Late bloomer: an indexer gets a start

Jane Purton

The world of indexing is a revelation to the late bloomer. Forget the lonely computer screen and a life of isolation. Training courses lead to mentoring schemes, committee membership, outings and projects, social events, conferences and writing. There is even time to produce a few indexes.

Why did I become an indexer? Why not a goatherd? I was drawn to indexing through my work as a librarian, which is not surprising given the close relationship between information and how to find it. After some time in the library some of us become attracted to the back end of a book, and find ourselves reading thesauri for fun. The next step is to think, 'I could do this. Just the thing for a retirement job,' and start looking for a training course.

The ANZSI (Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers) – or AusSI (Australian Society of Indexers) as it was then – state branches offer regular one-day introductory and intermediate courses for back-of-book and journal indexing. Trainees produce small indexes and learn more than they want to know about composting and lead paint. I completed these courses and even became a Registered Indexer, but was not ready to give up my job in a university library for the terrors of freelance indexing. Several years passed. My indexing career at this stage could be likened to a sickly seedling struggling in arid soil. This might have gone on forever had not the mentoring programme been launched in Victoria in 2003.

There is a yawning gap between training and working, which the mentoring scheme can bridge by enabling the beginner to build experience and confidence under the critical eye of a mentor. By the end of the programme the mentee will have completed three indexes. Indexing subjects have included published books without indexes, historical reports and local history newsletters. The indexes are published in a series and sold to libraries and other interested parties to complement the original titles. The indexer thus becomes a published author.

Boosted by mentoring compost, my indexing career started shooting. Before the scheme began I was a fringe-dwelling member of AusSI, an untried Registered Indexer nervously waiting for the first real job. During my time as a mentee, my mentor Max McMaster invited me to join the committee of the Victorian branch of AusSI. [See Max McMaster's article on page 189 – *Ed*] Despite the 300-kilometre round trip to Melbourne for the meetings I was happy to attend, for the committee was made up of interesting and amusing people. During my time the committee has been involved with amendments to the AusSI Constitution, which have included the renaming of AusSI to ANZSI with the inclusion of New Zealand. Then there was the conference.

The conference – *Indexing: engage, enlighten, enrich* – was hosted by the Victorian branch of ANZSI in Melbourne. The mentoring scheme had aroused so much interest that two talks were included in the programme. Max talked about the concept and development of the scheme while I spoke on the mentee's experience. When Max asked me to write a paper I was filled with consternation. However, I could see that the mentee's impressions were important for the sake of the scheme and its future (a thing of duty is a joy forever). In preparation I invested in a public speaking course and a tape recorder. My index for a report on the Aborigines of East Gippsland had been the first published under the scheme, and this with the report was circulated after my talk. Furthermore, as a committee member I played host at a table at the conference dinner, a far cry from the shrinking violet who attended the 1999 conference.

Victorian branch members enjoy social gatherings in the form of outings to libraries, museums, archives and other places of interest. In the spring of 2004 the committee was looking for a destination in Gippsland (south-eastern Victoria) in order to introduce AusSI and indexing to local history and genealogical societies, and as a Gippslander I was involved with the project.

The Gippsland project was a double-header which began when members were invited to index a small publication to demonstrate that there was no 'right' way to create a useful index. Seven indexes were produced for *Wonthaggi State Coal Mine: a short history of the State Coal Mine and its miners* (Fahey, 1987). We pinned the results on the wall and had great fun comparing them before taking part in a discussion about the various approaches. The value of the exercise to me was like a sprinkle of blood and bone on the garden.

Once the indexes had been merged into a super index, the next step, an outing to the Wonthaggi State Coal Mine, was organized. Closed in 1968, the mine has since become a tourist attraction. A crowd of indexers, their families and dogs, and members of local historical societies rallied to the call of 'Let's go underground,' and were treated to a tour of a tunnel and various museums. After Professor Neil Archbold (keynote speaker at the recent ANZSI conference) had spoken about the local geology, our index was presented to our host in both hard copy and electronic format. Copies will be made available with the booklet in the museum shop.

