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Editorial Assistant Internship

Noelle Schmidt
Western University, nschmid7@uwo.ca

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Professor Mahon

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Edit Connect: On Interning at Latitude 46 Publishing

Prologue

The road to this internship began with a throwaway remark from my mother months before on a Skype call, she eating dinner at the table in Sudbury, me curled up on the couch in my apartment in London.

"There's a new publishing company in Sudbury, Latitude something? I just heard about it."

I looked it up on my computer, her face relegated to a small square in the corner of the screen. I didn't have any intense interest in the company itself, but it was becoming habit to look up the answer to half-finished names or ideas my mother related to me – menopause brain, she's taken to saying. Latitude 46 Publishing. I smiled, said it was cool, and the conversation moved on. It didn't linger in my mind.

But then the time came that I needed to start planning my experiential learning credit. When I applied to the School for Advanced Studies in the Art and Humanities, I didn't give much thought to the experiential learning requirement. It only needed to be completed before graduation, and four years seemed like such a long time; no need to worry about it yet. But time always passes faster than you expect.

As soon as I started thinking seriously about the experiential learning credit, I knew that I wanted to do something in the field of editing. I wasn't sure that any of the existing partnerships SASAH had would offer me the kind of work I wanted. I was limited in my choices by my living

situation – I was already keeping an apartment in London over the summer to come back to for my final year, so it would be ridiculous to rent another place to live in another town. So my options were London, or living at home in Sudbury.

And then I remembered Latitude 46. I went back to their website and poked around; like my mom had told me, they were a young publishing company, small, and focused on Northern Ontario authors and stories. In fact, they had published a book by one of my high school teachers, her father's memoir of the Holocaust. It seemed like the perfect idea. A small publishing house meant it was more likely I would be doing something real, something more than the dreaded fetching of coffee. But I also knew that small and young meant little available funds. If I wanted this internship, it would have to be unpaid. I considered a compromise: the internship could be part time, but lasting the entire summer. I would get the hours that I needed for the credit, and could find some part-time paying work too.

I had the beginnings of a plan. Now I needed approval from the school. I scheduled an appointment with Professor Mahon, and presented my proposal for an internship with Latitude 46 Publishing. He approved. I went home and googled how to write an internship proposal document for a company, and then I wrote one. With Professor Mahon's blessing, I sent the proposal document to Heather Campbell and Laura Stradiotto, owners of Latitude 46 Publishing, and then I waited, until one morning I checked my e-mail and found their response.

They wanted me.

Chapter 1

After some back and forth e-mailing, paperwork signing, and driving back to Sudbury for a face-to-face meeting between the end of classes and the beginning of my exams, the details were finalized, and my internship was ready and waiting for when the school year ended.

On my first day, I met for coffee and hot chocolate with Laura at a local coffee shop with a distinctly hipster vibe – natural wood plank walls, eclectic tables, burlap sacks of coffee beans lining the wall, and the massive coffee bean roaster on display while it worked. She pulled out her notebook, I pulled out mine, and we talked about what kind of work I would be doing. By the time we left the coffee shop, I had a list.

For the next several weeks, I was going to be primarily concerned with the publicity and events for Latitude 46's two spring releases, *The Wintermen II: Into the Deep Dark* by Brit Griffin, and *Watermark* by Jennifer Farquhar.

From the coffee shop, we made our way over to the small office that Latitude 46 shares with the local French publishing house, Prise de Parole, where we met up with Heather, and I was introduced to Latitude 46's other summer intern who would be working more on the business side of things. That office was not where I would be spending most of my time; Heather and Laura themselves split their work between home and the office, and we agreed that I would work mainly from home. Exceptions would be special events I would attend to help out, and one such event was just days away: Salon du Livre, a (primarily) French book festival. Along with our neighbors Prise de Parole, Latitude 46 would be manning a booth at the festival, selling our books. We worked out a schedule among the four of us so that there would always be two people manning the booth, chatted for a bit, and then I headed home with a copy of *The Wintermen* and my first task: read the book.

