

When I'm not indexing . . . I'm publishing

My chief occupation other than indexing is (self-)publishing: a hobby I greatly enjoy, but one which proves much more expensive than the lamp-work, painting and running described by previous contributors to this series.

My second son is an actor, in musical theatre. On one of the many occasions when his career had landed me in a bizarre, thespian-driven situation, I realized that I had never read an account of the bringing-up of an actor, and how that career may affect their mothers. Stage mothers are archetypal ogre-figures, but I had never seen their experience recounted. I decided to break the silence, speak for us all, and wrote an account of how the rearing of an actor, and his adult career, had impinged on my own life and (publishing) career: *A Stage Mother's Story*. I had fun remembering and recording the fraught times, checking details in old hoarded programmes, choosing photographs, designing layout.

I submitted the book to 21 publishers. They all turned it down, often saying that my son was not famous enough to have his biography published – missing the point of the book; some said they only considered work submitted by agents. I wrote to eleven agents; all said they were taking on no new clients.

I decided to turn publisher myself to bring out the book, and registered as such, with the imprint HKB Press, in 2006. All it takes is to pay the New Publisher Registration fee (£94 then) to Nielsen Book Services. Registration brings you ten ISBNs (International Standard Book Numbers).

I paid to have the book printed, and sent out 39 review or complimentary copies. Some marvellous reviews appeared: *The Amateur Stage* even wrote, in its November issue: 'A perfect Christmas gift for any actor or parent of an actor'. Glowing, I awaited sheaves of orders pouring through the letter-box. Alas, just one order resulted, by telephone; the caller said she had been told by her local Waterstones that they could not obtain a copy for her. I took books to

local bookshops: they would not take any stock – theirs was all sent from Headquarters, who dealt only with the major publishers, they told me.



Still, the book was listed on Amazon, with extracts from its excellent reviews. I still hoped to receive orders. But to date I have sold just 40 copies – one more than the number of complimentary copies sent off! Boxes of books remain in my house, rueful reminders.

The total expense of printing, postage of free copies to legal deposit and copyright libraries and publications where I hoped for reviews, advertising and production of fliers, was four times the small income the enterprise netted. (And of course, I received no royalties, nor payment for indexing the book.)

I did enjoy it all, though; the designing and production, seeing the final product in print, and knowing my strange experiences as a stage mother were recorded. Having ISBNs in hand, I went on to publish more. My mother was an actress and playwright, specializing in plays with all-women casts in the 1940s and 1950s. I wrote a short book on her career, *Kay Macauliffe: Women Take the Stage*, quoting some of her articles and plays, with photographs of her various performances, and was glad thus to memorialize her. I realized that there's gold in them thar diaries I kept as a teenager: splendid social history of the 1950s,

including much about the forgotten Bognor Regis Repertory Theatre where my mother acted. I published extracts, adding illustrations and

indexes, and have now completed an autobiographical tetralogy: *Aged Thirteen in Felpham 1949*; *At Chi High 1949–52*; *Leisure round Bognor in the '50s* (these three now lodged in West Sussex Local History Libraries and Record Offices); *Student life at Reading 1952–8*. HKB Press is also co-publisher, holding UK rights, of *From Flock Beds to Professionalism: A history of index-makers*, produced by Oak Knoll Press in Delaware. The ratio of expense to income, reviews to sales, remained constant since the first one, *A Stage Mother's Story*.

There are now 18 HKB Press publications (I bought a second batch of ten ISBNs in 2008 for £57.50), including inter alia the four derived from my diaries; seven of or about my mother's plays and verse; the memoirs of her cousin, who was born in 1908, totally deaf, but enjoyed a full career: *Not Hearing But Living*; *Stage Mother* and *Flock Beds*. I have a catalogue (enclosed in all items I post) and a website – <http://tinyurl.com/nuln42d>

A commercial success HKB Press has not been. Going over the figures for my tax returns is humiliating. But I look on it not as a business but as an expensive retirement hobby: no pay, no profit.

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