

# West Coast EDITOR

A MONTHLY FORUM FOR EAC

MEMBERS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

TO EXCHANGE IDEAS,

DEVELOP SKILLS, AND

SHARE NEWS ABOUT EDITING

**SEPTEMBER 1999**

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Editors' Association  
of Canada



Association canadienne  
des rédacteurs-réviseurs

BC Branch

## PROGRAM REVIEW

# Corporate Communication for Editors

ANNA-LOUISE PENTLAND

As corporate communicator Karen Lee was introduced at EAC-BC's April meeting, the 50-something motherly figure stood modestly to the side. She looked much too kind to be giving advice about working in the big, bad corporate sector. A few moments later, that illusion was dispelled. "Tell me what you want to hear about," she challenged the group.

When only a few ideas trickled in, she joked about what a short presentation it would be. The stage was set and the group jumped in with both feet and got involved in a lively, humorous discussion for the rest of the evening.

Karen ran her own agency for 12 years until her biggest client, Providence Health Care, decided to move their communications in-house. When the opportunity to head their corporate communications came up, she decided to take it to "get her life back." Now, she works five ten-hour days instead of six. At her agency, she used to say to clients: "Fast, good, cheap—pick two." Now, she says, clients want all three and will go somewhere else if they need to. Communications managers make the decision to outsource only at the last moment. The need for speed now overrides all other considerations.

Many companies are starting to scale back their communications departments. The good news is that these in-house communicators are being hired to take on the more strategic role of coaching middle managers in communications skills and facilitating the production of communications material. The flip side, of course, is that there are fewer in-house positions available. "There's lots of work," Karen said, "but there are no jobs."

Karen looks for a communicator who knows the topic areas but is something of a generalist in writing style—someone who can write features,

brochures, and Web copy, and who can also edit.

When Karen hires communicators, it's important to her that they know the industry. She advises us to take whatever we know and find a market niche. "I'd kill for someone who knows the industry," she said. "When you get a contract in a certain industry, call every other person in that industry."

Two new things are being asked of communicators: use plain writing and go electronic. Plain writing uses metaphors and similes to paint pictures and the writing is lively, warm, and personable. It uses more commercial leads

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with less emphasis on traditional corporate writing. Many companies are searching for communicators who can navigate the Internet and write for the Web. Karen said people who surf the Net are more impatient and this requires a different style of writing.

She provided some other guidelines for contract communicators. The first is the ability to really listen. "Very seldom do we articulate what we want," she said. "Ask questions and clarify what you're hearing. Stay in touch through the secretary. And ask clients if they want to see rough drafts to make sure you're on track. Get an idea of the tone by asking the client what kind of a message they want their readers to walk away with."

Karen also cautions that staying on budget is crucial. When you get two-thirds of the way through the money, have a conversation with the employer about the progress of the project. The job often changes partway through and

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# Sex & the Art of Editing

*EAC president's welcoming speech at the 1999 conference & AGM*

NANCY FLIGHT

*Bienvenue. Je suis très heureuse d'être ici dans le capital national et de vous rencontrer.*

I am delighted to be here in Ottawa and to see so many editors from all over the country in one place. It is nice to see you all looking so visible. It is a bit scary, however, to have to give a speech to a roomful of editors—I'm just glad I didn't have to submit my speech in writing first. At least you won't be able to tell whether I'm using American spelling instead of Canadian spelling or whether I'm using too many em dashes.

When I first heard the topic of this conference, "The Art of Editing," I started wondering what artists have said about the art of art and whether what they said might have any application to the art of editing. As it happens, a couple of months ago I read an article about a British painter named Cecily Brown, who, among other things, does not have a kitchen or own any cookware. I knew immediately that she must be a person worth emulating and that she would probably have something important to say about the art of painting. And she did. This is what she said: "Painting is a metaphor for sex."

I thought that was pretty interesting and wondered if editing might be a metaphor for sex, too. Certainly there is married editing—as for us in-house editors who have committed ourselves, for better or for worse, to one publishing company, corporation, government agency, or whatever (though some of us might do a little editing on the side too)—and then there is unmarried editing—which all of you promiscuous freelancers out there are familiar with.

People of my vintage all remember the days when there were no courses in editing—we didn't exactly have to learn about it in the back seat of a car, but we certainly were left on our own to figure it all out. I remember wondering for years if I was doing it the right way or if

everyone else did it the same way. Now, of course, there are courses where you can learn all the best techniques, and you can even read about it in the mainstream press.

And we have probably all been guilty of trying to make every author believe that he or she is the only one, even if we are working on three or five or ten other projects at the same time,

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and we might even believe it in the heat of the moment. Perhaps we have even felt passion—not for the author, I hope, but for the manuscript.