I can think of no better way to have started this internship than the pleasure of reading a really good book. I went home and read it in one sitting from start to finish. My second task was to devise a five question mini-interview to send to the author, Brit Griffin, which we would include in our media package for publicity. This was easy to do – the novel had struck several powerful chords as a climate change dystopia with elements of mysticism that also touched on the complicated relationship of indigenous peoples and colonizers after the breakdown of colonial government. There was something surreal, though, about this first moment where I was officially conducting business with a capital-A Author. I was a colleague of this incredible woman who wrote and published a gripping novel, and I was asking something from her as her peer, to take my questions as a serious professional task in the promotion of her novel. It was both thrilling and frightening to have even this small power in the fate and process of a book's life.

Chapter 2

The Salon du Livre was uneventful – anyone who has manned a booth can surely understand. I spent most of the time reading the second assigned book, *Watermark* by Jennifer Farquhar. Another small thrill: when I met Heather at the booth, she handed me a grey binder containing the as yet unpublished manuscript of *Watermark.* The book was in the last stages of preparation before printing, and there I was, holding a pre-production copy. In fact, I discovered in the book a few small errors that had slipped past notice – the gift of fresh eyes – which would be fixed before the book went to print. I was in that moment, in that very small capacity, an editor.

The book was excellent. Once again I drafted five questions for the author, but this time, we came upon a point of concern. The novel, set on a fictionalized version of Manitoulin Island, is heavily influenced by the indigenous population and culture, inspired by Jennifer Farquhar's own experience growing up on Manitoulin Island. One of my original questions for Jennifer was this: In the novel, Marina struggles to walk the fine line between appropriation and appreciation in writing about 'Ojibwe' (Anishinabek) stories; what was your experience like creating a story so deeply entwined with these Indigenous narratives?

Jennifer was apprehensive about the question. With appropriation being such a heated topic lately, she was understandably worried about approaching it so bluntly and putting it in the spotlight. I realized in that moment that I had been approaching the interview questions as a reader, an academic, but not, as I should have been, as a publicist. It was an important epiphany, to realize that though I was putting into use the critical thinking I had been developing in school, I needed to shift my perspective. I wasn't interrogating the book. I was selling it.

I discussed the issue with Heather and Laura, but I was adamant that though the form of the question should change, we needed to ask about the Anishinabek connection. If we didn't, someone else would – someone else probably still would if we did – and this way Jennifer would have time to think it through and craft a thoughtful and respectful response that she could draw from if asked a similar question in a live interview. Heather and Laura agreed, and the question went through several permutations in back and forth emails, sometimes changing only one word, before we settled on this: In Watermark, the main character Marina is deeply influenced by the Anishinabe stories and people that permeated the island's culture. What can you tell us about your own experiences growing up on Manitoulin Island among several Anishinabe communities and how that shaped Marina's story?

I recently read Amanda Palmer's memoir *The Art of Asking*, in which she ruminates frequently on the nature of trust and connection, especially as an artist interacting with the public. Trust, she realizes, cannot exist without risk; without risk it is only certainty. Jennifer's worry about public backlash was a reminder to me that publishing a book is more than just writing. It is an act of trust, especially knowing how vicious the media can be, how unforgiving. Palmer also talks about the difference between being looked at and being seen. She says:

> One is exhibitionism, the other is connection.
>
> Not everybody wants to be looked at.
>
> Everybody wants to be seen. (Palmer 201)

As writers, words are more than just words. It's a romantic notion, but one I believe, that books are a part of the writer, in some sense a manifestation of their soul. To put your words out into the world is to hand readers a part of yourself, a huge act of trust, and hope that they will do more than look. You hope that you will be seen.

Chapter 3

Books read and interview questions sent, I turned to the next tasks that would occupy my time for the following several weeks. They were… well, less thrilling. I was scouring the internet for two things: event calendars or postings, and potential reviewers. This part of the internship was in fact far more like the summer job I'd had my first two years of university. Then, too, I was searching for every event calendar I could find for the area to post about events that were happening. The good news was, I knew what I was doing. Soon the internet would be plastered with information about Brit Griffin and Jennifer Farquhar's various book tour stops.

