

***The Winston Churchill Memorial
Trust of Australia***

Report by Jen McVeity

2002/2 Churchill Fellow

**Promoting Australian authors to
USA publishers**

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Signed: Jen McVeity

Dated: Wednesday 12 November 2003.

Executive Summary

Promoting Australian authors to USA publishers

Author Jen McVeity visited publishing houses in New York, Boston and California, to showcase the books of over 42 Australian writers. USA editors were delighted to meet, very enthusiastic about Australian talent and extremely interested in the publishing differences between the two countries. Jen also presented at conferences in Utah, Texas and Los Angeles.

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Aims... Actions... Achievement

Promote Australian authors

... your notes on the differences in our respective publishing worlds are fascinating and useful... thank you for all the effort you put into this trip, and for spreading the word about Australian books and authors here in the U.S! Sarah Pope (Assistant Editor, Dutton)

Encouragement

I am simply over the moon to have had this interest in my work from such publishers. I do thank you for your marvelous energy and generosity of spirit.... It is so hard to keep believing in one's work. And to have two major publishers look at it with interest lifted me sky high. Helene Smith (Author)

Breakthroughs

I now have an American literary agent and considerable international interest in many of my titles. Hazel Edwards (Author)

Empowerment

Thank you again for championing our cause. There is no way I would have sent work off to the U.S. without your opening the door for me. Emma Quay (Illustrator)

New Markets

Simon and Schuster are always on the lookout for fresh new voices, and Jen's visit exposed me to a great variety of literature I might otherwise not have ever come across. Caitlyn Dlouhy (Executive Editor, Atheneum Books for Young Children)

Promoting Australian authors to USA publishers

Report by Jen McVeity

2002/2 Churchill Fellow

- Jen McVeity is the Australian head of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (The SCBWI is the largest writing organisation in the world with over 20,000 members in 18 countries.) www.scbwi.org
- Jen has over 23 books published in five countries www.jenmcveity.com
- Dreamcatcher is a popular Year 7/8 text in many schools. (It is on the NY Library's Best Books list and is the Most Stolen book in Hawaii State Library.)
- The director of Highlighting Writing, Jen presents teacher PD to over 3000 teachers a year. www.highlightingwriting.com
- In 2002 she was state runner-up, Speaker of the Year. (An industry wide award covering celebrity, sporting and motivational speakers.)
- In 2003-4 Jen has been appointed international Chair of the SCBWI. She is the only non-American ever awarded this honour.

Why?

Many people dream of becoming an author. I was one of the lucky ones. However, there is a slight problem being a creator in Australia. It might be one of the best places in the world to live, but our population is small. I hate to start out with maths, but small population = small print runs = small royalty checks. You spend a year writing a novel, your publisher does a print run of 3000 and you get 10% or about \$1.50 per book. That means, unless you are J.K. Rowling or one of the big name authors, a year spent chained to the computer reaps you the grand total of \$4,500 for your efforts.

Thus there is a great need for more of our authors to get published internationally to help them thrive and survive. Australian publishers work hard on this, their rights people attend book fairs in Bologna and Frankfurt and liaise with publishers around the world. However, through my work with the SCBWI I have gained an in-depth knowledge of the USA publishing scene. I also have the support of fellow Regional Advisors in America willing to share their contacts with me. So the Churchill project was designed to use personal knowledge and contacts to benefit Australian authors and publishers.

USA Today...

So for two months I've been in the USA showcasing Australian authors to American publishers. The interest and enthusiasm all the publishers showed in our creators was fantastic.

