
**ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR WRITERS:
DEMISTIFYING THE PUBLISHING PROCESS**

one attendee's conference report

by Amanda Le Rougetel

MYSTERY SOLVED: YOUR BOOK CAN BE PUBLISHED

A glorious sunny Saturday in the middle of May found about 100 people learning intently about the publishing process. Sponsored by the MEA in conjunction with the Manitoba Writers' Guild, the Manitoba chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, the Association of Manitoba Book Publishers and the prairie branch of the Editors' Association of Canada, the one-day conference truly did demystify the publishing process – both the traditional path via a formal publisher and the newly respectable self-publishing path via a printer.

*Kudos to all the MEA volunteers – especially the conference chair **Karen Grant**, and organizing committee members **Cheri Frazer, Kirby Gilman and Meg Coish** – all of whom gave countless hours to make it happen. Thank you!*

SELF-PUBLISHING LEGEND

The conference keynote speaker was Mary-Ann Kirkby, self-published author of the memoir *I Am Hutterite*. She is a legend in the Canadian publishing world for having sold 75,000 copies of her book, and her speech made it clear why she is successful: Hers is a fascinating story well told. She had the audience eating out of her hand, with her charm, passion and wit. But beyond the story and the skill in telling it, Mary-Ann's success makes it clear that tireless – and I mean *tireless* – promotional efforts got her to the top of the bestseller list. Indeed, every author – self- or traditionally published – must be the champion for their book: turn down no speaking engagement; always have a few copies of your book on hand to sign and sell; and truly believe that everyone must read your story. Buy Mary-Ann's book at your local bookstore or go to her website (www.polkadotpress.ca).

WRITERS, WRITERS...EVERYWHERE!

Panelists shared their stories and their expertise, and it was all well received by the enthusiastic audience, about two-thirds of whom raised their hands when asked if people had a book ready to be published or a story they wanted to write for publication. Clearly, there are writers out there by the dozen just waiting to connect with professionals who can help their work get into the hands of readers. (Note to MEA members: Get your editor's profile up on our website so that writers/potential clients can find you.)

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What came through loud and clear for me throughout the day is this: Know why you're writing. Know what you want to achieve from your writing. Hook up with the right person or people to help you achieve those goals (from editor to printer/publisher to promoter, etc.). But the bottom line comes from the MEA's very own Jenny Gates, a freelance editor who has worked with self-published authors, and who was an eloquent and informative panelist: "If you have a story you want to tell, don't let anything stop you from writing it and sharing it."

SINGING THE PRAISES OF EDITORS

As a member of the MEA, you'll be pleased to know that writers and publishers alike sung the praises of editors' work, making it clear that any writer who thinks their manuscript (MS) is ready for publication without the benefit of an editor's input – well in advance – is dreaming in Technicolor!

WORDS OF WISDOM

Detailed conference handouts are posted on the MEA website. However, if those eight pages of notes are too much for you, here are some pearls of wisdom plucked from the panelists' presentations.

- › Do not send your MS to a publisher when it's really an editor you need.
- › Hire an editor. Do not be afraid of an editor.
- › Do not proof your own work. Get some fresh eyes.
- › It's ok to write garbage, as long as you edit brilliantly.
- › The writer/editor relationship is not always friendly; it can change one way or another, and it can be negotiated – or terminated. It's an adult conversation.
- › Canada has a population of 30 million. If a book sells 5,000 copies or better, it's a best seller in Canada. However, that number is only 500 if it's a book of poetry. To put it all into perspective: Turnstone (Manitoba publisher) publishes only 1,000 to 1,500 copies of each book it takes on, and it publishes fewer than 20 books each year.
- › One or two reviews across the country these days is considered good coverage, compared to 20 or 30 even just five years ago.

EDITING BY ANY OTHER NAME IS...WHAT EXACTLY?

A perennial question from writers is, 'What is editing anyway?' Jenny Gates provided some good accessible definitions:

Substantive editing reworks the structure of the writing (working with the author to do so). It is macro editing: big picture items such as characters, character development, character arc, plot holes, time errors in story, etc.

Copyeditors go over the writing line by line to strengthen the text. This is micro editing: Are words repeated? Is it the best word choice? Is the sentence structure smooth? etc.

Proofing is about catching typos, spelling mistakes, etc.



Mary-Ann Kirby speaking as the keynote presenter, and signing books (photos by MEA member Nancy Clark)

WHERE WAS THE EDITOR?

From the 2011 Toyota Matrix catalogue...

Rear Bumper Protector
“Protect your bumper from scratches and looking new for years to come.”

This is the final issue of MUSINGS for the 2010/11 year. Thanks to everyone who has contributed to the vibrancy of the MEA by attending events, workshops and sessions. Renew your membership now (still just \$45) to ensure you don't miss out on the great programming already being planned for next year!

See next page for an important message, please.

Programming *ideas* for 2011/12 from the MEA's fantastic events committee**

Ghost writing: What is it? Who does it?
Electronic editing
Freelancing issues
Different types of editing: from substantive editing to proofreading
The ethics and philosophy of editing
Behind the Scenes: Tours of local printing companies, archives and/or libraries
Grammar
Whine & Dine lunches (with discussion topic)
Writing beginnings, middles and endings
...and more!

** *ideas* only; nothing confirmed yet – but don't they all sound great? Email us at meaworkshops@gmail.com with your own workshop/session idea or your favourites from the list

We need you!

The Manitoba Editors' Association is looking for a few willing volunteers to join the executive committee in September to take on some tasks to help keep our organization going.

Please consider stepping up and giving a few hours a month to make a difference.

Without your energy and input, we cannot keep delivering the services our members rely on.

Membership chair: Manage the paperwork involved in tracking memberships (it's easy, honest). Draft and send welcome messages. Excellent experience for your resume.

Member at large: Learning position without specific responsibility. Great opportunity to learn from long-time volunteers. Excellent experience for your resume.

Send an email to meaworkshops@gmail.com with **YES!** in the subject line.