

***Antarctic Closeup* – a WIP writing diary**

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The latest work from Hazel Edwards' adventure as recipient of the Australian Antarctic Division's Humanities Program 2001 berth is *Antarctic Closeup*. Commissioned by the Australian National Museum's *Making Tracks* series around an item from their collection, it is a young readers' novel based around the story of John Collinson Close's Antarctic telescope, This WIP (work-in-progress) diary explores the process of building that story from the historical facts, but with a little fictional licence to include a child in the Mawson Expedition of 1911 as this was part of the brief to enable today's children to identify with the Antarctic world of that period especially as 2007 is the International Polar Year.

Writing 'Close Up' has been a literary sleuthing expedition.

Feb 2006: I first heard about the Making Tracks fiction series for 8-10 year olds and met the Museum's publisher Judy Gauld while speaking at the SCWBI Sydney conference and indicated I'd be interested in such a challenge.

July 2006: Judy rang to offer me the museum collection item of John Collinson Close's Antarctic telescope as the basis of a story. What a challenge! I'd read about Mawson's 1912 expedition but knew nothing about Close.

August 2006: Judy met me after I spoke at the Canberra Writers & Readers' Festival and we did a 10 minute detour to see the actual telescope in the National Museum. Fascinated to discover a photo of his 'weathered' face and the 'telescope' which looked very small alongside the Wiggles T shirts.

Not many clues.

'Close Up' became the working title. I read the other titles in the series and they were diverse in the way they included their museum item. That was a relief.

JCC became 'the new bloke' in my life and his face temporarily became my screensaver. I tend to use a reminder of a current project as my screensaver until the project is going well. JCC was up for a while.

The major challenge was to get a child into the story. While he was in the Antarctic, John's wife Alice had had their baby who lived only days. No other children. The story could be fictional but it needed to be of the period and historic from a child's viewpoint.

While I was having my hair done, and reading the notes, my hairdresser looked at his photo and said, 'He didn't have a hairdresser did he.' Statement not a question. I said, 'Maybe seal clippers.'

How was I to get a child's viewpoint into the story as Close's only offspring died a few hours after birth, while he was on the expedition and unaware even of the pregnancy? So I can't use even the Spirit of a Child, as a kind of ghost commentator.

Maybe I can find an expeditioner's family with a child who can write to thank Close for rescuing his father, because that did happen? Maybe using the auction?

I start to wake up, thinking of possible openings.

- Child doing an Antarctic project and involved with idea of courage/adventure?
- Radio transmissions being like webchats today?
- Showing Close's physical courage in the Aladdin Cave where he rescued others?
- Start with the Auction, kid attending as work experience?

Getting the telescope into the story without it sounding too contrived is the next challenge. Possibilities include:

Telescope being used for Aurora Australis observations. AAE were first to use radio in the Antarctic which enabled Mawson's transmission of the fate of his expedition (could be compared with kids using webchats today as latest technology)

Sept 2006: Start thinking-playing around with openings in between other work. Have decided to call the child Jack as a link to the past, ALSO now a popular name and it has several meanings. Decide on first person viewpoint to contrast the then and now perceptions.

My name's Jack.

Had to go to work with Dad today.

I love fiddling around with stuff. Finding how things work. Broke Mum's best watch, and her camera, but I'll fix it. Drop a few catches. 'Butterfingers' is my nickname at school. But that's how I found myself in Mawson's Antarctic hut, in 1912 (check) I didn't mean to drop the telescope.

In my evening Diploma of Professional Writing class at Holmesglen TAFE, we talk about techniques for time slips and the logic behind them. Playing around with my own ideas 'on my feet' enables me to justify the internal logic for this story. Maybe there could be a tiny jack at the side of the telescope into which a web cam could fit which takes him back in time?

Online, I check definitions. So many 'jacks' but a few could be made relevant.

Jack:

- Flag on a ship displayed to indicate the nationality
- Labourer or someone who does odd jobs (link to Close's Assistant Collector's job)
- Verb ... to prise something open
- On a visit to the Aquarium, I introduce my grandson to the Melbourne bridges across the Yarra which include King St & Queen St and then ask him what he thinks might come next. Familiar with cards, he says Jack Bridge rather than Princes. I might use that association!
- Playing card ... ranking between a ten and a queen with a picture of a young man on it. Also called a knave.