I have the most exciting photos to show. No, not sightseeing ones (didn't get time for that) these are pictures of enthusiastic editors in their NY offices with OUR Australian books in their hands. Here are just a couple of wonderful memories:

- A delightful editor at Simon and Schuster lingered for hours over the books. In the end I had to practically wrestle my last copy of Scary Bear (Tania Cox and Danny Snell) out of her arms. She even got an assistant to make a colour photocopy of it!
- The senior editor at Knopf, picked up Felicity Pulman's book Shalott and said: 'I don't do much in this genre...' She instantly changed her mind after the first page.
- Barry Goldblatt (agent). We're old friends from the time he was rights manager at Orchard/Scholastic (we negotiated my contract there), Barry and I always meet in NY. I went to buy us drinks at the bar and came back to find him totally engrossed in Anna Ciddor's Runestone. Not even champagne could make him put down the book.
- Two editors from Dutton (Penguin) had books spread all over the table. I didn't get the camera out fast enough as one started chuckling out loud at Margaret Clark's Board Shorts.
- Every second editor had Susanne Gervay's latest YA novel 'The Cave' in their hands. It was almost impossible to get out of a meeting without someone grabbing her books.
- Marcia Wernick (agent) loved Hazel Edward's delightful Hippopotamus books. 'How many have they sold????' she demanded. 'That's incredible ...' And she instantly went back and read the whole set again.

Oh, how I wish all the authors could have been there to see it!

*I'm just delighted there's been so much interest in the Shalott books It is really great there's been so much interest in Oz authors generally. Judging from the emails you sent during your visit o.s., not only were you a charming advocate but you obviously worked your sox off, and we are all in your debt as a result. Well done!
And thank you. Felicity Pulman (Author)*

Here's a quick Fact File on the journey:

- In all, I showcased over 42 published authors from the Australian SCBWI.
- I visited over 17 publishers, editors and agents in New York, Boston and LA.
- SCBWI Regional Advisors in America supplied personal introductions to all the top editors and publishers.
- Children's book publishers in Australia supported their authors by creating flyers, providing books and by paying shipping cost. The postage to the USA of books came to over \$900 in one week!
- The 'Style File' web site, put together by Elise Hurst, Rosie McKague, Judy Watson and Ann James, was created to help showcase illustrator's work. Funding came from the Australia Council. Every publisher or editor got a copy of the launch invitation and the promotional postcards which went with it. The site looks fabulous. Do visit it: www.thestylefile.com
- For two months I took only 11 kg of clothing in my luggage - but 22 kg of books and notes. That's not including the 120 kg of books I shipped!

I ended the journey with a speaking tour and presented at writer's conferences in Utah, Texas and California. I also got to present at the annual international SCBWI conference in LA - over a thousand people attend.

Wow, I'm so impressed with your schedule, that is fantastic.

What you are doing is HUGE, HUGE, HUGE.

Have fun - sounds as though you're doing a brilliant job.

Lisa Berryman (Children's Book Publisher, HarperCollins)

Jen is to be congratulated for being awarded the Churchill Fellowship, for her desire to help promote Australian authors and illustrators overseas, and for her input into the just-launched style file of Australian children's book illustrators

(www.thestylefile.com).

Erica Wagner

(Publisher, Allen and Unwin)

The Network of the SCBWI - USA

All Regional Advisors (RAs) in the SCBWI are on a listserv together, over 70 of us in 18 countries, sharing information daily.

The American RA's generosity in sharing their contacts was overwhelming. They not only passed on my explanatory emails about the project, they also sent personal recommendations about me to editors. I never had to cold call a single person. The warmth of my welcome throughout the USA came not only from each editor's interest in

Australian literature, but also from a genuine friendship and respect for the RAs who introduced me.

I would particularly like to thank:-

- Esther Hershenhorn (RA, Illinois)
- Robin Michal Koontz (RA, Oregon)
- Chris Eboch (RA, New Mexico)
- Claudia Harrington (Co-RA, Los Angeles County)
- Edie Pagliasotti (Co-RA, Los Angeles County)
- Alexis O'Neill (RA, Venture/Santa Barbara, California)
- Dawn Dixon (Past-RA, Arizona)
- Alice McLerran (author and host)
- Nancy Lewis (RA, New York Metropolitan)
- Mary Wade (Past RA, Texas)
- Erzsí Deak (International RA Co-ordinator)

This is absolutely outstanding! Your head will be filled with such an exchange of information on how two continents do business in the publishing world that you will have to remember to breathe.