Finally, I'm sure that most of us at one time or another have decided we've had it with editing, we're going to give it up, or we have a headache or we're too tired or we'd rather watch TV with a bag of Doritos. But who among us, if presented with a tantalizing bit of manuscript in need of a bit of stroking or massaging, would not be tempted to see what we could do with it?

It is this tenacity, passion, and commitment—and perhaps even that ability to endlessly stroke and massage—that has gotten us where we are today.

As you all know, we are celebrating our 20th anniversary this weekend. FEAC was born in May 1979 when 55 editors gathered at the Canadian Book Information Centre in Toronto. By the AGM of 1980, one year later, this energetic and visionary—and of course sexy—group had managed to:

- Put out a directory of members
- Hold a series of seminars
- Establish a committee to work on what would become *Editing Canadian English*
- Set guidelines for fees

- Agree on a constitution, the basics of which still hold

This impressive level of achievement set the standard for the years to come, and since then we have continued to uphold this high level of accomplishment.

Today we have over 950 members in five branches across the country; we are in the midst of negotiating with a publisher for the publication of the second edition of *Editing Canadian English*; we have published *Professional Standards* and *Meeting Editorial Standards*; we have established the Tom Fairley Award for Editorial Excellence; we publish an annual directory of members; we put out a regular newsletter, the highly acclaimed *Active Voice*; we have established a wildly popular members' list-serve; we have just hired our first association manager ever; and on and on. All of this has been done through the incredible efforts and dedication of volunteers. And it speaks volumes for our commitment to editors and editing in Canada.

Since that first meeting in 1979, we have also been remarkably consistent in our goals. Then, as now, they were:

- To promote and maintain high professional standards of editing
- To promote a high quality of publishing in Canada
- To establish guidelines for rates and good working relations with clients
- To share the experience of membership by providing information, news, and market data

The only thing that has changed is that we are now the Editors' Association of Canada instead of the Freelance Editors' Association of Canada. This change occurred because we wanted to more fully represent all editors in Canada and to welcome in-house

editors as full voting members. Since this change was made, however, there has not been a concerted effort to inform people of this change or to actively recruit in-house editors. Many still think that we are a freelance organization or do not even know we exist. Over the next year or so, I hope that we can do more to encourage in-house editors to join EAC.

I also hope that we can do more to welcome Francophone editors into EAC. This conference is a big step in that direction, and I hope that we will take more such steps.

I would also like us to do more to attract those experienced editors who have never joined or who used to be members but have let their memberships lapse. I would like all the best editors in Canada to be members of EAC. In Vancouver, for example, which I know best, there are many excellent editors. Some belong to EAC, but others do not. Why not? We need to find out and do something about it. And why don't the editors who were profiled in *Elm Street* several months ago belong? We must do more work to make EAC an organization that all editors—including those who are top in the field—want to belong to.

One of the best ways to do that is to continue to do all we can to promote the highest standards of editing. We have already done a lot in that regard, with our publications, with the work that the professional standards committee and the certification committee have done, and of course with the Tom Fairley Award, one of our most important means of promoting and honouring excellence in editing. I am sure that there is more we can do to promote high standards as well in the coming year.

Tonight, however, we are here to celebrate our achievements of the last 20 years. These achievements are the fruits of the labours of many of you here tonight, and they are something we should all be proud of. EAC has many strengths, and I'm sure that we will continue to build on those strengths as we enter our 21st year. Congratulations to you all, and I hope that you enjoy the conference. Thank you. *Merzi.*

**Nancy Flight** is editorial director of Greystone Books, a division of Douglas & McIntyre. She is rarely too tired to edit.

# Beauty in the Details, but Lacking in Passion

NANCY POLLAK AND BARBARA PULLING

EAC's 20th anniversary conference, "The Art of Editing: Beauty in the Details," aimed to "go beyond the basics to explore the creativity and style, sensitivity and passion involved in the art of editing." Quite a package to deliver at a three-day event in Ottawa in mid-May. As newcomers to an EAC conference, we arrived with high expectations, but unfortunately the conference was marked more by the good, solid planning of the conference organizers than by the passion and style of the speakers.

Things got off to a promising start with the Friday night schmooze at the Ottawa Press Club. In her opening speech, EAC president Nancy Flight made some hilarious—and convincing—links between editing and sex, and there wasn't a dry martini in the room by the time she finished.

By contrast, Douglas Gibson's keynote address the next morning was disappointing. The McClelland & Stewart publisher had some amusing stories to tell, but he missed an opportunity to share insights into the forces rocking the Canadian book industry or the state of relations between publishers and editors with the almost 200 professionals—mainly women—in the audience.

