

THE FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR

by Yvette Sharman

Yvette Sharman, the lucky winner of A Book's prize at the Darwin Conference gives a first-hand insight into the world of the Frankfurt Book Fair.

It was 5 o'clock on 4 July 1986 in Centennial Park, Darwin, when my name was drawn from barrel as the prizewinner of the DA 'Frankfurt Book Fair Competition'. It was that occasion that allowed me the privilege of visiting the world's biggest book fair.

Once a year, the great international family those who play a decisive role in the production and distribution of literature, the arts and scientific information, gather in Frankfurt. When that happens, the city becomes three things in one — sales fair, media stage and rendezvous for book lovers.

I have never seen so many books under 'one of'. There were something like 6,500 publishers from about 80 countries. Each publisher had a display of their existing product range as well as their forthcoming books, each of them a bestseller of course!

The Frankfurt Book Fair . . . Librarians can strike a balance between what they would like to order and what their budgets will allow. Literary agents have a field day Authors gain first-hand impressions of the effect of their works internationally.

People travel to Frankfurt every October for any reasons, one being that in Frankfurt as elsewhere else, they can get an up-to-date comprehensive overview of what is being published nationally as well as internationally. They can make personal contact with key persons in the trade to discuss general interests in business and just plain 'shop talk' with their colleagues.

The main reason for booksellers' attendance is to keep in touch with the publishers' new releases. Negotiating also takes place with booksellers and wholesalers saying to publishers, 'Look at what we have done for you over the year. I think we are entitled to a bigger discount so that we can give our customers (libraries and bookshops) a bigger discount also.'

For book dealers, the Fair offers a unique opportunity to view the latest publications and to place orders accordingly. Librarians can strike a balance between what they would like to order and what their budgets will allow. Literary agents have a field day, making or mentoring international contacts. Authors gain first-hand impressions of the effect of their works internationally. They attend the book fair to show publishers their works. They know that personal contact gives them a better chance of converting their manuscript to a commercial publication.

The book fair is housed in up to five different halls, each hall is assigned a particular topic; science and technology, fiction, religion, etc. One hall is set aside for the focal theme, which changes each year. In 1986 it was India. There are plenty of food and drink stalls offering typical German food such as bratwurst and sauerkraut for those in a hurry, with other

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eating areas provided to allow the opportunity for a quiet meal with a friend you only see once a year. One large hall has licensed restaurants!

The famous fair catalogue which weighs at least a kilo, is very helpful and includes an appendix with a calendar of events as well as a map of the entire fair grounds. Exhibitors and members of the press receive one complimentary copy. Participating exhibitors are asked to provide 'a few informative lines about the production of their publishing firm' which is entered in the catalogue.

There are restrictions on the times the public can visit the fair. This allows the trade to negotiate 'big deals' in a less congested environment. The correct colour name tag is the only way you can pass through the entry security gates. Exhibitors have been sent back to their hotels to frantically locate that missing tag.

During the first four days you can only look at the masses of books. On the last day books can be bought and taken so by then you must know which publishers you want to deal with, to obviate aimless wandering from hall to hall.

In the evenings, when the Fair gates are closed, the city of Frankfurt does its best to remind the visitor that the world is not made up of books alone. Frankfurt has something to offer everyone, from beer halls to operas with cultural information stands supplying information on these activities. One is never bored in Frankfurt.

There are many services offered to attendees, such as reservation of train and plane tickets, withdrawing and changing money, Post Office, photocopying facilities, typing and telexing. Translators are also available. The many shops provide a selection of goods that make it impossible to leave without making a purchase that will be a lasting moment.

As part of the prize, visits were arranged to five publishing companies, three in West Germany — VCH (Weinheim), Springer Verlag (Berlin) and Walter de Gruyter (Berlin) and two in the Netherlands — Elsevier (Amsterdam) and Kluwer (Dordrecht). It was a great experience for me, to be shown around publishing houses, finding out what occurs before a book is finally catalogued and given a home, its place on the shelf.

Their computer systems were amazing, showing who their booksellers are in all parts of the world, and the libraries who buy their products.

The five companies all publish books and journals in English and their native language for the world market. They do not have their own inhouse printing service but use between five and 15 different printing houses at one time because of the number of journal and book titles being released at the same time. They have big warehouses where they keep copies of all their past publications as well as books published by their overseas branches.

They all deal with specific subject areas, mainly science, technology and medicine, and

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publish books, journals and some text books on various topics. Computer software products are being investigated and several publishers have them on trial, in their attempt to keep pace with new forms of providing information.

I wish to thank the staff at DA Book for organising the competition to Frankfurt, as it gave me the great opportunity of viewing the book fair first hand, something I which all librarians could do.

I also wish to thank QANTAS for their participation. My appreciation goes to the five publishing companies for looking after me so well while in Europe. They provided first class accommodation and hospitality on my all too short stay.

I hope DA Book, in conjunction with the publishers they represent, will run the competition again, so that someone else will be able to experience visiting the biggest and best book fair in the world.

Yvette Sharman