

West Coast EDITOR

A MONTHLY FORUM FOR EAC
MEMBERS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA
TO EXCHANGE IDEAS,
DEVELOP SKILLS AND
SHARE NEWS ABOUT EDITING

JUNE 2001

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EDITORS'
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES
RÉVISEURS
BC BRANCH

Eight Step Editing—not magic, but almost!

CATHY BRANNEN

I had heard about Jim Taylor's Eight Step Editing workshop for almost two years before I finally managed to fit it into my schedule this past April 7. Informative, humorous, and interspersed with anecdotal information and hands-on exercises, it was well worth the wait.

Jim's presentation was not about spelling and punctuation, but readability. Throughout his five-hour long workshop, he stressed the importance of the reader's perspective.

"A lot of editors don't realize they are the court of last resort," said Jim. "This is about how an editor can take a text and massage it, and work with it from a reader's point of view."

Jim used the analogy of editors as gatekeepers who ensure the intended reader understands text. At least one out of two Canadians finds reading hard work, he said. So if a rule needs to be broken to achieve readability, break it.

As well as the eight editing steps, Jim explained what he calls the four stages of editing that all editors experience:

1. Paralysis—upon receiving any text, an editor assumes it is either too good or too bad to edit.

2. Contempt—when the editor starts to think the writer is either incompetent or an idiot.

3. Playing God—when the editor seeks perfection in the manuscript and thinks he or she knows better than the author.

4. Acceptance/Maturity—when the editor allows the author's voice to emerge, using the author's words and style.

Jim's intention with Eight Step Editing is to offer editors a more objective approach. Instead of having to make qualitative judgments, the editor finds and corrects specific recurring faults.

Step One deals with shortening the length of sentences for a quick improvement to any manuscript. If a sentence runs more than two typed lines of 12-point type, Jim suggests breaking it down into two sentences.

Sentence lengths have steadily decreased over the years. Eighty-word sentences were the norm during

Chaucer's time, decreasing to 35 to 40 words 300 years later in the Shakespearean era.

"Generally, sentences today should average 20 words or less," said Jim. Today's readers have difficulty with sentences that are longer, he added, attributing this lessened attention span to hectic lifestyles with many interruptions.

The remaining seven steps in the editing process are:

- ♦ take out the trash (redundancies, etc.)
- ♦ deflate words
- ♦ reduce negatives
- ♦ eliminate the equations
- ♦ activate the passives
- ♦ lead with strength
- ♦ parade your paragraphs

You don't need to complete all of the steps, nor edit every manuscript using the steps in the same sequence. Jim suggested limiting the number of changes you make with each pass of the manuscript. For example, make three passes through a manuscript by combining Steps 1 to 4 for one pass, make a separate pass for verbs and lastly look at paragraph leads and closings.

Simply knowing the steps, however, will not necessarily make you a great editor overnight. Not only is our language constantly evolving but so are Jim's editing steps. Jim revises the workshop materials after every session. This session's materials were prepared only one week before his presentation.

Whether you're attending Eight Step Editing or another editing workshop, the message to today's editor is clear and consistent: make it simpler—not simple.

Jim elaborated when an audience member asked, "If editors are allowed to dumb it down, who will save the language?"

"Language goes through periods of drastic changes," Jim replied. "It eventually finds its own level, although dramatically different from what we know. When you edit, the point is to not do as *much* as you can, but as *little* as you can. Just *charge* as much as you can!" ✧

Eight Step Editing will be offered again in the future. Details to be announced.

Hone your leadership skills as BC's chair

ANN-MARIE METTEN

My term as chair has come to an end, and I now pass on responsibilities to the BC branch executive, who will be sharing the job until a willing member steps forward.

My involvement will continue to a lesser degree as past chair. And Winnifred Assmann will be assuming a majority of the chair's responsibilities, including travel to national executive meetings, as BC's representative.

But BC needs a new chair. If you're a voting member of the Editors' Association of Canada, you might think about offering some of your time to this challenging volunteer position.