Edie Pagliasotti (Co-RA, Los Angeles County)

What you are doing is not easy, and I won't pretend it is... But if anyone can sell the broadest range of children's authors, including the BEST ones, from Down Under, I'd place my money on you. (Those who gave the grant obviously feel the same way.)

Alice McLerran (USA author)

The Exciting Part – the USA Tour

USA publishers were amazingly generous with their time, often setting aside 1-2 hours in their very crammed schedules and even inviting me to lunch! I thought it would be far more formal, but everyone was so friendly, helpful and interested that I had a ball!

In each visit I offered editors the following:-

- A showcase of 42 books from Australian SCBWI authors. (It soon became obvious that some editors honed in on young adults books, some wanted chapter books with humour, and others loved picture books.)
- A folder with full page flyers on every author.
- An executive summary of sales, awards and markets for books.
- The Style File – a series of postcards, a summary of the website and an invitation to the launch in August. In Australia!

- For some editors I also included a CD ROM quiz of Australian authors. (A product donated by my Highlighting Writing company.) Many USA editors already published some Australian writers, so they were delighted to have pictures of these authors – and a fun quiz.
- I also took photos of every editor for memories and to make my own 'rogues gallery' of editors for my files.

After each meeting, a confirmation email was sent to each editor. This included:-

- A list of all the books taken to be read.
- The executive summary of specific books.
- List of Australian children's book publishers, supplied by the Australian Publishers Society.

It was a delight to meet you on your visit -- I love meeting people who seem as in love with what they're doing as I am myself. Enjoy the rest of your US travels, Jen. I still am amazed at what a clever and fabulous thing you are doing.

Caitlyn Dlouhy, Executive Editor, Atheneum Books for Young Children

It was absolutely wonderful to meet with you last week. If everyone in Australia is as fun and down to earth as you, I definitely want to visit!! Thanks so much for the attached information; it is very helpful to be able to sort everyone out at a glance...

Thanks again.

Lisa Findlay, Assistant Editor, Random House

What Would I do Differently?

1) Not try to do so much in so little time. Everyone warns you about this. I thought I had listened. Wrong! The two months in the USA was fun, exciting and enriching. However, I had failed to factor in the 2 hours of emailing every night to Australian authors and publishers – that's in addition to the follow-up emails to USA publishers. After a full day in New York and a two hour commute, the emailing killed me.

2) Apply for funding for set-up and follow-up times. Set-up took 4 weeks. That included emailing the project information to Australian publishers, answering questions, emailing SCBWI authors, answering more questions and then, just as I was about to drop into bed at midnight, the USA publishers got on line – and more email started! Follow-up took 6 full time weeks. In a job that was voluntary that was too much.

3) Talk to the people who sell international rights at publishing houses in Australia. My contact with publishers has always been with the editors and publishers, so I went through them. However, the rights people do the sort of thing I was attempting as their every day job. Talking to them would have saved me reinventing the wheel. Though I

count it as a big plus that I actually gave one rights person a tip – take a wheelie trolley for books!

Thanks again for another exciting opportunity to follow up on! I will send a CD and letter / package to her today. You know I would love to be watching you , I bet you are having such a ball. Lots of love, can't wait to get more emails like this one, it's great!
Sonya Pletes (Cover designer and photographer)

Differences: USA and Australia Publishing

1) USA illustrations are softer.

The countryside is greener, gentler and lusher on the East coast compared to the hard dryness of Australia. The light is far softer. (I didn't need sunglasses, as necessary as car keys in Australia and sometimes the air was so thick I thought I had cataracts coming!) The illustrations in the USA are wonderfully creative and original, but generally are less bold in colour and gentler in style.

Strangely enough, the graffiti, that art form created in secret ways in public places by the young, the rebellious and the fringe dwellers of the art world, was EXACTLY the same.

2) YA age group.