When the tours came to Sudbury, I joined the small crowd to listen. For Brit Griffin, we gathered at La Fromagerie, Sudbury's local cheese shop and café, lit by a wall of windows and dotted with local artists' work. For Jennifer Farquhar, we appropriately took to the water on the William Ramsey, a small lake cruise boat. Thematically, this was a brilliant idea. Practically, taking a small enclosed boat with no air conditioning out on the lake crammed with people in the middle of a hot summer was less brilliant. Something to keep in mind in the future. It was strange to be on the side of the publisher in a book tour. I had been to two book tours before for Jodi Picoult's books, and while they were interesting and fun to listen to, Picoult remained at a remove. When Jennifer arrived for the book tour, she greeted me with a hug. I was a peer; I sat and listened, but I was not audience. I was on the other side of the glass. It felt good.

Meanwhile, I was also contacting every book review blog I could find with queries about whether they would be interested in receiving a copy of *The Wintermen* or *Watermark* to write a review, and searching out literary magazines and freelance newspaper reviewers. Sometimes I got responses. Mostly, I didn't.

Another important reminder from this internship: writing a book isn't just about writing a book. It's also about selling it. Selling it to a publisher, selling it to readers, selling it to the media. You have to be able to stand behind your words and say to the world, "Read this book. It's worth your time and money." And that means going on books tours where you don't know if people are going to show, and standing in front of whatever size crowd you have and reading your book for them, and doing interviews that might take you out of your comfort zone. And it means knowing you might not get responses. People might not read it. They might not see.

It was frustrating, sending out flocks of emails and receiving only a few responses, but maybe it made the successes sweeter. If nothing else, I know that I have built a reliable

relationship with James Fisher, writer and creator of review blog *The Miramichi Reader*, who reviewed both *The Wintermen* and *Watermark* and also encouraged us to continue asking him to review books for us. If I end up doing publicity work at another publishing house later, there's someone who knows my name; if I ever publish a book of my own, there's someone who knows my name. As an introvert, networking has always baffled me. Small talk? With strangers? Terrifying. Trying to ingratiate yourself with them in some way or 'make an impression' so you can make professional connections? Horrifying. But this internship has afforded me the chance to make those professional connections on my terms. When I graduate and start making my way in this career I've chosen, I don't go blindly or alone. It's a start. Someone knows my name.

Chapter 4

One day, when the publicity for *The Wintermen* and *Watermark* had tapered into a trickle, Laura sent me a manuscript called *If Tenderness Be Gold* by Eleanore Albanese, and asked me to write an editorial report. They were nearly certain they were going to publish it and were looking for my editorial suggestions. Thrilling and frightening: this was exactly what I had been hoping for in this internship. This was a chance to try out for real what I had spent the last four years of my life working towards. The manuscript was good. Really good.

This was, on one hand, great news – it was a pleasure to read, and it would be a good addition to Latitude 46's shelf. On the other hand, it sparked insecurity. Imposter Syndrome was coming to call: what if my sparse commentary had less to do with the quality of the writing and more to do with my incompetent critical thinking and editing skills? What if I was doing it wrong? What if I'd wasted the last four years working towards something I was bad at? Even so,

the insecurity didn't block out the fact that I'd enjoyed the work. Validation: I liked editing. The response came from Laura. She thanked me for my report and asked my permission to share it and my comments on the manuscript with the author. Validation: she thought my work was worthwhile. Things that I said were going to affect this book. My thoughts *mattered.* Still, I worried. I'm a worrier.

The next manuscript arrived; Laura had seen my work and trusted me to do it again. Trusted me more, even: they didn't know if they were going to publish this one. In fact, Laura hadn't read it yet. What I said was going to shape her opinion on it. I started reading and it… was bad. I kept reading, hoping it would get better; after all, the weakest part of *If Tenderness Be Gold* was the first few pages. 10 pages in, 20 pages in, 30 pages in… it wasn't getting better. I was writing so many comments that Microsoft Word had to collapse them on some pages. The writing was stilted and awkward, the characters were flat, and the plot somehow managed to be both overwrought and underdeveloped. It was a slog to get through, and in my more dramatic moments I lamented that it was hurting my soul. My family has taken to calling it 'The Manuscript from Hell'.

I felt cruel as I struggled to find a compliment to start my report with, and as the report grew longer with criticism after criticism. I can only hope that I managed to convey that criticism constructively, and that the author will accept it and work to improve. Another lesson for me to be reminded of before I head into a career in editing: some of the writing will be bad. You will have to learn to balance kindness and honesty, and to stand by your opinion.