Maybe young Jack turns up the volume/audio on the class web-cam and can talk to the past? Lots of classes use electronic portfolios for kids' projects.

Oct 5th: Watch TV doco David Parer's 'Surviving Extremes' which contrasts his 1983 'Douglas Mawson The Survivor' with recollections from modern astronauts, comparing self-reliance of space and Antarctic exploration. Had been aware of this comparison while in Antarctica.

Oct 17th: Don't believe in writers' block! Had the idea of using my existing Antarctic photos to symbolise each chapter e.g. Aladdin's Cave ... partly to get into the 'cool' atmosphere but

mainly for the illustrator or a chapter motif (and to feel I'd contributed an idea at a time when I had to work on other projects.) Use one as a screensaver until I get that project idea working so put up Aladdin's Cave or the shot I think symbolises it. Use the Aurora lights shot. Will Close see the 'southern lights' with his telescope? I think he will have to.

October 2006: Far-seeing Eyes. Judy Parker, my Himalayan expeditioner friend, visits and says "He has the far seeing eyes of an explorer always looking into the future.'

Psychologist's view of the characteristics of some explorers ... idealising their women at a distance, and maybe mildly autistic in the trait of concentrating so single-mindedly ... a strength as well as weakness.

To counteract the boredom, often expeditioners improvise concerts and there was an Adelie land Band. Need to know if Jack can play an instrument or if he can sing. E-mail Judy G who will check.

One of my TAFE students loans me the library copy of Heather Rossiter's *Lady Spy Gentleman Explorer* (Jane Curry Publishing) about Herbert Dyce Murphy who was also on Close's expedition. Another affluent family with an adventurer son who indirectly reveals another side of leadership and Mawson. Must check her references as the descriptions of voyage out seems authentic.

Oct 26th: Spend most of the day reworking chapter 1 to establish Jack as clumsy in the Auction Room leading into time slip via the jack of the web cam into the telescope.

Decide to check the specific Close references & sources from the *Lady Spy Gentleman Explorer* (Heather Rossier) - not many. seemed a reclusive man.

Conscious of the similarities to my own first hand Antarctic observations of depressive effect of 24 darkness, boredom vs creativity, blizzards, seasickness on voyage out and issues of leadership. Beauty of icebergs. Tall story telling and senses of humour of expeditioners. Penguin antics jumping into boat

Workshopping: Read my chapters as serial with Highvale Primary and my relieving principal friend Aileen Hall's current school. Maybe I'll re-name the teacher Miss Aileen because she's helped me with so many books?

Nov 1st: I re-read the details of Close's letters to his wife and the Latitude and Longitude which become the address and am aware of parallels. In 2001, I got first edition envelopes stamped with Casey postmarks for my stamp collecting husband. Usually the postmaster at Casey Station was a very, very part time job, and most philatelic mail was stamped in Hobart. I had to hang around after the meal, to get the expeditioner on postal duty to open up his stamps, and then he let me stamp whatever I liked.

Decided to insert photos as chapter motifs such as the web cam and the telescope. Sent draft chapter to Grade 5/6 Highvale for their comments.

Returned library copy of *Lady Spy, Gentleman Explorer* to Brighton Library after making notes about Herbert Dyce Murphy's references to Close. Very well researched book and have ordered my own copy to buy.

Ironically just as I drove out this afternoon, I heard an ABC National program on conserving Shackleton's Hut and they talked about the possibility of a web cam. I'm beginning to specialise in fiction prediction I think...

Nov 18: Have been working interstate but my grandson suggested WINDIA as the name of a windy place and that appeals so I'll put it into Close's conversation. It's a strange relationship which I have with this 'real' dead man, because I'm putting words into his mouth and that's

different from creating a fictional character. I know I've been given dramatic licence but I'm still trying to stay with the clues I can find about his personality.

Need to have a way to change the chronological order of events, so that my boy Jack can move back to the voyage after having been in Aladdin's Cave because that is a more dramatic scene for Chapter 2. Can he twiddle the telescope ... not like a clichéd time machine but

Nov 20th: Checking Lincoln Hall's book to find some real life funny episodes which can be projected around my character e.g. the meat freezer husky chase, 'being 'nailed' to the hut roof & husky dog poo on deck.

