

# AN EDITOR'S TOOLS— CIRCA 1979

By Elizabeth Trew

**T**AKE A TRIP DOWN memory lane to the year 1979.

The BeeGees ruled the charts. Disco was king. And big hair and shoulder pads were all the rage!

Culturally, 1979 was a year we'd sooner forget.

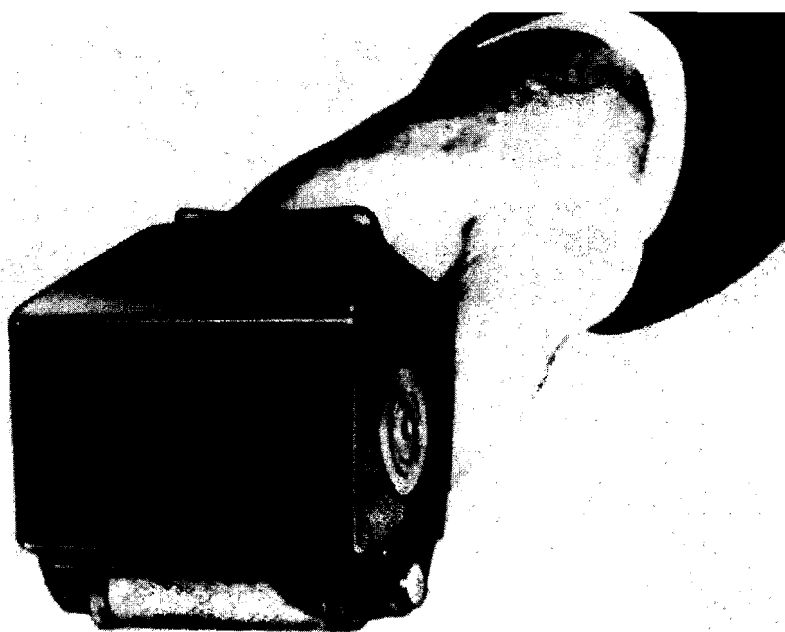
However, something positive came out of 1979—the founding of the (Freelance) Editors' Association of Canada.

Just as music and fashions change, editing tools have greatly improved since 1979.

Underwood typewriters. The IBM Selectric. Compugraphic's Compuwriter. X-acto knives. Hand waxers. Letraset. Rapidograph pens.

These are just a few of the tools editors used in 1979.

↙ *handwaxer*



Writers painstakingly typed manuscripts on manual Underwood typewriters with metal keys that jammed together when two keys were hit at the same time. Whiteout was a writer's best friend: Brush a little over a mistake, wait for it to dry, and then type over it. No need to retype the entire document!



## Single-column strips

### ↙ "whiteout"



Writers also used state-of-the-art IBM Selectric typewriters with built-in correcting tape (no more whiteout!) and interchangeable type balls with different fonts, making it possible to use more than one font type or size in the same document.

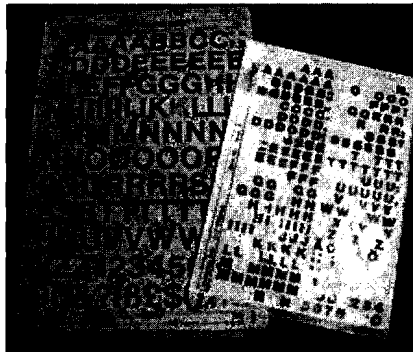
Desktop publishing didn't come along until the mid-1980s. Before desktop publishing made editors' lives simpler, manuscripts were retyped on a typesetting machine that perforated paper tape, making holes for each letter. Then, the tape was run through a phototypesetter.

Phototypesetting—made obsolete by desktop publishing—is a method of setting type to generate columns of type on a scroll of photographic paper to

produce film. The developed film, called galleys, consisted of long, single-column strips of typeset copy.

EAC member Jim Taylor worked on a "Compugraphic clunker" with no memory, where you had to set one line of phototype at a time.

### ↙ Letraset



"If you made an error you had to set as many lines as necessary to get back to your original line breaks," he remembered.

To arrive at a finished product, editors literally "cut and pasted" their work with X-acto knives and wax.

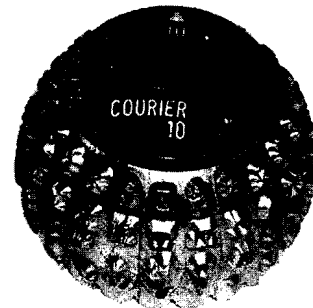
Galleys were then proofed against the original copy and lines containing errors would be retyped. The corrected copy would be carefully

cut out, using an X-acto knife, and pasted over the error. Using an X-acto knife was a skill—somewhat like surgery—as corrections could not be visible to the naked eye!

The galleys were laid out on a pasteboard, a page mock-up that specified where every story, headline, and copy was to be carefully placed. Then, someone would roll a "hand waxer" over the pasted galleys to seal everything together—a very messy process that left bits of wax on everything. If you were fortunate enough to work in a production house, you used a large waxer to feed the waxed sheets between rollers to seal them.

Several editors have fond

### ↙ type ball



## ↳ IBM Selectric



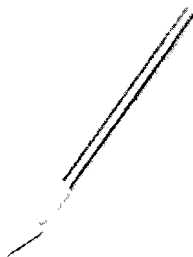
memories of the hand waxer machines that were used to paste galley's to a paste board. For those of you whose editing career doesn't go back that far, a hand waxer contained a heating coil to melt wax and a roller to measure wax to put on the reverse side of the trimmed page galley's. (If you are wondering why they didn't use glue, it's because the galley's could be lifted before sealing and moved, if redesign was required.)

EAC member Anne Brennan recalls working at a magazine where the finished pages were hung on the wall so staff could stand back to look at the camera-ready final proofs before they went to press. "It used to be very annoying in the summer when the wax melted and pieces of the magazine fell off the wall. We were always

checking the photocopied page proofs to make sure nothing was crooked."

Many editors had fond memories of Letraset's, sheets of paper one could buy at an art store with letters in a variety of fonts, symbols and graphics that could be transferred one-by-one to artwork. At the time, the only alternative to using Letraset's was to do the

## ↳ X-acto knife



lettering by hand, a long and tedious process that required graphic art skills.

To draw straight lines, editors used bordertape and Rapidograph pens, refillable fountain pens with a tubular nib that came in a wide range of nib widths in millimetre increments, not the typographic pica or point system commonly used in publishing. Editors and

artists required several pens of varying nib widths and different colours for drawing lines as they could not easily change the ink colour without leaving some of the old colour in the barrel.

Clearly the editing room in 1979 presented some challenges—having corrections fall off the paper, cutting fingers with X-acto knives and breathing in dangerous fumes from solvents used to remove wax from clothes and hair!

Some editors wax nostalgic over their old editing tools and have kept their old hand waxers as mementos of simpler times—before computers, e-mail, cell phones, digital audio recorders, and voice mail.

But just as they wouldn't want to go back to the music and fashions from 1979, they certainly wouldn't want to go back to the editing tools from 1979! ■■■