I read two more manuscripts before the end of my internship came rushing up. First, *Connection at Newcombe,* which was lighthearted and poignant, the kind of book that fit right in with the aesthetic of a hot mug of tea and a fuzzy blanket on a window seat while it rained. I had

some constructive criticism, of course, about some characterization, style, and minor plot points, but it was a thoroughly enjoyable read and I hope that after a few minor edits it finds its way to publication. Second, was *Blood Cove*, a vampire horror/thriller that was 565 pages of gore, trashy sex, and untethered plot with stiff writing. It had some potential, but it needed a lot of work.

For all that the second manuscript I read (and to a lesser extent, *Blood Cove*) pained me, good came out of it. It was reassuring, for one thing, to have so much to say, so many suggestions of what to improve. It helped quiet the insecurity that *If Tenderness Be Gold* brought. And it was also incredibly reassuring because I came out the other side of that agonizing slog, and I was more certain than ever that editing was what I wanted to do. Some of the writing will be bad, but maybe I can help make it better. Some of the writing will be good, and maybe I can help make it better. People will hand me their books, these parts of themselves and they will ask me to do more than look; they will ask me to see, and they will ask me to help other people see too.

Epilogue

What do you want to be when you grow up?

The thing is, I don't remember a single answer I gave to this question as a kid. For as long as I can remember, all I knew for certain was that I *didn't* know. In high school, it stopped being an idle question adults ask children, and started dogging my steps.

What do you want to be? Really it meant, *what are you going to do after high school?*

I was really good at math. As in, "was part of a special enriched math program in elementary school and skipped Grade 9 math altogether" kind of good. I found it meditative. I was okay at art – my parents had a lot more faith in my artistic skills than I did. I knew that I hadn't put in the hours of practice required to really be good. My family put math and art together, and got it in their heads that maybe I should be an architect, so I took the architecture class that my high school offered. I discovered that drawing plans with AutoCAD was like math: meditative. I thought, well, maybe I could be an architect. My dad set up a meeting for me with an actual architect. She loved her job, she told me, but it has to be a labour of love, because it's extremely demanding. I smiled and thanked her for meeting me, and knew that I didn't love it enough.

Grade 12 was upon me, and with it, the deadline to decide was closing in. *What do you want to be?* I still didn't know. It seemed far too soon to be deciding the course of my entire life. It sounds melodramatic, I know. I knew it then too. After all, while my dad went to school for math and computer science, then specialized in hydrogeology and has been working in that field ever since, my mom went to school for microbiology and only worked in that field for a few years. She has since: sold toys from a catalogue, run her own painting business, worked at Weight Watchers, and worked administratively in the Prototype and Development sector of NORCAT. She is now the CAO of Deltion Inc., a company she helped found that develops space- and terrestrial-mining technology. My sister, meanwhile, was certain her entire life that she was going to be a veterinarian. She even went to Vet Camp in PEI one summer. And then she went to university, and hated all of her classes. She dropped out, took a year off to work and travel to India on a Me to We volunteer trip. Then she went back to the same program… and she still hated it. She finished the semester and tried just taking a few courses in different fields that

sounded interesting, fell in love with anthropology, and ended up graduating with a Bachelor of Arts and Science in Anthropology and Biology. She now works in the Outreach Program at Science North, traveling Northern Ontario to run science programming for kids.

I knew that if I changed my mind in university my parents would support me, because that's what they did for my sister. I knew that I could change my mind even after university, because that's what my mom did. But I also knew that maybe I really would be deciding the trajectory of my entire life, like my dad. I knew that that's what it felt like. And then my mother suggested editing, and I thought, *I like books,* and I grabbed on with both hands. I'd decided. But it didn't feel like certainty – it felt like throwing a dart at a map and following wherever it landed.

Choosing SASAH felt similar. I was browsing English programs across the province when my mother showed me the program at Western and said, "These sound like your kind of people," and I said, "Yeah, okay." I applied, along with programs at Waterloo and Guelph. I got in to all three. I chose Western, and SASAH. I liked the idea of the intimate cohort sizes. To an introvert, it sounded a bit like a ready-made group of friends and allies. I liked it, too, because it felt exclusive. I felt special for having gotten in. The experiential learning requirement barely crossed my mind.

People kept asking me what I was going to do with my degree when I graduated, and I became accustomed to telling them "Editing" with a certainty I didn't feel. But the more I said it, the more I started to believe it. The more I gained conviction. The more I wanted it. But always in the back of my mind, that uncertainty, that feeling of having thrown a dart at a map.

