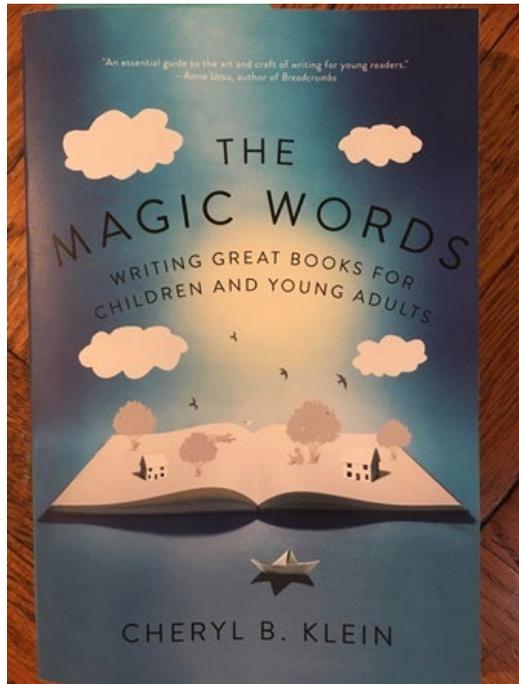
I've also been continuing my professional adventures in New York – over the past two weeks I've met with editors and others from both new and established imprints including Putnam (PRH), Little, Brown (Hachette), Park Row and Mira (Harlequin/HarperCollins), Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Flatiron again, and St Martin's Press (all Macmillan), and mid-size indie SoHo Press, plus more agents from Writers House, as well as Curtis Brown and Compass Talent. I also squeezed in a couple of meetings with freelance editors; and caught Liane Moriarty at an author event. Much more to come on all of those meetings as I digest their thoughts on our dynamic, multi-faceted industry, and ponder the similarities and differences in the ways we work.

This week I've also been thinking about why readers pick up books in the first place, and asking lots of questions about what makes a book break out. This also led me to ponder what gets my attention as a reader. And after coming across [this story](#) in Publisher's Weekly I picked up a copy of *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur – what is it about this admittedly charming little book that makes it sell 30,000 copies A WEEK. Why this publisher? Why now? Why poetry?



I've also been grabbed by the short-and-curlies by an ARC an editor gave me – if you're wondering why this entry took so long in coming, it's because I've been spending every spare minute reading it! This one is a UK-generated title that certainly fits neatly into that still 'hot' genre of domestic noir (a genre that also goes by several other names here including 'domestic thriller') but what got me in in the first place was the intriguing hashtag on the ARC, #WTFthatending. But I will leave you to go and explore that one for yourself, if you're interested...

I have ARC envy in general here. Apart from the abundant 'blurbs' from other authors, this one features a glossy first page and printed inside front and back covers. I've also seen them with flaps and heard discussions of all kinds of embellishments, plus the possibility of several different runs of galleys for key titles over the lead-up to pub date: an early version with review quotes from key authors; a new, updated version when the cover is final, say; and perhaps a third super-deluxe version that's more aimed at early readers and media than the trade. Also much more on the US obsession with 'blurbing' by other authors another time!



And finally, yesterday an agent thrust a book she represents into my hands and told me, with glowing eyes, that it changed her editing practice for both adult and children's books for life. Talk about one way of getting an editor-type reader excited to pick up a book and want to share it! (That said, I'm yet to read it but will report back.) Many of you will already know of the author, Cheryl B Klein, since she's also executive editor at Arthur A. Levine Books (Scholastic).

