

She's One in Eleven!

Beverly Ensom, is a committed freelance editor, who will take your "okay" document and make it superb.

As with every student, no matter where you are or what day it is, your assignments have a way of creeping into your thoughts. On this day, I was at work, firmly pushing the rest of the world into the back of my mind. That was until I was serving Beverly Ensom. My favourite part of my job is making connections with people. This is hard to do with the short amount of time I interact with my customers, but sometimes you have a moment. This particular moment was extremely surprising as I was greeted with such sincere enthusiasm. I had learned what her profession was, freelance writer, and started in on some questions just to find out some more. Delightfully, I realized that she was giving me far more than one-word responses and it dawned on me – maybe she would let me interview her! Tact is not one of my strong suits, I'm sure I then just blurted out the idea, but she gave me a bright smile and one of her cards.

A mere week later, after countless emails, I was on my way to Ms. Ensom's home office. She had set this up over two decades ago but as I was to discover, had been writing for many years before that. The leaves in her neighbourhood had yet to fall and it was a postcard-worthy autumn day. I parked on the street and walked up to her home. She cheerfully answered the door and ushered me inside. We settled on sitting in her kitchen so I would have space to set up my laptop, the only recording device I had. As I was plugging it in, her husband took a moment to introduce himself before heading out the door. Even after all of the smiles and kind words, I was still nervous. I took a deep breath though, and proceeded with some questions I had prepared.

Like most young people, holding true even to today, Ensom wasn't sure what she wanted to do with her life. She went off to university, obtained a Bachelor of Arts in English and then took off for Europe. It wasn't until her father desperately needed a writer did she start an actual job. Her father was a filmmaker, so Ensom's first experience was script writing. From there she wrote articles on film-making techniques. She had a hard time finding assignments outside of the film industry and she would actually flip through the phonebook looking for opportunities. Most notably, this led her to *Canadian Consumer Magazine*.

By the time she entered the 80's she was able to put the phone book down, her film work paid off in many ways but the most essential part of her career was in the form of contacts. Through her connections, she landed a job writing for a CBC telethon for the Heart Institute. From there, the Federal Centre on AIDS. She also spent some time working at a private consulting company. It was during this contract that she branched out to editing. As her colleague, Christine Leblanc, points out – writing and editing are closely related. Any time you reread and change sentences around. That is editing. As her enjoyment of writing grew, she went back to school to do her Master's in journalism. Everyone around her told her it wasn't necessary. An internship was the consensus. That was how she'd establish herself as a writer. Again her contacts came in handy and she ended up with a choice between the *Hill Times* and work with the regional government.

Seeing the opportunity to add the government onto her résumé, Ensom accepted the position, which was with Environmental Services. This was her start with government

work, which she has found to be an absolute pleasure. She finds that they actually know what they want, have a good understanding of what an editor does and have a proper hiring structure. Surprisingly, many clients expect many things that are outside an editor's responsibility. Ensom says this is why, upfront, she'll provide a complete contract outlining exactly what she will be doing for the project.

Although many changes have taken place during Ensom's career, like the increasing use of computers, she feels that any aspiring writer should take the same sort of direct approach that she did. She urges writers to get out there, if you want an internship, go to them directly. Leblanc cautions that editing is rarely in a job title though and when involved in a search, applicants should think about broadening it to communications. Also, do not try to only be a writer or only be an editor, it is important to keep developing both skills.

Leblanc has even expanded further in her job description. Starting her career in the book industry has given her a chance to see a project all the way through. So although not usually associated with editing, she works with event planning, project management and fundraising. After a book is completed she will handle the launch, which includes sending out invitations, preparing a media kit, sending out media releases as well as providing media training for the chosen spokesperson. Just like Ensom she has found running a home office to have larger benefits than if she were working in-house. Because really, who doesn't want to be their own boss?

Ensom was one of the first 11 editors to receive a Copy Editing Certification from the Editor's Association of Canada. For many years Ensom volunteered with the association as the National Rep where she worked closely with Leblanc. Leblanc describes it as a place where likeminded people could share information, give support and tips to each other. Leblanc finds that the association gives them credibility and increases their professionalism. Before joining the association she had a hard time being the only one who cared about things like commas. She recently took over for Ensom as the National Rep she laughed as she told me that Ensom made it look so easy – but it wasn't.

Surprisingly we had talked right up until Ensom had to leave for a meeting. As before any sort of job she takes she states her expectations up front so I knew how much of her time I could have. She graciously showed me around her office before showing me out where she actually has her Copy Editing Certification hanging on her wall. Bashfully, she mentioned that she is extremely proud of that accomplishment.

As I headed back out to my car I was extremely energized. Ensom made the world of writing sound so plausible. Upon her recommendation I was determined to look into the freelance agencies. I hadn't thought they existed past HR but they are out there for writers, and potentially a good way to build up experience. It left me feeling very confident, which relates to some final advice from Leblanc – "take it seriously so people take you seriously." She urges that it's all about who you know, what you have and spreading the word. A business card can go a long way.

I learned so much from interviewing Ensom, but as I try to put it into further words all I can think of is the fond way that Leblanc described her, she was "so friendly, working with her was a joy."