And then the internship. When I told people that I was going to have to do an internship for my program, there were mixed replies. What stood out was those people who spoke with

utter conviction about the exploitative nature of unpaid internships. I can't say I disagreed. I still can't, even though I sought what I knew would be an unpaid internship of my own volition. I would have liked to get paid for my time and effort, but luckily I had the luxury of not *needing* to get paid. I had my family's financial support. Not everyone does.

Regardless of economy though, what I gained from this experience is invaluable. I made connections and inroads into the industry that will help me find my place in it. I learned and was reminded of valuable lessons about the nature of writing and publishing. I discovered that skills I'd developed in summer jobs were things I could carry into my chosen career path along with those I learned through university. I was reminded that books are not sacredly exempt from the realities of business. Publishing is a business. Books, the great love of my life, are a business. I made my peace with that, but I remember also that books are not *just* business. They are of the author's soul, and I will not trade that reverence for economy. These principles will coexist. I learned that I will face bad writing, and will have to work to be kind in my honesty. I know it may not always be enough. I will try anyway. I learned that I can be good at this, I learned that what I think can matter. I learned, and I learned, and I learned.

But the most important thing this internship gave me is conviction. In my mind I am no longer a dart thrown blindly at a map; I am a compass, and I know which way is true north. I am going to be an editor, and I am going to love my job even when I hate it.

Presentation Script/Summary

My name is Noelle Schmidt. This summer, I completed an internship with Latitude 46 Publishing as an Editorial Assistant. Latitude 46 is a small publishing house in my hometown, Sudbury, Ontario, which was established in 2015 by Heather Campbell and Laura Stradiotto. Named for the 46th parallel, the latitudinal line where Sudbury falls, Latitude 46 focuses on Northern Ontario voices – that is, authors who live or lived in Northern Ontario, or stories rooted or set in the area. They publish fiction and nonfiction, poetry and prose.

My internship can essentially be split into two parts. First: PR. While I was interning there, Latitude 46 was releasing and promoting their two spring/summer novels, *The Wintermen II: Into the Deep Dark* by Brit Griffin, and *Watermark* Jennifer Farquhar. I was working on event promotion for the book launches and signings, which involved searching out any event calendars and community pages I could find to get the word out. Simultaneously, I was searching for potential reviewers for the books. This meant scouring the internet for book review blogs, journals, and freelance journalists and sending out mass queries to let them know what the book was about and ask if they were interested in receiving a copy to review. Mostly, it was radio silence. Many didn't reply. A few responded to say they weren't interested. And a very few responded that they were.

Another part of my job was to write questions for a mini-interview with each of the authors to include in our media releases. All went well with *Wintermen*, but when I sent my drafted questions to Jennifer, she responded with a concern. *Watermark* is set on a fictionalized version of Manitoulin Island, which has a rich Indigenous history and population, and the novel was influenced by and interacted with that history. One of the questions I wrote approached the topic of cultural appropriation, and Jennifer was, understandably, worried about putting a

spotlight on such a hot button topic. And I realized that while I was using the critical thinking skills I'd learned in school, I had been approaching the interview questions wrong; I wasn't supposed to be interrogating these books. I was supposed to be selling them. It was an important reminder that for all my love of books, publishing is a business.

The second half of my internship is my favorite. I was given unpublished manuscripts that had been sent to Latitude 46 for consideration, and was asked to read them and write up editorial reports to help them decide whether to publish them and to give editorial notes to the authors. The first manuscript was one that they were fairly certain they were going to publish. It was excellent – I found myself with few editorial suggestions. On the one hand, that was excellent, on the other, I was anxious. What if I was just a bad editor? But Laura thanked me for my comments, sent them on to the author, and gave me another manuscript. One they hadn't read yet. They trusted me to take the first look and perhaps shape their opinions about it. So I read it. And it was bad. I slogged through, waiting to see if it would get better (it didn't) and sent my comments to Laura. I was given two more manuscripts to review, one good, one bad. It was an object lesson in some realities of editing – there would be bad writing. But even when I was dealing with the bad writing, I found satisfaction in the job. And at the end of this internship, I am more certain than ever that editing is what I want to do.