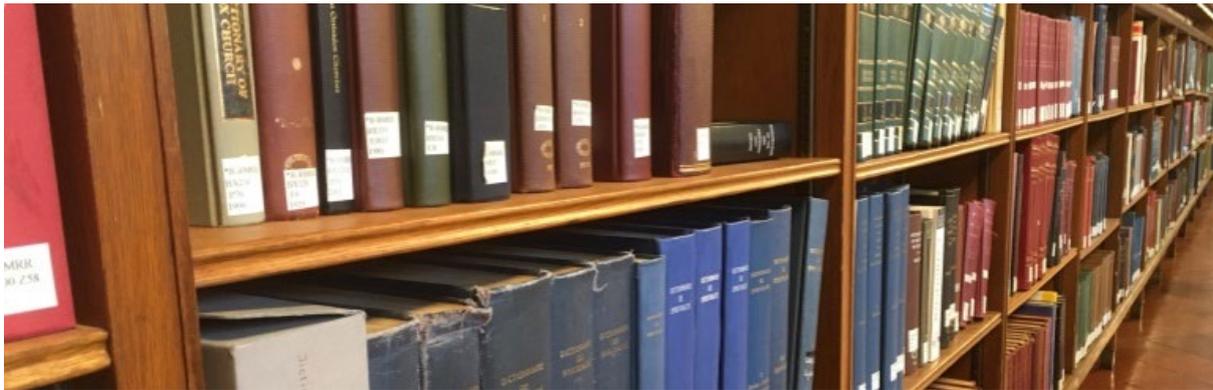
But in the end I don't actually have the answer to any of the questions I've raised yet, except to repeat what I have been told over and over here: you can try to create a break-out book, and so publishers constantly analyse what makes 'buzz' and try to create, and recreate, successful campaigns. Huge resources are sometimes behind break-out titles and sometimes there are no resources, and yes, absolutely there are things you can do to keep that ball rolling once it gains

momentum, but in the end it's up to the 'end user', the reader. They have to want to talk about the book. There has to be an almost magical 'something' in the book itself to ignite that spark in the first place. And isn't it that very 'something' that makes us all readers?

Cheers,

Annabel

18/10/2016 - The big questions?



As I move through my time here, there have been large and small challenges working and researching here in NYC. Try getting people to spell your name correctly when you have a 'foreign' accent, for one (and if you don't know exactly what I mean, please see Step 4 in [this amusing tutorial](#)). And it gets worse when I spell it out – my clean undies will forever be found under the name 'Annibel Blii' at my local laundry. 'No, it's A. Aaaaaay.' Gah!

Similarly an Aussie friend living here suggests one should never ask for a 'tuna and tomato' sandwich in a noisy deli. Ahem.

And then, asked for more selfies, I belatedly realise that any pic of me invariably involves food. In fact most of my pics seem to be food-related. (#firstworldproblems)



(Yes, that is a man dressed as a cannoli.)

But seriously, a larger challenge has been interviewing editors and agents about a 'typical' book or a 'typical' edit, or indeed a 'typical' author. If there's only one thing we can all agree on, it's that there's no such thing as a standard book or a one-size-fits-all approach to editing – although of course the sheer joy of that alone is one of the reasons we all do what we do.

It's difficult for editors to talk about, and even more difficult for me to report on, a typical way of working or typical editing strategy because there are so many different factors to take into account, so many questions editors end up asking themselves, even before they delve into the words on the page: Is this the first book by the author? Is it the first book by the author published by this editor or imprint? What experience does the author have – writing experience, editing experience, LIFE

experience? What is the book? Is it fiction or non-fiction? Does it fit easily into a genre or category? Does it need to? Is the book agented? (They usually are in the US but less so in Australia.) What's the history of the book pre-submission? Did the agent or someone else do any work on the book before you acquired it?

How long has the author been working on the book? Have they edited it themselves, had it edited, had extensive feedback from an editor or publisher or even an agent who liked it enough to give feedback but not quite enough to take it on? Do they have 'beta readers' or work with a writing group or have a mother, partner or friend who has given them useful feedback? Do they have any of these who have perhaps given them less-than-useful feedback?

What advance was paid? Is the book scheduled? Can it be rescheduled? Or is it 'pre-published' and being prepared for submission?

What is the author's situation – do they have other commitments that need to be taken into account? Can they revise full-time or are they squeezing it in around a job, a family, caring for others? Or a book tour? Or writing the next book, or a book for another publisher? What's their work-life balance like? Can they, will they drop everything to work on the edit? Can you even ask them to?

