



Is travel as an author, Work?

Yes, it is work, to publicise your books via workshops and festival talks. But indirectly, your life is enriched by the personalities, and the settings.

'May to September is the author travelling & literary festival season.'

I leave Melbourne on an 11.10 am Saturday flight and catch the pre-arranged coach at Maroochydore airport for the stimulating Voices on the Coast literary festival.

Seventeen days later, on 11th June, I arrive home at 7pm after a 10 hour drive from Condobolin in outback NSW with a few side flights to Perth, Brisbane and Melbourne (twice).' Hazel Edwards

What makes a successful literary festival?

- An efficient & enthusiastic local organiser with media savvy
- A mix of guest author skills & events including 'how to...s'
- Availability of books for sale
- Sponsors & central venue
- Prepared audiences
- Timing and a catchy title
- Spontaneously initiated extra projects

The serendipitous effect of creative people getting together, often initiates new cross-media projects, beyond what was planned. In places such as Western Australia where residential property prices are soaring due to the mining boom, it's appropriate to stress in opening festivals that creators are valuable intellectual property who bring ideas and business to a community.

'It was worth the 400K round trip to attend that session.' (The heARTlines festival of children's literature and book illustration WA illustrator participant)

'We've got a shortage of water with the drought, but no shortage of ideas.' 'Write in the Heart' festival, Condobolin (outback NSW)

Workshop participant & prison chaplain Kim Miller's YA novel 'They Told me I Had to Write This' will be published by Ford Street mid 2009 as a direct result of attending that Condobolin Festival and subsequent mentoring)

Historically, journalism was called the Fourth Estate but as a children's author I have been in four states in the past month, invited to present at interstate literary festivals



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along with illustrators, Manga artists, journalists, indigenous elder storytellers, cartoonists, historians and travel writers. A privilege and a challenge as each festival was very different, and thousands of kilometres apart. Participants often leave in a state of exhilaration, ready to read, write or create, sparked by shared ideas.

Peripatetic children's authors & illustrators can have significant and lasting impact on rural communities. Apart from generating business via festival accommodation, catering and transport, they often utilise the settings in later work, and this validates 'local' as worth writing about. Indirectly they help literacy.

If they are versatile and can talk in schools about their work as solo 'ideas' businesses as well as to special interest adult groups such as family historians, travel or storytelling groups, they are a worthwhile 'investment' for central funding authorities.

Increasingly, for communities hit by drought or disasters, the value of 'cathartic' writing as a form of therapy is paying off. Writing may not prevent suicide or depression, but it may enable communities to use humour to alleviate distress and provide vicarious experience through the therapy of writing and reading. The Katherine Susannah Pritchard writing centre offers cathartic workshops for victims of crime, with a psychologist in the group as well as a writing tutor.

'Powerful stuff. I really thought about that afterwards.' 15 year old male's response to Vietnam veteran Barry Heard's candid account at 'Voices on the Coast' Qld

In drought ridden areas like Condobolin in outback NSW, being able to write about the impact of the drought has been a survival technique, and a collection is planned of local inspirational writing.

However, creative overload can contribute to a state of exhaustion and the ability to sustain enthusiasm across delayed flights, early morning starts and jet-lag can require voice and endurance training comparable to preparing for an expedition. Being able to read others' books in airports or listen on audio during long drives, helps transport into other worlds.

Increasingly, there seems to be an emphasis upon visual and multi-media rather than verbal forms of storytelling.

Queensland's Voices on the Coast was held at the University of the Sunshine Coast at Mooloolaba and co-organised by Immanuel Lutheran College and attracted over 4,500 primary and secondary students plus parents, teachers and librarians to listen to 25 authors and illustrators across two days and had an emphasis upon collaborative new media including Manga art, cartooning, blogs and webchats.

Western Australia's 'heARTlines' at Mundaring Arts Centre in the Perth Hills had a total of 26 authors and illustrators involved in the schools or public programs and a month-long exhibition of illustrations with a legendary theme, a gallery bookshop and links to workshops at Katherine Susannah Pritchard's former home, with an emphasis on visual-verbal links. A 'Collaboration' session for the combined SCWBI and ASA members were included. The availability of books and artwork for sale across a month was significant, enabling follow up by procrastinators.

Outback NSW Condobolin's 'Write in the Heart' aimed at valuing the cathartic effect of local 'yarns' and oral histories in the midst of drought, when autobiographical accounts can help psychologically. Tribal elders told their stories and adults learnt new 'non-boring' ways of sharing bush yarns for grandchildren in different mediums,



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whether picture books, audio tapes, blogging, e-mails or mapping. Children attended the library storytelling with librarian inspired posters.

Electronic innovations mean distance is not a barrier to meeting an author, but the author's keyboard skills may be. During a Qld festival webchat about Antarctic writer on ice with a Bundaberg school, I deleted them accidentally but we resumed.

What do I remember most?

- The height, health and hi-tech savvy of young Queenslanders whose pastor-principal hoped that in their beachside 'surfing culture' they'd surf with a book in hand!
- The deep impact of Barry Heard's candid description of the personal reality of war trauma, and a silent totally engrossed and awed audience.
- Irish John Boyle, author of 'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas's story of the Holocaust boys either side of the fence, speaking candidly of international reactions to his book.
- Professionalism of author Isobelle Carmody who turned off her Prague-Qld-NZ jet lag to respond to readers.
- Sharing issues of copyright, rights reversions and across media publication with other professionals as well as encouraging young writing hopefuls.
- The joy of meeting other alert minds.
- Volume fading on live-to-air WA radio interview and having to 'talk over' to fill dead air space.
- Alice, the acknowledged CWA 'best cook' in Condobolin making me 24 profiteroles in exchange for the gift of ideas.
- 'Yarning' sessions at outback Condobolin where even the local pharmacist told his 'coping with the drought' story.
- SMS messages beeping as I did a left-hand turn on the Shire of Bland road and the mobile resumed after five days outback.
- The long distance 'truckie' stuck in the airport due to a delayed plane telling me he liked to buy 'unabridged' audio tape stories' which lasted longer.
- Swimming teacher learning how to write a book proposal to save kids lives.
- When technological links fail (like data projectors) just talk vividly.
- 'Yarning' of aboriginal elders about Go-Anna!
- Kiss & Go sign in parent car park dropping zone.
- Exhibited 'drafts' of 'Antarctic Dad' book artwork and student saying '*I didn't know they had to draw or write it more than once.*'
- Blood Red, Red Herrings, Red Stars and the Red Witch: Composing a group mystery on site at the historic KSP writers' centre. Scenarios valued the local and historic clues and could be adapted to any area, which was holding writing sessions. Co-ordinator Chris contributed local anecdotes and clues about the



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real KSP known locally as The Red Witch because of her Communist connections.

- Ned Kelly...armour on display at breakfast time at the wonderfully hospitable but not yet finished B& B with lamas at my window.

En route home, the cake-eating hippo and I were breathalysed at Jerilderie (NSW) near the bank, another Ned Kelly link.

There used to be car numberplate labels like STATE OF EXCITEMENT. Maybe there should be one for festivals...State of Exhaustion? State of Satisfaction?

This article written by Hazel Edwards

You can find Hazel (and check out her upcoming gigs) at www.hazeledwards.com

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