The sky is the limit when it comes to indexing subjects. We recently invited Sally Buttons to talk about her massive collection of buttons and their classification. It was simple really. The buttons are divided into four groups – animal, mineral, vegetable and artificial – each with relevant subheadings. And what about scalpels? We spent a

fascinating evening at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, escorted by the curator. Fifty years ago, en route to the dentist, my sister and I had often wondered what lay behind the pale brick walls of the College.

Where to now? The late bloomer is an indexer, thanks to the opportunities arising from the mentoring scheme. In addition to the mentored indexes, the first paying job has been completed. Further work will be sought rather than dodged. Furthermore, along with a boost to my social life, I have been given the opportunity to play a small part in the world of indexing.

References

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Impressions of a first Canadian conference

Dania Sheldon

The 2005 annual national conference of the Indexing and Abstracting Society of Canada/Société Canadienne pour l'Analyse de Documents (IASC/SCAD) was held in June in Ottawa, the national capital. Anglophone and francophone members gathered for an intensive four days of pre-conference and conference sessions, which are summarized in the following article by a new Society member and first-time conference attendee.

In a recent meeting of the Editors' Association of Canada, British Columbia (BC) branch, one of my colleagues tabled these questions:

Editing – is it a skill, or an illness?

Do we help, or do we need help?

Some of us may well ask ourselves the same questions about indexing, especially as we grapple with a particularly challenging project. One presenter at this year's IASC/SCAD conference in Ottawa expressed kindred ambivalent feelings when saying she loves 'having indexed' something; going through the actual process can, on the other hand, induce various symptoms ranging from mild frustration, through crises of self-belief, to advanced existential angst.

The nature of this experience is not always readily communicable to those in other fields. Indeed, when I say, 'I create indexes', the most common response I receive from those outside the overlapping worlds of publishing/writing/editing/ indexing is: 'What's that?' Explaining that I create those useful bits at the backs of books (my work has so far been on back-of-the-book indexes) draws looks of dawning comprehension combined with mild incredulity. Family and close friends benevolently lump this activity in with my overall obsessive-compulsiveness, noting that at least it brings in some money, whereas my involuntary straightening of the pictures on their walls is merely irritating.

It was thus both comforting and enjoyable to meet and mingle with fellow indexers at the June conference, especially as I am just this year getting back into the field.

A great deal seems to have transpired since I created my first two indexes back in 1998. At that time, I was a full-time volunteer in the production department of Douglas & McIntyre/Greystone Books in Vancouver; the opportunity to learn indexing 'on the fly' came when the last-minute crunch of publishing schedules threw two outdoor travel manuscripts in my path. I was hooked.

Seven years later, hook still embedded, I decided to brush up and catch up by taking an indexing course offered by Simon Fraser University's Writing and Publishing Program. Through instructor Annette Lorek's highly informative online lessons, I learnt of IASC/SCAD, as well as sister associations such as the ASI and SI. What better next step to take than to join IASC/SCAD and meet other indexers, seasoned and new?

I decided to attend the conference for a few reasons. First was the happy coincidence of the indexing conference being right before the annual conference of the Editors' Association of Canada/Association Canadienne des Réviseurs (EAC/ACR). As a new member of the EAC/ACR executive team, I had resolved on being in Toronto for that event, so the location and timing of the two was ideal. I don't know if

Bloomers, Late In Life Success - Infographic Late bloomers are people who achieved proficiency in some skill later than they are normally expected to.Late bloomers are people who achieved proficiency in some skill later than they are normally expected to. What does it mean to be a late bloomer? A late bloomer is a person whose talents or capabilities are not visible to others until later than usual. Late To Learn? It's never too late to start a successful business! Not that anyone in their right mind would call a person who finds success at age 24 a "late bloomer." Still, some good points! Teen gets perfect score on Japan's college entrance history exam with crazy-detailed notes【Pics】. The note is coming out! A late bloomer is a person whose talents or capabilities are not visible to others until later than usual. The term is used metaphorically to describe a child or adolescent who develops slower than others in their age group, but eventually catches up and in some cases overtakes their peers, or an adult whose talent or genius in a particular field only appears later in life than is normal – in some cases only in old age.