The label Young Adult (YA) is targeted at 12-14 year olds in the USA. In Australia we call that Teenage. YA is for approximately 13-17 year olds and thus deals with more controversial issues and is more confronting.

3) Middle grade stories are not compatible.

Aussie kids go to primary school from Prep to Year 6 and then attend high school from Year 7-Year 12. The concept of a middle grade school (Year 6-8) is alien. Wow, all those kids striving for sophistication, with raging hormones, packed into one school...gulp. Books pitched to the Year 6-8 age group in Australia are too 'young' for the USA market. Plus, any stories set in schools obviously don't travel well because of their setting.

4) Hardback/Paperback.

In Australia, high quality paperback is the norm. However, to get reviewed, a USA book must be hardcover. This means the vast majority of trade books are in hardcover. Chapter books, expensive to produce and sell at a reasonable price in hardcover, are difficult to sell in the USA, except in series. Middle grade and YA in hardcover are doing very well in the USA market.

5) Sense of humour.

Aussie humour has more in common with the reserved English ironic than with the more in-ya-face American style. However, there seems to be a common meeting ground in hilarious, rambunctious tales for boys.

6) Editing.

USA editors pride themselves very much on quality editing, from the first structural edit to the final line edit. Three page letters between author and editor are normal. An unfortunate and seemingly growing trend in Australia is to cut back on editing time and employ freelancers with no long term knowledge of an author's style or body of work.

7) Political correctness debate.

Editors on both continents were ambivalent about the increasing political correctness of books. Certainly Australians seem to swear, drink and be irreverent more – though it is not clear whether this makes them livelier writers! It was obvious that vocal minority groups can hijack literary agendas quite easily in both countries.

8) Language.

USA editors agreed that they now try and keep the original flavour (flavor <vbg>) of the original manuscript and its country of origin. Twenty years ago, changing Mum to Mom was mandatory. Now the consensus is to only change words which might jar the reader. We found some hilarious examples, like the phrase in my book Dreamcatcher where the kids were 'humping' (lugging) buckets of water. Not quite the visual image intended. Of course, in Australia, we would never call our sons Randy, even if they er...were!

9) Stories are 'sweeter' in the USA.

In the USA flags are flown outside houses, people are friendly (even in New York!), people talk about their faith and religion openly and drivers let you into their stream of traffic easily. (YES, I did go to NY and LA! Have you ever driven in Sydney?) There is more cynicism in Australia. This is reflected in the stories told and especially in the picture book market which is 'cuter' in the USA than in Australia.

10) Print runs.

In Australia, print runs start at 5,000 for picture books and 3,000 (even 2,000) for YA. In the USA a beginning writer would have a print run of 8,000 for a picture book and 6000 for YA. (Though publishers would like to make that lower.)

11) Awards.

If you win one of the big awards in Australia, the print run would jump to 20,000 copies immediately. In the USA, a Newbery win might mean 250,000 copies printed. (And if you sell the movie rights, e.g. the book Holes, you could sell 2-3 million!) A BIG difference in scale. You could retire on that – though your publishers probably wouldn't let you!

It was a real pleasure meeting you this afternoon. I was glad to learn more about Australian publishing and your country's many talented writers and illustrators. What a terrific opportunity for US publishers! I hope you enjoy the rest of your time in the States, and I look forward to speaking with you again.
Yolanda LeRoy, Senior Editor, Charlesbridge

All of your information was very helpful so yes, spread the word. You're doing an amazing job!
Wendy Lamb, Publishing Director, Wendy Lamb Books, Random.

Sharing the Churchill Tradition

The commitment to expand the work of the Churchill Trust – and also disseminate the information I have gained – is an important one. Here is part of my work to spread the word:-

- Every official email (and there were over 3,000 of them!) was sent bearing the SCBWI and Churchill logos.
- Articles on the Churchill project were sent to Writers Centres around Australia.
- Information on the project was sent to
 - 23 Australian publishers
 - 19 USA publishers
 - Over 200 SCBWI writers and illustrators
 - Over 300 VIPs in the writing community
- Follow up information on the project was sent to virtually the same mailing list.
- Presentations to writers/illustrators/publishers always include acknowledgement of the Churchill Trust and display the logo.
- Follow-up emails to publishers, writers and illustrators encourage people to apply for Fellowships and give the website and deadline date.