My time commitment has been about an hour a day on average. With Winnifred travelling to national meetings, the time commitment for next year's chair will be significantly reduced. Established members who know what the job entails should feel encouraged to step forward.

The benefits of serving as BC chair are many. Over the past year I have enjoyed the pleasure of meeting a number of BC editors at meetings and workshops, as well as at last year's national conference in Vancouver, *Editing on the Edge*. I have benefited from networking opportunities that allowed me to meet potential clients in other settings. And I have enjoyed spearheading new initiatives with a qualified and capable BC executive.

Travel to Victoria has also been a benefit. It has been a particular pleasure to renew relations with members of the Professional Editors' Association of Vancouver Island and with BC members of EAC who live there. Our joint workshop on Saturday, May 26, on editing for the web was highly successful, and another workshop is planned for the spring of 2002.

Many thanks to all BC members who have contributed this year on the executive—we have benefited from your volunteer efforts. And thanks to the membership for the opportunity to serve as BC chair this past year.

Now it's your turn! ✧

Editor shares her passion for fiction

NAOMI PAULS

More than 30 fiction writers, editors and wannabes soaked up the expertise and enthusiasm of Joy Gugeler on Saturday morning, April 28, at the season-ending EAC-BC workshop *Techniques for Editing Fiction*.

The editorial director of Raincoast Books' new national fiction imprint, Joy told how she parlayed a job as host of a biweekly radio show about books into a career as an editor of Canadian fiction. She provided many tips and contacts for those interested in becoming in-house editors.

Writers in attendance heard about the difficulties of getting published: the huge slush piles of unsolicited manuscripts, the long delays in hearing back from publishers, and the Catch-22 of not being able to get an agent until you have a book published.

However, they also learned ways to get an editor's attention, such as winning awards or competitions, having stories published in literary magazines, and, above all, taking themselves and their writing seriously.

Despite the frustrations, Joy said she thinks it is a good time to be a fiction writer

in Canada. In a lively session filled with illustrative anecdotes and insider wisdom, Joy outlined the various stages of editing fiction, from the structural, comparative read through to the copyedit.

Key components of this process are editorial letters to the author, which must be both sensitive and concrete. Besides being passionate (about the book) and diplomatic, Joy said a fiction editor needs to be empathetic, able to compromise, willing to listen, and, in the end, detached—able to ask "What is best for the book?"

"It's very hard to create and edit," said Joy. "You really need two people." Her workshop provided much insight into how the author-editor relationship can be nurtured to produce the best possible book. And lest editors entertain ideas of grandeur (or an eponymous imprint), she cautioned:

"Editors are by definition invisible. If you're in it for the glory, forget it. It's not about you."

Her frank, illuminating talk inspired a host of questions and no doubt encouraged a few writers to revisit their creative intentions. ✧

BC editor wins Tom Fairley Award

The winner of the 2000 Tom Fairley Award for Editorial Excellence is Barbara Pulling, for her work on *The Bear's Embrace* by Patricia Van Tighem (Greystone Books).

Judge Jean Wilson (associate director of the University of British Columbia Press) said of Barbara Pulling's work: "This is one of the most effective editorial jobs I've seen. Barbara Pulling added immeasurable value to this story. She saw the gem of the book to be in the first draft, figured out how to encourage the author to enlarge it most effectively, nurtured a novice writer ... and supported a person who had had a horrific experience yet had an inspiring story to tell."

According to Judge Jonathan Webb (managing editor at McClelland &

Stewart), Pulling's work "was exemplary. She demonstrated not only the editing skills that one would hope to find in a professional editor, but also creativity, flair, and insight of a high order."

Carol Berger is runner-up for her work on *The Holocaust's Ghost*, edited by F. C. DeCoste and Bernard Schwartz (University of Alberta Press).

The award will be presented at the banquet at the EAC/ACR Conference and AGM on June 16. ✧

The next issue of West Coast Editor will be available September 2001.

Have a great summer!