Spent 5 hours writing today, and feel that I just have bits of incidents. Went for a walk with Judy P. who loaned me the *Ghosts of Everest* (Hemmler, Johnson, Simonson as told to Nothdurft - Macmillan) book about Mallory and how his daughter was given his effects, but the photo of Mallory's wife was missing which he always carried and that maybe this was the clue he reached the peak, as he was to leave her photo there. Interesting link with Close's letters to his wife and how the distant partner becomes idealised for many explorers. Then I read Lincoln Hall's *Douglas Mawson* in my bath which is a challenge since it is a BIG book! (Not damp) Captions on the photos are helpful in indicating amusing anecdotes which might appeal to child readers.

Nov 21st: Aim to craft the chapters into a logical story with child-interest and print them out, so there's a feeling of progress.

Have spent a week, refining. Challenges of balancing facts against child-interest anecdotes. Worried about bits I haven't covered, so decide to have a fast flash like a kaleidoscope to all the places the telescope has been to cover this and the African connection with Kitchener as a Scout. Also need to cover why out of chronological order ... my reason is to make it more dramatic.

Often I need a break, so that I can return and see the whole in perspective. The issue of whether I have been faithful to the portrayal of the man's memory is a challenge when based on a real man. Also I haven't stressed enough the issues of leadership and 'being a legend' as kids call it.

Nov 24th: Now 5300 odd words and uneven chapters which need re-naming with intriguing titles. Need to cut by 600 words. Add Midwinter menu as artwork. Reshape chapters to equal length and maybe add one. Stress theme of legend/leadership Creativity vs boredom. Leave photos as suggestions for illustrator

Trial reading today and aim to have a final copy by Monday. Need to tweak it for subtle characterisation while I am fresh.

Since I have received two real MidWinter Dinner Invitations from Antarctica (which are always humorous) wonder if I should adapt one of them for the story?

Always the dilemma of dramatic licence versus the facts. Just as audiences believe film versions of historical fact which might have been manipulated in the interests of 'a good story' and an innocuous character made into a 'baddie', (the film 'Zulu' and the family of Private William Hook? feeling his reputation had been smeared,) I'm conscious of how Close's family may feel about my interpretation. I have stressed his positive qualities ... and I've made Hurley the joker which was true. But Mawson's leadership qualities seem to be a matter of interpretation according to which biographer is read.

Nov 25th: After spending most of today, 'tightening up' the ms, I'm reasonably happy with the final draft, although conscious of how much of the Antarctic story could not be included. Wondered whether I should have included:

'He didn't have a son like you. So he left memories.'

But decide to leave it as implicit rather than explicit.

Difficult to convey the heroism of a modest or introspective man, but I've tried to make readers wonder about what creates legends.

Museum Publisher's Response to First Draft 4/12/06

- Excellent use of historic material with regard to development of John Close, and dramatic licence vs fact well handled. Every opportunity needs to be explored to include descriptions that remind students that the Antarctic action is nearly 100 years ago, and to highlight the dangers to the men.
- I would like readers to engage with Jack from Miss B's class better though, not just through his observations of the historic Jack. How did the web-cam break?
- Suggest one way of developing Jack's adventure more is by having him time travel to each 'expedition incident' separately. This can all happen during the one day - he could return to the auction rooms and interact with Dad and develop new questions he wants to explore and then plug in the webcam to the telescope and time travel again. (Perhaps when the web cam is fixed he finds he can no longer time travel?)
- This would provide a means of legitimising the movement between different times during the expedition, which is not explained in the current manuscript.
- Developing the story of contemporary Jack more will mean reducing the number of Antarctic incidents that are explored. I suggest deleting the Base Hut incident (chapter 5), the crevasse incident (chapter 9) and the section where the expeditioners discuss the worst jobs (end chapter 6).
- Need to be absolutely sure, and consistent about, what Jack's role is. Most of the time he is an observer, but not observed. He doesn't just observe through the web-cam, as he wears the appropriate clothing and feels and smells. However during the crevasse incident he becomes an active participant when he, too, falls. And on another occasion his pants get nailed to the ceiling. However you define his role, it is important that he is consistently conveyed.

Feb 1st: Starting the re-write today. I need to solve the logic of whether Jack just observes the Antarctic life or whether he can inter-act with the expeditioners. I decided he needs to feel with all senses and knows what they know, but not 'act'.

Agree that having more links to contemporary school life with returns via the web cam, makes sense. And the logic that once the web cam's dodgy electronic is fixed, he can no longer travel in time to Antarctica is a fitting end.

