

PEN Spotlight: Nancy Pellegrini

Originally from Long Island, New York, Nancy Pellegrini lived in England, Ireland, and South Korea before spending 18 years in Beijing, China. For more than 15 years, she was the stage editor and writer for *Time Out Beijing* and *Time Out Shanghai* magazines; she also edited United Nations policy papers and has written and edited for Penguin Books. She started regular editing in 2011 and today runs Nancy Pellegrini Editorial Solutions, LLC, a writing and editing services company. She lives in Phoenix with her fiancé (COVID-19 postponed the wedding a year) and their three cats.

What led you to editing as a career choice?

I was writing full-time in Beijing, China, and a former editor asked me to subedit his monthly magazine. Editing reinforced everything I loved about writing—working with words, having flexible hours, and keeping a mobile lifestyle—but I now have the satisfaction of using both halves of my brain. That balance was crucial: editing helped me understand writing better, and writing made me a more sensitive editor. There's tremendous benefit in doing both, at least to some extent.

What is your editorial specialty?

I do medium-to-heavy copyedits or line edits for book manuscripts or feature articles, particularly in nonfiction subjects such as arts, culture, social sciences, and Asia.

What surprised you most about editing?

I'm surprised by how something so structured can be so individualistic, that proper editing is a balance between following rules and making choices, and how each project is so wildly different.

Which PEN events and aspects have been especially helpful?

Someday I hope to be able to attend events in person, but for now I do enjoy the newsletter.

What is the best career advice you were given?

Trust your judgment and don't doubt your skills.

Which project are you most proud of?

My personal and professional background leans toward nonfiction, so when Penguin approached me about editing fiction, I was terrified—and anxious to impress. But it all

went well. It was also interesting to see (translated) Chinese novels from the inside out—there is a different structural aesthetic—but I caught some major story errors and the editors were thrilled.

What are your go-to resources for professional development?

I did my professional copyediting certificate at UC San Diego, but I still take courses all the time through the Editorial Freelancers Association (EFA), Ed2Go—anywhere I can find. It's not cheap, but I'm always amazed at how much I learn, and it's wonderful for my self-confidence. It's also a good way to try out new forms of writing and editing before accepting a contract. And now that I'm living in the US again and have some lockdown downtime, I'm finally applying for a master's degree.

What editing tip do you have for other members?

Be sure you understand the scope of every project—don't assume anything, even with friends. Be prepared for the worst (new authors may not cite sources, and so on) and make sure you are not working beyond the terms of the contract. Don't be afraid to renegotiate if you have to.

What has changed the most since you started editing?

The available technology and reliance on social media have changed, both of which I find intimidating.

What do you do when you aren't working?

Besides spending time with my fiancé and our cats, I love reading, especially history or layperson social sciences. I love hiking, traveling in developing countries, going to art shows and the theater, and watching old movies and documentaries. I'm obsessed with crime dramas and true crime, and I have taken decluttering to clinical levels.

What is the most surprising thing about you?

I love traveling alone. I'll spend a month or so in developing countries I know nothing about and just figure it out as I go along. This surprises people who know me as hyperorganized, anxious, and a little neurotic, but travel is my "brain cleanse" and a break from myself. Overall, advanced research and planning is probably better, in terms of not backtracking covered ground or missing things because of poor planning (both of which I do), but I find I need the mental escape. Afterwards, I can think clearly and reset my system.