Is the book too long? Is it too short? Is there something fundamental missing: a point of view, a thread, a strand, the answer to a question the author has set up in the reader's mind? Or is it more subtle than that? What drew you to the book? What was that spark, the magic, that brought you here in the first place and has engaged you and your colleagues enough to invest time and resources and possibly cold hard cash into making this book the very best it can be?

Has the author worked with an editor before? What was the author's experience like with that editor? Did they feel understood, like it was a mutually beneficial and truly collaborative relationship? Did they agree with most of the editor's suggestions? Did the reviews point out a glaring error? Was there a horrendous typo on the very first page? Who was 'responsible' for that error? Did any readers actually care?

How much of the book reflects or is based on parts of the author's own life? What is 'truth' anyway? Will the author get married, or divorced, or pregnant, or have a baby, or twins, or two babies two

years apart, while you're still working together on this edit? Are they planning to change jobs? To move interstate? Will their computer work when they get there? How long will they be without internet access? Does this make or break them? Have they used track changes before? Are they someone who spends time plotting or are they a 'pantser'?



Do they write cleanly on the line, are you in love with each individual sentence, or is it the storytelling that took you to that special place all readers crave and all editors search for?

How well do you know the author? Have you worked together before?

What was the relationship like? Did you acquire this book or did it come to you in another way? Did you fall in love with it from the very first page or did it take you a while to get sucked in to the point where you knew you had to work on this one?

These are just a few of the things a 'typical' (haha!) editor thinks about as they read, acquire and edit a book. Sometimes they don't know the answers, sometimes they guess and get it wrong. And sometimes it just doesn't matter, and their passion for the book speaks for itself. And that is when you are lucky enough to have the perfect editor ...

Cheers

Annabel

30/10/2016 - #70NewYorkDays



I can't quite believe that this is my last week in New York – 65 days down, just 5 to go. I don't know where the time went (though apparently it wasn't spent blogging!).



We had a few glorious bonus days of Indian summer here last week – after an early morning meeting in downtown Brooklyn I snuck out to Coney Island – in the off-season, pretty much your basic deserted-amusement-park nightmare with a glorious backdrop of blue sky.

But since then? Brrrr!



The weather's definitely got a hint of winter in it now (oh, ok, 'winter' – since it is increasingly clear I am a wussy Australian, and a Sydneysider at that, as I shiver in my puffy jacket while women with bare legs and sandals wander past me). At least the huge case of warm clothes I brought with me is getting a workout at last.

I'm winding up my last in-house placement and confirming my last few appointments for next week.



(Here's the HarperCollins building being all pretty and picturesque by the World Trade Centre site.)

And doing some final touristy stuff including a jazz tour of Harlem (highly recommended, by the way. Check them out here: bigapplejazz.com)

But now it's time to work out how to get all the stuff I've collected home – or defy the hoarding



instinct and donate it to Goodwill, of course. (People who know me well are laughing now. STOP IT! I've lived in a tiny studio now, I CAN DO THIS!)

I can't say the election coverage is heating up since it's been the news the whole time I've been here, but it seems like there are more and more conversations happening. New York 'is Hillary's' (as they say) of course, and I have been very much in a New York bubble the whole time – but it has been a fascinating, terrifying time to be here regardless. I'm glad I decided to leave before the actual election, I admit.

And oh, New York! I can't help feeling I've missed much more than I've done – there are more people I could have met with, more events I should have been at, plays and shows and music and art I missed. Books I should have read! What have I been doing with my time?

Well, let's see: four placements completed. 60-odd interviews and meetings with editors, agents and others in the industry. Some 101 single-spaced typed pages and 50,000 words of notes to cull into a report (and I still have a half-week of meetings to go!). Countless articles and links saved to reread. An iBookshelf plus a suitcase full of books (all 'research' of course). 540-odd kilometres walked. A sheaf of security passes (watch the weather change through bad security pics...)



And so many editing 'feels' ... I am inspired by the people I've met, their work and their books. I didn't always agree with everything they said, of course, but I'm looking forward to sorting through it all, processing it and getting it down on paper in the form of a final report. Watch this space ... the report will be up here on the APA website at some point towards the end of 2016 or early 2017. Looking forward to sharing it with you!

Cheers

Annabel