Introduce his schoolmate Peter, so they can talk about what might have happened, and to characterise Jack .

Feb 2nd: Suggest that the web cam is like a pilot flight simulator into the past, and that's why Jack experiences all the other senses and becomes an active observer. Maybe mate Peter can suggest this in the final chat?

Feb 3-4th: This is rather like trying to maintain the logic of fantasy with the cake-eating hippo books. Via the web cam, Jack can 'see' and 'feel' but I don't want him to be an active participant with the expeditioners, just an observer. A school mate like Peter is going to want to go too.

Chronologically the dates of episodes are out of synch, so this is the rationale for Jack making several visits (and retaining the drama by having the most dramatic incident of Aladdin's Cave first and then flashbacks)

Making Peter's Dad a trainee pilot so they understand about flight simulators. Competitive Finn the school computer games-user identifies that they are playing a new version of VR Virtual Reality Antarctica game. Not correct. Only sees.

My husband reads to check the logic, and find that on P 7 I've now left out the scene between Mawson and Close which explained why modest Close was a hero. Must fix.

There are other minor references which imply that Jack is 'doing' rather than watching, so I have to fix them too.

Miss Aileen fixes the dodgy lead and then they cannot return to the past via the web cam and the earlier shots are deleted.

Jack regrets that he can't show the ice axe web cam shot to his Dad, but the reader is left with the idea that brave actions can have occurred even if they are not recorded.

Will Jack will have a bruise on his bottom where he was nailed to the roof? Logically, he can't because he leaves his Antarctic body and clothes in the past. But maybe mate Peter can work out why he doesn't?

The logic of historic fantasy?

Judy Gauld has replied with diplomatic suggestions regarding making the story more contemporary kid centred and clarifying that he can only see via the web-cam, not participate in Antarctic action. So the nail in his bottom and hypothetical bruise have to go.

- I think that the four incidents that will totally engage young readers are the ice cave, the shipboard/dog poo (up to the desert reference on p.10), the ice play from p.12 and the dogs being sent into the freezer to get the meat. I suggest that Jack zooms in and witnesses these short incidents and then zooms out and interacts with Pete or copes with Dad etc. (I will use just the ZOOM)

Friday 9th: I rewrite, extending Peter who becomes a device to enable Antarctic interpretation and characterisation of both boys. I limit senses to the visual. Contrast the fact orientated, careful Peter (who is like the Dad) with the messy, clumsy but adventurous Jack. Peter's Gran is confined in hospital, like the expeditioners are confined, but Peter also records her Olden Days story for the web cam and class portfolio.

Include FANTARCTIC title in for the hypothetical game as a Fan of the Antarctic. Re-name the teacher Miss Aileen, in acknowledgement of the relieving principal who has trialled many versions of my stories in many schools.

The only logical bits I haven't solved in the story are when the Auction occurs and who buys the telescope but they may be covered by the list of John Close memorabilia for auction?

Judy queries:

- Had earlier expeditions been to Aladdin's Cave and mapped it? Is that how Close's group knew about it? My answer is yes.
- You use the term 'Met warning'. Would this term have been used as early as 1911? Or are we applying a later service/ terminology to this time? I was ahead of myself here. We delete it.

On Feb 15, 2007 this draft is accepted. Antarctica Close Up is hard to say. We play with the title and agree on *Antarctic Closeup* with Closeup being one word.

March: A name change occurs when I'm asked if there is any evidence John Close was called Jack. I can't find the evidence. I'm sorry to lose the ambiguity of his name and relevance to today's most popular boy's name, but ...

June: Then when JCC's descendants check my ms, and are very happy with my interpretation of their ancestor AND they point out that his real name was Collinson, not Collison, so the Museum records are edited, and so is my story.

Artwork arrives and I like the perspectives of the cover linking past and now, and especially the Antarctic scenes but am concerned that blond boy John looks too Enid Blyton 1950's. Maybe this can be changed?

July 2007 I'm pleased I kept a candid log of the WIP (work in progress) because otherwise I would have forgotten the logic of historic fantasy which provided the challenge of this Antarctic project. The book will be published on September 21st, 2007 which ironically is my birthday! A gift from the past!

Link to Museum 'Making Tracks' site needed.
http://www.nma.gov.au/play/making_tracks/