At the professional development sessions we attended, which ranged from "Editing Art in a TV World" to "Silk Purses from Sows' Ears," the presenters were well organized and affable, but there were few dynamic moments. Friends reported similar experiences in other workshops. Little or no time was allowed for discussion; as participants, we sat in room after room filled with experienced editors, yet there was rarely a chance for us to talk to one another in a structured setting. Workshop topics sounded intriguing, but most presenters took a safe approach to their subjects. Since workshop leaders were usually solo acts or well-balanced twosomes, there were no sparks flying among panellists, and even such hot topics as "Libel and Lawsuits" failed to catch fire. Overall, the sessions tended to focus on the editor as quiet enforcer rather than as cultural beast. Authors were too often portrayed as the enemy, a stereotype we'd like to see laid to rest.

That said, it was good to be in the company of so many editors of so many different stripes. The atmosphere was relaxed, and who could complain about Ottawa's hot days and warm evenings? A high point for one of us, a longtime admirer of the Lee Valley catalogue, was the workshop entitled "Crafting Words and Pictures." Lee Valley owner Leonard Lee didn't talk much about editing, but he is an entertaining speaker, a gifted copy writer and an accomplished punster, all of which made for a lively session. The workshop on mentoring, in which the mentor-protégé duos of Shelley Henderson/Jennifer Latham (Ottawa) and Jennifer Glossop/Susan Goldberg (Toronto) spoke about their process, was enjoyable, too. It was a reminder of how many of us have learned our trade by looking over the shoulder of a generous and skilled editor.

**Nancy Pollak** is an editor and writer based in Vancouver.

**Barbara Pulling** recently embarked on a freelance career after ten enjoyable years of editing for Douglas & McIntyre.

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the new specifications should be discussed. The client should never be surprised by the final bill. "Underpromise and overdeliver—build in a 'shit happens' percentage," she said.

She reminded the group that they must be not only communicators, but small-business owners, too. When she first started out, she charged \$35 an hour and couldn't sleep at night, afraid that someone might find out she was a "fraud."

By the end of her 12 years of owning an agency, Karen was charging \$140 an hour. She said it was not unusual to present a menu of options with different prices attached. She has paid communicators from \$50 to \$75 an hour, but is "more comfortable" in

the \$50 range. A good way to keep everything clear with an employer is to send a letter outlining tasks, deadlines, and cash agreements and have both parties sign it. "You'll drive yourself into the poorhouse unless you start thinking about expenses," Karen warned.

Karen looks mainly for writers and said that most corporate organizations are looking for writers, not editors. "They don't know how an editor can help them. They don't know the difference." Perhaps EAC has a role to play in educating the corporate sector about the importance of editors.

**Anna-Louise Pentland** is a freelance writer and editor with expertise in newspaper writing, the health field, and government communications.

**Karen Lee** provides corporate communications and public relations leadership at Providence Health Care. She was named Master Communicator in 1994 by the International Association of Business Communicators.

## EDITING ON THE EDGE

### *EAC Conference is in Vancouver for the First Time*

The annual national conference of the Editors' Association of Canada will be held in Vancouver in 2000. Plan to attend "Editing on the Edge," May 26 to 28, at Simon Fraser University at Harbour Centre. Over 150 of our colleagues from throughout Canada will be in town for this fun and informative event.

As an EAC member, you'll receive a call for presentations and an advance program in November plus a conference registration package in March 2000.

Call 604.681.7184 or e-mail <editbc@web.net> for more information. Watch for a call for volunteers in the next issue of *West Coast Editor*.

### *Change of Address*

Did you move over the summer? Don't forget to let the EAC national office as well as your local membership chair know your new address.

### *Executive Meetings Moving*

Starting September, the BC executive will be meeting the third Wednesday of every month between 6:00 pm and 7:15 pm at the YWCA, right before the general meetings. Any interested members are welcome to attend and observe the executive meetings.

## NEXT EAC-BC EVENT

### *Alan Twigg: BC BookWorld*

The pages of *BC BookWorld* reflect a rich and diverse publishing scene in this province. Alan Twigg, *BC BookWorld's* publisher, will speak at the September meeting of EAC-BC. Join us to hear Alan talk about the history of this comprehensive quarterly, as well as his perspective on the current state of book publishing in BC.

**Wednesday, September 15**  
YWCA Hotel—Royal Bank Room  
733 Beatty Street, Vancouver  
(between Robson and Georgia)  
7:30 pm to 9:30 pm

## WEST COAST EDITOR

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