possible advantage of the opportunities that do arise, so that even if you don’t wholly succeed by whatever standards you use to measure your own performance, you will know that you have done your best.

‘To keep afloat as a freelance, it was necessary to take on too much (for fear that tomorrow would offer too little), yet never to fail to deliver on time. I had two very strong feelings about the life this led to: one of simple delight, and one of simple horror. Most of the time they were mixed up; I was delightedly horrified.’

—from Shaky relations by Edward Blishen (Hamish Hamilton, 1981, quoted by kind permission of the author).

References

Freelancing, 1980s

The Independent Publishers Guild, London-based, includes smaller publishers of specialized subject books, and aims ‘to provide opportunities for independent publishers to meet and cooperate’. It advertised a seminar, ‘Freelancing: both sides of the coin’ to be held in London on 10 May 1983, without specifying what type of freelancers might be concerned. But solo sharpeners of lawn mowers or street sellers of wrist-watches would not have benefited from attendance; editing was the chief service considered, but book design, production, reading, research, publicity, marketing, and indexing (once) were all also referred to.

There were three speakers; a freelance editor/proofreader, an accountant, and a publisher’s editorial director, as well as discussion from the floor. Book lists, advice sheets, and specimen work lists were provided. Much of the advice offered was financial, all of it business-like. The tenor was alarming. Freelancers nowadays come mostly through publishers’ redundancies, so that the market is flooded by former full-time employees with impressive experience and close contacts within the business. It becomes most difficult for the outsider to break in. Far too many of us are seeking—not the rainbow’s end, but the steady trickle of sustaining shower and sun.

Advice was tendered to those considering becoming freelance—all taken to be from a position of full employment. As well as the classic, ‘don’t’, there was, specifically, obtain your mortgage before, not after, casting adrift as officially self-employed. You must be prepared to put up with your own company; to be both workaholic and perfectionist; to work to a greater intensity, undisturbed at home, than formerly in the office. The freelance condition may be a freedom that becomes slavery, subject to tedium, irregularity, and the fickleness of publishers. And there is no one to pass the blame along to if deadlines are not met.

You cannot expect regular work for some considerable time, and even when you are established, bursts of frenzy tend to be interspersed with gaps of varying length; perhaps the most contented indexers are those whose life-styles will adapt to this pattern.

—words of warning from the Society of Indexers’ information sheet.

Financial advice offered to freelancers included finding and using an accountant, the importance of keeping records, invoicing monthly, where to start the financial year, how to plan for one’s own pension, how to insure professional equipment kept in one’s home and against loss of earnings, and knowing which expenses are tax-deductible (these may include equipment, stationery, travel for research, use of car, sustenance on location, union fees, subscriptions, and rates, heating and lighting of the room in which one works. This last, however, should also retain its alternative character as spare room or dining room, to avoid liability for capital gains tax if the house is sold.) Expenses are tax-deductible from the

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date one sets up as freelance, not from the date of one's first commission; and in periods of actual loss, tax paid may even be reclaimed. Special exemption from National Insurance may be claimed from the Department of Health and Social Security if one earns under £1600 p.a. (less expenses). The freelancer must be his own credit controller, and should always insist on prompt monthly payment, dealing direct with publishers' accounts departments.

*Rates* quoted by our freelance speaker were £5.50 per hour for bilingual proof-reading, £6.25 for copy-editing, plus extra for working at nights or week-ends and for travelling time; rates to be revised each calendar year. But a vigorous voice from the floor, that of a declared member of the National Union of Journalists, challenged this. The NUJ includes a freelance book group, producing registers of freelance workers, which was about to hold its first meeting of freelancers. Their rates were £5.75 per hour for proof-reading, £6.75 for copy-editing, £8.00 for word subbing or rewriting; and she poured incredulous scorn on the possibility of living on a mere £5.50 per hour, with overheads.

H.K.B.

I \(\ddot{\text{O}}\)\. . . I am beginning to feel that familiar unease that goes with a clean house and well stocked cupboards—\(\ddot{\text{O}}\)ve even begun to knit . . .

\(\ddot{\text{O}}\)\. . . I wish I could get people to accept that I do work, and quite a number of hours, and am not necessarily free to look after their children, ring round, etc., etc., just because I'm based at home.'

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*From the other side . . .*

— but to a freelance complaining to a publisher's editor of having turned down seven other offers while in constant expectation of the arrival of page proofs of a giant among indexing tasks, which in the event were three months late, the following charming letter was sent:

Once again apologies about the timetabling. I have only within the last year started full-time work again myself after freelancing for years until the youngest child was at school. I don't know whether it's worse being at home and having the frustrations of failed schedules or at work having to constantly apologise for them like ticket collectors for late trains. Part of the problem is that with large complex books it is not safe to leave things until the proofs actually arrive because of the impossibility of finding competent indexers free at the last minute. And then large complex volumes are more at the mercy of typesetters than small straight-forward ones which can be whipped away and placed elsewhere at the drop of a hat. But these are my problems. I mention them just because I wouldn't like you to think that we are casual about inconveniencing people, or that we have been sitting idly by letting the thing run late through inattention.

\(\ddot{\text{O}}\) \(\ddot{\text{O}}\) \(\ddot{\text{O}}\) 'I couldn't take on anything more at the present having had three indexes landed on my lap a week ago—one on time, one a month late, and one a month early, and all of them long texts and all publishers screaming to have them done straight away!'

— extracts from letters from members of the Society of Indexers working freelance.

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**Index most extraordinaire**

Crimes detected through opera glasses, field glasses and telescopes
Deaths from laughter
Deaths associated with the performance of Tchaikovsky's Pathetique symphony
Etiquette of undersea weddings
Sports abandoned because of earthquakes
Sports interrupted by animals

— some of the 47,000 categories of the extraordinary index compiled by W. E. Ashley Brown, a former deputy editor of the *Sunday Express*, to more than a million newspaper cuttings collected over 55 years. The cuttings are kept in mahogany cabinets, each item snipped without margins, folded, ironed flat, and tucked into an individual white envelope, to form a library with a total weight of five tons. Mr Brown employed a staff of six in a purpose-built garden outhouse, after retiring to run the library full-time. He died in 1972; the Ashley Library proved too odd for the BBC or British Library to absorb, and was advertised by Mrs Brown in the National Union of Journalists' newspaper. It has been bought by Graham Nown, a compiler of books of odd facts, for £5,000.

(By courtesy of *The Guardian*, 23 Feb. 1983.)