The Canadian perspective

Gillian Faulkner

An aspiring indexer in Canada shares her experience.

‘The world begins at a kitchen table.’ So begins one of my favourite poems (Harjo, 1994), and it is around my sister’s kitchen table (one of my favourite places), in County Durham, UK, that the world begins over and over as ideas are explored, projects designed, plans discussed, news exchanged, joys and sorrows shared; all over numerous cups of tea. And it was at her kitchen table that my sister sparked my interest in indexing. It is always interesting to listen to someone who clearly enjoys what they do, and I caught enough of my sister’s enthusiasm to return to Toronto with Nancy Mulvany’s book (1994) tucked into my carry-on luggage. (I had read the blow-by-blow account of the indexing course in numerous transatlantic emails, but emails are not the same.)

I came to Canada in 1982, ‘just for a couple of years’, for an adventure and to see more of the country I had so enjoyed visiting for a holiday. Figuring that if I was to be working in a different country, I might as well try a different type of nursing, I applied to work as an outpost nurse in isolated northern communities, and worked in native reserves and Inuit settlements for the next 12 years. My paediatric and midwifery background served me well. I have been living ‘down south’ in Toronto since 1994, working as a primary care nurse practitioner in various community health centres. Working, as I so often have, with people for whom English is a second language, I am used to giving clear, concise information, in language that is easy to understand or interpret. Now, after almost 40 years, I have retired from nursing to use that learning and experience in written communication.

During the past year I have been taking courses towards an editing certificate – courses that I have hugely enjoyed. Now I am anxious to put those skills into practice and am learning, as fast as I can, to network, network, network. In the meantime, I am taking the distance education indexing course offered by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). My tutor is Kari Kells of Index West in Washington State. I haven’t quite learnt to keep up with the reading yet, though!

I went to my first local indexers’ meeting last week, a lively and good-humoured group that includes a self-confessed indexing groupie – only in Toronto, folks! The topic for the day was ‘Golden rules of indexing’, and everyone brought their favourite maxims to add to suggestions made by members of INDEX-L. So here I am, barely through lesson two of the course, armed with this fabulous list of golden rules. It’s true, you see: ‘The world begins at a kitchen table.’

References


A former nurse practitioner, Gillian Faulkner is now an aspiring editor and indexer. She shares her Toronto apartment with her well-travelled cat, Gladys Butterboots. Gillian is a member of the IASC/SCAD and of the Editors’ Association of Canada. Email: dh939@torfree.net

Quick worker

She thought of the morning ahead. There was work to be done; at least three journal articles were waiting to be sent out to referees, and she would have to despatch them that morning. Then there was an index to be prepared for a special issue that was due to appear later that year. She did not enjoy indexing and she had been putting the task off. If she worked for three hours she would get through most, if not all of the index. That would take her to twelve-thirty . . .

from The Sunday Philosophy Club, Alexander McCall Smith