

## **Editing in Paradise — “All good writing is rewriting” Hemingway**

### **Interview with Shelley Kenigsberg, editor.**

*By Uma Anyar*

*Over the past four years, you have given, several workshops on the editing process, at the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival (UWRF). What do you hope participants gain from your workshops?*

The main thing... a sense that editing your own work is doable. Many authors will already have done a number of drafts (over months, even years) to get to where they're 'done' with a manuscript. So to hear there's still editing to do (which is necessary for all but the rarest of manuscripts) can be upsetting, annoying, even galling. But editing is somewhat different to that kind of redrafting... the way you finesse and shape your work in an edit happens when there is distance from the original writing, and takes a different eye.

A good edit can be a powerful thing; and it's a collaboration between the author as creator and editor as advocate... to produce the best book possible, for readers but also, mostly, for the book. What an editor can (should) do is provide the encouragement to keep going. Editors can give that deep and sensitive critical reading; they have to be engaged and close to it... have to really 'get the story' but also know where to suggest changes in structure or characterisation or description and, if the edit is done well, the process can be alchemical. I know... it sounds evangelical but I think it's a privilege to work with someone else's creation... can be a pretty strong experience.

*What qualities and abilities does a top-notch editor need? And what makes a good writer?*

I think they're some of the same things: deep interest, faith in the process, persistence, reading widely, having a style.

Diplomacy too. There's a lot of fear, I find, from authors — sometimes justified — of being judged, but the process takes the work to its highest point. Evangelical again? Well, it is a process of transformation. Done by the author or the editor, it invariably takes what was and transforms it into the newer, clearer, more enchanting piece of writing.

*At what stage should a creative writer seek out an editor?*

When they feel they can no longer be 'useful' to the writing. When they're ready to have another reading and interpretation; from someone they trust to be helpful.

*Most editors are deeply committed to the writing process and are writers themselves. Does the professional editor get in the way of the creative writer? What's been your experience?*

My experience ... deep frustration at times! I'm writing something at the moment (almost said 'trying to write' but that's the editor's 'noise' ... a built-in critic saying 'it

needs more work!'). So, yes, the professional editor sits as a rather forbidding, often irritating, and always present nudge on my shoulder; in my head. I like the idea of free (automatic) writing; try to do that every day. But it's hard to resist the compulsion to polish as I go. Still...that 'polishing and pruning' happens later.

*What advice for our readers who want to become writers?*

Do some writing every day. Find a book on writing (there are hundreds! In fact, the best way to be published is to write a book on writing), and begin. And keep going.

It really helps to have a listener in mind ... and pay attention to things, listen to conversations, keep a notebook and write things down. But don't compare yourself to others (therein lies anguish) even though it's important to note what you like in others' writing, then forget it. For half an hour a day...observe, and write. Get a daily practice.

And read poetry even if you're not writing poetry and watch films and TV and listen to songs and note what gives you that thrill...

And join a writing group (real or virtual) and swap work with others and do courses and keep believing you can do it and keep doing it.

*What books or websites do you recommend for budding writers?*

I highly recommend *If you want to write* by Brenda Ueland; a great find on a writing friend's bookshelf (don't be put off by the religiosity and old-fashioned style). I love Stephen King's *On Writing* (great storyteller too); Anne Lamott, Sol Stein and William Zinsser have a thing or two (OK, more!) to say ... Carmel Bird and Patti Miller on memoir, Natalie Goldberg, Noah Lukeman ... too many.

Websites are plentiful: Jessica Morrell's [www.writing-life.com](http://www.writing-life.com); the Allen & Unwin writing centre: [www.allenandunwin.com](http://www.allenandunwin.com). There's Browne and King [www.editorialdepartment.com/](http://www.editorialdepartment.com/) and [www.writersdigest.com/](http://www.writersdigest.com/) ...hundreds more. (Don't subscribe to too many; you'll spend [waste] time reading lots of advice and not writing. Procrastination is my biggest vice.)

*Do you see Ubud becoming a hot spot for creative writing?*

Well, because it is such an exquisite setting, in the fine island that Bali is, yes. It has so much aliveness. The place is teeming with inspiration and creative juice. It seems a magnificent place to bring together talented writers and editors and publishers (I think that's exactly what happens each year round October?) and make it a more sustained interaction. Masterclasses, and longer workshops; ongoing writing groups...

*What does Ubud need to do to support Indonesian and expat writers?*

If you build it (a writers' centre), we will come.

*Are you offering any workshops in the near future here in Bali?*

I'll be running the second Editing in Paradise workshop (which I ran with Selena Hanet-Hutchins in October 2009) after the URWF this October, 2010. It's a 6-day intensive for authors wanting to edit their own work: [www.editinginparadise.com](http://www.editinginparadise.com) is where you'll find more info. Thanks...for talking to me and happy writing.