Winners of the 2001 BC Book Prizes

RODERICK HAIG-BROWN REGIONAL PRIZE

The Encyclopedia of British Columbia, Dan Francis (Harbour).

Other contenders: The Last Great Sea, Terry Glavin (Greystone). *Island Timber*, Richard Somerset Mackie (Sono Nis). *The Politics of Resentment*, Philip Resnick (UBC Press). *Tom Thomson's Shack*, Harold Rhenisch (New Star).

BILL DUTHIE BC BOOKSELLERS' CHOICE AWARD

The Encyclopedia of British Columbia, Dan Francis (Harbour).

Other contenders: City of Glass, Douglas Coupland (D&M). *The Last Great Sea*, Terry Glavin (Greystone). *Wild West Women*, Rosemary Neering (Whitecap). *The Bear's Embrace*, Patricia Van Tighem (Greystone).

ETHEL WILSON FICTION PRIZE

Monkey Beach, Eden Robinson (Knopf).

Other contenders: A Message for Mr. Lazarus, Barbara Lambert (Cormorant). *The Hero's Walk*, Anita Rau Badami (Knopf). *The Judas Hills*, Peter Trower (Harbour). *Uther*, Jack Whyte (Penguin).

DOROTHY LIVESAY POETRY PRIZE

Another Gravity, Don McKay (M&S).

Other contenders: His Life, George Bowering (ECW Press). *The Bare Plum of Winter Rain*, Patrick Lane (Harbour). *Water Stair*, John Pass (Oolichan). *Slow-Moving Target*, Sue Wheeler (Brick Books).

HUBERT EVANS NON-FICTION PRIZE

The Last Great Sea, Terry Glavin (Greystone).

Other contenders: The Other Side of Eden, Hugh Brody (D&M). *Wild West Women*, Rosemary Neering (Whitecap). *Tom Thomson's Shack*, Harold Rhenisch (New Star). *The Bear's Embrace*, Patricia Van Tighem (Greystone).

SHEILA A. EGOFF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE PRIZE

The Grave, James Heneghan (Groundwood).

Other contenders: Men of Stone, Gayle Friesen (Kids Can Press). *Ballerinas Don't Wear Glasses*, Ainslie Manson author, Dean Griffith illustrator (Orca). *No Cafes in Narnia*, Nikki Tate (Sono Nis). *Frances*, W.D. Valgardson (Groundwood).

Before Wings chosen Young Adult Book of the Year

The Canadian Library Association has chosen Orca Book Publishers' title, *Before Wings*, as the Young Adult Book of the Year.

This honour recognizes an author of an outstanding English language Canadian book written for young adults ages 13 to 18. *Before Wings* is also the winner of the Saskatchewan Book Award and is an American Library Association Best Book nominee.

BC authors win Red Cedar Book Awards

The winners of the 2000/2001 Red Cedar Book Awards are Vancouver author Marg Meikle, for her non-fiction book, *Funny You Should Ask* and Delta author Gayle Friesen, for the fiction title *Janey's Girl*.

Ceremony hosts Namrata Jhamb and Andrew McKinlay from Burnaby's Sperling Elementary School announced the names at the Red Cedar Book Awards Ceremony Gala held May 12 at Burnaby North Secondary School.

Sixteen authors and 950 students and teachers cheered as student pairs performed skits, poems and songs honouring each of the 24 nominees.

The winners were determined by a BC-wide student vote in April. This year, 624 groups of up to 30 readers in grades 4 to 7 registered to participate in The Red Cedar Book Awards Program.

Red Cedar was established in 1996 to encourage literacy among BC youth and to promote quality Canadian children's books.

Fiction nominees include Christopher Paul Curtis' *Bud, Not Buddy*, Kenneth Oppel's *Sunwing*, and Kathy Kacer's *The Secret of Gabi's Dresser*.

Non-fiction nominees include *Earthlings: An Alien Studies the Human Body* by Valerie Wyatt, *Meet the Group of Seven* by David Wistow and Kelly McKinley, and *Wow, Canada!* by Vivien Bowers.

