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## Distinguished literary editor leaves a legacy of professional leadership

### Janet (Mack) Mackenzie 1947-2018

The Australian editing and publishing profession is mourning the death of one of its most fearless advocates whose vision and leadership was critical in transforming the national standards for editing practice and accreditation.



Janet Mackenzie

Janet Mackenzie is remembered as a calm, collaborative individual of immense competence who encouraged her colleagues to confront issues and embrace change.

In memory of her contribution, the Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd) is establishing The Janet Mackenzie Medal for distinguished service to IPEd and the profession of editing.

A feisty advocate, she not only served her colleagues but argued her way through. Modest by nature, she shunned the limelight but stepped in when necessary.

A founding member and inaugural president of the Society of Editors Victoria (now Editors Victoria), she represented the society nationally and she also helped to develop the national accreditation scheme for IPEd.

Her voluntary commitment over more than 40 years was backed up in 2004 when she published *The Editor's Companion*, (Cambridge) revised into the digital era and still considered an indispensable and authoritative guide for novices and experienced editors.

Janet's introduction delivers a telling insight: "If you are suited to it, editing is the best fun you can have at a desk." In her bones, Janet was a writer whose work was enriched by the care she took with life's details.

Her career is marked by awards: Barbara Ramsden Award from the Fellowship of Australian Writers for fiction or non-fiction editing (1972); life membership, Editors Victoria (1996); Distinguished Editor award IPEd (2008) and the George Robertson Award from the Australian Publishers Association (2010).

Family members speak of her wonderful gift that has given them context – a meticulously-researched recording and publication in three volumes of the family history, properly footed and referenced.

This professional and family legacy is just part of a broader impact Janet had across a wide spectrum of interests and causes.

Sustainability and integrity were key qualities that underpinned her dedication to her profession, the environment, the arts and community service.

Janet Mackenzie was a visionary in every sense. She introduced original concepts and initiatives that were ahead of their time and implemented with sustainable frameworks.

Known to the family as Barbara, she also assumed the name of Janet when she found herself at school in a class with many Barbaras. In more recent times she was also known as Mack.

She grew up in Brighton in a family that loved picnics and parties. The seaside was her playground, and her parents fostered her spirit of independence and curiosity.

Janet was educated at Firbank and graduated from Melbourne University with a Bachelor of Arts with honours in English Language.

Janet Mackenzie edited her first book in 1969 for Melbourne University Press. She attracted attention from the director who told her it was not becoming for a professional office girl to wear a pants suit to work. She was already showing signs of being ahead of the times, doing what seemed practical and natural to her.

Within a few years, Janet headed off to the UK with a backpack and comfortable shoes where she took an editing job with the prestigious publisher, Rutledge Keating Paul.

It was on a trip to Ireland in 1972 that she spotted an American trying to play English football on the village green in Blarney. Al Rozefsky was a Jewish boy on his way to work on a kibbutz in Israel. A serendipitous connection was made, and the couple headed off on their own explorations. This was the start of an extraordinary partnership spanning 46 years of intimate immersion in beliefs, philosophy and aspirations, incorporating the fun of travelling and friendships. They spent six months on a kibbutz before going to Iceland where they hitchhiked on ships and fishing boats to the Faeroe Islands and Norway.

Their travels took them through Africa, their accommodation being a small A-frame tent and hammock. From the coast of Kenya they took their passage to India.

Finally, a new era beckoned and they returned to Australia. Looking to recapture their kibbutz experience they joined a co-operative in the Strathbogie Ranges, near Merton, north-east of Melbourne. With zero experience Al and Janet built a shack, the first of three homes they would design and build.

Janet continued to work for some of the most prominent university publishing houses in Australia and their English offshoots. This was the pre-technology era when coloured pencils were the traditional tool and, in Janet's case, manuscripts were driven to the nearest post office through six gates along dirt tracks.

In the late 1970s, their son Sam was born in a home birth followed four years later by Rosie at Euroa Bush Nursing Hospital.

Over the years the children benefited from their mother's nightly bedtime reading, her love of nature and were inspired by her calm, practical sense of self. Their lifestyle – part hippy, part hobby farming – gave them the essential skills of country living.

With the co-op disintegrating the family moved to Mansfield while Janet continued with her professional career, working freelance. During the 1980s Janet also worked at the Mansfield Courier office, utilising her book editing skills in a newspaper environment.

1988 was a landmark year for Janet, the environmentalist. In an informal talk on World Environment Day in Mansfield she delivered a message that would have profound consequences: Ordinary people can make a difference by raising awareness and initiating actions to solve local environmental problems.

Out of her vision was born HOPE (Householders' Options to Protect the Environment) with the slogan: Think Globally – Act Locally. The vision resonated spontaneously with about 80 branches quickly established in

Victoria alone. Three decades later HOPE flourishes across Australia as a community-based, not-for-profit body promoting sustainability at householder level.

A poet and songwriter, Janet loved an excuse to pick up her guitar or banjo. Their final home on the banks of Fords Creek in the Mansfield township was renovated to accommodate the many social gatherings they hosted.

Having started the Australian Greens Party in North-East Victoria, Janet stood as a Greens candidate at the 2000 by-election for the seat of Benalla and in 2002 for Southern Highlands.

The Mansfield Musical & Dramatic Society (MMuDS) was a natural outlet for the theatricality of Janet and Al's lifestyle. Typically, they stayed out of the limelight but acted as stage managers for many years. Janet's rhyming ditties delivered backstage on closing night were typically clever and amusing.

MMuDS recognised the couple with life memberships last year.

With a lifelong interest in social justice and human rights, Janet yet again followed her Think Globally – Act Locally mantra as a foundation member of the Mansfield groups, Rural Australians for Refugee and Friends of Venilale and she also volunteered with Red Cross.

Janet and Al's relationship remained joyful and close, and they were rarely apart until Janet was hospitalised. They would often email each other from one end of the house to the other, commenting about the inanity of the world.

One of the greatest joys for Janet was becoming a grandmother with the birth of Sam and wife Sonja's daughter, Evelyn.

With a severe recurrence of cancer that had been treated earlier, Janet re-commenced treatment about three years ago.

During a bittersweet period, regular trips to Melbourne for treatment coincided with visits to their new baby granddaughter.

Although in palliative care in Melbourne Janet retained her pragmatic dry wit. In response to her son's encouraging words about her looking great she said: "Yes, if it weren't for this terminal disease, I'd be fine."

Janet's quote from *The Editor's Companion* delivers a fitting footnote: "Good editors may be likened to those crystal-clear prisms which form a vital part of a pair of binoculars. They are not there to alter the view or change the scene, but to make it clearer and closer."

***Written by Joan Tehan, former publisher and editor of the Mansfield Courier, drawing on eulogies from family, friends and colleagues.***