Thank you so much, Jen, for creating this fantastic opportunity for Australian writers. Having four publishers express interest in Choices has been such a boost! It was wonderful of you to undertake this on our behalf. Thank you also to the Churchill Fellowship people.
Dianne Wolfer (Author)

Recommendations

1. That authors and illustrators take a more proactive role in licensing the international rights of their books. This can be done in three ways:-
 - Working alongside their publisher and rights person. This includes suggesting opportunities gained through personal contacts, sourcing publishers in other countries through research, or even visiting publishers when they travel.
 - Employing an agent specializing in international rights. Often this needs to be done on a country by country basis. (e.g. UK agent in the UK.)
 - Sourcing and pitching to international publishers themselves if authors own their world rights. Marketing guides and Web searches are excellent tools.
2. It would be helpful (though time consuming) if publishers offered to revert rights to authors if they were not actively selling the book internationally. Often, when a book is

- several years old and not selling hugely, publishers concentrate on newer, fresher, trendier books - and the back listed books are not taken to book fairs overseas. However, authors are not aware of this and labour under the illusion they are still actively marketed.
3. For the above reason, authors should actually negotiate into their contracts reversion of rights. (If you have an agent, this is often a standard clause.) If after 2-3 years a book has not been licensed in any overseas countries, the rights should automatically be returned to the author.
 4. Some smaller publishers do not have a full time rights person. Authors should be aware of this and be prepared to take responsibility along with the publishers for rights sales. NOTE: Steps taken by the author to help with international sales should be done in conjunction with the publisher. It is a team effort.
 5. Publishers should know that often the things they take for granted are completely unfamiliar to authors who work solo and without a corporate structure or support. Negotiating contracts, asking about publicity and chasing up international sales are often threatening to creators.
 6. To empower their writers, and encourage them to be more proactive, publisher guidelines on how authors can assist with rights sales would be most beneficial.
 7. Authors benefit from being less insular. Joining writing organizations (ASA, SCBWI, and Writer's Centers), attending conferences and reading industry journals are all part of the professional development of creators.
 8. Thinking internationally means also thinking laterally. Organisations such as AUSTRADE are committed to taking Australian products, including books, to the export market.
 9. Tastes may be different, cultural discrepancies may cause problems, senses of humour may not travel. There are a myriad of reasons for which an Australian book may be rejected. But this is not a rejection of talent. All creators in Australia need to understand that our talent and skills are world class.

I want to thank you for all the work you have put into the promotion of Australian authors in the U.S. Your enthusiasm and dedication can only have been a source of inspiration for the US publishers and we are all grateful for your wonderful support.
Moya Simons (Author)

Boy! I don't think any of us can really appreciate how big this Churchill Fellowship really is. The work you have put into it is amaaaaazing. Words like 'huge', 'tremendous', 'gigantic' wouldn't even cover it!

Thanks very much again for your priceless support.

Warmest wishes,

Tania Cox (Author)

Ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

This is how I see the Churchill Fellowship project. More connections have now been made between USA and Australian writers and publishers. It is exciting to see the interest shown by USA publishers in our writers - authors now feel more confident and empowered because of this. Breakthroughs have been made and new markets found. A far greater understanding of the differences and similarities between our two publishing scenes has been fostered. Networks have started up, contacts formed and even friends found. The circle of influence is continuing and expanding.

My heartfelt thanks to the Churchill Trust for their support and vision to help make this all happen.

It has been an incredible journey.

Jen McVeity: www.jenmcveity.com

Highlighting Writing: www.highlightingwriting.com

Winston Churchill Memorial Trust: www.churchilltrust.com.au

Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators www.scbwi.org