Next year's awards gala will be held in Victoria. ✧

Footnotes

A warm welcome to new member **Janice Newrick**, who has jumped right into the fray and volunteered as a proofreader.

Originally from England, Janice has been living in Canada for the past 18 months and says she absolutely loves it. She has copyediting and proofreading experience in both the legal and business areas and lately has taken on a lot of web site editing work.

Janice is eager to gain experience in other subject areas, in particular fiction and health.

Janice lives in Whistler with her other half and helps him run a software development company. They are both "sports freaks," and they also volunteer at the local dog shelter by taking the dogs for regular walks. ✧

Introducing ... the new executive for 2001/2002

Cheryl Andrews, Secretary

Cheryl Andrews assumes the role of secretary this year, after getting her feet wet in the association as membership chair last year.

She is a new editor, having come to editing via a former career in education, and she thought that getting involved with the executive was a logical step to learning more about editors and editing.

Cheryl loves the collegiality of so many brilliant minds gathered together at EAC meetings and workshops, and considers editing a life-long path of learning.

Carol Zhong, Treasurer

From teaching ESL in a Quebec high school, in universities in Quebec and Ontario, as well as in a maximum-security prison, to teaching in China, Carol has experienced languages from many facets. She has a BA in French and an MA in TESL—teaching ESL and English for 20 years.

Carol lived and worked in China for four years, teaching ESL and writing teaching materials. After moving to London, Carol decided she needed a career change. When she noticed an intensive editing skills course, she enrolled and found it a natural move from ESL teaching.

She later moved to Hong Kong where she taught at City University for a year, at the same time freelancing for Bloomsbury Publishing. For Bloomsbury, Carol worked on a dictionary of synonyms and antonyms, which became part of Encarta.

Last August, Carol moved to Vancouver and has been freelance editing for the Open University of Hong Kong.

Janet Hudgins, Public Relations/ Industry Liaison Co-chair

Janet was born in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia, lived in Toronto for 35 years, and came to BC six years ago. She is now embarking on a new career in editing after a lifetime in business.

Janet is an English student at SFU and is writing a narrative history about a Loyalist family in the American Revolution.

She is also a director of the Canadian Peace Institute, which is now in its infancy but will soon offer graduate degrees in the studies of peace.

Says Janet, "It will be the only such institute of learning on this continent."

This past winter, Janet served as a juror for a Canadian history book award.

Ingrid Luters, Public Relations/ Industry Liaison Co-chair

Ingrid was born and raised in the printing industry. After encountering a small legacy and some mid-life angst, she took a break from printing to attend Simon Fraser University.

There she obtained a degree in communications and publishing, and she now works as a designer and production editor for a local book publisher. She says she still loves working with type, paper and colour.

"I appreciate my association with EAC for its professional development programs and the atmosphere of group mentoring at the monthly meetings.

There is always something new to learn," says Ingrid.

As public relations/industry liaison co-chair, Ingrid wants to help EAC reassert the importance of editors and good editing practices in the business and cultural communities.

You'll meet the rest of the executive in future issues of West Coast Editor.

WEST COAST EDITOR

West Coast Editor is the newsletter of the British Columbia branch of the Editors' Association of Canada. Views expressed in these pages do not necessarily reflect those of EAC/ACR as a whole.

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Next deadline: **August 15, 2001**

2001/2002 EAC-BC EXECUTIVE

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Ode to my Spell Checker

Eye halve a spelling chequer
It came with my pea sea.
It plainly marques four my revue
Miss steaks eye kin knot sea.
Eye strike a key and type a word
And weight four it to say.
Weather eye am wrong or write
It shows me strait a weigh.

As soon as a mist ache is maid
It nose bee fore two long.
And eye can putt the error rite
Its rare lea ever wrong.

Eye have run this poem threw it
I am shore your pleased two no.
Its letter perfect awl the weigh
My chequer tolled me sew.

- contributed by *Jacqueline Wood.*

Source: www.aspenwood.com/spelcheck.htm